

## Jyoti Basu met Vajpayee and me secretly, Advani says

Communist patriarch Jyoti Basu held a clandestine meeting with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani when the National Front was in power although publicly the Communists loathed the BJP, Advani says in his autobiography.

Advani has said in his 'My Life, My Country' that the former West Bengal chief minister sought a meeting with him and Vajpayee because he felt that the multi-party National Front government led by V.P. Singh was not functioning well.

But Basu laid a pre-condition: the meeting had to be under cover.

'No one should know about our meeting. Especially people in my party would not like it,' Advani quoted Basu as saying.

'One day Jyoti Basu sent a message to us from Calcutta through a common friend. This government is not functioning properly. I feel the three of us - Atalji, you and I - should meet to discuss the situation. Why don't we meet at Viren Shah's residence in Delhi?'

Shah, a successful Mumbai-based industrialist, a friend of both Advani and Basu, played the emissary.

'Atalji and I welcomed the idea of an informal dinner meeting,' Advani has written. 'Nevertheless, we were a bit puzzled. We conveyed our response to the intermediary.'

In their response to Shah, the BJP leaders said: 'We thank Jyoti babu for his suggestion. If he is interested in meeting us, we are prepared to go to Calcutta to meet him there. Otherwise, if he wants the meeting to take place in Delhi, he is most welcome to come to either Atalji's house or my house for dinner.'

The meeting finally took place at Shah's residence.

'But to me it was yet another instance of the hypocritical outlook and conduct of the Communists, especially those belonging to the CPI-M,' Advani has written.

There was, however, one Communist leader who Advani says he greatly admired - Indrajit Gupta of the Communist Party of India (CPI).

'The person who impressed me most was Indrajit Gupta. He was a man of impeccable integrity and great simplicity, besides being an outstanding parliamentarian,' Advani has said.

The BJP veteran has only bitter words for the CPI-M. 'In contrast, the CPI-M leaders were always conscious of being politically correct in their dealings with us.'

V.P. Singh, then heading the Janata Dal, became prime minister in December 1989, with the backing of the mutually antagonistic BJP and the Left. His government collapsed less than a year later after the BJP withdrew its legislative support.

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