



WAITING IN THE WINGS
12



IDOL WATCH
Voices

NOT IN RECKONING
2



After four days of worship, it ends in waste. In the Hooghly at Ahirkola Ghat on Wednesday. — Rajib De

Left on boycott

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — The Left parties are going to meet here tomorrow to decide on the issue of resumption of their participation in the Congress-Left coordination committee meetings. — SNS
Details on page 4

China mission

BEIJING, Oct. 12. — A rocket carrying two Chinese astronauts blasted off today from a base in China's desert northwest, returning the country's manned space programme to orbit two years after its history-making maiden flight. — AP
Details on page 3

Jaya Bachchan

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — The Election Commission has issued a notice to Jaya Sabha member Mrs Jaya Bachchan on a complaint that she was holding an office of profit and that she should be disqualified. — PTI

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e-mail: thestatesman@vsnl.com

It's now all right to seek information

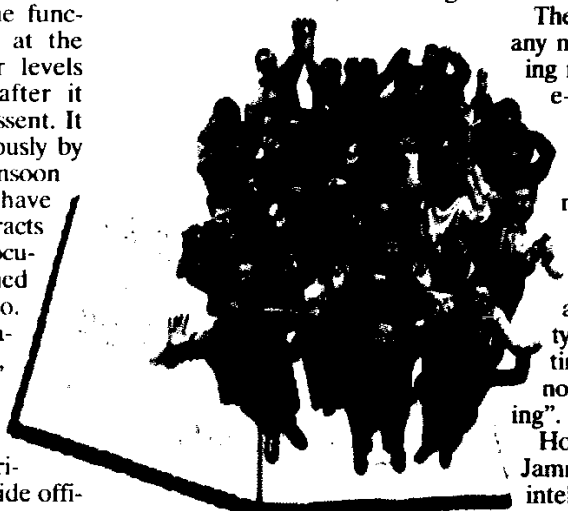
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — Indians today received the right to information that will empower them to inspect official records, documents and information from allied fields.

The Right to Information Act to ensure transparency in the functioning of administration at the Central, state and other levels came into force today after it received the President's assent. It had been passed unanimously by Parliament during the monsoon session. Citizens will have access to records and extracts or certified copies of documents or records or certified samples of material too. They can obtain information in forms of printouts, CDs, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode.

Henceforth, the authorities will be obliged to provide offi-

cial information to people through designated Public Information Officers and Assistant Public Information Officers. The citizens have the right to ask for records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advice, logbooks, contracts, samples, models and electronic information from the authorities concerned. However, file noting is



out of the purview of the Act.

The Union government will constitute a central information commission and the states would set up state-level information commissions which the people could access. The Centre and state governments have the power to make rules to enforce the provisions of the Act.

The Act refers to information as any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advice, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force but does not include official "file noting".

However, the Act will not cover Jammu and Kashmir. Eighteen intelligence and security agen-

Quake push to disaster policy

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — The National Disaster Management Authority headed by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh will soon come out with a plan that can ensure the government's "real time response" to natural calamities. The NDMA, set up on 15 July, in the wake of last year's tsunami, has also been mandated to lay down guidelines to be followed by various Central ministries and departments and the state authority.

The five-member panel, of which former Army chief, General NC Vij, is the deputy chairman, was scheduled to finalise the national disaster management plan by the year end. But the work is being expedited after the earthquake that has once again exposed shortcomings of the official relief machinery. — SNS

Mahajan wants team effort to tame indiscipline

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — The senior BJP leader, Mr Pramod Mahajan, has described as "unprecedented" the open questioning of the party president and suggested "collective leadership" could perhaps help curb indiscipline in the party.

In what is seen as a critical allusion to Mr LK Advani, Mr Mahajan said discipline could be restored to the party if decisions were taken collectively.

In another reference to Mr Advani's critical remarks about the RSS at the party's recent Chennai national executive, he said bringing RSS-BJP ties into the public domain "is not going to help. I don't think debating publicly about the relations between a mother and son would solve problems".

Terming as "unprecedented" the questioning of the party leadership by members, Mr Mahajan said: "Under such circumstances, the only option left is a collective leadership. That is, the general secre-

taries and a few vice-presidents should sit together and take all decisions collectively and stand by them.

"Previously, we used to take collective decisions. But slowly, as I said, some top leaders started taking decisions on their own. In BJP, we don't need a Sri Krishna to come and solve our problems. All we need is team effort," Mr Mahajan said in an interview to a TV news channel.

About the election of a new president, he said: "Either by 15 December, through consensus (among) senior leaders like Advani, (former Prime Minister Atal Bihari) Vajpayee, (Murlidhar Manohar) Joshi, the party can look for a candidate and Advaniji can announce the name at the Mumbai conclave (in December). Or, someone from the vice presidents can be made to officiate for two-three weeks and then in January 2006 a new president can be elected."

The BJP has been plagued by rows and endless polemics ever since Mr Advani described Pakistan founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah as "secular".

ANOTHER SHIPMENT LIKELY TO BE SENT SOON

India flies in relief after '71

Statesman News Service

Soldiers die in Tangdhar again

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — For the first time since the 1971 war, an Indian Air Force plane landed in Islamabad with 25 tonnes of relief supplies for quake victims. Another plane is expected to be sent soon.

There was an initial hiccup in the delivery, though, when the first flight yesterday returned. Apparently, airport authorities in Islamabad could not make space for the cargo plane to land. It returned to Delhi, before leaving again and landing at Islamabad airport at 2.45 a.m. today.

It was received at Islamabad airport by the Indian high commissioner, Mr Shiv Shankar Menon, and senior Indian diplomats, who formally handed over the relief supplies to Pakistani authorities.

About 15,000 blankets and 50 tents other than plastic sheets, mattresses, food items, medicines and medical items were sent. These material were part of the list of essential items handed over by the Pakistani government to heads of mission in Islamabad on Saturday.

Indian Air Force officials said they were loading another IL-76 to make it ready to take another consignment of relief material to Pakistan. Speaking to reporters, the assistant chief of air staff, Air Vice Marshal SC Mukul, said: "We have been asked by the government to be ready to fly out another consignment."

He also spoke of the efforts to help Indians stranded in quake-hit PoK. He said the IAF was making efforts to airlift the body of a Jammu resident who died in Muzaffarabad and his two injured family members. Government officials said five Indians had also been airlifted from Chakala airbase in Pakistan to Islamabad. But agencies said two more Indian nationals, Mr Jagdish Lal Tandon and Mr

SRINAGAR, Oct. 12. — Six army personnel were washed away today in a massive landslide in quake-hit Tangdhar area while on a rescue mission, a defence source said here. The jawans were killed on a rescue job in one of the worst-affected villages in Tangdhar area of Kupwara district in north Kashmir. — PTI

Shubash Tandon could not be brought to the Chakala airbase near Rawalpindi as the helicopter was overcrowded. They would be brought back either later today or tomorrow.

The Pakistan High Commission in India has opened an account at the ABN Amro Bank's Barakhamba Road branch in the Capital to receive donations for victims of the earthquake. A High Commission official said donations should be marked in favour of "Pakistan High Commission — Earthquake relief fund 2005".

Pakistan today ruled out induction of foreign troops for rescue operations in quake-hit areas, with its Defence spokesman saying it has already committed over 50,000 troops in affected places and another five lakh are standing by. The USA promised more aid to the quake-hit country and the World Bank has increased its initial aid for Pakistan to \$40 million and offered aid to India if needed. The US Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice said: "We will be with you in your hour of need," in a joint news conference with Prime Minister Mr Shaukat Aziz.

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today received calls from US President George W Bush and other foreign dignitaries who conveyed their sympathy and offered assistance in earthquake relief work.

More reports on pages 2 and 5

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