

Rahul Mahajan set free on bail

Told to surrender his passport and stay in Delhi until charge sheet is filed in the case

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Nine days after his arrest in a drug abuse case, Rahul Mahajan was granted bail by a special court here on Wednesday upon furnishing a bail bond of Rs. 2 lakhs and a surety of like amount.

Granting the bail, Special Judge Swarna Kanta Mehra said nothing worthwhile had been placed on record as yet by the prosecution to show that the accused had indulged in systematic or organised trafficking of drugs or was found in possession of drugs in commercial quantity.

She directed Rahul Mahajan not to leave the country without prior permission of the court and surrender his passport within a day of his release. Also, he would not leave Delhi without prior permission of the court till the filing of the charge sheet in the case.

Further, the court asked Rahul Mahajan not to tamper with evidence or approach witnesses in any manner.

The court had reserved its orders on Tuesday at the conclusion of arguments by counsel for the prosecution and the accused.

Commenting on the conduct and character of the accused, Ms. Mehra in her 20-page order on Wednesday said: "He belongs to a good family and is an educat-



BACK HOME: Rahul Mahajan with his mother at 7 Safdarjung Road in New Delhi on Wednesday night.

- PHOTO: PTI.

ed youth with otherwise clean antecedents as admitted by the prosecution. In fact, it seems that he needs professional help for his rehabilitation."

Ms. Mehra admitted the contention of the defence counsel that if Rahul Mahajan had committed an offence at all under

the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, it was consumption of narcotic drugs. It is clear at this stage that the present applicant had consumed heroin with champagne as his blood test reveals," she said.

The police could not bring on

record evidence pointing to a series of transactions of narcotic drugs by the accused to cover the present case under the ambit of Section 27 (A) (financing drug deals and harbouring drug dealers)," the Judge said.

Offences covered by Section 27 (A) of the Act are non-bailable and to be tried by a special court designated for NDPS cases.

The bail application by Sahil Zaroo, the other accused in the case, will be taken up by the Court for hearing on Thursday.

Meanwhile, a Metropolitan Magistrate recorded the statement of Karan Ahuja, a prosecution witness in the case.

Back to Safdarjung Road

Immediately upon his release from Tihar Central Jail at around 8 p.m., Rahul Mahajan headed straight for his late father's 7 Safdarjung Road residence where he was welcomed by his mother Rekha Mahajan, sister Poonam and uncle Gopinath Munde.

Rahul Mahajan was spirited out of the jail through a side exit to avoid media attention. At Safdarjung Road, celebrating his homecoming his relatives distributed sweets among the visitors. Though the family did not interact much with media, they informed that he would address the Press at 5 p.m. on Thursday.

Charges absurd, says Apollo Chairman

NEW DELHI: Refuting the allegations of tampering with evidence and misleading the investigation in the Rahul Mahajan case, the Chairman of the Apollo Hospitals Group, Pratap C. Reddy, said it was absurd that so much falsehood should be provided to misguide the public and the media instead of appreciating the efforts of the doctors of Apollo who saved a life.

"In an emergency situation, administrative details are secondary to saving lives and just to set the record straight, there is absolutely nothing that was fudged at the hospital," he said in a statement. The medico-legal register had no confusion at all and the samples were handed over to the police as soon as they came. The hospital had cooperated with the police and six of the top doctors had spent two days answering repetitive questions.

By way of abundant caution and to be absolutely sure, it was

the hospital's choice to send the samples to an independent laboratory for analysis.

The hospital's first priority, as suggested by the highest court of the land, was to stabilise any critical patient who came to it, and then give attention to processes and procedures, and that was precisely what Apollo had done. "It is indeed a sad day for the complete medical fraternity of the country when members of

their group are being traumatised as a result of ongoing witch hunting," Dr. Reddy said.

Police charge

PTI reports:

Faced with a court deadline to file a status report on investigation against Apollo Hospital, police on Wednesday said they had "ample evidence" to prove that "tampering" was done at the highest level to botch up the Ra-

Court wants status report

NEW DELHI: A city court on Wednesday directed the Delhi Police to file by July 7 a status report on investigations related to the case registered against the doctors and management of Apollo Hospitals in the Rahul Mahajan drug abuse case.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate

Kamini Lau said that since the case was registered under Section 182 (giving false information to a public servant) of the IPC it being a non-cognisable offence, no one could be arrested without a warrant. The court said no documents could be seized from the hospital without its prior permission. — PTI

hul Mahajan case.

Police sources said "there is ample evidence to show that the hospital wiped off evidence during the nearly two hour gap they got between Rahul's admission to the hospital and when the police were informed.

"We are also planning to question Apollo head Pratap Reddy and his aide Raji Chandru in the next couple of days," they said.

The sources said they also have evidence to prove that Pramod Mahajan's aide Harish Sharma, Dr. Reddy and Ms. Chandru made several calls to each other in the intervening night of June 1 and 2 between 2.55 a.m., when Rahul was brought in, and 5 a.m., when police were informed about his admission and the death of Bibek Moitra, personal secretary of Pramod Mahajan.

Text of statement on Page 14

BJP to step up agitation against increase in fuel prices

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party's nationwide agitation against the increase in oil price will be intensified with demonstrations planned in every district headquarters and State capital for June 19.

The party has also demanded

that a joint parliamentary committee go into the large number of suicides by farmers. The committee should come up with recommendations to address the core issue of indebtedness, it said.

Party leader M. Venkaiah Naidu said here on Tuesday that the State units were asked to ensure

the presence of State-level leaders in the protests in all districts. Central leaders would travel to State capitals to participate in the demonstrations.

On June 21 the general secretaries would review here the weeklong agitation and suggest ways to carry on with the protest until the Centre rolled back the

price increase.

The BJP is attacking the Left parties, more than the Congress, charging them with "duplicity" in supporting the government while opposing its policies on the streets. Mr. Naidu said: "They wave the green flag inside and come out with red flags on the streets outside."

This time the BJP is determined not to let the Left occupy the opposition space, as it has done on several other issues.

The party has held the Left responsible for the policies of a government which could not survive for a single day without its support.

14-day judicial custody for Rahul Mahajan

THE HINDU



RIGOURS OF LAW: Rahul Mahajan is carried by policemen as he faints at the Patiala House Courts in New Delhi Thursday.

Staff Reporter P. S. Rao

NEW DELHI: Rahul Mahajan, son of slain Bharatiya Janata Party leader Pramod Mahajan, who was arrested by the Delhi police under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act here on Monday, was sent to 14-day judicial custody by a local court on Thursday.

The court also ordered registration of a case against Apollo Hospital on charges of misleading the police.

Earlier in the day, senior BJP leaders Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Kalraj Mishra went to the Tughlaq Road police station to inquire about Rahul Mahajan's well-being.

He was then taken to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital for a routine medical check-up. Talking to the media there, he claimed he was innocent and that he had never taken drugs. While he was at the hospital, senior BJP leader Venkaiah Naidu

also went to the police station to inquire about him.

After the medical examination, Rahul Mahajan was taken to the Chanakypuri police station and confronted with the three Nigerian nationals arrested on charges of supplying drugs to the other accused in the case, Sahil Zaroo.

Subsequently, he was taken to a Patiala House court for production. Although counsel for the police requested extension of Rahul Mahajan's remand by five more days on the ground that he was not cooperating in the investigations, the court turned down the request and sent him to judicial custody till June 22.

Rahul Mahajan, who nearly collapsed inside the court premises, was subsequently taken to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences for a check-up.

Application moved

The police also moved an ap-

plication in the court seeking an order for registration of a separate case against Apollo Hospital on charges of providing wrong information to them to mislead the investigations.

The court subsequently issued an order for registration of the case under Section 182 of the Indian Penal Code at the Sarita Vihar police station.

The police claimed that they had come across evidence to suggest that hospital records had been fudged to mislead them.

"While the hospital doctors claimed that the toxic screen tests done on Rahul Mahajan did not show the presence of drugs and the tests conducted by Dr. Lal's Path Labs had indicated traces of drugs, we have serious doubts about their claims," said a police officer.

See also Page 12

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2006

Malaise too deep

It is raining scandal in the Bharatiya Janata Party's backyard — sleaze, murder, and now a suspected case of liquor-and-drug overdose. And who should the latest ignominy involve but the friend and family of Pramod Mahajan, murdered by his own brother for motives that are still unclear. The scandal claimed the life of Bibek Moitra, the senior Mahajan's private secretary, and hospitalised his son Rahul Mahajan — now arrested on serious charges under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Prevention) Act. That the mishap followed a champagne party held the night before Moitra and the younger Mahajan were to leave for Guwahati for the ritual immersion of the slain leader's ashes speaks to the distance the BJP has travelled from its self-righteous 'party with a difference' days. Unsurprisingly, the party tried to distance itself by contending that it was a family matter not linked to the party. But *l'affaire* Rahul Mahajan cannot be so easily dismissed. The young man aspired to fill his father's slot in the party, apparently with some encouragement from helmsman Rajnath Singh. Moitra's association with the parivar goes back a longer way: pre-Mahajan, he was active in the youth wing of the Maharashtra BJP and served as secretary to Gopinath Munde. In a further complication, the former Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, who is married to Pramod Mahajan's sister, has aired his belief — against all the current evidence — that Moitra and Rahul were "poisoned" by enemies of the Mahajan family.

Who would gain from eliminating the supposedly all-knowing secretary and son of the BJP's presumptive 'man of the future' who was brutally denied that future? Atal Bihari Vajpayee sought to defuse a potentially explosive situation with the statesman-like remark that it was not uncommon for young people to go astray. The BJP's immediate imperative is to bury the past: what better way to do this than to attribute all the recent degenerative ills to the 'Mahajan culture'? This is a euphemism for lifestyle changes visible in all sections of the saffron family, including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It is a different matter that the RSS is in the forefront of an inner-party campaign for 'moral cleansing.' The command centre strongly disapproved of Pramod's fast-track life, a stance hardened by the ugliness of the flamboyant general secretary's death and his son's headline-hogging travails. Indeed, it was to please the RSS that a section of the BJP distanced itself from Rahul, projecting him instead as a protégé of the party president. The irony is difficult to miss. Handpicked by the RSS, Mr. Rajnath Singh was thought to be the man to reform a party 'gone off course' under Lal Krishna Advani. In its two years out of power, a once-formidable party has lurched from crisis to crisis, unable to perform its role in the opposition and quite the antithesis of an organisation professing value-based politics. The malaise is too deep for any quick fix.

THE HINDU

8 JUN 2006

BJP washes its hands of the episode

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 3

FACING EMBARRASSMENT over the controversy surrounding Rahul Mahajan and his father's aide Vivek Moitra, the BJP on Saturday sought to distance itself from the affair. It said that it was a tragedy in the family of its deceased leader Pramod Mahajan but the party had nothing to do with it.

The issue is believed to have figured at a meeting of top party leaders at the residence of Opposition leader L.K. Advani where concern was expressed over its possible fallout on the BJP's image. The leaders were apparently anxious over the fact that the lifestyle of Rahul and Moitra, both of whom were said to have been affected by an overdose of cocaine, was being linked to the BJP's values.

BJP spokesperson Sushma Swaraj told newsmen after the meeting that it was the sort of thing that could happen in any family and should not be linked to the party in any manner. The issue had not figured at the meeting at all, she said.

According to her, the meeting discussed the issue of the President returning the Office of Profit Bill to Parliament, among other things. Those present included Jaswant Singh, Ravi Shankar Prasad, S.S. Ahluwalia and Arun Jaitley. A few days earlier, Rahul had been invited by BJP president Rajnath Singh for lunch with senior leaders at the party's national executive. It is believed that he was tipped for a position in the party's youth wing.



L.K. Advani

BJP leadership in a dilemma over Rahul Mahajan episode

HD-1
2/6

Party leaders contradict each other on the line to be adopted; Rahul was poisoned, says Munde

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party revealed its dilemma over the Rahul Mahajan episode on Saturday with party leaders appearing to contradict each other on the line to be adopted.

The son of slain BJP leader Pramod Mahajan was admitted to Apollo Hospital here in a critical condition in the early hours of Friday. Mr. Mahajan's personal secretary, Bibek Moitra, who had spent the previous evening with Rahul, was brought dead to the hospital. Initial reports suggested that it was a case of liquor and drug overdose at a party where four others were present.

Speaking to the Press on Saturday after a meeting at the residence of senior leader L.K. Advani, general secretary Sushma Swaraj described it as a family tragedy unconnected to the party. "Why do you want to link everything to the party," she asked. It was a sad moment for the family of the party's late general secretary. The party also dissociated itself from Moitra, who was personal secretary to senior Maharashtra BJP leader Gopinath Munde in Mumbai before moving to Delhi to join Mr. Mahajan's team. Mr. Mahajan's sister is married to Mr. Munde.

Munde's charge

However, within hours of Ms. Swaraj dismissing the matter, fresh controversy erupted with Mr. Munde going on record to allege that Rahul had been poisoned. Quoting the toxicology report released by Apollo Hospital, Mr. Munde held that con-



"HE WAS POISONED": BJP leader Gopinath Munde talking to the media about his nephew Rahul Mahajan at Apollo Hospital in New Delhi on Saturday. — PHOTO: PTI

trary to media reports, no cocaine or heroin was found in Rahul's urine sample. He said his nephew was the victim of a larger conspiracy aimed at defaming the Mahajan family.

"He seems to have been poisoned," Mr. Munde said — though he also claimed that he did not want to "rush matters" — that the police "must conduct an impartial inquiry."

By late evening, the BJP had adopted a softer line. Party spokesperson Prakash Javdekar said: "We cannot say that we have nothing to do with it. Rahul

Mahajan's father was a BJP leader, while Bibek Moitra was a member of the BJP who was active in its youth wing. What happened is sad and shocking. We regret Mr. Moitra's death and pray for the early recovery of Rahul."

On the circumstances of the tragedy, he said: "It is for the police to investigate all angles, including whether there was a conspiracy behind it."

Mr. Munde's insinuation and the BJP's willingness to explore "the conspiracy angle" come at a time of deep speculation within

the party on the circumstances leading to Moitra's death and the younger Mahajan's hospitalisation.

Barely was the twin-tragedy flashed on television than it was unofficially hinted that Pramod Mahajan's son had paid the price for a daring lifestyle that brought his father to ruin. Highly placed sources informally let it be known that Moitra was a known substance user who frequented celebrity parties. Further, they added, Rahul had a predilection for being "unstable". These sources also dis-

- Initial reports suggested that it was a case of liquor and drug overdose

- Sushma Swaraj described it as a family tragedy unconnected to the party

- "We cannot say that we have nothing to do with it": BJP spokesperson

counted reports that Rahul was on the verge of being admitted to the party. Said a senior leader: "He wanted to join the BJP but there was never any move from the party."

Rahul's induction

On the other hand, the senior Mahajan's supporters insisted that Rahul's induction was but a formality; it was just a matter of "when and in what position". They pointed out that at the recent national executive of the party in New Delhi, Rahul was introduced to top BJP leaders. "Rajnathji is on record that he wanted him to work for the party," said a party functionary, who also felt that "it was way too much of a coincidence" that within a month of Mr. Mahajan's murder his secretary should be dead and his son admitted to hospital in a critical condition. "If this was a lifestyle affliction, why did this happen only now? And why were only two people affected when there were six people on the scene?"

More reports on Page 14

We'll help Rahul choose right path: Vajpayee

Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI: Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Sunday broke his silence on the sordid Mahajan-Moitra episode of June 2 indicating that he wanted to come to the aid of the embattled Mahajan family hit by a double tragedy within a month.

Referring to Rahul Mahajan, the son of deceased BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan, who has hovered between life and death in Delhi's Apollo Hospital for two days, Mr. Vajpayee reportedly said: "Young people do make mistakes. We will help him take the right path." Mr. Vajpayee made his comments to a television channel in Manali where he is holidaying.

Two views

With Mr. Vajpayee's comments clearly two views have emerged in the party. One was articulated by BJP leader Sushma Swaraj on Saturday that the suspected drugs and alcohol combination that resulted in the death of Bibek Moitra, who had been personal secretary to Pramod Mahajan since 1995, and had seriously threatened the life of Mahajan's son, Rahul, was the personal tragedy of the Mahajan

family and "everything should not be linked to the party".

Significantly, Ms. Swaraj had said this after a meeting of party leaders at the residence of Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani, suggesting that this was the Advani view on how the problem should be tackled: BJP should distance itself from the episode.

Mr. Vajpayee's comments on Sunday represent the other view in the party: that the party should not be seen to have deserted the family of a leader who had served it for nearly three decades.

The comments made by Mr. Vajpayee and Ms. Swaraj are being seen as two opposing viewpoints, and two different ways to handle the crisis that have emerged from the two senior leaders, Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani.

A minority view

There is another, and as yet a minority view in the Bharatiya Janata Party that the kind of culture that allowed "shady characters" easy access to powerful politicians in the party "should never have been allowed".

It is voiced by the saner voices in the party, and the hope is that



• His comments represent the view that BJP shouldn't be seen as deserting the family

• Saner voices feel the episode has come as a 'shock therapy' for the party

this voice may now be heard. It was said that the episode — it has not yet become clear whether it was a case of drugs overdose or even poison being administered — has come as a "shock therapy" for the party. "We needed a shaking ... this kind of thing was waiting to happen."

It was pointed out that the BJP had virtually decided to give party membership to a politician who has many criminal cases registered against him.

That was stopped after several party leaders protested. All kinds of shady characters were given easy and permanent access to very senior party leaders.

That was bound to backfire some day. The happenings in the Mahajan house at 7 Safdarjung Road on the night of June 1 and 2, it is being hoped, will make some party leaders sit up and take note of the saner voices in the party.

Munde for restraint

There is also the view expressed most prominently by Maharashtra leader Gopinath Munde that at least the party should refrain from jumping to conclusions before the police complete its investigations. "Even if someone is used to taking drugs, would they be taking them in front of unknown characters?"

This question was posed by one senior party leader, who also added: "If both Moitra and Rahul were regular drug abusers, as alleged by some, would they both be affected by an overdose? That was a highly unlikely coincidence unless something else was mixed in the drug supplied, and if that was the case, some mischief was intended."

05 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

TERROR

AT DAWN

open fire from AK-56 rifles, cops retaliate.

SCA MB

Statesman News Service

MUMBAI, June 1: Three terrorists dressed like sub-inspectors who had arrived in a white Ambassador fitted with a red beacon were intercepted and shot dead by the Nagpur police barely 100 metres off the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's headquarters at Reshimbaug early today. Three AK 56 rapidfire rifles, 12 grenades and bullets were seized.

The RSS chief, Mr K Sudarshan, was not inside the building when the attack was foiled. The deputy chief minister, Mr RR Patil, said the state police had been alerted against attacks on the RSS headquarters in Nagpur and the Sri Siddhivinayak temple at Prabhadevi in Mumbai. He said, the tip-off notwithstanding, the Nagpur police had done a good job. According to him, it was too early to associate the killed terrorists with any organisation. An investigation was going on, though.

The joint commissioner, Mr KP Raghuvanshi, who also heads Mumbai's anti-terrorist squad, said terrorists appeared to have stepped up their activities all over the state. Nagpur's police commissioner, Mr SP'S Yadav, said the three extremists, aged between 20 and 25 years, had got past a security cordon about 200 metres away but were

States asked to step up vigil

NEW DELHI, June 1: In view of today's attack at the RSS headquarters in Nagpur, the Centre has asked state governments to beef up security around the offices of sensitive organisations including the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena and intensify patrolling around important religious places, mainly in the Hindi belt.

The Centre has issued advisories to state governments asking them to be vigilant and suggested that senior police officers personally supervise security arrangements at all possible soft targets.

As preliminary inquiries suggest the involvement of the Lashkar-e-Taiyaba in the attack, state police organisations have been asked to keep a constant watch on suspected sympathisers of LeT.

chased and intercepted subsequently. They aroused suspicion as sub-inspectors usually did not carry AK 56s. The police, in bullet-proof jackets, shot them dead from very close as soon as they got off the car. The trio was said to have come from Patna. The police found on them 25 May receipts for shoes, with "RSS Nagpur" written on the flip sides of the bills. Intelligence

quarters. State intelligence sources have said that in view of today's terrorist attack, security measures similar to those for the Siddhivinayak temple may be recommended for the RSS headquarters.



(Top) The car used by the militants in the attack and the three ultras killed in the encounter with police. ■ UNI & AFP

'Scorpene good, but deal is bad'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 22

The Scorpene deal is threatening to snowball into a full-blown controversy. Sharpening its claws on the issue of alleged kickbacks in the Scorpene submarine deal, the NDA on Wednesday demanded a comprehensive inquiry and termination of the contract.

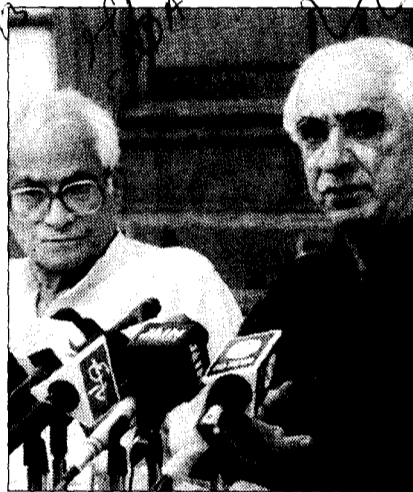
However, it said it did not question the quality of the submarine but the manner in which it was being procured.

Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani, while expressing disappointment with defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's statement in Lok Sabha on the issue, alleged that the Scorpene deal had been violated by the French supplier as a middleman, Abhishek Verma, said to be acting on behalf of Congress, had received a huge sum of money as commission.

"Therefore, the middleman must be arrested immediately, the Scorpene deal should be scrapped and a comprehensive and credible inquiry be instituted to fix political responsibility and ascertain facts relating to the scandal," he demanded.

Former Defence Ministers in the NDA Government George Fernandes and Jaswant Singh, who is also Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, were also present with Advani when he spoke on the deal.

"I had always maintained that Bofors is a very good gun but the procurement method was wrong. Similarly, the Scorpene is a very good system, Singh told mediapersons.



PTI

Jaswant Singh and George Fernandes brief the media on Wednesday.

"We are not questioning the quality of the weapon but the methodology of procurement," the former defence minister said.

The BJP leader rebutted Mukherjee's statement on the deal pointing out several flaws.

"Exposes of the Scorpene scandal reveal continuing governmental obfuscation aimed at diverting the nation's attention from a high-level cover-up operation," he said.

Dismissing the Opposition's charges of kickbacks in the deal, the defence minister claimed that the government had reduced the cost by Rs 313 crore and signed "integrity" pacts to ensure transparency.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Manmohan and Buta Singh should go, demands NDA

Delegation meets President Kalam and submits memorandum



TAKING IT TO THE PRESIDENT: NDA leaders Jaswant Singh, L.K. Advani, George Fernandes, Digvijay Singh and Rajnath Singh briefing the media after submitting a memorandum to the President in connection with the Supreme Court verdict on the dissolution of Bihar Assembly, at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PHOTO: R. V. MOORTHY

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Wednesday urged President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to seek the resignation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and dismiss Bihar Governor Buta Singh following the Supreme Court judgment that the dissolution of the Assembly last May was illegal.

A delegation led by NDA convener George Fernandes and BJP leader L.K. Advani submitted a memorandum to Mr. Kalam here and said "political morality" and "democratic accountability" demanded that the Prime Minister and the Bihar Governor quit their offices. Rep-

resentatives of the Akali Dal, the Biju Janata Dal and the Shiv Sena joined the delegation.

"Governor should not take salute"

Speaking to mediapersons, Mr. Advani said the NDA also urged the President to ensure that the Bihar Governor did not take the Republic Day salute in Patna. "If that happens it would be most unfortunate."

The delegation wanted the President to ascertain from the Prime Minister and Home Minister Shivraj Patil whether before Mr. Buta Singh recommended the dissolution of the House, anybody from the office of the Prime Minister, the

Home Minister or United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi talked to him. "The nation has the right to know if the unconstitutional, *mala fide* report was the brainwave and handiwork of the Governor or it was a command performance. Was he following somebody's orders?"

Centre's culpability

Although Mr. Buta Singh was responsible for recommending the dissolution, the culpability of the Centre, the Prime Minister and the Union Council of Ministers was much greater, Mr. Advani said.

"Finding a scapegoat, be it Buta Singh in this matter or Natwar

Singh in the Volcker Report controversy or H.R. Bhardwaj in the Quattrocchi case, undermines the principle of accountability."

The Opposition would take the issue to the streets and make it the main issue in the budget session of Parliament.

'Undue haste'

The four-page memorandum questioned the "compelling necessity" for holding a Union Cabinet meeting at midnight, where the Governor's report favouring the dissolution of the Assembly was accepted with "undue haste and without any application of mind or verification."

It questioned the "urgency" in

approaching the President "at dead of night in faraway Moscow" for seeking a Proclamation.

Quoting the Prime Minister as having said at Ranthambore in Rajasthan on May 24 last that "an atmosphere of horse-trading of the worst kind prevailed" and the Government had "considerable information to substantiate the Governor's recommendation," the memorandum said "he became an active participant in misleading the nation and the President."

"Quite naturally, he got a chorus of support from UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, all allies of the UPA and even the leaders of the Left," the memorandum said.

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NDA