

Bihar House is dissolved

Step Taken After Governor's Letter On Horsetrading In State: Patil

New Delhi: The Bihar assembly was dissolved on Monday with President A P J Abdul Kalam, away in Moscow, accepting a recommendation to this effect by the Union cabinet which met here late Sunday night. The dissolution comes in the wake of heightened political activities in recent days triggered by a section of MLAs belonging to Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party breaking away from him in a bid to form an NDA government led by JD(U).

The dissolution promptly evoked protests from BJP and other NDA partners. Announcing the presidential approval of the Union cabinet's recommendation, home minister Shivraj Patil told reporters it was done to prevent "horsetrading."

State governor Buta Singh had made the recommendation for the dissolution of the assembly to the Centre, Patil said. "Since the situation was worsening in the state, the Union cabinet accepted the recommendations of the Bihar governor and recommended dissolution of the assembly to the President," he said.

In the elections held to the 243-member state assembly earlier this year, no party or alliance had obtained a clear majority. The state was, therefore, brought under



Activists of NDA burn the effigies of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, RJD president Lalu Prasad and Bihar governor Buta Singh during a demonstration to protest against the dissolution of Bihar assembly in Patna on Monday

EC to meet on poll timing

New Delhi: The full election commission will meet soon to decide on the timing of polls in Bihar. Observing that the commission has got six months time to hold elections in the state which is under President's rule since March 7, EC sources said factors like weather, festivals, school schedules, training of poll personnel and movement of security forces and electronic voting machines (EVMs) would have to be considered.

President's rule and the assembly kept under suspended animation so far. "It is now for the election commission to hold polls in Bihar," the home minister said.

Patil said the Bihar governor, in his report to the Centre, had said "unconstitutional and illegal steps were being taken by political parties to win over MLAs. He said the Bihar governor had written two letters to the Centre pointing out that horsetrading was taking place. In the first letter, the governor had brought the issue of horsetrading to the notice of the Centre a few days back but had not suggested dissolution of the assembly. In the second letter (on Sunday), the governor recommended dissolution of the assembly as unconstitutional, illegal and unacceptable developments were taking place in the state," the home minister said. The governor's report was similar to the information available with the Centre which was corroborated by some political leaders from the state, he said. PTI

NDA calls it 'murder of democracy,' blasts Buta

New Delhi: Dubbing the dissolution of Bihar assembly as a "murder of democracy" and a "dictatorial step" by the Centre, an angry NDA on Monday demanded immediate holding of assembly elections in the state and recall of governor Buta Singh. Shortly after the Centre's announcement, NDA leaders, who met at former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's residence, decided to postpone their assessment of one-year rule of the UPA government by a day and took up the Bihar development. After the meeting, Vajpayee told a crowded press conference here that "they (UPA) have murdered democracy and hijacked the right of the people to have a popular government (in Bihar)." Flanked by NDA leaders, including L K Advani, George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar, Vajpayee said the NDA condemned the imposition of President's rule and the dissolution of the state assembly. JD-U leader Nitish Kumar, whom the NDA had

projected as the chief ministerial candidate during the last elections in Bihar, demanded appointment of an "apolitical" person as governor to ensure free and fair polls, accusing Buta Singh of acting as a "spokesman of UPA" and said "we have lost confidence in him."

Court to be moved

New Delhi: Terming the governor's decision to dissolve the Bihar assembly as a "panic reaction," BJP said it would challenge the "unconstitutional" decision in court and fight it out politically in the state. "This is a reaction in panic as NDA leader Nitish Kumar was on the verge of gaining majority with 17 Independent MLAs and 22 from LJP pulling their strength behind him," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley said.

Accusing the Centre of assaulting democracy when it saw the clear possibility of government formation in the state, Vajpayee said, "We condemn the dictatorial step. They have put democracy at stake and want the state to run according to whims and fancies." He said the UPA deployed similar tactics in Goa and Jharkhand but due to "popular support" democracy prevailed in Jharkhand. "People in Bihar wanted a government to be formed at the earliest, which would be by the people and for the people and work for protecting people's interests", he said, adding the possibility of a government formation was causing "uneasiness" to Delhi. PTI

Focus On The 'Non-Contentious And The Neutral', Conflicts To Be Resolved At A Later Date

UPA, Left Agree On A Better Tomorrow

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 18 MAY

THE UPA and the Left, having taken stock of the working of Manmohan Singh's government on Wednesday, concentrated on the "non-contentious and the neutral", leaving areas of conflict for another day. The seven hour meeting at the Prime Minister's residence — aimed at preparing a report card for the government — dispersed after repeating that the alliance built around a shared view of secularism was intact.

However, that this amity was vulnerable to economic policy became evident when the Left refused to be a signatory to a pre-anniversary "joint declaration" and indicated its resolve to highlight the differences with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) on economic matters on May 23.

The statement issued after the meeting said: "Those present at the meeting expressed overall satisfaction (on the government's performance in six key sectors including 'infrastructure and economic growth') and resolved to move forward even more purposefully to implement their collective political, social, social and economic agenda as embodied in the CMP". The Left's compulsive habit to strike a policy distant from the government's saw many of its leaders speaking in different voices after the meeting.

While CPM Politburo member Sitaram Yechury left the venue telling reporters that a "joint statement" was being issued, his general secretary, Prakash Karat, tried to distance his party from the statement saying what had been issued was only a statement of the Congress-led UPA. The RSP and Forward Bloc leaders said they would not "like to call" it a "joint statement". The Congress, however, preferred to call it a joint statement and said signatures of the participants were not needed.

While the government managers converted the meeting into one giving a detailed presentation of the performance of key ministers, the Left leaders chose to be attentive listeners, asking for a couple of clarifications and making occasional suggestions. However, they refrained from entering into any debate with the government over economic policies.

They later justified their peaceful behaviour at the meet-

ing on the ground that the agenda of Wednesday's meeting was only for annual stock-taking. They added that they would rather wait for the next government-Left co-ordination committee to take up their reservations on the economic policy front. In a way, the agenda was deliberately presented in a business-like manner, leaving the Left with little or no scope for taking up their pet grouses.

The meeting at 7, Race Course Road started with the Prime Minister's presentation on the overall performance and was followed with another by Sonia Gandhi. Both of them then congratulated all the UPA and Left leaders for their successful coexistence for one year, with a resolve to more meaningful working relations in the future too.

Jobs, More Jobs Top Priority List

New Delhi
18 MAY

PRESENTING the report card of his one-year-old government before the UPA co-ordination committee, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday identified employment generation, economic prosperity and elimination of terrorism, insurgency and Naxal violence as priority areas. Speaking at the marathon eight-hour meeting chaired by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Dr Singh noted that the government had launched nine major missions dubbed as navratna to accelerate overall development across the country, senior Congress leader and UPA spokesperson Ambika Soni told reporters here.

At the meeting attended by Left parties, the Prime Minister referred to the recently announced ambitious "Bharat Nirman" project to be implemented at a cost of Rs 1,74,000 crore in four years. He spoke about the rural health mission, urban reconstruction, national project for revival of water bodies and extension of Antodaya scheme, she said.

—PTI



FINANCIAL ADVISORS GIVEN THREE MONTHS TO REVIEW CORPUS FUNDS

Deficits Ring Alarm Bells, FM Asks For Cost Cuts

G Ganapathy Subramaniam
NEW DELHI 18 MAY

WITH recent reviews of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's first year in office indicating that fiscal deficit is a cause for concern, finance minister P. Chidambaram has urged all government departments to prune expenditure.

The targets set for 2005-06 as well as the long-term aim of eliminating revenue deficit should be met, Mr Chidambaram said at a meeting of financial advisors (FAs) here on Tuesday. Government sources said a conference of FAs is also scheduled to discuss strategies for expenditure control here on May 20.

Cost-cutting is expected to be in focus, especially in view of the growing need for additional resources for fund commitments made in the common minimum programme (CMP) of the UPA government. A review of the government's performance on CMP targets is already underway and the Left is pressing for greater emphasis on social sector commitments.

One of the suggestions made to lower expenditure is to ban creation of reserve funds and corpus funds which are used to park budgetary resources. A status report on such funds has been



sought and formal orders have been issued for winding them up after a detailed review. Various departments resort to the creation of such funds to park their budgetary resources. These are kept there simply to earn an interest income rather than being utilised for specific purposes.

The creation of such funds adds to the fiscal deficit of the government since the resources concerned are shown as spent. In reality, they are lying in a different account and the interest earned is used by some government organisation rather than accruing to the exchequer.

In 1997-98, for example, a culture funds was created with a Rs 20-crore corpus. The fund is lying unutilised while the interest is

being used for various culture-related projects. Sometimes, the sources said, such funds are also brought back to the books of the department concerned to provide for some other expenditure. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts also has a corpus fund.

If resources parked in such funds are brought back to the public account maintained by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), then the overall borrowing of the government to meet fiscal deficit will be reduced. Moreover, the interest on the corpus amount would also accrue to it. In several cases, corpus funds are maintained in bank accounts of commercial banks and the interest is used by the organisation concerned.

FAs were given three months to review corpus funds/reserve funds and furnish a status report and the government is now expediting these reports, the sources said. Guidelines on such funds were issued earlier this year, they added.

Usually, reserve funds are to be created only when the government has some surplus resources to spare. Since the government is grappling with a large fiscal deficit, these funds are being created out of borrowed money. The government has a huge borrowing programme to bridge the gap left by the fiscal deficit.

The Year That Was: UPA Balance Sheet On Sunday

New Delhi
18 MAY

THE ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) will prepare a balance sheet of its achievements during its past one year in office and release it on Sunday when it completes its first year in power.

"The UPA-Left Co-ordination Committee has divided the review of its performance in six phases. After going into each phase, the UPA will discuss with its constituents and supporting parties what has been achieved and what needs to be done before preparing the balance sheet," CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury said.

He was talking to reporters half-way through the meeting of the UPA-Left Co-ordination Committee at the residence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Mr Yechury said the meeting discussed the promises made in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) and reviewed how many of them were fulfilled and what required to be done.

Asked if any particular time frame was set for meeting the targets, he said every aspect of the NCMP has certain time frame and the purpose of the review was to find out how much had been done within that period and how much was outstanding. —PTI

10 MAY 2005

The Economic Times

Videos, charges fly over Lalu assault

BJP: No attack. IB: Attackers from VHP
Gujarat: No VHP, judicial probe on

25/4
Shekhar Iyer, Rajnish Sharma HPT
and Rathin Das
New Delhi/Ahmedabad, April 24

THE ALLEGED attack on Lalu Prasad Yadav in Gujarat has turned into a Centre-state tussle with the BJP claiming it has evidence to prove his charges wrong.

The BJP has armed itself with video clips to counter pressure within the UPA to act against Narendra Modi's government. The state government too has denied the alleged stoning of Lalu's car, said only water pouches were thrown and insisted that no VHP activist was among the protesters. This contradicts the version of the Intelligence Bureau, which has reported the presence of 50 VHP activists to the Union home ministry.

The state government has also ordered a judicial inquiry, a move that pre-empts the possibility of a central probe.

Lalu claims VHP activists had stoned his car at a hospital where train accident victims were being treated. Today, BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley released video clips to prove him wrong.

The videos, Jaitley said, proved that Lalu entered the hospital accompanied by people shouting anti-Modi slogans, provoking Modi supporters to raise counter-slogans and throw some water pouches. Lalu's motorcade left with windscreen intact, Jaitley said, but the railway minister showed a smashed windscreen on

reaching the local airport.

"It is now the Prime Minister's responsibility to remove a minister who is indulging in total falsehood," said Jaitley.

Gujarat chief secretary Sudhir Mankad's version is almost identical to the BJP's. In a report to the home ministry, he admitted the car was attacked but said water pouches, not stones, were used. "The Vadodara police commissioner has mentioned that he did not see anyone throwing stones," Mankad reported.

As for those involved, Mankad said they were relatives of those injured and killed in the accident. But the IB, too, has submitted a report to the ministry, saying the 50 attackers were Bajrang Dal and VHP activists. In fact, the IB said, a major incident could have occurred if news of Lalu's arrival had reached the site earlier.

The ministry is not satisfied with the state's version. It has questioned how the windscreen was smashed if no stones were thrown, and why the initial FIR mentioned stone throwing. It has reminded Gujarat that the incident was "a clear breach of security".

The state government has appointed retired judge N.B. Patel at the head of a panel to probe the allegation. This effectively prevents the Centre from instituting its own probe. The Commission of Inquiries Act stipulates that more than one inquiry cannot be instituted to probe the same incident.

PTI



Other things on his mind

Bihar government: Lalu claims he is working on a formula so that an RJD-led government can be installed once again in Bihar

Fodder scam: Lalu in Ranchi (photo above) for a hearing. Will appear before a special CBI court on Monday

Rail safety: Minister promises to fit an anti-collision device in trains

Retirement? Not at all: Says that politicians should not retire as they are not employed. Was reacting to the RSS chief's suggestion to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani

25 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Kalam bares bitter truth

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 21: President A.P.J Abdul Kalam chose the august company of India's political who's who to utter a "bare" truth: the "dubious" pursuit of power is taking its toll on the democratic system.

"The arithmetical compulsions of incremental numbers and the alleged tradability of certain legislative seats, won perhaps through means allegedly dubious and undemocratic, have many a time created doubts on our democratic system in the public eye," the President today told a stunned audience that included Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Opposition leader L.K. Advani.

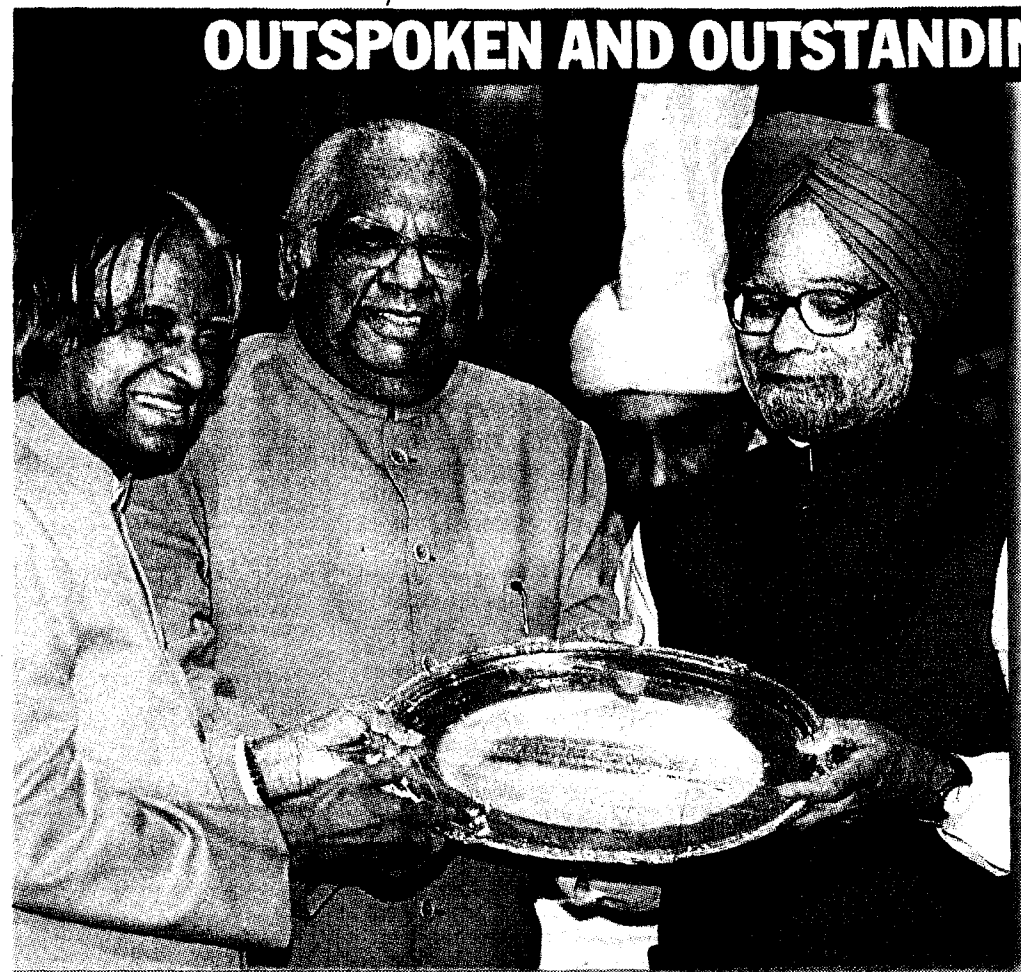
Kalam did not refer to the shenanigans that played themselves out in the Jharkhand and Goa Assemblies recently but the message was not lost on the political class.

The Prime Minister addressed Kalam's expression of anguish by conceding that an introspection is needed "without pointing fingers".

"We need to examine whether we are living up to the standards set by great parliamentarians of the early years of our Independence. It is for us to ensure that we set better standards for the future," Singh said when it was his turn to speak.

The Prime Minister said when people begin to lose faith in the institution of Parliament, "this important edifice" would also come under pressure. "We must not, we must never let this happen," Singh said.

The President had chosen the occasion for his plain-speak with care — a ceremony to honour outstanding parlia-



President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (left) presents the outstanding parliamentarian award to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Parliament as Speaker Samnaath Chatterjee looks on. (Reuters)

mentarians. Singh was one of the recipients of the award, so was Advani.

What would normally have been a staid *sarkari* function was transformed into a high-voltage event the moment Kalam began delivering his speech in the central hall of Parliament. "I am sure I have your permission to speak some bare truths which we all know are a fact but would refuse to acknowledge," Kalam said.

All the formal speeches of

the President are approved by the Union cabinet, but today's was written by Kalam himself.

Perhaps keeping in mind the current debate about separation of powers of different organs of the republic, the President established his credentials by saying: "I have no hesitation in talking to you about them (the bare truths) because I am part of you; I am as much part of Parliament as you all are, and I am as much concerned about the success

of our parliamentary system as you all are."

Kalam, who was forced to summon the Jharkhand governor after the power play there, said: "When politics degrades itself to political adventurism, the nation would be on the calamitous road to inevitable disaster and ruination. Let us not risk it."

He also reminded members of legislatures, often seen disrupting proceedings and engaging in indecorous behav-

The... alleged tradability of certain legislative seats, won perhaps through means allegedly dubious and undemocratic, have many a time created doubts on our democratic system in the public eye

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

We need to examine whether we are living up to the standards set by great parliamentarians of the early years of our Independence. It is for us to ensure that we set better standards for the future

Manmohan Singh

our, that "in every action of Parliament members, our 540 million youths who are below 25 years of age should see in you great leaders who can be their role models".

He also indirectly referred to the vitiated political atmosphere. "We seem to have been working with policies and procedures which are at times based on mistrust. As a result, motivation and empowerment are dampened and suppressed," Kalam said.

President warns politicians

‘...Tradeability of legislative seats...have cast doubts on democratic system’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

PRESIDENT A.P.J. Abdul Kalam today delivered a grim warning on the “dubious and undemocratic” goings-on in politics, ironically, as he gave away awards to outstanding parliamentarians. Without referring to Jharkhand, Kalam said politics should not degrade to “political adventurism”.

Addressing MPs at Central Hall, Kalam said it was high time for introspection. “The arithmetical compulsions of incremental numbers and the alleged tradeability of certain legislative seats, won perhaps through means allegedly dubious and undemocratic, have many a time created doubts on our democratic system in the public eye,” he said.

The awards went to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Union Minister Arjun Singh, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha L.K. Advani and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Jaswant Singh.

The context of the President’s remarks was clear though he did not expressly refer to any. “When politics degrades itself to political adventurism, the nation would be on the calamitous road to inevitable disaster and ruination. Let us not risk it,” Kalam said.

Observing that people are yearning for change and expect parliamentarians to deliver the goods through appropriate policies, laws and by facilitating societal transition, the President said: “We seem to have been working with policies and procedures which are, at times, based on mistrust.”

Urging members to distinguish between “political politics” and “developmental politics”, he said the former was needed at the time of the Freedom Struggle. “What is needed for India is a mission to make it free from poverty, illiteracy and



Anil Sharma

Accepting the award, PM Manmohan Singh also underlined the need to look back on the standards set by veteran parliamentarians. Anil Sharma

unemployment and this situation necessitates developmental politics,” he said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh echoed Kalam’s concern, recounting the days when he attended Parliament as a

**Outstanding MP
awards given to
Manmohan, Arjun,
Advani and Jaswant**

bureaucrat and heard brilliant speakers and the best of debates. Accepting the award, he regretted the decline in standards in Parliament and called for introspection before people lost faith in the institution. “Without pointing fingers, we

need to examine whether we are living up to the standards set by great parliamentarians of early years of our Independence. It is for us to ensure that we set better standards for future,” he said.

Even Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat lamented that public interest in parliamentary debates had gone down.

Accepting the award for 1999, Advani said Parliament should be used for raising important issues. He said “experiences of veteran parliamentarians should be utilised by all others for the benefit of the system”. He wondered, though, if the awardees had been chosen due to their age. Jaswant Singh said parliamentarians should codify their obligations. “In parliamentary democracy, there is governance through discussion. Discussion must end at some stage so that governance starts,” he said.

Advani sees "glimpses" of Manmohan

By Our Staff Correspondent

MANGALORE, MARCH 13. The BJP president, L.K. Advani, said here today that mistakes have been rectified in Jharkhand and there is no need to rake up old issues, particularly those concerning the high office of the Governor.

Mr. Advani told presspersons at the Bajpe airport near here that mistakes had been committed, knowingly or unknowingly, by the Governor but they have been set right by asking the NDA to form the Government. The office of the Governor of that State should be left

alone, he said.

Mr. Advani was here to attend the concluding session of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Akhil Bharat Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest policy-making body of the outfit.

Asked whether he felt the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, had become "visible" by asking Shibu Soren to resign as Chief Minister, Mr. Advani said, "I am beginning to know the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and I saw glimpses of him..." (During the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, Mr. Advani

had described Dr. Singh as an "invisible" Prime Minister as the "authority of the office was not being felt.") He said Dr. Singh surprised the BJP by making that move, but hastened to add that "...he had no other choice either, and it was a face-saving and crisis-management exercise for the Congress party."

"Jungle raj" ended

UNI reports:

Mr. Advani said the BJP-Janata Dal (United) combine had succeeded in bringing down the Rashtriya Janata Dal's "jungle raj" in Bihar. They had

achieved a major target of ending 15 years of "misrule" by the RJD, headed by the Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, and his wife, Rabri Devi. "It is a matter of happiness and satisfaction."

"Now the Governor's rule is in force. We will see how the situation develops and consult our leaders in Bihar and when the situation requires, NDA partners will meet and plan [the] future course of action," he added.

Mr. Advani also called for an end to the controversy between the Judiciary and the Legislature over the Jharkhand developments.

THE HINDU

14 MAR 2005

'Congress pushing country towards another emergency'

By Sushanta Talukdar

GUWAHATI, MARCH 11. Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader, Venkajiah Naidu, today alleged that the Congress was pushing the country towards another emergency as evident from the developments in Jharkhand, Goa, Bihar and Assam.

Mr. Naidu said this after the police burst teargas shells to disperse thousands of BJP workers in front of the Janata Bhavan, the seat of power in the State. Police also detained thousands of activists and supporters of the Opposition in different parts of the State to foil a "Dispur gherao" programme. Several BJP workers were injured when police used force to disperse the demonstrators at several locations near the capital complex and other parts of the city.

Although Mr. Naidu was stopped from leading a procession from the State BJP head-

quarters towards the Janata Bhavan at Dispur, thousands of BJP workers led by senior State leaders — Rajen Gohain, V. Satish, Indramoni Bora, Narayan Borkotoki and Bijoya Chakraborty — broke police barricades at several places in the city and held a siege around the capital complex for two hours.

The State unit of the BJP called the "Dispur gherao" to demand the dismissal of the Tarun Gogoi-led Government for its "failure on all fronts."

Addressing party workers, Mr. Naidu said the entire Guwahati city had been virtually turned into a "jail" by the Government. Thousands of BJP workers were illegally detained by police to prevent them from a peaceful demonstration. He said the State Government had no right to continue in power as it had "failed on all fronts."

Mr. Naidu also alleged that the Congress had "links" with the banned United Liberation

Front of Asom (ULFA).

While the police tried to whisk away Mr. Naidu and other BJP leaders after preventing the demonstrators from proceeding towards Dispur, party workers squatted on the road to prevent the vehicle in which Mr. Naidu was to be taken away.

The national president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, Dharmendra Pradhan, then announced that although Mr. Naidu had been "arrested," the workers would march towards Dispur under the leadership of Mr. Rajen Gohain.

The Kamrup Deputy Commissioner, Sameer Sinha, however, denied that Mr. Naidu had been arrested. He was only escorted by police to ensure his safety. Later, a BJP delegation led by Mr. Naidu called on the Governor, Lt Gen. (retd.) Aje Singh, and submitted a 14 point "chargesheet" against the Gogoi Government.

12 MAR 2005

THE HINDU

President Kalam summons Jharkhand governor 4/3

9. 10. 11
8/11

New Delhi: As his decision to install a JMM-led government snowballed into a major controversy, Jharkhand governor Syed Sibtey Razi was on Thursday summoned by President A P J Abdul Kalam for discussions, a move that has triggered speculation on various possibilities in the state.

The President has called Razi to get a first-hand account of developments in Ranchi on Wednesday leading to the swearing-in of Shibu Soren as chief minister of the state, hours after five independent MLAs had met the governor and expressed their support to formation of a BJP-led government. With the Congress seeking to distance itself from the governor's decision, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held discussions with Congress president Sonia Gandhi and senior ministerial colleagues, including home minister Shivraj Patil, on the political situation arising out of Jharkhand developments.

A high-level BJP delegation met the President on Wednesday and complained to him about Razi's action, claiming the party had provided proof of support of 41



MLAs in a house of 81. They demanded his recall. Kalam will meet all the MLAs supporting the NDA before he discusses the situation with Razi. The NDA was to produce all its MLAs before the President on Thursday evening. "The 41 MLAs along with leader of opposition L K Advani and NDA convener George Fernandes will be meeting the President this evening," former BJP president M Venkaiah Naidu said earlier on Thursday.

Observers said Kalam's decision to summon a governor in such circumstances was a rare action that brought back memories about the controversial role of governors, particularly Romesh Bhandari in UP in 1998 and Ram Lal in Andhra Pradesh in 1984.

The PM has discussed the Jharkhand issue with Attorney General Milon K Banerjee. With discussions at the highest levels in government and the party, there was speculation that Shibu Soren could be asked to prove his majority in the assembly in three or four days, instead of the 20 days provided by the governor. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA

04 MAR 2005

Sonia accuses BJP of divisive politics

Sonia Gandhi's speech

Udhawa (Jharkhand)
19 FEBRUARY

CONGRESS president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday accused the BJP of pursuing divisive politics for selfish reasons while keeping the serious issues on the backburner. "The previous NDA regime failed to provide equal rights to the people as its politics has been centred around attaining the seat of power," she said while addressing an election meeting here. Urging to vote for party candidate Thomas Hansda from Rajmahal constituency, under which the Udhawa block falls, the UPA chairperson accused the BJP and its allies of conspiring to divide the society on communal grounds.

"But the people of the country skuttled their attempts by voting them out of power in the Lok Sabha while giving the UPA a chance to work for them," she said and alleged the BJP-led NDA in Jharkhand had also followed the same sort of politics. "The UPA will take all sections of the society while im-



TALK TIME: Congress president Sonia Gandhi addressing an election rally at Gandhi Maidan in Patna on Saturday. — PTI

plementing development schemes," she said and stated the food-for-work programme to be implemented in 150 poor districts was waiting Parliament clearance.

Ms Gandhi said the people of Jharkhand thought they would get in a new life after the creation of the new state. But, she added the NDA government "failed" to live upto their expectations. "If the UPA voted to power, progressive

programmes will be taken up with concrete efforts," she said.

Accusing the BJP of failing to follow raj dharma, Ms Gandhi alleged the saffron party and its allies had been engaged in self-service while ignoring the people's needs. Recounting the days of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress president said both the former Prime Ministers had a special place and genuine concern for the poor, adivasis, women and the down trodden. "This was the reason why Rajiv Gandhi renewed the panchayat movement so that these sections are empowered. But the NDA government in Jharkhand has failed to hold panchayat polls, depriving them of their rights," she alleged.

Claiming that the condition of the people of Jharkhand remained unchanged even after the state's creation four years ago, Ms Gandhi asked the electorate to vote for the Congress and its allies to power so that concrete efforts could be taken to uplift the state. —PTI

The Economic Times 20 FEB 2005

Southern Ally Threatens Withdrawal As GOP Does Balancing Act

DMK falls out with Congress

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 25 FEBRUARY

THE Manmohan Singh government on Friday experienced serious political convulsions when DMK, rated as a dependable ally of the Centre, threatened to rework the terms of its relationship with the Congress. Angry over the government's reluctance to act on its "to do" list and Congress' recent attempts to play the "big brother" within the UPA, DMK chief Karunanidhi summoned all his seven ministers to Chennai for a political stocktaking.

The DMK leadership seized upon a statement from minister of state in the commerce ministry, E.V.K.S. Elangovan, that Congress should strive for "revival of Kamaraj rule in the state" — a government led by Congress — and said the party's future political reflexes will be decided at a meeting on Sunday in Chennai. Incidentally, the results of the three high-stake Assembly elections will be out the same day and Mr Chidambaram will be presenting the Budget on the following day.

A worried Congress leadership quickly stepped in to deny any intention to play the "big brother" in the alliance. It paraded Ambika Soni to reject reports that she had endorsed Mr Elangovan's "we-will-lead-the-next-government-in-Tamil-Nadu" vanity.

Political observers here were unanimous that Mr Elangovan's statement could not have been the provocation for DMK's aggression. For, "Kamaraj rule" is the only slogan that Congress is left with for recharging an emaciated organisation in the state, and mere sloganeering cannot upset a rival or an ally.

The DMK, just like other important allies of

the UPA, is getting increasingly wary of Congress' attempts to "tame" its partners. The goings on in Bihar, in fact, gave the allies a glimpse of Congress' strategy. The message from Congress during the election to the Bihar Assembly was about the party's plans to "overwhelm" Lalu Yadav.

The NCP, too, had got a taste of Congress' domineering ways when the Congress overruled its claim to lead the government in Maharashtra. Mr Pawar, who decided to put up with Congress, has been playing an alliance elder's role for all those who have a grievance against Congress.

Given this track record of Congress, DMK is not sure about the grand old party's fidelity towards its allies. Some in DMK suspect that Congress could play the same game that it played with Lalu Yadav when Tamil Nadu goes to poll in 2006.

The DMK, it is said, is also unhappy with the lukewarm response of the Centre towards its demands. The DMK has been a target of routine attack

from Ms Jayalalitha for not doing enough for the state. The growing distance between Congress and DMK was on display when Dayanidhi Maran refused a request for involving officials in the telecom ministry in the exercise carried out by Sam Pitroda.

Another DMK nominee, T.R. Baalu, made it known to the plan panel deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia that the infrastructure panel led by him may not get to direct the affairs of the surface transport department. The strains in the coalition will not suit the Centre before a crucial Parliament session.



KARUNANIDHI: TOUGH STAND



IN an attempt to dissipate the disquiet amongst its allies, especially the Left parties who have been snappish about the UPA's active reforms agenda, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday

said her party was primed to the sensitivities of running a coalition government and had strived to accommodate diverse points of view.

At the customary Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) general body meeting at the beginning of the Budget session, Ms Gandhi used the occasion to assuage the unease in the UPA allies.

Significantly, Ms Gandhi's remarks came in the backdrop of threats by its southern ally, the DMK to rework its equation with the Congress in the wake of a controversial statement by minister of state in the commerce ministry, E.V.K.S. Elangovan.

"Contrary to our detractor's expectations, the coalition has worked well. We, in the Congress, have been very sensitive to the challenges of running a coalition government, accommodating diverse points of view so as to ensure its cohesive functioning. We will continue to do so," she said at the general body meeting. She also used the occasion to reiterate that the UPA government continued to remain focused on basic issues like health, education and employment.

Opposition set to boycott rail budget

Our Political Bureau
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WHEN railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav rises to present the rail budget in Parliament on Saturday, he'll find the Opposition benches empty. In keeping with its stand on the "tainted ministers", the NDA on Friday decided to stay away from the two Houses of Parliament during the presentation of the rail budget.

The decision was taken on Friday evening at an NDA meeting chaired by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The BJP and its allies also decided to move an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha on March 1, a day after the trial of strength in Goa seeking a discussion on the "illegal" sacking of the Manohar Parrikar government minutes after it had proved its majority on the floor of the Assembly.

Buoyed by predictions of a much-improved performance in the just-concluded Assembly polls, the NDA, which did not pose much of a problem during the short winter session of Parliament, is clearly in a combative mood. It also wants the UPA government to act on the Supreme Court's suggestion by allowing a debate in the two Houses on the inclusion of "tainted minister" in the government.

While dismissing a PIL on the subject, the apex court had earlier this month lobbed the ball in the legislature's court. The NDA now wants the Manmohan Singh government to follow it up in right earnest.

AICC gives cold shoulder to Paswan call

Our Political Bureau
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EVEN as a large number of Bihar Congress workers are feeling let down by the high command's "neither-there-nor-here" electoral strategy, the AICC once again signalled its lack of interest in Ram Vilas Paswan's repeated call for an alliance or seat adjustment with the party to take on the RJD. For the last one week, Mr Paswan has been unilaterally announcing a Congress-LJP tie-up in Bihar even as the AICC failed to respond with a matching response. Mr Paswan on Tuesday modified his "love message" by calling for a limited seat adjustment with the Congress. But the AICC chose to look the other way. Even while the Congress leadership indicated on Tuesday the possibility of the LJP leader meeting some central leaders on Wednesday as part of a last-ditch effort, the signal from 24 Akbar Road is that the party will not go out of the way to join hands with the LJP.

"The maximum we could do is not to field any candidates against the sitting MLAs of the LJP. This is in line with our plan not to contest the sitting seats of the UPA partners like the RJD and the Left in Bihar," said a senior party leader. The Congress high command seems over-cautious to keep equal distance from both the warring UPA partners, RJD and LJP, as it fears taking Mr Paswan's side could antagonise Mr Yadav, whose 24 MPs in the Lok Sabha are too important a factor. Even as AICC's sympathies lie with Mr Paswan, it clearly lacks the political will to come out and openly support him against the RJD. Many Bihar Congress leaders and workers are seen in the party headquarters telling one and all how this "fence-sitting" strategy will only harm the interests of the state Congress.

JD(U) wants ban on use of Godhra report

Our Political Bureau
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IN the run-up to the Assembly polls held in Gujarat in December, 2002, the then Chief Election Commissioner, J.M. Lyngdoh had put a blanket ban on the use of visuals of the Godhra train carnage on the ground that it could foment communal tension and polarise the voters along communal lines. Citing this as a precedence, the JD(U) now wants the EC to ensure a level-playing field for the main political players in Bihar by prohibiting the use of the UC Banerjee committee's interim report on the Sabarmati Express tragedy in the coming Assembly polls in the state.

A day after the Justice (retd.) Banerjee took everyone by surprise by presenting the interim report, senior JD(U) leader and former railway minister Nitish Kumar wrote a letter to Chief Election Commissioner T. S. Krishnamurthy, seeking his intervention in the interests of "free and impartial polls" in the state. He dubbed the report as being "politically-motivated," aimed at "giving advantage to railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav," who is engaged in a tough battle to retain his hold over the state in the Assembly polls.

"It appears that the Banerjee committee report has been stage-managed at the instance of the present railway minister. Therefore, in the interest of fair and impartial elections, use of the interim report in any form by any political party or candidate ought to be prohibited," the JD(U) leader said in the letter faxed to the Chief Election Commissioner from Patna on Tuesday. In support of his demand, Mr Kumar is now planning to meet the CEC during his scheduled visit to Patna on Wednesday to oversee the preparations for the three-stage polls.

HARD TIMES