

Lalu rejects NDA demand to step down

Patna: Railway minister

Lalu Prasad
on Wednesday rejected
the NDA demand for his
resignation



Sudhoy Pradhan

from the Union cabinet in the wake of registration of an FIR against him on the charge of violating the Election Commission's model code of conduct by distributing money to some Dalit women.

"Why should resign? I have not committed any crime," Lulu told reporters while on his way to attend his party's national executive meeting here.

Reiterating that he had given a hundred or two hundred rupees to Dalit women when they stopped his vehicle at Bihta and demanded sweets for his elevation as the railway minister, he said he had not in any way violated the model code of conduct.

The opposition had stalled the proceedings of the two Houses of parliament demanding resignation of the railway minister on moral grounds in the wake of the FIR charging him with bribing voters by distributing cash.

Calling the NDA's charge as "biased and politically-motivated", Lulu reminded former PM A B Vajpayee of the stampede that claimed several lives during the distribution of sarees at BJP leader Lalji Tandon's house in Lucknow during the last LS polls. PTI

23 DEC 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Friends in need

18/11 37-6
NDA unites in defeat; victory still distant

Given General Election 2004, the Maharashtra verdict, Venkaiah Naidu and Uma Bharati — to give an incomplete list of the BJP's trouble spots — Tuesday's NDA meeting was a happy event. No soul-stirring new slogan was discovered by the erstwhile ruling alliance, no gargantuan government goof-up was handy to delight over and no new ally signed up at the meeting. But NDA allies' discomfiture over the situation in Ayodhya seemed to have been addressed, to the extent that the issue will find a definite place on the coalition, and not just the BJP, agenda now.

The significance of this goes well beyond taking note of BJP concerns. It is a fairly impressive demonstration of an alliance that is pledging to keep going despite the current political adversities that it is confronted with. That message of unity was helped in a large way by the BJP telling the smaller partners of the alliance that it was not about to be hijacked by the so-called hardliners. The Viswa Hindu Parishad obliged by trashing the NDA resolution almost immediately. Plus, the Opposition alliance did a clever thing by asking the ruling UPA to put Ayodhya on the policy map.

The NDA, when it was in power, did nothing much about Ayodhya either and serious efforts, led by Atal Behari Vajpayee and LK Advani, were only in the fourth year of its term. To that extent, the UPA can hardly be blamed for not having done anything during the six months that it has been in power. But in politics, most people don't remember these facts and it is equally possible to tailor the truth and ask the most difficult questions. The difficulty over Ayodhya is that its current aggressive electoral financing of the Muslim vote-bank pretty seals off options for negotiations.

Ayodhya is at that stage of a political conundrum where creative give-and-take from all parties is a must. Vajpayee had this special quality of coming across as a dealmaker concerned with both Hindu and Muslim interests. The Congress will find it tough to ask Muslim leaders to compromise.

It will be a little apprehensive about the Hindu reaction to Muslim recommendations. And it has no one of the stature and standing of Atal Behari Vajpayee to keep antagonists talking. The periodic effective jibes on Ayodhya from the NDA may, therefore, hit home. However, that, as the BJP knows well, is not enough to win elections. Politics seems all local and the BJP's local politics is currently in shambles. Uma Bharati was given charge of Bihar but left for the Himalayas, and no taker for the job.

The BJP, in fact, seems prepared to pay second fiddle to a Janata Dal (United)-Paswan alliance if the former NDA leader can be persuaded to break with the United Progressive Alliance government. The BJP badly needs a victory. The NDA badly needs a victory. But on current prospects, the wait may be longer than it takes to solve Ayodhya.

18 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Eye on Bihar, NDA stages unity show

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

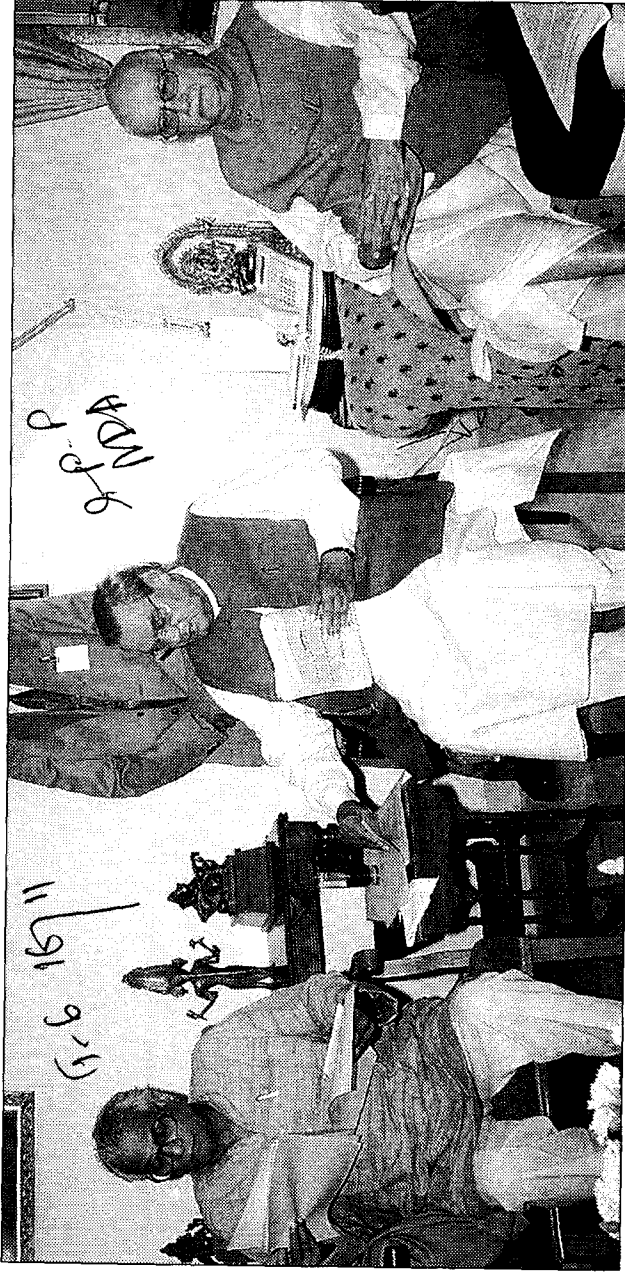
New Delhi, Nov. 15: The BJP has managed to coax a united response from the National Democratic Alliance on everything from Bihar and inflation to Ayodhya and the Kanchi sankaracharya's arrest.

Meeting at chairperson Atal Bihari Vajpayee's residence this morning, the combine placed the need for solidarity above all else and seemed ready to paper over differences that apparently surfaced over Hindutva.

A resolution adopted by the NDA said: "We hold that the NDA is as relevant, and its unity as important now as during the six-year period when our alliance provided the first stable and successful coalition government in the history of Independent India."

It claimed the combine was the "only and the true alternative to the contradiction-ridden Congress-communist combine, which is set to take the nation on a ruinous path" and arrogated to itself the task of "exposing this (the United Progressive Alliance) regime".

The next paragraph explained why "unity" was the NDA's byword: "An equal priority is to emancipate Bihar from the corrupt and anti-peo-



Vajpayee with Fernandes and Advani at the meeting on Monday. (PTI)

ple RJD-Congress rule, which is now a glaring example of absence of order in society, total erosion of law in governance and violation of all norms." In a veiled message to Ram Vilas Paswan, the resolution underlined the need for "all anti-RJD forces to unite".

That the need for cohesion was treated as synonymous with the Bihar elections indicates that the BJP and the

Janata Dal (United) continue to remain the fulcrum of NDA politics. The other constituents played along with this compulsion.

BJP chief L.K. Advani's speaking at length on the Ram temple during his speech at last October's national council and bowing to RSS leaders had led a flustered Dal (U) threaten to quit the NDA. Even so, Dal (U) chief George

Fernandes, as always, played the handy mediator today and persuaded the likes of Sharad Yadav and Nitish Kumar to pursue the "BJP line" on Ayodhya and the Kanchi seer's arrest.

NDA sources added that Advani maintained he had not said anything out of place on Ayodhya and the media had "blown" his statements "out of proportion". The resolution it-

erated the coalition's stand that a judicial verdict — which "must be accepted by all" — was the ideal solution. But if this took too long, a negotiated settlement between Hindu and Muslim representatives in an "atmosphere of communal peace, mutual trust and goodwill" was the best way out.

The meeting also decided that Fernandes will leave for Tamil Nadu tomorrow to try

and meet the sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati. The NDA has termed his arrest as "unfortunate".

Fernandes said after the meeting that "it is regrettable that no thought was given to the guidelines given by courts and other authorities pertaining to religious leaders" while arresting the seer.

Yadav, who yesterday said nobody should interfere in the case, today reportedly went along with the NDA's view "that while the law should take its course, he (the seer) should not have been arrested this way". Sources close to Yadav said "his words should not be quoted out of context".

The BJP was initially reluctant to spell out its stand on the seer's arrest for fear of annoying Tamil Nadu chief minister and ADMK president Jayalalithaa. But Vajpayee, Advani, Murlu Manohar Joshi and other leaders later backed the sankaracharya fully. They reportedly got their cue from the RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad which took to the streets, unmindful of how Jayalithaa might react.

Fernandes, too, made it plain that the NDA chose the seer over the chief minister. He said he had no plans to meet Jayalalithaa, who was not part of the combine.

NDA constituents to meet today

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 14 NOVEMBER

IN an attempt to finalise its strategy for the forthcoming winter session of Parliament, NDA has convened a meeting of its constituents on Monday. The meeting will be the first to be held after L.K. Advani's takeover as the new BJP chief.

The meeting was convened at the behest of some of BJP's allies which feared that the saffron party, under the stewardship of Mr Advani, the original Hindutva mascot, would try to revert to its hardline stance on its core ideological issues such as Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and uniform civil code.

Mr Advani's acceptance speech during his party's national council meeting last month was interpreted by some as an indication that BJP was set to re-embrace hardline Hindutva. The JD(U) national executive meeting held at Ranchi last month, in fact, saw a section of the party using this to make a strong pitch for severing ties with the BJP.

As the confusion between the two sides



ADVANI: HARD TIMES

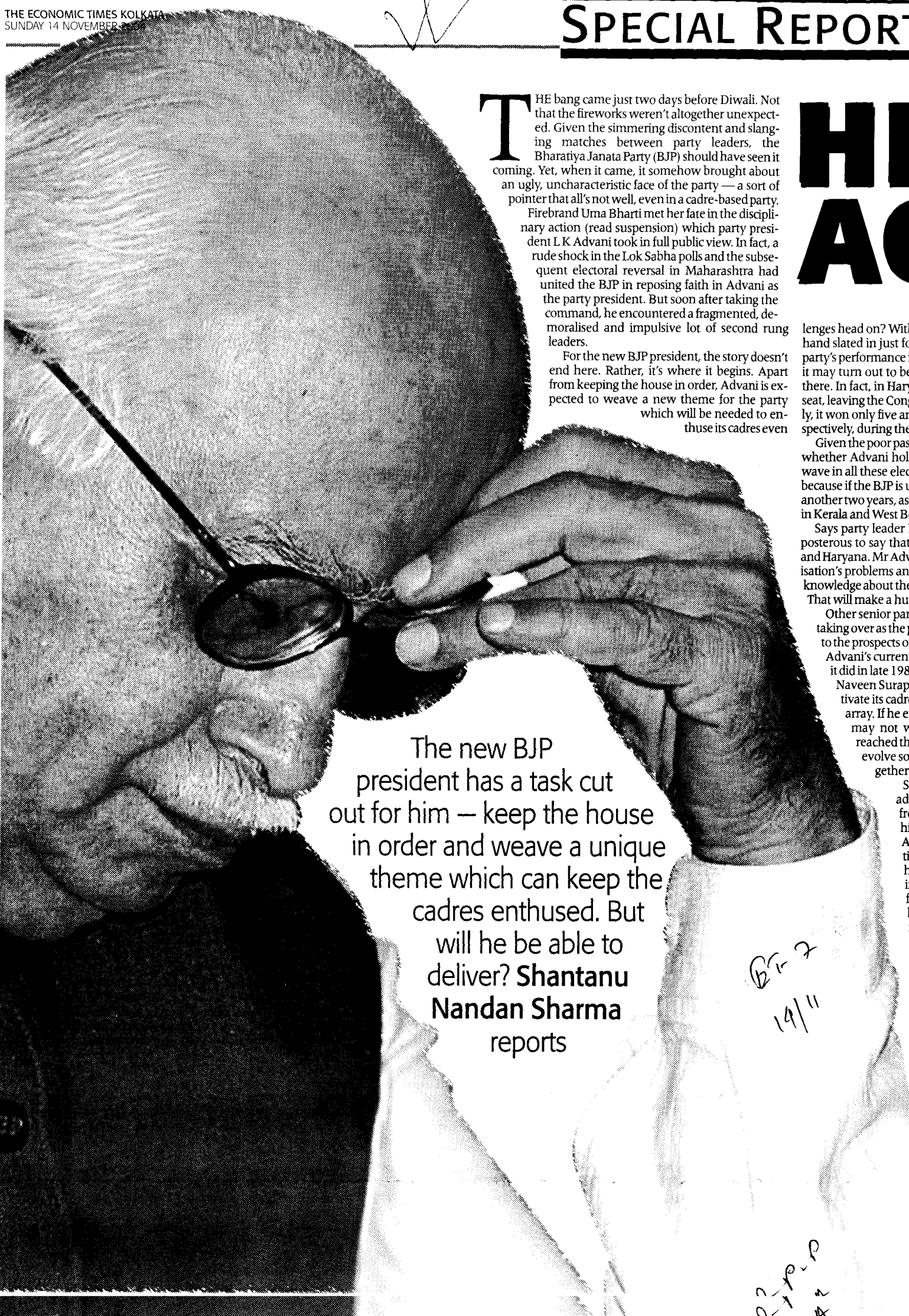
persisted, JD(U) president George Fernandes met Mr Advani and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to sort things out. It was explained to him that the stand taken by Mr Advani during the national council meeting was the same as that of NDA, and that there had been no change in it.

Mr Advani, who was in Amritsar on Sunday, himself ruled out the existence of any difference between BJP and its allies on Ayodhya. "No doubt, some misconceptions over

the issue have found their way in the media, but, in reality, there are no differences," he said, adding, "If anything exists, it should figure in the meeting of NDA to be held tomorrow (on Monday)."

"Moreover, the BJP has its own ideology. Just as BJP does not have any right to dictate the policies and programmes of its allies, our partners also recognise this and agree that they have no business interfering in our matters," BJP parliamentary party spokesman V.K. Malhotra said here on Sunday. Moreover, he added, NDA is not in power today. "Our partnership with our allies is limited to floor coordination in the two Houses of Parliament," Mr Malhotra said.

The meeting, according to him, is likely to finalise NDA's stand on the whole range of issues, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's announcement to reduce the number of troops in Jammu and Kashmir, the situation in the North East, inflation, Saturday's stampede at the New Delhi railway station which left five people dead, and possibly, the Kanchi Shankaracharya's arrest.



HEADACHE

THE bang came just two days before Diwali. Not that the fireworks weren't altogether unexpected. Given the simmering discontent and slanging matches between party leaders, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should have seen it coming. Yet, when it came, it somehow brought about an ugly, uncharacteristic face of the party — a sort of pointer that all's not well, even in a cadre-based party.

Firebrand Uma Bharti met her fate in the disciplinary action (read suspension) which party president L.K. Advani took in full public view. In fact, a rude shock in the Lok Sabha polls and the subsequent electoral reversal in Maharashtra had united the BJP in reposing faith in Advani as the party president. But soon after taking the command, he encountered a fragmented, demoralised and impulsive lot of second rung leaders.

The new BJP president has a task cut out for him — keep the house in order and weave a unique theme which can keep the cadres enthused. But will he be able to deliver? Shantanu Nandan Sharma reports

lenges head on? With elections in Haryana, Bihar and Jharkhand slated in just four months from now, and going by the party's performance in those states in the last Lok Sabha polls, it may turn out to be a tough battle for Advani and his men there. In fact, in Haryana, the party secured just the Sonapat seat, leaving the Congress to win the other nine seats. Similarly, it won only five and one seats in Bihar and Jharkhand, respectively, during the Lok Sabha elections.

Given the poor past record, it's indeed interesting to find out whether Advani holds the chances to reverse the anti-NDA wave in all these election-going states? It's a tough job ahead because if the BJP is unable to break ice here, it has to wait for another two years, as it has virtually no role to play in elections in Kerala and West Bengal in 2006.

Says party leader Ravi Shankar Prasad: "It would be preposterous to say that we won't do well in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana. Mr Advani is one person who knows the organisation's problems and assets in and out. He has the first hand knowledge about the BJP cadres down to the grassroots level. That will make a huge difference now."

Other senior party leaders echo Prasad's views. Advani's taking over as the party president will make a big difference to the prospects of the party, they say. But analysts feel that Advani's current innings is unlikely to be hit the same way it did in late 1980s and early 1990s. Says political analyst Naveen Surapaneni: "Advani must get a theme to motivate its cadres. Already, the house is in complete disarray. If he experiments with Ayodhya once more, it may not work in the present context, as it has reached the state of a diminishing return. He has to evolve something more to take the NDA allies together."

Senior party leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi admits that expectations are very high from the new president, and that's where his problems lie. "The main problem that Advani faces today lies on huge expectations that the party workers have from him. Yes, there were some problems of infighting, but that have been got over. In fact, our focus will remain the same—highlighting of the UPA government's failures, unemployment, laxity in national security, etc."

The firm action against Uma Bharti is seen as a signal to alert other BJP leaders that the axe may fall on undisciplined party activists. In fact, even before the televised drama took place on Wednesday, several BJP leaders wanted Bharti out of Delhi, if not out of the party. "There is infighting in the party because of Uma Bharti alone. And it's all because of her attitude. Over the years, she had bitter fights with Sunderlal Patwa, Kushabha Thackrey, Murlidhar Joshi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and of late with Venkaiah Naidu and L.K. Advani. In fact, the entire party is one side and she is alone on the other side," said a BJP leader a day before the event.

In fact, it is felt that Bharti's ouster may consolidate Advani and

help restrain the growing indiscipline and infighting in the party. But in the process, he has lost a firebrand soldier, supposed to be used for Bihar and Jharkhand polls. In fact, Advani's bigger challenge is to earmark the responsibilities to each of his lieutenants. While Pramod Mahajan's role has not been clearly defined as yet, Arun Jaitley along with Shah Nawaz Hussain, Ravi Shankar Prasad and several important leaders from Bihar will concentrate on BJP's gameplan to wrest the state from Lalu Prasad's hands.

"Lalu will face a double anti-incumbency. One is his misrule in Bihar and the second is his activities as a railway minister. In the next round of polls in three states, the ad hoc approach to the national security will also be highlighted," says Prasad.

But this poses another question: Will Advani's strong Hindutva image consolidate the Muslim voters against the BJP. In Bihar, for instance, 18 per cent voters are Muslims and their turnout is relatively higher than the rest. Says Hussain, "There is a misconception that Advani is anti-Muslim. It's not true. Look at his performance as the home minister of the country. Muslims were more than happy with him. Being a Muslim leader, my role will be to tell people the truth about Advani." It's for sure that the BJP has to break the Muslim voteshare, if not wooing them in bulk, if they wish to register victories in Bihar and Jharkhand.

Prasad believes that the problems of the UPA will give the BJP a chance to register a comeback. He says, "The BJP will have to use its equation with allies. Some, however, may desert the BJP on this ground. PROGNOSIS: Advani may not go all along with the Ram temple, but use it selectively."

INDIA SHINING
Despite electoral reversal in the Lok Sabha, the BJP may continue with its developmental plank. Achievements of the Vajpayee government such as highway projects, economic growth, etc., will be highlighted with a tag of their negative momentum under the new government. PROGNOSIS: Advani may use these, but unlikely to form the core campaign.

ANTI-INCUMBENCY
The BJP is waiting to exploit non-performance of the UPA government. It wants to the UPA's tall promises on employment and rural development to crumble. It's also waiting for any governmental scandal to surface. PROGNOSIS: The party may go aggressive on an anti-Congress drive once it gathers enough material on poor performance.

NEW AREAS
The party may go for issues targeting the youth. The agenda is not simply to woo young voters, but to make a serious effort to increase its youth cadres. PROGNOSIS: Advani's game for it. Will bring out issues to enthuse the young and spirited.

The NDA to jump into the next electoral battles in those three states. "Inherent contradictions of the UPA will give enough space for Advani to lead the party better. Also, Advani has a phenomenal ability to create issues for our party. And he has done it before," he explains.

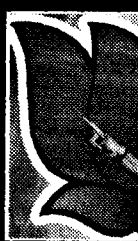
The vital question now is, of course, striking the right issue which can be experimented with successfully. Surapaneni feels that Advani may resort to a long-term policy rather than concentrating just on the coming elections. "In the coming series of Assembly polls, the BJP doesn't have much of a chance. Even Advani knows it well. So his policy may be to strengthen the organisation better and achieve long-term gains. In this process, Advani may test issues and experiment with leaders. You never know who comes up during this bad phase of the party? It's like coming up of Irfan Pathan at a time when the Indian cricket team is going really low," he says.

But Advani can't afford to surrender so easily in the coming state elections. Party insiders believe that in his two-pronged strategy, he may have a team to focus on the coming polls alone. But simultaneously, he may engage others to achieve his long-term objectives and indoctrinate more youths to the BJP ideology.

AYODHYA

Advani hinted at it. Ayodhya may boost the morale of the BJP cadres in the states going to the polls like Bihar and Jharkhand. But it's likely to damage its equation with allies. Some, however, may desert the BJP on this ground. PROGNOSIS: Advani may not go all along with the Ram temple, but use it selectively.

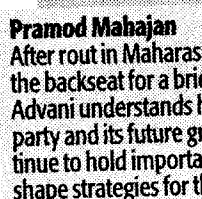
WHICH WAY TO GO?



MEN WHO MATTER



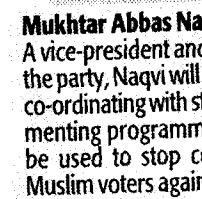
Venkaiah Naidu
Considered a key organisational man. No one can write him off at this point in time. He will remain active in party work, but how Advani plans to use his services is to be seen



Pramod Mahajan
After rout in Maharashtra, he may take the backseat for a brief period. Yet Advani understands his relevance in the party and its future growth. He will continue to hold important positions and shape strategies for the party



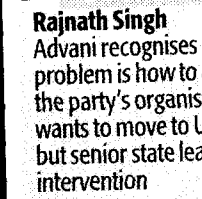
Arun Jaitley
He will primarily concentrate on Bihar polls, scheduled in February-March 2005. If the BJP-JD(U) combine succeeds in dislodging Lalu's monopolistic regime in the state, Jaitley will get a major credit



Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi
A vice-president and the Muslim face of the party, Naqvi will be involved more in co-ordinating with state units and implementing programmes. His services will be used to stop consolidation of the Muslim voters against the BJP



Sushma Swaraj
She has a proven track record of good administration and articulates the party ideology well. She may be used as a mouthpiece of the party on critical issues. After Uma Bharti's exit, she will be the most prominent woman face



Rajnath Singh
Advani recognises his talent, and but the problem is how to accommodate him in the party's organisational set-up. Singh wants to move to Uttar Pradesh politics, but senior state leaders do not want his intervention



Ananth Kumar
He will be Advani's man for the southern region. He is likely to play a bigger role in expanding the party base and propagating the party ideology in the key southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

THE COALITION CRACKS

Advani's hardline approach may lead to a divide between the partners

THE BJP's mega successful regime at the Centre is not old. Nor is Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his team's formula which worked well in managing a coalition of parties with disparate ideologies.

However, the same success story has now started troubling the party and its new president L.K. Advani. Advani, who gave a new definition to the anti-Congress parties with his Ram movement 15 years back, has probably discovered that the old tricks may not work in the post-NDA circumstances.

In fact, as soon as Advani talked about his resolve to build the Ram temple soon after he took over as the party president, several allies, including JD(U) and the TDP, reacted sharply and even threatened to walk out of the NDA.

For Chandrababu Naidu, it will be a difficult choice if the BJP goes ahead with a strong Hindutva line. Already, the party has realised that it has eroded its base among the minorities because of its closeness with the BJP. Says Naveen Surapaneni: "From the time of TDP's rout in the Assembly polls, many of its workers had a feeling that the BJP let it down on several grounds. Also, they are now feeling that BJP's plan to advance the polls created problems in TDP's arithmetic."

Even in Bihar, the situation is not too well for the NDA. In particular, the Janata Dal-United is getting somewhat restive and is even threatening to sever its political ties with the BJP in the coming Assembly elections. Though the BJP is none too pleased over the newly-adopted stance of the JD(U), the saffron party still wants the alliance going forward for the Assembly elections.

Interestingly, the JD(U) is keen to befriend the LJP of Ram Vilas Paswan who, too, is not averse to such a proposition. But Paswan's problem is the BJP which, he insists, should be kept out of any alliance between the JD(U) and LJP.

Clearly, the problem with the Bihar NDA started after it lost out to the Rashtriya Janata Dal in the Lok Sabha elections in the state. The trouble seems to have exacerbated as the JD(U) has become wary that the BJP may revert back to a more aggressive Hindutva

course. The prospect that the saffron party may adopt a hard line approach has indeed raised the alarm bells for the JD(U). The JD(U) went as far as to discuss the issue, debating in the party forum whether it should continue its alliance with the BJP.

"There should be ideological clarity on the part of the BJP. We will get to know their official views at the NDA meeting which will be convened in New Delhi on November 14. The JD(U) will take any decision vis a vis the BJP only after that meeting," says JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar.

Kumar has been publicly saying that Paswan should come forward and lead the "grand alliance" of the BJP, JD(U), LJP to trounce Lalu. Paswan is ready to work in alliance with the JD(U) but he is not prepared to have any truck with the BJP. That the two leaders recently met at an Iftar party have raised the prospect of an alliance. But what will be the contours and configuration of such an alliance—if it really works out—may well be a subject of speculation. It could be that the JD(U) may have separate alliances with the BJP and the LJP. But the question is—will such an alliance work at the ground level?

In Punjab, the BJP's relationship with the Akalis has never had a very strong ideological reasoning. It's a relationship that has taken into account political mathematics, more than anything else. The change in the top BJP leadership is expected to have no impact on the ties

ANDHRA PRADESH (TDP)

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) cadres felt that the BJP let them down during the last Assembly polls. If the BJP goes on the Hindutva track now, TDP's base among the minority community will be reduced further. Chandrababu Naidu may prefer to walk out of the NDA if temple issue comes to the core agenda of the BJP.

ORISSA (BJD)

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) chief Naveen Patnaik won't like the BJP making the Ram Mandir a



PULLING APART

BIHAR (JD-U)
The JD(U) is threatening to sever its political ties with the BJP on Hin-dutva issue. Problem also comes from JD(U)'s wish to befriend LJP of Ram Vilas Paswan. Paswan has no problem with it provided JD(U) divorces the BJP

big issue. For him, however, the priority is to solve his domestic problems

PUNJAB (SAD)

BJP's relationship with the Akalis has been guided by political mathematics rather than ideological reasoning. But Akali president Prakash Singh Badal has had a better personal rapport with Vajpayee

TAMIL NADU (AIADMK)

The arrest of Shankaracharya in TN has sent conflicting signals over AIADMK's tie-up with the NDA. Till now, it has been giving issue-based support

MAHARASHTRA (Shiv Sena)

Shiv Sena has had a long tie with the BJP because of the common Hindutva ideology. With Advani at the helm of affairs, Sena may find itself more near to the BJP

Akali spokesperson and secretary Daljit Singh Cheema: "Our alliance is with the BJP, the party, and not its leadership. A leadership change is their internal matter, it changes nothing for us so far as our relationship with the BJP is concerned."

BJD chief Naveen Patnaik won't like the BJP making the Ram Mandir a big issue. For him, however, the priority is to solve his domestic problems. BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad, however, feels that Advani has not said anything different on the Ram temple issue which is different from the NDA line. "What's new that Advani has said on the Ram temple? In the NDA agenda, it was clearly mentioned that the Ram temple issue should be sorted out either by court settlement or through a dialogue. We favour dialogue as a healthy solution," says Prasad.

ASHOK K MISHRA IN PATNA, JYOTI KAMAL IN CHANDIGARH AND SNS IN NEW DELHI

Hard options

Trinamul must reinvent itself

55-8
28/10

The fact that there are signs of a rift in the Trinamul leadership and the air is thick with rumours of an exodus to the Congress is ominous for a party that is still considered the main opposition in West Bengal. Successive elections have brought despair and demoralisation to a point where Mamata Banerjee must make some hard choices.

Every time a leader — as in the case of Nitish Sengupta the Trinamul candidate who lost in Contai in the last parliamentary election — quits the party, she declares with confidence that her party's base remains intact. Now that three assembly by-elections in Kolkata have confirmed that Trinamul is on slippery ground even in the city that was considered its stronghold and where it formed the municipal board. The assembly by-election has confirmed the trend witnessed during the parliamentary election where the Left won three seats as well as Dum Dum leaving Mamata as the sole Trinamul representative from the state.

The exodus was only to be expected. What is worse is the demoralisation in the ranks that is made worse by infighting in which some leaders have expressed their resentment quite openly. While Trinamul spokesmen blame the defeats on rigging, some Trinamul leaders have a different story to tell.

It does no good to keep harping on rigging every time the results are announced. That the CPI-M has made a shameless use of the administrative machinery and exploited other means of ensuring victory is well known. There is evidence of an anti-incumbency wave that was hardly reflected in the results. The question is whether Trinamul can present the organisational structure that the situation demands.

This is an old drawback made worse by Mamata Banerjee's style of functioning. It does not help to work with dissenting leaders or to put up candidates of dubious merit who do not enjoy the confidence of the rank and file. Without overcoming these weaknesses, Trinamul should find it hard in the Kolkata municipal election next year. The drubbing that it has received in recent elections cannot be justified wholly by the rigging and stronger tactics which the CPI-M has applied. It arises from Trinamul's own weaknesses and lack of direction which the Marxists have exploited. Even now, Mamata relies on ritual noises rather than on a positive gameplan and cannot make up her mind on whether the alliance with the BJP has backfired.

All this has prompted the Congress to send out signals to Mamata on a merger. On what terms? As an ally of the CPI-M at the Centre? While the Congress has sacrificed principles in order to remain in power, Trinamul seeks to cling to principles at the expense of a rapidly eroding base. The Congress stands exposed but Trinamul, if it is to survive, must reinvent itself.

তৃণমূলকে পিছনে ফেলে উঠে আসছে কংগ্রেস

প্রসূন আচার্য

কলকাতার তিনটি বিধানসভা কেন্দ্রের উপনির্বাচনে বিপুল ব্যবধানে জিতে বামফ্রন্ট প্রমাণ করল শহরে লোকসভা ভোটে তাঁদের জনপ্রিয়তা পাঁচ মাস বাদেও অটুট রয়েছে। উল্টে জনসমর্থন আরও বেড়েছে। এই পরিস্থিতি চলতে থাকলে আগামী জুন মাসে কলকাতা পুরসভার ভোটে তৃণমূল-বি জে পি-র জেতা অত্যন্ত কঠিন। তৃণমূলকে পিছনে ফেলে কংগ্রেস উঠে আসছে দ্বিতীয় স্থানে। দুটি কেন্দ্রে তৃণমূলের জামানতও বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়েছে। সংখ্যালঘুদের ভোটের সিংহভাগ পেয়েছে সি পি এম। আর শহরের অবাঙালি হিন্দু ব্যবসায়ীদের মধ্যে বি জে পি-র জনপ্রিয়তা আরও কমছে। ভোটের ফল দেখে বেশ কিছু তৃণমূল কাউন্সিলর দল বদলের কথাও ভাবতে শুরু করেছেন। শনিবার রাত থেকেই তাঁরা কংগ্রেস নেতাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে আরম্ভ করেছেন।

শ্যামপুকুরে ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের জীবন সাহা, জোড়াবাগানে সি পি এমের পরিমল বিশ্বাস এবং এন্টালিতে সি পি এমের আবু সুফিয়ান জয়ী হয়েছেন। তিনটি কেন্দ্রই বামদের দখলে ছিল। তিন বিধায়ক সাংসদ

নির্বাচিত হওয়ায় আসন তিনটি শূন্য হয়। সেদিক থেকে দেখলে বামদের বিশেষ লাভ হয়নি। কিন্তু তিনটির মধ্যে দুটি কেন্দ্রে এন্টালি ও জোড়াবাগানে তৃণমূলকে তৃতীয় স্থানে ঠেলে দিয়ে কংগ্রেস দ্বিতীয় হয়েছে। একমাত্র শ্যামপুকুরেই তৃণমূলের যুব নেতা মদন মিত্র ২৯ হাজার ভোটে হেরে দ্বিতীয় স্থানে রয়েছে। এই ঘটনা প্রমাণ করে, বিভাজনের দীর্ঘ ছয় বছর পরে আবার কলকাতায় কংগ্রেসই সি পি এমের প্রধান প্রতিপক্ষ হিসাবে উঠে আসছে। পুরভোটের আগে কলকাতায় বাম-বিরোধী ভোট অটুট রাখতে তৃণমূল নেত্রী মমতা বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়কে সসম্মানে কংগ্রেসে ফিরে আসার আবেদন জানিয়েছেন কংগ্রেসের মুখপাত্র মানস ভূইঞা। জবাবে তৃণমূলের নেতা পঙ্কজ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় বলেছেন, “আগে ওরা সি পি এমের সঙ্গে ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে আসুক।” তৃণমূলের এই শোচনীয় ফল দেখে সি পি এমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাসের সংক্ষিপ্ত মন্তব্য, “তৃণমূলের ভবিষ্যৎ অন্ধকার।”

ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের জীবন সাহাকে নিয়ে কলকাতা জেলা সি পি এমের আপত্তি ছিল। কিন্তু পরে আলিমুদ্দিনের নির্দেশ পেয়ে সি পি এমের স্থানীয় কর্মীরাই যে জীবনবাবুর হয়ে ভোটে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়েছেন, তা তাঁর পক্ষে পড়া

৩৮ হাজার ভোটই প্রমাণ করে। এখানে তৃণমূলের মদনবাবু ৯ হাজার এবং কংগ্রেসের শিবাজি সিংহ রায় প্রায় সাড়ে ৩ হাজার ভোট পেয়েছেন। শিবাজিবাবুর জামানত বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়েছে। শনিবার রাতেই তিনি কংগ্রেসের দলীয় পদ থেকে ইস্তফা দিয়েছেন। মদনবাবুর বক্তব্য, “সি পি এম কর্মীরা অধিকাংশ জায়গায় মানুষকে ভোটই দিতে দেয়নি। নিজেরাই ছাপ্লা দিয়েছে।”

মুসলিম-প্রধান এন্টালিতে কংগ্রেস, তৃণমূল, সি পি এম—তিন দলই মুসলিম প্রার্থী দাঁড় করিয়েছিল। এখানে গুজরাতের দাস্কাই ছিল প্রধান বিষয়। সি পি এমের আবু সুফিয়ান ৬০ হাজার ৭৩৬ ভোট পেয়ে রেকর্ড ৫১ হাজার ভোটে জিতে প্রমাণ করেছেন গুজরাতের দাস্কার ফল এখনও নির্বাচনকে প্রভাবিত করছে। কংগ্রেসের প্রার্থী খালেদ ইবাদুল্লা সাড়ে ৯ হাজারের বেশি ভোট পেয়ে দ্বিতীয় হয়েছেন। আর তৃণমূলের মঞ্জের ইকবাল কাউন্সিলার হওয়া সত্ত্বেও ৬৮৩ ভোট পেয়ে তৃতীয় স্থানে। মে মাসের লোকসভা নির্বাচনে এই বিধানসভা এলাকায় সি পি এমের মহম্মদ সেলিম ৩৩ হাজার ভোটে জিতেছিলেন। আর তৃণমূল ছিল দ্বিতীয় স্থানে। এবার কংগ্রেস, তৃণমূল দুই

দলেরই জামানত বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়েছে।

ঠিক একই ভাবে জোড়াবাগানে তৃণমূলের পিছনে ফেলে কংগ্রেসের রাজেশ সিংহ দ্বিতীয় হয়েছেন। তিনি পেয়েছেন ৯ হাজারের কিছু বেশি ভোট। আর তৃণমূলের সঞ্জয় বস্তু পেয়েছেন ৬৭৯৫ ভোট। তাঁর জামানত বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়েছে। লোকসভার ভোটে সি পি এমের সুধাংশু শীলের জয়ের ব্যবধান আরও বাড়িয়ে সি পি এমের পরিমল বিশ্বাস পেয়েছেন ২৩ হাজার ৪১৮ ভোট। এই এলাকাটি হিন্দু-ব্যবসায়ী প্রধান।

ভোটের ফল প্রমাণ করে বি জে পি-র কাউন্সিলর থাকা সত্ত্বেও তৃণমূল প্রার্থী ভোট পাননি। উল্টে ভোট গিয়েছে সি পি এমের বাস্তু। অর্থাৎ, কেবল গুজরাত-মহারাস্ট্রেই নয়, কলকাতার যে এলাকায় বি জে পি গত ১০ বছর ধরে ক্ষমতাসালী, সেখানেও তাদের ভোট কমেছে।

ভোটের ফলাফল বিশ্লেষণ করতে গিয়ে সি পি এম নেতা অনিলবাবু বলেছেন, শহরে তাঁদের জনপ্রিয়তা য' কমেছিল, কর্মীদের প্রচারে তা আবার তাঁদের পক্ষে ফিরে এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, তৃণমূলের পঙ্কজবাবু এবং কংগ্রেসের মানসবাবু দুই জনেই বলেছেন, সি পি এম রিগিং করে সাধারণ মানুষকে ভোট দিতে দেয়নি।

Radhika all set to quit Trinamool Congress

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, October 14

WITH RESENTMENT running high in the Trinamool Congress against the "autocratic functioning" of party supremo Mamata Banerjee, senior party leader Radhika Ranjan Pramanik said on Thursday that it was becoming impossible for him to stay in the organisation anymore.

Pramanik, a five-time MP and seven-time MLA of the CPI(M) had joined Trinamool eight months ago. He had been nominated executive editor of the weekly organ of the party launched in July, but was removed from the post when the paper, *Jago Bangla*, was relaunched on Wednesday.

"Mamata had publicly announced that I would be the executive editor. Now she has replaced me with Partho Chatterjee. This is sheer dishonesty and a dishonest person can't be ac-



Mamata Banerjee

cepted as the leader of the principal Opposition party of the state," Pramanik told *Hindustan Times* on Thursday.

Pramanik, however, chose to keep his cards close to his chest when asked whether he was planning to go to the Congress, as many of his comrades were doing. "It is necessary to have a strong Opposition party in this state. But the Trinamool, for all practical purposes, is finished. I will have to do something," he said.

Only on Wednesday, senior party leader and Kolkata mayor Subrata Mukherjee had defied Mamata

and attended a function with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at Star Theatre. The day before, he had shared the dais with Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, prompting Mamata to say that those who wished to quit the party were welcome to do so. Though Subrata would share the dais with Mamata at a KMC function on October 17, the two leaders have reportedly stopped talking to each other, Trinamool insiders said.

"The supreme leader is politically dishonest and the second ranking leaders spineless. I did not quit the CPI(M) to join such a party. Many Trinamool leaders are planning to quit. Given the stifling atmosphere in the party, many more will do so," Pramanik said. Asked whether he would talk to Mamata and sort out the differences, Pramanik said, "It is impossible to talk to a person like her."

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NDA raises 'tainted' Ministers issue again

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 16. The Opposition National Democratic Alliance raised the issue of "tainted" Ministers in the Central Cabinet in both Houses of Parliament soon after they reconvened today following a three-week recess.

The Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee, allowed both sides to present their view points while in the Rajya Sabha, its Chairman, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat's refusal to permit a discussion till he had scrutinised a notice on the issue led to a walkout.

Earlier, before Parliament convened, the NDA resolved at a morning meeting to raise the Taslimuddin issue as well as the general issue of continuation of Ministers who have criminal charges against them. After the meeting, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Sushma Swaraj, told reporters that the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, had talked of good conduct, morality and transparency in governance, but "tainted" Ministers continued to be part of his Government. The NDA would continue to raise the issue in Parliament.

Ms. Swaraj said the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary meeting will be held tomorrow where the "full strategy" for this

session of Parliament will be discussed and the Opposition's action plan decided. Privately, at least two senior BJP leaders have conceded that the case against Mr. Taslimuddin is "rather weak," but as part of the BJP-Janata Dal (United) Bihar strategy the NDA will raise the issue.

Shekhawat's firm 'no'

When the NDA members wanted to discuss the issue in the Rajya Sabha, the Chairman said firmly: "I have not permitted you to speak nor will I will allow you to speak. I will not use my discretion."

Repeated requests by BJP leaders, Ms. Swaraj, Murl Manohar Joshi and Ravi Shankar Prasad, met with the same firmness. The chairman said: "In this case, I have a notice before me. I will study it and then give my ruling but, in the meantime, I will not allow anyone to raise the issue."

When Mr. Prasad insisted on speaking on the "tainted" Ministers issue, Mr. Shekhawat asked Parliamentary reporters not to record the proceedings and sat back after telling him to "keep on speaking if you want it this way." Mr. Prasad dwelt on the issue for about 10 minutes with all his observations declared off the record. The BJP members then entered the well

of the House demanding permission to raise Mr. Taslimuddin's case and walked out after Mr. Shekhawat stood his ground. Earlier in the day, he turned down the Opposition plea to postpone the question hour to discuss the presence of "tainted" Ministers in the Union Cabinet.

'Politically motivated'

In the Lok Sabha, the issue came up after question hour with Sushil Modi (BJP) demanding Mr. Taslimuddin's resignation for "evading arrest" in the last five years and keeping the Election Commission in the dark about the fact that he had an arrest warrant pending against him. Mr. Modi said the Bihar Government's decision to withdraw the case against the Minister was politically motivated and "nothing but a blatant and naked misuse of State power."

Raghunath Jha (RJD) accused the BJP of applying double standards on the issue. "L.K. Advani, Murl Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti were charged with inciting communal trouble yet they continued in the Government. Why is a different yardstick being applied now," he asked. Nitish Kumar (JD-U) also wanted to speak on the issue but the Speaker moved on to the next business of the day.

WELCOME RESOLUTION

IT TAKES TWO to tango, and as much is evident from the National Democratic Alliance's mercifully short-lived decision to boycott parliamentary committees. The deadlock was resolved because both sides, in a spirit of parliamentary accommodation rarely to be seen these days, sat across the table and sorted out the matter. However, a special mention must be made of the role played by Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, who went more than the proverbial extra mile to satisfy the Opposition. The credit is all the greater considering Mr. Chatterjee was himself at the centre of the controversy. The boycott threat followed an ugly showdown between the treasury benches and the BJP over an incident that quite needlessly centred on the Speaker, only recently elected to his post and almost unanimously acclaimed for his parliamentary manner and skills. In attempting to stop Mr. Chatterjee from making a statement, the BJP not only behaved unacceptably towards a man of such eminence, but worse, displayed shocking disrespect to the Chair, and by implication, the institution of Parliament itself. Perhaps that is why the leader of the House, Pranab Mukherjee, took it upon himself to challenge the BJP, which added insult to injury by announcing a boycott of all parliamentary committees.

Much has been said about the nature and role of these committees, both standing and consultative. Suffice it to say that they are central to the functioning of Parliament as well as the executive. Parliamentary scrutiny is imperative for upholding executive accountability and this must explain the outrage that followed the BJP's boycott decision. A truant Opposition will have resulted in nearly unopposed passage of the demands for grants from the various Ministries. In the circumstances, the Speaker was constrained to try and achieve a quick end to the stalemate.

The solution that suggested itself was the removal of all offensive statements from the records of Parliament. Although this was evidently not to the full satisfaction of the Congress Party, the Speaker clinched the issue by arguing that since he was the one targeted by the Opposition, it should be left to him to "forgive and forget." Of course, it is hardly a coincidence that the BJP's return to the parliamentary committees comes at a time of some unease within the NDA — primarily over Hindutva but also over the party's irresponsible behaviour in Parliament. The Telugu Desam Party in particular is said to have been distressed by the boycott decision that caused the NDA as a whole to suffer by association.

It remains to be seen whether the ruling and Opposition benches will build on this positive outcome for a more productive time in Parliament. Experience suggests otherwise. The BJP has already made it clear that it will continue to agitate on the issue of 'tainted' Ministers. *Per se* this is unexceptionable and indeed there are enough parliamentary mechanisms available should the party want a full and uninterrupted hearing on this subject. Significantly, at a conference in November 2001 on "Discipline and decorum in Parliament, State Legislatures and Union Territory Assemblies," legislators unanimously adopted a code of conduct for themselves. It is instructive that, among other things, the code expressly forbade MPs and MLAs from questioning the Speaker. Party leaders too need to show greater responsibility on this count. The BJP, for instance, has within its own fold many leaders, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who have spent a lifetime (mostly in the Opposition) advocating decency and decorum in Parliament. They must ensure that their party, which is yet to recover from the shock of its electoral defeat, lives up to these sentiments.

THE HINDU

6 AUG 2002

P.P.P.
NDA

NDA withdraws boycott

By Javed M. Ansari

110-1
2/8

NEW DELHI, AUG. 3. The National Democratic Alliance today withdrew its decision not to participate in parliamentary committees. It is learnt that the "lists" of nominees of the NDA parties have been sent to the Speaker's office and the committees are expected to be constituted in a day or two.

The impasse was resolved after a series of meetings involv-

ing the Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani.

The breakthrough came at a breakfast meeting between Mr. Chatterjee and Mr. Advani, followed by a meeting between Dr. Singh and Mr. Advani at the Prime Minister's residence where the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, the Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, and the

Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, were also present. Later today, the NDA leadership met to formally decide to lift the boycott and send their list of MPs for the various parliamentary committees, including the standing committees, which have to complete their examination of the demands for grants for various Ministries before the Lok Sabha meets again on August 16.

Somnath happy: Page 11

Vajpayee plea to prevent NDA split

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 1: Atal Bihari Vajpayee today called for unity in the National Democratic Alliance even as two trusted partners made noises to the contrary.

At the BJP's *chintan baithak* in Goa, the former Prime Minister indicated that the party could not afford to alienate any of its allies, regardless of pressure from the RSS to revert to the Hindutva agenda.

The first sign of opposition ironically came from one of the BJP's most loyal ally, the Janata Dal (United), at a meeting of its national executive.

"If they (BJP) return to the old agenda (Hindutva), then we will not be with them. There cannot be any two opinions on this," senior party leader Digvijay Singh had warned yesterday.

Dal (U) chief George Fernandes said his party joined the NDA on the condition that the alliance's manifesto would not refer to the contentious issues of Ram temple, Article 370 and uniform civil code.

"We made it clear that we will not join the NDA if these three items remained in the manifesto," Fernandes said.

Another ally, the Telugu Desam Party, too, sent out a warning. "The TDP will review its ties with the BJP in the event they take the communal route," Desam spokesman Umareddy Venkateswarlu said today in Hyderabad.

His party's brass are observing the BJP's ongoing brainstorming session and feel there is little to hold the partners together after the defeat in the Lok Sabha polls. The Desam has 46 legislators as against its previous lowest tally of 75 in 1989.

The BJP rode to power on the Ram temple plank but put the



Vajpayee, Fernandes

issue on the backburner under compulsions of governance and to keep the NDA flock united.

But after the parliamentary poll defeat, the BJP executive had met in Mumbai and declared it was time to talk Hindutva.

Fernandes admitted that a section of his party is in favour of snapping ties with the NDA but the Dal (U) has decided to wait because so far there has not been any tangible indication of the BJP adopting a Hindutva strategy.

"Many leaders present at the (party) meeting argued there was no need for us to stay with the NDA. This is not the first time that the party has voiced

THE TE

2 AUG 2004

Team BJP's Stand Threatens Legislative Process, Manmohan Cries Foul

NDA to boycott parliamentary panels

UPA condemns Oppn decision

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 26 JULY

What signals an end to even a working relationship between the government and the Opposition, the NDA, on Monday, announced its decision to boycott meetings of the Parliament's consultative and standing committees.

The panels are crucial components of legislative process as the Budget comes up for threadbare discussion in these committees. Announcing the decision, the Opposition blamed the Prime Minister for the development as he went along with the ruling regime's response against a conciliation.

"Dr Singh ducked Parliament on the issue of his fugitive colleague. When we demanded a statement from him, what we got was a condemnation from the leader of the House," BJP spokesman Arun Jaitley said.

That a retreat is not possible as BJP leaders said it is an idea that is "unpopular" with its members. "The Speaker allowed the leader of the House to make a statement against the Opposition without giving the required notice. He did not ask the Prime Minister to tell



TALK SHOW: BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu speaks to reporters after a meeting with RSS leaders in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Parliament against his absconding colleague."

On its part, the BJP finds it a bit tiring that the Prime Minister should persist with the lament about the Opposition not allowing Parliament to function. "We are yet to hear from him on his views about absconders and tainted in his team," BJP leaders said.

Besides, this stand of the Prime Minister and his establishment show that they do not recognise that a communication between the treasury and the Opposition is important if the government was

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A conciliation and rapprochement between the government and the Opposition on Monday appeared remote with the prime ministerial establishment terming the NDA's decision to boycott parliamentary panels as "reckless and irresponsible."

PMO sources said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is of the view that: "MPs, as representatives of the people owe it to the public, especially the tax payers their time and cooperation in Parliament to carefully study and analyse the Budget."

For doing that, parliamentary committees are the right forum. In this context, the decision of the Opposition to boycott committees is unfortunate and irresponsible." Sources also said the Prime Minister was "disappointed" by the decision

of the Opposition.

Prime ministerial aides said the decision of the NDA came "despite the Prime Minister speaking to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, and Jaswant Singh seeking Opposition's cooperation during the Budget session." Incidentally, these contacts with the Opposition were made during the deadlock in Parliament.

The response of both sides indicated that there is no attempt from either side to agree on some kind of a settlement, which both the parties should feel enjoined to respect.

The Congress too went into the confrontational mode by using harsh words against the Opposition. They said: "The NDA decision betrays their lack of faith and respect in parliamentary institutions. Despite continuing efforts of the government to persuade it, the Opposition was having a pre-determined mindset."

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NDA

সংসদীয় কমিটি বয়কট করার সিদ্ধান্ত এন ডি এ-র

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও রাঁচি,
২৬ জুলাই: কয়লামন্ত্রী শিব সোরেনের
ইস্তফার পরেও মনমোহন সরকারের
উপরে চাপ আরও বাড়তে সংসদীয়
কমিটিগুলিও বয়কট করার নজিরবিহীন
সিদ্ধান্ত নিল এন ডি এ। সোরেন পদত্যাগ
করার পরেও সরকারের সঙ্গে এ ভাবে
পুরোপুরি সংঘাতের রাস্তায় যাওয়ার
পিছনে বিজেপি-র যুক্তি, সরকারই প্রথমে
সংঘাতের রাস্তা নিয়েছে। এখন তাঁরা এই
ভাবে প্রতিবাদ জানাচ্ছেন মাত্র। স্পিকার
সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায় ও সংসদীয়মন্ত্রী
গুলাম নব্বি আজাদ দু'জনেই এই সিদ্ধান্ত
পুনর্বিবেচনার জন্য বিজেপি এবং এন ডি
এ নেতৃত্বকে অনুরোধ করেছেন। কিন্তু
বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব বৃষ্টিয়ে দিয়েছেন, শুধু
অনুরোধে কিছু হবে না। সরকারের
তাদের মনোভাব আমূল বদলাতে হবে।

এ দিকে আজও বাড়খণ্ড হাইকোর্ট
শিব সোরেনের আবেদনের ফয়সালা হল
না। শিবুর রিট পিটিশনের শুনানি হলেও
রায়দান স্থগিত রেখেছে আদালত। কবে
রায় দেওয়া হবে, তা-ও জানানো হয়নি।
এই পরিস্থিতিতে পরবর্তী পদক্ষেপ নির্দিষ্ট
করতে দলের রাজ্যসভার সদস্য স্টিফেন
মারাউন্ডের বাড়িতে সন্ধ্যার পরে জরুরি
বৈঠকে বসেন জে এম এমের কেন্দ্রীয়
কমিটি ও রাজ্য নেতারা। রাতে দলের
কেন্দ্রীয় কমিটির সদস্য শৈলেন্দ্র ভট্টাচার্য
বলেন, “আদালত রায় দেয়নি বলে
ভবিষ্যৎ কর্মসূচি চূড়ান্ত করিনি।”

বাজেট পেশের পরে সংসদের
পরামর্শদাতা এবং স্ট্যান্ডিং কমিটিগুলি
প্রতিটি মন্ত্রকের ব্যয়বরাদ্দ নিয়ে
আলোচনা করে। স্পিকার কমিটিগুলি
গঠন করেন। অবকাশের পরে সংসদের
অধিবেশন শুরু হলে এই কমিটিগুলি
রিপোর্ট পেশ করে। ফলে, কমিটিগুলির
যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব রয়েছে। বিজেপি-র তরফে
কোন কমিটিতে কে থাকবেন, তাও ঠিক
করা হয়ে গিয়েছিল। কিন্তু সেই নাম
স্পিকারের কাছে না-পাঠিয়ে কমিটি
বয়কট করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিল এনডিএ।
অরুণ জেটলি জানান, সরকার মনোভাব
না-বদলালে তাঁরা কমিটিগুলি বয়কট
করে যাবেন। বস্তুত দাগি মন্ত্রীদের
বিষয়টি তুলে সরকারকে চাপে রাখার যে
কৌশল বিজেপি নিয়েছিল, এই সিদ্ধান্তে
তা তারা আরও বাড়াল।

সরকারকে চাপে ফেলতে স্পিকারের
কমিটি কেন বয়কট করা হচ্ছে? এই
ভাবে সংসদীয় কমিটি বয়কট করে
বিজেপি কি তাঁদের গণতান্ত্রিক দায়িত্ব
এড়িয়ে যাচ্ছে না? জেটলির জবাব,
“আমাদের সংঘাত স্পিকারের সঙ্গে নয়।
কমিটির গঠন নিয়ে প্রতিবাদ জানাচ্ছি
না। প্রতিবাদ জানাচ্ছি সরকারের আচরণ
নিয়ে। দেশবাসী কি এটা প্রত্যাশা করেন
না যে, পলাতক মন্ত্রী নিয়ে সংসদে
আলোচনা হবে? প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাঁর বক্তব্য
জানাবেন? কিন্তু সেই দাবি করে আমরা
কী পেলাম! লোকসভার নেতা
বেনজিরভাবে বিরোধীদের নিন্দা
করলেন। এটা কি সংঘাতের রাস্তা নয়?
সরকার এই মনোভাব ছাড়ুন।”

তাঁরা এই বয়কটের ব্যাপারে কতটা
অনড় থাকবেন, তা জানাতে চাননি
জেটলি। তিনি শুধু বলেন, “সরকার কী
প্রতিক্রিয়া জানায়, তার জন্য অপেক্ষা
করছি।” বাজেট অধিবেশনের গোড়া
থেকেই একের পর এক বিষয় তুলে
মনমোহন সরকারকে বিপাকে ফেলতে
চেয়েছে বিজেপি। এই আক্রমণাত্মক
মনোভাব নিয়ে সরকার এবং প্রধানমন্ত্রীর
ভাবমূর্তিতে তাঁরা চিড় খরাতে পেরেছেন
বলে বিজেপি নেতাদের দাবি।

আজ বাজপেয়ীর বাড়িতে এনডিএ-র
বৈঠকে ছিলেন আডবাণী, ফার্নান্ডেজ,
সুমমা স্বরাজ, বিজয়কুমার মলহোত্র এবং
দীনেশ ত্রিবেদী। পরে জর্জ এবং মলহোত্র
বলেন, সরকার সংঘাতের রাস্তা নিয়েছে।
প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় বিরোধীদের নিন্দা
করে বিবৃতি দিয়েছেন। এরপর তাঁরা এই
সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে বাধ্য হচ্ছেন। এ দিকে,
কংগ্রেস আজ এই সিদ্ধান্তকে ভর্ৎসনা
করেছে। দলের মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা এই
সিদ্ধান্তকে ‘দুভাগ্যজনক, দায়িত্বজ্ঞানহীন’
বলেছেন। তাঁর কথায়, বিজেপি প্রথম
থেকেই সংঘর্ষের পথে হাটছে।

● শিবু কী করবেন... পৃঃ ৫

ANANDABAZAR PATLINE

27 JUL 2008

NDA seeks President's intervention

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 25. An 18-member delegation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, L.K. Advani, and the Alliance convener, George Fernandes, met the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and requested him to advise the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to sack the Ministers who face charges.

This is the second time the NDA leaders are meeting the President on the same issue.

A five-page memorandum was submitted to the President detailing the charges against the

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader, Shibu Soren, who has resigned from the Cabinet, and five Ministers — Lalu Prasad, M.A.A. Fatmi, Jay Prakash Yadav, Mohammed Taslimuddin and Prem Chand Gupta.

'Insensitive regime'

The NDA appealed to the President as "the custodian of the Constitution" to prevent the "systematic brutalisation by an insensitive regime" which had on its Council of Ministers some who were charged with serious crimes. The Alliance said a shocked nation saw the police sticking the warrant of arrest on the door of the official residence of a Cabinet Minister (Mr. Soren) while the Prime Minister waiting "unconscionably" before asking Mr. Soren to resign.

'Disastrous impact'

"We have come to seek justice for India," the memorandum said. It talked about the "disastrous impact" of the continuation of "chargesheeted" Ministers on the country's mor-

al and ethical fabric. The NDA also complained about the manner in which the first part of the Budget session was conducted making the Opposition conclude that the Manmohan Singh Government did not think it was accountable even to Parliament.

The delegation was with the President for about 40 minutes. Besides Mr. Advani and Mr. Fernandes, the delegation comprised the BJP leaders, Jaswant Singh, Sushma Swaraj, M.M. Joshi and M.A. Naqvi, the Janata Dal (United) leaders, Nitish Kumar and Shard Yadav, the Telugu Desam Party leader, Yerran Naidu, and representatives of the AIADMK and the Biju Janata Dal. The NDA decided to meet the President a couple of days ago before the Prime Minister asked Mr. Soren to resign. At that time, it had decided to focus on Mr. Soren. However, now that Mr. Soren has resigned, the NDA wants the resignation of other "chargesheeted" Ministers.

Photograph on Page 11

NDA to boycott five 'tainted' Ministers

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 7. The Opposition parties ended their virtual "boycott" of Parliament today with the MPs of the Bharatiya Janata Party, its partners in the National Democratic Alliance and supporting parties such as the Telugu Desam Party and the AIADMK returning to both the Houses in full strength to take part in the debate on the Railway Budget.

The "boycott" will hereafter be restricted to five Ministers — Railways Minister Lalu Prasad; Coal and Mines Minister Shibu Soren; Minister of State for Company Affairs Prem Chand Gupta; Minister of State for Heavy Industries Taslimuddin and Minister of State for Water Resources Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav. The BJP deputy leaders in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, V.K. Malhotra and Sushma Swaraj, announced that the decision was taken today. It was confirmed by Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani after he held a meeting with NDA leaders.

Akali Dal and BJP MPs from Punjab will also "boycott" the Minister of State for Non-Resident Affairs, Jagdish Tytler, as he was an accused in a case related to the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 (he has since been acquit-

ted by a court).

The NDA decision was in line with the recommendation of a five-member committee set up for the purpose yesterday. The committee submitted its report to Mr. Advani today following which the decision not to disrupt parliamentary proceedings and to participate in the debate on the Railway Budget was taken. Ms. Swaraj said that in the next few days an NDA delegation would meet the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to impress upon him the need to drop the "tainted" Ministers and uphold high values.

A memorandum similar to the one already submitted to the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, would be given to Dr. Singh. She said the Opposition MPs would not put any questions to the "tainted" Ministers, nor listen to their replies in Parliament.

"We have not given up our protest on this issue but we have changed the form of protest," she said. When it was pointed out that BJP MP, Sushil Modi, led the Opposition in the debate on the Railway Budget and, in fact, pointedly placed demands before the Minister, Ms. Swaraj said the Opposition had decided that it would "have its say."

Divided within, NDA lifts House boycott

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, July 6: The National Democratic Alliance boycotted Laloo Prasad Yadav's railway budget but decided not to disrupt Parliament hereafter and allow it to function normally from tomorrow.

But in all likelihood, the alliance would continue to blackball the "tainted" ministers and not put questions to them or listen to their answers.

A five-member committee would formalise the NDA's "strategy" regarding the ministers and decide whether all four should be collectively shunned or "selectively".

Sources said the committee, which is expected to announce its decision tomorrow, may suggest the "boycott" of one of the ministers — railway minister Laloo Prasad — and not his colleagues from the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

The committee comprises MPs from the BJP and the Janata Dal (United) — which have spearheaded the campaign against the "tainted" ministers — and not from the other allies.

A meeting of the NDA this morning adopted a resolution that said: "Unlike the Congress, the communists and the RJD, who frequently disrupted the proceedings of the House during the six-year-long rule of the Vajpayee government, the NDA believes in the smooth functioning of Parliament."

"By electing us, the people have cast a duty on us to highlight their issues as well as issues concerning the vital interests of the nation in the august forum of Parliament. The NDA will perform this duty conscientiously," the resolution said.

NDA sources, however, main-



Advani and Vajpayee at a function to mark the birth anniversary of Jan Sangh founder Shyama Prasad Mookerjee in New Delhi. (PTI)

tained that the agitation was called off not so much for reasons of propriety as "pressure" from allies, the Shiv Sena and the Telugu Desam Party.

The nascent differences within the coalition prompted NDA chairperson Atal Bihari Vajpayee to emphasise at today's meeting that the allies must speak "in one voice".

Sources said Sena chief Bal Thackeray asked his MPs to oppose the boycott.

Thackeray reportedly said

the "charges" against Laloo Prasad and his colleagues related to a period when they were not Union ministers but Fernandes was a serving defence minister when the Tehelka sting operation happened.

NDA sources also appeared discomfited by the RJD's insinuation of a link between Fernandes and Abdul Karim Telgi, the key accused in the stamp paper scam.

They said the Dal (U) — gung-ho about the "tainted" ministers

issue because it hoped to put its Bihar adversary on the mat — may find the boot on the other foot after a photograph appeared in a section of the press showing Fernandes with Telgi at a farmers' function in Maharashtra in July 1999.

But the NDA resolution made it clear that the issue would be "highlighted, within and outside Parliament" until the ministers were dropped.

Addressing the media, leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani

harped on the issue. He also brought up the governors' sacking. "It (the Congress-led Centre's) is their mindset which worries me, it is distressing," he said.

Though he waxed eloquent on how he, as the home minister, had consulted chief ministers before appointing governors, Advani refused to field questions on the sacking.

"I do not want to say anything as it will be discussed in both Houses of Parliament."

Govt Makes Pro-Tem Plans For UP, Haryana, Gujarat, Goa As PM Awaits Sonia Nod

Four governors given marching orders

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 2 JULY

SETTING the stage for a confrontation with the NDA, the Centre on Friday sacked the governors of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat and Goa. Vishnu Kant Shastri (UP), Kailashpati Mishra (Gujarat), Babu Parmanand (Haryana) and Kidar Nath Sahni (Goa) were removed by President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who "directed that the four governors shall cease to hold office of their respective states."

The failure of the Prime Minister

to secure final approval from Congress president Sonia Gandhi on fresh gubernatorial appointments has forced the government to make temporary arrangements for a few days instead of naming their successors.

But indications suggested that Nawal Kishore Sharma would be given charge of Gujarat while A.R. Kidwai, who had an unsavoury reputation as governor during his earlier stint in Patna, may go to Haryana.

T.V. Rajeshwar is the front-runner for Uttar Pradesh while former Nagaland chief minister

S.C. Jamir's name has been finalised for the governor's position in Goa.

A press communiqué from Rashtrapati Bhawan said Maharashtra governor Mohammed Fazal would take additional charge of Goa while Madhya Pradesh governor Balram Jakhar would temporarily take over Gujarat. Likewise Punjab governor Om Prakash Verma would take charge of Haryana while Uttaranchal governor Sudarshan Agarwal would take up responsibility for Uttar Pradesh.

The removal of the four gover-

nors makes it obvious that the Congress was now trying to set the stage for a political battle with its chief adversaries, the BJP and the Samajwadi Party. Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's discomfiture will only increase with a Congressman taking over the Raj Bhavan in Gandhinagar.

And if the party decides to press ahead with "larger plans" for the state, the governor naturally would have a crucial role to play. The BJP too read the message correctly. BJP spokesman Arun Jaitley said it indicated the "Congress' future plans to misuse the

governor's office."

Similarly, the party would have a formidable office in its hands should political events in Uttar Pradesh take an unexpected turn in the coming months. Although the Congress is supporting the Mulayam Singh government in the state at the moment, the association has been an uncomfortable one.

Haryana, on the other hand, is bound for Assembly elections next year and the Congress, naturally, does not want to lose any time in placing its own man at the Raj Bhavan in Chandigarh.

আডবাবাণীর বোধোদয়, ভারত উদয় বলা তুল হয়েছিল

স্ট্যাক রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৮ মে: ভোটের আগে 'ভারত উদয়' ও 'ফিল গুড' স্লোগান তুলে প্রচার মস্ত বড় তুল ছিল, স্বীকার করে নিলেন বিজেপি'র অন্যতম শীর্ষ নেতা তথা প্রাক্তন উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাবাণী।

ভোটের ফল বেরনের পক্ষ কাল পরে মৌনরত ভাঙলেন বণীযান নেতা আডবাবাণী। এবং এই প্রথম স্বীকার করে নিলেন, 'ভারত উদয়' ও 'ফিল গুড' নিয়ে প্রচার বিজেপি'র বিরাট তুল ছিল। এতে হিতে বিপরীত হয়েছে। তার কথায়, "আমিই 'ফিল গুড' স্লোগান তৈরি করেছি। প্রথম আমিই ব্যবহার করেছি। একটি ইংরাজি দৈনিকের অনুষ্ঠানে আমি প্রথম এই শব্দটা ব্যবহার করি। 'ভারত উদয়' শব্দ দুটো অবশ্য বিজ্ঞাপন সংস্থার দেওয়া।"

এই স্বীকারোক্তির সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই আডবাবাণী অবশ্য জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন,

বিজেপি ভবিষ্যতে হিন্দুত্বকে বিসর্জন দেবে না। তার কথায়, "হিন্দুত্ব আমারা বিসর্জন দিইনি। ভবিষ্যতেও এই মতাদর্শ আমরা বিসর্জন দেব না। বিজেপি'র কাছে হিন্দুত্ব ও ভারতীয়ত্ব সমার্থক শব্দ।"

বিজেপি'র সদর কার্যালয়ে সাংবাদিক সম্মেলনে আডবাবাণী আজও এ-ও বলেন, রাজ্যে রাজ্যে শাসক জোটের বিরুদ্ধে অসন্তোষ, জাতপাতের সমীকরণ, তুল বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব যে আত্মসমীক্ষায় নেমেছেন, আজকের সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে প্রার্থী মনোনয়ন, নানা কারণে এই বিপর্যয়।



শুক্লাবার দিল্লিতে সাংবাদিক সম্মেলনে আডবাবাণী। — এ এফ পি

সেটা স্পষ্ট হয়েছে। দলের সাংগঠনিক রদবদল নিয়েও বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব চিন্তাভাবনা শুরু করেছেন। > জুলাই বিজেপি'র সংসদীয় দলের বৈঠকে আডবাবাণীকেই বিমোঘী দলের নেতার পদে মনোনীত করা হবে। অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী হবেন এন ডি এর নেতা। হেরে যাওয়া সাংসদদের

চলে সাজার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে। আডবাবাণী এ দিন এক প্রশ্নের উত্তরে বলেন, "বাংলাদেশ যুদ্ধে জেতার পর বাজপেয়ী যে ভাষায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইন্দিরা গান্ধীর প্রশংসা করেছিলেন তা ক্ষুদ্র রাজনৈতিক স্বার্থের উর্ধ্বে, দেশের কথা ভেবে। নানা ক্ষেত্রে ভারতের সাফল্য দেখে আমরাও তা তুলে ধরার চেষ্টা করি। কিং বিরোধীরা পাল্টা প্রচার শুরু করে দেন আমাদের ইতিবাচক প্রচার ওই নেতিবাচক প্রচারের মোকাবিলা করতে পারেনি।"

হতেদাম যে তিনি হননি তা তাঁ আজকের কথায় স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছে। দলী সমর্থকদের উদ্দেশে তিনি বলেন: '৮: সালে এর চেয়েও খারাপ অবস্থা হয়েছিল বিজেপি মাত্র দুটো আসন পেয়েছিল সেখান থেকে কিন্তু বিজেপি আজ এ: জায়গায় এসেছে।' আমি নিশ্চিত, হারানে জায়গা বিজেপি ফিরে পাবেই।

NDA march against 'tainted' six

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, June 3: Around 150 MPs of the National Democratic Alliance, including former ministers, marched to Rashtrapati Bhavan today to press for the removal of "tainted" people from the central government.

Among those who walked the 1 km from Parliament annexe were former deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, former finance minister Jaswant Singh and NDA convener George Fernandes, as well as several other Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha MPs.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was not among those who protested against "tainted" Union railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, coal and mines minister Siby Soren, as well as ministers of state Mohammad Taslimuddin, Jay Prakash Yadav, Prem Gupta and M.A. Fatmi.

The Congress questioned the NDA's seriousness. Party spokesperson Anand Sharma said the NDA had fielded 78 persons with criminal records during the recent Lok Sabha elections. Sharma said Advani, Fernandes and Murlidhar Manohar Joshi should not have found a place in the Vajpayee cabinet and Uma Bharti should not have been made chief minister if the NDA was serious about denying "tainted" ministers a place in the government.

Rapid Action Force personnel posted along the route tried to prevent newsmen from accompanying the marchers, lead-

ing to scuffles thrice. Advani's private secretary Deepak Chopra and senior BJP leader V.K. Malhotra had to intervene to keep matters from getting out of hand.

Arun Jaitley, Sushil Kumar Modi, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Vinod Khanna and Maneka Gandhi were among the protesters. The Janata Dal (United)'s Nitish Kumar, the Telugu Desam Party's Jagannathan, the Shiv Sena's Chandrakant Khaire, the Biju Janata Dal's Arjun Sethi and the Shiromani Akali Dal's Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa were also present.

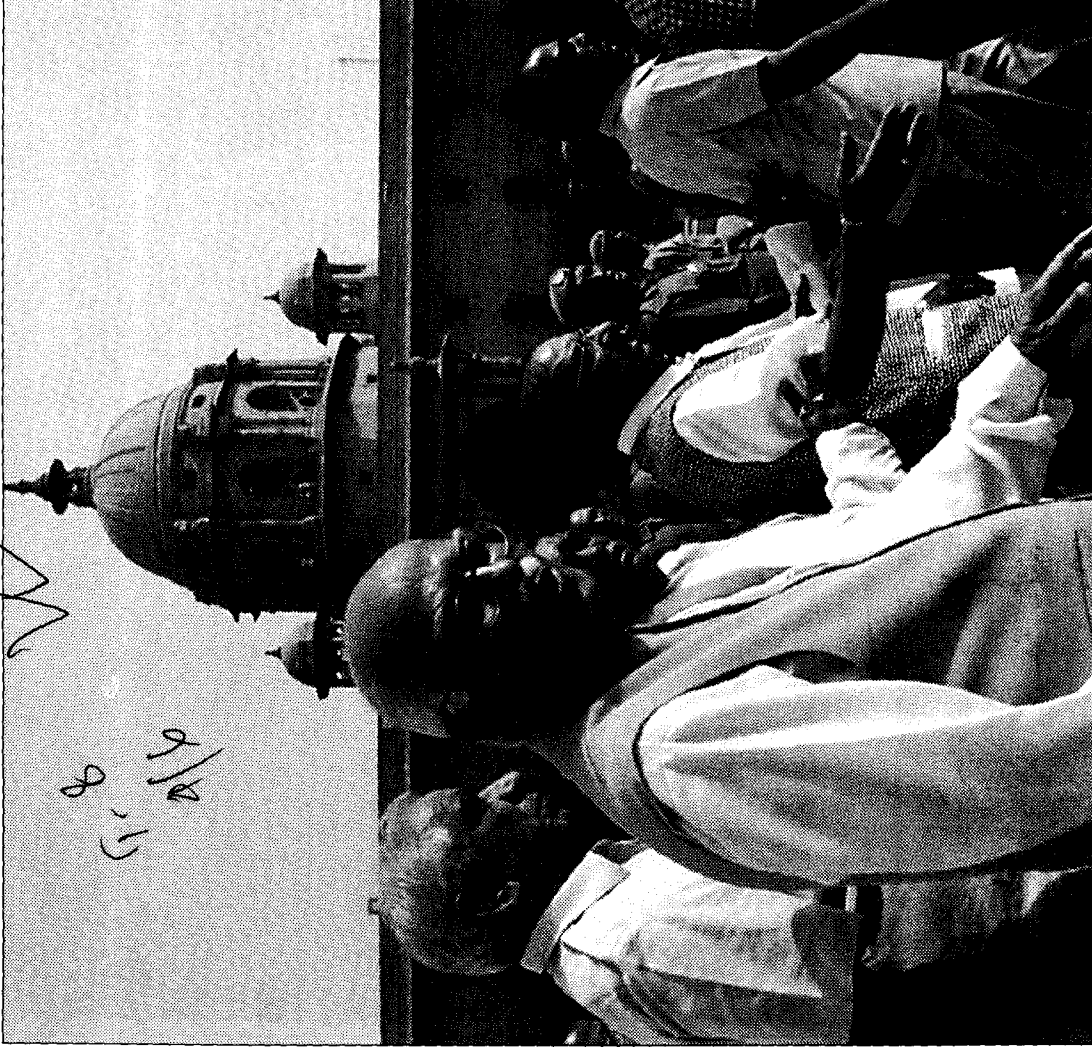
The Trinamul Congress was the only ally not to join the march.

Senior BJP leaders Kalyan Singh and Sushma Swaraj drove in to Rashtrapati Bhavan after the protesters had assembled there.

Some of the MPs held placards reading "*Pradhan mantri sharam karo, apradhi manriyon ko hatao*", "*Bapu ke desh mein apradhi mantri-besh desh mein*" (Criminals are masquerading as ministers in Gandhi's land) and "*Sonia-Manmohan sarkar ki dekh shaar, apradhi mantri mere Bharat mahaan*".

A 13-member team met President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and submitted a memorandum detailing the criminal cases pending against Laloo Prasad, Taslimuddin, Fatmi and the other ministers and sought their removal from the Manmohan government.

Fernandes said Kalam had said he would look into their demand.



L.K. Advani marches towards Rashtrapati Bhavan along with Jaswant Singh (left) and other National Democratic Alliance MPs. (Reuters)

Reinvented Leader

Atalji seeks a new role for himself as head of the NDA

As in government, so in Opposition, the political fortunes of the NDA will depend on the future role played by Atal Behari Vajpayee. During his six years as prime minister, it was Atalji's larger than life presence which kept the otherwise fractious ruling alliance together, giving it a semblance of direction and purpose — whether the issue was economic reforms or peace with Pakistan. It is a responsibility that he will have to continue to shoulder if the NDA has to play the part of a coherent and responsible Opposition. There are already rumblings within the BJP about what direction the party should take in the wake of the Lok Sabha debacle. A vocal section of the parivar has strongly advocated the abandonment of the moderate Vajpayee line. Atalji's deputy, L K Advani, has not helped matters by arguing — in his first public remarks since the results came out — that the BJP remains committed to its core Hindutva philosophy. Even as the BJP tries to come to terms with its crisis of identity, however, a number of NDA constituents — from the TDP to the Trinamul Congress to, ironically, even the Shiv Sena — have attributed the NDA's poor showing to the adverse political fallout of Gujarat. Some of them have also indicated that they might be in the process of reconsidering their long-term future within the alliance.

In one word, Atalji has his task cut out. For a start, he would do well — as some reports have suggested — to remain in the thick of politics and give up all thoughts of an early *sanyas*. Yet, donning the mantle of an elder statesman will not be easy. Many have argued, quite legitimately, that Atalji's earlier tenure as the unchallenged leader of the NDA and head of the government was marred by his inability, at key moments, to act decisively. His failure, for instance, to rein in Narendra Modi at the height of the Gujarat mayhem or intervene when M M Joshi was carrying out his textbook purges. Since the NDA's defeat, Atalji has been found lacking on the same score. While the *swadeshi* hotheads in the BJP were openly venting their spleen against Sonia's possible accession as prime minister, he chose to maintain a conspicuous silence. In the days to come, Atalji will have to confront many such situations. One can only hope, for the sake of his own legacy as much as anything else, that he will reinvent himself as a proactive, forthright leader. As before, he can draw strength from the fact that neither the NDA nor the BJP can do without him, for the foreseeable future.

মানুষ এমন সংস্কার চায় না এই জনাদেশ বিকল্প ভাবে বলে

অঞ্জন চক্রবর্তী

তেরো তারিখে ভারতে ভূমিকম্প হয়ে গেল। বাজপেয়ীর নেতৃত্বাধীন এন ডি এ-র পতনকে একমাত্র ১৯৭৭ সালে ইন্দিরা গান্ধীর পরাজয়ের সঙ্গে তুলনা করা যায়। দুটোই প্রকৃত অর্থে বৈপ্লবিক ঘটনা, যা জনগণ ব্যালটের মাধ্যমে ঘটিয়েছেন। বৈপ্লবিক, কারণ দুটো ভূমিকম্পই এমন সময়ে হল, যখন মানুষের পিঠ দেওয়ালে ঠেকে গিয়েছিল। এবং ভোটযন্ত্র ছাড়া তাঁদের হাতে আর কোনও অস্ত্র ছিল না। আর তাই, এই ভূমিকম্পের অভিজাত প্রমোদ মহাজনের মতো নেতারা, নিজেদেরই ভাষায়, 'শেল-শকড'।

আর যা-ই হোক, এন ডি এ সরকারকে কেউ 'দিশাহীন' বলবে না। বরং উল্টোটাই বলা যায়। এন ডি এ সরকারের পরিষ্কার তিনটে দিশা ছিল: হিন্দুত্ব, আর্থিক সংস্কার এবং 'কুছ-পরোয়া-নেই' মার্কা একটা উদ্ভাত্য। জনগণের রায়ে কোনও জল নেই— তাঁরা এন ডি এ-এর এই মৌলিক নীতি ও আচরণকে সামগ্রিক ভাবে প্রত্যাখ্যান করেছেন। ৬০ শতাংশের বেশি ভোটদাতা এন ডি এ-র বিপক্ষে রায় দিয়েছেন, যে কোনও গণতান্ত্রিক বিচারে এটা একটা বিরাট প্রত্যাখ্যান। এবং এর ফলে দেখছি, আমাদের কিছু গণ্যমান্য ব্যক্তি ও প্রতিষ্ঠান, যারা এই দিশার অঙ্গ, তাঁদের গোসা হয়েছে। আসলে তাঁরা এই ভূমিকম্পের আঘাতে বিহ্বল হয়ে পড়েছেন, জনাদেশ হজম করতে পারছেন না। তাই এমন এক সুস্পষ্ট জনাদেশকে অন্য রং দেওয়ার চেষ্টা শুরু হয়ে গেছে। এটা ক্ষমতার অলিন্দে নিজেদের গুরুত্ব বাঁচানোর চেষ্টা, পাশাপাশি এন ডি এ-র যে নীতিগুলিকে জনগণ প্রত্যাখ্যান করেছে সেগুলিকেও বাঁচানোর একটা উদ্যোগ।

এই পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে একটা কথা চালানোর চেষ্টা হচ্ছে। অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার মানে হল উন্নয়ন। তাই নতুন সরকারের উচিত অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার চালিয়ে যাওয়া। না হলে সর্বনাশ হবে। অনেকটা চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর মতো। তাঁর বক্তব্য ছিল, তিনি গদিচ্যুত হলে নাকি অল্পপ্রদেশ রসাতলে চলে যাবে। আসলে সংস্কারকে উন্নয়নের সঙ্গে গুলিয়ে দেওয়া হল তাকে বাঁচানোর একটি কৌশল। কিন্তু উন্নয়ন কথাটার মধ্যেই বা কী এমন মধু আছে যে তাকে না হলে চলবে না?

চার দিকে শুনবেন উন্নয়ন আর উন্নয়ন। তার চরিত্র নিতান্ত গোলমেলো। এই যেমন, গাছ কাটলেও উন্নয়ন আবার না কাটলেও উন্নয়ন। উন্নয়ন জিনিসটাই এ রকম বিশ্রান্তিকর। এবং এখানেই উন্নয়নের জয়গান গাওয়ার সুবিধে। এন ডি এ-র সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়নের কথাটাই ভাবুন। এই জোট যখন ক্ষমতায় এল তখন আমাদের বলা হল যে, ভারতে এ বার 'দ্বিতীয় প্রজন্মের সংস্কার' চাই। না হলে উন্নয়নে বাধা পড়বে, ভারত উদয় হবে না। বিশ্বের অন্দরমহলে চুকতে হলে অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন চাই-ই চাই। এবং এন ডি এ সাড়ে চার বছর ধরে সর্গীরবে সেই রথ চালিয়ে দিল।

এই প্রকার সংস্কারভিত্তিক উন্নয়নের চরিত্র কেমন? সমাজের একটা অংশ নিশ্চয়ই এ উন্নয়নের সফল কুড়িয়েছেন। কিন্তু প্রদীপের নীচে যে বিপুল অন্ধকার! চাষীদের বিভিন্ন ধরনের ভর্তুকি কেড়ে নিয়ে তাঁদের জীবন দুর্বিষহ করে তোলাই নাকি উন্নয়ন। সরকারি খাদ্য বণ্টন ব্যবস্থা ধ্বংস করে দেওয়া নাকি উন্নয়নের অপরিহার্য অঙ্গ। রাজ্যের জেলায় জেলায় মানুষ খাবার না পেয়ে, কাজ না পেয়ে আত্মহত্যা করছে, অথচ একই সময় আর এক জন নাকি শুধু বিল গেস-এর সুবিধার জন্য কোটি কোটি টাকা খরচ করে রাস্তা বানিয়ে অল্পপ্রদেশে উন্নয়নের জোয়ার আনছেন, আর সে নিয়ে কী হাততালি! সুদের হার কমাতে কমাতে আমাদের বাপ-ঠাকুরদাদের অসহায় অবস্থায় ঠেলে দেওয়াটাও নাকি উন্নয়নের শর্ত। সরকারের কথা মতো সারা জীবনের সঞ্চয় ব্যাঙ্কে না রেখে শেষের বা মিউচুয়াল ফান্ডে রাখতে হবে। আবার, শেয়ার বাজারে পস নেমে আপনার সেই সঞ্চয় যদি বিলীন হয়ে যায়, সেটাও, আহা, উন্নয়নের মুখ চেয়ে মেনে নিতে হবে। কলকারখানা বন্ধ করে শ্রমিকদের সপরিবারে মৃত্যুর মুখে ঠেলে না দিলে নাকি উন্নয়ন হয় না। শ্রমিকের অধিকার কেড়ে না নিলে ও তাঁদের যখন ইচ্ছে ছাঁটাই করে দেওয়ার অধিকার পরিচালকদের না দিলে নাকি উন্নয়ন রসাতলে যাবে। যে কোনও মুহূর্তে চাকরি চলে যেতে পারে— এই ভয়টাই নাকি কাজের পরিবেশ উন্নত করবে, তার ফলে উন্নয়ন জোরদার হবে। আর বেকার ভাইবোনরা, আপনাদের জন্যও উন্নয়নের নিদান আছে— নিজেরা নিজেদেরটা বুঝে নাও। ব্যাপারটা তো আপনাদের চেনা: স্বনির্ভরতা, মানে সব চলতা হয়, মানে সমাজের আবর্জনা। (আঘাত পাবেন না, বরং রাগটা পুষে রাখুন, কাজে দেবে।) এবং মনে রাখতে হবে, এই সংস্কারের একটা প্রধান শর্ত হচ্ছে, রাষ্ট্র যেন নিজে থেকে দ্রুত গুটিয়ে নেয়। তার ফলে রাষ্ট্রীয় উদ্যোগে ও খরচে সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা বিধানের যেটুকু আয়োজন ছিল, তা-ও দ্রুত

গুটিয়ে নেওয়া হচ্ছে। এ ভাবেই সংস্কার হনুমানের পিঠে চড়ে উন্নয়ন করে ভারত উদয়ের পথ পরিষ্কার করেছে। আর তাই আমাদের কানের কাছে ক্রমাগত গুনগুনানি চলেছে যে, এন ডি এ ফিরে না এলে নাকি ভারতের ভবিষ্যৎ অন্ধকার।

এই আওয়াজটা এমন একটা মাত্রায় পৌঁছল যে এই সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়নের ঠেলায় মানুষের দৈনন্দিন জীবনের অভিজ্ঞতার প্রকাশ ঘটানোর কোনও জায়গাই আর রইল না। এ রকম একটা দমবন্ধকরা পরিবেশেই মানুষ তাঁদের দীর্ঘনিশ্বাস ফেললেন ব্যালট বাজ্ঞে। মানুষের নিজস্ব দীর্ঘনিশ্বাস পরিণত হল একটি গণ-রায়ে: এন ডি এ-র অন্য দুটি দিশার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তারা এই ধরনের অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কারেরও বিদায় চায়। এই সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন হল 'খারাপ উন্নয়ন'। কারণ, এর ফলে বেশির ভাগ মানুষের মঙ্গল হওয়া তো দূরস্থান, কল্পনাতেই ক্ষতি হয়েছে। তাই এর বিদায় জরুরি।

একটা সরকার কিছু না করতে পারে। অনেক সরকার সে ভাবেই, বিশেষ কিছু না করে, চলে। কিন্তু এন ডি এ-র সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়নের উদ্যোগ অসংখ্য মানুষের কল্পনাতে ক্ষতি করেছে। এই ক্ষতি তাঁরা তাঁদের জীবনসংগ্রামের মধ্য দিয়ে উপলব্ধি করেছেন। এত মানুষের এত অভিশাপ নিয়ে কে-ই বা টিকতে পারে? সংস্কারের সমর্থকরা কেন এই সহজ সত্যটি বুঝতে চাননি এবং এই জনাদেশ দেখার পরেও, চাইছেন না? তাঁরাই তো মানুষকে জ্ঞান দিয়ে বেড়ান যে সরকারের দায়বদ্ধতা থাকা উচিত, ভুল থেকে শিক্ষা নেওয়া উচিত, ইত্যাদি। তা হলে জনগণের রায়েই এই সহজ পাঠটা মানছেন না কেন? তাঁদের ভয়টা কোথায়? কীসের ভয়?

কিছু দিন আগে আমি লিখেছিলাম যে আজ একটি নয়া বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থা তৈরি করার চেষ্টা চলছে, যেখানে বিশ্বপুঞ্জির প্রশাসিত দখল থাকবে। (এরই নাম বিশ্বায়িত ধনতন্ত্র, ১৭/৩) এই প্রকারের সংস্কার হল ভারতের এই বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার দরবারে ঢোকানো একটি আবশ্যিক অঙ্গ। তৃতীয় বিশ্বে যখন এই অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার চালু হল, তখন সেটিকে একটি সুন্দর মোড়কে পুরে একটি গালভরা নামে পেশ করা হল: ডেভেলপমেন্ট বা উন্নয়ন। ডেভেলপমেন্ট-এর একটা ধারণা গত অর্ধ শতাব্দী ধরেই চালু ছিল। কিন্তু এখন একটা নতুন ডেভেলপমেন্ট-এর মডেল খাড়া করা হচ্ছে, যাকে বলতে পারি অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার-ভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন। এই ধারণা বা মডেলটি নয়া

বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার একটি প্রকরণ। এর সাহায্যে তৃতীয় বিশ্বে নয়া বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার কাঠামোয় আনা হবে এবং এই ব্যবস্থার মাধ্যমে বিশ্ব পুঞ্জি তার সাম্রাজ্য আরও বিস্তৃত করতে সক্ষম হবে। এই ভাবে ভারত বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার একটি অঙ্গে পরিণত হবে। তাই বিকল্পের কথা ভাবতে গেলে এর মধ্যে থেকেই ভাবতে হবে।

এ রকম একটা বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থা এমনি এমনি চলে না। তার অনেকগুলি চাকা আছে। যেমন রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জ, জি-৮, ডব্লিউ টি ও, আই এম এফ, বিশ্বব্যাঙ্কের মতো আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিষ্ঠান; ব্যবসায়িক এবং রাজনৈতিক প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলির বড় অংশ; সংবাদমাধ্যমের একটি বড় অংশ, যাদের কাজ জনগণের কানে উন্নয়নের মন্ত্র জপ করে যাওয়া, বিশেষজ্ঞদের একটি অংশ যারা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বা নানান সংস্থায় বসে ডব্লিউ টি ও, বিশ্বব্যাঙ্ক বা আই এম এফের নীতির প্রচারক হয়ে সংস্কারভিত্তিক উন্নয়নের নব নব মডেল তৈরি করেন ও নতুন নতুন ছাত্রদলকে এই সব মডেলে দীক্ষা দেন; এন জি ও-

দের একটি অংশ যারা মাঠেঘাটে গিয়ে এই উন্নয়নের ধারণা প্রয়োগ করে। ভারতীয় নাগরিকদের একটি ক্ষুদ্র অংশ আজ নয়া বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার চাকাগুলির সঙ্গে ওতপ্রোত ভাবে জড়িয়ে গেছে। যদিও ভারত বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার একটি অঙ্গে পরিণত হয়েছে, কিন্তু এ দেশের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ মানুষ সেই ব্যবস্থার সফল কুড়োতে পারেনি, তা কুড়িয়েছে এই ক্ষুদ্র এবং ক্ষমতাবান অংশ। এদের অর্থনৈতিক প্রতিপত্তি, ক্ষমতা আর সামাজিক অবস্থান বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থা থেকে আসছে। তাই সংস্কারভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন এদের কাছে এত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ এদের প্রতিপত্তি এমনি যে সামাজিক স্পেসটাকে এঁরা দখল করে রেখেছেন, ফলে সেখানে আপনি সংস্কারভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন ছাড়া আ কিছুই শুনতে পাবেন না। যেন এর কোনও বিকল্প হয় না। বিকল্পের কথা যদি তোলেন, তবে এঁদের কাছে পাবেন শুধু উদ্ভত তাম্বিল।

সংস্কারভিত্তিক উন্নয়ন আসলে এক রাজনৈতিক প্রকল্পও বাটে এর সঙ্গে এন ডি এ সরকার নিজেকে পুরোপুরি জড়িয়ে নিয়েছিল। আর তাই বিশ্ব ব্যবস্থার অভ্যন্তরে থাকা ওই ক্ষুদ্রসংখ্যক কিন্তু বিপ্লবাত্মক মানুষই এন ডি এ-র নীতির সব থেকে বড় প্রচারক হা উঠেছিলেন। এন ডি এ-র বিরুদ্ধে সাধারণ মানুষের সৃষ্টি কর ভূমিকম্পে তাই তাঁরা 'শেল-শকড'। অপেক্ষায় থাকুন, আপনাদের জীবনের অভিজ্ঞতাকে ভুল প্রমাণিত করতে কিংবা আপনার রায়ে মানে বদলে দিতে এই প্রচারকরা মাঠে নামলেন বলে। এই রাজনৈতিক লড়াইয়ের নতুন পর্বের তো সবে শুরু।

লেখক কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে অর্থনীতির শিক্ষক

NDA works on Mulayam in vain

T-6
18/5

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, May 14: Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti today called on Mulayam Singh Yadav in an attempt to persuade him not to back a Congress-led government.

National Democratic Alliance convener George Fernandes also tried to win over the Samajwadi Party chief, fuelling speculation that the coalition might try to prop up a Mulayam Singh-led government to forestall the efforts of the Congress block and the Left, which together have 282 MPs.

However, the numbers for an alternative government simply do not add up. Even with the Samajwadi Party's 36 MPs, the Bahujan Samaj Party's 19 and some others, the NDA — whose tally is 187 — will still be stuck around 250. The 63-strong Left block would never back a BJP-propped front.

It appears that neither Bharti nor Fernandes could prevail upon Mulayam Singh. Soon after Bharti met him, the Samajwadi chief drove to CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet's residence and confabulated with him for some time.

Surjeet later told reporters that Mulayam Singh had made no demands and only wanted to "go along with the CPM".

Sources, however, said the Congress is not very enthusiastic about accommodating him in the government. A final decision will be taken in a day or two and much depends on what kind of bargaining Mulayam Singh resorts to.

The Samajwadi Party is a bit peeved that so far no signals have come from the Congress. General secretary Amar Singh said party leaders would not hesitate if Sonia called them for talks.

"Politics is a game of communication. Communication should not stop at any time with anybody," he said.

The Samajwadi Party leader also asserted that Mulayam Singh was not in the race for Prime Minister or any other

cabinet berth. "Mulayam is not interested in any post in Delhi. He is happy in Uttar Pradesh," he said.

Amar Singh said his party would go along with the Left's decision even if the Congress president was made Prime Minister. Sonia's foreign origin was no longer an issue for the party, he added.

Declaring that the Samajwadi Party was committed to secularism and wanted a "secular alternative" to the NDA at the Centre, he said his party was "ready for any sacrifice".

The Samajwadi Party general secretary said Mulayam Singh and he were in "constant touch" with Surjeet and the party will take a decision only in consultation with the Left parties.

Asked whether a Congress-led "secular" formation at the Centre would be acceptable to the party, the Samajwadi Party leader said: "We cannot ignore the Congress here as that party cannot ignore the SP in Uttar Pradesh."

After acting pricey till yesterday, the Samajwadi Party, which has limited options in the wake of an impressive Congress-Left tally in the Lok Sabha elections, has climbed down. The party's parliamentary board met today and authorised Mulayam Singh to take a decision on joining the government.

Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Laloo Prasad Yadav, who had in the run-up to the elections accused Mulayam Singh of having a covert understanding with the BJP, went soft on the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, saying he had no objection if the Samajwadi Party associated with the new government.

To questions whether the RJD would join the government or extend outside support, he said it was not a matter of priority for him. "Our objective was to defeat communal forces and we have succeeded," he said.

"We will draft a common minimum programme soon to speed up government formation," the RJD chief said.

15 MAY 2001

Four reasons and a funeral ^{NDA}

Saubhik Chakrabarti
in New Delhi

May 13. — This was an election the BJP had calculated it would win. Now that it has lost, the party should reflect on four political miscalculations.

■ First mistake: calling early elections. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's hand was forced by Mr LK Advani and other senior BJP leaders as well as by Mr Chandrababu Naidu to call elections six months ahead of schedule. Mr Naidu wanted to ride on Mr Vajpayee's "appeal" to beat anti-incumbency in Andhra Pradesh. BJP leaders wanted to extrapolate Assembly election victories in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and beat anti-incum-



INTO THE DUSTBIN OF HISTORY? Clean up time at the BJP Hq in Delhi on Thursday. — SNS

bency in the rest of the country. Neither happened. ■ Second mistake: arrogance with allies. DMK,

NDA



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■ Third mistake: turning the election into a referendum on leadership. India didn't buy Brand Atal because Indians mostly voted on local/regional issues even in a national election. The BJP's effort to turn the election quasi-presidential failed and the Vajpayee-centric campaign took the party's eye off crucial ground level issues, as BJP leaders are admitting now. ■ Fourth mistake: related to the third, campaigning

which has wiped out NDA in Tamil Nadu, was not appeased, partly because AIADMK made quasi-Hindutva noises. INLD of Haryana and AGP of Assam were also dismissed. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan could perhaps have been accommodated as well had the BJP been less confident about Bihar. Add all these allies' performances in states that have been guided mostly by local factors and NDA's tally goes up by 40-50. That would have been a

on a pan-Indian issue like economic development and economic potential to a fractured electorate. Indian voters seem to respond to emotive issues across the board, but not so much to material policy issues. This may not be necessarily good. But that's how it seems it is.

Of course, many neutral observers had made some or all of the miscalculations as well. But they weren't fighting for power — the BJP was.

8/5
2 P.P. NDA SF 12

I SEEK A DECISIVE MANDATE

Namaskar,

It is time for you to cast your vote and elect a government. Who you vote for is for you alone to decide. But I ask you to pause for a moment before you make a decision. Because on your decision rests the fate of your nation.

Five years ago you gave me the honour of serving you. The country has made remarkable progress in these years. Today, for the first time after independence, we are building world-class highways across the length and breadth of our country. The more than 1.5 lakh villages of our country that never had a proper road are now being provided with one. The revolution in Telecom and Information Technology is benefiting even common people. Last year alone our young IT professionals exported computer software worth Rs.45,000 crores!

Until recently our country used to import food grains from abroad. Today we have such an abundance of food grains that we export our food to many countries. India was once compelled to pawn its gold and its pride because of a shortage of foreign exchange. Today our foreign exchange reserves of 120 billion dollars are one of the largest in the world.

The winds of change are blowing across our borders as well. The goodwill created by the cricket series and our other initiatives will, we hope, lead to a permanent peace with Pakistan.

These achievements were possible because there was a stable government in New Delhi. Regrettably, an attempt is being made today to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. A return to instability can prove very costly for our country.

While we have done well in these last few years, there remains a lot to be done.

We will build a New India. An India free of poverty and unemployment. An India free of social inequalities and regional disparities. An India where every caste and religion is respected. Where every woman is honoured and where every Indian feels secure.

We will build new roads. We will build new ports. We will build new airports. We will build new schools. We will build new hospitals.

We will build an India that we can all be proud of. A resurgent India full of self-confidence and youthful vigor, marching ahead to become a Developed Nation and a Great Global Power.

A New India cannot be built with a fractured mandate, a hung Parliament. I want you to give us a strong and decisive mandate.

The tasks before us are indeed enormous. But we will accomplish them. Together, we will build the India of our dreams.

This is my promise.

A. B. Vajpayee



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Let Cong rest, NDA reign: PM

Statesman News Service

BHUBANESWAR, April 9.— Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee launched a blistering attack on the Congress accusing it of having encouraged communalism in the country right from pre-Independence days. "They charge us of being communal but it is they who had promoted it," he said while addressing a public meeting here today.

"But we want to forget the past — why Partition happened, why Bangladesh was created," he remarked before warning the Congress against pursuing its charges of communalism against the BJP.

The Prime Minister described the Congress as a party which needs to retire. "It can no longer serve the nation, it is not trusted by the people," he said claiming that the Congress' search for allies vindicates the fact that very few have faith in the party. He went on to list Congress' dubious role in toppling Prime Ministers. "They removed Charan Singh, Chandrasekhar, Deve Gowda, Gujral and even defeated me by one vote that of Giridhar Gamang," he said. He also made a passing remark on the tussle between Gamang and his wife for the Congress ticket.

Mr Vajpayee said Congress should take rest and allow the youth of the country to carry forward the progress that has been achieved. "But, then the Congress cannot remain without power," he quipped

Naxalite menace

KEONJHAR, April 9.—Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today assured that if the NDA government comes to power again after the polls it will implement a comprehensive action plan to put an end to the Naxalite menace.

Addressing a public meeting in Keonjhar today, Mr Vajpayee expressed sorrow and anguish over yesterday's MCC attack on Jharkhand police near the Orissa-Jharkhand border. He said if his government comes back to power, it will ensure a permanent solution to the problem. He also promised that tribals living in the forest areas till 1993 would be given patta and would be rehabilitated permanently. Daitari-Bansapani railway project would be completed very soon, assured the Prime Minister. — SNS

in his inimitable style.

Drawing loud cheers from an impressive turnout here Mr Vajpayee referred to the Indo-Pak relationship. "There is no need for bombs, cricket has served the purpose of brotherhood," he said.

He pointed out self-reliance in food production and development in science and technology as major achievements of his government. "Today foodgrain stocks are high and we export grains. We don't take loans from foreign countries but give loans to other nations. Our progress in the field of science and technology has been recognised throughout the world and soon we will send our own spaceship to the moon," he said.

Ayodhya, 'foreign origin' issue on NDA agenda

By Neena Vyas and Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. In a major shift from the past, and in deference to the wishes of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) agenda for governance today declared its commitment to finding a solution to the Ayodhya dispute through "intensified dialogue" for a "negotiated settlement" or a court verdict that "should be accepted by all." The manifesto also pledged to introduce legislation to ensure "that important offices of the Indian state could be occupied only by those who are India's natural citizens by their Indian origin."

While releasing the NDA's 36-page 'Agenda for Development, Good Governance and Peace,' the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, justified the inclusion of the Ram temple issue saying Ayodhya was "a public and national issue which could not be ignored and should not be allowed to go on or become an election issue."

When the NDA convener, George Fernandes, was asked why the allies, who had kept the Ayodhya issue out of the 1999 NDA agenda, had agreed to include it this time, he said that he did not think anyone would object to the sentences in the agenda.

The physical shrinking of the NDA was evident — five allied representatives were present (Janata Dal-United, the Akali Dal, the Biju Janata Dal, the Tri-

namool Congress and the Indian Federal Democratic Party), while the Shiv Sena, which undoubtedly is with the NDA, was absent. In contrast, the NDA in 1999 had over 20 partners.

Responding to a question on the post-poll scenario, the Prime Minister did not rule out post-poll partners while saying that a decision would be taken at that time.

"If new parties want to join the NDA, we will discuss with them and then decide," he said.

To a question on legislation on the "foreign origin" issue, the Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, said all the NDA allies were "committed" to every sentence in the agenda document. But, later, a senior BJP leader clarified that much would depend on the numbers in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

'Not yet time to go'

Mr. Vajpayee made it clear that "the time had not come" for him to "vacate the post" when he was asked about the possibility of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, taking over the leadership.

Asked whether a younger leadership should take over — as he himself had suggested when the former Prime Minister, Charan Singh, was ageing — Mr. Vajpayee did not give a direct response, saying that "the issue can be discussed later."

Law to protect cows: Page 11

THE HINDU

9 APR 2004

Regulate surrogate ads, Government tells EC

By J. Venkatesan

9-1-8
NDA

HD-80

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29. Expressing its inability to take any action on 'surrogate advertisements' being aired on certain television channels, the Central Government today put the onus on the Election Commission to regulate such advertisements under the model code of conduct.

The Commission had on March 27 asked the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to take appropriate action under Rule 7 of the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 against the telecast of 'surrogate' advertisements with oblique reference to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and inform it of the action taken by 5 p.m. today. In his reply, the Joint Secretary to the I&B Ministry, U.S. Bhatia, informed the Commission that the Advertising Committee, which met today, was of the opinion that the advertisements in question were being aired in the context of the coming elections and, therefore, would not fall within the purview of Rule 7. Instead, they would come within the ambit of Rule 7(3) of the Cable TV Network Rules.

He said that since Rule 7(3) had been stayed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court, the Commission could consider regulating these advertisements under the model code of conduct. The Ministry would provide the necessary assistance to the Commission for regulating/monitoring such advertisements.

The Commission's communication to the Ministry referred to a complaint received from the

Congress regarding an advertisement issued by Kamakshi Education Society and being telecast on Aaj Tak and Zee News channels. The Ministry's reply (without any comment) stated: "The Advertising Committee noted the contents of the reference and saw the video recording of the advertisement concerned."

The Committee's attention had also been drawn to an advertisement issued by the Sajhi Virasat Trust, and telecast on Aaj Tak, casting aspersions on the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The reply says: "The committee also saw a video recording of this advertisement which clearly vitiates the level of political debate in the country."

The committee noted that Rule 7 related to advertisements for goods and services being telecast on the electronic media, as political advertisements were specifically prohibited under Rule 7(3). Due to a ban on political advertisements, no norms had been prescribed for regulating them.

On the other hand, the contents of the advertisements viewed by the committee clearly had relevance to the ongoing electoral process. The only provision of relevance to these advertisements was contained in Rule 7(3), the operation of which had been stayed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

Under these circumstances, the committee concluded that the present provisions of Rule 7 were not attracted and hence asked the Commission to consider regulating such advertisements under the model code.

'Don't mix polls, temple'

■ NDA agenda swapped for BJP's in coalition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
YAVATMAL (MAHARASHTRA), MARCH 19

A DAY after VHP's Praveen Togadia urged people to vote for the party promising the temple, DPM L.K. Advani today called for "delinking" Ayodhya and the polls and put the NDA agenda ahead of the BJP's.

He said the NDA was firm that a solution to the Ayodhya dispute would come through a court verdict or negotiated settlement between the two communities. "The way things have moved in the last six to eight months, I am confident that a solution can be found through negotiations to the satisfaction of all," Advani said on the tenth day of his Bharat Uday Yatra.

The BJP has not "not given up" any of its core issues such as uniform civil code, Ram temple and Article 370 but was committed to the NDA



agenda while in power, he said. "In a coalition government, different parties will have their own policies and programmes but the government runs

AC breakdown on Day 10: DPM feels the heat, takes a car

■ YAVATMAL: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani was forced to travel by car on the 10th day of his Bharat Uday Yatra on Friday after the air conditioning and public address system of his rath broke down. The vehicle which had developed technical problems in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday evening could not be repaired here and has been taken to Nagpur. The AC failed to function at Gudihundnoor village and Advani was shifted to another vehicle to travel to Yavatmal. On the way, he addressed an unsheduled meeting at Panderkawada village in Maharashtra where the public address system also failed. — PTI

In Wardha, on Friday. PTI

on the basis of common minimum agenda," he said.

Entering Vidarbha on the tenth day of his tour, Advani touched on the issue of separate statehood. "We (the Centre) will be happy if the (Maharashtra) Assembly passes such a resolution because the BJP had favoured statehood for Vidarbha," he said.

The DPM also painted six years of the NDA Government as an all-round success on all fronts. "I feel proud and happy on this occasion of the NDA completing six years in office. I can proudly declare that we have brought about a sea change in the country's economic development and perception of the world about India," he said at his first public meeting in the state.

The Congress president's foreign origin, however, was a poll issue, he said and that parties were right in raising it during the campaign. "The foreign origin (of Sonia Gandhi) is a political issue. It can be raised during the campaign. In several countries, including the US, there are provisions touching upon this matter," he said. The DPM, however, urged parties to maintain dignity during campaign and refrain from personal attacks.

Day after, Captain sends stinker to Rajnath

S.P.SINGH
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 19

STUNG by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's digs at CM Captain Amarinder Singh in Patiala yesterday, the state government is planning a counter-offensive to nullify Vajpayee's rhetoric.

As part of this strategy, Amarinder today shot off the first letter to Union Agriculture Minister Rajnath Singh detailing how the offer made by the Centre for mitigating the problems arising out of non-payment of sugarcane arrears could not be availed of by the state, as it would bring down sugarcane prices.



Punjab CM plans to nullify PM's rhetoric. Reuters

The Punjab government and the Congress is also planning to take on the Centre on the issue of Bathinda Petroleum Refinery venture and the waiver of Punjab's loan incurred during the insurgency.

While Vajpayee referred to Centre's offer of package for settling sugarcane dues, and Punjab Government's alleged failure in availing of this package,

Amarinder today focussed upon how this "special package for Cooperative Sugar Mills" made in November 2003 by Rajnath Singh would actually reduce sugarcane price, something no government can afford politically.

Congress lists NDA Government 'failures'

● A saga of sins, scams and shame: 'chargesheet'

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Congress today released what it called a "chargesheet" against the Vajpayee Government. Titled 'A saga of sins, scams and shame,' the "chargesheet," released in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore, seeks to nail the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on various counts — defence and other scams, the Government's "failures," and Mr. Vajpayee's "flip-flops." On more than one occasion, the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's son-in-law, Ranjan Bhattacharya, finds mention in it.

In Delhi, the 55-page "chargesheet" — brought out in Hindi and English in pocket-book size — was released by the senior Congressman, Pranab Mukherjee, and the Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit.

A two-part booklet, the first details the various scams associated with the NDA Government "which, together, amount to a loss of Rs. 49,057 crores to the exchequer." The second deals with the Government's

"failures" and Mr. Vajpayee's "shifting positions" on various issues. An entire section on scams has been devoted to "defence scams" — beginning with Tehelka, the coffin issue, misuse of the Kargil cess and irregularities in purchases made for the Kargil War. The other scams include the UTI scandal, the petrol pump/gas agency allotments, the Judev episode and the allotment of plots to organisations close to the Sangh Parivar.

Stating that the Government was accountable for all its years in governance and not just for one quarter of a year — a reference to the NDA's claims of 8.4 per cent economic growth in the second quarter of this fiscal — Mr. Mukherjee attributed the "mounting unemployment" to the BJP's faulty policies. The sale of BALCO and the Centaur Hotel (Mumbai) were cited as "blatant examples" of the "loot of the public sector."

The plight of farmers which led to mass suicides, discrimination in the allocation of food-grains to the different drought-affected States and the failure on the Women's Reser-

vation Bill were the other highlights.

Mr. Mukherjee charged the Centre with "dereliction of duty" in providing both internal and external security. "This so-called 'nationalist' Government released terrorists who then masterminded the attacks on Parliament and the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, among others," he said. The Government "distorted social harmony" and was also responsible for the "denigration of key institutions of Indian democracy."

The "chargesheet" concluded with a three-page account of Mr. Vajpayee's "flip-flops" on issues such as Ayodhya, the Fernandes episode, Gujarat and its Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, Muslims, communal tensions in the Dangs and employment.

Conceding that much of what had been included in the "chargesheet" was common knowledge, Mr. Mukherjee said there was a need to remind the electorate at this juncture of the NDA Government's "track-record and their omissions and commissions."

'Congress not against reforms': Page 11

EC wants govt hoardings pulled down

Statesman News Service

NDA

NEW DELHI, March 9. — With the Election Commission today ordering the large hoardings of the Centre and state governments proclaiming their achievements be taken down, the I&B ministry said today that it will “comply” with directives in this regard although it hasn’t received any yet. “All hoardings and advertisements still on display at the cost of the public exchequer” must be removed “as soon as possible” by the Centre and the states and “compliance reports” sent, the Commission said today.

Reacting, the I&B ministry said it hasn’t got the directive in writing. “We will comply, of course, but it won’t be a blanket order. Let’s see what it is,” an official said.

While putting up new hoardings and advertisements at government expenditure was violative of the model code of conduct, even continued display of such material impinged upon the code, deputy election commissioner, Mr AN Jha said. Asked whether any deadline had been set, he said they had been asked to comply with it as soon as possible. The Commission was not aware of the exact number of such hoardings, but their number would be “sizeable” across the country. The Vajpayee government and all state governments, including those comprising non-NDA parties, have launched the campaigns

EC notice to TDP: Caught in a political storm over a booklet highlighting achievements of its government in alleged violation of poll code, the ruling TDP in Andhra Pradesh today said the booklet was published much before announcement of the poll schedule. The EC has issued a notice to the TDP and the information and P department based on a complaint filed by the Congress.

Buddha on cutouts: Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the chief minister today said that the cutouts used during the election time is not the culture of Bengal. Asked what measures he has taken to remove these cutouts, the chief minister said, “It is not my responsibility to remove these cutouts. The Election Commission will look after it.”

Gujarat a blot on NDA rule: Advani

Press Trust of India
Ghaziabad, March 8

DESCRIBING THE Gujarat incidents of 2002 as a "blot" and an "aberration", Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said on Monday that except for those "unfortunate" events, the tenure of the NDA government had been remarkable in terms of ensuring security and development.

Referring to the events in Gujarat during March 2002, Advani said, "Had Godhra not happened, the subsequent riots would not have taken place. The developments were unfortunate and all necessary



L.K. Advani inspects a CISF guard of honour.

steps were taken to correct the situation." He added that except for this "blot", the six-year rule of the Vajpayee government had been remarkable. Addressing officers and jawans of the CISF here on the occasion of the force's

35th raising day, Advani said that before the BJP-led government came to power, the country had been witnessing riots. "But during our government's rule, the country has been by and large saved from riots. Gujarat was an aberration."

But if Advani was trying to make amends, with an eye firmly on elections, he barely succeeded. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad said "blaming" the Hindus for everything had become a "fashion".

"There is a fashion in India to blame Hindus, who are the victims, for everything and not mention even the names

of jihadis who are aggressors," VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia said in Mumbai. "It is unfortunate that roasting 47 Hindus alive at Godhra station is not a blot for Advaniji," he fumed.

Even the Muslims were unimpressed. "All these tears are nothing but drama," All India Muslim Personal Law Board member Ahmed Ali Quasmi said. "Had they been serious about taking action against those responsible for the riots, Narendra Modi would have been removed long ago. But he still remains a hero (for the BJP)."

'Clear victory' for NDA: survey

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NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. A nation-wide opinion poll conducted by the English weekly, *Outlook*, has predicted a "clear victory" for the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance, giving it between 280 and 290 seats in the Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress and its allies, according to the poll conducted by the Marketing and Development Research Associates (MDRA), are slated to get "anywhere" between 159 and 169 seats, according to a release issued by the magazine.

While the BJP, on its own, will improve on its 1999 performance of 182 seats and increase its tally to about 195, the poll says the Congress will slip to an all-time low of about 103 seats. Its tally was 114 in the last elections. However, the Congress' allies are expected to better their performance of 1999 — from about 40 to 61 seats.

The NDA allies are expected to lose about eight seats and are likely to be down to 90 seats this time. "Other" parties are likely to corner about 89 to 99 seats, the release said quoting the poll.

The poll findings indicate that 'Brand Vajpayee' is the USP of the NDA. Overall, 58 per cent

of the respondents favoured Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister.

The majority (62 per cent) were of the view that the NDA should be given another chance. Sonia Gandhi found support among 26 per cent of the respondents while L.K. Advani and Mayawati impressed only two per cent, it said.

BJP's own survey predicts uphill task in Uttar Pradesh: Page 13

There was mixed response to the Sonia Gandhi factor, with 40 per cent of the respondents saying that if another prime ministerial candidate is projected, the chances for the Congress will worsen, while 38 per cent felt that they would improve. But a majority, 43 per cent, felt that Ms. Gandhi should step down as Congress president if the party fails to improve on its 1999 tally.

The poll was conducted between February 19 and 24 in 102 parliamentary constituencies in 17 States. In all, 12,249 voters were interviewed in 612 villages and 306 urban centres. — PTI

THE HINDU - 6 MAR 2004

Court seeks details of money spent on 'India Shining'

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3. The Delhi High Court today directed the Union Government to apprise it of the details of the money spent on the "India Shining" advertisement campaign as well as the guidelines governing it.

A Division Bench of the court, comprising Justices B.C. Patel and B.D. Ahmed, directed counsel for the Government, Sanjay Jain, to file the accounts by March 10.

However, the Bench did not issue notices to the respondents or ask the Government to bring out a white paper on the propaganda blitz as requested in two public interest litigation (PIL) petitions filed by the Unemployed Youth Unity Movement, a voluntary organisation, and a local advocate.

Earlier, the Government counsel justified the campaign, submitting that the Government was well within its rights to publicise its policies, programmes and achievements. Political parties in power at the Centre had run publicity campaigns in the past to inform people about their programmes, policies and achievements, he said.

While the Unemployed Youth Unity Movement urged the court to direct the Comptroller and Auditor-General to inquire into the alleged misuse of public funds, the advocate sought an immediate stay on the advertisement in both the print and electronic media.

The two PILs alleged that the Union Government was "utilising public money for promotion

of their political fortunes" in the coming Lok Sabha election.

The Union Government, the Planning Commission, the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), the Election Commission and the CAG are four of the six respondents in the petition filed by the voluntary organisation.

It alleged that the Government, the Planning Commission, the Finance Secretary and the DAVP were utilising the tax payers' money "to embark upon a misadventure promoting a specious belief and the 'India Shining' title, which had assumed the form of a publicity blitz, to benefit a particular political combine in the coming election."

They had "deliberately and in a *mala fide* manner permitted misuse of their machinery," including funds, by the ruling combine at the Centre, the petitioner alleged.

The Planning Commission had for the first time since its inception "deliberately and wilfully deviated" from the purpose for which it was set up and allowed itself to be "misused as a tool" in the hands of the ruling coalition at the Centre, it said.

The petitioner urged the court to direct the Government, the Planning Commission, the Finance Secretary, the Union Government and the DAVP to submit a full statement of accounts showing complete details of the funds, as well as to recover the spent amount from the beneficiary political parties and deposit the same with the exchequer.

AIPJD joins hands with NDA

By S. Rajendran 29/2

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BANGALORE, FEB. 28. The All-India Progressive Janata Dal said today that it had decided to be part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) following mediation by the Defence Minister and NDA convener, George Fernandes. The party said that it would seek a "fair share of seats" from the Bharatiya Janata Party for the elections to the Karnataka Assembly and the Lok Sabha.

However, the State BJP made it clear that it would have no truck with the AIPJD. Its State unit spokesperson, S. Suresh Kumar, also said that he was not aware of the developments Mr. Fernandes had initiated.

Senior leaders told *The Hindu* that the AIPJD would prefer to stick to the formula finalised by the former Karnataka Chief Ministers, J.H. Patel and Ramakrishna Hegde, with the BJP before the 1999 elections.

The mood in the AIPJD camp has changed overnight and reports say several of the members of the recently dissolved Assembly — who had crossed over to the Congress — were caught unawares. None had apparently expected Mr. Fernandes to come down to Bangalore and finalise a seat-sharing arrangement. The AIPJD camp is confident that some of those who had switched loyalties recently will return.

After informal discussions with the AIPJD president, S.R. Bommai, and others on Friday night, Mr. Fernandes held another round today before leaving for New Delhi to brief the BJP top brass, including the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who were reportedly in the know of the seat-sharing efforts.

Mr. Fernandes told *The Hindu* that Mr. Bommai was a longstanding friend and that the support extended by the AIPJD would go a long way in strengthening the NDA. "The AIPJD stands assured that it will not be let down in the seat-

sharing arrangement and that what counted most was the winning chances of the candidate concerned," he said.

In the last elections, the erstwhile Janata Dal (U) had been allotted 95 Assembly and 10 Lok Sabha seats, and won 19 Assembly and three Lok Sabha seats. The AIPJD leaders argue that they are entitled to the same number of seats since the workers had remained with the party despite desertion by some senior leaders. The State BJP is expected to go by the strength of each candidate while finalising the quota for each party.

The senior AIPJD leaders, B. Somashekar and Basavaraj Bommai, said the Dal had decided to retain the party's identity and fight the elections on the "maize ear" or any alternative symbol.

The leaders said: "Our candidates will not contest on the BJP symbol although it is too early to discuss these matters."

As a follow-up to the developments, the AIPJD has appointed Mr. Somashekar as the State unit president, H.N. Nanje Gowda as chairman of the Parliamentary Board, the former Minister, C. Veeranna, as senior vice-president, M.P. Nadagouda, secretary general, and M. Raghupathy, chairman of the campaign committee.

Bangarappa may join JD(U)

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 28. The former Karnataka Chief Minister and Congress leader, S. Bangarappa, is likely to join the Janata Dal (United). He was a member of the 13th Lok Sabha from Shimoga.

Recently, he expressed his desire to return to State politics and was said to be in the race for the Chief Ministership.

NOTHING IMMORAL, SAYS SUSHMA

Poll-eye sops to feel better

Statesman News Service

April-May elections in four phases

NEW DELHI, Feb. 20. — Are giving out sops before the Lok Sabha elections "moral"? While the Union parliamentary affairs minister, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, said there was nothing immoral about it, the Election Commission took a dim view of the Cabinet's sops for government employees and rural areas.

The total government expenditure as a result of the sops would be enormous. Sometime ago when the issue of merging 50 per cent of DA with basic pay from 1 April came up, it wasn't considered because it would cost more than Rs 2,500 crore per annum. The government today said as the financial situation is improving, it can be implemented. And now, just before the polls, DA to the extent of 50 per cent will be merged with basic pay. The remaining 9 per cent will continue as DA. Besides, DA and dearness relief for pensioners will go up from 1 April by another two per cent.

As a result, basic pay will go up by 4.5 per cent. The financial benefit on future instalments of DA will go up by 50 per cent. House rent allowance will also go up as will dearness relief. The total cost for the coming financial year alone, the government said, could be Rs 851 crore.

Power supply: The Centre also cleared the plan to accelerate electrification of one lakh villages and one crore households. This project could cost Rs 6,000 crore. Other sops include polio eradication sche-

NEW DELHI, Feb. 20. — The declaration of poll dates for the 14th Lok Sabha and four state Assemblies — Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka — is round the corner even as the EC today said that the four-phase poll schedule will be announced taking into account factors like board examinations, major festivals, weather conditions, procurement of foodgrain and the harvesting season. "We will try to hold elections as expeditiously as possible," the deputy election commissioner, Mr AN Jha, said here.

The EC today completed its consultation process with states and the Centre by holding today its meeting with all recognised parties. Beginning from mid-April, the polls are likely to be completed by early May. The EC is expected to make the announcement in a few days.

The EC has also asked Central and state/UT governments to "temporarily suspend" any eviction drive or demolition of unauthorised structures and shanty towns until the completion of the Lok Sabha polls.

— SNS

mes and insurance scheme for anganwadi workers and helpers as part of the ICDS that could cost Rs 15 crore and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme for setting up residential schools for SC, ST, OBC and minority community girls in the Tenth Plan.

Orissa: The Centre is readying a pre-election sop for Orissa before the elections: Rs 25 crore for the Biju Patnaik National Steel Institute at Puri.

Farmers last word now, says Advani

NDA raises feel-good temperature

New Delhi
19 FEBRUARY

Mumbai
19 FEBRUARY



DEPUTY prime minister L.K. Advani on Thursday said various sections of society in the country were talking about the feel good situation. After a Kisan leader told him that farmers were not

only feeling good but great, Mr Advani said he would believe that when all farmers shared this view. "Our government believes there is a good feeling in the country, But we feel, the feel-good will really be so when the farming community says so. Today, they are not saying so although various sections of the society are saying it," he said here.

Mr Lal Krishna Advani was addressing a group of farmers from various regions of Haryana who called on him to offer thanks for the Cabinet decision to waive capital gains and tax deduction at source (TDS) for agriculturists on their land acquired.

—PTI



AFTER "feel-good factor" and "India Shining", the NDA on Thursday introduced its new buzzword, "India Accelerating", to showcase the achievements of the country in the last 10

years of reforms.

Unveiling a short film, "Indian economy on an accelerated growth track", finance minister Jaswant Singh said: "It is a remarkable success story, not of any individual or organisation but that of India."

"The accelerated growth is purely based on data... it shows low inflation, low fiscal deficit and the interest rates were coming down in the country," Mr Singh said, adding that very few countries in the world have achieved this.

The film was not a partisan approach by the Centre, Mr Singh said and added it was to showcase that the country was on a dynamic growth path.

—PTI

The Economic Times 20 FEB 2004

১৪৫ কোটি গচ্ছা দিয়ে সেন্টুর বিক্রি! তিরস্কৃত শৌরি



ক্যাংগ রিপোর্ট শুনে মন্ত্রী : মুখের কাজ শিবসেনা খুশি, তদন্ত চাইল কং, সি পি এম

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: দিল্লি, ১৯ ফেব্রুয়ারি—
মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সেন্টুর হোটেল বিক্রি নিয়ে বেসরকারীকরণ মন্ত্রী অরুণ শৌরির বিরুদ্ধে অনিয়মের অভিযোগ করল কম্পট্রোলার অ্যান্ড অডিটর জেনারেল (কাংগ)। রিপোর্টে বলেছে, সেন্টুর হোটেল বিক্রির জন্য শোনা নিলামের ব্যবস্থা করা হয়নি। দরপত্র নেওয়া হয়েছে মাত্র দুটি সংস্থা থেকে। একটি সংস্থা সরকার নির্ধারিত দামের নিচে দরপত্র দেওয়ায় তা বেসরকারীকরণ মন্ত্রক বাতিল করে। অর্থাৎ দ্বিতীয় সংস্থার ক্ষেত্রে মন্ত্রক ৪ শতাংশ দাম কমিয়ে দেয়। যে নিয়মে প্রথম সংস্থার দরপত্র বাতিল হল, সেই নিয়ম দ্বিতীয় সংস্থার ক্ষেত্রে অনুসরণ করা হয়নি। এর ফলে সরকারের ১৪৫

কোটি টাকা ক্ষতি হয়েছে। শিবসেনা নেতা সঞ্জয় নরসিংও অরুণ শৌরির বিরুদ্ধে অনুরূপ অভিযোগ করেছেন। তার মতে, সেন্টুর হোটেল বিক্রির পদ্ধতি ষড়্ছ নয়। সি পি এম সেন্টুর হোটেল বিক্রি নিয়ে সি বি আই তদন্ত দাবি করেছে। কম্পট্রোলার অ্যান্ড অডিটর জেনারেলের রিপোর্টে বোঝায় চলেছেন অরুণ শৌরি। বলেছেন, এটা মুখের রিপোর্ট। কাংগ যে পদ্ধতিতে সরকারের আর্থিক ক্ষতির হিসেব করেছে, তা হাস্যকর। কাংগের উচিত ছিল সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রকের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করা, মন্ত্রকের বাবায় জানাতে চাওয়া। এটাই প্রচলিত পদ্ধতি। মন্ত্রককে কিছু বলার সুযোগ না দিয়ে রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করে নিয়ম লঙ্ঘন করেছে কাংগ। বিষয়টি নিয়ে

অরুণ শৌরি কারিগরি সচিবের কাছে যাবেন বলে জানিয়েছেন। প্রসঙ্গত, সেন্টুর হোটেলের মালিকানা ছিল রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সংস্থা হোটেল কর্পোরেশন অফ ইন্ডিয়ায়। কিন্তু সেটি তৈরি হয় আরেকটি রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সংস্থা এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি অফ ইন্ডিয়ার জমিতে। কিন্তু দুটি সংস্থারই প্রধানমন্ত্রিক কেন্দ্র ও ইজারার চুক্তি ছিল না। হোটেলটি বেসরকারি মালিকানা তুলে দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয় অরুণ শৌরির মন্ত্রক। সিদ্ধান্ত হয়, হোটেল কর্পোরেশন অফ ইন্ডিয়া সেন্টুর হোটেল এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটিকে বার্ষিক ভাড়ার ভিত্তিতে ইজারা দেবে এবং ভাড়া প্রতি বছর ১০ শতাংশ বাড়বে। বেসরকারীকরণ মন্ত্রকের গৃহীত সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে সারে চুক্তি হয়, হোটেল কর্পোরেশন অফ ইন্ডিয়া

বণমিটার পিছ ১৬০ টাকা দেবে এবং প্রতি ৩ বছরে ভাড়া বাড়বে ২০ শতাংশ। ১৮ এপ্রিল, ২০০২-এ বাটরা হসপিটালিটি নামে বেসরকারি সংস্থার কাছে সেন্টুর হোটেল বিক্রি করা হয়। বিক্রির সময় হোটেলের ভাড়া হওয়া উচিত ছিল বণমিটার পিছ ১৯৭ টাকা। কিন্তু অর্জাতকারণে ডিসেম্বর ২০০০-এর সময়কার ভাড়া অনসারে হিসেব করা হয়। এর ফলে হোটেলের দাম অনেকটাই কমে যায় এবং ক্ষতি হয় সরকারের। কম্পট্রোলার অ্যান্ড অডিটর জেনারেলের রিপোর্টে এই গুরুতর বেনিয়াম চিহ্নিত করে প্রশ্ন তোলা হয়েছে, বিলম্বীকরণ মন্ত্রক নিজেই স্থির করা নিয়ম থেকে সারে ছবি: এ এফ পি

এরপর ৫ পাতায়

তিরস্কৃত শৌরি

১ পাতার পর

গেল কেন? কেন দু'বছর আগেকার ভাড়ার দরে হোটেলের দাম ধার্য হল? কাগের তোলা আরেকটি প্রশ্ন, সেন্টর হোটেল বিক্রির জন্য শুধু দুটি সংস্থার কাছ থেকে দরপত্র নেওয়া হল কেন? কেন খোলা নিলামের ব্যবস্থা করা হল না? আরও প্রশ্ন, বেসরকারি মালিককে আকৃষ্ট করতে ফ্রেতার স্বত্ব ৬ শতাংশ থেকে কমিয়ে ২ শতাংশ করা হল কেন? এর ফলে ১৪৫ কোটি টাকা ক্ষতি হয়েছে। সরকারের আর্থিক ক্ষতি ঘটানোর জন্য অরুণ শৌরির মন্ত্রককে তিরস্কার করেছে কাগ। কংগ্রেস প্রতিক্রিয়া জানিয়ে বলেছে, আমরা বহুদিন ধরে বলে চলেছি যে সরকারি সম্পত্তি জলের দরে বিক্রি করা হচ্ছে। বিলম্বীকরণে কোনও নিয়ম মানা হচ্ছে না। এবং এত তাড়াহুড়া করে করা হচ্ছে যে বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনার সুযোগও রাখা হচ্ছে না। বিলম্বীকরণের নামে এন ডি এ-র শরিকরা কোটি কোটি টাকার গোপন লেনদেনে জড়িয়ে পড়ছেন এমন সন্দেহ করার যথেষ্ট কারণ আছে। সেন্টর হোটেল বিক্রি নিয়ে নিরপেক্ষ তদন্ত দাবি করেছে কংগ্রেস। শিবসেনাও বহুদিন আগেই বিলম্বীকরণ নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলেছিল। সেসময় সঞ্জয় নিকুপম ও অরুণ শৌরির তীব্র মন কষাকষি হয়। আজ সঞ্জয় নিকুপম বলেন, কাগের রিপোর্ট আমাদের অভিযোগের সত্যতা প্রমাণ করল। অরুণ শৌরি নিজেকে পৃথিবীর সেরা সং মানুষ বলে দাবি করেন। এবার সেই দাবি থেকে অন্তত সরবেন। আশা করি। সি পি এম পলিটব্যুরো সদস্য সীতারাম ইয়েচারি বলেছেন, ১৪৫ কোটি টাকা ক্ষতির জন্য অরুণ শৌরিকে জবাবদিহি করতে হবে। ভারত উদয়ের প্রবক্তারা বলেন, জনগণের টাকা নষ্ট করে দশকে অন্ধকারে ডোবানো হল কেন?

AAJKAL

20 FEB 2004

Cong fires questions on Bleach, IIM fee cut

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 11. — The Congress today asked the NDA government 10 questions; five queries on the recent release of Peter Bleach, the main accused in the Purulia arms-drop case, and another five on the decision to slash the fees of Indian Institute of Management courses.

Pointing out that the NDA government, its Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other senior leaders "are used to giving sermons on national security", the Congress spokesman, Mr Abhishek Singhvi, said the government's decision to release Bleach has exposed its hollow claims. He demanded that it answer the following questions;

What were the real reasons for Bleach's release? As two Presidents had rejected Bleach's mercy petitions twice in the past, was the government in possession of any fresh evidence that led to his release? Did the gov-

ernment of India get any assurance from the UK for releasing any Indian prisoner in return for Bleach since the five Russians, co-accused with Bleach, were released earlier in return of Russia releasing five Indians and reducing the sentence of a sixth Indian? Since all cases of clemency and pardon to such people are granted after their last appeal in the court is granted, why didn't the government wait for the final view of the apex court in Bleach's pending appeal? Was the government trying to bypass a possible rejection of his appeal by the apex court?

Maintaining that the IITs and IIMs, set up at the time of the Nehru government, had won laurels for the country, Mr Singhvi accused the NDA government of trying to force its 'control' on these prestigious institutions, to strip them of their 'autonomy' in order to make them 'the government's petty fiefdoms' by cutting fees and hiking government subsidy.

He asked;

Was there any case of any IIT and IIM student forced to drop out of the course due to lack of money to pay the fees? Is it not a fact that even poor students in IITs and IIMs could easily get affordable loans from many banks and prestigious FIs? If the government has money to offer subsidy to IIMs, why can't it invest the same amount in the primary education sector?. Why did the government, which justified its decision on IIMs on the basis that the Rao committee had recommended a fee cut, not clarify its stand after Mr Rao denied any such recommendation? Can the government show a single direction from the apex court asking for a fee-cut?

PIL filed: A PIL was yesterday filed in the Supreme Court challenging the Union HRD ministry's decision to drastically reduce the fees of Indian Institutes of Management, alleging that it was a move to gain control over the professional institutions, adds PTI.

50% DA merger means 50 more seats for NDA

Rajnish Sharma
New Delhi, February 4

BY ACCEPTING the government employees' long-standing demand for merging 50 per cent Dearness Allowance (DA) with basic pay, the BJP-led NDA regime hopes to please a constituency, which, in its assessment, can influence the voting pattern for at least 50 Lok Sabha seats in the coming elections.

According to rough estimates, around 30 lakh Central Government employees will benefit from the decision to merge DA with the basic.

The recommendation, originally made by the Fifth Pay Commission, was opposed by Finance Minister Jaswant Singh on grounds of fiscal prudence. The party leadership made him change his decision, since nearly 80 per cent of these employees are Class C and D workers with strong social linkages in rural and semi-rural areas, which the BJP-NDA might now exploit electorally.

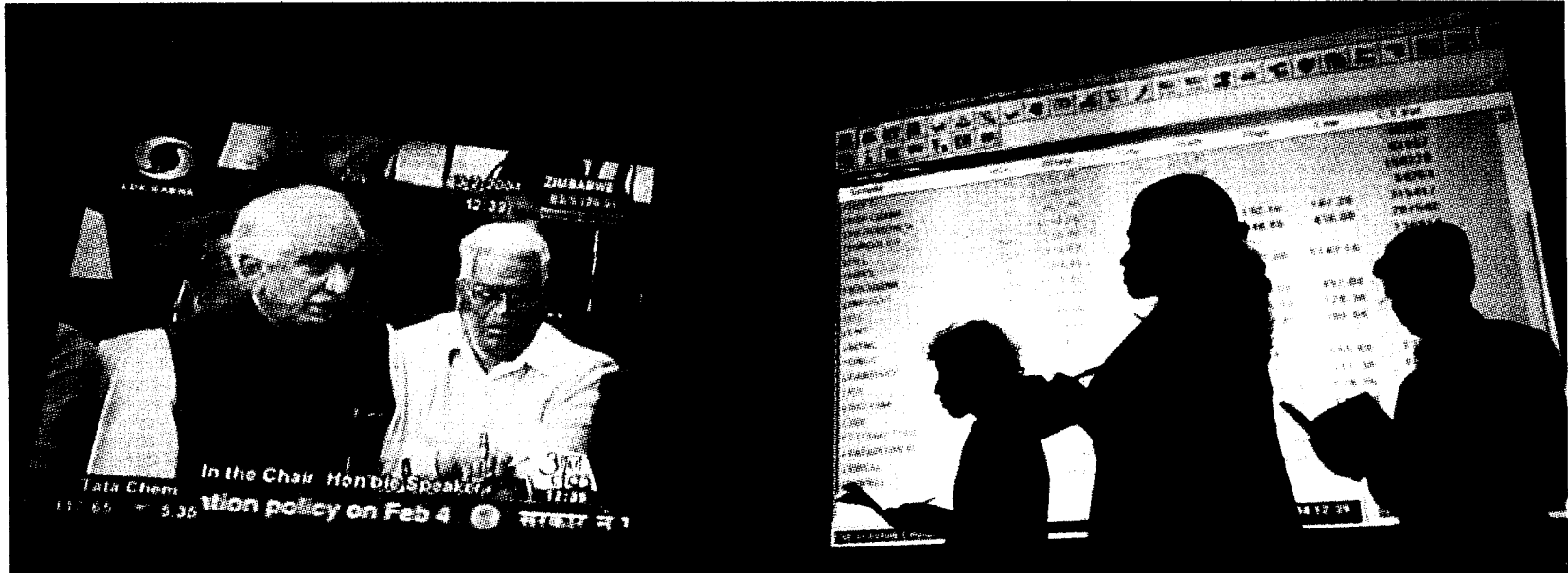
The benefits will also reach retired employees whose pension amounts to 60 per cent of the government's wage bill.

"This populist move will have a cascading effect on the Lok Sabha elections", a source said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 5 FEB 2004

No new taxes ■ Boost for BPO ■ Stamp duty halved

9/2/04 ✓



REUTERS

SHINE AND SHADOW: Stockbrokers at the Bombay Stock Exchange silhouetted against a giant screen as they take notes from the televised Budget speech on Tuesday.

Jaswant vote in NDA account

K.A. Badarinath
New Delhi, February 3

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES should be happy; so will be farmers, small-scale unit owners and the poorest of the poor. Finance Minister Jaswant Singh, in his interim budget tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, has tried to get all these people — a huge proportion of the population — on board the feel-good platform that the NDA wants to cash in on, come election day.

This was also the last of the goodies the government wants the country to savour before the Lok Sabha is dissolved and elections are announced.

The million-strong government employees will have 50 per cent of their DA merged with the basic, leading to fatter pay packets from April. An official with a basic salary of, say, Rs 10,000 will, after the merger of 50 per cent DA, get Rs 15,000 as basic pay. Consequently, his HRA will also go up from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,500. There will be similar hikes in all allowances

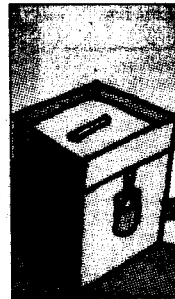
FOR YOU AND ME

- No tax cuts, no waivers. But a promise to look into higher exemptions at a future date
- You can bring in stuff (but not contraband) from abroad worth Rs 25,000 without Customs duty. Over this limit, you pay 40% duty instead of 50%
- Pay no capital gains tax on what you earn by selling shares for three more years



POLL PROWL

- Half of government staff's DA to be merged with basic pay
- Loans at 7% interest to farmers. Mortgage norms eased. Kisan credit cards by March-end. Cards to become ATM friendly. Farm income insurance in 100 districts. No capital gains tax on farm land acquired by govt
- Free grain for 50 lakh more families below the poverty line



ECONOMY

GDP	7.5-8%
Fiscal deficit	4.8%
Inflation	4-4.5%



STOCK MARKET

Sensex fell 74.69 points and closed at 5620 after the interim budget was presented

BY THE WAY INDIA'S TOTAL DEBT IS Rs 17241988200000

linked to basic salary. This will cost the exchequer an extra Rs 4,000 crore. For the second time in less than a month,

Singh has extended benefits to farmers. The budget has made provisions for cheap loans to them and rural entrepreneurs.

He has also announced a Rs 15,000-crore package for cooperative banks. The Antyodaya Anna Yojana, already cover-

ing 15 million families, has been extended to provide free grain to five million more rural families below the poverty line. Surplus from the overflowing granaries will be distributed to the jobless.

Small unit owners can now avail of higher credit, the limit having been raised five-fold from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. A credit card for them has been announced which can be used to draw money, cutting paperwork. If they want loans over this limit, they can go to the Small and Medium Industries Fund, which has been set up.

No tax break for salary earners, but Singh has promised to look at the exemption limit later. The only concession was to the investor. He need not pay capital gains on shares for three more years.

ON PAGES 4 & 12

- Jaswant serves BJP poll agenda
- India Inc welcomes budget
- Defence gets Rs 25,000 cr
- Jaswant's bounty for farmers
- Tea sector wants more sops

অটলের সঙ্গে এক মঞ্চে

এনডিএ-তেও

যোগ দিচ্ছেন

জয়ললিতা

কন্যাকুমারী, ২ ফেব্রুয়ারি— ফের জাতীয় গণতান্ত্রিক মোর্চার শরিক হতে চলেছে এ ডি এম কে। গতকাল জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে নৈশভোজে বসে তাঁকে এন ডি এ-তে যোগ দিতে রাজি করিয়ে ফেলেছেন উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী। চেম্বাইয়ে পোয়েস গার্ডেনে জয়ললিতার বাড়িতে আডবাণী তাঁর সঙ্গে প্রায় দু'ঘণ্টা আলোচনা করেন। জোটের খুঁটিনাটি নিয়ে দু'জনের মধ্যে কথা হয়। এ দিকে, বিজেপি-এ ডি এম কে জোট চূড়ান্ত হওয়ার পর আজই তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে এক মঞ্চে হাজির হলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী। উপলক্ষ শ্রীনগর-কন্যাকুমারী সংযোগকারী উত্তর-দক্ষিণ করিডর তৈরির ভূমিপূজা হলেও বস্তুত এই মঞ্চ থেকেই বাজপেয়ী তামিলনাড়ুতে জোটের নির্বাচনী প্রচার শুরু করে দিলেন। জয়ললিতাকে পাশে বসিয়ে তিনি জানিয়েছেন, এই আঁতাত বি জে পি'র কাছে খুবই মূল্যবান। '৯৯ সালে জয়ললিতা মুখ ফিরিয়ে নেওয়ার মাত্র এক ভোটে পড়ে গিয়েছিল বাজপেয়ী সরকার। তার পর, গত পাঁচ বছর ধরে এন ডি এ'র শরিক ছিল ডি এম কে। সম্প্রতি তারা কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে হাত মেলানোয় তামিলনাড়ুতে এ ডি এম কে-কে পাশে পেতে মরীয়া হয়ে উঠেছিল বিজেপি। সেই কারণেই স্বয়ং আডবাণী চেম্বাই গিয়ে জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসেছিলেন।

নয়াদিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, আজ সকালে বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে তাঁর আলোচনার ফলাফল জানিয়ে আসেন আডবাণী। ৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার পর জয়ললিতা দিল্লি আসবেন বাজপেয়ীর সঙ্গে বৈঠক করতে। তার পরই এন ডি এ-তে এ ডি এম কে'র সামিল হওয়ার ব্যাপারে আনুষ্ঠানিক ঘোষণা হবে। জয়ললিতার আশ্বাসের উপর ভিত্তি করেই তামিলনাড়ুতে লোকসভা ভোটের রণকৌশল তৈরি করতে শুরু করেছে বিজেপি। যদিও দু'দলের মধ্যে আসন সমঝোতা এখনও চূড়ান্ত রূপ নেয়নি। রাজ্যে বিজেপি'র তেমন শক্তি নেই এই অজুহাতে জয়ললিতা খুব বেশি আসন ছাড়তে নারাজ। বিজেপি'র তরফে দর কষাকষি চালাচ্ছেন সুকুমার নাথিয়্যার-সহ দু'তিন জন নেতা। ৬ ফেব্রুয়ারির আগেই আসন বন্টন চূড়ান্ত হয়ে যাবে বলে বিজেপি শিবিরের আশা। গতকাল বৈঠক সেরে বেরিয়ে আডবাণীও বলেছেন, আসন সমঝোতা নিয়ে কোনও সমস্যা হবে বলে তিনি মনে করেন না।

জোট সঙ্গী হিসাবে পাওয়ার খুঁশিতে এ দিন জয়ললিতার প্রশংসায় পঞ্চমুখ ছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। জয়া এক কথায় শিলান্যাস অনুষ্ঠানে যোগ দিতে রাজি হওয়ায় তিনি খুঁশি, এ কথা জানিয়ে বাজপেয়ী বলেন, “জয়ললিতার নেতৃত্বে তামিলনাড়ু আর্থ-সামাজিক ক্ষেত্রে প্রভূত উন্নতি করেছে।” জয়ললিতার পাশাপাশি এ দিন নিজের সরকারের সাফল্যও প্রচার করেছেন অটল। বলেছেন, “গত পাঁচ বছর ধরে স্বায়িত্ব এবং সুশাসন দিয়েছে আমার সরকার। নিরাপত্তা আর উন্নয়নই ছিল আমাদের প্রধান লক্ষ্য। তার ফলে ভারত আজ বিশ্বের দ্রুত উন্নতিশীল অর্থনীতিগুলির অন্যতম।”

স্বর্ণ চতুর্ভুজ প্রকল্পের কাজ দ্রুত গতিতে করার জন্য কেন্দ্রীয় সড়কমন্ত্রী বি সি খান্দুরি এবং জাতীয় সড়ক কর্তৃপক্ষের প্রশংসা করেছেন বাজপেয়ী। এর পাশাপাশি প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ‘ভারত জোড়ো’ প্রকল্পে দশ হাজার কিলোমিটার সড়কের উন্নতি ঘটানো হবে বলে তিনি জানান। এই প্রকল্পে প্রতিটি রাজ্যের রাজধানী ও প্রধান শহরকে আন্তর্জাতিক মানের সুপার হাইওয়ে দিয়ে যুক্ত করা হবে। এ খবর পি টি আই-এর।

চেম্বাই থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, দলের সাবিকি লোকসভা আসন পন্ডিচেরি ও রাজীব গান্ধীর স্মৃতিবিজড়িত শ্রীপেরেমপুদুর—সাথের এই দুই আসন চেয়েও পেল না কংগ্রেস। তামিলনাড়ু ও পন্ডিচেরির ৪০টি আসনের মধ্যে ডি পি এ জোটের নেতা করুণানিধির দেওয়া ১০টি আসন পেয়েই সন্তুষ্ট থাকতে হল কংগ্রেসকে। গণতান্ত্রিক প্রগতিশীল জোটের আসন ভাগাভাগিই শুধু নয়, কে কোথায় লড়বে সে সবই আজ চূড়ান্তভাবে নির্ণয় হয়ে গেল। এবং করুণানিধির মর্জি মেনেই।

আজ প্রায় দু' ঘণ্টা আলোচনার পর কংগ্রেসের সাধারণ সম্পাদক কমল নাথ জানান, তাঁর দল আসন বন্টন সংক্রান্ত চুক্তিতে স্বাক্ষর করেছে। পন্ডিচেরি ও শ্রীপেরেমপুদুর পাচ্ছে না জেনে তিনটি আসনের জন্য শেষ দিকে জিদ ধরে ছিল কংগ্রেস। আসনগুলি হল— সেলম, পেরিয়াকুলাম ও তিরুনেলভেলি। এই আসনগুলি আদায় করার পরই আজ কমল নাথ আসন সমঝোতা নিয়ে সন্তোষ প্রকাশ করেন। সাংবাদিকদের তিনি জানান, সন্তোষজনকভাবে আসন সমঝোতা হয়ে যাওয়ায় কংগ্রেস দলনেত্রী সনিয়া গান্ধী দিল্লি থেকে ফোন করে অভিনন্দন জানান ডি এম কে-র নেতা করুণানিধিকে। পৃথকভাবে করুণানিধিও আসন সমঝোতা হয়ে যাওয়ায় স্বস্তি ও সন্তোষ প্রকাশ করেন।

এ দিকে জয়ার সঙ্গে আসন বন্টন সংক্রান্ত আলোচনায় সন্তোষপ্রকাশ করেছেন উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী আডবাণী। এবং আজ কন্যাকুমারীতে এসে উচ্ছ্বসিত প্রধানমন্ত্রী বাজপেয়ীও বলেছেন, এ ডি এম কে-র সঙ্গে সম্পর্ককে বিজেপি অত্যন্ত মূল্যবান বলে মনে করে।

ANADABAZAR PATEIKA 1-3 FEB 2004

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Jaya hugs Atal, keeps NDA waiting

29/1

Indian as head of government.

The deal, struck this morning at Jayalalithaa's Poes Garden home, comes days after L.K. Advani looked her up in Chennai and promised funds to tackle the city's water crisis. The deputy Prime Minister had also given her a tinkle on New Year's day.

"The AIADMK and the BJP have decided to fight the elections together and the respective committees of both the parties will sit together and work out the details of the seat sharing," Jayalalithaa told reporters, looking cheerful after her hour-

Chennai, Jan. 28: Jayalalithaa today bridged a five-year political gulf in a single tête-à-tête with BJP boss Venkaiiah Naidu, agreeing to fight the general elections as friends but keeping her options open on joining the NDA.

By way of bonus, the ADMK chief also declared her support for A.B. Vajpayee as the next Prime Minister candidate. Taking a whack at Sonia Gandhi, she told a private TV channel her party was committed to having an

long meeting with Naidu.

Although she dodged queries on whether her party would join the NDA, saying "whatever I have to tell you, I have said", her swipe at Sonia came all too soon. Only in 1999, she had joined hands with the Congress chief after Subramanian Swamy's famous tea party to pull down Vajpayee's government.

"It is a question of whether an Indian is going to be the Prime Minister or whether a foreigner is going to be the PM. So, you know very well that AIADMK is committed to having an Indian

as PM," Jayalalithaa said.

Buoyed by the tie-up, Naidu later termed his talks with Jayalalithaa "friendly and meaningful". He said the parties had decided to "work together", adding that "other such issues, which needed more clarity", would be worked out later.

Political experts see today's tie-up as the "logical culmination" of the DMK quitting the BJP coalition in December, followed by smaller allies MDMK and PMK. Even as the walkouts were taking place, Naidu had hinted at reviving ties with Jayalalith-

aa. "If one party goes out (of the NDA), another would come in."

Ideologically, the ADMK is closer to the BJP and its Hindutva than the DMK. Over the past two years, Jayalalithaa has been massaging Hindu sentiment through the temple *anna dhana* scheme, by banning forcible conversions and even attending a *yagna* performed by the Kanchi Sankaracharya. So much so, that the BJP has been jittery that she would hijack its support base.

The ADMK has also been pursuing policies that are up the BJP's street, including ba-

cking the anti-terror law.

Experts say it was only a matter of time before a formal alliance between the two parties was sealed, though there was some suspense in December when Jayalalithaa declared she would try to forge a "non-BJP/non-Congress" alternative at the Centre.

After the DMK stitched up an "arithmetically formidable alliance" that included the Congress, Jayalalithaa revised her stand.

On her mentor M.G. Ramachandran's birthday a few days ago, she declared "politics itself means change and flexibility".

K.P. Pawar
20/1/04

THE NCP SPLIT

THE SPLIT IN the Nationalist Congress Party has been imminent ever since its president, Sharad Pawar, decided to forge an electoral understanding with the Congress. Mr. Pawar was aware of the political cost of such a tie-up well before his much-publicised meeting with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. The NCP general secretary and former Lok Sabha Speaker, P.A. Sangma, had made no secret of his implacable opposition to teaming up with the Congress. The Chhattisgarh NCP chief, V.C. Shukla, had expressed strong reservations about a Congress-NCP tie-up. While Mr. Pawar did his best to persuade Mr. Sangma and Mr. Shukla to stay on board, it was clear he was reconciled to the probability of losing them when he began responding to the Congress' overtures. From his point of view, it was imperative to register a good showing in Maharashtra, the only major State where the NCP has a sizeable presence. The experience of the 1999 general election — when the NCP won 21.58 per cent of the total votes polled in Maharashtra but a mere six Lok Sabha seats — underlined the perils of going it alone.

The perceived anti-incumbency mood in Maharashtra has strengthened the desire to forge an electoral understanding with the Congress. With exploratory talks with the BJP-Shiv Sena combine going nowhere, Mr. Pawar had no choice but to turn to his parent party to avoid political marginalisation. Although the presence of leaders such as Mr. Sangma and Mr. Shukla helped to lend the NCP a national image, their loss is likely to make only a minor difference in material terms. Mr. Sangma, who

has been expelled from the NCP, has now made his game plan clear. The North Eastern Peoples' Forum, a body he helped to found in 2003, will tie up with the National Democratic Alliance. This conglomerate of 17 parties, which is made up of those already in the NDA and players with support in local or restricted pockets, is expected to make a difference to the Congress' electoral prospects in the north-eastern region.

From Mr. Pawar's perspective, the fate of the NCP's electoral symbol (a table clock) is probably of greater significance than the loss of Mr. Sangma, who has since declared himself fancifully as the "real" president of the NCP and staked a claim to the party's name and symbol. A freeze on the use of the symbol, while the Election Commission hears rival representations, is the last thing Mr. Pawar needs at a time the general election is round the corner. Mr. Sangma has a measure of credibility when he claims that he parted ways with Mr. Pawar on a matter of principle — the foundational position that persons of foreign origin should not hold sensitive government posts. In contrast, Mr. Shukla's decision to float a new regional party is largely a matter of expediency. The veteran politician, who has pockets of influence in Chhattisgarh, has probably calculated he will be on the winning side in his State and also have a larger political role for himself by sailing with the NDA. In the recent Assembly election, the NCP led by Mr. Shukla won only one seat but polled seven per cent of the vote in Chhattisgarh. From the point of view of the BJP's campaign managers, this makes him a useful ally in a State where the contest is essentially bipolar.

Jharkhand Opp unites against NDA

Statesman News Service

RANCHI, Jan. 22. — The entire Opposition in Jharkhand has decided to join hands to fight the NDA in the coming elections. But the role of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the state's premier Opposition party, in the entire episode seems rather dubious as on the one hand it has decided to fight the "communal" NDA forces, while on the other they are negotiating for an alliance with the NDA. Not only that, they have also laid down certain conditions for joining the NDA-led formation.

According to RJD leader Mr Girinath Singh, all the Opposition parties, except the CPI-ME (Liberation), have agreed to

unite to combat the NDA. The parties, according to him, are the Congress, JMM, RJD, the Marxist Coordination Centre, CPI and CPI-M. The RJD leader said that during the all-party Opposition meeting, chaired by JMM leader Mr Sibusoren, it was decided to fight the elections under a common platform. Mr Singh said that it was also decided to petition the Governor to conduct an impartial judicial inquiry into the corruption charges against chief minister Mr Arjun Munda, as alleged by former minister Mr Samaresh Singh.

The entire Opposition had also decided to call a joint statewide bandh on 29 January in this connection, he added. While, the JMM has been spearheading the campaign to oust the NDA govern-

ment, on the other hand, sources close to the JMM said that the party was trying to revert back to its opportunist tactics by joining the NDA, albeit after the BJP "accepts" some conditions of the JMM. But Mr Singh said that the JMM was very much "a part of the united Opposition". However, Congress sources said that only the issue of judicial inquiry and the Jharkhand bandh were discussed in today's meeting. An alliance with the JMM was not discussed, Congress sources added.

Sources said that Mr Soren has offered a 60:40 seat-sharing formula for an electoral tie-up with the NDA. Mr Soren, according to sources, made this agreement during his recent meeting with the NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, who is yet to commit support to the JMM,

since he has to discuss the issue with the BJP. According to the proposed JMM formula, the JMM would support the NDA in 60 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats, and in turn, the NDA would have to support the JMM in 60 per cent of the Assembly seats. Another condition was the NDA must accept Mr Soren as the chief ministerial candidate.

Sources said if the last poll results were taken into account, then Mr Soren's formula seems unacceptable. In the 1999 polls, BJP won 12 seats, including Dumka — where former chief minister Mr Babul Marandi trounced Mr Soren. Mr Soren later won the seat in a by-poll after Mr Marandi became chief minister. Mr Soren is the lone JMM MP in the Assembly, NDA has 42 seats and JMM just 13.

Sangma sides with NDA

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 19. — Mr Purno A Sangma and the North-East People's Forum, a conglomeration of 17 North-eastern states' political parties, decided to contest the next Lok Sabha polls on a common platform with the NDA today.

A formal split in the NCP may take place on 24 January when the party's national executive meets to thrash out differences between Mr Pawar and Mr Sangma on forging an alliance with the Congress. Mr VC Shukla, a new ally of the NCP in Chhattisgarh, is also heading towards the NDA, Mr Sangma indicated tonight.

"The state of confusion (over the NCP's alliances) would end on 24 January when I and Mr VC Shukla take a final decision on electoral ties — may be that would be our last meeting with Mr Pawar over choosing our electoral partners," Mr Sangma said after the meeting of the forum.

For the BJP, it is a major gain after the DMK, along with MDMK and PMK, quit the NDA and joined the Congress-led

PM cancels trip

NEW DELHI, Jan 19. — The Prime Minister formally called off his foreign tour today, citing "domestic preoccupations" for his inability to travel to Thailand and Australia. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will soon start campaigning across the country. — SNS

Details on page 4

alliance. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee assured Mr Sangma during his meeting with him yesterday that he would campaign in the North-east.

Mr Sangma is not only a tribal but also a Christian. The BJP was paying special attention to the North-east despite its having only 25 Lok Sabha seats from 8 states. Assam has the highest among them — 14 seats. Congress has 13 seats from the N-E at present (9 from Assam), followed by BJP and the CPI-M with two seats each. The remaining 8 seats are held by parties constituting the NEPF. Mr Sangma said today he had spoken to Mr Prafulla Mahanta of the AGP and "appealed to them to join the forum".

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2004

OTHER REASONS

The decision of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam to leave the National Democratic Alliance was the signal for smaller parties to adjust their bearings. The Pattali Makkal Katchi, headed by Mr S. Ramadoss, has been the latest to leave the NDA, although even a fortnight ago the PMK had been more or less sure of its support to the NDA. The changing alignments in Tamil Nadu betray two different perspectives simultaneously. The perspective of the Congress and the left parties is the same: they would like to be part of the DMK-led front — even if they fought elsewhere — because the new front would be anti-communal. The DMK-led front would presumably spearhead the attack in Tamil Nadu against the Bharatiya Janata Party in the Lok Sabha elections.

But the PMK's argument is different. It reveals the other, regional, perspective. For the PMK leader, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with belonging to the NDA. He had good things to say about Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's governance. Mr Ramadoss is more interested in participating in the building of a significant force against Ms J. Jayalalithaa and her All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. According to Mr Ramadoss, it is time to fight her "anti-democratic, anti-labour, anti-poor policies". The argument is couched in terms of racial honour. The self-respect of the Tamils had been hurt by the closeness of the BJP and the AIADMK, and the PMK had to ensure that the anti-AIADMK vote was not split. Hence the decision to leave the NDA. The two Union ministers from the PMK will obviously no longer continue at the Centre. But the departure of the PMK has not really hurt the BJP. The NDA still sports 280 members, while the majority mark is 272. Early elections are meant to consolidate this advantage. The sudden restlessness among the opposition and would-be opposition is hardly unexpected. The BJP need not be hasty in finding new friends. Its recent glory in the series of assembly elections has contributed to its sense of solidity. It is now for the smaller parties to decide which way to go, and to settle their priorities, local or national, as the PMK has done.

15 JAN 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

JAN 2004

নয়া সরকার

এপ্রিলেই

প্রথম পাতের পর

নিচ্ছে বি জে পি। সব দিক ভেবেই ভোট এগিয়ে আনার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন তারা।

বি জে পি নেতৃত্বের আলোচনায় ঠিক হয়েছে, জানুয়ারির মধ্যেই ভোট অন অ্যাকাউন্টস পেশ হয়ে যাবে। তারপর দু দিনের সংসদ অধিবেশন। লোকসভার এক সি পি আই সাংসদের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। তাই প্রথম দিনের অধিবেশন এক বেলায় জন্য মূলতুবি রেখে ভোট অন অ্যাকাউন্টস পেশ করা হবে। দু দিনের নোটিসেই এই অধিবেশন ডাকা যাবে। শীত অধিবেশনের সমাপ্তি ঘোষণা করে বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করা হয়নি। একে বর্ধিত শীত অধিবেশন হিসেবেই ধরা হবে।

বি জে পি নেতৃত্বের একাংশ চাইছিলেন, ফেব্রুয়ারির প্রথমেই লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার কথা ঘোষণা করতে। কিন্তু প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিস চায়, বাজপেয়ী তাইল্যাণ্ডে বিমস্টেক সম্মেলন শেষে ফেরার পরে লোকসভা ভাঙার সুপারিশ করা হোক। সে ক্ষেত্রেও ১১-১২ ফেব্রুয়ারির মধ্যে লোকসভা ভঙ্গ হবে। বাজপেয়ী যদি কার্যনির্বাহী প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসেবে তাইল্যাণ্ড যোতে রাজি হন, তা হলে ফেব্রুয়ারির গোড়াতেই লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়া যাবে।

ভোটের সময় নিয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশনই চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে। ১৯৯৮ এবং '৯৯ সালে চার পর্বে লোকসভা ভোট হয়েছিল। এ বারও তাই হবে বলে বি জে পি নেতৃত্বের ধারণা। সে ক্ষেত্রে ভোটপর্ব চুকতে দিন কুড়ি লাগবে।

কর্মসমিতির বৈঠক শুরু আগের দিন বি জে পি-র সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রমোদ মহাজন জানিয়েছিলেন, পৌষ মাস শুভ নয়। মকর সংক্রান্তির পর প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভোটের ব্যাপারে ঘোষণা করবেন। মার্চে ভোট হবে। কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী প্রসঙ্গে প্রমোদ বলেছিলেন, জনাদেশ যাই হোক না কেন, বি জে পি মনে করে, সনিয়া বিদেশিনি। এই মন্তব্যের জন্য উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী এবং বি জে পি সভাপতি বেঙ্কাইয়া নাইডু এ ব্যাপারে প্রমোদের কাছ থেকে জবাবদিহি তলব করেন। তাঁরা জানতে চান, দলের এক সাধারণ সম্পাদক কী করে সরকার, নির্বাচন কমিশন এবং জনাদেশের উর্ধ্ব উঠে এই ধরনের মন্তব্য করলেন! তাঁকে পরিষ্কার জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়, এটা বি জে পি'র নীতি নয়। দলে মার্চের বদলে এপ্রিলের গোড়ায় ভোটের দাবিও ওঠে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীও মকর সংক্রান্তির পরের শুভ সময়ের অপেক্ষা না করে ভোটের সময় ঘোষণা করে দিলেন। বাজপেয়ী বলেন, “দলের কর্মীদের আমার অনুরোধ, বিশ্রামের সময় নেই। সম্মিলিত সংকল্প নিয়ে এখান থেকে বিদায় নিচ্ছি। এর পরে আবার মিলিত হব, জয়ের অভিনন্দন বিনিময়ের জন্য!”

এপ্রিলেই

লৌতম হোড ● হায়দরাবাদ

১২ জানুয়ারি— লোকসভা নির্বাচন নিয়ে যাবতীয় জল্পনার অবসান ঘটিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী আজ জানিয়ে দিলেন, ৩০ এপ্রিলের মধ্যে নতুন সরকার তৈরি হয়ে যাবে।

লোকসভা নির্বাচন ঠিক কবে হবে, তা নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী কিছু না বললেও বি জে পি সূত্রের খবর, নির্বাচন কমিশনের কাছে সরকার সুপারিশ করবে, মার্চের শেষে অথবা এপ্রিলের গোড়াতেই যাতে নির্বাচন শুরু করা হয়। ভোট সম্ভবত চার দফায় হবে। ২০ এপ্রিলের মধ্যে গোটা ভোটপর্ব শেষ হয়ে যাবে।

নির্বাচন এগিয়ে আনতে ফেব্রুয়ারির দ্বিতীয় সপ্তাহের মধ্যে লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়া হবে। প্রজাতন্ত্র দিবসের অনুষ্ঠান শেষ হওয়ার পরেই দিন দুয়েকের সংসদ-অধিবেশন ডাকা হবে। সেখানে অর্থমন্ত্রী

যশোবন্ত সিংহ 'ভোট অন অ্যাকাউন্টস' পেশ করবেন। আজ বি জে পি'র জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকের সমাপ্তি ভাবনে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেন, "আমি যশোবন্তজিকে সংসদে তাজাতাড়ি 'ভোট অন অ্যাকাউন্টস' পেশ করার নির্দেশ দিচ্ছি।" লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার পর ভোটের চূড়ান্ত দিনকণ্ঠক করবে নির্বাচন কমিশন।

ভোট যে এগিয়ে আনা হবে, তা নিয়ে সংশয় না থাকলেও জল্পনা হচ্ছিল ভোটের দিনকণ্ঠ নিয়ে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী আজ সেই জল্পনায় ইতি টেনে বলেন, "দল কোনও রকম অস্পষ্টতা না রেখে লোকসভা এগিয়ে আনার জন্য আমার কাছে সুপারিশ করেছে। এন ডি এ-ও এ ব্যাপারে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার ভার আমার উপর ছেড়ে দিয়েছে। এখন দায়িত্ব আমার। এন ডি এ তৈরি। বি জে পি-ও তৈরি। আমার আশা, এপ্রিলের মধ্যে নতুন সরকার শপথ নেবে।"

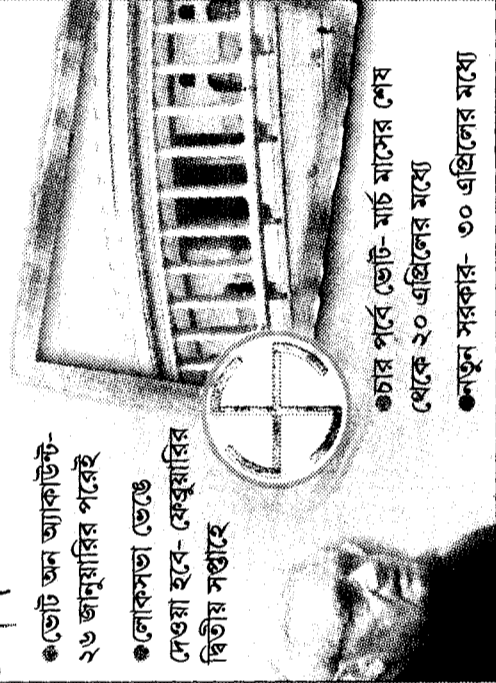
দিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানান,

নয়া সরকার

১২/১/০৪ ৭-PM from NDA

ভোটের তালিকা প্রকাশের নির্ধারিত তারিখ ২৩ মার্চ।" অতএব ২৪ মার্চও যদি ভোট ঘোষণা হয়, তাহলে নিয়ম মেনে তার ২১ দিন পরে ভোটের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি হবে। মনোনয়ন জমা, তার পরীক্ষা, মনোনয়ন প্রত্যাহার এবং প্রচারের দু সপ্তাহ— সব মিলিয়ে আরও ২৪ দিন পরে ভোট করা যাবে। বার অর্ধ, ২৩ মার্চ ভোটের তালিকার কাজ শেষ হলে ১০ মের আগে ভোট হবে না। কমিশন সূত্রে খবর, ভোটের তালিকা সংশোধনের কাজ যাতে মার্চের প্রথম সপ্তাহের মধ্যে শেষ করা যায়, তার চেষ্টা চলছে। ভোট কবে, তা নিয়ে আজ মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার জে এম লিংডো মন্তব্য করেননি।

বর্তমান লোকসভার মেয়াদ সেক্টর অবধি। তা সত্ত্বেও ভোট কেন ৫-৬ মাস এগিয়ে আনা হচ্ছে, তার ব্যাখ্যাও দিয়েছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। তাঁর বক্তব্য, "আমাদের লক্ষ্য, ২০২০-র মধ্যে ভারতকে উন্নত দেশে



● ভোট অন অ্যাকাউন্ট-
২৬ জানুয়ারির পরেই

● লোকসভা ভেঙে
দেওয়া হবে- ফেব্রুয়ারির
দ্বিতীয় সপ্তাহে

● চার পরে ভোট- মার্চ মাসের শেষ
থেকে ২০ এপ্রিলের মধ্যে

● নতুন সরকার- ৩০ এপ্রিলের মধ্যে

দেশ জোড়া ভোটের তালিকা সংশোধনের কমিশনের মুখপাত্র এ এন বা আজ রাতে কাজ শেষ হওয়ার কথা ২৩ মার্চ। বলেছেন, "উত্তরপ্রদেশে সংশোধিত

ঘোষণা

পরিণত করা। নতুন করে জনাদেশ পোলে আরও আত্মবিশ্বাসের সঙ্গে লক্ষ্যের দিকে এগিয়ে যাব। পরিস্থিতি আমাদের অনুকুলে। জনগণের আস্থা অর্জন করেছে। সাম্প্রতিক বিধানসভা নির্বাচন দেখিয়ে দিয়েছে, মানুষ আমাদের সঙ্গে রয়েছেন। বিরোধীরা ছত্রভঙ্গ। তারা জানে না, কী ভাবে এগোতে হবে, আমাদের কোণঠাসা করতে কোন বিষয় তুলতে হবে।"

সার্বিক পরিস্থিতি অনুকুলে বলেই আর অপেক্ষায় রাজি নন বাজপেয়ী। বিরোধীদের অগোছালো অবস্থার পুরো সুযোগ নিতে চান তিনি। তাঁর জোট তৈরি আছে। মোটামুটি গত লোকসভা ভোটের

সূত্র মেনেই আসন ভাগাভাগি হবে। অন্য দিকে, কংগ্রেস সবে জোট গড়তে উদ্যোগী হয়েছে। জোট গঠন শেষ করার পর আসন ভাগাভাগি নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করলেই কংগ্রেসে বিরোধ তৈরি হবে বলে ধরে

এর পর জোটের পাতায়

Centre calls Hurriyat for talks on 22 January

NEW DELHI, Jan. 13. — Three months after nominating Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani to hold talks with the Hurriyat Conference, the Centre today set the ball rolling for a Hurriyat-Advani meeting on 22 January with a formal invitation to the Hurriyat Conference chairman, Maulana Abbas Ansari.

The brief letter did not mention the agenda of the meeting. "Pursuant to the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security on October 22, the Deputy Prime Minister would like to meet you on 22 January," the invitation that gives the Hurriyat some

recognition as representatives of the Kashmiri people said.

This will be the first interaction between the Hurriyat and a Central government leader. The Hurriyat leadership has not met the Centre's interlocutor, Mr NN Vohra — or for that matter, his predecessor, Mr KC Pant — on the ground that they wanted to meet Mr Vajpayee or Mr Advani first.

The decision on the timing of the letter was taken over the weekend in view of the unanimity within the BJP and the NDA to recommend dissolution of the Lok Sabha and go in for early elections. — SNS

Fernandes invites Mulayam to join NDA bandwagon

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: NDA convenor George Fernandes "invited" UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav on Friday to join the NDA, so that the socialists could contribute their mite to the coalition. In answer to a question on whether he would consider including Mulayam Singh in the unity moves since he was on a mission to re-unite the old socialists, Mr Fernandes said, "When we joined the NDA coalition, some of my fellow socialists were unhappy. But now that the coalition is working so well, I feel all socialists should make their contribution to strengthening it."

This "invitation" comes amidst speculation that Mulayam Singh may be willing to join the NDA after the general elections. It also comes in the wake of the

mediatory role played by Mr Fernandes in installing the Mulayam Singh government in UP last year, and a more recent meeting between the two men here after it appeared that former UP chief minister Kalyan Singh may return to the BJP. Mulayam Singh reportedly complained that his alliance was being weakened.

Asked about his recent talks with Mulayam Singh, Mr Fernandes said the discussions had nothing to do with unity in the janata parivar; they had centred around the late socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia. To a question on Mulayam Singh's statement that he

would accept Mr Fernandes as his "leader" again if the latter severed his ties with the BJP, the defence minister refused to comment.

Mr Fernandes, when asked what kind of co-relation he saw between the socialist creed he professed and the BJP's Hindutva ideology, first said that Lohia had never opposed Hindutva or the Hindu religion. Indeed, he had spoken of the equality of all religions and played a central role in the celebration of the Ramayan Mela in Chitrakoot.

Then, he targetted the Congress, attacking it for all the ills in the country, stressing that when Lohia had propagated his plank of anti-Congressism, the Jan Sangh, the BJP's predecessor was part of it. Asked whether things had not changed since then, as the Congress was no longer in such a commanding position, and communalism was the major threat, he said, "Communalism is not an attribute of any one community. The Congress remains a bigger threat."

On whether he was not promoting the growth of the RSS by being part of this coalition, Mr Fernandes's reply was terse: "I don't think the RSS is in this government."

Asked whether the NDA was not encouraging the growth of personality politics, with Atal Behari Vajpayee, the subject of such adulation, he said, "How can anyone say so? Vajpayee has struggled so hard to get where he is today."

Calling all socialists



G. Fernandes



Mulayam Singh

PM authorised to fix poll dates

Sudesh K Verma and
Aloke Tikku in New Delhi

Jan. 8. — The NDA today authorised the Prime Minister to decide on advancing the Lok Sabha polls and also on issues such as tabling a vote-on-account in Parliament. Some alliance partners, however, expressed reservations on an April poll and argued for either a March or May election. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee reportedly said "the mood is good".

It is, however, learnt that the government has decided on tentative dates for dissolution of Parliament and the elections. This was finalised at a meeting called by the Prime Minister and attended by Mr LK Advani, Mr Jaswant Singh and BJP chief Mr M Venkaiah Naidu. A BJP leader said while it was for the Election Commission to chalk out the

Mamata gets coal

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8. — Miss Mamata Banerjee was today given charge of the ministry of coals and mines in the Union government. — SNS

Details on page 3

poll schedule, the government had worked out a tentative period.

The leaders had reportedly arrived at the dates after considering inputs from Union home secretary Mr N Gopalaswami on the availability of central forces for the poll duty. Mr Gopalaswami will attend a meeting called by EC tomorrow.

The government's sops today should be seen in accordance with this plan, a BJP leader said. The finance minister is learnt to have told the closed door meeting at Mr Vajpayee's residence that the government had

taken populist decisions and more such "sops are likely".

Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr V Ponnuswamy (PMK), however, suggested that Mr Vajpayee could explore the possibility of completing the term of this Lok Sabha. The partners were joined by MP chief minister Miss Uma Bharati, who said the *Mahakumbh mela* between 5 April and 5 May would make holding the polls during this period difficult. Shromani Akali Dal, Indian National Lok Dal and JD-U leaders said the polls shouldn't be held between 15 and 30 April since this was the harvest season in Punjab, Haryana and western UP. Such arguments came despite NDA convener Mr George Fernandes's statement at the meeting that all partners had been consulted on the issue and there was no need for further discussion.

THE STATESMAN

9 JAN 2004

Feel great: A Rs 8000-cr poll splurge

Mini budget with maxi gifts



POLL PONDERING: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and Yashwant Sinha before the ceremonial reception of Guyana President Bharat Jagdeo at Rashtrapati Bhavan. (PTI)

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 8: Jaswant Singh did not get to make a speech in Parliament today, but he did present the budget — well, almost.

Confirming — if any were needed — early polls, the finance minister sought to make the jump from “feel good” to “feel great”, as BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu said the other day, delivering a colourful bouquet of measures to the middle class.

Air travel will be cheaper by 15 per cent from tomorrow, prices of personal computers and laptops will drop Rs 1,500-2,000 and high-end cellphones should cost Rs 1,000 less as a gung-ho industry decided to pass on to consumers the benefits of a rash of excise and customs duty reductions.

Although the finance ministry was not putting a figure out, rough calculations show the concessions — led by a cut in peak customs duty on all non-agricultural products from 25 to

20 per cent — add up to Rs 8,000 crore in loss of revenue in a full year.

In last year's budget, the giveaways amounted to only Rs 2,955 crore, making today's measures much more than just a mini budget.

Jaswant Singh defended the sops, claiming that “faster growth will offset the revenue (loss). The impact on revenue will be temporary. These measures will, in fact, greatly enhance growth and stimulate investment”.

The mini budget left little doubt that elections will be held early. It is obvious now the full budget will be presented not on the traditional last day of February, but only after the elections.

The government slashed duties on computers, cellphones, life-saving drugs and aviation fuel and scrapped the tax on air

travel — domestic and foreign. Along with a cut in the peak customs rate, it withdrew the 4 per cent special additional im-

port duty on all goods.

Salaried employees with earnings up to Rs 1.5 lakh a year, whose taxes were being deducted and paid by their employers, need not file tax returns.

Pensioners without a taxable income will also be exempt from filing returns even if they own mobile phones, cars or houses.

“What benefits the common people, we are not against it. But it is clear that this has been done to bribe the people. Had they really wanted to give some relief to the people, why didn't they think of this earlier?” Congress leader Manmohan Singh asked.

The new lower duties will come into effect from January and the direct tax provisions — there are no changes in rates but only in rules — from April 1.

“The growth momentum is strong and what the finance min-

QUOTE

The time is favourable for elections

A.B. VAJPAYEE

istry is trying to do is to give the economy a boost,” said chief economic adviser Ashok Lahiri. Even without knowledge of the

Delhi stimulant, the stock market in Mumbai sizzled, ruing only that the announcements hit at a time trading was about to close. The sensitive index, which tracks the market mood, swung up by over 151 points to end at 6108, the highest closing in history.

Jubilation over Jaswant Singh's gifts is still left for tomorrow.

Before the finance minister announced the slew of sops, there was a meeting of the BJP Big Four — Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Jaswant Singh and Venkaiah Naidu — in the morning. Customs duty on most info-tech products and cellphones is being halved to 5 per cent. Excise duty on computers has been cut from 16 to 8 per cent. Recorded video compact discs and digital video discs have been completely exempted from excise.

Import duty on coal stands reduced from 25 to 15 per cent, a move that will help the booming steel and aluminium industries.

■ Full list of announcements and more reports in Business Telegraph

MORE FOR LESS

Peak customs duty on all non-agricultural products cut to 20%

Special additional customs duty abolished

Cellphones to be cheaper with duty halved

Excise duty on recorded VCDs and DVDs off

Computers will also cost less

Customs duty cut on life-saving drugs

IT returns can be filed by the salaried and professionals on the Net

Cost of air travel to drop



Eased baggage rules to allow duty-free liquor up to 2 litres

NDA govt cashes in on feelin' good

Banks on sops for middle class in mini-budget for mega returns in general polls

By Priya Ranjan Dash
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In a mini-budget of sorts, the Vajpayee government on Thursday slashed duty rates on a large number of consumer and industrial goods and provided procedural relief to some tax-payers by exempting low-income employees and pensioners from filing returns.

The move confirms talk that the government is bound for early Lok Sabha polls and that there will be no regular budget at the end of February.

The bonanza of duty cuts are designed to please the voter by making air travel and a host of consumer products, including cellphones, computers and live-saving drugs cheaper. They are also aimed at providing industry with cheaper imported inputs and machinery to keep up the so-called "feel good factor" and encourage investment.

Domestic producers had been prepared for an additional dose of foreign competition from next fiscal. The duty cuts would have come in the budget next month in any case. But these were made in advance, effective from Friday, through a notification, obviously with an eye on elections.

Finance minister Jaswant Singh claimed that the giveaways would not hit revenue collection. He said the duty cuts would greatly enhance growth and spur investment.

The FM said the duty concessions were not be linked to elections. "Budget process 'ko koi chot nahin pahuncha hai' (the budget process has not been hurt)," he said. "There are

sectors like health and information technology which are growing, so why delay giving them incentives?" he asked.

Officials also maintained that the revenue loss was only notional and there would be buoyancy in customs and excise collections arising from the boost given to the economy.

Sources said there would now only be a vote-on-account for authorising spending by the various departments during the first four months of the next fiscal. The 2004-'05 budget will be presented by the government after the elections. The overall sums will have to be worked out and the burden of the pre-poll largesse will have to be borne then.

In line with a pledge to lower tariffs to ASEAN levels and taking advantage of the cushion of record foreign exchange reserves, the ceiling rate of basis import duty on all non-farm goods has been cut to 20 per cent from 25 per cent. Also, the special additional duty (SAD) of four per cent has been abolished. Two litres, instead of one, of foreign liquor, laptops and exposed films can now be brought in as part of baggage from a trip abroad.

The duty cuts will make foreign goods, except a few special products such as cars, cheaper to import.

Customs duty on project imports, of at least Rs 5 crore in machinery, has been

slashed to 10 per cent from 25 per cent. Besides, duties have been cut in sectors including coal, power transmission projects, electricity meters, electrical appliances and bulk drugs.

In civil aviation, the excise duty on aircraft fuel has been cut to eight per cent from 16 per cent and inland and foreign travel taxes have been abolished.



Illustration: Ajit Ninan

You decide on election timing, NDA tells PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The NDA took the first formal step on Thursday evening towards holding general elections ahead of schedule in late April-early May: Its constituents authorised the Prime Minister - without any discussion - to decide the timing

of the polls. With this "authorisation" coming within hours of finance minister

Jaswant Singh announcing a slew of economic concessions, aimed largely at the BJP's middle class constituency, the message of early polls and a vote-on-account in place of a full-fledged budget was reinforced.

Sources added that the next step would be an endorsement for early polls by the BJP's national executive meeting in Hyderabad on January 11/12, after which a formal decision would probably come from the union cabinet.

The constitutional requirements of a vote on account and dissolution of Parliament would follow. However, it was stressed at Thursday's NDA meeting, that "no timeframe had been specified".

Simultaneously, on Thursday, with an eye to the upcoming polls, union minister without portfolio and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee was finally given coal and mines, shortly after she had a one-to-one meeting with NDA convenor George Fernandes. This was accompanied by a few small changes in ministerial portfolios, with coal minister Karia Munda being moved to non-conventional energy sources and MoS for mines Ramesh Bais being given...

At Thursday's late evening NDA meeting at the PM's residence, the "feel-good factor" was doubly underlined: First, external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha briefed the NDA leaders about India's "achievements" at the recently concluded SAARC meeting in Islamabad, both on the economic front as well as in the course of bilateral talks with Pakistani leaders. Then, finance minister Jaswant Singh explained the reasons for the economic sops announced earlier. Fernandes later told journalists that the NDA members "complimented" both the PM and Jaswant Singh for a good job done.

Sources added that Fernandes told the meeting that the suggestion of advancing the poll dates was on the agenda. Instantly, deputy PM LK Advani, these sources added, proposed that the issue need not be discussed at all, but individual allies could convey their views to the PM, a suggestion to which the members agreed.

NDA to meet today, talk early polls

PRADEEP KAUSHAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

EVEN AS the BJP looks for fresh partners in the NDA in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, a meeting of the ruling alliance has been convened tomorrow to discuss the issue of early elections.

Sources disclosed here today that the meeting is aimed at taking a collective view, as informal talks have already taken place among NDA members. The related issue of passing an interim budget or

obtaining a vote-on-account in Parliament will also be taken up, the sources said.

NDA convenor George Fernandes had met BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday morning, while Biju Janata Dal leader and Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is already here.

Though elections to the Orissa Assembly are due next year, the ruling BJD-BJP combine may opt for a snap-poll alongside the Lok Sabha elections.

While battle-lines are clearly drawn in most states, the scene is still hazy in three

vital states — Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu — accounting for a total of 167 Lok Sabha seats.

In UP, the BJP awaits the return of former chief minister and Rashtriya Kranti Party leader Kalyan Singh, who is holding his cards close to his chest. The suspense is expected to be over with the Prime Minister's return from Pakistan, as the deal has to be clinched between Kalyan and Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Kalyan is capable of drumming up BJP prospects in at least 10 Lok Sabha constituencies. The second crucial factor

will be a possible tie-up between the BSP and the Congress. Apart from consolidating the Dalit vote, it will be a counter-magnet for attracting the minority-vote.

The polite telephone conversations aside, BSP leader Mayawati is likely to strike a hard bargain with Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

She has already indicated that the BSP will demand a chunk of seats in Congress strongholds in other states in return for concessions in Uttar Pradesh. All eyes are rivetted on NCP in Maharashtra: Whether Sharad Pawar will

finally go it alone or tie up with either the Congress or the NDA.

If he joins NDA, it will be a serious setback to Congress efforts to form a front. Besides, a Shiv Sena-BJP-NCP combine will make a formidable line-up at the hustings.

In Tamil Nadu, it is not clear whether AIADMK will ally with the BJP or leave it in the company of PMK.

If Congress and Left parties make a common cause with DMK, Tamil Nadu will obviously present a convergence point for the proposed two fronts against BJP.

INDIAN EXPRESS JAN 7 2004

NDA meet may back early poll move

Sudesh K Verma
in New Delhi

SKV
QUNDA

Jan. 7. — An NDA meeting is slated for tomorrow. A meeting of the big four of the BJP — Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, BJP president M Venkaiah Naidu, and Union finance minister Jaswant Singh — is slated before the NDA meeting.

Sources said the scheduling of an NDA meeting after the meeting of top BJP leaders means that the BJP's proposal to advance polls to either April or May is slated to be endorsed by the NDA which may finally authorise the Prime Minister to decide the course of action.

Three allies — the Biju Janata Dal (Orissa), the Indian National Lok Dal (Haryana) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (Punjab) — have report-

edly sought May polls as this would give them more time to prepare. If a May election is proposed, the government may have a vote-on-account in February, sources said.

In between, there is a meeting of BJP general secretaries with Mr Naidu and Mr Advani that would discuss the modalities of the elections and set the tone of the national executive in Hyderabad. Top BJP leaders are slated to meet at 10 a.m. and the NDA meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m.

BJP leaders were apprehensive about the NDA meeting as they were not certain of the Prime Minister's mind. Mr Vajpayee today spoke to Mr Advani and Mr Naidu and reportedly clarified that he was in favour of going along with the poll advancement proposal, sources said.

All the parties in the NDA have already been consulted on the proposal.

The Telugu Desam Party, Shiv Sena, Biju Janata Dal, Samata-Janata Dal-United, Shiromani Akali Dal, Indian National Lok Dal, Trinamul Congress and smaller parties have been briefed.

BJP leaders are keen on a vote-on-account by the end of this month followed by dissolution. This could make April elections a possibility even if the Election Commission decides to complete revision of electoral rolls in January-February.

By calling for early elections, the BJP plans to take advantage of the "buoyant mood" after the victory in three major states — Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. The momentum has already been built and there was no reason to delay further, a BJP leader said. This would only give an opportunity to the Opposition to discuss formation of a rival coalition, he added.

The Paswan factor

SR 6
3/11/04 Will he forgive and forget? ✓

If the results of the assembly elections have given the NDA something to be happy about, that still does not quite put it in a comfortable position as far as the parliamentary elections are concerned. Some states with a sizable number of parliamentary seats are out of the NDA fold and, given the BJP's performance in those states, there is little chance of a turnout without some desperate moves. That explains the effort to woo Ram Vilas Paswan as a possible foil to Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar. It clearly suggests that the ruling NDA doesn't have much confidence in the abilities of either George Fernandes or Nitish Kumar to give the Rashtriya Janata Dal a run for its money.

The two leaders belong to the Samata Party, which had witnessed serious differences and had been on the verge of a split. The split has been avoided but Samata's chances of posing a serious challenge to the RJD are still in question. The state unit of the BJP has proved singularly incapable of matching Laloo's manipulative skills; and here too the party is far from united. Shatrughan Sinha had been dubbed the Bihari Babu and seen as Laloo's biggest rival till he ran into resistance in his own party in Bihar and has since been content to hold a Union cabinet portfolio and rarely visit his home state.

All this leaves the NDA with no option but to turn to Paswan who left the NDA in a huff to form his own Lok Janshakti. The new party has little chance of making any difference to the overall political scenario but NDA leaders have discovered that if Paswan's influence can be added to the NDA's, it might help wrest at least some of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the state. The Paswan (read caste) factor accounts for nearly 100,000 votes in select constituencies and in any case can sway voters all over the state.

Paswan speaks of "ideological" differences with the NDA but all this actually boils down to being treated very shabbily in the Union cabinet reshuffle a little over two years ago. He was first removed from Railways and then from Communications in what he believes to be a pre-meditated effort to humiliate him. The task now is to heal his hurt ego and reassure him that his importance to the NDA is no less than that of Fernandes or Nitish Kumar and that he will be given a portfolio of his choice should the NDA return to power after the parliamentary elections. Mamata Banerjee is in largely the same position with two differences: one, the Trinamul has been steadily declining in West Bengal and, two, Mamata herself is desperate to get back into the Union cabinet even for a few months prior to the elections.

Paswan has played his cards better at this point of time. His new outfit may not claim too many sitting members of Parliament but he would perhaps be the NDA's biggest hope against Laloo should he finally decide to forgive and forget. Paswan has an undistinguished record as minister but that is of no consequence. For the moment he holds the advantage.

9-PP NDA STEPPING OUT 11/1/04 ✓

Ideology, or even unease in partnership, can no longer be accepted as a convincing reason for exiting a power alliance. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has offered the second for leaving the National Democratic Alliance and giving it "issue-based" support from outside. Ideologically, the DMK had nothing in common with the Bharatiya Janata Party, its alliance was more strategic than "moral". The resounding success of Ms J. Jayalalithaa's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections of 2001 was enough to destabilize the logic of the DMK-NDA partnership. The list of grouses the DMK has produced to explain its decision to leave the NDA has to be seen against this background. One is that the BJP has been rather sweet on Ms Jayalalithaa. This political flirtation has not gone unnoticed, maybe because it was not meant to. The BJP has found it good strategy to forget Ms Jayalalithaa's role in the pulling down of the first NDA government in 1999. Without denying the DMK's allegation, the BJP has accused it of affectionately nuzzling the Congress. The DMK has other grouses. One is the Centre's refusal to take another look at the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Tamil Nadu. The fact that Mr Vaiko, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, has remained in custody after being arrested under POTA for speaking publicly in favour of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has become a contentious issue. It is not surprising that the MDMK has followed the DMK's suit and walked out of the NDA too. Apart from these, the DMK has complained that the BJP has not reviewed the issue of the banning of strikes. Nor has the BJP appreciated the DMK's good work.

When listed, these sound puerile. The decisive moment came when the BJP chief, Mr M. Venkaiah Naidu, said that it was not healthy when a coalition partner agitated against the BJP in the state and remained with it at the Centre. The point, however, is that the DMK has done this. Its prompt decision suggests that it was just waiting for provocation. The DMK seems to be carefully working out for itself a position with options. Local politics being the real arena of the rivalry between the AIADMK and the DMK, the latter is not willing to grant the former either the luxury of a choice of support or the safety of an opposition split between the Congress and the NDA. It is a risk the DMK has thought worth taking — early days mean a longer time for pre-poll negotiations. As the BJP has pointed out, the DMK and the MDMK's departures will mean nothing to the NDA. That is now. Perhaps the DMK is looking a little further into the future.