

Tehelka panel seeks time, Yashwant date

OUR BUREAU

June 28: The Venkataswami commission investigating the Tehelka disclosures has issued fresh notices to, among others, finance minister Yashwant Sinha.

Sinha was mentioned indirectly in the tapes as being an alleged beneficiary of a large sum of money purportedly collected on his behalf by a Bihar MP, Rajiv Pratap Rudy. The "information" was fed in the tapes by former Samata Party treasurer R.K. Jain. The minister had promptly denied the allegation, as did Rudy,

while Jain later claimed his quotes were "doctored".

A. Rao, officer on special duty to Justice K Venkataswami, said the commission had sought Sinha's response in his personal capacity and not as the finance minister. This clarification is likely to be used as an argument by the BJP to counter a possible Opposition demand for the finance minister's scalp.

Sinha has been given until July 2 to respond. Notices were earlier issued to former BJP president Bangaru Laxman, who was seen accepting money in the

tapes, and Samata leaders George Fernandes and Jaya Jaitly.

The commission, whose term was to expire on July 23, has sought a four-month extension. "Given the voluminous task under the terms of reference, the commission, in spite of its best efforts, is forced to ask for an extension by four months," Rao said. The request for an extension will be made after the next hearing on July 2.

If the extension is granted, and government sources believe it will be, the immediate political fallout will be that Fernandes is unlikely

to be reinstated in the Cabinet. The former defence minister was banking on a clean chit from the Venkataswami Commission at the earliest to come back to power.

Though he was retained as the NDA convener even after he was mentioned in the Tehelka tapes — which also showed his official residence being used to entertain arms dealers — Samata sources admitted that with the loss of ministership, much of Fernandes' sheen had been dulled.

It remains to be seen whether Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee carries out a limited minister-

ial shuffle before the monsoon session. Government sources had earlier said that Vajpayee was likely to fill in the berths vacated by Fernandes and Mamata Banerjee.

BJP sources said though the names of other Central ministers such as Ram Vilas Paswan and Santosh Gangwar were listed by the Tehelka probe panel, notices might not be issued to them as there was no "direct" mention of their involvement.

It is learnt that Laxman, who had earlier deferred filing a reply, has submitted one. Sources close to him said his main plea was that

while he had taken the money, it was promptly deposited with the BJP to be used in the party's corpus of funds.

The commission has also issued a "letter interrogatory" to tehelka.com after Justice Venkataswami was informed about some irregularities in the transcripts, including missing pages.

Of the 13 files mentioned in the tapes, the defence ministry has sent the files of six transactions to the commission. According to Rao: "The remaining seven files will soon be handed over to the commission for scrutiny."

Liberhan Commission warns Katiyar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE *SN*

NEW DELHI, July 24. — Mr Justice MS Liberhan, heading the one-man inquiry into the Babari Masjid demolition, today warned Mr Vinay Katiyar, the BJP MP from Ayodhya and also an active leader of the Bajrang Dal, that he wasn't cooperating with the commission.

Mr Justice Liberhan was apparently annoyed during the course of the hearing today when Mr Katiyar first questioned the commission's jurisdiction on a subject which was already being investigated and

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tried by another agency, the CBI.

The commission took exception to Mr Katiyar's remarks and told him that it was fully empowered to use its authority. Mr Justice Liberhan also said that he could use coercive powers to make him fall in line.

The commission noted that Mr Katiyar was not only evasive in his reply to the commission's counsel but raised absurd propositions to scuttle the proceedings.

Mr Katiyar in his deposition wondered what would happen if the CBI exonerated him of the charges in the Babari Masjid

demolition case while the commission held him guilty or vice-versa. There shouldn't be dual and parallel proceedings on the same charges, he said.

The commission reminded the Bajrang Dal leader that it has the jurisdiction to question those whose names were associated with the demolition of the mosque.

Mr Katiyar while deposing before the commission also made incoherent remarks. He told the commission to go to Lord Ram and ask Him about the demolition since Lord Ram is recognised by law as a legal person.

Netaji associate unhappy over commission's probe

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 1

MEMBERS OF the Justice MK Mukherjee Commission, led by PK Mukherjee, will arrive here on June 3 to make yet another attempt at solving the mystery over Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's death as no Government agency has declared him dead.

The members of the commission are likely to meet Lakshmi Sehgal and Manvati Arya, both close associates of Netaji, and some freedom fighters.

But Lakshmi Sehgal is not happy with the appointment of the commission.

"I have repeatedly said that there is no substantial evidence to establish that Netaji escaped death during the air crash, but no one is satisfied with my statement. What do they want me to say, I do not know. I cannot express any doubt over Netaji's death," she said.

"It is funny that the Indian Government instituted a commission to probe into Netaji's death but it never disclosed, even to the INA members, the revelations made by Abibur Rehman, a

close associate of Netaji who was with him on the fateful day," she said.

"Rehman told us very clearly that Netaji had received 90 per cent burn injuries and he could not have survived. Similar views were expressed by a Japanese doctor who had witnessed the tragedy. Of course, the Indian Government has not yet contacted the doctor so far," Sehgal said.

Sehgal dismissed rumours that Netaji was taken to Siberia or USSR as baseless propaganda.

"We had a talk with the ambassador of USSR who

described these probabilities as rumours and said there was no record or document with the USSR Government which could tell anything about Netaji. Fake documents and tales were being encashed in the name of Netaji," she said.

Had Netaji been alive he would have contacted his associates.

She said: "Instead of making futile attempts to find out if he is dead, the Government and should concentrate on spreading Netaji's message of courage, sacrifice, nationalism and fearlessness across the country."

Chance to solve Ayodhya dispute lost: Advani

By J. Venkatesan

HD-1 19/11
9-Sept Comtg

NEW DELHI, JUNE 13. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today said the Government lost a golden opportunity in 1990 to solve the Ayodhya dispute when the then Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, withdrew an ordinance issued to acquire the land around the disputed structure and to refer the issue to the Supreme Court.

Deposing before the Justice Liberhan Commission, Mr. Advani said the ordinance, by which about 67 acres of land was to be handed over for "kar seva", was withdrawn due to the "policy of appeasement" followed by the V.P. Singh Government, which staged a "somersault" within 24 hours of issuing the ordinance.

Describing the V.P. Singh Government's action as "unprecedented" in independent India, Mr. Advani said "this conduct only confirmed my misgivings about the Government that this is one which is committed to the policy of appeasement, a policy which is not in the interest of anyone and not in the interest of even the minorities".

By withdrawing the ordinance, Mr. Advani said, the Government lost a chance to solve the problem. The ordinance also proposed to make a single-point reference to the Supreme Court to determine whether a Hindu temple existed at the disputed site and, after demolition, a mosque was superimposed on it. "This certainly made many in the country feel that a possible solution is lost".

Mr. Advani said just before he was to resume his "rath yatra", Mr. V.P. Singh phoned him on October 18, 1990 and conveyed to him that there was a "ray of hope" to solve the vexed issue and asked him to wait in Delhi till the next day to see the "full light".

He said even the then West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, whose party was supporting the V.P. Singh Government, had also phoned him and conveyed similar views. It was after this that the ordinance was issued and later withdrawn.

He said "there is an attempt to make the people



The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, after deposing before the Liberhan Commission in New Delhi on Wednesday.

remember the Ayodhya movement merely by reference to the demolition of the disputed structure". While he felt proud about his participation in the movement, Mr. Advani said he and other leaders in the party did not approve of the demolition of the structure on December 6, 1992.

To a question from the Commission's counsel, Mr. Advani said "I have never described it as a mosque. I have always referred to it as a disputed structure". He said, "We in the country have been unfair to ourselves by describing a place where Ram idols are kept with the approval of the court and where poojas have been going on as a mosque because the structure of that place was one time that of a mosque". Mr. Advani said that "by doing so, we have earned a bad name for the country in the eyes of the world".

Govt assures help to Tehelka probe

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 6. — The Venkataswami Commission, which has issued notices to Mr George Fernandes, Mr Brajesh Mishra and other senior officials, was assured of full government cooperation by the attorney-general, Mr Soli Sorabjee.

The commission, set up by the Centre after the Tehelka exposure, will be handed over all necessary documents, except those concerning national security issues, Mr Sorabjee said at the first public hearing.

The panel, probing several defence deals, has issued notices to the former minister of state for defence, Mr Harin Pathak, Samata Party leader, Mr Srinivas Prasad, and the defence secretary, Mr Yogendra Narayan, asking them to file replies.

Having got affidavits from TV channels that aired the tapes

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showing, among others, Mr Bangaru Laxman, then BJP chief, taking money from a Tehelka reporter in the garb of an arms dealer, the panel will begin daily hearings from July 2.

Mr Laxman, Maj-Gen (retd) SP Murgai, Lt-Col BB Sharma and former Samata treasurer, Mr RK Jain, have already been issued notices. They've been allowed to see the Tehelka tapes and take a copy of the transcripts involving their names so that they could file responses within a fortnight.

Mr Laxman got video-tape copies and transcripts before filing an affidavit but after he was served a notice. Though the Centre has filed affidavits, the panel wants more information and the tapes given by Tehelka to the Army for its inquiry. They are needed to expedite the work of the panel. He had no objection if the tapes were handed over to the panel.

In his written submission, Mr Sorabjee said: "The importance of this commission cannot be over-emphasised. It has been constituted by the government of India not as an act of political expediency. It reflects the resolve of the government to address and to redress the various issues which have surfaced consequent upon the screening of the Tehelka tapes on the news channel.

"May I assure the commission that the Government will extend its utmost cooperation to the commission in its working and deliberations, especially with regard to the timely and expeditious completion of the inquiry.

"It will be appreciated that the government of India has adhered to the time schedule prescribed for filing of affidavits, replies etc., and shall endeavour to do so hereafter.

"The approach of the government of India, and my own view, is that there should

be no reluctance or hesitation about furnishing to the commission with any relevant information and documents it desires to have, except in those cases where the imperatives of national security and national interest necessitate a claim for privilege made in accordance with law.

"Nothing will be withheld from the commission. I am sure that the commission's working and findings will not be an exercise in futility.

Government is keen that true facts are ascertained and established so that those persons, who on the basis of credible and cogent evidence are found to have indulged in wrongdoings are appropriately dealt with.

"It is equally important that the cloud or suspicion based on surmises and speculation about persons who are not implicated in any way is dispelled and their honour and reputation are vindicated."

BAD FAITH AND POLITICS Parivar before the Liberham Commission

WHILE there is something to be said about commissions of inquiry completing their work and submitting a meaningful report within a reasonable period of time, when the VHP's senior vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore says that the Liberham Commission of Inquiry into the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya was constituted with a political motive in mind and, therefore, should be disbanded, one should start looking for his political motive. This should become clear if we consider the fact that the Commission was unable to record depositions from the principal protagonists until August 2000, when it issued a summons to Narasimha Rao, mainly because of the non-cooperative attitude of the Sangh Parivar. Three Central ministers, LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti were issued summons in November and RSS Chief KS Sudarshan and Jyoti Basu in December. In other words, the big politics behind the Babari Masjid episode was coming under public scrutiny for the first time, much of that focussed on the Sangh Parivar. This has proved to be very embarrassing since it reveals the gap in logic that separates the Parivar's thinking on the temple issue and the norms of parliamentary democracy, or rather its two-mindedness. If you have someone with a sense of responsibility, such as Advani, you will get "the most painful day of my life", "negotiated settlement" and "legislation", but if you have Sudarshan, then it is "maybe a bomb did it" and Uma Bharti goes something like this: "symbol of slavery", "insult to the nation" and "I can't remember" because she was "disinterested" in what was going on, which is another way of saying it was all right to do so.

The Commission is tying these people up in knots and the public notices. Advani, Joshi and Bharti are people in government and have to balance their Hinduisng convictions with the demands of office. But what happens when the Commission starts summoning people like Singhal and Kishore and Sadhvi Rithambara, as it is scheduled to do shortly? To give a foretaste of what to expect, we quote Kishore: "The Indian Government's liberal outlook often passes off for cowardice, but December 6 gave Hindus an opportunity to display their sense of self-respect and self-pride." The Commission will then balance these depositions with those from independent observers, like the BBC journalist who said Advani said "bada din" and offered her sugar and for which more time will be required. That's when the real fun and games will begin and elements in the Parivar won't like it. Motivated, says Kishore, because the Commission's report will be modulated by the values of liberal democracy which it was constituted to uphold, besides which the embarrassment of being torn between the hardline and the legalistic line will be on display. Bad for the faith, bad for politics.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAY 2001

Tehelka commission issues notices to Bangaru, Jaitly

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 25

THE JUSTICE K Venkataswam Commission today issued notices to former BJP president Bangaru Laxman, Samata Party leader Jaya Jaitly and 23 others, including three serving Major Generals, directing them to respond within a week to the allegations against them in the video tapes secretly filmed by tehelka .com.

Notices were also issued to Maj Gen P S K Choudhary, Maj Gen Manjit Singh Ahluwalia, Maj Gen Satnam Singh and Maj Gen (retd) S P Murgai, commission sources said.

An army court of inquiry had recently found the serving officers, Choudhary and Ahluwalia, guilty of "misconduct" in the tehelka expose which had alleged payment of bribes in defence deals to politicians, bureaucrats and army officers. The commission, has also issued notices to Laxman's personal assistant Satyamurthy, former Samata Party treasurer R K Jain and party leader Surendra Singh Sulekha and the then additional secretary in Defence Ministry L M Mehta, who has since been shifted to the Planning Commission.

Sources said more notices are likely to be issued in the coming days as the panel studies the tapes and other documents before it. The other serving and retired Army officials to whom notices were issued today include Brigadier Iqbal Aingh, Lt Col Sharma, Brig Anil Sehgal (serving), Lt Col Syal, Lt Col Berry and Maj S J Singh (all retired). Besides, notices have also been issued to H C Pant, the then deputy secretary in the Ministry of Defence, Shashi Menon, Rakesh Nigam, middleman R K Gupta and his son Deepak Gupta, Narendra Singh and Mahinderpal Sahni.

The commission had earlier issued notices among others to tehelka.com, the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Home Affairs and some television networks.

Among other things, it had asked the Defence Ministry to inform whether transactions relating to 13 defence deals including the T-90 Tanks and Barak missiles were carried out "according to the set procedure".

All the notices have responded while the dates for receiving representations from the general public has been extended till May 31, commission sources said.

'Cronjagate' cop to help SIT Tehelka 165 inquiry

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 15. - The joint commissioner (Crime Branch) of the Delhi Police, Dr KK Paul, will help the Justice Venkataswami Commission to find culprits in the Tehelka sting-operation case.

Dr Paul had nailed the former South African cricket captain, Hansie Cronje, in the match-fixing case.

Top government officials said Dr Paul will be in charge of a special investigation team but it will be an additional charge as he will continue to discharge his duties as a Delhi Police officer.

The SIT would consist of Delhi Police officials and also others, if necessary. Officials were hesitant to say what the team would do, but it could, for one, investigate the cases of corruption mentioned in the Tehelka tapes.

Meanwhile, the Commission has decided to extend the time for people to come forward and provide information to it. The notices were issued on 24 April and information was asked for by early May.

This was pushed back to mid-May and now, to end-May. This is the last postponement and the the hearings on the basis of the depositions will only start in end-June instead of early next month. This leads to some concern about whether Mr Justice K Venkataswami will be able to complete his task within the four-month period.

Mr Justice K Venkataswami, however, said: "If everyone cooperates then he would be able to so do within the required time."

Dr Paul, apart from cracking the match-fixing case, was involved in the recovery of over 60 kgs of RDX.

THE STATESMAN

16 MAY 2001

Rao delayed HC verdict, Advani tells Liberhan

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 15. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today accused the Congress Government of P.V. Narasimha Rao of "using judiciary as an instrument to thwart people's will" and delaying an early verdict from the Allahabad High Court on the Ram Janmabhoomi- Babri Masjid dispute which ultimately led to the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.

"If the verdict on the land acquisition case had been delivered before December 6, 1992, whether for or against the U.P. Government, a situation would have arisen where no demolition would have taken place," Mr. Advani told the Liberhan Commission here.

Continuing his deposition for the second consecutive day, he blamed the Centre for not taking any step at any point of time to request the Allahabad High Court to deliver an early judgment. "Even though the Government was conscious that certain aspects of the Ayodhya dispute could not be resolved through judicial process, they always avoided this by saying 'let us wait for the court orders'," he told the one-man Commission.

Mr. Advani said that Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, BJP leader, he and the then RSS chief, Mr. Rajinder Singh (Rajju Bhairya), had met the Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, to urge him to request the High Court to deliver its judgment early. "We were also putting pressure on the Central Government to request the High Court for an early verdict. But without giving us any rationale, they refused to do so. When it became public that the Central Government had told Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Advani and others that it is not going to make even a request for an early verdict, the message was conveyed to the judiciary, which did not give an early verdict."

Mr. Advani said that Mr. Rajinder Singh had met the Prime Minister on December 3 and again urged that the High Court be requested to deliver its verdict before December 6. But Mr. Rao told the RSS chief that he was confident that "with you all being in control nothing untoward would happen".

Only for 'symbolic' kar seva: Page 13

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16 MAY 2001

'DEFECTS IN GOVT. NOTIFICATION MUST BE RECTIFIED'

Reprieve for Advani, 20 others in Ayodhya case

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, MAY 4. The special CBI court trying the Babri Masjid demolition case today put on hold the trial of 21 accused in the case, including the Union Ministers, Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, several Shiv Sena and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders, until "defects" in the Uttar Pradesh Government notification referring the case to the court were rectified.

In its February 8 order, the Allahabad High Court had held that the second notification issued by the State Government referring to the special CBI court for trial case no. 198 of 1992 registered in Ayodhya was faulty and that the court could not proceed against the eight accused who had challenged their trial until a rectified notification was issued. The accused later challenged their trial on the basis of the High Court order and the Special CBI judge, Mr. S. K. Shukla, today accepted the plea. He also brought into the High Court's ambit 13 more accused saying they could not be proceeded against unless the defects in the notification were rectified.

Besides the three Union Ministers, others who got an immediate reprieve as a result of today's or-

der include the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Kalyan Singh, the VHP leaders, Mr. Ashok Singhal, Mr. Giriraj Kishore, Sadhvi Ritambhara, Paramhans Ramchandra Das, and Shiv Sena leaders, Mr. Bal Thackeray and Mr. Moreshwar Save.

The CBI judge said consequent upon the High Court judgment, two courses were open to him — to keep on hold trial of all the accused till defects in the notification were removed or to separate the joint chargesheet into two. He opted for the second course. While the trial of 21 accused would be on hold, proceedings would continue against the remaining 26 accused.

The judge ordered the 26 accused, including the then Faizabad District Magistrate, Mr. R. N. Srivastava, and the Superintendent of Police, Mr. D. B. Rai, to present themselves in court on June 8 for framing of charges against them.

Taking a serious view of their complicity in the incidents at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, the judge said they were aware of the repercussions of a demolition and were aware of the threat to the disputed structure. Still they did not make proper police arrangements and even deflated the security cover. They also did not make attempts to counter attacks

on mediapersons by "karsevaks" on the fateful day.

The legal anomaly arose from the State Government issuing two different notifications — the first on September 9, 1993, referring case no. 197 to the special court and the second on October 8, 1993, referring case no. 198 also to the same court. The second notification was found defective by the High Court. While only eight accused had challenged their trial on the basis of the second notification in the High Court, the CBI court today tagged 13 others with them as all of them were placed in similar circumstances.

The CBI court judgment is likely to generate a serious political controversy with the State Government having already taken the view that the second notification was issued in haste during the President's rule. The Government of the day was in an undue hurry to implicate senior BJP leaders in the case and it overlooked legal implications of its action, BJP leaders said.

The Opposition has indicated plans to put the Rajnath Singh Government in the dock over the issue. Opposition leaders have been demanding that the Government issue a rectified notification to try the accused. "The accused have not been discharged. Only their trial has been put on hold on

technical grounds," say the Opposition leaders.

Mr. P. K. Chaube, CBI counsel, said the option to appeal against the CBI court verdict was open to him. However, it was not for the prosecuting agency to dictate to the State Government to issue a fresh notification, he added.

We will go by the law: Rajnath

PTI reports from New Delhi:

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, today said his Government would do "whatever is lawful" in the Ayodhya case and denied that it was trying to protect "anyone".

"We will go by whatever is lawful. What I said two months ago is still relevant," he said in reaction to the CBI court putting on hold trial of 21 accused in the case.

Cong. awaiting order

The Congress today declined any immediate comment on the order of the CBI court, saying it would react only after studying the judgment thoroughly.

"We are awaiting the order of the special court. The party would examine it first before reacting," the party spokesman, Mr. Anand Sharma, told reporters.

Rectify mistakes: Page 13

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2001

Liberhan panel summons Sangh stalwarts

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 1

THE LIBERHAN Commission today issued summons to six senior RSS, VHP and Shiv Sena leaders to appear before it as witnesses in the probe into the Babri Masjid demolition.

Among those asked to depose before the commission next month are RSS leaders H V Seshadri and Moro Pant Pingle, the VHP's H Dalmiya and Giriraj Kishore, Bajrang Dal chief Vinay Katiyar, Sadhvi Rithambhara, Shiv Sena's Moreshwar Save and the then collector of Faizabad, D B Rai.

The announcement was made during today's proceedings, by commission chairman Justice M S Liberhan. Later, the panel's counsel Anupam Gupta said Sangh Parivar leaders and the former district official had been summoned as they were privy to the demolition.

Appearing before the commission for the third time today, HRD Minister M M Joshi accused former PM V P Singh of adopting an inconsistent approach on the issue, which led to the demolition. "Singh failed despite his promise to solve the problem in four months."

Recollecting the develop-

ments during Singh's tenure as PM, Joshi said the problem was aggravated after the Government withdrew an ordinance for the takeover of the 22.77-acre disputed land. The land was to be handed over to a trust headed by a neutral receiver.

Claiming that the BJP always stood for an amicable resolution of the problem, he said the V P Singh Government's dilly-dallying and frequent policy changes antagonised Ram Janmabhoomi activists. This, despite the fact that the then BJP chief L K Advani had always responded positively to Singh's proposals, conveyed through his ministers and emissaries.

Elaborating on the significance of the withdrawn ordinance, he said it was aimed at separating the disputed structure from the rest of the area. The structure, with the 30 square feet surrounding it, was to be acquired by the Government for determination by the Supreme Court whether a temple had existed at the site.

Joshi criticised the then UP Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav for acting in an "uncivilised and barbaric" manner to prevent kar sevaks from reaching Ayodhya.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAY 2001

Unbearable lightness of doublespeak

If L.K. Advani has narrated his piece of truth before the Liberhan Commission then all that he and his parivar has stood for before and after the Babri masjid demolition is nothing but a pack of lies

THE RECENT deposition of L.K. Advani before the Liberhan Commission (April 10-11, 2001) is an exercise in sophisticated hypocrisy. It is a subtle assertion meant not only to defend the indefensible act of the Babri masjid demolition, but also a signal to the Sangh parivar hardliners to carry on the 'unfinished agenda' of building the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Advani is at his cunning best in the depositions. Not only has he shed crocodile tears for the demolition but he also talks of respect for the law, which his parivar has flouted so brazenly on December 6, 1992, and several times after all over the country, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

The Union home minister states that he is deeply dejected by the act and that December 6 was the most depressing day of his life. One wonders with how many tongues this worthy can speak. It was Advani who took the issue of Ram temple in Ayodhya to its feverish pitch with the slogan *mandir wahin banayenge*. The basic message of his campaign was that the temple has to be built *only* at the very place where the Babri mosque was located.

It was obvious that the temple could not be built without the demolition of the mosque. Hence, while the overt emphasis was on temple construction, the exhortation to demolish the *masjid* was the subterranean message in Advani's *rath yatra*.

A month after the demolition, he said that he has no regrets over the demolition and that it was the hand of providence. (*Indian Express*, January 26, 1993). In his party's mouthpiece, he expressed regret not over the demolition but the manner in which it was done (*BJP Today*, September 16-30, 1997).

His shrewd assessment was that the political gain from the demolition would far outweigh the outpourings of secular remorse; that the events of December 6 would increase the vote base of his party (consider the BJP's white paper on Babri demolition). But what is his revised statement now: that of the two opinions which emerged after the demolition — one, that December 6 was a day of national shame, and two, that it symbolised the end of slavery — he subscribes to neither.

Given the deception before the Liberhan Commission, let us take a look at the BJP's white paper to see where the real sympathies of Advani lie. "For a handful it was a barbaric act, for the rest of the country it was liberation — a sweeping away of cobwebs..." "...The mosque Babar built at Ayodhya was without doubt 'a continuous ocular demonstration' against the Hindus. That the ocular demonstration is no longer there is not a matter of regret."

Advani also goes on to state in the commission that the *rath yatra* was not followed by any communal violence. The surcharged and sectarian atmosphere which his *yatra* created, resulted in a trail of bloodshed and violence all over the country. None

other than Sudheendra Kulkarni (currently officer on special duty in the Prime Minister's Office), who had not donned the saffron attire till then, wrote in one of his articles, "what is new to this present round of communal violence in this state (Karnataka) is the extent to which it has succeeded in penetrating the villages. The burning down of an entire hamlet of Muslim farmers near Chennapatana is only the most shocking among the cases reported so far." (*Sunday Observer*, October 14, 1990).

The Sangh strategy while deposing before the commission is apparent. Don't justify any illegal act directly, (after having derived maximum advantage of the act). Do not defend the *kar sevaks* who were mobilised by the 'leaders' to build the temple at Ayodhya. Ignore the fact that the BJP government in UP provided the facilities and the cover to the Hindutva warriors. Use selective amnesia to stall the inquiry.

Today Advani says that he felt depressed after the event. Since public memory is short, who is going to remind the nation that in the white paper on demolition, it was proudly stated then that the *kar sevaks* "did not just erase a symbol of our subjugation.

They did not just begin building a symbol of resurgence. They show us how far we have to travel." (Sufficient indication for more 'nation building' exercises: Kashi, Mathura and hundreds of other 'symbols' of slavery).

Advani, in his deposition, has also defined the future of his politics. He takes a quantum leap by declaring that there is no question of building a Ram temple at the site as the make-shift structure which his volunteers quickly constructed is not only *de facto* but *de jure* a temple.

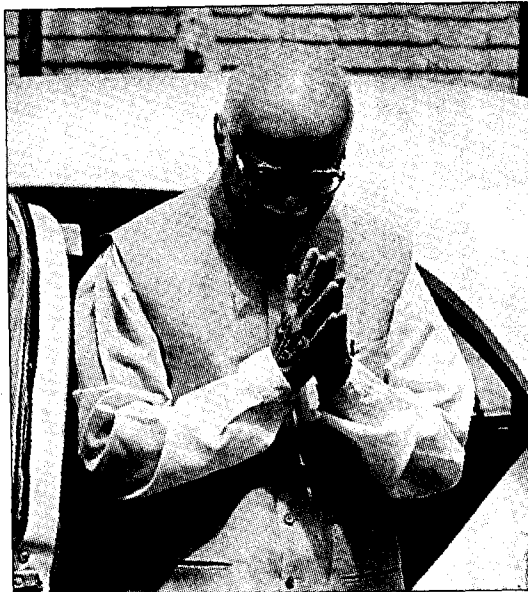
Since *namaz* was not being offered at the site from 1950 when some miscreants installed the Ram *lalla* idols in the night and the Muslim community went by the legal decency of not violating

it (and the Rajiv Gandhi government capitulated to the pressure of the Hindu Right to get the locks opened and *silanyas* performed), hence the 'process' of temple building is complete.

Brilliant logic. First you legitimise the illegal act of installation of the idols. All the court cases pending for the title of the land do not matter now. The judiciary and the faith in it is at once turned redundant. By a logical stroke of genius, Advani has proved that all his efforts before the demolition have borne fruit and the temple is now already there.

What one perhaps needs now is just a renovation, a grand temple, for which his fanatic vanguard are getting the pillars chiseled in different workshops scattered around Ayodhya.

Mayawati has asked a valid question. If this was already a temple, then why mobilise thousands of *kar sevaks* to destroy it? So, does the Sangh parivar led by Advani also has the ignominy of demolishing a so-called 'Ram temple' on December 6?



No semantics please

The writer teaches at IIT Mumbai

HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 APR 2001

'Advani told half-truths before panel'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 12. The Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee today charged that the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, had stated a number of "half-truths" before the Liberhans Commission of Inquiry, and reminded him of his oath of office to respect the rule of law and asked him to refrain from awarding title to a trespasser.

In a statement here, the Committee Coordinator, Mr. Syed Shahabuddin, said Mr. Advani had made a number of baseless points before the Commission and totally ignored the Supreme Court order of October 1994.

"Mr. Advani has repeated the old BJP-VHP line that the Court cannot solve the Ayodhya question. He should know that under the order of the Supreme Court, the title suit is being heard by the Special Bench of the Allahabad High Court. Obviously, the judiciary has placed its faith in the Rule of Law while the Executive, through the mouth of one of its highest functionaries, negates it. This is not only strange but un-

fortunate," he said.

Mr. Advani had also bestowed de jure status on the makeshift temple standing on the debris of the Babri Masjid, while the apex court deferred the allocation of land for the construction till the title was determined by the high court. This stand contradicted the Supreme Court order, he added.

On Mr Advani referring to the status quo order of 1950, he said it did not change the legal status of the Babri Masjid because no criminal trespass and subsequent unlawful occupation which was under legal challenge, could destroy the title of the original owner and transfer it to the unlawful occupant.

While stating that Mr. Advani was correct on de-facto existence, he said, it did not have any de jure status and similarly no prayers were offered at the Masjid since 1950 because the Muslim community respected the status quo order, Mr. Shahabuddin said.

Meanwhile, the CPI(ML) today strongly condemned Mr. Advani's statement terming it as holding a "mirror to the Government's fascist design on Ayodhya."

THE HINDU

13 APR 2001

What stands at Ayodhya is a temple, claims Advani

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: A day after expressing 'regret', 'pain' and 'sadness' at the demolition of the Babri masjid, Union home minister L.K. Advani declared that the structure demolished was actually a temple. On the second day of his testimony before the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry, he said that ever since 1950, "what stands at Ayodhya is a temple. First a *de facto* temple and today both a *de facto* and *de jure* temple. This is not something which anyone else but the court has decided," he said.

"I have been pleading with supporters of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement who occasionally announce a campaign for reconstruction of the temple that at the site there is nothing but a temple and it's the court order that the status quo cannot be changed. This is an order which confers on the place (not just) a *de facto* temple but a *de jure* temple as well," he observed.



Mr Advani's elaborate answer was to a question by Anupam Gupta, the commission's counsel. Mr Gupta asked Mr Advani about a newspaper article in 1989 where he had written, "If the controversy in Ayodhya were simply between a temple and a mosque it would not have been intractable. Those campaigning for Babri masjid should realise that they are wanting not to choose between mandir and masjid, but between Ram and Babar. Jinnah's two-nation theory should be buried. There is one India and its entire population can only identify with Ram and not Babar."

Initially uneasy, Mr Advani chose a lengthy answer highlighting how the 'mandir' at Ayodhya was Ram's birthplace although members of the Babri Masjid Action Committee give importance to the fact that it was built by Babar. "This is wrong. That is why I say don't pit Babar against Ram," he explained.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 APR 2000

Advani upholds Ayodhya temple de jure status

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 11 APRIL

L.K. ADVANI, who developed Hindutva into a potent political tool, on Wednesday forcefully defended the Ayodhya movement as one that strengthened the cause of nationalism and said the courts, too, recognised the de jure status of the temple.

Mr Advani, obviously backed by the judgement on the Presidential reference upholding the acquisition of the disputed land, said the temple at Ayodhya has been a place of worship of the Hindus.

It may be recalled that the Supreme Court on October 24, 1994, empowered the government to delegate a trust to manage the property and to enable Hindus to worship in the makeshift temple on the basis of "comparative user" principle.

Muslims were praying less often than Hindus in the disputed structure before demolition. Mr Advani told the Liberhan Commission that the temple exists at Ayodhya and that there was no need for any reconstruction.

From 1950 to 2001, namely for 51 years, what stands there is a temple. First, a de facto temple and today a temple which is de facto as well as de jure," Mr Advani said during his two-hour deposition before the Commission.

"I have been pleading with the supporters of Ram Janamboomi, who occasionally announce a date from when onwards reconstruction of the temple will be started. This is something the courts have decided...The court's order is against changing the status quo. This is an order which in a way confers on the place recognition as not only a de facto temple but a de jure temple as well," Mr Advani said.

Quoting the Faizabad civil judge's order of 1950, the home minister said "from 1936 onwards the Muslims have neither used the site as a mosque nor offered prayers there and...the Hindus have been performing the puja at the disputed site." He said "from 1950 onwards it had not become any major issue so much so that the Central government and the state government, both belong-

ing to the Congress party, seemed to cooperate in the locks on the temple being removed and 'shilanyas' being performed. However, when the Commission counsel asked how he could say that a "de jure" temple existed at the site and if he was legitimising demolition as a legal fait accompli.

Mr Advani said "so far as the courts are concerned, I am a humble citizen. I cannot at all contemplate presenting the courts a fait accompli. "What I have in mind are various organisations and political parties, who were part of this dispute all along prior to 1992 even they thought it was a temple by virtue of a court injunction."

The home minister said the superstructure was that of a mosque and he regarded it as significant that even the government in its white paper did not refer to it as a mandir or a mosque but only as a disputed structure.

Mr Advani said the first reaction of several organisations and political parties was that "we shall rebuild the mosque".

Babri masjid is a symbol of slavery, says Uma

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 11 APRIL

UNION SPORTS minister Uma Bharati, who reiterated her belief in construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, told the Liberhan Commission on Wednesday that the Babri masjid was a "symbol of slavery" since it was known by the name of an "aggressor".

Describing the Babri masjid as an "insult to the nation," Ms Bharati — known for her inflammatory speeches in the early 1990s, supporting the BJP's Hindutva line, as well as the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya — in her final deposition before the Commission, said: "I am hurt by anything that goes by the name of an aggressor...I cannot relate such a structure with any religion...aggressors should only be treated like aggressors."

She went on to cite the example of Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, where the names of buildings, cities and roads kept by its British rulers were changed after it gained Independence. The Rhodesians did it despite the fact that their erstwhile rulers belonged to the same religion (Christianity), she remarked.

Ms Uma Bharati's observations indirectly justify the demolition of Babri masjid — named after Mughal emperor Babur, who she described as an "aggressor" — by kar sevaks, wanting to build the Ram temple at the disputed site.

Asserting that she believed in the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya, Ms Bharati said: "My being a minister does not affect my belief."

De jure temple in Ayodhya: Advani

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today told the Liberhan Commission that the existence of a Ram temple at Ayodhya had been recognised by the courts, despite the fact that a final verdict was yet to be pronounced.

Continuing his deposition, Mr. Advani said that according to the Faizabad civil judge, the place was neither used as a mosque nor was *namaz* offered there, at least from 1936. On the contrary, Hindus had been performing *poojas* there.

"From 1950 to 2001, what stands there is a temple. First a de facto temple and today it is a de facto as well as a de jure temple. This is not something anyone else but the court has decided. In a way, this order confers on the place recognition as not only a de facto temple but a de jure temple as well."

Mr. Advani said, "I have been pleading with the supporters of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, who occasionally announce that from this date onwards we will start reconstruction of the temple, and telling them there is nothing but a temple at the Ram Janmasthan."

Explaining further, he said, "from 1950 onwards it had not become a major issue because of

the fact that both the Central and the State governments belonged to the Congress and they seemed to cooperate in opening the locks on the temple and *shilanyas* being performed."

When the Commission counsel wanted to know from Mr. Advani how he could say a "de jure" temple existed at the site and whether he was legitimising the demolition, he said "so far as the courts are concerned, I am a humble citizen. I cannot at all contemplate presenting the courts a *fait accompli*".

He added, "I would like to emphasise that I am not using this phrase as against the possibility of courts deciding something else finally in that regard."

The Minister underlined the fact that the site was important for the Hindus as it was believed to be the birth place of Ram.

Mr. Advani also gave a new definition to the concept of "Hindutva" saying "Hindutva" and "nationalism" were synonymous and that the BJP participated in the Mandir movement to strengthen the concept of nationalism.

"You call it Indianness, Bharti-yata or Hindutva, I view these words as essentially synonymous."

Quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr. Advani said, "the basis of our nationalism has been a silken

bond of culture, and when we participated in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement it was to strengthen this bond." Even the Supreme Court had said that Hindutva was not a religion but a way of life. Mr. Advani will continue his deposition on May 14 and 15.

A symbol of slavery: Uma Bharti

The Union Sports Minister, Ms. Uma Bharti, who also deposed before the Commission today, described the Babri Masjid as a "symbol of slavery and insult to the nation". She, however, said, "no conspiracy was involved in the demolition of the structure".

"The disputed structure was named after Babar, who had come to the country not as a guest but as an aggressor. My national sentiments used to get hurt whenever I had to hear the place called the Babri structure," she said.

To a question whether she subscribed to the view that all towns, buildings and roads named after Britishers, considered to be aggressors by her, should also be demolished, Ms. Bharti said, "Ayodhya is such a special case which cannot be compared with any other case in the country". She said she firmly believed in the construction of a Ram temple and being a Minister would not affect that belief.

THE HINDU

12 APR 2001

BABARI:

(Continued from page 1)

"I think it was a studied document — an earnest attempt to point out the lacunae in the government white paper," he said. The demolition was termed as a national shame and barbaric act by one section and an act of national liberation by others. "... I belonged to neither. I would add the happening was unfortunate..." Mr Advani said. "While I do not agree with either of the two descriptions, I do regard it as unfortunate and painful."

The movement was conducted by sadhus and sants and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and BJP came on the scene only in 1989 when the latter adopted a resolution in Palampur, Mr Advani said. The resolution called upon the Rajiv Gandhi government to adopt the same approach to Ayodhya which the Nehru government had done towards Somnath temple.

Drawing a parallel between the demolition and the Bhagalpur blinding case, Mr Advani said: "As a person believing in the rule of law, I felt outraged at this kind of an atrocious act. But when I actually visited Bhagalpur, I found that an overwhelming majority of the people seem to endorse it. Even lawyers of Bhagalpur organised a procession in support of police. I don't condone it. It only highlights how those who are really committed to the rule of law in a democracy are not able to assess how the common people would react to something which they think is wrong," Mr Advani said.

Babari demolition unfortunate: Advani

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 10. — Mr LK Advani today said the demolition of Babari Masjid in Ayodhya was "unfortunate, painful and has distressed me to a great extent".

The home minister deposed before the Liberhan Commission of Inquiry, probing the Babari Masjid demolition, for the first time today. He said: "I do regard it as an unfortunate and painful event which distressed me so greatly that day."

The kar sevaks demolished the masjid because they might have felt the Ayodhya movement leaders, who hoped to get a Ram temple built "by the due process of law", wouldn't be able to do so. "In their impatience they took to a wrongful course," Mr Advani said.

But he said the "wrongful" demolition undertaken by the kar sevaks to achieve their objective of building a Ram temple on the site couldn't have been endorsed by any person who believed in the rule of law or by a democratic government.

"December 6 has been one of the most depressing days in my life. Many others there were ecstatic — a mood I just couldn't share," Mr Advani said about his first reaction. "I have seldom felt as dejected and downcast as I felt that day."

Taking a dig at the slow judicial process, Mr Advani said in 1955 the Allahabad High Court had regretted that the Babari Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue had been dragging for many years and had directed that matter be decided forthwith.

"The word 'forthwith' was used by the judiciary in 1955. And the fact is that today, even in 2001, the issue which arose from the first petition or motion remains unresolved so far as courts of law are concerned," Mr Advani said.

"I would add the happening was unfortunate from the point of view not only of the country as a whole but even from the point of view of the cause which my party, BJP, was promoting when it supported the Ayodhya movement," he said on the impact of the demolition.

"If medieval wrongs are to be corrected, (it)... would have to be done by due process of law, which is precisely what we had committed to (the) people when we spoke about constructing Ram temple at Ram Janambhoomi in Ayodhya," he said.

The home minister said the BJP believed that construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya "was a symbol of national self-respect" and it was committed not to allowing vested interests to give it a sectarian and

communal colour. "We had proposed to do it through legislation or negotiated settlement as we felt litigation is not an answer to this problem."

On the mood of kar sevaks on 6 December 1992, Mr Advani said anger was swelling and when they were not allowed to perform kar seva on the sites adjacent to the disputed structure, "it exploded" resulting in its demolition.

"May be the kar sevaks in Ayodhya felt that the leaders of the movement, who hoped to get a Ram temple built by the due process of law, would not be able to do so and in their impatience took to a wrongful course," Mr Advani said. He admitted his failure to gauge the anger of the kar sevaks. "I have stressed my inability to assess the anger of those who demolished the structure."

Asked about his views on the white paper published by the BJP in April 1993, Mr Advani said: "I'm not the author of the white paper. It was a white paper by a group of scholars who had been following the course of the Ayodhya movement and who after perusing the white paper published by the government produced one of their own which could trace the entire course of events correctly."

■ See BABARI: page 8

THE STATESMAN

APR 2001

Demolition of masjid unfortunate: Advani

By J. Venkatesan *9-6-92 Courts*

*HD-1
11/9*

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today told the Liberhan Commission that the demolition of the disputed structure in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 was a "painful and unfortunate" incident that "distressed" him to a great extent.

Deposing before the Commission, Mr. Advani said he did not subscribe to either of the two views that the demolition was a "national shame" or "an act of liberation". "I felt dejected and outraged that this kind of thing should have happened."

Explaining his immediate reaction to the demolition, Mr. Advani said that "December 6, 1992 has been one of the most depressing days in my life; many others there were ecstatic, a mood I just could not share. I have seldom felt as dejected and downcast as I felt on that day."

The kar sevaks might have resorted to the demolition as they felt that the leaders of the Ayodhya movement, who were hoping to get the Ram temple built by due process of law, would not be able to do so and in their impatience they took a wrong decision.

Mr. Advani made it clear that as one who believed in the rule of law, he did not endorse the action of the kar sevaks to achieve their objective of building the Ram temple at the disputed site.

The Minister said he believed the demolition could have been prevented had the Centre moved the Allahabad High Court for an early verdict in the land acquisition case. The High Court had, as early as 1955, suggested settlement of the dispute through negotiations.

The BJP had told the Narasimha Rao Government to move the Allahabad High Court to get the order in the land acquisition case before December 6 so that mass mobilisation of the kar sevaks could be avoided. "But, we failed to persuade the Centre to take steps in this regard and the result was that the High court passed the order on December 11." As a result, the anger of the kar sevaks in not being allowed to perform kar seva on the site adjacent to the disputed structure "swelled and exploded", Mr. Advani said.

Referring to the views expressed by the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee in his 'Kumarakom musings' written on January 2, Mr. Advani said he fully endorsed the view that the wrongs of a medieval past could not be righted by a similar wrong in modern times.

"If medieval wrongs are to be corrected, that too would have to be done by due process of law, which is precisely what we had committed to people when



The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, arriving to depose before the Liberhan Commission in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— Photo: S. Subramaniam

we spoke about constructing a Ram temple at Ayodhya."

Rao statement unfounded: Surjeet

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10. The CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, today disputed the statement of the former Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, before the Liberhan Commission of Inquiry and charged him with making "some unfounded statements".

In a statement here, Mr. Surjeet said that while participating in the National Integration Council meeting in November, 1992, he had moved a resolution which was adopted unanimously authorising the Prime Minister to take whatever steps necessary to uphold the Constitution and the rule of the law.

Mr. Rao had told the Commission that the NIC meeting did not extend adequate support for him to intervene to prevent the demolition of the Babri Masjid. "This is totally untrue," Mr. Surjeet said adding the blanket authorisation was sufficient for the Prime Minister to ensure effective intervention when reports came about the gathering of thousands of people at Ayodhya.

"Till the end, Mr. Rao kept assuring the leaders of the secular opposition parties, including myself, that things were under control and nothing untoward would happen at Ayodhya," Mr. Surjeet said.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

11 APR 2001

'Netaji panel should visit Russia'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, March 11. - A Russian scholar has suggested that the commission probing Netaji's death travel to Russia and study the official and KGB files of the period to set at rest all controversy regarding the leader's detention in Soviet Union after 1945.

"The new commission can go to Russia and see the archives of the central committee of the Communist Party, the KGB and the ministry of external affairs between 1940 and 1945 to get the truth on whether or not the Indian leader flew to Diren from Manchuria instead of perishing in a plane crash in Taihoku (Japan) as is widely held," Prof Grigori G Kotovsky, deputy co-chairman, Indo-Russian Joint Commission for Cooperation in Social Sciences, said.

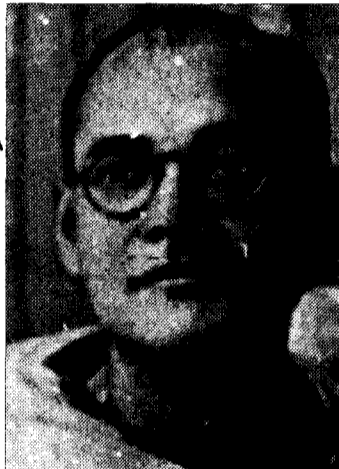
Taking strong exception to recent press reports that Netaji was under detention in Russia during Stalin's reign and that he had a meeting with the then Indian ambassador, Dr S Radhakrishnan, Prof Kotovsky told PTI that the new commission

could also access files during the Stalin period, which the US has procured.

"With relations between India and Russia on a new high after the visit of Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin, it shouldn't be difficult for the governments to agree to share information contained even in the foreign ministry files of the period," Prof Kotovsky said.

Citing from recent Russian research journals that have accessed the Russian Intelligence agency's declassified documents, Prof Kotovsky said while the articles had detailed Russian help to Netaji to go to Berlin from Moscow in 1940, they made no mention of his coming to Russia in 1945.

"The *Asia and Africa Today* monthly journal published by



the Institutes of Oriental Studies and Africa of the Russian Academy of Sciences had, in a recent article by its deputy chief editor Tuzajev, quoted extensively from KGB archives along with copies of some important documents pertaining to Netaji's visit to Moscow

after his escape from Kolkata."

Refusing, however, to be drawn into taking sides over whether or not Netaji boarded the ill-fated flight, Prof Kotovsky said it was in the interest of Indo-Russian relations to come clear on the Russian angle in the controversy.

He, however, added that the Russian government did not seem to have any reasons for keeping Netaji under detention after Indian independence or

as a closely guarded secret as - "it was then the beginning of the Cold War and Russia did not have any obligation towards the Allies."

"Moreover, Bose was known for his Leftist leanings and ideologically it would have made more sense to come public with his presence... given that Russian help to the communist movement in India was a widely-known secret then," the professor said.

Commenting on the sources of a recent press report that Netaji met Dr Radhakrishnan, Prof Kotovsky said there were factual errors in the report the outcome of which could have 'grave' political implications.

"The close aide of Stalin, Babajan Gafurov, mentioned in the report as the one who told an academic about Bose's detention, was not a close aide of Stalin and only the head of the Communist Party's Tajikistan unit.

"Any information... on Bose's detention would have been known only to two persons - Stalin himself or the head of the KGB.

THE STATESMAN

12 MAR 2007

Bose alive? Nonsense: daughter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

ANITA Bose, daughter of veteran freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, today described rumours about her father being sighted in some places as "nonsense" and said she found the air crash theory "convincing".

"Various theories abound about his being alive including sighting him in a Himalayan cave. All these are nonsense. The air crash theory is the most convincing of all: I do not believe he is alive as one rarely lives for 105 years," Anita said.

She was speaking to newsmen after receiving the first copy of *Subhas — A Political Biography* written by senior journalist Sitanshu Das.

Anita, who is married to a German and settled in Berlin, expressed hope that the Justice MK Mukherjee Commission appointed by the Vajpayee Government to unravel the mystery behind the late leader's death, would be able to find out the truth.

"The Commission is evaluating evidence and they are doing a good job," she said.

Asked whether she had any



Anita Bose, daughter of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (left) with Krishna Bose, MP, presents a book *Subhas: A Political Biography*, written by senior journalist Sitanshu Das, in Delhi on Thursday — PTI

memories of her late father, who is believed to have died in a plane crash in Japan in 1945, Anita said, "I was just four weeks old when father left me and do not have any memories of him, whatever I know of him was from my

mother."

An academic, Anita said she was looking forward to her second visit to her ancestral home in West Bengal, which has been converted into a museum and a library.

INDIAN EXPRESS

9 MAR 2001

Advani's absence annoys Liberhan

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. Annoyed at the failure of the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, to depose before it for the second time, the Justice Liberhan Commission probing the Ayodhya incident today directed him to appear positively on April 10 and 11.

The evidence of Mr. Advani, who has been cited as an accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case along with two other Union Ministers, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, is vital for the Commission to proceed further.

It also has significance in the context of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High court quashing the notification transferring the case against Mr. Advani and

seven others from the regular sessions court to the CBI special court.

Mr. Justice M.S. Liberhan, who was irked by Mr. Advani's absence today, in his order said a number of adjournments had taken place. He pointed out that on the last date of hearing, adjournment was sought on the ground that Mr. Advani had to attend an important meeting in the north-east because of the special situation prevailing there. The order said the counsel for the witness had assured the Commission of his appearance on the next date of hearing which was fixed for March 5 and 6, keeping in view the availability and suitability of the dates as also the engagements of the witness in public interest.

Today, an application was

moved by Mr. Advani's counsel stating that the witness had to leave for Andaman and Nicobar Islands to attend an urgent meeting in the Raj Niwas at Port Blair. It was stated that in spite of his best efforts, the visit could not be avoided because of the importance of the issue involved during this visit.

"Repeated adjournments sought are regretted. The counsel for the witness assures the appearance of the witness on the next date of hearing.

Keeping in view the constraints of the time schedule fixed for the Commission, the examination of Mr. Advani is adjourned to April 10 and 11," the Commission said and made it clear that no further adjournments would be granted to him.

THE HINDU

- 6 MAR 2001

Explain stand on riots report, SC tells State

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEB 26

THREE years after the Srikrishna Commission report on the Mumbai riots created a furore in the State Assembly, the Supreme Court on Monday asked the Maharashtra Government about steps taken to implement the recommendations of the Commission.

"The Maharashtra Government will file an affidavit disclosing action taken prior to July 21, 2000, and also steps taken after July, 2000 till date to implement the recommendations of the Commission," a three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice A S Anand, Justice R C Lahoti and Justice Brijesh Kumar said.

On July 21, 2000, the apex court, while hearing the case had severely criticised certain Central Ministers for speaking in different tones.

Giving a clarificatory stand on behalf of the Centre, Attorney General Soli J Sorabjee said the Union Government had nothing to do with the Commission's report as its implementation as well as follow-up action squarely fell within the domain of the state government.

The Court said the decision to implement as well as take follow-up action squarely fell within the domain of the Maharashtra Government.

The Court, while directing the state government to file a proper affidavit, adjourned the case by seven weeks.

INDIAN EXPRESS

27 FEB 2001

The Srikrishna report's plight

By Asghar Ali Engineer

9/5/00
HD-12
22/2

THE REPORT of the Srikrishna Commission which probed the Mumbai riots of 1992-93 remains unimplemented even three years after its submission. All previous riot probe reports have met with the same fate. Take, for example, the Reddy Commission Report on the 1969 Ahmedabad riots. It was prepared so painstakingly by Justice Reddy and fixed responsibility for the communal violence. But the then State Government turned a blind eye to the main body of recommendations and suggestions and implemented some fringe suggestions such as on reforming the police.

Another significant report was prepared by the Justice Madon Commission on the Bhiwandi-Jalgaon riots of 1970. It was in seven volumes and Justice Madon had worked very hard to get at the truth. Justice Madon had criticised the police role and pointed out that the Bhiwandi Superintendent of Police had forged the daily diaries to involve some minority leaders. Nothing happened and no action was taken against any police person or political leaders, including those of the Shiv Sena.

Human rights activists and secular forces had much appreciated the pains taken by Mr. Justice Srikrishna to compile the report after spending months listening to hundreds of riot-affected people and sifting through their affidavits and other documents to dig out the truth. To probe the Mumbai riots and to stand up to the wrath of the Shiv Sena required a judge of extraordinary courage and character.

The Shiv Sena-BJP Government during whose tenure the Report was submitted naturally rejected it as biased and anti-Hindu. The then Chief Minister, Mr. Manohar Joshi, said that if anyone touched the Sena supremo, Mr. Bal Thackeray, he would resign as Chief Minister and agitate in the streets. One could hardly expect from such a partisan Chief Minister any action on the Report. Again, like the other reports, the Sena-BJP Government of Maharashtra accepted certain marginal recommendations about the policing system and filed the report.

Mr. Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party promised in its manifesto that

if it came to power it would implement the Report within three months. However, it is more than a year since the Congress-NCP Government came to power but there is no sign of that happening. First, the Congress-NCP Government kept saying it is studying the 'legal position'. On December 6, 1999, a citizens delegation met the Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh, and urged him to implement the report. He asked for two months' time. A signature campaign was also launched by an organisation called "Nirbhay Bano" (be fearless) and submitted to the Chief Min-

ister. The Government found another way out for non-implementation of the report by filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court in January 2000 that it plans to refer the report to the Crime Branch.

action there would have been no need for the aggrieved people to go to the Supreme Court. In June 2000, the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, announced that 112 riot cases out of a total 1,358 were being reopened. It was during the Shiv Sena-BJP Government's time that most of these cases were closed on the grounds that no proper records were available or that the cases could not be substantiated.

Mr. Bhujbal also announced that the chargesheets in these cases would be filed within one month. Has this been done?

Action has not been taken against the culprits even three years after the Srikrishna Commission, which probed the Mumbai riots, submitted its report.

The question is: why has a report so painstakingly prepared by a judge of the High Court of Mr. Justice Srikrishna's integrity to be examined by the Crime Branch? Can the police officials who displayed their partisan and anti-minority character sit in judgment over a High Court judge of Mr. Justice Srikrishna's calibre? It was in February 2000 that Mr. Nasim Khan filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court asking that the Report's implementation be handed over to the CBI as he lacked faith in the Mumbai police. Again a delegation of some citizens led by the former Maharashtra Chief Secretary, Mr. J. B. D'Souza, met the Chief Minister. This time the delegation included some of the riot victims, one of whom, Ms. Hajira Bi, told the Chief Minister that her husband and brother had been missing ever since the riots and that she should be paid compensation. The Chief Minister promised to look into her request.

Meanwhile, the Government kept on saying that since the petition was pending in the Supreme Court it could not take action on the Report. In fact, had it taken

On August 7, 2000, a citizens' delegation again met the Chief Minister on the second anniversary of the submission of the Srikrishna Commission Report urging him to implement the report. He again promised action as usual. It was after this that the Government announced setting up of a task force to deal with the riot cases. The Task Force is supposedly examining various cases.

The Srikrishna Commission has indicted 31 police personnel from the rank of Deputy Commissioner of Police to constable. On the role of the police, the Report says: "The evidence before the Commission indicates that the police personnel were found actively participating in riots, communal incidents or incidents of looting, arson and so on. The Commission strongly recommends that Government take strict action against them." The Shiv Sena-BJP Government promoted 10 of these indicted police officers. This is how the Government took "strict action" against the officers. One of them was appointed Police Commissioner of Mumbai by the Sena-BJP Government. The Police Commissioner has since retired. What action, if any, can the Congress-NCP Government take against the retired officer? Of the indicted police personnel, the Government has suspended five constables. It

is always easy to take some symbolic action against the lower ranks. But the higher ranks go scot-free or are even rewarded.

Now the Maharashtra Government has decided to exonerate 12 policemen indicted by the Srikrishna Commission as stated in the affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court. One of them is dead. They were exonerated by the committee set up by the Government headed by the Additional Chief Secretary (Home). It is again the case of bureaucrats sitting in judgment on the report prepared by a High Court Judge of unimpeachable integrity. Of two police officers exonerated by the Government Committee, the Srikrishna Commission Report says, "...they were responsible for allowing the violent mob to hack to death one Abdul Razak Aba kalshekar (C.R. NO. 13 of 1993)".

If the Governments tend to protect such police officers one can hardly hope that police officers will play an effective role in checking communal riots. And if the police play an openly partisan role as they did during the Mumbai riots of 1992-93 it is doubtful whether future riots can be prevented. If the Government is unable to give exemplary punishments to such police officers, it should at least desist from promoting them.

It is true that police officers are also human beings and can get affected by the social and political atmosphere. But this explanation cannot justify the behaviour of responsible officers. There is also great need for secularising the attitudes of the police officers through training workshops for all ranks, but especially the constabulary which handles the situation in the field. It must also be said that there are some really secular officers of proven record. They were there during the Mumbai riots too. I wish the Srikrishna Commission Report had mentioned them too. They performed their duty with a full sense of responsibility. My experience with police officers shows that many among them are misinformed on crucial issues. Proper knowledge can greatly help. Hence, the urgent need for training workshops on secular values and communal challenges.

CLEARING THE NETAJI MYSTERY

THE DEATH OF "Netaji" Subhash Chandra Bose, taking place as it did in the midst of World War II, was sought to be shrouded in mystery. It may be true that the campaign carried out by a section of those claiming to be Netaji's legatees — that Bose had managed to survive the crash — lacked credibility even at the time when it was initiated. But then, the political context in which the campaign was taking place — the emergence of Jawaharlal Nehru as the natural leader of independent India and as Prime Minister later on — had given the campaign an unwarranted twist. The narration by Dr. Taneyoshi Yoshimi (a doctor serving in the Japanese Army at the time of the Netaji's death) who had examined and treated Bose after the crash must finally put the lid firmly on the decades-long "controversy" for whatever it is worth. Dr. Yoshimi's description of the events on August 18, 1945 (the day on which Netaji was brought to the Nanmon Military Hospital), going into such details as the extent of burns that Netaji had suffered and the kind of medical treatment and the death within hours after he was brought to the hospital must serve to put a stop to any debate on whether the death took place then and there or whether Bose survived the crash. Dr. Yoshimi's narration also includes the state of all those who accompanied Netaji on that fateful flight from Taihoku airport.

There were not really many takers for the story that Netaji survived the crash. The story, at least for a number of those who peddled it, was nothing more than a fantasy; they refused to believe that their leader was dead. But then, a story of that kind did have its implication (rather, some utility for a section) in the political arena. The legacy of Subhash Chandra Bose was sought to be constructed in a way so that it appeared that there was a permanent conflict between Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru. And it was in this context that tales began to be constructed suggesting

that Bose was "captured" alive and imprisoned in the Soviet Union; the construction went on to suggest a "conspiracy" entered into between the leaders of independent India and the regime in the Soviet Union to ensure that Bose did not return to India for ever. Bose, indeed, had differences with a whole lot of those who led the Indian National Congress including Mahatma Gandhi. But then, these were differences in perception on the form of the struggle for freedom. Bose was in perfect agreement with Gandhi as much with Jawaharlal Nehru insofar as the definition of freedom was concerned. They were all together in defining the struggle for freedom and Indian nationalism as an idea rooted firmly in the principles of secularism, egalitarianism and democracy. Bose was no less committed to resisting any attempts, even then, by forces wedded to notions of nationalism based on cultural or other forms of denominations.

It is this legacy of Bose that needs to be recalled at this stage rather than engaging oneself in a debate as to whether he really died in a plane crash or whether he survived. After Dr. Yoshimi has narrated the events during the few hours before Bose was dead, one will expect even those who insist on disbelieving the news of the INA leader's death to come to terms with the truth. And insofar as the legacy of Netaji is concerned, the cause he stood for will be served better if all the claimants to the legacy commit themselves to building an egalitarian and democratic order. Bose's most important contribution to the nation — the Indian National Army (INA) — after all stood for these values. And more than these, Netaji's comrades in the INA refused to allow religious identities to play any role in the making of the Indian nation. The best way to remember Netaji hence will be to accept these ideas and build on them.

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2001

Netaji died in 1945 of crash injuries and shock: Report

London, January 28

THE CONTROVERSY over the death of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has finally 'ended' with a Japanese doctor who attended on him certifying that the veteran freedom fighter and chief of Indian National Army (INA) died on August 18, 1945, a few hours after getting injured in plane crash.

The first hand account of how Bose was brought in a serious condition to a military hospital in Taihoku (Formosa, Japan), how he breathed his last and where his ashes were kept were narrated by Dr Taneyoshi Yoshimi.

Yoshimi, Captain (Medical) of Imperial Japanese Army, was interviewed by British intelligence in Hong Kong after the Japanese surrender.

Narrating the event in his inter-

view, Yoshimi who is still alive and resides in northern Japan, said Bose died of 'extensive burns and shock' despite best medical treatment.

According to the transcript of the interview, Yoshimi said: "In August, 1945, I was the senior officer at Nanmon military hospital, Taihoku, Formosa. At about 5 pm on August 18, 1945, a truck driven up before the hospital contained several men who had been injured in an aeroplane crash.

"One of the Japanese, a staff officer with the rank of Lt-Colonel whose name I cannot properly recall, but believe was Ishii informed me that one of the Indians, pointing him out, was Chandra Bose and that I was not to spare myself and must give him the very best of treatment," he said.

Yoshimi said he immediately

gave instructions for some medical orderlies to prepare a bed and asked others to carry in the injured. "During the first four hours he was semi-conscious, and practically normal, speaking quite a good deal. The first words I spoke to him were in Japanese, when he made a request for water, which had to be fed to him through a hospital cup with a spout," he said.

During the treatment, Yoshimi said he twice inquired whether he was in any pain but Bose gave him no reply. After four hours, "I inquired whether there was any statement, will, or such matter he wished to make. He answered 'nothing'. After the fourth hour, he appeared to be sinking into unconsciousness. He murmured and muttered in his state of coma, but never regained consciousness. At about 2300 hrs, he died." (PT)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JAN 2001

Nine city policemen charged for role in Mumbai riots

Activists call it eyewash, say only small fry have been cornered

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: The special task force (STF) constituted by the state government last September to implement the Srikrishna commission report that probed the 1992-'93 Mumbai riots has filed criminal cases against nine police personnel.

While six of them, posted at the Colaba police station during the riots, have been charged with conspiracy to commit murder, the other three, then with the Byculla police station, have been charged with recording false evidence.

In the first case, Inspector Vasant More, assistant inspector Sahebrao Jadhav, head constable Sitaram Bhosale and constables Suresh Hitambe, Shivaji Kasir and

Hanumant Chavan have been accused of being silent spectators to the lynching of Abdul alias Razak Baba by a mob on January 11, 1993, at Colaba.

In the second case, inspector Pandharinath Vahule, assistant commissioner Ulhas Patankar and sub-inspector Ramrao Desai have been charged with recording false evidence in a case pertaining to the burning down of a Mazgaon garment shop belonging to Abdul Ansari. The First Information Report had named the people who burnt the shop, but the policemen allegedly later altered the FIR by adding a supplementary sheet saying that Ansari did not recognise the people he had named.

Both cases were registered by the STF on December 7, 2000. Except for Sahebrao Jadhav, who has since retired, the others are serving officers. "They will be arrested once we get sufficient evidence against them," said deputy police commissioner S.M. Sayed of the STF.

The STF, which has a staff of 50, is also looking into charges of dereliction of duty against 45 policemen. The Srikrishna Commission had recommended the prosecution of 31 policemen, including R.D. Tyagi, who went on to become Mumbai police commissioner. However, the Democratic Front government in September absolved 12 of them, including Mr Tyagi. In fact, ten of the 31 policemen indicted by the Srikrishna commission were promoted by the Shiv Sena-BJP government.

Lawyers and activists involved in the campaign against communalism say that the STF's action is merely an eyewash. Lawyer Yusuf Muchala, who appeared for the riot victims before the Srikrishna commission, said the STF's action sanctioning the prosecution of nine lower-rung police officers while allowing the top-ranking officers indicted by the commission to go scot-free was a "cosmetic" move.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 JAN 2001



HUM HINDUSTANI: Sonia Gandhi with Kamal Hasan at an Army Day reception in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

CBI awaiting 17 nations' reply to LTTE funding probe

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 JANUARY

THE CBI is awaiting the response of 17 countries, to which letters rogatory had been sent, seeking assistance in probing the sources of funding tapped by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for masterminding the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Making the assertion, CBI director R.K. Raghavan, on Sunday, said that the letters rogatory had been sent as part of its investigations into the "larger aspects" of the conspiracy that led to the killing of Mr Gandhi. CBI heads the Multi-Dimensional Monitoring Agency (MDMA), which had been set up by the Centre on the recommendations of the Jain



Rajiv: the argument continues

Commission for undertaking further probes into the larger aspects of the assassination.

"The countries where letters rogatory have been sent include Switzerland, Australia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Germany,"

Mr Raghavan said. He also asserted that a two-member team had recently visited Sri Lanka to pursue the extradition of LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran.

However, he declined to comment on whether Chandraswamy had been interrogated by

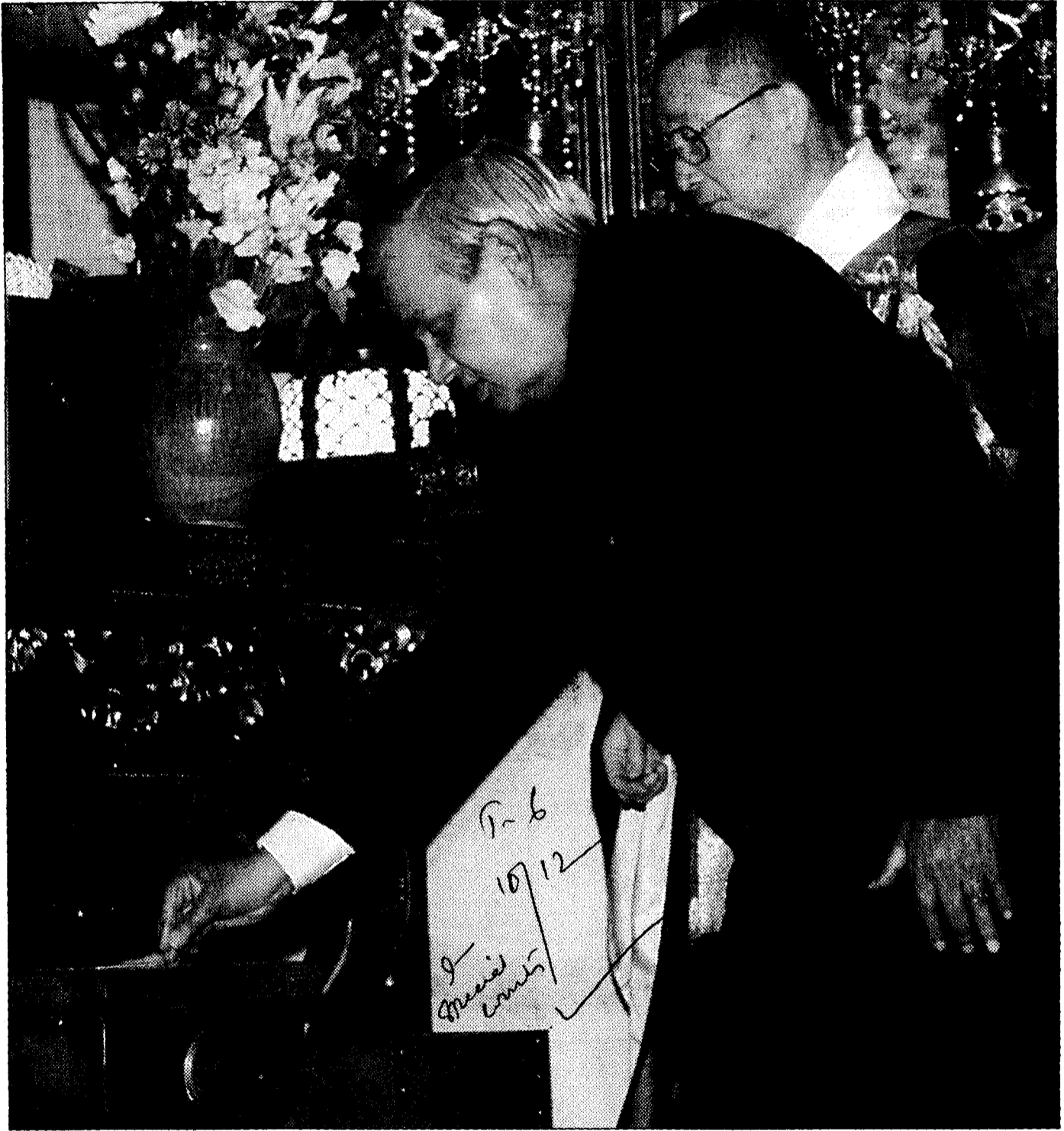
CBI in this connection.

"We have investigated all the points raised in the Jain Commission report, including references to controversial godman Chandraswami and others," he said.

The Economic Times

16 JAN 2001

PRIME MINISTER PAYS HOMAGE AT SUBHAS SHRINE



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the Renkoji temple in Tokyo. Vajpayee visited the 400-year-old temple on Monday to pay homage to Subhas Chandra Bose whose ashes are preserved at the shrine.

"I am glad to come again to Renkoji temple where the memories of the great Indian freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose are preserved," Vajpayee wrote in the visitors' book. (Reuters picture above)

The Prime Minister offered floral tributes to Netaji's statue, installed at the temple entrance in August, 1990.

Vajpayee, who spent about 15 minutes at the shrine, was briefed by chief priest Koshi Mochizuki. Several Indian dignitaries, including late President Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi had visited the temple.

The decision to visit the shrine was taken at the eleventh hour because of the controversy surrounding Netaji's status. Officially, India has yet to accept that Bose is dead and that the ashes preserved in the temple are actually his.

The Nichiren sect temple was founded in 1594 by Nippo Shonin. The sect has its head temple in Kuonji in Minobu. (PTI)

THE TELEGRAPH

11 10 DEC 2001

PM comment on Netaji ashes may spark fresh row

Observations not on record

Diwakar

TOKYO 9 DECEMBER

THE six-decade-old controversy over the authenticity of ashes supposedly of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose may get another lease of life following the reported remarks of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

During a visit to the Buddhist Renkoji temple where the ashes have been preserved, Mr Vajpayee is learnt to have agreed with a former Japanese official that it was time the ashes were taken to Netaji's home.

"I feel the same way," Mr Vajpayee remarked to Mr Shigemoto Okuda, who liaised with Bose's Indian National Army (INA) and the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II.

Mr Okuda, who turned 80 this year, has no doubts whatsoever about the genuineness of the contents of the urn at the temple which has featured on the itinerary of almost all the visiting Indian dignitaries.

Although no official confirmation was available, Mr Vajpayee's purported remarks may provoke, unless denied in time, protests from the Netaji diehards who refuse to believe that Netaji suffered fatal injuries when the plane provided to him by the Japanese crashed near Taipei in 1945.

To them, the ashes are of a dubious value. Mindful of the passions that any mention of Netaji's death evokes among his legion of admirers in West Bengal and elsewhere, successive predecessors of Mr Vajpayee avoided treading on the touchy terrain.

Jawaharlal Nehru, who visited the temple in 1957, steered clear of calling the ashes as Netaji's, restricting himself to writing a couple of lines on Buddhism. Indira Gandhi

showed similar caution in dealing with the issue which defies closure, and is currently being probed by Justice Mukherjee Commission.

On the record, however, Mr Vajpayee didn't stray from the straight line of political correctness. The Prime Minister, who first visited the temple in 1978 as the external affairs minister, avoided the sensitive "ashes" when recording his observations on Sunday evening. "I am glad to visit the Renkoji again, where the memories of the great soldier of the Indian freedom struggle, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, have been preserved."

Mr Okuda, though nostalgic of his INA association, is forthright when he attests to the genuineness of the ashes. "I have full trust in my colleagues who were collaborating with him in the failed INA operations in the Indian northeast," Mr Fukuda, presently a representative of the Saudia airlines, told a group of newsmen just after his brief conversation with the Prime Minister.

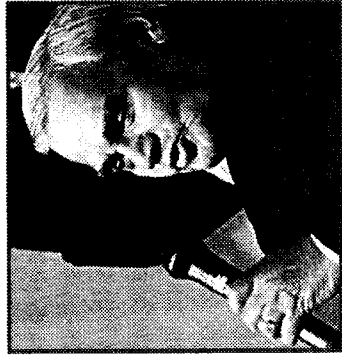
... puts Naga peace talks back on track

Diwakar

TOKYO 9 DECEMBER

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has put the Naga peace talks on track with the two sides agreeing to resume dialogue at Bangkok on Tuesday.

Mr Vajpayee, who had detailed talks with Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) leaders Isak and Muivah at Osaka on Saturday, sources said, is confident of working out a peace deal as the rebels don't seem to be keen on making their sovereignty demand the core issue. The previous talks had floundered when the two sides stuck to their established positions on substantive issues like the future status of Nagaland, the



VAJPAYEE: A NEW BEGINNING

question of a greater Nagaland including Naga-inhabited areas of neighbouring states inside India, and the bordering country of Myanmar, the government's relations with the rival Naga groups.

It may be recalled that the Centre had to call off the agreement with the NSCN for a ceasefire beyond Nagaland when it met with violent protests in Manipur. Although there were apprehensions that this could lead to a rupture in the talks, the NSCN leaders con-

tinued to do business with the Centre's interlocutor. The comfort level for the government has also increased in recent months as the opposing Naga grouping, NSCN unilaterally announced a ceasefire with all parties, including both the government and NSCN-IM.

The assessment here is that there is considerable change in the line of thinking of the Naga rebels. "One thing was clear. They are not willing to jeopardise the peace process," said a prime ministerial aide. For all their posturing on Naga independence and sovereignty, there is battle fatigue and the cadre is not ready to go back to the jungles and begin fighting.

There is also the realisation that neither the Nagas in Nagaland nor the Nagas in Manipur want Nagalim or Greater Nagaland as this could only aggravate inter-tribal conflicts. Mr Muivah is a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur, Mr Isak is a Sema from Nagaland and Khaplang, the rival faction's leader, is a Hemi Naga from Myanmar.

Ayodhya for culture, not votes: Advani

6-9
9-1
Smt. Conk
28/12

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Dec. 27: It was L.K. Advani the statesman before the Liberhan commission today. The home minister told the one-man panel inquiring into the Babri Masjid demolition that his party's aim in joining the "Ayodhya movement" was to kindle "awakening and awareness of Indian cultural nationalism among all communities".

Advani said his rathayatra to construct the Ram temple was not for "vote bank politics", but for the "future generation", to spread the message of "cultural nationalism".

Cross-examined by the counsel for All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, Yousuf H. Muchhala, Advani said: "The nature of the Hindu society is such that there can be no Hindu vote-bank. There could be a Brahmin or Yadav or Dalit vote-bank. But there cannot be a Hindu vote-bank. Therefore, it would be unfair to say that the BJP associated with the Ayodhya movement to create a Hindu vote-bank."

"Hindu society is not monolithic. The variety of castes and creeds and linguistic groups and the fact that the tribal sections of the society are totally distinct from the rest and that there is no one Prophet or one Book (for the Hindu society) to command all allegiance of the society, it is impossible for anyone to think of Hindus as a vote-bank. I have no such illusion," the home minister added during his deposition for the second consecutive day.

The counsels of the Muslim Personal Law Board and the commission cross-examined Advani at the deposition, which took more than four hours spread over two sessions.

Justice M.S. Liberhan also asked questions.

Advani's replies showed meticulous homework. He corrected several dates and events. He said the Babri Masjid was a "functional mosque" for a decade since 1936. However, in 1946 the mosque was "abandoned" as no worship took place. When the idols of Ram, Sita and Laxman were found at the site in 1949, the court had ordered that they should not be removed.

"Again, under the court orders the place was open for public worship," Advani said. He said: "A de facto temple is existing on the disputed site from those days and that a proper construction will only make it a de jure temple."

Advani said he had spoken to then chief minister Kalyan Singh and advised him to resign after the demolition. He added that he advised Singh as a BJP leader, as the then chief minister always "respected me".

He denied that his rathayatra had generated fear among Muslims. "In fact, quite a large number of Muslims had turned up for my meetings during the yatra and wanted to join the Ayodhya movement. It was for all communities," the BJP leader said.

"People looked at me with reverence as if they had, for say, Swami Vivekananda or any other religious leader, although I studied in a missionary school," Advani added.

He said the BJP never started the Ayodhya movement. "Those who launched the movement were motivated by religious considerations. For us, in the BJP, the motivation was strengthening cultural nationalism," the home minister said.

Advani is likely to depose before the commission again by January-end after his return from the scheduled US tour.

Ayodhya a setback to BJP: Advani

ST-3
9. Govt. Com. 27/12



Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Dec. 26. — Home minister Mr LK Advani has told the Liberhan Commission today that the demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya was a "big setback" to the BJP cause as the party was committed to the rule of law and did not want to build the Ram Temple by force.

"I could see that the demolition would be a big setback for the cause that the BJP was seeking to promote because the party's commitment is not only to support the VHP movement for the construction of the Ram temple at the place supposed to be the birth place of Lord Ram but also to adhere to the rule of law," he said.

Speaking as a witness before the Commission probing the demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya, Mr Advani said the BJP values democracy and the rule of law and honours the verdict of the court. The movement was aimed at converting the *de facto* temple into a *de jure* one through the legal process or a mutual agreement between the disputing parties.

"The movement and slogans (by kar sevaks) have to be seen in the

background of the whole controversy which emphasises that the *de facto* temple needs to be converted into a *de jure* temple by the process of law, which can be achieved either by mutual agreement, court order or by legislation but nothing has to be done by force or in any illegal manner," Mr Advani said.

The home minister said he had clarified in an article a fortnight after the demolition that "it (the demolition) would affect" the BJP's "credibility, which is very crucial to a political party".

Assembly election dates announced

ST-3
9. Govt. Com. 27/12

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 26. — The Election Commission today announced the dates for the Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttaranchal and Manipur Assembly elections and also for the by-elections to six Lok Sabha constituencies and six Assembly seats.

By-election would enable Miss J Jayalalitha to seek re-election from the Andipatti seat.

Madhavrao Scindia's son, Mr Jyotiraditya M Scindia, is slated to contest from Guna, which was represented by his father.

With the announcement of poll dates the model code of conduct has come into effect from today, the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr JM Lyngdoh, said.

While all the elections would be over by 21 February, votes would be counted on 24 February, he said. One-day polling will be held in Punjab and Uttaranchal on 13 and 14 February respectively.

Uttar Pradesh will have a three-day poll on 14, 18 and 21 February. Manipur is to go for polls on 14 and 21 February.

The elections have been planned in such a way that these wouldn't affect Parliament's budget session.

By that time, new governments would take over in all four states and the budgets there would be taken up by them.

These states might initially have votes-on-account as there would be no time for quick budget preparation.

The Lok Sabha by-elections will be held for Guna

(Madhya Pradesh), Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh), Jammu, Kaliahor (Assam), Kanakpura (Karnataka) and Tripura West. The Mirzapur seat was represented by Phoolan Devi.

The Chief Election Commissioner said electronic voting machines will be used in all the Assembly constituencies of Punjab, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh while they will be used for the first time in Assembly segments of Manipur.

The results are, therefore, likely to be announced on the polling day.

The Election Commissioner, Mr TS Krishnamurthy, said a "major departure" was undertaken in the commission by bringing into public domain the separate accounts maintained by political parties at the completion of the elections.

He also warned of strict action against derelict officers of duty by official machinery in the states going to polls.

The Election Commission decided to make voter identification compulsory in all states and constituencies going for by-elections, Mr Lyngdoh said. The dates tallied with those expected by political leaders. A formal notification is expected today.

The BJP had a meeting of its office bearers to discuss the Uttar Pradesh polls. The party's national executive meeting on Sunday is slated to launch the poll campaign.

The BJP spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said the dates would enable parties to plan their strategies.