

PM's meeting with bishops runs into rough weather

HD-1
31/12

By George Jacob

KOTTAYAM, DEC. 30. The much-awaited meeting of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Kerala Church leadership, during his vacation at Kumarakom, has run into rough weather. The Christian prelates were expected to meet the Prime Minister today, but the meeting did not materialise; the chances of a meeting on Sunday are also dim — the bishops would be busy in the morning and Mr. Vajpayee has his own engagements in the afternoon. And, by Monday noon the Prime Minister would have left Kerala. Even if some bishops get around to having an audience, Mr. Vajpayee meeting them as a delegation and accepting a memorandum — as claimed by many — is an option least favoured by the Prime Minister's advisers, it is learnt.

Efforts are on to find a way out of the impasse so that the much-publicised occasion would not boomerang on the State unit of the BJP, which had plans to use the occasion to build bridges with the Christian community.

Right from the beginning, the hawks in the BJP camp were against the Prime Minister meeting the bishops during his stay at Kumarakom, at a time when the party's stakes are high in Uttar Pradesh, which is to go to the polls soon. It was feared that the bishops might touch upon sensitive issues such as atrocities against the community, the proposed amendment to the Divorce Act, the Christian Marriage Act and above all the issue of conversion.

Any word of empathy from the Prime Minister on these issues would upset the BJP's applecart in U.P., it was pointed out. Most of the issues close to the heart of the bishops are those which have died down in the national media, so why resurrect them, appears to be the line of thinking.

"Whenever a bishop issued statements after meeting Mr. Vajpayee during his prime ministership, it

attracted international media attention and put the BJP in bad light," said one of the leaders. The Prime Minister himself had sent a clear signal when, after landing in Kottayam, he said: "I would like to meet them all as friends and not as religious leaders."

However, the immediate reason for the present impasse appears to be a statement made by some of the Church leaders at a press conference in Kochi on Thursday.

It was claimed that the clergy would meet the Prime Minister as a delegation and submit a memorandum on Saturday. In fact, they had already prepared the memorandum, expressing the community's apprehensions over the recent statements issued by certain leaders close to the BJP (read the RSS chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan) and making an appeal not to view the Christian community as separate from others in the country. "This amounts to the bishops themselves deciding the agenda," said a Christian leader who is keen to resolve the conflict between the BJP and the Church leaders. "The statement in Kochi was as offensive and untimely as the one made by the RSS chief recently," said another.

Internal conflict

Another contributing factor in the present stalemate appears to be the conflict within the Christian leadership. It is an open secret that the stance of Mr. John Joseph, member of the Minority Commission, is not acceptable to a section of some spiritual shepherds who believe that he is trying to wean away their flock to the BJP camp. Few of the Christian prelates would like to accept the leadership of Mr. Joseph in parleys with the BJP and those close to him believe that the Kochi statement the selective leaking of the contents of the memorandum were deliberate attempts to sabotage the dialogue, whose chief architect was Mr. Joseph.

Holiday pushes fishermen into deep waters: Page 11

THE HINDU

31 DEC 2000

PM & THE MOSQUE-II

Vajpayee's Policy Of Appeasement

By AG NOORANI

CAN a minister who is found prima facie guilty of grave offences by a Magistrate as well as a Sessions Judge continue in office? Sworn to uphold the Constitution and the law, he is under a cloud for violating both. What example will Joshi set as minister in charge of education and Advani as Home Minister in charge of the CBI? Reginald Maudling resigned as Home Secretary on 18 July 1972 when British Prime Minister Edward Heath announced that the Director of Public Prosecutions had asked the police to probe the affairs of John Poulson, a wealthy architect with whom Maudling had had a close business relationship a few years earlier. He returned to office later. Why does Advani not follow his own precedent in the hawala case?

The NDA did not explain why the PM spoke as he did on 6 and 7 December but recalled his "anguish" eight years ago. "Most unfortunate" was the favourite expression of apologists of aggression during the cold war. Why not call it "a crime", as SS Bhandari did? Since the past has been recalled, let it speak for itself. It explains the present.

BJP'S AGENDA

On 17 December 1992 Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha: "The top rank leaders of BJP, RSS and VHP had been trying to prevent kar sevaks there (from demolishing the mosque)". *Organiser* of 7 May 1995 carried his admission and justification of the act: "But we did pull down the structure in Ayodhya. In fact it was a reaction to the Muslim vote bank... Now I think the Hindu society has been regenerated, which was the task of the RSS. Earlier Hindus used to bend before an invasion but not now. This change in Hindu society is worthy of welcome." He explained, two days later, that he meant that "the Hindus pulled down the structure, not the RSS workers". Jaswant Singh made a similar admission in a press interview on 11 June 1996. "The BJP was one of the participants, the BJP has direct responsibility."

On 12 December 1992 Vajpayee told IANS: "We are trying to find out who masterminded the whole thing, if there was any agency or group. We are trying to ascertain the facts and see that such things are not repeated." The CBI and two courts did just that. Why does he not ask his colleagues to resign and face trial before a Sessions Judge?

To Vajpayee, construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya was necessary "to save the honour of the Hindu community" (12 May 1991). Yet, he offered to "freeze it, with two other issues, on 28 May 1996 to save his short-lived government and did so again in 1998 and in 1999 to form one. Sushma Swaraj gave the game away, in Bhopal on 14 April 2000, when she admitted that the temple movement was "purely political in nature and had nothing to do with religion".

It is this movement, which exacted a heavy toll of lives and spread communal hate, whose resurgence the PM is trying to

deal with in the worst possible manner — appeasement. At New York, on 9 September this year, he said, in reply to a pointed question of Swamy Satyanand "when would a Ram temple be built in Ayodhya?" that "if the electorate gives us a clear two-thirds majority, we will build the India of our dreams. There is no doubt about it". It is another matter that even a unanimous vote of Parliament cannot by-pass



court proceedings.

Two days later, the VHP announced its plan to go construct the temple. On 14 October the RSS's chief organiser, Suresh Rao Ketkar said: "The people of this country want a grand temple to be constructed... Any Government opposing it will face the ire of the people when elections come." Clearly, the RSS had had enough of the soft line. It did not owe the BJP a living. It is the BJP which depends on the RSS cadre without whose support it would face a debacle at the polls, as it did in 1984. The RSS calculatedly supported the NDA. As its former chief Rajendra Singh said during the 1998 elections: "A Central Government with a positive outlook would remove many hurdles in our way. This would benefit the country in general and the Hindu society in particular" (*Organiser*; 22 February 1998). The RSS's mandir outfit, the VHP, announced, on 3 October at Agra, that its apex body, the Dharam Sansad, would meet in Allahabad on 18-19 January to take a decision on the date for construction of the temple. Eighty of 100-odd pillars are ready. Its executive met in Goa on 18-19 October. Time was running out.

CALCULATED

On 1 December, Vajpayee hosted a dinner for the top brass of the RSS — the president K Sudershan, general secretary Mohan Bhagwat, two joint secretaries, former and present BJP presidents, Kushabhau Thakre and Bangaru Laxman, and Advani. Vajpayee's statement on 6 December was made against this background quite calculatedly. "The project for constructing a Ram temple in Ayodhya was the expression of nationalist feelings. The work has not yet been completed." This was said after the Lok Sabha had been adjourned for the third consecutive day on the issue. The Supreme Court has unanimously rejected the view that it was a "nationalist" project. Two judges (AM Ahmadi and SP Bharuchi JJ) did so explicitly citing the prior existence of the demolished Babari Masjid. The others (MN Venkatachaliah CJ, and JS Verma and GN Ray

JJ) did so implicitly. Section 4(3) of the Ayodhya Acquisition Act was struck down precisely because it aborted a litigation between two sides of different communities. A Prime Minister who characterises the demand of the one, the majority, as "nationalist", violates his oath of office which binds him to hold the scales evenly, the factual falsehood apart. A *fortiori* when he commits himself to completion of that communal project. His second assertion that the three ministers were there "to protect it and not to demolish it" is manifestly untrue. It is in any case a matter for the sessions court, not him, to decide. What he is bound, in all propriety, is to remove them till the court, which has framed the charges, delivers its verdict. Evidently, Vajpayee shares their apprehensions of its verdict.

The next day (7 December), Vajpayee again approximated a communal demand as a national one, with equal deliberation. He said: "The entire country wants the temple. The Muslims do not oppose it. The issue is how to make it and where." The VHP instantly welcomed his remarks and revealed that 5,000 cubic feet of completed stonework had been despatched to Ayodhya on lorries the day before. It is unlikely that Vajpayee was unaware of that.

IMMORAL

In Parliament, on 13 December, Vajpayee reiterated, for the third time, deliberately, his formulation of 6 and 7 December — construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya was "connected with national sentiment. How can you take exception to it? Can't a temple be built on the basis of national sentiment?"

It is unnecessary to discuss the pathetically disingenuous parallels he drew with the Dargah at Ajmer and the Golden Temple at Amritsar since Vajpayee himself said on 6 April 1989: "Hindus were the rightful claimants of the site". He added that he spoke not as a BJP leader, but as an RSS Swayamsevak and Hindu. The Prime Minister's denial in the Rajya Sabha on 19 December that he asked for the rebuilding of a temple at the site of the demolished mosque is belied by the Iftar statement on 7 December "the temple should be built at the site and the mosque can be built elsewhere". It is insulting that Muslims are prepared to accept such a humiliating proposal. It is no concession that he now agrees to abide by court order for the Supreme Court ruling completely bars legislative solution which the BJP had favoured all along.

Read all this with his 1995 acknowledgement of the culprits of the demolition and his assertion in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 1992: "Ram temple will not be constructed by foul or unfair means. If Ram temple is constructed it would be constructed on the basis of moral strength." And it is immoral to construct a temple in honour of Shri Ramachandra on the ruins of the 500-year-old Babari Masjid demolished by the Sangh parivar's men.

(Concluded)

PM & THE MOSQUE-I

Moral And Constitutional Aspects

By AG NOORANI

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee damaged his credibility, wantonly and irreparably, by his statements on Ayodhya on 6, 7 and 14 December. The NDA's statement on 10 December did not explain why he said as he did on the first two occasions but recalled his "anguish" on the demolition of the Babari Mosque at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, endorsed his new doctrine of ministers' accountability and capped it with an assertion which is recklessly wrong: "in the litigation over the title of the dispute of land in Ayodhya ... the NDA government is duty-bound to accept and implement the decision of the Supreme Court which is presently seized of the matter." It is shocking that the PM, eight Union ministers and three CMs were ignorant of the fact that this case, which they say "is at the centre of the long-standing controversy" has been before the Special Bench (Ayodhya) of the Allahabad

High Court at Lucknow, comprising Justices DK Trivedi, Syed Rafat Alam and JC Mishra, for the last seven years. It was transferred from the court of the District Judge, Faizabad.

STILL PENDING

On 7 January 1993 the President promulgated the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Ordinance, 1993 and simultaneously referred to the Supreme Court for its advisory opinion the question "Whether a Hindu temple or any Hindu religious structure existed prior to the construction of the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babari Masjid ... in the area on which the site stood." The Ordinance, later replaced by an Act of Parliament, vested the entire area in the Union and declared in Section 4(3) that all pending legal proceedings in respect of right or title to the property "shall abate".

On 24 October 1994 the Supreme Court ruled that Section 4(3) was unconstitutional because it extinguished "the judicial remedy for resolution of the dispute amounting to negation of rule of law". This, incidentally, would also render unconstitutional the BJP's old proposal to resolve the dispute "by legislation". Since Section 4(3) was void, the Court declined to answer the President's query ("unnecessary") and held that the pending suits "stand revived".

There is, however, one legal proceeding still pending before the Supreme Court — the notice for contempt of court it issued on 4 February 1994 against LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, and others.

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Sadly, nothing has been done about it. Apart from the civil suit on title to the land, on which the demolished mosque stood, there are criminal proceedings against these two, now Union Ministers for Home and HRD, respectively; Uma Bharati, also a Union Minister; Bal Thackeray and a host of RSS and VHP leaders. The CBI filed a chargesheet on 5 October 1993 after examining some 850 witnesses, 700 documents,



100 articles, video cassettes, photographs and media reports. Reputed national dailies reported LK Advani asking the mob to seal off the roads to prevent the CRPF from coming while the demolition was on. A photograph showed Uma Bharati, arms flung around MM Joshi. Both beamed in ecstasy. Now the PM says that all three were there to "protect" the mosque.

The chargesheet was followed by two judicial orders which found that prima facie case of conspiracy to commit grave offences did exist against the three ministers and their co-accused. On 27 August 1994, the Special Judicial Magistrate, Mahipal Sirohi, committed all the 40 accused to trial in the Sessions Court because "an offence is prima facie disclosed".

RICH DETAIL

Thereafter, the Additional Sessions Judge (Ayodhya) Lucknow, Jagdish Prasad Srivastava, framed on 9 September 1977, charges against the accused, the three ministers included, as a prima facie case existed warranting a full trial. However, Section 228(2) of the CrPC says that where the Sessions Judge "frames any charge ... the charge shall be read and explained to the accused, and the accused shall be asked whether he pleads guilty of the offence charged or claims to be tried". Hence, the Judge's direction to the accused "to be present in the Court on 17 October 1997". But they repeatedly absented themselves and filed revision applications in the High Court, thus averting the opening of the trial for three whole years on charges framed by a Sessions Judge.

His 61-page order records

Advani's role in rich detail: "it is concluded that in the present case a criminal conspiracy to demolish the disputed structure of Ram Janam Bhoomi/Babari masjid was hatched by the accused persons in the beginning of 1990 and was completed on 6 December 1992. Shri Lal Krishan Advani and others hatched the criminal conspiracy to demolish the disputed premises."

The Judge found that "On 5 December 1992 a secret meeting was held at the house of Sh Vinay Katiyar which was attended by Lal Krishan Advani, Pawar Kumar Pandey, etc wherein a final decision to demolish the disputed structure was taken..."

"Leaders on the podium were distributing sweets on the wrecking of the Tomb. At 2.30 pm Ashok Singhal and Advani asked the Kar Sewaks to block the main road so that the Central forces are not allowed to reach the spot. Parmhans Ram Chander Dass asked the Kar Sewaks to take advantage of the opportunity and asked them to demolish the wall of disputed structure so that Tomb comes down on its own. While the structure was being pulled down, Sh Kalyan Singh talked to Advani on telephone at Ram Janam Bhoomi Ayodhya and Sh Advani asked Sh Kalyan Singh to delay his resignation."

DOCTRINE

Para 50 concludes: "Prima Facie offence under Section 147/135-A/135-B/295/295-A/505 read with Section 149 IPC is made out against accused persons: Sh Lal Krishan Advani", MM Joshi, Uma Bharati and others. Para 59 reads: "I find a prima facie case to charge the accused "and they are charged under the aforesaid offences".

Can ministers against whom a court of law frames such charges continue in office? To dub them as "political offences" is to grant immunity to Naxalites and militants in Kashmir and the north-east. The PM lowered the standards of accountability by propounding the doctrine that "no allegation of corruption or misuse of office is involved". The NDA's statement endorses the Vajpayee Doctrine ("an issue that has no bearing on their constitutional duties") which flouts all precedents in India and abroad.

A minister who is found in the company of a Mrs Warren need not resign; for, the liaison is not part of his "constitutional duties". Cecil Parkinson, a favourite of Margaret Thatcher, resigned in 1983 when Sara Keays, who was expecting his child, revealed his breach of faith with her.

(To be concluded)

Sena chief may face case for views on Muslim voters

By S. Balakrishnan
The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The Democratic Front government may file a criminal case against Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray for reportedly demanding the disenfranchisement of Muslims. Minister of state for home Kripashankar Singh told *The Times of India* on Tuesday night that he has "asked the law and judiciary department to examine the three-part interview of Mr Thackeray by his party daily, *Saamna*, which contains the controversial demand".



Bal Thackeray

He said the government wanted to prepare a legally foolproof case against Mr Thackeray before proceeding against him. However, a senior police official said that the police department had so far not received any instructions from the home department. "But we will register a case if we are directed to do so by the home department," he added.

Another police official added, "When the gov-

ernment ordered the arrest of Mr Thackeray a few months ago for publishing certain editorials in *Saamna*, it had not done its homework properly, hence the case was thrown out by the Bhoiwada magistrate's court. This time, the government wants to be more thorough in its approach," he added.

Speaking to this newspaper on Tuesday, Mr Thackeray said, "My statement has been taken out of context and distorted by vested interests. All I had said was that the so-called secular parties would not bother about Muslims if the latter's right to vote is taken away from them. My aim was to expose these parties which have all along used Muslims as vote-banks and are not genuinely concerned about the community. I had not demanded that Muslims should be disenfranchised."

Mr Thackeray alleged that the issue was being politicised by his rivals. It is learnt that Sena leader Manohar Joshi, Union minister for heavy industries, has already clarified Mr Thackeray's stand to the central government. However, Mr Singh has noted that the heading of the first part of the interview, emblazoned on the front page

of the Sena mouthpiece, had clearly demanded the disenfranchisement of Muslims. A source in the home department said Mr Thackeray was the editor of *Saamna* and hence could be held responsible for the headline.

"It would be ridiculous if action were to be taken on the basis of the heading," Mr Thackeray retorted. "I have never come across an instance when action has been initiated on such a basis. The government should read what I actually said in the interview and not jump to conclusions."

Meanwhile, political observers say Mr Thackeray's interview is an effort to distance his party ideologically from its ally, the BJP. Mr Thackeray has criticised the strategy of wooing Muslims proposed by BJP president Bangaru Laxman. The Sena had criticised Mr Laxman for trying to dilute the Hindutva agenda.

In the recent interview to *Saamna*, while Mr Thackeray took a sympathetic view of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, he was critical of several decisions taken by the Union government, including granting Muslims permission to offer 'namaz' near the Taj Mahal.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 DEC 2000

'Snatch Muslims' right to vote'

Sujata Anandan
Mumbai, December 17

HT-1
18/12

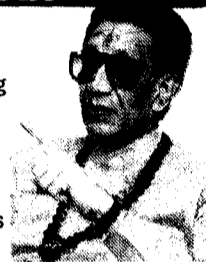
SHIV SENA chief Bal Thackeray is at it again. The latest round of vitriol from him: "It is time to disenfranchise all Muslims in the country". Thackeray's advice is part of a long interview that appears in *Saamna*, the Sena mouthpiece.

Former Maharashtra minister and Islamic scholar Dr Rafiq Zakaria, laughed heartily when informed about the "saffron roar". He said, "I think Thackeray is losing his balance. He is trying to whip up a religious frenzy. Nothing could please Gen. Musharraf more than what Thackeray has just said".

Thackeray's statements seemed to be aimed at BJP and what he sees as the party president's "appeasement of Muslims". The Sena chief also says it is high time that the memorials of carry the line "Hey Babar" in much the same way that Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi at Raj Ghat has

THACKERAYSPEAK

- Hindus aren't cared for in Pakistan. Pakistanis treat Indian Muslims shabbily.
- The Supreme Court banned loudspeakers during Ganeshotsav. Cowardly Hindus obeyed because only we are bound by the law. No other community is bothered.
- Vajpayee is so "accommodative" because he doesn't have the numbers in Parliament. He has no alternative but to appease the minorities.
- Memorials of leaders should have *Hey Babar* written on them. The secularists have ruined this country.



"Hey Ram" on it.

In the interview, Thackeray "forgives" Vajpayee for the "appeasement trip" he is on because "the PM is not in control of his Government". For good measure, the Sena chief observes, "Give us the numbers and see what we can do".

"Thackeray is living in a fool's paradise," says Dr Ishaq Jamkhanvala, chairman of Anjuman-e-Islam

group of educational institutions in Maharashtra. "Surely it is not up to him to decide who should be disenfranchised. Is he saying this because he himself has been disenfranchised? What makes him think he has the powers to take away ours?"

Said Samajwadi state unit chief Abu Asim Azmi: "This man, who has been disenfranchised, can never rise above his politics of poison."

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

18 DEC 2000

No endorsement of temple: TDP, Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 16. — Two major supporting partners of the NDA government have questioned the BJP's claim that the defeat of the censure motion in the Lok Sabha on Ayodhya was an endorsement for construction of a Ram temple.

"It is totally a wrong interpretation," Mr K Yerran Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party said today.

There has been no endorsement of the BJP's temple agenda, he said, adding that the TDP would be compelled to take action to prevent the government from pushing its agenda.

Miss Mamata Banerjee said in Calcutta that the Trinamul Congress would abide by the ruling of the court on the construction of the temple at Ayodhya and stressed that her party would not tolerate pushing of the Ram Mandir

issue by the BJP deviating from the declared agenda of the NDA.

"If anyone tries to deviate from the NDA agenda, we will be the last to tolerate it".

Asked if her party would quit the Vajpayee government if the BJP tried to move away from the NDA agenda on temple, she said: "We are part of the NDA government. We will abide by the declared agenda of the NDA. As far as the Babari Masjid issue is concerned, my party is in favour of the status quo as has been ordered by the Supreme Court."

Miss Banerjee was speaking at an Iftar party hosted by the West Bengal Pradesh Quami Tanzeem, an outfit of the Trinamul Congress.

"India is a secular country and the government will have to keep in mind the sentiments of all religious communities," she added.

The immediate provocation for the two

partners were newspaper reports quoting the BJP president, Mr Bangaru Laxman, as saying that the makeshift Ram temple in Ayodhya at the disputed site could not be removed even if the court ruling went against it.

Mr Laxman, however, denied having made such a statement and said he had been quoted out of context. Mr Laxman denied that he had said the BJP would not abide by the court ruling on Ayodhya. BJP's campaign in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh endorsing Mr Vajpayee's line on Ayodhya has come as a fresh irritant to the allies who have been pushed to the wall in defending their secular credentials.

Sources close to the Prime Minister told **The Statesman** that there was no threat to the government since all the allies had full faith in Mr Vajpayee. "Some comments here and there should not be taken as a threat to the

government," the sources said.

Mr Chandrababu Naidu is in constant touch with Miss Banerjee, sources close to the TDP leader said. But the strength of the Vajpayee government is the fragmented Opposition.

PTI adds from Lucknow: The BSP today held the Congress and Samajwadi Party responsible for the demolition of the Babari mosque. It said it had abstained from voting on the censure motion in the Lok Sabha on Thursday as it did not want to side with those who had "created" the Ayodhya problem.

Addressing a press conference, the BSP vice-president, Miss Mayawati, said while the Congress was the "real culprit" for creating the Ayodhya imbroglio by ordering unlocking of the disputed structure and getting the shi-lanyas performed, it was the Samajwadi Party's rhetorics in Uttar Pradesh that helped the BJP gain political strength.

THE STATESMAN
17 DEC 2000

RSS tries to revive Hindutva through books

BY AMITA VERMA

Lucknow, Dec. 16: A set of six books, four volunteers and a photograph of "Bharat Mata" will now spread the message of Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh across millions of households in the country.

The six book set will inform the people about the 75 year-old-history of the RSS, its role in nation-building, particularly the freedom movement, the essentials of Hindu culture and its relation to environment, the role of women in society and home and the makings of an ideal Hindu family.

The volunteers will politely hold a brain-storming session in every

household, convince the people to give a deeper thought to Sangh ideology — even as they pursue their own political ideology — answer questions, if any, and offer more Sangh literature if the person shows any curiosity in RSS affairs.

The 'Bharat Mata' photograph will also be 'gifted' to every household and people will be requested to give a prominent place to the photograph in their homes. "The nation is above any religion or politics" will be the punch line that will be delivered with the photograph. This 'Rashtriya Jagran Abhiyan' launched by the RSS to commemorate its 75th anniversary is an

attempt by the Sangh Parivar to "dispel doubts that have been created in the minds of people by vested interests and refurbish its image as a nationalist organisation." It also coincides with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's 'Ram Dhun programme' where VHP activists will go from door-to-door singing 'Ram Dhun' and distributing literature related to the proposed Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The RSS and the VHP are apparently working in perfect tandem to revive Hindu sentiments and mobilise the Hindu community before embarking on Ram temple construction.

The six books' set that are being

distributed by RSS volunteers, along with a pamphlet, tells the reader that 'Hindu and Hindutva is an ideal way of life that is directly related to the unity and integrity of the country.' It also carries quotes of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Jaiprakash Narain — all praising the RSS, of course!

One of the books titled *Nari Jagran Aur Sangh* makes a concerted effort to dispel the notion that RSS responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

This section quotes heavily from letters written by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel where the

two leaders insist that the RSS was not behind the assassination. There are also excerpts from the Kapoor Commission report that re-investigated the entire episode again in 1966. There are detailed articles on the RSS stand on conversion and the role of Christian missionaries in this book that says *Jab jab Hindu bata, desh toota*. (whenever Hindus divided, the country was divided) The RSS also underlines its commitment to social harmony and removal of casteism. "The shilanyas of the proposed Ram temple in Ayodhya was performed by a scheduled caste person which proves that the Sangh is determined to remove casteist feelings."

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 DEC 2000

Govt agrees to discuss Ayodhya in LS

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 DECEMBER

BOWING TO pressure from the Opposition, the government on Tuesday decided to end the week-long deadlock in Parliament by conceding the demand for a Censure Motion on the issue of the resignation of three ministers as well as a discussion on the Ayodhya issue.

Parliament is now expected to resume regular proceedings on Wednesday with the Censure Motion being taken up in the afternoon after Question Hour.

The breakthrough came at an all-party meeting called on Tuesday afternoon by speaker G.M.C. Balayogi, the fourth on the issue since last week. Leaders of various parties agreed to end the logjam with a discussion under Rule 184 in the Lok Sabha.

Though the exact formulation of the motion was left to the Speaker, the parties agreed on the broad contours — that it should refer to the resignations of the three ministers as well as the Prime Minister's controversial remarks on the Ayodhya issue.

However, it is still unclear how the issue will be tackled in the Rajya Sabha, where the government is in a minority. While the Opposition claimed that the discussions will be held in the Upper house too — though the



Balayogi: Plain speak

motion will be different — government managers indicated that the question of a debate there rested on the consent of the leader of the house.

The debate in the Lok Sabha is expected to spill over to Thursday and culminate in voting, after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's reply.

While the outcome of the motion is expected to be in favour of the government, it is the discussion which will become the focus in the next two days.

For most within the Opposition ranks, regional considerations are sure to steer the direction of the debate.

Bills gather dust as MPs fight for brownie points

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 DECEMBER

DESPITE A resolution hammered out between political parties to end the standoff in Parliament, it is unlikely to have any recognisable impact on the legislative process.

The impasse, however, will accomplish one thing: crucial reforms-minded legislations like the Electricity Bill will go into deep freeze.

With the Ayodhya discussion slated to take up the next two days of business, Parliament has effectively four working days before it is adjourned sine die on the 22nd. This is because Fridays are reserved for private members bills, which leaves only four days to debate crucial bills. However, judging by the prevalent mood of the legislators, it is almost inevitable that politics will wedge its head into these discussions too.

With the opposition parties determined to turn politics into a blockade against governance, Parliament has been frozen into immobility for over a week now.

Crucial economic and security issues remain unaddressed by parliamentarians.

A showpiece legislation which in normal circumstances, would have sailed through both Houses, the Bill on power sector reforms will now join the growing number of legislation held up by raucous politicians, since the government does not want to risk jeopardising this legislation while political tempers are running high.

In normal circumstances, this Bill would have got the blessings of the Congress which has endorsed sweeping power sector reforms in its latest economic position paper.

The problem is approaching crisis proportions as MPs spend their waking moments in the House invading the well and holding legislative business hostage to scoring political points off each other. It has long ceased to matter to any MP, responsible or otherwise, that the nation's taxpayers fork out a whopping Rs 9,42,000 for every hour in Parliament.

The Economic Times

13 DEC 2000

Ayodhya issue rocks Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 5. Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned for the day soon after question hour as the Opposition, led by the Congress, pursued its demand for the resignation of the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and two other Ministers charged in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

The Opposition stepped up the heat today and unlike on Monday when it was mainly a Congress affair, today the entire Opposition joined hands to force the adjournment. On Monday, the issue was raised in the Lok Sabha as the Upper House was adjourned following the death of a sitting member. But, on Tuesday, the demand was taken up even in the Upper House. In fact, there was more uproar in the Rajya Sabha as the treasury benches, led by Mr. S.S. Ahluwalia, tried to counter the Opposition. While in the Lok Sabha, the treasury benches sat back and watched the Opposition vent its spleen.

In the Rajya Sabha, the issue was taken up by Mr. Suresh Pachouri (Congress) who demanded

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the resignation of the three chargesheeted ministers. Soon after question hour, the Congress members were on their feet raising slogans and displaying a photograph of a BJP Minister at the demolition site on that fateful December 6.

The Lok Sabha witnessed uproarious scenes but the Congress and the Samajwadi party indulged in a game of oneupmanship in their bid to take the credit for raising the issue.

Caught unawares by the Congress on Monday, the Samajwadi Party (SP) today sought to upstage it by raising the issue even before question hour was over, but its members were soon outnumbered and outshouted by the Congress members who moved into the well of the House.

With an eye on the minority votes, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, the SP members sought to equate the Congress with the BJP blaming it for being equally responsible for the demolition. "The demolition took place as a result of the joint conspiracy of the BJP and the Congress," said

the SP member, Mr. Akhilesh Singh. But his exertions were drowned in the Congress sloganeering. Unable to get the members resume their seats and sensing the belligerent mood, the Speaker, Mr. Balayogi, adjourned the House for the day.

The Congress today made it clear that it would persist with the issue tomorrow as well. Briefing newsmen, the CWC member, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, said his party would continue to agitate till the Ministers resigned and a full-fledged discussion took place in both the Houses. He referred to the Lucknow court's observation that the conspiracy to demolish the mosque was hatched at the time of Mr. Advani's Somnath 'yatra'. It proved that Mr. Advani was the "principal conspirator". How can he continue as the Home Minister, he asked. Mr. Azad also held Mr. Advani responsible for the riots that followed the demolition. "Because of the conspiracy that he hatched the whole nation had to pay a huge price," Mr. Azad said.

Security for Dec. 6: Page 13

THE HINDU

6 DEC 2000

Deliberate design

By K. K. Katyal

One has to squarely reject the view that Mr. Vajpayee's statement on Ayodhya was a slip... He acted with due deliberation, with due calculation.

stage, there have been no convulsions in the party or the Parivar.

Mr. Vajpayee's move on Kashmir, on the one hand, and his temple-related performance on the other, projected two sharply conflicting images and evoked sharply clashing reactions. In the first case, he was lauded for his constructive role and found the nation united behind him (the Shiv Sena has to be counted out in serious matters). In the second case, his image as a unifier was completely sullied: he found the country divided because of him, his moderation was seen as giving way to sectarian extremism. Seldom before so much was squandered in such a short time.

There is another irony, if one were to look at this episode from the Vajpayee-versus-Advani angle. Till recently, the Prime Minister enjoyed a high rating because of his acceptability within the country and, of course, within the ruling alliance. That he was a "mask" for the BJP-Sangh Parivar ideology did not seem to matter because of his role as a rallying figure for a coalition. The various aberrations — the heterogeneous elements comprising the NDA, the signals received by the mad caps of the Parivar as they embarked on anti-Christian adventures — were no doubt noted with alarm but, on balance, he was commended for his role in bringing a semblance of political stability in the country, after three years of waywardness. As against that, the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, was associated closely with the RSS agenda and, as such, regarded sectarian, with low acceptability outside the charmed parivar and its sympathisers. Was it a coincidence that in the last few days, Mr. Advani was seen reaching out to different sections, to promote, as some felt, his acceptability, with a visit to the Muslim shrine at Ajmer and his positive interpretation of the Ramzan ceasefire initiative, while Mr. Vajpayee's image was dented? It may not have been the handiwork of a hidden hand, but the twists and turns in the two cases have not gone unnoticed.

Mr. Advani may not have gained but Mr. Vajpayee has lost — and so has the NDA. The task of preserving it will be more arduous now.

g. Religion & Pari

TAKING NEWSPAPER headlines as an index of the nation's mood, the Ayodhya-related developments have overshadowed what till the other day was the national priority, the Kashmir ceasefire. What other proof is needed to show that the utterances of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the subject have caused widespread concern? Parliament has been brought to a standstill, the confrontation between the Government and the Opposition has sharpened and serious misgivings have been caused among some of the constituents of the ruling combine. Equally noteworthy is the jubilation of the BJP cadres, especially the hardliners and the Sangh Parivar. Two major questions arise. Why did the Prime Minister choose to be categorical on the construction of a temple at Ayodhya? And what will be its impact on whatever cohesion there is in the National Democratic Alliance and the stability of the Central Government?

One has to squarely reject the view that Mr. Vajpayee's statements were a slip. This untenable theory rests on the reputation acquired by him, of late, of a moderate who carefully weighs his words while dealing with sensitive matters, especially those with the potential for a clash between the agreed programme of the NDA and the "hidden agenda" of the BJP. He, according to this view, would not have committed such indiscretions intentionally. In support are cited clarifications he issued after each of the contentious statements.

These assumptions are to be rejected outright, because of the firm evidence to the contrary. He acted with due deliberation, with due calculation. There was a set purpose and a set method. Vast sections of the BJP rank and file and the rest of the Sangh Parivar had made no secret of their unhappiness because of their perception that the cherished items of their platform had either been ignored or diluted. Their restiveness was all too evident on the Government's economic policies and the temple issue. Mr. Vajpayee resisted the "pressures" on economic matters, but on Ayodhya he chose to swim with the current. He could not afford to do otherwise, he concluded. His RSS past helped him reach this conclusion. The fact that the As-

sembly poll in Uttar Pradesh is not far off was also factored in. The party felt — and Mr. Vajpayee appears to have agreed — that ambivalence on the temple could prove costly to it.

What Uttar Pradesh meant to the BJP in the bid for power not only in the State but also at the Centre became clear in last year's general election, when its poor showing there depressed its all-India tally — bringing it perilously close to the loss of its earlier supremacy. Continuation of that trend would spell disaster for the party, it figured. This created an imperative for taking up issues, that would have an electrifying effect on the electorate. The Ayodhya temple had always been regarded by it as one such matter. Had it not paid rich dividends to the BJP in the past, especially in the wake of the Somnath-to-Ayodhya rath yatra? Had it not been kept alive all these years by the VHP and other Parivar outfits? Mr. Vajpayee had always recognised the force of this argument but did not follow it with deeds. He chose to act now.

There was only one problem in reviving the issue — the constraint imposed by the NDA minimum programme and the undertaking given by the BJP to put on the back-burner three issues, that used to render the party untouchable and used to come in the way of alliances with others. The Hindutva (and the temple issue), as is known, was one of the three, the demand for a uniform civil code and abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, giving special status to Jammu and Kashmir, being the other two. Mr. Vajpayee made use of the Ayodhya demolition anniversary and the occasion provided by the Opposition demand for the resignation of three Ministers, Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, charge-sheeted in the Ayodhya case, to bring the issue to the fore. In doing so, he took a calculated risk. Obviously, he regarded it manageable.

Mr. Vajpayee rejected the demand for the resignation of the Ministers. That was

understandable. But he went beyond that — though that was not necessary for the limited purpose of warding off the Opposition pressure against his colleagues — and made substantive points on the temple issue. He could not have been unaware of the implications of his action, of the misgivings that it would create among some of the coalition partners and the pressures it would generate in the alliance. Obviously, he calculated he would be able to deal with the consequences by a tightrope walk, by a sophistry that would make a distinction between the coalition programme, meant to be followed at the Government level through collective efforts, and the agendas of the constituents, meant to be followed at the party level. He could not but have taken into account the hole in this laboured argument but calculated that the shared vested interest of the partners to stay in power would not let them look at it. Whether or not it works that way means a lot for the cohesion, if not the survival of the NDA. The question mark remains despite the "unanimous resolution" on the subject adopted by the alliance on Sunday.

Another theory that has been doing the rounds links Mr. Vajpayee's Ayodhya statements to his delicate initiative on Kashmir. The Ramzan ceasefire would have to be followed by concrete steps towards resolution of the Kashmir problem, both in its internal and external context, involving give-and-take, unpalatable even unacceptable to the non-moderates in the BJP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar. It was to neutralise this factor, so goes the argument, that Mr. Vajpayee sought to mollify them in advance on an issue with which they had identified themselves so closely and which stirred their religious sentiments so powerfully. This reasoning, however, does not take into account the logic (or illogic) of extremism. Having tasted victory on the temple, the hardcore sections would only be emboldened into striking harder postures to forestall any flexibility on Kashmir. Up to the ceasefire

THE HINDU

12 DEC 2000

Advani, Joshi must quit: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 4. Three days ahead of the eighth anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Congressmen today demanded the resignation of Union Ministers, Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, and forced the Speaker to adjourn the Lok Sabha for the day.

Raising the issue, Mr. Jaipal Reddy said that since the Ministers were chargesheeted by the CBI "they should resign on grounds of impropriety". The Congress benches maintained that the Government itself had set a precedent, getting Mr. Hiren Pathak to resign from minister-ship after he had been charged by a lower court in Gujarat.

The Congress appeared determined to press ahead with the is-

Religion of Secular
sue and even sprang a surprise on the treasury benches as well as parties like the Samajwadi Party, by initially moving a motion under Rule 184, which entails a vote after the debate.

"I rise more in sadness than in anger," Mr. Reddy said and explained that since the CBI had chargesheeted the Ministers and as the designated court had found them prima facie guilty, their continuance amounted "to a constitutional impropriety". Caught unawares, the treasury benches responded with Mr. V. K. Malhotra first and later the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, joining with the Congress MP. Both the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, and Mr. L. K. Advani, were present but did not respond.

Mr. Reddy was supported by the rest of the Congress members

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who were on their legs as the Speaker tried to dissuade him from making a speech. They also moved into the well and thus forced an adjournment. When the House reassembled at 2 p.m.,

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they again trooped into the well chanting slogans "We want resignations", and turned a deaf ear to requests from the chair to resume their seats.

The party made it clear that it would keep raising the issue until its members were allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha. "We will continue to raise this issue," said Mrs. Margaret Alva, spokesperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party. She accused the three Ministers of trying to use their leave of absence from the court to prevent its framing charges.

Mrs. Alva pointed out that since the Home Minister himself was charged, "no investigations will be completed as long as he remains in charge of the Home Ministry". The issue related not just to Ayodhya but also to constitutional propriety, and the Congress could not afford to remain silent, she said.

High alert in U.P.

LUCKNOW, DEC. 4. Police and paramilitary forces were put on high alert in Uttar Pradesh, especially in Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi in view of the anniversary of the demolition of disputed structure in Ayodhya on December 6, official sources said today.

All sensitive districts have been asked to maintain strict vigil though there are no specific intelligence reports of apprehension of a breach of the peace, the Principal Secretary (Home), Mr. Hemendra Kumar, said.— UNI

THE HINDU

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10 The Muslim card 10-10

FOR ONCE Jyoti Basu and Bangaru Laxman have found a subject on which they can agree. In almost identical responses to Mamata Banerjee's demand for job reservations for Muslims, the Left Front chairman and the BJP president have voiced their summary rejection of the idea. Nor can they be blamed for, apart from any doubts that they may have on forever expanding the system of quotas, few can fail to see the political motivation behind Ms Banerjee's suggestion. Aware that for all her combative style, her one-person party may not fare as well as she expects in next year's Assembly elections in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress has obviously decided to play the Muslim card. There are two reasons for it. One is that she can hardly afford to ignore a section accounting for one-fourth to one-third of the electorate, according to various estimates. The other is that her proposal will mollify the liberals of all communities who frown on her alliance with the BJP.

Ms Banerjee's ploy is a blatantly cynical one not only because her concern is less with Muslim welfare than with the need to secure votes, but also because she is well aware that there is little chance of the suggestion being accepted. Yet, she has made it because it will enable her to go to the Muslim localities and say that she tried her best. It is this kind of reckless populism which is becoming a major feature of her politics. Whether she is against the petrol price hike or for affirmative action, she has little concern for the negative impact on either the economy or the social scene. All that she is bothered about is getting votes. To that end, she is said to be even driving the railway officials to despair with her proposals for investments in West Bengal which she hopes will earn her brownie points in the state.

What Ms Banerjee is demonstrating beyond doubt is that a sense of responsibility is not her strong point. She is not even a reliable partner, as the BJP is realising with each passing day. There is little doubt that her latest move on quotas will displease the BJP although the party may not show it. If the strains within the alliance reach breaking point as the polls draw near, an anti-Left *mahajot* may still take shape in West Bengal. But it will not be of a kind which will please the BJP.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 NOV 2000

Declare all Muslims backward'

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 17

THE DEMAND for job reservations for Muslims is neither illegal nor unconstitutional. It can be easily achieved by declaring the entire Muslim community in West Bengal as backward, convener of the West Bengal Minorities Reservation Movement, Dr M Nuruzzaman, said here today.

Nuruzzaman backed Mamata Banerjee's call for Muslim quotas, and flayed the Marxists for shying away from taking the steps the Governments of Kerala and Assam took long ago.

"No constitutional amendment is required to reserve jobs for Muslims in the State," Nuruzzaman said.

"This can be achieved by a simple enactment in the West Bengal Assembly. We already have a State Backward Class Commission that can provide details about the socio-economic and educational standard of Muslims and declare the entire community as a backward class.

"Article 16(4) of the Constitution says that the State can make reservations for the backward classes. We can easily make use of that provision to achieve our

end," he said.

According to Nuruzzaman, EMS Namoboodripad's communist Government had taken this route to implement quotas for Muslims in Kerala as early as in 1958.

"Even today, Muslims enjoy 12 per cent job reservation in Kerala Government services. Six per cent of Government jobs in Assam too are reserved for Muslims. But Jyoti Basu, Buddhaddeb Bhattacharjee and Anil Biswas are taking shelter behind the Constitution and ignoring what their comrades did in Kerala long before. I wel-

come the move made by Mamata Banerjee," said Nuruzzaman.

As early as in 1971, Nuruzzaman said, the Cabinet had unanimously approved a resolution tabled by the then Commerce and Industries Minister AKM Hassan-uz-Zaman, allowing reservations for Muslims in Bengal.

A commission headed by J N Talukdar had been appointed to consider what "reasonable preferences could be given to the Muslims and others".

But the fall of the Ajoy Mukherjee Government and out-

break of the 1971 war aborted the commission's project.

"Subsequently, several deputations have been made to the State Backward Commission, but we have been told by Chairman Justice A N Sen to provide relevant data about the socio-economic and educational background of the Muslims.

"We are a non-Government organisation, how can we provide such data? I do not know how a Government that has been in power for 24 years claims to have no records on a community that constitutes 25 per cent of the State's population," said the convener of the State's Minorities Reservation Movement.

VHP bid to perform 'yajna' in Qutb foiled

By Our Staff Reporter

*Religious
SPM*

NEW DELHI, NOV. 14. Tension ran high in the vicinity of the Qutb Minar here on Tuesday after a large number of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal activists gathered to perform a "yajna" inside the complex.

However, a potentially volatile situation was defused by the local

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police. Nearly 80 persons including some leaders of the two groups were picked up and booked under Section 65 of the Delhi Police Act, which deals with detaining people who cause a law and order situation. Among those arrested were Mr. Ram Krishna Gaur, Mr. Ajay Devgun and Mahant Nawal Kishore Das. They were let off with a warning in the

afternoon, a senior police officer said.

Later, VHP members alleged that the police used force while making the arrests. The policemen had resorted to a lathicharge to disperse those gathered for the "yajna", they alleged. Senior police officers denied the allegations and said the situation never went out of hand.

In the evening, the All-India Muslim Majlis-e- Mushawarat issued a statement condemning the incident and alleging that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had given permission for performance of the "yajna" inside the complex.

The president of the association, Syed Sahabuddin, said the incident constituted both a sacrilege and violation of the law of the land.

Sequence of events

A few days ago some activists of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal met senior police officers to seek permission for performing "puja" to a Ganesh idol, installed within the complex and long neglected.

The police did not give them permission for, the complex fell under ASI jurisdiction. Senior ASI officials also denied them permission. The activists by then had decided to go ahead with their plan.

The police, however, got wind of their plans. So even before about 130 activists gathered within the complex this morning, a large number of policemen had been present there. The arrests followed soon after.

The police officer denied that people were allowed to offer prayers in a mosque within the complex. It was a site meant only for tourists, he said.

THE HINDU

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15 NOV 2000

A Swadeshi church is a Christian idea

S GURUMURTHY joins the debate on 'Swadeshi churches' triggered off by RSS chief K Sudarshan

give up Roman Catholicism in 1688-89, he was dethroned and replaced by his Protestant son-in-law, William Orange. In 1594-97, Richard Hooker, a leading figure of the Church of England, au-

state churches into established churches".

The evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark is the recognised official church of Denmark and managed by the Government. In Norway too, it is the official church of Norway and is managed under Norwegian law. The head of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, managed under the Swedish law, is the Swedish king. All of them are independent of the control or of influence of any other transborder churches. Swadeshi churches are thus the rule in the Christian west, not exceptions.

Even in Africa, the spread of Christianity was through what was known as African Independent Churches (AICs). This movement of what is now thousands of churches was founded by black Africans. It dates back to 18th century when a young black woman, Kimpa Vita, resisted the Portuguese rule in Congo by proclaiming a "Black Christ" and a 'Utopian African Kingdom' (encyclopaedia). In 1706, the Portuguese rulers burned her as a heretic.

Later, this took the shape of Ethiopian Church Movement. This subsequently expanded into the African Independent Churches. Says the encyclopaedia, "AICs originate in either Pre-Christian or Christian movements and represent a reversion to traditional African religion in the face of intensive influence from the West. The AICs comprise the 'Ethiopian', 'the spirit' and 'Messianic' churches — each of them distinctly African. The African Independent Church is the 'indigenised' African Church. Thus both the 'enlightened' West and the 'not-so enlightened' Africans have established their own national churches. In this category falls the Russian Orthodox Church, which is the national church of Russia.

If small nations whose the Christian population is in lakhs and millions can set up their own Swadeshi churches, why can't the Indian Christian establishment — which has a following of over 20 million — debate the idea of a Swadeshi church?

ALL hell broke loose over RSS Chief K.S. Sudarshan's statement that members of the Christian establishment should become independent of foreign control. He had merely suggested the formation of a Swadeshi or a national church, and all he had intended was a debate.

Is the suggestion for a Swadeshi church anti-Christian or against Christian evolution or history? A study of Christianity establishes that the idea of a national church is entirely a Christian idea, not merely that of the RSS or Sudarshan.

The idea of national churches independent of Roman Catholic control was the product of the Protestant Reform movement and the consequent birth of nation-states in Europe. The Reformation which began in 1517 set off a serious erosion in the authority of the Pope, who was originally only the Bishop of Rome. The transnational papacy was a later evolution.

The Roman Catholic church of today was first known as the Western Church, the other being the Eastern. The Reformation resulted in the division of the West-

ern church into the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches. The ultimate result in the chain of this division was the formation of national churches in Europe and the evolution of independent churches in Africa and elsewhere.

The first national church was established in England in 1533. Henry VIII, King of England, sought the Pope's permission to divorce his first wife (who he believed was incapable of bearing a male heir) and to marry another. The Pope refused. Henry VIII, with the consent of the British



Swadeshi churches are the rule in the Christian west, not exceptions

Parliament, renounced Papal control and created the Church of England, separate and independent of Rome's control. His logic was, if one English king could cede the control of English Christianity to the Pope in AD 664, another king (i.e. himself) could take it back. Yet even after the separation, Henry VIII and the Church of England continued to be Catholic till 1563.

The separation of other European Churches into Swadeshi churches was more complex. "Nevertheless", as the *Encyclopaedia of Politics and Religion* (Routledge London 2 vols) says, "the general pattern became clear: a ruler would decide which competing set of ideologies to follow and that would become the religion of his people. This formula...was adopted in 1555 at Augsburg." This is how, says the encyclopaedia, "nation-states were born".

Later, says the encyclopaedia, "Even the nation-state came to supersede the ruler". For instance, when James II refused to

thorred the Book *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in which natural law, rather than Biblical scriptures, was accepted as the ultimate source of authority. In the 17th century, the Church of England came to be popularly known as Anglican, headed by the Crown. Likewise, Scotland also has a national church.

The process of formation of nation-states, which was almost co-terminus with the formation of national churches, was accelerated by the translation of the Bible from Latin into English, German and other languages. In most Protestant nations, the Church became a state apparatus or a creature of national laws.

If this was the position in Protestant nations, even in the Catholic Religion, agreements called "Concordats" were signed between the Roman Catholic Church and nations like France (in 1905), Italy (in 1894), Spain (in 1978), which, the encyclopaedia says, "came close to formation of state churches". Under the Concordats, the national churches became independent of the Vatican.

In modern times, the encyclopaedia says, "The general tendency is to change the status of

EXPRESS
FOCUS
OPINION

VHP paves path of temple thorns for Vajpayee

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Oct. 22: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today welcomed Atal Behari Vajpayee back to the capital by announcing a series of Hindutva programmes, including the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Hardening its stand on the day the Prime Minister landed here after a 12-day stay in Breach Candy, the VHP said that if the ruling BJP wanted votes, "the mandir should be built".

VHP working president Acharya Giriraj Kishore, however, denied that construction dates were being reworked keeping in mind the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections.

Asked if the BJP's allies in government would agree to the temple, he snapped: "Don't they want votes?"

Kishore cited the Shah Bano case when asked what he would do if Supreme Court negated the proposal. "If the government can subvert Supreme Court's judgment in the Shah Bano case, it can do so in this case as well."

He reiterated the VHP stand that the apex court had no locus standi to decide the issue. Public opinion would force the government to convince the court to rule in favour of the temple, he said.

The VHP has decided to take up in a big way the ban on cow slaughter and export of beef, a stop on the construction of

Tehri dam and the alleged anti-India activities of Christian missionaries in Tripura.

It claimed it had discussed Tehri with L.K. Advani, who had agreed on a "scientific reassessment" to decide if the hydro-electric project would destroy the river's purity.

As part of its drive to whip up public support for the temple, the VHP will organise *yatras* in three lakh villages.

In the first phase, activists will fan out in the country, setting up Ram *sankeertan* mandals and collecting signatures in favour of the temple. In the second, a couple of senior religious leaders will tour the country to "educate" the people.

Kishore also announced the setting up of a temple construction committee, a sub-committee to mobilise public opinion and a mass awareness campaign "to force the government to allow the work (to proceed) unhindered". He said a date to begin work would be decided by a *dharma sansad* at the Allahabad *mahakumbh* in January.

The construction committee is headed by Mahant Ramchandra Das, chief of the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust. The sub-committee is led by BJP Rajya Sabha MP Swami Chinmayananda.

The awareness campaign, to be launched after Kumbh mela, will be on lines of the Ram *shila puja* (brick worship), which eventually led to the Babri masjid demolition.

THE TELEGRAPH

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RSS threat to Govt. on temple issue

AGRA, OCT. 14. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) today issued a veiled threat to the BJP-led NDA coalition saying any Government opposing the construction of Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya will have to face its "consequences".

The Sangh Parivar outfit criticised the BJP "as a political party" for diluting its stand on issues such as the Ram temple construction and Article 370 "which brought it to power."

"The people of this country want a grand temple to be constructed at the place of Lord Ram's birth. Any Government opposing it will face the ire of the people when the elections come, like Mulayam Singh Yadav faced after the firing on kar sevaks in 1990," the RSS chief organiser, Mr. Suresh Rao Ketkar, told PTI in an interview here.

Conceding that it was "not practical" to build the temple without the Government's consent, he said the RSS would build social pressure to facilitate its construction.

He said that of all the political parties, the BJP was "closest to the RSS ideology" and that the RSS understood the party's "coa-

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lition compulsions. He said the organisation would abide by the Supreme Court decision on the matter but expressed confidence that "the court will decide in our favour based on the country's culture and traditions."

Asked what if the court verdict went against the temple construction, he said "it is a hypothetical question. We will cross the river when we come to it."

The RSS, he said, would strive to counter its image as "Gandhi's killers" and project its service aspect among the masses through a 'Jan Jagran Abhiyan' (door-to-door contact programme).

Seeks to shed image

The RSS sought to shed the "fundamentalist Hindu outfit" saying that it was engaged in the holistic development of the society through over 25,000 community projects across the country.

Mr. Suresh Joshi, in-charge of RSS' social service activities, told presspersons here today that "the development of any nation is strongly linked with the development of the individuals it is made up of."

Sudarshan's appeal to
Christians: Page 11

11 massacred in Bihar

By K. Balchand

SIWAN, OCT. 14. Eleven members of a Yadav family, including a minor girl, were gunned down in their sleep outside their house in village Mujahid, under Siwan Mufasil police station of the district, in the wee hours today in an intense battle over the control of a local *math*. Armed marauders, numbering over 20, swooped down on the *tola* (hamlet) belonging to a Yadav family of four brothers at about 2 a.m. killing all the four. The others killed were their sons, grandsons and a daughter. One of the injured has been hospitalised.

The bodies were cremated late in the evening after the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, arrived and assured them protection and sanction of gun licenses if they desired to possess arms.

The Chief Minister, Ms. Rabri Devi, announced compensation of Rs. 1.3 lakhs and employment to the kin of the deceased. This was the third massacre in as many days in the vicinity giving the turn of events the colour of a Yadav-Muslim confrontation. Today's carnage was said to be in retaliation of the murder of two Muslims yesterday at Chanaur

Picture: Page 7

THE HINDU

15 OCT 2000

Sudarshan under fire for China church model

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 11: Major church groups in the country today rejected outright the concept of "swadeshi churches" propounded by RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, saying government-sanctioned churches would be a flagrant violation of the Constitution.

"We totally and unequivocally reject any concept of a government-sanctioned church or churches in India. This would be a flagrant violation of the Constitution. This will also destroy the very concept of a secular nation envisaged by those who took part in the freedom struggle," said Catholic Bishops' Conference of India secretary-general Oswald Gracias.

The archbishop said history is witness to the failure of totalitarian regimes in suppressing or controlling people's faith.

"To give the example of China in creating a Chinese-type church and kicking out others" is a slur on our country's democratic polity and cultural pluralism, he said.

According to Gracias, faith was universal and not restricted by geographic or political boundaries. Nor was it bound by race, ethnicity or language. It was because of this all major religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism had spread all over the globe.

"In calling upon the government to involve itself in an 'Indian Church' and 'send home' all those he does not consider to be Indians, Sudarshan has challenged not only the constitutional guarantee of freedom of faith, but sought to interfere directly in the internal structures of several religions, including Christianity," the archbishop said in a statement.

He added that Christianity in India was 20 centuries old and no

one had the right to question the patriotism of Indian Christians. Gracias also warned that remarks like this, repeated over a period of time, could threaten peace and national solidarity.

The National Council of Churches in India also criticised Sudarshan, saying that its 13 million members were "staunch Indian citizens and true nationals" and there were no foreign churches or missionaries affiliated to it.

In a joint statement issued from Nagpur, the council's president, Bishop Vinod Peter, and general secretary Ipe Joseph said: "NCCI is an apex organisation of 29 member churches of non-Catholics with 11 regional councils, 14 all-India organisations and 7 related agencies, none of which is headed by a foreigner."

"Indian churches have contributed to nation-building through their services in the field of education, health, tribal and Dalit empowerment, gender justice, child rights, ecological justice, human rights, poverty eradication and empowerment of the marginalised in society," the council said.

But even as church leaders reacted with indignation, BJP president Bangaru Laxman assured US ambassador to India Richard Celeste that the government was committed to upholding religious freedom as enshrined in the Constitution.

He, however, added that the Centre was watchful of militant activities of certain Christian groups which had links with insurgent outfits in the Northeast.

Laxman told Celeste, who called on him today, that the NDA government had no problems with conversion, provided it didn't involve force or inducement. Kashmir, Pakistan and CTBT also figured in the talks.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 2 OCT 2000

Gopal's fifth mission likely tomorrow

Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, OCT. 7. Even as several unanswered questions persist on the "escape" of the assistant film director, Mr. Nagappa Maradagi, 10 days ago from the brigand Veerappan, the official emissary-cum-journalist, Mr. R.R. Gopal, is expected to leave here on his fifth forest mission tomorrow.

Mr. Gopal, who is apparently under pressure from the Karnataka Government, is getting ready to leave for the Sathyamangalam forest to recommence negotiations with Veerappan on the release Mr. Rajkumar and two other hostages. Mr. Gopal, who had indicated willingness to pick up the thread of talks despite Veerappan's "anger" at Mr. Maradagi's escape, was waiting for a 'signal' from the brigand before embarking on his visit.

However, sources in the Tamil bi-weekly *Nakkeeran* said that their editor had not received any message till this evening. Yet, they did not rule out Mr. Gopal leaving tomorrow as the time he reestablished contact with Veerappan would hopefully synchronise with the Supreme Court's final hearing

in the TADA detenus cases on October 11. Veerappan is demanding the release of 51 TADA detenus.

Mr. Gopal, on his return from the fourth mission, claimed that the release of the hostages had been "almost been clinched" until Mr. Nagappa's "sudden escape" unsettled the brigand. With the Karnataka Government deciding to continue with the strategy of negotiations, it has reposed 'faith' in the emissary.

Fortunately for Mr. Gopal, an audio cassette from Veerappan, which had recently reached the Tamizhar Desiya Iyakkam leader, Mr. Pazha. Nedumaran, had no new demand. The emissary is also setting much store by the Centre's stand in its apex court affidavit backing Tamil Nadu and Karnataka's views on the TADA detenus cases.

Notwithstanding the legal uncertainties, the Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, is stated to be keen that the momentum in the hostages release process be kept up, as his Government will also be completing its first year in office on October 11.

Set up swadeshi church: RSS

H9-1
8/10
NAGPUR, OCT. 7. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief, Mr. K. C. Sudarshan, today said a majority of the Christians were patriotic and asked them to disassociate themselves from the stranglehold of foreign churches by setting up a "swadeshi church".

Mr. Sudarshan, addressing an annual Vijaydashmi gathering here, launched a scathing attack on foreign churches and accused them of hatching a political conspiracy to destabilise the nation.

"Why are these foreign churches allowed to carry on their activities on our soil," he asked, and urged the Christians to set up a swadeshi church on the lines of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Marthoma Church of Kerala.

Mr. Sudarshan accused the Baptist Church of playing havoc in Tripura where, he alleged, Hindus were driven out and tribals harassed in the name of Christianity. The Sangh was being projected as anti-Christian and anti-Islamic in the world, he said, adding none of the Hindu organisations was found guilty of criminal assault on a nun in Jha-

bua (Madhya Pradesh), or the killing of an Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two sons in Orissa, or the attack on missionary schools in Agra.

On the contrary, a terrorist outfit such as the Deepdar Anjuman was allegedly behind the bomb blasts in churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa, he said.

The RSS chief urged the Muslims to keep vigil on the anti-national activities of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and give information about these to authorities. He said the ISI was indulging in bomb blasts, smuggling of arms and transporting RDX in the country. He called for complete "Indianisation of Islam" in the country and urged the Muslims to join the cultural mainstream.

Mr. Sudarshan said a vast country like India with the help of other developing countries can stop the World Trade Organisation (WTO) from being a puppet in the hands of some developed nations. Warning of an economic invasion on India, he said the development of the West was based on exploitation. — UNI, PTI

THE HINDU

- 8 OCT 2000

'NUCLEAR TESTS WERE NECESSARY'

I will always remain a swayamsevak, says PM

By Malini Parthasarathy

NEW YORK, SEPT. 10. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, appeared to be wading into a sharp political controversy on Saturday night by participating in a banquet hosted in honour of several Hindu religious leaders by, among others, the VHP and the BJP's "overseas friends". But more significant than his presence was his declaration that he had come there as a "swayamsevak" and that his "right to be a swayamsevak" could "not be taken away by anyone".

Amidst applause, the Prime Minister observed that while he would not always remain Prime Minister and that there were always other people for the job, he

would always remain a "swayamsevak", alluding obviously to his association with the RSS. The gathering which was organised by prominent Indian-American supporters of the BJP in honour of the Prime Minister and also the 108 religious leaders from India who had come for the U.N. World Peace Summit, took place on Staten Island, an hour's drive from Manhattan. Prominent among those present were several VHP leaders, including its president, Mr. Ashok Singhal. Indicating that the VHP had no hesitation in using the occasion to highlight its own political platform, one VHP leader reiterated the organisation's demand for a Ram temple in Ayodhya. However, the Prime Minister made no

reference to this issue in his own observations.

Mr. Vajpayee, however, made other symbolic gestures such as releasing a compact disc on the Hindu heritage and activating a website for Indian education. In the Prime Minister's presence,

Christian forum plans protest: Page 13

several Hindu religious leaders argued that Indian children living abroad should be educated about India's cultural heritage and said that schools ought to be established for this purpose.

The Prime Minister, who spoke without a prepared text and was

seated, as has been his practice during this visit because of his knee problem, told his audience that even without a full parliamentary majority, the BJP had done a lot for the country. If the electorate gave the BJP a two-thirds majority, "we will build the India of our dreams", he asserted.

In what might be seen as another evocation of one of the valued symbols of the Hindu nationalist platform, Mr. Vajpayee defended the 1998 nuclear tests and said that these were necessary for India's defence. He went further to say that those who had criticised India's nuclear tests no longer had doubts about the country's intentions but were only concerned that the tests would be used as a pretext for others to follow suit. The Prime Minister has been reiterating this idea in all his interlocutions with the Indian-American community here — that the fifty-year Indian historical experience had yielded the lesson that the country needed to "be strong" in order to survive.

The implications of the Prime Minister's characterisation of himself as a "swayamsevak" at the Staten Island function and the potential of the event to become a matter of political controversy have clearly begun to worry at least some members of the entourage accompanying the Prime Minister. It was argued by some RSS ideologues who are among the media delegation on this trip that the word "swayamsevak" ought not to be taken out of context or even to be construed as an RSS label, but read rather as meaning "volunteer". Whether that was indeed what the Prime Minister meant is, of course, another matter.

THE HINDU

1.1 SEP 2002

RSS cadres spring surprise, toe Bangaru's line on Muslims

By Sakina Yusuf Khan

NEW DELHI: It sounds too good to be true. The voices emanating from the RSS shakhas leave one bemused. Instead of finding hawkish cadres holding forth on Bangaru Laxman's 'sellout' to Muslims, there are the doves cooing the BJP chief's line. Their common refrain: We want to assure Muslims about our goodwill.

Is this volte-face a well-orchestrated performance? RSS full-timer and prachar pramukh Shrikant Joshi is affronted at the suggestion. Mr Laxman's statement has not come out of the blue. Way back in 1967, Mr Joshi recalls, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya had stated, "Musalman hamare shareer ka ek ang hain, unka khoon hamara khoon hai" (Muslims are a part of us. The same blood runs in our veins). It's a continuation of the same policy, Mr Joshi says, and Muslims should take it seriously.

The winds of change appear to be sweeping through the RSS corridors. What's behind it all?

Pragmatism, replies Chandraprakash Sharma, general secretary, south Delhi shakhas. The reality, he says, is that the RSS cannot afford to ignore the 15 crore Muslims of this country.

Emphasising that the RSS is not unhappy about Mr Laxman's overtures towards Muslims, Mr Sharma states, "We've been deliberately projected as hardliners and anti-Muslim. We want to dispel this image."

Mr Joshi goes further, "I would urge Muslims not to look upon themselves as minorities. Ethnically, historically, geographically, linguistically, they are no different from us. Only our way of worship is different."

RSS-Muslims bhai-bhai. Is that, then, the new RSS credo?

"Bhai to hain hi. Babur ke pahle yahan kaun Musalman tha, woh to kisi majburi se musalman ho gaye" (We are brothers. There were no Muslims here before Babur), says swayamsewak Mukesh Kumar at the RSS Jhandewalan office.

Behind this realisation lies some hard-nosed reasoning—that Muslims cannot be wished away.

As chartered accountant and RSS activist Satya Prakash Agrawal explains, It is important that the Muslims realise that the philosophy of Hindutva is based on cultural Hinduism, not on ways of worship. And this can be done only through interaction, he says. "There is no distinction between them and us."

Deshraj Mahajan, advocate and south Delhi Sanghchalak, blames vested interests for spreading canards so that "Muslims suspect us, fear us, and remain aloof from us". He adds, "We won't allow this to continue."

According to Mr Sharma, this has been the RSS line all along, and vote-bank politics has nothing to do with it. The only difference is that the RSS is becoming more vocal about it.

On the issue of reservations, Mr Sharma says, "There's no harm in providing reservations for backward Muslims. It's not appeasement, it's upliftment of a brother."

The final question: Won't Ram Mandir spoil this neat equation? RSS activists have a pat answer: Why should it? "We'll put the facts before them. We'll explain to them that if three-fourths of a family agrees on something, the dissenting one-fourth should give in."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 SEP 200

Religion Wooing Muslims

THE BJP'S occasional realisation that a section of the Indian people do not repose much faith in the party is not a new event. The reason for the sudden interest in Muslims can vary from time to time. This time, it is the stagnation of the party's vote, as noted by its new president, Bangaru Laxman, which has seemingly made him tell the party to woo the Muslims. He is in good company, for Mr Laxman's speech may have reminded the Prime Minister of what he wrote more than two decades ago in a newspaper article. In it, Mr Vajpayee, referring to the fact that "some people genuinely feel apprehensive about the RSS", asked: "Why does it not open its doors to Muslims?... A natural corollary of this process would be clear enunciation by the RSS that by Hindu *Rashtra* it means the Indian nation which includes non-Hindus as equal members."

If Mr Laxman is genuinely interested in finding out why the Muslims shun his party, he cannot find a better explanation than what is provided by Mr Vajpayee. It is the belief, substantiated by Golwalkar's writings, that the Sangh parivar does not envisage equal status for non-Hindus in the land of its vision which keeps the minorities away from his party. In fact, if Mr Laxman cares to ascertain how the ordinary members of his party routinely speak about the Muslim 'invaders' and their past atrocities, he will get further evidence of the reasons for the Muslim alienation. It is also worth noting that while holding out an olive branch to the Muslims, the BJP chief did not have a word to say about the Christians, who have recently developed the same aversion for his party, and for the same reasons, as the Muslims. Is his silence due to the fact that the Christians constitute a smaller vote bank — a mere 2.3 per cent — than the Muslims with their 12 per cent?

While Mr Laxman's focus on the Muslims can be explained by the BJP's political needs, his foray into political philosophy with the call for a convergence of beliefs of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Hedgewar can only be regarded with a sense of bemusement. While a similarity of views can be found between Gandhi and Ambedkar because of their concern for the underprivileged, to bring Hedgewar into the picture will compound the confusion. Gandhi was a true proponent of India as a country of all communities living together as equals, an ideal which is not shared by the RSS, as Mr Vajpayee's article has pointed out. Given such a fundamental difference, there is hardly any scope for closing the gap between Gandhi and Hedgewar, for they are poles apart.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 AUG 2000

Reach out and win Muslims over, BJP chief tells cadres

Shekhar Iyer
Nagpur, August 27

NEW BJP chief Bangaru Laxman set his agenda for the party today, proposing a dialogue for reworking the BJP's ties with the Muslim community.

Making a strong political statement, Laxman said the BJP's inability to secure Muslim votes was one of the chief reasons for "our-less-than-expected success in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls".

Delivering his inaugural address at the BJP National Council, Laxman said the Muslims had certain misgivings about the BJP, which had to be removed for mutual benefit. "We have not made sustained efforts to reach out to Indian Muslims. We have somehow taken it for granted that our party will never receive any significant support from them."

"Ironically, although Vajpayee is highly respected and popular among Indian Muslims, they tend to keep away from the BJP. We cannot afford to allow this situation to continue," he said.

"If we do so, we shall be hurting our own future prospects, and Muslims will continue to be used as vote banks by our adversaries."

The BJP president said that India's partition harmed the interests of Indian Muslims in many ways.

"One of the important areas where it did so was in politics. Muslims have not been able to play their role in the country's democratic process. Other parties have used them as vote banks to keep them away from the BJP by using the bogey of communalism."

Laxman said the Muslim masses

had not benefited from this politics and not got their rightful share in the nation's development nor had joined the mainstream to play their due role in nation building.

Recalling the Chennai Declaration adopted by the BJP last year proposing a non-appeasement but sincere approach towards the minorities, he said, "There is

non-discriminating towards all communities. Besides, the BJP's record of communal peace and "their experience of no diminution of, or threat to religious freedom under our governments" made a strong case in its favour.

Laxman wanted the BJP leaders to draw up a concrete plan to "take our appeal and our activities to

Knee-problem forces PM to return home

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Nagpur, August 27

A NAGGING knee problem today forced Prime Minister Vajpayee to cut short his stay in Nagpur and return home. Responding to a question by mediapersons on his arrival in New Delhi, Vajpayee said his two-week-long trip to the United States, from September 5, would take place as scheduled.

Vajpayee had reached Nagpur yesterday for the BJP National Executive session and the meeting of the party's National Council. But, following aggravation of arthritic pain in his knee joints, he had to return home on medical advice.

In Nagpur this morning, Vajpayee visited the memorials to B R Ambedkar and K B Hedgewar. Later in the day, when Laxman was addressing the inaugural session of the National Council, Vajpayee complained of uneasiness and retired to a makeshift room at the venue.

Doctors who attended on the PM advised him to rest. But, on the request of senior leaders, he returned to the dais. He made a brief speech, sitting on a chair.

"He had been advised rest after the Parliament session but he did not want to miss the BJP National Council and Bangaru Laxman's installation as the new party president," a spokesperson said.

Laxmanspeak



● THERE IS need to work on the basis of convergence of beliefs of Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and RSS founder K B P Hedgewar. All the three strove for reforming the Hindu society in the larger, cultural and civilisational sense of the term "Hindu".

● The vast majority of Dalits, adivasis and OBCs are not even in a position to make use of existing quotas. Therefore, a crash programme is vital to increase the level of literacy among Dalits, tribals and educationally most backward sections.

- The benefits of computer and Internet should reach these communities.
- Under represented castes should be mobilised to join the political process.
- The best administrators should be posted for better result in key areas such as health, literacy, education and vocational training.
- Obligations should be imposed on the private sector for social sector development.

nothing in our ideology, policies and programmes for anyone to surmise that we should not, or cannot reach out to the Muslims."

Laxman said he was optimistic of breaking the ice with the Muslims because "many of them are thoroughly disillusioned with the politics of minorityism of the parties they have been supporting for many years".

Secondly, he said, the Muslims had seen for themselves that the BJP governments at the Centre and in the States had been fair and

Muslim homes and mohallas". He said the party should forcefully espouse developmental issues concerning common Muslims.

Laxman wanted special steps to bring more and more dynamic and respected Muslim activists into the party and also ensure that more Muslims figured in the lists of candidates for various elections.

"In doing this, we should be guided by Deendayal Upadhyaya's statement in Calicut in 1967 that Muslims are the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood."

Centre to take stern action against those attacking minorities: Advani

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 18

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HOME MINISTER L.K. Advani today assured the Lok Sabha of the Centre's commitment to secularism and its duty to provide security to all, religious and linguistic minorities, in particular. "The Centre, in consultation with the affected states, will take stern action against all those found guilty in instigating attacks against Christians," Mr Advani said, while replying to a debate on atrocities committed on the linguistic and religious minorities, here this afternoon.

Sharing concern of the members over what is perceived as a "feeling of insecurity among Christians," the Home Minister, however, chose to apportion blame on agents working at the behest of India's enemies. He also identified Deendar Anjuman as the principal conspirator of recent series of attacks on churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa.

Mr Advani revealed that 35 members of the Anjuman had so far been arrested in connection with the attacks on churches in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and another 65 identified as part of a pre-planned operation to instigate disturbances.

Seeking support from all political parties in meeting the challenge from the enemy, the Home Minister recalled that he had perceived a design in these attacks right from the commencement of such incidents in May.

"Having exposed the conspiracy, the Government is working on its follow up by way of greater co-ordination between the Centre and the States and also among the affected State Governments", Mr Advani asserted while expressing his dismay at the criticism leveled by the members (during last night's debate) against the autonomous institutions such as the Minority Commission.

The Home Minister, who spoke for over 35 minutes, was heard with

Attacks On Churches



rapt attention except for a few interruptions from the Congress, SP and Muslim League members.

Mr Advani refused to be provoked when confronted by deputy leader of the Congress Madhavrao Scindia that his speech did not carry any credibility, as he (Advani) was present during the "criminal destruction of the Babri Masjid." He recalled that he had made his position clear immediately after the incident. He made a pointed reference to his statement that the demolition "was the saddest day of my life".

Underlying the importance of India as a secular State, the Home Minister opined that it was in tune with its culture. He quoted extensively from the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, Dr Rafiq Zakaria's book on Sardar Patel and Government data to substantiate his argument.

Mr Advani, however, drew a distinction between secularism as perceived in the West and in India, say-

ing that the term in our country meant respect to all religions and absence of any kind of discrimination on this count.

Dwelling upon the record of NDA Government's two-and-a-half-year rule, the Home Minister stated that there had been quantum fall in the number of communal incidents and inter-linked killings. He, however, hastened to add that the Government was conscious of the prevailing feeling of insecurity among the Christians.

Mr Advani said the BJP-led Government suffered from a few handicaps such as its image of being against the minorities. "This distorted image was farther from the reality," he emphasised while cautioning the members against attempts by the vested interests to perpetuate minoritism in the name of secularism. Opposition MPs P.R. Dasmunsi and Santosh Mohan Dev of the Congress and G.M. Banatwala of the IUMML extended support to the Government's stance to take stern action against the perpetrators of violence against the minorities, Christians, in particular.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 AUG 2000

When fringe becomes centre

Christian leaders have been accused of 'backing out' of a dialogue with the VHP-Bajrang Dal. What makes the latter a representative of all Hindus, asks DOMINIC EMMANUEL

A SURVEY was carried out on the *Hindustan Times* Internet edition which asked respondents to answer the following question: "Do the VHP-Bajrang Dal have the right credentials to represent Hindu opinion in any dialogue with Christian leaders?" The results showed that a good 52.44 per cent believed that the VHP-Bajrang Dal did not have the right credentials.

One often looks with suspicion at quantitative surveys such as those conducted every day by various organisations to measure the success or failure of a product or an idea. However, even those suspicious of such surveys concede that these do indicate a firm trend and markets often use them to boost their sales.

The *HT* poll result raised some basic questions for the larger thinking public. For instance, were some of the Christian lay leaders completely off the mark in raising questions which the poll attempted to answer? Were they being led into a trap? How did the VHP, which has been throwing a blatant challenge to the Prime Minister, the Supreme Court, the Constitution of India and the Government on the question of the Ram temple, suddenly become so docile to the call of the National Commission for Minorities?

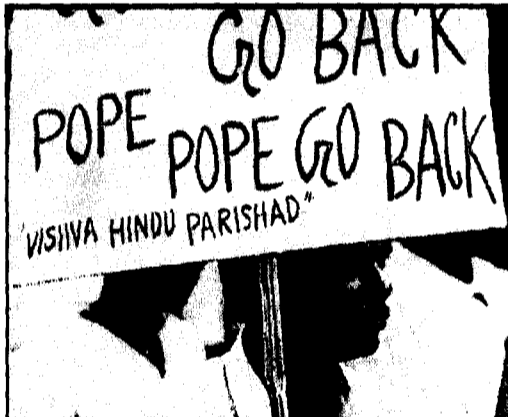
And how could the Bajrang Dal, which is running camps for mostly unemployed youth and training them to use guns all over Uttar Pradesh, show such meek readiness for dialogue? Did their docility and meekness have anything to do with the Bajrang Dal engaging with the National Human Rights Commission after the vituperative statements it made about 'ousting' Christians from this country and that Christians were even a greater threat than Muslims?

How the NCM itself came to believe that the two sides — the VHP-Bajrang Dal and the Churches — were equal partners in dialogue is more than intriguing. The NHRC had not called upon the Christian leaders and asked them to explain and/or withdraw their statements against anyone. Was it that the NHRC, unlike the NCM, was able to distinguish that among the two parties, one was aggrieved and

PLATFORM

the other the aggressor, hence not equal partners in dialogue?

The poll results also make a good case that the respondents were perhaps more perceptive than one would initially think. The result only gives figures in percentages. It does not, for example, say what led the respondents to state what they did. What leads to these responses is the basic question of whether the current problem of Christian-bashing in the country is merely a VHP-Christian community problem or something larger than that. The Church leaders have repeatedly emphasised that they feel safe among the 'larger Hindu



society' but feel unsafe at the hands of fringe, lunatic fundamentalist groups.

Or does the NCM plan a series of dialogues, say between VHP-Bajrang Dal and Muslims; VHP-Bajrang Dal and Sikhs and Buddhists and so on? Who would arrange a dialogue between the VHP-Bajrang Dal and Deepa Mehta, for instance, for burning the sets of her film *Water*? Were L.K. Advani and Bal Thackeray the right dialogue partners in the controversy of India-Pakistan cricket match series after the pitch was dug up in Delhi? Is the VHP-Bajrang Dal working under a larger design to assimilate the Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and tribals into one group on the one

hand and isolate the other minorities as 'enemies of the country' on the other?

The Christian leaders were blamed by the VHP-Bajrang Dal combine for 'backing out' of the dialogue for "fear of being exposed to truth".

The Christian leadership did not have to blow its trumpet about a readiness for dialogue as it had already once engaged in such an exercise with some prominent leaders like BJP president Kushabhau Thakre, RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, VHP general secretary Narendra Modi and a host of others.

This so-called 'dialogue', organised by some non-resident Indians from the United States, took place on December 18, 1998 at the Delhi office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Sadly, a week after that dialogue, which culminated in the delegation meeting Home Minister L.K. Advani, all hell was let loose in Dangs district of south Gujarat against Christians.

That the Church leaders already had a dialogue is evidence enough that they are open and keen on dialogue. But the fact of the matter is that the churches were not really consulted — neither about the subject of dialogue nor about the dates. As it turned out, hardly any one of the Church leaders was free for a meeting on July 11.

In the meantime, voices within the Church, mainly of lay Christians, began to be raised. Before giving into the NCM call, they wanted the parameters of this dialogue to be clarified. Who was really behind such a move? Who was or was not consulted? The Church leaders, for example, came to know about it only through newspaper reports. Would the Church leaders be giving legitimacy to some fundamentalist groups? And indeed, even before the *HT* poll results came out, does the VHP-Bajrang Dal, allegedly behind the attacks on Christian churches and their institutions, possess the credentials to speak for the larger tolerant Hindu community?

It would be certainly interesting to know the mind of the larger Indian public and whether as a nation we are getting more religiously fundamentalist or moving forward with modern times.

NDA meeting postponed after Shiv Sena boycott

Mahajan sent to Mumbai on peace mission

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 24. — In a last-minute scramble before the Maharashtra government goes ahead with its plan to arrest Mr Bal Thackeray — possibly tomorrow — the BJP today sent Mr Pramod Mahajan to Mumbai to attempt a peace deal between the warring sides.

Earlier, Sena MPs withdrew from today's NDA parliamentary party meeting, forcing the alliance to postpone it. The BJP, however, insisted the meeting was postponed as the Prime Minister had a throat infection.

Some Maharashtra BJP leaders joined Mr Mahajan in urging chief minister Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh, and home minister Mr Chhagan Bhujbal, not to give the arrest a green signal.

The brokers of the peace plan also requested Mr Thackeray to surrender before the court.

A home ministry official said security is being beefed up in Mumbai. The Centre today despatched three more companies of central paramilitary forces to the city.

The entire route from Mr Thackeray's house to the Court of the Magistrate has to be cordoned off. Officials said 27 companies of paramilitary forces had been placed at the disposal of the Deshmukh government.

A senior NCP leader described the situation in Mumbai as volatile saying "it is changing every hour".

The Centre has advised the state to let Mr Thackeray drive down to the magistrate's court to receive the charge-sheet and be allowed normal bail to contest the case in a court of law.

Mr Ram Jethmalani, who returned to Delhi today again said that Mr Thackeray could

not be arrested in the case. "Still I wonder why Mr Thackeray has this fear. Even if the police goes ahead with its plan to arrest him on paper it means nothing," he said.

But, Shiv Sena leaders continue to resist any attempt by the Mumbai Police to arrest their chief even if it means a token exercise, sources said.

The state, on its part, is not going to pull back after issuing orders to prosecute the Sena

spokesman Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said.

The Shiv Sena was supporting the government, he pointed out. "They were our allies even before others joined. The issue would be sorted out," he said.

The uncertainty clouding the resignations of the three Shiv Sena ministers from the Cabinet will trouble the government in Parliament tomorrow. The Prime Minister has not accepted the resignations, hoping that the conflict over the arrest of Mr Thackeray would blow over.

But the government will have to clarify in Parliament the status of the three ministers. Though their resignations have not been accepted, the Sena MPs are unlikely to discharge their parliamentary duties unless Mr Thackeray gives them the green signal.

The government was saved the embarrassment today as the Lok Sabha adjourned after condolence messages. The three ministries are functioning normally, indicating that the ministers' return was a mere formality.

Mr Mahajan will try to persuade the Sena chief to let the ministers rejoin the ministry. Mr Thackeray has reportedly told some Sena MPs that he didn't ask them to resign, so wouldn't ask them to rejoin. He is known to be unhappy with Mr Manohar Joshi and Mr Suresh Prabhu.

Sena MP, Mr Anant Geete, said it was unfortunate that the NDA partners were not supporting them on the impending police action against the Sena chief. Asked if the party would pull out of the government on this issue, he said: "today that situation does not exist. But such a decision will be taken by Balasaheb."

Sensex crash

MUMBAI, July 24. — The BSE Sensex crashed today as stock prices fell for the seventh trading session in a row to close 4,188.34 points a loss of 275.32 points against Friday's level of 4,463.66 points. The steep fall that set in on 13 July — when Sensex was at 5,058.90 — culminated in the massive loss today. One major reason was the stand-off between Maharashtra's home minister, Mr Chhagan Bhujbal, and the Shiv Sena leader, Mr Bal Thackeray. — SNS

(Details on page 12)

■ More reports on page 6

chief, senior NCP leaders said.

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena MPs met and decided to boycott this evening's NDA parliamentary meeting. They also registered their protest with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. The meeting was later put off.

The BJP, however denied that the Sena boycott had forced the deferment. Mr Vajpayee's throat infection was the reason, it said. Besides, it was not proper to hold the alliance meeting after the Lok Sabha was adjourned, party

Sangh outfit gets flak over NGO claim

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ahmedabad, July 24: The VHP's move to seek recognition as a non-government organisation has evoked strong protests from various quarters.

Christian leaders, scholars, film-makers and NGOs themselves are arguing that the Sangh outfit does not have the secular or social credential to be recognised as an NGO.

The VHP sought special status as a non-government organisation with the UN Economic and Social Council, describing itself as a Delhi-based NGO "that works for the total welfare of humanity without discrimination, promotes moral and ethical education, provides moral aid to the needy (and) relief to the poor".

Doric Emmanuel, spokesman for the Delhi archdiocese, has appealed to the community to launch a campaign against the application. "It should be our endeavour to oppose the move as the VHP is primarily responsible for fanning anti-minority feelings in the country," he said.

Noted Gandhian scholar Prakash Shah believes the VHP does not deserve the status as it is a blatantly communal organisation. So does Father Cedric Prakash and Father Mangalam, both social workers, as they feel the VHP has been trying to divide people by spreading hatred.

Sukhdev Patel, director of a city-based organisation, Gantar, says the VHP should not be granted NGO status because of its controversial character.

Like Gantar, several NGOs opposed to the VHP application have decided to send an appeal to the high commissioner of human rights in Geneva.

Anand Patwardhan, noted documentary film-maker and peace activist, has written to the United Nations, expressing shock that it is considering recognising the VHP as an NGO. This, he says, is similar to recognising Osama bin Laden as a social worker.

"The VHP may have done some social work, but they are

far more infamous for the hatred they have spread against minorities," he says.

His words are echoed by Teesta Setalvad, director of Khoj, an educational programme, who says the VHP is known for "inciting hatred against the minorities".

Natubhai Takkar, editor of the VHP mouthpiece, *Vishva Gujarati Samachar*, however, feels the outfit need not bother applying for NGO status. "It does not matter whether the VHP is recognised or not. We are already working as an NGO within the limits of Hindutva in more than 80 countries," he says.

On the criticism directed at the VHP, Takkar says: "The VHP is more secular than so-called secularists in this country, and for that we do not need any certificate."

THE TELEGRAPH

25 JUL 2000

It was religion, not caste, says Kerala temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Sept 17. — The chief priest of Guruvayoor temple ordered a purification rite (*punyaha*) to be performed after Congress leader Mr Vayalar Ravi's son offered prayers because Mr Ravi's wife was a Christian.

This was the explanation that the Devaswom Board offered today for the *punyaha* performed at the temple after Mr Ravi's son, Mr Ravikrishna, and his wife offered prayers.

Guruvayoor temple authorities have said that Mr Ravi's caste did not influence the decision. The chief priest had doubted Mr Ravikrishna's credentials as a Hindu because his mother, Mrs Mercy Ravi, was a Christian.

It was up to Mr Ravi or his son to provide certificates from Arya Samaj or other organisations to prove that he was a Hindu, the Board chairman, Mr M Venugopalakurup, explained.

He has written to Mr Ravi, regretting that the Congress leader had brought in a casteist angle into the matter. It was the chief priest who had the final say on matters within the temple, the Board said.

Meanwhile, several organisations have taken up practices of the famous Lord Krishna

temple at Guruvayoor, which has its own rules.

The temple had denied entry to several VIPs, including the renowned singer K J Yesudhas. The way it shut its doors to the lower castes was a major issue during the struggle for Independence, and later during the Communist movement. The issue has dragged the temple authorities to court more than once.

The powerful Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam of backward classes has seized on the issue to highlight the continuing bias against backward classes in temples controlled by Brahmins.

There is, however, a line of thinking that says Hindu temples have as much right to decide on the rules as have the authorities of churches and mosques.

The BJP's state chief, Mr C K Padmanabhan, does not share this view. Hindu temples, he says, should be thrown open for people from all religions.

Earlier, the Congress leader and former minister, Mr Vayalar Ravi, had taken umbrage at the way a purification rite (*punyaha*) was performed at the temple after his son and bride offered prayers.

The bride's family, unaware of the import of the ceremony, had paid Rs 1,500 for it.

THE STATESMAN

18 SEP 2000

BJP blames Islamic ultras

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 15. — The BJP today tried to apply a balm on the Christian community by saying that there was no conflict between the Hindus and the Christians. It alleged that some Islamic fundamentalist organisations were trying to vitiate the communal harmony that existed between these two communities.

These fundamentalist organisations were trying to create a wedge between the Hindus and the Christians and members of both the communities should not fall prey to this, the BJP vice-president, Mr JP Mathur, told **The Statesman**. The BJP has been uncomfortable with some Christian leaders' allegation that some RSS affiliates have been involved in the recent attacks on Christians.

Preliminary investigations into the recent bomb blasts in

DEENDAR ANJUMAN

HYDERABAD, July 15. — A little-known religious group, Deendar Anjuman, suspected to be behind the church blasts in South India, today denied involvement in the incidents, and disowned its members named by the Centre as having masterminded the explosions. — PTI

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa, had established that some Islamic fundamentalist organisations were behind the incidents, Mr Mathur claimed. The hand of the Pakistan-based ISI, therefore, could not be ruled out, he added.

The BJP leader demanded that these organisations alleged to be behind the bomb blasts be banned immediately. An inquiry should try to find out whether such organisations

had links with other organisations and individuals inside and outside the country.

These groups had spread their tentacles in South India and combing and arrest operations must be launched to break their network, he said.

The BJP appeals to responsible Christian leaders to look into their community to find out whether some vested interests were trying to foment trouble by making baseless allegations against the Hindu organisations. Such irresponsible people were even distributing pamphlets and other literature insulting Hindu gods, he said.

Mr Mathur said that the BJP or the Sangh Parivar had no objections to religious activities of Indian Christian missionaries. But foreign Christian missionaries were not needed, he argued. Indian Christians were capable of propagating their religion.

THE STATESMAN

16 JUL 2000

Christians must apologise before meeting, says VHP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JULY 12

THE Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today demanded an apology from church leaders for making "baseless charges" against Sangh Parivar outfits in the wake of the recent attacks on Christians as a pre-condition to any dialogue between the two sides.

Apparently irked by the Christian leaders' decision not to attend the National Commission for minorities-sponsored talks with VHP and Bajrang Dal on July 11, VHP senior vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore told reporters the Sangh outfits would meet church representatives only if they withdrew their "baseless charges" against them and apologise. Kishore, who had earlier blamed Pakistan's ISI for the attacks on Christians organi-

sation 'Save Chirstianity' was staging the attacks to get foreign funds.

"These attacks are engineered by Christians themselves as they want to fetch more money from abroad. These attacks are fabricated. It is a false propaganda," he told CNN Tuesday night.

Participating in the programme, Church spokesman Dominic Emmanuel said Christians were not in favour of papal intervention to resolve the problem "as this is an internal matter of the law and order of the country".

He, however, expressed disagreement with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's stand that the incidents were isolated.

"It might be his opinion or how he might have been informed. It is we who feel hurt, threatened, intimidated. We do not feel safe."

TALKING TOO MUCH

Return of P.M. Christians say no to meeting VHP *51-6 12X*

CHRISTIAN leaders including Sister Nirmala of the Missionaries of Charity have refused to hold a dialogue with the Bajrang Dal/VHP/RSS arguing that they would much rather meet real leaders of the Hindu community, both religious and otherwise, to discuss conversions. Scheduled for 11 July, the meeting between the Sangh parivar and Christian religious bodies is organised by the National Minorities Commission, but the reaction from all the Christian bodies has been a firm negative. Their argument is logical and correct. The VHP and its affiliates do not represent the Hindu community, they are an armed wing of a political outfit. They are prime suspects in the crimes against Christians being perpetrated all over the country in the last 30 months. To hold talks with the VHP is to give in to their terror tactics and recognise them as bona fide representatives of the Hindu community — which they are not.

V P Singh as prime minister gave in to the same terror tactics of the VHP during the Ramjanambhoomi movement when he agreed to hold talks with Ashok Singhal in return for an end to communal riots. The meeting held by a prime minister established the VHP as a recognised body and the riots continued. The Sangh Parivar are not known as exponents of truth, integrity and for keeping promises, the Babari Masjid being a case in point. The mosque was demolished under the nose of the Supreme Court after solemn promises that no harm would come to the mosque and only puja would be performed. What then can the Christian leaders expect from the talks and how long will any promises given be kept?

Christian leaders are not accountable to the Sangh Parivar. The RSS is not the arbiter of what is right and wrong. While the VHP accuses the missionaries of forced conversions so far there has not been a single official complaint. The same cannot be said for the VHP. In their zealouslyness to establish that all non-Hindus are converted by inducements or coercion and are desperate to return to the Hindu fold, a Muslim family of four were 'reconverted' a few days ago by the VHP in Calcutta with appropriate fanfare. The family has complained to the police that they were offered jobs and other benefits by the VHP to change their religion. Who is using inducements now? Religion is an intensely personal matter. If it is brought into the public domain then two can play this kind of game.

THE STATESMAN

BJP lashes out at church activities

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. Mr. K. N. Govindacharya, general secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party, today lashed out at the activities of the Church in India, saying that over the years it had "not confined itself to spiritual matters".

Answering questions related to continuing attacks on churches and Christian institutions — last night two churches in Bangalore were the targets — he did condemn "all incidents of violence by any person or group in the name of religion." But, he added, "proselytising pollutes the motivation of service" which the Church flaunts as its dedicated contribution to India.

He made a distinction between motiveless service to relieve the pain of the poor and service which expects as its reward a "conversion". That becomes a "sauda" (commercial deal), he said.

The BJP leader said freedom of religion in India guaranteed the freedom to practice and propagate one's faith, but it should not be confused with a freedom to convert people to a different faith.

He also denounced the activities of the Church trying to attract more people to the Christian faith and convert more and more persons. "When religion enters the numbers game, then ethics necessarily are given the go by." In short, his suggestion was that in trying to save more souls, the Church had often ended up abandoning ethics.

Mr. Govindacharya was asked for his comments on remarks made by the Samata Party leader, Mr. George Fernandes, on the selfless service done by missionaries in India. His response was that he was confident that "if Mr. Fernandes had to choose between social unity and the freedom to carry out reli-

gious conversions when the two become antagonistic, then he will prefer social unity." He had no hesitation in saying that "the fabric of social unity in India had been damaged by overzealous activists of the Church."

In his view, the problem was that Semitic religions were exclusive, while the Hindu faith was inclusive, believing that there are many ways to find God, and all of them should be respected. The Semitic religions, on the other hand, were based on the belief that there was only one path to God, and that theirs was the right way.

The BJP leader tended to dismiss the apparent contradictions between the BJP and the RSS as the result of the differing timeframes. "The RSS has its own timetable for nation building, and its positions are above party and power politics." Therefore, "at times, in certain situations their approach may differ." That was also applicable to the views of the two on the Jammu and Kashmir autonomy resolution.

The BJP was committed to the National Democratic Alliance manifesto, he said and appealed to the National Conference, a partner of the NDA, to express its commitment to the agenda. "We want to take everyone along with us, but it is for the NC to think about it." At the same time he charged the NC with not showing consistency.

On devolution of more powers to States in the context of the Sarkaria Commission report, the BJP felt the Jammu and Kashmir question was far more complicated and should not be "trivialised" by clubbing it with the question of more power for all States. There was also the issue of devolution of more power within the State, down to the panchayat level. And neither Bihar nor Jammu and Kashmir had held panchayat elections.

THE HINDU

BJP backs RSS stand on temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 8. — The BJP today supported the RSS stand on the construction of a Ram Janambhoomi temple, ending a long silence on the issue.

The RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan, has said in an interview to a TV channel that no one could prevent the temple from being built. He suggested that Muslims should give up their claim, or the government should simply hand over the site to the Ramjanambhoomi Trust. If these options fail, legislation can be a third way to resolve the matter, he said.

BJP vice-president, Mr JP Mathur, today said his party favoured solution to the temple controversy through court verdict, negotiation or legislation. He also said that the main hurdle to building Lord Ram at Ayodhya devoted to "pseudo-secularists", the Congress and the Left parties, were the "pseudo-secularists", the Congress and the Left parties, Muslims as the latter and not the former could be brought round through talks, he said.

This is the first instance in a long time of a BJP leader going on the issue. The on record indicated that the party had

issue was on put on the back-burner, with the ruling coalition's National Agenda for Governance taking centre stage. The statement comes on the heels of the BJP's debacle in the Uttar Pradesh rural polls.

The party's 1998 poll manifesto spoke of resolving the temple controversy on lines suggested by Mr Mathur. However, the party did not issue a fresh manifesto during the 1999 LS elections and dropped all the controversial issues including this from the NAG.

Later, Mr Vajpayee repeatedly snubbed efforts by BJP leaders to bring up the issue. Mr Ram Prakash Gupta, was forced to go back on his statement that he would facilitate the construction of a Ram temple.

BJP leaders, it now seems, are emboldened by Mr Sudershan's statement. Or, is it that the BJP leaders find it too tough to oppose Mr Sudershan, who till the other day was looking after the BJP as in-charge of the RSS' political affiliate?

On the RSS criticisms of the Centre's economic policies, he said the Sangh was an independent body and the BJP would welcome its good suggestions.

THE STATESMAN

RSS assails govt's 'apologetic' stand on Christians

By Our Special Correspondent
KOBRA (Gujarat): Close on the heels of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee assuring Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to Rome that Christians would be protected in India, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) declared here on Sunday that the Central government was unnecessarily becoming regretful over the attacks on the community.

A resolution passed at the end of RSS' national working committee meeting here said, "One fails to understand why the government authorities become apologetic about such reported atrocities." It criticised a "major section of church leaders" for seeking to internationalise the issue unmindful of the "adverse effect on the image of our nation."

The two-day meeting at a Jain premise here ended with yet another resolution reminding the Central government that any discussions on the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly's autonomy demand be coupled with the understanding that the autonomy talk is just a movement towards secession. Calling the National Conference's insistence on autonomy a "thin veil for azadi", the resolution said, the Jammu and Laddakh regions of J&K should be "fully and unconditionally integrated into India", hence the Kashmir Valley, forming one-sixth of the state, cannot be allowed to dictate terms.

Releasing the two resolutions, RSS joint general secretary Madan Das told newsmen that

the RSS was opposed to new liberalisation initiatives of the Central government. Referring to the just released International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, Mr Das said, "The IMF points towards the increasing gap between rich and poor. The Central government should review the liberalisation policy, as also the effort to disinvest public sector undertakings, adopt an open-door policy towards for-

foreign direct investment, and allow liberal repatriation of funds. We are falling in an economic trap."

Go-vindacharya, well-known BJP hardliner who deals with economic matters, was the only participant from the BJP at the meeting, in which nearly 240 delegates from all over India took part.

RSS DIKTAT

- Church leaders flayed for globalising the issue
- NC's insistence on autonomy criticised
- Liberalisation policy opposed

RSS to come up with 'right view' on Christians

51-8
24/6
SANJAY BASAK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9-Release
for

NEW DELHI, June 23. — The RSS will “explain” that the real danger to Christianity is not from BJP-ruled India, but Islamic countries.

The Sangh intends to tell “Indian Christians” they are better off in “Bharat” than in an Islamic country. The next *Organiser* issue, will have articles highlighting the “atrocities being committed against Christians in Pakistan” and “what Indian Christians should do to .. live in harmony ... in India”.

An RSS member said “atrocities” committed against Christians in Pakistan would be highlighted. The RSS thinks the “Church in India” should be aware of the plight of Christians in Pakistan.

“... Several atrocities (are) committed against Christians in Pakistan. They're not allowed to practise their religion as freely as they can in India. Indian Christians should also know how churches are being vandalised in Pakistan. Police and administration don't pay heed to their complaints”, the article says.

India is a “better and safer place” for Christians. The article says India has separate laws for minorities and the majority community never objects or opposes practice of any religion.

Asked why Islamic countries were the yardstick for the RSS to compare the plight of Christians in “secular India”, a senior leader said the West should know that the real threat to Christianity was from Islamic countries.

Another article will suggest the community should “try to respect the sentiments of the majority community and hold Indian culture in high esteem”.

It would also warn the church to not encourage conversions as this upsets the sentiments of the majority community. The role of churches in the subversive activities of the north-east, particularly Nagaland, would also be pointed out.

However, since attacks on Christians started a few months back, both the RSS mouthpiece, *Panchajanya* and *Organiser*, have been systematically publishing anti-church articles, pointing to the “anti-national activities being committed by them”.

Justifying the articles, an RSS functionary said the publications were trying to expose the “malicious campaign being carried out by a section of political parties against the BJP and Sangh Parivar”.

THE STATESMAN

24 JUN 2000

Kalyan Singh named 'key figure'

g - book info info

2/16

Anil Anand
New Delhi, June 21

HT-12

THE LIBERHANS Commission has declared former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh as "key figure" in the Babri mosque demolition case while asking him to appear before it on July 20.

On his part, the former CM had sought exemption from appearing before the commission, whose insistence on summoning him has, in fact, set the pace for the deposition of Home Minister L. K. Advani. Ironically, the panel is contemplating to summon Mr Advani at a time when the Ministry he heads has to take a decision whether or not to grant another extension to the Commission whose extended term comes to an end on June 30.

Sources close to the Commission confirmed that Mr Advani would be next in line to be summoned once Mr Singh's statement is recorded by it. The latter's testimony has assumed significance as it would enable the panel to make up

its mind on Mr Advani's deposition and that of some other important witnesses. Issuing fresh summons to Mr Singh, Justice Liberhans observed: "The commission cannot proceed without examining him as he is a key figure." The application for exemption was moved by Mr B B Saxena, the counsel of the former CM, who failed to appear before the

Babri demolition

Commission today. Mr Singh had sought exemption from participation in the probe on the plea that a writ petition challenging the inquiry as well as the order of the Commission, was pending before the Allahabad High Court. The petition also mentioned that the CBI was persecuting him in a special court at Lucknow also.

Rejecting Mr Singh's plea, the Commission further observed that his appearance was necessary as, apart from being the UP CM at that

time, his name figured in the Panel's terms of reference. Both these factors made it imperative for the commission to record Mr Singh's statement in the light of views expressed by him in the media in the recent past (regarding his role in the demolition episode).

Earlier, Cabinet Secretary Prabat Kumar, while continuing his deposition from where he had left on the last date of hearing (June 9), told the commission that though there was no specific intelligence input suggesting threat to the disputed structure, even then he had sought the then Chief Minister's directions for deployment of para-military forces' camping near Ayodhya.

On December 6, 1992, Mr Kumar was Principle Secretary (Home) in UP Government. He said no consultations were held with any other State to keep a tab on the kar-sevaks' movements. "I do not recall any consultations held with other States on the kar-sevaks' movement", he said while replying to a specific query posed by the Commission.

22 JUN 2000

Re-conversion bid evokes chain reaction in Orissa

Dara Sena, Sangh Parivar spruce up operations

Poornima Joshi
Bhubaneswar, June 19

THE SHANKARACHARYA'S much-hyped re-conversion bid at Manoharpur seems to have started an explosive chain reaction throughout Orissa.

On one hand, it has galvanised the 'Dara Sena' and its sister organisations in North Orissa into making more communal and provocative announcements, and on the other, the Sangh Parivar's proactive approach to the entire issue of re-conversions has become even more clear.

The Convenor of Dharamrakshak Sri Dara Singh Pujan Sahayata Samiti, Mukesh Jain yesterday announced that Dara Singh, prime accused in several sensational murders including that of Graham Staines and his two sons, would be contesting the next Assembly elections from Keonjhar. Predicting a "sure victory" for the "angel in disguise", Mr Jain went on to issue characteristically virulent statements against the minorities in the country.

Almost simultaneously, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) organised a massive "religious" function at Keutibereni village in Cuttack. The event was very clearly held as a part of attempts to re-convert five Christians in the village. The VHP organised it with much fanfare ferrying groups of journalists from nearby towns and impressing upon the local dailies to "splash" the news-item on the front page.

The ceremony was performed by

priests hired by the VHP for the purpose. The entire episode, however, took an unexpected turn with the district administration announcing that the function was organised without prior intimation to the concerned authorities. Under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (OFRA), the district

'Dara Singh, prime accused in several sensational murders including that of Graham Staines and his two sons, would be contesting the next Assembly elections from Keonjhar'

administration has to be intimated by way of affidavits filed by the persons who desire to convert to a certain religion. No such affidavit was reportedly filed in the case of the five villagers in Keutibereni village and an official inquiry has been initiated to probe into the incident.

Meanwhile, the VHP has claimed to be "deeply hurt" by the reaction of the district administration.

According to Arbind Rout, a spokesperson for the organisation, there is no reason to institute an inquiry into this incident, as it was not an attempt to re-convert any-

one. "These people were not re-converted. The ceremony for re-conversion is performed under different circumstances when the subjects in question are Christians or belong to any other religion. But these five people who participated in the ceremony at Keutibereni village were Hindus.

"They have been living like Hindus for a number of years. But their neighbours were not accepting them.

"So we got the priests to perform a 'Prayashchit', ceremony that is not the same as a re-conversion ceremony. I don't know why the administration is conducting an inquiry into this innocuous function. Do we have to take permission for every religious ceremony that we perform? We have not violated any law," Mr Rout told *The Hindustan Times*.

Incidentally, the criminal case registered against the 'Dara Sena' activists Mukesh Jain and Dara Singh's lawyer Pradeep Chowdhary has, in no way, proved to be a deterrent.

Mr Jain has been very openly holding Press conferences and distributing inflammatory reading material in Baripada, Karanjia and surrounding areas in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts. Despite a ban on these provocative booklets by the State Government, they are freely available in the entire State.

The Shankaracharya's open criticism of the "methods" used by Christian missionaries to convert people in tribal areas has given a boost to the hate-campaign headed by the Dara Sena.

20 JUN 2000

PRIEST:

(Continued from page 1)

munshi objected but Mr Sharma overruled him.

They didn't find the SSP at home. Mr Sharma then asked the Brothers to come to the reserve police lines. There he kept the priests waiting and took Ekka inside with an officer from the SSP's residence.

The Brothers were first told that Ekka would be released in 10 minutes. After half-an-hour, an officer went in and found the doors were closed. The Brothers were told that police would drop Ekka at the Navada school.

Around 7 p.m. constable

hour later, Brother Emmanuel and Brother Alphons went to the police station with Ekka's dinner but didn't find him.

At 11 p.m., the city magistrate and an officer told the brothers that Ekka had died.

Archbishop Concessao, whose arch-diocese includes Mathura, went to the spot as soon as he was informed.

The body was removed to the police lines and was taken for autopsy today. It showed signs of acute torture, the United Christian Forum for Human Rights said.

"We demand the immediate arrest of guilty police officers and transfer of senior officers of Mathura district for gross dereliction of duty," the Archbishop said.

Slain priest's cook dies in police custody

PTI & UNI

AGRA/NEW DELHI, June 18. — The cook of the slain Brother George Kuzhikandan died in police custody yesterday.

The state government today ordered a magisterial probe into Vijay Ekka's (28) death and suspended a sub-inspector and a constable of Nahrauli police station where Ekka died. A team of three doctors has been formed to conduct the post mortem, the SSP Ms Chandrika Rai said.

Ekka was first to see the body of Brother George who was clubbed to death on the courtyard of St Francis Public School at Nevada village in Mathura on 7 June morning.

The St Francis School principal, Brother Emmanuel, had lodged an FIR, alleging the cook was beaten to death. Police have, however, said Ekka, who was being interrogated for the past six days, committed suicide.

Vijay Ekka was picked up by police on 10 June and taken to the Nahrauli police station and kept in custody.

The Agra Archbishop, Dr Vincent Concessao, told reporters in New Delhi that when two Brothers went to the police station yesterday with Ekka's breakfast, they saw the suspended station officer Mr Sunil Kumar Sharma. (Mr Sharma was earlier suspended for dereliction of duty in probing Brother George's murder.)

Mr Sharma told the Brothers to take him and Ekka to the Mathura SSP's residence. The police station

■ See PRIEST: page 8

STATESMAN

JUN 200

Sangh Parivar behind the hate campaign, says Christian Council

HT Correspondent
Hyderabad, June 18

HT 11

THE ALL India Christian Council, which concluded its two-day emergency meeting at Chennai on Friday, has attributed the 300-odd incidents of violence against Christians and churches in India in the last two years to the "hate campaign" launched by the Sangh Parivar.

"In the last two years, the fascist conspiracy against the Christian community has unfolded fully. The Sangh Parivar's ideology and actions threaten not just the Christian community but the unity, integrity and plural cultural heritage of our country. This is amply clear to all citizens who have watched in horror the ominous escalation of the violence against the Christian community since 1998," the Council said here in a statement on Saturday.

The Council has said that from June 1998 to June this year, there were more than 300 incidents of violence against the Christian community. This year, there have been several major incidents of violence across the country.

"The ominous mass violence is meant to terrorise the Christian community, to stop people coming to churches, to frighten away students from our schools and the ill, the weak and the marginalised from our own programmes," the Council pointed out.

Attributing the attacks on Christians and churches so far, the Council said that the burning of 400 copies of the Bible in Rajkot, Gujarat in 1998 led inevitably to the burning of three

dozen churches in the Dangs in the same state in December.

The attack on nuns in Madhya Pradesh has led to similar violence against women and men preachers, evangelists, priests, social, education and medical workers. This violence peaked with the killing of Graham, Timothy and Philip Staines and Father Kristuraj in Orissa and the murder of Brother George in UP.

Expressing concern over the series of incidents, the Council said that it was "intrigued by the response of the Central and state governments who refuse to see the pattern of violence. Their motives are exposed in the fact that they refuse to see the campaign of calumny and hate that underpins this violence. It is a coincidence that the violence occurs even as senior leaders of the Sangh Parivar call for 'epochal wars' against minorities, stage-managed 're-conversions' and give a call to eliminate the missionaries from India."

The Christian leaders pointed out that they have repeatedly called on the Prime Minister and the state governments to take action against those who "perpetrate and encourage violence against peace-loving Christians in our homeland". These people are known. The poison they spew is in print and on tapes. The nation is not satisfied with the response of political and government.

The Council appealed to the people of the country to launch a national solidarity campaign against the "fundamentalist communal Hindutva forces of the Sangh Parivar" from July 8.

BJP for joint command to probe blasts in churches

HT Correspondent
Hyderabad, June 18

J. Kelleon

BJP NATIONAL general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu on Saturday suggested creation of a joint command of Central and state investigative agencies for a thorough probe into the series of bomb blasts in churches in three southern states.

Addressing a Press conference here today, Naidu said that a thorough probe was required into the blasts and the Centre and state must work together to nab the culprits.

He said that his party has information linking the recent blasts at churches in three states to Lashkar-e-Toiba, a terrorist outfit sponsored by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Allegations refuted: Naidu strongly refuted the allegations of Christian leaders and organisations blaming the Sangh Parivar for the bomb incidents. Ridiculing such "mischievous utterances", he charged the United Christian Forum and All Indian Christian Council with doing great disservice to the Christian community and the country by making such allegations.

The BJP leader even dubbed them as "self-styled outfits which are only the front organisations of the Congress."

Naidu said that by appealing to the constituents to withdraw support from these organisations were a coalition, ing to give a handle to "our enemies outside the country to defame India".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 JUN 2000

Azhar's remark unfortunate, says Minister

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17. The Union Minister of State for Sports, Mr. Shahnawaz Hussain, today described as "unfortunate" former Indian cricket captain Mohamad Azharuddin's remark that he was being dragged into the match-fixing controversy as he was from a minority community. He said Azhar should come forward and face the CBI.

"Azhar should not forget that he was accepted as a cricketing hero by people from all communities. Thus, he should refrain from raising communal issues and should clarify his stand to the CBI." Mr. Hussain concurred with the suggestion of the Sports Minister, Mr. S.S. Dhindsa, that players figuring in matchfixing allegations should step down until things become clear.

Sports policy

Mr. Hussain said the Government is coming out with a new sports policy with a provision for strict punishment for players who are proved guilty in match-fixing.

"The honour of the nation lies with them.... Matchfixers should be treated as traitors." He also said the Sports Ministry would advise the BCCI to drop tainted players till they come out clean after the inquiry. — UNI

3 bookies remanded

PTI reports from Calcutta:

Three bookies, arrested on charges of cricket betting, were remanded to police custody till June 30 by a city court.

The three were arrested while conducting cricket betting on Friday. Some documents, a huge amount of cash and computer diskettes containing reports of cricket matches were recovered from their possession.

**MK's father sticks
to his story: Page 11**

7 8 JUN 2000

Support for Azhar, not for his 'community' spin

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 16: Hansie Cronje's startling disclosure notwithstanding, the Muslim community is stoutly behind its hero Mohammad Azharuddin but feels the ace cricketer should not have brought the "minority angle" into the match-fixing allegations.

Many political and communi-

ty leaders said they would first ascertain facts before reacting to Azhar's statement that he was being victimised because he was a Muslim.

"Normally, it is not expected of a person of Azhar's stature. I do not know under what circumstances he has made that remark. Was he provoked or it was journalistic interpretation," said an Imam of a prominent mosque who has been playing an active

role in politics.

In the narrow bylanes of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Nizamuddin and Jamia, there was considerable speculation and even satta on whether Azhar's name would figure amid wild charges of his alleged involvement with bookies and the underworld, much before Hansie's Friday bombshell.

Cronje's statement has dampened the spirit of Azhar fans. It

became a matter of intense debate after "jumma prayers" today in the Jama Masjid area where there was near unanimous view that a mere allegation should not be held against the former captain.

"After all, it is coming from a person who has taken several somersaults. There is no proof of Azhar's alleged guilt," said Razi, a businessman. He said if people were to believe Cronje, they

should also give due weightage to Azhar's emphatic denial.

Shakil Shirin, a social activist, said: "Azhar has made significant contributions for the nation. So fitness of things demand that he should be given a fair chance."

Anis Durrani, who heads the Delhi Haj Committee, said Azhar could have avoided a reference to the fact that he was being framed because he came from

the minority community.

Businessman Khalil-ur-Rahman Kidwai questioned sports minister S.S. Dhindsa's suggestion that Azhar should withdraw from the national team till his name is cleared. "Why should a player be debarred just because someone somewhere said any thing against anyone," he said, adding that if such a precedence was observed in politics, each minister would have to quit.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 JUN 2000

Union govt. seeks reports from states on church blasts

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Friday sought detailed reports from the governments of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa on Thursday's bomb explosions in churches in these states even as Christian leaders condemned the blasts and alleged that "anti-Christian hate atmosphere has been created" with the silent approval of the government.

As probe continued into the incidents by respective state governments, there was a move by the police of the three states to launch a co-ordinated investigation.

The Union home ministry has sought reports from the home secretaries of the three states immediately and is closely monitoring the developments.

A home ministry spokesperson here said that investigations were carried out by the police in these states and the concerned governments were "alive to the situation and taking appropriate action to nab the culprits".

Bomb explosions had rocked two churches in Andhra Pradesh and one each in Karnataka and Goa on Thursday causing minor injuries to three persons and damage to one cathedral.

Karnataka director general of police C. Dinakar said in Bangalore that he had spoken to top police officials in Andhra Pradesh and Goa and the police of the three states would coordinate in the probe.

He denied that the explosion outside a Roman Catholic Church in Wadi town in Galbarga had any communal overtones.

Condemning the incidents Alan De Lastic, president of Catholic bishops conference in India, said, "There is a definite strategy or plan at national level to intimidate Christians to stop them from the work they are doing."

In Hyderabad, Union minister of state for home Vidyasagar Rao did not rule out the involvement of Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI into the blasts in the three states.

"Though we have no confirmed reports, suspicion points towards ISI as the pattern and material used in all the blasts were similar,"

he said. Deputy inspector general of police (Eluru Range) P. Chandrasekhar said that police were yet to identify those involved in the blasts in the Roman Catholic church at Tadepalligudem in West Godavari district and in Ongole town, where business establishments remained closed in response to a bandh call by the Congress to protest against the incident.

The Congress also condemned the latest "wanton and murderous" attacks on minorities and their institutions across the country and blamed the Centre's "laid-back" attitude for the emerging trend.

Meanwhile, in Chittoor, BJP general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu on Friday said that there was a "deep-rooted conspiracy"

behind the bomb blasts in some parts of the country on Thursday, particularly in the places of worship.

Addressing newsmen, Mr Naidu said, "It was done with the ulterior motive of

creating misunderstandings among the different religious communities and to destabilise the BJP-led NDA government at the centre."

The forces, including foreign ones, that were hostile to NDA government at the Centre, were responsible for the incidents, he said, adding that the NDA government has been maintaining total communal harmony in the country and also protecting the interest of the minorities.

He urged the state government to be vigilant to curb such incidents effectively at the initial stages.

Referring to Ongole bomb blast, the BJP leader alleged that it was only to create misunderstanding among a particular community and make the state government unpopular.

People who asked chief minister Chandrababu Naidu during his visit on Thursday to withdraw TDP support to NDA government were aiming to pull down the NDA government and install a weak government in its place, he alleged.

"The BJP will not tolerate such things and will put them down with iron hand," he said.

BLASTS THAT ROCKED

- Congress condemns attack
- ISI role in attacks suspected
- Deep-rooted controversy behind blasts, says BJP general secretary
- Investigations are on

55-8
20/6

GNLF IN DELHI

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R. L. M. S. P. M.

Where is the case for statehood?

IT is not surprising that a GNLFF team minus Subash Ghisingh to present its case for a statehood for Darjeeling has returned empty-handed. If the GNLFF supremo had indeed considered the meeting to be so crucial there was no difficulty in his meeting the Prime Minister himself. We are told that LK Advani made some sympathetic noises before rushing off to Israel but Advani is not available for confirmation. He is too careful a man to make such gestures. Subsequent events confirm that the delegation indeed drew a blank and must now live up to its threat of staging another 72-hour bandh — something the the GNLFF is comfortable with. Where is the case for statehood except that other regions like Jharkhand and Uttaranchal have been favoured. The difference lies in the fact that Darjeeling has already been favoured with an autonomous status which can help tackle chronic problems of power supply, drinking water and landslides if only Ghisingh can shed his tendency to capitalise on ethnic sentiments for no one's benefit except his own.

If Ghisingh needs to expedite development programmes, what has prevented him from doing so as chairman of the Hill Council for 12 years? Unlike the Jharkhand council which was starved of funds by Laloo Prasad Yadav, the Darjeeling Hill Council has received a generous share of Central grants. For entirely political reasons, the Left Front has refrained from asking for accounts. Ghisingh thus has the freedom and power to restore to Darjeeling the reputation it once had. Instead, his concern for development of tourism as the biggest revenue earner is well behind his skills in eliminating rivals. That does not strengthen his case in Delhi where he is liable to be considered a schemer and intriguer. Besides, no demand for statehood is logical while he continues to question Darjeeling's status and misuses development funds. A hill station hardly able to support itself economically is not a candidate for statehood. Jyoti Basu has said so in the past and it is time to call Ghisingh's bluff.

THE STATESMAN

10 10 10

Priest battered to death

FROMANAND SOONDAS

Lucknow June 7: The spate of attacks on missionaries continued in Mathura with unidentified assailants battering to death a Catholic brother from Kerala a little after midnight on Tuesday.

Brother George Kunjikundam's body was found this morning at a school in Nawada village, 8 km away from Mathura.

Around 10 armed assailants forced their way into St Francis Public School around 1 am today and assaulted Brother Kunjikundam with sticks, iron rods and even shoes. The 40-year-old brother, who had arrived from Kerala around six months ago and was the warden of the boys' hostel, died on the spot.

The police, pushed on the defensive after the string of attacks on missionaries in Mathura and Agra, claimed it was the handiwork of the dreaded Kaccha Banyand-

hari gang. But missionaries posted in Mathura said valuables, including a VCR, a colour TV, a mobile phone and Rs 2,000 in cash, found at the site prove otherwise. The Kaccha Banyandharis are notorious for decamping with everything they can lay their hands on.

The police have taken into protective custody Aizin, the 12-year-old-boy who is the sole eyewitness in the incident. Aizin's version is yet to be registered by the police who have refused to let the media speak to him.

In their FIR lodged at the Narhauri police station, Vijay Kumar and his wife Gloria have said the assailants came with the express motive of killing the brother and that the fifth such attack on Christians has left the community terrorised.

The All-India Catholic Union has called for an impartial and thorough investigation and stated that the fear within the Christian

community has only increased with the murder. Echoing a similar fear, Archbishop of the Agra diocese Vincent Concessao has appealed to the chief minister to intervene and "protect minorities".

Christian groups across the state have voiced their "sense of insecurity and fear" and asked the state to take immediate steps to halt "the sustained and systematic attacks on Christians and their institutions".

In April, missionaries distributing religious literature near Mathura were beaten up by villagers who objected to their proselytising activities. A group of nuns in a city convent were also attacked the same month.

Chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta has asked the police and district administration to take immediate steps to provide security to "all those who feel a need for it and allay their fears".

THE TELEGRAPH

8 JUN 2000

CBI court extends remand

Unrepentant Dara denies role in killing

FROM DEBASHIS
BHATTACHARYYA

Bhubaneswar, March 29: Dara Singh, prime accused in the killing of an Australian missionary and his two minor sons, today said he did "not feel sorry" for the mayhem. But he denied his involvement in the crime that jolted the nation a year ago.

Looking calm and self-possessed, Singh spoke at length to newsmen at the crowded CBI court here. He was brought to the court under heavy police escort from the Baripada jail. Later he was denied bail by additional chief judicial magistrate Sukumar Sahoo and remanded in CBI custody till April 10.

Already charged by the CBI in the killings, Singh claimed he was not in Manoharpur when Graham Stewart Staines and his sons, Philip and Timothy, were burnt to death by a mob in a jeep on January 23, 1999. The missionary had gone to the village to attend a Bible reading camp at the local Baptist Church.

The accused said he had no idea who had killed them. But the D.P. Wadhwa commission, set up by the Union government to probe the killing, had blamed Singh.

Accusing Staines of converting the tribals in Manoharpur, he alleged that other Christian priests were also converting people in the northern district.

The accused, described by the police as a religious zealot, said he was not a fundamentalist but was opposed to conversion in any form. He said he was supported by the local people in its anti-conversion crusade.

Not only the Mahantas, who were accused by the police of supporting him, people from other castes, too, were backing him, Singh claimed. He, however, refused to specify what he had been doing to stop conversion.

Singh disputed claims by the police that he had been arrested at Gohira, Keonjhar district, on February 1 after he had walked into a trap laid by the Mayurbhanj police. He said he had turned himself over to the police

because they had been "torturing innocent villagers for information" about him. He said he was worried about what the police would do to the villagers if he had not surrendered.

Singh claimed that the police had beaten him up "mercilessly" after he "surrendered." He said he was denied access to the Press and prevented from meeting his parents from Uttar Pradesh, he added. At the Baripada jail, he was provided with two newspapers everyday and given a copy of the *Gita* and *Ramayana*. He said he read the religious texts to keep himself busy.

Asked about his alleged links with the Hindu fundamentalist groups, Singh said he was not associated with any political party or group. He said he had never attended any RSS camp, as reported earlier by a section of the Press.

Singh denied his involvement in the killing of a Muslim trader in Pariabada and a Catholic priest in Jamubani last year. But the crime branch of the state police have already indicted him in the killings.

Singh said the police had trumped up charges against him and added that he had faith in the judiciary.

Singh said he had no intention of joining politics now but could not say what would happen in the future.

He said he also had no desire of meeting Gladys Staines, widow of the missionary to comfort her. Nor would he ever want to speak to her.

Earlier, as the police van carrying Singh threaded its way to the court house on the busy Lewis Road around 2.15 pm, a huge crowd had gathered outside the court.

The entire area was milling with securitymen. Television cameras whirred as Singh, dressed in white, stepped out of the van.

His hands were not handcuffed, unlike his earlier court appearances at Karanjia. No slogans were raised. Neither did he smile, but appeared confident as armed securitymen escorted him into the court room.

THE TELEGRAPH

30 MAR 2000

Akal Takht Jathedar 'sacked'

By Sarabjit Pandher

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 28. On a day of dramatic developments in the religio-political affairs of the Sikh community, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee today "sacked" Giani Puran Singh as Jathedar of Akal Takht.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the SGPC's executive body, chaired by Bibi Jagir Kaur. Giani Joginder Singh Vidanti, a 'granthi' (priest) in Harimandir Sahib, sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple complex, was appointed the acting Jathedar.

On the other hand, Giani Puran Singh handed out yet another 'hukumnama' — religious edict — to effect excommunication of four members of the SGPC's executive body. They include Mr. Pritam Singh Bhatia, who earlier in the day was awarded a 'tankha' (religious punishment) of cleaning utensils in the 'langar' (community kitchen) for five days.

Interestingly, three members owing loyalty to factions led by the former SGPC chief, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, and the Lok Sabha MP, Mr. Simranjit Singh Mann, boycotted the meeting. The senior vice-president of the SGPC, Mr. Balbir Singh Naushehra Pannu, its vice-president, Mr. Kewal Singh, and general secretary, Mr. Hardalbir Singh Shah, who are considered members of the Badal camp, also stayed away.

Later, talking to presspersons, Bibi Jagir Kaur said Giani Puran Singh had been posted at the historic gurdwara in Muktsar.

Bibi Jagir Kaur justified the decision to sack Giani Puran Singh, saying he had violated the accepted 'maryada' (code for religious conduct). Later, Giani Puran Singh refused to accept the SGPC verdict, arguing that excommunicated persons could not take any decision regarding the future of the Sikh community.

Security withdrawn: Page 13

THE HINDU
29 MAR 2000

A FIGHT OVER IMPLEMENTING A NEW CALENDAR HAS BITTERLY DIVIDED THE SIKH COMMUNITY, AND PITTED THE SGPC AGAINST THE AKAL TAKHT. RAVEEN THUKRAL REPORTS

Only God can resolve this one

THE AKAL Takht, or Nanakshahi calendar, which the eternal throne, had been devised by Pal Singh was established by the Purewal, a Canadian Sikh. The sixth Guru Hargobind calendar, in fact, was approved for resolving internal by the general house of the differences within the Sikh community, but today the august institution is itself plagued by conflicts and conspiracies.

"Political opportunism and anomalies like birthdays and selfish leaders are responsible for the present Akal Takht controversy. Instead of showing the community a direction at this time of this new century, religious and political leaders are involved in attempts to carve out their fiefdoms," says Dr Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon of the Institute of Sikh Studies.

Accusing chief minister Prakash Singh Badal of "capturing" Sikh institutions in his bid to stick to power, Dhillon thinks the Sikh community now "vertically divided over the manner in which the Sikh cleric and politicians are fighting each other to establish their supremacy over the Akal Takht."

The clash this time is between Akal Takht jathedar Giani Puran Singh, who has taken on Bibi Jagir Kaur, the first woman president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which controls most Sikh shrines countrywide. The origins of the tussle can be traced to the decision to replace the existing lunar-based Bikrami calendar by the solar-based

was issued from a PCO at Gunna, Madhya Pradesh, and also because it summoned the SGPC's executive committee to appear before the Akal Takht. But jathedars of the Keshgarh Sahib and Damdama Sahib, Prof Manjit Singh and Giani Kewal Singh, denounced the edict. Emboldened, Bibi Jagir Kaur refused to appear at the Akal Takht (the executive committee members did and underwent the *tankha*, or religious punishment).

Infuriated, the Akal Takht jathedar issued another edict restraining Bibi Jagir Kaur from acting as SGPC president till she sought readmission into the Panth. It also directed all Sikhs to refrain from having any social contact with the SGPC president.

But this split the Sikh cleric. Giani Puran Singh excommunicated three high priests, including the Takht Keshgarh and Damdama Sahib jathedars, for refusing to be part of the jury that was to hear Kaur's defense. The three, in turn, accused Giani Puran Singh of behaving in a dictatorial manner. In retaliation, he directed Badal to appoint an acting president for the SGPC and also replace the excommunicated jathedars. Director of Institute of Development and Communication Dr Pramod Kumar feels that the war of nerves between Kaur and Puran Singh is not a clash of egos, but is symptomatic of the shift of factional fights from the political arena to the religious domain prior to the celebrations of 300 years of Khalsa. "The political forces have become active in the religious domain thereby intensifying factional fights," he opines.

Kumar says if Badal supports Kaur on the Nanakshahi calendar, which is also supported by a group of political radicals opposed to the moderate politics of Akalis, he would indirectly provide legitimacy to the otherwise marginalised right wing politics. Earlier, the chief minister had said that only God would resolve the crisis. With Puran Singh directing Badal to appoint a new SGPC president, he can't stay aloof any longer.

Dhillon feels Badal has purposely precipitated the crises for his own political ends. Terming the denigration of Sikh institutions as RSS-inspired, Dr Dhillon says emphatically, "Badal is a RSS stooge and is playing its game which aims at convincing Sikhs that Sikhism is only a sect of Hinduism."

SS Dosanjh, former head of the department of Languages and Journalism, Punjab Agriculture University, attributes the present crisis to the fact that both the jathedar and the SGPC president have become victims of Brahmanism. "Instead of following the principles of Sikhism, both are fighting over conventions — and that is typical of Brahmanism," says Dosanjh.

Ironically, it is the SGPC which appoints the Akal Takht jathedar; the committee's president is the deciding authority on the issue. But in the present crisis the Akal Takht jathedar has assumed an all-powerful role for himself. With organisations like the Sant Samaj backing the jathedar, and detractors of Kaur in the SGPC providing a fertile ground for the his misadventures, Badal is right when he says that "only a divine intervention" can resolve the crisis.

Mr. Sudarshan's war

THE FIRST mistake in RSS leader K.S. Sudarshan's interpretation of the *Mahabharata* is that it was not a conflict between Hindus and anti-Hindus, as he has claimed while predicting another similar "epic war" in India, but a battle between two closely related families both of which were Hindus, although it is doubtful whether they would have used the term for themselves. However, Mr Sudarshan is right in a way because the battle which he foresees may well be within another family — the Sangh parivar — because it is unlikely that the BJP will be pleased with his grim prognostications. Even if there is some convergence in the strategic vision of both the RSS and the BJP, it is clear enough that the latter's tactics emphasise the soft-peddalling of the issues which are close to Mr Sudarshan's heart. To cite only one example, Parliament was officially told on Wednesday that the Centre was not in a position to ban cow slaughter.

The entire focus of the BJP's recent politics has been to downplay the contentious issues with which it used to be associated earlier in order to widen its scope for acceptability by other parties. Implicit in this approach is the recognition, as underlined by L.K. Advani some time ago, that "the country is so heterogeneous that ... an ideological party, be it the communists or the Jan Sangh, cannot hope to come to power at the Centre on its own". It is the evident compulsions of a multicultural society which have made the BJP shed its ideological straitjacket, even if as a tactical gesture. The essence of such a society is that the various communities in it are not seen as being antagonistic towards each other. The RSS leader's neat division of the citizens of India between Hindus and anti-Hindus and, what is more, the prediction of a war between them may well raise the question whether the temporary tactics and the ultimate strategy of the Sangh parivar is beginning to converge.

Such suspicions about the parivar's real agenda may gain credibility in the wake of the latest pronouncement because it is quite in line with Golwalkar's categorisation of non-Hindus virtually as second class citizens. In envisaging a war between the two, however, Mr Sudarshan has gone one step beyond his mentor. Unless the BJP dissociates itself completely from this particularly offensive remark, misgivings about its objective will continue to persist. Indeed, given the closeness of the relations within the parivar, doubts about even the BJP's intentions will not totally disappear. The BJP, therefore, has entered perhaps the most critical phase in its history because Mr Sudarshan's hard line has brought it face to face with issues basic to the parivar's ideology which it has been trying to gloss over so far.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAR 2000

NEW SUPREMO

KS Sudershan anointed RSS chief

WITHIN a day of his anointment as the new head of the RSS, KS Sudershan has created ripples by attacking the Government's economic policy and forcing the BJP troubleshooter Arun Jaitley to airdash to the RSS headquarters. Sudershan has been a long time supporter of the RSS *swadeshi* ideology. Sudershan, at a relatively younger age, is likely to be more proactive, re-energising RSS wings like the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch. After their recent reverses — reimposing the ban on the RSS in Gujarat and the failure to install an NDA government in Bihar — it is unlikely that Sudershan will jeopardise the existence of the government at the Centre, or create a situation where the Government is forced to choose, but there will certainly be attempts to influence policy in a more covert manner. The RSS thrives on brinkmanship and the Gujarat experiment was just that. The RSS wanted to test how far they could push the NDA without a revolt, and when they saw life threatening cracks emerging they were quick to signal a retreat. As Gujarat chief minister Keshubhai Patel put it, the RSS knows how to "take one step back in order to take two steps forward". They are fully aware that they cannot get a more "friendly" government and they are in no mood to risk it for the time being. Pressure from the allies in the NDA worked in Gujarat, but it is very likely that the RSS will ask for their pound of flesh in the not too distant future. Rajju Bhaiya, who now shifts base to Delhi and has a good relationship with the Prime Minister, will act as the liaison between RSS and the government and the equation between the RSS and BJP is unlikely to change drastically because of the new chief. The underlying truth is that the BJP is part of the Sangh and there is no way in which it can cut the umbilical cord. Only the parameters in which the BJP is allowed to function will continue to be tested frequently. The compulsions of politics and government force the RSS to bend their resolve, until one day, so they hope, they can force the BJP with a majority all its own, to fulfil the full RSS agenda.

In the 75th year of its existence the RSS has the first south Indian supremo — the three *sarsanghchalaks* Hedgewar, Golwalkar and Deoras were from Maharashtra and the fourth Rajju Bhaiya was from Uttar Pradesh — Sudershan is a Brahmin from Tamil Nadu who joined the RSS in 1954. A votary of the one nation one people theory, the new chief advocates one language, one culture — Hindi — which he spelt out in "Why Hindu Rashtra". His thrust will be on resuscitating the RSS and reunifying the organisation, weakened by the induction of those without an RSS background in the Sangh's various wings. His first targets are likely to be economic reformers.

Vajpayee is on his guard and our money is on him that he will overcome the refashioned hurdles.

THE STATESMAN

16 MAR 2000

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2000

MURKY POLITICS

THE THREE-MONTH-LONG highly personalised tussle between the Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee chief, Bibi Jagir Kaur, is becoming murkier by the day, with the two functionaries thoughtlessly indulging in recriminatory actions and in the process undermining the authority of the high offices they are holding. Inevitably, the confrontation which is fast heading for a showdown has landed the Chief Minister, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, in a piquant situation. The irony of it all is that both were handpicked by him, just about a year ago, for the two pivotal positions as a part of his well-crafted strategy to marginalise his arch rival, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, and to acquire supreme control of Panthic politics and institutions. And now, much to his consternation, Mr. Badal finds his two 'loyalists' at loggerheads, with the Giani ordering the excommunication of Bibi Jagir Kaur and directing him to see that someone else is chosen to act as SGPC chief in her place. That the Chief Minister should be talking in terms of "divine intervention" betrays as much a sense of frustration as of helplessness.

The provocation for Giani Puran Singh's edict excommunicating Bibi Kaur from the Sikh Panth, passed in January, was that she published and adopted the controversial Nanakshahi solar calendar — as distinguished from 'Bikrami' now in vogue — despite instructions to the contrary from the Akal Takht. The merits or the demerits of the calendar reform aside, the seeming defiance of the SGPC chief and the way the Giani issued the *hukumnama* (reportedly from a 'public call office' in Madhya Pradesh) against her clearly point to a deep game with personal stakes, impelled either by hurt egos or mutual distrust. This appears all the more so after the developments on March 12, the day on which Bibi Jagir Kaur was to present herself before the Akal Takht to seek pardon and receive the *tankhah* (punishment) as per an 'understanding' bro-

kered by some well-meaning mediators. It was apparent that neither side was willing to play by the rules of the gentleman's agreement. To compound the already complicated problem, Giani Puran Singh proceeded to excommunicate three of the designated 'Singh Sahibs' (high priests), apart from two SGPC members, for having aligned themselves with Bibi Jagir Kaur, a declared 'outlaw'. As his January edict against the SGPC chief, this one also has been called into question by a section of the clergy on grounds of traditional time-honoured procedures.

By any reckoning, Mr. Badal is in a predicament. As one commanding the support of a majority in the SGPC's general house, he should have no real problem persuading it to find a temporary replacement for Bibi Jagir Kaur as directed by the Akal Takht Jathedar; but that would not only mean letting down a 'loyalist' in favour of another but also giving a handle to his detractors, chiefly 'Tohra, Bhai Ranjit Singh and Company'. Significantly, the Tohra faction, which had consistently refused to recognise Giani Puran Singh as the Akal Takht Jathedar from the very beginning, came out strongly in his support on the issue of the *hukumnama* against Bibi Jagir Kaur. In fact, although Mr. Badal did succeed last year in pulling down Mr. Tohra from the SGPC pedestal, the task of dismantling the empire he had built over the decades across the gurdwara network cannot be that easy. Further, the Sikh clergy itself is badly riven by factional loyalties, not to speak of personal animosities, as evidenced by the role of the high priests in the running battle. If the institutions of supreme spiritual authority such as the Akal Takht or even the SGPC for that matter have had their images progressively tarnished in recent times, it is largely because the political class has come to use the religious sanctity attached to these for its own partisan ends. The ultimate remedy lies in insulating them from the baneful influence of politics.

THE HINDU
16 MAR 2000

Proteges at war

THE *HUKUMNAMA* issued by Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Puran Singh excommunicating five prominent figures in the politico-religious leadership of the Akalis has precipitated a crisis that has been in the making for some time. Among those excommunicated are the Jathedar of Takht Keshgarh Sahib, Prof Manjit Singh, the Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib, Giani Kewal Singh, and the Head Granthi of the Akal Takht, Giani Bhagwan Singh. They have been so treated for their seeming proximity to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) chief Bibi Jagir Kaur, who had also been excommunicated through a *hukumnama* issued earlier. Bibi Kaur's continued defiance of the *hukumnama* foreclosed any chance of a compromise as had been hoped last Sunday. Though her position was initially supported by a number of Sikh intellectuals, the entire SGPC executive has since appeared before the Akal Takht in an implicit endorsement of its decision. Moreover, her manoeuvrability has been further restricted by the fact that the SGPC has to meet in a few days to conduct important business including the passage of its Rs 100-crore budget.

Whatever the outcome of the present confrontation, the turmoil is bound to affect the position of Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal. Both Bibi Kaur and Giani Puran Singh are Mr Badal's nominees — and he will be hard put to side with either without damaging his own support base. Though the conflict between the two prominent figures in the Sikh politico-religious leadership came into the open with Bibi Kaur's decision to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh's birthday in January in what she claimed was in accordance with the Nanakshahi calendar, the differences between the two apparently ran even deeper. Mr Badal's decision to induct Giani Puran Singh as the Akal Takht Jathedar after replacing Ranjit Singh last year had been marked by an unseemly controversy. Any further unfortunate incidents will hurt the Sikh community's confidence in the functioning of these institutions. As past experience has shown, the kind of tension that prevails in times of such disputes is usually taken advantage of by the subversive elements. Mr Badal will have to act with considerable tact and circumspection, therefore, to ensure that the situation does not get out of hand and that the differences between his two proteges are resolved without any further loss of time.

RSS as a threat

ALTHOUGH ATAL Behari Vajpayee did not have much difficulty in countering the first challenge to his Government from within the Sangh parivar during the BJP's national executive meeting in Bangalore in the winter of 1999, the latest change of guard in the RSS is bound to revive uncomfortable memories of that encounter. Among those who had defended the Government at the time was Madan Lal Khurana who had even referred to the presence of "pseudo-Hindutva" elements in the parivar while L.K. Advani had noted that certain activities had given the Hindutva forces an image of intolerance. If the moderates had their way then, the reason may have been, first, the reluctance of the hardliners to endanger the Government and, second, the rapport which apparently existed between Mr Vajpayee and the topmost RSS leader, the ailing Rajendra Singh.

Now with K. Sudarshan, who has the reputation of being a hardliner, replacing Mr Singh, there is speculation whether the truce achieved in Bangalore following Mr Vajpayee's appeal to leave the Government alone will be jeopardised. Although Mr Sudarshan has acknowledged the compulsions of coalition politics which restrict the Government's scope for following the Hindutva line, even his forceful articulation of the RSS agenda may put the Government under pressure. Although there is nothing new in what he has said, the reiteration is still likely to jolt the Government's friends into realising the retrogressive nature of the organisation which stands at the head of the parivar. Whether it is the economy (where, of course, the views of the right and the left tend to coincide) or the perceived need to change the Constitution drastically or the spread of Western habits or the role of minorities, it is clear that the RSS continues to occupy the most extreme position on the right of the political spectrum. Even the slightest concession to any of its demands, so righteously made by the new chief, cannot but inflict irreparable damage on the multicultural Indian society.

Mr Vajpayee has already let it be known that so far as the policies of globalisation are concerned, the Government will accept pressure from no one. As a moderate and the tallest of all politicians today who is regarded with respect by all political segments, he can be expected to counter the pressures on the other issues as well. The dangerously divisive RSS agenda may even serve to bring him closer to his allies in the NDA. But the point is not whether the agenda is implemented. It is that such a regressive programme poses a grave threat to the country, apart from being a threat to the Government. That an organisation, known for its proximity to the largest ruling party and may have not a few closet supporters in it, can flaunt the sectarian agenda so brazenly is a cause for concern.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 MAR 2000

After Chattisgarh, now they want a Vindhya state

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHOPAL, March 13. — Creation of a Chhattisgarh state is sure to open the flood-gates for similar statehood demands from other regions of Madhya Pradesh. The Assembly Speaker, Mr Srinivas Tiwari, who hails from Rewa district of the Vindhya region, has already begun rallying support across the political spectrum to seek statehood for the region.

The draft Bill on formation of the Chhattisgarh state was tabled in the Assembly on 9 March for approval, and within hours in the evening, the 74-year-old two-term Speaker convened an all-party meeting of legislators from the region, including Independents, to discuss a separate Vindhya Pradesh.

The meeting had been attended by 35 of the 43 MLAs representing the region, Mr Tiwari later said. He said there was a virtual consensus among the

MLAs in favour of a separate state.

"If the Chhattisgarh state comes into existence, nothing will stop the creation of Vindhya Pradesh", he declared, adding that the leaders, irrespective of partylines, had all agreed on the need for a mass movement across the Vindhya region to press for statehood.

The people of the Vindhya region were not ready for the region's inclusion in Madhya Pradesh when the state came into being in 1956, the Speaker recalled.

He was then affiliated to the Socialist Party and involved in the movement against the Vindhya region's merger with Madhya Pradesh.

He said the proposed Vindhya Pradesh would comprise nine districts — Datia, Panna, Chhattarpur, Tikamgarh, Rewa, Shahdol, Umariya, Sidhi and Satna — and nine Lok Sabha and 64 Assembly constituencies.

On 10 March, the state Assembly passed by voice-vote a private member's resolution for formation of a separate Vindhya state.

Moved by a Congress member, Mr Shivmohan Singh and a BJP MLA, Mr Ramakant Tiwari, the resolution said the Madhya Pradesh government should take necessary steps to pave the way for creation of a Vindhya Pradesh and should urge the Centre to play the role of a facilitator.

Vociferous statehood demands are also likely from some other culturally disparate regions of Madhya Pradesh such as Bundelkhand, Mahakaushal, and Malwa.

A Jabalpur-based organisation, the Madhya Pradesh State Reorganisation Movement Committee, has argued that culturally and in terms of a separate regional identity, Bundelkhand, Mahakaushal, and Malwa are no less homogeneous than the Chhattisgarh region.

12 ✓ THE RSS GETS A NEW CHIEF 13/3

THE APPOINTMENT OF Mr. K. S. Sudarshan as sarsanghchak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) may not lead to any substantive changes in the course of the outfit given its structured nature and its well-defined ideological direction. Nevertheless, the change does assume significance in the context of Mr. Sudarshan's own reputation for being a hardliner within the RSS, critical even of the "tactical" compromises made by the BJP in recent years. In the context of the growing sense of unease arising out of the inability of the BJP to push the sangh's own agenda — the developments involving the Gujarat Government's order lifting the ban on government employees associating with the RSS, for instance — the prathinidhi sabha and the change of guard at Nagpur assume significance. Going by the very structure of the RSS — in which the sarsanghchak alone leads the organisation and his word is treated as a command by the cadre — Mr. Sudarshan's appointment serves as a pointer to the RSS pursuing its own agenda far more vigorously than anytime in the recent past. Mr. Sudarshan's taking over the reins of the RSS is bound to have an impact on the dynamics of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

It is indeed a fact and not just an impression that the BJP is among the organs around the RSS; and the RSS does not merely lend a helping hand to the party but guides its course systematically. For all the protestations by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and the others in the party or the allies in the NDA, the RSS treats the BJP as one of the 40 organisations created by it; the ABVP, the Hindu Jagran Manch, the VHP and the Swadeshi Jagran

Manch are some such outfits.

Mr. Rajendra Singh as sarsanghchak (during the past six years) was willing to consider the BJP's "difficulties" in pushing the Hindutva agenda to the extent the RSS would have wanted; he had no qualms in letting the BJP put on hold its stance on Article 370 of the Constitution, the Common Civil Code and the Ram mandir agenda in Ayodhya. Mr. Sudarshan was among those who did not approve of such "pragmatism." The stress laid by the RSS general secretary, Mr. H. V. Seshadri, at the Nagpur meet, just after Mr. Sudarshan was anointed, that it was high time Article 370 was scrapped (he is reported to have described Article 370 as "the springboard for separatist designs") and the strident positions Mr. Sudarshan himself took on this issue as well as on some other core issues of the RSS suggest a sharper thrust on the part of the organisation in relation to the BJP.

All these are of concern not just in the context of ensuring the survival of the BJP-led regime at the Centre, as it manifested in the case of the Gujarat Government's order where some of the allies expressed their difficulty to vote with the Government in the event of a censure motion in the Lok Sabha. A more strident RSS pushing its exclusivist agenda is an undeniable threat to the cohesion and integration of Indian civil society. The havoc caused by the sangh parivar's campaign in the past — the trail of violence left behind by the Ayodhya campaign — has traumatised the national psyche. The likelihood of the sangh pursuing more openly its exclusivist agenda and pressuring the BJP to go along with that has only increased.

GHV Nagpur Calling *157* *Review 9/10*

“Bad news for Vajpayee” says a headline in this newspaper, referring to K S Sudarshan’s elevation as the new sarsanghchalak of the RSS. The reading is not incorrect. Mr Sudarshan has a mind of his own, and an ideologically tough mind at that. The RSS’s first Kannada brahmin chief may seem an aberration in an organisation not known to favour the deep south. Nonetheless, Mr Sudarshan is rooted firmly in the RSS belief structure which is what decides who matters how much in the parivar. If anything, the fear about the ‘new man in’ is that he will be more inflexible in his relations with the BJP. At a recent function to honour ‘nationalist’ journalists, Mr Sudarshan and Atal Bihari Vajpayee had openly disagreed. Expounding on the now-familiar ‘India versus Bharat’ theme, Mr Sudarshan said that whereas Bharat was a civilisational concept, India was a gift from the departing British. Bharat was one united nation; India was many nations in one. Bharat was held together by a single strong culture; India argued for multi-culturalism. Then came the tricky bit. Mr Sudarshan wondered how any self-respecting country could allow English to co-exist with its own national language. Of the BJP’s two dozen allies in government, there are several who cannot and will not speak Hindi, much less accept it as the sole national language. Should Mr Vajpayee tell Mr Karunanidhi to correspond in Hindi, he will have a mini revolt on his hands. Little wonder then that at the same meeting the prime minister asked the RSS not to cross the Laxman rekha.

The obvious question that arises from this is: Will the RSS further enlarge its role under Mr Sudarshan? In the nearly two years that Mr Vajpayee has been in office, he has had many run-ins with the RSS, including that time in December 1998 when the sangh bristled at the government’s pro-liberalisation moves. Reflecting the outrage, the RSS weekly, *Panchjanya*, in fact, warned Mr Vajpayee against taking sangh support for granted. The crisis blew over thanks to the excellent rapport between Mr Vajpayee and Rajendra Singh, RSS chief at that time. Indeed, the personal equation between the two men has been instrumental in keeping RSS-BJP tensions under control. Mr Sudarshan, on the other hand, is a die-hard Swadeshi. The incident may have faded from memory but it was Mr Sudarshan’s midnight call that ensured the exclusion of Jaswant Singh and Pramod Mahajan from Mr Vajpayee’s earlier cabinet. The latest news from Nagpur confirms the worst fears about Mr Sudarshan: under the new chief’s stewardship the RSS has passed a resolution expressing “concern about economic policies of the current government”. However, the RSS is also a pragmatic body. Mr Sudarshan would most certainly know the consequences of pushing Mr Vajpayee too far. A BJP government, liberalisation and all, is better for the RSS than an inimical Congress government headed by a foreign-born woman. The Vajpayee government can expect a lot more pinpricks, though. In the end, only a conscious moving away from the influence of the RSS can save the BJP. For as the DMK and the Left parties have demonstrated, power and ideological rigidity cannot go together.

THE TIMES OF INDIA
13 MAR 2000

RSS to oppose 'anti-national' policies

Piyush Srivastava
Nagpur, March 12

THE RSS leadership today declared it would oppose steps taken by the Centre in keeping with treaties of the WTO and such other bodies if these were against the interest of the nation.

Newly appointed RSS general secretary Mohan Bhagwat and joint general secretary Madandas Devi, while addressing a joint Press conference here, told reporters that if the Vajpayee government adopted "anti-national" policies in enforcing the treaties committed to by India, the RSS would certainly oppose them.

Bhagwat, however, said that the Vajpayee government has no option but to honour commitment of previous governments to these international trade bodies.

He also said that the Vajpayee government was not being influenced by the WTO or the International Monetary Fund.

Referring to "the cultural degradation of

the country and blind following of the American lifestyle by our youths" Mr Madandas Devi justified the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad stand to oppose Valentine's Day.

He asserted that it was their duty to remind everyone of the Indian traditions and culture. "Our family bond is very strong and it is not necessary for each and every youth of our country to search for a girl-friend," he stated.

The RSS leaders said people belonging to all faiths were welcome to take part in *shakhas*. There are many Muslim and Christians in the RSS who were equally devoted, they added.

The leaders also announced the names in

the new executive.

They said Mr H.V. Seshadri, who had stepped down from general secretaryship, would be a joint general secretary along with Madandas Devi.

The following are chiefs and assistants of various sections in the organisational set-up —

Sharirik (physical training): Sakhalchand Bagrecha (Karnataka), Assistant: Ramchandra Sahastabhojane (Bihar), Boudhik (intellectual): Rangahari (Kerala), Assistant: Shripati Shastri.

Pracharak (preacher): Suresh Ketkar (Sangli), Sewa (social service): Suresh Joshi, Assistant: Surendra Singh Chouhan (Madhya Pradesh), Vywasatha (management): Vasant Rao Bapat (Calcutta).

Cow slaughter ban sought

THE AKHIL Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) of the RSS in its resolution has urged the Central Government to initiate a legislation to ban the slaughter of cows. They have stated that the cow occupies a unique place in the national psyche and its economic importance can also not be ignored in an agricultural country.

HTC, Nagpur

Assistant: Balkrishna (Lucknow), Sampark (public relations): Jagmohan Garg (Meerut) and Publicity: Shrikant Joshi (Nagpur).

Special invitees: Moropant Pingle, Suryanarayan Rao, Vishwanath, Rajju Bhaiyya and M.G. Vaidya.

Members: Kalika Basu (Calcutta), retired Justice Jitendra Singh Veer (Chandigarh) and Raghvendra Kulkarni.

BJP reaction: The BJP reacted cautiously to the RSS demands on the economic policies and other issues saying it was for the coalition government to consider them, PTI adds from New Delhi.

BJP vice president J.P. Mathur, when asked to react to the remarks made by the new RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan in Nagpur yesterday, said as far as changing economic advisers with accent on those who believed in swadeshi concept was concerned, it was for the government to consider.

Mathur said the RSS was making some suggestions at the level of an organisation and the BJP was a separate entity.

RSS chief puts Vajpayee Govt. on notice

NAGPUR, MARCH 11. The new RSS chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, today put the BJP-led Central Government on notice on economic reforms, saying the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, should bring in economic advisers who believed in 'swadeshi' concept.

At his first press conference, a day after he was appointed the organisational chief, Mr. Sudarshan also claimed that despite pressure from allies, the Vajpayee Government was in favour of construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya but the pending litigation in High Court had stalled it.

"Vajpayee should induct in his advisory team economists with a new thinking such as those who believed in Gandhian philosophy," he said.

Mr. Sudarshan said the RSS believed in 'swadeshi' concept that did not necessarily mean accepting only domestic goods.

The present Constitution should be "scrapped and replaced with a new one based on the aspirations of the Indians", he said. — PTI, UNI

Details on Page 8

THE HINDU
12 MAR 2000

Standoff on RSS issue continues

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 10

THE STANDOFF between the ruling party and the Opposition over Bihar and RSS issues continued to block proceedings in Parliament. However, it was Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi's ruling on the RSS issue that led to the adjournment of the Lok Sabha this afternoon.

When the House reassembled as it was adjourned after six minutes in the morning, a relentless Opposition pressed for a discussion on RSS. But the Speaker ruled that their notices under rule 193 and 184 had become infructuous after the Gujarat Government withdrew its circular lifting the ban on its staff joining the controversial organisation.

Mr Yerran Naidu, who was in the chair, read the Speaker's ruling. He told the House that a notice under rule 193, submitted to the Speaker on Feb 28, and rule 184, submitted on March 8, had

become infructuous. He, however, said that a notice under rule 193 submitted by Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Chief Whip of the Congress, on the activities of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and the RSS was under the consideration of the Speaker. A notice on withdrawal of publication of two volumes of "Towards Freedom" series by eminent historians of Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) was also under consideration.

SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav said the House should urgently take up the RSS issue since its activities posed a threat to the unity and integrity of the country. This sparked off a slanging match between Mr Yadav and BJP's Madan Lal Khurana, who wanted an assurance from the Opposition that they would hear him after Mr Yadav. In the ensuing din, the Speaker adjourned the House to meet again after the weekend.

Earlier, Mr Yerran Naidu allowed the Ministers to lay the

papers. There were uproarious scenes amidst trading of charges between the Opposition and the treasury benches. While the Opposition especially the RJD members raised the issue of propriety of the Governor in inviting the NDA to form the Government in Bihar, the ruling party members expressed concern that the House could not transact business.

The Lok Sabha had to be adjourned earlier six minutes into the question hour when the Opposition raised the issue of horse trading in Bihar where Mr Nitish Kumar is to move a motion of confidence in his ministry.

In the Rajya Sabha, as soon as the House assembled this morning, Mr Naresh Yadav and Ms Saroj Dubey (both RJD) and several Congress members were on their feet raising the Bihar issue.

Mr Yadav waved a newspaper, which carried a report alleging "the NDA was indulging in buying legislators to mobilise support for the Nitish Kumar government".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
11 MAR 2000

Sudarshan takes over as RSS chief

Nagpur, March 10 ^{11/3}

K.S. SUDARSHAN was today appointed as the new chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), succeeding Rajendra Singh alias Rajju Bhaiyya, who stepped down due to ill health.

Kuppahali Seetaramaiah Sudarshan, an electronic and telecommunication engineer by education, was inducted into the top post of the organisation on the opening day of the triennial three-day Akhil Bhartiyratinidhi Sabha, the RSS governing body.

Addressing about 1,500 delegates, Rajju Bhaiyya said he was stepping down after six years of stint as the "sarsanghchalak" (chief) in view of his deteriorating health since last year.

He said the second-in-command or "sarkaryawah" of the RSS H V Seshadri was also not keeping good health and had hence declined to accept the responsibility. The choice, therefore, fell on Sudarshan, who brought with him "maturity and vast experience" to lead the organisation, Rajju Bhaiyya said.

The outgoing RSS chief then invited Sudarshan to the dais, who sought blessings from him and Seshadri before occupying the "highest chair." Sudarshan was felicitated with a shawl by Rajju Bhaiyya.

Presenting the annual report, general secretary Seshadri hit out at Pakistan for unleashing a proxy war against India in Kashmir by spreading the tentacles of its intelligence agency, the ISI, in strategic border areas and sensitive Muslim-dominated localities.

He lamented that the demand of the Jammu and Kashmir Cabinet for autonomy to the State and reversal to pre-1953 status was only a step away from making it a totally independent Muslim State like Pakistan.

Seshadri said it was high time that all national parties rose above their "parochial" political interests to decide on doing away with Article 370, which had become the "springboard" for anti-national forces to further their separatist designs.

Commenting on the situation in J and K, he said the "systematic" terrorist attacks in Doda had severely depleted the Hindu population there and same situation prevailed in Rajouri and Poonch sectors.

Later, Rajju Bhaiyya reiterated his resolve to continue to "guide" the RSS despite his failing health.

The new incumbent Sudarshan, in his address, said a leader can not achieve success individually and has to depend on his team for meeting goals. He would follow such traditions laid down by his predecessors. (PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAR 2000

Vajpayee and the new RSS order

By Harish Khare

180-13
11/3

NEW DELHI, MARCH 10. For the past two days the buzz in the Central Hall has been that after the Keshubhai Patel Ministry's retreat on the "RSS/state government employees circular" the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, stands weakened. This question of the Prime Minister-RSS equations comes into sharper focus, now that the RSS has decided to have a change of guard.

However, those who know Mr. Vajpayee as well as know the "socio-cultural" organisation are inclined to believe that the new RSS chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, would find it difficult to dominate the RSS-PM relationship. For one thing, it is pointed out that the retiring chief, Prof. Rajinder Singh, had enjoyed a high moral stature, which Mr. Sudarshan would take time to match. Despite his ill-health in the past few years, "Rajju Bhaiya" was able to command unquestioned authority in the organisation.

Secondly, Mr. Sudarshan is younger to Mr. Vajpayee; and, though he has the reputation of being an "ideologue", no one is inclined to bet one's money that he would be able to get the better of the Prime Minister of the day. Mr. Vajpayee has the advantage of the being the "incumbent", a man with a badge of "popular mandate", while Mr. Sudarshan will take time to find his feet.

Even before the change of guard in Nagpur, it had been noted that it was the Prime Minister who wrote the script for Mr. Keshubhai Patel's retreat on the RSS issue. Mr. Vajpayee wanted the Gujarat order rescinded; it cannot be easily overlooked that the RSS leadership had no hesitation or difficulty in issuing "a statement of unconcern". Anyone closely following the Gujarat Government drama cannot miss the fact that it was the Prime Minister who was calling the shots.

Nonetheless, even if Mr. Vajpayee will continue to have the upper hand vis-a-vis the RSS leadership, it is most likely that the new "sarsanghchalak" would want to activate the organisation. After all, Prof. Rajinder Singh's ill-health these past few years did slow the organisation down; but, now the RSS observers believe that the priority for Mr. Sudarshan will be to rework sharply defined "Hindutva" themes into the organisation's activities.

In any case, the RSS observers argue now that the Congress(I) under Ms. Sonia Gandhi has taken a strident anti-RSS line, the organisation would have no compunction in returning the compliment. And, these observers believe that the Congress(I) is quite vulnerable on the charge of being "anti-Hindu." That is the next battle the RSS is likely to fight, without bothering about Mr. Vajpayee's compulsions.

THE HINDU
11 MAR 2000

Backtrack on RSS

It could have been a story foretold considering that the Parliamentary uproar over the RSS made for only one possible ending — withdrawal of the Gujarat government order permitting government employees to join the sangh. The BJP might have gone out to invite the headache, judging by the haste with which it proceeded on a matter involving the sensibilities of its allies. Had it been merely the opposition that the BJP was up against, it is a sure bet that it would have breezed through the trouble. With the allies on its side, any vote in the House was bound to have gone in the party's favour. But clearly that wasn't so. For all the claims of BJP spokespersons that the NDA as a whole was united on the issue, the opposite would seem to have been the case: The allies were uneasy in the extreme about standing up for the RSS. Slowly but surely the murmurs began, first from the TDP and then from the Trinamool Congress. With the opposition and as many as four former prime ministers joining in, the chorus inevitably became a clamour. The recap of the drama over, only one question remains to be asked: Why did the BJP take so long to do what absolutely had to be done? For days together the prime minister and his deputy clung to the logic that the RSS was a cultural organisation. If that only kept the focus on the RSS, it helped even less that the government passionately quoted the sanctity of federal relations. It was not the Centre that was being asked to give the Gujarat government a talking to. The word was meant to go from the BJP at the Centre to the BJP in Gujarat.

In the event, the long-delayed climbdown has cost the BJP a good bit of its prestige. As the irreverent will doubtless say: Mr Vajpayee has egg all over his 'masked' face. It should be evident to even the politically naive that the final act in this long drawn-out drama came courtesy hectic behind-the-scene negotiations. And inescapably any number of 'grand conspiracy' theories are doing the rounds. Was it a battle between the hardliners (Advani) and softliners (Vajpayee)? Did the BJP plan the controversy to test how far the allies can be pushed? It is difficult to say for certain, especially since the BJP is deemed to be adept at formulating strategems. Regardless of the truth, what is important though is that the party learn the right lessons from it: There is simply no way it can push through a saffron agenda in a country nurtured on multi-culturalism. The minorities are so integral to the concept of India that without their support not one party can hope to come to power. Even the BJP needs them indirectly — via its allies. This explains why the constituents of the NDA will not go beyond a point in backing the BJP. The consequences are already visible in Bihar where the NDA finished behind the Rashtriya Janata Dal despite forging a spectacular alliance against it. In now losing out the speakership to the opposition in Bihar, the NDA has suffered a further defeat. If this has anything to do with the setback the BJP has received on the RSS issue, then, that could well be a warning of things to come.

Gujarat Govt did no wrong: BJP

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 9

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) while giving a clean chit to the Gujarat Government for issuing the controversial order allowing its employees to take part in the RSS activities, today blamed the Opposition for raking up a "non-issue" to hide their own failures.

Speaking to mediapersons, BJP spokesperson M.Venkaiah Naidu today defended the Gujarat Government's decision by stating that "they were Constitutionally, politically and legally right" in having issued such an order.

However, it was only due to BJP's serious concern to ensure smooth functioning of Parliament — the highest democratic institution — that the party took an initiative for

withdrawal of the order.

Hailing the RSS for its "patriotic and philanthropic deeds", Mr Naidu said that denying a person employment due to his social philosophy was considered as a negation of human rights the world over. This view was held by many

RSS Issue

High Courts.

It was in the backdrop of this recognised fact that the Gujarat Government had allowed its employees to take part in RSS activities.

"Any amount of disinformation campaign against the RSS has not affected its progress. In fact, it has emerged more stronger after such controversies", he added.

Criticising the Opposition particularly the Congress, for their irresponsible behaviour, Mr Naidu said that adoption of "undemocratic" means by them to paralyse the Parliament's functioning was an outcome of their frustration on account of total rejection by the people and growing popularity of the Vajpayee Government and the BJP Government in Gujarat.

When asked whether rescinding of the order by Gujarat Government was a defeat for the NDA Government and the BJP, he further maintained that this decision was taken to resolve the stalemate as the entire nation was concerned about Parliament's functioning having come to a standstill.

"We hope that the Opposition will come back to discussion and discharge their responsibility."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAR 2000

Gujarat reimposes RSS ban

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, March 8. — Gujarat has withdrawn "in the national and party interest" its circular lifting the ban on government staff participating in RSS activities.

The decision, taken on the "direction of BJP advisers from the Centre", came after two senior party members flew down to Gandhinagar for a four-hour visit.

Both the chief minister, Mr Keshubhai Patel and his minister of state for home, Mr Haren Pandya, had till this morning maintained there was no going back on lifting the ban.

BJP general secretaries, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu and Mr KN Govindacharya, arrived here by helicopter late in the afternoon and immediately went into a huddle with Mr Patel and the

state BJP president, Mr Rajendra Singh Ranka.

They also met with senior ministers — Mr Suresh Mehta, Mr Vajubhai Vala, Mr Ashok Bhatt and Mr Pandya — and some RSS functionaries like Mr Sanjay Joshi.

At the end, a BJP functionary issued a statement announcing the outcome: "The Gujarat government after considerable thought had withdrawn the circular prohibiting government employees from joining the RSS. The decision of the Gujarat government was well within its rights. It was Constitutionally, legally and politically correct."

"To deny a person employment due to his social philosophy is regarded world over as a negation of human rights. "However, keeping in view the overall interests of the country,

the party, and also primarily to resolve the stalemate in Parliament, the BJP advisers from the Centre have directed the leadership of the party in Gujarat to withdraw the circular."

The statement added the BJP would now take the issue to the people, and expose the "disruptive tactics of the Congress and of other Opposition parties".

The general administration department of the state will now issue an order including the RSS in the list of 33 organisations which government servants cannot join. The same department had issued in the first week of January — days before an RSS *shibir* in Ahmedabad — the circular lifting the ban on state staff associating with the Sangh.

The lifting of the ban had become a rallying point for Gujarat Congressmen since

Mrs Sonia Gandhi took a pledge at Sabarmati Ashram on 30 January, and launched an agitation from the Kankaria Grounds in Ahmedabad.

The issue has snowballed in Parliament's Budget session — the Opposition has allowed no business for over a week now, and the BJP has been under pressure from allies to get Gujarat to withdraw the order. Today, the Congress staged a walkout in the state Assembly on the issue.

The day's development left the mood in the BJP here gloom. After Mr Naidu and Mr Govindacharya left for Delhi by a regular flight, no senior leader was available to the press. Both Mr Pandya and Mr Patel went uncommunicative.

The Congress claimed a "moral victory". Mr Amarsinh Chaudhary, Leader of the

Opposition in the Assembly, said the government's back-track would boost the morale of his party's rank and file, and trigger rumblings within the BJP-RSS.

In Delhi, a senior partyman said they would now decide on whether to withdraw the notice for a motion in the Lok Sabha under Rule 184, as most leaders feel the motion has now become "politically infructuous".

PM, Advani: Both Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani said the Central government had had nothing to do with the withdrawal order, UNI reported. "Don't talk of signals (sent by the Centre)," the Prime Minister said. "It was their (Gujarat's) decision."

But the BJP had, as a party, requested Gujarat to reimpose the ban, the home minister said.

'DECISION IN LARGER NATIONAL INTEREST'

Gujarat order on RSS goes

By Manas Dasgupta

GANDHINAGAR, MARCH 8. The Gujarat Government today withdrew its controversial notification of January 3, thereby reimposing the ban on its employees from participating in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. This brings to an end the battle of attrition between the ruling party and the Opposition in the State and at the Centre on the issue.

The decision to cancel the notification under which it had amended the State employees' service conduct rules to allow them to take part in the activities of the RSS, if they so desired, was taken here this evening at the behest of the BJP's central leadership.

BJP emissaries accomplish mission

Two senior central leaders of the party, Mr. K. N. Govindacharya and Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, flew in here this afternoon with a message from the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on what he expected from the State Government on the notification which had disrupted Parliament work over the last several days.

The order to cancel the notification was issued immediately after the Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel, the Minister of State for Home, Mr. Haren Pandya, and other senior BJP leaders held a meeting with Mr. Naidu and Mr. Govindacharya.

Later in a brief but hard-hitting statement, Mr. Pandya, "architect" of the controversy, said that though the January 3 notification was "just, legally sound, and reflected the sentiments of the people of the State", the Government decided to withdraw it "in the larger national interest".

The "popularity" of the "performing" BJP Governments in the State and at the Centre had frustrated the Congress(I) so much that it adopted the "anti-democratic" measure of stopping Parliament work and "instigating" the sentiments of the people in the country on an issue which was "purely within the purview

of the State Government".

It was to ensure that the highest democratic institution in the country resumed its normal functioning that the State Government decided to withdraw the notification, Mr. Pandya said.

Coming on the heels of the RSS chief, Mr. Rajendra Singh's statement that the organisation was unconcerned about the notification's withdrawal, the arrival of the two senior BJP leaders signalled the turn the situation had taken here after the controversy broke out in New Delhi.

Earlier in the day, the Congress(I) legislature party staged a walkout in the Assembly after it was disallowed permission to raise the issue even when it was discussing the appropriation bill on the supplementary demands.

The decision to withdraw the notification was hailed by the State Congress(I) as a "victory

ry for the people" and defeat of the "fascist and communal forces". The convener of the United Christians Forum for Human Rights, Father Cedric Prakash, while welcoming the measure hoped the Government would honour the secular fabric of the Constitution in the future.

It is their decision: Vajpayee

PTI reports from New Delhi:

Mr. Vajpayee today dismissed the suggestion that the Centre had a role in the Gujarat Government's decision to withdraw the circular. "Don't talk of signals. It was their decision," he told reporters when asked whether the decision was taken at the behest of the Centre. On whose victory the withdrawal of the circular was, Mr. Vajpayee said "it is difficult to say".

Other reactions: Page 14

Rule 184 is fine by me: PM

The sudden turnaround in the Government's stand came this morning when Mr. Vajpayee spoke his mind at a meeting of the BJP's parliamentary party saying the issue could not be allowed to drag on disrupting the functioning of Parliament. In such a situation the Government has to break the ice.

Later, he conveyed his decision at an emergency meeting of his allies, many of whom were reluctant to have a censure discussion because of their differences with the RSS.

Sources said the Prime Minister also did not seek any assurance from the allies, some of whom have openly said they would support the Government should there be a vote on the issue.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The two-week deadlock in the Lok Sabha over the controversy surrounding the Gujarat Government's order on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ended today with the Vajpayee Government agreeing to the Opposition demand for a vote on it, but normal business remained disrupted for much of the day because of a row over the Bihar Governor's conduct.

The truce in the Lok Sabha followed the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's announcement that his Government had no objection to discussing the RSS issue under Rule 184 with a vote at the end of the debate. PTI reports:

MOUNT PRESSURE ON GUJARAT, ALLIES TELL BJP

RSS issue continues to stall Parliament work

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. The Opposition today forced the adjournment of Parliament without transacting any official business in support of its demand for a discussion with voting in the Lok Sabha on the decision of the Gujarat Government to allow its employees to participate in the activities of the RSS and the insistence on an immediate discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the installation of a National Democratic Alliance Government in Bihar by the State Governor.

Proceedings in the Lok Sabha, which was adjourned for eight consecutive days without taking up any official business, barely lasted a few minutes today as the Opposition members were in a belligerent mood after the initiative taken by the Speaker, Mr. G. M. C. Balayogi, to resolve the row before the House met failed to yield results.

As soon as the House assembled, some members from the Opposition benches trooped into the well demanding a discussion on the Gujarat Government order under Rule 184. They also criticised the action of the Bihar Governor in swearing-in Mr. Nitish Kumar as Chief Minister ignoring the Rashtriya Janata Dal's claims as the single largest party in the new Assembly. Sensing the members' mood, the Deputy Speaker, Mr. P. M. Sayeed, adjourned the House for the day.

In the Rajya Sabha, the day began on an

orderly note and the question hour proceeded uninterrupted. For, the Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, had conveyed categorically last week that question hour was "inviolable" and rejected the notice for its suspension.

It was announced that the Chairman had admitted the Opposition motion for a discussion on the Bihar developments.

The trouble began immediately after question hour with the Opposition insisting on an immediate discussion on the motion and the treasury benches opposing saying the discussion could take place only after the Government fixed the date and time.

'Solution soon'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. The Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi has indicated that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) issue might be resolved "very soon".

Mr. Balayogi, who was speaking to mediapersons after a meeting of NDA allies, said, "Today also it (a solution to the issue) can be possible, tomorrow also it can be possible."

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said the Government should be given a day to resolve the issue.

— PTI, UNI

When Mr. Pranab Mukherjee of the Congress(I) wanted the Leader of the House, Mr. Jaswant Singh, to indicate the date and time for the discussion, the Minister said he could give a commitment only after consulting all concerned. This triggered protests from the Opposition who said that once a motion was admitted it was for the Chairman to fix the time for discussion in consultation with the Leader of the House. As the tussle between the two sides continued, the House was adjourned till lunch.

Earlier at the all-party meeting convened by Mr. Balayogi, the NDA's allies indicated to the Bharatiya Janata Party that it should take up with the Gujarat Government on a "party-to-party" basis the issue of withdrawing the circular issued by it allowing government servants to participate in RSS activities.

The allies were firm that they would not accept a discussion on the issue in the Lok Sabha under rule 184 (which entails voting). Nor was there any agreement between ruling party leaders and the Opposition.

In fact, some leaders openly said today that they expected a resolution of the crisis through a withdrawal of the Gujarat Government's circular later in the day. While the BJP did not say this clearly, enough hints were thrown that this was expected to happen after the statement issued on Monday by the RSS chief, Mr. Rajendra Singh.

BJP to prevail upon Gujarat on RSS

Anil Anand
New Delhi, March 7

BOWING TO the wishes of its allies, the BJP has agreed to prevail upon the Gujarat Government to withdraw the controversial order permitting its employees to take part in RSS activities.

Party general secretary Venkaiah Naidu confirmed that efforts were being made by the BJP to break the Lok Sabha impasse following the Opposition's refusal to discuss the issue under Rule 193. The Opposition wants a discussion

under Rule 184 with a voting provision.

More than the Opposition, pressure mounted by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) seems to have forced the party to pursue this line. This suggestion was made by allies like the Telugu Desam Party and Trinamool Congress at an NDA meeting convened by the Prime Minister today.

Naidu said that he was in touch with the BJP's Gujarat unit to "gauge" its mood. "As a responsible party we have decided to take an initiative to break the logjam,"

he added.

Observers feel this is a face-saving device by the BJP to get out of a tricky situation created by the Opposition and its allies. The BJP was caught off guard with an adamant Opposition stalling the Lok Sabha for over a week. Its allies have said they would not support the Government if it agreed to a discussion under Rule 184.

Naidu, however, said RSS chief Rajendra Singh's statement distancing the organisation from the Gujarat Government decision had paved the way for the BJP to take a

political initiative to end the crisis. ^{HT} ^{8/3} Singh had said yesterday that the organisation was "unconcerned" about the State Government order to lift the ban on its employees participating in RSS activities. Speculation has been rife that the BJP worked out a deal with the RSS to help the State Government rescind its order. Even the theory propagated by NDA partners asking the BJP to tackle the issue at a political level by keeping the Centre aside, was understood to be in tandem with the BJP-RSS plan to end the stalemate.

RSS provides a face-saving

HDI formula?

By Harish Khare 7/3

NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. The stage has been set for a resolution of the impasse over the Gujarat Government's order permitting its employees to participate in RSS activities. As expected, the RSS chief, Mr. Rajendra Singh issued a statement of unconcern from Nagpur, more or less suggesting that the organisation would have no objection should Gujarat chose to rescind its pro-RSS move.

However, Mr. Haren Pandya, the Minister of State for Home in the Keshubhai Ministry, told *The Hindu* that the RSS chief's statement was unlikely, as of now, to prompt the Government to rescind its order of January 3. "Our stand remains unchanged."

On the other hand, the official sources here were hopefully pointing out that the logic of the RSS chief's statement of today was that the Keshubhai Patel Ministry should help the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, cut his political losses on the issue; otherwise, it is pointed out, where was the need for the statement.

In his statement, helpfully made available here, the RSS chief praised the Gujarat Government's correctness in undoing the earlier order; but, he also pointed out that "the RSS had not sought the withdrawal of the circular prohibiting Government employees from participating in its activities, because RSS work has never been dependent on any Government's attitude, positive or negative, towards it."

Mr. Singh acknowledged that a number of political parties were needlessly making the RSS "a scapegoat". As Mr. Singh sees it, these political parties are flirting with failure and redundancy and are therefore making the RSS the focus of their activities, to the extent of paralysing the function of Parliament. Mr. Singh notes: "We, of the RSS, would like to be outside the vortex of contentious politics."

The BJP central leaders are likely to use the RSS statement help the Gujarat Government find a honorable way out of the impasse at the Centre. Mr. L.K. Advani has already forcefully argued that the Centre could not Constitutionally issue any directive or advice to Gujarat. Hence, there would be considerable back-room consultation and persuasion before Gandhinagar can condescend to accommodate New Delhi.

THE HINDU

- 7 MAR 2000

It is cultural terrorism: Sonia

By Angana Parekh

NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. The Congress (I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, today launched a frontal attack on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Vajpayee Government. She challenged the Ministers in the Vajpayee Government who had an RSS background to clarify whether their allegiance was to the Constitution (which they swore by when taking the oath of office) or to the RSS oath (which swears by a Hindu rashtra).

Partners in the ruling National Democratic Alliance too should answer whether they accepted the BJP's communal agenda. "All they want is power," Mrs. Gandhi said while addressing a rally called to protest the Gujarat Government's order permitting Government employees to join the RSS.

Mrs. Gandhi accused the BJP of fostering "fascism and cultural terrorism," and targeting secular and liberal organisations. Apparently referring to the recent controversy over the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), she said the BJP was trying to rewrite history and spread hatred through textbooks.

Since the rally was billed as an anti-communalism protest, Mrs. Gandhi's silence on Bihar developments was noticeable. Though her party had protesting vehemently against the Bihar Governor's "impropriety" in inviting

the NDA to form the Government despite the Congress (I) informing him of its decision to support the RJD, Mrs. Gandhi did not mention this issue in her speech.

In fact, practically the only person who referred to Bihar was the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, who said the formation of a secular government had been prevented. Besides Mr. Singh, four other Congress (I) Chief Ministers — Mr. S.M. Krishna, Mr. Ashok Gehlot, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh and Mrs. Sheila Dikshit — spoke out against the Gujarat order and the Constitution review.

The rally seemed to have a subtext: reassertion of Mrs. Gandhi's leadership. Several speakers, including the Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra Chief Ministers, exhorted Congress (I) workers to "strengthen Mrs. Gandhi's hands" both in the fight against communalism and in her efforts to revive the party at the grassroots.

The Congress (I)'s poor performance in the recent Assembly elections in four States appears to have been the provocation. Mrs. Gandhi devoted a significant por-



The Congress (I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, waving to the crowds at a rally at the Ramilla grounds in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

government employees and would put an end to impartial administration. She warned that India would not progress if the country fell victim to narrow, communal vision.

Exhorting all those present, especially the youth, to oppose the RSS-BJP with the same spirit that energised the freedom movement, Mrs. Gandhi charged that a product of the RSS's fascist and divisive philosophy had killed Mahatma Gandhi. Through the cracks in the BJP's "mask", one could see the "real face" of the RSS, she said. The Congress (I) would continue to fight against communalism, poverty and unemployment.

tion of her speech to criticising the Union Budget. Giving an indication of the line the Congress (I) would take during the Budget debate, she said its provisions would hurt the poor, the middle classes and farmers. Unemployment would increase and India would become the market for other countries, since 13,000 items had been put on the free import list. They included rice, potatoes, milk, cloth, shoes, jaggery, bajra and dals. This had been done by a party that ostensibly swore by swadeshi, she said.

Mrs. Gandhi strongly opposed the move to review the Constitution and the Gujarat order. The latter was an attempt to "co-opt"

No move to pressure Gujarat govt. to revoke order on RSS

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Despite a palpable uneasiness in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the Keshubhai Patel government's hasty decision withdrawing the ban on its employees' participation in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activity, the party's central leadership has ruled out any move to pressurise the state to rescind the order.

Clearly embarrassed by the Gujarat government's "unwarranted" move which has triggered the Opposition boycott of the Lok Sabha for over a week now, the BJP leadership, however, does not seem willing to ask Mr Patel to review the order which would amount to reimposition of the ban.

"The party central leadership is not contemplating any move to instruct the Mr Patel to withdraw the ban," BJP vice-president Jagdish Mathur told this newspaper on Sunday.

He said home minister L.K. Advani's statement in Parliament that the Centre would not send any directive to the state government had put an end to the issue.

However, as BJP sources indicate, the party's top leadership has not only been annoyed with Mr Patel's decision, it has actually snubbed him in no uncertain terms.

Mr Patel who was scheduled to visit Delhi to participate in a programme earlier this week, was asked by the party leadership to cancel his trip so that his possible remarks to the national media did not exacerbate the issue.

There is a feeling in party circles that Mr Patel has come to represent a new tendency of apparent RSS appeasement as a cover for failings on other fronts. The Vajpayee government had to suffer severe embarrassment over the state's inept handling of the com-

munal situation in Dangs provoking critical publicity in the international media.

Party sources, however, discount any possibility of a change of leadership in Gujarat.

A view has found support in the BJP that instead of telling the state government to review its order, the party should face the situation in Parliament. "Not a single National Democratic Alliance (NDA) constituent will let the government fall on this issue," remarked a party functionary claiming as soon as the Telugu Desam MPs were back from campaigning in municipal polls in Andhra Pradesh, the government would be ready to face voting in the Lok Sabha on this issue.

The NDA partners are meeting on Monday morning to discuss the situation arising out of the continuing stalemate in the House over the RSS issue.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 6 MAR 2000

Samata to take pro-Govt stand on RSS issue

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 5

THE SAMATA Party has come clear that it would vote in support of the government if the contentious question of Gujarat State employees joining the RSS is put to vote in the Lok Sabha. "We will vote against any motion to censure the Government this issue because the Centre has upheld federalism by choosing not to intervene in the matter", party president Jaya Jaitly said today.

"We agree with the Prime Minister that a state subject should not be used to disrupt Parliament proceedings", she said. The Samata Party had earlier walked the tightrope on this question and had disagreed with the BJP's view that the RSS is a cultural organisation.

Ms Jaitly said the government employees ideally should not be part of any non-governmental organisation regardless whether it was involved in culture or politics. But since other states began turning a blind eye to civil servants joining political organisations, the RSS should not be singled out. She singled out the Left parties in this context saying "Why don't people question them?"

The Samata president recalled that prior to the 1999 elections, a number of NGOs had taken out advertisements in newspapers asking people not to vote for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "A uniform yardstick should be used. The opposition parties should not expect us to believe that joining other organisations is all right but not the RSS", she said.

At the NDA meeting convened by the Prime Minister tomorrow to discuss the RSS and budgetary slashes on fertilizer subsidies, the Samata Party is expected to take a pro-government stand. "We think downsizing of subsidies is necessary. The Finance Minister has announced a number of pro-poor policies also", Ms Jaitly said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
- 6 MAR 2000

BJP 'deal': Gujarat Govt may withdraw order on RSS

Anil Anand
New Delhi, March 5

PUSHED TO a corner by the Opposition pressure and silent threats by its own allies, the Bharatiya Janata Party is understood to have worked out a deal with the RSS to bail out the Vajpayee Government on the controversy over the Gujarat Government's order lifting the ban on its employees joining the RSS.

Although Mr Vajpayee has convened a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance tomorrow morning to discuss the issue, the chances of the Gujarat Government withdrawing the order over the next couple of days are rated high by BJP sources.

Significantly, these sources, while seeking to underplay the crucial NDA meeting, said it had nothing to do with the RSS controversy.

"It is a routine floor management exercise undertaken by the ruling alliance during Parliament session,

which has been blown out of proportion," they claimed.

Another senior BJP leader, while confirming that the controversial order would be withdrawn by the State Government, said the NDA meeting would be dominated by budget related issues.

Several of the NDA partners have been exercised over the hike in the prices of urea and foodgrains supplied under the Public Distribution System (PDS). Some of them have publicly demanded a rollback of the price revision.

Ostensibly, the BJP high command, after having sought the RSS top brass's consent, is understood to have broached the issue with Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel.

Convinced that the Congress would not relent on the RSS issue and that some of its own allies were finding it difficult to support the Government on the issue, the BJP initiated the move whereby the Gujarat Government

would take corrective action.

It may be recalled that the Opposition had managed to stall Lok Sabha proceedings for the whole of last week (save for presentation of the Union Budget), demanding that the issue be discussed under Rule 184 which provides for voting.

On its part, the Government has been equally firm on a general discussion under Rule 193 as permitted by Speaker G. M. C. Balayogi.

Towards the end of the week, the Speaker had put the onus on Prime Minister Vajpayee to resolve the imbroglio at the earliest.

At the last meeting of NDA constituents, some of the parties indicated that they might not be able to vote in favour of the Government if the Gujarat issue was discussed under Rule 184.

The parties subscribing to this view include the Telugu Desam Party, Trinamool Congress, National Conference and JD (U).

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 MAR 2000

Gujarat not averse to revoking order if Delhi desires so

By Manas Dasgupta

GANDHINAGAR, MARCH 3. The Gujarat Government is awaiting a clear instruction from New Delhi on its January 3 notification giving permission to its employees to participate in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The stalemate in Parliament, created by the Opposition, and the differences among the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners, have left the Keshubhai Patel Ministry confused.

According to the Minister of State for Home, Mr. Haren Pandya, no instruction or advice has come to the State so far from either the Prime Minister's Office or the Union Home Ministry, to withdraw the controversial notification or at least to reconsider it. The ruling BJP, however, is monitoring the developments in Delhi closely to take necessary steps to clear the mess over the notification.

While maintaining that the notification was "legally sound and justifiable", Mr. Pandya, however, did not rule out its withdrawal by the State — if necessary and if so advised by the Centre. However, on its own, it is not considering any initiative.

The ruling party is worried that the withdrawal of the notification under pressure from the Opposition at the Centre would not only be frowned upon by the RSS — whose support is vital for the BJP's electoral successes — but would also antagonise a large number of people in the State who had favourably

reacted to the decision.

In addition to giving their approval to the notification through ballot boxes in the municipality and two Assembly by-elections, many people have also publicly supported the move. The RSS, at least in Gujarat, is no longer a taboo and the people do not hesitate to come out openly in its favour. The withdrawal of the notification at this stage could disappoint many of its supporters and turn them against the party.

The State BJP, however, is aware of the mess its decision has created for the party's central leadership. This experience has forced the State Government to drop like a hot potato a proposal to grant similar permission to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and a few other organisations. This was under considerations earlier.

Government sources maintained that though the Union Home Ministry was "consulted" on the Central tribunal's remarks on the RSS as a social organisation, it had neither sought the Centre's advice nor discussed the issue with it before issuing the notification. It was not even discussed in the State Cabinet and was issued as a "routine" matter.

Even the State Congress(I) failed to realise its implications initially and its first protest came more than a fortnight later. Except for a public meeting addressed by the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, on the Gandhi Nirvana Day on January 30, and an attempted gherao of the Assembly on the opening day of the budget session on

February 21, the State Congress(I) has not organised any other demonstration to oppose the notification publicly.

Even its protest in the Assembly was rather feeble and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Amarsinh Chaudhary, had to tender an apology in the House for allegedly insulting the Governor on the RSS issue. The party's organisational wing was sour over the way the legislators made peace with the ruling party, but the elected members have a different opinion about the ground realities in the State and feel that a persistent anti-RSS stand may harm the party more than do it good.

RSS issue stalls L.S. proceedings

PTI reports from New Delhi:

Proceedings in the Lok Sabha were thrown out of gear on the controversial RSS issue for the seventh consecutive day today with members from the Opposition and treasury benches getting involved in a heated verbal duel.

Agitated Opposition members twice stormed the well of the House reiterating their demand for a discussion on the Gujarat Government's order lifting a ban on its employees on joining the RSS under a motion which would censure the Vajpayee Government.

In the midst of the pandemonium, the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, adjourned the House till 3.20 p.m.

Editorial on Page 10

POLITICS OF CONFUSION

The home minister, Mr L.K. Advani, may have given wits like Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar a very good handle by announcing that all his plus points are from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. His opponents might point out that he has no plus points and therefore the RSS has nothing to recommend it. The point, however, is a little more serious. It relates to the entire controversy over the Gujarat government's decision to lift the ban on government servants from joining the RSS. Those opposed to the RSS argue that it is nothing more than a political organization and therefore its doors should be closed to government employees. But the *sangh parivar* does not see the RSS as a political organization but as a cultural one. There is something more here than a debate regarding the character of the RSS or about the intersections between culture and politics. The entire episode is a very good example of the doublespeak that afflicts Indian public life. Those attacking Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee in the Lok Sabha and disrupting proceedings in Parliament cannot by any means be unaware that in other parts of India government employees remain members of political organizations or of fora which are no more than front organizations of political parties. There cannot be two laws on the same issue in India.

In West Bengal, the entire lower rung of the bureaucracy owes allegiance to a forum calling itself the State Co-ordination Committee of West Bengal Government Employees' Associations. It is no secret that this body is controlled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). *Babus* who belong to the co-ordination committee stop work, demonstrate, go slow and so forth at the behest of the CPI(M). The committee also acts as a pressure group on the government since it forms a cadre base and a vote bank. Similarly, teachers in government schools and colleges in West Bengal belong to various associations which are

fronts of the CPI(M). Leaders of these associations do more political work than their assigned duties as government servants. Nobody has ever raised any questions about this state of things in West Bengal, not even the Congress whose members are the most vocal in the Lok Sabha about the RSS in Gujarat. This blindness is rooted in a mindset which sees the RSS as a big bogey. There is no doubt that the RSS peddles a most pernicious version of Indian history on the basis of which it propagates an anti-Muslim ideology. Its vision of India runs contrary to what the Constitution seeks to uphold. It has also been involved in inciting violence. Many of these charges

The debate over government servants joining the RSS in Gujarat ignores conditions existing in states like West Bengal. There is a need for a uniform guideline on the matter

can also be levelled at the CPI(M) which still believes in revolution. This means that the CPI(M), at least in its party programme and rhetoric, is committed to overturning the existing Constitution. It has also been implicated in the spreading of hatred and violence. This is not to equate the RSS and the CPI(M), but merely to show how different yardsticks are applied to the two of them even

though both are devoted to fashioning an India which would be economically, socially, politically and culturally different from the one that exists today.

There is an urgent need to clarify the confusion that prevails. There should be one rule for all government servants joining political organizations. The difficulty here would be defining the term "political". There is hardly any sphere which is not in one way or the other touched by politics. Even organizations involved in matters pertaining to environment have to engage in political activity to push through their aims. The issues are by no means simple. They need to be discussed and guidelines formulated. Otherwise the shadow of a bogey will continue to disrupt the proceedings of Parliament and stall decisions on matters of vital importance. There are no grounds for holding that membership of a *shakha* is a sin and holding a card of a party cell is not. Both are equally political.

OPPOSITION UNRELENTING; L.S. BUSINESS HANGS FIRE

Gujarat Govt. did not violate any law: Advani

40-1
3/3
From Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, told the Rajya Sabha today that the Gujarat Government had not violated any law or rule by allowing its employees to participate in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and that the Centre had no jurisdiction to issue any directive seeking withdrawal of the controversial circular even as the entire Opposition walked out in protest.

g - Release of India
He was replying to an acrimonious short-duration discussion in the House which took almost three full days. Mr. Advani's curt but polite message that the Centre would not advise the Gujarat Government came after a passionate plea by the Leader of the Opposition,

Dr. Manmohan Singh, to prevail upon the State to withdraw the circular and end the controversy. Mr. Advani pointed out that the Janata Party leaders ended up undermining their own interests by raking up the dual membership issue in 1979 and accused the Opposition of raising the RSS issue to drive a wedge between the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance partners.

The Minister agreed with the views expressed by the Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, that the RSS was a "reservoir of good character and patriotism" and said all the plus points in him could be attributed to his association with RSS since the age of 14. At another point, he said: "I see no reason why anyone should complain against the RSS. This needless maligning of the RSS day in and day out is

not good." Mr. Advani charged the Opposition with raising the RSS issue only to weaken the Central and the Gujarat Governments and not to advance of the cause of secularism. Turning to the NDA members, the Minister asserted that the Opposition would not succeed in its game plan.

However, Mr. Advani hastened to add that the Centre in its approach to governance would entirely be guided by the Common Minimum Programme and ideological issues would be kept aside. The Centre had no plans to lift the ban on its employees associating with RSS activities. The BJP had reached its present position not by manipulation but by earnest appeal to people and parties who are ideologically different. He said that barring the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal, no other party was willing to touch the BJP with a bargepole in 1996 when it emerged as the single-largest party in the Lok Sabha. The remarkable leadership of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, has changed it all.

Mr. Advani was at pains to emphasise that the Gujarat Government neither consulted nor sought the Centre's approval before issuing the RSS circular. "We have certainly not given any direction. At the same time, we have certainly not advised them against such a move." He said that There was a difference between a political party and an organisation which holds political views and the RSS was certainly not a political party. when the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, had referred the representations he had received from various quarters against the Gujarat Government order, the Centre got the issue examined and found that the State Government has not violated any law or rule.

In the Lok Sabha, it was yet another day of disruption with the Opposition showing no sign of relenting on its demand for a vote on the issue. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan's statement that the Centre had no role in the Gujarat Government's decision did not impress the Opposition. It contended that the Centre could not run away from its responsibility,

The House met briefly in the morning but with the Opposition in no mood to let it function, a visibly annoyed Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, adjourned it till 2 p.m. A replay when the House resumed forced Mr. Basudeb Acharya, who was then in the Chair, to adjourn it again — this time for the day.

The Opposition case, argued mainly by the Congress(I)'s Mr. Madhavrao Scindia and the CPI(M)'s Mr. Rup Chand Pal, was that the Opposition had cooperated with the Government in helping it present the Railway Budget and the Union Budget and the Speaker should now take into account their sentiments on this "very sensitive and fundamental issue".

Ex-PMs plea to Vajpayee: Page 13

THE HINDU

- 3 MAR 2000

Advani rejects oppn. demand on RSS issue

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Home minister L.K. Advani on Thursday rejected the opposition's demand to issue a constitutional direction to the Gujarat government to withdraw the controversial circular on RSS, saying it was up to the state government to withdraw it.

"The circular allowing state employees to participate in the RSS' activities was the Gujarat government's and we have no constitutional authority to ask it to withdraw it," he told the Rajya Sabha. Remarking that the tirade against the RSS was politically motivated and aimed at destabilising the NDA government, he said the strategy would fail.

Mr Advani's reply to the three-day acrimonious debate on the issue was marred by a noisy walk-out by the entire opposition led by Congress leader Manmohan Singh midway through his speech. A lone National Conference (NC) member Sharief-ud-Din Shariq too walked out, supporting the opposition demand. The NC incidentally is part of the NDA. Two other allies of the BJP, the DMK and the TDP, who had also opposed the circular, however, did not join the walkout.

Mr Advani charged the opposition with making the RSS a scapegoat in its political conspiracy born out of desperation and frustration at having being rejected by the electorate. He added that by maligning an outfit of the Sangh Parivar the opposition was trying to drive a wedge between the alliance partners. "We have united not through manipulations but on the basis of a commonly agreed programme and have been able to give a good government," he said.

Clarifying that the decision was that of the Gujarat government, he said the Centre was neither consulted nor had given any instruction to the Gujarat government on the issue. Describing the RSS as a reservoir of good character, he said, "I have been a member of the RSS since the age of 14 and all the good qualities or plus points people say are in me are due to what I have learnt from the RSS and my parents."

Meanwhile, concerned over the week-long government-opposi-

tion standoff in the Lok Sabha on the issue, speaker G.M.C. Balayogi on Thursday asked Prime Minister Vajpayee to take the initiative to break the deadlock.

As the Lok Sabha lay disrupted for the sixth straight day over the opposition's demand for a discussion that would allow voting on the issue, the speaker took the unusual step of calling the Prime Minister to his chamber to discuss ways to end the impasse. Parliament sources said Mr Balayogi had impressed upon the Prime Minister that as the leader of the House, he must take the initiative to resolve the crisis.

During the 20-minute meeting, Mr Balayogi is also understood to have stated that the demand to convert the discussion under rule 193 to rule 184 was in the hands of the House and as leader of the largest party the PM should discuss it with the opposition.

Declining to give details of the meeting between Mr Vajpayee and Mr Balayogi, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said it was only a courtesy call. According to NDA sources, the government is in favour of a simple discussion on the RSS issue under rule 193, maintaining the matter did not concern the Centre.

At Bhopal, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi described as "a beginning of big danger" the Gujarat government's decision on the issue. Without naming the RSS, Ms Gandhi charged it with "division of the country and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi". "There will be no compromise with such forces," she said, adding that a nation-wide struggle had been launched against divisive forces and organisations.

"If a government employee becomes part of party politics, he will not be able to do justice to all. It is everybody's responsibility to maintain the tradition of our composite culture and brotherhood," the Congress president said.

At Jammu on Thursday, amid vociferous opposition from the BJP members, the state assembly, passed a private member's resolution that the Centre be "approached" to persuade the Gujarat government to change its decision on the RSS issue.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA
- 3 MAR 2000

RSS issue continues to haunt Parliament

HO-1
By Our Special Correspondent 2/3

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. For the fifth consecutive day, question hour was disrupted in the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day before scheduled time as the differences between the Opposition and the Government over the Gujarat Government order allowing its employees to join the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh continued unresolved.

While no official business could be transacted in the Lok Sabha, as the Opposition insisted on a discussion on the subject under Rule 184 (which would require voting at the end of discussion), the Rajya Sabha had to be adjourned abruptly amid heated exchanges between Opposition and BJP members on certain remarks made by Mr. Kapil Sibal (Congress-I) on the views of the RSS ideologue, M.S. Golwalkar, on the freedom movement and freedom-fighters.

The resumed short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the move of the Gujarat Government generated a great deal of heat right from the word go. The Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, who could not complete his intervention in his capacity as a member of the House on Monday, once again ended up provoking the Opposition with some of his observations on the RSS.

So agitated were the Opposition members over the Minister's observations that they demanded that the Deputy Chairperson, Ms. Najma Heptullah, adjourn the House to verify the records. However, the Opposition members faced embarrassing moments when Ms. Heptullah returned to the House after a 15-minute adjournment to report that the Minister had not made the alleged remarks.

The Opposition members, led by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee (Congress-I) and Mr. Gurudas Das Gupta (CPI), accused Mr. Jethmalani, saying that those who consented to the partition of India had killed Mahatma Gandhi and maintained that it amounted to an insinuation against leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and others.

Trouble erupted once again as Mr. Kapil Sibal

(Congress-I) began reading from a book quoting a biography of Golwalkar with the BJP members questioning the authenticity of the book. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, rose twice to assert that the RSS has not published any such literature and that the member was quoting from a Communist publication. With Mr. Sibal sticking to his contention and the BJP seeking an apology from him, Ms. Heptullah adjourned the House for the day.

Turmoil in Lok Sabha

The Lok Sabha remained deadlocked over the form in which the issue should be discussed. The House adjourned without doing any work after Opposition members repeatedly collected in the "well" and raised slogans. With question hour derailed for the fifth consecutive day, the treasury benches charged that the Opposition was holding the House to ransom.

The House was plunged into turmoil immediately after it assembled in the morning with the Opposition members wanting to know from the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, if he had taken a decision on their demand. Even as the Speaker appealed for restraint and suggested that they should not obstruct question hour, an agitated Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, protested the Opposition's conduct.

The Congress(I) deputy leader, Mr. Madhav Rao Scindia, pointed out that the Opposition had cooperated with the Government during the presentation of the Railway Budget and the Union Budget and it expected "some reciprocity". Other Opposition members also made the same point, and as the din continued, the Speaker adjourned the House until 2 p.m.

When it resumed, the RJD's Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh was in the chair and he had a difficult time controlling the members who trooped into the well and chanted: "We want 184, we want 184". After managing to get the papers tabled, he adjourned the House for the day.

THE HINDU

- 2 MAR 2000

Allies not to back BJP on Gujarat order

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. The allies in the National Democratic Alliance and the supporting parties today virtually rejected a suggestion by the Bharatiya Janata Party that they give a firm commitment on voting with the Government on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh issue in the Lok Sabha, if the need arose.

In fact, one ally went so far as to suggest that the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister use their good offices with the Gujarat Government to get the controversial order on the RSS rescinded to knock the bottom out of the controversy.

At a 45-minute meeting of the NDA and its supporting parties here this morning, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, directly put the question: would the allies be prepared to bale out the Government if the matter was discussed in the Lok Sabha under a rule which allowed voting on the motion at the end of the debate?

The answer from the allies was

that the Government should insist on a debate under a different rule and not allow voting to take place, and the lead was reportedly taken by Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, Leader of the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party.

Clearly, the hint was that it might become difficult for them to vote with the Government after the public stand taken by them against the Gujarat order.

Besides the Telugu Desam Party, this was the stand of the Indian National Lok Dal and the other allies. And Mr. Vaiko, MDMK leader, went a step further by asking why the BJP leaders could not use their good offices to get the Gujarat Government take back its controversial order.

Against this background it does not seem likely that the stalemate between the Opposition and the treasury benches on the RSS issue will end quickly. The Government has its compulsions and will continue to insist that the matter be debated but not voted upon.

In any case, as the treasury benches pointed out, the discussion had already begun in the Lok

Sabha on a notice given by BJP MP, Mr. Kirit Somaiya.

A senior BJP leader, who had attended the NDA meeting today, was frank enough to say that "apart from the Shiv Sena, none of the other allies have given a 100 per cent commitment on voting against an Opposition-sponsored motion related to the RSS issue." He said "there is also the political compulsion for the BJP since the large majority of our MPs are from the RSS."

There are senior Government leaders who argue that the tug-of-war between the Opposition and the treasury benches is unnecessarily leading to a situation in which the Government could be in danger.

"In politics, one thing leads to another, and even if nobody wants the Government itself to go, the logic of the situation sometimes takes over. Naturally, we want to avoid such a situation."

Finally, yet another argument extended by the treasury benches is that it is for the Speaker to decide, and the Opposition should not defy his ruling.

11 Deadlock on RSS 13

EVEN IF the stalling of the parliamentary proceedings almost every day on the RSS issue is unfortunate, there is little doubt that the Opposition's insistence on a debate under Rule 184 which permits voting cannot be dismissed out of hand. The Opposition's, and especially the Congress party's, hope is that the voting will expose the divisions in the ranks of the ruling coalition since it will be embarrassing for parties like the DMK, TDP, the Akalis or the Trinamul Congress to support the Gujarat Government's move to allow State employees become members of the RSS. Even if these allies of the BJP abstain from voting, the so-called secularists will be able to score a political point. It is an opportunity no rival of the BJP can be expected to miss. To avoid this outcome, the BJP is equally keen to avoid voting. It has no objection to a debate, of course. After all, Parliament is the right forum for a consideration of the controversial move by the Keshubhai Patel administration. But the BJP is obviously nervous about the dissenting opinions that are bound to be expressed by the allies during the debate being reflected in a vote.

What is more, since the combined strength of the Opposition and the dissenters is considerable, a vote against the move in Gujarat has the potential of causing acute discomfiture to the Vajpayee Government. It was up to the Speaker, therefore, to find a way out of the impasse, but so far he has not proved to be particularly successful either in controlling the House or persuading the two sides to reach an agreement. Yet, it should have been obvious both to him and to the Government that the issue will be a foremost one in the current session, not least because it fuels the fears of the Hindutva camp taking another step in the direction of achieving its supposedly hidden agenda. For the Opposition, a controversy of this nature is even more handy to put the Government under pressure than such contentious matters as the red-saffron debate on historical documents and the difficulties faced by the maker of the film, *Water*. As such, G. M. C. Balayogi should have had some kind of a gameplan ready to deal with the situation. Instead, he seems to be a helpless spectator of the daily disruptions, routinely appealing for calm and adjourning the House when he finds that no business can be transacted. But the repeated postponements are not enhancing his reputation for effectiveness. And, if the Opposition's complaints are to be believed, he is not exactly enhancing his reputation for impartiality.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 MAR 2000

Cong bent on Rule 184 to test BJP allies

RSS issue threat to PM's chair

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 1. — The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance is determined to block the Congress gameplan of bringing the RSS issue under Rule 184 and force a vote in Lok Sabha as there is a "possibility" of the Prime Minister resigning if the government loses the motion. *9 parliament*

The motion censures the government for having failed to "discharge constitutional responsibilities" by failing to prevail upon the Gujarat government to continue with the ban on government employees from joining RSS activities.

The BJP is caught on the wrong foot as by the wording of the motion placed by the Congress, most NDA partners are not too sure what their final stand on the subject would be. The Telugu Desam Party is learnt to have refused to make a firm commitment to the government till the municipal polls in Andhra Pradesh — due on 9 March — are over.

Sources in the BJP said it is being apprehended that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee "is likely to resign if the government loses the motion and the message has been conveyed both to the allies and the Opposition", though he is not legally bound to do so even if he loses a motion under Rule 184.

It is also learnt that despite the government vehemently

opposing the move to bring the issue under Rule 184, it has not closed the option since the House was being unable to function owing to the Opposition's move to block proceedings over the issue.

The NDA is now trying to persuade the Congress and the rest of the Opposition to change the language of the motion. A senior BJP minister disclosed that feelers had been sent to the Congress to soften such tough words as "failure" to "discharge constitutional obligations" to something like "expressing concern or regret", which could avoid the complications over the issue. "Failing to discharge constitutional responsibility would be like a death knell," a BJP minister said. "Change of language would make the motion under Rule 184 somewhat similar to Rule 193, under which discussion is already on in Lok Sabha."

The Congress has not yet given any positive signal to the government. Party sources said it would prefer to keep the government on tenterhooks till the proposed 6 March rally at Ramlila grounds to protest against the Gujarat government order lifting the RSS ban on government employees.

After a discussion under Rule 184, the motion is put to vote, while a discussion under Rule 193 is not tested through voting. The Congress is insisting on discussion under Rule 184. "Let the nation clearly know where the allies like Trinamul

Congress and the TDP, who claim to be secular, stand on the RSS issue and whether they support the Gujarat government order or not," said Congress Chief Whip in Lok Sabha, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

A TDP leader told The Statesman that the party was sticking to the BJP "under compulsion". He said: "We are with the BJP for our anti-Congress stance, but we cannot support the government on the RSS issue. Hence a discussion under 193 would best suit us."

On what the party's stand would be if the motion was put to vote under Rule 184 and if BJP's defeat might threaten the government's survival, the deputy-leader of the TDP in Rajya Sabha, Mr S Rama Chandra Reddy, said: "In that case we have to consult our leader, Mr Chandrababu Naidu. He will have to take the decision."

Sources said even though the Janata Dal-U top brass assured the BJP that it might support the government if the motion was put to vote, other party leaders are against the decision.

DMK and Trinamul also want discussions under 193. Trinamul leader Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyaya and TDP leader Mr Yerranaidu said they were supporting the government's move for discussions under Rule 193.

■ RS heat over Gandhi, Sangh: page 6

THE STATESMAN

- 2 MAR 2000

Reconsider RSS issue, oppn. requests speaker

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The opposition is hopeful that speaker G.M.C. Balayogi may finally concede to their demand for a discussion on the RSS issue under Rule 184 which allows for voting.

Opposition sources say this follows a discussion within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in which it was agreed that those parties opposed to the Gujarat government order allowing government servants to join the RSS, were free to say so, but that they would vote with the government against the motion.

On Tuesday, opposition leaders — including those from Congress, the Left Parties, RJD, and SP — met the speaker and urged him once again to reconsider their request for a discussion on the RSS issue in the presence of parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan.

The Congress pointed out that during P.V. Narasimha Rao's premiership, as many as four adjournment motions — including ones on Charar-e-Sharif and violence in Assam — were admitted. This meeting followed the successful stalling of business in the Lok Sabha by the opposition leading to the House being

adjourned twice. On the second occasion, the House was adjourned till 2 p.m., when the Union budget was presented.

As soon as the House met Tuesday morning, the opposition said it would cooperate with the chair if he gave a specific date for the discussion under Rule 184, instead of Rule 193, allowed by him earlier. The speaker repeatedly appealed to the MPs to cooperate as the matter had not been listed for Tuesday due to the presentation of the general budget, but to no avail. Failing to restore order even 15 minutes after assembling, Mr Balayogi adjourned the house till noon.

The speaker pointed out that Question Hour had not been taken up for three days and normal business should be permitted. He said he had a "good meeting" with leaders of the opposition on Monday, and was already considering the issue. "I am looking into it," he said.

CPM's Somnath Chatterjee and Rupchand Pal, Congress' Priyaranjan Das Munshi and Rajesh Pilot, Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav, and RJD's Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, all stressed that the RSS issue affected the entire country.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

= 1 MAR 2000

Gujarat RSS issue rocks Parliament

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P...
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 28. — The Opposition today stalled the proceedings of the Lok Sabha on the RSS issue, demanding that a censure motion be admitted against the Centre.

The Speaker admitted a short duration discussion under Rule 193, but the Opposition members stalled the proceedings demanding that the matter be taken up under Rule 184, which leads to a voting.

The Opposition was adamant in disturbing the session tomorrow too. However, at a meeting of senior leaders of the Lok Sabha in the Speaker's chamber, the Congress leadership got the impression that Mr GMC Balayogi might admit a motion under Rule 184 tomorrow.

Trouble began since question hour when the Speaker announced that he was admitting motions under Rule 193 from Mrs Gita Mukherjee (CPI) and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party).

The Congress, which gave a fresh notice for discussion under Rule 184 protested, resulting in suspension of question hour. Within 15 minutes, the Speaker had to adjourn the House as 87 members rushed to the Well. The

■ See RSS page 7

RSS:

(Continued from page 1)

finance minister did not get a chance to place the Economic Survey.

The House reassembled at 2 p.m. but the Opposition forced yet another adjournment, though this time Mr Sinha managed to table the Survey.

When the Lok Sabha reassembled at 4 p.m., Mrs Mukherjee and Mr Yadav withdrew their notices under Rule 193 and asked the Speaker to give a ruling on the other notices under Rule 184. When Mr Balayogi allowed Mr Kirit Somayya (BJP) to initiate discussion on Rule 193, trouble broke out. Opposition members rushed to the Well of the House and forced Lok Sabha to be adjourned for the day.

In Rajya Sabha, during a discussion on the issue, Mr Ram Jethmalani indicated that the Centre was unlikely to intervene in the RSS controversy, thereby virtually rejecting the Opposition demand for such action.

The law minister also suggested that New Delhi found little fault with what the state government had done, and only the compulsions of running a coalition government prevented it from lifting the ban for Central government workers.

Mr Jethmalani's intervention in the inconclusive debate did not appear to be completed when the House rose for the day. Earlier, the Opposition closed ranks to decry the Gujarat order and pressed the BJP's coalition partners to apply requisite pressure.

THE STATESMAN
29 FEB 2000

JETHMALANI DEFENDS GUJARAT ORDER ON RSS

Opposition determined on 'censure' of Govt.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 26. The Lok Sabha was disrupted again today with the Opposition insisting on "censuring" the Vajpayee Government over the RSS issue, even as the Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, defended in the Rajya Sabha the Gujarat Government's decision to allow its staff to join the RSS.

After two days of disruption and furor over the wording of a motion to discuss the issue, the Rajya Sabha settled for a short discussion on the Centre's failure to persuade the Gujarat Government to withdraw the circular regarding Government employees joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Though the Opposition in the Upper House agreed to drop the words in the motion that the RSS' basic philosophy ran counter to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, the discussion witnessed heated exchanges with the BJP staunchly defending the Gujarat circular and the Opposition attacking it as an act of a much larger design.

Mr. Jethmalani who defended the Gujarat decision while participating in his capacity as a member of the House had to end his speech amidst protests from Opposition benches to his remarks on the origins of RSS as a response to the failure of the Khilafat movement of Mahatma Gandhi.

In the Lok Sabha, the bone of contention was the rule under which a discussion on the issue should be held. The Government's decision to discuss it under Rule 193, which does not involve voting, provoked angry protests with the Opposition arguing that it was too serious an issue to be simply "talked out".

Senior Opposition leaders contended that they wanted to "censure" the Vajpayee Government for its "failure" to intervene in Gujarat and since a discussion under Rule 193 did not convey fully the significance of the issue they preferred a debate under Rule 184 which entailed voting.

The CPI's Mrs. Geeta Mukherjee, in whose name the discussion was listed, said her party had indeed given notice under Rule 193 but this was before the Opposition unitedly decided to press for a vote. The CPI supported the demand for discussion under Rule 184 and was withdrawing her earlier notice, she said.

A point repeatedly made by the Opposition was that since the Speaker had already allowed an adjournment motion he should at least agree to discuss it under Rule 184. "You have taken the softest possible opinion", complained the Congress(I) leader, Mr. Kamal Nath, pointing out it concerned the entire House.

The Congress(I)'s Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, said the decision to have a discussion under Rule 193 was taken without "consulting us" and urged the Speaker to reconsider it. It was a "matter of regret" that a decision was taken without taking the Opposition into confidence. The Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, supported the Congress(I) stand, saying nothing short of a discussion under Rule 184 would be acceptable to his party.

The trouble began as soon as the House met in the morning with the CPI(M) demanding a debate on its adjournment motion after suspending question hour. The party leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, asked the Government

not to treat it as a "routine matter" as the "integrity" of the country was involved. He wondered why the Government was running away from an adjournment motion when it had a majority.

Meanwhile, some members trooped into the "well" and as noisy scenes prevailed the Speaker adjourned the House until 2 p.m. The turmoil continued when the House re-assembled, with the CPI(M)'s Mr. Basudeb Acharya in the Chair, and it was adjourned again after tabling of papers. There was more commotion when the House resumed at 4 p.m. forcing the Speaker to adjourn it for the day.

In the Rajya Sabha, Mr. Jethmalani sought to make out that the Gujarat Government's decision was accepted by a large section of State's people and said the Centre could not follow the example of the State as it was a coalition government. "Lifting the ban on government employees to take part in RSS activities is not a decision of the NDA Government. The coalition government at the Centre will hold its horses till all partners agree".

Mrs. Jayanti Natarajan quoted extensively from the RSS constitution and the oath administered to its members to prove her contention that the ideology and philosophy of the organisation ran contrary to the letter and spirit of the Constitution. The clout enjoyed by the RSS in the BJP Government could be gauged from the fact that it brought out a special supplement commending the Pokhran nuclear tests simultaneously with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's announcement to the rest of the world.

Govt. unrelenting. Page 13

THE HINDU
29 FEB 2000

Govt ignores US report on religious freedom in India

State Department report had criticised 'societal violence'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 28

INDIA TODAY brushed aside the US State Department report on its human rights record asserting that it took no cognisance of it.

The 1999 Report on Human Rights Practices has quite a few harsh words about India.

Attacking the country for its "societal violence", it says, "The Indian Government policy does not favour any religious group but tension between the Muslims and Hindus and, to a lesser extent between the Hindus and Christians, continues to pose a challenge to the secular foundations of the state."

"Governments at the state and local levels too only partially respect religious freedom," the indictment reads.

Reacting strongly to media reports quoting the report, the official spokesman for the External Affairs Ministry said, "We take no cognisance of the report. It is an internal exercise of the US Government, prepared by the State Department and meant for the US Congress. They didn't con-

sult us (while preparing the report). We don't respond to it."

Apparently peeved by the harshness of the report, he said, "We don't need to reiterate time and again our well-known position (on religious freedom and human rights).

"The Constitution guarantees human rights; These rights are guaranteed and justiciable accord-

sations involved in violence against minority communities.

The report also mentions Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti as a "new Hindu militant group" in this context.

To the Government's chagrin, the report says that the potential for renewed Hindu-Muslim violence remains "considerable" as Hindu "extremist" groups continue to attack Christians.

Last September, New Delhi reacted equally sharply to indications that US Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom Robert Siple could visit India in the wake of the publication of a report on religious freedom in India and other countries.

"The Government and people of India," the External Affairs Ministry said at the time, "reject any intrusive exercise into how we conduct our affairs. Those who concern themselves with monitoring religious freedom would be well-advised to focus their efforts on countries which remain under the pall of bigotry and intolerance, where religious minorities are discriminated against by law and their freedoms progressively curtailed."

Reacting strongly to media reports quoting the report, the official spokesman for the External Affairs Ministry said, "We take no cognisance of the report. It is an internal exercise of the US Government, prepared by the State Department and meant for the US Congress. They didn't consult us (while preparing the report). We don't respond to it."

ing to the law of the land and protected by the judiciary. We have a strong framework for a secular and democratic polity."

What has apparently riled the Government is the identification of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main ruling party, and its associates Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Hindu Jagran Manch, Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad as organi-

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
29 FEB 2000

RSS issue rocks Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 24. Amid signs of mounting confrontation with the Vajpayee Government over what was termed as the "RSS-isation" of administration, an aggressive Opposition today disrupted Parliament demanding the reversal of the Gujarat Government's decision to allow its staff to join the RSS. There were angry scenes in both Houses as the Opposition refused to cooperate with the treasury benches unless a Congress(I)-sponsored adjournment motion on the controversy was taken up, setting aside other business.

Later, Opposition representatives, led by the Congress(I) deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, walked out of a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee protesting the "lack of response" from the Government. At a separate meeting with the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, reportedly expressed her party's unhappiness over the Government's attitude. She felt that the Opposition should have been given a chance to put across its viewpoint.

Even as tempers ran high with the Congress (I) declaring that it meant business, Government sources were optimistic that the deadlock would be resolved.

The "action" began as soon as the two Houses assembled in the morning with the Congress(I) members demanding suspension of question hour to discuss the adjournment motion. In the Lok Sabha, the demand first made by Ms. Sonia Gandhi was supported by

the entire Opposition. The Speaker told them that he had disallowed the motion but they could raise the issue after question hour. Enraged, several members belonging to the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party rushed to the well of the House and raised anti-RSS slogans. As the din continued, the Speaker adjourned the House until 2 p.m.

When it resumed, there was a re-enactment of the morning scenes, but the Speaker managed to rush through the tabling of papers, including the Subramanyam Committee's report on Kargil. With the Opposition in no

Leaders to meet Speaker

NEW DELHI, FEB. 24. The leaders of all major political parties are to meet the Lok Sabha Speaker tomorrow morning to discuss the conduct of business in the current session of Parliament.

mood to relent, he adjourned the House for the day.

Trouble in the Rajya Sabha began as soon as the members assembled in the morning, first leading to adjournment till lunch and again for the rest of the day over the admissibility of a motion for a short-duration discussion.

Immediately after the House proceedings started, the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was on his feet seeking the suspension of question hour to debate the failure of the Union Government to prevail upon the Gujarat Government to withdraw its

controversial order. The Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, made a plea in vain to allow the House to continue with the customary question hour. However, the Opposition members argued that the issue they have raised was very serious with repercussions on the upholding of the Constitution and the rule of law.

The External Affairs Minister and the Leader of the House, Mr. Jaswant Singh, sought to make light of the issue saying that it was a feeble attempt by the Opposition to cover up for its imminent defeat in the Assembly elections to the four States where results are expected tomorrow.

Countering the Minister's statement, Mr. Gurudas Das Gupta (CPI) said the Gujarat Government's decision was not an election issue and there have been instances of parties with bigger majorities losing Assembly elections. As the wrangling continued, the Chairman adjourned the House till lunch.

It was action replay in the post-lunch session. The only difference was that the Opposition was insisting on an immediate ruling on their motion for a short-duration discussion on the subject.

They refused to participate in the proceedings of the House pending a ruling on the admissibility of the motion.

The Government and the Opposition were divided on the wording of the motion. It said the basic philosophy of the RSS "runs counter to the letter and spirit of the Indian Constitution". The Deputy Chairman, Ms. Najma Heptulla, adjourned the House till tomorrow morning.

Cong.(I) plans dharna, rally against Gujarat order

10.1 24/2 9. Release of Perin

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. The Congress(I) Parliamentary Party is planning to stage a symbolic dharna inside the Parliament House complex tomorrow morning, against the Gujarat Government order, lifting the ban on Government employees from participating in the RSS activities.

The Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, is scheduled to address a general body meeting of the Congress(I) MPs in the Central Hall; she is likely to spell out the Congress(I) preferences on many issues before Parliament. After the meeting, the MPs are likely to engage in the protest. The matter of the Gujarat order is also likely to be raised in the two Houses.

Outside Parliament, the Congress(I) is planning a massive rally on March 6 at the Ram Lila ground here. Similar protests would also be staged in various parts of the country, according to the party spokesperson, Mr. Ajit Jogi. According to Mr. Jogi, the protests would continue till the controversial Gujarat order was

withdrawn. The script for the rally was given final touches at a meeting of the senior leaders, which was attended among others by many members of the Congress(I) Working Committee, leaders of the Congress Legislature Parties, Chief Ministers and Pradesh presidents.

Though there was considerable speculation that the meeting would be used by the "loyalists" to express their faith in Ms. Sonia Gandhi's leadership, as it turned out it was used by senior leaders to praise Ms. Gandhi's perspicacity in taking up in a big way the RSS issue.

The ball was set rolling by the former president, Mr. Sitaram Kesri, said he was happy that the party was at last thinking about the menace posed by the RSS.

Another senior leader, Mr. Arjun Singh, expressed his gratitude that Ms. Sonia Gandhi had awakened the Congress activists on the crucial issue of the RSS and its dangers to country's secular fabric.

Both Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Natwar Singh thought that the Gujarat order was an "in-

tellectual challenge" and that the Congress(I) ought to mobilise public opinion. "It will simply not do," Mr. Mukherjee reportedly asserted.

Ms. Sheila Dixit made the useful suggestion that there should be a separate enclosure for women at the March 6 rally. Expectations are that neighboring States like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi would contribute the maximum number of participants to the rally. At least the AICC establishment hopes that the March 6 rally would be a more impressive show than the wash-out of January 30 in Ahmedabad.

UNI reports:

Adjournment motion

The Congress(I) today served a notice on the Speaker's office to move an adjournment motion against the Gujarat Government order enabling its employees to join the RSS. A notice on behalf of the Congress(I) was served by its deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, and the chief whip, Mr. Priya Ranjan Das-munshi.

THE HINDU

24 FEB 2000

HD-1
20/2

PM writes to President on RSS membership issue

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, FEB. 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is understood to have replied to the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan in response to a Rashtrapati Bhavan query on allowing the Government employees to participate in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh.

The Prime Minister is said to have reassured the President that the Union Government had no intention of lifting the ban on the Central Government employees on joining the "socio-cultural organisation", but at the same time Mr. Vajpayee is understood to have cited "constitutional" difficulties in asking the Gujarat Government to reconsider its decision to let its employees, if they so desire, join the controversial organisation.

A "clarification" had been sought early this month by the President, after the Congress(I) and other political parties registered their protest with him over the Gujarat Government's decision. There were open hints by the BJP Chief Ministers in Himachal

Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh that they too might follow the Gujarat example; and, the icing for the "hidden agenda" cake was provided by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, who openly suggested that the Central Government employees need not be deprived of the beneficial blessings of participation in the RSS activities. All these statements — calculated trail-balloons — made the Opposition as well as the BJP allies see as the unraveling of the "hidden agenda".

Though from the very beginning sources in the Rashtrapati Bhavan were keen to downplay the "controversy", the President's communication was seen — by the Government's partisans — as yet another case of what they disapproving call the Rashtrapati Bhavan pro-activism. In fact, the BJP, its official organs and its drum-beaters in the media have been waging an open propaganda war against the President, especially after his warning against tinkering with the Constitution.

Mr. Vajpayee has now sought to repair the relationship with Rashtrapati Bhavan. As a matter of fact,

the Prime Minister has already made a public announcement of his government's intention not to lift the ban on Central Government employees; in a rather deft move, he had prevailed upon the RSS chief, Mr. Rajinder Singh, to state that his organisation had never even asked that the ban be lifted.

In his communication to Mr. Narayanan, the Prime Minister has de-linked himself and his Government from Gujarat, invoking the much-convenient constitutional space available to a Chief Minister. The argument, more or less, is that it was a Gujarat Government order in the first place that put the RSS on the list of prohibited organisation, another Gujarat government has undone that classification; the Central Government, was neither involved in the first place nor is concerned now.

Digvijay puts the brakes on Bajrang Dal convention

Dal leaders manage to hoist flag; Uma Bharati, Giriraj Kishore held

By Sudhir K. Singh
The Times of India News Service

BHOPAL: Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh scored a major political victory over the Sangh Parivar by preventing the Bajrang Dal from beginning its three-day national convention here on Friday.

The Bajrang Dal's threat of doing an Ayodhya thus turned out to be a damp squib. Key parivar leaders, including BJP MPs Uma Bharati and Jaibhan Singh Pavayya, were arrested along with Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore and current Dal chief Surendra Jain. While Ms Bharati was released after an hour, the others have been detained at the government guest house at Kewra.

The police stated that with the venue having been declared a prohibited area by the state government, all that the 1,200-strong Bajrangis managed to do was court arrest in an "orderly" manner at Bitthan market in downtown Bhopal. According to official figures, more than 2,913 Bajrangis have been arrested all over the state, of whom 906 have been released.

DIG (intelligence) Surendra Singh told this newspaper that the only report of violence was received at around 1.30 p.m. when around 200 Bajrangis managed to give the police the slip and sneak into Chola maidan, the venue of the meet. However, they were arrested after a scuffle in the course of which a barricade was set on fire. Meanwhile, some of the Bajrangis managed to clamber up to the dais, which had originally been erected for Ramlila shows, and to hoist saffron flags and buntings.

With the atmosphere surcharged, Bajrang Dal chief Surendra Jain vowed to disrupt all the engagements of Congress president Sonia Gandhi during her visit to the state on March 2. He accused Mr Digvijay Singh of terrorising the Bajrang Dal into submission in order to please Ms Gandhi and get into her good books.

The Bajrang Dal chief argued that extremism and how to deal with it were to have been the main topics of discussion at the meet. "Even former CBI chief Joginder Singh had agreed to come. By disallowing the event, the CM has shown that he does not have the slightest intentions of fighting ISI-inspired terrorism," he said.

His views were echoed by BJP MP Jaibhan Singh Pavayya before his arrest outside the assembly gate where he had been sitting on a dharna with a few party MLAs. Mr Pavayya said the CM had no business to disallow the convention of a "national minded" and "legally-constituted" outfit like the Bajrang Dal. Asked if Mr Digvijay Singh had emerged as the hero of the day, Mr Pavayya said although the Congress chief and the party's supporters might feel so, to the people of the state Mr Singh had proved to be a villain. "Someday, he will pay the price for it," he remarked.

Meanwhile, with BJP MLAs making it impossible for the speaker to conduct the proceedings, the state assembly has been adjourned until Monday. The entire opposition later staged a dharna at the assembly premises to protest against the attitude of the state government.

In New Delhi, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Friday denied reports that the Bajrang Dal had shifted its first convention venue from Madhya Pradesh to Mathura in Uttar Pradesh at the instance of Atal Behari Vajpayee. A PMO spokesman said Mr Vajpayee had spoken neither to the Bajrang Dal nor to representatives of the BJP.

VHP general secretary Ashok Singhal later announced that the venue of the convention would be changed to Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. He, however, added that the Dal activists gathered here would launch a struggle against the Madhya Pradesh government for its refusal to allow the convention at the venue of their choice on Friday.



Digvijay Singh



Uma Bharati

Bajrang Dal activists defy ban, hoist flag

19/2
By Lalit Shastri HD 1

BHOPAL, FEB. 18. Defying the ban imposed by the district administration on holding the Bajrang Dal convention, hundreds of activists of the organisation today made light of the presence of a large police force and entered the well-guarded Chola Maidan and hoisted a saffron flag. Police resorted to a lathicharge to disperse the crowd. J. P. Singh & Co.

Earlier, the whole city — particularly the roads leading to Chola Maidan — was sealed off and hundreds of activists, including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's international vice-president, Mr. Giriraj Kishore, were arrested at different places.

The former Union Minister for Tourism, Ms. Uma Bharti, arrested on the outskirts of the State capital, was later released. She said she would take up the

central India, were supported by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence.

At Chola Maidan the Bajrang Dal activists staged police. A mob tore part of the barricade and forced its way in and threw stones at the policemen and set some of the uprooted barricades on fire before police burst teargas shells and resorted to a lathicharge.

'Permission denied to avoid disturbances'

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, FEB. 18. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, today said that permission



The Bajrang Dal activists hoisting their flag at Chola Maidan in Bhopal on Friday. (Right) The BJP leader, Ms. Uma Bharti, being taken into custody. — Photo: A. M. Faruqui

matter with the Lok Sabha Speaker as it "is a privilege issue".

The BJP MP from Gwalior and former Bajrang Dal president, Mr. Jaibhan Singh Pawaiya, was also arrested. Mr. Pawaiya also raised a privilege issue and said the convention had now turned into a "people's movement". Aimed against terrorism, it was scheduled to be held in a maidan but now every street and neighbourhood had become a venue. The Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, might view his decision to impose the ban "as a victory but for the majority community he has ended up becoming a villain", Mr. Pawaiya said.

Meanwhile, before a large crowd at Bittan Maidan in the new city area, a message on behalf of the former CBI Director, Mr. Joginder Singh, was read. It said all terrorist outfits, be they militants in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast or the naxalites in

was denied to the Bajrang Dal convention in Bhopal to avoid communal disturbances. The district administration, he said, decided not to allow the convention there as a large number of minorities were living in the area where the event was to be held.

(The Bajrang Dal has since shifted the venue of the three-day convention to Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh). To a question on the reported statement of the VHP working president, Mr. Ashok Singhal, that the refusal to permit the convention was undemocratic, Mr. Singh retorted, "who is he? I do not take him seriously. Mr. Singhal is trying to act as the Pope of the Hindus. Let the Sangh Parivar not talk of democracy."

On Mr. Singhal's threat to retaliate by disturbing the programmes of the Congress(I), the Chief Minister said he would ensure that adequate security was provided for the party programmes.

SAFFRON CENSOR

Relax The historical record will stand *Sir*

CULTURAL policing, intellectual censorship — this is the world on offer from the BJP and its *parivar*. The decision of the ICHR authorities — packed with saffron sympathisers — to suspend publication of Sumit Sarkar and KN Panikkar's volumes in the "Towards Freedom" series is an ominous sign of what could happen in an India governed by the BJP, unrestrained by the compulsions of coalition politics. ICHR was set up principally to execute this project which envisaged a series of volumes of annotated documents along the lines of the *Transfer of Power* series, without the latter's colonial slant. The ICHR authorities claim that volumes by PS Gupta and Basudev Chatterjee have belittled the role of the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha and highlighted the role of Communists in the nationalist movement. Generations of students of history in Delhi University will testify to their eminence — and charges of deliberate falsification are contemptible, especially when they come from people with an avowed agenda of rewriting history with a narrow, sectarian politico-cultural focus.

The decision to "review" Sarkar and Panikkar's volumes is obviously a part of the saffron censorship agenda. No reasons have been given. There are plenty of good reasons for not having a review. Both Sarkar and Panikkar are historians of high standing — their eminence internationally recognised. Their scholarship, let alone mere competence, is not in question. Moreover, the volumes are collections of documents. To suggest a review is to question the integrity of these scholars. To do so without any stated grounds is incredibly gross, especially when it comes from a fellow historian, in this instance, BR Grover. We are driven to the conclusion that such gross, fascist behaviour is to be expected from the Sangh *parivar* and assorted hangers-on. In the absence of official justification, we are driven to informed speculation. Sumit Sarkar has written the finest textbook on modern Indian history. It was not a government project, and was published by a reputed publishing house. It is required reading for undergraduates. Sarkar has shown that the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS kept aloof from the "Quit India" movement — a matter of historical record. Are the *parivar* cohorts after Sarkar because he has exposed their antecedents? What would they have him do, falsify history to cast them as heroes? This censorship is intolerable — and if the BJP's secular allies acquiesce in it, they will have reduced their share of power for a mess of pottage.

THE STATESMAN
19 FEB 2000

Bajrang Dal shifts meet venue to Vrindavan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BHOPAL, Feb. 17. — The Bajrang Dal tonight said its proposed first three-day national convention here tomorrow would not be held in its planned form because of "police and administrative repression" of its workers.

A spokesman for the district Bajrang Dal unit said tomorrow's meet would now take the form of the struggle against the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr Digvijay Singh, whom he described as "anti-Hindu".

He said a three-day convention of the Dal would be held at Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh from 3 March to discuss the issues of terrorism and religious conversion.

These issues would have been discussed if the district administration had allowed the Dal's convention to be held here from tomorrow, he said.

SNS adds: Earlier, the authorities issued prohibitory orders in Bhopal to thwart any attempt by the Dal to hold its convention at the Chhola Maidan.

The state sealed off the ground and drowned the city in khaki. It had brought in Rapid

Action Force, Special Task Force and Special Armed Force as well as police from other districts to help Bhopal police foil the convention. Other districts were also asked to prevent Bajrang Dal activists from entering Bhopal, and other states requested to hold back saffron workers at the borders. Bhopal is under Section 144 and a red alert has been sounded across the state.

Yet Bajrang Dal leaders said the convention will be held at any cost. "No power can stall our convention in Bhopal," the Bajrang Dal leader, Mr Prakash Ratnaparkhi, had said.

He accused the Chief Minister, Mr Digvijay Singh, of backtracking from his stand that his government could grant permission for the convention if the Bajrang Dal agreed to change its "sensitive" venue, Chhola Maidan in Old Bhopal.

Mr Ratnaparkhi said the Bajrang Dal had been prepared to organise its convention "anywhere" in Bhopal, and had submitted to the district administration an application towards this on 14 February. But it wasn't granted.

"Now we are determined to organise our convention at Chhola Maidan itself, whatever the consequences. And if there are any, Mr Digvijay Singh will be responsible."

The state BJP today expressed solidarity with the Bajrang Dal, again disrupting the Assembly in protest against the government's crackdown on the activists of the Bajrang Dal, the VHP, the RSS and the BJP.

Raising the issue at Zero Hour, BJP members Mr Babulal Gaur and Mr Brijmohan Agarwal alleged that the Digvijay Singh government has imposed an "undeclared emergency" in the state to block the Bajrang Dal convention.

"Police have unleashed a reign of terror to repress our people and are carrying out searches everywhere — homes, bus depots, railway stations — to apprehend them," Mr Agarwal said.

The Bhopal district administration has clamped prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC in the city, banning conventions, public meetings and rallies within the city's municipal limits till 25 February.

THE STATESMAN

18 FEB 2000

Congress denounces RSS propaganda against Nehru

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 16

THE CONGRESS today denounced the "tragic and deplorable" RSS propaganda against Pandit Nehru, the founder of modern India, in the midst of the Sangh's parallel bid to "rewrite" history towards the creation of a fundamentalist State.

In a written retort to recent statements by RSS leader K S Sudershan and Union Minister Sundarlal Patwa, Congress spokesman Ajit Jogi said that Nehru's story was India's story. "Our first Prime Minister," he argued, "was the ideological and political heir of Mahatma Gandhi. He shaped the new State on the foundations laid by the Mahatma as the leader of the Congress party and Independent India."

As for the controversy over the recall of manuscripts of two ICHR-sponsored volumes on the country's freedom struggle, Mr Jogi castigated it as an attack on the values, essence and quintessence of Indian culture and history. Describing Pandit Nehru as a statesman in the "platonian mould," he said the late leader's ideas commanded an empire far greater than

the India he ruled. "Behind whatever Pandit Nehru did was an ideology, a pattern of ideas which were in the best interest of not just the nation but the entire world," Mr Jogi remarked, adding: "He did with India what a poet does with words."

Mr Patwa had told this newspaper that at the root of the present day morass was the replacement of Gandhi's economic philosophy

Indias with their extremes but without their contradictions. It was the alchemy of Gandhi-Nehru idealism of reconciling the contradictions that created modern India."

Accusing Mr Patwa of a total lack of understanding of the history of Independent India, Mr Jogi said Pandit Nehru's mind was steeped in new ideas about science and political theory and in a secular interpretation of history.

Responding to questions, the spokesman demanded an early clarification from the Prime Minister on the Gujarat Government's decision to persist with its order permitting civil servants to participate in RSS activities.

When asked as to what the Congress stand was on the proposal to bring rich farmers under the tax net,

Mr Jogi pointed out that the idea has been floated by the BJP and not the Central Government. Moreover, the subject falls under the purview of States and not the Centre, which would need to bring a Constitutional amendment to realise the objective.

On the presence of Congressmen on the CVC's list of politicians facing graft charges, the spokesman had no comment to offer for want of "authenticated" information.

As for the controversy over the recall of manuscripts of two ICHR-sponsored volumes on the country's freedom struggle, Mr Ajit Jogi castigated it as an attack on the values, essence and quintessence of Indian culture and history

with the Nehruvian model. To that, Mr Jogi's response was that Pandit Nehru "nourished the flame of his idealism in the teeth of dangerous storms and brought prosperity, brick by brick, grain by grain, in his war against degrading poverty, to which India had been reduced by imperialism and disunity."

The spokesman said the late Premier at once embodied the Sanskrit, Mughal and English India: "He represented these three

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 FEB 2000

School changes uniform after Sangh dress code

FROM ANAND SUNDAS

Kanpur, Feb. 16: A day after the BJP's student wing ordered girls not to wear jeans or mini-skirts on campuses in Kanpur, one of the city's oldest institutions has decided to change its 100-year-old dress code.

Senior students of St Mary's Convent have been told to mothball their skirts and shirts and switch to *salwar-kameez* from the next academic session. In a statement, Sister Damien of St Mary's said the changeover had been ordered "keeping in mind the Indian tradition".

Another institution, the

Acharya Narendra Dev Girls' College, will follow suit. The principal of a school, too scared to be named, said: "The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad has taken the concept of moral policing to the limit. I would, in fact, call it cultural terrorism."

Yesterday, the BJP's student wing — which, along with the Shiv Sena, had launched the Valentine's Day crackdown in the interest of "*Bharatiya sanskriti*" — had identified *salwar-kameez* as the proper attire for girl students.

"We are helpless. After what happened on Valentine's Day, we are not taking any chances. But the sad part is that somehow they

are targeting only women," a student said.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has reacted cautiously to the development. Conference spokesman Fr Dominic Emmanuel said in Delhi: "We are aware that there are a few self-appointed cultural policemen who are trying to control society and the agenda of the government. We have not received any report from Kanpur. If the news is true, we express our deep concern about such cultural policing."

Vigilante squads of the ABVP have divided the city into zones in the pattern followed by police. For 42 police stations and 19 circles, it

has appointed its own IGs, DIGs, station house officers and even constables to spot and punish "indecency and obscenity".

Sanjay Kumar Jha, the ABVP's commissioner (administration), said it was time someone assumed responsibility for stemming "the rot in Indian culture".

If their "culture" code is to be followed, gender mixing will be restricted between brothers and sisters. Boys and girls, they say, can come together only on Rakshabandhan day.

On Monday, ABVP and Sena activists had gone on a rampage, ransacking gift shops, restaurants and flower stalls to protest against

Valentine's Day celebrations. Yesterday the ABVP released a list of restaurant-owners to be kept "on a tight leash" for "encouraging western culture".

"The ABVP boys came here and hunted for couples. They didn't find any, but I still had to close shop because they told all my customers to go home," P.K. Jaiswal of Captain's Table, a well-known restaurant in Kanpur, said.

Earlier, the ABVP had announced a "students' curfew" on Valentine's Day, warning violators of punishment. The All-India Lovers' Association was formed to mount resistance, but melted as the ABVP turned the heat on.

Asked why the police had looked the other way, Kanpur DIG, Dilip Trivedi, said: "There are 5,000 restaurants in Kanpur. It's impossible to post policemen everywhere. We are investigating and we will take strict action against those who were involved."

Action, however, might come from other quarters. The Little Chef restaurant the culture crusaders targeted first on Valentine's Day has turned out to be owned by a Sangh ideologue, Yatinjit Singh, who is close to RSS chief Rajju Bhैया.

Satyadev Pachauri, chairman of the state BJP disciplinary committee, is part-owner of the restaurant.

RSS & GOVERNMENT

5/6/17/2 The twain must not meet *from*

THE RSS "climbdown" over the issue of allowing government servants to join the organisation has no doubt pleased the government, which was finding it increasingly difficult to put a spin on what looked to everyone like a fairly sinister design. But knowing as we do the determined brains behind the RSS, the issue is far from buried. Resurrection will await a favourable political climate and/or will be done by stealth, taking advantage of a "friendly" government. To be fair to the RSS, though, they are hardly the first at this game. Marxists, especially in West Bengal, have made the nexus between government employees and party organisations almost official. So broad is the interface between the CPI-M and the West Bengal government that the issue raises little comment and the party feels less need to explain or apologise. The RSS would be delighted if it could achieve a tenth of what the CPI-M's front organisations have in the Left's years in power in West Bengal. And if it does, the destruction of governance in the eastern state will be repeated on a national scale.

The cadre raj in West Bengal has subverted administration, education, police and even the lower ranks of the judiciary. No one gets a government job or an official contract until he is proven to be one of the faithful. Licences for taxis, employment as taxi-drivers, bus and truck drivers and conductors are all impossible without a link with the party. The result is there for all to see: Calcutta University is a joke, Writers' Buildings, a Kafkaesque warren of bureaucracy, roads outnumbered by potholes, the list is endless. With the exception of Bihar, no other state represents so hopeless a picture and a crucial factor is the brutal politicisation of civic institutions. Were the RSS to infiltrate government services, it may not necessarily cause inefficiency and sloth, if only because RSS and unions do not mix. But other kinds of pathogens will be soon detected: a loss of the liberal stance that Indian administrators have to observe, the manipulation of official rhetoric beyond the bounds of accepted nationalist bombast, legitimising a view of history, culture and communities that will be in conflict with a modernist ethos painstakingly built. These are as reprehensible fallouts as economic disaster of the kind in which Marxists specialise. This cannot be allowed to happen but it will, if, to quote the PM, the RSS crosses the *lakshman rekha*. There must, therefore, be formal strictures against government employees becoming *pracharaks*. They will inevitably carry that into their offices and files. The question is whether the BJP will show some spine and tell its cousins that such plans are not on. The issue is not that of the RSS being kind and letting the PM off the hook but that of the PM saying no, once and for all. Given what happened over *Water* and what Sangh-affiliated students did in Kanpur on Valentine's Day — targeting young couples — the possibility of a firm BJP "No!" looks unlikely. When will it become a reality?

THE STATESMAN
17 FEB 2000

Learn it from the American church

RSS at a dead end

968
16/2

SIDNEY VERBA and his associates (1995) have focused on the significant role religion plays in moulding politics and in providing a school for training politicians. This important study raises serious questions about the actual link of religion to a liberal democratic process that theoretically accepts a strict distinction between religion and politics. Generally, there is an agreement that non-political institutions like the family, educational institutions, institutional affiliation and identification play an important role in shaping political opinion. However, the least emphasised but perhaps the most important is the pivotal role that religion plays in a secular political order.

In their study on the major role religious institutions play in the United States, Verba and his associates point out that religious institutions provide opportunities and the necessary skills for a career in politics. The clergy discusses political issues from the pulpit, provides the necessary institutional infrastructure for political mobilisation and it is well known that the church officials take up positions concerning public issues. The church performs a number of compensatory functions for the less privileged, who without its help would have been left out of the political arena. The high percentage of church attendance has important implications for citizen activity in politics. People attend services and take part in the church's educational, charitable and social activities. In this close relationship the church leaves an indelible impression on its followers. The role of the American Southern Black Church on behalf of the Civil Rights Campaign is well known. Martin Luther King Jr. himself was a member of the clergy. What is less known but equally significant is the role of the white fundamentalist Protestant Church in propagating conservative issues.

One very important role that the American church plays is the political

mobilisation through religious institutions. A significant offshoot of this political involvement, according to Verba, is that it "provide(s) a counter-balance to this cumulative resource process", namely to offset the advantages that well-off groups with their prestigious educational background, lucrative jobs and organisational affiliation accrue. This balancing act infuses life into American pluralism by challenging what President Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex. This is an unusual and exceptionally important role that the American participatory system gains out of the church's mobilisation of the resource-poor but bright Americans to the political process.

This linkage between the religious and the political process in a new modern nation like the US



SUBRATA MUKHERJEE

The RSS's wider appeal and acceptability would largely depend on its capacity to carry forward its legacy of fighting the Emergency

should allow us to understand the role of organisations like the the RSS. This is especially important in a situation where the other channels of political mobilisation like trade unions and the cultural wings of the left parties like the IPTA have ceased to be functional. The flexibility of Jawaharlal Nehru allowed him to incorporate the traditionalist and socially conservative Hindu leaders, mainly in north India, within his broad framework of a modern secular India with emphasis on science, rationality and progress. In the background of the glory of the Gandhian Congress, the euphoria of a new age led to the very limited success of the Hindu nationalists. It is noteworthy that in the first general election the socialists committed to both nationalism and democracy polled

16 percent of the votes, much more than the nationalist Hindus.

But the post-Nehruvian Congress could not carry on the bright legacy of the pre-independence Gandhian Congress and one of its important components—a broad democratic organisation. The Gandhi-Nehru Congress resembled an European Social Democratic Party that gave ample opportunity to talented people at the regional and national level.

However, under Indira Gandhi organisational elections were not held for 17 long years. Her dynastic politics failed to attract the talented successor generation. It is this failure that allowed the RSS to fill the vacuum, partially with its organisation and egalitarian ethic to perform in India what the Church plays in the US.

Gurukul system is integrated with the concept of a modern organisation. It follows a decentralised structure, and no leader is projected as indispensable as is the case with most other political and social organisations. It is the office and not the particular incumbent who is revered, giving it a certain modern sanctity in the Weberian sense. For the young, the emphasis on discipline and physical training assumes the form of a boys' scout organisation.

It is the larger organisational skill and a feeling of oneness that has enabled the RSS to promote many of its cadres through the BJP to project themselves in the political arena. Today it seems to have reached a plateau and, unlike the American church system, has not so far championed important issues facing the nation. It has not transcended its obsolete religious and caste prejudices and has been unable to create an organisation that would be attractive to the bright poor. Its brand of Hindu nationalism is not only retrograde but also inadequate to win elections. It is a cardinal principle of democracy that extremist forces cannot endure. Once Gramsci, the famous Italian communist, remarked that if people are to be successfully mobilised then the Roman Catholic Church ought to be the role model. The RSS urgently needs a Gamscian transformation, if its role is to be as enduring in Indian politics as that of the American Church in American politics. It would have to discard its ethno-religious platform and use its extensive and decentralised organisation to deal with poverty and champion pluralism and human rights. The RSS's wider appeal and acceptability would largely depend on its capacity to carry forward its legacy of fighting the Emergency and its subsequent incorporation into the JP movement for a better India not for any particular section but for all.

The writer is a professor of political science at Delhi University

INDIAN EXPRESS

16 FEB 2000

We will ignore ban orders: Bajrang Dal leader

By Our Staff Correspondent

BHOPAL, FEB. 15. The senior Vice-President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Mr. Giriraj Kishore, has issued an ultimatum that the Bajrang Dal would ignore the ban orders and hold its three-day national convention at its original venue in the old Bhopal area from February 18 if the State authorities fail to respond to their offer of shifting the venue to elsewhere in the State capital.

Mr. Kishore issued the threat that the Bajrang Dal, youth wing of the VHP, would go ahead with its convention despite the ban imposed by the district authorities following the Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh's assertion that the Dal would not be allowed to hold its convention.

After newspapers reported that Mr. Digvijay Singh was ready to consider giving permission for the convention if the venue was changed, a formal application

was given to the local authorities here by the Dal accepting the offer. This was also followed up by several round of talks between the Dal representatives and Government officials.

Mr. Kishore said they had been given to understand by senior officials that they would now be given permission to hold the convention at the sprawling Bitan Maidan in the new Bhopal area till this morning but were denied a final confirmation on the plea that this would be done after taking the Chief Minister into confidence.

Later in the evening, Mr. Kishore, when contacted, said that they had not yet received any communication. "We have fixed today as the deadline and if the Government fails to respond, the Dal will go ahead with its convention on "national security" as per its original programme, he emphasised.

Echo in Assembly: Page 9

THE HINDU
16 FEB 2000

Ban on govt staff participation in RSS to stay: PM

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 14 FEBRUARY

Emboldened BY RSS supremo Rajendra Singh's assurance that they will not upset the hassle-free environment for the government, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said his government was not planning to lift the ban on employees participating in the activities of the Sangh.

"There will be no change in the existing laws... No such proposal is under our consideration," agency reports quoting Mr Vajpayee said. It may be recalled that the Sangh supremo in a signed statement had said the RSS will not seek governmental intervention to lift the ban and that it was up to the government to take a decision on the matter.

The Prime Minister's statement was likely to be relieving for the allies who have come under pressure from the Opposition to declare their stand on the issue. The DMK chief M. Karunanidhi, the TDP and the Samata Party had differed with the BJP's stand on the issue.

Agency reports

said the Prime Minister, replying to a question on Mr Chandrababu Naidu and his Tamil Nadu counterpart's Opposition to the Gujarat government's decision allowing its employees to take part in RSS activities, said: "They have not exactly protested... They only expressed their views. But now the controversy has been settled with the RSS declaring it does not want government's intervention."

The Prime Minister's statement is sure to take the sting out of the Opposition's campaign over a "plot to saffronise the bureaucracy." Desperate to anchor

an anti-government campaign on the issue, the Opposition has been charging that the entire government brass were involved in a move to "legitimise" the activities of the Sangh.

The RSS position cannot, but, be a shot in the arm for the government as it signifies the parent outfit's anxiety not to put hurdles before the regime and distract its attention from issues of governance. Although the Sangh offshoots may not necessarily shelve its pet programmes, it certainly signals an appreciation of the government's compulsions not to offend the sensibilities of the allies.

The statement of the RSS supremo, whose reflexes are more political than his predecessors, no doubt, will restrain the Sangh offshoots from precipitating matters for the government.

However, the second line of Sangh leadership, whose views on matters ranging from social to economic, are not in sync with the BJP leadership and this appears to be a cause of concern.

Laloo unhurt in helicopter attack

Patna
14 FEBRUARY

RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav on Monday escaped unhurt when his helicopter was attacked by a stone-throwing mob in Sabhalpur Diara area of Raghopur constituency in Vaishali district.

The state's director general of police, Mr K.A. Jacob, said suspected supporters of the sitting RJD MLA from Sonepur, Mr Raj Kumar Rai, who was denied a ticket this time, threw stones at the helicopter when Mr Yadav was about to alight to address an election meeting.

The RJD chief is seeking a second term from Raghopur, apart from contesting the Danapur seat. Mr Jacob said the police contingent present there dispersed the crowd and the former chief minister escaped unhurt.

— PTI

No law to legitimise RSS govt staff: PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA/NEW DELHI, Feb. 14.

— The Prime Minister today sought to allay the Opposition's fears about the enactment of a law allowing government functionaries to participate in RSS activities. "There is no such proposal under the government's consideration. There will be no change in the existing law."

Replying to the queries about the Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu Chief Ministers shooting letters to him to protest against the Gujarat government's decision permitting government employees to participate in RSS functions, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said: "They have not protested. They have only expressed their views."

The Prime Minister, en route to New Delhi after campaigning at Bhagalpur and Bihar Sharief, said at Patna that the controversy over the issue has been settled with "the RSS chief declaring that the organisation does not want its members to join the government".

The Congress, evidently, is not impressed by Mr Vajpayee's reasoning. The party today demanded an explanation from the Vajpayee government on who ordered the lifting of the ban on Gujarat government employees participating in RSS activities, as the latter itself claimed that it had not made any such demand on any government.

In Delhi, Congress spokesman Mr Anil Shastri accused Union Home Minister Mr LK Advani of lifting the ban in Gujarat and gave a clean chit, of sorts, to the Prime Minister. Referring to Mr Advani and the Gujarat Chief Minister participating in an RSS rally

15/2 9 Release
before the ban was lifted, Mr Shastri said: "It seems the home minister has given the orders and we charge him with creating a fear psychosis on the RSS issue."

Keeping Mr Vajpayee out of the controversy, the Congress spokesman said: "We are convinced that it is the hardcore elements within the BJP, which, in the name of other communal outfits like the RSS, are trying to push their communal agenda."

On whether the Congress considered Mr Vajpayee as a "hardcore", he said: "The Prime Minister is posing not to be hardcore."

Referring to the editorial of RSS mouthpiece *Panchajanya*, Mr Shastri said RSS chief Rajju Bhैया has surprised the country by saying the RSS had neither demanded that the government lift the ban on government employees participating in RSS activities nor has it ever wanted to patronise any section of the bureaucracy.

"In that case, who is responsible for lifting the ban in Gujarat?" he posed.

"RJD the culprit": Addressing massive election rallies at Bihar Sharief and Bhagalpur, Mr Vajpayee blamed the "inefficient" RJD regime for "driving Bihar into the quagmire of anarchy and impoverishment." He said he would be very surprised if the people of Bihar voted for the RJD despite the chaos, anarchy and poverty. He lamented that Bihar had remained untouched by development and most people were living below the poverty line.

THE STATESMAN
15 FEB 2000

RSS breathes easy on govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 13. — The RSS today said it would not seek revocation of the ban on the participation of government employees in its activities, bringing much relief to the Prime Minister's Office.

It is up to the government to decide whether to lift the ban and the RSS will not pressure the government, Mr Rajendra Singh, RSS chief, said in a statement in *Panchajanya* — the Sangh mouthpiece.

(Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Mr Digvijay Singh has warned that employees and officers who have links with the RSS will not be allowed to continue in government service in the state. RSS is not a cultural organisation but a political entity since its members only support the BJP or function as BJP leaders, Mr Digvijay Singh said. As long as Congress remains in power in the state, people having links with such a political organisation have no place in government service, he said, adds UNI.)

The RSS statement comes amid a raging controversy sparked by the Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh governments' announcements that they would allow government employees to participate in RSS activities. The Congress and the Left protested against the decision and demanded an explanation from the NDA. With the RSS hardliners trying to push their philosophy in running the government, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee too seems to be in a politically uneasy situation.

At an RSS function on Friday, Mr Vajpayee warned the Sangh not to cross its "lakshmanrekha" and to let the government carry on with its work.

The PMO, today, made it a point to refer to the latest *Panchajanya* editorial, in an effort to assert that the Prime Minister's line has prevailed over the RSS.

The editorial statement was replete with arguments against the ban. Accusing "pseudo-secularists" of continuing with the system, it pointed out that "law and justice" was in favour of RSS' stance.

THE STATESMAN
14 FEB 2000

Gehlot concerned over Gujarat order on RSS

HT Correspondent
Alwar, February 13

HT-12
14/2

CHIEF MINISTER Ashok Gehlot has expressed grave concern over the growing tendency amongst the States ruled by BJP to go out of the way to permit employees to participate in the activities of RSS which might endanger the integrity and unity of the country.

Mr Gehlot was on his election tour in Alwar district when he talked to this correspondent today. He talked about the growing influence of RSS which had forced the Prime Minister to welcome the decision of Gujarat government to permit government employees to attend 'shakhas' and other activities of the 'sangh'.

Mr Gehlot said he had written a letter to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and urged him to

Reliance Bin

direct the Chief Ministers of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh to withdraw their orders to permit the government employees to take part in the activities of RSS.

The CM expressed his anguish over the conspiracy to permit the government employees to participate in the activities of RSS which was linked with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. He said he was shocked to read the statement of Prime Minister who described RSS as a cultural organisation and it had hurt him. He suggested that Mr Vajpayee should refrain from issuing such statements which could jeopardise the fabric of administration in the country.

Mr Gehlot said the RSS was banned due to its nefarious activities and its involvement in the administration would disturb the communal harmony in the country.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 FEB 2000

Digvijay does a volte-face on Bajrang Dal convention

The Times of India News Service

BHOPAL: Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders feel that Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh's sudden volte-face on whether or not to let the Bajrang Dal hold its annual convention in Bhopal has



Digvijay Singh

confirmed suspicions that he was merely using the issue to extract political mileage in this month's assembly by-polls and distract public attention from the more pressing problems facing the state.

State VHP sources said the chief minister's statement in Raipur on Saturday that the state government was never against the Dal holding its convention per se — the objection being limited to the choice of venue in Muslim-dominated old Bhopal — was an "absurd lie".

Mr Singh has for the last fortnight been constantly hammering away with regularity on the inherent dangers of permitting the Dal convention in view of the fact that such an event could inflame communal passions.

State VHP spokesperson Anil Ayachit argued that if the "sensitive" nature of the venue was the only bone of contention, the Bajrang Dal leadership had voluntarily offered to shift the meet to another place. A clear offer to this effect was made to the chief minister on the February 1 which was spurned, he said.

VHP leader Giriraj Kishore had later complained to mediapersons on the patent "unfairness" of the chief minister's stand. Apart from having described Bajrang Dal members as a bunch of "lumpens", the chief minister even went to the extent of baiting the RSS in his reply to the governor's address in the assembly.

He said he would have "finished" the RSS if it was in his hands. Also

given was the promise of releasing documentary evidence in support of the claim that cases against Dal members had been registered in practically every police station in MP.

Orders were also passed a couple of days ago to ban all rallies and political meetings till February 25. Indeed, the chief minister has given the impression that he is itching for a showdown with the Dal. What also came in handy, VHP sources said, was the dispute over the filming of Deepa Mehta's *Water*.

The moment the chief minister learnt that the Varanasi district administration was disinclined to let the shooting continue, he gave the director an open offer to come to MP, total security guaranteed.

Mr Ayachit felt that Mr Singh's decision to mellow down his stand over the Bajrang Dal convention indicated that he had either caved in to popular opinion or realised that confrontation would only work to his political detriment.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 FEB 2000

The siege from within

By Shamsul Islam

HO-1 14/2
A. felony from

THE WAY the RSS fraternity in Gujarat and at the Centre has reacted to the criticism against permitting government employees in the State to participate in the activities of the organisation has made it clear that Gujarat will soon be resurrected throughout India. The green signal for the lifting of the ban goes to prove that despite its proclamations that it will not raise contentious issues, the RSS is in a hurry to implement its original agenda. The RSS brass seem to have reached the conclusion that NDA or no NDA it is the last chance for them to lay the siege from within.

The country is being informed by no less a person than the Prime Minister himself that the RSS "is a cultural, social organisation and I do not think objections should be raised to anybody joining it". He seems to have picked up this argument from the editorial of the RSS mouthpiece, *Organiser* (February 6, 2000). It reads: "The RSS is not a political party. It does not take part in elections, nor its office-bearers are supposed to become office-bearers of any political party. The RSS has no election symbol, nor its leadership or members have ever endeavoured to seek political office. It is a social-cultural organisation trying to inspire all national activity."

It is pertinent to compare this information with the facts available in the official publications of the RSS. Its central publication house brought out a book, "Param Vaibhav Ke Path Par" (1997), detailing more than 40 organisations created by the RSS for different tasks. The BJP as a political organisation figures prominently in it, clubbed with the ABVP, the Hindu Jagran Manch, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the Sanskar Bharati (currently in the news for alleged attacks on Ms. Deepa Mehta's film unit at Varanasi). The preface is in direct contradiction with the statement of the Prime Minister when it declares that "without the knowledge of the different kinds of activities of the Swayamsevak (volunteer of the RSS) the introduction of the RSS is incomplete.

flag, one leader and one ideology." It is dead against the federal structure of the Constitution, a basic feature of the Indian polity, as is clear from the Guruji's communication which he sent to the first session of the National Integration Council in 1961. It read: "Today's federal form of government not only gives birth to but also nourishes the feelings of separatism, in a way refuses to recognise the fact of one nation and destroys it. It must be completely uprooted, constitution purified and unitary form of government be established."

The Prime Minister, while defending the decision of the Gujarat Government, does not seem to be aware that government employees by joining the RSS anywhere in the country are bound to have divided loyalties. It will be a constant struggle between a secular India and a 'Hindu Rashtra'. In fact, such government employees can be held guilty of contempt towards the Constitution and the national flag. Their activities will also be a direct violation of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act 1971 passed by Parliament. Section 2 of this Act says clearly that if anyone "brings into contempt whether by words either spoken or written or by acts the Indian national flag or the Constitution of India or any part thereof shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine or with both".

Keeping this in mind, it has been attempted in this book to produce the brief information about the diverse activities of the Swayamsevaks."

How 'apolitical' the RSS is can be gauged from the statement by M. S. Golwalkar, who headed the organisation after the death of Dr. Hedgewar (its founder) and who is considered its greatest ideologue. "We know this also that some of our Swayamsevaks work in politics. There they have to organise according to the needs of work, public meetings, processions, etc., have to raise

religion, Hindu society and Hindu culture". In a complete break with the Constitution of India, the prayer says, "Affectionate Motherland, I eternally bow to you/O Land of Hindus, you have reared me in comfort.../O God Almighty, we the integral part of the Hindu Rashtra salute you in reverence/For your cause have we girded up our loins/Give us your blessings for its accomplishment."

The RSS as an organisation salutes the saffron flag as opposed to the tricolour. The same is the routine at every *shakha*. Guru Golwalkar was very clear in his op-

The Prime Minister, while defending the Gujarat Government's decision, does not seem to be aware that government employees by joining the RSS are bound to have divided loyalties.

slogans. All these things have no place in our work. However, the actor should portray the character accepted to the best of his capability." In fact, Guru Golwalkar refers to the Swayamsevaks loaned to the political offshoot as *nat* or performers who are meant to dance to the RSS tune.

The pro-RSS lobby claims that the participation of government employees in the RSS activities will fill them with a 'nationalistic' and 'patriotic' fervour. However, no one should be under any illusion that the patriotism and nationalism of the RSS have anything to do with the "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic" Constitution of the country or with the tricolour which symbolises Indian patriotism and nationalism. Anyone familiar with the functioning of the RSS would know that the organisation has no regard for these two symbols.

A look at the RSS oath, which is mandatory for every Swayamsevak, and the prayer, with which every *shakha* starts, will be sufficient to show the hollowness of the RSS claim. The oath says, "I most solemnly take this oath, that I become a member of the RSS in order to achieve all-round greatness of Bharatvarsha by fostering the growth of my sacred Hindu

position to the national flag: "Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating. Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?" Even during the freedom struggle when the whole country adopted the tricolour as a symbol of resistance to the British rule, the RSS never accepted it. Guru Golwalkar declared in 1946 that it was the saffron flag which represented the great culture: "It was the embodiment of God. We firmly believe that in the end the whole nation will bow before this saffron flag."

That the RSS does not believe in the present Constitution is clear from his words: "It has absolutely nothing, which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!" This statement appears in "*Bunch of Thoughts*" published by the RSS as late as in 1996. The RSS has been constantly demanding that India be ruled under "one

The government employees who are supposed to be committed to "the sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic" and the tricolour as the national flag would in reality be glorifying the cause of a 'Hindu Rashtra' and the saffron flag by participating in the activities of the RSS, thus insulting both the Constitution and the tricolor. The choice, it must be understood, is between a 'Hindu Rashtra' and the tenets which the Constitution and the national flag stand for — the choice between theocracy and democracy.

(The writer is Reader, Department of Political Science, Satyawati College, Delhi.)

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2000

Accord with PM; RSS backs off

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. The Central Government will not revise the conduct rules for Government servants which forbid them from becoming members of or participating in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh.

Apparently a decision on this has been taken at the highest levels of the Government and the RSS in the interest of avoiding an "unnecessary controversy" and a "possible confrontation" between the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies in the ruling National Democratic Alliance, on the one side, and between the NDA and the opposition parties, on the other.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, took up the matter informally with the RSS, after which the RSS chief, Mr. Rajendra Singh, issued a statement to the press today.

Mr. Singh made it clear that although "justice and law are on our side" it must be remembered that "we (in the RSS) have made no plea for the ban on government servants to be lifted."

His organisation had never depended on government largesse and had grown enormously despite being banned several times and the rules forbidding government servants from participating in its activities.

Mr. Singh's statement has appeared in the latest issue of *Panchjanya*, a magazine run by the RSS, but separately the statement was released to the press today directly from the RSS headquarters here.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office confirmed that Mr. Vajpayee was not interested in allowing the controversy to get out of hand. It was felt that a "confrontation" would build on this issue within the NDA and it was better to drop the move now than as a response to an aggressive posture by allies.

The DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, wrote to the Prime Minister a few days ago warning that allowing government servants to join the RSS on the pretext that it is a socio-cultural organisation would create a dangerous precedent for all political parties to launch their "socio-cultural organisations" and then seek to infiltrate the administrative machinery.

Close on the heels of this letter, the Telugu Desam Party, through its leader, Mr. Yerran Naidu, also indicated that it would not sit back silently and allow this to happen and, on Saturday, the Samata Party also signalled that it was ready to take up the issue within the NDA.

Matters came to a boil

recently after the Prime Minister defended the Gujarat Government's decision to withdraw an earlier order to allow the State Government officials to join the RSS and participate in its activities.

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, was also reported to have said that the Centre would also review the position in relation to Central Government servants.

Two days ago, at a *Panchjanya* function, the RSS chief said he saw no harm in allowing government servants "except those in the police and the judiciary" to join RSS activities.

Sources close to the Prime Minister said that there were some sections in the RSS which seemed bent on embarrassing the Government — the controversy over the lifting of the ban on government servants and the manner in which some activists went "beyond democratic protests" in the case of Ms. Deepa Mehta's *Water* controversy — was mentioned.

"The RSS must make up its mind whether it wants or does not want this Government to continue," sources close to the Prime Minister said, but also indicated that the "problem" was over, at least for the moment. The RSS has decided to back off.

Like it or not, RSS is political

BY DR GOYAL

THE RASHTRIYA Swamishwak Sangh (RSS) is not a political outfit. It is a cultural and social organisation and I do not think objection should be raised on anybody joining it, said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. This he said to justify the Gujarat government's decision to lift the ban on state employees joining the RSS. Encouraged, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta, too, has followed suit.

The controversy has arisen as the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules specifically prohibit government servants from joining any political party or organisation which participates in political activity, and subscribes to a movement or activity. Now, Home Minister LK Advani has decided to examine whether the restriction under Central Services Rules is applicable to the RSS. Apparently he, like the PM, believes that the RSS is a non-political, socio-cultural organisation, and poses no threat to the civil democratic order.

If one is not to doubt the motives of these gentlemen, one can only say that their training in the RSS has not only immunised them to the pain and misery that the Sangh Parivar has caused, but also affected their sense of discrimination and objectivity.

The RSS may not take part in day-to-day politics, but has a definite political philosophy. The

current RSS chief, Rajju Bhaiya, and his predecessor, Balasaheb Deoras, in a deposition in 1978 in the court of that Nagpur Charity Commissioner had claimed in "the RSS activity is akin to a work for a political purpose, though the RSS as an organisation eschews participation in active politics of power as of policy."

Earlier in the same deposition, it was said: "It is possible for Sangh to change its policy and even participate in politics." (Para 14) Further, Para 19 stated, "Tomorrow the policy could be changed and the RSS could participate in even day to day political activity as a political party because policy is not a permanent or irrevocable thing."

So, why did the RSS shy away from political activity despite having a definite political philosophy? Firstly, it was opposed to democratic practice. According to its ideologue MS Golwalkar, democracy bred self-praise and denunciation of others, both unworthy traits. It also feared both government action and popular disapproval. People like Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who sponsored and nurtured the RSS, belonged to that Hindu elite which sought to surpass Muslims in currying favour with the British. Significantly, Golwalkar described the prevailing anti-British attitude as unfortunate in his book, *We or Hindu Rashtravad Defined*.

RSS leaders were simultaneously afraid of adverse popular reaction because Gandhi with his hope died with his hope and the party veered back to the old Jana

Sardar Patel, who had earlier advocated its cause, lost sympathy for it. So intense was the public outrage against it that open political activity was just out of the question.

That also rendered the infiltration strategy infructuous. It, therefore, took recourse to launching a political party which could defend the RSS in the political sphere and, simultaneously, build public sympathy for its ideology. Dr SP Mookerjee's exit from Nehru's Cabinet provided the opportunity. The RSS needed a publicly-known personality; and Dr Mookerjee was looking for an organisation. So was set up the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was kept under control through the network of organising secretaries who, according to its leader Balraj Madhok, were all RSS *pracharaks*, paid by the RSS and answerable only to it.

Over time, the RSS cadres attached to Dr Mookerjee learnt the ways of politics and emerged as public figures. And yet they never developed the confidence to snap the umbilical cord that tied them to the RSS. The most glaring evidence of it was when the RSS men in the Janata Party walked out on the issue of that relationship — and established the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

At the founding conference in Bombay, the BJP adopted a public posture that made its ideology look different from the RSS. The camouflage did not bring the expected political dividends in the 1984 elections and the party veered back to the old Jana

Indian version of fascism, and, in the case of the RSS, it is not difficult to perceive certain similarities. The leader principle, the stress on militarism, the doctrine of racial-cultural superiority, ultra-nationalism infused with religious idealism, the use of symbols of past greatness, the emphasis on national solidarity, the exclusion of religious or ethnic minorities from the national concept — all of those features of the RSS are highly reminiscent of fascist movements in Europe."

The objective of the political formation has been to build and consolidate a separate Hindu political entity. Towards that end it had been adopting agendas calculated to widen the communal gulf. If it was the demand for a uniform civil code and abolition of Article 370 at one time (1951), it later became ban on cow-slaughter (1967) and revengeful demand for return of temples supposedly destroyed by Muslim rulers.

For creating popular hysteria, other RSS fronts like the Hindu Dharam Raksha Samiti (Ahmedabad, 1969), the Rashtriya Utsav Mandal and Shree Ram Tarun Mandal (Maharashtra, 1970), and Bajrang Dal (Moradabad, 1980) were floated. Inquiry commissions have revealed their true character. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal have been quite prominent during the last two decades.

To deny that the RSS is a political organisation is to fly in the face of facts. The only difference from what we generally recognise as political parties is that it is neither democratic nor secular. American researcher Donald E. Smith had come to the conclusion: "Nehru once remarked that Hindu communalism was the

Government employees and the RSS

Testing the water

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's clean chit to the RSS that it is not a political organisation in the context of the Gujarat government lifting the ban on its employees joining the RSS and Home Minister L.K. Advani's open-mindedness on the question of allowing central government employees to join the RSS are all intended to test the waters. If the near-silence from the BJP's allies is anything to go by, it will not be long before central government employees will be able to take part in the morning shakhas of the RSS and attend their government offices later in the day.

The central issue is how participation of government employees in the RSS will compromise the political neutrality of the government. It is true that the RSS is not a banned organisation but that does not legitimise involvement of government employees in its activities, either. As it is, the employees are not allowed to join any political party. On its apolitical character, M.S. Golwalkar, who was the RSS *sarsanghchalak* in its formative period, clearly explained the position thus: "Hitler's movement centred round politics. We try to build life without being wedded to politics. It is many times found that many are gathered for political purpose. But when that purpose fails, unity is lost. We do not want any temporary achievement but an abiding oneness. And so we have kept aloof from politics."

It is this "apolitical character" of the 75-year-old organisation that has enabled it to withstand the pressures of time. But that does not mean that the RSS has not played any political role. It is as political a body as any other except that it has a long-term view, unlike the Janata Dals or the Congress, whose vision is narrow and chair-centric, and all its actions are in furtherance of it. Because of this, it even had to hear snide remarks like this one from V.D. Savarkar, "The epitaph for the RSS volunteer will be that he was born, he joined the RSS and he died without accomplishing anything." But that did not deter

the RSS from persisting with its agenda.

Its claims of political disinterestedness had a selfish motive too. During the British period, it did not want to antagonise the government and thereby invite retributive action. Walter Anderson and S.D. Damle, who are otherwise favourably disposed towards the RSS, in their pioneering study on the RSS, *Brotherhood in Saffron* were constrained to write: "When the British banned military drill and the use of uniforms in all nonofficial organisations, the RSS complied." It even stayed aloof from the Quit India movement earning, in the process, a certificate of good conduct from the alien rulers while Congress workers led by Mahatma Gandhi went to jail in their thousands.



A.J. PHILIP

At one time even Vajpayee was constrained to argue that the political activities of the RSS affiliates did not establish the organisation's apolitical credentials

After Independence, when Sardar Patel's plan to allow the RSS cadres to join the Congress did not fructify, Golwalkar felt the need for some sort of political cover. He knew without political support, the RSS could virtually turn into a football in the political field. He, therefore, lent the services of four of his able cadres to Shyama Prasad Mukherjee when he founded the Jan Sangh in 1951. Among the cadres lent were Vajpayee, endowed with consummate oratorical skill, and the mild-mannered Advani. They can hardly be blamed if, half a century later, they feel beholden to the RSS and are compelled to oblige their parent body out of sheer gratitude.

Since 1951, the RSS has always guided or directed the activities of the Jan Sangh and its latter-day avatar. Not only that, it also participated in the 1952

movement against cow slaughter and several other political agitations, including the Nav Nirman movement in Gujarat and the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam. By no stretch of the imagination can these activities be described as cultural, however loosely Vajpayee may define the adjective.

Let there be no mistaking, the RSS is authoritarian in its emphasis on discipline, in its refusal to recognise the spe-

cific character of minorities and in its intention of reforming the Hindu mentality absolutely to prepare the advent of a new man, implying the need to extend its sway over the whole society. It is yet to repudiate Golwalkar's original prescription that still rankles the minorities, "The foreign races in

associated with Shivaji. Strictly speaking, Godse may not have been a member of the RSS when he shot Mahatma Gandhi, but Gandhi Jayanti is not sacred for the RSS. Nor is the *Jana Gana Mana* revered. In fact, Vajpayee was virtually crucified when as the then president of the BJP he announced that the new party stood for Gandhian socialism, whatever it meant.

Similarly, the RSS has not yet abandoned its Akhand Bharat project. The map of India that it uses includes countries like Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet and Afghanistan. Imagine a future Indian foreign secretary attending the RSS shakha and affirming his commitment to Akhand Bharat when he has to manage diplomatic relations with these very nations.

Small wonder that the fears that the RSS generate are not confined to some sections alone. At one point, even Vajpayee was constrained to argue that the political activities of the RSS affiliates "do not help an organisation (the RSS) to establish its apolitical credentials. He further argued that "it is possible that some people genuinely feel apprehensive about the RSS. A certain onus accordingly devolved on the RSS, an onus that has not been discharged effectively by the RSS". Elaborating on this theme, he wrote, "Its (the RSS) repudiation of the theocratic state was welcomed. Yet, the question could legitimately be asked — why does it not open its doors to Muslims? Recent statements of the RSS chief, Mr Deoras, indicate that non-Hindus are being encouraged to join the organisation. A natural corollary of this process would be clear enunciation by the RSS that by 'Hindu Rashtra' it means the Indian nation which includes non-Hindus as equal members." (Indian Express, August 2, 1979).

Two decades have passed since Vajpayee wrote this article but the RSS is yet to repudiate the fundamentals on which Hegdewar, Golwalkar and Balasaheb Deoras built up its edifice and Rajendra Singh soldiers on. Until then the fears will remain.

RSS trying to confuse main issue, says Cong

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 10

Religion & Power

SENIOR CONGRESS leader Arjun Singh today lambasted the RSS for questioning President K R Narayanan's wisdom in seeking a clarification from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on the Gujarat Government order allowing its employees to join the Sangh.

He emphasised that as the "protector and defender of the Constitution", the President was well within his rights in trying to satisfy himself whether an action of a state or Central Government functionary was consistent with the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

By raising doubts on the score, the RSS and BJP were trying to confuse the real issues involved in the controversy, Mr Singh stated at a news briefing at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) office.

Terming Prime Minister Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani as "apologists

Questioning President's role

for the RSS", he sternly criticised them for putting forth various explanations to defend the organisation and the Gujarat Government's controversial move.

"They have completely missed the point that our objection in this matter is not related to the legal status or otherwise of the RSS," Mr Singh said while stressing that it was the ideology and activities of the organisation that was objectionable.

He said that the basic thinking and style of functioning of RSS was "totally alien" to the political system that the country had adopted through the Constitution.

Ridiculing the Prime Minister's explanation that the RSS was a cultural organisation, the Congress leader caustically recalled some of the prominent "cultural activities" that the organisation had indulged in during the past 75 years of its existence.

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Mr Arjun Singh charged that RSS had scrupulously distanced itself from the country's freedom movement, had created an atmosphere in which Mahatma Gandhi's assassination became possible, and brought about the demolition of Babri Masjid.

Referring to the RSS oath which requires its members to swear unflinching allegiance to the cause of Hindu religion and culture, the Congress leader demanded to know from Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani whether they too had subscribed to the oath on becoming its members.

He recalled that both the Prime Minister and Home Minister had on several occasions spoken of their long association with the organisation as its members.

Mr Singh said they should state in clear terms whether there was no conflict between the RSS oath taken by them and the oath of office administered to them while taking up their current positions in the Government.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 FEB 2000

Advani's move on RSS leaves Opposition fuming

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 9

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THE OPPOSITION parties today mounted a stinging attack on the Government following Home Minister L.K. Advani's indication of a review of the ban on Central Government employees' participation in RSS activities.

The Congress threatened to launch a nationwide agitation to resist the BJP-led Government's "nefarious moves to destroy the fundamentals", while the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) charged Mr Advani with deviating from the legal position on the RSS issue.

The CPI-M warned that Mr Advani's reported plan was really aimed at facilitating an "insidious penetration and subversion of the system", the CPI alleged that the Government was out to "destroy the secular fabric" of the nation.

Accusing the Government of going all out to "destroy and desecrate" the Constitution in a planned manner, Congress spokesman Ajit Jogi said his party was gearing up for action with all its might in Parliament and outside. He appealed to "all the secular and like-minded parties" to rise to the occasion.

Significantly, the Congress asked the BJP's own allies in the ruling NDA coalition to spell out their stand on the issues raised by the

BJP lately on the RSS issue.

NCP'S POSER: The NCP, in a strongly worded comment, said: "The RSS believes in Hindu rashtra and, therefore, has a communal ideology whereas India has a secular Constitution. Any organisation favouring a communal ideology in a secular set up is dangerous."

NCP spokesman Devendra Nath Dwivedi pointed out that the judicial pronouncements which Mr Advani was invoking were really on the question whether the RSS came within the purview of the Unlawful Activities Act, whereas the ban on Government employees' participation in RSS activities was under the conduct rules for civil servants framed under Article 309 of the Constitution.

While the ban on participation in political activities is intended to ensure neutrality of the administrative apparatus, the ban on the RSS is aimed at maintaining the secular character of civil servants, he added.

Mr Dwivedi accused the Home Minister of making this statement either without thought or with the clear intention of changing the very character of bureaucracy, with a view to advancing the Hindutva ideology.

The NCP, on its part, has also demanded more confidentiality in the interactions between the Rashtrapati Bhawan and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Regretting the "loss of respect and

confidentiality", Mr Dwivedi said that exposing the Rashtrapati Bhawan to "public gaze is gross impropriety" and the ties between the Prime Minister and President should have confidentiality.

The NCP spokesman was commenting on a remark made by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at a Press conference that he would convey to the President the decision about Central Government employees' participation in RSS activities.

"This means that the Prime Minister is conveying the Government's decision to the President through the media whereas the President should be first told about it", Mr Dwivedi said.

LEFT WARNING: CPI(M) politburo member Sitaram Yechury, warning of the dangers of "insidious penetration and subversion of the system", said the current statements and clarifications about the RSS was mere hair-splitting.

Seeking removal of the Government ban on RSS, Mr Yechury said the RSS leaders had in 1948 assured the Government that the organisation would cease to take part in politics.

CPI national secretary D. Raja said the proposal to allow Government employees to join the RSS was highly dangerous. The Home Minister was carrying out the RSS agenda and not the NDA agenda, he said.

Revoke ban on officials' joining RSS: Shanta

Kalyan opposes move, Chautala ducks for cover, Karunanidhi backs PM

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

NEW DELHI: The decision of the Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh governments allowing their employees to participate in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activities has evoked restrained but mixed reactions from political leaders across the country.

On Tuesday, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Union consumer affairs minister Shanta Kumar demanded lifting the ban on central and other state government employees participating in RSS activities.

"If RSS members like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani and myself can become Prime Minister and Union ministers, then where is the rationale for restricting a government clerk from participating in RSS activities?" Mr Kumar reasoned in an interview.

Mr Kumar, the third Union minister after Murli Manohar Joshi and Lal Krishna Advani to defend the Gujarat government permitting its employees to join the RSS, said, "If it can be done in Gujarat, then why not in the rest of the country? The RSS is, after all, a cultural and nationalist organisation."

Asked if the ban on the Jamaat-i-Islami which, along with RSS, was put under the list of organisations which government employees were restrained from joining could also be lifted, Mr Kumar said, "The RSS is definitely on a different path. Even various courts have dubbed it a nationalist organisation. Jamaat-i-Islami's case should be considered separately on merit."

In Aligarh, however, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan

Singh criticised the statement by his successor Ram Prakash Gupta permitting UP government employees to participate in RSS activities.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Kalyan Singh said Mr Gupta was preparing a "recipe for disaster" by encouraging officials "to participate in political activities".

Mr Kalyan Singh added, "I have been a member of the RSS since my childhood, and have closely known its functioning. The entire political system of the BJP is controlled by the RSS. This includes all activities, such as allotment of party tickets and the appointment of ministers."

In Chandigarh, Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala ducked a question on whether his Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), which is a part of the NDA, supported the Gujarat government's decision on the RSS. At first he said that the Prime Minister had already clarified the situation, then added, "Besides, we don't have any such problem in Haryana at present."

In Chennai, Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi endorsed the PM's remark that the RSS was not a political outfit but only a social organisation.

Talking to mediapersons at the state secretariat, Mr Karunanidhi said, "The Prime Minister has said the RSS is not a political organisation. I accept it."

However, he said Tamil Nadu government employees would not be allowed to participate in RSS activities unless they obtained orders from the courts in favour of such a move.

► See Edit: RSVP: RSS, Page 12

THE TIMES OF INDIA

9 FEB 2000

Lessons from Austria?

THERE IS a distinct parallel between the developments in Austria today and India.

The European Union, some say, has painted itself into a corner by deciding to outcaste Austria under that country's new coalition government where the Joerge Haider's Freedom Party is a powerful constituent. But the EU is moved by the cry often heard in Europe during World War II and after, "If only Hitler had been stopped just after 1933, but Europe slept".

Haider is on record about his Nazi, anti-semitic, racist aims. So is the Sangh parivar about its Hindutva, anti-minority, saffronisation aims. The favourite pastime of politicians is to deny statements made; they wait that they were misquoted or quoted out of context. Haider is doing that about his pro-Nazi statements, so are the BJP leaders about Hindutva. There is an exception, however; some of the RSS and VHP leaders are open about their statements despite the pronouncement of its disciple, the BJP, that nothing is on the cards which is not on the national agenda for governance. But it is plain that the objectives of building a temple in Ayodhya, 'freeing' the temples in Varanasi and Mathura, altering the constitutional provisions about the minorities and the right to manage educational institutions, changing the form of governance of the country to a Presidential system, altering Centre-State relations, and doing away with Article 370 about the special position of J and K are unchanged.

Besides, the statements of Sangh parivar leaders the election manifestos of the BJP for the election of 1991 make this abundantly clear. If the BJP in a future election even scrapes a majority the national agenda can be shrugged off for a BJP agenda. This is the same danger that the Austrian Chancellor does not seem to realise of what legal or judicial value is the

CHANCHAL SARKAR

Declaration of Democracy that he has got the coalition constituents to sign? What Europe has woken up to is that, in an ethnic, fundamentalist and propagandist world veined with fanatical narrowness, elections are not the last word. Vox Populi is not always Vox Dei and can even be Vox Diaboli. Ominously, leaders of the Sangh parivar have stated that in "matters of faith" the judgements of even the highest court in the land are irrelevant.

How is the objective of stability helped by introducing controversial matters like review of the Constitution, allowing civil servants to join the RSS, and the open attack on churches and the not so subtle packing of the governing bodies of cultural institutions? The offensive, as in the case of Graham Staines and his two sons and in the trivial matter of *Water* is not verbal; it is violent, again reminiscent of the Brown Shirts of the Nazis. There is more than enough violence in the offing from the ISI, and the violence within if not nipped will magnify it. Kashmir already has 1.05 lakh soldiers and paramilitary; with the scrubbing away of Article 370 the State will have to be blanketed with fighting forces.

Tragically, the opposition Congress party is sclerotic, confused and uninspiring, guilty of its own fascist past contribution, the emergency, its own fiddling around with the Constitution, its own use of Article 356 in dismissing State governments. The Left is a talking shop and is fangless, forever attempting unlikely and impossible groupings. The coalition partners of the BJP are not fools but their paramount, selfish aim is for them to be in power in some States and in the Centre's coalition. So who is left? The people of country, for "the certain way to bring disaster is for enough good people to do nothing".

Karunanidhi
defends PM's
stand on RSS

CHENNAI, FEB. 8. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, today defended the Prime Minister, Mr. Vajpayee's stand that the Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Sangh is not a political party. "It is an accepted fact," he said.

At any rate, the Tamil Nadu Government would not permit its employees to participate in RSS activities, though the problem did not concern the State, he said.

Mr. Karunanidhi faced a volley of questions at a press meet in which the Gujarat Government's recent revocation of the order barring its employees from participating in the activities of the RSS figured prominently. He had already made known his stand that Government employees were barred from joining any political party, Mr. Karunanidhi said when his attention was drawn to the Opposition criticism that partners in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance had not opposed the Gujarat Government's move.

The RSS had been termed a social movement by the PM and the Supreme Court had lifted the ban on the outfit which had earlier been proscribed three times, he said. "Tell me what is communal and I will learn from you" the Chief Minister shot back responding to a question whether the RSS was not communal. — Our Special Correspondent

See also Page 13

THE HINDU

- 9 FEB 2000

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'No action against officials for RSS activities in U.P.'

LUCKNOW, FEB. 7. Amid the raging controversy over the Gujarat decision, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, said today that his Government would not take any action against State Government officials taking part in activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as there was no ban on it in the State.

"The officials of the State Government are not barred from participating in RSS activities as it is just a cultural organisation and

not a political outfit," he said. "The ban on Government officials is on joining any political party," he told reporters here.

The interpretation that the RSS had political leanings was a matter of discussion that could be left to the courts, the Chief Minister said adding that the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, too had already clarified this.

To a question whether there was any Government Order banning State officials from participa-

ting in such activities, Mr. Gupta replied that he had no knowledge about any such order.

Earlier, the Bahujan Samaj Party vice-president, Ms. Mayawati, had warned the State Government against any Gujarat-like step allowing officials to take part in RSS activities, saying the State had witnessed frequent communal tensions and any such move would further aggravate the situation. — PTI

'RSS was never banned for UP staff'

HT Correspondent
Lucknow, February 7

just an interpretation. He, however, reiterated that the workers were not allowed to join political parties.

In reply to a question, the Mr Gupta said that even if there was any old government order imposing restrictions on the employees, it may have been tailored by a political party to suit its needs. The Congress Government had banned the RSS when it had enjoyed an overwhelming majority in the state, he recalled.

However, he added that it was the employees' prerogative to decide whether to join the RSS or not. He said his officers always joined

**Gujarat-inspired
Guptaspeak**

him at every function, so there would be nothing wrong if they accompanied him at the meetings of the Deen Dayal Shodh Sanshan. Despite repeated queries from newsmen on the issue, Mr Gupta remained firm that there was no GO banning employees from joining the RSS.

The CM disclosed that he would carry out a reshuffle of his council of ministers shortly to primarily address grievances of the BJP's allies about "insignificant portfolios". When asked to elaborate on what he meant by shortly, Mr Gupta said: "In a day or two."

With reference to the forthcoming

ing by-elections in the state, Mr Gupta said the BJP-led coalition would come out with flying colours.

Replying to a question on his predecessor Kalyan Singh's challenge, that the BJP would be wiped out, Mr Gupta said: "The elections will prove who will be wiped out." He said his government's endeavour was to ensure "free and fair" elections in the state. "We will not allow booth capturing," he added.

Mayawati warns CM: Condemning PM Vajpayee for giving a clean chit to the Gujarat Government for allowing its employees to participate in the activities of the RSS, BSP leader Mayawati warned the Ram Prakash Gupta Government against taking a similar decision.

"I have information that the BJP is contemplating withdrawal of the ban imposed on the participation of Govt staff in *shakhas*, but the BSP will never allow it to happen in UP," Ms Mayawati said.



VHP threatens stir against Bajrang Dal meet ban

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHOPAL, Feb. 6. — The Vishwa Hindu Parishad will launch a nation-wide agitation on 14 or 15 February to demand the Madhya Pradesh chief minister's dismissal, if he disallows the Bajrang Dal from holding its first national convention here, during 18-20 February, the VHP senior vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said here today.

Acharya Kishore threatened that VHP activists will disrupt programmes involving Mr Digvijay Singh throughout India, if he does not desist from throwing a spanner in the works of the Bajrang Dal, the VHP's youth wing.

He said the Bajrang Dal will have its convention, regardless of the "consequences" for which, he added, the Digvijay Singh government would be responsible. He said 10,000-odd VHP-Bajrang Dal delegates will "peacefully" gather to participate in the three-day convention, adding that the state government might arrest them in its bid to torpedo the convention.

Holding the move as "illegal and undemocratic", Acharya Kishore said certain compulsions arising out of the Congress party's "internal contradictions" might have forced Mr Singh to take the decision.

The VHP will not ask the BJP-led Central government to intervene, he said, although the deci-

sion is a "blot on democracy." "We are capable of fighting against the subversion of our democratic rights," he said. Acharya Kishore said the proposed convention will be inaugurated by the former CBI director, Mr Joginder Singh. It will deliberate on the threat to our national security and work out strategies to curb rising terrorist activities across India. "Obviously, Mr Singh is disinterested in such crucial issues of national importance, even as cassettes of the militant leader Azhar Massood do the rounds here, and Christian missionaries assault minor children to convert them to Christianity in his home turf, Rajgarh." The state BJP has also condemned Mr Singh for his "inappropriate, high-handed and illegal" decision to stymie the convention. The Union minister of state for HRD, Mrs Sumitra Mahajan, and several state BJP leaders described the decision as "unconstitutional."

In his response to the Bajrang Dal's intention to go ahead with its convention, Mr Singh said his government will take "effective and stern" measures to maintain communal harmony and uphold the law and order situation in a "sensitive" Bhopal, which witnessed the country's worst communal riots after Babri Masjid was demolished in December 1992.

"We will not allow the VHP-Bajrang Dal to vitiate the peaceful and harmonious atmosphere here at any cost," he said.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 FEB 2000

PM defends Gujarat Govt. order on RSS

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, FEB. 5. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today defended the recent order of the Bharatiya Janata Party Government in Gujarat lifting the ban on participation by Government employees in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Although sources in the Rashtrapati Bhavan clarified that the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, had merely forwarded to the Centre, along with a covering letter the memoranda submitted by the Congress(I) and other Opposition parties opposing the lifting of the ban, the Prime Minister himself gave the impression that reports suggesting Mr. Narayanan had asked for specific clarifications on the subject were correct.

At the inauguration of the World Book Fair, Mr. Vajpayee said, "The Government's stand will be made known to the President and I am confident that will satisfy him."

Mr. Vajpayee denied that the RSS was a political organisation. "It is a cultural and social organisation and I do not think objections should be raised to anybody joining it."

The crux of the controversy lies in the fact that the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules prohibit Government servants from joining any political party or organisation which participates in political activity, subscribes or assists in any manner any political movement or activity. The RSS admittedly has not only close links with the BJP — it is the party's parent organisation — but also actively subscribes to and participates in political movements spearheaded by the BJP or other RSS fronts. But the RSS and the BJP have steadfastly maintained that the Sangh was only a "cultural organisation".

The BJP has pointed out that the ban on Government servants becoming members of the RSS or participating in its activities had been in force mostly during periods when the RSS itself was a banned organisation and its

members had gone underground. The ban was put into effect in the mid-eighties in Gujarat and the Keshubhai Government "had simply withdrawn the ban order".

The RSS and some of its other fronts have been banned by the Central Government at least three times for different lengths of time immediately after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, during the Emergency and after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

While the Opposition has denounced the Gujarat Government's move as a blatant attempt at politicising the bureaucracy and giving it a distinctly saffron colour, the BJP's allies in the National Democratic Alliance Government have maintained a studied silence.

A major deviation, says Cong-(I)

By Angana Parekh

NEW DELHI, FEB. 5. The Congress (I) today deplored the Prime Minister's justification of the Gujarat Government order and his statement that since the RSS was a "social and cultural" organisation there was nothing wrong in Government servants being allowed to participate in its activities. To describe in such terms an organisation whose worker had assassinated Mahatma Gandhi was "highly condemnable", it said.

Mr. Vajpayee's statement marked a "major deviation", according to the AICC spokesman, Mr. Anil Shastri. It seemed that Mr. Vajpayee had decided to come out from behind the "mask" of being a moderate and take the same line as the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal both to maintain his own position in the BJP and to keep the NDA Government afloat.

The Congress(I) welcomed reports that the President had sought a clarification from the Centre on the Gujarat order. The Government should immediately rescind the order, Mr. Shastri said. The Congress(I) had received re-

ports from Gujarat that Government staff who did not have RSS leanings feared that they would be victimised.

The party also criticised the Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha's statement that a harsh Budget was in the offing. It was incorrect of Mr. Sinha to have made such a statement at this juncture, when the Budget was being formulated, as it could lead to hoarding, blackmarketing and artificial price rise. Any step that was detrimental to the common man and farmers would be opposed tooth and nail, Mr. Shastri said.

On the Constitution review issue, he said the Vajpayee Government had brought it up to revive its sagging popularity. The Government's proposal for a fixed term for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies would amount to changing the basic structure of the Constitution as it would upset the checks and balances between the Legislature and the Executive. Far from providing stability, such a move would lead to greater instability and "there would be a new Prime Minister every two months".

BJP has not given up agenda: CPI(M)

The CPI(M) too reacted sharply, saying the Prime Minister's open defence of a "rabidly communal outfit" confirmed that the BJP had not given up its hidden agenda. On the contrary, it was making all efforts to implement it. This, the party said, should "serve as a warning to the BJP's allies who were earlier taking stand against communalism".

The party politburo refuted the Prime Minister's claim that the RSS was a "social outfit" and said there was no doubt it had a "clear-cut political-ideological perspective though working in the guise of a social outfit."

"The notification issued by the BJP Government in Gujarat is nothing but a measure aimed at infiltrating and communalising the administration of the State," it said in a state-

PM backs Gujarat order, Cong cries foul

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 5

PRIME MINISTER A B Vajpayee today lent full support to the Gujarat Government's notification lifting the ban on its employees joining the RSS and said there need be no objections on this score.

Close on the heels of President K R Narayanan seeking clarification from the Centre on the Gujarat action, Mr Vajpayee said, "The RSS is not a political outfit. It is a social and cultural organisation. I don't think objections should be raised on anybody joining it."

He made these remarks while responding to newsmen's queries over the Presidential poser after inaugurating the World Book Fair here.

The Government, said Mr Vajpayee, would be providing the President with the clarifications that he has sought on the Gujarat Government's action. "I am confident this will satisfy him," he added.

Reacting to the news published in these columns this morning on the Presidential communication, a Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman said the President had merely forwarded to the Government the memoranda submitted to him by the Congress and other Opposition parties along with a covering letter.

Meanwhile, the Congress has deplored Mr Vajpayee's defence of the Gujarat Government's order permitting civil servants' participation in RSS activities.

Responding to the Premier's remarks, Congress spokesman Anil Shastri said the NDA

partners should take note of the fact that Mr Vajpayee, in describing the Sangh as a socio-cultural organisation from which Government employees need not be cordoned off, has now chosen to wear the "mask" willed to him by the RSS, the Bajrang Dal and the VHP.

Describing the comments as a "major deviation" on the PM's part, Mr Shastri said the line he had taken was meant to please the RSS and its frontal outfits: "Mr Vajpayee's description of the Sangh as a cultural body needs to be condemned. It cannot be forgotten that an RSS worker had killed Mahatma Gandhi."

Reacting to a report in *The Hindustan Times*, he welcomed the President's action: "We feel happy and satisfied that the President, in his wisdom, is discharging his Constitutional responsibilities and duties."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 FEB 2000

Clarify Gujarat order, President tells Centre

Jay Raina
New Delhi, February 4

HN-1 5/2 ✓ 9- Religion & Position ✓
IN A significant departure from practice, President K.R. Narayanan is understood to have sought clarification from the Centre over the Gujarat Government's recent withdrawal of the ban on its employees joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

In a communication to the Prime Minister, Mr Narayanan has reportedly posed specific queries on the Centre's role in the Gujarat decision to lift the 14-year-old ban.

The President's note is reported to have been accompanied by the memoranda submitted by the Congress and some other Opposition parties to him recently on the contentious issue.

Highly placed sources said the President generally forwards many a memoranda submitted to him from time to time for the Government's consideration. "But in this particular case, Mr Narayanan has chosen to seek clarifications on certain specific points," they said.

Mr Narayanan's intervention assumes significance in the light of the Gujarat notification on removal of the ban making a clear reference to the Union Home

Ministry's communication that there is "nothing unlawful" in the activities of the RSS as spelt out in the June 1993 pronouncements of the Unlawful Activity Prevention Tribunal.

The Tribunal's judgement had followed an appeal by the RSS against the Centre's ban slapped after the December 1992 demolition of the Babri mosque.

The Centre's ban order had also named Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as an unlawful organisation.

Even as the Tribunal refused to confirm the Government's ban over the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, it upheld the same against the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. However, the ban against this organisation lapsed on its own in 1994.

The Centre did not renew the same afresh.

Official sources indicated that the Centre had not acted on the Tribunal's report over the last six years, nor had it ever recommended it to other State Governments even where the BJP has been in power.

Gujarat is the first State to have amended its Civil Servants' Conduct Rules (1971) to give a free hand to its employees including policemen below the IPS rank

to openly participate in the RSS activities.

With regard to all other State and Union Territory Governments, the service conduct rules of the employees are in conformity with the Central Civil Service (Conduct) Rules, 1964.

These rules prohibit government servants from joining any political party or organisation which takes part in politics, subscribes in aid of or assists in any other manner, any political movement or activity.

The participation of the Central Government servants in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Jamaat-e-Islami is banned under Clause (16) of the CCS (Conduct rules).

"As certain doubts have been raised about the Government's policy with respect to the membership of and participation in the activities of the RSS and Jamaat-e-Islami by the Government servants, it is clarified that the Government has always held the activities of these two organisations to be of such a nature that participation in them by the Government servants would attract disciplinary action," says clause 16 of the CCS rules.

The Government's stance has been further clarified in this regard, in Clause 18.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 FEB 2000

UP Governor refers Religious Buildings Bill to President

HT Correspondent
Lucknow, February 2

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UTTAR PRADESH Governor Suraj Bhan has referred the controversial Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill to the President for his assent.

Not only has the Governor conceded the demand of various Muslim organisations, but has also raised a question mark on the future of the Bill.

After Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, UP was the third state in the country to have passed the controversial Bill.

Incidentally though the Bill raised a furore in the social and religious circles here, there had been no noise from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh where they were adopted way back in 1954 and 1984 respectively. Apparently the state government's claim that the bill had been brought primarily to check the ISI activities had raised the apprehensions in the Muslim quarters, especially with a BJP government at the helm of affairs.

On being contacted, Governor Suraj Bhan said that he took the decision to refer the bill to the President primarily because of the involvement of some Central Acts like the CRPC, Transfer of Property Act, Waqf ACT and Religious Trust Act. He said he had gone through the proceedings of both the Houses of the state legislature in connection with this Bill before taking a decision.

It may be recalled that the Bill was tabled in the state Assembly on January 4 and was passed by voice

vote on January 5 next. The Upper House cleared the Bill the very next day.

The Uttar Pradesh government had immediately sent the bill to the Governor for his assent. However, the Governor withheld his assent as he had sought some clarifications from the state government.

The Home Secretary had also met the Governor in this connection and provided data on the increasing ISI activities on the Indo-Nepal border in recent years.

On the other hand, several social organisations had also personally met the Governor to convey their fears about certain provisions of the Bill. While urging the government to take the sternest possible action to check ISI activities in the state, the Muslim leaders demanded protection for the innocent members of the community.

The Governor said that he had asked the delegation members if they had received any complaint

from the two states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Their replies were in the negative.

The issue was also raised during the Governor's visit to Nadwa to condole the death of Maulana Ali Mian. There he was told that Maulana Ali Mian would have also opposed the Bill.

Thereafter, a delegation of prominent Muslim scholars had also met him in this connection. Deeni Talimi Council, a prominent organisation of the Minorities had also demanded the Governor not to give his assent to the Bill while the Muslim League MPs had sought an appointment with him.

Though the Bill has raised a furore in UP, there was no protests in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh where they were adopted way back in 1954 and 1984.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 3 FEB 2000

UP Governor Bhan sends Religious Bill to President

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, FEB 4

IN an apparent attempt to cool off tempers and avoid any controversy, Governor Suraj Bhan has declined to put his seal of approval on the controversial Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill, passed by both the Houses through voice vote despite strident opposition in early January. The Bill virtually bans construction of any religious place or building or even renovation of existing ones unless permission is obtained from the District Magistrate.

"I referred it for Presidential consent because of the involvement of some Central Acts like the CrPC, Transfer of Property Act, Waqf Act and Religious Endowment Act and had gone through the proceedings of both

the Houses before taking the final decision," the Governor said.

The President is likely to refer the Bill to the Law-Ministry which might introduce some amendments to make it more acceptable before returning it to the President. The Governor's move was not unusual and there were a number of precedents, legal sources said.

But this decision of the Governor has led to many red faces in the Ram Prakash Gupta government because officially, it had claimed that the introduction of the Bill was a necessity to curb "increasing ISI activities," especially along the porous Indo-Nepal border.

The Opposition, however, criticised the government claiming that the Bill was targeted at alienating the minority community and a violation of the fundamental right to practice a religion. Gupta had then

countered by saying that if so, "any court" would throw the Bill out.

While the Opposition couldn't block the passage of the Bill, the Governor's decision has given it another chance to rally against it. "The Bill is nothing but another tool in the hands of the BJP government to persecute and harass the members of the minority community. We will continue opposing it at all possible fora," said Pramod Tiwari, Congress Legislature Party leader.

In fact, several delegations comprising members of the minority community met the Governor arguing that the Bill was being introduced only for their persecution.

The Bill had clearly stated that before making any construction of religious places and buildings the consent of the DMs was a must and his decision could be challenged only by the Commissioner.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 5 FEB 2000

Basu lambasts Vajpayee for his remarks on Ayodhya

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 6

FORMER WEST Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu today strongly protested Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statement that the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya was the expression of a "national sentiment" which remains unfinished. "Is it the people's wish to construct a temple on illegal land? Is it people's wish that thousands be killed?" Mr Basu expostulated in anger.

On his first visit here after quitting office, the veteran Marxist was at his scathing best as he used the Babri Masjid demolition anniversary to flay the "evil forces" representing the Sangh and its ideology and justified his earlier description of their activities as "barbaric and uncivilised."

"The demolition and the attacks on the Christians cannot be described in any other way," he said, while releasing noted lawyer A G Noorani's book "The RSS and the BJP: A Division of Labour" brought out by CPI-M's Leftword Books.

The subject of the book, Mr Basu pointed out, was "very important for the Left, democratic, secular, civilised and patriotic people" and needed to be taken to the people to educate them of the RSS-BJP's real face. It should be translated into different Indian languages so that even "the illiterates" get to know about it, he said, quite carried away by his own impassioned plea to launch an "ideological battle" against the forces which are now ruling the country.

The inadvertent slip apart, Mr Basu did not hold back his punches. He exposed the Sangh's attempts to establish a misplaced synonymity between Hindutva and Hinduism and accused it of "attacking other religions as well as insulting Hinduism". He charged the BJP with using its "influence in power to completely do away with our idea of unity in

diversity and national integration". He lamented that communal forces were circumventing existing electoral laws to use religion for electoral purposes.

"We have to fight back. We cannot surrender to those who want to destroy India's unity and the secular character of our Constitution," Mr Basu declared. The only way to do this, he said, was to "repeatedly go back to the people" and "unite the secular, democratic forces." Elsewhere, Mr Basu also noted that there was a difference between the Congress and the BJP where communalism was con-

cerned.

Mr Basu also narrated his conversation with the Prime Minister last year after he had dubbed the Sangh as "barbaric and uncivilised". When Mr Vajpayee maintained that the demolition was an "accident", Mr Basu said he gave him taped speeches of former UP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh and cited the riots that trailed L K Advani's rath yatra. He urged Mr Vajpayee to write to him and suggest how he should describe the demolition. "He has still not written to me," Mr Basu said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JAN 2000

9 DEC 1999

Unlawful Entry

The Gujarat government has lifted a 14-year-old ban on state government employees joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This concession would not apply to IAS, IPS and Forest Service officers, since these services are governed by the All-India Service Rules. Many would argue that singling out the RSS for preferential treatment from among the 16 organisations that have been declared unlawful betrays the ideological bias of the state government. Organisations such as the Anand Marg, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Sati Pati Creed and the All-India Muslim Majlis-E-Mushawarat can now claim that they are as patriotic and culturally oriented as the RSS. To pre-empt any such argument, the Gujarat government has resorted to legalism. It has quoted a 1993 directive of the Unlawful Activity Prevention Tribunal of the Union home ministry which gave a clean chit to the RSS, declaring its activities to be lawful. It is not surprising that the lifting of the ban comes on the eve of the three-day 'sankalp shibir' of the state RSS starting January 7. There is hardly a shred of doubt among commentators that the Gujarat government is beholden to the RSS and its more extreme affiliate organisations when it comes to crucial questions that affect minorities and their basic human rights. The recent instance of allowing the 'shilanyas' for a temple in a Christian majority village is only the latest proof of the government's partisan attitude. With the lifting of the ban on state government employees joining the RSS, what was being encouraged covertly will now be done in broad daylight. Whether this could vitiate the neutrality of the civil service in the long run is something politicians with narrow agendas seldom pause to consider.

The events in Gujarat have once again lent credence to the allegation that the BJP has a 'hidden agenda'. This is reflected in the party consigning to cold storage a number of contentious issues in order to meet the compulsions of coalition politics at the Centre. Hence, at the level of the politics of pragmatism, Ayodhya, Article 370 and a common civil code are anathema to the BJP. The party has taken pains to convince its coalition partners that the agenda of the NDA is indeed the preferred agenda of the BJP. In the process, however, it has had to turn its back on the very issues that catapulted it from 3 to 162 seats in the Lok Sabha. The conduct of the Gujarat government makes one thing abundantly clear: the original ideological moorings of the BJP remain unaltered. The state government in Gujarat has a comfortable majority and is not hostage to the vagaries of coalition politics. It has, therefore, chosen to follow the undiluted agenda of the BJP and the sangh parivar. The voting public of India has, in successive elections, refused to give the BJP a decisive mandate at the Centre. This has forced the party to respect the plurality of India, despite its adherence to a largely monochromatic vision, of which the RSS is an emblem. By openly espousing the cause of this organisation, the Gujarat government could be dangerously rocking the boat for the BJP at the Centre.

BJP allies silent on Gujarat RSS move

Rajesh Ramachandran
New Delhi, January 9

HT-29 1871

THE BJP'S allies are refusing to be drawn into any criticism of the Gujarat government's decision to allow its employees, including the police, to join the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

There has been a single, faint voice of dissent from the Tamil Nadu ally, Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK). Its general secretary, V Gopalaswamy, has expressed "resentment", and said he will take up the issue with the Prime Minister.

Asked to react, Telugu Desam parliamentary party leader Yerran Naidu first wanted to know whether Trinamool Congress leader and Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee had said anything. But she too is quiet. She is in Calcutta and would not respond to calls. Her spokesman, Mr Jayanta Bhattacharjee, said: "I don't know. Only Mamata Banerjee can speak on the issue." Mr Yerran Naidu too preferred to refer the matter to his leader. Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Even the DMK, which makes a virtue of its secularism and Dravidian nationalism, warded off the question. Union industry minister Murasoli Maran passed the

buck to Chennai where chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi and his personal assistant, Mr Shanmughanathan, were perpetually busy.

Samata Party general secretary Jaya Jaitely openly supported the move: "I would support an individual's right to be in the RSS even if he is employed in the government. But the government shouldn't encourage or promote anyone to join the RSS."

Gujarat home minister Haren Pandya, while announcing the decision, had referred to a central home ministry communique. But central government employees are still barred from joining the RSS. However, the Union home ministry too was in no mood to explain the dichotomy.

What the BJP's allies did hesitantly, the beauracrats did with elan: The buck was passed from the home ministry spokesman to a special secretary to another special secretary to a joint secretary to another joint secretary and back to the spokesman, who by then was on leave.

With the establishment shying away from disclosing the facts and influential allies turning a blind eye, soon the neighbourhood policeman will don khaki of another variety. And so could the primary schoolteacher manning an election booth.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

.10 JAN 2000

RSS wants Centre to adopt Gujarat pattern

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, JAN. 9. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has demanded that the Centre adopt the Gujarat Government pattern and allow its employees to participate in the activities of the RSS.

Talking to presspersons on the concluding day of the three-day State-level "Sankalp Shibir" of the RSS here today, the organisation's national general secretary, Mr. H. V. Seshadri, said the Government, unfortunately, was still following the British pattern which had even banned the Congress then for leading the freedom movement. There was no logic in denying Government employees the freedom to join the RSS if they so desired.

Mr. Seshadri, however, differed with the Gujarat Government on allowing police staff below the rank of IPS to join the RSS ranks. Though the State had allowed it, the Centre must decide on its own on withdrawing the restriction.

While refusing to comment on the performance of the Vajpayee Government, stating that the RSS opinion "was the same as that of the common man," Mr. Seshadri, however, said India's over-dependence on the U.S. to declare Pakistan a terrorist state was not acceptable. India should take its own stand and prepare itself accordingly to meet any threat from across the border. India's strength would go unrecognised if it merely kept pleading

with the U.S. to declare Pakistan a terrorist state.

The experience in the past was that none of the countries had come to the aid of India and if anything they had sided with Pakistan. Mr. Seshadri was all praise for Indira Gandhi, who took the 'bold step' to decide the destiny of Bangladesh after she realised that no other country was supporting India's cause in 1971.

He also had a dig at the Telugu Desam party, a partner of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, as well as the Congress(I). He alleged that the two were taking the support of naxalites in Andhra Pradesh during the elections to reach out to the rural masses. The Centre alone would not be able to contain internal terrorism unless actively supported by the State Governments, he felt.

Both Mr. Seshadri and the RSS Sarsanghachalak, Mr. Rajendrasinghji (Rajju Bhaiya), expressed concern over the conversion activities of the Christian missionaries which was "threatening the unity" of the country, particularly in the north-eastern region. Asking the missionaries to 'behave' and learn to "respect the Indian culture and ethos," they said they had no objection to the missionaries working for "religious conversions" but opposed "cultural conversions" of the Indians. "teaching them to abuse their own country, its culture and rich heritage."

Demanding a ban on conversions through

pressure, inducement and allurements, the RSS leaders said this would automatically stop if the Hindus stood united. The RSS chief criticised the 'fuss' created over the Vishwa Hindu Parishad laying the foundation stone of a Ram temple in a south Gujarat village recently and wondered why Hindus cannot build a temple when they had allowed the Christians to construct churches even though the latter were in a minority.

Strongly criticising the "foreign outlook" of Indians, Rajju Bhaiya expressed shock over the "millennium" celebrations in the country. "It is the Christian millennium and not ours." He also regretted that even 50 years after Independence, the Indian Airlines served "British snacks" as if "only the foreigners are travelling." Outlying the basic principles of the RSS, the Sangh joint general secretary, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, attacked the "Nehruvian policies" of the urban-based economy which was nothing but an "extension of the British legacy."

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, the Textile Minister, Mr. Kashiram Rana, the Minister of State for Defence, Mr. Harin Pathak, and the Minister of State for Railways, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, were among those present on the concluding day of the Shibir. The Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel, wore the RSS uniform of khaki half-trousers. Many of his Cabinet colleagues attended the 'shibir' as ordinary members.

KHAKI SHORTS

516 101 Gujarat lifts ban on RSS *Religion & Politics*

WHAT Gujarat does today, India does tomorrow — so says the BJP. Gujarat is the BJP's model state and with its vast cadre network and clear majority in government it is the testing ground for the entire RSS family — of which the BJP is an important part. The communal riots of the 80s first started in Gujarat with a pogrom against Muslims beginning as early as 1985 and spreading to the rest of the country; L K Advani started his rath yatra from Somnath; the political polarisation along communal lines won its first electoral dividends in this state; the violence against Christians was initially tested out in the tribal areas of Dangs before moving east; the religion-based census was tried here last year before it was revoked because of strong opposition. The latest attempt to saffronise the state is the lifting of the ban on government employees joining the RSS. According to civil service rules, government servants are not allowed to be members of any political parties, or have anything to do with 16 banned organisations like the Ananda Marg, Hindu Mahasabha, VHP, RSS and the Jamaat-e-Islami. The Keshubhai Patel government has lifted the ban on the RSS saying that the latter is committed to patriotism and discipline and he cannot find "anything unlawful about its activities".

The first steps on the BJP's real agenda have been taken. There is no denying that many bureaucrats already harbour RSS sympathies, with the lifting of the ban they will be able to wear their *khaki* shorts over their trousers. The BJP have been trying to legitimise the RSS for sometime — distancing Nathuram Godse, the murderer of the Mahatma, from the organisation; showing off the RSS as a social and cultural organisation working towards Gandhian nationalism, but all it requires is a single reading of their mouthpiece, *The Organiser*, to see their communal fangs. The RSS is a completely exclusivist body which projects a Hindu theocratic state with all minorities relegated to second-class citizens. Its concept of Indian nationalism enshrines Hindutva, very different from the secular character enshrined in the constitution. By lifting the ban on the RSS, the BJP, in Gujarat first, has embarked on the long-term goal of gaining acceptability for the Parivar. Once the RSS is rehabilitated then VHP, Bajrang Dal and Hindu Jagaran Manch can follow. By experimenting in Gujarat where it needs no allies, the BJP is testing the reaction of other constituents of the alliance. The TDP, DMK and Trinamul Congress have been very critical of the RSS in the past, but have been impressed by the cultivated liberal face of the BJP headed by Vajpayee. The NDA partners should seriously consider the developments in Gujarat and take remedial action. Tomorrow may be too late.

THE STATESMAN

10 JAN 2000

RSS & SERVICES-I

Advani Sanctioned Gujarat's Order

"IF you do not adopt this course, then do not follow the present Constitution. Substitute something else. Put in a Congress Constitution or some other Constitution or put in the RSS Constitution — whatever you like — but not this Constitution. This Constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of service which will keep the country intact." When Sardar Patel delivered this anguished admonition to the Constituent Assembly, on 10 October 1949, he was at pains to emphasise that a politically neutral civil service is indispensable not only for the working of parliamentary democracy but also for preserving its unity. "The Union will go — you will not have a united India, if you do not have a good all-India service which has the independence to speak out its mind..."

Patel could not have imagined that a day would come, and in his own state, too, when the RSS would be invited to work the Constitution and become, in form a state functionary; in effect, the ruler of the state. He was rebutting criticisms of the provisions in the draft Constitution regarding the services. It would be absurd to suggest that his remarks concerned the central services alone, leaving the states free to pack their services with party men.

POLITICAL

As far back as 27 April 1948, as Union home minister, Patel wrote a letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru which deserves to rank among the historic documents of Constitution-making in India: "I need hardly emphasise that an efficient, disciplined and contented service, assured of its prospect as a result of diligent and honest work, is a *sine qua non* of sound administration under a democratic regime even more than under an authoritarian rule. The service must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations, either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether."

The issue was whether to leave the basic rules of the services to be regulated by ordinary legislation or in the Constitution itself. Patel opined: "Constitutional guarantees and safeguards are the best medium of providing for these services and are likely to be more lasting." No court can ignore this document while construing Part XIV of the Constitution concerning the services. Article 309 empowers the "appropriate legislature", central or state,

By AG NOORANI

law to regulate their recruitment, conditions of service, etc. Until that is done, the President or the Governor, as the case may be, can make rules for those purposes. Article 312 provides for the establishment of All-India Services "Common to the Union and the States".

Patel's observations apply to, both, all-India services and state services. When Article 154 says that "the executive power of the State be vested in the Governor and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to

The author is a lawyer and commentator on current affairs.

him in accordance with this Constitution", it means clearly, in so far as the civil service is concerned, one which is "above party", recruited without "political considerations". Article 53 contains identical provisions in respect of the President. Any other construction would leave the Congress, the CPM, the Akali Dal, the DMK and Telegu Desam free to recruit civil servants from the ranks of their party or front organisations of the party. That would be a perversion of the Constitution.

On 4 November 1948, while introducing the draft Constitution in the Constituent Assembly, BR Ambedkar expounded the fundamentals underlying it: "The form of the administration must be appropriate and in the same sense as the form of the Constitution." An RSS-ridden civil service cannot work a secular Constitution. For, "it is perfectly possible to pervert the Constitution, without changing its form, by merely changing the form of the administration and to (sic) make it inconsistent and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution."

NO PRETENCE

This is precisely what the government of Gujarat has done with the full backing of the Government of India in the ministry of home headed by Lal Krishna Advani. Ever since independence, governments at the Centre and in the states banned members of certain organisations from recruitment to their respective services. Additionally, they forbade personnel of the services from membership of those bodies. The list was prepared by the Centre and revised periodically; the last time, in 1986. Accordingly, the Gujarat Civil Servants Conduct Rules, 1971, forbade them from having any connection with the RSS, besides some others. The VHP, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Anand Marg, the All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat, the Sati Pati Creed and the Mass Movement (Madhok faction) were among the 16 bodies on the list.

The change was brought about with a deviousness and disingenuity that reveals the Advani approach in its true colours. The Gujarat government sends a "query" to the Union home ministry, quite out of the blue, and the latter sends the desired reply. What was the inspiration behind this move in respect of just one black-listed body? There was not even the pretence of a comprehensive review of the list by the Centre. The state RSS had organised a mammoth camp of 30,000 near Ahmedabad from 7 January. Gujarat's minister of state for home, Haren Pandya, disclosed the contents of the Centre's letter of 13 July 1999. It cited the report of the Unlawful Activities Tribunal in 1993 which had not found anything "unlawful" in RSS activities.

This was a reference to the report of the tribunal, headed by Justice PK Bahri of the Delhi High Court on 4 June 1993, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, striking down the Government of India's order of 10 December 1992 banning the RSS along with the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. The bans, imposed after the demolition of the Babari mosque on 6 December, cited two grounds, namely, complicity in the demolition and imputation of disloyalty against members of certain communities. This ban, surely, had no-thing to do with the black-list of old which was based on wider considerations which are still valid. If the letter of 13 July 1999 is allowed to pass muster, there is nothing to prevent Advani from amend-

ing the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1994 on the lines of the Gujarat amendment.

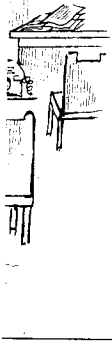
PERVERSION

Justice Bahri's findings were as strange as his outlook was revealing. In his view, "by itself the Ram Janmabhoomi movement could be termed as laudable as far as Hindus are concerned", provided it was conducted "peacefully". He did not say it was permissible, but "laudable". He said also that the "laudable objectives being pursued by the VHP cannot be objected [to], for strengthening the various Hindu sects for uniting them". British policies were aimed at preventing Muslims from getting "assimilated in the mainstream of the culture of this country" — the Sangh parivar's view.

It was a judge with such an outlook who, rejecting all evidence of complicity in the demolition, perversely exonerated the RSS. But the list was based on the RSS's entire record since it was founded 75 years ago; a record of complicity in communal riots and of sheer deceit. Advani is very much mistaken if he imagines that his edict of dispensation can wipe out that record or, more to the point, escape judicial scrutiny. The full text of the letter of 13 July 1999 must be published now. The record will be dragged before the courts if the Gujarat order is challenged. It is based on authentic documentation. Haren Pandya's fulsome praise of the RSS seems only to invite attention to the record. "The RSS is preaching patriotism and serving the society and the nation," it is a "patriotic, service-oriented, nation-building organisation" which has "proved its credentials" — an organisation which, despite the fervent pleas of Jayaprakash Narayan in 1977-78, refused to open its doors to non-Hindus.

The RSS's professions of nobility and selfless service merit the poet's rebuke: *Itni na barha pakiye daman ki hiqayat Daman ko zara dekh zara bandey kabah dekh* (Don't tell a long tale of virtuous conduct. Just look at your skirt, the tell-tale stains and the tears).

(To be concluded)



THE STATESMAN

14 JAN 2000

RSS & SERVICES-II

51-8 A Half-Century's Gory Record

WHAT of the earlier ban on the RSS on 4 February 1948, in the wake of the assassination of Gandhi by Nathuram Godse on 30 January and the events preceding it? The then chief secretary of UP, Rajeshwar Dayal, revealed in his memoirs, *A Life of Our Times*, published in 1998, that soon after the partition the deputy IGP of the western range, BBL Jaitley, produced before him two steel trunks. They "revealed incontrovertible evidence of a dastardly conspiracy to create a communal holocaust throughout the western districts". There were accurate maps "marking out the Muslim localities and habitations ... Timely raid conducted on the premises of the RSS had brought the massive conspiracy to light. The whole plot had been concerted under the direction and supervision of the supremo of the organisation himself — Both Jaitley and I pressed for the immediate arrest of the prime accused MS Golwalkar (the supremo ...)". He eluded the police who were armed with nothing more deadly than a letter of warning from the CM, GB Pant, who refused to order the arrest. He was arrested only after Gandhi's assassination.

RSS FAMILY

For long, the Sangh Parivar claimed that Godse was not a member of the RSS. His brother and co-conspirator, Gopal, spilled the beans in an interview to *Frontline* (28 January, 1994): "All the brothers were in the RSS. You can say we grew up in the RSS rather than in our home. It was like a family to us. Nathuram had become a *baudhik karyavah* (intellectual worker) in the RSS. He has said in his statement that he left the RSS ... because Golwalkar and the RSS were in a lot of trouble after the murder of Gandhi. But he did not leave the RSS." To the question, "Advani has recently said that Nathuram had nothing to do with the RSS", he replied: "It is cowardice to say that."

A government communique of 4 February 1948, announcing the ban, accused RSS members of "acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity and murder" and attempts to "suborn the police and military". A communique of 11 July 1949 recorded the RSS's assurances which led to the lifting of the ban. They concerned democratic functioning internally, "eschewing secrecy and abjuring violence".

By AG NOORANI

Earlier, to Shyama Prasad Mokerjee's pleas for letting the RSS free, Patel wrote to him on 6 May 1948 that Hindu Mahasabha members had "gloated over the tragedy and distributed sweets ... The same would apply to the RSS with the additional danger inherent in an organisation run in secret on military or semi-military lines". On 1 July 1948, he wrote, "The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of the Government and the State".

More than one judicial commission of inquiry has indicted the RSS for complicity in communal riots. If the Jagannathan Reddy Commission on the Ahmedabad riots (1969) and the Madan Commission on the Bhiwandi riots (1970) exposed the United Front tactics of the RSS and its political wing, the Jan Sangh, ancestor of the BJP, Justice Vithayalil's report on the Tellicherry riots (1971) censured the RSS for "rousing up" communal feeling and for "preparing the background for the disturbances". Justice Jitendra Narain's Report on the Jamshedpur riots (1979) censured the RSS supremo MD Deoras personally for the communal propaganda that had caused the riots. The RSS had held a conference there "only four days before the Ram Navami festival (when the riots erupted) and the speech delivered by Shri Balasaheb Deoras contributed their full share in fomenting these communal feelings". The RSS had created "a climate for these disturbances".

The report of Justice P Venugopal of the Madras High Court, on the riots in Kanyakumari in March 1982, found the RSS guilty of fomenting anti-Christian feelings: "It has taken upon itself the task to teach the minority their place and if they are not willing to learn their place, teach them a lesson. The RSS has given respectability to communalism and communal riots and demoralise (sic) administration."

POLITICS

The RSS position on the Constitution of India was revealed by its chief, Rajendra Singh in an article published on 14 January 1993: "Certain specialities of this country should be reflected in the Constitution. In place of 'India that is Bharat', we should have said 'Bharat that is Hindustan'. Official documents refer to the 'composite culture', but ours is certainly not a composite culture. Culture is not wearing of clothes or speaking languages. In a very fundamental sense, this country has a unique cultural oneness. No country, if it has to survive, can have compartments. All this

shows that changes are needed in the Constitution. A Constitution more suited to the ethos and genius of this country should be adopted in the future". The plea for "changes" is swiftly altered to one for a new Constitution altogether suited to "the ethos and genius" of the RSS. This was written soon after publication, on 1 January, of a pamphlet by Swami Muktananda Saraswati on the Constitution. He denounced it as "anti-Hindu".

The RSS claims to be a "cultural" body but its definition of "culture" includes politics and its activities are nothing but political. In a letter to Nehru (12 November 1948) Golwalkar claimed that the RSS was "aloof from politics". Nehru had no illusions about its "declared objectives" having "little to do with the real ones" and its "anti-national and often subversive and violent" behaviour (10 November). The duality came to the fore when, to escape tax, it claimed to be a charitable body. But, to escape registration as a public charity, it claimed a political complexion, as Dr MD Kamdar of

Nagpur brought out in the proceedings he had instituted.

In miscellaneous application No 17 of 1978, Rajendra Singh and Deoras's brother, Bhaurao, asserted in para 14 that it does not indulge in politics, ie, day-to-day politics though the Sangh has a political philosophy within its wide sweep of political work. It is possible to change this policy and even participate in politics" — a far cry from the 1948 claim of "being aloof from politics".

PROJECTING RSS

He added that there was a "limited democratic form and machinery provided for carrying out the work of the Sangh... there is no election at all levels but selection and nomination, except the posts *Sarkaryawaha* (general secretary) and Prant Sanghchalaks". Also, "there is no right of admission to everybody". He now argued: "The work of the RSS is neither religious nor charitable but its objects are cultural and patriotic as contra-distinguished from religious or charitable. It is akin to political purposes though RSS is not at present a political party inasmuch as the RSS constitution, quoted above, bars active political participation by RSS as such, as a policy ... Tomorrow the policy could be changed and RSS could participate in even day-to-day political activity as a political party because policy is not a permanent or irrevocable thing." Nothing could be more explicit.

On 15 and 16 November 1987, Deoras said that the RSS planned to enter politics. Three years later, Advani said in his famous speech at the RSS meeting in Coimbatore on 17 March 1990: "We have to intensify our efforts to project the viewpoint of the RSS." He amplified: "There has been a conscious effort on the part of *Swayamsevaks* who are working in the BJP to make each one understand the ideological base to which we belong, and our connections with sister organisations like the VHP, the ABVP, the BMS, the Sena Bharati and the Kalyan Ashram which are all based on the inspiration from the RSS."

A decade later, comes the edict to Gujarat — let the RSS enter the services. This, from a government which disavows a "hidden agenda" and speaks of the NDA's programme. But if it can go so far when it is hopelessly dependent on the allies, what will the BJP not do if it acquires a majority in its own right? As Jesus Christ warned the wailing women of Jerusalem, as he was being led away, "If they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (St. Luke; 23:31).

(Concluded)

THE STATESMAN

15 JAN 2000

Rebel hand in N-E killing

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Jan. 14: The authorities of the Loktak hydroelectric project have agreed to resume work following an assurance by the Manipur government to provide adequate security in the project area.

State power minister Govindas Konthoujam said additional CRPF companies have been deployed in the project area at Ningthoukhong and Kom Keirap after project chief engineer Subhash Chandra Sher was gunned down by militants on Wednesday.

The banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) has claimed responsibility for killing the chief engineer. In a statement released here, the KYKL said Sher was "punished" for stubbornly refusing to pay them "tax". The outfit has warned other government officials as well.

Loktak power project officials refused to disclose how much money the KYKL had demanded from the chief engineer. Sher's predecessor, R.P. Sehgal, had also been attacked by mili-

Manipur govt pledges foolproof security for Loktak engineers

tants in Bishenpur. But he had survived as he had been travelling in a bullet-proof car, official sources said.

Sher's murder has shocked the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC), which is running the Loktak project. It had threatened to pull out all its employees from different power projects in the Northeast.

Three high-level NHPC teams headed by director (personnel) A.I. Buneet, executive director (projects) A.K. Gangopadhyay and security advisor Alloor had rushed to Imphal yesterday to take stock of the situation.

The NHPC team today held a marathon meeting with state government officials led by state chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh. Senior police, CRPF and BSF officials also attended the meeting.

The power minister, who took part in the meeting, said the

tions CRPF company was rushed to the area yesterday. The state power minister said another CRPF company will be deployed there soon.

Chief minister Nipamacha Singh has strongly condemned Sher's killing. The government has urged the Union home ministry to raise a separate security force for guarding the Loktak project. Official sources said the Union home ministry has given a green signal to the proposal.

Sher cremated

The chief engineer of the Loktak power project was cremated at Noida near New Delhi today, adds PTI. Heart-rending scenes were witnessed at the funeral, attended among others by Union minister of state for power Jayawanti Mehta, power secretary V.K. Pandit and NHPC chairman-cum-managing director Yogendra Prasad.

Sher is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter. Originally from Kashmir, Sher's family lives in Delhi. He had been posted at the Loktak project three months back.

NHPC officials agreed to resume work only after the chief minister assured them of foolproof security. The government has also agreed to guard residential quarters of the families of the project officials. The NHPC team was pacified by these assurances, official sources added.

Official sources said the militants were able to sneak into the project area as the Army had been pulled out of the state for the Kargil operations. Earlier an Army brigade had been posted at the project area.

An Assam Rifles battalion, which was moved in after the Army's departure, was also pulled out recently from the area for counter-insurgency operations. Assam Rifles officials said no troops have been posted in the area since last month.

Three CRPF companies were posted at the project area but this was not enough. An addi-

We will allow Ram temple to be built peacefully: UP CM

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 28

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Ram Prakash Gupta today said his government would not stop the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) unless it threatened law and order or violated any law.

Addressing his first formal conference in the Capital since he replaced Mr. Kalyan Singh three months ago, Mr. Gupta said, "Why should I stop them from constructing a temple so long as law and order is not affected? We will stop them only if they break the law."

Asked if his remark meant that the VHP would be allowed to build the temple "peacefully", he said, "Even the demolition of the Babri Masjid had taken place peacefully."

Mr Gupta was replying to questions on the BJP keeping the contentious issues — the Ram temple, Article 370 and uniform civil code — out of the National Agenda for Governance as well as the BJP's Chennai Declaration.

"These are not our basic issues, and were kept out in deference to the wishes of the BJP's allies," said Mr. Gupta. The

Chief Minister had only two months ago put the BJP and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in a tight spot in Parliament after he said the issues were very much part of the BJP's agenda.

"It is not a question of giving up these issues. The NDA's agenda is the BJP's agenda," he said. "Our basic issue — since the Jana Sangh days — is to usher in value-based politics to ensure social, economic and political equality for the benefit of all."

Asked about the controversial Bill requiring official permission for the construction of places of worship in the state, Mr. Gupta said it was to discourage ISI's mischief-mongering under the garb of religious activities along the Indo-Nepal border.

"It is for the limited purpose of maintaining internal security," he said when asked if the Bill did not go against the fundamental right of worship.

"We could not have a law only for the border districts. Therefore, it had to be made applicable to the entire state. If necessary, we will amend this law."

The Chief Minister said he could not divulge details about the "misuse" of religious places by the ISI on the border areas, but intelligence agencies had gathered enough evidence in this regard.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JAN 2000

UP CM for Ram temple if within ambit of law

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Triggering yet another controversy, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta on Friday said that he was not opposed to the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya if it did not create



R.P. Gupta

any law and order problem. Mr Gupta told reporters that he had no objection to such activity if it remained peaceful. "Why should I stop the Bajrang Dal and VHP from building a temple if it does

not pose any threat to law and order," he said when asked if he was in favour of the temple. He insisted such activity should take place within the ambit of law.

He claimed the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 had been "peaceful". He disagreed with the view that the BJP had dropped contentious issues like Ram Janmabhoomi, Article 370 and uniform civil code. He said because of the coalition the BJP had adopted the National Democratic alliance agenda. He said his government had to bring a bill for prior clearance to construct any place of worship in the state as measure to thwart growing ISI activity along

the Indo-Nepal border. Mr Gupta who is not a member of either House, said he would not contest any of the coming by-elections. He disagreed with a suggestion that the outcome of the by-elections would be a reflection on his performance. To another question whether his government would allow its employees to join RSS as in Gujarat, Mr Gupta said he had not applied his mind to it. On the Centre's move to set up a commission to review the constitution, he said he was in favour of review but there should be a national debate on the issue. He did not agree with the views of his opponents that his decision was a sign of weakness.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 JAN 2000

'Gujarat notification on RSS will stay'

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JAN. 30. The Gujarat Home Minister, Mr. Haren V. Pandya, has ruled out the possibility of his Government withdrawing the controversial circular permitting employees to participate in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Defending the circular, the Minister said the Government had neither made it mandatory for its staff to take part in the RSS activities nor invited them to join the organisation as the Congress (I) was making it out to be. It had merely given them freedom to participate in the work of a social organisation.

At a press conference here on Sunday, Mr. Pandya denied that the Government was playing the communal card. Several other outfits including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Hindu Mahasabha and Anand Marg along with the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the Tameer-e-Millat remained on the Government's list of banned organisations, he pointed out.

He said the Congress(I) Government in 1986 banned 32 outfits and included the RSS in the list though the Sangh was a social organisation engaged in character-building and promoting na-

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tional spirit. The decision was not only well thought out but based on a communication from the Centre that the RSS was not in the list of banned organisations following a judgment of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Tribunal.

He said the Congress(I) regime had not included the Seva Dal and the NSUI in the list of banned organisations while targeting the RSS though it was not a political outfit. The Congress(I) leaders were raising a hue and cry nearly a fortnight after the circular was issued exposing their political bankruptcy.

Gujarat had witnessed a 7.6 per cent decline in violent crimes due to the implementation of the Police Action Plan. Crimes such as murder, rioting, kidnapping, dacoity had come down from 48,057 in 1998 to 44,232 last year.

Activities of Pakistan's ISI had also been kept under check through a special department for border security and a three-tier security system.

Mr. Pandya met his Andhra Pradesh counterpart, Mr. T. Devender Goud, and the Union Minister of State for Urban Development, Mr. B. Dattatreya, besides visiting the HI-TEC City and the National Police Academy.

Sonia blasts Gujarat on govt staff joining RSS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, Jan. 30. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today blasted the Gujarat government for lifting of ban on its employees to take part in RSS activities.

The Congress president made a trip to Ahmedabad where she attended a prayer meeting at Sabarmati Ashram — on the day of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination — and then addressed a party meeting.

Mrs Gandhi singled out the BJP government in Gujarat and said the Congress would continue its battle until the state government re-imposes the ban on government servants joining the RSS.

Flanked by three Congress Chief Ministers of Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, she blasted the communal forces in the country. She said that the ideology behind the killing of the

Mahatma was raising its head again. The government in Gujarat is the true face of the BJP, she said.

The Congress president said the withdrawal of the ban meant that Gujarat was dividing the government servants and painting them in their party colours.

"How can they force their party agenda on government servants?" she questioned. She added that the move was against the Constitution and against the democratic values which are cherished in the country.

Mrs Gandhi said according to the Indian Constitution, every citizen was equal and should enjoy equal rights. "There is no discrimination with regard to religion or caste, but the BJP government is working against these directions".

"Congress will oppose the anti-social policies of the BJP,"

she announced.

Earlier today, Mrs Gandhi with 17 other party leaders was arrested for violating prohibitory orders while leading a march towards the Prime Minister's residence to protest the Gujarat government's decision, PTI adds from New Delhi.

The Congress spokesman, Mr Ajit Jogi, told reporters here that the Congress president and several CWC members "courted arrest as they were prevented from proceeding to the Prime Minister's residence."

The Delhi Police Joint Commissioner, Mr RK Niyogi, said Mrs Gandhi, and 17 Congress MPs were arrested under the Delhi Police Act near Tees January Marg.

Mrs Gandhi was "detained for a minute" for defying prohibitory orders before being freed, police said.

She later left for Ahmedabad.

THE STATESMAN
31 JAN 2000

Temple indiscretions

IN THE unlikely event that history remembers Ram Prakash Gupta at all, it will be as the most forgetful chief minister in Indian history. Mr Gupta has turned absentmindedness into an art form. He does not recognise his own ministers, forgets who his secretaries are and can't remember today what he decided yesterday. Worse still, from the BJP's point of view, he actually speaks his mind. While the rest of the party is still engaged in the traditional obfuscations over the Ayodhya issue, Mr Gupta has no hesitation in declaring that the Sangh parivar will build a temple in Ayodhya and that the UP government will make no attempt to halt the construction.

Predictably, Mr Gupta's candour has embarrassed his party which is still trying to have it both ways. On the one hand, it declares that the temple is not on its agenda while on the other it keeps the party faithful within the fold by suggesting that Ayodhya is still very much a BJP issue. Thus, when Mr Gupta gives the game away, the BJP has reason to be concerned. Fortunately, from the party's perspective, such is Mr Gupta's reputation that his statements can be easily dismissed and he can be made to issue an immediate denial; and who knows, it is even possible that Mr Gupta has forgotten ever having made the statement, given his past record.

Though it is tempting to view the whole issue as just another episode in the long-running comedy series that is the BJP government in UP, the fact is that Mr Gupta's indiscreet statement raises serious issues. Mr Gupta's views are not his alone, they are the Sangh parivar's. When he says that the temple will be built, he speaks for all his colleagues. And when he makes the seemingly incredible remark that the Babri masjid was demolished peacefully, he is actually only restating the conventional wisdom within the parivar. The Vajpayee government likes to pretend that the parivar's views are of no consequence and that it is bound only by the NDA agenda. This position is beginning to wear increasingly thin. The truth is that as far as the parivar is concerned, it is Mr Vajpayee and the NDA whose views are of little consequence. So far, the parivar has bided its time. But judging by Mr Gupta's candour, it may be running out of patience.

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