

Catholic priest shot dead

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Dec. 4: Unidentified gunmen shot dead a 30-year-old Catholic priest near Sugunu in Manipur's Thoubal district on Saturday, police said today.

The victim, Father Shajan Jacob Chittinapilly, was the assistant priest of the St. Joseph's parish in Sugunu and the third missionary to be killed in Manipur.

Sources said Jacob, who hailed from Kerala, was abducted by two gunmen from the St. Joseph's School in Sugunu on Saturday. The duo also forced the priest's driver to accompany them in the school jeep, they added.

Jacob's body was recovered from Tangjeng, 7 km from Sugunu, early yesterday.

The priest was taken to a paddy field and shot in the head. The gunmen deflated the tyres of the jeep before fleeing, sources said.

According to a statement issued by the Archbishop's House, members of the Sugunu parish launched a search operation immediately after Jacob's kidnapping, but in vain.

Jacob's driver, Khaidem Thoi-ba, was spared by the assailants. He lost consciousness when he saw Jacob being attacked. When he came to, he found the priest lying in a pool of blood. He immediately went to Sugunu and informed the police.

Sources said a particular militant outfit had demanded Rs 50,000 from St. Joseph's School sometime ago.

However, the amount was not paid as the Church had earlier decided not to accede to the demands of militants.

Various church organisations today condemned Jacob's killing.

THE TELEGRAPH

5 DEC 2000

Tight security for Babri anniversary

NEW DELHI, DEC. 5. Security around the country, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and other communally-sensitive States, has been beefed up with heavy deployment of police and para-military forces in view of the eighth anniversary of the demolition of Babri Masjid tomorrow.

The Union Home Ministry has instructed all States and Union Territories to take necessary security measures and heighten vigil in vulnerable areas.

In Uttar Pradesh, the PAC and police have been deployed in adequate strength in the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad following the decision of some Hindu and Muslim organisations to observe the day as "victory day" and "black day" respectively.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has announced holding of a special

function at Kar Sewak Puram to mark the day. It is expected to be attended by the VHP president, Mr. Ashok Singhal.

The U.P. Government has also taken strict security measures in Varanasi and Mathura.

In Delhi, the Joint Commissioner of Police, Mr. Ajay Chadha, said patrolling has been intensified in trouble-prone areas.

Police and Rapid Action Force personnel have been posted at sensitive places of worship in and-around Hyderabad. The Police Commissioner, Mr. S.R. Sukumara, said mobile patrol parties would intercept vehicles and persons in case of suspicion.

In Gujarat, the Minister of State for Home, Mr. Haren Pandya, said a general alert has been sounded in the State to maintain law and order.

Over 10,000 police personnel will be deployed in Chennai. The Police Commissioner, Mr. P. Kalimuthu, said police are taking no chances as three years ago the day was marred by explosions on three trains that left Chennai.

In Maharashtra, police have stepped up surveillance in areas vulnerable to militant attacks.

In Calcutta, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr. N.C. Ghosh said additional deployment would be made in all sensitive pockets in the metropolis with the RAF and mobile police units making frequent rounds.

Security has been tightened at the famous Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala in the wake of a 12-hour strike called by People's Democratic Party tomorrow. — PTI

THE HINDU

6 DEC 2000

Ayodhya mission yet to be realised: Vajpayee

Demand for resignations of Advani, Joshi, Uma rejected

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 6

PRIME MINISTER Vajpayee today said that the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya was "an expression of the national feeling which is yet to be realised." He added that how the temple is built "is also very important."

He was speaking to reporters after the Opposition forced both Houses of Parliament to adjourn for the day to mark the eighth anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

Mr Vajpayee's reaction today was not only reiteration of the position he had taken in the Lok Sabha on December 7, 1999, (when the Opposition had come up with a similar demand) but also seemed to justify the Ayodhya movement, which was spearheaded by Mr Advani.

Mr Vajpayee rejected outright the Opposition's demand for the resignations of Union Ministers L.K. Advani, M.M. Joshi and Uma Bharti, who are charged in

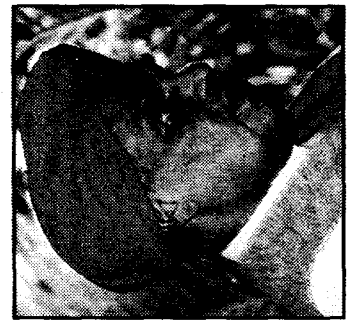
the Babri Masjid case.

He said allegations of involvement in the demolition of the disputed structure were contrary to facts. "They were in Ayodhya to protect it (the mosque) and not to demolish it."

Accusing the Congress of raking up the demand because it had no other issues, Mr Vajpayee sought to distinguish between the status of their case and the resignation by Union Minister of State for Defence Harin Pathak and Gujarat Health Minister Ashok Bhatt. Pathak and Bhatt were charged in a murder case.

"The Gujarat Ministers," the PM said, "resigned because we wanted certain propriety to be maintained, whereas the Ayodhya issue is no reason for anyone to demand the resignation of the three Ministers."

The Prime Minister said Mr Advani and those present at the site at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 were in fact telling people that they had come to register their "protest" against the dis-



BABRI DEMOLITION



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mean that he supported the pulling down of the mosque on December 6, 1992.

Last year, when the Opposition had similarly stalled proceedings in Parliament, Mr Vajpayee had said: "In view of the fact that no change in the position of court cases has taken place ever since the Ministers concerned were inducted into office in March 1998, and no allegation of corruption or misuse of office is involved, the demand that they should quit or that be barred from replying to certain questions is untenable."

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 6

THE CONGRESS and the Left's promise today of a 'befitting response' to Prime Minister Vajpayee's stout defence of the Ayodhya movement and his three chargesheeted Cabinet colleagues, has virtually shut the doors on an early end to the parliamentary impasse on the issue.

Congress spokesman Anand Sharma said Mr Vajpayee's remark - that the Ram Temple movement was ongoing process and an expression of the yet-to-be-realised national sentiments - "established beyond doubt that the NDA agenda of governance was a mere smoke-screen." The Government's real commitment, he said, "is to the RSS-Saugh Parivar's communal agenda."

The Left reacted on similar lines and with the same intensity. Condemning the PM's remarks, CPI's D Raja alleged that Mr Vajpayee was extending support to a fascist agenda. The Ministers, he said, have to go because they

have committed a crime against the Constitution. "We all know what the BJP's real face is," said the CPI-M's MP Nilotpal Basu. He said the PM's headline stance cannot be allowed to go uncontested.

On his part, the Congress spokesman claimed that Mr Vajpayee's clean chit to Mr Advani, Mr Joshi and Ms Uma Bharti showed his utter disregard for the rule of law. "He has declared the Ministers innocent even while the matter is pending before courts."

Mr Sharma also sought an apology from the BJP for equating the Ayodhya movement to the freedom struggle. "This is an insult to Mahatma Gandhi and freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the country," he said. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) today said Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee's statement on the Ayodhya issue would create "unnecessary tension and complicate the problem."

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- Ayodhya indifferent to VHP's Shaurya Divas show
- Vajpayee's defence of Advani unites BJP

Hindutva forces make desperate attempt to keep temple issue alive

Ayodhya indifferent to VHP's 'Shaurya Divas', Black Day call

Umesh Raghuvanshi
Ayodhya, December 6

THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad today failed to stir up people's emotions as its Virat Kar Sevaks' convention to observe Shaurya Divas (Victory Day) evoked a poor response in this temple town.

Despite attempts to politicise the Ram Temple issue by observing Shaurya Divas and Black Day, the eighth anniversary of the demolition of the disputed structure passed off peacefully.

The VHP demanded that the Centre hand over the disputed site along with 70 acres of acquired land to the Ram Jann Bhoomi Nirman Samiti to pave the way for the construction of temple. On the other hand, various minority community organisations demanded reconstruction of the Babri Masjid at the disputed site.

The VHP convention started at Karsevakpuram with the blowing of conch shells. Religious songs were also played at the public address system. VHP activists shouted slogans like *Har Har Mahadev* and *Mandir Bhavya Banarjge* soon after the arrival of Mr Ashok Singhal, Mr Ram Chandra Paramhans, Mr Praveen

SOUND AND FURY OVER AYODHYA

● Centre should hand over disputed site along with the 70 acres of acquired land to pave way for construction of Ram Temple. Deadline for handing over of land and construction of Ram Temple would be announced at the Dharan Sansad to be held at Prayag during Kumbh Mela next month.

● **Ashok Singhal, VHP**

● Whatever they are doing is for political gains. Such organisations should be banned. **Zafaryab Jilani, UP BMMAC leader**

● Stone carving work for construction of first storey of Ram Temple would be completed by March 31, 2001.

● **Girish Bhai Somapura, Supervisor, Ram Mandir Workshop**

● Babri Masjid should be reconstructed at the disputed site.

● **Yunus Siddiqui, Farrukhabad BMMAC leader**

● The intervening period between Prayag Dharan Sansad and the date of construction of Ram Temple would be used to awaken people and mobilise public opinion in favour of Ram Temple.

● **Pravin Bhai Togaria, General Secretary VHP**

● I would want the focus not on Ayodhya but on my house today where the first ever traders parades is on. **Rajinath Singh, Chief Minister UP**

● **BJP/VHP leaders are guilty. They should be punished.**

● **Ram Suresh Das, SP state President**

Bhai Togaria and other leaders on the podium.

VHP leaders decided to go ahead with the temple construction programme despite BJP's statement that the temple issue did not figure on its agenda. But the local people remained

indifferent to VHP leaders' effort to paint this temple town saffron on the occasion of Shaurya Divas.

There was concern among the leaders about the organisations' poor show at the Karsevak Puram, VHP secretary of Ayodhya Prant, Mr Keshav Prasad, was seen telling the workers that a large number of Kar Sevaks have been stopped by the police. Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans also made a vague reference of it by saying that Karsevaks should have come on their own.

Ashok Singhal and Praveen Bhai Togaria said, the saints would meet at Prayag during the Kumbh Mela to announce a deadline for handing over of the land. The Dharan Sansad would also announce the date to start the construction of the Ram Temple.

Singhal said, his organisation would constitute committees in all the 6 lakh villages to recruit kar sevaks. Meanwhile, programmes by organisations opposing the temple also evoked a poor response and passed off peacefully. Members of the minority community observed a bandh by closing down their commercial establishments.

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, December 6

THE OPPOSITION'S onslaught on the Ayodhya issue has again tilted the BJP leaders.

Even if all of them do not think that the agitation for the Ram temple was the right thing to happen for the party's ascent to power, they cannot disown the past.

Mr Vajpayee's stout defence of Union Ministers L K Advani and two others named in the Babri Masjid demolition case today underscores the Bharatiya Janata Party's predicament on this issue.

Although eight years have elapsed and there is the talk of reaching out to Muslims to expand the party's social base, the harariya Janata Party when cornered by other parties on this issue, has to defend with one voice.

The agitation led by Mr L K Advani, which alienated the minorities and the liberal class, but brought electoral dividends in 1996 and 1998, cannot be divorced from the BJP's foundation or its ties with the RSS.

The Prime Minister's assertion today was not a plain reiteration of the position he took in the Lok Sabha on December 7, 1999 while replying to the Opposition, which

had forced a similar adjournment of Parliament on the same demand.

At that time he had not justified the Ayodhya movement.

He had merely described the Opposition's demand as "untenable", saying that neither the Constitution nor the law disquali-

BABRI DEMOLITION



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files a Minister from holding office merely because a charge-sheet is filed by police or formal charges are framed by a court.

Today's statement of Mr Vajpayee in support of the Ayodhya movement has come four months after his remark about being a "swayamsevak", which was music to the ears of the RSS and the VHP leaders.

The Prime Minister's remarks will certainly warm the hearts of

those in the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, who have been uneasy with "the liberal phase" of the party.

Even new BJP chief Bangaru Laxman, who is considered the architect of the new party line towards wooing Muslims, also came out with a statement today in defence of Mr Advani.

Few days ago, he had caused the media to speculate about a shift in the party's stand on the Ayodhya issue by stating that the Ministers' exit could be considered if they were charge-sheeted.

The BJP leaders say the Opposition must appreciate that Mr Vajpayee will not let Mr Advani or any other Minister to resign on the Ayodhya issue. Mr Vajpayee knows that the exit of Mr Advani and others on this count can only trigger such changes that will unsettle the internal dynamics of the BJP and pose a threat to the Government's stability.

Secondly, the BJP is confident that a divided Opposition cannot pull down the Government. It thinks that its allies cannot be lured to leaving the coalition just because the Prime Minister defends the Ram mandir movement or says the Ayodhya task is "unfulfilled."

Allies tear into PM's Babari remark

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 6. — The Ayodhya movement was an expression of "national sentiment yet to be fulfilled", the Prime Minister said today while defending Mr LK Advani, Mr MM Joshi and Miss Uma Bharti, inviting sharp rejoinders from the Trinamul Congress and the TDP.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee made it clear that the three ministers would continue in his Cabinet even if they were charged in the Babari Masjid demolition case.

The Trinamul Congress demanded a clarification from the Prime Minister over his "national sentiment" statement. Another BJP ally, the Samata Party, urged the government to stick to the NDA's agreed agen-

da. Later in the day, Mr Vajpayee clarified that he had never justified the demolition. He said the three ministers were only trying to rein in the mob which went out of control. "We had gone there to express anger, not to bring down the structure," he said.

Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay of the Trinamul, which observed a Communal Harmony Day in West Bengal today to mark the anniversary of the demolition, said the statement was unwarranted and the NDA should stick to its common agenda.

He said the Prime Minister had been distancing himself from "provocative statements and actions" of the RSS and the rest of the Sangh parivar and could have easily avoided the confusion created with the statement. Equally disturbed, TDP leader Mr Yerran Naidu said the statement would trigger unwanted speculation and hence could have been avoided. He said the NDA, while agreeing on a common agenda, had consciously kept away contentious issues like Article 370, Ayodhya and common civil code.

The Samata, while opposing the demand for the resignation of the Babari trio, said the party joined the government on the condition that the NDA agenda would keep off the contentious issues.

The CPI-M and the CPI criticised Mr Vajpayee's remark and said it exposed "the real face of the so-called liberal Prime Minister".

VHP and BJP leaders, Mr Chimmayand and Mr Aditya Nath, welcomed Mr Vajpayee's statement and demanded a Bill

■ Editorial: Dumbing down, page 6

to evolve a consensus on construction of the proposed Ram temple.

The strongest defence of the Babari trio came from the BJP's only Muslim minister, Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain. The Congress and the Sam-

ajwadi Party were trying to mislead the Muslims, he said. Rather than demanding the resignation of the three ministers, the Congress should reflect on its own role in the controversy as the Muslims held the Rao-Chavan duo responsible for the demolition, he added.

With the Congress deciding to disrupt the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament even tomorrow on the resignation demand, the stalemate is likely to continue longer than expected. Congress MPs said the party planned to paralyse Parliament for at least nine days, as the BJP had done in 1995 over the telecom scandal, demanding the resignation of Mr Sukh Ram.

Parliament was then allowed to function only after Mr Ram resigned from the Narasimha Rao government. The BJP had also forced Kalpana Raj's resignation after the sugar scam surfaced, again by disrupting Parliament.

Ayodhya arrests: Nearly 110 volunteers, both Hindus and Muslims, were arrested at Ayodhya today. No untoward incident was reported from Faizabad and Ayodhya. The VHP performed the Kar Seva and said the final decision on Ram temple would be taken next month, adds SNS from Lucknow.

Hyderabad violence: Stones were pelted from the Jama Masjid near the Charminar

soon after the afternoon prayers today. Youths in the mosque raised slogans in protest against the Babari demolition, after which a crowd of around 1,000 marched out towards the Charminar police station.

Police brought the situation under control, but the crowd went back into the mosque and started pelting stones. The mob dispersed only after assistant commissioner Mr Amjad Ali Khan made an ardent plea to those inside the mosque, adds SNS from Hyderabad.

Effigies burnt: The Samajwadi Party and the Congress burnt effigies of the Babari "villains" in West Bengal today. The Left Front also held meetings and processions on the "Anti-communism Day", adds SNS from Calcutta.

Whose sentiment?

ATAL Bihari Vajpayee says that the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya is 'an expression of national sentiment'. Really? If that were so, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should have got more than the 20 per cent of votes that it won in the 1996 general elections, the first after the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. In elections held three years later, the BJP improved its tally — to only 25.6 per cent of votes. With about half the population entitled to vote and a turnout of about 62 per cent, this means that less than 8 per cent of all Indians voted for the BJP. A majority of those did so out of fatigue with other parties, or because India had successfully fought a war in Kargil under the previous Vajpayee administration, or for personal reasons that had little to do with mosque breaking or temple building. The only national sentiment about Ayodhya is to get the courts to judge guilt or innocence and resolve the dispute fast. Mr Vajpayee says that there is no reason for ministers Advani, Joshi and Uma Bharati, charged with criminal conspiracy in the demolition case, to quit government. Why not? Mr Advani resigned from the Lok Sabha and waited till he was acquitted in the Jain hawala case to contest a second time. Recently, Harin Pathak, a minister of state charged with rioting, quit. All three *mantris* should quit — if only to show, belatedly, that the talk about principles is not humbug.

Disturbingly for the nation, the timing and content of Mr Vajpayee's statements are utterly irresponsible. The economy is slowing down and urgently needs reforms for a boost. Important legislation and discussions, scheduled for the ongoing winter session of Parliament, have been held up by opposition parties demanding that the three charge-sheeted ministers quit. Instead of trying to clear legislative gridlock, Mr Vajpayee has made things worse with his remarks. In the process, he has sent jitters up the spines of other parties in the coalition, who had grouped around the non-controversial agenda of the NDA. Mr Vajpayee has done his best to blow it all. The government has to work hard — and fast — to contain the fallout of his words.

The Economic Times

8 DEC 2000

PM's two-pronged Ayodhya solution opens Pandora's box

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee opened a can of worms on Thursday by formally bringing up the Ramjanambhoomi issue.

While 'clarifying' his stand on the Ayodhya issue on Wednesday, Mr Vajpayee explained that there were two ways to settle the issue—either by leaving it to the courts or by getting Hindus and Muslims to sit together and agree to handing over the disputed site for the Ram temple while providing an alternative site for a mosque.

The PM's second explanation, 24 hours after his first one, was made during a crowded iftaar party at the residence of minister of state for human resource development Syed Shahnawaz Hussain. It came at the end of a day which began with the opposition demanding an apology from the PM on the floor of parliament for reopening the Ayodhya issue, and after leaders of two National Democratic Alliance partners—Union railway minister Mamata Banerjee and Telugu Desam Party leader Yerran Naidu—had expressed their unhappiness at his statements on the Ayodhya issue when they met him.

After the meeting, Ms Banerjee said she was satisfied with the PM's explanation. Mr Naidu, however, said that the question of being "satisfied" did not arise. "We are part of a coalition government which had agreed to put the Ayodhya issue, the common civil code and the demand for the abrogation of Article 370 on the back burner. The PM's statement was unwarranted and has created confusion. We let him know that and he just smiled, saying he would not deviate from the NDA agenda," he added.

In his explanation, Mr Vajpayee

admitted that the alliance partners had been "unhappy" with Wednesday's statement and said he had explained the situation to Ms Banerjee and Mr Naidu, who met the PM on Thursday. He said he had made it clear that what he had said about Ayodhya was neither to influence the courts nor the CBI. The courts, he said, were independent and could work without fear. "Although the CBI is under my purview, I never tried to influence it on Ayodhya or any other matter," the PM added.

As Mr Vajpayee had indulged in doublespeak, BJP MPs remained the one happy section. A senior BJP MP told journalists, "The PM made a very good statement. It is associated with Uttar Pradesh. With the Congress, the Samajawadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party competing for the Muslim vote, we, too, have to play politics."

On the political front, the Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam Party on Thursday acutely embarrassed the Vajpayee-led government by staging dharnas outside parliament, ostensibly to press their respective demands for aid to flood-ravaged West Bengal and relief to Andhra farmers.

Underlining the political pressure tactics, however, were scarcely veiled protests and reservations about the PM's statement on Ayodhya which had described the temple as "unfinished work".

The TDP, by its actions on Thursday, sent a strong message to the government not to take its support for granted. While the TDP parliamentary party gave notice for an adjournment motion seeking a debate on the Andhra farmers' issue, TDP supremo and AP chief minister Chandrababu Naidu cancelled his scheduled visit to Delhi. He was due here on Friday.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 DEC 2000

'MOSQUE COULD BE BUILT AT ALTERNATIVE PLACE'

PM for temple at disputed site

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 7. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today just stopped short of articulating his party's old formula for resolving the Ayodhya tangle, which was 'Mandir wahin banayenge.' (We will build the temple only at the disputed site).

Elaborating on his statement made yesterday, Mr. Vajpayee suggested two ways of resolving the Ayodhya dispute. One, the courts could give a verdict "in favour of the Ram temple at the disputed site" (*kort uske paksh mein phaisla dein*); or two, Hindus and Muslims could talk and arrive at a decision — "Muslims could decide to allow

Hindus to build the Ram temple where it exists (at the disputed site), and Hindus could offer the Muslims an alternative site for a mosque."

It was a clear indication that the Ram temple should come up at the disputed site where a makeshift temple existed before and after the demolition.

This "formula" comes close to his own solution to the problem offered before the demolition of the disputed structure in 1992, when he had said that the Babri Masjid could be "respectfully relocated elsewhere" and the temple could come up at the disputed site.

Mr. Vajpayee spoke to reporters informally, although the plan was

well-rehearsed. The BJP spokesperson, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, had let it be known in the afternoon that Mr. Vajpayee would be clarifying his remarks of yesterday at the Iftaar hosted by Mr. Shah-nawaz Husain, Minister of State for Food Processing, this evening. Of the 30-odd minutes spent by Mr. Vajpayee there, five minutes went towards greeting visitors, and the rest in clarifying and elaborating his Ayodhya comments to the media.

The Prime Minister began by saying that his NDA partners were unhappy, but he had met them and they were satisfied. His remarks yesterday giving a clean chit to his chargesheeted Ministers

were not meant to influence the courts or the CBI". The courts, he said, were independent and would arrive at their own judgment without fear or favour, and although the CBI was admittedly "under him" he had never interfered with its functioning. Saying his party had "no secret Ayodhya agenda" and that he was committed to the NDA agenda, he nevertheless added that "the Ayodhya dispute had to be resolved," thus bringing the issue out of hibernation on the centre stage of politics.

Mr. Vajpayee said "the unfinished task" he talked about yesterday referred to the "unfinished task of resolving the dispute". Then came the crucial statement. There were two ways of resolving the Ayodhya tangle. One, "If the court were to give a verdict and all concerned parties were to accept it, that could be a solution."

Two, Hindus and Muslims could sit together and "arrive at a common decision". He went on to stress that "how and where the mandir will be built is of critical importance. The Muslims, after all, have not objected to the building of a temple, where and how this is to be built is the question."

After a pause, Mr. Vajpayee added: "The mandir can be built where it already exists, the masjid can be built on an alternate site." Later, PMO sources tried to explain that he meant this as a solution if agreed upon by Hindus and Muslims, but clearly Mr. Vajpayee had left no one in doubt that this was his preferred solution.

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THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

Cong. to press for debate in Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 7. The Congress today hardened its attitude on yesterday's controversial statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Parliament on Ayodhya and the issue relating to the continuation of the three ministers. The party today indicated that the present impasse in Parliament would continue and it would settle for nothing less than a thorough debate and vote on the issue.

The main thrust of the party's stand, evident in the statement issued this evening, was for the suspension of official business and a discussion under Rule 170 in the Rajya Sabha and Rule 184 in the Lok Sabha. Significantly, a discussion under these rules entails a vote at the end of the debate. By insisting on the debate under these rules the Congress as well as the Opposition aimed to exploit the divisions within the NDA on the issue and force the allies to commit themselves through a vote.

Referring to the Prime Minister's statement, the Congress said it was "a partisan political statement contrary to the sentiments of the people of India and a direct violation of the rule of law". The Congress Working Committee member, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, told reporters that Mr. Vajpayee's statement had compounded the situation and demanded that the be thrashed out in Parliament.

The party also linked the Prime Minister's statement with his attempt to give a clean cheat to the three Ministers charged in the Babri Masjid demolition case. Accusing Mr. Vajpayee of "gross impropriety and of violating the oath of allegiance" the statement

accused him of contempt of court" for trying to interfere in the course of justice.

The Prime Minister's clean chit to Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti flew in the face of the court's findings against them, Mr. Azad said.

According to excerpts of the court's observations, made available to mediapersons, "Mr. Advani was involved in the conspiracy for the demolition of the Babri Masjid commencing from his rath yatra from Somnath in 1990 and culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992." The court also referred to Mr. Advani's statement of December 1, 1992 where he said that the Kar Seva at the disputed site was actually for the construction of the Ram temple.

The judges said, "that on December 5, 1992 a secret meeting was held at the house of Mr. Vinay Katiyar which was attended by Mr. Advani, Mr. Pawan Kumar Pandey and the final decision to demolish the disputed structure was taken there." Their argument was that "there was a ban on the construction and not on demolition", the judges added.

Having succeeded in paralysing Parliament for the past four days, the Congress leadership today began efforts to evolve a common strategy with other Opposition parties. Senior party leaders led by Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. Madhavrao Scindia held a series of meetings with the Left parties, the AIADMK and the Rashtriya Janata Dal. Though the leaders did not say it in so many words they gave ample indication of their desire not to allow the Government to transact any business until their demands were met.

THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

MASSAGING THE TEMPLE

BJP needn't be in a dither over Ayodhya

TO give the devils their due, the Shiv Sena are at least consistent in their stand on Ayodhya. They have maintained since 1992 that the demolition was welcome, and a temple should be constructed in its place. Contrast that to the painful verbal contortions of the BJP. The Prime Minister's demolition anniversary statement — that Ayodhya was “an expression of national sentiment...yet to be fulfilled” — would seem to indicate that differences with the Shiv Sena position is a matter of semantics, not substance. Yet the party and the PMO are always insistent that Atal Behari Vajpayee regretted the 6 December 1992 thuggery. Indeed, hours after the first statement on Wednesday, the PMO issued a “clarification” that Vajpayee did not “justify” the demolition. How can you regret the climax and praise the build up? Are we expected to believe that the rath yatras and the mobilisation were totally divorced from those final moments? And how are we to interpret Vajpayee's remark that “national sentiment” is “not yet fulfilled”? Does he mean fulfilment is contingent on building a grand temple as the VHP wants? Or does he mean more mosques which were built on razed temples should be targeted by similar “national sentiments”. Or both? If there are any other interpretations, they would seem to escape everyone but the PM's speech writers.

The prime ministerial spin on Ayodhya is, of course, in aid of his three ministers named in the demolition case. The Congress, devoid of any imagination and further handicapped by a party president patently unfit for the job, has found the Ayodhya anniversary a godsend, more so after two BJP ministers recently resigned on account of their alleged involvement in criminal cases. Bluntly put, the BJP and the government have no answer to the Opposition argument that LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti should resign. That Ayodhya was a political strategy is irrelevant for the law, which is concerned only with the fact of an illegal demolition. The three ministers are free to argue their case in the courts, to say that they personally did not encourage, connive at or condone the demolition. But till they do, by all precepts of public conduct, should they not step down?

Of course, they won't. Because the BJP, first, considers Ayodhya, and the demolition, to be a political movement, and, second, it fears the resignations will be politically damaging. The first point is of no consequence in determining technically correct behaviour. The BJP, for its own sake, should therefore shelve it. As for the second, the party may be missing out on a better strategy: Demolish the Congress argument via resignations from the three ministers and work towards speedy resolution of the Ayodhya court case. The BJP has never believed that the three ministers will be convicted in the case; its worry has been over political implications. But the political dividends of resignations can be enormous, too. Especially if the government decides to return the compliment to the Congress — by vigorously pursuing the Bofors investigation, and putting the official stamp of veracity on the widely and credibly assumed links between Sonia Gandhi's family and the gun deal. The Congress will then be desperately running for a cover that doesn't exist, and the BJP, “ennobled” by its Ayodhya stand, will be in pursuit. Isn't that worth three resignations?

Allies keep up heat on PM over temple remark

SFI 9/12 ✓

9-minutes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 8. — The storm over the Ayodhya controversy did not calm down today with NDA's allies coming out openly against the Prime Minister for his statement on building a Ram temple at the disputed site.

While the Congress kept its focus on the resignation of three CBI-chargesheeted ministers — Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati, the allies demanded that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee issue immediate clarification to pre-empt the possibility of communal riots.

At an all-party meeting at the Speaker's office today, the Trinamul Congress, TDP and the Indian National Lok Dal held that Mr Vajpayee's yesterday's statement at the Iftar party, hosted by Union minister Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, had vitiated inter-community relations.

(Miss Mamata Banerjee said Mr Vajpayee should clarify his reported statement on Ayodhya. adds UNI. She told reporters after the meeting that the statement had sent a wrong message. She requested Mr Pramod Mahajan to convey her views to the Prime Minister.)

MUSLIMS ANGRY

NEW DELHI, Dec. 8. — The Union minister of state for human resources development, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, was heckled by some irate Muslims at the Jama Masjid today. Shouting slogans against the Prime Minister, they demanded why he didn't object to Mr AB Vajpayee's statement on Ayodhya and reminded him that the TDP and Trinamul Congress had opposed the Prime Minister. One leader said Muslims were angry because the minister had allowed his residence to be used for "anti-Muslim statements." — SNS

The three parties see the possibility of a front within the NDA to put a check on the BJP. Mr Yerran Naidu (TDP), Miss Mamata Banerjee (Trinamul) and Mr Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD) had a separate meeting. The Samata Party and Janata Dal-United, which also opposed Mr Vajpayee's statement, are yet to indicate their plan to join the possible front.

The Congress desisted from focussing on the temple issue and emphasised the demand to

discuss the continuation of the three ministers under Rule 184 of the Lok Sabha that allows a vote. The BJP dared the Congress to move a no-confidence motion.

The government refused to accept a discussion under Rule 184. It however left the matter to the Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, when the Congress pointed out that such a motion had been moved earlier by Madhu Limaye and Jyotirmoy Basu.

While the Left and the NCP were reportedly in a mood to let the House function once the Prime Minister clarified his stand, the Congress seemed to be determined to press for Rule 184. The Speaker said he would give his verdict on Monday at another all-party meeting.

The NDA allies said they did not want to embarrass the government by supporting the demand for Rule 184. "Our intention is not to topple the government, but to raise those issues which affect the people," Miss Banerjee said. The leaders of the Trinamul, TDP and INLD wanted to send a message that the NDA stood for secularism.

Mr Mahajan said it's up to the Prime Minister to issue a

■ See ALLIES: page 8

(Continued from page 1)

ALLIES:

clarification. Mr Mahajan promised the allies that he'd convey the message to Mr Vajpayee and get back to them on Monday with Prime Minister's reactions. Mr Yerran Naidu said Mr Vajpayee's remark was "unwarranted and unnecessary" and he should clarify his position.

Mr Indora said: "It's our moral responsibility to lessen communal tension... We've seen

what's happening in Rae Bareilly" where a mosque was reportedly damaged yesterday.

The Trinamul demanded an NDA coordination committee be convened immediately to clear the Ayodhya issue. In a letter to the NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, Mr Supdip Bandopadhyay said Mr Vajpayee could clarify his stand to the allies and those supporting the alliance from

outside.

Houses adjourned: Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned again today. In the Lok Sabha, the Opposition went to the Well before question hour. The Speaker, reached the House at 11 a.m. to find the Opposition demanding Mr Vajpayee's resignation. After a pandemonium of a few minutes, he adjourned the House till Monday.

The Rajya Sabha too was adjourned till Monday.

THE STATESMAN

9 DEC 2000

Cong to keep up pressure

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 8

THE CONGRESS has decided to single-mindedly pursue its demand for the resignation of three Union Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case. This despite the distraction caused by PM Vajpayee's remarks on the Ayodhya controversy.

The Congress felt that the PM's remarks were meant to brush the resignation issue under the carpet. "We are not going to walk into the trap he has laid," declared party spokesman Ghulam Nabi Azad. At the floor leaders' meeting convened today to break the parliamentary logjam, the Congress representatives delinked their motion under Rule 184 (entailing a vote) from the uproar caused by the PM's statements.

"Our party never talked about the temple-masjid issue while giving notice for a discussion on the

propriety of the ministers' continuation in office after being charged in the Ayodhya case," he explained. "It's the PM who has complicated matters by talking about temple construction."

Azad maintained that Vajpayee's statements had plunged the country into a crisis and escalated communal tensions. "What the PM said is against the spirit of the Constitution and damaging to the country's secular fabric," he alleged while disclosing that Congress president Sonia Gandhi had despatched Capt. Satish Sharma to Rae Bareilly, where a mosque was reportedly attacked and damaged yesterday.

Talking informally to reporters earlier, Congress Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha Madhavrao Scindia said that there was no change in his party's focus on the propriety of the accused ministers' continuation in office. "We want the House to discuss and vote on

the issue we raised," he remarked.

Terming as unacceptable the PM's remarks on the temple issue, Scindia insisted that the unwarranted comments have only unmasked the Government's real agenda. However, the Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi said: "We have given the Government till Sunday to respond to our demand on the 184 motion. After knowing the Government's reaction, we will state our party's position when the Speaker calls an all-party meeting on Monday."

Dasmunshi also sought to put to rest any speculation regarding the Congress bringing a no-trust motion against the Government. "There was never any move on our part to bring a no-confidence motion," he said.

A whip has been issued to all Congress MPs to be present in the House on Monday in anticipation of a discussion followed by voting.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 DEC 2000

Centre softens on Ayodhya debate

To be
9/12

9 minutes

**FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT**

New Delhi, Dec. 8: The Ayodhya standoff, which has crippled Parliament for a week, could end on Monday with the Atal Behari Vajpayee government sending signals that it is ready for a discussion under rule 184 in the Lok Sabha as long as it does not touch matters that are "sub judice".

The government has been under pressure from both the Opposition and a section of the allies, namely the Trinamul Congress, Telugu Desam and the Indian National Lok Dal, to agree to a discussion under rule 184 that provides for voting.

However, the Congress and other Opposition parties are wary of the government offer as parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan raised the technical issue on the wording of the resolution and the question of the Ayodhya dispute being sub judice. Mahajan made it clear that the resolution should deal with the "legality" of the issue instead of "propriety".

The Opposition's entire focus is on propriety and morality of the three ministers — L.K. Advani, Uma Bharti and Murli Manohar Joshi — continuing in office after the exit of Harin Pathak from Vajpayee's council.

Congress MP Jaipal Reddy, who had given notice on Monday, said he would not change a "word" of his resolution. Since Reddy's motion is strongly worded, the government is unlikely to accept it.

Moreover, the Opposition is determined to censure the Prime Minister over his remarks on temple construction. Since the discussion under rule 184 will skirt it, the Opposition wants to exert more pressure, hoping

that NDA allies will succeed in forcing Vajpayee to retract the statement.

Congress deputy leader Madhavrao Scindia said his party would insist on two core issues. "The Prime Minister will have to make amendments in his remarks on Ayodhya and the issue of the resignation of the three Union ministers will have to be discussed under rule 184," Scindia said.

Scindia said the Congress was keeping "all options open". His views were endorsed by Sonia Gandhi, who said: "Various options are being explored."

Congress floor managers said they will be forced to move a no-confidence motion if their demand for rule 184 is not accepted.

The all-party meeting convened by Lok Sabha Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi today failed to break the deadlock. The Trinamul, Desam and the Lok Dal sought a statement from Vajpayee on "reducing communal tension caused" by his remarks.

For once, the Congress and Trinamul were on one side. AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad shared Mamata Banerjee's concern for communal harmony and accused the Prime Minister of "escalating communal tension".

Azad cited the example of Rae Bareli where a madrasa was pulled down by some miscreants. As the all-party meeting remained inconclusive, they will meet again on Monday. Mamata said after the meeting that a message should go from Vajpayee to bring down communal tension.

Sushil Indora of the INLD echoed her sentiments and said: "We are with Mamata Banerjee. And if the BJP has any agenda of its own, we will not allow it to be imposed on the NDA."

THE TELEGRAPH

9 DEC 2001

Shahi Imam steps up Ayodhya heat

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9. — The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid today stepped up pressure on the Prime Minister to withdraw his statement on Ram temple, describing him as "the most communal face" of the BJP.

Ahmed Shah Bukhari demanded that the NDA allies, who resented the Prime Minister's statement, should withdraw support to the Vajpayee government. "The Prime Minister whom we considered secular should not have made such an irresponsible statement, especially when the matter is in court," he said.

The Imam said they would hold a demonstration in front of Jama Masjid on Friday to demand withdrawal of allies' support to the government.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee fielded the BJP's only Muslim MP and minister, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, to clarify the government's position to the minorities after his statement that the entire

nation wanted the Ram temple and his suggestion for an alternative site for a mosque.

The Imam said Muslims won't accept an alternative site for the mosque. "Even if they (BJP) gives us the entire Ayodhya, we will not accept an alternative site." But he said Muslims would abide by the court verdict.

Mr Hussain, who met the Prime Minister to tell him about the sentiments of the minorities, told reporters that the court would decide the site where the Ram temple should be constructed.

Mr Vajpayee's suggestion for an out-of-court settlement is not new since this happens with every court case if the contending parties want a quick solution, he said.

The Prime Minister asked Mr Hussain to explain to Muslims that his (Mr Vajpayee's) commitment to the minority community had not changed. The whole issue was blown out of proportion and the government did not intend to influence the judiciary either, Mr Vajpayee told Mr Hussain.

Mr Vajpayee reportedly said what he had meant was that the controversy hadn't died. He didn't mean that the Ram temple construction was incomplete. He said he talked of a consensus on the construction of the temple and not about the place where it should be built.

Mr Hussain met the Prime Minister yesterday after a mob heckled him during the *Zohr namaz* at Jama Masjid. He said Mr Vajpayee told him that the Centre was

committed to the national agenda for governance and that didn't refer to a Ram temple. Mr Vajpayee said the government would abide by the court verdict and that the minorities should not feel insecure.

'Fatwa'

The Shahi Imam today asked Muslims not to attend Iftaar parties hosted by BJP members. It will be understood that those who will attend the parties "want a temple, not a mosque, at the disputed site in Ayodhya," he said.

BJP yes to debate on 'tainted' trio

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9. — Parliament proceedings are expected to resume on Monday following the government's tacit approval to the Congress notice on discussion of the resignation issue.

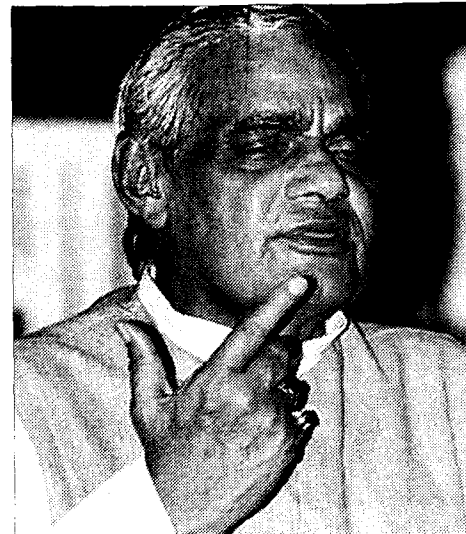
But the Samajwadi Party may continue to disrupt the House to distance itself from the Congress.

The Congress has recently revived its demand for the resignation of the three Union ministers — Mr LK Advani, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati — chargesheeted by the CBI in the Babari Masjid demolition case.

The BJP has agreed to the debate after assurance from its allies, Telugu Desam Party and Trinamul Congress, that they will vote against the Congress motion. This eliminates the risk factor for the government.

Mr Chandrababu Naidu has said the TDP would continue to support the Vajpayee government. Miss Mamata Banerjee, too, affirmed her support as long as the NDA does not deviate from the common agenda of the ruling alliance, meaning no commitment to the *mandir* issue.

The Samata Party and the JD-U have remained dormant all through the crisis that followed the Prime Minister's statement on the temple issue. Both the allies will vote along with the government.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

The notice, if admitted in the Lok Sabha under rule 184, would have a division of the House on the motion at the end of the debate, adding an element of suspense. The Speaker's decision would be final.

The Congress today iterated its earlier stand of debating the resignation issue under rule 184 in the Lok Sabha and under rule 107 in the Rajya Sabha. A final decision on the subject would, however, be taken at the meeting of the floor leaders of all parties called by the Speaker at 10 a.m.

MY STATEMENT WAS DELIBERATE: VAJPAYEE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9. — Further embarrassing BJP's allies, the Prime Minister today indicated that his statement on Ayodhya should not be interpreted as a slip.

"I have said what I had to say. And if there is need to say more, I will say in Parliament," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee told reporters at a lunch hosted by the party spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra.

The allies yesterday demanded that the Prime Minister clarify on his

statement that the entire nation wanted a Ram temple and that it should be built on the disputed site.

He lambasted the Congress and other Opposition parties for holding Parliament to ransom and said it's not healthy for democracy. He said the government was prepared to discuss the demand for three ministers' resignation under any rule decided by the Speaker. "Whatever the decision, it will be acceptable to us," he said.

The Congress is demanding a discussion under Rule 184 of the Lok Sabha that allows a government was ready to discuss anything in the House. "I can understand if the proceedings are disrupted for one or two days. But not like this..." he said.

The Prime Minister ruled out differences with the allies on his statement on temple. He rejected reports that the Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam Party had said

on Monday.

But whether the Lok Sabha would be allowed to function normally depends on the Samajwadi Party. Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav may throw a surprise by tabling a separate notice to the Speaker for discussion on Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement. The party will reveal its stand on Monday.

The CPI-M had earlier expressed its preference for a discussion on Mr Vajpayee's stand on the mandir-masjid issue rather than one on the resignation demand. But the party may fall in line on Monday to support the Congress motion in the Lok Sabha.

The Congress is wary of a fresh debate on the temple dispute as some senior party leaders find the subject deceptive.

"We could fall into the BJP's trap should we agree to a debate on the construction of the temple in Ayodhya," a Congress leader said today. Firstly, the matter is subjudice and secondly, it could open the Pandora's box bringing back the charge against the Congress for having opened the locks of the temple housed in the Babari Masjid in the late 1940s.

The party fears a debate on the *shilanyas* performed by the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, at the disputed site in Ayodhya in 1989 and the Narasimha government's alleged complacency in preventing the *kar sevaks* from gathering at Ayodhya on the eve of 6 December.

his statement would vitiate inter-community relations. "I have checked. None of the NDA allies said so." On pressure from the allies to issue a clarification, he said: "At least I don't know about it." Mr Vajpayee refused to comment on the statement of the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan, that the demolition of the Babari Masjid was caused by an explosion triggered from inside. "I have read what he has said; I will not comment," he said. — SNS

AYODHYA: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

Sudarshan Chakra

THE RSS CHIEF NOW CLAIMS THAT A BOMB BLEW UP THE BABRI MASJID. WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE, ASKS SIJNITA ARON

EIGHT YEARS have passed since rampaging *kar sevaks* demolished the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. It's been eight years since and there has never been word till now that a bomb explosion brought down the disputed structure. Not until December 8, 2000, that is.

RSS chief KC Sudarshan claims he has "secret" information the Masjid was brought down by an explosion. Why did he keep quiet about it for eight long years? Even if you grant him the right to remain silent, what is the truth?

Also, if it had indeed been a bomb, as claimed by Sudarshan, who planted and exploded it?

Not many people agree with the bomb theory in the first place. At least not those who were there and saw it happen. There is no bomb mentioned even in the two FIRs lodged with the Ayodhya *karwals* in the evening of December 6, 1992, nor in the chargesheet filed against 48 persons — including BJP veterans L.K. Advani, Murlidhar Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and others. Even the 800 witnesses interviewed by the CBI, the investigating agency in the case, did not mention any blast.

Did anyone, in fact, hear an explosion?

The then District Magistrate of Faizabad, R.L. Srivastava, says, "There was no explosion inside the disputed structure which was razed to the ground brick by brick by the *kar sevaks*."

His lawyer IB Singh, who is representing his case in the CBI court, adds: "I have watched all the video cassettes provided by the CBI. There was no sound of explosion, only of teargas shells fired by the police to disperse the mob." He maintains that the video cassettes show *kar sevaks* going wild, demolishing the disputed structure with iron bars and any other instruments they could lay their hands on.

BBC correspondent Ram Dutt Tripathi, who covered the Ayodhya movement from the day of unlocking of the Masjid to its demolition, says, "Some of us were watching the developments from Manas Bhawan, the most vantage position near the acquired 2.77 acres of land. The 'symbolic' *kar seva* programme started on a peaceful note. The disputed structure was heavily barricaded with iron bars."

"RSS *swayamsevak*s, clad in bright yellow dress, were leading the crowd though there was a heavy police deployment. But *kar sevaks* were getting restless, with some even trying to break the cordon. The *swayamsevak*s tried to discipline them. There was a mild lathi-charge too."

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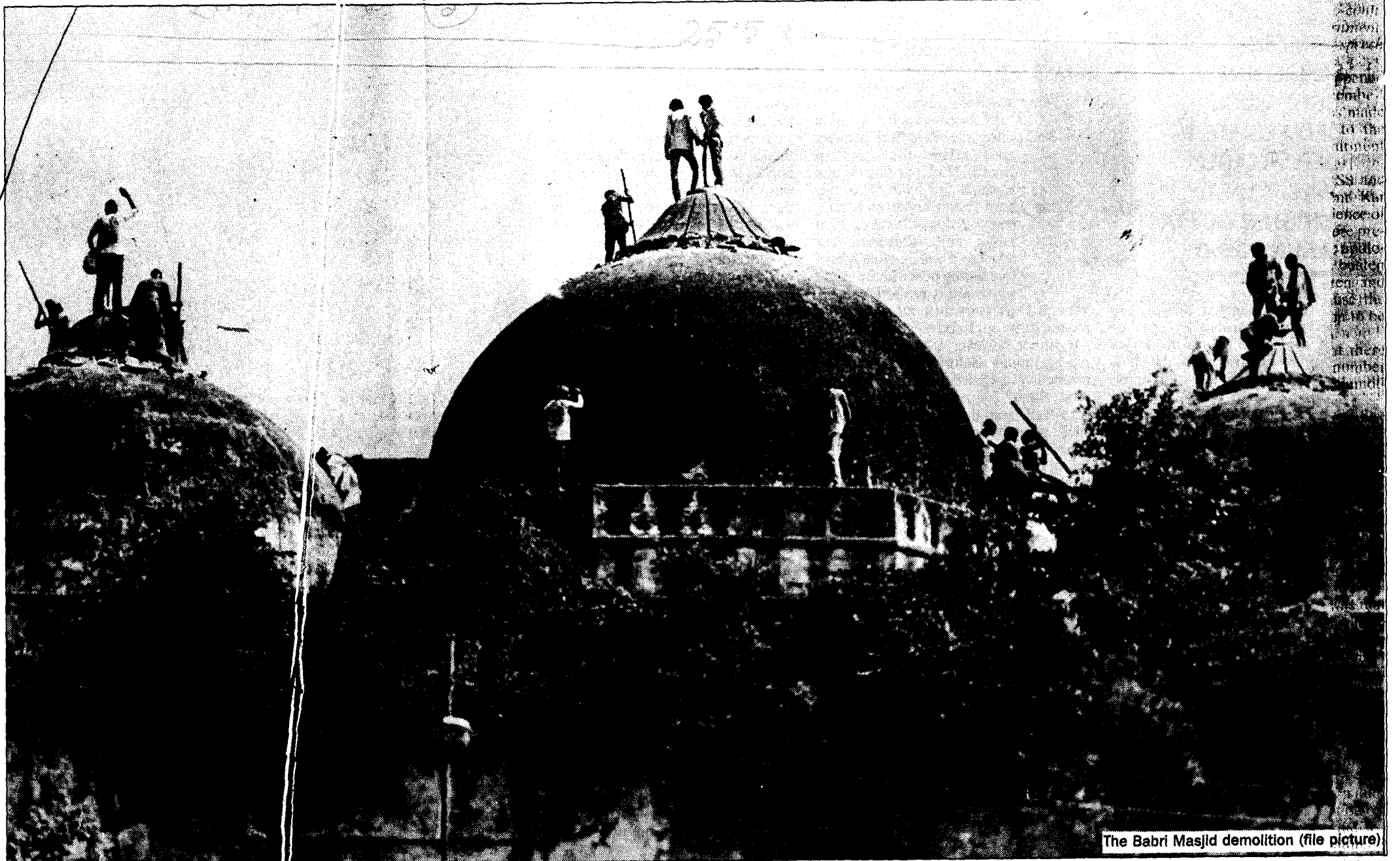
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"RSS *swayamsevak*s, clad in bright yellow dress, were leading the crowd though there was a heavy police deployment. But *kar sevaks* in three states by the Narasimha Rao government, others claim that it was done right-away, in the evening of December 6. But there is no mention once again of any explosion.

Though it was the largest-ever assembly of people in Ayodhya, not one person has so far spoken about a bomb explosion. There were, however, intelligence reports around that time of the possibility of a strike by militants — that they may try to blast the structure.

Following this, frisking of visitors to the area was intensified, say the Faizabad police, adding, "the report turned out to be a false alarm later."



THEORIES, THEORIES AND THEORIES

There is no shortage of theories about what happened on December 6, 1992. Some people maintain that it was a spontaneous upsurge, others that it was a conspiracy.
A brief run-down on the theories.

The Bomb

A NEW theory propounded by RSS Chief K Sudarshan in a speech on Friday. Mr Sudarshan told his audience that he was going to reveal a secret. The *kar sevaks* had only managed to damage the outside of the structure he said, when an explosion brought the building down. He would not reveal who planted the bomb or caused this explosion.

Even Nirmala Deshpande, a former Rajya Sabha member, believes it was a bomb. She told a Delhi daily recently, "The dome did not fall from the top."

it was hit from the base. Maine suna hai ki un logon ne explosive istemal kiya (I have heard they used explosives). She suspects it to be the handiwork of a "few experts" hiding in the Masjid.

The Conspiracy

THE CBI came to the conclusion that leading lights of the sangh parivar entered into a conspiracy to demolish the Babri Masjid. Among those named are L.K. Advani, Murlidhar Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti.

The Spontaneous Upsurge

FOR many years, the official BJP line. According to this version,

the *kar sevaks* suddenly got so agitated that, without any pre-determination, they rushed to the masjid and brought it down with their bare hands. This version does not explain how pickaxes and other implements miraculously manifested themselves at the

Narasimha Rao Govt.

IN the same speech where he revealed the 'secret' about the bomb, the RSS's K Sudarshan claimed to be privy to another 'secret' about how sections of Narasimha Rao's government knew that the demolition was being planned.

Shiv Sena

FIRST reports suggested that the masjid had been brought down by a Shiv Sena contingent present at the *kar seva*. When Bal Thackeray heard this, he complimented his *sainiks*. Later reports suggested that the train from Bombay reached late so the *sainiks* couldn't even be present at the

kar seva. No matter. Thackeray says that in case his boys did it, he is proud of them.

The Hit Squad

MANY journalists who were in Ayodhya that day say that there was a hit squad that had been specially trained in climbing and demolition. Some journalists even attended, and photographed, a rehearsal of the operation. Video footage of the demolition shows the emergence of a group of men in yellow bandanas who quickly take-over and mastermind the demolition. They know where the ropes and implements are hidden and seem to have the tacit co-operation of the UP administration. Journalists and photographers were assaulted, and driven away precisely so that they could not photograph these men or identify them.



India's black day: Dawn to Dusk

Ayodhya, December 6, 1992

9.30 am: Union Home Secretary telephoned Director-General, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (DG ITBP) in Faizabad to keep the CPMF ready and to respond immediately to any request for assistance received from the State Government without waiting for a formal order from the Union Home Ministry.

11.30 am: Situation peaceful. A gathering of about 50,000-60,000 *kar sevaks* being addressed by top leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party.

12.00 noon: Information received from IB and CRPF control room that about 150 *kar sevaks* had stormed the disputed complex. The State Police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary did not check them though senior officers were present close to the structure. Local authorities also don't intervene. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister are informed of the developments.

12.10 pm: Union Home Secretary tries to speak to UP Chief Secretary, the latter is not available. So, instead he speaks to the Director-General of Police, UP

forces stationed near Ayodhya. **12.25 pm:** Home Secretary speaks to the Principal Secretary, Home(UP), who is at the CM's residence. He asks him to persuade the Chief Minister to accept the assistance of Central Forces. Principal Secretary informs the former that the decision regarding the use of Central Forces will be taken after consultation with the Chief Minister. He also mentions that the CM was talking with the Home Minister on telephone at the time.

12.30 pm: The Home Minister spoke to CM about the attack on the structure and urges him to make all attempts to protect the structure and to make use of the Central Forces. The CM said that had received conflicting reports about the entry of *kar sevaks*. He promises to call back after verifying. But he did not call back.

12.35 pm: Home Secretary talks to DG-ITBP to provide help to local administration on demand. DG-ITBP informs that 2 battalions of Rapid Action Force at the Dogra Regimental Centre at Faizabad were ready to move. He also says that damage to the struc-

ture is continuing and no action is being taken though senior officials are present.

12.45 pm: DM, Faizabad approached DIG, CRPF asking for 30 companies of para-military forces. DG-ITBP, DG-CRPF in Faizabad were contacted and 30 companies were immediately released.

12.50 pm: DG ITBP requests the DM and SP through the DIG CRPF who was present on the



spot, to send magistrates to accompany the troops. **1.00 pm:** Home Minister speaks to the Governor drawing attention to the assault on the disputed structure and the need to take action for its protection. **1.15 pm:** One magistrate and one Circle officer reach the DRC Faizabad to accompany the troops. **1.25 pm:** Three battalions of para-

military forces move. **1.40 pm:** Home Secretary again asks all Central Forces stationed near Ayodhya and elsewhere in UP to be on red alert.

1.45 pm: DG-ITBP informs Home Ministry that considerable damage to the structure had taken place but UP police was not taking any action. Also that 3 battalions had moved and the remaining battalions were waiting for the magistrates to arrive.

2.00 pm: HM again speaks to the Chief Minister

2.20 pm: DG-ITBP informs Home Ministry that the 3 battalions which had moved, have met with resistance and obstructions. The magistrate asked them in writing to return. The Commissioner had been contacted who informed that CM, UP has ordered that there will be no firing under any circumstances.

2.25 pm: Home Secretary speaks to DGP, UP who informs him that the CM's instructions were that firing should not be resorted to but if necessary force could be used. Necessary instructions are issued. **2.35 pm:** Home Secretary speaks to Defence Secretary to keep

helicopters and transport plans ready for the movement of troops.

3.30-4.30 pm: Home Secretary is informed that communal incidents had started in Ayodhya. DGP says that situation cannot be controlled without firing. He also speaks to the Army chief for assistance in case the situation worsens.

4.45-6.45 pm: All state governments are informed of the situation and asked to take the help of the army if necessary.

The DGP, UP was also informed that the plea of DM/SSP that the Chief Minister or the Chief Secretary had asked them not to act will not be tenable in view of their statutory responsibilities. At 6.30 pm ADM comes to the camp where troops are stationed and says that magistrates will be provided at Kotwali. The Control Room informs the DM and SSP Faizabad that thought the troops were ready till noon they could not be deployed in the absence of magistrates and clear orders.

6.45 pm: Idols are placed back where the erstwhile disputed structure stood.

7.30 pm: Work started on the construction of a temporary structure for the idols.

LOK SABHA ROCKED

Excerpts from the parliamentary records of the proceedings in the days following the demolition

December 7, 1992

Digvijay Singh (Raigarh): Mr Speaker, Sir, We want a ban on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Digvijay Singh: Mr Advani has no right to sit in this House.

Ram Vilas Paswan (Rosera): Mr Advani should be arrested...

Suraj Mandal: The BJP should be banned....

At This Stage, Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait and others came and stood near the table (Trooped into the well, in other words)

December 8

Atal Behari Vajpayee (Lucknow): Mr. Speaker, Sir, With your permission I would like to submit that I along with Shri Jaswant Singh had met you and requested to get released the opposition leader Shri Lal Advani, who had been arrested in the morning, and make proper arrangements so that he may attend the House....

Paswan (Rosera): You first ask the Prime Minister to resign and then start the business of the House.

Basudeb Acharya: The entire country is burning and they are the creators of the riot and you are allowing Mr. Vajpayee to speak, he should not be allowed to speak. You should first allow us to speak.

December 9

Somnath Chatterjee (Bolgpur): Sir, We must condemn what they are doing. This House cannot be held to ransom. This House cannot be held to ransom.

(Interruptions)
Paswan: The House must condemn whatever has happened in Ayodhya...

(Interruptions)
Chatterjee: Sir, the country is burning and the Parliament cannot sit idle.

December 17

Atal Behari Vajpayee moves a non-confidence motion against the government.

Digvijay Singh: Mr Advani has no right to sit in this House.

We are unhappy on whatever happened in Ayodhya on 6th December. (Interruptions) ... Every effort was made to fulfill the commitment given to the prime Minister. But the commitment could not be fulfilled.

The top rank leaders of BJP, RSS and VHP had been trying to prevent *kar sevaks* there. Video tapes are evidence of it. At that time many journalists were present there. (Interruptions) We have apologised to the journalists who were beaten there. The journalists were beaten and their cameras were broken because the *kar sevaks* did not want their action to be recorded.... (Interruptions)

...I would also like to state that there were *kar sevaks* present in a large number but they were not involved in the demolishing (of the structure).

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.... Had there been an intention to demolish the structure, it would have been done easily without collecting *kar sevaks* in large number. ... If the structure was to be demolished secretly and according to a plan, it did not require *kar seva*. So whatever happened there, we regret the incident....

... We would like to know who was that group, from where it came and who organised it. ... I think a group out of the mob emerged and they refused to follow the leaders and attacked and demolished the structure. It was very bad.

Atal picks up Ayodhya House vote gauntlet

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Under pressure from allies to control the snowballing Ayodhya controversy, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today agreed to the Opposition's demand for a debate in Parliament under a rule that entails voting.

Vajpayee also said he was prepared to hold an NDA meeting on the issue. PTI quoted NDA sources as saying that the meeting might be convened tomorrow.

At a luncheon meeting hosted by party spokesman V.K. Malhotra, the Prime Minister emphasised that he had already said whatever he had to on the matter and had nothing more to add.

"If I have to say anything further, I will say it in Parliament. We are ready to face any sort of discussion," he told reporters. "If a party moves a resolution under 184 or any other rule and the Speaker deems it fit for discus-

sion, it is acceptable to us. But they should also accept it."

Vajpayee also indicated that he was for an early resolution of the impasse that has paralysed proceedings. "I can understand if the House is stalled for a day or two. But if it goes on like this for days on end, it will not strengthen democracy." The comments came amid mounting pressure from key allies, including the Trinamul Congress, the Telugu Desam and the DMK, for a clarification.

Hardening her stand, Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee said her party was ready for any sacrifice to uphold secular commitments. "We do not want to pull down governments every year. But, at the same time, deviation from the NDA agenda is not acceptable to us," she said. "Secularism is something we cannot compromise on. We will not allow any dilution of it. We are ready to make any sacrifice."

Mamata said she was waiting to hear what Vajpayee says in Par-

liament on Monday. "What we will do will depend on the situation. We hope the Prime Minister will clear all doubts and say simply that he will not deviate from the NDA agenda."

The Desam warned of "serious consequences" if there was any deviation from the coalition's common agenda, while the DMK disapproved of Vajpayee's statements (See Page 6).

But despite the veiled threats, the Prime Minister did not retract any of his comments, though he did give the impression that he wanted to address the concerns of the allies.

Vajpayee said he had "merely" clarified his stand on the Opposition's demand for L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti's resignations. He attributed the latter half of his statement — in which he spoke of the temple agenda as a "manifestation of nationalist feelings" — to the "cleverness of the press".

"Those who stalled Parliament

proceedings on December 6 on the issue of the resignation of the ministers know they have been working as ministers for many years and their resignations were never sought earlier. I only reiterated that there was no need for them to resign. It is the cleverness of you people that made me say something more," Vajpayee said.

The BJP's lone Muslim minister, Shahnawaz Hussain, also came in handy. At a press briefing, the minister of state for human resources development said Vajpayee had assured him in a meeting this morning that the "government has no intention to intervene in the judicial process" and would stick to the national agenda.

Hussain, who was heckled by members of his own community after namaz yesterday, said he was "satisfied" with the assurances. He also said that Vajpayee had made it clear that no negotiated settlement would be foisted on Muslims.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 DEC 2000

DMK against raising new issues on Ayodhya row

By Our Special Correspondent

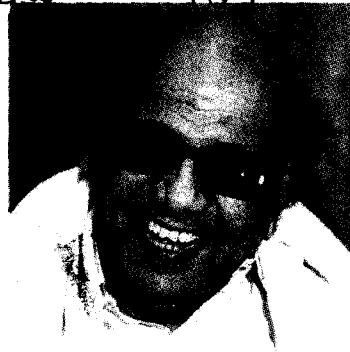
CHENNAI, DEC. 9. The DMK, a partner of the BJP-led Central Government, today expressed itself against any new issue being raised regarding the Ayodhya temple row, as the NDA's "National Agenda for Governance" had "pledged to have a moratorium on contentious issues".

"Raising fresh issues now cannot be accepted," in the context of controversial issues such as Ayodhya, uniform civil code and deletion of Article 370 of the Constitution (conferring special status on Kashmir) not finding a place in the NDA's common agenda, the DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, said in a statement here.

Reiterating that the DMK would continue to protect the minorities and be their "affectionate friend as ever", Mr. Karunanidhi said the National Agenda had specifically called for putting an end to divisiveness and being committed to "reaching out to the minorities," besides safeguarding their rights as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

On the recent remarks of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, on the Ayodhya issue, Mr. Karunanidhi, without explicitly referring to the former's statements, said the NDA's common agenda had given a "clear commitment" to secularism — "the emotional harmony of all Indians and full protection of minorities."

"The NDA is secular. In the NDA, there are parties holding different views. There should be a consensus on common issues and



M. Karunanidhi

thrusting a different point of view cannot be accepted," he said.

The NDA's common agenda was the benchmark for all the allies and it was also for sharing the hopes and anxieties of the people of India, besides urging the minorities to "hold hands and walk together to build a resurgent, modern India," he said.

As far as the DMK was concerned, it held the "same strong feeling with which it condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid," in 1992. Taking a dig at some of the Opposition parties, including the Congress, Mr. Karunanidhi said that those who were in power at the Centre in 1992 were "silent spectators to the demolition while the Army was stationed close by."

Those "who spoke in support of the 'kar seva' at the National Development Council meeting (1991) and those who sent men and material from here for the 'kar seva' are now shedding cocodile tears," Mr. Karunanidhi said in an apparent reference to the AIADMK, which was then ruling the State.

THE HINDU

10 DEC 1992

PM sticks to his guns

9 minutes 10/12
DMK calls it unacceptable:
clarify by Monday, says TDP

Panel may call
RSS chief

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 9

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today refused to clarify or tone down his statement on the Ayodhya issue as another ally, the DMK, joined the TDP and Trinamool Congress in expressing concern over his remarks. Mr Vajpayee said his clarification, if necessary, will come in Parliament. And, he added, there was no pressure on him from the allies.

Surprising reporters by turning up at a lunch hosted by BJP parliamentary party spokesperson V K Malhotra, the PM rejected the charge made by some allies and the Opposition that he had with his statement sent a "wrong message" and disturbed "communal harmony". He also declined to comment on the RSS chief's statement that the Babri Masjid was blown up not demolished.

Joining TDP and Trinamool, the DMK said in Chennai today that adding controversial subjects to the NDA's secular common agenda was unacceptable. The party's Tamil Nadu chief minister K Karunanidhi pointed out that controversial subjects had been consciously omitted from the agenda

to assure minorities their constitutional rights would be protected.

The TDP also stepped up the heat a little posting a deadline of Monday for the Prime Minister to clarify his remarks in Parliament. After a meeting of party MPs in Hyderabad, TDP parliamentary party leader K. Yerranna said the PM's remarks were "uncalled for and unwarranted".

But the PM said "Those who paralyse Parliament did it deliberately to coincide with Dec. 6. And they knew well that the ministers whose resignation they are demanding have been in their posts for some years. There is no relevance or propriety in demanding their resignations now."

He said he could have understood the Opposition's behaviour if the Parliament proceedings were stalled for a day or two but not for a whole week.

He said he spoke on Ayodhya outside Parliament only when reporters insisted on his comments on the Opposition's demand.

Anil Anand and Syed Liaquat Ali
New Delhi, December 9

RSS CHIEF K S Sudarshan's claim that the Babri Masjid was blown up and not demolished by kar sevaks, appears incredible. But the Ayodhya Commission, probing the December 6, 1992 events, might take suo motu notice of that claim and summon him.

"It is of course a very important development," a source in the Liberhans Panel said today, adding, "If Sudarshan is summoned, he would be required to provide evidence in support of his sensational charge." Former Solicitor General A

It was a bomb: Shahnawaz

UNION MINISTER Shahnawaz Hussain on Saturday claimed the Babri Masjid was blown up as part of a conspiracy hatched by the then Narasimha Rao Government.

M Singhvi, who had appeared before the Commission, said given the nature of the RSS chief's assertions, it has become "necessary" for the commission to summon him.

Justice M S Liberhans is understood to have already sought details of Sudarshan's statement made at an RSS rally in Thiruvananthapuram yesterday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 DEC 2000

Cong bomb demolished Babri: RSS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC 9

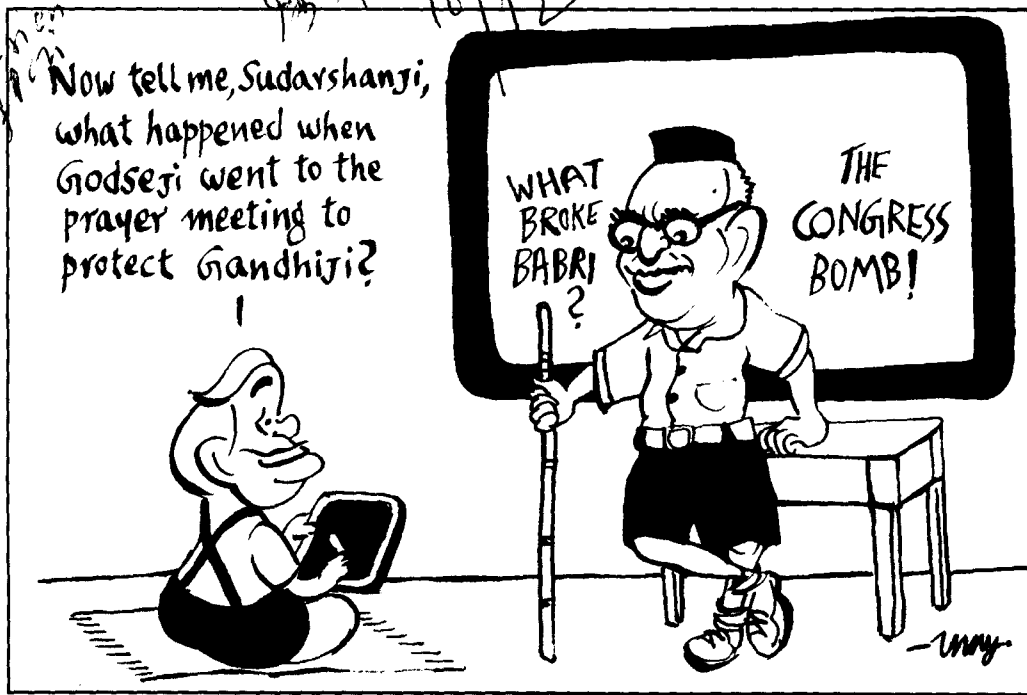
IN a bizarre attempt to white-wash the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, the RSS today spun a conspiracy theory when its chief K S Sudarshan claimed, at a public gathering here, that the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992, by an explosion. And that the then Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and some of his Cabinet colleagues were responsible for the act.

Sudarshan claimed a powerful device was exploded inside the Masjid tomb with the connivance of the Congress Government to raze the building. "This was a grand conspiracy. This is only part of the story. There is more to come," he claimed.

The RSS chief's version of the incident comes barely two days after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee claimed that his three chargesheeted Ministers had gone to Ayodhya to "protect" the mosque, not to demolish it.

Addressing a public meeting here, the RSS chief exonerated the Bajrang Dal and VHP, saying that the volunteers of these organisations took away only the plaster of the building on that fateful day. They had no hand in the demolition of the building. BJP leaders L K Advani, M M Joshi and Uma Bharati, who were chargesheeted in the case, too were innocent, he claimed.

The RSS chief went on to say that he chanced upon a "fax message" sent by a Maharashtra Congress leader to P V Narasimha Rao on December 10, 1996, which clearly spoke of the role of the



'kitchen Cabinet' around Rao in the demolition of the Masjid.

Sudarshan criticised the Congress for stalling Parliament for the last three days, demanding the ouster of Joshi, Advani and Uma Bharati in connection with the demolition of the Masjid. "These leaders tried their best to calm down an emotional gathering who assembled around the Masjid."

After his Babri claim, the RSS chief, in his two-hour-long speech, reiterated his familiar line on the Christian church. He called for the "indigenisation" of churches and "integration" of the Muslim community into the "great Indian culture which could be traced back to several thousands of years."

Sudarshan claimed that Muslims in India hadn't accepted their "Indian heritage." Even Muslims in Indonesia, he claimed, "do not have any qualms in accepting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

from the front page

Cong bomb demolished Babri: RSS

RSS chief Rama and Krishna as their ancestors and they also hold Ramayana and Mahabharata in high esteem." He criticised the Roman Catholic Church for standing in the way of the demand for a national church in the country. This was negation of history as national churches came into being in countries like Britain, Denmark, Norway, Russia and Italy by breaking away from the hegemony of Roman Catholic Church.

According to the RSS chief, the separatist movements in the North-East states were being funded and supported by Baptist Mission Church. BNLF, TNLF and NNLF were all instigated by the Baptist missionaries.

INDIAN EXPRESS

10 DEC 2000

NDA plays down PM's statement on Ayodhya

Demand for Advani, Joshi, Uma resignation rejected

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, December 10

THE ALLIES of the BJP tonight succeeded in forcing the NDA Coordination Committee to tone down Prime Minister A B Vajpayee's remarks on constructing a Ram temple at Ayodhya by calling for the status quo to be maintained at the disputed site until the Supreme Court delivers its verdict.

They also got the NDA to aver that the Government is duty bound to accept and implement the decision of the Supreme Court in the litigation over the title of the disputed site.

At a two-hour meeting, led by Ms Mamata Banerjee, the leaders of the supporting parties, including Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, DMK leader and Environment Minister T. R. Baalu, Janata Dal (U) chief Sharad Yadav and Communications Minister Ram Vilas Paswan called for a clear-cut message from the NDA to end the confusion caused by the PM's statement.

They also got the Government to agree to any debate in Parliament, sought by the Opposition under relevant rules, even if it insisted on a vote to gauge the mood of the members. The PM, they said, would have ample opportunity to clarify matters and the allies would stand by the Government.

Finally, a resolution, which was amended three times to accommodate the views of Ms Banerjee and others, was adopted, declaring the NDA's "unambiguous commitment" to the protection and promotion of secularism and implementation of its national agenda for governance without "any deviation."

Notwithstanding Ms Banerjee's reservation, however, the resolution also gave a sop to the BJP. It committed the NDA to support the Prime Minister in rejecting the Opposition's demand for the exit of the three Union Ministers who figure in the CBI case against the demolition of Babri Masjid.

Supporting Mr Vajpayee's argument, the resolution said the NDA saw no reason for these three Ministers to resign on "an issue that has no bearing on their Constitutional status."

The NDA resolution attempted to defuse the impact of the PM's remark on the Ayodhya issue by recalling his earlier statements in Parliament and outside that the demolition of the Masjid "was most unfortunate." It applauded his rein for reducing incidents that create disharmony in the last three years.

The PM did not speak at the meeting. Home Minister L. K. Advani was absent. The BJP was represented by party chief Bangaru Laxman and its senior Ministers - Jaswant Singh, Yashwant Sinha, and Pramod Mahajan.

Ms Banerjee said the PM's statement on Hindus and Muslims agreeing on building a Ram temple at the disputed site and finding an alternative site for the Masjid had created confusion and heightened communal tension. She also mentioned that Minister Uma Bharti's remark, in support of the PM's statements, had added fuel to the fire and that "the confusion must end." She said the NDA need not speak in defence of the three Ministers since it was a matter between them and the BJP.

Ms Banerjee's objection was overruled by NDA convenor Fernandes and others on the ground that they were NDA Ministers and the alliance had to respond to the Opposition, which had paralysed Parliament for five days. **See also Page 11**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 DEC 2000

Kar sevaks did it, says ex-RSS chief

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi, December 11

WHILE RSS Sarsanghchalak KS Sudarshan is adamant on his bizarre bomb theory, his predecessor seems to think otherwise. As far as former RSS chief Rajendra Singh alias Rajju Bhaiya is concerned, Sudarshan's conspiracy theory has fallen flat. Sudarshan is said to have himself tried very hard to control the kar sevaks at Ayodhya on Dec. 6, 1992, but failed.

In an interview reproduced in the latest issue of RSS mouth piece Panchjanya (Dec. 17, 2000) Rajju Bhaiya has implied that the Babri masjid *dhancha* (structure) was destroyed by *kar sevaks* who just could not be controlled. The interview first appeared in *Panchjanya*

on June 28, 1998.

"None among us wanted that the structure should be demolished like this. Advaniji and Sheshadriji tried repeatedly that the kar sevaks should not destroy the structure. They told the kar sevaks not to do it. Sudarshanji tried hard, but the kar sevaks were adamant," he said.

This not only proves the presence of top leaders near the masjid, but also that of Sudarshan, while the kar sevaks were at it. There is no mention of the mythical bomb in the interview.

Rajju Bhaiya has claimed that Messrs Narasimha Rao, Sharad Pawar and (late) R Kumaramanglam (then in the Congress)



Rajju Bhaiya

were fully aware of the explosive situation. The crowd was determined to do kar seva. He spoke to Rao and Pawar about it.

According to Rajju Bhaiya, it was Pawar who informed him at Nasik in the last week of November, 1992, that sadhus have decided to perform kar seva on Dec. 6. He said that he asked Rao to petition the Supreme Court to direct the Allahabad HC to take a decision on the disputed site before Dec. 6.

But Rao refused. "We cannot do this, you do whatever you want," Rao is supposed to have said.

"I said, look, this time so many people have collected there (at Ayodhya)," Rajju Bhaiya claims to

have told Rao, "They will feel insulted. They have already come there thrice earlier and gone back. If they go back again then people will tease them, 'Great! What kind of kar seva have you done?'. In this situation you must understand that a catastrophe can happen. But Narasimha Raoji kept saying, 'No, No... Don't worry, nothing will happen'. After that the event that happened everyone knows."

Rajju Bhaiya has implied that Rao and his coterie were playing delaying tactics. "Hence, the kar sevaks will be emotionally aroused, some struggle will happen and consequently the Muslims would support the Congress. They would then use this struggle to dismiss the BJP governments in the states. Rao must be having a plan like this in his mind."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 DEC 2000

AYODHYA: OPPOSITION FIRM ON CENSURE MOTION

Bid to break deadlock fails, Parliament adjourned again

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 11. The two Houses of Parliament plunged into chaos today and were adjourned yet again within minutes after an all-party meeting called by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. G. M. C. Balayogi, failed to end the deadlock.

The question uppermost on everybody's mind was whether the deadlock would end tomorrow, but the uncertainty persisted till evening as the Congress was unwilling to change its strategy. All it planned to do was change the wording of its censure motion in the hope that it would be found in order and within the framework of the rules.

Even before Parliament assembled, it became clear that the rules did not permit the Speaker to accept the Congress censure motion seeking resignation of the three Cabinet ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

The result was that as soon as the Houses met, Congressmen rushed into the well of the House, both in the Rajya Sabha and in the Lok Sabha (where the Samajwadi Party MPs also made their presence felt).

With agitated members of several Opposition parties shouting simultaneously, nothing could be heard. The Rajya Sabha was adjourned within a minute after the Congress and BJP leaders used their lung power. In the Lok Sabha, pandemonium prevailed for several minutes while Mr. Balayogi read out his ruling, but everybody seemed to be shouting and nothing could be heard. While Congress and SP MPs rushed into the well of the House, MPs of the RJD, the AIADMK, the Left, the BSP were on their feet speaking simultaneously.

In his ruling (the text was made available later), the Speaker said he had received notices for a censure motion under Rule 184 against three Cabinet Ministers seeking their removal from office

because charges had been framed against them in a criminal court. Those who had given notices included Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy (Congress), Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPM), and Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD).

The notices could not be admitted because the matter was sub judice, the charges against the ministers were not recent, and a motion seeking a minister's removal could not be brought as the Council of Ministers was collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.

The Speaker, however, agreed to reconsider if fresh notices were brought in an "appropriate form," admissible under the rules, or the House itself, supreme in procedural matters, could decide to set aside the rules and discuss the issue.

The Opposition remained dissatisfied, knowing that the House decision would naturally be with the majority treasury benches.

At the all-party meeting convened by Mr. Balayogi earlier, several Opposition parties insisted on a discussion on the resignation issue under Rule 184, which is a censure motion. However, there were others who felt that the Prime Minister's controversial statements could be discussed, and the resignation issue could be brought in. The Speaker made it known that he was duty bound to follow the rules and could not admit the motion.

The differences in the Opposition seemed to be more on what form the motion should take — should resignations be the focus or the Prime Minister's Ayodhya statements. These have not yet been resolved.

One way out of the impasse, and some were hinting that this may happen, is that some of the NDA allies may agree to vote for a discussion on the resignations. Thus the House could decide to set aside the rules of procedures.

The Speaker has already ruled that this would be acceptable to him. The other scenario, which the allies would prefer, is a discussion on Mr. Vajpayee's statement.

Differences in NDA

The differences within the ruling front have also been exposed despite the "unanimous" resolution of the NDA yesterday. The Trinamool Congress feels the resignation issue is a matter between the Prime Minister and his ministers, it is loath to rush to their defence.

The Telugu Desam Party's stand is the law should take its own course and demanding resignations was the prerogative of the Prime Minister. Both these allies, and some others too, did not approve of the Prime Minister giving his ministers a certificate of innocence when the matter was yet to be tried and decided in court.

WHAT THEY SAY...

"I am duty-bound to follow and enforce the rules which have been given to me... and to ensure the business of the House is transacted in an orderly manner."

— Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi

"I had resigned on moral grounds and there was no chargesheet against me."

— Former Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh

"If the Opposition agrees, the Prime Minister is ready to make a suo motu statement in both Houses."

— Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan

"Vajpayee used to maintain a little bit of decency, but has unmasked his fundamentalist character."

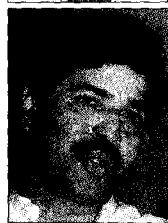
— CPI(M) leader, Mr. Jyoti Basu

"Mr. Vajpayee must withdraw his statement first and make the Government's stand clear to allow Parliament to function normally."

— Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav

"We have the right to demand the removal/dismissal of a Minister... The Government would not fall. But they should have the magnanimity to discuss the issue."

— Cong. chief whip in Lok Sabha, Mr. P.R. Dasmunshi



THE HINDU

12 DEC 2000

VHP move on Ram temple may have prompted PM's statement on Ayodhya

Cadres were unhappy with BJP govt's 'compromises' No case on construction of temple pending before SC

By Rajesh Ramachandran
The Times of India News Service

By Rakesh Bhatnagar
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's controversial statement on the Ayodhya issue last week may have been prompted by a recent Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) decision on the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site.

A high-level VHP meeting in early October had taken a "final decision" on the construction of the temple at the site of the demolished Babri masjid, it is learnt. Although the official line of the VHP is that a date for the construction would be announced at the 'dharma sansad' during the forthcoming Kumbha mela, the organisation has already chalked out its strategy to hit the road.

According to Sangh sources, even the RSS was taken aback by the VHP's fait accompli—its decision to go on a mass mobilisation programme, beginning January-February 2001, which would culminate, forcibly if needed, with the temple construction some time in 2002. Nevertheless, RSS leaders who attended the meeting accepted the VHP's decision.

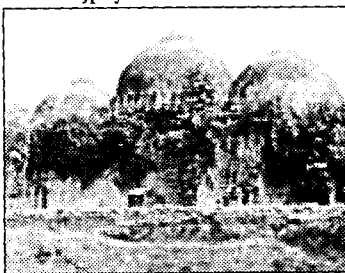
The meeting was preceded by a conclave at Haridwar at September-end at which the VHP leadership appeared convinced that its cadres were unhappy with the "compromises" made by the BJP-led government. It was felt that the VHP would also soon be suspect if it went on with 'the temple pillars are still getting ready' line. With the BJP in power, VHP leaders felt that only the Ayodhya issue could revitalise the Sangh cadres.

The Sangh leadership was called over for discussions to the VHP's headquarters in R.K. Puram in early October.

VHP vice-president Vishnu Hari Dalmiya admitted that a decision on construction of the temple had been taken at the October meeting. "In principle, it was decided that we should go ahead with the construction. We did not announce the date at our Goa meeting in mid-October because the 'sant samaj' should do so at an opportune time, like the Kumbha mela," he said.

The VHP was forced to act so that its cadres would not feel they were being taken for a ride, he added.

Meanwhile, the RSS leadership had had a dinner meeting with the Prime Minister. However, nothing concrete had emerged from this meeting, Sangh sources said. But after the controversy erupted, the RSS seems to have directed the Prime Minister to be firm on his new stand on Ayodhya.



NEW DELHI: Except for a few petitions seeking contempt action against key stalwarts of the Sangh Parivar currently holding high positions in the government and elsewhere, as well as the then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, no case regarding the disputed Babri mosque demolition is pending before the supreme court.

Some Union government counsel have expressed their surprise over the ruling National Democratic Alliance resolution of Sunday that the government will be bound by the apex court's decision on the issue of the construction of a temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

"Any outcome in the contempt petitions will have no bearing on the issue of constructing a temple, it's a separate matter altogether," said a senior government attorney.

"I don't know what they are all talking about," said another lawyer who had earlier argued in the Ayodhya reference case and defended the Hindus' right to offer prayers at the site. He wondered aloud about the various statements that had been made by responsible persons in government, including by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the temple issue.

By refusing to give its opinion on the controversial Ayodhya reference, the supreme court had cleared its desk of the litigation. It had transferred to the Allahabad high court all suits relating to the ownership of land where the disputed structure stood. And it had upheld the validity of a section of the Ayodhya Land Acquisition Act which, it said, "freezes the situation admittedly in existence as of January 7, 1993".

The majority 3:2 opinion said: "This would not grant further benefit to the Hindu community, except to offer worship in the makeshift temple which the community had been doing since 1949 and also on January 7 last, 1991."

However, lawyer M.M. Kashyap, who argued for petitioner Mohammad Aslam in defence of the Muslims' right to offer prayers at the mosque, said that besides filing a few contempt petitions, he had also moved an "application" seeking the apex court's direction to order reconstruction of the mosque. Although the application was filed eight years ago, it was awaiting preliminary hearing by the court.

► See Edit: Mandir as Manoeuvre, Page 10

► PM's remark fall-out of SP's gain in UP, says Mulayam Page 7

All-party meet fails to end Ayodhya impasse

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The impasse over the Ayodhya issue in parliament entered the second week on Monday, with the all-party meeting called by speaker G.M.C. Balayogi failing to come up with a solution.

On its part, the government has adopted a three-pronged strategy: Sell the idea of the PM making a suo motu statement on the issue, which could then be discussed under any rule of the opposition's choice; divide the opposition by distracting a section from the demand for the resignation of the three chargesheeted Union ministers; dare the opposition to bring in a no-confidence motion.

On the opposition side, the Left parties, the RJD and the NCP, led by the Congress, remained insistent on a discussion under Rule 184, focusing on the three ministers' resignations. Speaker Balayogi had rejected the notice these parties had given under Rule 184.

Liberhan panel summons Sudershan, Basu

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 12. — The Liberhan Commission today asked the RSS chief, Mr K Sudershan, and West Bengal's former chief minister, Mr Jyoti Basu, to appear before it as witnesses.

The RSS chief was summoned following his statement that a bomb blew up the disputed structure at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992.

Mr Basu was summoned for his reported remarks that he had passed on to the Prime Minister audio tapes containing the speech of former UP chief minister, Mr Kalyan Singh, at a meeting of the Sadhu Samaj in Calcutta.

Mr Justice MS Liberhan, who heads the panel probing the sequence of events leading to the demolition, has directed Mr Sudershan to appear before him on 20 December.

The Union sports minister, Ms Uma Bharati, was scheduled to appear before the panel today. But her counsel told the panel that she could not appear because she was busy with the parliamentary session. The commission has asked her to appear before it on 19 December.

The commission has also rescheduled dates for the appearance of the Union HRD minister, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, and Union home minister, Mr LK Advani. Mr Joshi has been

asked to appear on 15 and 16 January, and Mr Advani on 22 and 23 January. Both of them have said they are unable to do so as Parliament is in session.

Mr Narasimha Rao, who was Prime Minister when the Babari mosque was razed, will appear before the commission on 26 and 27 December.

The commission also summoned former Rajya Sabha MP, Mrs Nirmala Deshpande, for her recent statement on the issue. She has been asked to appear as witness on 29 and 30 January.

Mrs Deshpande had, like Mr Sudershan, said an explosion had brought down the Babari structure. Mr Basu, on the other hand, had made a statement on

the role of "Dharam Sansad" in the demolition.

Kar sevaks, including Shiv Sena, VHP and Bajrang Dal volunteers who had assembled at Ayodhya, could only peel off the mosque's plaster, he claimed. Leaders like Mr Advani and Mr Joshi were trying to pacify the kar sevaks when an explosion blew it up.

The panel said Mr Sudershan and others have made statements on the manner in which the disputed structure was demolished and they should be examined as witnesses.

■ 'Bomb theory' embarrasses RSS cadres: page 8

Speaker's nod to Opposition motion

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 12. — Parliament will resume business tomorrow, with the Speaker deciding to allow a joint censure motion moved by the Opposition on Ayodhya in the Lok Sabha under rule 184.

The House will debate the motion after the question hour and legislative business in the afternoon tomorrow, ending a week-long stoppage.

The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's reply to the debate will come on 14 December before the motion is put to vote the same day. Representatives of political parties decided this at a meeting of the Lok Sabha's Business Advisory Committee.

The Opposition is divided in two camps — the Congress and the non-Congress parties — though at the end of the debate

the two camps would vote on the same lines for the censure motion on Ayodhya.

A set of 45 notices under rule 184 tabled by the Congress members demanding discussion on the resignation of three Union ministers chargesheeted in the Babari case has been moved. Eight notices also under rule 184 have been tabled by members of the CPI-M, SP, RJD and AIADMK, seeking discussion on the Prime Minister's statement on a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, has clubbed the Opposition motions together into a common censure motion. Members of all parties accepted this, at a meeting he called after the Lok Sabha was adjourned this morning.

The Congress and CPI-M have welcomed the Speaker's decision for allowing the motion under rule 184. Opposition leaders today said the government was to blame for

the series of adjournments, because it had blocked debate on Ayodhya under rule 184.

The BJP, however, accused the Congress of holding Parliament to ransom on a "non-issue". As far as the BJP was concerned, Prof V K Malhotra asserted, it had said before that the party had no objection to discuss the matter under any rule fixed for the debate by the Speaker. He welcomed the Speaker's decision to allow the motion moved by the Opposition.

As the House takes up the contentious issue of Ayodhya, many members of the Opposition and the ruling alliance expect the cross fire would not spare the Congress — the main mover of the motion on the temple issue. The arithmetical position in the Lok Sabha gives the government a clear edge over the Opposition.

■ Allies face piquant situation: page 8

THE STATESMAN

13 DEC 2000

Ayodhya

Madhu Dandavate

AS I look back upon the tenure of my five consecutive terms of Lok Sabha, I recall vividly several occasions both during my parliamentary tenure and earlier times, when various parliamentary devices could be effectively used to expose the severe lapses on the part of the government and in some cases bring the government to book and rectify its mistakes. This could be possible, when presiding authorities too in both the houses of Parliament used their parliamentary acumen to find the way out of the parliamentary crisis.

If only the parliamentarians were to scrutinise the previous parliamentary debates and study the precedents, the critical issues arising in the present situation could



have been forcefully presented in the Parliament with telling effect.

It is not only the issue of the demand for the resignation of three cabinet ministers in the Union government but also the policy pronouncements by the Prime Minister regarding Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy could have been made the subject matter of parliamentary debates. But what happened in both houses of Parliament in the past few days gives an impression that there is a collapse and paralysis of Parliament's authority.

While Prime Minister's remarks on Ayodhya controversy outside Parliament, when both the Houses were in session has been glibly supported by his supporters and stoutly opposed by his critics, several Speakers of Lok Sabha through their unambiguous rulings have clearly stated the correct parliamentary conventions. The common tenor of all these rulings of successive Speakers of the Lok

issue shows collapse of Parliament's authority

whether discussion about the conduct of persons in authority could be discussed in the House since Rule 352 for the business in Lok Sabha stated:

"A member while speaking shall not - (v) reflect upon the conduct of persons in high authority, unless the discussion is based on a substantive motion drawn in proper terms".

The explanation of the Rule, had however given discretion to the Speaker to decide whether the substantive motion was drawn in proper terms.

When the Speaker of the Lok Sabha was convinced that this condition was fulfilled, my motion under Rule 184 on the conduct of the Governor of Andhra Pradesh was allowed. Though my motion was defeated, on the basis of the unimpeachable evidence about the misconduct of the Governor, he was removed from his office and Shri Rama Rao re-installed as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

DATE OF SITTING OF LOK SABHA	SPEAKER WHO GAVE THE RULING
1 Aug/Just, 1953	G.V. Mavlankar
1 Apr/11, 1959	Ananta Shetye Nam Yangar
4 Dec/ember, 1959	Ananta Shetye Nam Yangar
23 T/ecember, 1960	Ananta Shetye Nam Yangar
27 F/ugust, 1963	Sardar Hukum Singh
18 D/ecember, 1963	Sardar Hukum Singh
3 D/ecember, 1971	G.S. Dhillion
28 August, 1973	G.S. Dhillion
16 August, 1985	Balram Jajhar
7 M/arch, 1987	Balram Jajhar

is implied in the rules and the Speaker can use his discretion to allow the debate.

I distinctly remember that when I pleaded with the Speaker of Lok Sabha in 1984 to discuss the conduct of the Governor of Andhra Pradesh in dismissing the Chief Minister Shri Rama Rao without ascertaining the wishes of the Assembly and keeping it under animated suspension, initially the Speaker expressed the doubt

Sabha has been that no minister should make policy statements outside the House, when Parliament is already in session.

(See box for record of such rulings)

Very often if the text of certain rules about the business of Lok Sabha are rigidly interpreted, the debates on some subjects are prohibited. But as one goes through the rules carefully, there is a vivid, giving some latitude for debates. It

This analogy is given only to show that if parliamentarians ingeniously evoke the suitable rule of procedure of Lok Sabha, the matter which eludes discussion in the House can be brought back on the rail. When the debate in the fifth Lok Sabha on "Import Licence Scandal" was struck up on the House for days together, the deadlock in the functioning of Parliament was ultimately resolved when the Speaker exercised his authority.

He ruled that the concerned minister should share jottings in his file about the episode with the leaders of all the parties in Speaker's Chamber -- and finally that clinched the issue.

Thus, it is only the application of mind by the parliamentarians about using the appropriate parliamentary device and the flexibility of approach by the Speaker of Lok Sabha that can prevent the collapse of Parliament's authority and power.

DISGRACE ABOUNDING

Prime Minister Exonerates Babari Brutality?

By HIREN MUKERJEE

AS the year of grace 2000 approaches its end, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, of all people, lends his voice in support of on-going designs of fanatic zealotry to aggravate the crisis created by the almost universally detested demolition of the Babari Masjid in Ayodhya eight years ago. Of all people, I repeat, Atal who never fails to choose his words thought fit in Parliament, on the anniversary of that Black Day (6 December, 1992) to call the designedly and demonstratively dastardly Babari demolition-Ram Janmabhoomi agitation as "a manifestation of nationalist feelings". This has been said without even an accompanying word of regret — which India owes to herself and to the world — for an infamous and in every sense impious act of disgrace in Ayodhya. That act has sullied ineffaceably India's image as the land where even militant all-conquering Islam came to terms with our unique civilisational eclecticism and a lovely cultural synthesis, now so much in peril, was evolved on our soil.

If this is how even Atal Behari Vajpayee reacts, what of the cohorts of near-demented zealots, the obviously odious outfits like Bal Thackeray's Shiv Sena and other formations behind and around him? It may be conceded that the Prime Minister, pressured by his entourage, has a hell of a job to keep it in check. But there was no call for him, especially on a day of solemn introspection, to speak in that way. If the light that is in thee is darkness how great is that darkness!

CLEAN CHIT

Can it be that the comparatively sensitive Atal Behari Vajpayee's capitulation to his communalist *enrages* has gone so far that he had no compunction in gratuitously proceeding to give a clean chit to his colleagues, the charge-sheeted trio — LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti — who have yet to purge themselves judicially. If things were normal and even minimally moral in our public life they should not have been permitted to gad about in Parliament and elsewhere as functioning ministers. The Prime minister must have known that both Advani and Joshi, after much procrastination, are slated to appear later this month before Mr Justice Lieberhan entrusted long ago with a judicial inquiry into the December 1992 impasse, and alas, typically in our political predicament, trapped into a characteristically contrived process of the law's delay, perhaps in order that the inquiry is effectively scotched.

In our feeble and often rancorously fatuous Parliament, voices have been raised from time to time but in vain for the charge-sheeted trio to be out of the ministry. That apart, the Prime Minister aggravates what appears almost to be his malleance by a blatant attempt to shield his tainted colleagues. They may be estimable otherwise and capable of boot, but they are awaiting the

The author, an eminent parliamentarian, represented the Communist Party of India.

verdict of the law of our land and how their alleged doings are to be judged.

It is a shame even to recollect how the judicial inquiry has been almost jettisoned and turned nearly futile by manoeuvres that have made the unwilling Lieberhan play a sadly lingering innings. There has been murder, in very suspicious circumstances, of vital witnesses like Suraj Bhan who was travelling to Delhi from Varanasi by train with important documentary evidence to be placed before the Lieber-

that historic moment, but nobody seems to share my anguish at such failure. A truly sensitive and sensible idea was just cavalierly dropped. The entire Parliament, the Left particularly included, shares the responsibility for an unforgivable default.

It was inhuman — I should be permitted to say — and not just disgraceful that the Babari Masjid, a stupendous pile that had stood for five hundred years decorating the skyline of the sacred city of Ayodhya as places of worship of different denominations do in our country, was demonstratively destroyed by nearly demented *kar sevaks* in the presence of and to the then widely reported applause (which no later denial could wish away) of not only the impetuous Uma Bharti but of stern, sedate, solemn political personages also.

Who can erase the record of the picturesque (and perilous) *Ram Rath yatra* which Mr Advani, wise and wily as he always has been, undertook and performed with gusto as preparation for other things to follow? I at least cannot push away from my memory press reports of the scene when, before December 1992, Bal Thackeray in his Mumbai headquarters, gleefully affirmed that if he was India's Prime Minister he would demolish the Babari Masjid in twentyfour hours, while his guests, Vajpayee and Advani, guffawed as if it was a typical Thackeray joke?

HURT

It is no use recalling the sordid story, but are even more sordid things to happen now that our reportedly liberal-minded Prime Minister equates "national" aspiration with construction on Babari ruins of a new and shining temple for which sculptured items have already started pouring in? All this, without honestly to attempt assuaging the hurt not only to our principal religious minority but to the very ethos of our ancient country; the ethos of tolerance of diversity and universal compassion. Whatever might be said in derision of India, this is the fundamental quality which has made our land invincible in spite of all the agony inflicted on us for ages past. How can this process of assuagement be so thoughtlessly sabotaged by the Prime Minister himself fuelling the flames perhaps only to appease his fanatic fringe. At this point of time when Kashmir, the North-East, the bizzareries of the South (LTTE, Jayalalitha *et al*) and other perils persist, why aggravate communal issues that jeopardise not only India's security and stability and developmental prospects but also her historically evolved integrity?

I look around and wish I had not lived to see such happenings. I have no illusions about my voice carrying any weight in today's public life. Atal, for all the affection in which I have held him, will have, I am certain, no time even to learn of my distress! But even if it is the last time I have written for this paper which has given me hospitality since around 1936, I let go of my agony and hope for the best.



han Commission but was, in puzzling circumstances, done away with and the documents vanished. There were other such "doings", but that is not the theme of this piece. One might only add another mystifying murder, the killing, while he was asleep in his own Ayodhya home, of a priest Lal Das (1993) who had the gumption of attacking the demolition of the mosque and was in possession of vital evidence of the Commission.

In Parliament, on the day after the demolition, the then Congress Prime minister, PV Narasimha Rao with his still somewhat unblemished appearance, posed as if he was overpowered with grief over the "unintended" outrage and kept putting away with philosophic solemnity. One could almost reconstruct in imagination the scene in Parliament and its precincts, even Advani appearing uncharacteristically distraught and Vajpayee, the finished stage artist, seemed too emotionally overwhelmed — stunned into stoic silence. The chronically voluble and rumbustious Opposition, perhaps rejoicing over the opportunity, volleyed and thundered for a while, all their righteous indignation ending in a whimper, and nothing tangible was done to mollify, to the extent possible, the effects of a craftily and cruelly contrived exercise in Ayodhya.

AGONY

If my memory serves me right, the then Speaker Shivraj Patil had suggested a parliamentary resolution to be broadcast to the world and especially the Muslim countries, conveying the country's profound agony over the hideous act of vandalism which India's conscience condemned unequivocally. This eminently reasonable suggestion was foiled because the fractious parties, including the Opposition, could not agree on the text of the resolution. I can never forgive the Left, especially the Communists in Parliament (with whom my whole life has been linked) for their failure at

A SLIP OF THE MASK, NOT OF TONGUE: JAIPAL REDDY

Govt. put on the back foot in Ayodhya-Babri debate

By our special correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 13. The Lok Sabha finally began the 'Ayodhya/ Babri Masjid debate', with the Government finding itself, for most of the time, on the back foot. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is scheduled to reply tomorrow, after which the House will most probably see a division, forcing the National Democratic Alliance partners to take a stand, for the first time, on an issue that has been the litmus test for the secular/communal divide.

The six-day impasse in the Lok Sabha ended when the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, admitted a motion under Rule 184. The motion read: "That this House calls upon the Prime Minister to drop three Ministers from his Government, namely Mr. Lal Krishna Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti against whom *prima facie* charges have been found to exist for their involvement in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 and disapproves the stand of the Prime Minister seeking to exonerate the concerned Ministers."

This formulation was not much to the liking of the treasury benches. Their only consolation was that in his ruling the Speaker had enjoined that "nothing is said during the debate which may prejudice the course of justice in any manner". The BJP members came pretty near to questioning the wisdom of the Speaker's ruling.

Speaker warns BJP

It took a stern note of disapproval from the Chair for the BJP benches to calm down and let Mr. Jaipal Reddy (Congress) start the debate. He began with a flourish, saying he owed it "to my conscience and my country" to move the motion, and proceeded to lambast the Prime Minister for "abandoning the sectarian neutrality of his office" by his statement favoring a temple at the disputed site. He also came down hard on the propriety of the three Ministers continuing in office. Accusing them of being a part of the conspiracy, Mr. Reddy said it was "a colossal crime against the Constitution".

Mr. Reddy's opening salvo was laced with wit. He said the Prime Minister had "made the Pilgrim's Progress from hypocrisy to theocracy". The eloquent Mr. Reddy noted that the Prime Minister often took recourse to poetry to avoid taking a stand on issue "and had never condemned the demolition"; but now, Mr. Reddy wondered whether the Prime Minister "was a converted liberal who had become a reconverted fundamentalist". The Congress lead speaker concluded: "The

mask had fallen and revealed a lame-duck Prime Minister devoid of moral authority."

Mr. Vajpayee's statement that construction of Ram temple at the disputed site was "an expression of national sentiment" was in fact "a slip of his mask and not a slip of the tongue".

Parallel trial: Jaitley

From the treasury benches the burden of refuting Mr. Reddy fell on the Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, who argued like a good lawyer that he is. Mr. Jaitley effectively sought to deflate the Opposition's contention that the three "chargesheeted" Ministers should resign, and charged that the Opposition was conducting a "parallel trial", and was trying to write a "new jurisprudence".

The Law Minister's contention was that the chargesheets "were filed before they became Ministers", that each one of them had

subsequently won a number of elections, and that "civilised jurisprudence" demanded that these be presumed innocent till proven guilty. Mr. Jaitley questioned the constitutional propriety of the Opposition telling the Prime Minister who to keep and who to keep out of his Cabinet.

It was left to the veteran, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M), to put the motion in the larger perspective of the great constitutional, political and moral issues involved in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Debunking the Law Minister's charge of "parallel trial", the CPI(M) leader reminded the BJP that it had sought the exit of Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mr. Buta Singh and Mr. Sedapatti Muthiah when these were chargesheeted.

Mr. Chatterjee went on to question the propriety of the Prime Minister casting himself as the spokesperson of one community,

whereas his high office enjoined him to care for all sections.

Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) forcefully made the point that the "*mandir wahin banega*" line (temple will be built on the disputed site) was "not a nationalist but an RSS sentiment."

He reminded the BJP that it had lost the election in Uttar Pradesh after December 6, 1992.

He charged that Mr. Vajpayee had tried to divert the people's attention from the allround failure of the Government.

Interestingly, while Mr. Yadav was speaking about the Babri Masjid demolition, a BJP member, Mr. Avaidhyanath, was heard saying "*Mathura ka bhi number aana hai*" (Mathura's turn too will come), revealing the new assertive mood in the BJP's 'temple brigade'.

Rajya Sabha debate: Page 13



Mr. Jaipal Reddy, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, Mr. Arun Jaitley, Mr. George Fernandes

'From ministry to monastery'

Senior Congress leader, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy using his felicity of words to great effect, said Mr. L.K. Advani had articulated a medieval ideology in a modern idiom. Profusely quoting the CBI, Mr. Reddy said Mr. Advani held a three-day hurricane tour of Uttar Pradesh whipping up emotions and mobilising people to reach Ayodhya on the day of the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

Mr. Reddy's wit did not spare Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi either — "a sweet and generous scholar who confused history with theology, and then astronomy with astrology"; as for Ms. Uma Bharti, she "shuttled between Ministry and monastery, and then between mandalism and kamandalism".

Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) accused Mr. Advani of trying to interfere in the due process of law in the Ayodhya case in a virtual attempt to exonerate its Ministers. He said the CBI chargesheet was enough ground for raising the question of propriety against the three Union Ministers and added the prosecutor and the accused were the same.

Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) said the BJP-led Government was in power because of the wrong-doings and policies of the Congress. They had a secret understanding as their policies were almost the same — to ruin the country economically.

'New phrases, new parties'

The Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, asserted that the Government has made no attempt to interfere with the law and functioning of the Liberhans Commission or the court where the issues are pending. "The Vajpayee Government's stand is an illustration of its commitment to the rule of law although there are several instances in the past when Governments have withdrawn cases against those holding offices," he said.

Mr. Jaitley took a dig at Mr. Jaipal Reddy and read out from his speech in Rajya Sabha in 1992 following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in which he had severely criticised the Congress

holding it responsible for the demolition. Mr. Jaitley said Mr. Reddy was fond of coining new phrases just as he was fond of joining new parties.

The Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, indicating the Government's mind on the Ram temple issue, said: "We want to complete the good work started by the Congress regime." He wondered "what was wrong in completing the good work started by erstwhile the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. The foundation of the temple was laid during the Congress regime."

Mr. Fernandes, also convener of the NDA, said Mr. L.K. Advani was full of tears when the disputed structure collapsed. Mr. Advani was appealing to the karsevaks not to demolish the structure, he claimed.

CROSSFIRE

RS impasse over Ayodhya continues

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 13

9- Rajya HC-11
THE RAJYA Sabha impasse over the Ayodhya debate continued today as the Government declined to have a discussion under Rule 168 which requires voting.

The Government is in a minority in the Upper House and the voting on the discussion could have resulted in an embarrassing defeat for it. The Opposition parties led by the Congress and the CPM were adamant that if the Opposition demand for the debate could be accepted in the Lok Sabha, how could they be denied the opportunity.

A discussion under Rule 168 required consent of the Government since the Chair had to fix the time and date of the discussion in consultation with the Leader of the House Jaswant Singh.

During the meeting convened by Chairman Krishan Kant, the Opposition leaders were

willing to have their motions re-worded but insisted on Rule 168 for the debate.

Blaming the Government for the impasse, the leaders of nine political parties jointly issued a statement saying the "Government has adopted different standards in the two Houses."

'PM's remarks planned'

FORMER BJP president Kushabhau Thakre has said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's remarks on Ayodhya issue were made "not at random but in a planned way." He however, refused to elaborate his point.

Pti Ratlam

Releasing the statement, Congress Rajya Sabha member Ghulam Nabi Azad said "it is for the Government to decide whether to run the House or not. We should not be blamed for blocking the proceedings."

The leaders said for the last seven days the

11/12
Rajya Sabha work was stalled "because the Government did not agree to have discussion on the impropriety of the statement of the Prime Minister exonerating the three Union Cabinet Ministers against whom chargesheets have been filed in connection with the demolition of the Babri mosque."

The members who had given notices hoped since the impasse had been broken in the Lok Sabha, the Government would allow "this subject to be discussed under the corresponding rule of discussion culminating in a vote." They said "We are only interested in having a meaningful discussion of the issue under Rule 170." The debate sought under Rule 168 finally takes place under Rule 170. Commenting on Government attitude, Mr Nilotpal Basu (CPM) said "this is duplicity, why should we change the Rule under which we want the discussion."

He said "our job is to oppose and expose." Mr Kapil Sibal (Cong) said "they don't want any discussion because they will be defeated."

Briefs

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 DEC 2000

Ayodhya issue gets tossed around in political war zone

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI, 13 DECEMBER

THE AYODHYA issue, once again, provided political formations with an opportunity to play identity politics — it helped the BJP give the Ram Janmabhoomi movement the legitimacy of a political action; gave the Samajwadi Party an occasion to cement its ties with its Muslim constituency; prompted the Left parties to repeat their now-familiar "secular-communal" theme and helped the Congress exercise its past.

While the BJP rejected the Opposition's demand for the resignation of three ministers — L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati — over Ayodhya and charged it with reviving communal tension, the Samajwadi Party and the BSP made sure that the Congress cannot elbow into their "secular" space.

The debate, which saw the Congress entrust its initiation to a neo-convert Jaipal Reddy, provided an opportunity for Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav to project himself as the "real protector" of the interests of the minorities. MDMK's Mr Vaiko said his party was opposed to the demand for the resignation of the three ministers, and that the Congress had no commitment to secularism.

Mr Arun Jaitley, who was fielded to defend the government in the Lok Sabha, where a debate on the issue as well as the Prime Minister's defence of the temple movement is yet to be concluded, attempted to ram in the ruling party's point that there was no case for the resignation of the ministers.

In a scathing attack on the Congress in an hour-long speech, Mr Jaitley sought to turn the Congress, alleging that it was the Congress — which has been charging the BJP of mounting the Hindutva tiger — that had played a valuable role in fanning the Hindu sentiment. "It was the Congress which allowed the VHP to perform shilanyas; it was the Congress which asked the Muslims to approach the court and not create disturbances; and it was the Congress leaders who said kicking off the election campaign from Ayodhya where Ram lives, gave them immense satisfaction," Mr Jaitley said.

Mr Jaitley, who described the Congress-sponsored motion as "politically motivated," said the demand for resignation of the three ministers was untenable, as it was in violation of a sub-judice rule. The motion, he said, was an attempt to lay down "new legal principles



STREET WATCH: People watch the House proceedings on TV at an electronics shop in the city on Wednesday. — AFP

and new jurisprudence" to nail the accused even before the trial commenced in court. In an attempt to reconcile the concerns of the allies, Mr Jaitley said he has made it clear that there will not be any deviation from the NDA's national agenda for governance. In his interpretation of the Vajpayee-speak, the Prime Minister had only reiterated that the dispute could be settled through negotiations between the contending parties or through the court's verdict.

Mr Jaitley said there was nothing new in Mr Vajpayee's suggestions for a negotiated settlement, since several Prime Ministers in the past have talked on these lines. The minister asserted that the government has made no attempt to interfere with law and functioning of the Liberhans Commission or the court where the issues are pending. "The Vajpayee government's stand is an illustration of its commitment to the rule of law although there are several instances in the past when governments have withdrawn cases against those holding offices," he said.

He quoted the then Uttar Pradesh governor Satyanarayan Reddy as having stated that CID officers posted at Ayodhya had told him that Mr Advani had tried to prevent "kar sevaks" from demolishing the structure. "Police and other security officers, who had been deputed with Advani at that time, had also given similar testimony," the minister said, adding one of them had stated that Mr Advani wanted to climb the dome to persuade the "kar sevaks" against taking law into their own hands.

Mr Jaitley said the chargesheet filed by CBI in the court has been challenged in the High Court and "simply because some facts have been invented, this cannot be the basis for punishing anybody."

Govt shies away from temple debate in House

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI, 13 DECEMBER

THE GOVERNMENT ducked a discussion on the Ayodhya issue for the eighth successive day on Wednesday in the Rajya Sabha, where it lacks sufficient strength to pull through during a voting under Rule 170, even as the Opposition turned up the heat on the issue.

The Opposition parties, which have for the last week been consistently demanding the admission of a motion under Rule 168 culminating in a discussion and voting under Rule 170, issued a joint statement on the subject in the late afternoon that charged the ruling regime with stalling normal transactions by adopting, "different standards in the two houses — one for the Lok Sabha and another for the Rajya Sabha."

The statement, which came after attempts to break the deadlock through a meeting under the aegis of leader of the House Jaswant Singh failed. "Now that this impasse has been resolved in the Lok Sabha, we were hoping that the government would take a similar position in the Rajya Sabha and allow this subject to be discussed under the corresponding rule of discussion culminating in a vote."

While members of the Lok Sabha had been allowed to clinch the discussion through voting, members of the Upper House have been calculatedly "denied the opportunity," the joint release signed by Opposition leaders said.

The Opposition's heightened belligerence on the issue, however, appeared to have only put the government, which is in a minority in the house, on a worse backfoot.

This, particularly since discussion on the Ayodhya issue under Rule 168 would come very close to a censure of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's recent remark on the Ayodhya issue. This will include his comment that the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya is "the expression of an unfulfilled national sentiment."



MUM'S THE WORD: Sonia Gandhi at an Iftar party hosted by Congress leader P.M. Syed in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

THE LEADER of the Opposition, Ms Sonia Gandhi's continuing silence in Parliament during the Ayodhya debate on Wednesday highlighted yet again the Congress party's persistent crisis of leadership.

If Opposition parties expected the Congress to be the vanguard of attack against the government on an issue as sensitive and politically volatile as Ayodhya, they were doomed to disappointment as Mr Gandhi spent the entire day in an almost inert position, moving only to nervously adjust the folds of her perfectly pleated saree.

This left the Congress attack confined to new recruits like Jaipal Reddy, raising eyebrows that the Congress which had inspired the week-long protest could not field senior leaders for the debate.

Ms Gandhi has continually demonstrated her complete failure to grasp the minutiae of Indian politics — from failing to stand up during the national anthem on Navy Day to letting a parliamentary debate go by without intervention or any discernible political directive.

The most savage attack against her came from Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party leader. Rising to attack the government in the Lok Sabha, Mr Yadav instead trained his guns on the Congress party and specifically at Ms Gandhi for failing to provide any leadership.

Turning to Mr Jaipal Reddy, he said Mr Reddy was "an outsider," since he had only recently joined the party, having spent many politically active years outside the Congress party, opposing its policies.

"Yet today, the Congress party is in such a perilous state that it has to requisition the services of an outsider to defend its point of view. You were the spokesman of our group," Mr Yadav reminded Mr Reddy, "and you can return whenever you want."

Mr Reddy's current political convictions were singled out for special treatment even by the Union law minister Arun Jaitley, who rose to oppose the motion for the government.

"I have admired his (Mr Reddy's) choice of words but never his choice of parties. I have admired his turn of phrase but never the turn of his ideology."

Govt. will honour court verdict on Ayodhya: PM

Demand for ministers' resignation rejected

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Though the opposition-sponsored censure motion against the government was defeated by a convincing margin in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, the Prime Minister's response to the debate left a section of the NDA allies unhappy.

While 291 of the members voted against the motion, 179 supported it. The 14-strong BSP group abstained from voting, holding both the BJP and the opposition responsible for the imbroglio.

Shortly before the voting, the entire Trinamul brigade went out of the House to consider the option of abstention. The Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam made clear their unhappiness with the PM's reply. However, last-minute persuasion by the BJP and Mr Vajpayee's assurance that his government would accept and abide by the court verdict on the Ayodhya issue assuaged the sulking allies.

In his response to the two-day discussion which took place in an unusually polarised and surcharged atmosphere in the House, Mr Vajpayee upheld his earlier view that the temple issue was an expression of national sentiment.

He defended home minister L.K. Advani, HRD minister M.M. Joshi and sports minister Uma

Bharati, saying that even if they tendered their resignations he would not accept them.

Striking an aggressive posture, Mr Vajpayee accused the opposition of "playing with emotional issues". He rejected the opposition demand that the three ministers should quit because of the CBI chargesheet against them in a case relating to the Babri Masjid demolition. He rejected the opposition argument that the example of Harin Pathak's resignation as minister, following a judicial indictment, should be followed.

Mr Vajpayee's speech left no doubts that his position on the Ayodhya issue, first articulated on December 6, is an indication of the future course of BJP's politics.

Though the NDA allies stood by the government and defeated the motion, they made no bones about their unwillingness to carry the burden of the alliance if the BJP sought to deviate from the NDA programme.

Speeches made by Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee and TDP's house leader Yarren Naidu held out a warning to the BJP that if it wanted the coalition to continue it should put on hold its individual agenda.

Rounding up the discussion, Congress leader Jaipal Reddy said that constitutional morality

demanding that the three ministers resign to uphold the tradition set by the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had obtained the resignation of T.T. Krishnamachari on not too strong a ground. A minister, Mr Reddy said in his inimitable style, was like "Caesar's wife" and, therefore, would have to be above all suspicion.

In his short reply, Mr Reddy cautioned the NDA partners that the BJP would only implement the sangh parivar agenda and that they should have no illusions about it. He said the prime minister had evaded several questions raised by the opposition on his remarks made last week and that the "confusion is now worse confounded".

He warned the NDA partners that BJP was only one of the tentacles of the 'parivar octopus' which would rope in everyone in the coalition. Mr Reddy rejected Mr Vajpayee's contention that there was no need for the ministers to resign simply because they were charge-sheeted and said by such a logic there would have been no resignations in independent India from T.T. Krishnamachari to now.

He also said that if the government had agreed to the censure motion discussion on the first day, there would have been no deadlock of parliamentary proceedings.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 DEC 2000

Vajpayee and the Babri Masjid

By Rajeev Dhavan

The Prime Minister must not create the mischief himself. If he wants to lead the BJP rather than India, he always has that choice.

MR. VAJPAYEE has a party political memory. It is not the memory of a Prime Minister. Mr. Vajpayee seems to have forgotten that he represents all the people of the most varied multi-cultural and multi-religious nation in the world. Between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean lies a veritable civilisation composed of measureless diversity. It is not a question of numbers. But, the numbers themselves are daunting. India is the third largest Muslim country in the world after Indonesia and Bangladesh. It houses more Christians than the population of Australia. Buddhism and Jainism are practicing faiths in India. Hinduism, itself, is a compendium faith of many varied, breathtaking and, often, inconsistent interpretations. All this is known. It is all too easily forgotten. It has to be repeated again and again to remind Mr. Vajpayee that he must behave like a statesman. He cannot continually walk back to his Jana Sangh origins. He must look forward. He is the Prime Minister of India. He has forgotten that he represents 100 million Muslims and people of innumerable persuasions. Unfortunately, this too, needs to be said.

The Babri Masjid was destroyed on December 6, 1992. It was a wanton act of constitutional sacrilege. If India is to survive as one nation and one civilisation, such a sacrilege is simply impermissible. This is not simply because the Constitution and the law do not permit it. Or, because the Supreme Court has declared 'secularism' to be part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Without secularism, there can be no India as we know it. To lose the gift of secular tolerance, religious equality and benign neutrality to all peoples and faiths is to lose the entire enrichment of India's unparalleled but turbulent history. There is little point in going back to the 'sacrileges' of the past. Many did occur. No one defends the 'sacrileges' of India's ancient medieval or pre-Independence past. The new post-independence compact between all communities' peoples and faiths in India unequivocally looks to the future and de-

cries any future sacrilege as an act of faith of all Indians. This is relevant for the near future and the more distant coming together of the subcontinent as a whole.

The BJP and its allies alone are happy to risk 'India' in order to win elections and retain power. The resurgence of the BJP as a political force was built entirely on the vicious campaign to destroy the Babri mosque. After the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the BJP's White Paper on Ayodhya (1993) unrepentantly and mercilessly canvassed the case for historical revenge against the Muslims. Having failed to win three elections decisively on its own, the BJP puts its Ayodhya rhetoric on the back-burner to serve its 'coalition' route to power. A view was projected that the BJP was maturing into a national party and shedding its communal image.

But, the events from December 5, 2000, belie the BJP's new secular image. On that date the party's spokesmen likened the destruction of the Masjid and building of a temple on that spot as akin to the 'freedom movement'. By December 6, 2000, the Bajrang Dal wanted the day of the demolition to be celebrated as 'shourya diwas' (gallantry day). The Opposition demanded the resignations of Mr. Advani, Mr. Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti until their non-complicity in the destruction of the Masjid was established in criminal proceedings. On December 6, 2000, the Prime Minister dropped a bombshell declaring that the construction of the temple at Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiment, which was yet to be realised. The Opposition reacted to this communal rhetoric strongly since it implied that supposed majority sentiment could ride roughshod over minority rights in a secular democracy. On December 7, Mr. Vajpayee's clarification at a Rashtrapati Bhavan function, in fact, confirmed

what he said. He also refused to sack the trio of Ministers who allegedly participated in the sacrilege. The VHP cashed in on all this by declaring the date of the Kumbh Mela in 2001 as the date of construction of the temple. Demonstrations followed. On December 7, 2000, an ambiguous statement of Mr. Vajpayee suggested a new inchoate plan to build the Hindu temple at the site of the makeshift temple constructed in 1992 on the site of the destroyed mosque.

He suggested that the mosque could be constructed elsewhere. The allies of the BJP's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (especially the Telugu Desam) claimed to be fuming. Many, like Mr. George Fernandes, had been staunch secularists. Eventually, the NDA emerged with a formula that they will abide by the verdict of the Supreme Court. This was an ill-informed ruse to remain in power. Apart from a few contempt petitions, nothing is pending before the Supreme Court. By rejecting the Presidential Reference in 1994, the Supreme Court had refused to get drawn into deciding the issue; and, asked the High Court of Allahabad to decide the pending suit. In a questionable order, the Supreme Court ordered a pro-communal status quo in favour of the makeshift temple installed after the destruction. This, amidst heart burning, was graciously accepted by the Muslims. Technically, Mr. Vajpayee's, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal's statements hover on contempt of court.

Parliament was paralysed. Even a debate on this issue had been reluctantly agreed. The BJP challenged the Opposition to file a no-confidence motion aware that it has the brute strength of its allies in Parliament to avoid the real issue. No one wants another election. In this process, values crucial to Indian democracy will be sacrificed to expediency.

But the quest for the soul of India's gov-

ernance must rise above this tumult. First, the Prime Minister and the BJP are wrong. The destruction of the Babri Masjid was not a 'freedom movement', but a shameful act. Neither the NDA nor its allies are fit to rule in India as long as they do not acknowledge this act of shame in clear and equivocal terms. This means that the BJP must repudiate its White Paper (1993) and Mr. Vajpayee's statement (2000) which together portray an uneasy continuity. Second, the 'rule of law' must, of course, take its course and has already resulted in an indefensible status quo in rewarding the miscreants of destruction to continue the makeshift temple. But, Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Narasimha Rao did try a negotiated settlement which failed due to the intransigence of the VHP. It would be a supreme act of grace to rebuild the mosque. If anything has to be built on this site, it has to be the mosque. If a negotiated settlement results in building both the temple and the mosque elsewhere, that should be done. Third, having initiated this controversy, Mr. Vajpayee needs to make a clear and unequivocal statement in Parliament (rather than through casual remarks) and face a full-fledged debate on his remarks. If he is unable to defend Indian secularism as correctly interpreted by the Courts, he should accept that he cannot rule India constitutionally and speak for all Indians and resign. Fourth, Parliament should seriously step in and resolve this controversy on a secular basis and for all religious sites.

In 1990, Mr. V. P. Singh was forced into resigning as Prime Minister because he wanted to introduce reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the Central Services. History and the Supreme Court proved him right. Like social justice, secularism, democracy and the rule of law are the cornerstone of Indian governance. The Prime Minister must take a lead, not create the mischief himself. If he wants to lead the BJP rather than India, he always has that choice. This is not yet another fracas in Parliament. The Babri Masjid goes to the core of Indian governance.

OPPOSITION TO REWORD STATEMENT ON MOTION

Ayodhya: RS debate on Monday

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 15. The Government today acceded to the Opposition demand for a discussion on the Ayodhya issue in the Rajya Sabha ending the nine-day deadlock in the Upper House. The debate will be held on Monday. As soon as the House assembled this morning, the Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, said the Opposition-sponsored motion had been admitted but did not specify the rule under which it would be discussed.

For the past nine days, the Opposition did not allow transaction of any business in the House insisting on a discussion culminating in voting on the impropriety of the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, exonerating the three Union Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case. The notice for the motion was given by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee of the Congress and supported by eight other Opposition parties including the Left parties, the Samajwadi Party, the AIADMK, and the United Parliamentary Group.

The Opposition had hardened its stance after the Government agreed to discuss the issue in the Lok Sabha under a substantive motion but disagreed to have a discussion in the Rajya Sabha. Opposition MPs accused the Government of adopting different standards in the two Houses. The stalemate ended after the

Opposition agreed to reword the motion preferring to "disagree" instead of "disapproval" on the Prime Minister's statement on the three Ministers chargesheeted by the CBI.

Opposition members and Government sources said the motion would be discussed under Rule 170 that would entail voting. The Government, in a minority in the Upper House, is apparently not worried on the likelihood of the motion being carried.

Sources in the Government sought to give it a spin stating that even if the motion was carried by the Rajya Sabha it would not mean a censure of the Vajpayee Government but only disagreement with the Lok Sabha which rejected a similar motion yesterday. Once again the issue would be debated at length through Monday, this time in the Rajya Sabha and the Prime Minister is expected to reply the next day.

I need not be apologetic: Advani

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 15. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today said he need not be apologetic about his ideology. "Can anyone say they will be able to build a mosque at that (disputed) site (in Ayodhya)?"

While Mr. Advani did not clarify his stand on

the Ram temple or any of the BJP pet themes, it was clear that after the Prime Minister's statements last week, and his reassertion in the Lok Sabha yesterday that the temple issue was a matter of "national sentiments," party leaders do not feel they should maintain a studied silence on issues dear to them.

Speaking informally to reporters at a lunch hosted by Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, Rural Development Minister, Mr. Advani differentiated between matters of governance and ideology, suggesting that they did not overlap. "I do not need to be apologetic about my ideology," he added.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was also present, kept his distance from mediapersons saying he would not give into the pressure from those looking for a "quick byte". Mr. Advani's charge against the Opposition was that "it had raised the issue (of his resignation and that of two other Ministers) to create problems for the Prime Minister and the NDA government, but the Opposition also did harm to communal harmony."

Then almost as if to warn the Opposition, Mr. Advani said that year after year "they" were raising this (Ayodhya) issue. "If we were to raise the issue of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 every year on November 1 it may certainly make for some political gain, but communal harmony would be hurt."

THE HINDU

15 DEC 2000

Ayodhya debate goes to RS now

■ Govt gets consensus on the 3 ministers in LS, prepares for upper house debate

SHARAD GUPTA
NEW DELHI, DEC 15

JUBILANT with the impact of its thumping victory in the Lok Sabha on Ayodhya, the BJP today readily agreed to debate the issue in Rajya Sabha as well, under a rule entailing voting, knowing fully well that it was set to lose there.

The BJP was resisting a discussion in Rajya Sabha for the past nine days under a rule that entailed voting, leading adjournment of the Rajya Sabha, since it does not have a majority and losing here would have meant censure of the three chargesheeted ministers.

But with Lok Sabha giving them a clean chit, the BJP apparently decided to reap political harvest on the Ayodhya issue. NDA partners endorsing Prime Minister's statement about Ram Temple movement being an expression of national sentiments, was a major achievement for the BJP, party's floor managers feel.

Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, who along with Uma Bharti and MM Joshi, had been chargesheeted in the demolition case asserted that he was ashamed of his ideology. Sarcastically refer-



Prime Minister Vajpayee shares a light moment with BJP president Laxman Bangaru on Friday -PTI

ring to the CBI chargesheet in the demolition case Advani said, "I am surprised at the charges they have levelled made against me".

The jubilant mood of BJP workers was very much on display at a luncheon party hosted by Rural Development Minister Venkaiah Naidu today and the only topic of the debate was the

Lok Sabha debate.

BJP's hardline workers who had become indifferent due to abdication of Ram Temple issue, would be reactivated by Vajpayee's commitment to the temple cause, feel leaders.

This is probably why the party agreed to the discussion in the Rajya Sabha under rule 168 on an

Opposition-sponsored motion broadly saying that the House disagrees with the Prime Minister's clean chit to the three Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

"Yes, we know we won't win in the Rajya Sabha but losing here won't make much of a difference

INDIAN EXPRESS

16 DEC 2000

Advani critical of CBI's Ayodhya probe

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: A day after the BJP-led government won the vote on the opposition's demand for the resignation of the three ministers chargesheeted in the Ayodhya case, Union home minister L.K. Advani appeared to be casting aspersions on the CBI, currently under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

In an informal conversation with journalists at a luncheon hosted by rural development minister M. Venkaiah Naidu, he said, "When I saw the contents of the CBI chargesheet (on the Ayodhya case), I began to wonder at the way it functions.

"Uma, maybe you should take a look at the way it is handling the cases in your ministry (a reference to the match-fixing case)," he said, addressing sports minister Uma Bharti, who was also present.

Later, sources close to Ms Bharti said that she felt it was possible Mohammed Azharuddin and Ajay Jadeja had been falsely implicated by the CBI. Last week, she had said the government was considering taking back the Arjuna awards conferred on the two cricketers, but now she seems to have changed

tack on this score as well.

Opposition sources said the home minister's critical remarks against the CBI confirmed their fears that he might use his ministerial position to browbeat the investigative agency.

Mr Advani's reflections on the CBI were an indication of the BJP's upbeat mood after the Prime Minister reiterated on the floor of parliament on Thursday what he had said outside it last week. While Mr Vajpayee—also present at the lunch—refused to comment on the issue, Mr Advani took the floor. "I don't have to be apologetic about my ideology," he said, adding, "I believe the opposition raised the issue (of resignations) for purely political reasons. Those who raised the December 6 issue are not helping the Muslims. What would happen if we raised the issue of anti-Sikh riots every November 1? We would gain, and they (the Congress) would lose."

Commenting on the two-day debate, Mr Advani added, "We've registered a massive victory even though I am not feeling very happy about it. The opposition raised the issue to create a problem for the Prime Minister and the NDA"

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18/11/2000

ENIGMA VARIATIONS

Slightly altering a very wellknown phrase, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee can be described as an enigma wrapped in craftiness. The enigma grows out of the aura of mystery that surrounds the prime minister and his utterances. Take the string of recent statements about the Ram *mandir* in Ayodhya as an example. Nobody is quite sure why Mr Vajpayee decided to make these statements at this particular juncture. He could not have been unaware of the furore his pronouncements would create not only among the opposition parties and the secularists but also within the National Democratic Alliance. He could not have been oblivious of this because he knows that his endorsement of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign would surprise all those who support and respect him. Mr Vajpayee never associated himself with the campaign even when it was at the height of its popularity. He distanced himself from the *rathayatra* of Mr L.K. Advani which prepared the ground for the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. Thus Mr Vajpayee's endorsement of it in 2000 made everyone sit up and take notice. Was this a new Mr Vajpayee? Has the liberal mask finally slipped from the face of a diehard Hindu fanatic? Or was this the quintessential Brahmin speaking: elliptical, saying one thing, intending another.

Speculations abound. Mr Vajpayee may be a lot of things but transparency is not one of his virtues. He has not been nurtured in the school of politics which believes that straight talking is a commendable quality in a politician. It would be advisable, indeed, not to take anything that Mr Vajpayee says at face value. Mr Vajpayee's actions and statements are all well thought out pieces of a design. Nothing is said or done in a fit of absentmindedness. Mr Vajpayee is a master in the crafty art of politicking. If one accepts this as a premise — and there are no reasons for not doing so — then his recent utterances on the Ram *mandir* can be read in a different light.

From the time he became prime minister, Mr Vajpayee has been trying to free the Bharatiya Janata Party and the NDA government from the influence of Nagpur. His actual hidden agenda — contrary to the "hidden agenda" the secularists accuse him of harbouring — has been to reduce the importance of and to marginalize the extremists within the *sangh parivar*. He has tried, with varying degrees of success, to focus on governance and stability rather than on ideology. His critics within the *sangh parivar* have argued that the fading of the saffron element is equal to the loss of

Mr Vajpayee's mysterious statements on Ayodhya may be pointing out to the saffron flag wavers that Hindutva, in the age of coalition politics, can go thus far and no further

the BJP's unique selling point. There has been a pressure on the prime minister that he should reclaim the *Hindutva* agenda for the BJP. By declaring the Ramjanmabhoomi movement as a manifestation of national sentiments, Mr Vajpayee appears to be doing this. Suddenly, Mr Vajpayee seemed to be the voice of Nagpur. The results were deadlock in Parliament and howls of disapproval from allies in the NDA. Mr Vajpayee thus showed extremists in his backyard that a Hindu agenda would erode governance, weaken the NDA and might eventually lead to loss of office. Mr Vajpayee has told Nagpur and the saffron flag wavers that Hindutva in the present age of coalition politics can go thus far and no further. He has announced in his uniquely elliptical way that for the BJP to remain in power, Mr Vajpayee cannot speak as the prime minister of the BJP.

All this indirectly emphasizes the importance of Mr Vajpayee in Indian politics and for the BJP. For the BJP, it is he alone who keeps the party in office. The BJP — and for that matter the entire *sangh parivar* — cannot afford to overlook this. In Indian politics, there is no other acceptable leader who seems to stand on the middle ground. Secularists may lament this but they have to accept this as the reality. Mr Vajpayee cannot give up saffron but at least he accepts that there are other colours on the Indian flag.

Govt may help build temple, says Bangaru

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 15. — The echo of the Ayodhya controversy is unlikely to die down with the BJP deciding to pick up from where Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee left.

The BJP chief Mr Bangaru Laxman told **The Statesman** today: "The time has come to start a dialogue for negotiated settlement to the controversy... The Ram temple cannot be removed from the disputed site."

The Centre will play the role of a facilitator to resolve the dispute amicably, Mr Laxman said. The Prime Minister's statement on temple construction had come after some Muslim leaders spoke to him about the need to resolve the controversy, he said. "...The overall atmosphere has been taken into consideration," he said. The Prime Minister thought it was time "to make clear the ground reality".

That the government should facilitate construction of the temple at the site of the makeshift temple was the party's original commitment in its

DMK ALARM

NEW DELHI, Dec. 15. — The DMK today threatened to pull out of the government in case of any deviation from the NDA's agenda of governance. The alarm seems to be a fallout of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech in Lok Sabha yesterday.

Meanwhile, Miss Mamata Banerjee met Trinamul, TDP, JD-U and INLD MPs in the central hall of Parliament "to take stock of the situation". — SNS

(Details on page 8)

■ Photograph, more reports on page 8

manifesto which was dropped in 1999 in favour of the NDA's common agenda. Mr Laxman's statement is reflective of the BJP's original commitment.

What was left to be resolved was finding an alternative site for a mosque, Mr Laxman said. Muslims felt the issue must be settled at some point of time.

The temple cannot be

removed from the disputed site, he stressed, and reminded the parties concerned of the ground reality which he said "is that a temple exists there".

Even Parliament had endorsed this view and none of the MPs, who participated in Thursday's debate, spoke of the need to remove the temple from the present site, Mr Laxman said.

He gave a convoluted reply when asked if the party would accept the court verdict if that favoured the Muslims' claim to the site. "How can one presuppose what the court will say?" It was always better for the concerned parties to come together and reach a negotiated settlement, he said. When pressed further, he said the party would abide by the court verdict.

He claimed that by and large it would not be difficult to convince leaders of both the communities for a negotiated settlement once the heat generated by the controversy dies down. Now that Parliament had also endorsed it, the task was easier, he said.

Without naming anybody he

■ TEMPLE: page 8

DMK threatens to pull out of govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

NEW DELHI, Dec. 15. — The DMK today threatened to pull out of the government if it deviated from the NDA's agenda of governance. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech on the Ayodhya controversy in the Lok Sabha yesterday was cause for the threat.

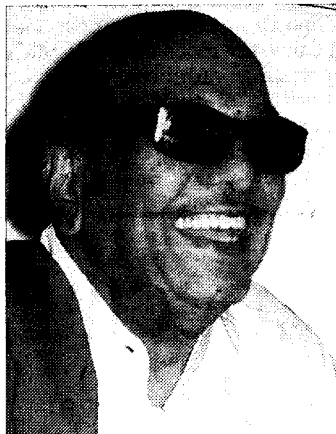
The JD-U president, Mr Sharad Yadav, too discussed Mr Vajpayee's speech with the TDP parliamentary party leader, Mr K Yerran Naidu, today.

Miss Mamata Banerjee, before leaving for Calcutta this evening, met TDP, JD-U and INLD MPs, though it was termed as an informal meet "to take stock of the situation".

Mr DP Yadav (JD-U) said the allies were unanimous that they would be forced to review support to the government if it deviated from the agenda.

Mr M Karunanidhi said: "In the Lok Sabha yesterday (during the debate on censure motion), the DMK leader had said the party will not be part of the government if it deviates from the NDA agenda. That is the party's view."

Mr Karunanidhi said that if the DMK wanted to cling to power at the Centre, it wouldn't have opposed the idea of building a Ram temple at the disputed site. DMK is still a part of the NDA only to protect the interests of minorities.



Mr M Karunanidhi

Miss Banerjee, meanwhile, is trying to form a "secular watchdog" on the BJP, especially the alleged bid to deviate from the NDA's agenda.

It's perhaps a bit early to conclude that her allies will be ready to stand by her at the hour of confrontation. For even yesterday, no ally except for Mr Yerran Naidu, to a certain extent, came forward to save Miss Banerjee.

A senior NDA leader feels Miss Banerjee "wasted yet another opportunity to make a credible revolt on a populist

SR

TEMPLE:

(Continued from page 1)

made it clear that the followers of Mr VP Singh and Mr Chandra Shekhar were trying to create problems.

He complimented the members of the minority community for maintaining their cool despite provocations by Opposition parties. Even the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid had issue a fatwa, he pointed out.

Parliament was held up for 10 days during Ramzan, yet

the community maintained utmost peace. This demonstrated that the Nagpur message wherein the party called upon the minority to come closer to the BJP had not failed, he said.

Talking about the likelihood of the VHP deciding on a date for temple construction soon, he said the organisation should understand the mood of the people. "As BJP president, I will request them not to go ahead with their plan."

■ If some allies, even while co-existing with the BJP, are particular in protect their "secular constituencies", the BJP, though "committed" to the NDA agenda, can be equally possessive about its Hindutva constituency.

■ The responsibility to ensure the survival of the government "through compromises" does not lie with BJP alone. It's in the "interest of all".

■ No one should have any illusion of enjoying power without paying a price for it.

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■ No one should have any illusion of enjoying power without paying a price for it.

Cong fishes in troubled waters

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 15. — Opposition parties, the Congress in particular, are a bit disappointed since the Ayodhya row failed to fracture the ties between Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and some regional satraps supporting the government, key Opposition leaders admitted.

But the Congress is still hopeful of a realignment of political forces. The vulnerability of the TDP, DMK and Trinamul Congress is apparent since the Ayodhya issue refuses to die down.

"Alignment and realignment are part of politics," said Mrs Margaret Alva, the Congress spokesperson. "In politics, nothing can be ruled out."

Third front leaders, including Mr VP Singh who have accepted Mr Jyoti Basu as the shadow prime minister of the front, say the only alternative to the Vajpayee-led government is to repeat the failed 1996 experiment — Mr Basu as PM with Mrs Sonia Gandhi supporting him from outside. "A nonsensical proposal," a senior CWC member said.

Mr LK Advani said the Congress move to split the ruling alliance by raking up the Ayodhya issue had proved to be a fiasco. But the home minister admitted that by rekindling the mandir-masjid dispute, the Congress had succeeded in vitiating the communal harmony that has been the

hallmark of the NDA government.

"It is unfortunate that the Opposition by targetting me and two other ministers went on to hit the Prime Minister," Mr Advani said. Mr Vajpayee was present, but he refused to respond to reporters' queries on Ayodhya.

The Prime Minister's statement in the Lok Sabha notwithstanding, some Opposition leaders have refused to call it a day.

Mr Chandrababu Naidu is not too disturbed over the Prime Minister's revival of the temple issue. Sources said he is more worried about the BJP's aggressive posture in Andhra Pradesh and the slow pace of economic growth. The failure of the Centre to tackle the farmers' plight is another cause of concern for the chief minister.

The most vulnerable ally of Mr Vajpayee is Miss Mamata Banerjee who has to face Assembly elections in West Bengal in a few months time. She went to Calcutta today a bit disappointed, sources said.

The DMK is also vulnerable as it has limited options. With no hope of revival of the third front in near future, Mr M Karunanidhi needs the support of the Centre more than the BJP to counter Miss J Jayalalitha.

When the Congress talks of realignment, it will have to forget the TDP and the DMK, even if the two NDA constituents become disenchanted with Mr Vajpayee and the BJP.

VHP DENIES BLAST

JAIPUR, Dec. 15. — The demolition of Babari Masjid was the result of a revolt or breach of discipline by kar sevaks, the VHP kendriya marg darshak Acharya Dharmendra said. He dismissed the RSS chief's claim that a blast caused the demolition. It was not a plot hatched by any organisation, he said. — UNI

The PM, secularism & Ram mandir

By Asghar Ali Engineer

A Prime Minister has no right to equate purely communal sentiments with the national sentiment.

10-12
19/12
M R. ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE issued a statement saying construction of a Ram mandir at Ayodhya is in keeping with the national sentiment. This raised a storm at various levels, political, social and religious. The Prime Minister could not have been unaware of the consequences of such a statement. His remarks came at a time when the Opposition had stalled Parliament proceedings demanding the resignation of Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti all of whom have been chargesheeted for complicity in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, in Ayodhya.

The Prime Minister has connected construction of a Ram temple in place of the Babri Masjid with "national sentiments." Who will decide what the national sentiment is? In a multi-religious country like India can one religious community's sentiments become the national sentiment? Is nation constituted by one religious community? Or is Mr. Vajpayee endorsing the two-nation theory by implication and yet claiming to be a secular Prime Minister.

If some ideologue of the BJP or the VHP had made such a statement it would have been understandable. But the Prime Minister of a secular country and head of a coalition Government which has a common agenda for governance? This common agenda excludes communal issues like construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

A Prime Minister has no right to equate purely communal sentiments with the national sentiment. The sentiments of the Sangh Parivar cannot be equated with the sentiments of the entire Hindu community. All Hindus are after all not for construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya in place of the Babri Masjid. They would prefer construction of Ram Mandir elsewhere rather than demolish a mosque.

I am saying this after interacting with many Hindus, otherwise quite poor and illiterate. It is politicised, middle class educated Hindus who are showing fervour for construction of a Ram temple by demolishing the Masjid.

The ordinary Muslims in this country too have a great reverence for Lord Ram. Many rural Muslims take part in Ramlila enthusiastically and even play the role of Hanuman.

They would even help materially and physically in constructing a mandir. But they were certainly agonised at the destruction of a mosque by some Hindus raising a false controversy about it and causing bloodshed of innocent people in the country.

Ordinary Hindus are not, and cannot, be communal. They are quite respectful of other religious traditions and would not like to see religious places of other communities demolished. The demolition of the Babri Masjid was not a religious project; it was the communal project of a communal party which was misusing the religion of the majority community for its own political purpose.

The BJP's earlier avatar, the Jana Sangh, had admitted in 1977 by renouncing communalism and taking a vow that it would embrace secularism and Gandhian socialism that it was a communal party and that from then on it would shun communalism.

It was an irony of history that the BJP has become the most aggressively communal during the 1980s, after taking a pledge for 'secularism' and 'Gandhian socialism.' It was during the late 1980s that the BJP took up the Ram temple issue. In 1990, Mr. Advani took out a Rath Yatra in support of this project which

became practically a 'blood yatra.' What do politicians care if a few hundred or even a few thousand innocent lives are lost if they can grab power in the process. Who knows all this better than Mr. Vajpayee?

His statement has exposed Mr. Vajpayee in many ways; even if one takes into account the tremendous pressures he has to function under — from hardliners in his own Parivar, coalition allies and the Opposition. A statesman would not have issued such a rash statement which could raise the communal temperature to unacceptable levels. It has taken several years for our country to emerge out of the communal abyss into which it was pushed by the Ayodhya controversy.

Mr. Vajpayee had earned lot of goodwill by his Ramzan peace offer in Kashmir as he had earlier by undertaking a bus journey to Lahore. A statesman has to continue on his hazardous path, come what may. Mahatma Gandhi never wavered in the face of much greater difficulties and often staked his own life for the sake of a cause. I am not comparing but only giving an example.

Mr. Vajpayee's admirers have also tried to project him as a Prime Minister comparable in stature to Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru was very consistent in his commitment to secularism and composite nationalism. Nehru too came under tremendous pressures, especially during Partition and also from his own party colleagues in post-Partition India. However, he never wavered in his conviction and commitment to secularism even for a moment.

Mr. Vajpayee, on the other hand, has always been torn between his loyalty to

the RSS and to secular nationalism. Witness his speech at Staten Island in the U.S. where he said amidst applause from hundreds of VHP sadhus that the RSS was his soul and Hindu Rashtra his dream. If he made his recent statement on Ayodhya with an eye on the upcoming Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh, it is more proof that Vajpayee is far from being moderate and that his moderation is nothing more than political posturing.

Who knows better than Mr. Vajpayee that the process of nation building is highly challenging and much more so if what is involved is a composite, pluralist nation like India. Let us not forget that because our political leaders, with some honourable exceptions, could not handle the delicate process of working out a constitutional arrangement for power-sharing, our country got divided in 1947. The process of composite nation-building being much more challenging needs to be handled with even more care and sensitivity.

The Ram mandir controversy must be avoided at any cost. Such controversies neither serve our nation nor even the Hindu community. There are much more challenging problems before India today and those who are sensitive to the basic needs of the people would be more concerned with these issues rather than with raising artificial controversies.

The Muslims had not taken in good faith the statement issued by Mr. Bangaru Laxman, soon after he was elected BJP president, that Muslims should support his party. Now the Prime Minister's statement has confirmed their belief that Mr. Laxman's statement was just a political ploy. One can of course also argue that since the Muslims did not bite the bait, the BJP had to resort to another gamble, this time that of Ram mandir and through a more weighty person like Prime Minister, to revive its fortune.

THE HINDU

19 DEC 2000

Vajpayee asks allies to exercise restraint while expressing views

NEW DELHI: In a virtual expression of displeasure over their repeated attacks, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday said whatever may be the "political compulsions" of the regional allies on the Ayodhya issue, they should exercise "restraint" while stating their views on it.

Addressing the BJP parliamentary party meeting here, he said even though the allies may have "regional interests" to take care of, they should also bear in mind "national interests" which are of utmost importance, party spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra told reporters here.

Mr Vajpayee's remarks come in the wake of allies' attack on his controversial statements on the Ayodhya issue.

He said Mr Vajpayee reiterated the view that Ayodhya issue could be resolved either through a court verdict or through a dialogue between the two communities.

Thanking the allies for supporting the government on the Opposition censure motion in Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister appreciated that they did not "fall into the trap of the Congress" and this had "strength-

ened" the NDA, Mr Malhotra said.

Mr Vajpayee told the meeting that the government had no role to play in resolving the Ayodhya issue.

The Prime Minister said had the Opposition not stalled the proceedings in Parliament over the issue, there would have been no need for him to speak on it outside the House, Mr Malhotra said.

Mr Malhotra said home minister L.K. Advani has been deputed to evolve a consensus among the alliance partners on the women's reservation bill giving 33 per cent reservation in assemblies and Parliament.

"Though there appears to be some movement in the direction of evolving a consensus among the allies on the bill, they appear to have some misgivings on the issue of reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the bill", he said.

"No consensus has yet been evolved on the bill and Mr Advani has felt that there should be consensus among allies before discussing it with other political parties", Mr Malhotra said.

He said the bill is to be introduced in Lok Sabha on Thursday.

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27 09 DEC 2000

PM's temple talk: A blunder?

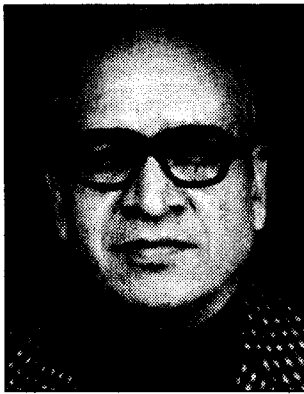
According to the spin doctors, the PM's talk of building the temple was a 'masterstroke'. Yet other serious commentators have said it was the 'blunder of a lifetime' that has seriously dented Vajpayee's liberal image. We posed the question to three seasoned minds:

Bipan Chandra

Professor Emeritus, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU

The recent discussion of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's politics is based on neglect of ideology: that is, on the wrong assumption that his life-long ideological commitment does not matter. His image as a 'liberal' and 'responsible politician' is not necessarily wrong; but the question is: liberal in what context. He is more liberal with regard to communalism than RSS but his ideological development has been wholly communal. Consequently he can shift from liberal to extreme communalism whenever the situation so dictates. We may remember in his respect Jinnah, who had little difficulty in making the transition from his liberal communalism of 1920 to 1936, when he affirmed commitment to Indian nationalism and Hindu-Muslim unity even when talking of Muslim interests, and of defending Muslim community, to the hard, anti-Hindu, religion-based two-nation theory from 1937 on.

Vajpayee has never denied, not to speak of decried, RSS or communal ideology and vision – and at the needed occasions, affirmed it. In the last few days, most media personalities have been disturbed by his statement that Ram Janmabhoomi issue was an "expression of national sentiments." But as early as 4 April 1991, he had told a VHP rally that the construction of the temple at Ram Janmabhoomi was necessary because "national honour" (a stronger phrase than "national sentiment") had to be restored. In fact, RSS and its front organizations had always portrayed the Ram Janmabhoomi issue as an aspect of nationalism. For example, K.S. Sudarshan wrote in April 1996: "The laying of bricks for the Shilanyas of Ram Janmabhoomi was not merely a matter of a temple, it was symbolically laying the foundation of this Rashtra." Only the RSS leaders put across their approach more clearly and stridently because they are ideologists and not parliamentary political leaders who have to function in



a different and difficult political terrain and constantly make tactical choices.

Seen in this light, Vajpayee's statement is neither a blunder nor a masterstroke. It represents the inevitable approach of the head of a government belonging to a communal party, heading a coalition committed to secularism but facing electoral defeat in one state after another. Vajpayee foresaw earlier and better than others that BJP would have to go through coalition stage. He could foresee that hard communal ideology gave RSS-BJP a solid cadre base and 6 to 7 per cent of the vote. Appeal to religious sentiments via Ram Janmabhoomi campaign could raise this percentage to 20 or so; but to raise it to 40-level needed coalition partners or appeal to nationalism. The 1996 elections made this clear.

The BJP leadership has thus been faced with the hard task of keeping the cadre active and enthused, the 20 per cent vote-base solidified, and yet reach out to the remaining 80 per cent. This keeps the party constantly wobbling. The dilemma has been compounded by the coming elections in UP, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. BJP feels that it requires the Ram Mandir appeal in UP while its allies still need the fig leaf of the NDA agenda in Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Vajpayee's political stance assures the hard core communalists that he is basically with them. It cautiously warns the allies that BJP's and their dependence is mutual and not one-sided. It tells Advani and Joshi that though he supports them and needs them, only he can run the NDA. He warns RSS as to what would be the political consequences if he were to speak with its tongue.

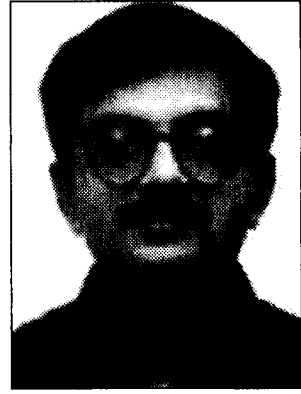
In the end, we have to grasp the fact that to Vajpayee his liberal image is an asset but not an ideological commitment. And Vajpayee, as also the country, have both to answer the question: can the nation survive if it gives up the basic secular approach adopted by the national movement in creating and consolidating the nation by not only accepting but celebrating its linguistic, cultural and religious diversities?

Tarun Vijay

Editor,

Panchjanya

Babar must be blushing in his grave that even after five hundred years of his getting a victory memorial built over the temple of the most revered god of the land, Ram, there still are people to defend it with all that vengeance and venom enough to put Mir Baki to shame. Though they can never deny that their forefathers were Hindus and Ram is their ancestor yet it's amazing that they are unable to make up their mind about the temple of Ram. Where on earth can we have a Ram Janma Bhumi temple if not in India? It can happen only with the Hindus and only in India, such is the influence of Macaulay and Marx over their minds. Scores of mosques can be demolished in Saudi



Arabia and Pakistan to make way for the express highways and hospitals.

But in India the business of the supreme law making institution is put to a halt over the demolition of a dilapidated and unused structure, a war memorial of an invader, which unearthed impeccable proofs of the Ram temple when razed to the ground.

And if someone tries to stand erect and say, no, you cannot compare Babar with Ram, he really disappoints a section, miniscule in numbers but powerful in clout. The truth, though unpalatable to them is that Vajpayee is liberal because he is a faithful Hindu.

He is responsible, hence he did not succumb to the illegitimate pressures from various quarters. He said: "No one can compare Ram with Babar. Shri Ram is the Maryada Purushottam – embodiment of all virtues - of this land, and a national hero. And who is Babar? He came as an invader and barbarian." (Atal Bihari Vajpayee, 6th March, 1987, Lucknow).

And later declared unambiguously in the parliament: "The top ranking leaders of BJP, RSS and VHP had been trying to prevent Karsevaks

there. 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... If the structure was to be demolished secretly and according to a plan it did not require Karseva... But the reaction to the happening in Ayodhya throughout the country and abroad is more or less over reaction... We never clarified that along with the structure of the mosque there is a temple also in which prayer and worship is being done and this dispute has been going on for the last five hundred years.

When Toynbee visited India he taunted us that it is possible in India alone where a mosque has been erected after demolishing the temple." (Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in Lok Sabha, December 17, 1992).

And now in the Lok Sabha when he spoke about it once again as 'Yeh rashtriya bhavnaon ka para-katikanan

tha' - the Ram temple movement is an expression of a national sentiment- he was merely reiterating what he has consistently maintained. Another significant point which went unnoticed was that Advani started his Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath and Vajpayee concluded his Lok Sabha speech with reference to Somnath. He knows the people are with this sentiment. Vajpayee has very clearly gained a lot from his straight talk - yet fully conforming to the NDA agenda.

I know personally, he spoke from his heart and he asked himself whether as a Prime Minister he should have done so? And the answer came from within- yes. What happens if Osama Bin laden demolishes the statue of Liberty and builds a mosque? There certainly were no tactical or compulsive choices to choose. He spoke for Bharatvarsh.

Those who fight for the cause of the invaders thinking Muslims can be fooled again are their worst foes. After the Ayodhya debate, Vajpayee's stature has risen to greater heights and the Congress along with the other Babri-opposition faces a challenge to declare, *Kalan banegi unki Mosque?*

NDA ALLIES AFFIRM SUPPORT; VOTING TODAY IN RS

Opposition assails Govt. again on temple issue

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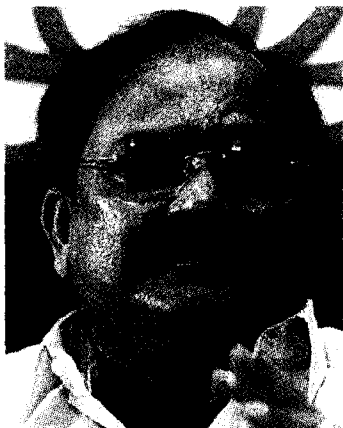
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 18. The Opposition today mounted an attack again on the Government through a motion disagreeing with the Prime Minister's statement giving a clean chit to the three Union Ministers charged by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Amid a spirited defence by the treasury benches and with non-BJP allies affirming support to the NDA agenda, the discussion in the Rajya Sabha progressed on party lines, at times interrupted by verbal clashes and procedural wrangling. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, sat through as the Congress leader, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, led the attack.

The discussion will be put to vote tomorrow in the House where the Opposition enjoys a majority.

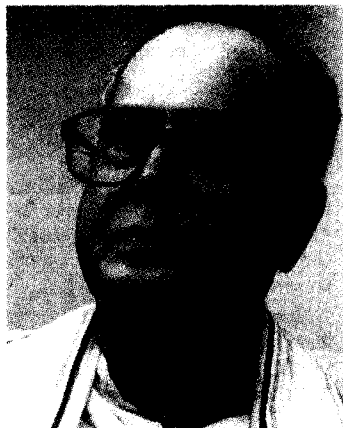
Mr. Mukherjee insisted that the issue was not "superfluous" and was not meant to show any disrespect to the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, he wanted to know how the Prime Minister could give a clean chit to Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti. Was there a distinction in the Indian Penal Code between offences committed by



Venkaiah Naidu

ordinary people and the privileged? He also charged that the Prime Minister had "denigrated" the CBI and objected to his description of the Ram temple movement as "an expression of national sentiment" when in fact even the BJP's allies and supporting parties — the TDP, the DMK and others — did not share this view.

The Rural Development Minister, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, charged the Opposition with seeking to drive a wedge between the BJP and its allies, but it was unsuccessful. Barring his reaffirmation of the commitment to the NDA agenda, Mr. Naidu's defence



Pranab Mukherjee

was short on content and it was left to the Information and Broadcasting Minister, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, to retrieve some ground. She sought to counter a strong attack from Mr. Kapil Sibal (Congress), who quoted both from the Supreme Court's observations and the white paper on Ayodhya, with telling effect. For a brief while she argued like a lawyer, a profession she quit to join politics.

Mr. Sibal had strongly objected to Mr. Arun Jaitley's defence in the Lok Sabha of the three chargesheeted Ministers, stating such a thing by a Law Minister was unprecedented. The Opposition, he

said, raised the issue following reports of progress on temple work ahead of the "Kumbh Mela", where the date for construction was to be decided. He warned the BJP's allies that they could stand accused of aiding and abetting the task of temple construction. Mr. Suresh Pachauri (Congress) quoted from speeches of some of leaders of the BJP's allies who had in 1992 strongly criticised the BJP for the demolition of the masjid.

Mr. K. M. Saifullah of the Telugu Desam asserted that the party's support to the Government would continue if it remained committed to the NDA agenda, while the DMK's Mr. P. N. Siva said his party's presence in the Government was a guarantee of its commitment to secularism.

Mrs. Jayanti Natarajan (TMC) said it was up to the conscience of the chargesheeted Ministers to resign and it was natural for the Prime Minister to defend his Ministers. She said Mr. Vajpayee's statement on the temple issue had caused "tremendous dismay" among the right-thinking people. He had "destroyed the faith the people of the country had in him" and proved that he was not the Prime Minister of the country but that of the BJP and the RSS, she said.

Details on Page 13

THE HINDU

19 DEC 2000

RS adopts motion to censure government

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Voting along predicted lines, the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday adopted by 121 to 86 votes the opposition resolution "disagreeing with the Prime Minister's reported statement" defending his three cabinet colleagues, L.K. Advani, M.M. Joshi and Uma Bharti, facing trial in the Ayodhya demolition case.

The resolution has no legal effect at all, which is why the government agreed to the debate. It is the Lok Sabha's confidence which is mandatory for a government.

This is only the second occasion when the Rajya Sabha has adopted a motion censuring the government. The first one was in August 1978 on the alleged meddling in the government for non-legitimate aims by the relatives of the then prime minister Morarji Desai and home minister Charan Singh. That, too, was a Congress-sponsored one and Atal Behari Vajpayee was the main speaker defending the government.

As the Prime Minister, Mr Vajpayee did so again on Wednesday and pulled apart the resolution. He had given no statement, he had specifically said the court would have to decide on the matter, he said. He had been simply replying to journalists' queries on the general issue and, on being asked, had

said he did not at all believe his colleagues were guilty. Being the PM, he said, he had every right to speak up for colleagues whom he trusted. Was it for parliament to decide who should be in his cabinet?

Check, he demanded, the statement that he gave in parliament a few days after the demolition in December 1992 with this one—it was exactly the same. The demolition was a sad event for him and he had never defended it, then or now. Nothing had changed in all these years, the three ministers had been holding office for a long while.

VAJPAYEE'S DEFENCE

- Stands by right to defend colleagues
- Describes demolition as a sad event
- Accuses opposition of whipping up controversy

What was the sudden provocation for the opposition motion, Mr Vajpayee asked. It was just an attempt at whipping up a controversy from nothing, an attempt to divide the ruling alliance and was doomed to fail, he said.

Congress chief whip Pranab Mukherjee, who had moved the motion, said the PM's explanation for how he came to make the remarks was not satisfactory. As a

seasoned politician and PM, he had the ability and responsibility to handle media queries without creating a controversy on a sensitive topic.

The PM said he had never asked for building a Ram temple at the site of the demolished mosque. What he had said, and reiterated, was that there were two ways out—either everyone agrees to wait and abide by the court verdict or there should be "unconditional" negotiations between the parties concerned on a way out.

At no stage had anyone tried to influence the court. His own statement, the basis for the opposition resolution, had said the courts would decide the issue (of guilt for the demolition).

Sit with us and let us agree on a code on when ministers should be asked to resign, he told the opposition, noting that the Congress party was a part of the Bihar council of ministers even though the chief minister there had been indicted in a chargesheet. "You can't have one standard for Bihar and another for Delhi," he said.

There was barracking from the opposition at one point when Mr Vajpayee declared the Ayodhya demolition to be the culmination of a "movement" and thus something distinct from other cases where he had asked ministers indicted by a court to resign.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 DEC 2000

PM adamant: Ayodhya is a 'people's movement'

Not surprisingly, NDA Govt outvoted in Rajya Sabha debate

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 19

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today said his Government would honour the court's verdict on the Ayodhya tangle when it is delivered. But, he maintained, the Ayodhya issue was "a people's movement and not a mere court case".

The Prime Minister was replying to a Rajya Sabha debate on the Opposition motion that "disagreed" with his remarks that gave a clean chit to the three Union Ministers who are chargesheeted in the Babri Mosque demolition case. The House adopted the motion by 121 to 86 votes. This was not surprising: the Government is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha. More importantly, today's vote has no implications on the longevity of the Vajpayee Government.

Mr Vajpayee said the country was passing through difficult times and the Opposition should avoid contentious issues. The Government had taken initia-

tives on Jammu and Kashmir and is to soon decide on the continuance on the ceasefire there. "We are ready to talk with anybody, including our neighbours if need be, to resolve the issues," he said.

Mr Vajpayee said he made his remarks on the three ministers while replying to questions from mediapersons. He rejected the demand that the ministers' resign, saying that they were doing well.

The Prime Minister said he had no intention of curtailing the role of courts in deciding who was innocent or guilty.

The discussion raised by the Opposition was politically motivated, Mr Vajpayee asserted. Elections were still far away. He was being charged that he made "the statement" keeping the polls in the view. This was wrong, he said. When mediapersons questioned him, he couldn't keep quiet. He made his position clear.

The Prime Minister said the Opposition gave the example of Mr Harin Pathak who recently quit his ministry. Mr Pathak, he said, had quit on his own. The three Ministers - L.K. Advani, M. M.

Joshi and Uma Bharati - faced no charges of corruption or misuse of office. There was objection to some of their activities relating to Ayodhya. The issue was in court and there were no attempts to influence the course of justice.

He said norms could be fixed for the seeking of ministerial resignations. But the yardstick ought not be different yardsticks for the Government in Delhi and the one Bihar. The PM said he, however, treated Ayodhya "separately." It was a movement — an "andolan." The others could differ with him on his views. There was protest from the Opposition benches at this stage but Chairman Krishan Kant ruled nothing would be recorded.

"I never supported the demolition of the structure. I spoke in the House. I brought a no-confidence motion. There is no change in my view. There is no new mukhauta (mask)," he said. The Ayodhya temple issue was a movement, which in fact shrunk when the structure came down, he said.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 DEC 2000

20 DEC 2000

Defeated PM in temple truce

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 19: The Congress had the consolation of "disapproving" the BJP standpoint on Ram temple construction in Ayodhya as it sailed through with its censure motion against the government in the Rajya Sabha today.

In his speech, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described Ram as a national icon, but agreed that the matter be best left in the hands of the court because this issue "divided too much, broke too much".

The only other option, Vajpayee added, was to get Hindu and Muslim groups to sit at the table for an unconditional dialogue.

The Congress, with support from the Left and the Samajwadi Party among others, won comfortably. Though both camps had sev-

eral absentees, the motion was adopted by 121 votes to 86, dealing a harmless but embarrassing blow to the BJP.

The Prime Minister conceded ground soon after he rose to speak. "No one doubted the numerical majority of the Opposition in the Upper House. I fail to understand why the Congress insisted on voting," he said, in a bid to convey the impression that his government was hardly embarrassed by this predictable defeat.

Despite the attempts to play down the Opposition's emphatic victory, this was the first time that a government has been defeated in the Upper House since 1978.

Legally and constitutionally, the government is accountable to the Lok Sabha. But today's defeat was a symbolic way of informing the Vajpayee administration that one important arm of Parliament

was in disagreement with the government and was even censuring the Prime Minister. Congress chief whip Pranab Mukherjee quoted Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the Rajya Sabha's first chairman, to insist that the purpose of this House is not to make or unmake a government, but influence it.

In 1978, a motion moved by Congress' N.K.P. Salve on the conduct of Morarji Desai's family members had been passed by this House.

During his speech, Vajpayee did not attempt to change his new image of a Hindutva proponent. He went to the extent of describing Ram as "*Maryada Purushottam*" (The Ideal Man) whose status in society was beyond the ambit of any one religion.

What he did want to convey in his speech was that he had followed a consistent line through-

out his life. He spoke of a poem he had penned when he was in the tenth standard in which he had tried to explore his Hindu identity.

Vajpayee iterated that the destruction of the Babri masjid was wrong, but the demand for a Ram temple was an "*andolan*" (movement) that could not be viewed alongside other issues.

In contrast with his Lok Sabha speech, Vajpayee was eager to defend the three charged ministers. Describing L.K. Advani as a very "capable" minister, he said there was "not a single charge of corruption and misuse of power" against him. Vajpayee invited the Opposition for talks on formulating a code of conduct for ministers, saying the "parameters should be uniform". "You can't have one norm in Bihar and one in Delhi," he said.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 DEC 2000

NO! NOT ACCEPTABLE!

Temple at the cost of country's honour?

MAMATA Banerjee has skilfully sidestepped the trap laid for her by that decrepit organisation, the Indian National Congress, which especially since Rajiv Gandhi, has not hesitated to use the communal card quite shamelessly, all the while posing as a champion of secular values. Rajiv opened the gates of the Babari Masjid to allow worship of the idols forcibly introduced into it, then placated Muslims by being the first government in the world to ban Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and extinguishing by legislative fiat, the eminently sensible judgment of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case which laid down that it made no difference whether an abandoned wife was a Muslim, a Hindu or a Sikh or belonged to any other religious persuasion. They held, and with respect rightly, that it was a social problem, not a religious one and ought to be dealt with accordingly. Then followed Rajiv's mindless order to Indian Airlines to serve only vegetarian meals on Tuesdays because even meat eating Hindus tend to abstain from it on that day of the week. No one noticed the irony of a once junior pilot of the Airline passing such a mindless order.

Mamata is seeking twin objectives — adherence to the NDA agenda and that excludes any reference to the construction of a Ram mandir. It ought to be remembered that destroying one place of worship to build another of a different persuasion is a crime, an act of cowardice and unworthy of all that India has stood for over generations. The other objective is to box in the Union government by forming a pressure group within the coalition, if so she serves notice that she retains her secular credentials but will not precipitate another election that nobody wants. She and Chandrababu Naidu should have no difficulty in acting together to achieve their purpose. At the other end of the scale, the Dharam Sansad, a collection of handpicked sadhus, are to meet some time next month to fix a date for the commencement of construction of the Ayodhya mandir. They will decide what Ashok Singhal tells them to; the whole process is a sham and no one is deceived. That the purpose is political is quite obvious. The three other mosques identified for demolition have not been given up by the VHP. So if it is now suggested that Muslims should give up their rights in the Babari Masjid context, merely because the VHP and assorted outfits want them to; we must remind ourselves it will not be the last, but the beginning of fresh demands to which there will be no end.

Mamata has thought up a winning combination. The position taken by her is no gimmick, it is sincerely meant and the wild men of the Sangh Parivar should understand that. And so should the CPI-M. The RSS position is morally bankrupt, legally untenable and administratively fraught with grave damage to the country's polity. A Ram mandir built on a foundation of lies, deceit, malice and vulgarity is an insult to the memory of the avatar they seek to honour. As Mahatma Gandhi never ceased to remind us — by wrong means no right thing can be accomplished. And the means adopted are wrong, grievously wrong. A temple is a repository of love, compassion, reverence and goodwill. What kind of temple is this going to be — a monument to folly, a permanent scar on the country's face and a place to avoid.

There is still time — let us use it well.

THE STATESMAN

20 DEC 2000

Ayodhya: symptom, not the disease

By V. Krishna Ananth

THE WINTER session of Parliament, during which a debate on the "secular" foundations of the ruling NDA combine dominated the political discourse, sent out two distinct signals: (1) Its non-BJP partners have revealed their weak spot; it is now clear they will do nothing to destabilise the ruling arrangement. (2) Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee will continue to speak his heart — singing the Hindutva song — rather than think in his head.

By refusing to push to its logical end their disagreement with Mr. Vajpayee's forthright association with the Sangh Parivar's agenda — that the Ram temple movement was an expression of a nationalist sentiment —, the non-BJP partners have indeed spared the nation yet another mid-term poll. In this sense, the leaders of the Trinamool Congress, the Telugu Desam, the Janata Dal (United) and the DMK may have endeared themselves to the intelligentsia.

And for their cadres, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, Mr. M. Karunanidhi and Ms. Mamata Banerjee managed to "wrest" a "commitment" from Mr. Vajpayee that the Union Government would "abide" by the Supreme Court's verdict in the Ayodhya dispute. It is another matter that the court it is not seized of the issue now. All that the judiciary is concerned with at this stage (and, for that matter, the Allahabad High Court and not the apex court) is a bunch of cases pertaining to a dispute over title claims to the land around the site where the Babri Masjid stood.

All these, however, did not matter to the leaders in the NDA as well as a large section of the intelligentsia. Their only concern was (and is) that the nation could not afford frequent elections. A "stable" government, they insist, is the need of the hour; it does not matter if a section of the political class ends up compromising on ideology and principles and such compromises lead the nation into a situation where men, women and children will be divided on denominational lines. All is well as long as the supermarket and its cultural forms are allowed to grow and they enjoy the "freedom of choice" in the market-place.

In this sense, they now have contempt for the Congress, the same party which

served their interests all these years, initially through the Nehruvian socialist path and later by opening up the market. The intelligentsia are convinced that the Congress is not in a position to supplant the BJP now and that the party, by trying to embarrass the able leader — Mr. Vajpayee — at this stage, will do nothing but derail the "stable" market regime.

Instability, they are convinced, will force a slowdown in the reforms process; yet another general election will "force" the party in power to step up efforts (at least for the time being) to provide remunerative prices to farmers, subsidised foodgrains to the poor and other welfare schemes; these will dampen the enthusi-

The political discourse has now come to be determined by the predilections of leaders rather than by any ideological position on issues confronting the people.

asm of the foreign investor.

Hence, the intelligentsia are willing to "appreciate" a George Fernandes (despite his having been a crusader against the colas) or a Mamata Banerjee (in spite of her image as a street-fighter taking up the cause of the slumdweller in South Calcutta) or such leaders as Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. Sharad Yadav (whom they detested for their role in the mandalisation process) or even a Karunanidhi, whose DMK played a critical role in destroying the Brahmanical order in Tamil Nadu at least 25 years before this was achieved by resort to the Mandal Commission report in the rest of the country.

It is not the middle class concern that the non-BJP parties behaved in such a "responsible" manner, not because they were committed to the "welfare" of the nation. The middle class is, indeed, aware that the NDA allies did what they did only because the leaders were concerned about their own "future" in the governing apparatus; in other words, to remain members of the Union Cabinet or ensure that their own men continued in the ministerial offices.

Ms. Banerjee and her followers in the Trinamool Congress were convinced that they could not remain in the ruling fold in

the event of the present regime falling; after all, they know too well that the Congress was in no position to provide an alternative (at least in this Lok Sabha) without the Left supporting such an arrangement. And how could Ms. Banerjee find a place in the ministry then? After all, her own party's *raison d'être* is the opposition to the Left in West Bengal.

Mr. Karunanidhi too is aware of the Congress' dalliance, at least for now, with Ms. Jayalalitha's AIADMK; and this will mean Mr. Murasoli Maran having to go without a position in the Union Cabinet. For this reason alone, the DMK will stay with the BJP, a party wedded to such ideas as Aryan supremacy, Hindi-Hindu-

Hindustani and one-nation-one-culture; it is another matter that Mr. Karunanidhi persists with the rhetoric that the NDA's agenda is distinct from the BJP's ideology and that Mr. Vajpayee did no wrong even after he declared that the agenda of temple construction at Ayodhya was a nationalist sentiment.

The DMK's political line is dictated not by its own leaders but by Ms. Jayalalitha and her party. It is indeed the same logic which keeps Mr. Paswan and Mr. Sharad Yadav in the combine; their political preferences are guided by Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav and his RJD. The same is the case with the Samata party. They depend on Mr. Laloo Yadav to decide their own priorities.

Mr. Fernandes will cling on to the BJP and persist with the idea that the entire Sangh Parivar is secular (even if Mr. Vajpayee wants to get rid of the mask) only because he cannot allow himself to be seen among those facilitating a Congress return to power. And he will not have problems with the reforms agenda as long as it is being carried out by a party other than the Congress.

The long and the short of it is that the political discourse has now come to be determined by the predilections of vari-

ous leaders rather than by any ideological position on issues confronting the people and any agenda for nation-building.

Indeed, Mr. Naidu and his Telugu Desam will have to remain anti-Congress at least until the BJP supplants the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. And this is also the case with the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab and Mr. O. P. Chautala in Haryana.

Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav can have the Congress for company as long as Ms. Sonia Gandhi fails to revive her party's fortunes in Bihar. Whereas Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav cannot afford this only because the Congress has shown signs of supplanting, to some extent, the BJP in Uttar Pradesh since 1998. It is another matter that Mr. Mulayam Singh, with just three members in the Lok Sabha, stood like a rock by the Congress when Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister. The Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress, at that time, existed more in the drawing rooms of the PCC members in Lutyen's Delhi than in the towns and villages of the State.

Mr. Vajpayee's declaration, at long last, that he too was part of the *mandir-wahin-banayenge* crowd, the reaction to that by the non-BJP allies in the NDA and the "battle" in Parliament by the Congress-led Opposition will all have to be seen in this larger context. Only then will it be possible to discern the weak base on which the ideological offensive against the Hindutva challenge stands.

Meanwhile, amidst the din that marked the discourse — the high point being the Opposition embarrassing the Government in the Rajya Sabha and "exposing" the secular commitment of the NDA's allies in the Lok Sabha — during the last couple of weeks, associates of the Sangh Parivar were formulating a school curriculum (to include in syllabi the "spiritual" aspects which enabled the "inner sublime meaning of life to be reached in the ancient times"). This even as the leading lights of another arm of the parivar (the VHP) were hopping from one place to another in Europe and in the U.S. collecting funds from the diaspora.

Neither the non-BJP partners in the NDA are bothered about these nor are those leaders in the Opposition concerned. And there lies the danger.

THE HINDU

29 DEC 2000

Anniversary jolt to demolition trio, Rao

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Nov. 23: With the Ayodhya anniversary barely two weeks away and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) sharpening its campaign to demand the construction of a Ram temple, the Liberhan Commission today issued summons to Union ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti.

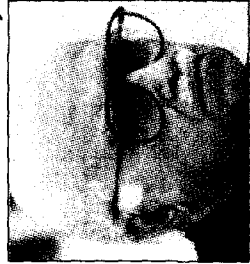
The panel, probing the events leading to the demolition of the Babri masjid on December 6, 1992, has asked them to depose before it as witnesses next month. Summons have also been

sent out to former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao.

The commission's summons come in the midst of the winter session in which the Opposition has been unable to seize the political initiative and put the NDA on the mat mainly due to its internal differences.

But with Ayodhya likely to unite even sworn enemies like the Congress and the Samajwadi Party on the secularism plank, observers believe that the summons may revive the Opposition's demand for the resignations of Advani, Joshi and Bharti.

The possibility of the Opposition citing the resignations of Harin Pathak and Ashok Bhatt



Advani, Joshi, Bharti and Rao

from the Union and Gujarat governments respectively as a precedent to bolster its case for the heads of Advani and the others was indicated today in the Lok Sabha by CPM lawmaker Suresh Kurup. During Question Hour, he asked that since Prime Minister

Atal Behari Vajpayee had set a "noble" precedent in the Pathak case, would Advani, Joshi and Bharti follow suit in the Ayodhya litigation?

However, chances of the BJP waffling over the matter were evident in law minister Arun Jaitley's reply. He said the question of persons chargesheeted in criminal cases being barred from Assemblies and Parliament could arise only after their conviction.

able" in the present case and argued: "There is a difference between that case and this one. The Ayodhya case relates to a political agitation while the earlier case involved a murder charge." He stressed that the resignation of Advani and the others was not germane since a chargesheet has not been served on them.

As for the Liberhan summons, the minister said: "I do not know right now whether Advani/ji will appear or not. But there's no problem since the commission has merely asked them to elaborate on the incidents of December 6, 1992, as witnesses."

The commission headed by Justice M.S. Liberhan, who

recorded Bharti's statement today, has asked Joshi to appear on December 19 and 20 and Rao on December 26 and 27. Advani has been asked to depose on December 29. The commission adjourned the recording of Bharti's statement to December 12.

In her deposition, the sports minister said she was in favour of construction of the Ram temple at the "disputed" site in Ayodhya. But she added that since the issue was "emotive", it should be settled through dialogue.

"The ultimate solution to this issue can be attained only through a dialogue and this has been the basis of my speeches on Ayodhya," she stated.

THE TELEGRAPH
24 NOV 2000

MF10 Justice delayed MS/M

SINCE A democracy cannot run whimsical and arbitrary kangaroo courts, the judicial process is bound to be slow. However, despite this inherent difficulty, the judicial process in India seems to be much too slow; so slow that cases drag on for years and for common citizens the maxim — justice delayed is justice denied — becomes a bitter truth. This is precisely what is happening with regard to the case of the Babri masjid demolition on December 6, 1992 at Ayodhya. It has been eight years now, and still, the case is trapped in a legal labyrinth.

The demolition was one of the most shameful chapters in the history of Indian democracy. Not only was it a violation of the Constitution, the judiciary and the pledge to safeguard the mosque given to the National Integration Council by the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh Government, with Kalyan Singh at the helm, and by the BJP's national leaders like L.K. Advani, but it also created sharp and tragic social ruptures, the wounds of which have still not healed. Besides, the demolition by frenzied *kar sevaks* in the presence of senior leaders of the Sangh parivar was followed by a spate of communal riots all over the country. That is why a Commission under Justice M.S. Liberhans was instituted to conduct an objective probe into the tragedy.

It is obvious that one crucial reason why the Commission is unable to come to a conclusion is the reluctance of politicians, especially those of the BJP, to depose before it. Kalyan Singh gave a complicated legal alibi to stay away. That the Commission was compelled to issue an arrest warrant against a top bureaucrat in the Union Cabinet (who is now a Governor) before he heeded its summons is evidence that official cooperation was not forthcoming. In this context, despite her seeming amnesia, the deposition by Uma Bharti is welcome because, as per reports, she was a proud catalyst in the sequence of events on that fateful day. In the same vein, the fresh summons to two Union Cabinet ministers and a former Prime Minister is a positive move. It is hoped that their testimonies will help the Commission to make up its mind and place its findings before the nation without any further delay.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 NOV 2000

Living with diversity

By Asghar Ali Engineer

Handwritten: *Asghar Ali Engineer*
10-12
27/11

ALL OF South Asia is intensely diverse. It is this diversity of culture, religion, race and language which makes it so rich, colourful, liveable and interesting. People from different parts of the world made it their home. Some came with their own religion and others embraced the local ones. Many languages are spoken in different regions of the subcontinent. After independence, India opted for linguistic States and officially accepted linguistic diversity. But even after this, problems remain and regional identities are strongly asserting themselves.

Take Jammu and Kashmir, where secessionism is propagated on the ground that Kashmiri culture and identity are different from the rest of India. But the State itself is highly diverse. Jammu is dominated by Punjabis and Dogras. The Kashmir Valley, of course, has a Muslim majority but this region too is quite diverse. It had a substantial number of Pundits and even the Muslims are far from being a homogeneous mass. There are Sunnis and Shias. There are Gujjars who, though Sunnis, are culturally and linguistically very different from other Kashmiri Muslims. The Ladakh region has a Buddhist majority.

Assam, another hotbed of militancy, is equally diverse. There are Bengalis and Assamese, tribals and non-tribals, plains tribals and hill tribals, Bodos and Lalungs, Ohoms and non-Ohoms. The entire northeast is greatly diverse and is experiencing social and political turmoil.

There is no homogeneity even on the basis of religion. The British divided the Indian population into Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians. All those who were not Muslims, Parsis or Christians were characterised as Hindus; the implication was that all these religious communities were not only homogeneous but also had common interests. This assumption ultimately led to the communal discourse, which plagues the polity today. The diversity within every religious community was totally ignored by the British and even by modern democratic rulers. The Hindus are divided into a number of castes. It is not only caste diversity but

also linguistic, regional and cultural differences which make the Hindu society a non-homogeneous mass. Along with caste-based parties, regional outfits such as the Asom Gana Parishad, the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the AIADMK get voted to power. The BJP, party of the Hindu right, is slowly coming to terms with these harsh realities and has formed a National Democratic Alliance of 22 regional and caste-based parties, diluting its Hindutva agenda.

with this diversity. The RSS would like to promote cultural, religious and linguistic uniformity. It projects the Hindus as a homogenised community. And the Hindu community of its conception relates to a Brahminised culture, ignoring folk religions, customs and traditions.

Indian secularism is nothing but another name for diversity and pluralism. In fact, by adopting secularism the founding-fathers of the Indian National Congress in 1885 sanctified diversity and

development is highly skewed and all regions do not get adequate opportunities. Regions which are neglected and remain less developed become volatile. Ethnic conflict, more often than not, is a conflict for development resources.

A diverse society needs dialogue among the different groups to promote better understanding. The three Ds — democracy, diversity and dialogue — go together. Diversity can become a source of strength, and not of conflict, only if all linguistic, cultural, religious and caste groups are provided equal opportunities, not just equal rights. The Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens. But all groups and communities are not getting equal opportunities for development and progress. Thus, regional and ethnic conflicts in the northeast and Kashmir can be explained by a total lack of development in these regions.

After all, what do various regions want autonomy for? For proper development opportunities, for fulfilling their aspirations of material and cultural development. The Kashmiris, Assamese and Nagas feel they have been marginalised in the power structure. It is through an appeal to the feeling of identity that people can be mobilised; identity becomes important for its potential for mobilisation in democracy. A nation is not mere geography as the rightist forces would have us believe; it is its people and their inspirations. And people are always diverse. Thus a nation can remain stable only if the aspirations of all its people are satisfied. India has remained united, not merely under coercion but because of attempts to accommodate — though not satisfactorily — the aspirations of its diverse people, giving them at least some share in power. There is violence, not always because people want to secede from the Indian Union but because in their perception their share in power is far from satisfactory. Diversity will remain a source of conflict as long as people's aspirations are not fulfilled. It will be a great source of richness and variety if all sections have the satisfaction of enjoying their proper share in power and development.

The three Ds — diversity, democracy and dialogue — go together... Diversity will remain a source of conflict as long as people's aspirations are not fulfilled.

The Muslims are no less diverse. Apart from sectarian divisions into Shias and Sunnis, Khojas, Bohras and Memons, there are regional differences. There are Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati and Marathi-speaking Muslims with distinct identities. It would be a mistake to assume, as many communalists do, that all Muslims speak Urdu. The sectarian differences are also quite sharp. On some issues such as the Babri Masjid and the Muslim personal law, their behaviour tends to be uniform and this creates the illusion of homogeneity; this is projected with undue emphasis by the communalists.

There is no community which is not diverse. Even personal laws are not uniform, either of the Hindus, the Muslims or the Christians. Those who demand a common civil code do not take this diversity into account. One law professor said at a seminar that there was such a bewildering diversity among the Hindus that they would, more than others, reject a common civil code.

A democratic society cannot but be diverse. Uniformity ultimately leads to authoritarian and centralised power structures. The rightist forces always opt for overcentralised power structures. Democracy cannot improve without decentralisation. But ultra-nationalists among the Hindus and fundamentalists among other communities are not comfortable

pluralism. But from day one, the rightist forces in all religious communities, especially among the Hindus and the Muslims, found secularism problematic. The Hindu Mahasabha rejected the concept and so did the Muslim League.

Nation is a political concept which has nothing to do with religion at all. It applies more to a culturally and linguistically cohesive group than to a religious group. Of course, there can be problems if a linguistically and culturally homogeneous group has religious fault lines. If speakers of the same language are divided along different religions, tensions, even hostility, can and do arise. But an assumption that if followers of the same religion are divided into different language groups, no tensions or hostility will occur is problematic.

The BJP, despite its Hindutva hyperbole, could not even unite all Hindus religion-wise, let alone do so politically. At the height of the Ramjanmabhoomi frenzy, it boasted that minority votes could be dispensed with. But the BJP has now been forced to woo the Muslims. A communal polity based on one religion or language or culture can never succeed in ruling India which is a coalition of heterogeneous identities. There are tensions in the polity today because all regional and ethnic identities have not been shown an equal measure of accommodation. Capitalist

THE HINDU

27 NOV 2000

27 NOV 2000

RSS moots swadeshi Church

AGENCIES

NAGPUR, Oct. 7. — Down the centuries, Christians have formed new Churches over theological disputes. For probably the first time, they are expected to do that at the behest of non-Christians — to prove their patriotism.

The RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan, today allowed that most Indian Christians are patriotic, but said their problem is that they are under the stranglehold of foreign Churches, which are hatching a political conspiracy to destabilise the nation.

What the Indian Christians must do is set up a swadeshi Church, on the lines of the Orthodox Syrian Church and the Marthoma Church of Kerala, he said. Wasn't a move started in 1962 towards that by Rev Fathers William, Rodrigues and Das?

Mr Sudershan, speaking at a Vijaya Dashami gathering here, also called for complete "Indianisation of Islam" in the country, and urged Muslims to join the cultural mainstream.

He also singled out the community for advice on a national duty: Keep an eye out for the ISI's anti-Indian activities and tip off the authorities.

But the brunt of his speech was directed against the foreign Churches which, he had just said, have Indian Christians under their thumb.

He accused the Baptist Church of playing havoc in Tripura, where Hindus were allegedly driven out of their homes and tribals harassed in the name of Christianity.

"Tribal Hindus were terrorised to stop them worshipping Hindu deities, women prevented from applying the vermilion mark and wearing bangles."

Four RSS activists were kidnapped in Tripura at the behest of the Church; a Hindu saint, Baba Shantikali, was killed; and a VHP hostel for tribal youths in Anand Bazar torched by Christians, he said.

The Church, he alleged, wants the entire Tripura hills declared a sovereign nation. "Why are these foreign churches allowed to carry on their activities on our soil?"

He then went on to defend the RSS' own record. The Sangh is being painted across the world as anti-Christian and anti-Islam, he said, but no Hindu organisation has been found guilty in the criminal assault on a nun in Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh), the killing of the Staines in Orissa, or the attack on Missionary schools in Agra.

As for the alleged Bible-burning in Rajkot, the theft of the Holy Book from a Kerala church, the intimidation of an American missionary couple in Allahabad allegedly by the Bajrang Dal, and the reported attack on nuns in Orissa and Bihar — these "actually did not take place".

He took a pot shot at the Vatican. At the global conference of all religious heads in New York recently, he said, the Vatican had opposed the declaration signed by about 1,000 delegates placing all religions on par.

He described how Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of the Vatican, reading out the 36-page response from the Pope, had said that "by placing all the religions on par, we are crossing the limits of tolerance".

■ On Page 9
BJP plans to project
Vallabhbai Patel

THE STATESMAN

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2000

A DANGEROUS AGENDA

THE UNSOLICITED 'ADVICE' the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, has proffered to the Christian community in India — that it should establish a 'swadeshi church' — indicates both superciliousness and patronage. Behind the clean 'patriotic' chit he gave rather condescendingly to a "majority" of Christians in the country is the Sangh Parivar's presumption of a self-ordained 'inalienable right' to pronounce on what makes for patriotism and its exclusivist ideological plank that equates patriotism with religion. The fundamental freedom to practise and propagate one's religion also encompasses the right of the members of a particular faith to organise and run their religious institutions in the way they want to, subject of course to the law of the land. This is to say, it is for the Christian community in India, not for the likes of Mr. Sudarshan — or for that matter anyone outside that community — to decide whether it should have links with churches abroad. Any reform or change in the institutional arrangement has to come from within the faith.

The advent of Mr. Sudarshan as the RSS chief some six months ago was seen as heralding an aggressive pursuit of the Hindutva agenda, a rollback to the late 1980s and early 1990s, what with his talk of an "epic war between Hindu and anti-Hindu forces". In a strategic shift, after the Babri Masjid demolition, the RSS and its siblings trained their guns on the Christian community by running an insidious hate campaign against its missionaries and rationalising the physical attacks on priests and vandalism of churches that had been occurring across the country; it was even sharply critical of the Centre for being "apologetic" about such incidents. The 'justification' for its anti-Christian campaign was based on the charge of coerced and enticed conversion resorted to by the missionaries. In a subtle change of tack, the RSS chief has brought in the 'swadeshi' con-

cept and sought to portray the "foreign churches" as the villain since they involved themselves in "disruptive and divisive activities". Nothing could be more sweeping and irresponsible an allegation than this, given the irrefutable fact that the Christian missionaries have over the decades done a commendable social service in the areas of education and health, for instance.

The enthusiastic endorsement Mr. Sudarshan's articulation has received from the BJP general secretary, Mr. Narendra Modi, should dispel any notion that the BJP under Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee was moving away from the RSS line. If anything, the two seem to be reaching a new accommodation with each other. Witness for instance, the RSS chief's approval of the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman's calculatedly 'soft' approach to the Islamic community exemplified in his famous declaration of the Muslims being "flesh of our (Hindus') flesh" and "blood of our (Hindus') blood". In fact, the BJP (as the leading constituent of the ruling coalition) and its affiliates would appear to be working to a new gameplan to advance their Hindutva agenda, and the perceived change in accent and the alternating of targets (Muslims and Christians) are but a part of the calibrated strategy. And the 'instruments' they have chosen — such as systematic violence and virulent cultural nationalism — may well prove to be more dangerous and harmful than the three specific ones the BJP has shelved (not jettisoned) — namely the building of a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and enactment of a uniform civil code — to the essentially secular and pluralistic Indian society. The fact that the lack of numbers for the BJP in Parliament is what really stands in the way of the party pursuing its fundamentalist goal has been reiterated in unambiguous terms by the party leadership.

THE HINDU

10 OCT 2000

No Govt-sanctioned churches, rules CBCI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, OCT 11

THE Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) today "unequivocally" rejected any concept of Government sanctioned churches in India saying "it would be a flagrant violation of the Constitution."

Reacting to RSS chief K S Sudershan's call for "swadeshi churches", CBCI said "in calling upon the government to involve itself in 'Indian church' and 'send home' all those he does not consider to be Indians, Sudershan has challenged not only Constitutional guarantee of freedom of faith, but sought to interfere directly in the internal structures of several religions, including Christianity."

"Christianity in India is twenty centuries old. No one has the right to question the patriotism of India Christians," CBCI Secretary Gen-

eral Oswald Gracias said in a statement.

"Such statements, which have been repeated over a period of time, threaten peace and national solidarity by attempting to create unnecessary division between people and sowing seeds of division between communities," he said. "No single authority dictates the political or cultural preferences of the people of any country or region," Gracias said.

In his Dussehra address in Nagpur recently, Sudarshan demanded expulsion of foreign Christian missionaries from India. Meanwhile, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) too said there were no foreign churches or foreign missionaries affiliated to NCCI. NCCI said 13 million Christian members of NCCI were "staunch Indian citizens and true nationals". In a joint statement here, NCCI president

Rev Bishop Vinod Peter and General Secretary Rev IPE Joseph said that "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".

Reiterating that Indian churches did not have foreign dominance, they said "the Indian church is truly Indian and some of the churches exist since the first century". NCCI said Indian churches are part of the global churches just as the Indian community is part of the global community.

Denying the RSS accusation that Baptist churches in the North-East region were resorting to terror tactics and "forcibly prohibiting" Hindus from practising their culture and traditions, the council asked the RSS chief to verify the historical facts.

INDIAN EXPRESS

1981 200

Christians criticise Sudershan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, Oct. 11. — The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India today "unequivocally" rejected any concept of government-sanctioned churches in India saying "it would be a flagrant violation of the Constitution."

Reacting to the RSS chief's call for "swadeshi churches", the CBCI said: "In calling upon the government to involve itself in 'Indian church' and 'send home' all those he does not consider to be Indians, Mr KS Sudershan has challenged not only constitutional guarantee of freedom of faith, but sought to interfere directly in the internal structures of several religions, including Christianity."

"Christianity in India is 20 centuries old. No one has the right to question the patriotism of the India Christian," the CBCI secretary-general, Mr Oswald Gracias, said in a statement.

"Such statements, which have been repeated over a period of time, threaten peace and national solidarity by attempting to create unnecessary division between people and sowing seeds of division between communities," he said.

"No single authority dictates the political or cultural preferences of the people of any country or region," Mr Gracias said.

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In Nagpur, the National Council of Churches in India said its members were "staunch Indians and true nationalists" and there were no foreign churches or foreign missionaries affiliated to it.

- BJP calms Celeste fears on Christian, page 8
- Cong wants explanation, page 8

THE STATESMAN

1977

News

BAPTISM BY FIRE

Tribals re-converted to Hinduism

5/6/67

SIXTEEN months after the grisly murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor children at Manoharpur village in Orissa, 72 Christian tribals were converted to Hinduism in a ritualistic extravaganza at the same village. The organisers chose the location to emphasise the Sangh Parivar's argument that the Staines murder was actually a popular backlash against Christian conversions and thus attempt to justify the killings. By getting the Sankaracharya of Puri to participate and later give an inflammatory speech calling all conversions after partition illegal and part of a conspiracy to turn India into a Christian country, the organisers attempted to give a stamp of religious authority to their actions and those of Dara Singh, the main accused in the murder case.

Dara Singh is finally in judicial custody after months of evading arrest. He along with 17 others will have charges framed against them on 1 August. His supporters hope that by holding conversions at the very site of the gruesome murder and getting support from a religious head, they will be able to give a veneer of credibility to their argument that the tribals of Manoharpur were unhappy with activities of the missionaries, and the deaths were the result of local resentment; it is also intended to frighten all missionaries and minorities. Inquiries into the Staines murder have revealed that the attack was politically motivated, instigated by the Bajrang Dal, and Dara Singh was a supporter of the Sangh Parivar and their Hindutva agenda. The ritualistic Hindu re-conversions were also political, proven by the fact that the local BJP MLA and other leaders were present at the gala function. If religion is a matter of personal choice, then why do conversions — to any denomination — have to be public events complete with politicians to give approval? Just as the Sangh Parivar argues that missionaries pressurise tribals to convert by offering inducements, is it suggested that inducements were scrupulously avoided on re-conversions? Will the Sankaracharya agree that these re-conversions were also illegal?

THE STATESMAN

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Catholic priest murdered near Mathura

MATHURA, June 7. — A Catholic priest was murdered last night in his mission home at Navada, eight km from here.

9 minutes
“Some persons, still to be identified, entered the house, locked up the servant, and then entered Brother George’s room. They beat him to death and then escaped in the night,” a report said today.

The All India Catholic Union has alleged that though there were no indications about the motive, the crime seems to follow the pattern of violence at Kosi Kalan earlier this year in which a priest and two nuns were assaulted and their rooms ransacked.

The UP principal secretary (home), Mr VK Mittal, said the incident had no communal overtone and the motive behind the murder appeared to be “loot”.

Police said the assailants hit the priest on the Brother Polus Memorial School campus with lathis and iron rods killing him on the spot. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

JUN 8 1960

JUN 8 1960

Blasts rock churches in 3 states

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 8. — Explosions rocked churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa today, injuring at least five persons.

On Tuesday, a 43-year-old priest, Brother George, was murdered in his mission home at Navada near Mathura in UP.

Three people were injured when two bombs exploded almost simultaneously at two churches at Ongole and Tadepalligudem towns in Andhra Pradesh around 8.45 a.m.

About 100 students had left the church after attending Bible classes just before the bomb went off in Ongole American Baptist church. Three of the four persons inside the church were injured and furniture and window panes damaged. The bomb was planted under a bench near the 114-year-old church's entrance.

In the Tadepalligudem Roman Catholic church in West Godavari, the bomb was planted under the pulpit. A few chairs and window panes of the recently-built church were damaged in the blast that left a big crater. No one was injured.

Police suspect the blasts were aimed at fanning communal passions.

Karnataka

Two bombs went off in St Anne's Roman Catholic church at Wadi Karnataka's Gulbarga district this morning. Two people were

injured and minorities in the area are feeling threatened.

Windows and glass panes were damaged in the blasts, the first around 6.15 a.m. and the second three hours later.

Wadi has been free from communal tension and people of all communities visit the church, Gulbarga police said. But without taking chances, the administration has tightened security.

The first blast occurred when gelatine stuffed in chocolate-box went off near the boundary wall. The missionary's cook reported the blast to police.

The second blast occurred even after police had searched the church and its compound and said they didn't find any more explosives.

A local newspaper reporter and another passerby were injured in the second blast. Christian associations in the city are worried, though they don't fear communal violence.

Goa

A crude bomb exploded at the St Andrew's Church at Vasco in south Goa around 10.15 a.m. Police said the bomb might have been planted near a window and damaged panes and grills. No one was injured.

Those in the church said the bomb went off five minutes after the students of a school, adjacent to the church, returned to their classes after recess. Police has sounded a general alert.

■ Another report on page 8

THE STATESMAN

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Attack on churches in 3 States

A series of bomb explosions occurred in a few churches in three States on Thursday causing concern to the minority community. While two churches were targeted in Andhra Pradesh, two bomb explosions took place in a Catholic church in Wadi town of Karnataka's Gulbarga district. In another incident, a bomb went off in a church at Vasco in south Goa damaging a portion of the building.

Three persons suffered bruises in the blast at a church in Ongole town of Andhra Pradesh and one was hurt in the explosion at Wadi.

Naidu's assurance

Our Special Correspondent reports from Hyderabad:

Two explosions, caused by bombs fitted with timers, occurred at the Gewett Memorial Baptist Church in Ongole and the Mother Vannini Catholic Church in Tadepalligudem town of the State early today. The blast in the Ongole church, which occurred at 8.15 a.m. after the morning service, injured three persons.

Today's explosions were the sixth in a series of attacks on churches in the State in recent weeks. Earlier, churches in Machilipatnam, Vijayawada, Vicarabad and Medak were targeted.

The Chief Minister, Mr. N.

Chandrababu Naidu, rushed to the two towns by helicopter and assured the Christian community that stringent action would be taken against the culprits. Stating that he saw a pattern in the six incidents, Mr. Naidu suspected the hand of a "criminal gang" bent on creating communal strife. People gathered outside the church in Ongole shouted slogans urging the Chief Minister to withdraw support to the BJP-led Government at the Centre.

Mr. Naidu directed the local officials to repair the damage to the churches at Government expense, without affecting worship schedules.

One hurt in Wadi

Our Staff Correspondent reports from Wadi:

Two bomb explosions at a Catholic church early on Thursday shocked the small Christian population in Wadi.

The first blast occurred around 6.05 a.m. on the left side of the church while the second bomb went off in the front of the building three hours later.

The first explosion, which damaged at least two windows and blew up glass panes of all ventilators, did not cause any damage to the building but the impact created a huge crater.

The second blast could have caused serious damage had the car usually parked there not been moved by its owner minutes before the explosion. Police found a tin box protruding from the ground and on removing the lid found battery cells and other material. Before the bomb disposal squad could reach the spot, the material exploded injuring one person. The church authorities said the 80 Christian families in the town enjoyed a cordial relationship with members of the other communities.

Investigation on

PTI reports from Panaji:

A "crude" bomb of low intensity exploded in the St. Andrews church in Vasco of south Goa this morning, shattering window panes and twisting grills out of shape. There was, however, no report of any casualty.

The Superintendent of Police, CID, Mr. Karnal Singh, told reporters that vigilance had been stepped up in the State following the blast.

The Goa Pradesh Congress(I) committee president, Mr. Luizinho Faleiro, condemned the incident and demanded that police immediately arrest the culprits.

THE HINDU

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CONG., LEFT FLAY GOVT'S LAID-BACK ATTITUDE

Home Ministry seeks reports on church blasts

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 9. The series of explosions in different churches spread over three States, all on Thursday morning, have forced the Union Home Ministry to look at the grim reality of growing attacks on Christians even as the Congress(I) and the Left saw a "pattern" in the incidents which they said "led a trail to the Sangh Parivar related outfits."

In the face of the well-timed explosions, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Government it presides over could no longer hide behind the theory they were expounding till yesterday, that the attacks on churches and Christian priests and nuns were being "blown out of proportion" and that they were simple "law and order problems" related to incidents of "dacoity and loot". The Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pandey, was in touch with the States — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa — where the incidents had occurred, and was awaiting intelligence reports before a "strategy" was worked out.

(Mr. Bandaru Dattatreya, Minister of State for Urban Development, who met the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today said that the latter had agreed to take follow-up action on protection of the minorities on receipt of

the reports.) But even as the Government began acknowledging for the first time that there was a problem, Mr. Arjun Singh, senior Congress(I) leader said the Prime Minister must himself make the effort to forge a national will "which will have to be pitted against these communal and fascist forces" indulging in "wanton and murderous attacks."

While Mr. Singh refrained from naming the Sangh Parivar outfits, the Left was far more direct saying the attacks had been "systematically planned," and that they

Editorial: Page 12
Christians' concern: Page 13

would add to the already heightened sense of insecurity among the minorities. The CPI leader, Mr. D. Raja, suggested that the "trail of violent incidents seemed to lead to the Sangh Parivar outfits."

The BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, an RSS offspring, both preferred to blame an "ISI conspiracy." Mr. J. P. Mathur, BJP vice-president, said his party and the Government were "committed to the security of the minorities" and he appealed to the Christians "not to be misled by political propagandists."

The Government, which at the highest levels till yesterday had been dismissive of several attacks on churches, priests and nuns, today expressed "serious concern" and Home Ministry officials began to see a "pattern" behind the attacks. It may be recalled that after the first reported attacks on churches in Gujarat, the Prime Minister visited the State and asked for a "national debate on conversions". The impression that the BJP and the Parivar outfits have been creating is that somehow the violence was related to "forced conversions".

But even as the Government "waited" for reports from States, the Left and the Congress(I) were clear that the issue was too serious for a laid-back attitude which the Government had displayed so far. Mr Arjun Singh condemned the "irresponsible elements" who were "gradually destroying the secular fabric of the country" while the CPI(M) charged that the repeated incidents had demonstrated that those behind them enjoyed political patronage.

ISI conspiracy: VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 9. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad — which today blamed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence for the almost simul-

taneous bomb explosions in churches in three different States yesterday — warned that the growth of the ISI network over the last three years could lead to another division of India, as in 1947. Demanding a high-level probe into the incidents, it said the findings should be made public through a "white paper".

Mr. Giriraj Kishore, a senior VHP leader, indicted the Government without saying it in so many words. "There is an undeclared emergency" in the country. "If the Centre is unable to effectively control the situation, 1947 may be repeated again."

At the same time, unwilling to blame the ruling politicians directly, he pointed a finger of blame at an "untamed bureaucracy" and "a dark conspiracy to ensure the disintegration of India" in which the "ISI and the CIA were partners." He added that any division of Sri Lanka would pose a danger to India's territorial integrity.

Mr. Kishore was concerned that while the ISI was "targeting Christians" the VHP and its sister organisation, the Bajrang Dal, were being blamed. But he did not bat an eyelid when reminded that till yesterday he had dismissed attacks on Christian priests and churches as a simple "law and order problem".

JUN 9 2000

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SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 2000

49-12
10/6
DANGEROUS HATE CRIMES *Minister*

THE BRUTAL MURDER of a Catholic missionary near Mathura last Tuesday and the bomb attacks on Christian places of worship in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa on Thursday reinforce the disturbing pattern of physical assaults on the minority community, its missionaries and the educational institutions run by it. Less than two months ago, Uttar Pradesh was witness to such incidents in places such as Mathura, not to mention the earlier outrageous episodes in the Dangs region in Gujarat and Manoharpur in Orissa. Two factors are striking about the latest attacks. First, they have occurred on the same day and around the same time in three different States and this certainly cannot be dismissed as a mere coincidence. The second and more worrying feature is the use of explosives. In Andhra Pradesh — the State where Thursday's Ongole blast was the sixth such occurrence in recent weeks — a 'time' device is reported to have been employed at least in one instance. It is perhaps fortuitous that the blasts did not result in any loss of human life. But the message sought to be conveyed by the perpetrators of the crime is unmistakable: to instill a sense of insecurity in the minority community.

In the immediate context, the priority of the State Governments concerned should of course be bringing the culprits to justice swiftly and initiating measures to ensure that such attacks do not recur. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, may be right in suspecting the hand of a "single criminal gang" behind the series of bomb blasts targeting churches in his State. In any event, no effort should be spared in tracking down the criminal elements and in unravelling their gameplan in all its insidious ramifications. For instance, one wonders whether there could be an organic or motivational link between the Andhra Pradesh blasts and the Agra episode wherein a Christian group from that State was attacked and some scriptural material was set on fire last April, with the suspect Bajrang Dal coming up with a coun-

ter charge of 'induced' conversion against the victim, a Hyderabad-based contingent.

But the point is that the Governments have almost invariably tended to see, for their own reasons, the various assaults on the minority community from the narrow viewpoint of law and order and have been overly anxious to discount the 'communal' angle. Even where the ostensible motive happens to be robbery or personal grievance (either with the individual or the institution targeted) or enmity, it would be unwise to write out the communal factor and refuse to see such seemingly 'isolated' and 'purely criminal' acts in the wider perspective of the anti-minority milieu that the hindutva forces have engendered by their hate campaign. In fact, even the National Commission for Minorities, a statutory body mandated to ensure that the minority communities really enjoyed the rights guaranteed under the Constitution, would seem to have acquired the official establishment's blinkered vision. Witness the NCM's report on the Uttar Pradesh incidents, ruling out the communal motive; its finding on the basis of a flawed and cursory exercise flew in the face of facts thrown up by quite a few objective enquiries. Nothing could be more tragic and ironic than the fact that the credibility of the Commission as a protector of the minorities' rights should stand severely eroded just at the time when these communities feel increasingly threatened as a result of the vicious campaign by the majoritarian fundamentalist forces who have apparently become emboldened under the benign gaze of the BJP-led coalition regime at the Centre. In sum, it is not enough that the Governments remove the proximate and superficial causes for the recurrent attacks on the Christian minority; the political establishments need to take credible initiatives towards arresting the sangh parivar's hate campaign. Unless this comes about, whatever assurances that the Prime Minister or Chief Ministers may choose to give the minorities on protecting their rights will carry little conviction.

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REAL TARGET

Attacks on Christians continue

SIMULTANEOUS explosions in Christian churches as far apart as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Goa, hard on the heels of a spate of attacks on missionaries in western UP and the battering to death of a priest in a village just outside Mathura are not unconnected incidents. Ten armed assailants forced their way into St Francis Public School in the dead of night and attacked the 40-year-old priest from Kerala with sticks, iron rods and shoes. Counting previous attacks in Mathura and Agra this is the fifth in the last two months — police are assiduously suggesting that the motive is burglary. Why such brazen lies? Whose instructions are they following? The killing of Brother George is part of the planned reign of terror unleashed on the minority community by the Sangh Parivar and their proponents. Assault on priests, rape and molestation of nuns, violent disruption of religious meetings, burning of churches and Bibles and detaining priests in lock-ups have been used to terrorise the community. These are part of a planned strategy to keep the Hindutva platform alive.

As the party of government, the BJP cannot be seen to be helpless, hence the central leadership make polite noises but do absolutely nothing to control its Sangh Parivar brethren. Instead the home minister says they are not involved and the Prime Minister calls for a national debate on conversion. The BJP's coalition partners who, it was hoped, would keep communal elements under check, are just as much to blame for their silence. Attacks on Christians have grown in intensity and frequency in the last year. Why is the Sangh parivar suddenly training its guns on this tiny minority which they must know is in no position to, and does not intend to, threaten Hindu dominance? An answer that suggests itself is that the government has forced the parivar to go slow on their favourite pastime — Muslim-bashing. Many coalition partners have Muslim voters whom they cannot antagonise, so temporarily the VHP can keep themselves occupied and in practice, by turning their attention to another minority. Also as the party in power, if the BJP allow the Sangh Parivar to continue instigating Hindu-Muslim riots, it is their government which will come under flak. These are the constraints of *realpolitik*. At the ideological level both Christianity and Islam are proselytising religions and have come from outside the sub-continent. If the parivar can establish all Christian conversions are forced and therefore illegal, it must follow, by their lights, that conversions to Islam are also illegal. End of argument and cheap at the price. Already in Gujarat the VHP has opposed Hindu-Muslim marriages arguing Muslims boys marry Hindu girls only to convert them forcibly. Very much on the agenda is control of Christian schools, institutions of excellence in great demand. Catch them young is an old tactic. If they can get the missionary schools to toe the line then shutting down *madrassas* and other minority institutions becomes easier. If Christians can be established as outsiders, then so are Muslims — the real target. The parivar is fooling no one.

THE STATEMENT

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Govt lethargy on church blasts angers Christians

■ Centre urged to institute CBI probe into sustained attacks

NEWS AND AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

CHRISTIAN leaders in the country today condemned the bomb blasts at churches in Andhra Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka on Thursday and alleged that a "anti-Christian hate atmosphere has been created" with the silent approval of the Government.

"We are intrigued by the response of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Chief Ministers of these states, and saddened at the silence of the Government on whom we look upon for support," Alan De Lastic, president of Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), told reporters.

The Delhi Archbishop also alleged "there was a definite strategy or plan at the national level to intimidate Christians to stop them from the work they are

"A secular, democratic and united India is being put to the test today by communal and fundamentalist forces. Innocent blood has been shed, and shed again. The cry of the traumatised community is sought to be drowned in the strident noise of a viciously poisonous, highly motivated and well financed hate campaign," he said.

Citing the incidents of attacks on the Christian community between April and June which were more than 24 in number, the leaders said "every attack is a criminal act but what we are worried about is the pattern of violence against the community."

Reacting to the reported claim by the Sangh Parivar that ISI was behind the blasts at the churches yesterday, the leaders criticised "those in power" for jumping to conclusion before the whole inves-

more doubt in the mind of the community that they are trying to hush up things."

The leaders have sought an appointment with the Prime Minister to share their concern regarding the issue and demand that preventive steps be taken immediately to stop the atrocities on the Christian community.

The leaders also demanded "if these incidents were the problem of law and order as portrayed by the Government then why don't they activate their agency like intelligence and others to find out the real culprits."

Meanwhile in Panaji, the police so far have not been successful in arresting the culprits behind the bomb explosion that occurred in St Andrew's Church, Vasco. Investigations are in progress and the police are examining the incident in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

from the front page

Govt lethargy angers Christians

three different angles, namely the Meta Strips agitation, the blasts that have occurred in other Roman Catholic churches in other states, and the ISI hand. "Extensive inquiries are in progress, and we are confident of a breakthrough in the near future" said Alex Rasquinha, SP, South Goa, to this reporter. Shiv Sena's recent declaration of support to Meta Strips on the eve of the explosion, following the violent turn taken by the anti-Meta Strips group, make the two organisations suspects for inquiry, in addition to widespread terrorist activity in the

The Ministry was monitoring all developments in this regard, while its officials were in touch with concerned departments in these states, a Home Ministry spokesman said.

The Home Secretaries of the three states have been asked to submit reports on the incidents immediately, he said.

Investigations were being carried out by the police in these states and the concerned state governments were "alive to the situation and taking appropriate action to nab the culprits," he added. Earlier in Andhra Pradesh's Ongole town

INDIAN EXPRESS

10 MAY 1990

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Christian
preacher
murdered
in Jalandhar

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, June 11. — The partly-burnt body of a Christian preacher, bearing sharp stab wounds, was found at his home in the heart of Jalandhar city this morning.

With the valuables in the Kanyawali Mohalla house untouched, the suspicion is on anti-Christian groups. Police are also exploring a family dispute angle.

Ashish Prabash Masih, in his early twenties, worked for the Ludhiana-based Jesus Films Ministry and would travel around showing villagers films on Jesus. His hometown was Batala near Gurdaspur, where he was involved in a property dispute, police said.

This morning, he lay dead on his cot with thick black smoke coming out of the partially-melted TV. Police said the deep gashes on his neck, chest and back, and the burns indicate murder.

Ashish lived alone after his parents died and his wife deserted him. Police today established his identity from certificates. The last rites were performed according to Christian traditions in the presence of local Christian representatives.

Christian leaders will meet the Prime Minister tomorrow to discuss the continuing attacks on the community.

THE STATESMAN

12 JUN 2000

Minorities are safe, says Vajpayee

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By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, JUNE 12. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today endorsed the suggestion of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR) for an end to negative propaganda against all religions. He assured a UCFHR delegation at his official residence here that all minorities in the country were secure.

Briefing presspersons after the meeting, the Archbishop of Delhi and president of UCFHR, Rev. Alan de Lastic, said the Prime Minister asked the Special Secretary (Home), Mr. T. R. Kakkar, to investigate into the hate literature that the church leaders said was in circulation.

Naidu's warning

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JUNE 12. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, today categorically assured Christian lead-

ers that he would withdraw support to the Government at the Centre if it was proved beyond doubt that the BJP-RSS was behind the series of attacks on churches, the latest victim being Andhra Pradesh.

Mr. Naidu made this offer at a meeting at his office in the Secretariat here, where these leaders pointed an accusing finger at the BJP-RSS, saying his image at national and international levels would be at stake if this trend was not nipped in the bud.

According to the leaders who spoke to the press after the one-hour meeting, the Chief Minister said, "why only Andhra Pradesh? I am worried about the entire country. If any shred of evidence is found indicating the BJP-RSS link with the incidents, I will certainly withdraw support to the Centre. But I can't issue support-withdrawal threats even before anything is found, throwing the system into disarray". He promised to take up the matter with the Centre.

THE HINDU

13 JUN 200

Nation-level group blamed for church attacks

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JUNE 12. Christian leaders today appreciated the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, for his "quick action" rushing to the church sites where bomb blasts occurred in the State recently, and thus instilling confidence in the community, but wanted him to ensure the same speed in the government delivery system.

They thanked him for providing security to churches all over the State amidst which services were conducted at these places for the first time on Sunday.

They, however, declined to form committees with community youth for the reason that they might themselves become cause for unrest, but offered to keep vigil, as suggested by the Chief Minister, through the community as a whole.

A 30-member Christian delegation met the Chief Minister in the Secretariat today.

Both sides held the view that the attacks were engineered by a group operating at the national level and it was well-knit.

ND-13 13/6
An update of the information on investigation provided to the Christian leaders by the Chief Minister, apart from the Home Minister, Mr. T. Devender Goud, and the DGP, Mr. H. J. Dora, was that there was no breakthrough in the probe into all six incidents witnessed in the State. Nor was there any arrest.

The fingerprints which the police lifted with great difficulty could not provide any clue as they were "inter-mixed" with that of the people who thronged the area after the incidents.

The Christian leaders informed the Chief Minister of 36 incidents having taken place in the State so far, including some threats, and not merely six as was reported. They complained against the RDO, Kakinada, for allowing RSS drills in the Mc Laurine High School after government takeover of the land.

The Pentecost priest from Ongole said he had received a telephone call on Sunday from a person, who spoke in Hindi, threatening him about his religious activities. Citing this, the Christian leaders blamed the attacks on a group based in the north and said they must

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be acting at the behest of some like the BJP and the RSS.

The Chief Minister, who promised "all possible cooperation" from the Government side, said groups were formed for each church with men drawn from Intelligence wing of the Police department, to keep a watch on visitors.

He wanted the leaders to form a core group with which he could interact on a weekly basis. He asked them to approach him directly if there was any problem.

The delegation consisted of Rev Fr. Hendry D' Souza, Rev Fr B. Julian, Chancellor and Vicar-General respectively of the Hyderabad Archdiocese representing the Catholics, Mr. A. Vijayakumar, president, Baptist Churches Association of India, Mr. C. Francis, vice-president, All-India Catholic Union, Mr. Sam Paul of the All-India Christian Council, all representing Protestant denominations, Rev D. John Augustine, Rev Y. Thomas and Fr G. Gnananandam, priests in-charge of Ongole, Vikarabad and Tadepallegudem churches which were attacked recently.

THE HINDU

1 JUN 2000

Plea to probe pattern of attacks on minorities

By Our Staff Reporter

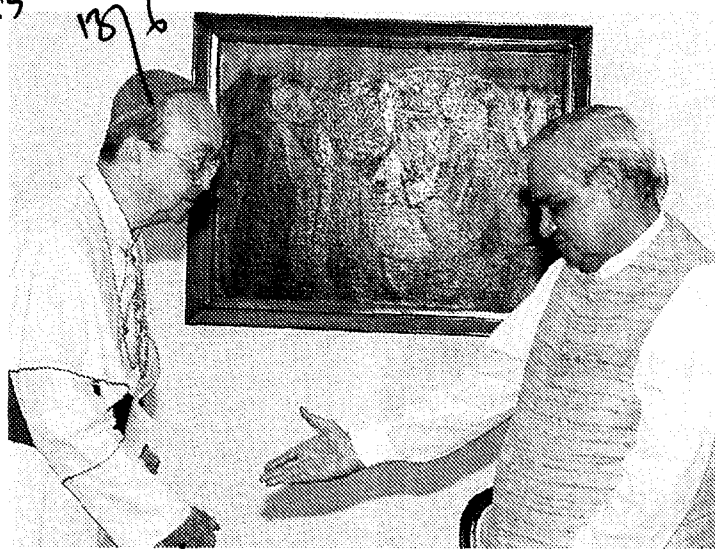
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12. A delegation of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR) met the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, at his official residence here today and urged him to examine the pattern that was emerging in the attacks on minorities across the country.

At a press conference here after the meeting with the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Delhi and president of UCFHR, Rev. Alan de Lastic, was asked whether any mention was made of the involvement of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence in the recent bomb blasts at Christian missions.

The Archbishop said the Special Secretary (Home), Mr. T.R. Kakkar, informed the Prime Minister that he had received no report from the three States where the explosions took place.

Unwilling to comment on who was behind the attacks, the Archbishop said: "It is not for us to find out; the Prime Minister has promised that he would do his best to find out who is behind these attacks."

When reminded that similar as-



Archbishop of Delhi Alan De Lastic calling on the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee at his residence in New Delhi on Monday.—Photo:S. Arneja

surances had been given in the past, Archbishop de Lastic said, "We always hope for something better; an improvement on the past."

He also refused to react to the recent comments on conversion made by the Shankaracharya of

Puri on the plea that "it does not call for any comment and he has a right to his own opinion".

Later, giving details about the meeting, an official in the Prime Minister's Office said the two sides agreed that all incidents of violence involving Christians

should not be seen as anti-Christian and that these attacks had nothing to do with conversions.

While conceding to the latter, the national convenor of UCFHR, Mr. John Dayal, said of the former: "Let proper investigations be conducted before arriving at such a conclusion."

About the investigations, the Archbishop of Agra, Rev. Vincent Concessao, said though police had initiated action, it was not satisfactory.

"They are still to solve the incidents of violence that took place within the diocese in April."

While conceding that the Karnataka Government had acted very quickly, the Archbishop of Bangalore, Rev. Ignatius Paul Pinto, sought to draw attention to the fact that the three explosions in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa last week took place almost simultaneously. "And in all three cases, gelatine sticks were used."

Added the Archbishop of Hyderabad, Marampudi Joji: "People are afraid to go to church these days for fear of their lives. The practice of religion is becoming increasingly difficult."

Christian body to move UN on recent attacks

Calcutta, June 13

14/6
41-5

THE BANGIYA Christiya Pariseva, apex body of Christian organisations in the eastern region, will seek intervention of the United Nations and Amnesty International in the recent atrocities on Christians throughout the country.

Accusing the Centre of tacit support to the religious terrorism unleashed by the Sangh Parivar, Pariseva general secretary Herod Mullick said here today that the organisation had no option but to appeal to the UN, as it had lost all faith in the Vajpayee Government.

The decision to move the UN and Amnesty International had already been conveyed to the Archbishop of Delhi Alan d'Lastic, he said.

Speaking at a protest rally, Mullick said the pariseva was in the final stages of building a broad-based forum of minorities, Dalits and secular people in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and seven North-Eastern States for the

protection of minorities and Dalits.

Holding the Sangh Parivar responsible for the recent bomb explosions at four churches in three States, Mullick said: "The heinous attempts to blow up churches in three States and the cunning way of diverting the

'The mask of secularism has been ripped off the faces of the PM and his men'

accusing fingers of the public is a special feature of the Sangh Parivar."

While stating that the Sangh Parivar's shifting of blame to the ISI agents for the blasts was a 'ploy' to create hatred between peace-loving Christians and Hindus, he said, "they know that

while the intelligentsia would see through the trick, the illiterate and unaware millions would easily swallow the pill."

The other speakers at the rally, which was attended by intellectuals and representatives from the Hindu community, appealed to all sections of the people to stand united and frustrate the designs of the self-styled custodians of Hinduism to whip up hatred among communities.

Alleging that the Sangh Parivar would soon launch religious terrorism in other States, they said that atrocities on Christians would increase in the coming days.

It was observed that while there had been no hatred among the two communities in the country, the Sangh Parivar was deliberately creating misunderstandings between them with fabricated information.

The mask of secularism has been ripped off the faces of the Prime Minister and his colleagues as they are not paying any attention to the repeated appeals to restore normalcy, they said. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 JUN 2000

~~Christian Council~~ g.m. 'surprised'

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JUNE 14. The All-India Christian Council has said that it was "surprised" that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, had denied having said that he had "nothing to do with communal elements if they are proven to have a hand in the bomb explosions" in churches in Andhra Pradesh.

In a statement, the Council said: "In the meeting of the representatives of Christian leaders with the Chief Minister on June 12, the matter of support to the NDA Government came up for discussions." The Chief Minister said he is not of the type to issue threats to the Centre, for every smallthing and, in the same breath, he also said that he will have nothing to do with anyone that will be proven as involved in these bomb blasts, no matter what party or organisation, no matter how big or small they are".

14 JUN 2000

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18/6

PM apprised of attacks on Christians

By Soma Basu

NEW DELHI, JUNE 15. The only Christian member of the National Commission for the Minorities (NCM), Mr. John Joseph, was granted an exclusive appointment with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, here this evening, fuelling rumours about voices of dissent among the Commission members over their reaction to the recent attacks on Christians. *g-mi v m w*

The talks lasted 40 minutes and ended on a "positively reassuring note" with the promise of another meeting between the two tomorrow to "discuss more points in detail".

When contacted by *The Hindu*, Mr. Joseph, however, dismissed any difference of opinion among the Commission members. Asked specifically why he sought a personal appointment when the NCM chairman, Mr. Justice Mohd. Shamim, had called on Mr. Vajpayee only on Monday, he said, "when the entire Commission goes, several other issues are

discussed, diluting Christian issues. Since I am the only Christian member in the Commission, I wanted to specifically discuss issues related to the community."

Mr. Joseph, who submitted 23 suggestions to the Prime Minister, was reluctant to comment on the attacks on Christians. "What is happening is very unfortunate and a sensitive matter and politicians are taking advantage of the situation. Investigations into various attacks are on and the matter is sub-judice and I can't say more," he said.

Mr. Joseph suggested that Mr. Vajpayee immediately address the nation reassuring the Christians of their "safety and security", besides convening an urgent meeting with all Bishops and

holding an exclusive meeting with the Chief Ministers to discuss the law and order problem in this context.

A regular dialogue between the spiritual and intellectual leaders of both the communities (Christian and Hindus), setting up of local and district level committees of such members and creating a separate cell in the PMO to monitor incidents of violence against the minorities and ensure action are some of his other suggestions.

Gujarat's 'no'

In another development, the BJP Government in Gujarat has turned down the NCM's request to probe the attacks on Christians in the State on the ground that it was "busy tackling the drought situation".

However, Mr. Justice Shamim said that there was "no meaning attached to it." "We had written to them about our decision to visit the State, but the State responded saying it will not be able to provide any assistance to the Commission at present as it was busy taking measures to counter severe drought conditions in the state," he told *The Hindu*.

Commenting on the attack against Christians in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, he said, "These are law and order problems and the Commission has a limited role in these States at present. Police investigations are on and it will be unfair to hamper them," he said, placing full confidence in the State's and the Centre's handling of the issue.

THE HINDU

16 JUN 2002

Christian council blames Centre for 'Parivar' attacks

BY R. BHAGWAN SINGH

Chennai, June 16: The All-India Christian Council on Friday laid the blame squarely upon the Centre for the spurt in attacks against Christians by the Sangh Parivar over the last two years which, it said, had led to a state of panic among the minorities.

"We are intrigued by the response of the Central and state governments, who refuse to see the pattern of the violence. Their motives are exposed in the fact that they also refuse to see the campaign of calumny and hate that underpins this violence. The nation is not satisfied with the cosmetic response of political and government leaders," said the council at an emergency meeting of its national executive held here.

Briefing the media about the deliberations, council president Dr Joseph D'Souza said over 80,000 nuns in the country had recently met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and told him: "For the first

time, we are scared." Dr D'Souza said the council decided to observe July 8 as "All-India Black Day" and launch a "Movement of National Solidarity," when not only Christians but "all people of goodwill" would fast and wear protest badges to focus public anger against the rising violence of the Sangh Parivar, which enjoyed "extra-constitutional authority" from the government at the Centre.

The campaign was meant to "send a clear signal to those in power that the people of this country will not stand by and see the blood of innocents spilled or a community terrorised," Dr D'Souza said.

Calling upon the government at the Centre and the state governments to investigate the violence against minorities, Dr D'Souza said: "The hate campaign against us has been signed by the RSS. The government is only too ready

to blame it all on the foreign hand. There is no foreign hand, only an internal hand that is behind the attacks against us."

Tracing the violence against the minorities, beginning with the burning of 400 Bibles in Rajkot and the burning of three churches in Dangs in 1998, the attacks on nuns, preachers and other social, educational and medical workers, Dr D'Souza said the council noted that the terror peaked in 1999 with the burning alive of Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his two minor children in Orissa.

It said: "The ominous mass violence is meant to terrorise the Christians, to stop people from coming to churches, to frighten away students from our schools and the ill, the weak and the marginalised from our outreach programmes. Is it a coincidence that the violence comes even as senior

SPOTLIGHT

leaders of the Sangh Parivar call for 'epochal wars' against minorities, stage-managed

'reconversions' and give public calls to 'eliminate missionaries' from India?"

The council said Christian representatives had repeatedly called on the Prime Minister and state governments to take action against those who perpetrated hate. "These people are known. The poison they spew is in print and on tapes."

The national spokesperson of the All-India Catholic Union, Mr John Dayal said congregations in the south were now scared to go to church because of bomb scares following the recent blasts in four churches.

Those responsible for violence against Christians were being allowed to go scot-free and enjoyed the protection of those in power. "India used to be secular, we cannot say that any more. Front organisations of the ruling BJP violate provisions of law," Mr Dayal said.

THE ASIAN AGE

17 JUN 2000

Restive Christians pressure PM

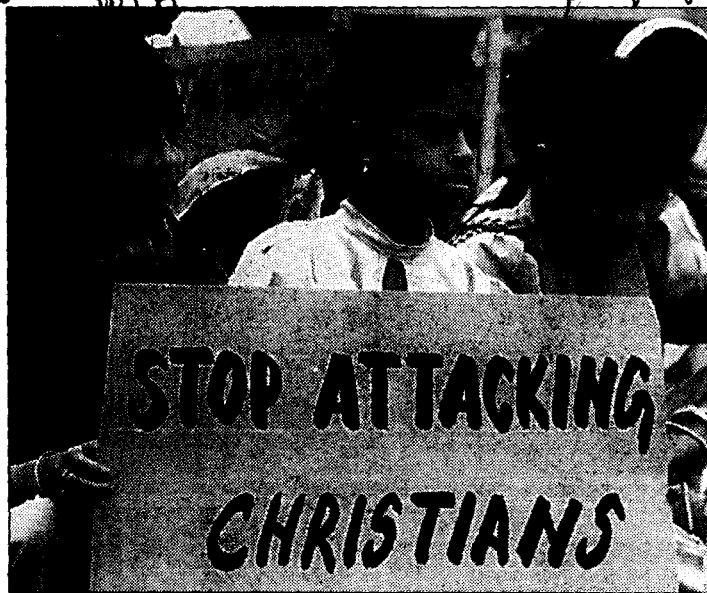
FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, June 17: A section of Christians has stepped up pressure on the Centre by hinting that it may be forced to take to arms in self-defence if the current wave of violence against them continues.

A member of the National Commission for Minorities yesterday told Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee: "There are reports from some areas that efforts are on to form militant outfits with financial and technical assistance from vested interests outside the country," even as the All-India Christian Council proposed to launch a solidarity campaign against "(Sangh) parivar terrorism" from July 8.

Minorities commission member John Joseph, who led a delegation to the Prime Minister yesterday, said: "Reports of atrocities on Christians will have serious consequences in Europe and America, where various Hindu organisations are active".

The apprehension that a section of Christians may take up arms comes in the wake of the attacks getting attention in foreign countries. The Indian Christian Forum (ICF) in New York has "strongly condemned the increasing violence against Chris-



School children staging a protest in Bhopal. (PTI)

tians in India".

The forum said: "It is becoming increasingly clear that the Hindu nationalist government is either unwilling or unable to deal with this new round of violence." Urging Delhi to "rein in the extremists", the forum said there was a pattern to the attacks on churches and its leaders.

The Bangiya Christiya Samaj

had threatened a few days ago to seek United Nations intervention to end violence against the community.

During their meeting, Joseph had suggested to the Prime Minister that he set up a cell in the PMO to monitor the anti-Christian activities of certain outfits, give free access to minority organisations (to the cell), address

the nation on issues related to Christians and convene an all-India meeting of bishops.

But the suggestion of "treating Christianity as an Asian religion" is likely to invite the wrath of the RSS. He said leaders of some organisations "should be told or convinced that Christians in India are Indians and not foreigners. The Sangh parivar considers only Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism as being the religion of the soil while Islam and Christianity came from outside".

The commission member also mooted a meeting of chief ministers to discuss the social, cultural and law and order ramifications of the issue. He said efforts should be made to remove the feeling that the BJP was anti-minority.

He added that the Union home minister should direct all state governments to take steps to prevent violence and announce proper incentives to encourage people to provide clues against the perpetrators of violence.

The government should encourage Christians to continue with their work in the field of education, health and other humanitarian activities, Joseph member told the Prime Minister.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 JUN 2000

Eyewitness to Mathura murder found dead in custody

By Our Staff Reporter

*9 minutes
HD-15*

NEW DELHI, JUNE 18. An eyewitness to the murder of a Catholic missionary at the Assisi Ashram in Mathura earlier this month was found dead in police custody last night. While the post-mortem report is awaited, the United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR) today alleged that the eyewitness, Vijay Ekka, had been tortured to death in the police bid to pin the murder of Brother George Kuzhikandam on him.

At a press conference here, the Archbishop of the Agra Diocese, Vincent Concessao — under whose jurisdiction Mathura falls — said an FIR had been filed today against the Mathura police under Sections 302 and 342 of the IPC. The FIR had been filed by Brother Emmanuel of the Congregation of Franciscan Missionary Brothers, the order to which Brother Kuzhikandam belonged.

According to Archbishop Concessao, the police were trying to make Ekka's death look like a suicide. "But there is no evidence to suggest suicide while there are several marks on the body that point to his being tortured. He, in fact, told the brothers who used to visit him daily with food that he was being tortured. He even feared for his life and told one of the brothers that "they are going to kill me".

Ekka, who was employed as a cook in the ashram, was one of the two persons who had seen the men involved in the murder of Brother Kuzhikandam. A

native of Raigarh district in Madhya Pradesh Ekka was picked up by the police on June 10 for questioning. Though no formal arrest was made, Ekka had been in custody ever since.

Archbishop Concessao said the brothers at the ashram were informed of Ekka's death around 1 last night. The police told them that Ekka had been found unconscious in a toilet. He was breathing then but was declared "brought dead" at the hospital.

Earlier in the day, the brothers were told by the police that they would drop Ekka at the mission later. But when Ekka did not return till late in the evening, the brothers went to the Narauli police station with dinner for him. "The SO there, Mahavir Singh, did not know anything about Ekka," the Archbishop said, adding this made the brothers suspicious.

What has raised the suspicions of the missionaries is the involvement of the SO, Mr. Sunil Kumar Sharma, in the interrogation of Ekka. The Station Officer had been suspended in view of public protests for his failure to take action in the murder of Brother Kuzhikandam. The UCFHR has demanded immediate arrest of Mr. Sharma and constable, Dinesh Upadhyaya, besides the transfer of senior officers of Mathura district for dereliction. The UCFHR, the All-India Catholic Union and the All-India Christian Council have also decided to approach the National Commission for Human Rights for an independent enquiry into the "custody" death.

THE HINDU

19 JUN 2000

Death of a witness

IT IS the Uttar Pradesh Government's case that too much is being made of the violence against Christians. Yes, says the government, there have been assaults but these have not followed any particular pattern or formed part of an orchestrated campaign. It is quite wrong, the UP Government insists, to pick on individual crimes and then lend them a communal character by focusing unnecessarily on the religion of the victim. One such instance has been the murder of Christian priest Brother George Kunjikandam at a school campus at Nawada in Mathura. The UP Government's Principal Secretary (Home) has said, quite categorically, that there is no evidence of a communal motive. Christian organisations have disputed this and demanded a fuller inquiry. *9. 6. 2000*

That inquiry will now find it difficult to establish the truth. Brother George's Cook, Vijai Ekka, was the man who discovered the body and could have provided valuable clues. He was arrested by the UP police and placed in their custody. Far from eliciting any useful information from him, the police either killed him in their overzealous interrogation or, at the very least, failed to protect him while he was in their custody. According to the post-mortem report, Vijai Ekka died of "asphyxia due to strangulation", a verdict that has been more or less corroborated by Ashok Kumar, Senior Superintendent of Police at Mathura. So far at least, the police has not suggested that somebody entered the lock-up at night to kill the cook. The transfer of SP Chandrika Rai and the institution of action against other officials all suggest that the police are willing to accept the responsibility for Vijai Ekka's death.

Off-the-record, the UP Government's version is that the cook's death is no more than an instance of an interrogation gone wrong. Given that the UP police tops the list for human rights violations in the country, this is plausible enough. Nevertheless, the State Government must recognise how bad things now look for it. The claim that the murder of Brother George was a mere criminal act with no communal overtones now seems sadly vulnerable. The police have yet to provide a motive — it clearly was not robbery — and have managed to kill the only witness who might have shed some light on what happened. Even if you argue that Vijai Ekka was not killed to shut him up, there is still the doubt that the police killed him while trying to get him to confess to the murder. If this is the UP police's idea of an investigation — torture the only witness into saying he did it — then it seems clear that we will never know who really killed Brother George. And if we can't find a solution to the mystery then the fear that the murder was part of an anti-Christian conspiracy will seem more justified. None of this can do the BJP's reputation much good. It would be sad if UP too went the Gujarat way.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 JUN 2000

Insecurity grips Mathura Christians

SWATI R SHARMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MATHURA, June 20. — Insecurity has gripped the Christians here after the murder of Brother George Kuzhikandan and the death of his cook, Vijay Ekka, in police custody.

Ekka, who died in Nehrauli police station here on Saturday, was a witness to the murder of Brother George on St Francis School campus at Nevada on 7 June.

(The UP government has announced a judicial inquiry into the murder of Brother George and death of Ekka. A

judge of Allahabad High Court will head the commission of inquiry and submit the report within three months, SNS adds from Lucknow. Sources said the judicial probe was announced at the instance of the Prime Minister).

The civil administration and police have not regained

the confidence of Christians despite their assurance to provide security to the community.

The VHP and other Hindu organisations have denounced efforts by missionaries to single them out for the murder of

Brother George and death of Ekka.

After Ekka's death, the suspended SHO of Nehrauli police station, Sunil Kumar Sharma, and constable Dinesh Upadhaya were charged with murder and sent to jail. Sharma

was earlier suspended for not competently handling the

probe into the murder of Brother George.

These steps have failed to calm the Christian community who allege that the local administration and state government were protecting the culprits.

"The entire community is shattered after these incidents," said Fr Joseph Dabaria, principal of Saint Dominic School here. The Christians are "terrorised by such vicious acts," said Mr Anurag Singh, principal of Grace Convent Senior Secondary School.

Amrit Raj, a priest from Nagpur, said "frequent attacks on missionaries in UP, especially in Mathura, indicate the emergence of fanatical forces." He said the attacks could be a fallout of the Nagpur RSS convention held two months ago.

■ Editorial: Mockery of justice! page 8

■ See INSECURITY: page 6

THE STATESMAN

21 JUN 2000

Attacks on Christians: NHRC seeks reports

New Delhi, June 22

IN THE wake of several incidents of attacks on Christians and their institutions, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Centre and all State and Union Territory governments and sought reports within two weeks on measures taken and action plan drawn to meet the situation. The Commission's decision to issue notices to Union Home Ministry and Chief Secretaries "is based on the need to take a holistic view as well as to inspire requisite confidence amongst the people of Christian community who appear to be feeling insecure at this time," a NHRC release said today.

Maintaining that the NHRC has received petitions complaining that the incidents disclose a 'pattern of violence' against Christians and their institutions, especially in some states, it said "the commission proposes to make an in-depth scrutiny of the situation".

NHRC wanted to ensure that there is not merely an inquiry into the violation of human rights of a section of people, but also the avenues necessary for the prevention of any such violations in

future, it said.

Meanwhile, Blaming the Sangh Parivar, the Congress today urged Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to check the activities of the Sangh Parivar so that such attacks did not recur. The party made a specific reference to the killing in Mathura of Christian priest George Kuzhikandam and then the death in police custody of a key witness, Vijay Ekka. AICC spokesperson Anil Shastri said that the minorities felt insecure by such recurrent violent incidents, and the Prime Minister should curb the activities of the Sangh Parivar.

Delegations of Pradesh Congress Committees in Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh today submitted a memorandum to their respective State Governors that immediate steps should be taken so that the Christians did not feel insecure living in their own country.

The memoranda expressed concern that there was an alarming increase in the attacks on Christians in the last two years and efforts were being made by selfish politicians to incite people's passions in the name of religion.

(HTC, PTI)

22 JUN 2000

Muslim Personal Law Board decries verdict

Kumkum Chadha
New Delhi, June 22

THE MUSLIM Personal Law Board has decried the judgement of the Calcutta High Court granting maintenance to a Muslim woman till she remarries. Stating that it is reflective of society's "communal hatred" for the Islamic law, Qazi Mujahidul Islam Qasmi, President, Muslim Personal Law Board has said that this is another link in the chain to denigrate the Islamic Law.

Reacting sharply, Maulana Qasmi told *The Hindustan Times* that there is a sinister design to ensure that Islamic law gets wiped out: "Under the Hindu law women never got any maintenance. They took the concept of maintenance from Islam and today they have become the messiahs of women" he said.

As against this, Dr Syeda Hameed, author of the controversial Report on Muslim Women and a former member of the National Commission for Women (NCW) has said that the time has come for the Muslim community to wake up to the plight of Muslim women in India.

"The judgement is a reminder to

the Muslim community to put its own house in order. Unless the Muslim leadership takes note and alleviates the sufferings of the Muslim women, judicial interventions such as the one by the Calcutta High Court will attempt to redress the grievances of the hapless Muslim women" Dr Hameed told *The Hindustan Times*.

Conceding that the plight of Muslim women is a matter which merits immediate attention, Maulana Qasmi however felt that it is for the Muslim community and its leadership to take stock of the situation: "The urgency is there but such judgements only go against the spirit of the Quran. In fact, word 'matah' on which many judgements have been based has been misinterpreted as maintenance. It means benefit or one-time gift, which the woman can accept from her divorced husband. Anything after that has been forbidden because under Islam, a woman has to sever all connections with her divorced husband. If she continues taking financial help then she can also continue accruing other advantages." The society, he said, is deliberately turning a blind eye to these provisions.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JUN 2000

Delhi drive to arrange PM meet with Pope

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, June 22: Worried about India's image abroad in the wake of attacks on Christians in the country, Atal Behari Vajpayee's managers are trying to arrange a meeting between the Prime Minister and Pope John Paul II at the Holy See at the end of an Italian visit which begins this Sunday.

The Prime Minister is going on a five-day visit to Italy and Portugal with a high-level delegation. After his bilateral visit in Italy, Vajpayee will go to Lisbon where the high point will be his participation in the first-ever Indo-European Union summit.

Attempts are being made by South Block officials to fix a meeting between Vajpayee and the Pope at the Vatican on June 27 after the Prime Minister finishes the Italian part of his visit and is on his way to Lisbon.

Indian foreign ministry officials are, however, trying to play down the proposed meeting on the plea that nothing has been finalised and both sides are trying to work out a date and time.

Refusing to attach any significance to the meeting, if and when it takes place, they pointed out that the Pope had met Vajpayee when he visited India in November last year. On the Prime Minister's part, it is an attempt to return the "courtesy".

However, attempts to get the two to meet have much to do with the ruling BJP's image in some parts of the world as a hardline Hindu party.

In January 1999, when the murder of Graham Staines in Orissa coincided with a series of attacks against Christians in different parts of the country, India put forward its foreign minister Jaswant Singh to convince the international community that these were "aberrations in the system

and the new government was as committed to secular values of India as its predecessors".

By allowing the Pope to visit India and hold the Asian Bishops' Synod last year, the Vajpayee government had earned several brownie points diplomatically, particularly as it came after China's refusal to let the Synod be held in Hong Kong.

With a fresh series of attacks on Christians, underscored by Brother George's murder in Uttar Pradesh, the Prime Minister's advisers feel that there is once more a need to refurbish the government's image.

One reason for the uncertainty about the meeting is Vatican's reluctance in accepting a visit which is attached to Italy. The geographical proximity between Rome and Vatican has made the latter extremely sensitive to any such practice. The Vatican is keen on an independent visit.

If the visit materialises, Vajpayee may take the opportunity to reassure the Pope that Christians in India are not being targeted and the recent attacks, though unfortunate, should be seen as "stray incidents" and not as a trend. The meeting will also give the Prime Minister a chance to send a signal to Christians in India that they are safe under his rule.

But irrespective of whether Vajpayee gets to meet the Pope, the Prime Minister may feel the need to explain his government's stand to the Italian leaders and, later, other European representatives. Both the European Union and Italy are important for India, not only in the economic field but also politically.

Rights panel order

The National Human Rights Commission today told the Centre and all state governments to file reports on attacks against Christians. (Details on Page 6)

THE TELEGRAPH

27 JUN 2000

Targeting Christians

Even if the recent violence against Christians in Uttar Pradesh is not the handiwork of a single organisation working to a sinister plan, one thing is clear: It is the atmosphere of permissiveness generated by the state and Union governments — and, regrettably, by the ambiguous statements made by the political leadership of the BJP — which is largely to blame. Over the past few years, various front organisations of the *sangh parivar* such as the Bajrang Dal and Sanskriti Raksha Manch have been conducting a shrill campaign against “Christian missionaries”. Christians are alleged to be on the verge of “taking over the country” and of plotting with foreign powers to subvert Hindu culture and “enslave India”. Despite some of these organisations indulging in crude propaganda and violent acts, senior members of the Union government — including Home Minister L K Advani — have gone out of their way to grant them a clean chit. No action has been taken against under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. In the Mathura case, the death in police custody of Vijay Ekka — sole witness to the June 7 murder of a Catholic priest — suggests that matters in UP are more than a bit murky. The Christian community suspects Ekka was deliberately eliminated by the police and that Brother George might have been killed by persons with official or political clout. Although the Criminal Branch of the UP Central Investigative Department (CBCID) is now investigating Ekka’s death and Brother George’s murder — and a judicial commission has also been appointed — there is no reason to believe the truth of the matter will be revealed any time soon.

Though one may never discover the identity or motive of those who killed Brother George in Mathura or who attacked Father Joseph in Kosikalan, it is evident that the assailants acted secure in the knowledge that they would never be apprehended. Even by India’s abysmal standards of law enforcement, the performance of UP’s police force leaves much to be desired. Equally alarming is the extent to which politics in the state has become criminalised. Criminal elements view political parties as a vehicle to advance their interests and, likewise, politicians make free use of gangsters as a means of furthering their own political agendas. It is in this context that organisations like the Bajrang Dal have acquired prominence — and immunity from the laws of the land. Senior BJP leaders seem happier to blame all incidents of violence on Pakistan and on an “international conspiracy” to defame the Vajpayee government than to turn the light inwards and see whether the party’s strident stand against Christian missionaries and religious conversions might have something to do with the recent violence. If anything, the anti-minority propaganda of the *sangh parivar* provides an opportunity for foreign powers to interfere and subvert; all the more reason for any government interested in national security to clamp down on inflammatory campaigns and ensure that every citizen feels secure. Yet on this account, the BJP governments in Lucknow and Delhi have been a dismal failure. Even as it probes the various acts of anti-Christian violence in UP and elsewhere, the Vajpayee government must ensure that the anti-minority rhetoric of the *sangh parivar* is ended immediately.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 JUN 2000

HO-5
25/6

'Christian Marriage Bill must reflect religious aspirations'

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, JUNE 24. At a meeting to discuss the Christian Marriage Bill 2000, Ms. Padmini Jesudurai, Chairperson, TN State Commission for Women, said the legislation should reflect the religious aspirations of the community.

She went on to say that "the Bill being a personal law cannot be non-religious or secular. Nor can it be a replica of the Hindu and Special Marriage Acts", as it would be the first step towards a uniform civil code.

She welcomed some of the recommendations of the Law Commission of India, which had urged that the Act should be amended to do away with the gender discrimination (Section 10).

Another provision requiring that dissolution/annulment (of marriage) of the District Judge be confirmed by a Bench of three judges of the High Court, be deleted. The proposed Bill had recommended that it no longer be confirmed by a superior court and dissolution can be filed at the District/Family Courts instead.

The conference which was organised by the Inter-Church Service Association (ICSA) was attended by representatives of various Christian denominations and organisations.

Emphasising that under the existing Act and

under the 1994 Bill (drawn up by the Joint Women's Programme following a consensus with various Christian denominations), it is not necessary that both parties to a marriage be Christians. It is enough if one is, allowing for mixed marriages in church. Under the Bill 2000, only if both parties were Christians, the marriage could be solemnised under the act. "This change was never asked for by the community and had been introduced only to bring it on par with Hindu Marriage Act, compelling them to opt for a civil marriage instead".

Another significant omission according to Ms. Jesudurai was the clause where "any person including non-Christians can solemnise marriages". This is an uncalled for deviation and is the blatant violation of the rights of minorities. In this connection, she pointed out that HR & CE Act, 1959 required that all appointments shall be to a person professing the Hindu faith and shall cease to hold office as and when he ceases to profess that religion. Correspondingly, the Wakf Act disqualifies non-Muslims from being a member of the Board.

The draft Bill 2000 also makes it mandatory for registering of marriages which would now only apply to Christians, she contended. With the exception of Kerala and Maharashtra, it is not compulsory to register Hindu weddings.

Recording of Muslim wedding is also not obligatory, she said.

Giving a different perspective to the Bill, Ms. Sheila Jayaprakash, senior advocate, felt the draft was too weighty with around 75 sections and emphasised the need for simplification. She was of the view that marriage should retain its religious characteristic while divorce could come under uniform provisions.

On the need for revision, Ms. Arul Mozhi, senior advocate said the laws were archaic and based on British statutes which had been replaced long since. She called for changes in keeping with the present scenario and suggested that a difference between justice and religion be maintained.

Rev. Dr. Gnana Robinson, Chairman, ICSA, acknowledged the need for equality for women in marriage. The religious heritage of the country endorsed women as being inferior including Christian liturgy. However, at the same time the Bill should safeguard the sanctity of family values. Advocating the need to provide for divorce in the Bill, he said it was often an outcome of extreme individualism coupled with materialism. The others who also participated were Dr. P. Moses Manohar, Executive Director and Dr. Ethel Balachandran, co-ordinator, ICSA.

25 JUN 2000

There is no organised drive against Christian community, says PM

ROME: Attacks on members of India's Christian minority are only isolated acts and there is no organised campaign against them, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said here on Sunday.

"There is no ethnic war being waged between Hindus and Christians," Mr Vajpayee said in an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*.

Mr Vajpayee, who arrived here on Sunday on a two-day visit, is set to meet Pope John Paul II on Monday. This visit assumes significance in the light of the recent attacks against Christians.

Mr Vajpayee said those attacking Christians were people who wanted to embarrass his government and promised that they would not remain unpunished.

"We are nationalists because we love our country which embraces Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and so many others," he said. Mr Vajpayee is here to explore new areas of economic cooperation with Italy.

Mr Vajpayee, who was given a warm welcome on arrival, will meet his Italian counterpart Giuliano Amato and President Carlo A. Ciampi on enhancing bilateral cooperation in both political and economic fields and exchange views on evolving a new global financial architecture.

Coming ahead of the first-ever India-European Union summit in Lisbon on June 28, the visit to Italy and Portugal will give a new impetus to relations with EU on both economic and political fronts, the PM said before his departure from New Delhi.

"We have good relations with these countries and our aim is to further cement the bond," he told journalists at the airport before he set on his five-day visit.

On his meeting with the Pope in the context of attacks on Christians in India, Mr Vajpayee said "it is just a courtesy call" and that he would look forward to renewing his dialogue with the Pope to "enhance our mutual understanding."

Meanwhile, finance minister Yashwant

Sinha, on board the special aircraft carrying the prime minister, said that as a leading member of G-20 developing countries India had an "important role to play in evolving an international financial architecture".

He said Mr Vajpayee's interactions with Italian leaders would cover attempts at evolving a new financial order that will seek to prevent recurrence of the global financial crisis like the one witnessed in East-Asia recently.

Mr Sinha said the prime minister's visit was aimed at exchanging views with Italy and other G-7 countries. Italy will be taking over the chairmanship of the world's most power grouping, G-7, from January next year.

"This is a very important issue which will also be discussed at the G-20 finance ministers' conference in Montreal in October next," Mr

Sinha said.

Admitting that the volume of trade and investment between India and Italy was not yet satisfactory, he said there was a need for enhancing cooperation in areas like food processing, information technology and biotechnology.

The finance minister said India wanted greater involvement of Italy in infrastructure sectors like power, road, airport, telecommunication and hydrocarbon.

There was a great scope for enlarging bilateral cooperation apart from learning from Italy's experience in reining in fiscal deficit and privatisation and disinvestment, he said.

Earlier, on his departure from New Delhi Mr Vajpayee said his visit to Italy and Portugal would give a new impetus to India's relations with the EU on both economic and political planes. About his visit to Rome, the PM said Italy was an important interlocutor for India both politically and economically. "It is a significant trading partner and also an important investor in India," he said. (Agencies)



A.B. Vajpayee

PM meets Pope, assures protection to minorities

M. Shakeel Ahmed

ROME 26 JUNE

MEEETING POPE John Paul II in the wake of the recent attacks against Christians and their institutions in India, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Monday, assured the pontiff that his government would deal firmly with the perpetrators of such violence.

Mr Vajpayee, who had a 15-minute meeting with the Pope at the Vatican, said: "The government is deeply concerned about the attacks" and that exemplary punishment should be awarded to those responsible.

The Prime Minister began a hectic day of meetings with the Pope and President Carlo A. Ciampi and held wide-ranging talks with his Italian counterpart, Mr Giuliano Amato.

India and Italy signed an agreement on boosting tourism and decided to explore the possi-

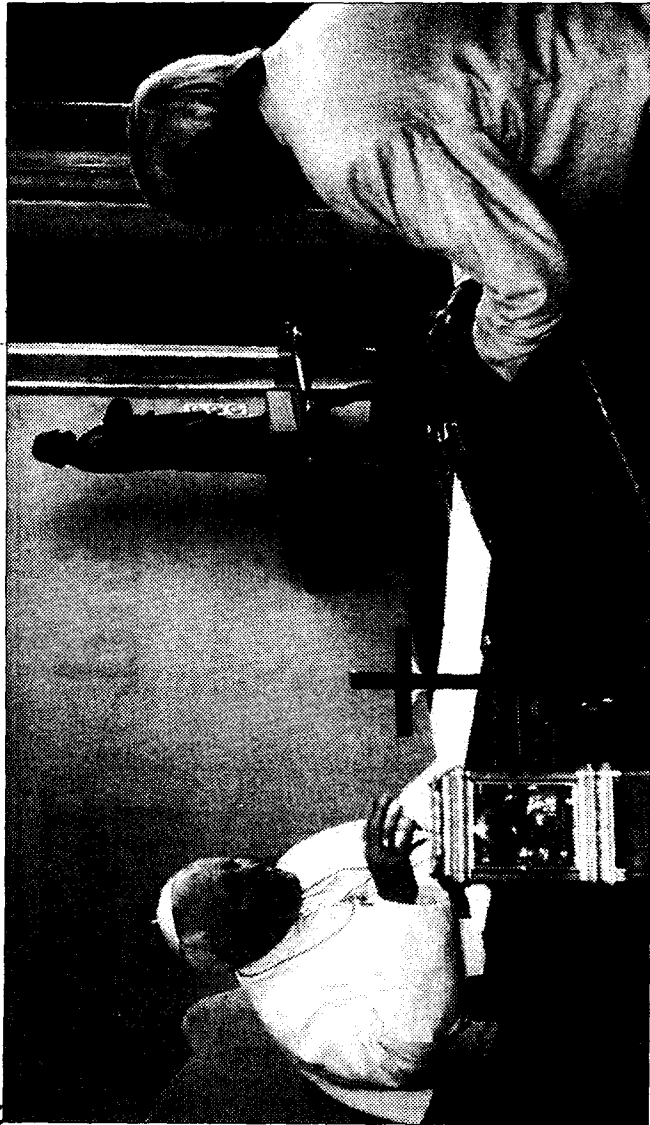
bility of enhancing co-operation in information technology and other knowledge-based sectors. He also sought a greater flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Rome.

The Prime Minister, who arrived here on Sunday on a two-day visit, conveyed to the Pope that all efforts were being made to prevent these incidents and protect the minorities, said the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, to reporters after the meeting.

During the meeting, the Pope is understood to have urged an end to violence against Christians and underlined the importance of freedom of religion and the tradition of religious tolerance in India.

Mr Vajpayee asserted India was open to a composite dialogue process with Pakistan provided Islamabad abjured cross-border terrorism and violence in Jammu & Kashmir

— PTI



TETE-A-TETE: Pope John Paul II and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during their meeting in the Vatican on Monday AP

Another church attacked

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YAVATMAL, JUNE 26. A Roman Catholic church at Pusad town in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra was reportedly ransacked on Saturday night.

The persons who damaged the church entered it through the terrace door and broke the wash basin, windowpanes, lavatory fittings, water pump and drainage pipes.

They also stoned the church as a lot of stones were found inside, police said today.

The damage was discovered on Sunday morning when the priest went to conduct the mass. The extent of damage could not be ascertained, because the priest had left the town without lodging a police complaint.

Mr. Sudhakar Rao Naik, former Maharashtra Chief Minister, is the NCP MLA from Pusad.

An English medium high school run by the Catholic church nuns had been attacked in Yavatmal on April 3, 1999 and the cross atop the building had been destroyed.

— PTI

Our Hyderabad Staff Reporter writes:

A complaint was lodged today with the Vanasthalipuram police about the uprooting of two crosses and a plaque at a cemetery in Shahid Nagar.

According to the police, some persons visited the cemetery ten days ago during the night and did the damage.

However, the incident was not reported to the police immediately.

THE HINDU

21 JUN 2000

19-12 ✓ THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE POPE ✓

WHEN A PRIME Minister under increasing pressure over fierce attacks against Christians in his country calls on the religious head of the world's Catholic community, the meeting is the message. By seeking an audience with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee may have seized an opportunity to try and beam a few reassuring signals abroad as well as back at home. In the face of continuing and relentless assaults against the Christian community, the Prime Minister has struggled to demonstrate that his Government has both the capacity and the will to protect the interests — or indeed sometimes the very lives — of those belonging to minority communities. Just how keen Mr. Vajpayee was on receiving an audience from the Pope may be gauged from the fact that his already tight schedule was altered to accommodate this meeting.

True to expectation, Mr. Vajpayee has used the occasion to reiterate his Government's concern over "the attacks which have taken place on Christians and their institutions" and its resolve to punish all those guilty of such fundamentalist violence. Such statements of reassurance are welcome; but they have been heard before and are unlikely to allay fears unless they are backed by a (hitherto lacking) determination to mercilessly crack down on those responsible for conducting their dangerous and divisive campaigns to pit community against community. In the absence of this, Mr. Vajpayee's meeting with Pope John Paul II will end up as an event of little significance: a mere photo op, a simple public relations exercise.

Mr. Vajpayee was right when he said that there is no "ethnic war" waged against Christians in India. But he surely underplayed the situation by describing the incidents as "isolated acts" and mere aberrations in a general climate of communal peace and harmony. His statement, made on the eve of his visit to Italy,

which urged all State Governments to firmly tackle acts of inter-community violence also needs to be viewed in the right perspective. While the Prime Minister is correct in stating that law and order is a State subject, the point is that the kind of violence which has blighted India over the past couple of years — from Dangs to Staines to the goings-on in States as far-flung as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa — has been underpinned by a hard and unmistakable communal edge. In case after case, the perpetrators of the violence have been those who are motivated by little else than communal hatred. More importantly, there is reason to believe that in a number of cases, the criminals belong to organisations which are linked — in one way or another — to the party which heads the coalition Government at the Centre.

Therefore, while it may be the direct responsibility of State Governments to maintain the peace, the larger question is whether the rash of communal incidents in various parts of the country is an offshoot of the confidence that fundamentalist forces have gained from having what they regard as a friendly — or any rate not too hostile — Government at the Centre. When Pope John Paul II visited India late last year, Mr. Vajpayee was reported to have told the Pontiff during an interaction that India supports religious freedom and that the violence against Christians was the handiwork of an intolerant fringe, some members of which wanted to embarrass his Government. From all appearances, the Prime Minister told the Pope pretty much the same thing during his recent visit to the Vatican. A spate of attacks has occurred between the two meetings. It is ironic that the Prime Minister's explanation for the violence has remained unchanged. And it is only natural that it will find fewer takers than it did the first time around.

28 JUN 200

9 min
9/12/13

Bajrang Dal denies role in attacks on Christians

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 27. The RSS Joint General Secretary, Mr. Madan Das, expressed concern today at the "false allegations against the Sangh" and organisations close to it in the context of violent incidents against Christians and their institutions.

Simultaneously, Mr. Giriraj Kishore, senior leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which "guides" the organisation, led a delegation to meet the National Human Rights Commission here today to plead innocence and clarify that these organisations have no hand in anti-Christian violence. The delegation charged that reports in the press have been concocted to make it appear that the Bajrang Dal was working to throw Christians out of the country.

It seems that the organisation has demanded a CBI inquiry to

establish how a certain news report had quoted its activists making strong anti-Christian statements. Mr. Surendra Jain, an office-bearer, said this was part of a "conspiracy" in which some Christians and "vested interests" in the media were involved. The VHP had also offered to sit across the table and discuss with Christian leaders what steps could be taken to prevent the communalising of the atmosphere.

The NHRC which had asked the Uttar Pradesh Government for a report on the issue is awaiting its response.

Mr. Surendra Singh and other office-bearers said that since the Jhabua rape case more than a year ago a systematic effort had been made to blame it for the different incidents of assaults on Christians and churches. But not a worker had been found to be guilty.

At the same time the VHP and

Bajrang Dal have made it clear that they will not stop their "re-conversion" drive and the campaign against so-called "forced conversions."

Mr. Madan Das, a RSS office-bearer, also made it clear that "the issue of religious conversions" was "capable of provoking protests, particularly in tribal areas" but nevertheless, it "condemns every act of violence against anyone, whether the victim belongs to a minority community or the majority community."

The RSS view was that it was being made the whipping boy to embarrass the NDA Government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party. It noted that a similar attempt was made during the Janata Government from 1977 to 1979. Mr. Madan Das denied that the organisation was a violent or intolerant organisation.

THE HINDU

28 JUN 2000

Minorities panel calls for report on U.P. attacks

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 28. As part of its ongoing discussions with Christian and Hindu leaders, the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), led by its chairman, Justice Mohd. Shamim, convened yet another meeting here with representatives of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI).

On Monday, the Archbishop and president of the Catholic Bishops Council of India, Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios, called on the NCM members and stressed the importance of continuing the dialogue between leaders of both communities. Both the meetings are seen as "significant gestures on the part of the Christian leaders in helping to restore mutual trust and confidence."

At yesterday's meeting also be-

tween the NCM and the NCCI, both sides expressed concern over and condemned the recent, growing atrocities on Christians and reiterated their resolve to sort out the problems. After the two rounds of talks, the NCM has called for an "urgent report" from the Uttar Pradesh Government on the recent incidents in the State. It has also assured the Christian community that the "culprits would be dealt with with a heavy hand."

During the talks, Justice Shamim expressed dismay at the "situation where small incidents were blown out of proportion in various quarters to give an impression as though the entire country was against Christians." He said, "It is totally against the ethos and secular fabric of the country."

29 JUN 2 1970

Govt puts Christian marriage Bill on hold

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, June 28: The Centre today decided to shelve the Bill to amend Christian law on marriage, divorce and inheritance.

"It is a collective decision of the Prime Minister and the home and law ministers," official sources said. They added that the legislation, drafted after consulting around 20 Christian organisations and MPs, will not be introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament, scheduled to begin on July 24.

According to political sources, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee decided to

go slow on the proposal as he did not want to provoke the community at a time when it is seething at the spate of attacks on missionaries and churches.

The sources added that the Bill would "certainly" be taken up later and leaders of all denominations of Christianity would be consulted to find a consensus.

The decision to put on hold the legislation can be seen as another positive gesture towards the church after Vajpayee's Vatican mission.

But the move is a blow to law minister Ram Jethmalani, who was one of the moving forces behind the unpopular Bill.

Jethmalani had convened a meeting of Christian leaders where he and his deputy, O. Rajagopal, made it clear that the community's laws needed to be overhauled.

While acknowledging that changes were necessary to the 1869 Act, the Christian leaders objected to some of the amendments on inter-community marriages and on divorce. The protest was led by the late Delhi archbishop Alan De Lastic.

According to the draft Bill, a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian will be brought under the Special Marriage Act instead of the Christian Marriage Act. The government also said that

district courts can henceforth be the final arbiter of divorce. So far, a ruling on divorce had to be upheld by the high courts.

Some Christians also frowned on the move to grant "gender equality" while deciding on divorce. A woman has to prove any two of the three grounds of insanity, cruelty and adultery to seek dissolution of marriage, while a man needs to cite one.

Jethmalani had asserted that the government's move should not be seen as interference by the BJP in the personal laws of communities. But, he added, in a democracy, the government has the mandate to regulate certain procedures.

THE TELEGRAPH

79 JUN 2000

CONSPIRACY THEORY

Attacks continue as PM reassures Pope

EVEN as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was defending his government in a fifteen minute meeting with Pope John Paul at the Vatican and assuring the Pontiff that those guilty of attacking Christians across the country would be punished, Christian graves were being desecrated in Hyderabad and a bomb exploded in a mosque at Guntur. The Indian government is already facing severe criticism in the West because of repeated incidents of churches and Bibles being burned, missionaries being killed and nuns being raped which have intensified in the last two years. Till date not a single culprit has been brought to book. Even the trial of Dara Singh, the main accused in the Staineses' murders, perhaps the most heinous of the crimes against Christians, is yet to begin. The country's image as a secular nation took a bashing in 1992 with the demolition of the Babari Masjid, and this has now been compounded with increasing attacks on another minority. The PM's meeting with the Pope was put together in the hope that it would go some way towards quietening the criticism and instil confidence among the minorities. He must have been at the receiving end of some plain speaking from a Pope who knows his mind, but the PM's efforts are to no avail if the attacks continue and spread to other areas.

Brajesh Mishra's protestations to the joint Indo-Italian media in Rome that all minorities are secure in India sound hollow when attacks on places of worship occur the very same day. Minorities will only feel safe when attacks stop and they will not stop until the government demonstrate their firmness in tracking down and prosecuting the culprits. The RSS and VHP continue their campaign of hate, but insist they have no hand in the attacks as they do not believe in violence. This is hard to accept on their record — the Babari Masjid was destroyed in the presence of the world's media — but of course now the parivar say it fell down all by itself. The VHP-Bajrang Dal insist that they are being blamed for the attacks on Christians merely to malign the Parivar. The conspiracy was sought to be blamed on the ISI, then it was shifted to thieves and robbers and now it is part of a grand design by missionaries themselves and some newspapers. The missionaries are killing themselves in their desire to blame the parivar just as the Babari Masjid fell down by itself to achieve the same end. The VHP are innocent. Try something not quite so stupid!

THE STATESMAN

30 JUN 2000

Christian council assails minority panel's report

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 2

HT-22
THE ALL-India Christian Council today sharply criticised the report of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) for terming the attacks on the Christian community in the country as unconnected acts of petty criminals or accidents.

Dismissing the report as a political move to divert attention from the communal motives behind such incidents, council president Joseph D'Souza said the Christians were being targeted for the past three years by the Sangh Parivar which wanted to continue its agenda of "one nation, one culture."

"We are aghast at the report in which the National Commission for Minorities finds the series of

attacks on Catholic nuns, priests, preaching teams, schools and churches in Agra, Mathura, Kosi Kalan, Bijnore and other areas of the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to be unconnected acts of petty criminals or accidents," it was pointed out in a joint statement signed by Mr D'Souza and representatives of other Christian organisations.

The other signatories included Gospel for Asia head K P Yohannan and All-India Christian Voice national convenors Sajan K George and John Dayal.

"We are distressed that the Minorities Commission and others have kept quiet while these fascist forces spew such hate, coercing minorities and the downtrodden," they said in the statement.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 MAY 2000

Dara produced in court, next hearing on 1 June

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, May 2. — The CBI today produced Ravindra Kumar Pal alias Dara Singh and 13 others, accused of killing the Staineses, before the District and Sessions Judge, Mr MN Patnaik. The judge posted the matter for framing of charges to 1 June.

This was Dara's first appearance after commitment to the District and Sessions Judge Court. The others, arrested earlier than Dara, had appeared before the court. But today Dara's case and theirs were merged.

The CBI had filed a charge-sheet in the Staines murder case on 23 June 1999, showing Dara as an absconder. The CBI had arrested some of his associates and named others as absconders in the charge-sheet. The CBI had then indicated that it had recorded statements of witnesses saying Dara had campaigned for a candidate during a Lok Sabha election. He was also reported to have links with some unnamed organisation. However, while filing the charge-sheet, CBI said it had no proof whether any other organisation was also behind the killings.

Dara interview: The government will scrutinise transcripts and video clippings of Dara's interviews in jail, before they are published. If anything is deemed to give unhealthy publicity or thought to lead to communal discord will be censored.

This authorisation was given to the state government by Orissa High Court yesterday while giving judicial sanction for interviewing Dara Singh in jail custody to the *India Today*, Spctranet (a Delhi-based Internet news service) and an Oriya fortnightly. The division bench comprising Justice Pradipta Ray and Justice Laxmikant Mohapatra, however, specified that only accredited correspondents of the above three organisations will be entitled to interview Dara Singh. The interview should not be more than one hour and should be conducted within 10 days.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 2 2000

Four killed in communal clash, curfew in Jirania

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

AA-3
Agartala, May 2: Curfew has been imposed in Jirania after four persons were killed in a communal clash, soon after the first phase of the Autonomous District Council elections was over in the state.

Clashes began on Monday morning when National Liberation Front of Tripura militants attacked Bengali farmers at Dudhpatil village in Jirania, 35 km from Agartala. Militants gunned down two persons, Gopal Das Baishnab, 50, and Krishna Debnath, 35. The incident sparked off communal tension in the area. An irate mob in retaliation pulled down tribal passengers and lynched them at Mohonpur market. Seven persons were hurt in the mob fury while two died of their injuries at the GB Hospital. Police said the victims have not been identified.

The district magistrate had imposed a 24-hour curfew in the region which was to be over by 12 pm on Tuesday. But this has been extended till Wednesday morning. The incident has aggravated the situation in the state which will

hold the second phase of ADC election on Wednesday when 2,86,228 voters in South Tripura district will exercise their franchise to elect 12 members. A CPI(M) member has already been declared elected uncontested from the district.

A police spokesman said elaborate arrangements have been made to ensure free and fair polls in the second phase. Election commission's secretary Kishor Ambuly has expressed satisfaction over the measures.

Meanwhile, the ruling Left Front has criticised the election commission for ignoring its demand for repoll in 138 polling booths, where poll procedure was disrupted during the first phase. The commission has ordered a repoll only in 14. Repoll in two booths passed off peacefully on Tuesday, the rest will be held on May 4 and 5.

In a statement the front said the commission's decision would help Indeginious People's Front of Tripura who had intimidated voters with the help of NLFT militants. It has urged the commission to reconsider its decision.

THE ASIAN AGE

MAY 2 1988

Christians oppose Govt move to present marriage bill

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

THE Christian community on Monday strongly opposed the Government's move to introduce the Christians Marriage Bill 2000 in Parliament in its present form.

Leaders of the Catholics Bishops' Conference of India (CBI) and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) addressing a joint press conference here said they had proposed certain changes in the draft before taking it to Parliament and had handed over to Law Minister Ram Jethmalani written suggestions covering various modifications that the Christian community had sought.

Delhi archbishop Alan de Las-

tic said the Draft Bill with draws important freedoms historically enjoyed by Christians. Hitherto marriages could solemnised in the church when one party was a Christian and both wanted to wed in church. This right has been taken away. The new Bill restricts church marriages only when both partners are Christians and forces mixed couples to go for a marriage under the special marriage act. Also under the new bill severe restrictions have been placed on priests performing marriages in church with penalties for violations of regulations going up to ten years in prison and fines.

Describing the Bill as part of the hostile activity against the church the archbishop apprehended that the punitive provi-

sions could be misused. He demanded that personal laws of the minorities should not be interfered with and if needed, any amendments be done in consultation with and on the appeal of the minorities only.

The archbishop said they had waited for the Government response to the Bill for three years but the Government had now "rushed into it" and given them only about ten days to consider. They suspected some design behind the Government's hurried move to present the Bill before Parliament. He said they had asked for an appointment with Jethmalani to explain to him their point of view.

The Law Minister had convened a meeting of church leaders

and several other organisations on April 28 to discuss the Christian Marriage Bill, 1994, prepared by the JWP and the ecumenical committee for changes in Christian marriage law. He reportedly told those attending the meeting that he would introduce the Christian Marriages Bill 2000 in the current session of Parliament. The draft Christian Marriage Bill, 2000, supports the proposal made by the JWP Bill 1994. It strikes down Section 10 of the Divorce Act 1969, removes the clause on minor marriages in Christian Marriage Act 1972, provides for right to matrimonial home in the case of divorce and also provides for divorce by mutual consent.

"We felt very happy when the Law Minister gave indication that

the Government was willing to introduce the legislation we sought... upon examining the draft bill we found several major shortcomings in the draft bill which we pointed out during the meeting. We strongly urged the government that the draft bill could not be introduced in Parliament in its present form." Archbishop de Lastic, who is also president of the CBI, said the Bill seeks to describe "marriage as a contract while as marriage is something sacred. The bill also tends to liberate divorce which is clearly discriminatory".

Rev Oswald Gracias, general secretary of the CBI, who was also at the press conference, said their criticism of the Bill in the present form should not be mis-

understood as the Christians blocking an important piece of legislation. "In fact we only want certain amendments in the Bill in its present form before it goes to Members of Parliament," he added. The two leaders said the church in India had been demanding for a long time a new legislation to replace the existing four acts on marriage, divorce, adoption and succession. Some of these laws date back to the 19th century.

After intensive discussions within the Christian community, drafts of four bills were submitted to the Government about 12 years ago.

Since then successive governments were requested to expedite the bills.

INDIAN EXPRESS

3 MAY 2000

Masked men beat up nuns in Jhansi

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, May 4. — Six masked men assaulted nuns at a Jhansi convent on 2 May, desecrated their prayer room, and looted money and valuables, according to a delayed report.

The All India Catholic Union said today the men forced their entry into the convent, breaking the locks on its collapsible gate. They cut the telephone cable, beat up the nuns and took away Rs 12,000 in cash, a tape recorder, wrist watches and three silver chains.

Before leaving, they barged into the chapel, found the keys to the tabernacle, and desecrated it.

The National Commission for Minorities had recently dismissed, in its report, the attacks on Christian institutions in the state as a law and order problem.

The BJP issued a statement today commending the NCM for its "factual report" on the string of attacks.

The NCM had denied any political angle in similar attacks in Agra, Mathura and Rewari last month and dismissed them as "robbery and law and order problem".

BJP leader Mr Venkaiah Naidu said the NDA government's track record showed that "there is complete harmony among all sections of people. During this period least number of communal clashes took place."

Dangs violence

At Subeer, 33 km from Ahwa in Dangs district, a group of Christians was beaten up during a light-and-sound show last night.

The Catholic Union general secretary said a group of people, led by one Navaneether, attacked the Christians during the show. Police protected their van and equipment, and arrested Mr Navaneethar and eight others.

Later, protesters sat on a dharna outside the police station where the trouble-makers were kept, he said.

Cong poll schedule

NEW DELHI, May 4.— The Congress today announced a fresh seven-month organisational election schedule. This will include election of the new party president by 3 November this year. The last election for the party president's post was held some three decades ago.

Chairman of the Congress election authority, Mr Ram Nivas Mirdha, said the polls "will no longer be postponed under any circumstance". — SNS

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2000

Trapping minorities, Gujarat style

Rathin Das
Gandhinagar, May 6

AFTER BEATING an ignominious retreat on the RSS circular issue, the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat has unveiled yet another sinister plan against the minorities. A booklet on how to implicate the minorities in court cases has been in circulation in the state for about three months now.

Titled *Hinduno Bachao -- akraman ane kayedo* (Save Hindus -- attacks and laws), the 12-page booklet is supposed to be a guideline for framing charges, false as well as genuine, against the minorities under the existing laws.

Top State police officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, do acknowledge that the booklet has been in circulation for nearly two to three months.

The booklet has no printline, nor does it name the author. But the

have been levelled against Christian missionaries in Gujarat.

But the most startling aspect of the booklet is the glorification of an incident in Halvad town of Surendranagar district in which a crowd had beaten to death a Muslim boy and an adult Brahmin girl in full view of the judge and court officials. None could be punished because thousands were involved.

Regretting that in cases of elopement of adult girls their families are not enthusiastic (about the rescue operation), it advises, "Even by using threats and punishment and taking law into our hands and unmindful of any violence or untoward incident, we should take the girl into our custody."

Indeed, incidents of Sangh Parivar activists taking law into their hands abound, even long before the booklet was put into clandestine circulation.

Fresh attack on Christians

BAJRANGDAL activists on Friday evening attacked some Christians who were distributing copies of the Bible and other evangelical literature, in Ahmedabad. Copies of the Bible and other leaflets were also burnt by the activists, who attacked the Christian activists with lathis and sharp-edged weapons. According to police, two Dal activists were arrested. The incident took place when people from the Bible House were distributing handouts.

HTC, Ahmedabad

we file to take revenge, we should implicate the top authorities of the mission and if possible, foreign missionaries also."

"They may not be convicted in the court in the end, but they should be made to go up and down the court for months on end... harassment is also a type of punishment."

In fact this booklet, which has a chapter on how Bakr Id was disrupted, is proof of the motivated nature of allegations of rape and allurements for conversion that

needle of suspicion is naturally on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad which had orchestrated similar campaigns in the past.

"At one place, the booklet says 'Now that we have our own government, we should take proper advantage of it and get our work done by it.'"

Apart from delivering guidelines about how to make use of the laws to register complaints against minorities for their Vidharmi (non-believer's) act, the booklet actually advises, "In the complaints

INDUSTRIAL TIMES

MAY 2001

Mob attack on Christians

Nashik Christian meet

attacks

agitors then shattered the glasses and attempted to set fire to the "Bookmobile" (an Eicher minibus — MH 12 AQ 1128) of the Rural Literature District Division, Pune.

The unit chief of the bookmobile, Rev K P Ranasingh, said the mob threw away the books and cassettes and set fire to the screen on which the film was being shown. He said his unit had arrived in Abhona on Monday from Nashik for exhibiting the religious literature. According to the driver of the Bookmobile William Pawar and projector operator George Massey, the mob comprised youngsters most of who were in an inebriated state. No organisation has yet claimed responsibility for the attack but the hand of the Bajrang Dal or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad which have been targeting Christian missionaries in

the last two years is suspected, though police have not named them officially.

Abhona, however, spent a tense day today by observing a spontaneous bandh against the "wrongful" arrest of college students in connection with the incident. Local leaders said no organisation or party had given the bandh call. The bandh was being observed in protest against the arrest of college and school-going boys for the riot, they said. The NDCC has been running a hostel for primary school girls. It is now housed in rented premises. About 60 girls (mostly non-Christians, according to Ashok Abraham) are lodged there. The institution has started constructing a new hostel on the outskirts of Abhona for shifting the hostel.

told *The Indian Express* that the three-day, 45th annual convention of the Evangelical Alliance-Christian Church and Nashik District Church Council (NDCC) was in progress in the under-construction premises of the NDCC's new hostel for girls. The conference had started off on Monday in a *shamiana* on the premises. Tuesday night, after a religious discourse by Dr Mohan Ram and dinner, a full-length film in Marathi entitled "Jesus" was being screened for the 60 to 65 delegates to the convention. The film started around 9.00 pm

and at 10.30, the mob entered the spot shouting slogans such as "Jai Hanuman", "Jai Shivaji" and "Jai Bhavani".

They pelted stones, broke tubelights and attacked the members of the audience with sticks and pipes. Two persons, Ambadas Chaudhari and Rajani Ashok Budha, were injured in the attack. They were treated at a private hospital and discharged today.

Ambadas Chaudhari, who was injured in the attack said the mob set fire to three motorcycles. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

RSS reiterates charge against Christian MPs

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 14. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh today accused Christian MPs and Church leaders of "anti-Sangh Parivar propaganda" and "making an issue out of non-existent events". In an open letter to all MPs, the intellectual wing of the RSS, "Prajna pravah", reiterated the charge that missionaries were engaged in large-scale conversions.

The letter, which is likely to evoke a strong reaction, advised Christian bodies to verify facts before making public accusations against the RSS. "They should look into church propaganda and literature which is often derogatory to non-Christians to the point of being offensive," says the letter, written by Mr. Rajendra Chaddha, joint coordinator of "Prajna pravah".

The Church and its leaders were "using all means, fair and foul, to sell their gospel and spread falsehood about India and Hindus. They are in the habit of making an issue out of a non-existent event", it adds. "Even a theft in a Christian house these days is claimed to be part of an anti-Christian drive."

The letter comes in the wake of the newly-formed Christian MPs Forum expressing concern over the

recent attacks on minorities and distribution of hate literature by Hindu organisations. The RSS and its affiliated organisations have come under fire in Parliament and outside on these issues.

On the two incidents in Rewari (Haryana) and Agra (Uttar Pradesh), the letter claimed that in the former case, "even the two nuns and local Christian leaders expressed surprise as to how such an incident could be termed an attack on Christians".

In Agra, where a group of Christian missionaries were attacked, the letter said the "local population" had opposed the move of some Christians "who landed in the village that morning and entered the temple with their shoes on".

Questioning why Christians were not raising their voice against rape and attacks on the religious institutions of other communities, the letter wondered "why do they not protest against religious atrocities in the Kashmir Valley?"

To "substantiate" its claim of Christian missionaries carrying out mass conversions, it referred to the report of the Justice Wadhwa Commission which inquired into the Graham Staines murder. It also referred to several Church publications, including the World Christian Encyclopaedia and the Delhi Catholic Directory.

15 MAY 2000

Not a coincidence

THE NATIONAL Commission for Minorities has ruled out any communal overtones to the recent attacks on Christians. As the commission's vice-chairman pointed out, the Christian community is simply harbouring "outlandish apprehensions about the Hindu fanatical fringes" after being fed by "exaggerated accounts" by the media. In other words, law and order problems are supposedly being paraded as acts of communal violence for nefarious purposes. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who had earlier asked for a probe into the attacks, is also upset about the doubts expressed on the commission's report. However, on the face of statistical evidence alone, it would take a great leap of faith to believe that the recent spate of violence against Christians is nothing but a string of disjointed events. It does not take much analytical prowess to realise that by clubbing these attacks with everyday law and order problems, one is taking the first step to deny the existence of Hindu religious fundamentalism in this country.

That there has been a sustained campaign against Christians cannot be denied. As the poison has spread, the fallout has been disastrous. How else can one explain the growing number of attacks which are being carried out with increasing boldness presumably because the perpetrators are let off with only a rap on the knuckles? The fact that Christians are being targeted in Indore, Nasik, Meerut and other parts of the country, point to the fact that the "logic of coincidence" cannot be stretched any more. It also seems that absolving the fundamentalist organisations or individuals cannot amount to much when simultaneously there are declamations by serious functionaries of these outfits about a "Christian menace".

Given the obvious motivation, why does it become so difficult to link these acts of violence with a communally-charged programme? It will be a grave mistake to provide simplistic explanations for what is evidently a very disturbing development. The social fabric will come under enormous strain if the "lunatic fringe" can get away with its insensate acts of violence. After all, what can benefit these groups more than being written off as ordinary criminals simply disrupting law and order?

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAY 1993

FELLING FANATICS

Government Has To Protect Minorities

By HL KAPOOR

RECENT attacks on Christian missionaries in the country have established once again that such attacks are carefully planned in advance by anti-national elements to serve vested interests and give it a religious hue. The murderous attacks are designed to frighten the Christian missionaries. The killing of Graham Staines and two sons in Orissa had little effect on the government. Though it was announced more than once that the government will leave no stone unturned to initiate action against the murderers, nothing concrete has been done to ensure that such shameless and ghastly incidents do not recur.

The attack on the Christians continue. Recently, Christians were attacked in Mathura and Agra. Even Haryana has not lagged behind. There have been as many as five incidents in Haryana during the last year, says the All-India Christian Council, the Rewari incident being the latest attack. Bajrang Dal activists have argued that the Christian Missionaries are converting Hindus. If this is true, the assailants should have lodged a report with the police for action against forced conversions.

ATTACKS

The absence of such a report falsifies the Bajrang Dal's allegations. Dal activists had been exculpated in the Staines killing, their anti-minority activities thus being encouraged, by the home minister. He will perhaps now be more than convinced about the culpability of the Bajrang Dal and urge state governments to be proactive about protecting the minorities.

The premeditated attack on Christians pose a serious threat to the very fabric of the nation; communal tensions and their ugly manifestations pose a serious law and order problem. The intelligence agencies, on whom lakhs of rupees are lavished, have failed to monitor the situation so as to prevent further attacks on Christians. Lack of coordination between intelligence agencies and district police has preempted the possibility of preventive action, which in turn has allowed communal tension to spiral out of control.

A lot can be done to prevent communal attacks. Legal cells can be set up in sensitive districts/cities to analyse the causes of attacks on minorities. These inputs can help intelligence agencies to detect underlying patterns behind communal attacks, and thus predict and preempt such attacks in future. But the will to act is in short supply. The government must not abdicate its responsibility to enforce the rule of law. The minorities must feel satisfied that action is being taken to protect them.

The author is former Assistant Commissioner of Police, Delhi.

Murderous attack on Christian missionaries and Bible-burning has rocked the Lok Sabha. While members, cutting across party lines, condemned the incidents, a BJP member of the Lok Sabha, Vijay Kumar Malhotra, tried to play down the incidents and communalise the issue when he said: "Opposition members remained silent when Hindus were attacked in J&K." Statements such as this will only encourage the wrongdoers. The attack



on Hindus in J&K is no justification for attacks on minorities by the majority community elsewhere.

Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion is guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution. Article 25 guarantees to every person, not merely citizens of India, the freedom of conscience and the right to profess and propagate religion. The Supreme Court has held that "to profess a religion means the right to declare freely and openly one's faith" (Punjab Rao vs DP Mesh Ram — AIR 1965 SC 1179; 1965, SCR 849 refers). Further, religious practices or performances in pursuance of religious belief are as much a part of religion as faith or belief in particular doctrines (Rati Lal Pun Chand Gandhi vs state of Bombay 1954 SCR 1965; AIR 1954 SC 388 refers).

RIGHTS

However the Supreme Court in the case of Ramji Lal Modi vs state of UP held that Section 295A IPC is not inconsistent with Article 25 as it imposes a restriction in the interest of public order, that is, makes punishable deliberate and malicious acts outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India (AIR 1957 SC 620; 1957 SCR 860; Sant Das vs Babu Ram; AIR — 1969 Allahabad 436). Thus forcible conversion attracts the provision of Section 295A IPC and constitutes an offence. Article 25 gives permission to propagate freely one's religious views. It is immaterial whether the propagation is made by a person in his private capacity or on behalf of a Church or any other religious institution. (AIR 1954 SC 388 refers).

Article 30 of the Constitution guarantees to minorities the right to establish and administer institutions of their choice

and enjoins on state governments the responsibility of granting aid to minority educational institutions without discrimination on the ground that it is under the management of a religious or linguistic minority.

The Supreme Court has held that the right established under Article 30 is intended to be a real right for protection of the minorities in the matter of setting up of educational institutions of their choice. But the right to recognition is not a fundamental right (Kerala

Education Bill 1957, 1959, SCR 995; AIR 1958 SC 956 refers). Former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Justice AN Ray observed in the Ahmedabad St Xavier College Society case that the object of conferring this right to minorities under Article 30 is to ensure that there will be equality between the minority and majority communities. If the minorities do not have such equal protection, they will be denied equality.

Reference to constitutional provisions is aimed at making religious fanatics understand that the minorities have equal rights under the Constitution. This should be drummed into the thick heads of religious fanatics.

RESTRAINT

The majority community has a moral responsibility to promote harmony by reassuring the minorities and making them feel secure. It should exercise restraint even in the face of provocation, taking recourse, when needed, in the law. Tolerance is the basic tenet of Hinduism. Mutual faith leading to national integration, in the words of Radhakrishnan, cannot be built by "brick and mortar". It should come from within human beings.

When attacks on minorities take place, the responsibility must be fixed expeditiously: local police and district officials must be made accountable. In case there is recurrence of attacks in one area, the DM and SP concerned must be penalised. Intelligence gathering has to be made more effective and close surveillance kept on *agents provocateur*. If there is apprehension of breach of peace, known fanatics should be detained and security proceedings launched under preventive sections of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The government must initiate steps to ensure safety of minorities. Exemplary punishment for communal agitators, especially those who are active in persecuting the minorities, is necessary.

The law must provide for such punishment. In the ultimate analysis, what is required is political will — the government must make it absolutely clear that attacks on minorities will not be tolerated, and that heavy-handed executive action will be employed, if necessary, to break the back of majoritarian disorder.

MC-13

Divorced from reality ^{9 minutes}

The Christian community's protests against amending the Christian Marriage Act is not based on reason or the law of the land, argues TAHIR MAHMOOD

THE DRAFT Bill prepared by the Union Law Ministry for the reform of the Christian personal law has turned controversial. Some Christian organisations are loudly protesting against some of its provisions. Among these provisions is the proposed amendment of Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act of 1872.

The Christians have reportedly rejected this as "undue interference" in their religious affairs. Their viewpoint in this regard is, however, legally untenable. Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act of 1872 is now *ultra vires* — beyond the legal power — of the Constitution of India. Its proposed amendment will, therefore, be perfectly legal as well as unavoidable.

By virtue of Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act, all marriages — not only between two Christians, but also between a Christian and a non-Christian — are without an exception to be solemnised according to Christian religious rites alone. Any such marriage "if solemnised otherwise" shall be "void". This provision is clearly untenable in law for more than one reason.

First, the Indian National Law furnishes to all Indian citizens, irrespective of their religion, and is applicable to both religious and civil marriages. Under the Special Marriage Act of 1954, a civil marriage is possible whether the parties belong to the same religion or are of different religious persuasions. This provision does not make any exception for Christians. Making an exception would, in fact, have been palpably discriminatory.

In view of this provision of the Special Marriage Act, Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act of 1872 (which it does not specifically protect) has already become ineffective. In fact, it disallows the solemnisation of the marriage of a Christian

PLATFORM

except when dealing strictly as per Christian rites.

Second, the Christian religious law is not the only such law to allow an inter-religious marriage. The Islamic law also permits a Christian-Muslim marriage in some cases, to be solemnised as per Muslim rites and governed by the Muslim law. Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act had made this provision of Islamic

un-Constitutional.

In respect of an inter-religious marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian, the Christian Marriage Act may now at best allow it to be solemnised as per Christian rites. It cannot rule that such a marriage can take place only according to those rites. In the fitness of things, all inter-religious marriages should be governed by the Special Marriage Act. However, since the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 allows inter-religious marriages (to a limited extent, of course), the provision of the Christian Marriage Act for such marriages cannot be regarded as un-Constitutional. However, it now needs to be only a permissive provision and can no longer remain mandatory.

During 1997-98, while heading the National Commission for Minorities, I had tried to evolve a consensus among all the Christian groups on the three Bills for the reform of the Christian law which had been drafted by the Joint Women's Programme and sent to the Law Ministry and the commission. After some modifications — to which all the Christian groups had agreed on — these Bills were sent to the Union Law Ministry.

In July 1999, the Ministry sent its own Christian Family Laws (Amendment) Bill to the commission. It stated that the Government proposed to enact it by an Ordinance. I had then advised the Government not to rush through the Bill and to allow a proper debate on it in and outside Parliament.

It is perhaps the same Bill of 1999 on which the Ministry has now consulted the Christians and against which there are objections to some of its provisions. One is not aware of the nature of other objections from Christians, but their displeasure on the proposed amendment of Section 4 of the Christian Marriage Act is ludicrous.



law inoperative in India. This arbitrary preference of one religious law over the other, which had been imposed by the British rulers of India, is now un-Constitutional in view of the legal equality given to all religions in the country.

The Christian Marriage Act can, therefore, only provide that the marriage between two Christians "may" (not must) be solemnised according to its provisions. Since all non-Christian citizens, including Hindus and Muslims, have a choice between their religious law and the law of civil marriages, closing the doors of the law of civil marriages to Christians will be

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MINORITIES

MAY 1999

Review Old Models

A Fair Share for Minorities

By IQBAL A ANSARI

WHILE electoral behaviour of Muslims as a minority group in all parliamentary and assembly elections, has been extensively reported and analysed in the media and scholarly studies, the pattern of the community's representation in legislatures has not received much attention. Muslim community forums have, however, lately been raising the issue of adequate representation, though not conceived in terms of ethno-religious nationalism but to ensure their full participation in the national life. The issue requires to be studied in all its dimensions, especially now that the working of the Constitution is under review. Of the ten expert committees constituted by the review commission, the one on electoral reforms, besides those on fundamental rights and the SC, ST, OBCs and minorities, will have to address issues related to minorities.

With only 31 Muslim members getting elected to the present Lok Sabha, is the the community's representation declining as it is being generally viewed? Is there an explanation for this in terms of the increasing caste-community consideration of voters?

The actual figures tell a different story. In the very first Lok Sabha (1952) there were 22 Muslim members which was about 4.4 per cent of its strength, whereas Muslims constituted about 9.9 per cent of the population. The figures for subsequent elections are: 1957(23), 1962(23), 1967(29), 1971(29), 1977(34), 1980(49), 1984(45), 1989(29), 1991 (27), 1996(27), 1998(29), 1999 (31).

Low Representation

Except for the seventh (1980) and the eighth (1984) Lok Sabhas when Muslim representation peaked at 9.2 per cent and 8.7 per cent, it has ranged between 4.4 per cent to 6.6 per cent, the average coming to 5.8 per cent, whereas the average percentage of their population during the period has been 11 per cent. In some state assemblies, Muslim representation has been 11 per cent. In other state assemblies, Muslim representation has been far less. The previous Madhya Pradesh assembly, for example, did not have a single Muslim member. How can one explain this consistent pattern of under-representation of a significant religious minority in the central legislature, which is one of the indicators of a group's share in power? The answer lies partly in the first-past-the-post electoral system, the con-

stituency formation and in the territorial dispersal of Muslim population, so that there are only 11 parliamentary constituencies where Muslims can expect to get elected on their own strength.

The explanation lies partly in the behaviour of political parties and the voters. While the BJP's ideological constraints make it deny due representation to Muslims, the calculation of other 'secular' parties makes them show due consideration to the caste factor in the selection of candidates. In case they decide to give a party ticket to a Muslim, their social base does not get automatically transferred in favour of an 'outgroup' candidate, though cases of some Muslims getting elected from overwhelmingly non-Muslim constituencies is not uncommon.

Equitable Share

It is thus obvious that given the electoral system and voter behaviour and the dispersal of Muslims, their numerically adequate representation in the legislatures cannot be ensured. Should this cause any concern to those who want the political process and power structure in India to be truly participatory? It is unfortunate that having witnessed the results of successive elections, the political class did not address the issue of adequate minority representation in elected bodies, though lately it has prominently figured in the Muslim agenda, as this is considered one of the sources of social and economic deprivation. Is there any real linkage between the two? Or does the issue lie entirely in the domain of political psychology? Even if it is latter, it cannot be dismissed as unreal.

The implications of ethno-religious nationalism requiring Muslims to be treated as a separate political community and the demand for their adequate representation in legislatures in a common polity under joint electorate are quite different. Any new formulation like the proportional representation system, the list system or certain double-member constituencies, which could ensure adequate numerical representation to minorities within the common polity should lead to their greater integration in the system. A study on minorities in all parts of the world carried out by Claire Palley establishes the thesis that in those countries where there are fair arrangements for equitable sharing of power and resources by minorities, the system enjoys peace and stability and

those that do not ensure such an arrangement are ridden with strife.

As early as May 1930, Nehru in his *Note on Minority* published in *Young India* had made similar observations that there could be no stable equilibrium in any country without fair treatment of minorities. About the method of their representation he had observed that it must be such as to carry the goodwill of the minorities. It is this consideration which made the Indian National Congress give repeated assurance to minorities that seats in legislatures would be reserved for them on the basis of their population under joint electorate. Ultimately this promise got written into the Draft Constitution as Articles 292 and 294. Provision was also made for due representation of minorities in the cabinet under a schedule to the Constitution. Under the shadow of partition these special measures for protection of political rights of minorities were removed.

It needs to be recalled that while deleting these provisions of reserved seats for religious minorities in May 1949, Nehru had given the assurance in the Constituent Assembly that even without any statutory safeguards the majority would not only be fair and just but also generous to them. He called it an act of faith. The working of the electoral system, however, has demonstrated that given the constraints, magnanimity of the majority itself cannot make much difference in practical terms.

Act of Faith

The modifications that are required within the existing electoral system for the minorities to get their fair share need to be explored by political theorists and practitioners. The Motilal Nehru report of 1928 and the debate in the Constituent Assembly in August 1947 and May 1949 are quite instructive in this regard.

It needs to be stressed that none of these reforms would require any amendment of the Constitution. Second, it should not be forgotten that the adoption of some alternative to the present Westminster model was high on the non-Congress national agenda from the 1970s. It is unfortunate that the issue of due representation of minorities never figured in the terms of reference of any of the earlier official as well as non-official electoral reform committees.



Christians may oppose marriage Bill

5/8

29/5

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 28. — The proposed Christian marriage Bill, which the Union law minister has said will be tabled during the monsoon session, could face stiff opposition from Christian leaders if their views are ignored.

The Union law minister, Mr Ram Jethmalani, who spoke to **The Statesman** recently, was confident that a consensus on the issue will evolve by the time the Bill is introduced.

A consensus, however, would not be easy to reach.

The Archbishop of Delhi, Alan de Lastic, for example feels that the proposed legislation would not be an improvement

CONSENSUS WOULDN'T BE EASY TO REACH

on the present one.

Christian leaders are particularly upset with the clause that makes union under the Special Marriage Act mandatory for marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian.

On 25 May, various Christian denominations decided at a meeting to present a combined resistance to the proposed legislation should the need arise.

The Church is careful not to give the impression that it is opposed to the Bill.

Archbishop Alan de Lastic said: "It is completely false to say that the Church is opposing the Bill's introduction. We

are ready for it provided it carries amendments proposed by us."

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and National Council of Churches of India have jointly prepared a list of amendments they want incorporated in the new legislation.

At the centre of the controversy is the definition of marriage between a Christian and non-Christian.

The proposed Bill says the union between a Christian and a non-Christian should be solemnised not in a Church but under the Special Marriage Act.

The Church says the decision should be left to the couple.

A VHP leader has said that in the marriage of a Christian with a non-Christian, the latter is forced to convert and even give an undertaking that the offspring would be Christian.

Mr John Dayal, executive committee member of All India Christian Council, refutes this.

The non-Christian is not required to convert, but merely give an undertaking that they have understood the responsibilities.

Archbishop Lastic said: "Forced conversion is a contradiction in terms. Conversion is a free personal choice."

THE STATESMAN

State Christian body demands presence on minority board

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 9

9 minutes HTS

THE BANGIYA Christiya Pariseba wants "genuine and well-known representatives" of the Christian community to be on the board of the West Bengal Minority Development and Finance Corporation (WBMDFC). The corporation has been monopolised by one particular religious community, Pariseba leaders said.

"We have been completely in the dark about the creation of the WBMDFC and Christians have no representation on its board," said Pariseba vice-president, Samuel Mohan Gomes. The appointment of one KK Bose as representative of the Christian community by the State Government on the WBMDFC's board is arbitrary, Gomes said. "He does not represent the community, is not aware of the community's problems and seldom attends meetings of the corporation," he said. Neither is the Buddhist nor the Jain community represented on the board.

WBMDFC comes under the aegis of the West Bengal Minority Commission and is entrusted with the responsibility of providing financial assistance to members of minority communities in the State.

But the spokesperson of WBMDFC countered the Pariseba's allegation. "They have always been unhelp-

ful. We have tried to contact them since 1999 but they never responded," the spokesperson said.

Pariseba chief coordinator Robin Behura, however, said, "It is a complete lie. We were invited for the first time last month on March 25." He wondered why the corporation waited for two years since its formation in 1997 to seek cooperation from the Pariseba.

Last year, WBMDFC provided loans to nearly 2,750 members of the minority communities. According to the spokesperson, 2 per cent of the beneficiaries were Christians. "We don't know who the Christian beneficiaries are. It may all be a hogwash and I doubt if even two Christians were helped by the corporation," says Gomes. "Even 2 per cent is too small a figure and is disproportionate to the percentage of Christians in this State," he added.

A booklet brought out by the corporation to tout its achievements provides examples of persons who were given loans by the corporation. All the beneficiaries belong to just one minority community. "We will get in touch with leaders of the other minority communities like the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists to jointly present our case to the State Government. We will write to the Minorities Affairs Minister as well as the Chief Minister demanding proper representation in the WBMDFC Board as well as the State Minorities Commission," Behura said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 APR 2000

Dara charges to be framed on June 1

HT Correspondent
Bhubaneswar, May 2

CHARGES AGAINST Dara Singh, the prime accused in the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, would be framed on June 1, a city sessions court decided here today.

Dara, looking shabby and ragged, was today presented before the sessions judge Mahendranath Patnaik after the case was committed to his court from special chief judicial magistrate (Central Bureau of Investigation) Sukumar Sahu. The CBI, which is probing into Dara's role in the Manoharpur tragedy, has already charge-sheeted Dara and his 17 accomplices. Once the court frames charges against him and his accomplices, trial proceedings would be initiated.

The CBI's investigation officer also petitioned the court to allow the agency to record the confessional statement of one of the accused, Andha Naik, alias Aniruddha Dandapat. The court fixed May 8 as the date

for hearing the CBI's petition.

Dara was brought to court today amid heavy police presence as lawyers and local people crowded around the court to have a look at India's most wanted person. Supporters of Dara milled around the court

with pictures of their 'mentor' pinned on their shirts. Mukesh Jain, who is spearheading the Dharmarakshyak Sri Dara Sena Bachao Samiti from New Delhi for the release of Dara, said Staines deserved to be killed for his acts of conversion.

"Staines and his men in Australia had killed the aborigines there before he came to India. Dara didn't commit any crime by burning him," he said, while distributing leaflets that glorified the killings of Staines. Jain, who shouted inside the court premises in favour of the accused, said missionaries have killed soldiers in the North-east for objecting to their acts of conversion. "What the Sangh Parivar couldn't do, Dara did. He is the bhagwan for us," he said. Jain said the Samiti would organise meetings and rallies for their leader's release. He alleged that the police was not allowing Dara's parents to meet their son.

Ranjan Kumar Sahu, general secretary of the Dharmarakshyak Sri Dara Singh Samiti, the body that has been formed at Karanjia in support of the accused, alleged that the police didn't allow him to meet Dara in person in Baripada jail. "They (the police) can't stop us like this. People from Patna, Karanjia and Jashipur are fighting for the release of Darabhai. What he did was for protecting the Hindu religion. He is innocent," Sahu said.

Three magazines get an hour to quiz Dara

Cuttack, May 2

THE ORISSA High Court has given three newsmagazines a maximum time of one hour to interview Rabindra Kumar Pal, alias Dara Singh, the prime accused in the Graham Staines murder case.

The Division Bench of Justice P Ray and Justice L. Mohapatra, in response to the writ petition filed by English weekly India Today, web magazine Wahindia and Oriya fortnightly Satabdi, directed the authorities

concerned to permit the petitioners to interview Dara inside Circle Jail in Baripada on a suitable date and time to be

fixed by the jail authorities "within a period of 10 days from the date of communication of this order".

Earlier, the petitioners had argued that prior permission sought from the authorities concerned had been rejected directly and indirectly.

However, the Bench said before holding the interview, the petitioners will have to produce their accreditation cards to satisfy the authorities.

Also, all the petitioners will interview the prisoner jointly and it should be completed within an hour.

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HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 11 AM 2000

3 1 MAY 2000

Hindu outfit threatens stir against Orissa conversions

Bhubaneswar, April 7 (PTI) —
HINDU JAGARAN Sammukhya
has threatened to launch an agita-
tion in Orissa unless the State
Government initiates action to
stop what it described as "rampant
conversion by Church and
Christian missionaries".

"The Government must ensure
that the provisions of Orissa
Freedom of Religion Act, 1967, is
strictly implemented to curb prose-
lytisation," the Sammukhya's
Orissa convenor, Subash
Chouhan, told reporters yesterday.
"We will take to the streets if
conversions do not stop. We will be
forced to initiate action," he said.

Chouhan congratulated the State
Government for the recent amend-
ment incorporated in the rules of
the Act, which has come under fire

by Christian organisations inside
and outside the State.

He alleged that children were
being influenced in schools run by
a Christian organisation in
Jhatsuguda and claimed that two
teachers of a school run by the
organisation were arrested after
some guardians complained.

He alleged that political parties
were patronising a large number of
infiltrators from Bangladesh and
said the Sammukhya would soon
submit a memorandum to Chief
Minister Naveen Patnaik demand-
ing their identification and repatri-
ation.

Chouhan refused to comment on
the killing of the Australian mis-
sionary Graham Staines and his
two sons but said the incident
might have been the culmination
of continued proselytisation.

He claimed that an estimated
8,000 to 10,000 people were being
converted to Christianity in Orissa
every year and alleged that the fre-
quent theft of idols from different
Hindu temples was a "conspiracy
against Hinduism".

He said the Sammukhya is
against the killing of any person
"but we share the views of Dara
Singh, the prime accused in the
Staines case.

Referring to the issue of
Bangladeshi infiltrators, he said an
estimated 15 lakh of them are now
living in the State, particularly in
the coastal districts of Balasore,
Bhadrak, Kendrapara and
Jagatsinghpur. These infiltrators
were cleaning up forests to set up
new settlements, he said, adding
the Government should stop this.

(PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6.8 APR 1977

Attack on nuns, priest in U.P.

MATHURA, APRIL 12. In the second attack on Christians in as many days, 10 armed people severely assaulted two nuns and a priest and ransacked their houses on the St. Teresa school premise on Nandgaon road near here, police sources said. The nuns, Sister Mary and Sister Gloria, were beaten up and Rs. 26,000 and other valuables taken away on April 10 midnight.

The attackers then swooped on the residence of Father K.K. Thomas, school principal and priest of a local church and beat him with iron rods and decamped with ornaments and cash. They also broke open the lock of the school office and smashed the almirahs.

The attack came a day after the principal of St. Dominics Convent School in Mathura cantonment, Father Dabre, was roughed up by a group of persons.

The Uttar Pradesh DGP, Sri Ram Arun, told presspersons in Lucknow that adequate security had been provided in and around Christian institutions, specially in Mathura, and efforts were on to nab the attackers. — PTI

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3 APR 200

UP alert after serial strikes on convents

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Lucknow, April 12: Shaken by three attacks in the past week on schools run by the community, Christians in the state have decided to convene an emergency meeting of the United Christian Forum and approach the Governor for help.

Police have sounded a statewide alert following the daring raids in Mathura.

On Tuesday evening, 20 armed men raided St Teresa School in Mathura and assaulted the principal and nine others, four of whom were nuns.

Principal Rev. K.K. Thomas was beaten up so severely that he had to be rushed to a hospital in Delhi. Sister Gloria and Sister Mary are also in a serious condition.

After injuring Rev. Thomas, the miscreants tied him up before proceeding to the nuns' hostel, where they assaulted four nuns and other staff members.

Last Sunday, a dozen men, armed with iron rods and sticks, beat up Rev. Joseph Dahwari, principal of the St. Dominic School, before ransacking his office.

In an FIR lodged by the school, one Suresh Sharma has been named as the person leading the

attack. The police produced six suspects before the principal, but none was identified.

The Sacred Heart Convent, also in Mathura, was attacked on April 6.

While a rattled police force is still groping in the dark about the identity of the attackers and their motive, the minority community is scared.

Father Ignitius D'Souza, co-ordinator of the Christian United Forum, said it will convene an emergency meeting in view of the deteriorating situation.

"We are very concerned. The atrocities against minorities seem to be on the rise," he said. Unlike the police, Father D'Souza is convinced these are not "stray incidents, but part of a much bigger plan".

"The government must take immediate steps to reassure the Christian community," he added. Fearing that violence against minorities might spread, he said: "Today it is Mathura, tomorrow it might be Lucknow."

In a swift reaction, the Delhi-based Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has expressed deep anguish over the repeated attacks in Uttar Pradesh and appealed to the government to ensure a "free and secure atmosphere" for

priests and nuns in the state.

With memories of Dangs and Dara Singh fresh in their minds, the police, this time around, have been quick in taking preventive measures.

Taking a serious note of the situation, director general of police Sri Ram Arun said he will take "every necessary step to assuage the growing feeling of insecurity among Christians".

Ganeshwar Jha, ADG (law and order), said investigations will be handled by a special team that has already been set up.

Arun has instructed DIG, Agra Range, Arvind Jain to personally supervise the investigations. He has threatened strict action against those officials not taking the job seriously.

Jain, along with Mathura SSP Chandrika Rai, has visited the three convents and assured them of better security. Each school has been provided with armed police guards while some other policemen have been instructed to maintain vigil over churches and convents in Mathura.

Maintaining that investigations are being carried out in "urgent earnest", Ram said the police have not yet been able to identify the hand of any political party or religious organisation behind the attacks.

THE TELESTAMP

APR 20 1978

(10) Nuns, priest
beaten up
in Mathura

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MATHURA, April 12. — In the second attack on Christian missionaries in as many days, 10 armed men assaulted two nuns and a priest and ransacked their quarters on the St Teresa School premises at Nandgaon Road near here around Monday midnight, police said today.

The attackers stormed the quarters of Sister Mary and Sister Gloria, beat them up with sticks and made off with Rs 26,000 in cash and valuables. Next, they raided the quarters of Father KK Thomas, principal of the school and priest of a local church, beating him with iron rods till he fell unconscious. His domestic help was roughed up as well.

The men broke open the school office, smashed furniture and decamped with ornaments and cash worth several thousands rupees.

THE STATESMAN

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PM calls for report on attack

on nuns

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 13. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has directed the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, to send a detailed report on the assault on nuns and a priest in Mathura district two days ago. 9 - hi. ver. re.

The Information Advisor to Prime Minister, Mr. H. K. Dua, said taking note of the reports, Mr. Vajpayee called up Mr. Gupta today and urged him to send details of steps taken by his Government to prevent such incidents.

The Prime Minister expressed concern over the attack. In the second attack on Wednesday, 10 armed persons assaulted two nuns and a priest and ransacked their houses on the St. Teresa school premise on Nandgaon road near Mathura.

'No communal angle': Page 13

14 APR 2000

They wanted to kill me: Father Thomas

Sudhi Ranjan Sen
Kosi Kalan (Mathura), April 13

THREE MONTHS ago, Father K K Thomas of St Theresa's School here received an anonymous hate mail. It asked him to wind up the church and the school and move out. He, however, did not bother as the locals were with him.

Today he is in a hospital brutally beaten up by a group of unknown assailants who attacked the church and the school on April 10. He has a skull fracture along with several other broken bones. "They wanted to kill me," he says.

On the night of April 10, the barking of his two dogs woke up Father Thomas. He called for the two guards. Failing to get a response, he stepped out of his room. "The guards were not present in their room, so he proceeded towards the school," said Father Verghese Kunnath, now running

the show in the school. In the veranda, "I found the blankets of the two watchmen lying. Before I could realise what was happening, someone flashed a torchlight on me. I saw seven-eight people coming towards me," said Father Thomas.

Sensing danger, Father Thomas started running back towards his room. But it was too late. First it was lathis blows on the head and shoulders. The beating continued even after he had fallen on the ground. And would have gone on and on had not the sisters on the other block raised an alarm.

"As soon as they heard us, they covered Father with his lungi and headed towards us," said Sister Marie. The door leading to the nuns' quarters was broken open with the help of a cement flower-pot and a heavy stone.

"When they were breaking the door, I rushed to the telephone in

the first floor only to find out that it had been disconnected before the attack," said Sister Marie. By this time, the assailants had caught hold of a maid and were beating her up.

The assailants then made their way up to first floor and beat up Sister Gloria. They then took the keys away from her and went about ransacking the nuns' quarters. They allegedly picked up about Rs 26,000 from there and went back.

On their way back they stopped to check on Father Thomas, who was still lying unconscious. "They tried to check my pulse beat and told my servant that I was dead," said Father Thomas.

After this, they went to the school building where they broke open the cash box and picked up some more cash, destroying whatever furniture they could find and left. In between, inmates of St Teresa said that assailants even

ransacked the refrigerator in the dining room. "They sat in the courtyard, drank milk, cold drinks and ate ice-cream before leaving."

Police have detained some locals, the guards at the school who were found have been tied up and gardener of the school. They have indicated that the motive behind the attack could be robbery.

Father Verghese, however, refuses to buy that theory. "It cannot be simple robbery. If that was the case why did they beat Father up so badly? There was no need for that, they could have simply asked for the valuables and left," he pointed out. "Moreover, several valuables which were lying around in the office were not touched at all," he added.

New Delhi: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today voiced his concern at reports on the assault and sought a detailed report from the Uttar Pradesh Government.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 8 APR 1991

Terror wave worries Kosi Kalan Christians

DEVIRUPA MITRA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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KOSI KALAN (Mathurd), April 15. — Was it a mere robbery or a new way of spreading terror?

While local authorities are adamant it was the former, missionaries of the St Therese school here are convinced the masked "robbers" had a sinister motive.

The small town of Kosi Kalan, 45 kilometres west of Mathura, has recently been in the eye of a storm after it witnessed a spate of violence targeting Christian missionaries.

On the night of 10-11 April, about 10 masked men brutally beat up the St Therese princi-

pal, Father KK Thomas, and a maid with sticks, locked up the sisters and ransacked the rooms. They fled with a booty of Rs 26,000, wristwatches and a few cameras after a two-hour spree.

Strangely, they left behind a video cassette player, a computer, tape recorders and portable televisions.

The school's founder and director, Agra Catholic Diocese Samaj Seva Sansthan, Father Verghese Kunnath, believes this could be a new trend of attacks without an overt anti-Christian flavour.

In fact, the "robbers" seemed too polite about the sentiments of the inmates. After leaving a battered Father Thomas writhing in pain on the

lawn, they broke into the convent where five nuns were staying.

"Though they first attacked two of the sisters, they desisted when some of them (robbers) said they were 'behenlog'," Father Kunnath said.

Again, the robbers did not ransack the church on the floor above the priest's home, when they were told by a servant that it was a 'girja ghar' (church).

But Father Kunnath does not rule out a communal angle. "The strategy may have changed from showing a clear atrocity, to one which looks like a mere crime, but still can terrorise," he said.

Police, however, have no

doubts. As far as they are concerned, it was just a robbery, perhaps with an insider involved. "We cannot rule out a former employee being involved, as they knew the plans of the premises", said an officer, adding, "we hope to make arrests very soon".

Father Thomas is now in hospital, while the nuns have been transferred "for a change of place".

The assault was the latest in a series of attacks of missionaries in 10 days.

The first attack was on a nun's school in Bulandshar. Around the same time, two Agra priests were "illegally" detained by police after a former teacher registered

a case. There were also two confrontations between parents and school managements in Agra, mainly over a fee hike and admission problems.

But, Father Kunnath said, local saffron leaders raised the bogey of "isaikaran" (christianisation) to increase the pressure.

In the case where priests were detained, school authorities discovered that the child of a police officer had failed in his exams that very day.

"It is interesting to note that the children of these saffron leaders are more often than not found on the rolls of the very schools they are protesting against," Father Kunnath said.

PM advises caution on minorities

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 16. — The Prime Minister today cautioned government and party functionaries to be careful and sensitive while dealing with issues relating to minorities.

"We must endeavour to carry all sections of the society with us ..." Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said at the concluding session of the BJP's two-day national executive.

The party spokesman, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, felt the Prime Minister's words were prompted by statements from a section of the party on the Uttar Pradesh religious Bill — "of which the Congress was at times taking advantage". But some others thought it was a warning to Sangh Parivar members to restrain their "anti-minority activities and statements".

Mr Vajpayee once again asked NDA partners to desist from activities that harm the government's image. "We must resist the temptation of speaking out too frequently," he said.

He had earlier expressed his disappointment at the way some allies took their differences with the BJP on economic issues to the media.

For the Opposition, particularly the Congress, Mr Vajpayee had tough words. He criticised the parties' "political negativism from Pokhran to Kargil".

He went on to point out the Congress's "doublespeak" dur-

ing the US President's visit. "The Congress party delegation told President Bill Clinton that India needed a minimum nuclear deterrent. The Congress spokesman informed the media of this. But later the party denied it. Petty political considerations resulted in this ... somersault," Mr Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister also appeared upset over the "language being used by some leaders on the issue of Constitution review". Political leaders, he said, "must try to raise the level of debate ... and the debate must be constitutional and not provocative as some Opposition leaders are indulging in." The language, he rued, had now "acquired a new low".

Miss Mamata Banerjee's idea of a *mahajot* between the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP in West Bengal got a nod of approval from partymen at the meeting.

Mr Naidu said there was a "broad acceptance of the idea for West Bengal as well as in Kerala to end the Marxist domination in the states."

The "political resolution" adopted by the executive, however, was critical of the state-level allies in Bihar. Lack of coordination among the partners had wrested the initiative away from the NDA during the Assembly polls, was the general feeling. "The result in Bihar has not satisfied us. Lack of

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PM:

(Continued from page 1)

proper coordination amongst the NDA partners resulted in fluttering away the political advantage that we had in Bihar. Let the Bihar experience remind us of the cardinal importance of harmonious relationship between the NDA partners," the resolution said.

The resolution supported the government's move to review the Constitution, and was confident that the "outcome of the review will further strengthen democratic institutions within the framework of the Indian Constitution". It blasted the Opposition's "vicious and motivated campaign" against the review panel.

Pakistan's policy of "encouraging cross-border terrorism" came under heavy fire at the executive. Pakistan, the resolution said, was "a country unable to grapple with its own internal problems of development and governance ... Yet, it "continued with its futile and dangerous anti-India polity".

Mr Clinton's visit was hailed as a "major triumph" for India's foreign policy.

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1879

THE STATE MUST ACT

missionaries

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS RUN by Christian missionaries have been targeted once again. If the scene of such attacks was the Dangs in Gujarat last year, it appears that this focus has shifted to Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. Armed gangs, it has been reported, entered the premises of three schools (between April 6 and 11, 2000), beat up the principal and others around, vandalised property and took away cash and other valuables. The vandals seemed to have warned those running the institutions of their determination to carry on with such acts in future too. The response of the district administration to these attacks was to treat them as nothing more than problems pertaining to law and order. More inexplicable is the fact that the members of the civil administration have refused to disclose the identity of those involved in the criminal violence. The political establishment — the BJP Government in the State — seems to have endorsed the version of the district administration that these were only localised clashes.

That the political masters had even refused to pull up the law-enforcing authorities in the district for having failed to take the necessary steps to prevent recurrence of violence even after the first such attack on the premises of the Sacred Heart School on April 6, 2000, cannot be glossed over. There is a clear set of similarities with the violence and all that was witnessed in the Dangs district about a year ago. It is now an acknowledged fact that the violence unleashed against members of the Christian community and the acts of vandalism in which institutions run by the missionaries were targeted were part of the Hindutva brigade's majoritarian political agenda. It is also a fact that the district administration and the police had, at that time, sought to describe the sectarian campaign in the

Dangs district as being nothing but petty clashes arising out of localised disputes. The State Government too had characterised the events in the Dangs in the same way. And this was even after such bodies as the National Minorities Commission and several independent groups had concluded, after their members visited the region, that the violence in the Dangs was part of a larger campaign by sectarian outfits.

Seen in this context, the incidents in Mathura in Uttar Pradesh are a cause for concern. Apart from the parallels between the recent incidents in Mathura and the Dangs in terms of the tactics employed — to strike terror among the missionaries — the timing of the attacks is striking. That the attacks have taken place within a month of the Bajrang Dal holding its conference at Mathura where the leaders impressed upon the "ranks" their "duty" to check the activities of the "anti-nationals" (recall such statements by Bajrang Dal-VHP stalwarts after the rape of nuns in Jhabua that it was an act of patriotism), cannot be overlooked in this context. Given all these factors, the imperative for the State Government in Uttar Pradesh is to instruct the civil administration in the district (and elsewhere) to remain vigilant and deal with the situation with the seriousness it warrants rather than dismiss the incidents as mere local issues. One would expect the Union Government too to rise to the occasion and ensure that the law of the land and the fundamental right of citizens to profess, practice and propagate any religion of their choice is not encroached upon. The issue here is not one of partisan political considerations between the Union and the State Government in Uttar Pradesh. Instead it relates to Constitutional principles.

18 APR 2000

Varanasi tense, indefinite curfew on

Varanasi, April 21

INDEFINITE CURFEW, clamped on five sensitive localities here, remained in force for the third day today even as the holy city, which witnessed communal clashes on Monday, was peaceful with security forces maintaining a strict vigil. District Magistrate Alok Kumar said the situation was tense but under control, adding no untoward incident was reported from anywhere since yesterday. The administration did not relax the indefinite curfew, he said.

Jodhpur: An uneasy calm prevailed in Rajasthan's

Pipar city which witnessed communal violence on Wednesday as the police today continued to patrol the city, about 25 km from Jodhpur. The district authorities said the situation was "under control" but "tense." Violence broke out in the town on Wednesday evening when activists of some organisations tried to block a religious procession.

Guwahati: Two days after 11 people were massacred in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, the situation was still tense. Additional police and paramilitary forces have been deployed to bring normalcy to the area.

HTC, Agencies

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 APR 2000

ATTACKS AGAIN

58 Christian missionaries beaten up in UP 20/4

THE attacks on Christians have started again, this time in BJP-ruled UP. A series of violent attacks targetting missionaries in western UP have terrorised the peace-loving community which is feeling extremely vulnerable in a state run by the party which was in office when the Babari Masjid was torn down. The target this time are schools run by missionaries. They are now given the garb of "robberies" — at the St Therese school in Mathura, "thieves", after brutally beating up the principal and five nuns, fled with cash, wristwatches and cameras, leaving more valuable booty lying around which sort of gave the game away. The priests are "illegally" detained by the police on cooked up charges as in Agra.

Though the UP administration is insisting that the attacks are not political or communal but the handiwork of anti-social elements who attack all communities, Christian organisations do not buy the story for good reason. They are right to be intensely suspicious. Any complaint against missionary schools, even if it starts with a hike in fees, ends in a plea of forced conversion — an allegation which cannot be proved or disproved, but can be used to terrorise and detain without cause. Just as every Muslim is a Pakistani ISI agent so now every Christian missionary is converting forcibly — or so the administration would have us believe. The change in tactics from open aggression — which came in for worldwide condemnation after the brutal murder of Australian missionary Grahame Staines and his two minor children — to organising robberies is worrying. The RP Gupta government's track record is despicable when it comes to minority issues. The PM has had to caution the chief minister and his colleagues. The chief minister himself went so far as to say that the controversial UP Religious Places Bill has been brought in only to curb ISI agents who are supposed to be in every mosque or *madrasa* in the state, putting an official seal on the police's tendency to deal with minorities in a rough, high-handed manner believing that in the end the ISI tag can always be attached. The Christian community has become vulnerable at the hands of a police force not known for religious tolerance or impartiality. While the DGP in UP says that investigations into the attacks are being carried out on an urgent basis, no leads have been found. You cannot find things that you do not look for. //

23 APR 2000

Fresh attacks on Christians

Three Rewari nuns assaulted

Agra Bajrangis target group from Andhra

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 23

THREE CHRISTIAN nuns, on their way to Easter-eve midnight Mass in Rewari in Haryana, were attacked by an unidentified man last night. Sister Anandi, who suffered head injuries, is currently in the intensive care unit of Holy Family hospital here.

Sister Mariam, who brought her to Delhi, said Sisters Gertrude, Anandi and Iramali were attacked by a scooter-borne youth around midnight. He hit Sister Iramali and when she fell, he attempted to run Sister Anandi with his scooter.

The trio's cries attracted a crowd and the assailant then fled. Sister Iramali and Sister Anandi are recuperating in the Civil Hospital in Rewari.

Sister Anandi was clearly in a state of shock. She said that all she

could recall is her being attacked. "When I opened my eyes I found myself in the hospital," she mumbled to this correspondent.

Sister Mariam said that it was difficult to say who had attacked the nuns. "But since over the last few days there had been a few local publications threatening to get rid of us. These publications warned us to leave Rewari or face the consequences," she said.

"The nuns at the Deepti Ashram have been actively involved with the women of the area, campaigning against social evils such as drinking. So in the last few days some of these publications were being circulated warning to harm the nuns," she added.

Mr John Dayal, national spokesman, All India Christian Council said that this was the fifth incident of violence against the Christian community in Haryana.

A GROUP of Christians from Hyderabad was attacked and biblical literature was set on fire by Bajrang Dal activists in Jagdishpur on the outskirts of Agra yesterday.

The local Bajrang Dal lodged an FIR alleging that the 14-member Christian group was trying to convert villagers by offering them money. Some members of the Christian group were arrested but later released on personal sureties.

The Christian group too lodged an FIR alleging that 20-30 people surrounded their van and took out biblical literature and burnt it. Some members of the group were also beaten up and an attempt was made to set their van on fire, the FIR said.

PTI, Agra

24 APR 2000

Bible burnt, Bajrang leads Agra attack

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

511 24/4 9. minutes
AGRA, April 23. — In less than a fortnight since a priest and two nuns were assaulted in neighbouring Mathura, a Christian group distributing religious literature in Nagla Ajita village of the district was attacked yesterday by villagers who were egged on by a band of Bajrang Dal activists.

The villagers burnt copies of the Bible and other religious books and pamphlets that the

group was carrying in a van. Police said the group, which claimed links with the Hyderabad-based, Indigenous Churches of India, came under attack when the Bajrang Dal activists and villagers saw it distributing pamphlets.

Mr Jagmohan Sharma, acting president of the Agra District Congress Committee, said a call to a party functionary brought a group of Congress volunteers rushing to the spot. The volunteers got in touch with the DIG,

who in turn sent forces from the Jagdishpura police station. By the time police arrived, the Bajrang men had reduced all biblical literature to a smouldering heap of ash.

Police took the van carrying the 14 Christian missionaries as well as the villagers to the police station where FIRs were filed by a villager against the Christian group. A counter-FIR was filed against the Bajrang men by one Walter Robinson, representing the Christian group. Members of

the Christian group were arrested, but later released on personal sureties.

The attack comes close on heels of assaults on Christian institutions in various parts of the Catholic Archdiocese of Agra which covers 11 districts of Western UP and the Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. A priest and a nun of a church and a nunnery in Kosi Kalan were injured in one of these assaults. They are recovering in Fatima Hospital in Agra.

2-4 APR 2011

Unwillingness to enforce the law is the problem

WITHIN a fortnight of the unprovoked assault on a Christian priest and two nuns in Mathura and within days of a clear warning by the Prime Minister himself to desist from such vulgar displays of ignorance, intolerance and brute force, it has happened again and in the same district of Uttar Pradesh. A group of Christians distributing religious literature in the village of Nagla Ajita were set upon by what are euphemistically described as villagers egged on, at the very least, by activists of that notorious organisation in which the Home Minister sees no criminality, the Bajrang Dal. They burnt their bibles and other literature, and for good measure took away the van they were using. Not content with that, they carted the 14 missionaries to the local police station and got some solitary local to file an FIR against them. Is it suggested that all this happened without official connivance? No details of the alleged offence committed are available for the simple reason that none was committed. It is the constitutionally guaranteed right of every citizen to practise and propagate the religion of his choice. It was with considerable difficulty that a Walter Robinson, representing the missionaries was able to register a counter FIR.

IT is time to draw attention to the contradiction between constitutionally guaranteed rights and the reluctance, nay the determination, of politicians in office and the police they have subdued to do their bidding, not to enforce it. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution has had two

meetings so far; at both they were at pains to state categorically that the Commission regard the rights guaranteed to the minorities and to the backward classes to be non-negotiable and that their concern would be to see what could be done to effectively entrench and enforce these rights. Those who suspect the Commission of having a hidden agenda which they are supposed to share with certain political parties, either of their own volition or out of helplessness — that little detail is not made clear — are barking up the wrong tree. Apart from the unfairness of the charge and the lack of any material on which it is based, it should be obvious that the fault lies at

C R IRANI

CAVEAT

the level of law enforcement and the total lack of accountability of those who, with malice aforethought, do not choose to enforce the law and when they feel obliged to apprehend culprits, to see to it that proceedings do not commence. At long last when proceedings do commence, official agencies ensure that witnesses do not come forward because of terror and intimidation. Anyone interested should follow as an illustration what is happening, or more correctly, what is not allowed to happen, to Dara Singh, the prime suspect in the case of the burning alive of Graham Staines and his minor sons.

The malady affects all crimes, civil and criminal. How many of those involved in the securities scam have been dealt with, how many econom-

ic offenders were allowed to be dealt with by that intrepid investigator, the head of the Enforcement Directorate, MK Bezbaruah? Is it or is it not true that at the highest levels of Government — Vajpayee's government merely continued the practice actively encouraged by at least two former Prime Ministers, Deve Gowda and IK Gujral — of interfering in criminal investigations to the extent of persecuting the prosecutor instead of bringing the wrongdoer to justice. What about that disgrace to the CBI Director, RC Sharma, who admitted to having sat on the Bofors investigation for only five years and not seven as alleged? If such things happen at high levels, what are local level policemen supposed to think?

How is this problem to be tackled? It is the view of the Central Vigilance Commissioner that corruption free service should be a fundamental right of the citizen. I have respect for NN Vittal, who is doing his duty under tremendous odds. But at the end of the day is it not a simple matter of enforcing the law? And visiting exemplary punishment on those, police, bureaucrat or politician involved in abuse of the legal process in order to shield the guilty?

IN the meantime, those who filed the fake FIR against the missionaries who were victims in Nagla Ajita, not offenders, must be dealt with under the law, the FIR filed against the mischief makers must proceed to trial and conviction. It is time we acted to bring the rule of law into its own. In a word, enforce the law and be seen to be enforcing it. That is the need of the hour.

2-5 APR 2000

Protection of minorities our obligation: Govt.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24. Amid sharp and widespread condemnation of the continuing attacks on Christians in different parts of the country, the Government in the Lok Sabha today owned up its "constitutional obligation" to protect the minorities. It also promised to consider the Opposition demand for a meeting of the National Integration Council to discuss the issue.

Responding to the Opposition charge that there was a "pattern" in the attack on Christians and that minorities were feeling increasingly unsafe, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said it was the constitutional responsibility of the Centre as well as State Governments to protect the minorities. "We attach top priority to protecting the minorities wherever they are, whether they are Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir or Muslims and Christians elsewhere."

Mr. Mahajan condemned the recent attacks on Christians in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and said he would request the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, to talk to the Chief Ministers of the concerned States to ensure that such incidents did not recur. The Centre, he said, was prepared to extend all help to the States to protect minorities.

About the suggestion of the Congress(I) deputy leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, that a meeting of the National Integration be called, Mr. Mahajan said it was a good idea and he would convey it to the Prime Minister. However, he skirted the Opposition's pointed reference to the alleged involvement of Bajrang Dal in the anti-Christian campaign.

Significantly, the issue was first raised by the Trinamool Congress, an ally of the Vajpayee Gov-

5 held for Agra incident: Page 9
U.P. probe begins: Page 13

ernment, with Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyaya pointing out that Christians had been attacked in two States in the past few days — in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

The CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, referring to the attacks on Christians in Agra and Rewari said that it seemed that a "jihad" had been unleashed against the minorities.

Mr. Jaipal Reddy (Congress-I) saw a "perverse pattern" in the anti-Christian campaign pointing out that the name of Bajrang Dal had been mentioned by every newspaper in this connection.

Noisy scenes erupted as some BJP members tried to interrupt the Opposition speakers, partic-

ularly the Samajwadi Party's "star" MP, Mr. Raj Babbar. The Opposition accused the BJP of trying to shut out inconvenient voices, with Mr. Scindia pointing out that the most dangerous thing was that "some people are not willing even to listen". Mr. Babbar rushed to the "well", saying: "I will speak from here if they continue to interrupt."

Several members, including Mr. Babbar and Mr. Rashid Dalvi (BSP), demanded the dismissal of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, for his Government's failure to check the attacks on Christians. Mr. Scindia said the country was facing a dangerous situation with caste and religion being sought to be used for political purposes. He called upon the "liberals" to unite against the "hardliners."

From the BJP, Mr. V.K. Malhotra, while condemning the attacks on minorities, complained that the Opposition kept silent when Hindus were killed in Jammu and Kashmir. There had been no reaction, he said, to the Shahi Imam's "open declaration that I am an ISI agent." Mr. Babbar's retort that his party condemned both the Shahi Imam and Mr. Bal Thackeray had the Shiv Sena members on their feet protesting their leader being spoken of in the same breath as the Shahi Imam.

24 APR 2000

SECULARISM UNDER ASSAULT: SONIA

We make no distinction: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 25. In a major intervention, which the Prime Minister Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, mistakenly termed her maiden speech in the Lok Sabha before correcting himself quickly, the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today questioned almost every aspect of the BJP-led Government's policies but reserved the sharpest barbs for its "hidden agenda" saying the Congress(I) would be "unrelenting" in resisting attacks on secularism.

In a spirited attack, while speaking on the motion of thanks to the President's address which the House later adopted by voice vote, the Leader of the Opposition said secularism had been consistently under assault ever since the National Democratic Alliance Government came to power. Though the Prime Minister had tried occasionally to "deflect" these assaults it was "not out of deep conviction, but out of compulsion to protect the very fragile coalition he heads." Her party, she declared reading from a heavily marked text, would stand up to all "overt" and "covert" attempts to "subvert" secularism, the "bedrock" of the Constitution.

The Prime Minister, speaking immediately afterwards, quickly got the issue out of the way with the familiar BJP argument that his party and Government were as secular as anybody else and no single party could claim to be the torchbearer of secularism. But "our" secularism — presumably unlike the Congress(I)'s — treated all religions equally without making any distinction. "This is the basis and foundation of our secularism", he said.

The recent attacks on Christian missionaries in Uttar Pradesh were "unfortunate" and the Home Ministry had asked the State Government to investigate and punish the guilty, he said.

The opposite poles of Indian politics couldn't have stood out in sharper contrast as Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Mr. Vajpayee, repre-

senting two different generations and two different political cultures, slugged it out — one somewhat tentative but sharply focussed, the other brimming with confidence but diffused to the point of being evasive. The Left parties, in fact, walked out protesting that the Prime Minister had ducked the most important issue of the day: the recent price hike and its impact, particularly on the very poor.

Ms. Sonia Gandhi, in her 25-minute speech, criticised the Government's economic agenda saying the all-round hike in prices, plus the cuts in subsidies, had exposed its "anti-poor" bias. The Prime Minister, in his reply, skirted the issue of prices altogether, barring a reference to the cut in fertilizer subsidies. The subsidies, he said, were benefiting the industry more than the farmers and accused the Congress(I) of chang-

ing its stand on the issue.

He sought a political consensus on economic reforms and strongly defended the proposed constitutional review assuring members that the basic structure of the Constitution "which includes secularism" would not be altered.

The ambience varied from pin-drop silence when Ms. Gandhi spoke to near-chaos when the Prime Minister got up to rebut her charges.

The Prime Minister, however, didn't seem to mind and even indulged the Opposition, telling an impatient Mr. Madhavrao Scindia: "Ek Gwalior wale ko doosre Gwalior wale ke saath yeh nahin karna chahiye" (fellow Gwaliorians should not do this to each other). In the end, what lingered was not so much the rhetoric from the two sides as the style: and, for once, the "Veterans XI" looked a little jaded.

26 APR 2000

Minority panel probes attacks on Christians

HT Correspondent
Agra, April 26

A FOUR-MEMBER delegation of the National Minority Commission (NMC) today visited Agra, Mathura and Kosi Kalan to investigate the attacks on Christians. The team led by its chairman Justice Mohammad Shameen visited schools in Mathura and Kosi Kalan where attacks took place. They also met the Bishop at the Sacred Cathedral. The Cathedral

priests were allegedly harassed at the police station on a teacher's complaint.

The group besides chairman has Trilochan Singh as vice-chairman and members Gen (retd.) A. M. Sethna and John Joseph. The team also visited St Theresa School, Kosi Kalan where Father Thomas was injured in attacks on April 11.

The team also went to St Dominique School, Sacred Heart School in Mathura where nuns running the school were attacked on March 31. Vicar general father K. C. Thomas appraised the team about attacks on the schools and nuns here.

The members later told the media that efforts are being made to reach a settlement on the issues. The members will also hold meeting with the local officials.

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THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2000

ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS

27/4 THE RASH OF vicious attacks on Christian missionaries and educational institutions witnessed over the past few weeks in Uttar Pradesh are unpleasantly reminiscent of the scourge that visited Gujarat, its Dangs region in particular, just over a year ago. There is no mistaking the pattern or the sinister design behind these incidents or their striking similarity with the Gujarat happenings. In Mathura, as many as four missionary institutions came under attack within a two-week span, the most serious of these cases being the one in which a priest was brutally assaulted and a huge sum of money taken away. As has been the wont of official establishments as a class, the Uttar Pradesh administration has been quick to reject the 'communal' angle and dismiss the incidents as the handiwork of some criminal elements or those disgruntled because of denial of admission to the schools concerned. But what happened on the outskirts of Agra last week — a Christian group from Andhra Pradesh was attacked and some printed scriptural material was set on fire — has exposed the superficiality of that theory. The Agra episode clearly points to the unfolding of a Gujarat-type scenario, what with the resurrection of the bogey of "induced conversion" which was raised by the Hindutva forces in the context of the anti-Christian campaign in Gujarat and elsewhere. The Bajrang Dal whose activists are alleged to have been involved in the Agra incident has levelled a counter-charge that the Hyderabad-based Christian contingent in question was seeking to convert people by "offering money".

The way the minorities are being targeted across the country by the majoritarian fundamentalist forces, especially after the advent of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre, suggests a clear pattern and a definite purpose, as evidenced, for instance, by the fact that such attacks are timed for occasions of religious importance for the target-community; like Christmas and Easter in the case of Christians. Therefore to treat the various cases of attack on

119-12
Christian missionaries, places of worship or institutions either merely as criminal acts or as sporadic manifestations of frenzy will be to indulge in self-deception and ignore the insidious forces at work. In Uttar Pradesh, the motivational trigger for the attacks was apparently provided by the Bajrang Dal's impassioned call — at a conference held at Mathura hardly a month earlier — for an "awakening" against what it called the "conspiracy of conversion" and for "checking" the activities of "anti-nationals"; whom this term refers to in the sangh parivar's parlance is not difficult to figure out. Add to this the several blatantly hindutva-oriented policy enunciations and initiatives of the Ram Prakash Gupta Government, notably the controversial legislation on religious places, the explosive potential of the anti-minority campaign is there for all to see.

In a response typical of the BJP-led coalition in such situations, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has come out with a condemnation of the attacks on Christians and a promise that his Government would see to it that the culprits are brought to justice by the State administration. Without trying to belittle the importance of Mr. Vajpayee's words of reassurance, which are indeed significant coming as they did from the nation's topmost political executive, it must be said that his response has fallen far short of what the "Constitutional obligation" of protecting the minorities (which the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, spoke of in the Lok Sabha) entailed for the Centre. Given the serious dimensions of the threat the minority communities are increasingly coming under as a result of the sustained hate campaign and calculated attacks by the sangh parivar outfits, it is imperative for the Vajpayee regime to send a strong and unequivocal message to the likes of Mr. Keshubhai Patel and Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta on reining in the Bajrang Dal, the VHP, the Hindu Jagran Manch and other saffron brigades which seem to enjoy a lot of immunity under their benign rule.

27 APR 2000

Mysore Christians under siege

K S Dakshina Murthy
Bangalore, March 8

A YEAR after anti-Christian hoardings appeared all over Mysore City, the minority community there is once more under siege. This time, a self-styled Hindu organisation has demanded that the church authorities donate part of their land for construction of Hindu temples.

An organisation describing itself as Jai Hanuman Bajrang Samiti in a letter to the Mysore Bishop Joseph Ray has asked that he set aside a 30 by 45 feet site inside the world-renowned St. Philomena's Church for the construction of a temple of Nandi. In another demand, the Hanuman samiti has stated that it will install an idol of God Ganesha in St. Anne's church in Gandhinagar, 40 km from Mysore. "Please accept it," it said in a terse letter to the bishop.

The samiti has also asked the bishop to "hand over" an acre of

land at Mysore's Dorannahalli village in K R Nagar on the right side of the St. Antony's church to construct a "grand Ram temple". The letter then goes on to talk of the church authorities disparagingly before signing off.

The letter was posted to the Bishop's residence and was received on Monday. Immediately, Rev. Ray alerted the Mysore police commissioner and the chief minister's office. He informed leaders in the Christian community in Mysore and Bangalore.

Talking to this correspondent from Mysore, the bishop said he had not heard of the organisation earlier.

But, "I did not want to take any chances and give room for trouble. So I have informed the authorities concerned," he said.

Interestingly, the genesis of the anti-Christian incidents appears to be linked to the prime land held by church authorities since several years. In the late 60s and 70s an

attempt was made to grab land belonging to the St. Philomena's church. The bishop then had erected a wall around the church as a protective measure. However, a temple of Nandi came up on the western side adjoining the wall.

Later, near the St. Philomena's Boys Home in the same area, a temple of a Shaivite saint Basavanna was built. A stretch of land was demanded from the church authorities to provide passage alongside the temple. Not wanting trouble, this was conceded. Interestingly, later the passage was closed at one end and now three-wheelers are parked there at night for a fee. The beneficiary seems to be a local sangha, the bishop said.

Three years back, a temple came up behind the St. Philomena's College, around the same area on land belonging to the institution. The church authorities again kept silent and simply erected a wall to maintain peace.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 MAR 2000

Minorities panel seeks Govt help to redress grievances

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, March 18

WEST BENGAL
Minorities' Commission chairman Justice K M Yusuf today said that the majority of the representations received by the commission pertain to education, employment and housing. He added that after taking over in September 1999, he was very surprised to find that the commission was virtually defunct and existed only in name. "The reality is that very few minorities actually knew of its existence," he said.

"The Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists and Sikhs constitute the minorities in Bengal. Among them, the linguistic Muslim minority, who are Urdu-speaking, Buddhists and Anglo-Indian Christians have sent most of the representations to the commission. "In February, commission members made a trip to Burdwan and the response was very positive," K M Yusuf said.

The majority of the Urdu-speaking Muslims reside in Calcutta, Asansol, Raniganj, Murshidabad and Midnapore. "The problem is most of the Urdu schools are not recognised by the State Government. The commission is

examining the complaints, because these schools have to fulfil certain conditions before getting Government recognition," the chairman said. "I have spoken to Education Minister Kanti Biswas, who told me that if there were genuine cases then it should be immediately referred to him."

With regard to employment, the Muslims, in their representations before the commission, have said there is a general feeling in the community that in Bengal they are denied jobs in Government services. Some sections of the Muslims have also demanded reservations in Government services. But the commission is still non-committal on the issue. "We are concerned about the complaints of the minorities but the commission being a statutory body cannot go against the policies of the State Government," affirmed K M Yusuf.

The minorities have also complained that there is a lack of transparency in the recruitment process in West Bengal School Services Commission and West Bengal Central School Services Commission. "I have conveyed this to Kanti Biswas, who said there were certain difficulties but he was considering the issue," the chair-

man said. "Already, transparency has been introduced in the recruitment procedure of the former, but the latter is under consideration," he added.

The Minorities' Commission chairman said that he has written to the State Government to provide a block of residential flats to the minorities so that they can live together and also celebrate their festivals. "I have requested the Government to provide them accommodation in the Rajarhat Township. This is under consideration," Yusuf said. "But I must say one thing: there is tremendous support from the Government to the Minorities' Commission without which nothing can be achieved at the end of the day."

However, Justice Yusuf said that a lot of work needs to be done before the commission actually starts producing results. "Nothing practically has been done since it was established in 1996. I don't know why? Now we are trying to get the body back in shape and conducting surveys and preparing reports. In fact, when I joined, the commission was totally off the rails. Now it has been brought back on the track. Only the momentum has to be achieved," Justice Yusuf said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
19 MAR 2000

36 gunned down in first strike on Kashmir Sikhs

FROM MUKHTAR AHMAD
AND AGENCIES

Srinagar, March 21: Timing a terror sweep with Bill Clinton's visit, gunmen lined up and shot dead 36 Sikh villagers in southern Kashmir late last night.

The violence spiral continued with a *fidayin* (suicide) squad of the Lashkar-e-Toiba storming the Border Security Force headquarters at Chanipora in Srinagar this evening, exploding grenades and firing at random. Two BSF jawans were wounded.

Clinton expressed "outrage" at "the brutal attack in Kashmir", and said it highlighted "the tremendous suffering this conflict has caused India. The violence must end," he said.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described the massacre of Sikhs — the first in Kashmir — as an act of "ethnic cleansing".

Vajpayee alleged that there was a "deliberate design" to foment killings and mass murders to sabotage any attempt to restore normality in Kashmir.

"I hope this question will be discussed by the President in Islamabad," he said, prompting Clinton to reply that he "will" take up the issue of cross-border terrorism with Pakistani leaders.

National security adviser Brajesh Mishra blamed the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen for the attack. "These outfits are supported by the government of Pakistan," Mishra said, adding that India had evidence pointing to these groups.

Pakistan "condemned" the killings and demanded a probe, voicing fears that India might exploit the incident for propaganda.

Police said the group of around 50 militants swooped down on Chati Singhpora village in Anantnag, 68 km from here, and forced the residents into the road in two groups. They segregated the men from the women, announcing that they were carrying out a "crackdown".

The gunmen, wearing combat



Grieving relations of a massacre victim. (AFP)

uniforms, opened fire on the men, killing 34 of them and seriously wounding three who were shifted to a hospital in Anantnag. Two of them succumbed to wounds there. A woman, identified as Virender Kaur, died due to shock after seeing the bodies, police said.

Nanak Singh, writhing in pain at the Bone and Joint Hospital here, said the AK47-wielding militants attacked the village of 250 Sikh families shortly after 10 pm. Nanak had finished evening prayers and was about to leave the gurdwara when he was stopped by a band of masked gunmen.

"I, along with other villagers, was stopped and they started asking questions and checking identity cards. A few of them entered

nearby houses and asked the Sikh villagers to come out," he said. "Suddenly, the gunmen started firing. I saw my fellow Sikhs lying in a pool of blood. I was struck in the leg; I tried to flee but couldn't and fainted."

Nanak was carried to a hospital in Anantnag, but he had to be brought here after his condition deteriorated.

Naseeb Singh, accompanying Nanak, said the militants later went to Samadhal hall, another gurdwara, and dragged out the devotees before shooting them from point-blank range.

The killings sparked sporadic violence in Jammu, forcing the administration to clamp a curfew this afternoon.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAR 2000

J&K Sikhs knew their killers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 549 23/3

NEW DELHI, March 22. — The night of 20 March might not have been the first encounter villagers of Chhatti Singhpora had with the militants who mowed down 36 of them. Preliminary investigations show that these ultras had visited the village earlier: for food, water and possibly shelter.

The villagers seem to have been "cheated" by the militants, drawn from the Lashkar-e-Taiyaba and the Hizbul Mujahideen, senior home ministry officials said. Chhatti Singhpora, about 70 kilometres from Srinagar, had been fairly safe from such attacks in the past. "We don't know for certain why the militants did it," Mr Tilak Raj Kakkar, special secretary (Jammu and Kashmir affairs) in the home ministry, said.

(Meanwhile, a general strike called by various organisations to protest against Monday's massacre, crippled life in the Kashmir valley today, reports UNI. Shops and business establishments in Srinagar and other major towns were closed and vehicles stayed off the roads.)

In Jammu, over 10,000 Sikh mourners, including women and children, today defied a curfew and assembled at the Gurdwara Bibi Chand Kaur Samadhi. Armed with swords and iron rods, they then marched to the Raj Bhavan to present a memorandum on the killings. The protesters were supported by various political parties, including the BJP, Congress, Janata Dal and Panthers Party.

Though there were some scuffles and tyres were burnt, police and Army jawans deployed on the roads did not try to stop

the Sikh mourners.

The District Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee has demanded the dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah government and imposition of Governor's rule in the state. The chief minister, it alleges, is hand in glove with the militants.

Prominent members of the Sikh community in Dehra Dun also took to the streets today to protest against the ghastly killings.

Mr Kakkar visited Chhatti Singhpora

STOP PAKISTAN: ABDULLAH

JAMMU, March 22. — The J&K chief minister, Dr Farooq Abdullah, has asked Mr Bill Clinton to persuade Pakistan to stop killing innocent people in Jammu and Kashmir, and stop cross-border terrorism. "The President has assured me that he is with us in the fight against terrorism," he said. — SNS

yesterday with Union ministers Mr Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa and Prof. Chaman Lal Gupta, and the home ministry's director (Kashmir) Mr Sishir Gupta.

He said the government was trying to find out if this was an isolated incident or the beginning of a trend to hound out the Sikhs from the valley.

Quoting some boys who had fled the village shortly before the men were lined up and shot, Mr Kakkar said the militants, about 35 to 40, were mostly foreigners. "They spoke chaste Urdu and Punjabi."

Other officials claimed the killers were drawn from the Kuthar and Murtaza battalions of the two outfits and had assem-

bled outside the village.

Mr LK Advani yesterday voiced the Centre's fears that militants want to drive out Sikhs from the valley, when he described the massacre as "deliberate" rather than random. Even the Prime Minister referred to it as a form of "ethnic cleansing".

There are nearly 95,000 Sikhs in the valley, mostly in and around Anantnag, Mattan, Baramulla, Pattan and Sopore. In Chhatti Singhpora, the families had been living for several centuries, home ministry officials said.

"They are well-off, a majority being engaged in agriculture. Some residents are government employees," an official said.

After visiting the village, some senior officials said the Sikhs could have been perceived as soft targets or the militants' command structure could have gone awry.

But the ministry is worried over the sudden shift in focus of militant operations. "Attacks like the one on the BSF camp near Srinagar last night, we can tackle. But Chhatti Singhpora is different," an official said.

The Centre is trying to persuade other Sikh-dominated villages in the state to form village defence committees. BSF pickets will be set up around the villages. **13 killed:** Thirteen people, including 10 militants and an Army jawan, were killed and two soldiers wounded in separate incidents in the state since last evening.

BSF men gunned down four foreign mercenaries, including an Al-Badr "district commander", after a fierce gun battle at a hideout in Zakoora on the outskirts of Srinagar early today.

Sikhs protest despite curfew in Jammu

420
29/3

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, MARCH 23. Police opened fire in the air after bursting teargas shells and resorting to a lathicharge to disperse thousands of Sikh protesters who defied curfew and tried to enter the Civil Secretariat in Jammu today in protest against the Chani Singhpore massacre.

The protesters, who want the Farooq Abdullah Government dismissed and the killers of their brethren identified, went towards the City Chowk and the Indira Chowk areas of Jammu in large groups, shouting slogans against Pakistan and the State Government. One group moved towards the Civil Secretariat — where the Assembly was in session to make obituary references to the killings — and tried to enter the premises but police resorted to a lathicharge and burst dozens of teargas shells. When this did not help, they opened fire in the air. This led to tension in the city.

On hearing that another group was heading towards the Muslim-dominated Talab Khatikan, the residents of that area started assembling in small groups to take on the protesters. However, police pacified them.

The Director-General of Police, Mr. Gurbachan Jagat, said the "situation was tense but under control." The Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, held Pakistan responsible for the massacre and said "I have urged Mr. Bill Clinton to impress upon Pakistan to stop aiding and abetting militants in Kashmir."

Violence in Delhi

Our New Delhi Staff Reporter reports:

Protesters went on the rampage



Sikhs in large numbers marching through the streets of Jammu on Thursday, protesting the killing of 35 Sikhs near Srinagar on Monday night. — AP

damaging buses, hurling stones and blocking traffic in many areas of West Delhi today. At least a dozen Delhi Transport Corporation buses— all of which had been diverted to avoid traffic snarls caused by a series of "chakka jams"— were partially burnt.

Students of a school near the Chhoti Sabzi Mandi faced the anger of the protesters. Stones were hurled at the windows of the school even as a board examination was on. The protesters spared the school only after the authorities pleaded with them.

Demonstrations were organised at Jangpura, Lajpat Nagar, Bhogal, Ashram, Nehru Nagar and other areas in South Delhi.

PTI, UNI report:

Several Sikh organisations urged the visiting U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to declare Pakis-

tan a terrorist state, saying the massacre of Sikhs was an "example of Islamabad's barbaric designs towards India." The protesters were led by senior BJP leader, Mr. M. L. Khurana.

In Calcutta, Sikhs urged the Centre to institute an enquiry by an agency of international repute to probe the massacre. They also called upon their brethren in Kashmir to strengthen themselves with arms and not migrate from the valley. A large number of them marched towards the Raj Bhavan and submitted a memorandum to the West Bengal Governor, Mr. Viren Shah.

In Raipur, Madhya Pradesh, Sikh businessmen downed the shutters of their establishments and observed a day-long dharna at the Shastri Chowk.

Cong. team in village; Page 14

THE HINDU
24 MAR 2000

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2000

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

IF THE COLD-blooded massacre of 35 innocent Sikhs in Chani Singhpore was horrenduous, the entry of a two-member suicide squad of terrorists into a BSF camp in Srinagar showed a dangerous audacity. Coming in close succession, the two attacks by terrorist outfits such as the Laskhar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen make it chillingly evident that cross-border terrorism has become a deadly menace in the Kashmir Valley. That the Kashmiri separatists should have ordered the Sikh men out of the gurudwara, lined them up and shot them dead indicates a new depth of homicidal madness, though the intention is to spread a reign of terror. The killing of Sikhs, who have continued to live in southern Kashmir despite the campaign of terror unleashed in the valley, marks a new low in the strained communal relations in Jammu and Kashmir. Obviously, the terrorists wanted to stoke communal tensions, hoping for some kind of reprisal. New Delhi is convinced that these two dastardly attacks were timed to coincide with the visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to force U.S. attention on the Kashmir issue. Despite the immediate visit of the Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, and the Punjab Chief Minister, Mr. Prakash Singh Badal, a pall of gloom hangs over the valley as the Sikhs ponder their future.

Even before the Central and State Governments could come to terms with the massacre outside a gurudwara, a two-member Laskhar-e-Taiba suicide squad entered the Chanpora BSF company headquarters in Srinagar, leading to a nearly day-long battle with the security forces. After evacuating the BSF personnel and removing most of the ammunition in the camp, the Indian forces blasted the building to bring the exchanges to an end, killing both the terrorists. This seems to be a parallel operation, a contin-

uation of the new trend of mercenary suicide squads sent in to strike terror among the people. Both these incidents deserve to be condemned unequivocally and the international community has been quick in doing that. Mr. Clinton was quite forthright in his denunciation of such terrorist acts. It is only a suicide squad which will take on such a daring operation in a company headquarters and except for the impact and media focus on Kashmir, they could not have expected to gain anything else out of it.

It is unfortunate that the violence continues unabated in the valley. Despite the recently announced initiatives to beef up security and create an additional, unified command for Central and State security and police services, the security on the ground has not improved. It again points to the need for better and sharper intelligence gathering on terrorist movements and plans. Even if India wants some confidence building measures and reassurances from Islamabad to resume the dialogue, the Centre can surely open up a political dialogue in Kashmir to contain militancy. With so many outfits functioning within the country and some from outside, steps must be taken to bring on board at least the more moderate militant organisations in the search for a political solution to the problem of Kashmiri alienation. The externally-supported terrorist groups must be isolated. If the Centre and the State Governments fail to act even now to contain the violence and ensure communal harmony in the valley, it could lead to another exodus of Sikhs and other minorities. It will take some time to deal with cross-border terrorism, but the Centre must at least work on a parallel track on the domestic political front to resolve some of the local problems.

THE HINDU

24 MAR 2000

Cong. seeks security for Sikhs in J&K

25/3
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24. A Congress (I) delegation led by the party president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, today submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, urging the Centre to take immediate steps to provide adequate security to all minority communities in Jammu and Kashmir. It warned that unless this was done, there would be another wave of mass migrations from the Kashmir Valley.

The memorandum follows the massacre of Sikhs in Chani Singhpore village in the Valley by militants four days ago. The Congress(I) demanded that proper security arrangements be made for the 130-odd Sikh-dominated villages in the Valley. (10-1)

The memorandum deplored the 'inadequate' attention given by the State and Central Governments to the incident and said that the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, had made only a very short, cursory tour of the area. The memorandum also said that after the attacks on the Kashmiri Pandit community, it should have been obvious that the Sikhs, another minority community, were also at grave risk. But both the State and Central Governments "chose to turn a blind eye" to this danger.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mr. Ahmed Patel, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mr. Balram Jakhar and Mrs. Ambica Soni, who visited Chani Singhpore yesterday to condole the bereaved families on behalf of the Congress(I), accompanied Mrs. Gandhi to submit the memorandum.

They told presspersons that a fear psychosis prevailed amongst the villagers. Mr. Jakhar charged the State Government with being totally ineffective.

He also said there was anger over the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, not visiting the village.

According to Mr. Azad, the militants were clearly backed by Pakistan. After its humiliation in Kargil, Pakistan was now trying to foment trouble in Kashmir by creating a rift between Muslims and Sikhs.

THE HINDU
25 MAR 2000

Militant spills the beans

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 24

IN WHAT is being claimed as a major breakthrough, the Jammu and Kashmir Police have arrested a local militant, Mohd Yaqoob Wagay, for his role in the gruesome killing of 35 Sikhs at Chitti Singhpora village in South Kashmir.

A resident of the ill-fated village, Yaqoob joined the ranks of the terrorists early last year. He is reported to have confirmed the involvement of a 17-member group belonging to the Pakistan-backed Lashkar-e-Toiba/Hizbul Mujahideen combine in the March 20 carnage.

Yaqoob has been remanded in police custody by a judicial magistrate in Anantnag. He is reported to have told the investigating agencies that the group of LeT/HM

25/3 9- miles
mercenary was armed with a light machine gun and 16 AK 47 rifles.

Of the 17-member team, 12 were Lashkar men. They were led by their chief, Abu Mahaj. The remaining five belonged to the HM. They were led by Saifullah.

Addressing mediapersons here today, Home Secretary Kamal Pande identified two other mili-

Massacre of Sikhs

tants involved in the carnage as Maqsood and Abdul Rashid.

Yaqoob claimed that the terrorists divided themselves into two groups while converging on Chitti Singhpora. Wearing army uniforms, they are alleged to have asked the male members of the community to collect in a group under the pretext of a crackdown.

After a pause of around 20 minutes, one group of militants are alleged to have shot 18 Sikhs dead in Akalipora segment of the village while the other group gunned down 16 others in the village's Shokeenpora Mohala. Among the victims, one person is reported to have succumbed to his injuries later. Yaqoob is reported to have been part of the group that massacred Sikhs at Akalipora Mohalla.

Mr Pande said some of the culprits had visited the village on many occasions earlier and taken meals provided by Yaqoob.

Reacting to a query, the Home Secretary confirmed that the intelligence agencies had intercepted a message from across the border to the mercenaries stating that they could "go ahead with finishing off these bearded fellows" just before the Chitti Singhpora carnage.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAR 2000

Militants behind Sikh massacre killed

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, MARCH 25. The Army today claimed to have eliminated five militants responsible for the massacre of 35 Sikhs on Monday at Chatti Singhpora, Anantnag.

According to Col. M.K. Bawa of the 15 Corps headquarters, the troops, on receiving specific information that the militants were hiding in the upper woods of Koker-nag, 13 kilometers east of Chatti Singhpora, launched a search operation on Saturday morning.

During the search, the militants opened fire, and the security forces retaliated. In the ensuing encounter, which lasted for about 10 hours, all the five militants, belonging to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba, were killed.

"They were all in combat dress," Col. Bawa told *The Hindu*, adding that the hutment used by the militants caught and their bodies were burnt. He said the place, called Panchal Taran, was infested with militants and they

had been hiding there after committing the crime.

Three of the killed militants have been identified as Abu Shaheen, Abu Hanifa and Rahim Bhai.

The officer confirmed that the involvement of these militants in the massacre has been established. The Army is still in the process flushing out the rest of the militants.

Five Muslims shot dead

In the Jammu region, five Muslims were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the Gool Gulab Garh area in Udhampur district last night. Police sources said that a group of gunmen entered the village and barged into the house of one Fateh Mohammed and fired indiscriminately at the inmates. Five persons — identified as Noor Shams, Gulzara Begum, Sajjad Mohammed, Begum Jan and Mir Hussain — died on the spot, while three others sustained injuries.

THE HINDU

26 MAR 2000

Security shield after
intelligence warning

Strike alert on Kashmir minorities

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

New Delhi, March 27: Prompted by intelligence reports of a possible "massacre" of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir, the Centre has instructed the state and the Unified Headquarters to concentrate security forces in minority enclaves.

Following last Monday's massacre of 36 Sikhs in Chatti Singhpora village in Anantnag, the home ministry has also asked the Farooq Abdullah government to set up village defence committees in areas inhabited by minorities, including Hindu Pandits and Sikhs, both in Jammu and in the valley. Around 4,500 such committees are already functioning as the first line of defence against militants.

The directive to set up new defence groups was issued by home minister L.K. Advani, who feels the massacre was part of the process of "ethnic cleansing" started by pro-Pakistan terrorist outfits.

Home ministry officials said they have reports that Hindus could be the next target of foreign mercenaries. According to one wireless message intercepted by the BSF, the Hizbul Mujahideen has plans to "eliminate" double the number gunned down at Chatti Singhpora. The message, intercepted a couple of days ago, is believed to have originated from a district north of Doda along the LoC.

"It is an indication that the next attack against a minority community could be in Jammu

region where the concentration of Hindus is more in some districts," an official said.

The home ministry has asked the Unified Headquarters in Srinagar to despatch more troops, including army and paramilitary personnel, to minority pockets in six districts.

"As an immediate step, more security forces are being concentrated in and around Anantnag to dispel the sense of insecurity that has gripped the district, especially the Sikhs," an official said.

Simultaneously, defence committees will be set up in about 300 border villages in the valley and 200 in Jammu. The process of arming the groups — each comprise nine volunteers led by two special police officers — will be carried out in two phases and could take nearly six months. "The system of VDCs has paid off in villages which may have to bear the brunt of terrorist raids first. VDCs in Udhampur, Doda, Rajouri and Poonch have proved successful," an official said.

The home ministry believes the carnage could have been avoided. The BSF and other security forces have been "cautioned" that tougher measures need to be taken. "There was an intelligence failure on the part of the sector commander concerned, especially when a powerful transmitter was being used by Mohammad Wagey, the local chemist-turned-terrorist, to send messages to the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen," another official said.

■ Grenade attack, Page 10

THE TELEGRAPH
28 MAR 2000

Dara arrested in late night swoop near Keonjhar

K RAVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Jan. 31. — Ravindra Pal Singh, alias Dara Singh, wanted in several cases, including the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children, was arrested by Mayurbhanj police late tonight.

Dara, who has been on the run since long, particularly after the Staines murder on 22 January 1999, ran out of luck as he was sleeping in the dense forest bordering Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts along Baitarani river.

He had a reward of Rs 6 lakh on his head.

The Mayurbhanj SP, Mr Yogesh Khurania, and a police team were on his trail for the past couple of days.

Police officers, who returned from the successful raid, told **The Statesman** that they had put up a decoy as Dara was keen on purchasing a gun.

"He was moving with two other associates and, over the past two days, we had been keeping a watch before we decided to catch him late at night," said an officer.

The criminal, who had become a cult figure in the tribal pockets of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts, did not resist as policemen overpowered him. One of his associates managed to escape, though.

The accused had no arms, except for a spear. He is being taken to Baripada.

Since 1996-97, Ravindra Pal Singh has been targeting people of the minority community. He has several cases instituted against him, but managed to elude police so far.

He had been arrested earlier and released on bail.

The fanatic earned notoriety when he burnt the Australian missionary and his two children to death at Manoharpur on 22 January 1999. Though he was on the run, he is suspected to have committed two other murders — that of Arul Doss and Sk Rehman in July and September 1999.

The CBI and other investigating agencies were on his lookout and a cash reward of Rs 6 lakh had been announced. But tribals, fearing reprisals, protected Ravindra Pal, helping him to evade arrest.

Some of his close associates, including his two main lieutenants Dipu Das and Andha Nayak, had been arrested earlier. They reportedly confessed to the Staines murder during police interrogation and said Dara had led the attack.

Nayak reportedly told police about Dara's involvement in the Rehman and Doss murder cases too.

THE STATESMAN

- 1 FEB 2000

Dara's luck runs out

Fugitive trapped by ²¹²Mayurbhanj police

HT Correspondents

Cuttack/Bhubaneswar, February 1

HTI

AFTER PLAYING hide and seek with the police, Rabindra Kumar Pal alias Dara Singh, the main accused in the gruesome murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children at Manoharpur in the Mayurbhanj district, fell in the police net at about 11 pm on Monday night at Gohira village in the Keonjhar district.

Acting on a tip-off, a special squad, led by the Mayurbhanj Superintendent of Police Y. B. Khurania, nabbed Dara in the dense forest of Gohira village under Patna police station in the Keonjhar district, according to Director General of Police (DGP) B. B. Panda.

One of his associates Jagganath Munda was also nabbed while the other associate Srinath Naik managed to flee.

Graham Stuart Staines had been burnt alive while he was sleeping in his jeep with his two sons in Manoharpur last January.

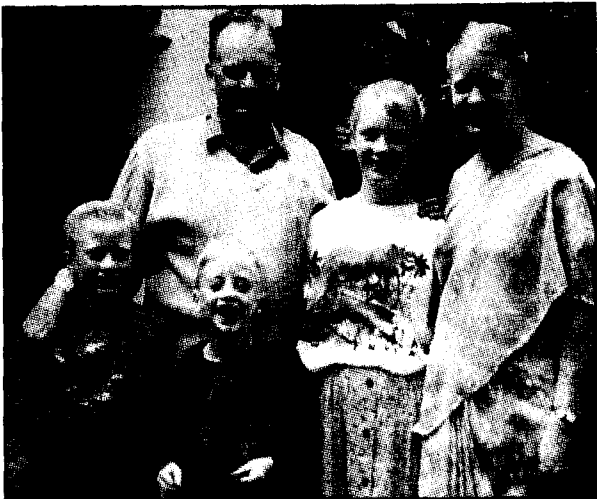
According to Mr Khurania, the four teams that had been constituted in the district along with the Special Task Force (STF), had information that Dara planned to buy a pistol.

"We set up a decoy who, posing as an arms dealer approached the middleman doing business for Dara. The middleman was very suspicious initially but our officer, posing as the arms dealer, took just four days to convince him. Finally, a deal was struck for yesterday night in the forest surrounding the Guhira Dihi village," Mr Khurania said.

A team of officers proceeded on the Thaku Munda road and parked their vehicles about 9 kms away from the meeting place. They covered the last nine kms on foot.

The police party pounced on the criminal the moment he appeared from the thicket. He and his two associates put up a fierce fight.

Dara, who carried cash awards of Rs. 8 lakh on his head, was also wanted for the murder of Father Arul Doss, which was committed at Mahuladiha village in the Mayurbhanj district. The CBI had declared an



(From left) Philip Staines, 10, Graham Staines, Timothy Staines, 8, Esther Staines, 14, and Gladys Staines in a 1998 AP file photo.



award of Rs 5 lakh, while the State police had announced an award of Rs 3 lakh for Dara's arrest.

Meanwhile, the Crime Branch, which is investigating the murder of the Muslim trader, Rehman, in Padiabeda, produced Dara Singh on Tuesday before the Sub-Judicial Magistrate at Karanjia in Mayurbhanj district. The Crime Branch has requested the court to transfer Dara Singh to the Baripada Jail for security reasons. The Crime Branch also requested the court to remand him to its custody for interrogation in the Padiabeda incident.

HTC adds from New Delhi: Church bodies have congratulated Orissa Police for its success in nabbing Dara Singh, but have expressed concern at the hate campaign of the anti-minority organisations, which continues unabated. A spokesperson of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR) in New Delhi described Dara Singh as the "product of a particular ideology that preaches communal hatred and dictates a creed of violence".

Widow Gladys leaves it to the Lord: page 10

Islam & Secularism

No Sanction for Theocratic States

By ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

A NUMBER of Islamic countries claim that they are Islamic states and that secularism has no place in their society. In fact, some primordial Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia consider secularism a great sin. The question arises: Is there any concept of an Islamic state in the Koran? Or do we find any such concept in the Hadith?

The answer is a categorical no. There is no concept of an Islamic state in the Koran. It gives a concept of the society, not of any state. In fact, a book of guidance cannot involve itself in any time-bound concepts. Moral guidance has permanent value whereas a concept like what form a state structure will take is limited both by time and space. In the period when the Koran was being revealed, Arabia had no state whatsoever whereas there existed in Rome and Persia what can be called monarchy.

When the Prophet started preaching, he was basically concerned with the social malaise rather than any political problem. Society in the Arab peninsula at the time was riddled with many problems. The tribal bonds were breaking down and a new commercial society was being born in Mecca which was the centre of high finance and commerce on an international route. The trade caravans passed through Mecca which traded between China and the Roman Empire. There was the Bedouin society in the desert rigidly bound by tribal customs and traditions on the one hand, and, the Meccan urban society dealing in high finance and trade, on the other.

Lost Sensitivity

Many Bedouins migrated to Mecca in search of jobs and ended up as casual workers loading and unloading the camel caravans and living a poverty-stricken life. Also, there were slaves and other weaker sections of society who, against tribal traditions, were being utterly neglected by the rich merchants whose main concern was the accumulation of wealth. They had, in their greed to accumulate, lost sensitivity to their suffering.

The Koran dealt with this social malaise and was greatly concerned with establishing a just society. It exhorted the rich to be sensitive to suffering and required them to re-distribute their wealth and levied Zakat which was to be

spent on the poor, needy, orphans, widows, travellers, liberation of slaves and paying off debts. Thus, it will be seen that it was quite a revolutionary programme.

Thus to enforce what is good and eradicate what is evil is considered a spiritual and individual duty rather than a legal or political requirement. The primary concern of the Koran is to provide moral guidance and develop an appropriate atmosphere to set up a society which is just and benevolent for all, including people of other faiths. It nowhere discusses any political doctrine or programme, much less the state structure.

As long as the Prophet was alive, all problems were referred to him and his authority was supreme. He had also drawn up a covenant between people of different faiths in Madina, including the Jews, Christians and pagans. It is interesting to note that the Prophet had given full freedom to all to practice their respective religions. Thus, Madina was a pluralist society and there was no attempt whatsoever to impose Islam on any unwilling soul. Thus it was very much 'secular' inasmuch as plurality of religion was recognised.

Political Crisis

However, after the death of the Prophet a political crisis developed which was sought to be resolved through historical experience as there was no categorical statement in the Koran or Hadith about his succession as per the Sunni tradition. Thus, there was a split among the Muslims on the question of succession to the Prophet.

Those who came to be termed later as Sunnis believed the Prophet has left no specific directive for his succession. The Shi'a Muslims, on the other hand, believed that he had appointed Ali, his son-in-law and legate as his successor. After his death, the Sunni Muslims developed the concept of Khilafah and the Shi'a Muslims that of Imamah. According to the former, one of the elected companions of the Prophet would head the state and look after the affairs of the nascent community with mutual consultation among the Muslims. The Shi'as believed that one of the members of the Prophet's family through Ali and his daughter Fatima would look after the spiritual and

political affairs of the community.

In the course of time, neither the Khilafah nor the Imamah survived in the political sense. Imamah never acquired a concrete political form as the Imams never headed any state and were severely persecuted by the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphs. The state during the Umayyad period and later the Abbasid period cannot be described as an Islamic state. These were primarily monarchies based on the principle of hereditary succession. These caliphs had no religious or spiritual qualification at all. They built their empire on the basis of the sword. Maulana Maududi, the founder of the Jamat-e-Islami, has dealt with this problem in his book *Khilafat Aur Mulukiyat*. When the Abbasids seized political power from the Umayyads through a bloody fight two Muslim rulers came into existence.

Koranic Morality

The Muslim political theorists had to develop a new political theory — that of two simultaneous caliphs ruling over the Muslim world. Later, of course, many caliphs and rulers, Fatimids in Egypt, Umayyads in Spain, Abbasids in Baghdad, Ghaznavids and others in Central Asia came into existence. Not only that, the Turkish generals captured real power and the Abbasid caliphs became mere figureheads. Thus, the political theories had to undergo repeated changes in the Muslim world. All a ruler could claim was that he was enforcing the Islamic Shari'ah to claim Muslim support. But even the Shari'ah was never implemented in its real spirit.

The Koranic concept of a just and benevolent society was an ideal concept which could not be realised in practice except for a brief attempt which lasted for a few years. Thus the states in the Muslim countries claiming to be Islamic states are far from these ideals. Most of these rulers are power hungry and deny even basic rights to their citizens. Democracy comes very close to the Koranic ideal. But one hardly finds democracy in any of these countries with one or two honourable exceptions. None of these states guarantee freedom of conscience which is very basic to the Koranic social morality.



Dara Singh remanded in judicial custody

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Feb. 2. — Ravindra Kumar Pal alias Dara Singh was remanded in judicial custody after being produced at the sub-divisional judicial magistrate's court, Karanjia, by state crime branch yesterday.

The court rejected the plea for a police remand as the crime branch had already filed chargesheets in both the cases in which it produced Dara Singh in court: the murders of Sheikh Rehman and Fr Arul Doss. (Rehman, a Muslim shopkeeper, was killed at Padiabeda on 26 August 1999 and Fr Doss was murdered on 2 September.)

An appeal will be made before the district judge's court tomorrow for a revision of the order, police sources said.

Staines case: A CBI team led by joint director Mr ML Sharma arrived here today on way to Mayurbhanj district.

The CBI has been investigating the Staines' murder and

has filed a chargesheet naming Dara Singh and several others as accused. The case is pending with the CBI designated court here.

Dara Singh was arrested by Mayurbhanj police on 31 January from a jungle near Keonjhar district.

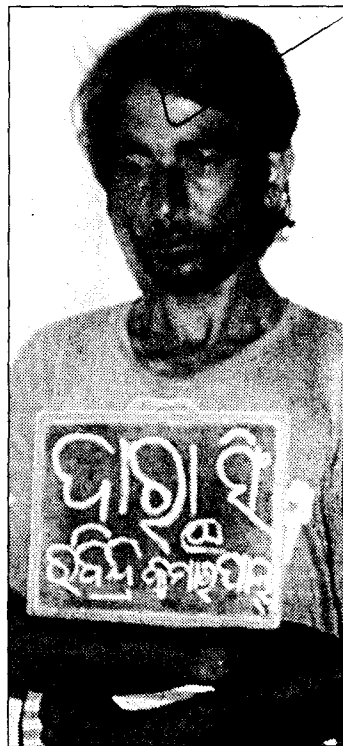
A bag was seized from him that reportedly contained a few clothes, food, a Hanuman chalisa and a packet of chilli powder, apparently meant as a weapon.

He, however, put up no resistance as policemen overpowered him in the dead of night.

Graham Staines and his two sons — Timothy and Philip — were burnt alive while they were sleeping in a jeep on the night of 22 January 1999.

Dara Singh the alleged king pin of the attack. He escaped the police dragnet for one year before being caught yesterday in the dense forest of Keonjhar.

He has confessed that he was present at the scene of the crime.



Dara Singh at Kuliana police station, Mayurbhanj, on Wednesday.
— The Statesman

UP Governor steers clear of row **Bhan refers religious Bill to President**

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Feb. 3. — The Governor has "reserved" the Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill for the President's consideration.

Mr Suraj Bhan, a BJP member, had distanced himself from the controversy the Bill had caused in the state. Both the Opposition and minority organisations have opposed its provisions.

The move is expected to disappoint his party since it will delay the Bill's enactment. Only last week, the state unit chief, Mr Om Prakash Singh, had said the Governor's assent was only a matter of routine. Before giving his nod, he wanted to hear those opposing its provisions, Mr Singh had maintained.

Raj Bhavan sources today explained the Bill had been referred to the President under Article 200 of the Constitution, because provisions of four central Acts were affected by it.

The Bill allows the government to check "indiscriminate" use of public land or places which could hurt "communal sensibilities". The government had maintained that the provisions were not against any specific religion, for it covered all religions.

Mr Bhan was learnt to have weighed several aspects of the debate the Bill had generated, consulted legal experts and sought clarifications from the state government.

Both Houses of the state legislature passed the Bill by voice vote last month almost without any debate. On 24

January, the All-India Denni Taleemi Council general secretary presented a memorandum to the Governor voicing concern over its passage. Urging Mr Bhan not to give his assent, Mr MIH Qureshi maintained the provisions violated the Fundamental Rights.

The Bill had been modelled on the Acts prevailing in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Some provisions of the Acts are said to be more stringent than the Bill. Before their enactment by the states, it was learnt that both Bills had been referred for the President's assent.

As per the Constitution, it is up to the President to withhold or give assent. Since the UP Bill is not a Money Bill, he may direct the Governor to return it to both Houses of the legislature for reconsideration within six months from the date of receipt of such message. If passed by both Houses with or without amendment, it shall be presented to the President again for his consideration.

This procedure is bound delay the Bill's enactment, which the state government might not welcome because it had shown a lot of urgency in getting it passed during the legislature's short winter session.

The government had maintained that the Bill was needed to check ISI activities on India, Nepal border in the garb of religion. It empowers the state to frame rules to regulate use and construction of public buildings and places for religious purposes and notify burial, cremation and other places as religious places.

1572 Bohra reformist demands CBI probe into attack

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, FEB. 15. Both the Bohra community reformist, Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer, and the community's religious leaders who rallied around the Syedna, Dr. Mohammed Burhanuddin, today took their cases to the Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh.

Mr. Engineer, who was released from the Nanavati hospital today, demanded a CBI probe, alleging that the Syedna had instigated the attack on him. The community, however, wanted full protection for their religious leader.

Mr. Engineer said, "Who can speak out against tyranny when the threat of social boycott looms large on them?", referring to the talk that the community was rallying around their religious leader. "The Syedna can even dissolve marriages. Those risking his wrath can also be denied access to pray in the mosques." But the Alims, who are representatives of the Syedna, shot back, saying, "Who asked him (Mr. Engineer) to interfere with our religious beliefs?" After a delegation met Mr. Deshmukh along with two city BJP MLAs, Mr. Atul Shah and Mr.

Raj Purohit, members of the Bohra community agreed to call off their bandh and open their business establishments, saying the concession was limited to Mumbai alone.

Saffron fury over temple demolition

9 - min
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, Feb. 20. — Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal members yesterday went on the rampage in Ahmedabad over the demolition of a temple in the Maninagar area.

VHP has given authorities a Monday deadline for rebuilding the Ramdevpur temple.

Demanding an early decision, about 10 people gheraoed the Mayor, Ms Malini Atit, at Sardar Bhawan where the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation was discussing its annual Budget. Shouts of "Jai Shri Ram" rent the air as the protesters broke into the chamber where the Mayor was sitting, breaking glass and furniture. Slogans were also shouted against Ms Atit.

The group wanted to know why the temple had been demolished when a number of buildings belonging to members of the minority community remained untouched.

Both the VHP and the Bajrang Dal made it clear that they would settle for nothing less than the reconstruction of the Ramdevpur temple. They demanded an early decision, even as the Mayor tried to impress on them her inability to take a decision by herself.

Police have increased security at the residence of the Mayor.

Jamaat

In Bhopal, Mr Digvijay Singh today announced that his government would initiate action against the "communal" Jamaat-e-Islami. "In my view the RSS and the Jamaat are the two sides of the same coin," he said.

Mr Singh recalled that at a Jamaat convention in Bhopal, the RSS chief had been the chief guest. The two outfits are primarily responsible for fomenting communal trouble in the state, Mr Singh said.

Curfew

Curfew was imposed today in Tonk, about 80 km from Jaipur, after a communal clash between two student groups killed one person and injured several others.

THE STATESMAN

21 FEB 2000

BJP MP defends Staines's killer ✓

Withdraw remark on Dara, Thakre tells partyman

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 21

HT-1 22/1

THE BJP leadership today disapproved of Rajya Sabha MP Dilip Singh Ju Dev's open support for alleged Staines killer Dara Singh to save the Government from a major embarrassment before Parliament's budget session.

Hours after Mr Ju Dev announced at a Press conference that he would arrange defence for Dara Singh because he was "innocent", BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre directed him to withdraw his statement.

A BJP Press release said Mr Dev's statement was contrary to the known stand of the party, which was that the assassin must be arrested and punished through due process of law. "Therefore, Mr Thakre has directed Mr Dev to withdraw his statement," said the release issued by BJP office secretary R K Sinha.

Mr Dev was not available for comment after Mr Thakre's order.

Earlier in the day, Mr Dev told reporters that he would arrange for "all possible legal assistance" to Dara Singh, the prime accused in the killing of Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines and his two sons in Orissa last year. He said his help for Dara Singh, who was nabbed by the Orissa police last month, was in his individual capacity and "the party has nothing to do with it."

Mr Dev has been spearheading a campaign against conversions in the tribal areas. Last year, he had organised a camp under the auspices of an RSS outfit to re-convert some tribals from Christianity.

Mr Dev said Dara Singh was innocent as the killings appeared to be the handiwork of certain forces determined to brand the Hindus of India as "bigoted and blood-thirsty."

Mr Dev's announcement caused tension in the party circles as well as in the Government.

BJP officials said Mr Dev's statement was certain to cause ruckus in Parliament. Therefore, it was decided that he should withdraw his statement.

Soon after the Staines killings last year, the BJP and the Sangh outfits had claimed that Dara Singh was not a member of their organisations. They had held that they would leave no stone unturned to ensure that the accused were nabbed and punished.

BJP officials said the party MP's support for Dara Singh would revive the Opposition charge that the latter was indeed one of the Sangh activists involved in terrorising the minorities in Orissa.

Mr Dev's contention was that until Dara Singh was conclusively held guilty of killing the Staines by the court, he could not be treated by the media and everyone else as the convict.

"The Staines killings," he said, "seem to be a wider conspiracy to defame Hinduism, which is the most democratic and liberal religion, so that conversions can continue unhindered."

Mr Dev, whose membership of the Upper House from Madhya Pradesh runs till 2004, said, "There is no apparent motive that could have led Dara Singh to involve himself in the killing of the missionary and his two children."

He said, "This is an established fact that no crime takes place without a motive. And since Dara Singh is not going to be a gainer in any way, his involvement in the crime appears to be far-fetched."

He alleged that Gladys Staines, widow of Graham, was still carrying out missionary work in Manoharpur area in Orissa with the hidden objective of conversion. "We will not allow conversion to take place in the garb of missionary work. Crores of rupees are being pumped into the country for this purpose.

"No political party has the guts to speak the truth. All kinds of means are used for conversion," said Mr Dev.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 FEB 2000

Communal violence in India

By Asghar Ali Engineer

THE TWENTIETH Century has come to a close and we are in not only a new century but also a new millennium. It would, therefore, be interesting to take stock of the communal trend and communal violence in India, particularly in the last 50 years since India became free. There is no doubt that communalism is a modern phenomenon and began with the establishment of British rule in India. All historians and social scientists agree with this. Communal politics is closely associated with electoral politics and as the base of electoral politics widened in the 20th Century, communalism and communal violence also intensified. The British introduced electoral reforms in the early 20th Century to counter the nationalist movement but at the same time tried to widen the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims. Separate electorates were a deliberate and mischievous measure. It would not be unrealistic to maintain that had separate electorates not been introduced, part of India would not have been divided. Partition was the greatest tragedy for India and it left permanent scars on the Indian psyche and nourished a communal mindset.

Partition was not basically brought about by religious differences but by differences between the elite of the two communities on a power-sharing arrangement. The Muslim elite led by Jinnah demanded more representation in Parliament than the Muslim population warranted. The Muslims were 25 per cent of the population but Jinnah and his followers insisted that Muslims be given 1/3rd representation in Parliament. Jinnah was apprehensive that if Muslim representation was less, the Congress would change the agreed constitutional arrangement. The Cabinet Mission Plan which was a better solution to the political tangle did not work because of mutual suspicions.

After the formation of Pakistan, it was thought that the communal problem had been resolved and that independent India would not inherit it. The Indian Constitution not only guaranteed religious and political rights for the minorities but also declared India a secular state (though the word 'secular' was not used in the Constitution until 1975). It was also thought by eminent leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru that with the spread of a scientific education, a secular mindset would develop. This

proved a simplistic assumption. As democratic politics is nothing if not competitive, communal trends re-emerged in post-independence India. The post-Partition riots continued up to 1949. The Constitution was framed and enforced in 1950 and the first general elections took place in 1952. No major communal disturbances took place until 1961 when the Jabalpur riots shook the country. This was more a result of economic competition between a Hindu and a Muslim bidi manufacturer than any electoral competition. But since it came so soon after the Partition, it was alleged that

Communal politics is closely associated with electoral politics and as the base of electoral politics widened in the 20th Century, communal violence also intensified.

Pakistani spies were active in organising the riot and that instructions were being received by local Muslims on a hidden transmitter from Pakistan.

A series of riots broke out particularly in the eastern part of India — Rourkela, Jamshedpur and Ranchi — in 1964, 1965 and 1967, in places where Hindu refugees from the then Eastern Pakistan were being settled. Hindu communal organisations exploited their tales of woe to incite communal passions. The riot in 1967 in Ranchi took place on the question of Urdu. The CPI in Ranchi took out a procession pressing for recognition of Urdu as a second language. The procession was attacked and communal riots broke out.

These were followed by the Ahmedabad riots in 1969 and those in Bhiwandi-Jalgaon in 1970. The Ahmedabad riots shook the conscience of the nation. More than 1,000 people perished. The main cause was intense opposition to Indira Gandhi's leftward thrust by the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party. The Jan Sangh was at its aggressive best and it was in 1968 that it

passed a resolution on Indianisation of Muslims. The gravity of the issue can be gauged from the fact that Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who was then in India for treatment and Jayaprakash Narayan together formed an organisation called "In-sani Biradari" (Human Brotherhood) and organised a number of conventions to pro-

voke communal harmony. The 1970 Bhiwandi-Jalgaon riots were equally cataclysmic and were provoked by the Shiv Sena which was trying to establish itself in Maharashtra.

Communal violence erupted again in 1978 when the Janata Party was in power in the post-Emergency period. The Jan Sangh had merged with other socialist parties to form the Janata Party and took an oath to follow secularism and Gandhian socialism. But soon socialist leaders such as Raj Narain, Madhu Limaye and others raised the dual membership controversy and the Jan

Mr. Bal Thackeray provoked these riots with his anti-Muslim outburst to revive the political fortunes of the Shiv Sena which had lost its appeal. It jumped on the Hindutva bandwagon to revive its fortunes. The Meenakshipuram conversion of a few hundred dalits had given a boost to the VHP and the controversy was fully exploited to boost the appeal of Hindutva forces. Indira Gandhi also allegedly tried to use the VHP for enhancing her dwindling appeal among the Hindus.

The Shah Bano controversy in 1985 made waves in India and Muslim fundamentalists and political leaders exploited this judgment about maintenance of a Muslim divorce. This gave a boost to both Hindu and Muslim communalism. After the Meenakshipuram conversions, the Shah Bano case was the most major communal controversy. Both these controversies became powerful tools for intensifying communalism in the Eighties. This was followed by the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. The Rajiv Gandhi Government gave a boost to it by changing the law for Muslim divorcees, on the one hand, and by opening the doors of the Babri Masjid, on the other. Several riots took place after this — Meerut 1987 and Bhagalpur 1989.

It was in 1990 that Mr. L. K. Advani took out a Rath yatra which turned into a blood yatra and more than 300 small and big riots took place that year. It appeared as if communal chauvinism had gripped the middle classes. The BJP boosted its vote-catching capacity by using this controversy. The final disaster of the 20th Century communal violence occurred in December 1992 when despite assurances to the contrary the BJP, the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal demolished the Babri Masjid. This was followed by the worst riots of post-independence India — in Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Delhi and other places.

It can be said that communal violence touched its apogee in 1992-93 and nothing worse could happen thereafter, at least in the 20th Century. Let us hope that in the new millennium religion will not be misused politically and it will become an important resource for peace rather than an instrument for hatred and conflict.

Back to 1984

THE MOVE in favour of a fresh inquiry into the 1984 anti-Sikh riots appears to have been inspired more by political considerations than a burning desire to ascertain the truth and punish the guilty. Had the latter been the case, the government would have been more concerned to find out why the earlier inquiries have really led nowhere. It might have been more advisable in this respect to pick up the threads from where they have left off — deliberately or otherwise — and pursue the matter to the bitter end. Instead, a fresh inquiry will only result in further delay since the whole cumbersome legal process will have to be set in motion all over again. It is difficult to escape the conclusion, therefore, that the government is merely trying to pretend that it is doing something while, in reality, its present initiative will have exactly the opposite effect.

True, several prominent Sikh leaders have backed the demand for appointing a commission of inquiry to look into the whole brutal episode again. But it needs to be appreciated that the Sikh community's anguish basically emanates from the fact that none of the people widely seen as having been prime movers behind the outrage has been punished. In some cases, even the FIRs had not been filed against those who were believed to be responsible for the violence while, in some others, the accused have been acquitted by the courts. It is unlikely, therefore, that the new inquiry will reveal anything of great significance that is already not common knowledge. What has evidently been lacking all along is the political and administrative will to bring the guilty to justice. It is now fifteen years since the Ranganath Mishra Commission began its inquiry into the 1984 riots, and a new panel can be trusted to take nearly as long. Meanwhile, as the acquittal of several of the accused has shown, much of the material evidence has disappeared or has been doctored. A fresh probe is unlikely to be of much help in this context.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 JAN 2000

FIVE AIRPORTS TO BE LEASED OUT

Cabinet nod for fresh probe into anti-Sikh riots

By P.K. Bhardwaj

NEW DELHI, JAN. 12. A fresh judicial probe into the November 1984 anti-Sikh riots by a retired Supreme Court judge is among the several decisions taken by the Union Cabinet which met here today.

The other important proposals cleared by the Cabinet include another relief package for the super cyclone victims of Orissa, a technology mission for improving the quantity and quality of cotton produced in the country, extending the satellite networking facilities to Indian companies and sharing of the INSAT time with non-Government users and leasing out five major airports for 30 years in preference to their corporatisation and an Ordinance to amend the Debt Recovery Tribunal Act. The Cabinet rejected the controversial recommendations by the Bakshi Committee, proposing higher salary benefits for the faculties of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences and the Post-Graduate Institute, Chandigarh.

The one-man Judicial Commission to be set up to inquire into the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and other areas of the country in the wake of the assassination of the former Prime Minis-

ter, Indira Gandhi, on October 31, 1984, will be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court to be nominated by the Chief Justice of India.

The terms of reference for the inquiry, to be completed within six months, requires the Commission to go into the causes and course of criminal violence and riots targeting Sikhs.

Apart from examining the complaints and allegations either by individuals or the Government, the Commission will find out whether the heinous crimes could have been averted and whether there were any lapses or dereliction of duty on the part of police and others.

Denying that the decision was politically motivated and directed against the Congress (I), the Union Parliamentary Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, who briefed the media after the Cabinet meeting, reeled off facts and figures to justify the decision. The riots were probed by the Ranganath Mishra Commission and two committees and 147 police officers were blamed for dereliction of duty.

Fortytwo out of them had either died or retired. Of the rest, 77 were exonerated, one warned and 14 punished. Proceedings against 13 others were in progress and only 10 were

found guilty. Similarly, 707 criminal cases were registered. Out of them, 322 cases were sent as untraced and cancelled. As many as 320 cases had ended in acquittal. While 25 cases were pending in trial courts, only 30 cases, which did not constitute even 10 per cent of the total, resulted in conviction.

In these circumstances, the Government thought of re-examining everything and decided to constitute a fresh probe. A similar judicial probe had been ordered by the Congress(I) Government earlier.

The new package for Orissa envisages implementation of the Food-for-Work Programme under the Employment Assurance Scheme in all the 14 affected districts. Two kg of rice will be supplied under the programme to persons belonging to the Below Poverty Line(BPL) families and BPL prices. The Food Corporation would make the rice available to the Orissa Government, which would implement the programme at a cost of Rs. 275 crores.

About 2.5 lakh houses would be constructed under the Indira Awas Yojna and 50,000 more houses under the credit and subsidy housing scheme.

THE HINDU
13 JAN 2000

Shamim to head Minorities Commission

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JAN. 14. In a move aimed at sending out signals of moderation towards the minorities, the Vajpayee Government is said to have decided to reconstitute the National Commission for Minorities, putting at rest apprehensions that the Commission could be abolished altogether, as the ruling coalition has had occasions to feel embarrassed by its observations and findings. The re-constituted Commission is likely to be headed by Mr. Justice M. Shamim, a judge of the Delhi High Court who gave the ruling in the hawala case that the "diaries" were not admissible evidence. The "Kashmiri Pandit" slot is to be filled by Mr. Vijay K. Dar, a retired IAS officer, while the "Shia" seat would be occupied by Mr. Shamim Qazim, a banker by profession.

The other members are: Mr. Trilochan Singh (a former aide to former President Zail Singh); Gen. A.M. Sethna (retd.), a Parsi; Mr. T.K. Lochen Tolku (a Buddhist), Mr. John Joseph from Kerala.

The Prime Minister is also said to have approved the appointment of Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde as Chairman of the Indo-French Forum, Dr. I.P. Singh as Chairman of the Indo-German Forum, and Mr. K.C. Pant as Chairman of the Indo-British Forum; each of the appointments carries with it a Cabinet rank.

THE HINDU
15 JAN 2000

IS INDIA A HARD, SOFT OR BIASED STATE?

BY C.P. BHAMBHRI

The recent hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft IC-814 has generated a public debate on the real capabilities of the Indian state while dealing with external and domestic challenges during serious crisis situations. The RSS leadership has maintained that the Indian state could not take hard decisions while dealing with the hijackers because Indian society is "soft." If this logic of the RSS is accepted, a soft society cannot have a "hard" state. According to RSS joint general secretary, K.S. Sudarshan the Vajpayee government "capitulated" because the relatives of the hostages demonstrated at the Prime Minister's residence. RSS chief Rajendra Singh sees in this an evidence of Hindu "cowardice." So he has urged the "Hindu society" to become courageous and "boldly confront such incidents." The RSS and the BJP leadership are however making false dichotomies between a hard, effective and capable state and a soft, weak and vulnerable state.

The task before Indians is not to transform a so-called "soft" state to a "hard" one but to ensure that the state behaves like a state while dealing with problems.

First, the Indian state has been able to defend its territorial integrity which has been quite often challenged by external forces and internal secessionist and insurgent groups. Second, the Indian state has effectively promoted and protected its national interests in spite of opposition and pressures of the powerful Western state systems. Pandit Nehru and Mrs Indira Gandhi dealt with the problems of Goa in the Sixties and of Sikkim and Bangladesh in the Seventies irrespective of the opposition of the international community. Both Pakistan and China accept that any military solution to the disputes with India is not possible because the Indian state with its professional army can defend its national interest. This assessment precedes the Pokharan II of May 1998.

Third, the Indian state has successfully confronted the believers in the politics of bullet in the Telengana where a violent movement was launched by the Communist Party or in Bengal by the Naxalites in the Sixties. The late Naxalite leader Vinod Mishra formed the Indian People's Front and participated in the politics of ballot by abandoning the politics of annihilation of class enemies. Similarly in the Northeast several erstwhile insurgent leaders have opted for the democratic political process as they found themselves completely "unequal" before the power of the Indian state. Hence L. K. Advani's personal agenda of making India a "hard state" to confront the enemies of the country is irrelevant.

The relevant agenda before India is to purge the state of its

The growth of BJP and the Sangh Brotherhood has made minority groups quite insecure and vulnerable. The BJP-led Vajpayee coalition government at the Centre or the BJP state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat have given a sense of insecurity to the minorities who do not feel fully protected by the law enforcing machinery of the Indian state

class, caste and community bias and prejudices. Here a few illustrations should be given to validate the argument that the Indian state has to be cleaned before it can act as a neutral and impartial protector of the rule of law. Important studies by bureaucrats like N. Vittal, N.N. Vohra, and P.S. Appu have established that the Indian state is being held hostage by powerful politicians, bureaucrats, criminals and other dominant lobbyists. Scholars like Gunnar Myrdal in his *Asian Drama: Study into the causes of Indian Poverty* and Oliver Mendelson and Maria Vicziany (eds.) in their study of *The Untouchable. Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* have proved that the Indian state discriminates while dealing with the poorer strata of society and the Dalits.

The tardy implementation of land reforms in India has been attributed to the prevalent class bias practised by the functionaries of the state. Many democratic struggles have taken place against the Indian state to defend the rights of the poor and the oppressed castes as the state has often not behaved as a neutral umpire while dealing with the problems of oppressed classes and castes.

The growth of BJP and the Sangh Brotherhood has made minority groups quite insecure and vulnerable. The BJP-led Vajpayee coalition government at the Centre or the BJP state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat have given a sense of insecurity to the minorities who do not feel fully protected by the law enforcing machinery of the Indian state. The states of Gujarat and UP have a history of communal divide and the governments of these states have to be extremely sensitive to the feelings of the minorities. In this context certain decisions and actions taken by these governments seem to be very alarming. The Gujarat government has per-

mitted its employees, including those belonging to the police, to join the RSS. This decision can have far reaching consequences. Similarly, the UP government has formulated a law aiming to regularise the construction of religious buildings and places. By this law any new construction of mosques will have to be permitted by the district magistrate. One of the objectives of this is to curb the activities of Pakistan's ISI along the Indo-Nepal border where several mosques, which allegedly provide safe sanctuary to the Pakistani infiltrators, are being constructed. But who would judge the neutrality of the UP district magistrates in a state where bureaucracy is completely politicised and communalised?

Similarly the "Chennai Declaration" adopted by the BJP National Council on December 28, 1999 clearly suggests that the BJP government is committed to the implementation of the ideology of Hindutva. K. Jana Krishana Murthy, the vice president of the BJP, while releasing the "Chennai Declaration" on January 13, 2000 observed that "It is our vision of the country." The document states: "Our party now has the opportunity, and the obligation, to give a new direction to poli-

tics and government in India. We can succeed in this task, provided we remain committed and loyal to the ideals and ideology that brought us into existence as a political party, first as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951 and later as the BJP in 1980." Thus the Indian state under the BJP leadership is committed to implement its ideology of Hindu nationhood which is under threat from Muslims and Christians. The Chennai Declaration provides a clear direction to its ministers and legislators to uphold its political ideology of targeting all minority groups and cultures. In the light of this declaration, the decisions of the UP and Gujarat state governments assume great significance.

What is the RSS? In the Twenties Dr Hedgewar founded the RSS to train the Hindu youth to protect and defend his religion against the enemies of the Hindus. In the Twenties the Muslims were the main targets of Hedgewar's RSS. The RSS training induces youth to behave aggressively against the enemies of Hindutva and this mindset prompted the RSS chief on January 5, 2000 to blame the "Hindu cowardice" for India's surrender before the hijackers. In RSS ideology the concept of "the other" is the principle on which the value system is founded.

In Gujarat the RSS organised "Sankalpa Shibir" (pledge camp) where the important topic was "the concept of Hindu Nationalism." The Sangh Brotherhood indoctrinates its workers to view Hindu interests as real ones and that minorities are a challenge to Hindu society and security of the Indian state. Hence construction of mosques by Muslims in UP has to be regulated and, in effect, stopped. In Gujarat, the RSS trained functionaries of the state government will be successful in protecting the interests of Hindus who are threatened by the so-called conversion activities indulged by the Christian missionaries. Is it not the responsibility of the Central government to control the states which are weakening the basic structure of the secular Constitution of India? Is it not incumbent on the Prime Minister to contradict the racist and communal statement made by the president of the RSS? The self-appointed secular, socialist and regional coalition partners of the BJP do not seem to be worried about the "hijacking" of the Indian state by the Sangh Brotherhood. The BJP has been quite honest that the building of Ram temple is just one of its programmes like its anti-cow slaughter movement. It is clear it has not abandoned its ideology of Hindutva and actions of the BJP-led state governments are taking India towards its real goal of the Hindu state.

As a result Hindu biases are getting quite solidified within the apparatus of the Indian state. A religiously biased state is dangerous in a multi-religions, multi-cultural and plural society like India because it will lead to the establishment of privileged citizens and second class citizens — of Hindus and inferior/enemy non-Hindus. The Indian state is gradually being captured by these believers who are trained to exercise state power in a biased and discriminatory manner. All this clearly establishes that India is witnessing a process of a Hindu state-in-the-making which will be the carrier of RSS ideology. **PROF. C.P. BHAMBHRI** is an eminent scholar with the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Gujarat's communal trajectory

There is now a shift in emphasis on the imaginary enemy. The Sangh Parivar is exploiting a feeling of vulnerability of the majority community by raising the fear of conversion. ASHOK KUMAR BEHERA says effective non-governmental intervention is necessary if people are to be made aware of the Sangh Parivar's insidious design

CERTAIN developments in Gujarat over the span of a fortnight deserve close consideration. On Christmas day 1999, two Hindu outfits — the Hindu Jagaran Manch and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad — took out a rally in the predominantly Christian-populated area of Ahwa, district headquarters of Dangs. At a meeting near a church where mass was on, Swami Vidya Sankar Bharati, Shankaracharya of Karveer Peeth, and Swami Aseemananda launched a diatribe against conversions and the evangelisation of tribal society.

Swami Aseemananda said "this foreign culture (Christianity) is destroying the Adivasi culture" and that "conversions should not be allowed". Both of them declared a Hindu function would be an annual feature at Ahwa on Christmas Day.

On Christmas day in 1998, the HJM-VHP had also organised a rally to protest against an alleged wave of conversions and this was followed by a series of attacks on churches and Christian schools. Thirty-six churches and prayer halls were burnt. Last year's rally was "incident-free" in terms of violence, but the anti-Christian hysteria generated in the run-up to the rally and the inflammatory speeches on the day itself have done incalculable damage to the social fabric.

The HJM-VHP made the state BJP government withdraw the 27 October circular banning rallies or provocative programmes by one religious community during the festivals of another community. A quid pro quo with the government was reached and the Hindu outfits agreed to bring forward the *shilanyas* for a Ram temple, near a church, originally scheduled for Christmas. The outfits got away with everything they wanted and Christmas was observed under the shadow of the gun.

Close on the heels of the Ahwa incident, Gujarat lifted the ban on state government employees joining the RSS. Under the Gujarat Government Service and Conduct Rules, in force since 1986, the RSS was one of 16 banned organisations state employees were not allowed to

associate themselves with. Chief minister Keshubhai Patel described the RSS as a "nationalist" cultural organisation, but its involvement in the perpetration of communal violence and anti-minority campaign is self-evident.

The ban was lifted just before a state-level RSS *sankalpa shivir* in Ahmedabad during 6-9 January. RSS chief Raju Bhaiyya and his deputy harped on conversion and urged nearly 26,000 volunteers to be alert against Christian missionaries. For the Sangh Parivar, Gujarat is the model state — the testing ground of Hindutva. The BJP, with the help of allied outfits, have consolidated themselves in the state over decades through a mixed strategy of Hindutva mobilisation and social engineering — emphasising socio-economic issues, expanding social bases and entering into alliances with secular mainstream political parties. The militant Hindu strategy is based on exploitation of the majority's vulnerability by raising the fear of being swamped by "alien forces", particularly Islam and Christianity.

Only recently, the Sangh Parivar targeted Christians by fanning passions over conversion. Otherwise, since the establishment of the state unit of the Jan Sangh in 1951, Hindutva mobilisation had been on an anti-Muslim plank. The Sangh Parivar began to reap the benefits of Hindutva mobilisation and organisation-building in the early 1990s and captured power in Gujarat in 1995.

In the 1950s, the RSS and Jan Sangh could not make much impact in Gujarat. The Indo-Pakistani conflicts of the 1960s and the 1965 war helped the Jan Sangh exploit the anti-Muslim feelings among upper castes. The death of chief minister Balwantrao Mehta in 1965, when his plane was shot down by Pakistan, heightened anti-Muslim feelings among the urban middle class. The RSS-Jan Sangh cashed in and spread hatred against Muslims. This was followed by communal riots in Saurashtra and Kutch. The Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti, formed in Ahmedabad in 1968, fanned anti-Muslim feelings. Ahmedabad was

rocked by communal riots in September-October 1969. Official figures show that there were 2,938 communal riots in the state during 1960-69. The Jan Sangh made its debut in the assembly, winning the Rajkot seat in the 1967 elections.

Communal tension abated in the 1970s and the Jan Sangh followed a moderate strategy. The ABVP and the Jan Sangh participated in the 1974 Nav Nirman student movement that highlighted the issue of corruption. The Jan Sangh forged an alliance with the Jan Morcha to defeat the Congress. It also joined the anti-Emergency campaign. In the 1975 assembly elections, the party secured 18 seats and became a coalition partner in the United Front government.

Gujarat was again drawn into the vortex of communal strife in the 1980s. The Jan Sangh was rechristened the BJP in 1980. The anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985 often took the form of Hindu-Muslim riots. Besides the BJP's Hindu mobilisation, Congress factionalism also fuelled communal violence. Riots spread from Ahmedabad and Vadodara to south Gujarat.

The Jan Sangh and the BJP were aware that communal passion in itself could not win elections and so they concentrated on organising and mobilising various castes and social groups. In Saurashtra, Rajputs lost their economic and political power after the abolition of *zamindari*. They had a grudge against the Congress which was responsible for land reforms. Most Rajputs initially supported the Swatantra Party but the Jan Sangh managed to woo a section of them with Swatantra's decline.

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In 1980, the BJP developed strategy to broaden its base among different castes. It realised that Hindu unity was not possible without mobilising backward castes, Dalits and tribals. The Bharat Sevashram and Hindu Milan Mandir, pro-BJP groups, undertook welfare measures among backward castes. To some extent this helped the BJP gain support among the backward castes. In the early 1980s, Sankarsinh Vaghela, then BJP president and a Rajput, built a pro-party Kshatriya Sabha. Many peasant castes like the Kolis, which acquired Kshatriya status in the Sanskritisation process, joined the Kshatriya Sabha.

In 1983, the RSS floated the Samajik Samrasata Manch — the Social Assimilation Front — to attract Dalits. The BJP supported Dalit protests against atrocities committed by upper castes and organised *nyaya yatras*. Harijan and tribal cells were formed in the BJP and a number of Dalit and tribal leaders given important positions in the party.

Efforts towards broadbasing the party helped the BJP in the Ramjanambhoomi mobilisation. In 1989, the Sangh Parivar organised *Ramshila puja* at Ayodhya. Bricks were collected from Gujarat villages. LK Advani began his *rath yatra* from Somnath in September 1990. Several mini *rath yatras* were organised and communal riots occurred at 26 places in which 99 people were killed. The communal mobilisation helped the BJP win 20 of 26 Lok Sabha seats in 1991.

The campaign for the demolition of the Babari Masjid and

construction of a Ram temple began in November 1992. Hundred of *kar sevaks* from various castes, including OBCs, Dalits and tribals, were recruited from Gujarat for Ayodhya. Demolition of the mosque sparked communal riots in various parts of Gujarat which continued for six months and claimed more than 200 lives. Against this backdrop, the BJP won 122 of 182 assembly seats in 1995 and formed the government.

There is now a shift in emphasis on the imaginary enemy. The Sangh Parivar now exploits a feeling of vulnerability of the majority community by raising the fear of conversion. For the Hindu Right the "other" is now Christianity. The anti-Christian mobilisation in Dangs and south Gujarat is primarily aimed at strengthening tribal support. In Dangs, 94 per cent of inhabitants, living in 309 villages, belong to the Scheduled Tribes. Of them, 40 per cent are Kunbis or Kuknas, 33 per cent Bhils and 14 per cent Varlis.

According to the 1991 Census, the Christian population of Dangs was 7,500 or five per cent of the inhabitants. Though Christian missionaries had been working in the area since 1904, they made only a few converts. Kukna headmen and Hindu forest officials had opposed their activities. In the past decade, the number of converts has increased. According to an estimate, there are now around 20,000 Christians. Some Kukna political leaders invited missionaries in the 1970s to run schools and welfare activities.

Parallel to missionary activities, Hindu sects have been active in Dangs and south Gujarat to convert Adivasis to their brand of Hinduism. The Moksha Marg began to proselytise among Adivasis of south Gujarat in the early 1950s. Other Hindu sects — Sat Keval, Swadhyay and Swaminarayan — also emphasise devotional worship. Followers of these sects, however, continue to worship their traditional gods and goddesses and participate in community festivals.

Christian converts, on the other hand, feel they have liber-

ated themselves from old tribal beliefs which they consider morally inferior. Christians remain aloof from community festivals and religious ceremonies. Non-Christians resent this attitude and see it as an attack on community solidarity. The converts, however, believe they are discriminated against. This is the cultural contradiction between Christians and non-Christians in Dangs.

Swami Aseemananda exploited this contradiction to mobilise tribals against conversion and Christianity. Seeing that Hanuman was worshipped by every Dangi, he went to their homes and distributed prints of the deity and copies of the *Hanuman Chalisa*. He did not interfere in the food and drinking habits of tribals and cultivated personal contacts with each family. With help from the VHP and Bajrang Dal, he established his base at Waghai. His Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad

runs schools and hostels in Dangs.

The Dangs district panchayat was controlled by Kukna leaders of the Congress from 1970 to 1996. They had misused power and did not bother to address issues of landlessness, unemployment and labour migration. This style of operation faced challenges with the emergence of a new generation of educated Dangi youths. Many tribal youths joined the BJP because of the corruption of the Congress leadership. Even many Christians joined the BJP because of this. After joining the BJP, they sought to win popular support.

In March 1997 the BJP held a meeting at Valsad town and the work of Swami Aseemananda was appreciated. It was decided that conversion should be taken up as an issue. A *trishul* investiture ceremony was organised at Ahwa and 700 *trishuls* were distributed. On Christmas day, 1997, the VHP-HJM organised a rally against alleged conversions at Pipalwada village, bordering Dangs.

Contradictions in tribal society and discontent among sections of tribals took a sinister dimension with the communal instigation of the Sangh Parivar. This explains why a tribal does not hesitate to kill a fellow tribal. The solution lies in firmly handling the communal campaigns of Swami Aseemananda and his ilk and solving fundamental problems like landlessness. Effective non-governmental intervention is also necessary to make the people realise the insidious design of the Sangh Parivar.

(The author is on the staff of The Statesman, Calcutta.)

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IT IS JAIL OR JUSTICE, CONGRESS WORKERS TOLD

Sonia's call for prolonged fight against communalism

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, JAN. 30. The Congress (I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today gave a call to party workers to "go to the jails" and fight the "spreading of communalism" by the BJP Governments in Gujarat and at the Centre and resist the attempt being made to subvert the Constitution.

"Justice or jail" would be the motto of the Congress(I) workers till they succeed in defeating the communal forces and force the BJP Government to reverse its attempts to subvert the Constitution which guarantees equality for all, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, Ms. Gandhi said.

With her, the party workers present at the public meeting — which also marked the conclusion of the 'Sankalp Yatras' launched by the party from four corners of the country — took a pledge to "dedicate" themselves to a prolonged fight against communalism and to uphold the values and principles of the Constitution and oppose "tooth and nail" the Gujarat Government's notification giving permission to its employees to participate in the activities of the "communal" Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

"Gujarat is only a testing ground for the BJP's hidden agenda to spread communalism and therefore the fight will not be confined only to Gujarat but will be taken to every corner of the country to defeat the ruling party's design to divide the nation on communal and religious lines," Ms. Gandhi said.

Thin audience

The meeting, however, was a disappointment considering the preparations the party had made and the hype generated over the last few days. Though it was supposed to be a public meeting, the thin audience mainly comprised Congress(I) workers, mainly those who formed a part of the 'Sankalp Yatras'. The fact that she arrived three-and-half hours late (and not at 11.30 a.m. as scheduled) also showed on the numbers at the meeting.

Immediately after her arrival, Ms. Gandhi visited the Sabarmati Ashram along with a large number of senior party leaders and attended a prayer meeting. Among those present were the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. P.M. Sayeed, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mr. A. K. Antony, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, Mr. Jitendra Prasad, and the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan — Mr. Digvijay Singh, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh and Mr. Ashok Gehlot.

On BJP's origins

In her brief 12-minute address, Ms. Gandhi touched upon the



The Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, courting arrest while leading a march to the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Sandeep Saxena

Protests 'saffronisation', courts arrest

By Sujay Mehdudia

NEW DELHI, JAN. 30. The Congress (I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, along with CWC members, legislators and councillors courted arrest at Tees January Marg here today while proceeding towards the Prime Minister's residence to protest against the "saffronisation" of the bureaucracy in Gujarat and the move by the BJP-led coalition to review the Constitution.

It was the first time that Ms. Sonia Gandhi had courted arrest, and the second time she had led a protest march. The show, however, left much to be

desired. It reflected the failure of the local Congress leadership, as well as other leaders, to mobilise workers. In fact, securitymen and vehicles outnumbered the protesters.

Earlier in the morning, senior leaders and workers assembled at the party headquarters at 24, Akbar Road. This was followed by a tribute of bhajans to the father of the nation on his martyrdom day. Ms. Gandhi then administered a pledge to the Congress (I) workers to uphold the nation's integrity and unity and work for the betterment of Da-

lits, women, backward classes and minorities.

After paying floral tributes to the Mahatma at the Gandhi Smriti, Ms. Gandhi led the protesters towards two security barriers. On reaching the first barrier, they were stopped; and Ms. Gandhi was seen gesturing to the accompanying leaders to go ahead. When she proceeded towards the main steel barrier, the police announced that all leaders, including Ms. Gandhi, had been arrested. After a few minutes of resistance, Ms. Gandhi courted arrest and later drove away in her car.

history and origin of the BJP which she said was born out of "hatred and intolerance" towards Mahatma Gandhi's lofty ideals and values.

It was immaterial to which organisation the killer of the father of the nation belonged; what was important was that he subscribed to the "ideology of hatred and communal passion" which the RSS believed then, and was "hell-bent to spread in the country" even now.

Describing the BJP as the "most opportunist" party, which did not believe in any ideology but was only "guided by the lust for power," Ms. Gandhi said it was "unfortunate" that the killers of Gandhian ideology were now rul-

ing in Gandhi's and Sardar Patel's Gujarat.

"It is the duty of all Congress(I) workers to oppose any such move and expose to the people the BJP's nefarious designs to divide the country on caste and religious lines and damage the social fabric of the nation," she said.

Threat to democracy

Ms. Gandhi described the BJP Government's notification on the RSS in Gujarat as a "threat to democracy" and said the ruling party, through "RSS-coloured" employees, would try to subvert the electoral process and allow bogus votings to retain power. "It has set a dangerous trend and unless the Congress(I) takes upon it-

self the solemn duty of opposing any such move, the democratic structure of the country will be in peril," she cautioned.

The notification, she felt, would divide the administration and asked the BJP Government whether it would deal without any bias with employees who refuse to join the RSS. Claiming that the notification was against the Constitution, which banned Government employees from actively participating in the activities of any communal organisation to ensure an impartial administration, she said her party would not allow the BJP to "impose its hidden agenda on everybody".