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Advani -
Mishra
Baird...

Missive danger

CBI, as political gun, has a nasty recoil

The controversy over the PMO's letter to the CBI querying whether all legal/investigative options have been exhausted vis-a-vis LK Advani's alleged role in the Babari Masjid demolition case is the umpteenth instance of politicians making a mockery of the investigating agency's independence. The BJP is super-agitated about the letter but when it was in power it did not allow the CBI any more elbowroom than what the Congress does now. And before the BJP, when the Congress was in power for decades, it institutionalized its use as a gun in political hunts.

The CBI and its counsel should be deciding whether Advani's discharge by the Rae Bareilly court merits a revision petition or not. A letter from a PMO official to the agency that, between the lines, actively encourages such a course of action is highly improper and wholly contraindicated by the Supreme Court's directions in the Vineet Narain case on the CBI's functioning.

That seminal judgment should have been the last word for all politicians on how to handle, or rather, not to handle, the CBI. Such is the departure from the court's prescriptions that were the apex court to take suo moto notice of whether various administrations have been contumacious in their conduct it should occasion no surprise and plenty of satisfaction.

Indeed, the context for such a legal intervention is perhaps the most apposite now, when the Congress seems a little unbalanced in its use of state organs for political purposes. Unbalanced because the attempt to fix Opposition leaders is coupled with efforts to unfix cases against ruling alliance worthies.

The CBI has been made to tell courts that nothing useful will come out of further looking into Captain Satish Sharma's petrol pump allocations. Lalu Prasad had had the benefit of tax authorities discovering a new goodness in him in the disproportionate assets case. Renuka Chowdhury, whose feistiness in defending the Nehru-Gandhis sometimes spills over to other activities, has had a case of assault dropped.

Doubtless other UPA notables will find their inconveniences treated similarly. The simultaneity of letting friends off while going after enemies is a bit too brazen by even Indian political standards. The bigger danger is that it will set a new standard, of violently vindictive conduct against those vanquished in vote counts.

The Congress, as is inevitable in politics, will lose power one day. If today's Opposition then write a sheaf of letters to the CBI asking certain cases be given fresh attention, it will have only itself to blame.

25 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

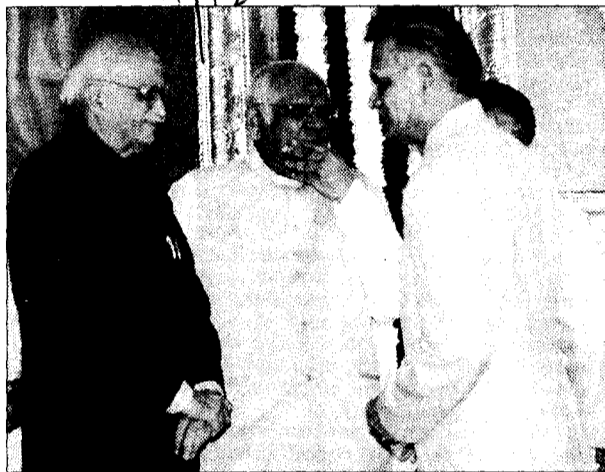
PMO letter rocks House

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 23

THE PMO-letter issue rocked both Houses of Parliament today, as the Government maintained in the Lok Sabha that it was its legitimate right to seek information about the legal position in any case. Defence Minister and Leader of the House Pranab Mukherjee contended that a PMO official had written the letter in the context of a revision petition filed by two witnesses challenging the discharge of BJP chief L.K. Advani in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Former prime minister A.B. Vajpayee led the NDA attack on the Government. Advani stayed away, as agitated NDA members staged a walk-out after charging the Government with interference in the working of the CBI.

The Speaker adjourned the Lok Sabha for 15 minutes to facilitate a discussion, when BJP and RJD members tried to shout each other down.



Somnath Chatterjee, Shivraj Patil and L.K. Advani at a function to commemorate the 102nd birth anniversary of the late Chaudhury Charan Singh at Parliament on Thursday. PTI

Mukherjee stated that the PMO official had only sought clarification on the legal position on the filing of revision petitions (by witnesses) and the failure, if any, on the part of the prosecuting agency in taking timely action to move a higher court. "The sum total of this correspondence is nothing more than eliciting information from the investigating agency. It is not a directive of

any kind to any investigating agency and cannot be construed to amount to any manner of interfering in the working of the agency," he said.

Vajpayee described the letter as "peculiar" and sought to know what it amounted to, if not applying pressure (on the CBI). "It is not correct — stop this," he told the Government.

Brij Kishore Tripathi of Biju Janata Dal, Prabhunath

Singh of Janata Dal (U) and K. Yerran Naidu of Telugu Desam supported the BJP stand.

In the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Suresh Pachouri said the letter was not a directive. Pachouri contended that the PMO during the NDA rule had also asked for information from the CBI in the case. "You are exposed," he said, which led to an uproar.

BJP leader Arun Jaitley alleged that the Government was interfering with the functioning of investigating agencies. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said he would be happy if Jaitley searched his conscience on whether the principle of independence of investigating agencies was not breached during NDA rule. "I would like to say that this principle has not been breached during the six months of UPA rule," he added.

Meanwhile, UPA members, waving copies of a weekly, sought to raise the latest controversy about Zehra Sheikh.

7.5% ANNUAL RATE ENVISAGED

Speed up reforms for growth: PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 4. — Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today advocated an increase in the rate of growth of capital formation in the economy for the government to deliver on its commitments to generate employment, reduce poverty and find resources for new investment.

"It is of utmost importance that we create an enabling environment that rewards creativity, risk-taking and the spirit of enterprise and adventure," Dr Singh told the second meeting of his Council on Trade and Industry. "I do believe that we are entering a new phase of growth and that over the next decade we should be able to register an annual growth rate of around 7.5 per cent."

The Prime Minister later told reporters: "This is just the beginning."

According to a senior official, the one difference between previous meetings was that the Prime Minister played a more "active" role in the proceedings, and asked questions that suggested he was aware of what was going on.

Virtually all those invited turned up except for Mr Kumarmangalam Birla.

Describing as "distressing" the declining ratio of gross domestic capital formation to gross domestic production, as well as private corporate sector capital formation from 26.9 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 1995-96 to 23 per cent and 6 per cent in recent years, Dr Singh said this

trend must be reversed.

Singling out inflation as an area of major concern, Dr Singh, however, asserted the government was committed to protecting the common man by holding the price-line and speeding up reforms to push up economic growth to 7.5 per cent.

"I don't wish to downplay the concern being expressed on inflation... I have already stated that holding the price-line is a priority for our government," he said. Pointing out that inflationary pressures were almost entirely on account of the increase in world oil prices, he said: "We cannot insulate ourselves... We are, of course, committed to protecting the common man to the extent possible from these market-induced pressures."

For the country to be able to register an annual rate of growth of 7.5 per cent, the Prime Minister called for an acceleration in the rate of growth of agricultural production up to 4 per cent and industrial production at around 10-12 per cent.

Seeking to end the tyranny of "inspector-raj", Dr Singh said to modernise India, "we must reduce transaction cost of doing business. We must integrate our economy at home and be more integrated globally".

Finance minister Mr P Chidambaram, who was present at the meeting, asked the gathering of industrialists to suggest an alternative way if the present system of getting licences, permits and other clearances was too time consuming.

■ Another report on pg 12

05 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

মুক্ত বাণিজ্যের স্বপ্নে লাওসে প্রধানমন্ত্রী

২৭ নভেম্বর: জয়সুত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

২৭ নভেম্বর: চীন-মায়ানমার-ভিয়েতনাম লাগোয়া ছোট দেশ লাওস। দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব এশিয়ার এই কমিউনিস্ট রাষ্ট্রেই স্থাপন হতে চলেছে ২০০৬ সাল থেকে অবাধ বাণিজ্য ব্যবস্থা গড়ে তোলার ভিত্তিপ্রস্তর। তৃতীয় আসিয়ান শীর্ষ বৈঠকে। সেই বৈঠকে যোগ দিতে কাল লাওসের রাজধানী ভিয়েনতিয়েনে পৌঁছছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। ঘটনাচক্রে তাঁর সরকারও বামেদের উপরে নির্ভরশীল।

১৯৫৪ সালে প্রথম ভারতীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসাবে লাওস গিয়েছিলেন জওহরলাল নেহরু। পঞ্চাশ বছর আগে তাঁর সামনে যে লক্ষ্য ছিল, তার সঙ্গে মনমোহনের উদ্দেশ্যের আকাশ পাতাল ফারাক। ঠাণ্ডা লড়াইয়ের যুগে যে আঞ্চলিক জোটের প্রায় কোনও কদর ছিল না, তারাই এই উদার অর্থনীতির আমলে ছোটখাটো সার্বভৌম দেশগুলির ভরসা।

আসিয়ান নিয়ে ভারত যে কতটা উৎসাহী, তার প্রমাণ আসিয়ান মোটর র্যালি। সম্প্রতি গুয়াহাটি থেকে কেন্দ্র এবং সি আই আইয়ের যৌথ উদ্যোগে আয়োজিত এই র্যালির উদ্বোধন করেন মনমোহন। এটি যখন লাওস পৌঁছবে, মনমোহন তখন সে দেশে। মোটর যাত্রার উদ্দেশ্যই হল এই বিস্তৃত ভৌগোলিক মানচিত্রে বাণিজ্য ও সাংস্কৃতিক সংহতির জয়গান গাওয়া।

এই প্রেক্ষাপটে কাল সকালে লাওস পাড়ি দিচ্ছেন মনমোহন। ব্যাককে বিমস্টেক সম্মেলনে যে সব বিষয় নিয়ে আলোচনা হয়েছে তাকে আরও এক ধাপ



এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার জন্য উদ্যোগী হতে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এবং দেশের প্রাক্তন বিদেশসচিব জে এন দীক্ষিত।

ভারতের কাছে আসিয়ান সম্মেলন প্রথম গুরুত্ব পায় ১৯৯০ সালে, পি ভি নরসিংহ রাওয়ের আমলে। তার পর প্রথম আসিয়ান-ভারত শীর্ষ বৈঠক হয় ২০০২ সালে নম পেন-এ। তখনই ঠিক হয় দশ বছরের মধ্যে মুক্ত বাণিজ্য চুক্তি করবে সদস্য দেশগুলি। পরের বছর ইন্দোনেশিয়ার বালিতে দ্বিতীয় সম্মেলন হয়। তৎকালীন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী কংগ্রেস সরকারের বাণিজ্য নীতিকেই আরও এক ধাপ এগিয়ে নিয়ে যান।

শুধু আসিয়ানই নয়, বিমস্টেক বা মেকং-গঙ্গা সহযোগিতার মঞ্চটিকেও এখন সম্ভ্রাস দমনের উদ্দেশ্যে ব্যবহার করছে ভারত। তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ঘটনা হল বিমস্টেক আর আসিয়ান, দু'টি

মঞ্চই পাকিস্তান নেই। ইসলামাবাদ আসিয়ান ও বিমস্টেকে আসতে আগ্রহী হলেও এখনও সেই সুযোগ নেই। পাক নেতৃত্বের আশঙ্কা, ভারত এই আঞ্চলিক মঞ্চকে এক পৃথক চাপ-সৃষ্টিকারী গোষ্ঠী হিসাবে কাজে লাগাচ্ছে। তাই আসিয়ান নিয়েও পাকিস্তানের গোসা রয়েছে।

মন্ত্রিসভার সম্প্রসারণ নিয়ে ব্যস্ততার মধ্যেও আজ মনমোহন তাঁর দফতরের অফিসারদের সঙ্গে আসিয়ান নিয়ে বৈঠকে বসেন। আসিয়ান শীর্ষ সম্মেলনের মাধ্যমে বাণিজ্যের নতুন দিগন্ত খুলবে, ভারতের পূর্ব ও উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলে আসবে অর্থনীতির নতুন জোয়ার। এই স্বপ্ন নিয়েই আপাতত পথ চলা শুরু মনমোহনের।

Handle seer with care, PM tells Jaya

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 25

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh has told Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalithaa to ensure the probe into the case involving Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati is handled with "extreme care and consideration."

In a letter to her, Singh also requested the Tamil Nadu government to "take all such measures as appropriate to ensure the physical well-being" of the seer. The Prime Minister said that the sentiments of many individuals were closely associated with the Sankaracharya's well-being. "An investigation involving a person of his eminence needs to be conducted with extreme care and consideration," he added.

On two earlier occasions, Singh had said that the Centre had no hand in the arrest of the seer but felt that he should be given his due respect considering his age and stature as a religious leader. He noted that Jayendra Saraswati had been arrested by the Tamil



Manmohan & Jaya A note of caution

Nadu police in connection with investigations into the murder of a former employee of the Kanchi Mutt.

"I believe that the government of Tamil Nadu has had to take this extreme step of arresting Swamiji keeping in view the gravity of the allegations against His Holiness in the murder case," he observed.

"Whereas it is extremely important that due processes of law must not be interfered with and that law must be allowed to take its own course, it is also relevant to note that Swamiji keeps in different health. His Holiness also enjoys a high religious status and posi-

tion in society," he added.

Singh's letter may be seen as a move to counter the BJP's decision to treat the seer's arrest as an issue at par with Ayodhya in its campaign to re-hype Hindutva. The L.K. Advani-led BJP, which has cited the seer's arrest as a mark of the Congress-led Centre's insensitivity to Hindu sentiments and an eagerness to appease minorities, found fresh ammunition yesterday, when Kadiravan, the man who had confessed to have helped hire the killers to murder former Mutt manger Sankararaman, turned hostile before the Kancheepuram magistrate. He said that the police had used force to extract "confessional statements" from him.

No CBI probe

The Supreme Court today dismissed a PIL seeking that the probe against the Kanchi Sankaracharya be handed over to the CBI. The court said the petitioner had not made any effort to verify the facts, nor did he have any locus standi in the case.

PM open to talks with North East rebels

Imphal

21 NOVEMBER

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday offered to hold peace talks with all militant groups in the restive North East region that gave up arms. Winding up a 24-hour trip to Manipur, the Prime Minister assured the people of the troubled state that steps would be taken to prevent the misuse of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, but urged civil society groups not to set any deadlines for withdrawing the anti-terror law.

"I am giving an open invitation to all young men and women who have taken to arms to come for talks with us so that we can usher in peace and prosperity in the North East," the Prime Minister told reporters here. "Our government is willing to talk to anybody who shuns the path of violence."

Manipur has witnessed violent protests since July for the repeal of the anti-terror law, with Apunba Lup, a conglomerate of civil society groups, setting December 10 as the deadline for withdrawing the Act that gives sweeping powers for arrest and use of force to security forces engaged in counter-in-

surgency operations.

Dr Singh appealed to the Apunba Lup, which has threatened to intensify protests over the law, not to get restless. "I appeal to the people of Manipur not to set deadlines and not to adopt a rigid stand. I assure you that we will come with some checks and balances, maybe before the stipulated six months period," he said, referring to the time set by his government for the review of the law by a panel of experts.

The Apunba Lup has called a boycott of teaching of Hindi in schools and colleges as part of its protest until the December 10

deadline. Referring to efforts to bring militant groups to the negotiating table, Dr Singh said there were "positive overtures" from the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulf), an influential group fighting for an independent homeland in Assam.

But he indicated that his government would continue to work with neighbouring nations to crack down on anti-India rebels that had bases outside the country. Dr Singh said Myanmar had given an assurance that it would act against separatists having bases in the neighbouring country.

— IANS



HAT TRICK: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh tries on a Japi, a traditional Assamese hat, in Guwahati on Sunday. — IANS

PM assures execution of Assam Accord

Guwahati
21 NOVEMBER

IN a bid to soothe the frayed nerves of All Assam Students' Union (Aasu), Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced on Sunday that the Assam Accord would be implemented in letter and spirit. "I can assure you that the government is committed to the implementation of the Accord in letter and spirit," the Prime Minister said while inaugurating the Assam Secretariat.

The Centre had announced on Friday that it would soon convene a tripartite meet to take stock of the implementation of the Assam Accord. Aasu had announced an agitational programme to oppose the Prime Minister's visit in protest against the UPA government's decision to retain the controversial Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunals Act. The students' body later called off the protest following an assurance from both the Centre and the state government on a tripartite meeting for proper implementation of the Accord. Referring to the gas cracker project, the Prime Minister said it was a matter of "great disappointment that the project which was conceived by the last Congress government at the Centre, had not yet been fully implemented."

The issue of Rs 400 crore capital subsidy made no progress after the Congress government went out of power. GAIL was in the final stages of preparing a feasibility report and the government would take steps as soon that was available, he added.

— PTI

PM looking to talk autonomy for Kashmir

Manoj Joshi
New Delhi, November 18

THE BOTTOMLINE has been spelt out — no redrawing borders of Jammu and Kashmir and no further partition on religious lines. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's decisions on thinning forces, comments on talks with the Hurriyat and Pakistan, and his economic plans for J&K, have made India's roadmap on Kashmir much clearer.

According to a source who travelled with Singh to the state, the PM is clear that he has no mandate to "negotiate the transfer of Indian territory". Through his visit, Singh has repeatedly referred to his own background as a refugee and in that context, he has made it clear to Pakistani President General Musharraf that he was not willing to accept "a second partition". The PM is conscious that he is the leader of 150 million Muslims as well and he can make no concession that "could jeopardise our social equilibrium by extremism of the right".

The PM's own take appears to be a solution that involves both India and Pakistan offering maximum autonomy to the parts of J&K they control and then open up borders. According to the source, "Soon, you will discover that there is no need to redraw borders in this borderless world."

The source said the PM has come back with the conviction that the 2002 polls have strengthened the position of those who stood against separatism. For this reason, the government appears to be taking a firm line with the Hurriyat — "small men thrown into big chairs", as the source described them.

The PM sees his broad offer



Jobs for J&K

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh announced on Thursday that Jammu and Kashmir would be exempt from the nationwide ban on recruitment in Central government services. "The ban imposed by the Centre will not apply to J&K since the youth in the state are facing hardships in getting jobs," Singh told a rally in Jammu.

PTI, Jammu

for unconditional dialogue with all parties who abjure violence as a sufficient invitation for the Hurriyat to talk. In other words, if the separatists are waiting for an invitation, it is not going to come. The Centre's attitude has been shaped by its belief that Pakistan "has used terrorist means to condition these people (the Hurriyat)".

In this context, the source said, the Centre was willing to once again consider the autonomy proposals that had been placed by the National Conference government some years ago.

■ More reports on Page 2

New Kashmir in Singh vision

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Srinagar, Nov. 17: As the first batch of Indian Army soldiers pulled out of Anantnag, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh offered the people of this benighted state "a new Kashmir" that would be secure, peaceful and prosperous.

To make that dream a reality, he offered a further pull-out of troops if the situation improved, unconditional talks with anyone who abjured violence and a four-year development and reconstruction plan worth Rs 24,000 crore.

Peace was on the Prime Minister's lips but violence made its presence felt as he landed in Srinagar. Singh's touchdown coincided with a gunbattle between two militants and security forces 300 metres from the venue of his public meeting. The militants were killed and the meeting went ahead after some delay.

If 19 months ago his predecessor Atal Bihari Vajpayee had pulled a rabbit out of the hat in Srinagar by extending a hand of friendship to Pakistan, Singh's promise was not as dramatic a gesture. But the lack of drama did not mean an absence of vision.

While Vajpayee had talked to Pakistan, Singh started a dialogue with the Kashmiris themselves. He offered them a vision of prosperity if peace prevailed. He told them that he had come to learn what agitated their hearts and minds and what their needs and wishes were.

However, the crowd response did not match Singh's sentiments. It showed little emotion — perhaps inured by many such promises from Delhi.

Singh's message was essentially four-fold: that his government was sincere about talking unconditionally to anyone and everyone who shunned violence; that those who opposed peace were not the true friends of the Kashmiri people; that peace without dignity was meaningless; and that "peace building" could begin even before the successful conclusion of a dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue.

"I come with no pre-conditions, if your heart is clear, your



Manmohan Singh at the Srinagar rally on Wednesday. (AFP)

intentions honest and your desire genuine. I have no pre-conditions except that you come in peace so that we can give peace a chance," Singh declared in Urdu at the Sher-i-Kashmir Cricket Stadium at Sonawar to a bussed-in crowd of Congress and People's Democratic Party supporters.

"Our doors are open for everyone," he declared.

A dominant theme of Singh's public address was that "peace without dignity is meaningless". By "dignity", Singh said, he meant "respect for all those fundamental rights and freedoms that the citizens of this country enjoy". He argued that the honour and dignity of the Indian armed forces enjoined them to respect human rights.

He stressed this repeatedly and referred to the sufferings of the Kashmiri people both in his public meeting and at the convocation of the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences.

Recalling the "traumatic experience" of the Kashmiris, Singh said: "Nearly every family has witnessed a tragedy, hundreds have been killed or injured and thou-

sands have been displaced. Women and children have been the worst sufferers. My heart goes out to those innocent mothers and sisters, sons and daughters. I share your grief and understand how difficult it often can be to believe that a better future lies ahead."

Because the people of Jammu and Kashmir had suffered and continued to be scarred by violence, the Prime Minister said: "We are working on our neighbour (Pakistan) to put a permanent end to this meaningless violence. If the violence ends, the security presence will be unnecessary."

The troops could then be reduced further, Singh said.

While Singh said that a purposeful dialogue for peace would continue, he also argued: "Kashmir cannot wait until these dialogues arrive at a satisfactory solution. The challenge to peace building in Kashmir is now. I want the journey of development to begin here and now."

■ See Page 6

18 NOV 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Troop-cut not an unacceptable risk, says PM



'No scope for third party'

HYDERABAD, Nov. 14. — The Prime Minister today said the government had taken a risk, though not an unacceptable risk, to order the reduction of troops on the border.

"The major reason for it is that infiltration has come down largely due to the efforts of the security forces. It is an experiment that we will be trying and we will constantly review it. We have taken some risks, but not unacceptable risks," Dr Manmohan Singh said. He was responding to a question at a press conference on what was the basis of his confidence to order troop reduction.

Referring to President Musharraf's proposals for the India-Pakistan border and whether he would tolerate US intervention to hasten the peace process in J&K, he said: "There is no scope for third-party intervention. We are confident of dealing with it bilaterally, on the basis of dialogue, which is making progress. We are committed to get credible, lasting, mutually satisfactory solutions to all problems."

On what he wants to achieve during his trip to

J&K he said, "I want to reach out to the hearts and minds of the J&K people. They have seen a lot of violence. We have to put this chapter of violence behind us and a new chapter of hope and trust should start. That is my goal. That is my hope and my prayer..."

On the recent rise in petro prices, he said there are technical compulsions caused by the steep hike in international prices.

"I have said it is a painful necessity taken in the country's interests, for development and to take care of social concerns. I propose to discuss this with my colleagues in the Left parties. I am confident of the ways and means to convince them," he said.

Earlier, he launched the national Food-For-Work programme in Chevella, Rangareddy district, where he promised to strengthen panchayati raj institutions. The Centre would soon unveil a health and medicare policy for the rural poor.

On how he rated his government's performance which is completing six months, he quipped, "The issue of stability worries the BJP more than anyone else in the country."

Dr Singh said his government has begun very positively on various fronts, including foreign policy and also internally like the dialogue with the Naga groups. "We have improved our relations with Pakistan and USA. There are policies in the CMP (which we have attended to) and the expansion of the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan*." — SNS

15 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

DELHI SPRINGS DIWALI SURPRISE

Kashmir-bound PM cuts troops

Agencies

New Delhi, November 11

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh today announced a winter troops cut in Jammu & Kashmir, taking the media by surprise and drawing instant endorsement from Islamabad.

The move, announced in a statement, precedes Singh's maiden visit to Jammu & Kashmir as Prime Minister on November 17-18 and resumption of the composite dialogue process with Pakistan later in the month. The move will also add to the backdrop for Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's visit to India on November 23 as Saarc's outgoing chairperson.

Explaining the move, Singh said, "During the past several months, the Indian Army and other security forces deployed in the state of Jammu & Kashmir have achieved success in bringing about an improvement in the security situation in the state."

He said effective counter-infiltration measures and successful mobilisation of popular support behind the war against terrorism had led to a "visible improvement" in the ground reality in Jammu & Kashmir. "This is reflected in the increased tempo of economic activity, continuing increase in tourist arrivals and a general sense of security among the people."

Pakistan welcomed the announcement, terming it a step in the right direction. "This is a positive decision and it could ease tension between the two countries. We have completed one cycle and are



FINE PRINT

- A sop to separatists to resume dialogue
- A response to Musharraf's call for demilitarisation of state
- Message to the world that PM is keen to respond to the improved situation, vindicating Indian logic that troops have been sent to J&K only because of militancy

going towards another cycle," Pakistan foreign office spokesman Massod Khan told an Indian TV channel.

But the Prime Minister added that the situation would be kept under constant review. "We cannot, however, afford to relax our vigil. We are aware that infiltration attempts from across the border and the LoC continue, and the infrastructure of terrorism in the shape of training camps and launching bases remain intact.

"If the levels of infiltration and terrorist violence increase, more troops, as necessary, will be redeployed," Singh said.

More reports on Page 4

NOV 2004

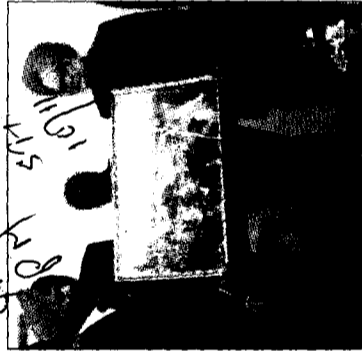
THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

PM Looks East, tariffs southbound

Press Trust of India

THE HAGUE, Nov. 9. — Promising to usher in further tax reforms in the next Budget and to bring down tariffs in India to Asean levels, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh has assured multinational corporations that an independent Petroleum Regulatory Authority would be set up to provide a level playing field to them in the oil sector.

At an interaction with Chief Executive Officers of European and Indian corporates last night, Dr Singh also made it clear that India will adhere to all the commitments already at the WTO including Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights



Representatives of Sikh Gurcharas of the Netherlands present Dr Singh with a replica of a mid-19th century painting of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In Amsterdam on Tuesday. — PTI

(TRIPs) on which legislation will be brought before the Parliament soon.

"An independent and credible

Petroleum Regulatory Authority will be set up," he told Mr Jeroen van der Veer, chairman, Board of Management, Royal Dutch Shell.

Shell has extensive investments in India and is putting in another \$1.3b. At the interaction, Mr Van der Veer had specifically suggested creation of a level playing field for multinational corporations in the oil sector. Declaring that the economic reforms process initiated in India in 1991 were not reversible, Dr Singh said the next Budget would focus on tax reforms. However, he did not elaborate. Recalling that all the finance ministers in the last ten years have repeated the promise of India's commitment to reducing the tariffs to Asean levels, he

said the government would adhere to this commitment.

The economist-Prime Minister also utilised the opportunity to raise concerns in India on the non-tariff barriers imposed by European countries and excessive use of anti-dumping measures on Indian exports and the continued restrictions of movement of professionals from India. He told the chief executives that India was not a mercantilist economy. "We do not want to accumulate reserves for the sake of it. The more we earn, the more we will spend."

Maintaining that India needed at least \$150b, Dr Singh said massive investment was required in infrastructure and therefore great possibilities were open for European skills.

10 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Cong wants Modi out for 'insulting' PM

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Ahmedabad,
October 11

A LIVID Congress leader-ship on Monday demanded Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's resignation and an apology from the BJP for the "uncivilised" and "low-level language" the former had used against Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Modi had apparently referred to Singh as a "Sar-

dar" and mentioned an old Sikh joke about the clock striking 12 o'clock.

Condemning the "unparliamentary language" used against Manmohan Singh, the Congress alleged that it was an affront to the man, the constitutional office he held and the Sikh community. "That a chief minister could stoop so low as to attack the Prime Minister on the basis of his community is highly objectionable," said

an indignant Jayanthi Natarajan, AICC spokesperson. Since a dismissal has to be based on constitutional reasons, the party sought Modi's resignation while "appealing" to the BJP's finer instincts, even if these were non-existent, according to Natarajan.

Modi denial

The Chief Minister's Office in Gandhinagar, mean-

while, denied that Modi had made any derogatory references to the Prime Minister during an election meeting at Dharampur in south Gujarat last week.

A CMO spokesperson told *Hindustan Times* on Monday evening that the Chief Minister had neither called the Prime Minister "Sardar" or "Sikh" nor did he make any reference to 12 o'clock midday. The reference to the watch, the CMO spokesperson

clarified, was to the election symbol of the NCP.

In a similar clarification, the state BJP spokesman, too, has denied Modi's alleged derogatory references to Singh. The spokesman claimed that it was Modi who had announced that the Gurudwara at Lakhtar near Indo-Pak border in Kutch district, where Guru Nanak paid a visit few centuries ago, should be developed as a World Heritage site.

Reason badhao

The PM's 'rozgar badhao' slogan may sound good but it does not pass the reality test

THE UPA's strategy for raising employment rests on very weak pillars. The weakest is the new slogan coined by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh: rozgar badhao (increase employment). It goes with an assurance not to bring in "hire and fire" by changing labour laws. Labour laws may apply only to organised labour which constitute 7 per cent of the work force, but by keeping them in place India has already witnessed an incredibly slow growth in employment in large scale industry. It is not surprising that investors are unwilling to take the risk of setting up industries which they will not be allowed to close down, or hire workers who they cannot fire. The slow growth of employment in the large-scale private manufacturing sector is a major contributor to the growth of unemployment in the country. Today, central and state governments are not in a position to increase employment significantly by more hiring. Therefore, the slogan that employment should be enhanced without a change in labour laws translates into saying that jobs in the unorganised sector should grow. But for these jobs to grow, the country needs growth.

The second pillar of the UPA's strategy to raise employment is the proposal to give 100 days per year of work to able-bodied rural job-seekers. In this case again there is an analytical mistake. Employment guarantee schemes, designed for coping with droughts, are being sought to be used to solve chronic problems.

Unemployment is highest among the highly educated. NSSO data shows that in 1999-00, unemployment among illiterates was just 0.2 per cent. For those educated up to primary school, unemployment was 1.2 per cent. In contrast, unemployment among college graduates was 8.8 per cent. The employment guarantee scheme will not target employment where it is the highest. The pitiful resources of the government can hardly overcome economy-wide labour market issues. If there is a chronic problem in the labour market, a government job guarantee scheme can hardly address it. It is not the job of the government to give jobs. The job of the government is to create an environment where the economy grows well.

If India had succeeded in massive industrialisation, like China, this would have generated a great deal of employment, particularly for college graduates who would be technicians operating machines. This would have further created incentives for people to get education. If the government is serious about the unemployment problem, this is the area where a concerted policy focus is required. What India needs to do is to launch a concerted attack on matching China in the game of globalised production. This includes rationalisation of customs and excise and VAT, removal of small scale sector reservations, easing FDI procedures, as well as reforms to labour law.

INDIAN EXPRESS

6 OCT 2004

No dilution on cross-border terror: PM

SAYS PAK

S. Rajagopalan
New York, September 25

ALTHOUGH THE joint statement that followed the meeting between Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf made no mention of India's concerns over cross-border terrorism, the Indian Prime Minister has denied any dilution of the nation's stand on the subject.

Singh said he had made it clear to the Pakistani President that rooting out the menace will remain a "precondition" for moving forward on the dialogue process. "I mentioned unambiguously to President Musharraf that the starting point of the whole dialogue is the commitment given by Pakistan in the January 6 statement that territory under its control will not be used for terrorist activities," Singh told a media conference.

INDIA'S

"There should be no doubt that this (ending cross-border terrorism) is the precondition for moving forward... We cannot go on with confidence-building measures or discuss substantive issues if terrorist acts continue," he said, adding that Musharraf "recognised" the Indian concerns. Singh also pointed out that the joint statement did refer to the January 6 statement that had a binding commitment on Pakistan's part on the terror issue. The Prime Minister otherwise stuck to the description that his meeting with Musharraf represented "a new beginning".

"It was an easy flow of conversation and there was never a dull moment. He spoke with great sincerity to improve relations with our two countries. He also told me he was grossly misunderstood in India and many other coun-

COMING SOON:

Vir Sanghvi
New York, September 25

IT WAS a meeting that would set the tone for India-Pakistan relations. When General Pervez Musharraf met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New York on Friday, he knew that he had to charm the reticent Indian Prime Minister into agreeing to take the dialogue process forward.

Musharraf is noted for his charm (which he can switch on and off at will) but Singh is more matter-of-fact. So while Musharraf came bearing gifts — including marksheets from Singh's old school, which is now in Pakistan — Singh was ready to be suspicious.

The one-on-one meeting, when aides left the two men alone, was due to last 15 minutes. But Singh was not

AND

BEHIND THE NEWS

sure that it would take that long. "If I find that it is not going too well then I'll call you in after ten minutes," he warned his delegation.

In the event, things went so well that Singh and Musharraf spent an hour together alone, without any aides being present. Afterwards, Musharraf said that he was optimistic that the peace process would now go ahead. And Singh said that he was impressed by Musharraf's sincerity.

The text of the Joint Statement released after the meeting does not offer many clues as to what really transpired. But it marks some concessions on both sides. India did not mention cross-border terrorism (this was a

LINKS

joint statement that both sides had to agree with) but threw in a reference to the January 6 agreement where Pakistan vowed that it would not let its territory be used for terrorist purposes. And the Pakistanis abandoned their old stand that any peace must be based on a territorial settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Instead, they spoke India's language about how confidence-building measures must first transform the climate before any settlement could be considered.

But the two men, it does seem, did agree, in principle, to a host of proposals. Within the next three months or so, new Indian consulates will open in Pakistan and vice-versa. There will be a bus-link between the two Kashmiris. And a train link is also in the works.

Continued on Page 4



tries," Singh said. Asked if he discussed any of the options on Kashmir, Singh said no. At the meeting, Musharraf reportedly said that there were many options on the issue. The Prime Minister confined himself to saying that India was willing to look at the various options "with an open mind".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 SEP 2004

SINGH TAKES SWIPE AT WEST ON TERROR

PM raises UNSC pitch

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
at the UNHQ

Sept. 23. — Making a pitch for India's inclusion as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, the Prime Minister today also took a swipe at the "political expediency" that besets the US-led global war against terrorism.

In his maiden address to the UN General Assembly, Dr Manmohan Singh relegated Pakistan to a brief paragraph towards the end of the speech, after assertions of support for the democratic process in Iraq and Afghanistan, "two countries with which India has had historically friendly ties". That was a clear indication that India aims to get out of the rut that, in the international community, equates it with its Western neighbour.

Wearing an ash-grey *bandgala* suit, Dr Singh said: "The expansion of the Security Council and the inclusion of countries like India as permanent members would be a first step in the process of making the UN a truly representative body."

The 15-minute address in English, to a near-full house, was aimed at highlighting the need to avoid "selective approaches and political expediency" in dealing with issues like terrorism and nuclear proliferation. He

said the UN was "unable to exert an effective influence on global economic and political issues of critical importance" because of what he termed "its democracy deficit, which prevents a multi-lateralism that is based on a democratically-evolved global consensus". In an oblique reference to the lack of international pressure on countries like Pakistan, which are not democracies, he said India is

a responsible democracy, with an "impeccable" record in non-proliferation and a strong base in human rights. "Terrorism exploits the technologies spawned by globalisation, recruits its foot soldiers on ideologies of bigotry and hatred, and directly targets democracies. And yet it's a sad reality that international networks of terror appear to cooperate more among themselves than the democratic nations they target," he said.



Dr Singh addresses the UN General Assembly on Thursday. — AFP

German support

German foreign minister Mr Joschka Fischer appealed to include India, Japan, Brazil and Germany as permanent members on the UNSC.

No compromise on J&K: Pak

Pakistan Prime Minister Mr Shaukat Aziz has said that Islamabad will never compromise on Kashmir, PTI adds from Islamabad.

Pak on mind, PM leaves on America trip

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 19

TWENTY DAYS after the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan clinched a 13-point agreement to strengthen confidence-building measures, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is to review the progress of the peace process with President Pervez Musharraf in New York on Friday.

The two leaders are expected to carry forward the composite dialogue process leading to enhanced people-to-people contacts and cooperation on humanitarian issues, official sources said minutes before the Prime Minister's departure on a nine-day visit to the UK and the US.

Considerable significance is being attached to Singh's talks with the Pakistani President as it will be the first top-level contact with Musharraf after the installation of the UPA government.

Singh will have a breakfast meeting with US President George W. Bush on September 21. He is likely to stress the need for greater economic cooperation in the light of India continuing its economic reforms process. In his departure statement, Singh said that both India and the US were determined to endow their vital relationship with greater content, particularly in the fields of economics and high technology.

Meetings with the heads of state of Japan, Afghanistan, Germany and Brazil apart from other candidates for permanent membership of the Security Council have also been lined up for Singh on the side-lines of the UN General Assembly session.

On the first leg of his visit, Singh will meet British Premier Tony Blair on Monday in London. Later, a joint declaration will be issued. It is likely dwell

THE ITINERARY



Manmohan is greeted by Sonia Gandhi and Union ministers before his departure.

September 20 Meeting with Blair in London

September 21 Breakfast meeting with Bush, likely to stress importance of greater economic cooperation

September 23 Address to UN General Assembly, will make case for India's candidature as permanent member of UN Security Council

September 24 Meeting with Musharraf in New York, will review progress of peace process

upon a future joint strategy on combating global terrorism, illegal immigration and conflict resolution. Singh will also meet a select group of CEOs of British industry to encourage them to take advantage of the investment and business opportunities in India.

In New York, Singh will address the UNGA on September 23. "We will make our case for India's candidature as permanent member of the UN Security Council, which is gaining increasing international support," Singh said in his departure statement.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 SEP 2004

নাটকীয় মোড় আশা করা হচ্ছে না, ৯ দিনের সফরে মনমোহন

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৯ সেপ্টেম্বর: প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার পরে মনমোহন সিংহের দ্বিতীয় ও দীর্ঘতর বিদেশ সফরের খুঁটিনাটি চিত্রনাট্যের রচয়িতা, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়ের এক কর্তা জানিয়ে দিলেন, কোনও নাটকীয় কূটনৈতিক সিদ্ধিলাভ এই সফরের লক্ষ্য নয়। ভারত-মার্কিন অথবা ভারত-পাক সম্পর্কে নাটকীয় কোনও মোড়ও এই সফরে আসবে না। বরঞ্চ আবেগহীন, নৈর্ব্যক্তিক এক অবস্থানই নেওয়া হবে।

তার মানে এই নয় যে 'ফিল গুড' উপেক্ষিত হবে। কূটনীতিতে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি সম্পর্ক বজায় রাখার ক্ষেত্রে এই 'সুবাস্টাস্‌টাও প্রয়োজনীয় বলেই ঠাসা কর্মসূচি ও 'ভাল ভাল' কিছু কূটনৈতিক প্রস্তাব ঝোলায় ভরে আজ লন্ডন হয়ে আমেরিকা পাড়ি দিলেন মনমোহন। এবং অতীত ঐতিহ্য ভেঙে বিমানবন্দর নয়, আনুষ্ঠানিক বিদায় নিলেন ৭ রেসকোর্স রোড থেকেই।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসাবে তাঁর এটাই প্রথম আমেরিকা সফর। উদ্দেশ্য, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের সাধারণ অধিবেশনে যোগ দেওয়া। এই ৯ দিনের বৈঠকে মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট

জর্জ বুশ, ইংল্যান্ডের প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্লেয়ার থেকে শুরু করে পাকিস্তানের প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফের সঙ্গেও মনমোহনের বৈঠক হওয়ার কথা। এই সফরের প্রাক্কালে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়ের এক কর্তা জানাচ্ছেন, মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টকে জানানো হবে যে নতুন সরকার আর্থিক সংস্কার এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার প্রপ্নে দৃঢ়সংকল্প। এই সংস্কার অর্থনৈতিক আদানপ্রদানের ক্ষেত্রে আরও বেশি সুযোগ তৈরি করবে। পাশাপাশি গত কয়েক বছরের মতো এই সফর যেন অতিরিক্ত পাকিস্তান-কেন্দ্রিক না হয়ে যায়, শুধু কাশ্মীর-বিতর্কই যাতে গোটা সফরে ছায়া ফেলার সুযোগ না পায়, সে বিষয়টিও মাথায় রাখা হচ্ছে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসাবে এই প্রথম লন্ডন ও আমেরিকা সফরে যাওয়ার সুবাদে দু'দেশের পক্ষ থেকেই কিছু ইতিবাচক ঘোষণায় সফরের মেজাজ অনেকটাই নরম হয়ে যাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে। তার আবহ তৈরি করতে ভারতে পরমাণু গবেষণা সংক্রান্ত রফতানির উপর থেকে মার্কিন নিষেধাজ্ঞাও উঠে গেল। অন্য দিকে ভারতও পাক-ভিসা



দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে বেশ কিছু নিয়ম শিথিল করে দিল। এই ছোট ছোট ঘটনাগুলি নিউইয়র্ক, লন্ডন, ইসলামাবাদ ও নয়াদিল্লিতে ইতিবাচক ব্যঙ্গনাও তৈরি করেছে। কিন্তু ভারতীয় বিদেশমন্ত্রক থেকে এটাও বলা হচ্ছে, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই সফরকে ঘিরে কোনও নাটকীয় প্রত্যাশা তো দূরের কথা, এখনই চটজলদি কোনও লক্ষ্যে পৌঁছে যাওয়াও অভিপ্রেত নয়। আরও একটি

বিষয়কে যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব দিচ্ছে মনমোহন সরকার। নভেম্বরে আমেরিকায় প্রেসিডেন্ট নির্বাচন। সেই নির্বাচনের ফলাফল দেখে না নিয়ে আগে থেকেই কোনও গুরুতর কূটনৈতিক পদক্ষেপ এড়ানোর চেষ্টাই হবে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়ের এক কর্তার কথায়, "গত ছ'বছর ধরে বাজপেয়ী-জম্মানায় ভারত ও মার্কিন সম্পর্কে এর পর সাতের পাতায়

ANADARAZAR PATRIKA 20 SEP 2004

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E. T. S.

৯ দিনের সফরে মনমোহন

প্রথম পাতার পর একটা আতিশয্য লক্ষ্য করা গিয়েছে। এ ক্ষেত্রে সচেতন ভাবেই কৌশল বদলানো হচ্ছে। বাজপেয়ী যখন প্রধানমন্ত্রী, তখন আমেরিকা থেকে ঘন ঘন বহু প্রতিনিধি আসতেন। কিন্তু গত দু'মাসে মার্কিন শীর্ষ নেতাদের আগমনের ক্ষেত্রে এই ঘনঘটা দেখা যায়নি।" ওই কর্তার আরও বক্তব্য, "আমাদের মনোভাবে মার্কিন রাষ্ট্রনেতারা খুশি হয়ে প্রেসিডেন্টের ওভাল অফিসে আমাদের নিয়ে একান্ত বৈঠক করলেন কি না, তাতে কিছু এসে যায় না। শুধুমাত্র এটাই বিদেশনীতির 'সাফল্য'-এর মাপকাঠি হতে পারে না। বিদেশনীতির সাফল্য নির্ভর করবে জাতীয় স্বার্থকে কতটা মজবুত ও সুরক্ষিত রাখা যাচ্ছে তার উপরেই।" জাতীতে ওভাল অফিসে তৎকালীন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা ব্রজেশ মিশ্রকে সম্মান দিয়ে নিয়ে গিয়ে বৈঠক করানো হয়েছে। তাকে 'বেনজির' বলেও অভিহিত করা হয়েছে। এ ব্যাপারে কোনও সন্দেহই নেই যে মনমোহন-সরকার এই 'সাফল্য'-এ আর উৎসাহী নয়।

এই সফরটি যাতে অন্যান্য বারের মতো পাকিস্তান-কেন্দ্রিকতায় না ভেঙে 'সে' ব্যাপারেও সচেতন থাকতে চাইছে দিল্লি। অতীতে বহুবার এই ধরনের সফর ভারতের কাছে শেষ পর্যন্ত পাকিস্তান ও কাশ্মীর সমস্যা নিয়ে আলোচনার মঞ্চ হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে। মনমোহন সরকার মনে করছে তাতে আঁতরে লাভ হয়েছে ইসলামাবাদের। কাশ্মীর-সমস্যাকে আন্তর্জাতিক স্তরে তুলে ধরার সুযোগ নিয়েছে তারা বার বার। এ বার এই চিরাচরিত বৃত্ত থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে ভারত-মার্কিন দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের বিভিন্ন দিক খতিয়ে দেখার ও অন্যান্য নির্ধারিত বৈঠক ও কর্মসূচির উপর গুরুত্ব দেওয়ার কথা ভাবা হয়েছে। সেই কারণেই মুশারফের সঙ্গে বৈঠকটি ফেলা হয়েছে ২৪ সেপ্টেম্বর, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কর্মসূচির শেষ দিন। বিদেশমন্ত্রক সূত্রের খবর, প্রতিবারই কাশ্মীর-বিতর্কের ছায়া ত্যাগ করে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নিউইয়র্ক সফরকে। কাশ্মীর নিয়ে ভারত-পাকিস্তান চাপানউতোর অন্যান্য বিষয়কে ঢেকে দেয়। সেই কারণেই শেষ দিনে বৈঠক ফেলে এ বার সেই সম্ভাবনাকে কমানোর চেষ্টা হয়েছে। ভারত-পাক বৈঠক সম্পর্কে প্রধানমন্ত্রী শুধু বলেছেন, "পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে চলতি আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়ায় এই বৈঠক আরও একটি পদক্ষেপ।"

রাতের খবর, লন্ডনে পৌঁছে বিরোধী দল নেতা বাজপেয়ীকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেছেন, "দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা চালিয়ে যাওয়ার পূর্বশর্ত হল, ইসলামাবাদকেই কঠোর ভাবে সম্মান দমন করতে হবে। মুশারফকে বলব, ভারত আলোচনা চালিয়ে যেতে আন্তরিক। সমস্যাটা জটিল। তাই দু'পক্ষকেই স্বৈর্য ধরতে হবে।"

জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা পর্যবেক্ষণ উপদেষ্টা জে এন দীক্ষিত দায়িত্বভার নেওয়ার পর থেকেই এই সফরের খুঁটিনাটি আর হোমওয়ার্ক তৈরি করেছেন। সেই চিত্রনাট্য অনুযায়ী শুধু আমেরিকা নয়, পাকিস্তান ও বাংলাদেশের মতো রাষ্ট্রের ক্ষেত্রেও সরকার এই একই রকম নৈর্ব্যক্তিক বিদেশনীতি গ্রহণের পক্ষপাতী। এই বিদেশনীতির মাধ্যমে কংগ্রেসও দল হিসাবে তার পুরনো জাতীয়তাবাদী আদর্শকে নতুন করে পুনরুজ্জীবিত করার সুযোগ পাচ্ছে। কূটনৈতিক পর্যবেক্ষকদের মতে, বহু বছর পর ইন্দিরা গাঁধীর প্রতিচ্ছবি দেখা যাচ্ছে মনমোহন-সরকারের মধ্যে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রের খবর, এই নৈর্ব্যক্তিক বিদেশনীতির রূপায়ণের অর্থ এই নয় যে ভারত-আমেরিকা, বা ভারত-পাক দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কে অবনতি ঘটানো হবে। বরঞ্চ এই সংকেতই দিল্লির পক্ষ থেকে বিশ্বের কাছে পৌঁছানো হবে যে এই দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্ক এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়াই ভারতের অবশ্য কর্তব্য। তার জন্য যা যা করণীয় সবই করা হবে। তবে সেই পদক্ষেপের মধ্যে কোথাও আতিশয্য যাতে না থাকে সেই হিসাবও কষে রাখা হচ্ছে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী এ বার মার্কিন স্টক এক্সচেঞ্জে বক্তৃতা দেবেন। সন্দেহ নেই ঘটনাটি অভিনব। বৃশের সঙ্গে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বৈঠকে দু'দেশের মধ্যে বাণিজ্যিক সম্পর্ককে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া, তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি সম্পর্ক আরও মজবুত করার মতো বিষয় থাকছে। অনাবাসী ভারতীয়দের সঙ্গেও দেখা করবেন মনমোহন। পাশাপাশি ভারত-পাক, ভারত-আমেরিকা, আমেরিকা-পাক বৈঠকগুলি চলতে থাকবে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী যাত্রার আগে বলেছেন, "দু'দেশই পারস্পরিক সম্পর্ককে আরও বৃহত্তর আঙ্গিকে তুলে ধরতে সংকল্পবদ্ধ। বিশেষত আর্থিক ও উচ্চপ্রযুক্তি বিষয়ে।"

রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের এই সাধারণ সভার বৈঠকে ইন্দিরা ফি-বছর যেতেন না। পাঠাতেন বিদেশমন্ত্রীকে। রাজীব গাঁধীও প্রধানমন্ত্রী থাকাকালীন তা-ই করেছেন। নরসিংহ রাও তৎকালীন

বিরোধী দল নেতা বাজপেয়ীকে পাঠান। তবে বাজপেয়ী প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার পর থেকেই দেখা গিয়েছে, প্রতি বছর নিয়ম করে সেপ্টেম্বরে তিনি আমেরিকায় যেতেন। মনমোহনও এন ডি এ জমানার সেই ঐতিহ্য ভাঙলেন না। তবে এই সিদ্ধান্ত তিনি নিয়েছেন, পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে আলোচনাই যেন এই সফরের কেন্দ্রবিন্দু হয়ে না ওঠে।

PM picks RSS journal for his first interview

Media - PM *16/9*
**Tactical Move Aimed
At Burying Hatchet**

By Mohua Chatterjee/TNN

New Delhi: It seems like an audacious manoeuvre, aimed to disarm. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has chosen RSS journal, 'Panchajanya', for his maiden interview, a sure disappointment for many in the press corps eager to grab that 'first'. 'Time' magazine is the beneficiary of his second interaction with the press, its choice perhaps dictated by the PM's forthcoming visit to New York for the UNGA session.

The interview to 'Panchajanya' is being viewed as the PM's bid to reach out to the opposition and to bury the hatchet. The conversation with the editor of the Hindi weekly saw Singh being afforded an opportunity to put across his side of the skirmish in parliament. Interestingly, the magazine has also featured leader of the opposition L K Advani—more prominently than Singh—in the same issue, who has reciprocated the PM's 'let bygones be bygones' message. "It's a closed chapter," Advani is quoted as saying in response to a question on the standoff in parliament.

'Panchajanya' itself seems to be in synch with the mellow mood with the editor sparing Singh the tough questions that are its stock-in-trade. Rather, by singing a tune contrary to Yashwant Sinha's "shikhandi" note, he describes Singh as one who is beyond criticism. The bonhomie extends to giving the Prime Minister

space to blame the dispute on the opposition, and the interviewer urging Singh to understand that the opposition has its own compulsions to be heard. However, political circles note that there is realpolitik behind the display of warmth and



civility on both sides soon after the bare-knuckle showdown they had on the floor of parliament. For the government, the loss of almost the whole session has brought home the need to carry the opposition with it. For the opposition, the growing middle class annoyance with such agitational measures in parliament has come as a blow.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told Panchajanya, "My government does not consider anyone to be an enemy" (*Meri sarkar kisi ko bhi shatru nahin manti*). He added, "It is better if the government and the opposition work together." The Prime Minister's bid to reach across the aisle comes at a time when he is being egged on by colleagues as well as partners on the Left to up the ante against the BJP.

Handwritten notes:
Joshi
K.P.A.
Joshi
Prime Minister

Manmohan plans 'policy blitzkrieg'

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By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 14. Before he leaves for a week-long foreign trip, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has called a Cabinet meeting on Friday where he proposes to unveil a "policy blitzkrieg," all intended to operationalise the commitments made in the Common Minimum Programme. The idea is to give a new orientation and new energy to the Government, which has so far been seen as engaged mostly in fire-fighting operations and has spent most of its time in coping with political distractions.

Dr. Singh and his senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office are reported to have been working overtime during the last five days, reviewing the pace of implementation of the CMP. There is a realisation that part of the supporting Left parties' impatience is on account of the somewhat-below-expectation implementation in the first 100 days of the United Progressive Alliance Government. Some of the promises made in the CMP have been sought to be fulfilled by way of increased allocations for education and the food-for work programme. But it is realised that something dramatic, if not drastic, needs to be initiated.

Actionable proposals

The CMP consists of four types of actionable proposals. First, commissions and committees such as a national commission on the unorganised informal sector; a second "Sarkaria" commission; an administrative reforms commission; a national manufacturing competition commission; revamp of the National Integration Council and a National Commission on Education. These are easily doable proposals, but the Government is yet to announce a single commission.

A second clutch of proposals includes legislative initiatives on cooperatives, reservation for women in legislatures, a model law on communal violence, constitutional status to the Minorities Commission, a law on Urdu under Articles 345 and 347, the Right to Information, the Lok Pal, and repeal of POTA. The prolonged disruption

of Parliament in the budget session derailed the Government's legislative agenda. Third, a review of the existing programmes and, fourth, new programmes. The progress so far has been slow. Dr. Singh has begun the process of asking each Minister to come up with five action points that his/her Ministry could implement in the next six months. The Ministers would be held accountable on this score.

Friday group

According to informed sources, Dr. Singh has been pondering over ways of producing a synergy between the political and administrative elements, especially between the Congress and the PMO. There is a structured core group which meets every Friday; it consists of the Prime Minister himself, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, the Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh, and the political secretary to the Congress president, Ahmed Patel. But this Friday group has yet to acquire the efficacy or the cohesion of an inner group.

Role for young MPs?

There is a proposal before the Prime Minister to tap young and competent Congressmen and women for administrative and parliamentary responsibilities. One innovation could be the revival of the parliamentary secretary system, whereby young MPs could get attached to important Ministers.

Above all, Dr. Singh has accepted the advice that he needs to be more "visible" than he has been so far. According to sources, Dr. Singh believes that the visit to Andhra Pradesh was a rewarding experience. Visits to Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East are being worked out. In fact, the visit to Jammu and Kashmir was proposed for this week but was put off because of the Election Commission's model code of conduct coming into force. The intention is to repackage the Manmohan Singh Government as a purposeful entity.

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"I am in charge and will last"

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4. There is "no foundation" to the "insinuation" that there are two power centres in the United Progressive Alliance Government, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said at his first formal press conference here today. Also, he asserted that he would not be pressured into giving up his job half-way. "Let there be no doubt or ambiguity" on his Government lasting its full term and that "the misconception" that he could be pressured into giving up "is simply not going to materialise."

Also, Dr. Singh made it clear that while his Government wanted to deepen the process of peace and friendship with Pakistan, the onus was on Islamabad to live up to the promise made in the January 6, 2004 joint statement that Pakistani territory would not be allowed to be used for terrorist activities.

Before taking questions during the hour-long press conference, Dr. Singh had issued — and declared it as "taken as read" — an opening statement that sums up the political perspective of the coalition Government.

'India must shine'

Dr. Singh's theme song was that the people of India had given a mandate to him and had rejected the National Democratic Alliance. He said the United Progressive Alliance "was a natural product of that mandate and reflects the preference of the overwhelming majority of the electorate."

Responding to questions of the presumed incompatibility between his Government's desire to carry forward reforms and its dependence of the Left parties, Dr. Singh's argument was that economic decisions should be equitable. In his opening statement, he said: "India must shine for the poor, it must shine for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes and the minorities. India must shine in the cities and the villages. We want India to shine, and shine for all."

In response to questions on



The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, addresses his first press conference in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Kamal Narang

the current political controversies, he sought to present himself as a reasonable and moderate voice. On the question of periodic "tinkering" with textbooks, he said that "certain distortions were introduced" during the previous regime and these needed to be "corrected," but added that "I am opposed to fundamentalism of all kinds, be it of the Left or the Right."

Savarkar issue

Asked about the controversy over the Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar's remarks about Veer Savarkar, he said

there were aspects to Savarkar's life which were controversial and some of his views were not acceptable, but did not think "any good is achieved by speaking ill of the dead; it generates only unnecessary controversy."

On the latest inquiry ordered into the Godhra train carnage, Dr. Singh said the new inquiry would in no way impinge on the on-going investigation. "I am fully satisfied," he said thereby backing the Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, who has appointed a three-member probe panel headed by a retired Supreme Court judge.

'Tainted' Ministers

Nor did the Prime Minister give an inch on the question of the "tainted" Ministers. He repeated his Government's contention that there could be no two categories of "taint." The remedy to the problem was to see that "tainted" people did not get into Parliament. "This malady must be nipped in the bud, at the electoral stage, if we seriously wish to deal with its consequences for governance," he had noted in the opening statement. He said he was considering an all-party conference on

electoral reforms on this count.

About the brewing discontent in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East, Dr. Singh said his Government would fulfil its internal security obligation in "a humane and compassionate manner and in keeping with [the] democratic traditions." He invited all groups, including the Hurriyat to sit at the dialogue table; "we are not laying down any pre-conditions, but expect that those who resort to militancy should eschew the path of violence, and stop the killing of innocent citizens."

More reports on Page 8

India, Pakistan to continue dialogue

● Kasuri strikes a jarring note

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4. The Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan, Shyam Saran and Riaz Khokhar, today agreed to recommend to their Foreign Ministers, who meet over the next two days, that the composite dialogue process be continued.

This agreement, contained in a joint press statement, came on a day when the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, said that the people of Kashmir be given the choice to determine their future — using an alternative term for a plebiscite.

Using strong words, Mr. Kasuri said that India and Pakistan were still at the "starting line" as far as Kashmir was concerned. In an apparent response to a comment made from New Delhi, Mr. Kasuri said, "Kashmiris are not holding India and Pakistan hostage. By denying them their rights, we have kept their future in limbo, and ours in a state of perpetual tension."

'Unifocal statement'

Reacting to it, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said there was "considerable disappointment here" at the "unifocal statement" made by Mr. Kasuri prior to his departure from Islamabad. "This is not in consonance with the spirit in which we have conducted the

composite dialogue so far. It also violates Pakistan's own call for a rhetoric restraint regime," he said.

'Positive assessment'

The Foreign Secretaries, who met to prepare the ground for the Foreign Ministers' meeting, "assessed positively" the talks on the eight subjects that comprise the composite dialogue — peace and security, Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul navigation project, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and cultural cooperation and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields.

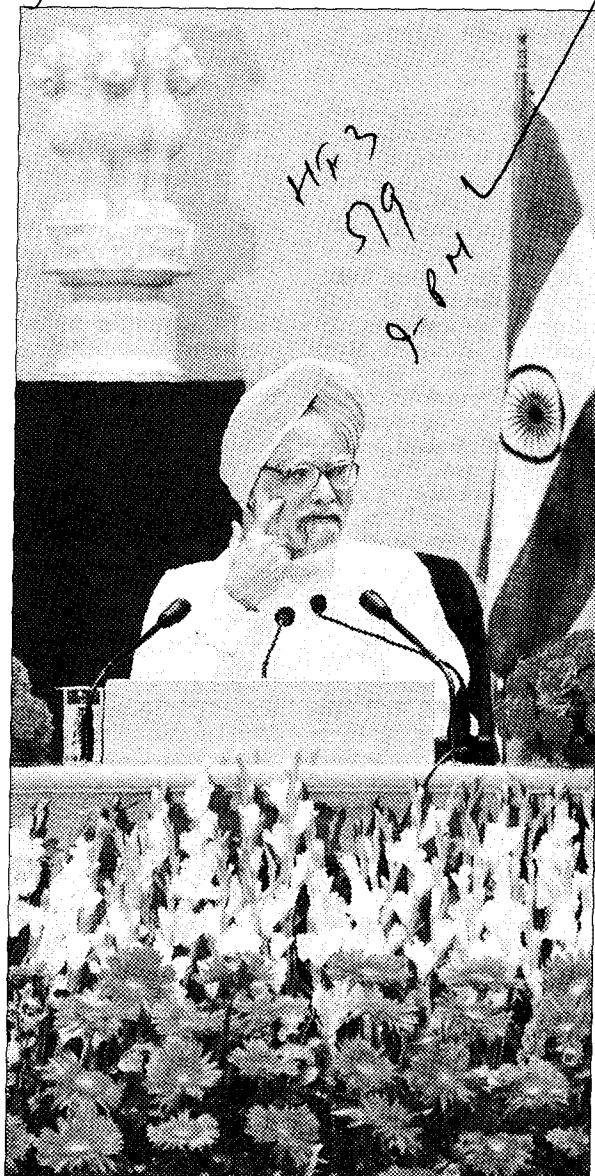
"The Foreign Secretaries agreed that the discussions had been productive and had taken place in a cordial and constructive atmosphere. Several useful ideas and suggestions were made by both sides," the press statement said.

Official sources told this correspondent that while India called upon Pakistan to put an end to terrorism emanating from its territory, Mr. Khokhar said that Kashmiris should be associated with the current dialogue between the two countries. Responding to the Pakistani suggestion, Mr. Saran said the Government of India represented the Kashmiri people as well.

More reports on Page 9

PM pulls no punches

J.P.M



S.N. SINHA/HT
CENTRESTAGE: Manmohan Singh talking to newsmen in New Delhi.

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 4

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh expressed hope that the private sector would show sensitivity towards the need to enlarge employment opportunities for SC/STs, OBCs and other disadvantaged groups.

Singh's first public articulation on the delicate issue comes in the backdrop of the industry's negative response on earmarking jobs for marginalised groups in a rapidly changing economy. Singh also sought to dispel apprehensions that the government would force job reservations down the private sector.

"The modalities will have to be worked out in close consultation with the private sector. A Group of Ministers has been set up to engage in a constructive dialogue with the industry to see what is possible without legislation," the Premier said at a crowded press conference at Vigyan Bhawan, marking 100 days in office.

The first press conference to be held by a PM in almost a decade, Singh dispensed with his opening remarks — and later even extended the interaction by 10 more minutes — to field a wide range of questions.

Does he endorse Aiyar's statements on Savarkar?

Aiyar's statements are his personal views and not that of the Government. Veer Savarkar was a freedom fighter and a patriot.

But there are aspects of his life which have created controversies. He was associated with an ideology we do not agree with.

Does he endorse one of his senior minister's detoxification of the administration?

We don't want the educational system to become a prisoner of ideology and bureaucracy. Our focus is on de-politicisation of institutions by giving them maximum autonomy to manage their concerns. But certain distortions were introduced in the last five or six years. These needed to be corrected. I'm opposed to fundamentalism of all kinds, whether from the Left or Right.

Message for the country.

No power can stop an idea whose time has come. It is the emergence of India as a global power whose time has come. We can realise this objective.

The Government's objective is that the country must forge ahead with a higher rate of economic growth but that growth process must generate more employment, must be equitable, socially just and humane and agriculture and farmers must receive more focussed attention.

India must shine for the poor... the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and minorities. India must shine in the cities and the villages.

We want India to shine, and shine for all.

Singh's Mr Clean image clashing with the tainted ministers' controversy.

Time has come for political parties to evolve a mechanism to ensure that tainted persons of all shades don't enter Parliament. There is an inconsistency in the system, where they can sit in judgement on important legislation, but not become ministers.

Is Sonia the super PM?

There is no foundation for such a statement. As UPA chairperson and Congress president she has every right to know what goes on in the government.

Vajpayee has urged the Government to take steps to break the parliamentary deadlock.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. I met Mr Vajpayee as part of our efforts to consult political parties before Indo-Pak talks. As for the wider issue of what happens in Parliament, the Speaker has convened a meeting to discuss the issue.

On charges of his "wrong" behaviour with the Opposition in Parliament.

The impression that we are not amenable to reason or discussion is not correct. The specific incident is a closed chapter.

A reluctant PM initially, how does he feel after 100 days?

I was not an aspirant. Since I was entrusted with the job, I consider it a great challenge and honour.

Manmohan sets agenda for CMs

Statesman News Service & PTI

NEW DELHI, July 18. — Invoking Jawaharlal Nehru's name, the Prime Minister has asked all chief ministers to work for development and also ensure that officials are not transferred frequently. For, frequent transfers slow down the administration process.

"Frequent transfers of public servants have a debilitating impact not only on their performance and morale, but also on the whole process of governance," Dr Manmohan Singh said in a letter to chief ministers, copies of which were released here.

The Prime Minister also called for efforts to reform public institutions at the Centre as well as in states. "It will involve energising institutions of governance and ensuring accountability in the provisions of public services, transparency in handling of public funds..."

Maintenance of law and order, Dr Singh said, is necessary for economic development and social harmony. Also, officials responsible for public services have to be accountable. Asking chief ministers to be "visionary leaders", he called for "collective endeavour in the true spirit of an abiding partnership in the best traditions of cooperative federalism".

Despite accelerating growth over the last 20 years, India is yet to realise its full potential. And to realise that, there has to be a "determined and concerted action on many fronts".



Dr Singh: Banking on Nehru

Remembering Pandit Nehru's goals of ending poverty, illiteracy, disease and inequality of opportunity, the Prime Minister said India had developed unevenly. "We need to make our economic reforms inclusive, at the Centre and in the states." To make reforms inclusive, there has to be a sharper focus on agriculture through increased public investment and employment generation. "It will mean ensuring equal opportunities for vulnerable sections like SCs, STs, OBCs, women and minorities," he said. This would mean investing in backward areas. Inclusive reforms, he said, must keep in mind the interests of labour in organised and unorganised sectors.

Dr Singh said: "We need to give specific timelines for delivery on key development goals and be held publicly accountable for them. We need to identify the bottlenecks... and procedures that limit the utilisation of our potential."

9-PM
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Manmohan promises 'New Deal' for rural India

By Our New Delhi Bureau

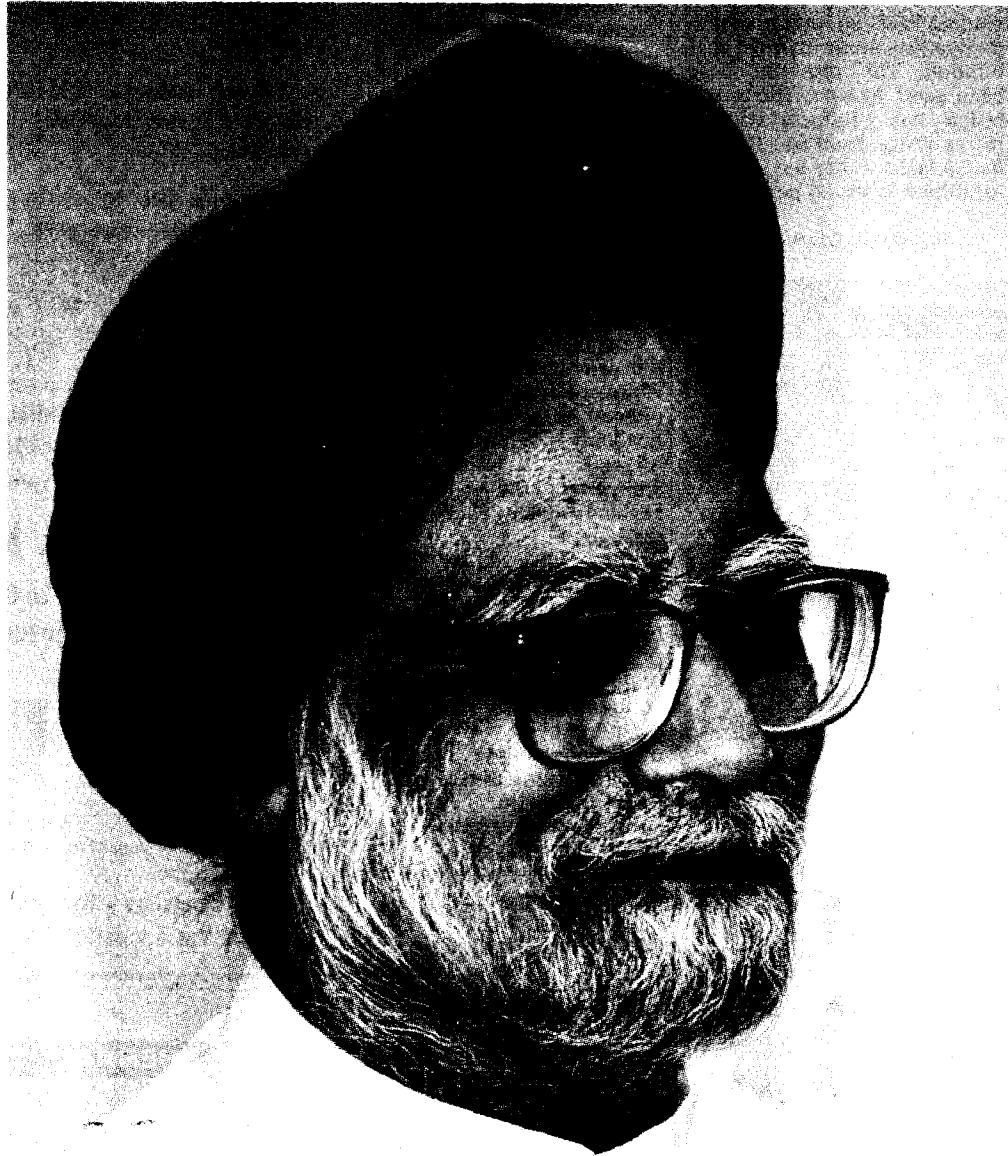
NEW DELHI, JUNE 24. Addressing the nation for the first time since being sworn in a month ago as Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh tonight reiterated the commitment made in the Common Minimum Programme to give a "New Deal" to rural India. Acknowledging that "farmers in many parts of the country have faced distress and there has been no helping hand," he claimed that his Government "is already addressing this issue directly by pursuing policies that improve the farmer's access to affordable credit."

In his 20-minute televised speech, the Prime Minister articulated the governing philosophy and the administrative priorities of the United Progressive Alliance regime. Rather than spell out the item-wise policies, Dr. Singh promised a caring and sensitive dispensation, a government that is committed to "equity and social justice" at home and to the pursuit of "supreme national interests" through "an independent foreign policy."

Claiming that the electorate's "verdict is clear," Dr. Singh assured the nation that he and his Government had understood the meaning of that verdict. According to him the verdict was for "a change in the manner in which this country is run, a change in national priorities and a change in the processes and focus of governance." Dr. Singh said his Government had been given "a mandate which enjoins us to be sensitive to the concerns of those deprived sections and regions." He sought the citizens' support "to restore to our public life a greater sense of purpose and a renewed commitment to decency, morality and the hard work needed to take our country and every one of our citizens forward."

No political overtones

For the first major statement by the new Prime Minister, the address was completely free of political overtones or partisan rancour. The closest Dr. Singh came to being partisan was when he took note of the Opposition's disruption of Parliament early this month; even here, he did not apportion any blame but merely noted that Parliament could not debate the President's Address. He requested all parties "to respect Parliament as an essential fo-



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. — Reuters

rum for public debate so that we can move forward on the task of nation-building which is a common goal for one and all."

However, there was no criticism of the previous Government, neither praise for the Congress nor any expression of gratitude to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. The word "secular" or "secularism" did not figure, though there was an acknowledgement that the "minorities suffer from not only economic insecurity but also a sense of marginalisation from political and governing processes."

Dr. Singh's first public address was marked by an equanimous tone, thoughtful content, competent articulation and a tightly-written prose avoiding

rhetorical flourishes, reflecting the Prime Minister's own personality. Flanked by the National Flag, with a Mahatma Gandhi bust in the background, he read out his speech in Hindi and then in English.

The over-riding theme is that while the economic reforms would continue, the "growth is not an end in itself. It is a means to generate employment, banish poverty, hunger and homelessness and improve the standard of living of the mass of our people." He said that economic reforms did not stop at "freeing private enterprise from the shackles of bureaucratic control, it is also about making the Government more effective, efficient and people-friendly."

Stressing the need for "social

and political stability, communal harmony and respect for the rule of law," Dr. Singh promised: "We cannot forsake the obligation of running a Government that works, and works for the people."

Reform the instrument

Dr. Singh mentioned abiding problems such as water, health, the need to step up public spending on education, education of the girl child and world-class and cost-effective infrastructure. But he said that no development agenda could be carried out "if we do not reform the instrument in our hand with which we have to work, namely the government and public institutions. Clearly, this will be my main concern and challenge

in the days to come."

On the crucial issue of internal security and terrorism, the Prime Minister undertook "to combat it [terrorism] with all the resources at our command. There shall be no doubt whatsoever about our resolve to deal with this insidious threat to our nation."

In the same vein, he said, "The government will continue the process of dialogue with the Hurriyat and all other groups in Jammu and Kashmir." He also acknowledged the needs of the armed forces and said that "we will not be found wanting in providing for our armed forces, or in caring for our ex-servicemen."

In the external sphere, Dr. Singh promised to carry forward the "tradition of an independent foreign policy, built on a national consensus and based on our supreme national interests." Expressing a desire to live in peace with Pakistan and avowing a sincere dialogue on all issues including Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Singh put the onus on Pakistan for ensuring the requisite atmosphere. He noted that "it is self-evident that terrorism and violence would cast a dark shadow over this process."

With China, he promised to continue boundary talks "from the political perspective of our bilateral relations". He acknowledged, "strengthened relationship with USA" while also taking note of "the strength and vibrancy of our partnership with Russia [which] has withstood the flux of the post-Cold War world."

The Prime Minister ended on a personal note. He invoked his own innings in public life to invite the citizens to get involved in "our public life so that governments at all levels — Central, State and local — are all constantly put on notice and not just tested once in five years."

Text of speech: Page 14

'No objective can be met if we do not reform Govt. Clearly, this will be my main challenge'

In his first address to the nation, PM Manmohan Singh stressed on reforms with a human face. And the need to ensure that economic growth touches all sections. Excerpts from his speech:



My fellow citizens, I speak to you with a deep sense of humility, fully conscious of the sacred responsibility entrusted to me. You have assigned the task of governance of our country to the United Progressive Alliance and its supporting parties. You have delivered your verdict and the verdict is clear. You have sought a change in the manner in which this country is run, a change in national priorities, and a change in the processes and focus of governance. You have, through your mandate, made it clear that economic growth has to be accompanied by equity and social justice. You have expressed concern for the poor and disadvantaged sections of our society and for minorities and backward regions to be at the heart of all policies of the government.

As I share with you the priorities of our government, I am reminded of the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji had said that his mission in life was "to wipe every tear from every eye". Think of the poorest person you have ever seen, Gandhiji would say, "and ask if your next act will be of any use to him." That message of Bapu resonates in our ears as we settle down to the business of government.

The National Common Minimum Programme has been prepared by us keeping in mind the priorities brought into focus by your mandate. The address of the President of India to Parliament outlines a comprehensive agenda for the nation to which our government is committed. The country would have benefited if Parliament had been allowed to discuss the President's address. I was eagerly looking forward to contributions from all parties in this discussion. Unfortunately, this was not allowed to happen. It should be a matter of deep concern for all of us when established mechanisms for a constructive dialogue and critique, which are vital for a parliamentary democracy, are disrupted and not allowed to operate. Parliament is a forum which is sacred, and it must be our collective endeavour to ensure that we maximise its effectiveness. I request parties across the entire political spectrum to respect Parliament as an essential forum for public debate so that we can move forward on the task of nation-building which is a common goal for one and all.

We can justly take pride in the fact that since independence we have been able, with our efforts, to build the foundations of a modern economy and record an accelera-

tion in the rate of economic growth. There have been impressive gains in terms of the educational and health status of the nation. However, the benefits of this performance have not touched all our citizens in equal measure. Growth is not an end in itself. It is a means to generate employment, banish poverty, hunger and homelessness and improve the standard of living of the mass of our people. It must also be environmentally sustainable. Equity and efficiency are complimentary, not contradictory, and we must move forward on both these while maintaining a high degree of fiscal and financial discipline, and a robust external economic profile.

To be able to devote our attention and energy to economic development that improves the lives of our people, we must ensure social and political stability, communal harmony and respect for the rule of

law. We must put in place policies and programmes, which empower all our citizens to lead a life of dignity and self-respect. Our government is committed to the security and welfare of all minorities, the protection of the interests of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, of backward classes and all weaker sections. Equally we are committed to the empowerment of women. We will ensure equal participation of all in the processes of governance.

The essence of the National Common Minimum Programme is the recognition that policies that are aimed at promoting economic growth must also advance the cause of distributive justice and create new employment opportunities. Eco-

omic reform is not only about freeing private enterprise from the shackles of bureaucratic control. It is also about making the government more effective, efficient and people friendly so that it can handle better the many tasks that only governments can perform. And, it is also about ensuring fair and transparent regulation of the market where this is necessary. While many in our country are benefiting from their integration into the market and the global economy, millions of our citizens are still plagued by illiteracy, disease, want, hunger and malnutrition. Gender disparities are high and educational, nutritional and health levels of women are much lower than of men. Chronic poverty afflicts millions who lack income and food security. This is particularly acute among the scheduled castes, other backward castes and scheduled tribes.

At a regional level, too, the disparities are high and while some regions of the country seem to be on an accelerating growth path, there is a concern that other regions are not only lagging but are also falling behind. Regrettably, minorities suffer

and are not adequately equipped and attuned to deal with this challenge and meet the aspirations of the people. To be able to do so, we require the reform of government and of public institutions. Much of the focus of economic reforms in the past decade has been on reducing the role of the government in controlling the private sector; controls that hampered entrepreneurial dynamism and often bred corruption. This was necessary. Yet, there are many areas, critical areas, that directly affect the quality of life of every citizen, where the government has a role, and is expected by every citizen to have a role.

These include the provision of social and physical infrastructure for development, the provision of elementary education and public health, providing drinking water and sanitation. They also include economic infrastructure, which in our country in large part must be provided by the government such as irrigation, power, roads and railways. Our people expect the government to be pro-active and sensitive to their needs. In each of these ar-

country have faced distress and there has been no helping hand. The National Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance is committed to giving a "new deal" to rural India. Agriculture must receive the priority attention it deserves. Public and private investment in agriculture has to be greatly increased. A key concern in recent years has been the lack of access to credit. The Indian farmer has also suffered from too many controls and restrictions. There are still far too many internal barriers to trade that must go. We must also re-examine those aspects of our policies that prevent a creative interaction between farmers and agro-industries. I would like to see the creation of a "single market" across the country for both manufactured and agricultural produce with encouragement of agro-industry linkages. With the introduction of value-added taxation this integration of the Indian market will be further enabled.

OUR economy has been rapidly integrating with the global economy over the

We greatly value their participation in the development of our nation.

No objective in this development agenda can be met if we do not reform the instrument in our hand with which we have to work, namely the government and public institutions. Clearly, this will be my main concern

lations with the countries of South East and West Asia, based on cultural affinities, economic interaction and a vibrant Indian expatriate community. We aim to build upon these. While speaking of West Asia, I must share our deep concern about developments in Iraq



The NCMP is committed to giving a 'new deal' to rural India. Agriculture must receive priority. Public and private investment in it has to be increased... Internal barriers to trade must go. I would like to see a 'single market' for both manufactured and agricultural produce with encouragement of agro-industry linkages

and challenge in the days to come.

We will maintain our tradition of an independent foreign policy, built on a national consensus and based on our supreme national interests. We will expand our network of international relationships—preserving solidarity with traditional allies and strengthening new partnerships. We will work with like-minded nations for an equitable, multi-polar world order, which takes into account the legitimate aspirations of developing countries.

We desire to live in a neighbourhood of peace and prosperity. We will actively pursue the composite dialogue with Pakistan. We are sincere about discussing and resolving all issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. We recognise that resolution of major issues requires national consensus and accommodation of public sentiment in both countries. It is self-evident that terrorism and violence would cast a dark shadow over this process. With our other South Asian neighbours, it will be our sincere effort to jointly re-examine the vast potential for cooperation, and to ensure mutual security, stability and development.

In our relations with China, we are encouraged by positive developments, which we are committed to strengthening. Bilateral economic cooperation has shown remarkable growth and diversification. We shall carry forward the process of discussion to resolve the boundary question from the political perspective of our bilateral relations.

As two of the world's great democracies, our strengthened relationship with the USA is a fact of considerable importance. The transformation of our relations with USA has been supported by the expansion of economic links and people-to-people ties. We will welcome the expansion of cooperation between the two governments to include new and mutually beneficial areas, particularly high technology.

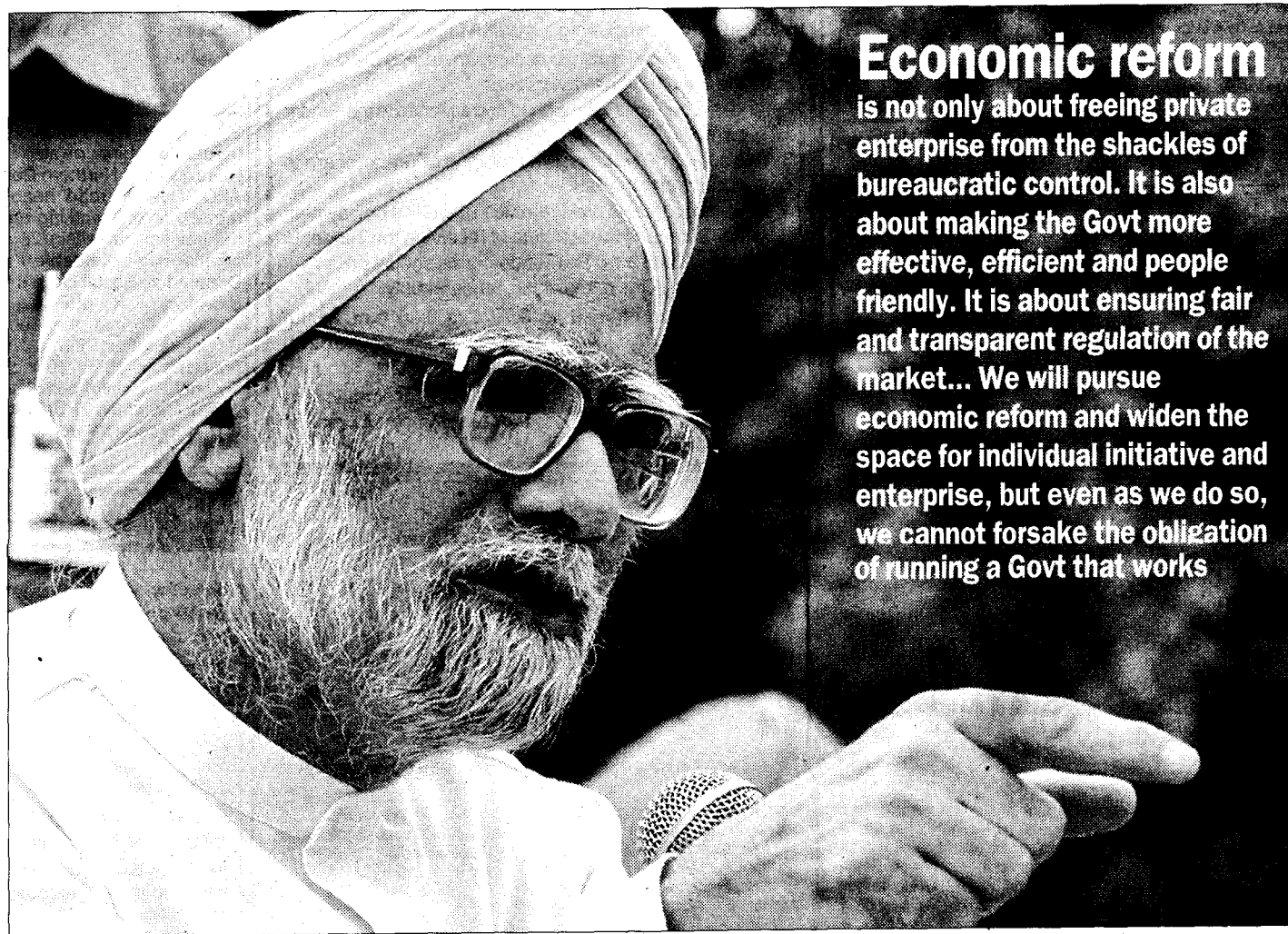
The strength and vibrancy of our partnership with Russia has withstood the flux of the post-Cold War world. We will accelerate the diversification of our relationship, particularly in defence, high technology, space and nuclear energy, while intensifying economic cooperation.

We have traditionally strong re-

and the suffering of the people of that country. It is our earnest hope that democracy would be restored and full sovereignty transferred to a truly representative government of Iraq. India is committed to participate in all endeavours aimed at bringing stability and to ensure the wellbeing of the Iraqi people. We will also strengthen our bilateral relations with developing countries of Latin America and Africa. Similarly, strong ties with the nations of Central Asia are of importance for our international trade, as well as for our strategic and energy security. We will actively pursue a cooperative relationship with the European Union to expand the political and economic frontiers of collaboration. We welcome the inclusion of many new member states, with whom we have a long tradition of cooperation.

I wish to place on record the nation's deep sense of gratitude and pride in the valour, professionalism and the spirit of self-sacrifice of our armed forces. I assure the nation that we will not be found wanting in providing for our armed forces, or in caring for our ex-servicemen. We will streamline Defence acquisition procedures, so that our forces obtain the modern weapon systems and technologies. Our government will ensure that the necessary funds are made available for these purposes. We will maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent, along with a policy of "no first use" in our nuclear doctrine. India is a responsible nuclear power, and we will continue to work to prevent proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. At the same time, we remain committed to the goal of universal nuclear disarmament.

Internal security remains an important challenge. Terrorism poses a grave threat to the unity and progress of our nation. We shall combat it with all the resources at our command. There shall be no doubt whatsoever about our resolve to deal with this insidious threat to our nation. The Government will continue the process of dialogue with the Hurriyat and all other groups in Jammu and Kashmir. The Government is willing to talk with all disaffected groups provided they shun the path of violence.



Economic reform is not only about freeing private enterprise from the shackles of bureaucratic control. It is also about making the Govt more effective, efficient and people friendly. It is about ensuring fair and transparent regulation of the market... We will pursue economic reform and widen the space for individual initiative and enterprise, but even as we do so, we cannot forsake the obligation of running a Govt that works

from not only economic insecurity but also a sense of marginalisation from political and governance processes. As a nation, we cannot accept such disparities. We have been given a mandate, which enjoins us to be sensitive to the concerns of these deprived sections and regions. We have an obligation to ensure that they too benefit from growth in full measure. Our commitment to investments in the social sectors is rooted in this reality. It is the responsibility of government, at all levels, at the Centre, in the States and at the level of the community, to address each of these economic and social challenges.

However, I am convinced that the government, at every level, is to-

past decade, with a growing sense of self-confidence. However, domestic enterprise needs world-class and cost-effective infrastructure. Better roads, better connectivity, modern airports and railways, efficient ports and affordable and reliable power are all the basic requirements for a competitive economy.

For centuries India has been a trading nation, actively engaged in the movement of goods and people across continents and high seas. We will pursue policies that enable our economy to be better integrated with the world economy without hurting the interests of our people. We will create an environment conducive to the utilisation of the talent pool of the vast and diverse Indian diaspora.

There has been a neglect of the interests of the farmers in recent years and this is reflected in a significant slowing down in agricultural growth in the past five years. Farmers in many parts of the

don't hear anything other than the imam's voices. People are barely aware that other, more tolerant forms of Islam exist." The depth of this created culture of extremism is most evident regarding tolerance for non-Muslims—a crucial mat-

Why doesn't the regime take on the religious establishment more frontally? There is little danger that it would lose. Between State and mosque, there is really no contest. Every Imam in the country is on the Govt's payroll, every religious scholar, judge and teacher is a salaried Govt employee

ter for the outside world. The Saudi religious establishment has until recently almost always referred to almost all non-Wahhabis (including the Shia, Sufis and all other Muslim sects) in derogatory terms. Non-Muslims are, of course, rank infidels. Saudi Arabia does not allow any churches, temples or synagogues and has

no plans to allow any—despite having 6 million foreign workers in the country.

Even last week, as the regime was issuing fatwas against the killing of Paul Johnson, one could see forces that fueled his execution. A prominent cleric, Sheikh Saleh bin Abdullah al-Humaid, explained that "killing a soul without justification is one of the gravest sins under Islam; it is as bad as polytheism." So polytheism is akin to murder? Is it any wonder that the leader of the recent terrorism in Khobar explained his killing of Westerners and Indians thusly: "We purged Muhammad's land of many Christians and polytheists?"

Why doesn't the regime take on the religious establishment more frontally? There is little danger that it would lose. Between state and mosque, there is really no contest. Every imam in the country is on the government's payroll; every religious scholar, judge and teacher is a salaried government employee. There is no Vatican here, no independent authority like the pope. And yet the regime is extremely cautious about clipping the wings of these bureaucrats.

The key to the kingdom is not religion but politics. To understand why, you only have to drive through Riyadh, large parts of which are decaying, and then around the perimeter of the royal court. Rising on one side is an extension of the king's

palace, a fantastical set of buildings, with a vast domed Renaissance extravaganza. When I commented on it, a government official nervously said to me, "Well, the French have Versailles." (I couldn't help but note, "Yes, and then they had a revolution.") Actually, Versailles doesn't capture it. Only Las Vegas compares. On the other side of the complex, which totals hundreds of acres, is a mile-long, high-walled compound of buildings, cloistered by hundreds of leafy trees rising out of the desert. All this has been built by a 32-year-old prince who never went to college: Abdel-Aziz bin Fahd, the favourite son of the king of Saudi Arabia.

King Fahd is 82 and totally incapacitated, but "Azouzi" (the favourite son's nickname) has the king's check-signing authority over the royal coffers. And large checks they are: the figures banded about in official circles for the cost of Abdel-Aziz's palace are well over \$2 billion. Abdel-Aziz's palace in Jidda is a waterfront estate, also vast and walled, with two exquisitely carved Spanish-style towers rising out of it, dwarfing virtually everything in the city. An Arab diplomat who has been to one of the palaces recalls that inside the compound the roads are paved with Italian marble.

To be concluded
Courtesy Newsweek Inc.



THE SAUDI TRAP - II

FAREED ZAKARIA

Just politics, not religious extremism

At a meeting with prominent Saudi journalists and academics, most argued that several trends over the past 30 years had fueled this radicalism. During the 1950s and 1960s, other Arab governments like Egypt and Syria had expelled Islamic fundamentalists. The Saudis, as competitors to these regimes, welcomed the dissidents, who came with revolutionary ideas advocating pure Islamic states across the Middle East. The intellectuals also recalled that the revolution in Iran in 1979 rattled the royal family, who feared a rising tide of Islamism across the Middle East.

But the pivotal event was in November 1979, when a group of Islamic militants, led by Juhaiman al-Oteibi, took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca and held hundreds of pilgrims hostage. The government surrounded the mosque

and, after a bloody showdown with dozens killed on both sides, Oteibi surrendered. The regime executed the 63 captured rebels in different locations across the country. But, as a businessman in Jidda put it to me, "having killed Oteibi, the regime implemented his entire agenda."

Hoping to co-opt the Islamists, the royal family handed over education, the courts and cultural affairs to the imams. Many of the rigid features of modern Saudi life—no women, on television, no music in any media, an overdose of religion in schools, stores closed during prayer times, increased powers for the religious police—were passed in the early 1980s.

After my meeting, I was contacted by one of the people present, a young man who wanted to see me separately. (This would happen three times during my

stay.) Abdullah Bajad al-Oteibi was once an Islamic radical and some years ago turned away from that world view. He began our discussion by telling me, "I didn't like what they were saying at that meeting. The problems don't simply come from the outside. Our biggest problem is that our founding creed, Wahhabism, is itself an extreme ideology. It is revolutionary and was used to revolt against the Ottoman Empire. In a sense, bin Laden is using Wahhabi ideology in this original, revolutionary form against the Saudi state." Oteibi described Saudi Arabia as having two parallel ideologies now. "One says 'Follow the ruler', the other says 'Only a narrow, pure Islam is good'. But there is an internal contradiction." I noticed throughout my visit in Saudi Arabia that you could talk about extremism, but you could not say Wahhabism itself was extreme. I asked Oteibi if I could quote him by name. He said, "I don't mind. I've been to jail. They're less rigid now. I'll probably get called in for hours of questioning but no jail."

How deeply does Wahhabism run through Saudi society? "Saudis are very pious, they are conservative, but they did not create this extremism," said Oteibi emphatically. "It's politics. This version of religion comes from the religious establishment. The regime supports the imams, judges and teachers. And people

don't hear anything other than the imam's voices. People are barely aware that other, more tolerant forms of Islam exist."

The depth of this created culture of extremism is most evident regarding tolerance for non-Muslims—a crucial mat-

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ter for the outside world. The Saudi religious establishment has until recently almost always referred to almost all non-Wahhabis (including the Shia, Sufis and all other Muslim sects) in derogatory terms. Non-Muslims are, of course, rank infidels. Saudi Arabia does not allow any churches, temples or synagogues and has

'Low-key' officials at the helm

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 8. — The reconstitution of the Prime Minister's Office is largely complete, with a new joint secretary overseeing foreign affairs being appointed to replace Mr PS Raghavan.

Equally low-key Ms Sujata Mehta, making a lateral shift from the ministry of external affairs, where she briefly worked as a joint secretary (Americas), will now be the key link official between the PMO and the foreign ministry, largely responsible for providing foreign policy content and even form to the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's speeches. Ms Mehta had served as director in the PMO when Mr PV Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister.

Another IFS official, Mr Vikram Doraiswamy, has replaced Mr Ajay Bisaria as the private secretary to the Prime Minister. Mr Raghavan is likely to proceed to Prague as India's envoy to the Czech Republic, while Mr Jaishankar, now in Prague, is likely to come to South Block as the joint secretary (Americas).

A key ingredient among officials newly appointed to the PMO appears to be their complete adherence to the term 'faceless bureaucrat'. Like Dr Singh himself, members of his PMO, beginning with his principal secretary, Mr TKA Nair, are low-key to a fault.

While it is normal, when a new administration assumes office, for the Cabinet secretary to be replaced, the current incumbent, Mr Kamal Pande, who retires in October, is

likely to find an officer on special duty (OSD) at his heels shortly.

It is the usual practice to appoint an official as officer on special duty for several weeks before taking on the most sensitive job in the bureaucracy, that of Cabinet secretary.

While Mr Pande, though closely identified with the NDA regime, is unlikely to be shown the door, having held off some key appointments sought by the previous government once the elections were declared and the model code of conduct was in place, it is likely that Mr Rajiv R Shah will shortly be appointed as officer on special duty in the Cabinet secretariat.

Another contender is Mr Nripendra Mishra, a former commerce secretary and also a UP cadre official of the 1967 batch.

THE STATESMAN

9 JUN 2004

'If politics is instrument of social change, if it has to serve people, it has to be based on good economics'

Weeks after the Lok Sabha was dissolved, Dr Manmohan Singh told Shekhar Gupta, Editor-in-Chief of *The Indian Express*, there should be no doubts about the total commitment of the Congress to economic reforms, but with a human face. Excerpts from the interview telecast on NDTV 24X7's *Walk the Talk*:

■ We are at DSE. A whole lot of people whom you taught have gone on to run our economic policy, corporations, so much. I have fond memories of having been a teacher at DSE. Some of the most valuable friendships of my life were made during this period: Prof A K Sen, Prof Sukumar Chakraborty, Prof Jagdish Bhagwati, and a generation of younger economists who have made phenomenal contributions.

■ You brought many of them into the policy structure. Many of them have then run India's economy.

Yes, in fact, Bimal Jalan was one of the persons I picked up for the Ministry of Finance when I became the chief economic adviser. Montek Singh Ahluwalia was another distinguished economist whom I brought to government...Rakesh Mohan is another distinguished economist...

■ But Dr Singh, you taught economics here between 1969-1971, before that at Panjab University, at Oxford, and later lecturing on commerce and trade...It was very different from the economics you practised when you became the Finance Minister.

Well, times have changed. In the '50s and '60s there were very few people in the world, including those in the West, who dif-

ON THE RECORD MANMOHAN SINGH Prime Minister

public sector investment in steel, the institutions of higher level in the department of atomic energy, space programme, India would not have been able to reap the benefits of globalisation, which we are now able to claim.

■ Let me take you back to the summer of 1991. What happened when you were actually in the hot seat?

Well, I had no indication that I would be called upon to become the finance minister. I had come back from the South Commission, and India was well in crisis. The then PM, Mr Chandrashekhar, asked me to help him as an advisor to the PM. I saw at that time that India was in the midst of a crisis and I started thinking what to do. In my convocation address at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, long before I became the FM, I set out the elements of stabilisation-cum-structural adjustment programmes which I

wanted their money back. And if we had gone that way, we would have to impose such drastic controls on imports that we would have unimaginable increase in unemployment. Sharp increase in inflation was already evident; when we came in, prices were increasing at 20 per cent per annum... what we faced was a complete breakdown of the economic system of India.

■ Would you say that this was the greatest crisis in India's economic history?

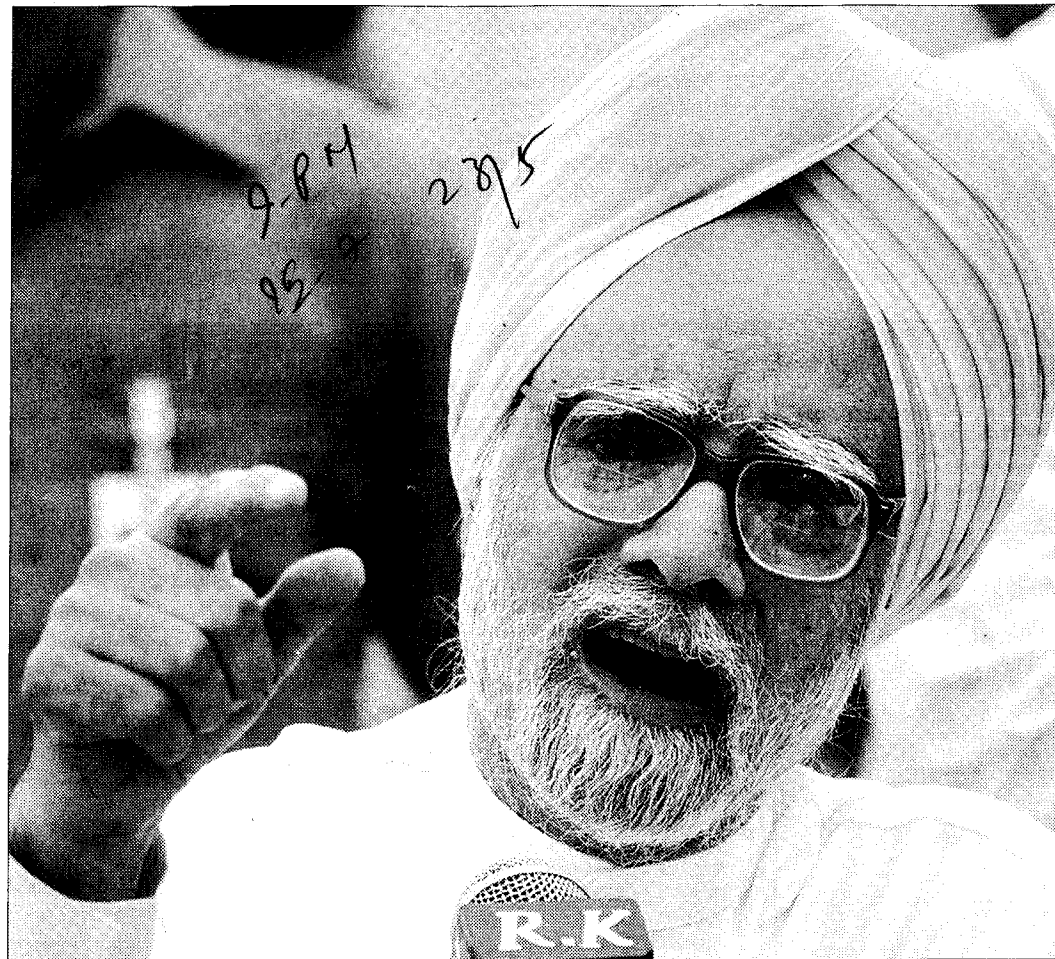
Well, I think we had crisis in foreign exchange in 1957-58, but in terms of consequences for managing the Indian economy, the 1991 crisis was probably the most severe.

■ Tell me a few things you did at the point...Your government had to get a vote of confidence.

The first thing I had to realise was that India's exchange rate had to be checked.

■ Was it too high?

Well, the rupee was at an unrealistic level, we had to depreciate it. But changing the rupee rate in India has always been a political problem. And here was a government which was a minority government, here was a government which had yet to win a vote of confidence... I went to the PM (and told him) we cannot



There are important reforms processes, say the opening up of the insurance sector; it would not have been possible without the support of the Congress party. The new Electricity Bill, which is reform-oriented, it would have not been possible but for the Congress. Let me say we are the original reformers, the better reformers. We will have reforms that address the problems of poverty, working class, and of farmers

mately it was done in 1966. In between, there were tensions within the government; it was not able to take a decision. But within 10 days of the Narasimha Rao government, we took some of the most difficult decisions. Take for example the adjustment of the industrial licensing policy. We abolished the Licence Permit Raj within one month of our government and I was able to report in my Budget speech that India...

■ Did Mr Narasimha Rao understand the need for change? Because both of you were brought up in a socialistic milieu, he more than you.

Well, he was most supportive. Without his active backing I could not have done anything.

■ But he knew the risk...

Yes, he knew the risk. And he told me that if this thing succeeds, we will all claim credit, and if things don't work, well, we'll sacrifice... And I was prepared for that.

■ So you were marked out as a likely scapegoat...But were there moments of doubt, that things are going wrong?

Well, I had some doubts when I presented my first Budget, we had cut subsidies very sharply. Also, in the history of Indian business it's never been done, we adjusted, reduced the fiscal deficit of the Central Government by full 2 percentage points of the GDP. Therefore we adjusted food subsidies, fertiliser subsidies. But then there was pressure from Parliament and the government developed cold feet. At that stage, I protested. I gave my resignation to the PM. I said if you are going to go this way then I am not able to... But I must say that Mr Rao backed me to the hilt, I think, in the first two years of our government.

■ But there are those who say that this was like Manmohan Singh's re-education. He was a socialist, and when crisis came, he made a turnaround.

Well, I've always been a socialist in the sense that I regard the quest for equity, the quest for social equality as fundamental to running a modern economy, a modern society. If by socialism you mean a passion for equality, I am a socialist even then. But I've never been a socialist in the doctrinaire sense, that all things must be done by the government.

■ So what is it that the NDA government did by way of reforms that you disagree with?

First of all, I do not agree with the way this government handled the problems of the public sector. This government, for its ideological reason, wanted to dismantle the public sector. Our view is public sector should be allowed to grow if public sector can compete on an equal footing with private sector. That profit-making public sector units, if they can compete, should be given every opportunity...

■ But why shouldn't they just become private? Why should government run companies?

Because there is a distinction between private profit and public profit. When public sector companies make profits, that becomes the asset for the nation to expand for reinvestment. Where are resources for education, for health going to come from?

■ What else do you disagree with?

Although this government talked of deregulation, it was a case-by-case deregulation. There was no consistent hand moving...

■ Your government was called suitcase-by-suitcase...

Well, I think, suitcase-by-suitcase people ended up in the BJP, like Sukh Ram has.

■ Is there anything that the NDA government did which you not only agree with but also endorse?

Maybe it's peace with China or Pakistan, it may be economic reforms... As far as peace with Pakistan is concerned, our party has had a structured approach... we've always been for talks of peace with Pakistan. Whereas what is the consistency of this government? The PM, one day, talks of *aar-par*, the other day he mobilises a million people, then suddenly there is a change, he goes to J&K, he talks of *insaaniyat*... There has been no consistent hand as far as this government is concerned.

■ What is it that this government did that you endorse? Give me one or two examples.

I think, one thing I would say is the National Highways pro-

gramme. I would also say the fact that they came to power on the slogans of swadeshi. I think they have, over a period of time, not dismantled the reforms structure that we had set up.

■ On that you see consistency if there is a change of government?

How can one be sure? How

■ But if you come to power, you will not reverse it?

No, we will not... When I became the Finance Minister, I said we are going to produce a model of adjustments and structural changes with a human face... that we will show to the world that there is a humane way of dealing with economic problems.

■ If your party or your coal-

tion comes to power, are you promising us even better, faster reforms?

Of course. Reforms which will address the problems of poverty, reforms which will address farmers' problems, which will address the problems of the working class.

■ So what is it that will change in the current scheme of things if you come to power?

As I said, we will have a more consistent...

■ Are you going to stop privatisation of public sector?

We will not stop privatisation of loss-making public sector companies. But public sector units which are doing well, which can compete with private sector, both domestic and foreign, we will give them all opportunities to expand. But that does not mean that these public sector enterprises can't disinvest. If they want to raise money in the capital market, we will allow...

■ But government won't give up control. And the same goes for nationalised banks?

We are against a system in which the banking system will be entirely in the private sector. The Congress government nation-

alised the banking system. We would like the Indian banking system to remain 51 per cent in the hands of the government.

■ Talking of changes, tell me about the re-education of Dr Manmohan Singh in politics...

When I came to politics, I thought this as an opportunity for me to convert good economics into good politics. That has been my effort. But I have come to realise that politics, after all, is the art of the possible. And sometimes you have to compromise. But also, I came to politics with the belief that we need to have a long-range vision, that we must look at India's problems from a long-term perspective. But I have come to realise that a week is sometimes too long in politics.

■ And economics works in five-year plans. It was said that good economics doesn't make good politics. Do you think it continues to be true?

No. If politics is the instrument of social change, if politics in this country has to serve the people of India to get rid of chronic poverty, ignorance and disease, it has to be based on good economics.

■ You worked with many leaders of the Congress party. How do you compare Sonia Gandhi with Rajiv or Narasimha Rao or Indira Gandhi before that?

Well, of course, Indira Gandhi was the most towering personality. I've worked closely with Mrs Gandhi, I've worked closely with Rajivji, I've worked closely with Narasimha Raoji, each one of them were men/women who have served India with great distinction. Soniji, I think, is new to politics, but in the last five-six years that she had been the leader of our party, she has given the party a lead which has helped unify our people.

■ What is her brief for you? What are you to achieve for the party and her in this campaign and beyond?

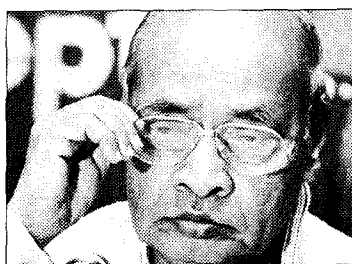
A progressive expanding economy, a socially just...

■ But there is a difference between a politician and an academic. There must be areas where you disagree with party.

Well, I think, when you are a member of the party, you have to abide by the party discipline. But that also means that there are ar-

Within 10 days of the Rao government,

we took some of the most difficult decisions, we abolished the Licence Permit Raj within one month. Mr Rao was most supportive. Without his backing I could not have done anything. He told me that if this thing succeeds, we will all claim credit, and if things don't work, well, we'll sacrifice... And I was prepared for that... There were some difficult moments... I resigned, but Mr Rao backed me to the hilt



ferred from what India was trying to do. Those were the days of the take-off into self-sustained growth... that all you need for an economy to take off was a large dose of public investment and thereafter the economy will look after itself. We had, I think, in the late '50s, an MIT project—the MIT people were closely involved in planning the economic policy of India—and there was no difference between our Planning Commission and the advice that came from the distinguished economists of the MIT.

■ Sort of East Coast academic advice, because the US economy was going in a different direction.

Well, obviously nobody would say that India's problems are the same as that of the United States. I think that was the period when most people believed that in developing countries, because of the lack of development of entrepreneurial

though India needed. But at that time no indication...

■ But when did you realise that Indian economic thinking and the way in which Indian economy was managed now needed such a big turnaround?

I won't say about-turn, but such a big change? Well, I was convinced from the early 1970s. When I became the chief economic adviser, the first paper I did for Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was what to do with the victory. At that time I said we had gone too far in imposing unrealistic control structures, that liberalisation of the private sector was required.

■ So you first recommended the end of Licence Quota Raj in 1970s?

Early '70s. In fact, the paper that I wrote was in 1972.

■ But you got the chance of putting that into effect 20

wait till the vote of confidence...

■ Because in India, in the popular mind, we link the value of rupee with national pride.

Yes. So the first thing we did was to adjust the exchange value in two doses. I had to do that because there were difficulties in going the straightforward way.

■ What was the straightforward way? Announcing devaluation?

Devaluation...but the Cabinet was not prepared. There was opposition from the President. He said, 'Your government is yet to win the vote of confidence, how can you...'

■ Mr Venkataraman?

Mr Venkataraman. So we found a way out. I instructed the Reserve Bank to announce a devaluation, after a few days I asked them to repeat it, and the result was that we brought about devaluation.



■ Without announcing it...

About 25 per cent. The world got the message that there was a government which, despite being a minority government, was able to take the toughest decisions. If you remember, the decision to adjust the exchange rate in the 1960s, I think the decision could not be taken over a period of three years.

■ Until Morarji Desai came...

No, I think the World Bank had proposed the depreciation of Indian rupee in 1962, ulti-

Soniaji, I think, is new to politics, but in the last five-six years that she has been the leader of our party, she has given the party a lead which has helped unify our people

skills, private-sector limitations, public sector had to be...

■ When did you realise that maybe some of what has been taught to you, or you have taught, was either a myth or that times had left it behind...

No I don't think it's a myth. I think, what India did in the late '50s and the '60s, laid the foundation of what has happened to India since then. If Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had not invested in the modern temples of India, the massive irrigation project, the

years later.

Well, I was a civil servant...the chief economic adviser, also Secretary, Economic Affairs, then I became the Member-Secretary of the Planning Commission.

■ But sir, in 1991, when you took over as the Finance Minister, how bad were things? I believe we didn't have exchange even for a week's imports?

India's foreign exchange reserves had been exhausted. People who had lent money to the Indian banking system, they



Among the achievements of the NDA government

is the National Highways programme. I would also say the fact that they came to power on swadeshi. I think they have, over a period of time, not dismantled the reforms structure that we had set up during our regime

reas where sometimes you have to abide by the party decision even when you think that is not the right decision.

■ But at the same time you think you will have sufficient moral or intellectual strength to keep the party in the right decision—in terms of having a sensible view on reforms.

I think there is no doubt on it. The Congress party, under Sonia Gandhi, has stood by reforms. There are important reforms processes, say the opening up of the insurance sector; it would not have been possible without the support of the Congress party. The new Electricity Bill, which is reform-oriented, it would have not been possible but for the Congress party. The Congress's record is that when reforms are in the interests of the nation, we have backed it.

■ So as a citizen, investor, taxpayer I should not have any sense of insecurity...

Of course, let me say we are the original reformers, we are better reformers and our commitment to reforms with a human face, to work for a new India free from the fear of war, want and exploitation... there should be no doubt about our total commitment.

Manmohan heads 68-member Ministry

Pawar, Paswan, Laloo in Cabinet • 7 women Ministers • Big share for Tamil Nadu, Bihar

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 22. India has a new Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the first man ever from a minority community to hold the highest political office in the land. Dr. Singh became the 14th person to take oath as the Prime Minister of India today.

The 71-year economist and architect of India's economic reforms was administered the oath of office and secrecy by the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, at the Ashoka Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Watched by his predecessors and by his future colleagues as well as by the leaders of the allied parties, Dr. Singh took the oath as the head of a 68-member Council of Ministers, with 18 Cabinet rank Ministers, 10 Ministers of State with independent charge and the rest Ministers of State.

After the swearing-in ceremony, Dr. Singh spelt out his priorities: "This is a mandate for change; for strengthening the secular foundation of our republic, to carry forward the process of social and economic change which benefits the poorer sections of our community, particularly our farmers and workers. We will ensure that we have a development strategy to empower our people to realise their vast latent potential."

The Cabinet sworn in this evening is rich in ministerial talent and experience as it in-



A NEW ERA BEGINS: The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, administering the oath of office and secrecy to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

cludes some of the most experienced hands such as Pranab Mukherjee, Arjun Singh, Shivraj Patil, Natwar Singh, Sharad Pawar, Ram Vilas Pas-

wan, P. Chidambaram, Hansraj Bhardwaj and Ghulam Nabi Azad.

The Prime Minister also in-

ducted two senior Congress leaders, Shivraj Patil and P.M. Sayeed, who had lost the recent Lok Sabha elections.

There is no official announcement so far of the portfolios,

though the allies have apparently negotiated their Ministries. It seems there is scope for further juggling of portfolios among the Congress Ministers.

The new Council of Ministers has the requisite geographical spread, regional distribution and gender representation; the seven women members do fall short of the politically correct one-third formula.

It also reflects the new political realities of the United Progressive Alliance.

The lion's share has gone to Tamil Nadu, which has, as many as 12 seats in the Council of Ministers whereas Uttar Pradesh, which traditionally dominated the Congress Ministries, has only two representatives, with only one with the Cabinet rank.

Pranab Mukherjee was the first to take oath after Dr. Singh, suggesting a new order of standing in the new Cabinet.

Mr. Mukherjee was followed by Arjun Singh, Sharad Pawar and Laloo Prasad Yadav. There were minor glitches on way to the swearing-in ceremony as Ram Vilas Paswan was reported to be sulking after being denied the Railways portfolio, which has reportedly gone to Mr. Laloo Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal. The portfolio has acquired a strange symbolism in Bihar politics, with every senior politician from the State wanting to preside over the Rail Bhavan.

Mr. Paswan is believed have been mollified with two Ministries - Health and Family Welfare, and Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

When the Prime Minister was asked about the difficulties in government formation, he con-

ceded that there were "difficulties but all of them were overcome."

He gave all credit to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, for the party's good showing in the elections and reiterated that he would not be where he was today but for her "as he had never expected to become the Prime Minister."

Cabinet meet today

UN1 reports:
The first meeting of the new Union Cabinet, headed by Dr. Singh, will be held tomorrow.

Official sources said Dr. Singh had called a meeting of his Cabinet tomorrow at 4 p.m.

According to highly-placed sources, the 14th Lok Sabha is slated to begin a week-long sitting from May 31.

The first three days will be devoted to the swearing-in of the newly elected 539 members. The election of the Speaker will then follow.

Immediately after being sworn in, Dr. Singh drove straight to South Block to take charge of the office.

The Prime Minister, accompanied by his wife, Gursharan Kaur, was received at the office by the Chief Economic Adviser, S. Narayanan, and other senior officials. Later, Dr. Singh held discussions with the Cabinet Secretary, Kamal Pande, and the Foreign Secretary, Shashank.

More reports on
Pages 8, 10, 11

List of Ministers: Page 10

Manmohanomics at work again?

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 20. — The man who crafted India's economic reforms a decade back, Prime Minister-designate Dr Manmohan Singh, has taken up the challenge once more. With the din over disinvestment still resounding and the mayhem in the bourses still fresh, Dr Singh today set out the new government's economic agenda, promising to continue reforms, including privatisation, but with a "human face".

At an unscheduled press conference, Dr Singh ruled out disinvestment of PSUs in strategic sectors, like oil and gas majors ONGC and GAIL, to protect "workers' interests". "There is no intention to privatise them," he said. But he endorsed the commitment of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance to build strong private and public sectors while pursuing "selective disinvestment".

Asked about the Left's role in the new government's reform process, Dr Singh said: "Life is never free from contradictions and the coalition government will try to promote a strong and stable government and create relations with allies to fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. They (Left parties) are also great patriots."

"Privatisation was not part of our ideology. We believe India needs a strong private sector and it needs a strong public sector," he added. Similarly, he said, nationalised banks will remain in the public sector domain. "If they can't compete on equal footing with the private sector or become a drag on the exchequer, then by all means they will be allowed to raise resources from market through disinvestment," Dr Singh said, even as he promised that workers' interest will be protected at the same time.



← Mrs Sonia Gandhi will remain a guiding force



9 P.M. 5/21
2/15 →
Economic reforms shall have a human face



← Gujarat and 1984 riots will never happen again

Wife's plea on LPG

NEW DELHI, May 20. — Dr Manmohan Singh's wife said today that the price of cooking gas should not go up any further. "We are already paying around Rs 241 for every LPG cylinder.... I don't think the price should go up any further," Mrs Gursharan Kaur told reporters here. — PTI

effort to realise Rajiv Gandhi's dream "to make 21st century India's century", he said education and health for all, improved environment, housing for slum dwellers and increased agricultural production will be his main targets. The CMP, Dr Singh said, will create an industry-friendly environment.

Dr Singh allays fear of two power centres

NEW DELHI, May 20. — The Prime Minister-designate Dr Manmohan Singh today ruled out the possibility of two power centres in the wake of Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi refusing the top post. "Mrs Gandhi will remain a guiding force for us, it is a coalition government and I do not see any problem," said Dr Singh while addressing his first press conference at his residence this morning, after being elected the CPP leader last evening. Dr Singh said the top priorities for his government will be poverty alleviation, welfare of the farmers and unemployed youth. He vowed to carry on "economic reforms with a human face," making it clear that the focus will be on the social sector, including education, health and job. Dr Singh underlined communal harmony as another priority area for his government. He warned that the country will be in danger if it is divided on religious lines. While highlighting the need to strengthen the secular fabric of the nation, Dr Singh said he will create an "environment of peace". The nation cannot be divided on religious or racial lines and the essence of our ancient civilisation and Hinduism is tolerance and pluralism, he said. On Ayodhya, he stressed that the law of the land will prevail. Asked whether his government will give compensation to the victims of 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Dr Singh said no compensation is enough for people who had lost their near and dear ones in such tragic incidents. "Whatever is possible will be done," he said taking a vow that "Gujarat and 1984 riots will never happen again". Dr Singh expressed concern over the functioning of the judiciary in Gujarat. — SNS

However, he was silent on the issue of mergers of large and small banks. It's speculated that this may perhaps figure in the Budget to be presented soon.

Dr Singh said that if PSUs, while remaining as public enterprises, wanted to raise resources through disinvestment or sale of part of their equity, "they are most welcome". Wherever public sector enterprises want to compete with the private sector, domestic or foreign, there was no reason why they should not be allowed to go forward, he said. This, some analysts point out, was exactly what former disinvestment minister Mr Arun Shourie had suggested for ONGC.

Describing the reforms process as an

11-10 2005

MANMOHANOMICS

Budget after Budget

1991-92

M RTP Act relaxed to allow industry growth; rupee devalued 18%; import licences made tradable; canalised import list slashed; FIPB set up to clear foreign investment proposals; export sops to be phased out; 15% cut in fiscal deficit proposed

1992-93

Many import curbs lifted; new exchange rate mechanism LERM introduced; import licensing diluted; FERA relaxed; peak tariff cut to 110%; income tax slashed; fewer slabs; ad valorem excise duties for most things; deposit rates freed; FIs can buy 24% of local companies; National Renewal Fund to finance layoffs

1993-94

Special and basic excise rates merged; capital gains tax rate slashed for FIs; dual exchange rates unified and made flexible; interest rate slabs cut from 4 to 3; banks get funds to capitalise new provisioning norms; Indian companies can access European markets; CCI abolished, issue prices market determined

1994-95

Almost all bulk drugs delicensed, automatic FDI up to 51%; actual disinvestment crosses target; banks free to determine PLR; no minimum lending rate for big loans; greater thrust to poverty removal; projects to create jobs stressed

1995-96

Income tax exemption limit raised; rural infrastructure development fund set up; five year tax break for road, port, airport and mass transport projects; higher defence spending; more for food and fertiliser sops; Modvat rules relaxed; capital goods import duties relaxed

Other Reforms

From 1991-92 to 1995-96, industrial licensing goes out of fashion; PSUs like ONGC are corporatised; govt cuts stake in Maruti; minerals reserved for private exploration opened up to private sector; disinvestment kicks off with mixed success

Private players allowed in oil exploration and refining; private equity in road projects; private players in telecom, cellular services begin; private players allowed in aviation in a small way in the early 1990s, by 1994, private airlines allowed to operate; private and overseas players allowed in power projects, Enron signs up for Dabhol in 1994; R-group on oil suggests full decontrol by 2002

FIs allowed to buy into Indian companies; issue pricing market driven from 1993-94; OTCEI, first screen-based trading system, set up; fully online NSE also starts up; takeover code comes in force; state-owned mutual fund UTI comes under Sebi jurisdiction

Narasimham committee suggests sweeping reforms in banking system — implemented over the years; statutory reserve requirements systematically cut to increase loanable funds with banks; government securities rates gradually market-determined; prudential norms laid down to limit risks taken by banks; Malhotra committee recommends private investment in insurance sector; SBI becomes first desi bank to list overseas; IDBI raises Rs 1,200 crore through IPO; private dealers in G-secs allowed

Surviving Rao, Charming Sonia

By Rajeev Deshpande
NEW DELHI

It was said of Sitaram Kesri when he was Congress president, that whenever he needed to find someone with a clean image to handle a sticky assignment, the search would end with either Manmohan Singh or Kerala's A K Antony.

It's an enduring tribute to the man chosen by Sonia Gandhi to be PM that Manmohan Singh has retained his credibility ratings after being pitchforked from a life in academia and bureaucracy into the manic rough and tumble of politics. That he has managed this without perceptible discomfort is even more astonishing.

One hot mid-June afternoon in 1991, when new prime minister P V Narasimha Rao suggested that he swap his roost at the UGC for North Block, it seemed to be the call that Manmohan Singh was waiting for.

Despite a lifetime spent heading the Central bank, the Geneva-based South Commission and advising ministries, Singh had come around to the belief that disbanding India's byzantine licence and permit regimes and giving play to markets, duly adapted to Indian conditions, would release the nation's entrepreneurial instincts.

In Narasimha Rao he found a prime minister who fully believed in these prescriptions

and gave him the political backing which Manmohan has always acknowledged. As finance minister, one of the first statements he made was that treasury gold held mortgage in England as a result of the previous Chandra Shekhar government's desperate bid to salvage a debt-ridden economy, would be brought back. Yet, changing the mindset of the Congress, still steeped in controlled economy and welfarist slogans, was not easy.

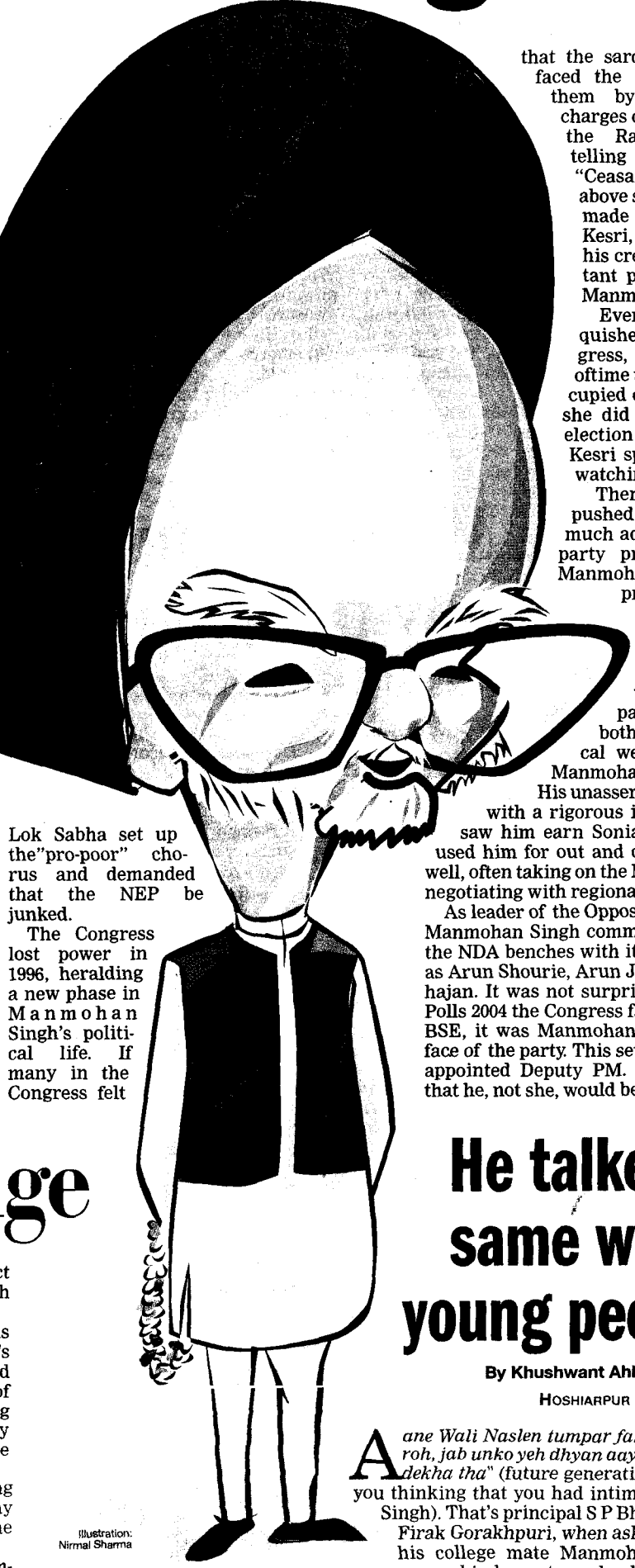
In fact, when Arjun Singh first decided to oppose Rao's leadership, he chose to attack the New Economic Policy.

However rebels in the Congress then felt that the economy was not a sufficiently emotive issue and latched onto the Ayodhya issue when Rao faced an aggressive challenge from the BJP. Yet, within the Congress, Manmohan Singh was constantly the target of dissidents. Uttaranchal CM Narain Dutt Tiwari once famously demanded that Congress policies must be dictated by "sense, not sensx".

The ordinary politician tended to view reforms as a sinister mix of incomprehensible formulations and politically damaging prescriptions. Manmohan Singh's first big test came with the 1992 Harshad Mehta stocks scam. When he offered to resign, Rao felt that this

was an even bigger disaster than the rigging of the markets, and in the words of an official in his PMO, conveyed to his FM: "Tussi pe jao (sit tight)".

Manmohan Singh and the NEP faced their sternest test when Rao, weakened by the Ayodhya demolition, faced rout in the November 1994 Assembly elections in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, NTR promising people 1 kg of rice for Rs 2, reduced the Congress to a paltry 26 in a House of 294. Congress MPs unnerved by the shrinking odds on their returning to



that the sardar of reforms now faced the axe, he confounded them by tacitly endorsing charges of corruption against the Rao government by telling the CPP that "Caesar's wife should be above suspicion". Soon, Rao made way for the rustic Kesri, who keen to establish his credentials gave important party assignments to Manmohan Singh.

Ever since Rao relinquished charge of the Congress, it was only a matter of time that Sonia Gandhi occupied centre stage and this she did in the 1998 general election campaign which Kesri spent mostly at home watching television.

Thereafter, the CWC pushed Kesri aside without much ado and Sonia became party president. All along, Manmohan Singh kept a low profile.

Every leader needs talented men and women. Sonia was no exception, whenever complex party resolutions — both economic and political were to be drafted — Manmohan was always there.

His unassertive nature combined with a rigorous intellectual approach saw him earn Sonia's appreciation. She used him for out and out political tasks as well, often taking on the NDA in Parliament or negotiating with regional parties.

As leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh commanded the respect of the NDA benches with its leading lights such as Arun Shourie, Arun Jaitley or Pramod Mahajan. It was not surprising that when after Polls 2004 the Congress faced the crash on the BSE, it was Manmohan Singh who was the face of the party. This set off talk of his being appointed Deputy PM. Until Sonia decided that he, not she, would be PM. TNN



Amil Kumar

Lok Sabha set up the "pro-poor" chorus and demanded that the NEP be junked.

The Congress lost power in 1996, heralding a new phase in Manmohan Singh's political life. If many in the Congress felt

Puffed up in Oxbridge

By Rashmee Z Ahmed
LONDON

As he inexorably moves to prime ministerial office, it is Manmohan Singh's seven years in dreary university

digs at Cambridge and Oxford back in the empire-exhausted Britain of the mid-1950s and early-60s that are held to be the key to his metamorphosis as an economist. It was at Oxford, Singh's supervisor at Nuffield College, told TNN that he began to change from orthodox Nehruvian economist to the great liberaliser.

Dr Ian M D Little, 85 and now retired, recalled with pride and fondness late on Wednesday: Indeed, Manmohan's excellent, well-researched thesis changed a lot of minds. It definitely influenced me, which is quite unusual for a student's work.

Nuffield, one of Oxford's wealthiest colleges, has its share of famous fellows and Nobel Laureates, including James Mirrlees and Severo Ochoa. But on Wednesday,

there were puffed chests and quiet pride at news of Singh's elevation to India's highest office. The college confessed to having managed to dig up a lone "group photograph of Dr Singh".

Published 40 years ago by Clarendon Press with the forbidding title, "India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-

Published 40 years ago by Clarendon Press with the forbidding title, "India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth", Little believes Singh's thesis was the first to demonstrate an essential truth: That the poor performance of India's exports was due to indigenous factors and not lack of world demand.

The thesis, says Little, was a product of his students extraordinary intellectual honesty. The very quiet, very hard working turbaned PhD student did not mix much with other students. By all accounts, he was not a gay blade. Tutors and fellow students remember him as "subdued". He was "reliable" and "honest" but not charismatic, says Little. Overall, he was "a good man".

Instead of nights out on the town, Singh spent his two-year Oxford sojourn rigorously re-

searching a closed-door subject and establishing the truth about India's dismal exports.

In the midst of planning his congratulatory letter to India's next prime minister, Little said Singh was probably one of Nuffield's most outstanding students. I cant think of any other who went on to become prime minister.

Nuffield's most outstanding students. I cant think of any other who went on to become prime minister. Meanwhile, over at Cambridge's 500-year-old St Johns College, where Singh did a BA and an MA and went on to become a serial winner of prizes for academic excellence, memories of the famous alumnus are slightly weaker.

Old Johnians recall that Singh's old college has already awarded him its highest mark of honour. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, St Johns elected Singh an honorary fellow, to join roughly 35 other prominent alumni around the world.

Singh will add to a glittering list of prime ministerial Johnians, college sources stiffly told this paper. The ancient Cambridge college, which is notoriously far more reticent than Oxfor's so-called more

He talked the same way all young people do

By Khushwant Ahluwalia
HOSHIAHPUR

Ane Wali Naslen tumpar fakkar karengi, hum is-roh, jab unko yeh dhyaan aayega ki tumne Firak ko dekha tha" (future generations will take pride in you thinking that you had intimacy with Manmohan Singh). That's principal SP Bhandari, reciting poet Firak Gorakhpuri, when asked to comment about his college mate Manmohan Singh. Bhandari runs a kindergarten school in the city, said that Manmohan was an unassuming and a brilliant boy in college. His close friends were Pritam Singh Bhandari husband of former MP Sukhbans Kaur Bhandari; B N Goswami and Prof M L Bhanot. Singh finished post graduation in economics from Punjab University College, Hoshiarpur.

Bhandari pointed towards the street across, and said that the college hostel was right there and was home to Manmohan. What was he like as a young man? Bhandari replies "we talked the same as young boys are supposed to do". Menaan...Shameaan, especially after he visited Hoshiarpur after completing his degree from Cambridge.

Bhandari who lost touch with Singh, says that after he became the finance minister, I thought he would be very busy. But Bhandari now wants to meet Manmohan and congratulate him in his moment of glory. Bhandari says that friends always thought that he would become a Bureaucrat. But becoming the Prime Minister of India, one could never imagine sixty years back. TNN

Meanwhile, back home in Gali Beriwali

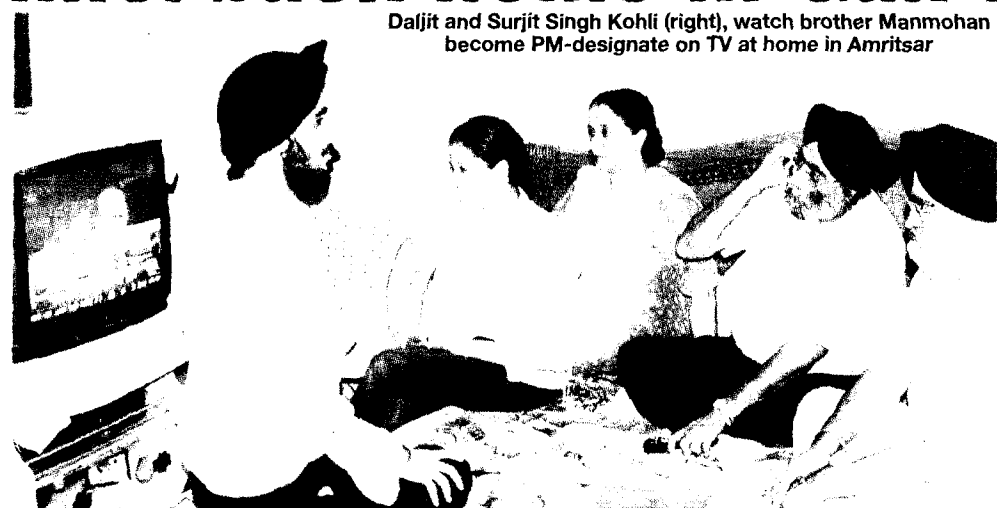
By Team TOI
CHANDIGARH

Always the topper at school, Manmohan Singh's brilliance often led his father Gurmukh Singh Kohli to gush affectionate: "Mohan, you'll be the PM of this nation one day." Nearly half a century later, a fond parent's utterance has come true to chart the course of a nation.

The country's first Sikh prime minister spent his childhood in the neighbourhood of Gali Beriwali in Amritsar. Emigres from Peshawar in Pakistan, the Kohli family dealt in dry fruits. Those were tough times when Manmohan had to pursue his love of books under the glare of streetlights. Clan Kohli numbered 12 and early enough in life, the man learnt the benefits of juggling figures to make ends meet.

Campaigning for the Congress early this month he'd stated: "I know my worth and capacity. I am not cut out for the PM's office." Destiny sure knows how to flummox the most agile of brains. Gusts from the political whirlwind unfolding in the Capital tore asunder Dr Singh's humble words. They also ushered in a new dawn for Indian politics: a Manmohan era.

As a child: Mature beyond his years and more given to gravity than childhood gaiety, Manmo-



Daljit and Surjit Singh Kohli (right), watch brother Manmohan become PM-designate on TV at home in Amritsar

han showed a marked disinclination towards the family dry-fruit business. His proclivity towards the written word found full support from his father who felt it was the best investment possible. Never too fond of movies or music, he was extremely particular about overspending. But old friend Prem Kumar recollects his fond-

ness for kite flying which had to be indulged in secret for fear of parental disapproval. The student: "Unassuming brilliance" is a classmate's description of the good Dr Back from Cambridge the young man often talked about gori mems to friend SP Bhandari. Not blessed with a flowing mane, he often bore jibes for his bald pate when notorious classmates managed to get his turban off. Manmohan was financially hard up during his student days and lost a year of college on account of inability to pay his fees.

A friendly teacher: The influence of the man stretched to making many opt for a career in academics in favour of the civil services. Known to be the most accessible of masters, he developed a devoted student following. What he said was read serious not just by the students. Prof H S Shergill remembers how a protracted strike by PU non-teaching employees ended as soon as he assured them of looking into the matter. Outside the class Manmohan the friend came to the fore and he would even offer lifts to students as he trooped about on his cycle. The family man: Whether PM or

not, the family expects him to carry on giving as much importance to family functions as he always has. His message to his brothers has always been to lead a simple life. Married to Gursaran Kaur in — he's rumoured to have carried the bride home on a bicycle. The mild-mannered husband refused to ask his wife to do any chores, he'd rather help himself much to the chagrin of the traditional family. The family claims that the possibility of getting any favours from PM Singh is an impossibility for the bureaucrat even refused to let his wife or three daughters misuse his official car. Personal habits: Very religious and recites the gurbani everyday. Being diabetic, he's quite conscious of his eating habits. Meals are fixed at 8.30 am, 1.30 pm and 8.30 pm. Manmohan hates the idea of cycle rickshaws as he feels it is demeaning for one man to pull another's weight. Even when his mother lay in hospital in 1979 and Manmohan was in a hurry to be with her, he refused to mount a rickshaw. His simplicity is legendary. He acquired his Ph D from Oxford at the age of



Manmohan at the wedding of Surjit Singh, 1982



Singh's bhabhi distributing sweets to family and friends

Default PM, But Man For The Job



By Mahesh Daga
NEW DELHI

Over the last 15 years, the story of India's politics has been marked by more stunning twists than can be contained in an Agatha Christie bestseller. But, for sheer dramatic quality, nothing could — or will — match the circumstances in which Manmohan Singh finds himself catapulted to the threshold of the most powerful job in the country. That he may yet decline the honour is as much a part of the bizarre turn of events as the fact that he was chosen for it in the first place.

Admittedly, Singh will not be the first compromise candidate to assume that high office — the names of HD Deve Gowda, I K Gujral, even, Chandrasekhar, come to mind. But the crucial difference — or irony — is that this time there was no need for stop-gap measures or compromise candidates.

In Sonia Gandhi, the unanimous leader of more than 320 members of Parliament, the most legitimate contender for the post was already in place.

But with the prime minister-designate opting out of the race at the last minute — thanks as much to hysterical parivar paranoia as her own 'inner voice' — the mantle has fallen on Singh.

In 1991, with the economy on the verge of collapse — and barely enough forex reserves to fund two weeks worth of imports — a desperate Narasimha Rao had called on Manmohan to take up a job that few would have craved — that of a finance minister.

Thirteen years later, a besieged Sonia has called upon Singh to carry out an even tougher assignment. Talk about running a political coalition, with most of the bigger constituents either unable or unwilling

to join the government. Talk about taking the process of economic reforms forward in the face of Leftist intransigence.

Talk about keeping the peace process with Pakistan on track, when the opposition benches will be monopolised by some of the country's most jingoistic elements.

So how equipped is the former professor to become the country's

well as in global financial institutions. Second, his non-controversial image as a leader — particularly one with a long and spotless record of personal integrity. And, finally, his singular success in changing the economic landscape of the country during what has now come to be known as the Rao-Manmohan era of liberalization.

On the negative side, Manmohan has no feel for mass politics. Indeed, the only time he fought a Lok Sabha election — in 1999 — he lost to a relative political lightweight in the elite South Delhi constituency. Since then, Manmohan, the quintessential technocrat, has shown few signs of being able to successfully negotiate the delicate dynamics of India's coalition era politics.

In short, Singh might have moral stature but he will always lack the political authority that comes with securing a popular mandate.

In 1991, when Rao first sounded out a reluctant Singh for the finance minister's post, he is reported to have agreed only on two conditions.

First, he would be allowed a free hand to do the job. Second, he will not be made a sacrificial bakra, if the going

Wah, Janaab

"Sartaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai, dekhana hai zor kitna bazu-e katil mein hai."

"Sir, I have come to the end of my labour. Tonight, I feel like going to the theatre. Let the assassins be informed, I am prepared to meet their onslaught."

"My wife maybe somewhat suspicious of the soft corner I have for working women. But I expect my daughters to fully support this noble act of their father (proposing tax sops for working women)."

"I must own up to a personal interest in this concession (for self-employed), since I may also have to join the ranks of self-employed persons if the Opposition has its way."

"Every finance minister has to do his bit to curb smoking, which is injurious to health. I would be failing in my duty if I did not make one more attempt to use the fiscal instrument in this worthy cause."

13th prime minister? On the face of it, his assets are three-fold. First, his vast administrative experience and acumen — having spent the better of his life holding a variety of senior positions both in the government as

got tough. One can only hope, as much for his sake as for the country's, that he will have secured a similar promise from Sonia before he takes up his biggest challenge ever. **TNN**

QUOTES OF A LIFETIME

An Idea...
"Victor Hugo said no power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come...the emergence of India as a major economic power happens to be one such idea."
— In his first budget speech on July 24, 1991.

Sensible Indians...
"Time and again, Indians have shown they can be relied upon to make sound and sensible decisions. I have every reason to believe when the time comes, our people will be discriminating enough to recognise the friendly hand that alone can help our nation to move forward."
— In his last budget speech on February 28, 1996.

A New Mindset...
"Two things are needed for economic progress of India. First, we need a new mindset of our political entities and second, a section of the Indian industry which still believes that it can somehow bring back the licence and permit raj must give up that feeling."
— In 1996

Privatisation No Mantra...
"We don't see privatisation as a mantra to be applied regardless of the merit of the case."
— In his latest interview to TOI on April 19, 2004

Moderation In Taxes...
"A Congress government will not jack up tax rates, certainly not income-tax on personal income. I'm for moderation and stability in tax rates."
— in the same interview

No Hesitation In Action...
"The new government will not hesitate to take action against those who seek to manipulate markets and create unnecessary panic."
— On May 17, 2004

Commitment To Swadeshi...
"We cannot fritter away our vast energies in senseless communal strife. Nor can we allow the national commitment to Swadeshi to be misused to perpetuate economic backwardness and prevent India from occupying her rightful place."
— Budget speech on Feb 28, 1996

Hard Talk: Shooting From The Lip

By Team TOI
NEW DELHI

Excerpts from various interviews Manmohan Singh has given to The Times of India over the years:

Interview published May 1, 1999
There is not one person in this country who believes that they have provided a thoughtful Budget. Policy-wise, they were constantly pulled in different directions and in the end, swadeshi was equated with globalisation!

We wanted to provide a government that was not riddled by too many internal contradictions, a government not subject to pressures, a government that would be purposeful and cohesive, a government that would be able to manage the economy and the polity unhindered. We recognise that the anti-BJP alliance was an alliance based against the BJP's communal agenda. But we felt that if on our own, we could provide a government that worked, a government on a totally secular basis, perhaps that would be better.

We did not want an alliance that was baffled by internal contradictions. So the Congress gameplan all along was to have a minority government? We always thought that the numbers would be forthcoming, and it was the understanding that those who played a leading role in asking the Congress to head the alternative, were not interested in a power-sharing role.

Interview published Aug. 12, 1999
In response to BJP allegations that he was trying to cash in on Sikh votes by contesting the



Amit Kumar

South Delhi seat: I am proud to be a Sikh and an Indian. But I hate to exploit this for gathering votes. It's not proper; I hope I don't do it ever. But then is being a Sikh a disqualification? BJP always plays the religion card. After Babri Masjid, they rose from two seats to the present strength on that issue only. I have never looked upon politics as a ground for religious exploitation.

I am merely a candidate for south Delhi and I am not being projected as a Prime Minister. This is all a figment of the media's imagination.

The negative slide began because of the BJP. Their first budget by Mr Yashwant Sinha was a disaster. And if the Congress liberalisation policies were so wrong, why haven't they changed the trend? The fact is the potent economic indicators were strongest during our tenure. The exports were rising and industrial growth recorded a big jump.

Interview published August 25, 1999

I think we cannot fool our people. I do believe that in the last 50 years, politicians have been taking our people for a ride and I feel there is a great danger if the gap between what politicians say or promise and what they do grows the way it has been growing.

Interview published February 9, 1998
If we (Congress) had continued to misman-

age the fiscal system, we would have gone under. I would have had to declare India a debt defaulter and we would have gone the route of the African and Latin American countries.

PSUs should not be helped by budgetary measures. Profitable enterprises must go to the market to raise resources. But it is not an ideological imperative for us that all PSUs must be privatised, regardless of efficiency. We are not opposed to disinvestment per se. But these have to be case-by-case decisions.

The "real BJP" is controlled by the RSS which was the "holding company" and events suggested that the prime ministerial candidate Atal Behari Vajpayee is a "mask" hiding the "rigid and hardcore" BJP. The BJP is a cadre-based party. Three-fourth of the BJP comes from RSS. How can they delink from that.

Interview published March 1, 2002
Reacting to the BJP Budget: I don't think the FM will succeed with his carrot-and-stick policy with the states. Most states are in serious trouble. They are diverting funds left and right just to pay salaries. Their problems should be faced head on and, if necessary, by a once-and-for-all debt rescheduling programme.

By Raja Bose
AHMEDABAD

No one needs to be told that Manmohan Singh is good on the economic front but, what many do not know is that he is a shrewd politician too, a strong man and has great political acumen, feels former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor IG Patel, as Prime Minister-designate Manmohan Singh, the man Patel knows for over five decades, ready for his coronation.

"He knows very well how to deal with politicians. He is a man who would not like to rub anyone the wrong way. But, he does have the strength to deal with the rough characters in politics," feels Patel.

For years, they have taken active part in scripting the country's economic progress and Patel, whom Singh has succeeded as chief economic adviser and RBI governor, talks about the genteel man who would not rub anyone the wrong way and yet stand strong in the face of adversity.

But, will he be able to make the party tide over the rough and tumble of coalition politics, more so when he has to deal with the likes of Laloo Prasad Yadav and the Left? Patel is certain he would. And, he should know, having known Singh for 52 years. "People are talking about the pulls and pressures of coalition politics. They are also asking whether this coalition will be able to carry on with reforms. I feel Singh has the strength to have a moderating effect on the allies, which he would do along with Sonia Gandhi," says Patel.

"He is a person whose integrity is beyond doubt. He is a low key man and



I feel, even as Prime Minister, he will like to make it appear as if he is not the man who is running the country. He will not be very assertive. He has never been except for the time when he needed to assert while driving reforms as the finance minister. It is not in his nature and it is his general tendency not to annoy people," adds Patel.

For the former RBI governor, now settled in Vadodara, Singh is also a man who has the courage to take tough decisions. "If faced with a situation like Gujarat, Singh would not hesitate to take drastic action. I believe much more drastic action would be taken if such a situation arose again,

maybe even the chief minister would get removed.

"As far as running the country is concerned, he has a style of functioning that is not difficult, apart from being a person who would not take on people. That would make things easier. With over 50 years of association and having seen him from such close quarters, I am sure he will even make it appear as if he is the man on the hot seat."

"He will maintain a fine balance. So, do not expect too much on the economic front from him. And, do not underestimate him on the political front. And, he will run the country very well," says Patel. **TNN**

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Man of the moment



Manmohan Singh with the letter of appointment from the President

PRIME CV

1952 First in BA (Hons) in Economics, Punjab University

1954 First in MA (Econ), Punjab University

1957 D.Phil (Oxford) and D.Litt (Honoris Causa) PhD on India's export competitiveness

1957-59 Senior Lecturer (Econ), Punjab Univ

1963-65 Professor (International Trade), Delhi University,

1966-69 Chief, Financing for Trade Cell, Unctad

1969-71 Honorary Prof, Jawaharlal Nehru University

1971-72 Economic adviser, ministry of foreign trade

1972-76 Chief economic adviser

Nov 1976-Apr 1980 Member (Finance), Atomic Energy Com, Space Commission

Apr 1980-Sept 1982 Member Secretary, Planning Commission

Sept 1982-Jan 1985 RBI Governor, IMF Board of Governors

Jan 1985-July 1987 Dy Chairman, Planning Commission

Aug 1987-Nov 1990 Secretary-General and Commissioner, South Commission, Geneva

1987 Padma Vibhushan

Dec 1990-March 1991 Adviser to the PM on economic affairs

March 1991-June 1991 Chairman, UGC

June 1991-May 1996 Finance Minister

Oct 1991 Elected to Rajya Sabha

March 1998 Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha

Nothing to fear, reforms guru tells market

HT Political Bureau
New Delhi, May 19

A RELAXED and beaming Sonia Gandhi stood beside her trusted lieutenant Manmohan Singh on the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan this evening as he announced to the world that the President has appointed him the country's Prime Minister.

The 71-year-old Singh, who will be sworn in on Saturday, did not forget to mention that the mandate of the people was for Sonia who had risen in the esteem of her countrymen by declining to accept the top political post despite being elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party.

"I feel humble and say that the nation has given us the mandate and the mandate was for Sonia Gandhi," he said. "I will work under the guidance and support of Sonia Gandhi. I know my limitations."

He assured the nation that the new Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government will carry forward India's social and economic development along with economic reforms, with emphasis on the human element.

Sonia said she felt relaxed after the "tremendous pressure" of the last couple of days. She was happy that the uncertainty about who would be Prime Minister had ended.

"I had been under tremendous pressure from my colleagues, party workers and people across the country. So, naturally, being under such pressure takes you down a bit. But now that everything is over, I am very happy. I think that the country will be safe in Dr Manmohan Singh's hands," she said.

Manmohan, after being elected leader of the CPP today, went to Rashtrapati Bhavan and was invited to form the government. The Congress constitution was amended today to provide for a CPP 'chairperson' (apart and distinct from the 'leader' of the CPP). Sonia was then elected to the post unanimously by all party MPs. The post confers on her the power to nominate the leaders of the CPP in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.

Sonia then made a statement committing herself to the party and asking members to give their unstinting support to Manmohan Singh. "I am not going anywhere. I am still very much in politics. I will continue as Congress president and chairperson of CPP, as long as you want me to," she said. Putting forward Manmohan's name for the top job, she said: "I am happy to let Manmohan Singh take this great responsibility."

In his speech to the CPP, the Prime Minister-designate said he would exert himself to live up to the great trust placed in him by Sonia. Earlier, Manmohan's candidature took final shape after Sonia discussed the matter with her allies and the parties supporting the alliance.

She held meetings with DMK chief M. Karunanidhi, CPI(M) general secretary H.S. Surjeet and RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav to seek support for Manmohan. All of them agreed to extend support. Sonia's meeting with Karunanidhi also resulted in the DMK agreeing to be part of the Congress-led government.

Sonia also held a meeting with party leaders, MPs and state Congress leaders to explain the rationale behind her decision. But Congress leaders continued to build pressure. AICC office-bearers, CWC members and newly-elected MPs of the party submitted their resignations to her. But Sonia rejected their appeal.

Sonia Gandhi is my leader. I'd hate to be a substitute for Mrs Gandhi. No one can be a substitute for her

■ More reports on Pages 3 & 4

Sonia's logic: country first

She had only one reason: avoid civil strife

RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, May 18: Yesterday, Sonia Gandhi had prepared a letter of regret. Today, she flashed another and held out a threat — if her renunciation is not accepted, she would resign as party president.

An extraordinary scene unfolded at 10 Janpath at 1 pm. As a "loyal" AICC general secretary tried to reason, tears falling incessantly, Sonia turned away her face, saying if they try to dissuade her, she would quit as the AICC chief.

The crestfallen Congressman told *The Telegraph* later: "We thought her to be powerful. But today we realise that she was strong, too. Today I felt that she was also an ordinary human being of flesh and blood."

Many party leaders had feared all along that a drastic measure was lurking behind Sonia's determination as she de-

himself/herself on fire. She was convinced that the office of Prime Minister was not worth that," a party MP from Maharashtra said.

She said that in her "modest" views, the country needed drinking water, schools, basic health services, small-scale industries, social security and not a debate revolving around her place of birth.

She said her association with the Nehru-Gandhi family had taught her an unforgettable principle — country first.

Sonia was reluctant from day one. Yet, political exigencies did not permit her to opt out of the race until everything had seemingly fallen in place. While stepping off the power podium, Sonia took utmost care to ensure a smooth succession.

Those who know Sonia well said they are least surprised by her action. Circumstances, they said, have trained Sonia in such a way that she is capable of taking tough decisions with ease.

There are several pointers in that direction. She had hated the idea of Rajiv Gandhi joining politics but conceded, realising that he had to fulfil his sense of duty towards mother Indira Gandhi.

In 1984, she let him become Prime Minister, much against her wishes because she felt Rajiv Gandhi had a duty to perform. In 1991, she declined to lead the party as she felt she was not cut out for politics. Seven years later, she was drawn into it due to a host of factors such as likely disintegration of the party.

Today, she answered her conscience when she asked herself if the office of Prime Minister was worth alienating a section of her countrymen.

She, too, was overwhelmed by emotion and avoided meeting allies and party MPs. The decision to opt out was communicated to allies through Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, Ahmad Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad and others.

Sources close to Sonia said other than a desire to avoid civil strife, the AICC chief was not driven by any other motive.

"We know the media will say 1001 things that security concerns were there, that she was unsure of facing the Lok Sabha, that she had a nagging doubt over her ability to lead the nation."

"But let me assure you, there was nothing of the sorts. She has learnt to live in a stringent security environment, she led the Congress as leader of Opposition for five years and is well versed with all national and international issues."

"She had just one view while vetoing herself. She could not bring herself to cause a sense of hurt to a minute section of society which had a jaundiced view about her," one of the sources said.

Apart from her children Rahul and Priyanka, Sonia consulted two other trusted but apolitical friends who agreed with her decision.

CHALLENGE AFTER CHALLENGE, AND NOW THE BIGGEST OF THEM ALL?



In your leadership, we see motherly affection and I request you as your child to please lead the country

Govinda

fied single-handed one of the biggest electoral odds in recent times.

She hated the idea of being challenged by a section of her countrymen, however minuscule a minority who was uncomfortable over the prospect of her becoming Prime Minister of India.

Sonia said she had no problems taking on those like Sushma Swaraj and Uma Bharti, but she had "no strength" to be a "cause" of a likely civil strife.

Congress leaders said in retrospect that they and the allies made a "blunder" in trying to assure that those raking up her foreign origin would be given a befitting answer.

"She dreaded such a scenario — the prospect of Congress workers battling Sangh activists. She was horrified to visualise that some day, somebody, driven by xenophobia, would try to set

LIFE AND TIMES OF MANMOHAN

BORN

September 26, 1932 in Gah, West Punjab

EDUCATION

M.A., D.Phil., D.Litt. (Honoris Causa) from Universities of Punjab, Cambridge and Oxford

CAREER

- Professor and civil servant
- Governor, Reserve Bank of India from 1982 to 1985

POLITICAL DEBUT

- Union finance minister from 1991 to 1996
- Ushered in liberalisation
- Minimised interference which helped promote industries
- Risk taking made more attractive

BIG CRISIS

- In 1991, fiscal deficit ballooned to 8.5% of GDP
- Huge balance of payments deficit
- India had barely a billion dollars in forex reserves — roughly equal to two weeks' imports

BREAKTHROUGH

- By 1994, economy was on way to recovery
- Government put a stop to automatic monetisation of fiscal deficit, a historic step

TAX REFORMS

- Simplified and rationalised the tax structure
- Removed many controls and regulations on industry
- Death of permit raj

SOUNDBITE

Quoted Victor Hugo while presenting the budget in 1994-95: *No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come*

POLITICAL LOW POINT

Lost Lok Sabha elections in 1999

CURRENT STATUS

- Rajya Sabha MP from Assam
- Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha

Extremely suave move: she gains, Cong gains, India gains

OUR BUREAU

May 18: A dramatic turnaround that started as a relief rally gained momentum as news trickled in around 2.30 pm that Manmohan Singh could be the next Prime Minister.

It pumped adrenaline into a market that was tiring as the bounce in share prices after Monday's crash seemed headed for a correction. It was then that news trickled in about Sonia Gandhi declining to be Prime Minister.

Share prices took flight as activity in the dealer rooms turned frenetic on expectation of Manmohan taking the chair. Apprehensions about reforms generated by statements of Left leaders also appeared to evaporate.

Until yesterday comments like the one by CPM's Sitaram Yechury that the disinvestment ministry ought to be shut down

had been blamed for the crash on Friday, followed by a collapse on Monday, the Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index losing close to 850 points in two days.

Today, the market recovered in the early part of the day and then towards the close the Manmohan punch gave it additional momentum. The sensx gained another 160 points, ending the day up 371.86 points, or 8.25 per cent.

"It's an extremely suave move by Sonia Gandhi. She is magnanimous in victory," said Ramesh Damani, a leading BSE broker. "Everybody gains by this move. She gains, the Congress gains and the country gains."

Not to say the market gains, too, going by today's evidence. "Manmohan Singh is a unifying figure for the country, gushed Damani.

"The markets will give him a honeymoon period. He has the

right credentials for leading the country as he is a non-controversial figure.

"For the stock market he is an endearing politician because he has the reforms credentials too."

Sonia's move saw the sensx recording its second biggest rise in history after a 426.05-point rise on March 24, 1992 during Harshad Mehta's time.

"We want a common minimum programme and a PM very fast," said Arun Kejriwal of Kejrival Research and Investment Services. The markets will get a direction as soon as this is in place.

"Sonia Gandhi declining the Prime Minister's post will help the new government to concentrate on governance, instead of getting bogged down in personal differences," said Venkatesh Iyer, director at RK Charl Stock Broking.

"It has to be true and it has to

be fast," Iyer said about reports of Manmohan becoming Prime Minister.

In Delhi, finance ministry officials heaved a sigh of relief. "His (Manmohan's) name has done the job... it has brought the punters back to bourses."

Yesterday's crash had prompted the officials to keep vigil on the sensx today, after having

spent last evening talking state run financial institutions into buying more stock today to stabilise the market. Most are Manmohan loyalists and some had worked with him in his last stint as finance minister.

There were whispers that several key officials were already in touch with him and were acting on his orders. Though their boss as of today remains outgoing finance minister Jaswant Singh, with Manmohan earlier tipped to succeed him, many officials appeared to have decided to renew their allegiance to their "old master".

But the government-sponsored bull run was overtaken by a wave of buying that happy ministry officials described as "Manmohan magic".

Manmohan had pioneered economic reforms, but this time he tried to give the party's economic manifesto a human face,

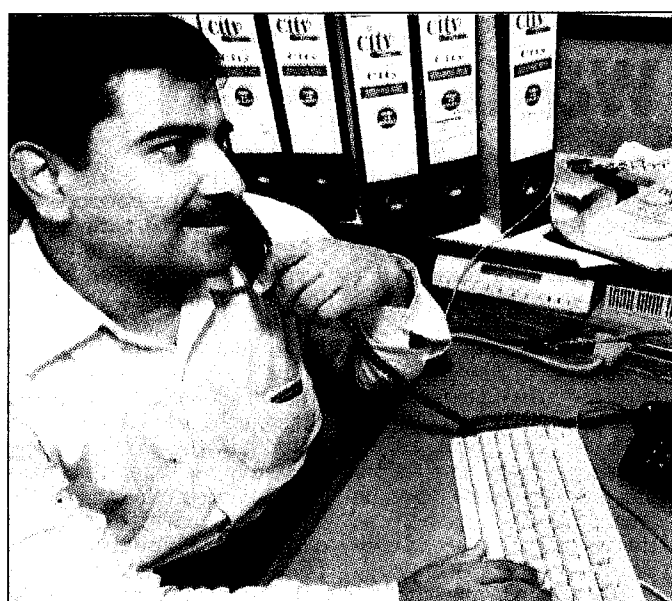
taking into account the Left's views on ticklish issues such as privatisation and the need for stepping up investment in the social sector and agriculture.

Most Left leaders believe his first draft of a common minimum programme for the new alliance continues to have the same pre-poll flavour they liked.

But as far as the market crash and recovery is concerned, the Left continues to feel it "was sheer manipulation that has now been checked by pro-active steps".

Nilotpal Basu, the CPM leader and member of the last joint parliamentary committee that probed market scams, believes so.

"I am getting information that this is part of the stock market manipulations which some brokers have been doing... we will be asking for a thorough enquiry into all this," he said.



SMILE AFTER SCOWL: A stockbroker in Mumbai on Tuesday. (AFP)



She has shut the mouths of those who were unnecessarily raking up the issue of her foreign origin
Kiran Mazumdar Shaw
Chairperson, Biocon India

Power of Sacrifice

6/12 Sonia teaches the parivar a lesson in Bharatiyata 19/5

Whichever way you looked at Election-2004, it belonged to only one person: Sonia Gandhi. The Congress president fought the most daunting odds to give her party the kind of victory no one ever imagined. The Congress came back from behind to emerge with the highest vote share and the largest number of seats. But more remarkably, she won the unanimous support of over 300 legislators, among them men who had earlier opposed her on grounds of her foreign origin. Sonia had a mandate way beyond anything the outgoing government enjoyed in its five years in office. By all canons of democracy — and decency — she ought to have been sworn in as India's next prime minister. That things have turned out differently is an adverse comment, not on the democratic credentials of this wonderful country and the large masses of its people, but on the behaviour of a handful of men and women who, through sheer political blackmail, have sought to reverse the electoral mandate. It is a sad day for India. And yet, even if regretfully, we must accept her decision. By stepping aside to make way for another candidate, Sonia has emulated a tradition of renunciation that, ironically, has long been held to be the pinnacle of Indian civilisational thought.

Sonia can rest assured, though, that her stock will go up — as much here as internationally. By the same token, those in the BJP and the RSS who have spearheaded a hate campaign against her, must know that they have come out of this sordid drama looking like street bullies: The display of *shakti* by Sushma Swaraj and Uma Bharti has done little to uphold the so-called *maryada* of the Hindutva parivar. This is all the more unfortunate considering the nature of the electoral verdict which was unambiguously against this kind of xenophobia. However, such is the politics of blackmail that it spares no one. It won't be long before these hoodlum tactics rebound on the political class and the country. We have seen a manifestation of this in the behaviour of the stock market in the last few days. Clearly, the record fall of the Sensex by 564 points on Monday and its instant recovery within minutes of information that Sonia will be stepping down, cannot be explained in purely market terms. That markets should play such a role, by design or default, in the formation of government bodes ill both for our democracy and the future of free enterprise. This is a travesty of the larger ideals that capitalism, globalisation and democracy represent.

With Sonia saying no, Manmohan is set to be Prime Minister

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By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 18. Listening to her "inner voice," Sonia Gandhi today walked away from the job of prime minister by stepping down from the leadership of the Congress Parliamentary Party. She is expected to hand over the baton to Manmohan Singh.

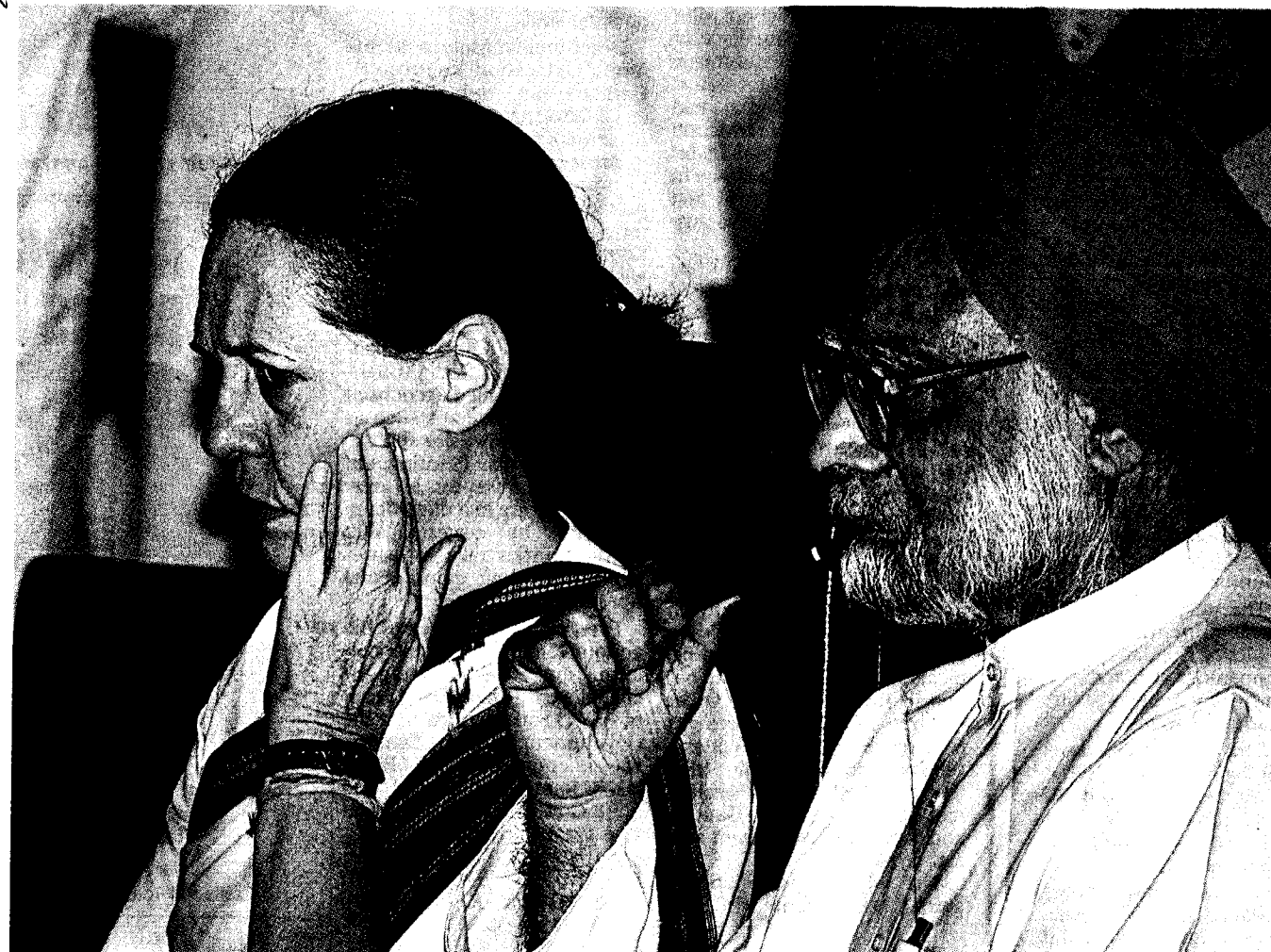
All the allies in the United Progressive Alliance as well as the Left parties have been informally sounded about Dr. Singh as the prime ministerial candidate and all of them have replied that they would accept the Congress decision.

Ms. Gandhi announced her "I-will-not-be-your-prime-minister" decision at a meeting of Congress MPs, former MPs and other leaders. She told the gathering in the Central Hall of Parliament as well as the nationwide audience that watched the proceedings on television that she never hankered after office and that her only aim was "to defend the secular foundation of our nation and the poor of our country." She stood her ground, despite emotional protests by new and old MPs.

After the two-and-a-half hour meeting, responding to a resolution asking her to reconsider her decision, she said: "Trust me and allow me to take my decision."

The script that began yesterday was completed today. Yesterday, Ms. Gandhi's script went awry when the allies vetoed her desire to step aside. However, late last night she had told her senior colleagues in no unmistakable words that her decision to decline the prime ministerial chair remained "unchanged."

It came to a standoff between



DRAMATIC TURN: Sonia Gandhi, after resisting enormous pressure from the Congress Parliamentary Party and the ranks, was authorised on Tuesday to take an "appropriate decision" on who should be the Prime Minister. Her choice is known to be Dr. Manmohan Singh. — Photo: V.V. Krishnan

the moral minority (consisting of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Vardra and one or two aides) and the political majority (consisting of the political bosses). In a

last-ditch effort to exert pressure on her, the party managers massed "crowds" outside 10 Janpath. But the moral minority prevailed.

Convinced that Ms. Gandhi would not go back on her decision, the party managers reluctantly began putting together the organisational act to carry

out her desire. The "caucus" met this morning at the senior leader, Arjun Singh's residence. Besides Mr. Singh, those who attended were Dr. Manmohan

Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, Ahmed Patel, M.L. Fotedar, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Natwar Singh. They farmed out assignments among themselves. Mr. Natwar Singh and Mr. Fotedar were entrusted with the task of conveying Ms. Gandhi's decision to the regional parties, while Mr. Arjun Singh and Mr. Azad were asked to explain things to the Left parties. These interlocutors were told to tell the allies that Ms. Gandhi meant what she said.

That Ms. Gandhi was not going to stake her claim to form the government became somewhat discernible when Rashtrapati Bhavan could not confirm when she was going to call on the President. It was only after noon that she travelled to Rashtrapati Bhavan accompanied by Dr. Manmohan Singh.

After her meeting, she told the waiting newsmen that she had discussions with the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and that she would meet him again on Tuesday with "proper documentation." It was plain and clear that she had gone through the motion of keeping her appointment as per the President's invitation, without sounding discourteous to the head of the republic. It was obvious that she had on purpose not carried with her the letters of support from the allies. However, authoritative sources insisted that the President had not asked Ms. Gandhi for any kind of "clarification." It was also denied that the President had asked the Attorney General to give a legal opinion on Ms. Gandhi's citizenship status.

Interestingly, Rashtrapati Bhavan deemed it proper to put out a press release, noting that

Sushma Swaraj, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, had called on the President and "told him that she felt Ms. Gandhi should not be the Prime Minister of this country, because she was of foreign origin." A delegation of the "Rashtriya Swabhiman Aandolan," headed by the former BJP ideologue, K.N. Govindacharya, also called on Mr. Kalam and gave a representation pleading that "Ms. Sonia Gandhi should not be allowed to be sworn in as Prime Minister." The press release added that "the President simply heard them."

This sentence of five words became necessary because the President's saffron visitors gave the impression that Mr. Kalam had expressed some kind of empathy with their views. In fact, knowledgeable sources within the Congress were insistent that Ms. Gandhi's decision had nothing to do with Ms. Swaraj's views and that it was always on the cards, as she herself told the Central Hall congregation that "I was always certain that if ever I found myself in the position that I am in today, I would follow my own inner voice."

The Congress leaders say that her decision has enhanced her moral stature and that she would now become the biggest source of strength to the party. The last word belonged to Jairam Ramesh: "A long line of renunciates have dotted India right from the days of Gautama Buddha to Mahatma Gandhi; and, Sonia Gandhi has now joined this pantheon."

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Uma offers to quit

9 PM
Tension on the
back



Statesman News Service

BHOPAL, May 18. — With the Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Miss Uma Bharati, playing her trump card by submitting her resignation to the party president, Mr Venkaiah Naidu, confusion has started reigning supreme here.

Though the chief minister's resignation to Mr Naidu has no legal validity, sources close to the

chief minister said that Miss Bharati might submit her resignation to the Governor tomorrow, if Mrs Sonia Gandhi decided to become the next Prime Minister.

Sources said it was certainly a "pressure tactics" by the chief minister. But if Miss Bharati tenders her resignation to the Governor tomorrow, it should not come as a surprise to anyone.

The chief minister has opted for the wait-and-watch policy till tomorrow morning.

The Congress, however, has dubbed it a "political stunt and theatrics" by the chief minister. Congress spokesperson, Mr Manak Aggarwal, said: "If Miss Bharati was really so keen on resigning, she should

have submitted it to the Governor, not to the BJP president".

About her *yatra* to Kedarnath to seek blessings from the Lord before taking the next move, Mr Aggarwal said Miss Bharati should permanently settle there, rather than acting "irresponsible and opposing people's mandate in favour of Mrs Gandhi".

A senior political analyst said Miss Bharati perhaps wanted to score over her party colleague, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, in opposing Mrs Gandhi's candidature for Prime Minister's post.

Gaur to take charge

In the wake of Miss Uma Bharati submitting her resignation today, urban

administration minister Mr Babulal Gaur was asked to officiate in her place for a week, adds PTI.

A fax message to this effect was received here by Mr Gaur from Miss Bharati and a copy of the same was also sent to chief secretary Mr BK Saha.

In the message, Miss Bharati said she would be away from the state for one week and during this period Mr Gaur would be empowered to preside over Cabinet meetings and discharge other necessary responsibilities.

Mr Gaur later told reporters at his official residence that he would carry out the instructions given by Miss Bharati and work according to the priorities set by her.

SC to hear PIL

NEW DELHI, May 18. — The Supreme Court (coram, Pal, Agarwal, JJ) will hear a PIL challenging the likely appointment of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi as the next Prime Minister of India on 24 May. The Delhi High Court, which has been seized of a similar petition since 1999, will hear it two days later.

Supreme Court listed the matter for hearing on 24 May after it was mentioned by the petitioner-in-person, Lucknow-based advocate, Mr Ashok Pandey, at the residence of Ms Justice Ruma Pal. The petitioner had sought the court's intervention for a direction to the President to declare a national emergency as Mrs Sonia Gandhi's likely appointment as PM would be a "threat to the security of the nation".

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court refused to grant an interim stay restraining Congress President Sonia Gandhi from taking over as the Prime Minister on a plea challenging the constitutional validity of the move to invite Mrs Gandhi to form the government in April 1999 by the then President KR Narayanan as she was not a natural-born citizen. The Division Bench (coram Patel CJ, Ahmed

'Mandate favours her'

NEW DELHI, May 18. — Warning that anybody except Mrs Sonia Gandhi as Prime Minister would amount to jettisoning the mandate, constitutional expert Ram Jethmalani today said her hesitation to take over reins of the country "will let loose fissiparous elements in Congress".

Comparing Mrs Gandhi's hesitation to that of Arjun just before the war began in Mahabharat, Mr Jethmalani said though he was not Lord Krishna, he could give similar advice to her by saying the mandate was clearly in her favour. — PTI

J) posted the stay application for 26 May even as counsel of the petitioner, Rashtriya Mukti Morcha (RMM), Mr PN Lekhi, sought a hearing tomorrow before she was expected to be sworn in.

The judges, however, said if the court found merit in the application appropriate remedies could be granted even after Mrs Gandhi took over the post.

The Bench allowed the RMM's early hearing application and advanced the hearing on the petition from 20 July to 26 May. — Our Legal Correspondent

Govindacharya not to stop stir

Statesman News Service

JAIPUR, May 18. — Even as Mrs Sonia Gandhi decided against becoming the Prime Minister, Mr Govindacharya said he would continue his agitation as the issue of foreign origin was a much bigger an issue than related to a single person.

Speaking to reporters here, Mr Govindacharya, who launched a nationwide agitation against Mrs Gandhi becoming the next PM, said the people of the country are feeling relieved by Mrs Gandhi's decision.

'No bar on Rahul, Priyanka'

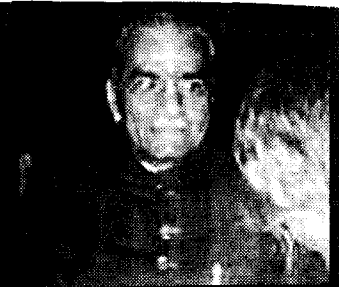
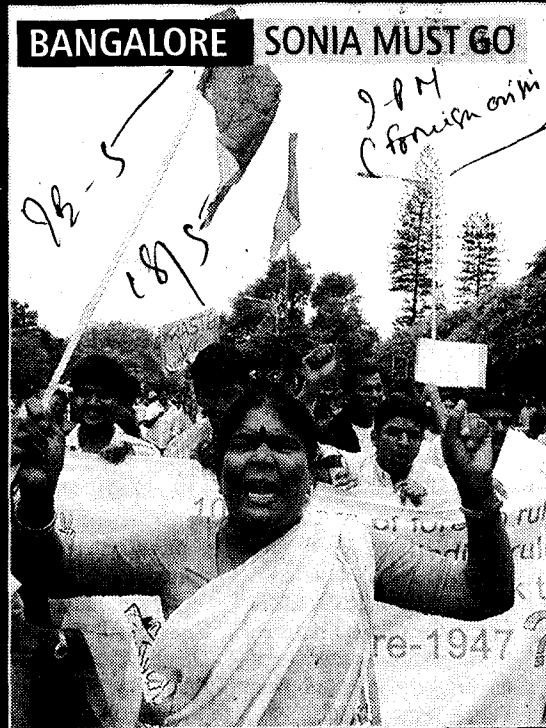
Mr Govindacharya today said the foreign origin issue would not be applicable on Mr Rahul Gandhi and Mrs Priyanka Vadra, adds PTI.



It is a black day in the history of Independent India. People of this country are terribly pained, anguished and hurt on this decision of Congress and its allies to chose her as their leader. We will not be attending the swearing-in ceremony to express popular sentiments... The alliance has decided to play the role of a constructive Opposition but we are not going to leave this issue of foreign origin.

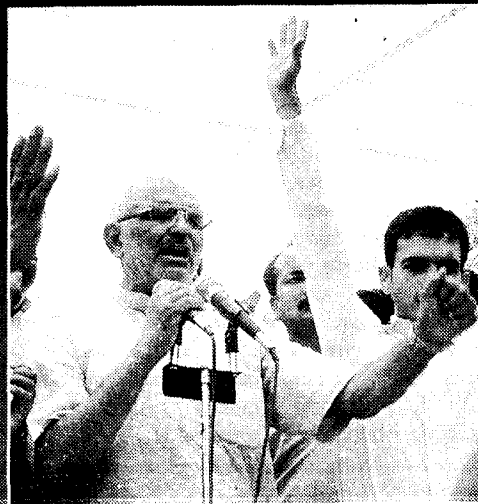
■ BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu

Swearing before swearing-in



By protesting against Sonia Gandhi's impending appointment as the PM by the President under Art 75, Sushma Swaraj is violating her solemn oath (to bear true faith and allegiance to the constitution). Even after Swaraj resigns from RS, she will be bound by Article 51-A which lays down the fundamental duties for every citizen.

■ Senior Supreme Court advocate Shanti Bhushan



It would be against our swabhiman (self-respect). A person who waited for 16 years before deciding to become an Indian citizen, someone who does not know our culture and tradition, who cannot recite *Vande Mataram*, how can such a person be relied upon for ruling our country? — BJP leader and former Union minister Sahib Singh Verma

Videshi mool ke anari vyakti PM ban jaye (a naive person of foreign origin becoming PM), is not leaving a good example for our future generations. *Mai videshi mool ke vyakti ko PM banne ke baat ko hundred per cent oppose karti hoon.* — Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Uma Bharti



‘বিদেশিনি’

গৌতম হোড় • নয়াদিল্লি

১৩ মে: প্রাথমিক দ্বিধা বেড়ে ফেলে ‘বিদেশিনি’ সনিয়া গাধীর বিরুদ্ধে অবিলম্বে প্রবল জনআন্দোলনের রাস্তায় যাচ্ছে বিজেপি। সেই আন্দোলনের রূপ ঠিক করতে আগামিকাল জরুরি বৈঠকে বসছেন বিজেপি নেতারা।

তবে উমা ভারতী, সুষমা স্বরাজের আগেই বিজেপি-র তৃণমূল স্তরের কর্মীরা ‘বিদেশিনি’ সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে চরম পন্থায় প্রতিবাদ করতে শুরু করে দিয়েছেন। কর্মীদের চিত্রদূর্গের বিজেপি কর্মী মহেশ কুত্থু আত্মহত্যা করেছেন। কারণ, ‘ইন্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানির পর দেশে আবাক বিদেশির হাতে চলে যাচ্ছে’— এটা সহ্য করতে পারেনি মহেশ।

মধ্যপ্রদেশের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী উমা ভারতী দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, সনিয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রী হলে তিনি ইস্তফা দেবেন। (যদিও ভোপালে উমা সাংবাদিকদের কাছে তাঁর ইস্তফার সজ্জাবনা উড়িয়ে দিয়ে শুধুই আন্দোলনের কথা বলেছেন।) উমা ইস্তফা দিলে গুজরাতের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদীকেও একই ভাবে পদত্যাগ করতে বলতে পারে বিজেপি শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব। কালই সুষমা স্বরাজ রাজ্যসভা থেকে ইস্তফা দেওয়ার কথা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

বেশ কিছু নবনির্বাচিত বিজেপি সাংসদও দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বকে সংসদ থেকে সদলে ইস্তফা দেওয়ার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছেন। তাঁদের মতে, এই ধরনের চরম পদক্ষেপ নিলে তবেই সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে প্রবল আন্দোলন গড়ে তোলা সম্ভব হবে। এই প্রস্তাব নিয়েও দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব আলোচনা করবেন।

বিজেপি শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব প্রাথমিক ভাবে

প্রসঙ্গে ফের পথে নামছেন বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব

মোদীকেও একই পথ নিতে বলতে পারেন বিজেপি শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব। মোদীকে নিয়ে ইতিমধ্যেই গুজরাতে দলের ভিতরে অসন্তোষ প্রবল। তার উপর সুপ্রিম কোর্ট যে ভাবে বেস্ট বেকারি মামলা নিয়ে মন্তব্য করছে তাতেও বিপাকে বিজেপি। ‘বিদেশিনি’ সনিয়ার বিষয়টি তুলে মোদী ইস্তফা দিলে দু’টি উদ্দেশ্য সাধিত হবে বিজেপি-র। দলের অসন্তোষ দূর হবে, সনিয়া বিরোধী লড়াইও জোরদার হবে।

বিজেপি নেতারাও আজ সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে সুর কড়া করতে শুরু করেছেন। উমা, প্রমোদ মহাজন, বাবুলাল মরাস্তি, মুখতার আব্বাস নাকতি, সকলেই বলেছেন, ভোটদাতারা সনিয়াকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার রায় দেননি। কংগ্রেস একক ভাবে বা ভোটের আগের সঙ্গীদের সঙ্গে সরকার গঠনের মতো অবস্থায় পৌঁছিতে পারেনি। সনিয়াকে তারা প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদপ্রার্থী বলে কোনও সময়ে ঘোষণাও করেনি। তাই সনিয়া কী করে প্রধানমন্ত্রী হতে পারেন। তাঁরা আজ শেষ বাণের মতো কংগ্রেস নেতাদের কাছে আবেদন করেছেন, অন্য যে কোনও ভারতীয় নেতাকে তাঁরা প্রধানমন্ত্রী করুন।

কিন্তু তাঁদের এই আবেদনে কংগ্রেস কান দেবে না, এটা বিজেপি নেতারাও জানেন। তাঁরা আন্দোলনে নামার ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত করছেন মাত্র।

এ দিকে, কলকাতায় প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের কার্যকরী সভাপতি প্রদীপ ভট্টাচার্য বলেছেন, বিজেপি যে ভাবে সনিয়া গাধীর ‘বিদেশিনি’ প্রসঙ্গ তুলে তাঁর প্রধানমন্ত্রিত্বে আপত্তি জানাচ্ছে, তার প্রতিবাদে যে দিন সনিয়া শপথ নেন সে দিন রাজ্যের সমস্ত ব্লক এবং পুরসভার কংগ্রেস কর্মীরা বিক্ষোভ মিছিল করবেন।



সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে ‘স্বাভিমান আন্দোলন’ শুরুর কথা ঘোষণা করছেন বিজেপির তাত্ত্বিক নেতা গোবিন্দচাঁদ। — পি টি আই

বিরোধিতার সূচনা করেছিলেন সুষমা। তার পর উমা ভারতীও অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী ও লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানীর কাছে ইস্তফা দেওয়ার ইস্তফা প্রকাশ করেছেন। উমা বলেছেন, তিনি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী-পদ ছেড়ে দিয়ে সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে আন্দোলনে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়তে চান। তাঁর বক্তব্য, “এটা শুধু আমার একার লড়াই নয়। অনেক বড় লড়াই। দেশের কোটি কোটি লোকের লড়াই।”

উমার ইস্তফা গৃহীত হলে নরেন্দ্র

এন গোবিন্দচাঁদ। তিনি মঙ্গলবার সংসদ ভবন পর্যন্ত পদযাত্রা করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। এ জন্য গোবিন্দচাঁদ রাষ্ট্রীয় স্বাভিমান আন্দোলন বলে একটি মঞ্চও তৈরি করেছেন। সনিয়া যে দিন শপথ নেন সে দিন কালো ব্যাজ পরে সারা দেশে ধনী দেবেন গোবিন্দচাঁদ এবং তাঁর সঙ্গীরা। এই আন্দোলনে পুরোপুরি সামিল হবেন আর এস এন্ডের স্মরণসেবকরা।

কালই ইস্তফার কথা বলে সনিয়া-

মাসখালেক অপেক্ষা করে তার পর সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইয়ে নামতে চেয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু আর এস এস নেতৃত্ব বিন্দুমাত্র অপেক্ষা করতে রাজি নন। তাঁরা তাঁদের মনোভাব বিজেপি নেতৃত্বের কাছেও স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছেন।

তবে বিজেপি সনিয়ার বিরুদ্ধে আন্দোলনে নামার আগেই আর এস এন্ডের সহযোগিতায় আন্দোলনে নামে পড়েছেন বাজপেয়ীর দলের প্রাক্তন তাত্ত্বিক নেতা কে

EC panel rejected BJP's ads on foreign origin

By Lalit K. Jha

APD-11
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NEW DELHI, MAY 16. Even before the electorate rejected — as is being claimed by the Congress leaders — the Bharatiya Janata Party's issue of foreign origin, the Election Commission "did not allow" the BJP to have a "free run" when it came to making it [the foreign issue] part of their electioneering through advertisements in the electronic media.

It is believed that the Ghonkrota Committee constituted by the Chief Electoral Officer for Delhi, Arun Goyal, at the direction of the Election Commission following an order of the Supreme Court, rejected at least two such advertisements of the BJP. In fact, the BJP was forced to withdraw over half-a-dozen advertisements, the maximum for any political party.

Highly placed sources, on condition of anonymity, revealed that at least two advertisements of the BJP depicted a "white-skinned" foreigner woman being rebuked by villagers. It is believed that the BJP withdrew the ad films at the direction of the committee. "Or else, these would be rejected, the committee told them," the sources said. Headed by the Joint CEO for Delhi, S.S. Ghonkrota, the committee was constituted on April 16 to ensure that advertisements run by the political parties for their campaigning on the electronic

media did not offend the morality, decency and religious susceptibilities of the voters. Also the advertisements, which derided any race, caste, creed and nationality or tended to incite people to crime, cause disorder or violence, were not allowed, sources said.

The committee also objected to the BJP films on the "Yamraj-Yamdoot" theme on the ground that this might offend the religious sentiments of some people and as such it was withdrawn. Another film titled "Gabbar" purported to be telecast in Rajasthan did not find favour with the committee as it depicted a police officer unabashedly praising the State Government.

In all, the committee received applications for 74 advertisements, of which 58 were certified. While 49 advertisements were approved by the committee in the first instance, nine were cleared only after the applicants carried the necessary deletion/modification in accordance with the observations of the committee. The remaining 16 advertisements were either withdrawn by the political parties or rejected by the committee. Sources said that before rejecting any advertisement the political parties were given a chance to withdraw the applications, so as not to cause them any embarrassment.

The film titled "Now it is the time" of the Nationalist Con-

gress Party was the first film to be rejected by the Committee. The film showed the demolition of the Babri Masjid, burnt bogies of trains and riot scenes referring to the Godhra tragedy. Rejecting the film, the committee observed that it "offended decency, glorified violence and offended religious susceptibilities."

Other prominent rejected advertisements included that of the Samajwadi Party, the Congress and the India Heritage Trust, a non-governmental organisation.

The film titled "Employment" submitted by the Samajwadi Party gave the impression that a large number of posts were being filled up by its Government in Uttar Pradesh. The committee rejected the proposal on the ground that it violated the model code of conduct, which prohibited a party in power to make promises.

Similarly, the Andhra Pradesh unit of the Congress was not allowed to telecast its films — "One bulb" and "Twenty Paise" — as they made a promise of a specific nature. Another film titled "Young Lecturer" was rejected as it asked voters to elect the National Democratic Alliance Government, even though the applicant, Delhi-based India Ahead Foundation, an NGO, had submitted in its affidavit that the film was not for the benefit of any political party, sources said.

The BJP and the foreign origin issue

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MAY 16. Several pieces of information are fitting together as in a jigsaw puzzle to suggest that in the coming days the Bharatiya Janata Party will take up the "foreign origin" of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, in a big way.

Today, the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, met the National Democratic Alliance convener, George Fernandes, to discuss this question. And in a few days, perhaps even tomorrow, the BJP leaders and the newly elected MPs could meet to further discuss the issue.

Yesterday, the Rajya Sabha MP, Sushma Swaraj, said that she and her husband, Swaraj Kaushal, also an MP, would resign from the Upper House rather than accept Ms. Gandhi as the country's Prime Minister. There are reports that Ms. Swaraj will get herself tonsured, don white clothes and perhaps travel through the country to propagate her point of view and that of her party. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has also come out strongly against a "foreign born" becoming Prime Minister.

Since May 13, when the election results became known, a series of meetings have taken place between the RSS leader, Madan Das Devi, and senior BJP leaders, including Mr. Naidu and L.K. Advani. Today, a person close to the BJP leadership said the party was under "intense pressure from its State units and newly elected MPs" to "do something" on the foreign origin issue.

There seems to be two elements in all this. First, the BJP wants to create as many difficulties as possible for a new government led by Ms. Gandhi. Secondly, there is now an intense rivalry within the BJP for "leadership" with an eye on the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. Some leaders see Ms. Swaraj's announcement as an attempt to seize the opportunity to project herself on the national political stage. It is almost taken for granted in the BJP that in 2009 it will

NEWS ANALYSIS

have to be led by one of the younger leaders and there will be intense rivalry between Ms. Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan, Venkaiah Naidu, Arun Jaitley and even Jaswant Singh for the top party slot. Sacrificing her Rajya Sabha MP's position and tonsuring her head may at once endear her to the RSS bosses, who will certainly have a role to play on the leadership issue. Mr. Mahajan acknowledged this in an interview to this paper during the course of elections.

It seems that in the coming days, the BJP is planning to do something dramatic, although a day after the election results Mr. Naidu had categorically ruled out the boycott or non-recognition of Ms. Gandhi as an option.

The BJP has been arguing that it may have lost the mandate but the Congress does not have it either. It is ignoring the fact that at least on the foreign origin issue, a

number of political parties had made their views clear before the polling day, and together they do constitute the majority in the Lok Sabha. The Congress and its allies had said that together they will choose their leader, the Left had stated that it does not share the BJP's views on the question and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has made its position clear as has the Rashtriya Janata Dal president, Laloo Prasad Yadav. It was a national election and the race was between two formations, one led by the BJP and the other by the Congress; voters were surely aware that Ms. Gandhi was the leader of the Congress.

Another argument used by the BJP is that Ms. Gandhi was not presented as the prime ministerial candidate to the people. But then she was not ruled out either. Under the Constitution, it is the party or parties with a majority who choose their leader. In fact, to announce the name of the leader before the MPs are elected amounts to taking away the constitutional right of the majority party MPs to elect their leader. It cannot be a valid argument that Raman Singh should not have been made the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh because he was not presented to the people during the Assembly elections as a would-be Chief Minister. For that matter when the Congress elected P.V. Narasimha Rao as the leader in 1991 he was not even an MP, as he had not contested the elections. Neither was H.D. Deve Gowda "projected as the Prime Minister" in 1996.

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CPM invited to join govt Sonia on PM track

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 15. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi is all set to become the Prime Minister following her unanimous election as the Congress Parliamentary Party leader today.

The formality over, the Congress president drove straight from Parliament House to Banga Bhavan to meet Mr Jyoti Basu and invite the CPI-M to join the new government. "The idea is to have a coalition government," Mrs Gandhi said after a 20-minute one-to-one talk with the former Bengal chief minister. Asked if she had invited the CPI-M to join the government, she said: "Of course".

Mrs Gandhi (58) was elected leader of the CPP, the single largest party in the Lok Sabha with 219 members, at the Central Hall of Parliament by an overwhelming show of hands. Her name was proposed by Mr Pranab Mukherjee and seconded by eight other members. As presiding officer Dr Manmohan Singh wanted to know if there was any other candidate for the post, the members, including Mr Rahul Gandhi, shouted "no, no".

Speaking on the occasion, Mrs Gandhi asked her MPs to "acknowledge that the people have chosen us to represent their aspirations, not our own". She told them to understand the "sentiments behind the mandate",

Will they, won't they?

■ The CPI-M is divided over whether it'll join the Congress-led government. The matter has been referred to the central committee.

■ The DMK will keep out of the government for now; it'll decide after "observing the Congress's approach".

■ The JMM has given its letter of support to Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The party will join the government.

■ The LJP also decided to be part of the coalition.

Reports on page 10

instead of gloating over the victory. "It's an opportunity to effect the changes that may better the lives of our brothers and sisters." She described the defeat of the BJP-led NDA as "people's decisive rejection of the ideology of the RSS, BJP, and the VHP."

Mrs Gandhi took a pledge to work closely with allies and partners. "The commitment to provide a strong and stable government dedicated to promoting social harmony... (dedicated) to the welfare of the *kisan* and *khet mazdoor*, of youth, women, and weaker sections of society... (and) to accelerating employment, growth, and investment unites all of us in the coalition."

BJP refuses to give up foreign origin issue

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, May 14

THE BJP is all set to take up the foreign origin issue once again despite stunning reverses in the Lok Sabha polls. Bracing itself to face Sonia Gandhi as PM, the party has decided that the issue should not be given up.

The BJP's offensive will begin soon after Sonia takes charge and the new government is formed. Party leaders said while the Lok Sabha polls had thrown up a fractured verdict, the Congress and the Left were trying to convert it into a mandate for a person of foreign origin. The BJP's line of attack will be to "create awareness" about the issue without coming in the way of Sonia's functioning as PM.

In his first Press conference after the poll verdict, party chief M. Venkaiah Naidu said the BJP continued to believe that high constitutional posts should not be held by people of foreign origin. "We are not opposed to Sonia Gandhi in person but our conviction is that Constitutional posts like President, Vice-President and Prime Minister should be held by people of Indian origin. She was not projected as the Prime Ministerial candidate," he said in response to a question.

Asked whether the BJP would boycott Gandhi in Parliament, he said, "It is not in our culture. We accept the people's verdict. We are a democratic party." The BJP's parliamentary board has ordered a detailed post-mortem into the party's debacle in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and other states to "get into the bottom" of things. Both A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, who attended the board's meeting, favoured the BJP taking "corrective steps" where necessary and



Congress workers celebrate their victory in New Delhi.

PTI

focus on the next round of Assembly polls due in Maharashtra and other states end of this year.

Naidu said the leaders took an overview of the electoral outcome and the broad conclusion was that the results needed to be analysed and studied deeper.

"The state units would be asked to convene meetings of their respective executives and

office-bearers to make a detailed review of the outcome and a Central observer would be deputed to guide them," he said.

BJP general secretary Sanjay Joshi, who is in charge of the party organisation, would also be gathering feedback and thereafter the CPB would review the results at the national level and take specific correctives.

Sonia as PM will be a disgrace: RSS

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 14. — The RSS today said it would be a “disgrace” to the nation if an “Italian leader” was made the PM.

“It’ll be a disgrace to the nation if the Congress and Communist parties try to foist an Italian as Prime Minister on the country. All self-respecting and freedom loving people of this country will be greatly hurt if any such mishap occurs,” RSS spokesman Mr Ram Madhav said.

Asserting that the electorate had delivered a “fractured mandate”, he said: “The Congress has not secured the people’s mandate. It is evenly split between the Congress and the BJP, and parties such as the NCP and the SP that had opposed Mrs Gandhi on the foreign origin issue have got a bigger mandate.”

NTC leader Mr PA Sangma too reiterated his opposition to a person of “foreign origin” becoming the PM, adds SNS from Guwahati. “It is a threat to national security — a foreign-born being privy to secrets related to the country’s security by becoming the PM,” he said this afternoon on his way to Delhi from Tura in Meghalaya.



Mrs Sonia Gandhi comes out of her house to meet supporters on Friday. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

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15 MAY 2004

PM alleges Cong-CPM plot

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, May 4.— The Prime Minister alleged today that both the Congress and the CPI-M are "plotting" in Delhi to prevent the NDA from returning to power and "also cuttle its chances to form a government if it wins a majority".

Addressing a huge meeting at Deshapriya Park in south Kolkata, Mr Vajpayee described the two parties as "two sides of the same coin".

"The two parties have ganged up to stop the NDA from coming back to power. They are saying that NDA rule has pushed the country to the path of ruin. Are factors such as economic growth, a record foreign exchange

Name the successor

KANDARAN (Malda), May 4. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today demanded that the BJP name Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's successor. She was

speaking at Kandaran village in Malda district of West Bengal. Mrs Gandhi said that while Mr Vajpayee had claimed that his party had already identified the next leader, the leader was yet to be named. — SNS

Details on page 4

reserve and overall development signs of ruin? People outside the country are appreciating our success, but the Congress and the Marxists don't agree," he said.



He wondered whether free and fair poll is possible in the state. "I'm told many have expressed misgivings that polling day may witness booth-capturing, rigging and intimidation. Our people may be poor, but they have the right to decide their destiny and cast votes for the party of their choice," he said.

There was some heartburn among Mr Tapan Sikdar's followers as the PM didn't address any meeting in Mr Sikdar's constituency. BJP insiders said Mr Sikdar's rival faction won the day by arguing with the PM's aides that if Mr Vajpayee addressed a meeting at Dum Dum he would have to attend one in Nadia, the constituency of the other BJP minister from the state, Mr Saytabrata Mukherjee.

We did not yield to U.S. pressure on n-arms: PM

By Prafulla Das

BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 9. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today said the U.S. had put pressure on him not to go in for a nuclear bomb, but he refused to yield.

Addressing an election rally here this evening, Mr. Vajpayee said that his Government went ahead with the n-arms programme and the world came to know of it only after the n-bomb was tested. "But we did it and did it in such a fashion that the world came to know of it only after we tested it," he said.

The Prime Minister alleged that the Congress government had shelved the n-weapon project under pressure from the U.S. "However, we will not use the n-bomb against any country first," Mr. Vajpayee said.

About his Government's 'achievement' in improving the country's relationship with other countries and Pakistan in particular, Mr. Vajpayee hoped that a 'nuclear flashpoint' will never arise. "We can strengthen ties through cricket.

No matter if we win in one and lose in the other."

Mr. Vajpayee also blamed the Congress for pulling down the governments of Charan Singh, Chandra Shekhar, Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral as well as his own government by the lone vote of Giridhar Gamang. Terming the Congress "a party of distrust", Mr. Vajpayee said that it should never rule the country. "The party should take rest and spend time in religious chants," he suggested. Stating that the Congress was desperate to come to power, he said that when out of power it felt like 'fish out of water.'

The Prime Minister also criticised the Congress for branding the BJP a communal party. "It was the Congress which encouraged the growth of communalism in the country by dividing people on the basis of religion. Bangladesh was created on these lines," he said.

Mr. Vajpayee urged the people to vote for the National Democratic Alliance on the basis of its performance during the past six years. The Orissa Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik, also addressed the rally.

THE HINDU

10 APR 2004

PM, deputy rake up Sonia origin

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PM

SNS AND PTI

CHENNAI/JAIPUR, April 3. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin is definitely "an issue and a major factor in the elections", the Prime Minister said today.

"The issue is being discussed all over the country now," he told reporters on arrival from New Delhi en route to Nellore, where he launched the BJP's election campaign in Andhra Pradesh. Tamil Nadu chief minister Miss Jayalalitha, who received Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee at Meenambakkam airport, said the question was whether the country needed an Indian or a foreigner to rule. "The correct person is only Vajpayee."

In Jaipur, Mr LK Advani carried the anti-Sonia campaign a step further, saying the Congress president was not acceptable as Prime Minister even to Opposition parties because of her foreign origin.

Speaking to reporters here on the 22nd day of his *Bharat Uday Yatra*, the Deputy PM said that not just the BJP, but Opposition parties too held the view that top constitutional posts should be reserved for

NDA manifesto

BANGALORE, April 3. — The NDA's manifesto, to be released on 8 April, may call for a ban on foreign-born nationals seeking top posts, Mr George Fernandes said here today. — SNS

natural-born Indians. "The issue of foreign origin is not a personal attack on Mrs Gandhi but a major political issue. The Congress has split after Mr Sharad Pawar and Mr PA Sangma questioned Mrs Gandhi's claim to the PM's post. The NCP too had split on the issue earlier this year." The Congress is not announcing its prime ministerial candidate because it's aware of Mrs Gandhi's unacceptability to other Opposition parties, he said.

On the Congress' statement that he too was born on foreign soil (Karachi), Mr Advani said: "By questioning the Indianness of those who chose India over Pakistan and sacrificed everything to remain Indian, the Congress has maligned lakhs of Punjabis and Bengalis."

■ Another report on page 10

Vajpayee raps Visva-Bharati..

5:17 12/4. AND CHIEF MINISTER TOO

Sougata Mukhopadhyay
in Santiniketan

April 2. — The Prime Minister today didn't mince words while expressing his shock at the security arrangement at Visva-Bharati, from where such priceless artifacts as Tagore's Nobel medal had been burgled. "It's disheartening to see that the priceless mementos were not guarded in the way they should have been," he told journalists here.

And to the chief minister, as reported by Mr Tapan Sikdar, he made clear his dismay over the "slow pace" of the investigation conducted by the state police before the CBI took over. "Aath din laga diya, yeh achcha nahin," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee reportedly told Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at NSC Bose Airport today.

At Santiniketan too, the Prime Minister expressed "regret and concern" that the stolen items couldn't be recovered even eight days after the theft came to notice. He said he had "asked the investigators to expedite the probe".

The theft has put "national prestige" at stake, Mr Vajpayee said. "This is no ordinary theft. Those who did it knew that they weren't up to anything ordinary... It



The Prime Minister at Visva-Bharati, on Friday. — Shyamal Maitra

appears that it's the handiwork of experts, who were fully informed about the items kept at the museum."

As for the possibility of insiders' involvement in the crime, he said: "That can't be said for sure. But if the probe reveals any such involvement, action would be taken against those responsible."

Mr Vajpayee was accompanied to Santiniketan by Governor Mr Viren J Shah, Union minister Mr Sikdar, Miss Mamata Banerjee, state BJP chief Mr Tathagata Roy and CBI director Mr Uma Shankar Mishra. He landed at Santiniketan at 1.15 p.m. and headed straight for Uttarayan, where he stayed till around 4.45 p.m.

Apart from visiting the crime spot, he held meetings with the vice-chancellor and other officials of Visva-Bharati, including members of the university's inquiry committee. CBI officers briefed him about the progress of the probe. A document prepared by the sleuths was read out to him.

Mr Vajpayee also met representatives of the university's students' union, Karmisabha and Adhayapaksabha. He returned to Kolkata in the evening and left for Delhi at 5.50 p.m.

More reports on page 8

PM seeks debate on 'foreigner' issue

Statesman News Service

MUMBAI, April 1. — The Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today raised the Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin issue for the first time in the current Lok Sabha election-campaign.

He chose the tribal dominated Javhar taluka of Thane district, about 70 km from here, for stirring the proverbial hornet's nest. Mr Vajpayee, without naming Mrs Gandhi, expressed the need for a nationwide debate on the issue. "There should be a comprehensive debate whether a person of foreign origin should assume high constitutional position in the country."

The constituency of Dahanu chosen by the Prime Minister to launch the indirect attack on the Congress president is a Congress stronghold. Ridiculing the Congress-NCP alliance in the Lok Sabha polls, the Prime Minister reminded the people that the NCP had parted ways with the Congress on the "big issue" of foreign origin. "I do not not understand this alliance," Mr Vajpayee said referring to the joint rally by Mrs Gandhi and NCP leader Mr Sharad Pawar in Sholapur and took a dig at them saying that at least they

should have avoided holding it on April Fool's day. The Prime Minister asked: "Is it an all fools' day joke on the people?"

The NCP was formed five years ago on the sensitive issue of Mrs Gandhi's Italian origin, he recalled. The Congress and Mr Sharad Pawar's NCP now display a rare bonhomie in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections.

The Prime Minister's rally was a well attended affair with a turnout of over one lakh people. Mr Vajpayee spoke about the involvement of the tribals in the developmental activity. The BJP leaders accompanying him said since the Prime Minister has raked up the issue it would be the NDA's major poll plank in the Lok Sabha elections.

The Prime Minister said the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance was working well and his NDA government had proved wrong the Congress and other political opponents by successfully running the coalition for five years. Listing the various steps his government had taken for welfare of tribals, he said a separate ministry of tribal affairs was created and a commission set up to redress their grievances. He asserted his government was committed to bringing tribal regions in the mainstream of development.

THE STATESMAN

2 APR 2004

Advani starts second leg of yatra

9:00 PM 3/31/3
Statesman News Service

PORBANDAR, March 30. — The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani, today started the second leg of his *Bharat Uday Yatra* from the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, on the birthday of Lord Ram.

He recalled Gandhiji's definition of swaraj, which was signified by Ram Rajya, and the promise of Ram Mandir at the Janamsthan in Ayodhya.

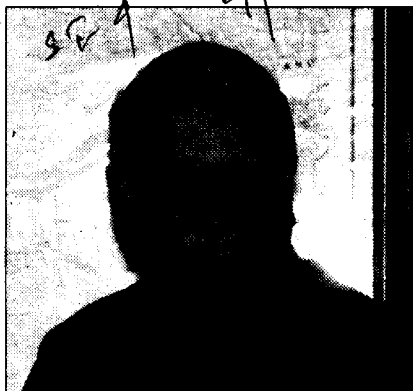
The people's response at the venue was lukewarm and half of the pandal, set up on the occasion, remained empty. Both Mr Advani and the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, made fiery speeches on elections and good governance.

The 3,000 km long yatra was christened as a *yatra* "from Sudamapuri to Jagganathpuri." It was pointed out that Porbandar was called Sudamapuri.

At the beginning of his speech Mr Advani told the audience that "*secularwad ke jadh Hindutva main hai*" (the roots of secularism lie in Hindutva) and went on to add that "Gandhiji used to say with pride that he was a Hindu, a Sanatani Hindu."

"This truth should be recognised, otherwise you cannot understand the culture of the country," Mr Advani said.

He urged people to vote for Mr



Assurance on Temple

RAJKOT, March 30. — For the first time perhaps, Mr LK Advani gave a categorical assurance on the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Addressing a sizeable meeting here, Mr Advani said: "Mandir to banega (the temple will be built)". He said this would happen when the new government would come to power. "Talks are on," he said. — SNS

Atal Behari Vajpayee to make him do the "hat-trick" (getting to be the Prime Minister for the third time).

Mr Narendra Modi said that BJP would win all 26 Lok Sabha seats from Gujarat. Referring to the five Congress MPs in the previous Lok Sabha, he said that they did not do anything in Parliament, when Gujarat was being brought into disrepute.

2004

INDIA THROUGH ATAL'S LOOKING GLASS

Vision India

- Transform India into a developed nation and a great power
- Make India a global manufacturing hub
- Put India at the centre of knowledge economy
- Turn India into a major sports power
- Education for all

New initiatives

- Three-point assurance to minorities: education, economic uplift and empowerment
- Consensus over uniform civil code
- Autonomous regional councils for Jammu and Ladakh with financial and administrative powers
- Protection of original demographic identity of the three J&K regions
- Second Green Revolution
- Two-child norm with incentives for girls
- Encouragement to private enterprises to help SC/STs

Contentious issues

- High constitutional offices to be occupied only by persons of Indian origin
- Cultural nationalism: Bharatiyata and Hindutva made synonymous
- Ram temple in Ayodhya

What's missing

- Abrogation of special powers to J&K
- Swadeshi slogan: No potato chips, only computer chips

Economic policy

- Make government a facilitator rather than an interventionist
- Broaden and deepen liberalisation



Graphic: MANOJ

BJP drops one holy cow, picks on 'foreigner'

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 30: The BJP today came out with its Vision Document 2004, soft-peddalling its opposition to Article 370 that guarantees special status to Jammu and Kashmir but repeating its support to the Ayodhya temple and a uniform civil code.

The 48-page document is divided into two parts: the first unpooled the BJP's "basic mission and commitments" without setting a time frame and the second spelt out its wish list to the NDA. It outlined the BJP's "priority agenda for the next five years" which it wants incorporated in the NDA's election manifesto, to be released on April 6.

Every BJP manifesto in the past promised that the party would repeal Article 370 if elected to power. The Vision Document has no reference to the contentious issue in the first half and barely touches on it in the second.

"While recognising that the Constitution provides for certain transient and temporary

provisions for Jammu and Kashmir, we believe that the immediate challenge before the Centre and the state is to involve all sections of society in eliminating terrorism, accelerating economic development and strengthening popular governance that can provide people-friendly administration," it said. But party sources insisted there was no departure from the earlier stand.

It is likely that the "foreign origin" issue will find place in the NDA's manifesto because the document said: "The BJP firmly holds that the high offices of the Indian state — legislative, executive and judicial — should be occupied only by those who are India's natural citizens by their Indian origin." The party has made Sonia Gandhi's "foreign" origin a key campaign issue.

The please-all Vision Document has something for every BJP constituency and for every section the party is trying to win over.

If it reaffirmed its commitment to constructing a Ram temple in Ayodhya through

"dialogue and a negotiated settlement", the BJP, for the first time, had a three-point assurance for the minorities: education, economic uplift and empowerment.

The party that has been accused of saffronising education also spoke of "rectifying the biases in history education, increasing the moral and cultural content in syllabi and restoring the neglected focus on character-building".

The uniform civil code has been presented as a gender issue rather than a minority or party-specific one. The BJP stressed it would evolve a social and political consensus before enacting a common code.

The document reinforced the BJP's commitment to globalisation. While swadeshi did figure, it was relocated in the context of the global challenge.

"A strong, efficient and high-growth Indian economy, in which Indian products, services and entrepreneurs dominate the domestic and global markets, is our concept of swadeshi," it said.

■ See Page 6

Vote-bank politics ruined country: DPM

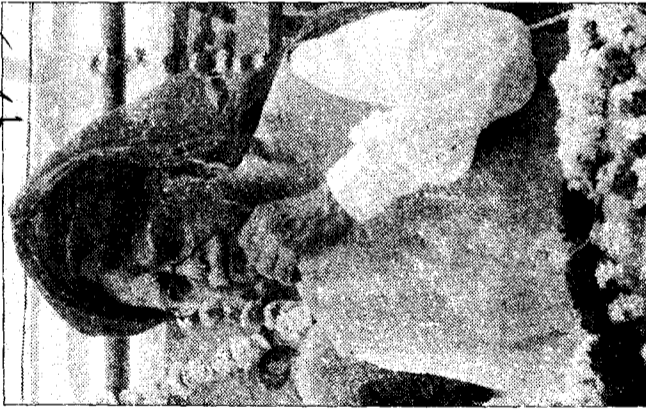
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SONEPAT, MARCH 24

DEPUTY Prime Minister L.K. Advani today ridiculed the Congress for opposing his Bharat Uday Yatra charging that it would unleash communal violence in the country.

"I laughed when the Congress said that the yatra would cause communal violence in the country as the Ram Rath Yatra had in 1990. There was not a single incident of violence during the previous yatra except one which was that of some youths pelting stones at the rath," he said.

"This was not done by Muslims but some upper caste Hindus who were upset with us for not having pulled down the V.P. Singh Government over the Mandal issue," he said. Stressing that Muslims have been exploited, he said the country has been "ruined by vote-bank politics".

Referring to the recent Uttar Pradesh government's order declaring a half-day on Fridays to allow Muslim students to offer *naraz*, he said: "I was happy that opposition came from within the Muslim community as they need jobs and education and not holidays."



Advani at Sonapat on Wednesday. P71

In a veiled attack on the Congress, he said politics has become a "shortcut to success. During the freedom struggle, our leaders were educated but now any ordinary man can join politics and think of

ruling the country." Reiterating that he is not in the race for prime ministership, Advani said: "A.B. Vajpayee will be the Prime Minister after the Lok Sabha elections." The BJP would win more than 300 seats and the party would name Vajpayee as the next Prime Minister, he said.

Speaking at Karnal, he questioned the Congress' democratic credentials, saying it has "never hesitated to undermine democracy" in the country. At Kurukshetra, Advani clarified his statement where he had asked people not to vote for small parties. He said: "I was not seeking votes for the Congress, but I wanted people not to waste their votes." The Congress is capable of at least creating an illusion of forming a Government at the Centre, but the other parties are incapable of doing even that."

"Indian voters are politically mature as we saw during the 1997 polls when the Congress was voted out of power and we should not underestimate them," Advani said.

Meanwhile, Left wing organisation Chitra Jagroop Manch distributed pamphlets at the meeting claiming they had burnt an effigy of the Deputy Prime Minister who they said was misleading the nation through his yatra.

EC puts brakes, Advani, Modi absent from IAF exercise

SAIKAT DATTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

GUESS who was missing in action from the IAF's most ambitious fire-power exercise recently. Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and his Rajasthan counterpart Vasundhara Raje Scindia had to stay away as the Election Commission promptly denied permission by citing the model code of conduct and put brakes on the IAF's plans to fly them in by special aircraft.

While official IAF spokesman Sqn Ldr Mahesh Upani declined to comment on the issue, Defence Minis-

ter George Fernandes reportedly decided to stay away from the March 14 demonstration citing the model code of conduct. Modi had reportedly been invited by the Gandhinagar-based South Western Air Command's AOC-in-C, Air Marshal A.R. Gandhi, on behalf of Air Headquarters. A similar invitation was extended to Vasundhara as the demonstration was carried out in the IAF's firing range in Pokhran, Rajasthan.

According to South Block sources, all the three VIP guests were keen to show up for the Millennium Vayu Shakti fire-power demonstration and the IAF had ear-

marked AN-32 aircraft for bringing them on the penultimate day. The IAF approached the Election Commission early this month seeking its clearance but Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy struck down the proposal. The EC made it clear that once the model code of conduct was in force, only the Prime Minister could use IAF aircraft. The EC has earlier refused permission to Advani for using IAF aircraft during elections. Finally it was left to Rajasthan Chief Secretary R.K. Nair to hold fort. He flew in thanks to Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Madhvendra Singh.

Congressmen should ponder over 'leadership issue': Advani

9-6-8
9-6-8
2/17

By Our Staff Correspondent

CHHINDWARA (MADHYA PRADESH), MARCH 20. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said today that people across the country had started viewing the Congress as an "irresponsible party" and would reject it in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

He was addressing a public rally here, as part of his 'Bharat Uday Yatra'.

Earlier, he was accorded a rousing reception by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, her Cabinet colleagues, the State BJP president, Kailash Joshi, the Union Ministers, Vikram Verma, Sumitra Mahajan and Prahlad Patel, and senior party functionaries at Satnur, 50 km from Nagpur, when he entered Madhya Pradesh.

Mr. Advani said the Congress, even after ruling the country for more than 45 years, had failed to provide even the most basic facilities to the rural people. Even as an Opposition party, it had behaved irresponsibly, he said and cited its boycott of the function held in Parliament to unveil a portrait of Vir Savarkar, who had fought for the country's independence and had served 10 years in the Cellular Jail at Port Blair.

Reiterating the importance of a two-party system to strengthen democracy, Mr. Advani said that "it would be better if we



The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, addressing a crowd at Saunser village in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday during his Bharat Uday Yatra. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, is also seen. — Photo: A.M. Faruqui

have a two-party system in India. "Politics has become bipolar with the BJP, on the one side, and the Congress on the other.

Mr. Advani asked Congressmen to give serious thought to the "leadership issue" and do some introspection on its values and commitment to the cause of

the nation. He said the Congress, when out of power, had installed "puppet" Prime Ministers — Deve Gowda, Chandrashekhara and I.K. Gujral. He said that between 1988 and 1998 there had been seven Prime Ministers whereas since the 1998 parliamentary election,

Atal Bihari Vajpayee had remained the Prime Minister and was now heading for a hat-trick. Addressing a public meeting at Saunser near here earlier, Ms. Bharti said that India would emerge as the "Number 1" country after Mr. Vajpayee got elected for another term. There

would be a Ram temple at Ayodhya and Ramrajya in Chhindwara.

After the parliamentary elections, she would like to take the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, along with the senior Congress leader, Kamal Nath, to Ayodhya for 'kar seva.'

In Amma land, Advani blasts Cong 'dynasty'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COIMBATORE/DHARMAPURI,
MARCH 12

CONTINUING his Bharat Uday Yatra in the dusty plains of the south, Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today stepped up the attack on the Congress accusing it of promoting "dynastic" politics and rejected DMK chief M. Karunanidhi's allegation that it was a Jayalalithaa-Advani alliance in Tamil Nadu.

"I have nothing against the children as they are youth and have a right to contest elections. But we are against the dynastic rule in the country," he said before his yatra started for Bangalore on its third day.

Attacking the Congress chief, he said a person who cannot understand the nuances of Indian politics and the problems of the people is not fit to hold the highest post. "This issue has now spread so much that there is no need to further elaborate on it. It is an election issue and after all the person seeking the prime ministerial post should be able to understand the nuances of Indian politics and the problems of the people," he said.

To a question on the reported

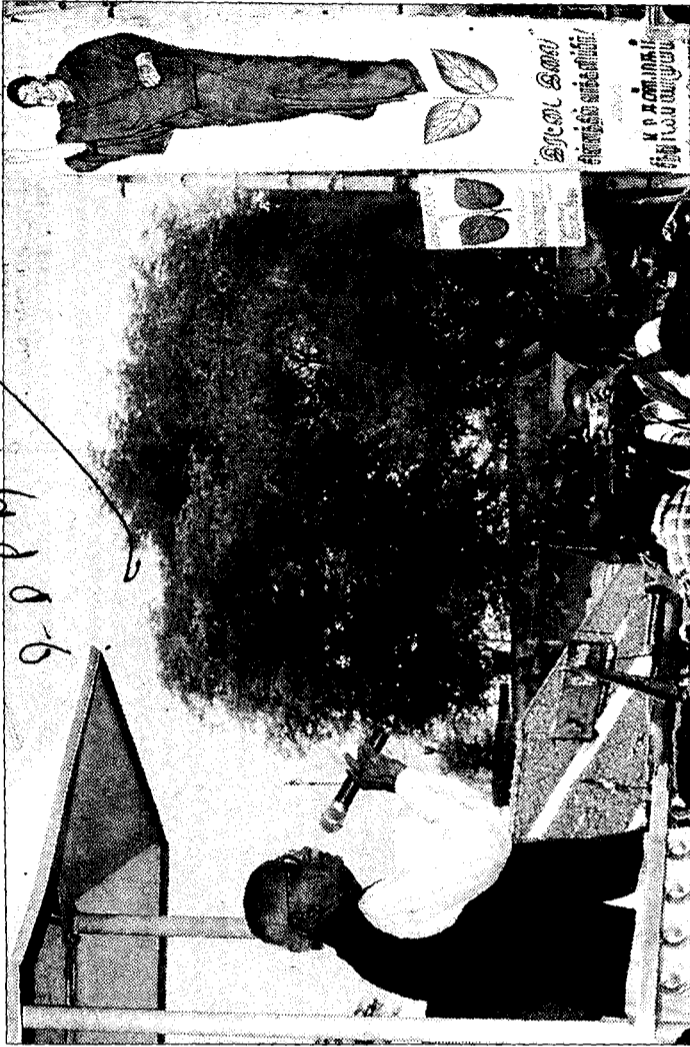
Advani's remarks 'unjustified': CPM

■ **KANNUR:** Terming as "unjustified and far from truth", Dy PM L.K. Advani's remarks that Kerala had been a prisoner of differing political ideologies, the CPI(M) on Friday said it has been playing the lead role in making Kerala a progressive state in the country. "Advani's remark during his Bharat Uday Yatra that Kerala's economic backwardness is due to its varying political ideologies was least expected from a leader of his stature. The remarks are baseless and against history," CPI(M) state secy Pintrayal Vijayan said. —PTI

Advani takes a traffic police stand to make a speech at Colmbatore on Friday. PTI

statement by Karunanidhi that it is "Advani-Jayalalithaa alliance" to sideline PM A.B. Vajpayee, he said concerted efforts have been on for the past six years to create a wedge between him and Vajpayee.

"At least I am happy that the Opposition, which did not agree with us on many issues, have concerns and support for Vajpayee



(to make Prime Minister) he said, adding: "Nobody would succeed in creating a wedge between us."

The Deputy Prime Minister mourned the death of 58 people who were killed in a bomb explosion, set off by a some terrorist organisation allegedly to kill Advani, in 1998 here. "Six years later, I once again mourn those victims of

terrorism," Advani, who had attended the meeting, said.

Describing the J-K bill denying permanent resident status to women marrying outsiders as "anti-women", Advani said: "I don't subscribe to that. The bill brought in by the PDP and the Congress is anti-women which will have wider repercussions," he said.

At Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu, Advani said victory of the NDA and Vajpayee becoming PM again is a foregone conclusion like the result of an Australia-Bangladesh cricket tie. "There is no competition in the match. Everyone knows the NDA will win and Vajpayee will become the Prime Minister," he said.

Shame and scandal in Cong attack on PM

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, March 11: Snapping out of a stupor, the Congress has picked its prime target: Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Prime Minister was put on public trial by the principal Opposition party today when it released a 56-page chargesheet against the government's six years of "sins, scams and shame" in the most vocal and direct attack on Vajpayee in the run-up to the coming elections.

"The Prime Minister cannot disown his responsibility" for the Centre's omissions and commissions because the ultimate responsibility in a parliamentary democracy is the Prime Minister's, Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee said.

The Congress so far has been concentrating on Sonia Gandhi's roadshows and trying to drive home the point that its governments pioneered most of the steps that led to the perceived feel-good in the country.

However, the party's reluctance to zoom in on the several scandals that broke during the BJP's rule had spread disquiet in the Congress ranks, strengthening a perception that the cam-

ATAL ON TRIAL

The Congress chargesheet and verdict against Vajpayee

- Brought back Tehelka-tainted Fernandes
- Maintained silence on UFI scam
- Favoured relatives in petrol pump allotments
- Shielded Dilip Singh Judea
- Sold P&Us to favourites
- Remained a spectator while Dalits were massacred
- Killed the women's reservation bill
- Allowed Babri demolition chargesheeted to stay in ministry

paign lacked political teeth.

Today's move to gun for Vajpayee is intended at countering the Atal factor that the NDA has been highlighting in its campaign. "There is no Atal factor," Mukherjee said.

The booklet — released in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Bangalore simultaneously — repeatedly mentions Vajpayee's name while listing the scams and the government's "failures". (See chart and Page 6)

The document also mentions his principal secretary, foster son-in-law and a relative. The

concluding part details instances of Vajpayee's "doublespeak".

"These (scams) may be known to you. But when 700 million people cast their votes, we want to remind them about these scams," Mukherjee said.

BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu dismissed the chargesheet with characteristic disdain, describing it as "stale and pale".

The Congress' charge that the NDA government has compromised national security dominates with the document asserting that the Prime Minister owes an explanation for reinducting Tehelka scam-tainted George Fernandes as defence minister.

The document accuses the Centre of diverting Rs 22,000 crore collected as Kargil cess. Over Rs 49,000 crore was involved in 80-odd scams, including those on coffins, UFI, petrol pumps, land allotment and divestment, Mukherjee said. "So much for the India Shining campaign."

The most direct attack on Vajpayee is reserved for his "flip-flop" on Ayodhya, Fernandes' alleged involvement in Tehelka, Gujarat riots, minorities and employment. "India will (therefore) feel good only when the NDA is thrown out," the booklet says.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAR 2004



L.K. Advani and Venkaiah Naidu outside the Vivekananda memorial in Kanyakumari at the start of the BJP's yatra on Wednesday

Advani's rath rolls

Shekhar Iyer
Kanyakumari, March 10

L.K. ADVANI wasted no time. Just after flagging off the BJP's poll roadshow on Wednesday, the Deputy Prime Minister reverted to his pet subject: Congress president Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin.

"Vajpayee is a great leader whereas the prime ministerial candidate from the other side doesn't belong to India and she doesn't understand it either," he said at Nagercoil, only 15 km into his 8,000-km 'Bharat Uday Yatra'. "She's even shy of projecting herself as the next PM."

Advani's attitude was different before his bus rolled out of Kanyakumari. "I'll have one simple message for all countrymen," he said. "India's time has come. Through this trip, I'll project India's achievements under Vajpayee."

But his tenor changed with the landscape; synchronising with similar attacks by NDA allies AIADMK and TDP. His gratitude

towards J. Jayalalithaa knew no bounds. He praised her to the skies for carrying forward the legacy of Dravidian icons Annadurai and MGR. But the Tamil Nadu chief minister was not present at the yatra flag-off. Instead, she deputed senior leader T. Sunderam to keep Advani's company. She also made sure that AIADMK flags fluttered beside the saffron ones.

The BJP's poll generals — M. Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan and Arun Jaitley — flagged off Advani's bus amid cries of "*Lauha Purush* (Iron Man)". Prominent cheerleaders included recent BJP converts Arif Mohd Khan and Ajmer Sharief Dewan, and old faithfuls such as Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Shahnawaz Hussain.

The bus will be Advani's home for the next fortnight as he travels to Amritsar. In the second phase of his yatra, the Deputy Prime Minister will travel from Porbander to Puri, and thus would be absent from party meetings to select its candidates.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAR 2004

Amused Advani road-ready in new avatar

10/3
9.6
MR. VENKATESH
AND DALIP SINGH

Kanyakumari/New Delhi, March 9: A day before his rath rolls on the 8,000-km Bharat Uday yatra, charioteer L.K. Advani sneered at Opposition remarks that his countrywide campaign would fan communal passions.

"The Opposition reaction is predictable. It amuses me," Advani told reporters before leaving for saffron-draped Kanyakumari that waited with his vehicle — a hi-tech air-conditioned bus belonging to Dilip Singh Judeo — in the ready.

Advani was accompanied by his family and party colleagues Arun Jaitley, Pramod Mahajan and Ravi Shankar Prasad.

The 79-year-old leader said he was looking forward to the "8,000 km of exhilarating journey" and allayed the fears, saying he would spread the message of stability and good governance under Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Reacting to Opposition criticism on the ground that his two roadshows — in 1990 and again seven years later — had left behind a trail of riots, Advani said: "Earlier when I undertook ya-

tras, I was in the Opposition and would focus on criticism of the then governments. But this time, I am approaching the people with the good track record of the Vajpayee government."

The first leg of the tour will end in Amritsar. After a brief break, Advani will head for Puri from there.

BJP president M. Venkatesh Naidu also refuted impressions of any communal overtones in the roadshow, saying in Chennai that more and more minorities are coming to support the yatra.

"This will be a historic turning point in the annals of the nation," Naidu said today before admitting former petroleum minister Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthi's son, Suganthan, into the BJP. Dheeran, a breakaway leader of the PMK, also joined with his followers.

At the function, former cricketer Krishnamachari Srikanth announced he would campaign for the party and its allies.

Kanyakumari is teeming with policemen who have thrown a cordon around the maidan near Kerala House from where the deputy Prime Minister will launch his yatra.

9. D.P.M

The kickoff point has been chosen with care. Though Kanyakumari comes under the Tiruchendur Lok Sabha seat being contested by ally ADMK, it is blessed with several symbols — the confluence of three seas, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial where the sage dreamt of a modern, resurgent India and the Mahatma Gandhi memorial. It fits the BJP's bill of an "ideal spot" to start the yatra and will help to keep Jayalalithaa in good humour.

Only after the show here will Advani enter Nagercoil, which has been allotted to the BJP.

But Jayalalithaa did not return the gesture, launching a two-month roadshow in Chennai a day before Advani. She will tour all the 40 constituencies in the state and the lone seat in Pondicherry, which go to polls in the last phase on May 10.

Her first stop was Maduranthakam, a temple town 75 km from Chennai, where she met the 33 ADMK candidates.

DMK president M. Karunanidhi also kicked off his party's campaign by introducing the 15 candidates at an impressive rally in Chennai this evening.



Advani with daughter-in-law Geetika at Palam airport in Delhi on Tuesday. (PTI)

2 DPM
HRB
9/3

Advani rides again ✓

ONE NEEDN'T be a psychoanalyst to know why the word 'Advani' is automatically conjured up whenever the words 'rath yatra' are uttered. True, the idea of setting off in a decked-up vehicle before polls was not L.K. Advani's invention. Former Andhra Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao may have brought in the distinct Ramanand Sagar-quality to election campaigning. But it is L.K. Advani's 1990 rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya — passing through ten states in a Japanese jeep improvised to look like an ancient chariot of war — that fixes our notion of a political roadshow. Mr Advani, now as the deputy prime minister and Numero Due in the BJP, is ready to set the chariot rolling again. This time round, he insists that he will be simply spreading the good word about the NDA's 'India Shining' campaign — a neat way of sidestepping the Election Commission's ban on pre-poll political ads.

While Mr Advani is keen to show that he is no longer the L.K. Advani of 1990, whose juggernaut journey culminated in the disgraceful destruction of the Babri masjid and subsequent communal riots nationwide, it remains to be

seen what the more radical elements of the Sangh parivar make of his latest travel plan. Mr Advani has undertaken rath yatra after the 1992 demolition — the Swarna Jayanthi Rath Yatra to celebrate 50 years of independence in 1997, for instance — in which he refrained from veering into any communal direction. But such is the impact of the 1990 yatra and its aftermath that Mr Advani in a chariot before elections can give the wrong idea to those who see Hindutva as being the BJP's USP. Politicians such as Ramvilas Paswan and Laloo Yadav are, therefore, justified in questioning the BJP leader's intentions — and warning us about the yatra's repercussions.

Mr Advani — like his party — has, in the past, insisted his innocence in the Babri masjid tragedy, maintaining that the demolition was an 'unfortunate' but 'spontaneous' action. So to trust the same man is always risky business. It is also curious that the BJP, supposedly brimming with frontline leaders, couldn't opt for more than one man — and this man — to tom-tom its many virtues in government. One hopes that the party knows that no one will buy any excuses if things go 'awry' once again.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 MAR 2004

Shed fear, PM tells Muslims

Think and decide before casting your vote, urges Vajpayee

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 25

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee on Wednesday led the BJP in an all-out attempt to reach out to the Muslims to vote for the party.

Addressing the largest minorities development conference organised by the BJP, the PM said, "Get out of the fear that's dividing the nation and vote for a government that will not allow any community to live in fear." He appealed to them to "think and decide" for themselves in the coming Lok Sabha elections and not shun the BJP without a careful thought.

Indicating that all issues could be solved through talks, Vajpayee said Muslims should consider themselves rightful partners in the development wave sweeping the nation brought by the BJP-led dispensation. "A superhighway is not meant for just one community, it is for all. Similarly, the fruits of development are meant for everyone to share and take benefit of."

The Prime Minister spoke of his initiative to improve ties with Pakistan, which is the BJP's USP among Muslims. "Our policy is to have peace with all our neighbours and, at the same time, keep the country's interests in mind. There's no conflict between the two," he said.

Though his bus journey to Lahore had failed, Vajpayee said his message to Pakistan was, "Let's walk and live together. If we have to fight, we have to fight against poverty and unemployment, but not with each other. We have fought wars and seen the results, too."

"There's peace all over the country and along the border.



ARVIND YADAV/HT

VEILED SUPPORT: A section of the gathering at the BJP's Minority Development meet in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Both countries are going to play cricket and not wage a war. Our players can play in Karachi or Peshawar, we've told them (Pakistan), depending where arrangements are made. But the atmosphere created for sporting links should be maintained".

Vajpayee, who got a standing ovation from the audience repeatedly, said there was no issue that couldn't be resolved through talks.

Attacking the Congress, he recalled that Muslims were once told that if they failed to vote for that party, they would be sent to Pakistan. "Now, people are queuing up for visas to go to India or Pakistan. This is the change that's been brought about by our gov-

ernment," he said.

He countered the charge that the BJP was a communal party, saying there was no basis or ground for the allegation. "If we wanted to, we could've floated a party only of Hindus after the country gained Independence. But the Muslim League is still surviving because it's being patted by the Congress," he said while criticising the existence of different yardsticks to measure secularism.

Those who spoke at the meet included Arif Mohammed Khan, who joined the BJP a day ago, Finance Minister Jaswant Singh, BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu, Shahnawaz Hussein and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi.

Ethnic cleansing of poll lists: Cong

THE CONGRESS has accused the NDA government of "ethnic cleansing" of the electoral rolls, claiming that 22,000 notices had reportedly been issued to people in Delhi on why their names would be deleted from the rolls.

Congress spokesman Kapil Sibal demanded that the BJP respond to following questions:

- Will it investigate this allegation of ethnic cleansing?
- What will its policy be towards the minorities?

● Will it remove the fear for life among people from the minority community?

● Will it give justice to Muslims, including setting up special courts for the riot-affected? and

● What steps will it take to provide education and employment to Muslims?

Stressing that there could be peace only when there was prosperity, Sibal spelt out the Congress's promise in its manifestos.

HTC, New Delhi

26 FEB 2004

No government plane for Advani: EC

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. The Election Commission today turned down the Union Home Ministry's request for allowing the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, to use government aircraft during the campaigning for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Disclosing this to presspersons, the Deputy Election Commissioner, A.N. Jha said: "The Commission has told the Government that the existing instructions will continue," implying that except the Prime Minister, no other Ministers of the Union or the State Governments will be extended this privilege. Asked when such a decision was communicated to the Government, he refused to say anything.

(Under the instructions issued by the Commission on April 9, 1996 the use of State-owned aircraft will not be permitted for any reason including security to anyone other than the Prime Minister).

On Friday last, the Commission had said that it had received a request from the Home Ministry to grant exemption to Mr. Advani as in the case of the Prime Minister considering his threat perception and that such a request was under its consideration.

The rejection of the Ministry's request assumes significance in the context of various political parties urging the Commission during the all-party meeting not to extend any concession to Mr. Advani to ensure a "level-playing field".

Mr. Jha clarified that only travel expenses of the designated leaders of recognised political parties would not be included in the poll expenses of the candidates and not all expenses as reported in a

newspaper today. He said: "Guidelines have already been issued during the previous round of State elections last year. They are clear and unambiguous." This would cover 40 leaders of recognised political parties and 20 leaders of unrecognised but registered parties.

The ceiling of Rs. 25 lakhs for a candidate contesting the Lok Sabha elections would continue.

The number of polling booths would decline from 7.75 lakhs to seven lakhs following the rationalisation of the polling booths. And voters per polling station would increase from 750 to around 970/1000.

Besides reducing the number of polling booths, the number of persons deployed at a booth would also be cut from five to four.

The BJP today filed a complaint with the Commission taking exception to advertisements by Punjab and Karnataka, both ruled by the Congress highlighting their achievements without indicating whether the advertisements were issued by the Governments concerned or by the Congress.

Regularisation stayed

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. The Supreme Court today stayed a series of orders of the Union Government to regularise encroachments in forests and give land rights to tribals in Madhya Pradesh and Tripura jeopardising over two lakh hectares of forest. — PTI

Details on Page 11

PM launches social security scheme for unorganised sector

● Vajpayee to contest only from Lucknow

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, FEB. 22. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today launched a social security scheme for workers of the unorganised sector, providing them old age pension, health insurance and personal accidental insurance cover for a monthly contribution of Rs. 50 and Rs. 100, depending on the age of the beneficiary.

Mr. Vajpayee handed over National Social Security numbers to 14 workers at the inaugural function and expressed the commitment of his Government to take care of the social security problems of workers in the sector.

The scheme will be managed by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation and will be initially implemented in 50 districts of the country. Workers in the unorganised sector drawing wages up to Rs. 650 a month will be covered under the scheme.

The employees' contribution will be Rs. 50 a month from those in the age group 16-35 and Rs. 100 a month from workers in the age group 36-50. On retirement at the age of 60, the worker will get a pension of Rs. 500 a month and in case of his untimely death the family members will get Rs. 1.25 lakhs plus a pension of Rs. 500 a month.

The Prime Minister, who arrived here this morning on a two-day visit, told a meeting of Bharatiya Janata Party

workers that he would contest the next Lok Sabha elections only from Lucknow constituency, even though he had received invitations to contest from several other States. He said he had started his political career from Lucknow and contested elections from here both successfully and unsuccessfully. He had become Prime Minister only because he was an MP from Lucknow, Mr. Vajpayee said while stressing his association

with his constituency.

Mr. Vajpayee asked the party workers to go to the masses to highlight the achievements of his Government. They should display unity and work hard to project the achievements of his Government to the masses.

He said Uttar Pradesh accounted for 80 Lok Sabha seats and that showed how vital the State was for the party.

The workers should not be guided by media publicity and should approach the voters in right earnest.

Mr. Vajpayee said he had successfully run a coalition Government with the support of a number of parties. The Congress was also now talking of contesting the elections in alliance with others. But the Opposition parties which wanted to go along with the Congress would have to think of the past. The Congress was known for giving support to other parties and then pulling down governments, he said.

'Cricketers not going to war'

LUCKNOW, FEB. 22. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today said the Indian team was going to Pakistan to play cricket and not to fight a war.

"On Pakistan's invitation, the Indian cricketers are going there to play cricket and not for any war," Mr. Vajpayee told reporters at Amausi airport.

With India and Pakistan chalking out the time-table for a composite dialogue to resolve the outstanding issues, the Prime Minister said "There is a conducive atmosphere for holding a dialogue with Pakistan." — PTI

PM hardsells 'India Shining'

Manoj Chaurasia
in Vaishali

Cong fightback

Feb. 10. — An extra cautious Prime Minister today tried to hardsell the NDA's concept of "India Shining", softened his tone against his political adversaries, skipped the contentious issues and harped on the age-old theme of development.

"We do not promise the moon, but we believe in bringing the moon closer to the masses," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said here today nearly kicking off the party's poll campaign in the state, while inaugurating construction works on the Hajipur-Sugauli rail line, a part of the Buddhist circuit. "Those who claim to be ancient nations are welcome to come to Bihar and see the history scattered everywhere," he said, adding that his government was concerned about giving a fillip to tourism. Three crore tourists visited India last year, but even this figure leaves much to be desired and the government is doing its best

BANGALORE, Feb. 10. — The Congress party in Karnataka has found its own way to counter the "India Shining" ad blitz of the NDA-led government. Not content with organising a cabaret show last week in Mandya district to attract crowds, it has now resorted to bribing journalists, to go by reports reaching here..

The latest incident in Mysore yesterday has riled the Mysore Journalists' Association. The rural district Congress committee convened a press meet on its membership drive launched by it. After the meet, leaders gave them sealed envelopes. Those who opened their envelopes were shocked to find Rs 500 along with a wrist watch. — SNS

to generate more revenue, he said.

Stressing that development holds the key to pros-

perity, Mr Vajpayee said his government's efforts were paying off.

The BJP today lashed out at the Congress for trying to put it in the dock on the Bofors pay-off case. Why do they want an apology for, BJP president Venkaiah Naidu asked. He was referring to the Congress demand that the BJP apologise for attacking Rajiv Gandhi in the Bofors case. **'Temple issue clouds BJP vision':** A dilemma over Ayodhya is confronting the BJP as it prepares a vision document ahead of the elections.

The document will focus on negotiation as the route to resolution of all conflicts facing the nation, but the party is undecided whether resolution of the Ram Temple issue through negotiation should also be mentioned. The problem has been compounded with Mr Vajpayee, telling a rally in Faizabad last week that a solution to the temple issue should be through negotiations.

Advani committed to Ram temple

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 8 FEBRUARY

IN an effort to address any concern that the BJP may be distancing itself from its Hinduva agenda, deputy prime minister L.K. Advani on Sunday said the government, if re-elected, will try to settle the Ayodhya dispute and ensure swift return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley.

Mr Advani, who called these part of the government's unfinished agenda, made the promise for resolution to the two issues in the Hinduva bastion of Gujarat.

"We have much more to do for the people and one such demand by crores of Indians is that the Ram Temple must come up at Ram Janmabhoomi... which will happen... and that too with the consent of both parties," agency reports quoting the deputy prime minister from Gandhinagar said.

He also said the government will work for the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley. "It is important for the Kashmiri Pandits to return to the Valley in a conducive atmosphere and that is our agenda," Mr Advani said.

The statement of the deputy prime minister clearly underscored the BJP's anxiety to reconcile its new focus on developmental politics with the party's core concerns. On Saturday, at a



OLD CAUSES DIE HARD: India's deputy prime minister L.K. Advani speaks at a rally of BJP supporters in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — Reuters

rally in Faizabad where Ayodhya is located, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee too had spoken about the construction of a Ram temple, but only in a way as it ensures that it did not trump the concentration on developmental issues. At the rally, none of the speakers, barring Kalyan Singh, talked about the temple issue. Even Mr Singh sought to link it with the larger issue of conflict resolution.

In his Gandhinagar address, Mr Advani made it clear that the articulation of Hinduva issues will interfere with the party's just-acquired faith in the winning potential of developmental

issues. At the same time, it is expected to send a clear signal that the new preoccupation will not push Hinduva on the backburner. In any case, the BJP has always maintained that concepts of Hinduva and development are not mutually exclusive.

Projecting Mr Vajpayee as the leader of the nation, Mr Advani said: "The chant around the nation is Chauthi Bazaar Atal Bihari (fourth time for Atal Bihari)." He said: "The feel-good factor across the country has compelled me to come to the people of Gujarat so that the ruling NDA can once again come to power."

It's Yadav vs Yadav in Bihar LS elections

Ashok K. Mishra
PATNA 8 FEBRUARY

THE Samajwadi Party (SP) will not be a part of any front but is willing to support those parties which will take on communal outfits in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

This was stated on Sunday by SP general secretary Amar Singh. But SP supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav, while addressing a rally here, said in Bihar the party will go all out to defeat Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD as it had been befooling the people of the state for the last 14 years.

Mr Yadav said the RJD-led government in Bihar had not done anything for the people and there was no way SP could extend any helping hand to it. In fact, SP would field candidates against the RJD nominees.

Lamenting over the lack of development in the state, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said the people were fed up with this government and it was bound to get a drubbing this time at the hustings.

Trinamool, BJP may repeat seat sharing strategy

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 8 FEBRUARY

AS they begin seat-sharing talks, Trinamool Congress and the BJP are inching towards a repeat of the 1999 pact which saw them contesting 29 and 13 seats respectively.

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, in her preliminary talks with BJP president Venkaiah Naidu, has indicated her willingness to leave the same number of seats to its poll partner as in 1999. The BJP had in the last round of Lok Sabha polls contested 13 seats, of which it won two: Dum Dum and Krishnanagar.

The two seats are represented by Union ministers Tapan Sikdar and Satyabrata Mukherjee. The Trinamool Congress fought from the remaining 29 seats, emerging triumphant in eight: Kolkata South, Kolkata North-East, Kolkata North-West, Barasat,

Comtai, Jadavpur, Serampore and Nabadwip. It later won the by-election from Midnapore, which fell vacant following the demise of Indrajit Gupta.

Even though, according to the seat-sharing deal being finalised between the two parties, the Trinamool Congress may end with the same number of seats in its kitty as in 1999, there is a realisation among the political observers that Ms Banerjee's hold over the state has considerably weakened following fratricidal war within the party and Ms Banerjee's flip-flop on the issue of identifying the alliance partner.

Though the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Trinamool Congress contested the last general election together, the West Bengal leader parted ways with the former to join hands with the Congress on the eve of the Assembly elections held in the state in 2001.

We will build temple: DPM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, FEBRUARY 8

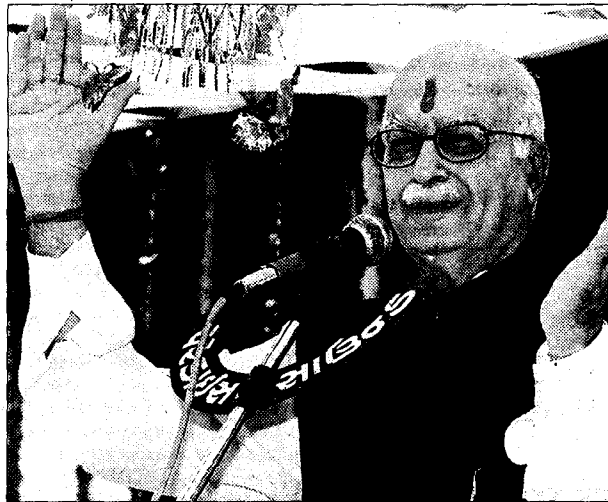
Says he will contest from Gandhinagar again

SEEKING a renewed mandate for the NDA at the Centre, Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today said a temple will be built at Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya — with the consent of both Hindus and Muslims — and that his government will work towards the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley.

Addressing a gathering at Chandlodia, Advani quoted Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's appeal in Ayodhya yesterday and said: "Give us five more years as we have much unfinished work to do for the people that includes the construction of Ram Temple."

"We have much more to do for the people and one such demand by crores of Indians is that Ram Temple must come up at Ram Janmabhoomi... which will happen... And that too with the consent of both parties," the BJP leader said.

Advani said another important issue for the NDA when they return to power will



Advani at a rally in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Reuters

be to "ensure the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley." "It is important for the Kashmiri Pandits to go back to live in the Valley in a conducive atmosphere and that is one of the important things on our agenda," he said.

The Deputy PM also put to rest speculations about the Lok Sabha seat he will be contesting, saying he will "once again contest from Gujarat's

capital Gandhinagar".

Opening a Health mela in Madhavpura Assembly segment, Advani said: "There has been much speculation regarding my parliamentary seat. When I was in Kutch recently, people asked, 'Why don't you contest from here as your father belonged to this place?' The very next day there were media reports that I would be contesting from Kutch."

Raymond ad inspired 'feel-good factor'

■ AHMEDABAD: Giving an insight into how the phrase "feel-good factor" was coined, Deputy PM L.K. Advani on Sunday said it was inspired by the ad of a garment company. "I had seen an advertisement of Raymond Suitings where people who touch the fabric ask the person wearing it... 'How do you feel?'... To which he replies: 'I feel good,' he said while addressing a gathering at Asarva. —PTI

A few days later there were media reports that he would contest from Amreli district in Saurashtra and then even Jaipur in Rajasthan cropped up in media reports as his choice of seat, Advani said.

"But considering the amount of love and respect I have got from people of Gandhinagar, I have decided to contest the upcoming polls from here itself," Advani said.

PM leads scramble to break new ground

Foundation Rush Aimed At Beating EC Deadline

By Akshaya Mukul
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Prime Minister Vajpayee is leading the government in what seems to be a scramble for announcing new projects and laying foundation stones. In two days, Mr Vajpayee has traversed through the east to the south to announce road projects.

Election Commission officials jokingly call it the "foundation rush" and expect more to come before the election dates are announced by the EC next week and the model code of conduct comes into force.

A quick look at certain decisions in the offing will give a clear picture of the announcement rush. The 'open sky' policy is slated to be cleared by the cabinet on February 4, the PM will be inaugurating the Hajipur-Sugauli railway line in Bihar on February 10 while petroleum minister Ram Naik will be in Gujarat on February 9 to kick off an LNG import terminal at Dahej, which was originally scheduled to be launched by the PM and his deputy

The one major announcement which might not see the light of the day is an increase in the foreign direct investment limit in the telecom sector to 74 per cent.

The model code envisages a total ban on announcing financial grants, laying foundation stones

are banned from using government aircraft. In case, private aircraft are used, the EC wants maintenance of full records. Ministers are also barred from combining official functions with political work.

It is a period of flux when even discrete decisions are set aside and the normally reverent and reticent babu looks the other way—in short discovers his back. The model code has become a dreaded word among politicians, more so for those in power, since the early 1990s when it came to be enforced strictly by the EC. No wonder, there is a rush now to be seen to be working.

The dilemma of the politician in power is best explained by a cabinet minister: "In the run-up to the election, the model code just allows you to breathe as a politician. One wrong speech and you are gone." Not so long ago, the EC censured former Chhattisgarh CM Ajit Jogi and Punjab CM Amarinder Singh for violating the model code by using state aircraft during the election period.



of projects/schemes, making promises of construction of roads, provision of drinking water facilities and fresh appointments and transfers. Even fresh release of funds from the MP's Local Area Development Scheme is banned. Ditto for the MLA/MLC development funds.

Except for the PM, all Union ministers and chief ministers

Tour off, PM in a hurry to calm hosts

PRANAY SHARMA

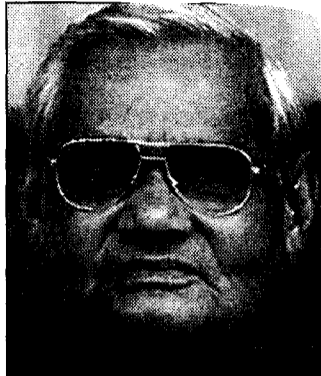
New Delhi, Jan. 19: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called Thai counterpart Thaksin Shinawatra twice and apologised to Australia after his trip was cancelled due to "domestic preoccupations".

Vajpayee spoke to Shinawatra on Saturday and today, expressing his inability to attend a Bimstec (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Co-operation) summit to be hosted by Thailand.

Thailand then called off the Bimstec meet and said it would reconvene the summit later at a date convenient to all five participating nations.

Vajpayee also wrote to Australian Prime Minister John Howard apologising for his inability to come to Canberra.

Soon after Vajpayee spoke to Shinawatra, the Indian foreign ministry issued a statement. "The Prime Minister informed the Prime Minister of Thailand that he would be unable to attend the summit from February 8 because of a number of domes-



Vajpayee: Hands full

tic preoccupations," the statement said.

"The Prime Minister of Thailand conveyed that he had discussed this with the other Bimstec leaders and it was felt that it would be inappropriate to proceed with the summit under these circumstances. It was, therefore, agreed that the summit would be postponed to a subsequent mutually convenient date, to be fixed through diplomatic channels."

However, it is not clear whether Vajpayee cancelled his trip as he may not be able to be part of any official document once Parliament is dissolved and he becomes the caretaker Prime Minister, or because he did not want to be away from India for nearly a week at a crucial time.

Foreign ministry officials said nothing prevents a Prime Minister from travelling abroad — and sign documents — even after polls are announced.

E TIMES

20 JAN 2004

New govt to be in place by April: PM

5-1 13/1/04

Stanley Theodore
in Hyderabad

Jan. 12. — The Prime Minister today told the BJP national executive that Lok Sabha polls would be held at the earliest, and that a new government "would be in place" by April. This was after a political resolution urged the government to seek early elections.

The elections are likely to be held in the last week of March or the first week of April. A decision to this effect was taken at a closed-door meeting of the national executive, attended by top party leaders.

Mr Vajpayee asked finance minister Mr Jaswant Singh to prepare a vote-on-account. It was learnt late tonight that Parliament would meet on 3, 4 and

5 February.

The Prime Minister said: "The BJP has made its recommendation in an unambiguous manner that we should seek the people's renewed mandate at the earliest for completing the unaccomplished part of our mission. The recent NDA meeting has authorised me to take a final decision about advancing the elections."

"Now the responsibility is mine. The NDA is ready. The BJP is ready. The hour of deciding has come. The decision can only be one. I hereby direct Mr Singh to present a vote-on-account in Parliament at an early date. I hope that a new government will be in place by April."

Mr Jaswant Singh moved the political resolution.

At a press conference, BJP

states some time in March, EC sources said. It is normally on the completion of this exercise that the commission sets the ball rolling for conducting polls. The panel also takes care to ensure that the poll schedule doesn't clash with annual school examinations, since schools are used as polling stations and teachers as poll staff.)

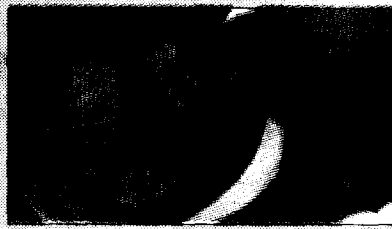
Mr Naidu said the election campaign would start on 23 January, birth anniversary of Subash Chandra Bose. About hundred rallies will be taken out across the country before the notification of the polls, he said. On whether the campaign would start before the vote-on-account, he said: "Irrespective of that."

Mr LK Advani would meet state BJP presidents and general secretaries on Tuesday to finalise

'Not as a caretaker'

HYDERABAD, Jan. 12. — The Prime Minister's reservations about his caretaker status in the event of an immediate dissolution of the Lok Sabha has spoilt the plans of a section of the leadership to hold elections as early as March. He made it clear to the leadership that he does not want to address the nation on Republic Day in a caretaker capacity.

Nor for that matter does he want to attend the BIMSTEC summit (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) from 8 to 10 February in Thailand as a caretaker Prime Minister, top party sources told The Statesman. — SNS



president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu refused to discuss poll dates.

"The Election Commission in consultation with the government will decide the dates after taking into consideration several issues." (According to reports from Delhi, the revised electoral rolls are expected to be ready in all

the campaign programme.

Mr Naidu announced a campaign committee headed by party general secretary Mr Pramod Mahajan and a resource mobilisation committee headed by Mr Ved Prakash Goel. Law minister Mr Arun Jaitley will head the panel that'll draft a vision document for the next five years.

The BJP president said the main campaign issue would be development. On being asked whether this meant the BJP has buried its pet agenda (Ayodhya), he said, "Burial is for the dead. Ayodhya is important for the country and BJP's stand on it is well known. We are in favour of a Temple and there is no compromise on our ideology. But governance is different."

Venkaiah set to get a fresh term, page 4

Advani backs Dalai's appeal

By Rajesh Ramachandran
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: With deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's quick assurance of government support on Friday to the Dalai Lama's appeal for a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya tangle, momentum seems to be picking up for talks on the issue before the general elections.

While the sangh parivar's detractors see this as an attempt to assure the BJP's core constituency of the government's commitment to the temple issue, parivar leaders say this is the "last honest attempt peacefully to settle the issue".

Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders, who were non-committal on Thursday, have issued a statement expressing their willingness to accept any effort that honours the "self-respect and sentiments of Hindus". Also, the RSS is hopeful that with

Temple talks



Dalai Lama

L.K. Advani

the government's intervention the Muslim Personal Law Board and other Muslim organisations could be roped into the talks.

The shahi imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, has responded positively to the appeal that there could be a chance for a solution if the government is interested and that it does not matter even if this is done for elections. The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind had al-

ready welcomed the move.

Mr Advani's statement earlier in the day was a government commitment to facilitate negotiations: "On behalf of the government led by A.B. Vajpayee and on behalf of the BJP, I welcome the suggestion of the Dalai Lama. This government would not only encourage but also actively participate in any serious and reasonable effort to settle the issue in an amicable manner. Our government will extend positive support to any effort for a peaceful settlement of the Ayodhya issue."

However, the Muslim Personal Law Board is not keen on talks with the sangh parivar. At the same time, it does not want to be portrayed as unreasonable by the parivar. So, the board spokesman S.Q.R. Ilyas said, "There is no proposal. If the government has a proposal, we will talk with the government."

Election date left to PM

9-1
OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT 9/11/04

New Delhi, Jan. 8: The National Democratic Alliance today authorised Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to decide how early the Lok Sabha polls are to be called.

A meeting of the allies chaired by Vajpayee this evening at his residence expressed "total confidence" in his "wisdom".

"*Mausam chunav ke anukool hai* (The time is favourable for elections)," Vajpayee is believed to have said.

Sources said the polls were "most likely" to be held in May since, at today's meeting, some members expressed reservations about April.

"April is harvest time in states like Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, so the turnout could be lower than normal. The Kumbh Mela is also taking place in Madhya Pradesh in April and it would be difficult for pilgrims to return to their homes just to vote," they said.

Even less probable seems March, the sources added. Even the BJP needs time to expand its alliances in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, explore the possibility of holding Assembly polls simultaneously in states other than Andhra Pradesh and allow the benefits of the measures an-

nounced today by finance minister Jaswant Singh to be felt.

The sources argued that May would give the government a chance to present an interim budget with the opportunity to offer more carrots as the Election Commission's code of conduct would come into effect only from mid-March. Under the rules, there has to be a gap of 46 days between notifying the dates and holding the polls.

NDA convener and defence minister George Fernandes said after the meeting: "What he (Vajpayee) said was for members sitting there. He was not expected to indicate what was on his mind."

Soon after external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha briefed the partners on the Saarc

summit and Jaswant Singh on today's concessions, Fernandes told the meeting advancing election dates was on the agenda.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani proposed that instead of discussing it, the NDA should authorise the Prime Minister to take a decision. "All other consequential things come later," he is believed to have said.

The allies were told they could convey their views to Vajpayee, if they so chose. Official sources clarified that no time frame was set.

BJP sources described the meeting as part of the exercise to evolve a consensus — or at least appear to do so — by first taking the allies into confidence. The next step will be to secure a similar authorisation from the BJP at the Hyderabad national executive this weekend. That done, the sources said, Vajpayee will convene a cabinet meeting to decide when Parliament should be convened to pass a vote-on-account/interim budget prior to dissolution.

Fernandes said election strategies or alliances were not discussed. But the presence of two constituents — the Indian National Lok Dal and the Pattali Makkal Katchi — generated speculation as both were reportedly "in two minds" about staying on with the BJP.

Mamata berth



After four months of wait as minister without portfolio, Mamata Banerjee was allotted coal and mines on Thursday. She accepted the offer. The move came as the BJP prepares for elections in a few months and gets down to the business of finalising alliances. (See Page 6)

Political will needed to boost S. Asia: PM

By Manoj Joshi
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Islamabad: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took the high road in his address at the inaugural session of the 12th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Sarc) here on Sunday. Speaking as the leader of the economically and physically dominant country of the region, he came across as a statesman, stressing the message of a larger unity in the region when he declared that while the region had talent, resources and markets to make it an economic powerhouse, "all it needs is political will".

He was applauded when he pointed out that a hoarding at Islamabad airport—"Together we stand a better chance in the world"—expressed the "profound truth that South Asia is yet to grasp fully". There was applause again when he declared that the region had to "make a bold transition from mistrust to trust, from discord to concord and from tension to peace". He suggested that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh could cooperate in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the 1857 war of independence. The war, Vajpayee said, reminded us "that many of us have a shared history, which predates our more recent divisions".

But the constructive quality of the PM's tone came out in the practical suggestions he made to achieve the ideal of a united South Asia: a poverty alleviation fund, to which India would make an initial contribution of \$100 million, to be used within the Sarc

area, but outside India; an Indian contribution for a Sarc task force for a modern rail-road-water-air transportation network; and Indian help in cooperation in the use of information technology and biotechnology.

The issue of terrorism came up indirectly when Mr Vajpayee praised Bhutan's decision to take action against insurgent groups. "It is an outstanding example of sensitivity to the security concerns of a neighbour, which is at the same time in the direct long-term security interest of Bhutan itself," he said.

Prime Minister of Bhutan Jigmi Y. Thin-

Pitch for unity



A.B. Vajpayee

Countries in the Sarc region have to "make a bold transition from mistrust to trust, from discord to concord and from tension to peace"

ley detailed his country's efforts to clear out militants who had established camps in the kingdom. Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa of Nepal spoke of efforts to deal with Maoist rebels.

Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali made a passing reference to the subject when he spoke of the finalisation of the additional protocol on terrorism. His major point was that all efforts on the economic unity front would fail "unless we are able to address the political environment in our region in a just and realistic manner".

Peace with Pak possible in my lifetime: PM



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee presents a bouquet to President APJ Abdul Kalam at Rashtrapati Bhavan on New Year's day. — PTT

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan 1. — The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, began the year on a note of hope, expressing optimism that a solution to the Kashmir issue was possible during his lifetime. There

was a rider, however, he clarified, adding that no meaningful discussions could be held on this issue unless Pakistan changed its perception on the "fundamental" matter of the state because of its Islamic majority.

"There has to be a fundamental

change in Pakistan's perspectives," he said in an interview to a news-magazine today. "Until it (Pakistan) changes its perception about Jammu and Kashmir — that because it is a Muslim-majority state, it should be part of Pakistan — no meaningful discussions can take place on this matter."

Mr Vajpayee, who is preparing to fly to Islamabad on Saturday to attend the summit of nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, (SAARC), said a number of bilateral meetings have been scheduled with SAARC leaders, but was reticent on the question of holding bilateral meetings with the Pakistani leadership.

"Naturally, I will also interact with our Pakistani hosts," he said.

Asked whether it is possible to find a solution to the vexed Kashmir imbroglio during his lifetime, Mr Vajpayee said "I remain optimistic about it.... During my Lahore visit, I had clearly conveyed our desire for peace and friendship. Apparently, Pakistan did not believe us."

The perception of India among Pakistanis was changing, the PM noted, saying Indian delegations

which have returned from that country and Pakistani groups that have come here have consistently talked about the desire for peace and friendship.

On whether the Pakistan President, General Pervez Musharraf, could be trusted, the PM said "it is not a question of trust. We have issues of bilateral importance to discuss with the political leadership of Pakistan, if conditions permit it".

Asked whether problems between India and Pakistan would remain as long as Kashmir remained an issue, Mr Vajpayee said "it does not have to be so".

Observing that there were important economic and cultural issues on "our agenda", he said "this does not mean that we are running away from the J&K problem or that we are not willing to discuss it".

On the issue of cross-border terrorism, he said "we have a ceasefire along the international border, the LoC and the ground position at Siachen. Let us see if these will lead to further positive developments."

The Prime Minister refused to go into specifics of the kind of solution he contemplated for the

J&K issue. Asked whether India or Pakistan would accept the Line of Control as the international border, he said "No. Such matters have not yet reached the discussion table".

"If it is left to you, what will be your solution?, he was asked. The Prime Minister said "why leave it to me? This is a subject of grave national importance and it has to be resolved with the collective wisdom of the people".

The Prime Minister completely dismissed the possibility of his using the nuclear button. "The only button I will press is of an electronic voting machine," Mr Vajpayee said. "It is madness even to contemplate nuclear war. Our nuclear weapons are meant to be a deterrent".

Asked if his government was right to conduct the Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998, Mr Vajpayee defended his government's decision to carry out the underground nuclear explosions.

"It was definitely the right decision. Most countries today recognize this, though they may not publicly admit it. The nuclear tests strengthened our national security in a strategic sense," the Prime Minister said.

57-5 2/11/04