

'Coupon' stampede kills 42 in Chennai

By T.S. Sreenivasa Raghavan/TNN

Chennai: History repeats by itself. So do tragedies. This became evident on Sunday morning when Chennai city woke up to a stampede tragedy which killed 42 people, 23 women and 19 men, and injured over 40. The injured have been admitted to the Chennai and Royapettah government Hospitals. Fortunately, the nauseating tragedy spared the children considering its occurrence at an odd hour. A similar tragedy at Vyasarpadi in North Chennai had killed six women and injured over a dozen on November 6.

The incident took place at 4.30 am on Sunday at the MGR Nagar Corporation School. Over 10,000 people from three divisions, namely, K K Nagar, MGR Nagar and Sathya Nagar had assembled before the closed school gate to get the flood relief coupons.

Be it Vyasarpadi or MGR Nagar, the stampede victims were



Amudha, who lost her husband, being consoled by the Tamil Nadu CM J Jayalalithaa outside the Government General Hospital mortuary in Chennai

scrambling to get hold of the relief coupons at the hands of TN government officials which entitled them Rs 2000 in cash, a sarcee

worth Rs 150, dhoti of Rs 75, 10 kg of rice worth Rs.140 and one litre kerosene costing Rs.9 on production at their respective ration shops. So, in effect, each stampede victim was trying to buy the paltry relief worth Rs.2,374 by paying with his or her life.

Forty five-year-old Aruna—a resident of MGR Nagar—who lost her brother-in-law in the tragedy said, she along with Kanakasabhai (29) were waiting in the queue since 2 am.

"In the beginning, there were three separate queues for three divisions. But, when the gate was opened, there was a rush from behind and the queues disappeared. Some ran into the school premises. Some fell down. I could hear the painful screams of people who're being run over. Only then I realised what happened. When I turned back, Kanakasabhai (29) was lying in a pool of blood", she told the TOI.

K Kothandan, who lost his sis-

ter's husband, R Selvaraj (32), said nearly 100 policemen were on duty when the incident took place. "We're there from 1 am. Then it started raining at about 4.15. One policeman in uniform came and opened the gate without taking any precaution to regulate the entry," Kothandan said and affirmed the thoughtless action of the policeman alone resulted in the stampede.

Mohammed Farooq (55), who lost his son-in-law Kaboor Khan (30), blamed the residents of MGR Nagar for the tragedy. "It's they who started the mad rush first", Farooq alleged. Farooq who remained in the queue with Kaboor Khan appeared to be saying the truth since 99 per cent of the casualties were reported from the crowd of MGR Nagar division.

Meanwhile, TN chief minister J Jayalalithaa, who later visited the injured at the hospitals, announced a solatium of Rs 1 lakh to the relatives of the victims who were killed in the stampede.

E-mail threat no mere "mischief"

Specific leads pursued to get at self-styled sympathiser of Osama

Staff Reporter

MADURAI: The e-mail threat to blow up Parliament and United States consulates in the country, sent from a browsing centre at Palayamkottai in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, has raised suspicions of like-minded extremist elements "regrouping" in the State.

Though no arrest has been made as yet, senior police officers said here on Saturday that they were pursuing specific leads that might help get at the "self-styled" sympathiser of Osama bin-Laden.

While the owner of the browsing centre at Murugankurichi, who was interrogated by the police, could not provide much information on the identity of the suspect, investigators are trying to correlate the threat to earlier instances.

Though the appearance of intimidating posters, leaflets and letters from banned fundamentalist organisations emanating

from this part of Tamil Nadu are not uncommon, this is the second e-mail threat in three years.

On November 11, 2002, a prominent hospital in Madurai received an e-mail from a self-styled Al-Mujahideen operative, Arshad Hussain, who warned of "bomb blasts" and challenged the police and the Government of India to stop "bloodshed" if they could.

A few months ago, an organisation named AMF, suspected to be the 'Al-mum Touheem Force', threatened to attack police officers involved in the special operation in which Imam Ali and four others were gunned down in an encounter in Bangalore on September 29, 2002.

Recently, a letter was received by the Ramanathapuram police that the Pamban bridge, the Ramanathaswamy temple in Rameswaram and another temple in Devipattinam would be blown up. However, no arrest was made in any of these cases and intelligence agencies dis-

missed the threats as a "mischief intended to cause upheaval".

Intelligence sources said the needle of suspicion in the latest threat to Parliament pointed to some members of the clandestine "Muslim Defence Force (MDF)", basically formed to "train youth in the use of arms, explosives and other expertise to organise attacks on enemies of Islam in case of necessity".

The core group of MDF held a meeting with some 25 youths at Courtallam in Tirunelveli district in June 2002 and "indocinated on the importance of Jihad and the necessity to train the cadres". The network was busted in 2003 but not many arrests were made.

Storming operations are likely in some parts of southern districts in the wake of the e-mail threat. Intelligence sleuths and police officers would only say that the e-mail threat was more than a "mischief" and needed to be thoroughly probed.

THE HINDU

Mulayam accuses Sonia of tapping his, Amar's phones

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 DECEMBER

THE already-strained relations between the Samajwadi Party and the Congress today plunged to a new low when Mulayam Singh Yadav accused Sonia Gandhi of ordering tapping of telephones of senior SP leaders. Mr Yadav said the move had the stale smell of political calculations as the Congress was trying to topple his government in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr Yadav, who cast the first stone in the direction of 10, Janpath, said the Congress leadership, which is displaying an itch to fix political rivals, has already started a game of intimidation. "The phones of senior party leaders including National General Secretary Amar Singh are being tapped at the behest of 10, Janpath," Mr Yadav said.

At the press conference in Lucknow, a Pandora's Box of harsh words was kicked open by the SP chief. "It reminds me of Italian mafia culture and the entire phone tapping operation is being supervised by Pulok Chatterjee, Ms Gandhi's former private secretary and additional secretary in the PMO," he told reporters. Mr Yadav also alleged that the move was part of a larger plan to divert attention from the Volcker investigations as there was evidence about a London-based businessman, close to the

Congress leadership, benefitting from the oily scandal.

Mr Yadav also sought to draw a line between the prime minister and Ms Sonia Gandhi. "The prime minister does not know what's happening in his government. The home minister and the defence minister have no role in this ugly exercise. It's all being done by 10, Janpath. The tapes will be released to the media in January," he said. The government and the Congress responded swiftly ordering investigations into the allegations.

Earlier, addressing the media in Lucknow, Mr Yadav alleged that Mr Amar Singh's phone has been linked to the phone of Joint Commissioner (Crime), North Zone, Delhi, and the conversation among senior leaders was being taped regularly.

The chief minister alleged that orders to this effect had been given by the principal secretary, home, and this has also been confirmed by Police Commissioner of Delhi K K Paul. However, the Police chief denied having confirmed this "information".

The SP leader said he had already contacted the prime minister, home minister and defence minister over this issue. Mr Patil had informed him that there was forged letter in this connection and assured him that that the matter would be investigated. Mr Yadav said he had been provided one such tape by a reliable source but refused to divulge his name.



Govt rejects charges, orders probe

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 DECEMBER



THE Centre on Friday rejected as "baseless" Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's charge of tapping of phones of Samajwadi Party leaders, including Mr Amar Singh. The Union home ministry today conducted an immediate in-house probe and got registered a case of criminal conspiracy and forgery against "unknown persons" which includes those of the telecom service provider — Reliance Infocomm.

The Centre, which moved in swiftly to counter the charges levelled by Mr Yadav, said the issue has been examined by the Delhi Police. "This matter has been thoroughly examined by the Commissioner of Delhi Police and principal secretary (home) in the government of Delhi," joint secretary in the home ministry L C Goyal said.

31 DEC 2005

The Economic Times

Mulayam rejects plea for CBI probe into MLA's murder

2/18
10-5
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'Special Task Force capable to work out the case'

LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, slammed the Opposition on Friday for demanding a CBI inquiry into the killing of BJP MLA Krishnanad Rai and said that State police was capable of working out the murder.

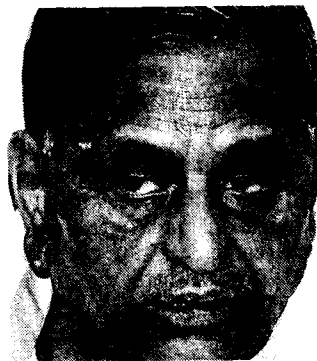
"Those demanding a CBI inquiry into the murder of Mr. Rai are in fact helping the culprits," Mr. Yadav said replying on the discussion on Mr. Rai's killing in the Assembly.

Citing the probe by the State police in the recent terrorist attack on the Ram Janambhoomi complex in Ayodhya, Mr. Yadav said the Special Task Force was able to work out the matter within quick time.

The CBI takes a long time in the inquiry and the culprits will be freed till that time, he said giving details of several cases being handed over to the agency in the past. He, however, said that he would consider a CBI inquiry if the State police failed to work out the case.

Mr. Yadav said the State police could seek help of the CBI, Interpol and other security agencies in working out Mr. Rai's murder case. He rejected the BJP and BSP's contention that the STF had informed the government about the possibility of an attack on Mr. Rai.

The Chief Minister also took exception to dragging of his party's name with the independent MLA Mukhtar Ansari and made it clear that Samajwadi Party has never had any relation with Mr. Ansari. He, however, gave a clean chit to the party MP Afazal Ansari, who had surrendered be-



• 'CBI inquiry if the police failed to crack the case'

• 'SP never had any relations with Mukhtar'

• 'Dharna by Rajnath on the behest of the mafias'

fore a Ghazipur court on Thursday after being named in Mr. Rai's killing, saying that he was a 'gentleman'. Mr. Yadav claimed that he had never sought support from Mukhtar Ansari despite being urged to do so from some quarters at the time of formation of his government in 2003.

"The BJP leaders are spreading rumours that Mr. Ansari had links with our party," he said.

Mr. Yadav launched a scathing attack on the BSP and alleged that it had been encouraging criminals and giving them tickets in the elections.

The Chief Minister said the government would probe the allegation that notorious criminal Munna Bajarangi, whose name

figured in the Mr. Rai's killing.

Slamming the Opposition for alleging that the role of the state government in the investigation was not above board, Mr. Yadav said if it was proved that the SP had encouraged criminals he would resign from his post.

He also rejected the Opposition contention that there was any political pressure on the police and said that the killers of Rai managed to escape as the sniffer dogs rushed to the scene were delayed owing to the agitation by the saffron party as a result of which roads were blocked. The Chief Minister also said that a 'mutt' (religious ashram) in Gorakhpur had been providing patronage to criminals from Poorvanchal.

"We have the reports to this effect... but if we send police it will be construed as an attack on a religious place," he said inviting strong protests from the lone Hindu Mahasabha MLA from Gorakhpur Radha Mohan Agarwal. The Chief Minister also slammed BJP General Secretary Rajnath Singh for sitting on a indefinite dharna in Varanasi in demanding a CBI probe in the matter and alleged that the dharna was being held on the instructions of the mafias.

He said his government was carrying out a drive to eliminate criminals and so far as many as 395 dreaded criminals had been killed in encounters with the police. He informed the House that there were 32 registered inter-State criminal gangs in the State having 445 members of whom 52 had been killed and 71 arrested. -- PTI

For decades Uttar Pradesh has been trapped in a spiral of violence. And there is no end in sight

Dons, death and despair

By Pervez Iqbal Siddiqui/TNN

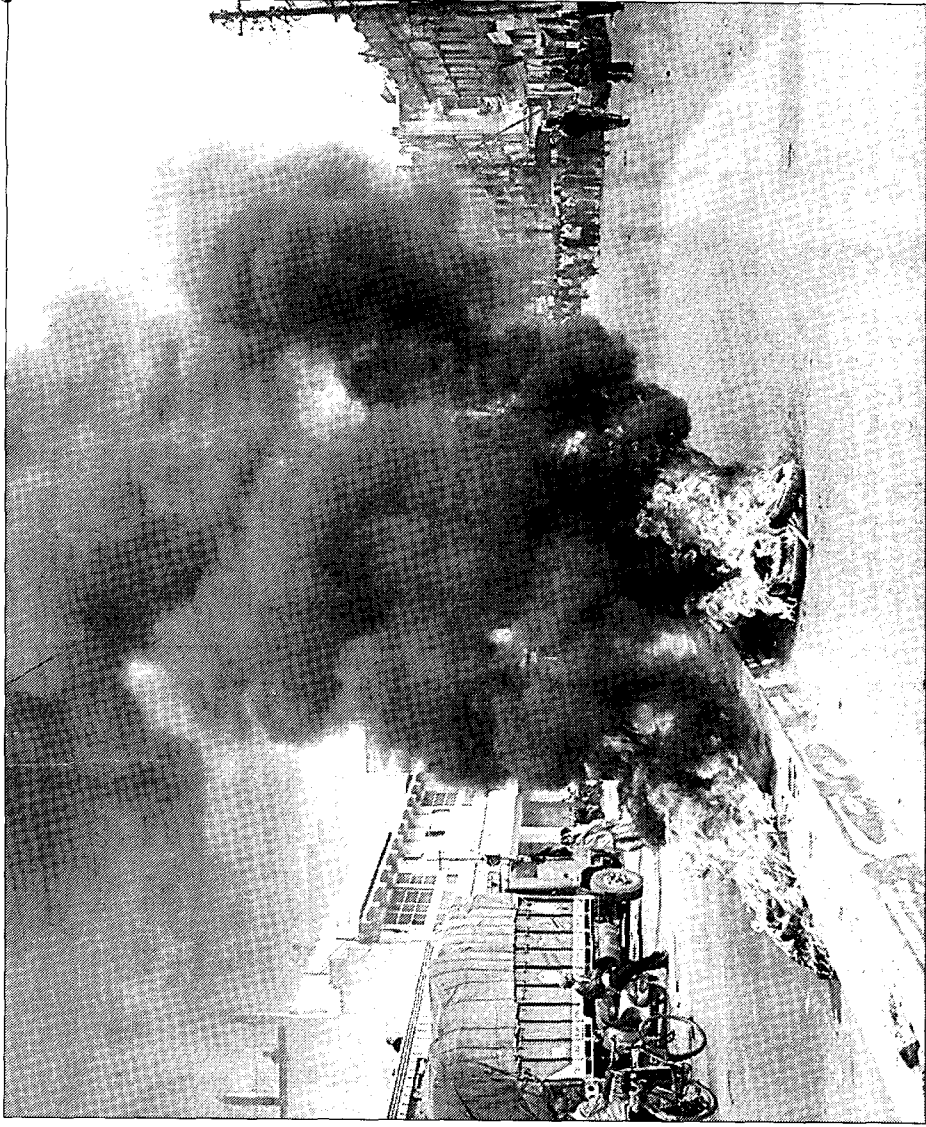
Lucknow: Everybody knew it was waiting to happen. For enmities of these kinds usually end in a hail of bullets and a pool of blood. And it did.

Two days after the murder of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai and six others, the government is trying to trace the genesis of enmity between accused Independent MLA Mukhtar Ansari, who seems to enjoy the closet support of the ruling Samajwadi Party and the slain BJP MLA, which according to police estimates, claimed at least a dozen lives in the past four years.

Blame it all on a battle for the lucrative government contracts that created a turf war between Krishnanand and Mukhtar in the Poorvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh. But Krishnanand wasn't really his own man, he was rather perceived as the frontman of Brijesh Singh, the most powerful Thakur gangster with similar interests. Reports have linked Brijesh with underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

In 2002, Brijesh exchanged gunfire with the Mukhtar gang in Usra Chatti, Ghazipur. The former has not been seen since then and many believe that he was killed in that encounter. Even the UP police is not clear if Brijesh is still alive.

With the Thakur don missing from action, Mukhtar's men had be-



HEARTLAND UP IN FLAMES

gun to turn the heat in the former's area of influence. The heat got unbearable and slowly Krishnanand emerged as a nominee of the Brijesh syndicate. Krishnanand was the lone rival of Mukhtar and company in Poorvanchal. His thumping victory in the last assembly elections from Mohammadabad in Ghazipur on a BJP ticket

— where he defeated five-time MLA Afzal Ansari (Mukhtar's elder brother) — was a blow to Mukhtar who had emerged as the undisputed ganglord after escaping alive from the Usra Chatti ambush.

After Krishnanand's emergence as a replacement candidate for the Brijesh syndicate, both sides did not miss a single chance to hit at each other. The present spate of killings owes its root to the murder of Krishnanand's supporter Shibnath Rai on the polling day of last Lok Sabha election.

his close aide. The two murders then led to a retaliatory shootout in which two contractors were peppered with bullets by motorcycle borne miscreants in Ghazipur last May. The slain contractors, who happened to be Dalits, were associated with Mukhtar. Undoubtedly, Krishnanand's name figured in this double murder case.

Mukhtar's name surfaced as the prime suspect. Murder of a college employee in Ghazipur was another setback to Krishnanand. The de-

ceased was believed to be

By Pervez Iqbal Siddiqui Times News Network

Lucknow: Murder of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai and his six others may have laid the foundation of a crime corridor starting from Siwan in Bihar to Allahabad, covering virtually the entire Poorvanchal—also known as the crime nursery of the country.

The basis for the Uttar Pradesh police to believe there's a crime corridor rests on the well-established connections between don-turned-politician Shahabuddin in Bihar stretching out to mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari in Mau to end with no less notorious gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad in Allahabad.

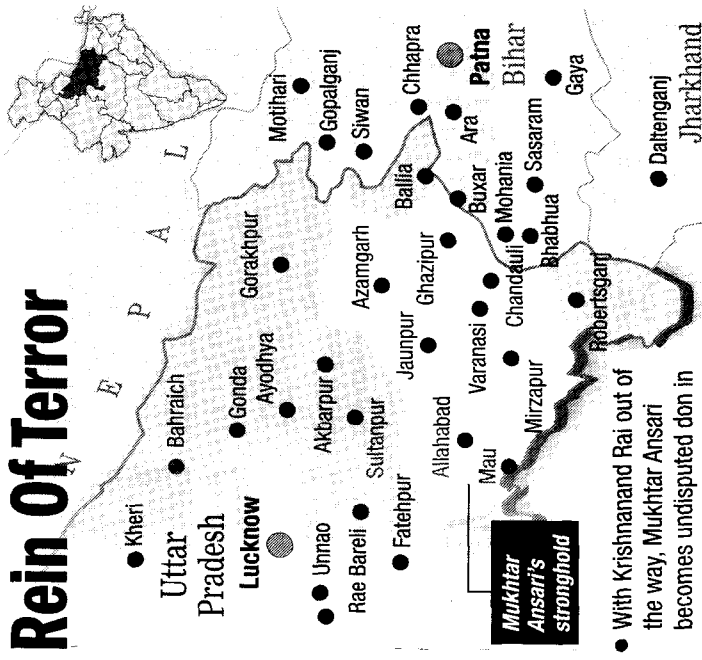
And the links could very well stretch to the treacherous Himalayan swathe where the Maoists operate.

Amarmani Tripathi — the lone surviving challenge to this corridor in eastern Uttar Pradesh — already in jail, the next phase of expansion might see this corridor form a permanent safe passage to Nepal," said a senior IPS officer posted in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Nepal, police officers claim, has often played safe host for those on the wanted list of the Indian investigative agencies in the absence of an extradition treaty between India and the Himalayan kingdom.

Not only that but there seems to be wider terror ramifications. The Special Task Force has sought the help of

Rein Of Terror



- With Krishnanand Rai out of the way, Mukhtar Ansari becomes undisputed don in most of Poorvanchal
- With Amarmani Tripathi in jail, Ansari unchallenged on government and railway contracts.
- Ansari leaves Allahabad region for SP MP Atiq Ahmad
- Police know all, but say dons enjoy political patronage

Interpol after the investigating agency found some foreign links of criminals who killed Rai.

Principal secretary, home, Alok Simha said Special Task Force has sought Interpol's help to establish foreign connections of the criminals.

He refused to divulge any details of the progress made by the investigating agency in the murder, saying, "We cannot reveal the clues and leads gathered as it will not only hamper the inquiry but also create difficulties in establishing the missing links."

MLA'S KILLING | Workers set fire to a power station, railway property; train traffic badly hit

BJP men go on rampage, curfew in Ghazipur

SANJAY SINGH

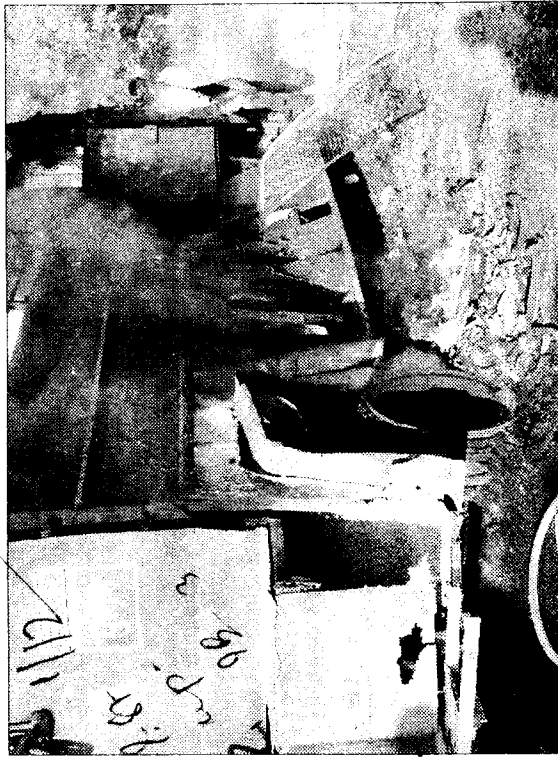
GHAZIPUR, NOVEMBER 30

CURFEW was declared in Ghazipur as violence continued today in the wake of the killing of controversial BJP legislator Krishnanand Rai and his six supporters. The seven were shot dead in Basha-nia village of Ghazipur yesterday. By late evening, violence had broken out in neighbouring areas.

Today, violent BJP supporters set fire to a power substation in Mohammadabad and railway property in Ghazipur. Dhonadiha railway station building on Chapara-Varanasi route was burnt to ground.

Trouble began early this morning with Roy's supporters gathering on the roads. Around 9.30 am, a group of Roy's supporters attacked the railway employees at Dhonadiha railway station.

"They beat me up. Then they sprayed petrol inside the office and set the entire building on fire. The



Madiadiha-Chapara passenger train was stopped at the outer signal. The mob chased the train as the driver took it to the Yusufpur railway station," said Divya Prakash, the assistant station master.

The attackers also damaged the cabin and gate number 24 at Rauza in Ghazipur town.

They set afire a few shops belonging to minority community in their apparent bid to give a communal colour to the shooting.

Vehicular traffic on the road between Varanasi and Ballia had to be stopped. Movement of trains on Chapara-Varanasi route also remained suspended.

FIR against Ansari, Ghazipur SP shunted out

▶ VARANASI: Claiming to have found "vital clues" in connection with the murder of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai, Uttar Pradesh police on Wednesday registered an FIR against the independent legislator Mukhtar Ansari and his brother and Samajwadi Party MP Afzal Ansari.

The authorities also transferred Ghazipur SP Mukesh Babu and suspended SHO of Banwar Kole police station where Rai was gunned down along with six of his supporters on Tuesday.

Sharpshooter Munna Bajjangi, Afzal Ansari's brother-in-law Ejaz Ahmed, Ata-ur-Rehman and Babu were among eight others mentioned in the FIR. — PTI

A fire brigade vehicle near Parsa village in Mohammadabad was intercepted and set on fire. The vehicle was on way to Dhonadiha station to extinguish the fire. A few people, including policemen called to quell the mob sustained injuries in the following stone-pelting.

In Gadaur, the administration was not allowed to take charge of the body for postmortem. Pitched battles started between the police and the crowd when the former tried to enter the village. Finally, the mob, led by former BJP MLA Manoj Kumar Sinha, brought all seven bodies to Ghazipur.

Rai was engaged in political war of supremacy with his rival and don-turned-MLA Mukhtar Ansari who represents Mau assembly seat.

The state government declared curfew and transferred the Ghazipur SP, Mukesh Babu Shukla. "Shukla would be replaced by STF SP Akhil Kumar. We have deployed enough forces to keep the situation under control," said principal home secretary Alok Sinha.

Admitting that shops belonging to the minority community were damaged, Kumar said, "that is why we have pressed the Rapid Action Force into service."

Priority for providing relief: Patil

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28/11

Union Ministers survey flood damage in Tamil Nadu

S. Vijay Kumar and R. Rajaram

MADURAI: Villages, paddy fields and roads, all submerged. These were the predominant scenes that a team of Central Ministers saw when it undertook an aerial survey of the flood-affected districts in Tamil Nadu on Sunday.

Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and two of his Cabinet colleagues, who took off in a special Indian Air Force helicopter from Madurai on Sunday morning, could see only sheets of water everywhere. Two days after torrential rains lashed many districts, the flood situation remained grim with scores of residential localities, mostly villages, still surrounded by water.

"It is very unfortunate that the flood has affected many areas badly. Our priority is to provide immediate relief and temporary shelter. Rehabilitation and reconstruction activities will follow. A Central committee of experts will assess the damage correctly and submit a report," Mr. Patil said.

Accompanied by Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs S. Raghupathy, Mr. Patil flew over Madurai, Sivaganga, Pudukottai, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Tiruchi districts. The Secretary, Disaster Management, D.K. Sankaran, and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president G.K. Vasan were present.

"There will be no holding back on relief. Whatever has to be done will be done. We responded immediately when the tsunami struck Tamil Nadu. An announcement on the interim relief will be made in consultation with the Prime Minister in a day or two," Mr. Chidambaram said.

Mr. Patil told newsmen here that the Disaster Management Bill was likely to be passed in the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

• Flood situation remains grim in many districts

• Announcement on interim relief in a day or two

• Disaster Management Bill likely to be passed in Rajya Sabha today

The provisions of the Bill would be applicable to the States. "If the State Governments want to have their own law, they may be able to do that. But that should not be contrary to the Centre's law. The Disaster Management Authority will make plans and policies and coordinate the activities of the Centre and States. They will obtain the support of the NGOs. The idea is to keep contingency plans ready and mitigate losses when disasters occur," Mr. Patil said. He visited a relief centre and made enquiries.

More Armymen

Speaking to newsmen in Tiruchi, Mr. Patil said more Army teams would be sent to the State for rescue operations. Acknowledging that the damage caused by the floods was "enormous," Mr. Patil said the Centre would do everything possible to help Tamil Nadu. The Army and Coast Guard were rescuing those in flood-ravaged areas, he said and added that they would continue the task.

Mr. Patil, who was earlier briefed by Home Secretary Pawan Raina, Revenue Secretary Shakhthikantha Das and other senior government officials at the airport here, said the rain had affected 15 districts.

Photograph on Page 12

Focus on relief work in Tamil Nadu

Threat from swollen Cauvery and Coleroon

Tamil Nadu Bureau

CHENNAI: With the sun coming out over parts of Tamil Nadu on Saturday, rescue and relief operations moved into top gear. Rescue teams in Thiruvadanai, Ramanathapuram district, and in Pattukottai in Thanjavur district had retrieved 83 bodies by evening. The search for more bodies continued, but officials fear they could have been washed away some distance.

Police said that at Pattukottai in Thanjavur district, where a private bus was washed away on Friday evening, 53 bodies were recovered. Among the dead were two infants and a pregnant woman.

In Thiruvadanai, the situation was gloomier. The crew of a State Transport Corporation bus that was washed away on Friday, as also some of the surviving passengers, told the authorities that over 90 passengers were on board the vehicle when tragedy struck. But till Saturday evening only 31 bodies were recovered, while 18 have been hospitalised. The Navy, with its aircraft, joined in the search operations, but local people fear the bodies might have been swept away into the sea. The police and the revenue authorities were trying to put together a list of "missing" people along the bus route and have informed the authorities at these places to inform them of any such complaints from relatives. "It is going to be a long drawn search and we have to wait for more information about passengers who were on board the bus," a district administration official said.

The situation in Cuddalore, Thanjavur and Tiruchi districts

remained grim. Chief Minister Jayalalithaa began her three-day aerial survey of the flood-affected areas, and visited Cuddalore and adjoining areas to meet some of the flood victims. She distributed relief materials to people in the area.

Both in Thanjavur and Tiruchi districts, the threat from the Cauvery and the Coleroon remained real. Public Works and district authorities battled it out through the day, plugging leaks and "managing" the floodwaters. Fortunately for them, the flow in the two rivers came down to less than one lakh cusecs on Saturday morning. But the waters had entered several villages and parts of Tiruchi town. The Army had been called in from Coimbatore, with boats, to rescue ma-

roomed families off the National Highway to Dindigul.

As the ground was saturated, Corporation authorities said it would take some time for the water to recede.

Relief camps were more active across the State and there were fewer complaints about non-receipt of food packets.

Relief authorities in Chennai said over two lakh people in the State were provided food at various centres on Saturday. This was done both through the district administration as well as the Armed Forces, who were a out in the field.

Ms. Jayalalithaa wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking an immediate assistance of Rs. 3,000 to take up relief and rehabilitation works.

Union Ministers meet flood victims

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: As Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa completed an aerial survey of the flood-affected districts, Home Minister Shivraj Patil arrived in Madurai to assess the damages. He was accompanied by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram.

Ms. Jayalalithaa, who returned to the city on Friday from Hyderabad, flew over some of the affected areas in north Tamil Nadu and walked down near Cuddalore to meet the flood victims.

IT and Communications Minister Dayanidhi Maran

announced here on Saturday morning that Mr. Patil had been deputed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to visit Tamil Nadu, following his meeting with a delegation of MPs from the State.

Shipping Minister T.R. Baalu told a press conference that another Central team would be visiting the State soon to reassess the damages.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam president M. Karunanidhi said he would be visiting some of the affected areas in Villupuram and Cuddalore on Sunday and the other districts when the situation improved.

27 NOV 2005

Two buses washed away: 145 feared killed

No let-up in rain in Tamil Nadu

G. Srinivasan and C. Jaishankar

THANJAVUR: At least 145 passengers were feared killed when two buses were washed away in floods on Friday, even as rain continued in Tamil Nadu for the fourth day.

At Perumalkoil, two km from Pattukottai in Thanjavur district, 80 persons were reported to have been washed away when a private bus tried to cross an overflowing causeway across the Maharajasandram river.

More than 65 people were killed and 15 injured at Sanaveli near Thiruvadanai in Ramnathapuram district when a State Transport Corporation bus was washed away in a flash flood.

So far, 38 bodies have been taken out from the bus in Perumalkoil. Search operations by the police and fire service personnel are continuing for the other victims.

According to police, the bus, going from Pattukottai to Aranthangi, was overcrowded. The driver underestimated the force of the swirling water on the causeway. The bus rolled into the river and was carried to a distance of 50 feet. Water was about three feet above the causeway at the time of the tragedy.

Villagers tried to pull the bus out of the water, but did not succeed. Fire service personnel arrived at the spot and used cranes and ropes to drag the bus to the riverside.

The bodies were taken to Pat-

tukottai Government hospital. The victims, including women and children, are yet to be identified.

In Thiruvadanai, the bus, going from Tiruchi to Rameswaram, was actually stopped by policemen and villagers when it approached the Sanaveli earth bridge at about 12.45 p.m. The driver was asked to be cautious while negotiating the bridge. However, a sudden increase in water flow from the stream washed away the bus.

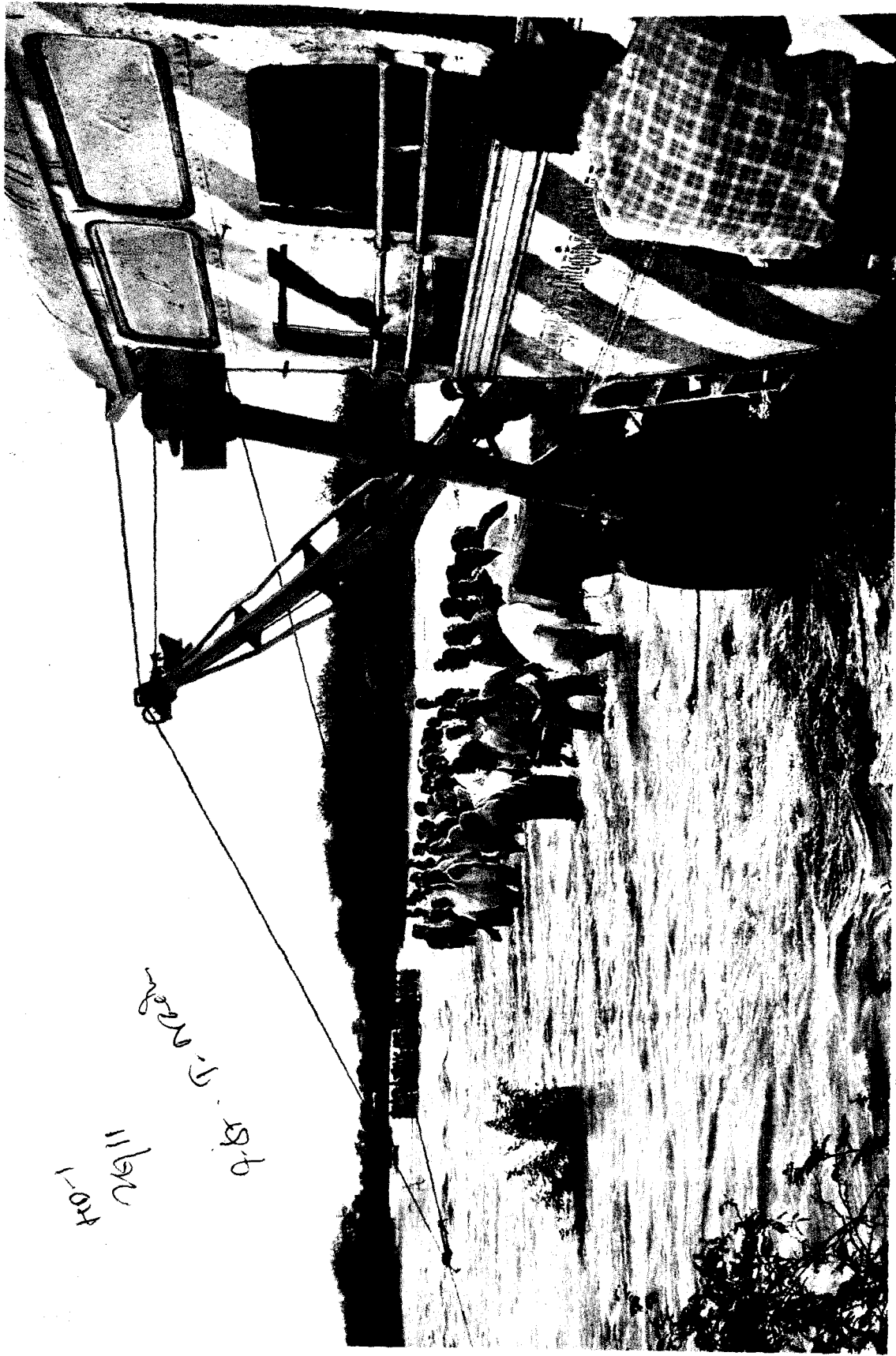
Most of the passengers were unable to swim to the shore as a major portion of the bus went under water.

The policemen and villagers managed to rescue 15 persons, but the strong current claimed the lives of others.

According to the conductor of the bus, 63 passengers were in the bus, but eyewitnesses claimed that at least 90 persons were travelling in the bus. Fire service personnel, police, ambulances and others from Ramnathapuram and Sivaganga districts reached the site and started rescue operations.

A helicopter from the Coast Guard Air Station at Uchipuli was also pressed into service. But, the strong current, and inaccessible roads hampered the rescue operation.

So far, 16 bodies including 8 women and a child have been found and were sent to Thiruvadanai Government Hospital. The driver and the conductor of the bus have been arrested.



TOUGH TASK: A recovery van trying to pull out the State Transport Corporation bus that was washed away in flash floods near Thiruvadanai in Ramnathapuram district of Tamil Nadu on Friday. - PHOTO: C. JAISHANKAR

THE HINDU

26 NOV 2005

Bid to storm Ayodhya shrine foiled, six ultras shot

4 CRPF jawans injured in gunbattle

Ayodhya: Six heavily-armed terrorists on Tuesday made an unsuccessful bid to storm the high-security makeshift Ram temple here and were killed by the security forces before they could strike at the shrine that came up the day the disputed Babri mosque was demolished 13 years ago.

Four CRPF personnel and two civilians, including a woman, were injured in the attack which occurred at around 8.15 am and subsequent intense gun-battle with the terrorists.

The attackers, in the disguise of devotees, came in a hired jeep bearing registration number UP-42-T-0618 and stunned the security forces deployed at the first barricade by blasting the explosive-laden vehicle in which one of them was blown to pieces.

His other accomplices, who had got down from the vehicle earlier, hurled grenades and fired indiscriminately with sophisticated weapons, including AK-47 and carbine rifles, while entering the premises of the disputed area. They were challenged by the personnel of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and CRPF near the 'Sita Rasoi' temple, part of the disputed area, and were gunned down nearly 70 metres short of the makeshift temple in an operation lasting about 90 minutes.

The driver of the taxi Rehan Alam, a resident of Ayodhya, who also got down along with the five terrorists a short distance away from the barricade, was arrested and is being questioned. Another militant killed in the encounter was later found with explosives strapped to his body. PTI

► Lashkar hand suspected, Page 8



Security personnel inspect the bodies of two terrorists who were killed in a gunbattle with security forces in the makeshift Ram temple premises in Ayodhya on Tuesday

Jaiswal calls it lax security

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kanpur: Expressing deep shock over the terrorist attack on the disputed structure in Ayodhya, Union minister of state for home affairs, Sriprakash Jaiswal called it a callous security lapse and urged chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav to conduct a high-level inquiry.

Incidentally, Jaiswal, who is the Congress MP from Kanpur, was meeting with the chief minister in Lucknow to draw the latter's attention towards problems of his constituency when

Bandh call on July 7

Mumbai: The VHP and the Bajrang Dal have called for a Maharashtra bandh on July 7 in the wake of attempted storming of the makeshift temple in Ayodhya by terrorists.

the report of the attack came in.

"I immediately offered to provide the NSG commandos to eliminate the terrorists, who had entered the disputed structure premises," said Jaiswal, while talking to TOI on Tuesday. The MoS maintained that the NSG commandos had been very effective in Akshardham temple

attack and they could have been deployed in Ayodhya also. "The chief minister, however, asked me to wait for a few minutes and now the structure has been freed from the terrorists, which is good news," he added.

Jaiswal, however, said that the chief minister should initiate action against the officials responsible for the security lapse. "It is not an ordinary incident as it could have shaken the entire country, hence officials responsible for the lapses must be punished," he added. He said that the recent warmth in bilateral relations with Pakistan had demoralised the ultra forces and they were now trying to derail the process.

Sethusamudram project launched

This channel will be a bridge with our neighbours: Manmohan; a historic moment, says Sonia



R.K. Radhakrishnan and S. Sundar

MADURAI: As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pressed a button here on Saturday, dredging commenced in the Bay — 45 km off the Kodiakkarai coast in Tamil Nadu — signalling the beginning of the works of the Rs. 2,427.40-crore Sethusamudram channel.

Three-and-a-half years from now, the project, expected to act as a catalyst of industrial development, spur trade and commerce, promote coastal shipping and generate employment opportunities, will be ready to receive the first vessel.

The project, whose first proposal dates back to 1860, is also of strategic importance. "This channel will be a bridge with our neighbours," said the Prime Minister. "I hope this project will also benefit not only us but our neighbours. All of us have a common and shared destiny. Their prosperity is our prosperity; their welfare is our welfare," he said.

Dr. Singh described the project as "one of the most ambitious ever to be conceived in the Indian port sector" and said that the inauguration of works constituted fulfilment of one of the promises made in the Common Minimum Programme. "I am certain that the people of this region will, in a few years time, see their lives transformed for the better by this project," he said.

Keen to develop ports

The Centre was keen to develop ports with all forms of investment, both from the private sector and public sector. "Over the next few years, we expect to see major transformation of all our ports, large and small, whether for shipping or for fishing," he said.

Dr. Singh announced the set-

economically vital," she said it would benefit lakhs of people through the creation of new jobs. "It is truly a day of satisfaction, a historic moment for Tamil Nadu and for the country."

Ms. Gandhi said that she was aware of the environmental issues involved and added that she was confident that the project authorities were "alive and sensitive" to these concerns. "The fishermen communities also will need to be paid particular attention... They need our care and concern, and we must make sure that their interests are protected, and that their welfare is central to our endeavours," she said.

Boost to coastal economy

United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi said the coastal economy and maritime trade would receive a boost once the project was completed. Describing the project as "technologically challenging and

"In fact, we will make sure," she said.

Special position

She said that Tamil Nadu had a special position in the UPA. "What I do want to convey is the special position that Tamil Nadu occupies in the UPA. Dr. Kalaignar Karunanidhi himself is one of the main architects of the UPA and he has helped guide our coalition over the past year," she said. DMK president M. Karunanidhi detailed the long struggle from the time C.N. Annadurai was Chief Minister before the project was taken up for implementation. The project involves

dredging 82.5 million cubic metres over 89 kilometres.

The width of the proposed channel at sea-bed level is proposed at 300 metres — to facilitate two-way navigation.

The project envisages dredging of a ship channel in the shallow portion of the sea to the south of Tamil Nadu to connect the Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal through the Palk Strait so that ships moving between the east coast and west coast could have a straight passage within India's territorial waters, instead of having to go around Sri Lanka.

A DREAM COME TRUE: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh inaugurating the work on the Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project at a function in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, on Saturday. With him are (from left) Union Minister for Shipping T.R. Baalu, DMK president K. Karunanidhi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Tamil Nadu Governor Surjeet Singh Barnala, Union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss and MDMK general secretary Vaiko. PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

● Project expected to act as a catalyst of industrial development

● Fulfills one of the promises made in the CMP

● "Will transform lives of the people of this region"

● "Alive to environmental concerns"

● "Taken up after long struggle"

Protests against Tonk firing on farmers continue

Rajasthan Congress chief B.D. Kalla, others arrested on the way to Raj Bhawan

Special Correspondent

JAI PUR: Protests continued in various parts of Rajasthan over the death of five persons in police firing in Tonk district on Monday last even as the affected villages, Sohla and Jhirana, remained peaceful on Thursday.

Pradesh Congress Committee president B.D. Kalla was arrested

by the police outside the Civil Lines entry point here when he tried to lead a group of party workers to Raj Bhawan to submit a memorandum to Governor Pratibha Patil on the firing on farmers. He was taken to the Bani Park police station and was released later.

In the divisional town of Kota in South Rajasthan, protesting

Congress workers, led by former Minister Shanti Dhariwal, allegedly damaged the official car of a visiting Minister Kanakmal Katarava. Five persons have been arrested in this connection. However, the Congress party has denied any role of its workers in damaging the Minister's car.

The one-day "Mahapaday" (siege) carried out by the Kisan Mazdoor Vyapari Sangarsh Samiti, which had led the last year's farmers movement for water in

Gharsana and Hawala areas of Sriganganagar, attracted a huge crowd at Kajuwala town of Bikaner district. The meeting denounced the "anti-farmer" stand of the State Government and decided to hold the next "paday" at Anupgarh on July 1.

The Kajuwala meeting marked the break of the truce made through an agreement on December 11, 2004 between agitating farmers of Indira Gandhi Canal Phase I and the State Government. It was addressed by All

India Kisan Sabha State president Sheopath Singh, Communist Party of India MLA Amra Ram, former MLA Hetram Beniwal and other farmers leaders, Sant Lekha Singh and Ballabh Kochar.

The CPI (M) and the farmers' groups are holding protest programmes against the police firing on Tonk farmers in the districts on Friday. The Congress party's next protest is scheduled for June 21 when the district committees will demon-

strate in front of the respective Collectorate and submit a memorandum in the name of the Governor.

The Tonk district administration, a day after the replacement of Collector Subhash Sharma with Hemant Kumar Gora and the Superintendent of Police Jagnardhan Sharma with Prem Singh Chudawat, went about its job dutifully. There are about 700 police personnel still deployed in the disturbed areas of the district.

Sikkim tug-of-war on Wen visit eve

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 8: A diplomatic tug-of-war is going on between India and China over the official status of Sikkim.

South Block wants China to state categorically that Sikkim is an integral part of India and wants this reflected in the proposed joint statement that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao is likely to issue with Manmohan Singh at the end of a four-day official visit, beginning tomorrow.

China, however, is reluctant to make this a part of the joint statement though it acknowledges Sikkim to be an integral part of India and has promised to reflect its new stand in the official maps likely to be out later this year.

"We would like to put the Sikkim issue behind us," a senior foreign ministry official said. "We want a categorical statement from China that it acknowledges Sikkim to be an integral part of India."

China fears that an overnight acknowledgement may anger the hardliners in Beijing and elsewhere. It favours a gradual progress by first opening trade points at the Nathu-la border to indicate the shift in its position.

But Delhi wants no further delay or ambiguity because it has already acknowledged Tibet as an integral part of China.

Sikkim and a proposed ag-



Wen: In dilemma

reement on "the guiding principles and the political parameters" to help resolve the boundary issue are likely to be the two high points of Wen's visit.

After a kick-off in Bangalore, the Chinese Premier reaches Delhi on Sunday evening to start political meetings from April 11 with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Singh, foreign minister K. Natwar Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi.

Indicating the seriousness of a proposed agreement on the two issues, foreign secretary Shyam Saran and Chinese vice-foreign minister Wu Dawei will meet here tomorrow to hammer out whatever differences exist between the two sides.

The next day, Chinese "special representative" Dai Bing

Guo and his Indian counterpart, national security adviser M.K. Narayanan, will meet.

South Block officials pointed out that an understanding on the "guiding principles and political parameters" would in itself be a big step though "no swapping" of areas was expected at this stage to settle the boundary dispute.

"This will be the first step where the two countries come to an agreement on the framework under which they will try to resolve the boundary issue," the senior official said.

The two sides are also trying to put in place a number of other confidence-building measures (CBMs), both military and civilian, to signal the growing depth in Sino-Indian relations.

These are aimed at carrying forward the agreement that both sides had signed in 1993 to maintain peace and tranquillity along the boundary and the military CBMs put in place in 1996 to sustain the calm along the borders.

In line with the perception that Wen's visit will be a "landmark" in transforming bilateral ties, both Delhi and Beijing are keen to stress on areas of "complementarity" and work towards mutual benefit.

Wen is thus bringing along a large business delegation and will address the Joint Business Council meeting between the two countries.

SC whip lashes Chennai and Delhi

Jaya Speaker told to face trial

OUR BUREAU

March 30: In what could give the Jayalalithaa regime a red face, the Supreme Court today asked Tamil Nadu Speaker K. Kalimuthu to honour a Madras High Court order to appear before a Chennai trial court in a 22-year-old bank loan scam.

The case, filed by the CBI, relates to orders allegedly given by Kalimuthu to nationalised banks in 1983 to advance vehicle loans totalling Rs 56 lakh to Robin Mayne, the main accused in the scam. The funds, belonging to the Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, were allegedly deposited in the banks by Kalimuthu, who was then state agriculture minister.

Disposing of the Speaker's petition against the high court order, the bench said it did "not find any infirmity in the judgment". It asked the trial court to "dispose of the case as expeditiously as possible" as the chargesheet was filed nearly two decades ago.

When the CBI first filed the case in the trial court, Kalimuthu contended it had not obtained proper government sanction to prosecute him. As such, the court could not take cognisance of the case, he said.

The trial court had upheld his contention. But the high court reversed the order on March 31 last year on a CBI appeal and asked Kalimuthu to appear before the trial court



Jayalalithaa with governor Surjeet Singh Barnala and Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (left) and his wife Nasreena at Chennai airport on Wednesday. (PTI)

on April 16, 2004.

Subsequently, the Speaker moved a special leave petition in the Supreme Court pleading for an interim stay on the high court order. The apex court then ruled Kalimuthu need not personally appear in the trial court from April 13 last year till date.

But today's order means there is no way Kalimuthu can skip appearing before the trial court. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that the CBI will not have to seek fresh sanction to produce him before the court.

Political sources said the order has put the Speaker, already under fire in the Assembly for his allegedly "partisan

attitude", in a spot. Not only will he have to face the embarrassment of presiding over the Assembly and standing trial at the same time, it will embolden the Opposition to step up its campaign against him.

The Opposition has been on a warpath since rural industry minister B. Valarmathi made some allegedly derogatory remarks against DMK chief M. Karunanidhi last week.

Since then, the DMK and its allies, including the Congress, PMK, CPM and the CPI, have been boycotting the Assembly to protest "the continuing violations of the rules and conventions of the House by the ruling ADMK led by Jayalalithaa".

They had also contemplated bringing a no-trust motion against Kalimuthu "for tacitly cooperating with the treasury benches" but backed off for lack of numbers.

On Monday, when Opposition MLAs kicked up a ruckus in the House demanding that the allegedly derogatory remarks be expunged, Kalimuthu had them evicted on grounds of "obstructing proceedings". This led to a huge protest against his "high-handedness".

Today's court order is, therefore, likely to have the Opposition MLAs rubbing their hands in glee. Till this evening, there was no word from the Speaker's office. Kalimuthu was unavailable for comment.

Centre gets rap on fast courts

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, March 30: The judiciary and the legislature appear to be on a collision course again, this time over fast-track courts that were set to wind up tomorrow after the Centre failed to grant funds for their continuation.

The Supreme Court today took a grim view of non-allocation of funds to the 1,734 courts by the 12th Finance Commission while the Centre contended that there was no money.

A division bench of Justices S.B. Sinha and S.H. Kapadia today ordered that the courts should function beyond March 31 and "at least" till April 30.

The bench indicated that it would be compelled to direct the continuation of the courts if the government did not allocate money even after April 30.

When solicitor-general G.E. Vahanvati argued that the matter be left to the government, the judges shot back. "This court has been monitoring the functioning (of the fast-track courts) and the government has repeatedly assured that not only would the existing fast-track courts be continued for another five years, but efforts would be made to establish additional courts.

"Look at the chaos that would result from the wind-

ing up of these courts.... Cases (pending before them) have to be reheard... judges have to be readjusted and a long delay in the adjudication of the cases," the court pointed out.

Vahanvati said Union law minister H.R. Bharadwaj was personally in favour of continuance of the courts.

The apex court today also issued notices to the Centre on a related petition by the Chennai-based All India Media Journalists Association seeking the extension of the fast-track courts beyond 2010.

The courts were established in 2001 to speed up criminal case trials. Over 2.5 crore cases were pending in criminal courts then. The fast-track courts were supposed to try cases on a day-to-day basis to reduce the burden on the regular courts.

However, no money was sanctioned after the initial release of Rs 509 crore by the 11th Finance Commission, with which the 1,734 courts were established.

The courts are a "dream come true" for those undertrials who suffer jail terms for years for petty offences. The case of Bengal's Ajay Ghosh was an eye opener in this respect. He was the longest imprisoned undertrial in the history of independent India, having spent 37 years behind bar, from 1962 to 1999.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 MAR 2004

Jaya will move SC over LS results

By Swati Das/TNN

Chennai: Dropping a bombshell in the Assembly on Wednesday, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalithaa announced that her party, the AIADMK, would move the Supreme Court seeking to declare the elections to all the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu null and void as the Election Commission had found that there were irregularities in the preparation of the electoral rolls.

She made the announcement, intervening during the debate on the motion of thanks to the address of the Governor.

She contended that the EC had stated, based on a probe report of the Kerala Chief Electoral Officer Thomas, that a "big fraud" had been committed in the preparation of the rolls. The matter was raised when the Congress MLA S G Vinayagamurthy expressed disappointment over the failure of the Governor to mention the victory of the Democratic Progressive Alliance (DPA) in the Lok Sabha polls. He also told the House that following the poll results the state



government had reversed its "anti-people" policies.

"Our charge that there was a large addition of supporters of the opposition and deletion of our supporters has been proved. We will move the Supreme Court seeking to declare the results of Lok Sabha election null and void and order fresh polls for the 39 LS seats," Jayalithaa told the House adding that the elections then was neither genuine, nor the defeat of the AIADMK real.

"It is a fact that the election officers conspired against the AIADMK," she said, observing that the EC had directed the state to take action against the electoral registration officers of all the 234 constituencies in the state.

In defence the DMK treasurer Arcot N Veerasamy pointed out that the issue of malpractice were raised by his party and the probe proved that many names of the his party supporters were removed from the rolls.

The others in the opposition too pointed out that the election works were carried out by the state government officials.

Not too late

Sr b
Nathu-la deserves Centre's attention

Sikkim's euphoria over the previous NDA government's announcement in May 2003 to reopen the Nathu-la corridor for trade with Tibet and China is giving way to disappointment. Chief minister Pawan Chamling is puzzled by the UPA government's failure to keep to schedule — it was to have been formalised in July last year — particularly when the Congress leadership so enthusiastically welcomed the NDA decision. What is not clear is the obstacle, but at least Sikkim Congress chief Nar Bahadur Bhandari is known to have objected that this would merely encourage outsiders to enter the state and Sikkimese would finally have to pay Central income tax, exempted so far. The Sikkim Lepcha Bhutia Apex Committee also organised a rally in Delhi to highlight what they claimed would endanger the survival of indigenous ethnic tribes. It is unreasonable that the NDA government could have taken so important a decision without considering all the angles. West Bengal argued in favour of restoring Kalimpong's reputation as the "Gateway to Tibet" through Jelep-la but the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front, being friendly with the NDA, clinched the issue. Kalimpong still has warehouses and infrastructure Sikkim lacks but this is not to suggest that the NDA decision should be reversed.

The Centre's prevarication is unfortunate since Sikkim expected Nathu-la to open up business and job prospects for locals. The state is going all out to promote eco-tourism and hopes to take adventurers on the mule track Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi used in 1958 to travel to Bhutan through Chumbi Valley in Tibet because there was no direct communication between India and Paro then. The Centre owes Sikkim an explanation for the delay.

Mutt takeover

Tamil Nadu government has no proposal

The BJP and the Sangh Parivar have been insinuating that the Tamil Nadu Government would take over the administration of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam following arrest of Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi. The possibilities were strengthened when the junior Sankaracharya, Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi, was picked up on the day his senior was released on bail. It is also rumoured that government is planning to promulgate an ordinance for the takeover of the Mutt.

Chief minister Jayalalitha had informed the Tamil Nadu assembly as far back as 17 November 2004 that her government had no intention to take over the Mutt but that it should continue to uphold the traditions and principles of Hinduism. "The government feels that no disrepute is caused to the glorious Kanchi Mutt. I wish to make it clear that the government had no intention at all to paralyse the Kanchi Mutt which has a holy tradition", Jayalalitha declared. Her sentiments were echoed by the home secretary, Pavan Raina, who said there was no change in the government's policy.

Nevertheless, the Kanchi Mutt has moved Madras High Court seeking to restrain the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Tamil Nadu Government from interfering with its right to administer its affairs and property, including the operation of the bank accounts. All its bank accounts have already been frozen by the state police.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi is no ordinary Sankaracharya. His role has extended far beyond the traditional duties of a pontiff. He has brought about fundamental changes in the activities of the Mutt.

Through his Jan Kalyan and Jan Jagran movements, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi has developed a direct interest in electoral politics and in several lucrative welfare schemes. He is in absolute control of a vast empire of religious, charitable, educational and medical institutions he has built.

It was at his initiative that Jayalalitha, forsaking the Dravidian ideals and principles, pursued the Hindutva line by forging an alliance with the BJP and came a cropper in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. The results taught her the folly of siding with communal forces in a state-like Tamil Nadu.

Jayalalitha wants to retrace her steps and join the secular bandwagon. She knows that unless she revives her alliance with the Congress and the Pattali Makkal Katchi, she cannot retain Fort St George after the state assembly election which is due in the middle of 2006. What better way is there to convince the Congress that she has moved far away from the BJP than her handling of the Kanchi Mutt case?

Cases against Kanchi seer will stay, says Jaya

Chennai: Ruling out withdrawal of cases against Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswathi as demanded by the BJP, Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalithaa on Sunday charged the saffron party with taking up the issue to "rehabilitate" itself.

In a seven-page statement, Jayalalithaa said, "I cannot yield to their request contrary to the law of the land, especially when I have taken an oath under the constitution which is of a secular nature."

She said the stand of the BJP and "certain other vested interests" that she should "intervene" in the investigation process was "purely politically motivated and their expectations are contrary to the rule of law."

"Adherents of the BJP think that religious leaders are above law and no

investigation can be conducted against them. It is for the public to think and judge whether their view is right or not. BJP may be interested in taking up this issue in their programme to rehabilitate their party," she said.

"No one wished and expected that the

heads of the Sankara Mutt, established to uphold Hindu dharma, would stray from the path of dharma and doctrines of shastras to be arraigned as accused in a murder case. At the same time, when all the ev-

idence clearly pointed towards them in the com-

mission of such a crime, that could not be ignored," she said. Jayalalithaa said investigation of the Sankararaman murder case was being conducted by the appropriate officers. When the investigation was taking place, even the judiciary could not intervene in the matter.



Mutt takeover plans,