

# Ram temple, not NDA, top priority for RSS

BY SANJAY BASAK

**New Delhi, Dec. 6:** The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has made its choice clear as far as Ayodhya is concerned. It has chosen the Ram mandir over the "stability" of the Vajpayee government.

Earlier, the VHP made it clear that construction of the Ram Mandir would be carried out regardless of its consequence on the NDA government.

On the ninth anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition on Thursday, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad distributed *trishuls* to Bajrang Dal members in Ayodhya.

VHP leader Acharya Giritraj

Kishore told *The Asian Age* that the Ayodhya cell announced by the Prime Minister is yet to start functioning. The Acharya claimed that BJP MP Shatrughan Singh, who heads the Ayodhya cell, has not even found a "place to sit."

Supporting the construction of the temple on the disputed site, RSS spokesperson M.G. Vaidya said: "The stability or instability of the government is the concern of the party in power. We are engaged in the social sector. We have an agenda. The Ram temple is on our agenda. And it is important."

He, however, hoped that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would be able to resolve the issue

before March 12 next year, the VHP's deadline to begin construction at the disputed site.

Mr Vaidya described both the proposed construction of the Ram Mandir and demolition of the Babri mosque as "secular activities."

The RSS also said its movement would not stop at Ayodhya.

The next target would be "liberation" of the birthplace of Lord Krishna in Mathura and the Vishwanath temple in Varanasi.

Asked to choose between the Ram Mandir and the government, the RSS spokesperson was clear: "The choice is the Ram mandir. It is important."

Mr Vaidya also said the govern-

ment's decision was "not binding" on those determined to construct the temple.

When asked if the temple will be constructed at any cost, Mr Vaidya said: "Yes, no matter what happens, the temple will be built."

The RSS then endorsed the movement started by the VHP as a runup to the construction, scheduled to start from March 12 next year.

However, Mr Vaidya said if the deadlock continued till March next year, the VHP would what to do next.

The RSS will take a decision on the VHP's decision during its general council meeting slated to begin from March 15, 2002.

## No violence in Ayodhya on Babri Masjid anniversary

BY AMITA VERMA

**Lucknow, Dec. 6:** The 9th anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition passed off peacefully amidst unprecedented security arrangements in Ayodhya.

The occasion was marked by feeble demonstrations and protests in various other places but these were more for an annual rituals for parties and outfits positioned in favour of and against the entire temple movement, rather than any meaningful expression of thought and action.

In Ayodhya, after the VHP leaders stormed the sanctum sanctorum of the makeshift temple on October 17, security arrangements were unduly tight. All vehicular traffic was stopped at Ayodhya and even though there were no official orders to the effect, people were restrained from entering the temple area on Thursday.

As a result, several of the local devotees were also deprived of their daily "darshan" at the makeshift temple.

Uttar Pradesh director general of police R.K. Pundit said that special measures had been taken to prevent any outbreak of violence in view of the sensitivity of the occasion but said that no reports of any violence had come in as yet.

The strict security arrangements were, apparently, made in view of intelligence reports that the VHP leaders and other Hindu hardliners could go in for a replay of the October 17 drama in order to revive Hindu sentiments on the issue.



Indian Army soldiers keep a strict vigil along the Line of Control which divides India from Pakistan in Kashmir Wednesday. A judge and two bodyguards were killed on Wednesday in the troubled state. (AP)

# Temple issue: PM accused of influencing judiciary

By Neena Vyas

APD-11  
23/8

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 29.** Taking exception to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's "endorsement" of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-determined date of March 12 for starting the construction of the proposed Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, Syed Shahbuddin of the All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee has charged Mr. Vajpayee with trying to influence the judiciary. He has also criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party's allies for remaining silent.

Referring to Mr. Vajpayee's statements in Lucknow and Parliament that a solution to the Ayodhya problem could be found by March next year, Syed Shahbuddin said the Prime Minister had virtually suggested to the judiciary that it should "hand in a judgment favourable to the Sangh Parivar before March 2002," a hint which "is in essence a contempt of court."

In a statement here today, he said the "Prime Minister has not only brought the Ayodhya dispute back to the centre-stage of

national politics but has tried to muster forces in retreat in Uttar Pradesh and lift the sinking morale of his cadres."

Pointing out that the allies of the National Democratic Alliance had insisted on keeping the Ayodhya dispute and other contentious issues out of the NDA agenda for governance, he wondered why they were silent now when the Prime Minister himself was trying to push the issue. He specifically mentioned the Telugu Desam Party (supporting the NDA from outside) the DMK, the Akali Dal and the Samata Party (partners in Government) and asked them to "clarify their position and publicly disassociate themselves from any move by the Central Government which gives, or appears to give, a free hand to the VHP and the Sangh Parivar to do as they like."

Mr. Shahbuddin warned that the Sangh Parivar had set March 2002 as the deadline after which it could go ahead and take the law into its own hands, as was done in December 1992. And the non-BJP parties in the NDA "should not underwrite the anti-national and anti-secular agenda of the VHP to vitiate the social environment." If not checked, it would "un-

dermine the legitimacy of the State" through its open support for "a patently unlawful act."

At the Kumbh Mela earlier this year, the VHP had demanded that the disputed land, acquired by the Centre through an Ordinance, be handed over to the trust managed by it so that it could begin construction of the temple by Mahashivratri of 2002 — March 12 — and warned that it would not wait any longer. The VHP was also planning some other "action" to build up the issue by that time.

Today, when contacted, Mr. Giriraj Kishore and Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalmia, senior leaders of the VHP, said that so far they had no information on what the Government had done or was doing with respect to handing over the disputed land to the VHP.

The Law Ministry sources also denied that the Government was trying to find a way out to hand over the acquired land to the VHP or any other body. Legal experts have pointed out that the Ordinance through which the Centre had acquired the land had itself indicated that the Government would hold the land as a trustee till a final decision by the courts.

THE HINDU

30 AUG 2001

# 'PM's Ayodhya remark political'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 27. - According to some BJP leaders, the Prime Minister's yesterday's statement that a solution to the Ayodhya tangle would be found by next March and negotiations to this effect were going on at different levels, was largely political and did not carry much substance.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee made this statement in response to a query in Lucknow. Now, the NDA allies and BJP leaders concede that the statement was aimed at placating the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which has gone on the offensive against the UP government on issues concerning Hindutva.

The VHP had given a deadline to the Centre to find a solution by 12 March, and if the Centre failed to do so, it would lead a "march to Delhi" on 21 March. The term of the present UP Assembly, expires on 24 March.

The VHP's threat was potentially damaging to the BJP, which has already said the UP assembly elections were a test case for them. The VHP's march to Delhi and the rhetoric could confuse the hard core supporters of the BJP and reduce the party's hopes to return to power in the state.

A Hindutva card played by the party could, on the other hand, help in consolidating Hindu votes in its favour, which had shown signs of slipping away, a senior BJP leader said.

Party leaders are still groping in the dark on who the Prime Minister referred to when he said negotiations were going on at various levels to settle the Ayodhya issue. They barely managed to point out some stray efforts made by Maulana Wahidudin Khan, a "progressive" Muslim leader and the Shahi Imam.

They also cited the Prime Minister's meeting with some Shia and Sunni leaders in Lucknow yesterday. But Maulana Khan has been declared an "outcaste" by a section of Muslim organisations and the Shahi Imam's initiative was not taken seriously.

The Babri Masjid action committee ridiculed the Prime Minister's statement. Should the Muslims offer Babri Masjid to them on platter, they asked. The solution could be only found in the light of the 1994 Supreme Court directive.

The convener of the Babri Masjid coordination committee, Syed Shahabuddin said: "We are not aware of any negotiation made at any level. Negotiations on an issue of

such national importance could not be made in dark rooms with non-representative organisations or individuals.

The only competent body to negotiate on the issue is All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which has the mandate of prominent Muslim organisations related with the subject.

The Prime Minister's statement was political kite flying to lift the fading morale of the party in UP."

The board had offered to negotiate with the government on this issue in December 2000 after passing a resolution at its convention.

It had, however, made a condition that an atmosphere conducive for a dialogue should be made by putting curbs on the VHP. But the government never responded to that, he said.

Mr Shahabuddin said there were only three ways to find a solution.

The first was through legislation for which the government did not have the requisite strength in Parliament and consensus among the coalition partners. Second was a judicial verdict on the issue; and third was through negotiations, which was not being done at a substantive level.

THE STATESMAN

28 AUG 2001

## Details of Ayodhya talks will be tabled in LS: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 27.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, told the Lok Sabha today that his Government was in touch with several organisations and people in its bid to find a solution to the contentious Ayodhya issue. He, however, declined to reveal the names of the people involved in the negotiations, but promised to place on the floor of the House all the details pertaining to the people he was in touch with.

Mr. Vajpayee, who made an un-scheduled appearance in the Lok Sabha, spoke at the end of a heated impromptu discussion on the issue, with angry Opposition members charging him with trying to gain political mileage keeping in mind the coming Uttar Pradesh elections.

Mr. Vajpayee clarified that when asked for his response to the VHP's deadline of March 2002 for beginning the temple construction, he told the questioner that he wanted the issue resolved before March itself and talks were on in this regard.

The issue was raised during zero hour by Mr. Jaipal Reddy (Cong.) and later supported by Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M), Mr. Ramji Lal Suman (SP) and Mr. Rashid Alvi (BSP). Mr. Reddy charged Mr. Vajpayee with making a "false and untrue statement", as all the Muslim organisations and committees associated with the Babri Masjid issue had denounced the Prime Minister's claims.

Mr. Reddy took exception to the

Prime Minister making a statement on a sensitive matter outside the House when Parliament was in session. Mr. Chatterjee regretted that Mr. Vajpayee had developed a tendency to periodically issue statements on the issue.

The issue later threatened to degenerate into an U.P. affair with the SP and the BJP blaming each other for playing communal poli-

### 'Temple will be built, come what may'

**BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 27.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today said the Ram temple would be built at the disputed site in Ayodhya irrespective of the Centre's support or opposition to it.

"The temple construction will start anytime after the March 12 deadline, no matter whether the Central Government agreed to the proposal, remained indifferent or opposed the initiative," the VHP international vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told presspersons here. — PTI

Details on Page 11

tics. Mr. Ramji Lal Suman (SP) said the statement was made with a view to vitiating the atmosphere by communalising the issue to bail out the BJP in the State.

He was countered by Mr. Vinay Katiyar (BJP) who charged that the SP was communalising the issue by raising it.

27 AUG 2001

# Religious from H.D. - Opposition slams PM's remarks on Christian missionaries 21/8

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 20.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's remarks at a book release function about Christian missionaries being engaged in conversions has evoked strong protests in Parliament and outside.

In the Lok Sabha, the issue was raised by Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasgupta (Cong.), who alleged that the Prime Minister's remarks amounted to casting aspersions on the Christian community. "How can the Prime Minister pass such a comment," he asked. The remarks had the potential to create a sense of insecurity among the minorities, he said, and referred to Mr. Vajpayee's assurance on the floor of the House that the NDA Government's agenda was different from that of the RSS.

The Congress benches alleged that the Prime Minister was now going back on the assurance given to the House and that the Government's "hidden agenda" was now

coming out in the open. Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) said the Prime Minister's statement meant that he was again going back to the Hindutva agenda.

The Opposition MPs quoted from newspaper reports of the book release function at the Prime Minister's residence on Saturday in which the RSS leader, Mr. Sudarshan, was also present. Reading from the newspapers, the members quoted Mr. Vajpayee as saying that while some Christian missionaries were engaged in good work, some others were engaged in conversions.

The ruling party members led by Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra and Mr. Vijay Goel and Mr. Mohan Rawale (Shiv Sena) defended the Prime Minister and charged the Opposition with trying to distort the statement.

The issue generated some heat outside Parliament as well. The All-India Christian Council termed the Prime Minister's statement unfortunate and said it

would aggravate communalism and violence against the minorities.

In a statement, the Christian Council said that "remarks such as the Prime Minister's are seen as condoning the hate campaign and the canards, lies and half-truths that are being spread in many parts of the country. They encourage communal and extremist elements".

**'Criticism unsubstantiated'**

PTI reports:

The BJP today termed the Congress criticism of the Prime Minister's remarks on conversions as "unsubstantiated". Mr. Vajpayee had appreciated the work done by these missionaries in the backward and tribal areas, but felt that they should not carry out conversions, Mr. Malhotra said. However, the Congress, in search of issues to raise, was making unsubstantiated charges. "It is not proper to make it an issue in Parliament," he said.

**RSS hails statement: Page 11**

# Idol removed from mosque site

419-1

By Mohammed Iqbal 2/8

**JAIPUR, AUG. 1.** The communal tension prevailing at Asind in Bhilwara district, where a 16th century mosque was pulled down by a mob last Friday, subsided today following the removal of the idol installed at the site. The 3-ft idol of Lord Hanuman was shifted "voluntarily" by the Gurjar community after midnight, the Rajasthan Government said. Though the Gurjars — who manage the huge Sawai Bhoj temple situated nearby — were still in control of the mosque site, there were indications that the community elders had been made to see reason and remove the newly-built temple from the spot. The idol was removed around 1-30 a.m. "without using any force."

"This gesture is a positive step towards restoration of normality and has helped reverse the impact of the provocative act of demolition," the Principal Secretary, Home, Mr. R. K. Nayar, told *The Hindu*. Related issues, such as reconstruction of the mosque and its restoration to the Rajasthan Waqf Board, would be resolved in the coming days. Security was tightened in and around Asind and the sprawling Sawai Bhoj complex, 3 km from the town, where the temple, the mosque site and a Dargah are situated. The Inspector-General of Police (Intelligence), Mr. M. K. Dev- arajan, is camping in the town.

## Probe ordered

The State Government has ordered an adminis-

trative inquiry into the episode under the Revenue Secretary, Mr. G. S. Sandhu, and asked him to submit a report within a week. He met the people of both the communities in Asind today to record their versions. Besides the members of a probe team constituted by the Pradesh Congress Committee, the Chairman of the Waqf Board, Mr. Nasir Ali Naqvi, also visited the complex.

Speaking over telephone from Asind, Mr. Naqvi said the mosque was situated in the vicinity of several temples. "It would have been a matter of pride for the Sawai Bhoj Temple Trust to let the mosque remain there as a beautiful example of religious coexistence," he said, adding that the trust had itself repaired a minaret of the mosque damaged in 1985.

Our Special Correspondent reports: The Rajasthan Government is peeved at the media glare it has received during the past three days. To add to its woes, the Pakistan Foreign Office too reacted to the development, describing the demolition as 'desecration.'

"The Pakistan Government is not in the know of things. It does not have any business to react like this," Mr. Gehlot told *The Hindu* in a terse response to the report from Islamabad. "There used to be no prayers at the mosque. The maintenance of the place is also carried out by the Sawai Bhoj Trust," he said while making it clear that he condemned the destruction of the mosque.

# Joshi blames Rao for Ayodhya stalemate

By J. Venkatesan

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 12.** The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, today blamed the former Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, for the stalemate in the Ayodhya dispute.

Continuing his deposition before the Justice Liberhan Commission, Dr. Joshi maintained that it was because of Mr. Rao's indifference that the dispute could not be solved though a solution was in sight before the demolition of the disputed structure in December 1992.

He said that if only M. Rao had followed the path of negotiation mooted by the former Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, in inviting the parties for a discussion on whether a temple existed or not at the disputed structure before the masjid was superimposed, the dispute could have been amicably resolved.

Dr. Joshi alleged that Mr. Rao was totally indifferent to the issue and that he did not take any initiative till the sants and sadhus

announced a 'kar seva' in July 1992. Thereafter, he said "Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, Mr. L.K. Advani and myself requested Mr. Rao to call the sants for talks and he agreed to call them for talks."

To a question from the Commission's counsel about the BJP's White Paper, wherein it was stated that what the courts could not do for 42 years the kar sevaks would do, Dr. Joshi said "we do not approve of the stand of the VHP and we are for implementing the court orders."

It was true that the BJP supported the movement led by the sadhus and sants following a resolution passed by it in 1989 but, at the same time, it wanted to expose the "competitive pseudo-secularism and anti-BJP policy" adopted by Congress and other political parties.

He had a dig at the Congress and other political parties for maligning the BJP as a communal party. He will continue his deposition on July 17 and 18. Tomorrow the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, will depose before the Commission.

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# 3 Hindu radicals held for Amritsar sacrilege

Chandigarh, March 22

Rehman & Pw  
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THREE ACTIVISTS of Bharatiya Hindu Suraksha Samiti (BHSS) were among four men arrested today in connection with the alleged sacrilege of a place of worship and defiling of a scripture in Amritsar.

Police have launched a hunt for the others involved in the incident. Local Government Minister Balramji Dass Tandon told the Assembly

Police cordoned off the area around the place of worship after the incident and security was beefed up around other places of worship in the holy city.

Police have registered cases under the Indian Penal Code against those identified. Those arrested are Arvinder Sharma, Rakesh Kumar, Shakti Sharma and Alok Sharma of BHSS, Tandon said. The House passed a unanimous resolution condemning the incident. The Government has promised tough action against those involved in the incident, that led to communal tension in parts of Amritsar.

Moving the resolution, Parlia-

mentary Affairs Minister Madan Mohan Mittal denounced the act as "anti-national" and assured the House of the Government's stern action against the accused.

"Certain elements are playing such games for for political gains and disturbing the peaceful environment of the State," he alleged. Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal said the incident would hurt the sentiments of the minorities.

Seeking immediate action against the accused, Akali Dal rebel Manjit Singh, said, "otherwise peace in the State will be disturbed". He alleged that the "so called Hindu organisation" wanted to create communal tension in religious land of great gurus.

Agriculture Minister Gurdev Singh Badal, Forest Minister Mohan Lal and Mahesh Inder Grewal condemned the act terming it as a "criminal offence". Forest Minister Mohan Lal and Mahesh Inder Singh Grewal (Akali rebel) also condemned the incident.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAR 2001



# Basu sees Taliban clone

FROM OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 15: Jyoti Basu today likened the BJP to the Taliban while deposing before the Liberhan Commission on factors leading to the Babri masjid demolition in 1992.

Basu, appearing for the third time before the commission, said his party condemned as "barbaric" the Taliban's demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

"We condemn the BJP and other parivar organisations, too, along the same lines as they accounted for demolishing the mosque."

Besides deposing before the commission, Basu was here to attend a meeting to revive the Third Front to look into the possibilities of dislodging the BJP-led NDA government following news portal Tehelka's exposure of the unholy nexus between arms dealers, politicians and bureaucrats.

He was categorical in his views that the demolished struc-

ture at Ayodhya was a "mosque". "At least the Taliban said they would not destroy Hindu statues. Here, it is worse. They demolished the mosque," Basu said in answer to a volley of questions from various lawyers representing the commission.

"The Taliban are the uncivilised lot. Their act of demolition was barbaric. So is the act of those who demolished the Babri Mosque," Basu told the commission.

Basu had earlier submitted before the commission the audio cassette of a speech Kalyan Singh made at a public meeting in Calcutta where the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said "it was a proud job to have demolished the mosque".

Giving the entire transcript of the speech translated into English to the commission, Basu said, "Had I been the Prime Minister, I would have imposed President's rule in the state and prevented the kar sevaks from gathering at Ayodhya."

When asked why he did not arrest Advani when his Rath Yatra passed through West Bengal, Basu said: "First of all there was no law and order problem. Secondly, when I asked the then Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, he told me not to arrest Advani as every arrangement had been made with Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav to arrest him in Bihar."

"Vajpayee, who had initially condemned the demolition, has shifted his stand after becoming Prime Minister. I condemn his (Vajpayee's) statement that demolition of the mosque was expression of national sentiment," said Basu.

The former chief minister of Bengal said the BJP and its earlier avtar Jana Sangh were always "untouchables for us" and even during V.P. Singh's time when "we were all to work together, we made it clear that we would not share any platform with the BJP and we should not be seen together."

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAR 2001

# Law will take its course in Ayodhya case: Vajpayee

140-1  
13/3

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 12.** The Vajpayee Government today suffered a major embarrassment when an Opposition-sponsored amendment on the decision to sell the Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) to a private industrial group was carried in the Rajya Sabha during the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address.

The defeat in the Upper House, though, has no bearing on its continuation in office. Under Article 75(3) of the Constitution, the Council of Ministers is responsible only to the Lok Sabha.

The Rajya Sabha voted on the motion after the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, defended his government's policies as elaborated in the address. Earlier, the Lok Sabha had given its stamp of approval to a similar motion of thanks through voice vote.

Winding up the discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address, Mr. Vajpayee said his Government would endeavour to build a national consensus on the nuclear policy. "We want to discuss this with all political parties, it must reflect the national will and not just be a policy of a single party."

His reference to the nuclear issue was in response to a query from the Leader of the

Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, seeking an explanation of the Government's nuclear doctrine.

The Prime Minister's speech was a vintage performance laced with his customary wit and humour. Unlike the statement made at the end of the discussion on the situation arising out of the Gujarat earthquake, Mr. Vajpayee today maintained his composure, used his felicity with words to parry uncomfortable questions, and even his exchanges with the Opposition were more in the form of light-hearted banter.

## Attack on media

The only jarring note was his attack on the media, accusing it of playing its own political games. "*Unki alag rajtreet hoti hai, alag khel hai* (they have their own politics they play their own games). Mr. Vajpayee was referring to a report in a magazine alleging that the Government was being run by a handful of bureaucrats and business houses. He also chided the Opposition for relying on newsworthy reports to embarrass his government.

The Prime Minister assured Parliament that his Government had no intention of interfering with the legal process in the Ayodhya issue, or of trying to bail out the three Ministers charged by the CBI in the Babri Masjid demolition case. The CBI felt

it had a tight case against the Ministers, despite the order of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, he said.

Calling for a consensus on the economic reforms, he urged the main Opposition party, the Congress, not to reverse its policy on reforms as it could cause great problems. He claimed his Government had transformed the economy from one of scarcity to one of plenty.

Mr. Vajpayee also assured the House that he would convene a meeting of Chief Ministers to focus on the challenges arising out of the agreement with the World Trade Organisation. Describing the situation in the power sector as worrisome, he said, "power production has increased but so has theft." The power distribution was weak and tough times lay ahead.

## Appeal to Pak.

The Prime Minister referred to his Government's achievements in the international arena saying the world was now coming round to India's view. "The world recognises that we are for peace, our position on Jammu & Kashmir is being appreciated." He also called on Pakistan to change its attitude and give up its hostile posture towards India.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Sonia Gandhi said the economy was in a deep

crisis, and the Government's claims were "empty and full of vain glorious boasts." She said it had not dealt with the problems of the kisans and khet mazdoors and the organised and unorganised working class. Privatisation without reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was undermining the weaker sections as seen in the handling of the BALCO deal. "The nation's patience was wearing thin on Kashmir, she said and turning to the Ayodhya issue termed it the litmus test of secularism. The Government must clarify its stand on the three tainted Ministers. PFI reports:

Mr. Vajpayee categorically said anybody found guilty of burning copies of the Quran would be severely punished. "If there was any mischief, the guilty would be brought to book. At the same time, if the reports are not true, such rumour-mongers will also be dealt with." The Prime Minister's assurance came after the JD(S) member, Maulana Obaidullah Khan Azmi, wanted to know what the Government was doing on reports of communal violence in some parts of the country following alleged burning of some pages of Quran in New Delhi.

The Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani would make a detailed statement in Parliament tomorrow, Mr. Vajpayee said.

See also page 15

# Taliban *Religion & Power* pounds Buddha *HT-1* statues

Islamabad, March 1 *13*

THE TALIBAN'S cannons and battle tanks today began blasting the Bamiyan Buddhas and other heritage statues across Afghanistan to pieces, as a horrified world first implored the militia to stop and then condemned it as barbaric.

Afghanistan radio quoted Taliban information minister Qudratullah Jamal as saying in Kabul that statues were being destroyed in Kandahar, Bamiyan, Herat and the Kabul museum after a fresh decree from the militia's chief, Mullah Omar.

"The work started five hours ago; I don't know how much of it (the Bamiyan Buddhas) has been destroyed," Jamal said. "We will use all means, including cannons and tanks."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Unesco chief Koichiro Matsuura called on the Taliban to rescind its order, saying a significant part of the world's cultural heritage was at stake. Germany was "indignant" at the Taliban's actions, and Russia termed them "vandalism".

The destruction began even though Taliban's close ally Pakistan, under considerable pressure from various Saarc and Western countries, appealed to the Taliban to protect the rich historical monuments.

Yesterday in Islamabad, a Sri Lanka-convened meeting of heads of missions—from India, Bangladesh, Japan, Korea, Nepal and France—had urged Pakistan to intervene and prevent the "barbaric" act.

*PTI*  
More reports on Pages 9 & 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 MAR 2001

# Court reprieves Uma, Advani, M M Joshi

Lucknow, February 12

IN A new twist to the Babri Masjid demolition trial, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court today set aside as "improper and defective" a notification for trial of eight accused including Union Ministers L. K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti and the framing of charges against them in the case.

A single-judge bench comprising Justice Jagdish Bhalla allowed the government

to issue a fresh notification with prior permission of the High Court if it so desired.

Justice Bhalla, however, upheld the special CBI court's decision to frame charges against 40 other accused including then Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh and Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray.

Apart from the three Union Ministers, the eight accused who have got a reprieve are BJP MP Vinay Katiyar, VHP leader Ashok

Singhal, Giriraj Kishore and Vishnu Hari Dalmiya and Sadhvi Rithambara. The court deleted the name of BJP leader Vijayaraje Scindia from the list of 41 accused following her death.

It did not find anything wrong in the constitution of the special court through a notification in September 1993 for trying the 41 accused but said the way the other notification was made for including the names of eight others in October of the same year was

"improper and defective" as prior concurrence of the High Court was not obtained.

The court, however, observed that the defect was a "curable" one and the state government could issue a fresh notification.

The special court had on September 9, 1997 ordered framing of charges against all the 49 accused. Thirty-three of the accused, including Uma Bharti, had challenged the special court order.

(PTI)

See also Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 FEB 2001

# Dalai Lama lashes out at conversions

PTI & AP

KUMBH NAGAR, Jan, 25. — The Dalai Lama today opposed forced conversions but said one was within his or her right to embrace any religion.

"An individual changing his or her religion is not a problem but conversion by force is wrong. I will oppose this," he told reporters after meeting the VHP international president, Mr Ashok Singhal here.

The exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, on a two-day visit to the Kumbh mela, however, added, "I believe it is safer and better to keep one's own faith."

He said forced religious conversion had negative effects and was an outdated method, adding that Buddhism was against this.

"Whether Hindu or Muslim or Christian, whoever tries to convert, it's wrong," he said after a lunch meeting, with top Hindu priests and members of the World Hindu Council,

which preaches Hindu Rashtra.

The council invited the Dalai Lama to discussions on conversion in the Kumbh Mela. He met them before joining Hindu priests to offer prayers to the river.

The Dalai Lama said the purpose of his visit here was to promote human values and religious harmony. "I have come here to promote religious harmony among people of various faiths. I came here in the sixties also with the same purpose."

After the meeting, the Dalai Lama and others signed a joint statement saying: "We oppose conversions by any religious tradition using various methods of enticement."

Members of the Hindu Council have repeatedly criticised Muslims, called on the government to ban Christian conversions and oust missionaries, and demanded that Muslims and Christians revere Hindu gods.

According to Supreme Court judge Mr KT Thomas, India's

constitutional guarantee of freedom to propagate one's religion as well as profess and practice it, was meant for Christians. The framers of the Constitution, 80 per cent of them Hindus, realised that propagation is a tenet of the Christian faith, he said.

Mr BK Modi, president of the foreign wing of the World Hindu Council, commented during the break in the meeting with the Dalai Lama: "The wave of conversion should end. There should be an understanding on that... Conversion is an issue disturbing both Hindus and Buddhists."

Reacting to the Dalai Lama's statement, Rev Dominic Emmanuel, a spokesman for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in New Delhi, said: "Conversion is a matter between oneself and God. If somebody finds another view or faith and wants to change, that is basic human freedom and nobody can take away that freedom."

THE STATESMAN

26 JAN 2001

## **Bajrang Dal to arm cadre with trishuls**

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 25. The Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, today announced its determination to recruit 30 lakh youths over the next few months, to give martial arts training to 10 lakh and arm 3 lakh of these volunteers with 'trishuls', all in the name of "awakening" the people on the Ram temple issue. 110-13

Simultaneously, the Dal convener, Mr. Surendra Jain, announced a drive to collect funds — Rs. 1,100 to be taken from each of about 3 lakh villages to make up a grand sum of Rs. 33 crores — also in the name of the Ram temple. Mr. Giriraj Kishore, senior VHP vice-president, did not rule out the need for "sacrificing" the Vajpayee Government. 111

The Bajrang Dal was not at all worried that its plan to raise a veritable army could lead to Muslim organisations doing the same. Let them do it too, Mr. Jain said, adding that the Dal was not afraid of a confrontation. The Dal also said it would "monitor" movement of all cattle during Bakri-Id and "we will not allow a single cow to be sacrificed and slaughtered that day". His view was that if Muslims agreed to restrict their offering and sacrifice to goats, that would be appreciated.

### **Not against Valentine Day**

PTI Reports:

Mr. Jain said the Bajrang Dal had not chalked out any programme "as yet" to oppose the Valentine Day celebration on February 14. "Now, we have no such plan," the Bajrang Dal convener told reporters here.

THE HINDU

26 JAN 2001

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2001

## A DISTURBING ESCALATION HP-12

WITH THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad-sponsored 'dharam sansad' (assembly of sadhus) at the Maha Kumbh setting a deadline — March 12, 2002 — for the removal of "all obstacles" to the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre and the BJP regime in Uttar Pradesh have been put on notice. The fact that the 'sansad' has refrained from fixing a firm and proximate date for putting up the contentious temple, as the VHP had been threatening it would do, should have come as a big relief, in the immediate context, to the BJP leadership and to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, personally since 'managing' the coalition partners with pretensions to secularism must be that much easier now. The perceived 'climbdown' suggests that the hardliners in the Sangh Parivar were presumably made to realise the logic of political expediency that lay in keeping the temple issue on the centre stage without enforcing a showdown for the present. The objective evidently is to draw maximum electoral mileage in the coming Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh by drumming up communal passions on the emotive issue, even while taking care that the applecart (the Vajpayee Government) is not upset on that account at least for now.

Highly disturbing and ominous, from the standpoint of cherished national values and traditions and religious harmony, is the 'action plan' the 'sansad' and the VHP have unfolded for the runup to D-Day. The three-phased plan — comprising collective chanting of 'Ram' in villages and offering of 'jalabhishek' to deities in temples across the country, with an Ayodhya-to-Delhi march of sadhus providing the finale in February 2002 — is typical of the Sangh Parivar's mobilisation strategy and is of a piece with the programmes the saffron forces had organised in the pre-Babri Masjid demolition phase. Although no threat of a forcible occupation of the disputed site (in the event of the Government failing to oblige) has been openly

held out, there is no mistaking the intention of the VHP and such others spearheading the 'Ramjanmabhoomi' movement. Which is to build the temple on the very site where the Babri Masjid had stood before it was pulled down on December 6, 1992, and get the authorities to clear all the 'obstacles' that might stand in the way of their accomplishing the task. Their idea is, plainly, to give the ruling establishment an ultimatum and then use the lead time to pressure — possibly intimidate and coerce — the Government into acquiescence by whipping up communal frenzy. And this is an open challenge not just to the Government of the day, which is duty bound to abide by and honour whatever verdict is handed down by the judiciary (in the pending cases), but to the very concept of rule of law.

*9-Religion & Faith 29/1*

To the provocative posturing of the Ram temple protagonists, the response of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board has been predictable — that the Masjid site is "non-negotiable". In fact, the Muslim community has a very valid and legitimate claim for reparation in respect of the wrong done to it when the mosque was demolished. With the VHP and those of its ilk proclaiming their determination to push their temple agenda aggressively and to the finish, on the one side, and the minority community finding itself driven to the wall, on the other, one dreads to visualise the evolving scenario. It would not do for the Prime Minister and his colleagues to offer bland assurances that the "law would take its course" and that the Government would not remain "spectators", should anyone attempt to disturb the *status quo* in Ayodhya. In a matter such as this, involving as it does highly sensitive religious sentiments, any intervention has to be in the initial stages. And the time is now for the Vajpayee Government to act firmly by way of restraining the likes of the VHP, to start with, from going ahead with their communally explosive programmes.

THE HINDU

## Talking on Ayodhya

SINCE NO one other than the wild elements in the Sangh परिवार hopes for a solution of the Ayodhya dispute except through a judicial verdict or negotiations, the Muslim Personal Law Board's emphasis on a 'meaningful dialogue' with the Centre is a reasonable one. It also has a point in refusing to talk with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad because of its role in demolishing the Babri masjid. Besides, how representative the VHP and the Bajrang Dal are of the Hindu community is open to question. It is not only the exposure of the differences in the ranks of the *sadhus* during the Kumbh *mela* which has undermined the VHP's claim to speak on behalf of the Hindus; even the other outfits in the saffron camp are said to have played a part in preventing it from announcing the date of the temple construction. This exercise in restraint is evidence that the VHP's views are only its own and of no one else's. 46-17

In the political field, too, indications that the BJP's influence is waning suggests that the temple issue is no longer of as much interest to the Hindus as it was earlier. In fact, the suspicion that the issue is being raised again by the Hindutva lobby with the Uttar Pradesh elections in mind underlines its political, rather than religious, connotation. All this points, first, to the need for the observance of restraint by the concerned parties and, secondly, for a reiteration of the judiciary-or-negotiations route to a settlement. Undoubtedly, the Centre will have to play an increasingly assertive role in this respect if only to ensure that no ultimatums are issued to raise the communal temperature. The judiciary can also be urged to expedite its process of examining the dispute. 22/1

However, since the question of negotiations has been raised again, it can be legitimately asked who will negotiate with whom. That the Centre will be both initiator and moderator is undeniable. But who are the other parties? Since an issue of this nature is marked by religious, cultural and social overtones, it is not unusual to find that organisations and individuals with limited and often retrogressive perceptions come to the fore. Some of them may have the authority of tradition behind them, but no popular sanction in the modern sense. From this standpoint, their claims to speak on behalf of either the Hindus or the Muslims are not always credible. It is open to doubt how far they really reflect the views of the silent majority. Their advice can be sought, of course, but the Centre will have to tread with the utmost caution in choosing and interacting with them.



# Gorkha Hills Council accord up for review on February 7

HT Correspondent  
Siliguri, January 22

9-Per P-16  
HR

THE DARJEELING Gorkha Hill Council Accord of 1988 is due for a review next month.

DGHC chairman Subhas Ghising will leave for New Delhi on February 7 to participate in the meet called for the purpose by the Union Home Ministry.

Ghising has of late written several times to the Centre asking for a three-way meeting. The Home Ministry's special secretary recently invited him to Delhi. State rep-

2311

representatives will be present at the meet.

State Urban Development Minister Ashok Bhattacharya, who also heads the committee set up to give more powers to DGHC, said today: "The tripartite meeting has been called on the State Government's request."

The State representative will be decided at a meeting with Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, he said. Bhattacharya refused to say if the council's demand to include the DGHC area in the Constitution's

8th schedule will be discussed at the Delhi meet.

DGHC, ruled by the Gorkha National Liberation Front, has demanded that the council area be declared a tribal region. Most political parties in the Hills have criticised the move and dubbed it the GNLF's political gimmick.

The GNLF, in charge of the council from its inception on August 22, 1998, has long been complaining of inadequate powers. The State Government, apparently, supports the council's demand for more powers.

23 JAN 2001

# Muslims open to talks with govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 21. — The All India Muslim Personal Law Board today ruled out negotiations with the VHP on Ayodhya, but left open its options for talks with the government.

After a marathon meeting, the board said it was prepared to consider any initiative for talks by the government, provided it sincerely tries to create a conducive atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue.

The Board also resolved that land dedicated to a mosque shall always remain for a

mosque and every effort shall be made for its restoration.

At Kumbh Nagar, the VHP-sponsored Dharam Sansad ended with an open session of sadhus endorsing the plan to build a Ram temple at Ayodhya after 12 March next year.

The Muslim board set up a five-member committee headed by Maulana Nizamuddin to monitor the situation arising out of statements and policies adopted by "forces directly responsible for demolition of the Babari Masjid". The panel, which also includes Yusuf Mucchala, Maulana Sajjad

Nomani, Syed Shahabuddin and Zafaryab Jilani, will present its report to board president Maulana Qazi Muzahidul Islam Qasmi.

Upset with the Sansad resolution, Maulana Nizamuddin said: "Are we going to accept the rule of law or succumb to brute muscle power?"

Board member Syed Shahabuddin said the issue now was not confined to the two communities but posed a challenge to the State and the Constitution.

■ CPM warns Centre on temple, page 8

THE STATESMAN

22 JAN 2001

# CPM warns Centre on temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Jan. 21. — The VHP's blatant attempts to whip up communal frenzy in the run-up to Uttar Pradesh polls and a one-year temple deadline have put the BJP and its allies in a spot, the CPI-M central committee said here today.

All NDA allies will now have to clarify their stand and whether they will allow such tacit communalisation of politics, Mr Sitaram Yechury said.

The VHP and the Dharam Sansad are more concerned about UP elections than anything else, Mr Yechury said after the meeting.

The Prime Minister, in his 'musings', said the government would abide by the court verdict. He should now stand up and establish his credentials, the CPI-M said.

The CPI-M central committee today adopted a resolution, condemning the announcement on temple construction and warned the government that any tinkering with the status of the land acquired in the area will not be tolerated.

No decision can be taken on the disputed site at Ayodhya till the courts dispose off the case regarding the site's ownership. No religious gathering or RSS outfit is above the law of the land and no self-styled representative of a religious community can take a decision, the resolution said.

No representative 'section' of the two communities has the mandate to negotiate on the issue, as several other secular forces are involved and affected, Mr Yechury said.

"The Prime Minister's commitment to abide by the court decision will have to be tested in the face of the threats issued by the VHP-RSS combine," the resolution said.

The CPI-M decided to step up its opposition to the economic policies of "unbridled liberalisation" and knit together the affected sections as part of its political line against the onslaught of imperialist forces and the "diabolical strategy of communal forces".

THE STATESMAN

2232 JAN 20 1991

212 JAN 20 1991

# Temple decision: Reprive or threat?

**Vinod Sharma**  
New Delhi, January 20

**T**HE LUNATIC fringe and the moderate wing of the Sangh Parivar were always suspected to be acting in tandem on the Ayodhya issue. But the final proof of it, if one was indeed required, lies in the decisions of the VHP-sponsored Dharma Sansad in Allahabad.

At the end of the deftly orchestrated show, one is left wondering whether the Sansad was about dharma or politics? Should the assembled *sants* and Dharmacharyas resolve to start building the Ram Temple a year from now—after March 12, 2002 to be

precise --be interpreted as a threat when it actually amounts to a reprive for the Vajpayee regime?

"I am giving Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee an year's time to resolve the issue. After that, no matter what happens the Ram *mandir* will be built at any cost and no force on earth can stop us," thundered Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, head of the Shri Ram Mandir Nirman Samiti and Ram Jannabhoomi Nyas, addressing the Dharma Sansad at Kumbhagar.

On the face of it, the VHP, amid the Sants' well-rehearsed outbursts, has secured for the BJP a temporary win-win situation. The temple tantrums are expected to enthu-

the party's Hindutva vote-base without giving the NDA secularists any immediate cause for alarm. Coalition politics, after all, is the art of piecemeal existence.

Barring perhaps the likes of Mamata Banerjee, who has to face the Marxists at the hustings in West Bengal a few weeks from now, other non-BJP partners in power might well wait until the NDA appecart gets closer to the March 2002 bridge. But that probably would be a trifle late. By then, the VHP and its band of sadhus would have

sold enough opium (of religion) to secure a bridgehead in UP. Or such is their prayer to Lord Rama.

In fact, the Dharma Sansad's schedule for taking up the Temple project is sweetly timed. The UP Assembly's term expires in April next year, barely a month after the expiry of the deadline the parliament of seers' has set for the Centre to clear road-blocks in the way of Ram *Lalla's mandir* at Ayodhya.

Only the naive, therefore, would dissociate the Sansad's edict from the Parivar's political objectives in UP and other Hindutva-prone States, notably Gujarat, where the BJP has been rapidly losing base.

The VHP's Allahabad jamboree has been a copy-book demonstration of what NCP leader Devendra Nath Dwivedi called "controlled" brinkmanship; a custom-built game-plan to carry forward the Parivar's agenda to secure power with popular base.

The irony of it all is the arguments heard at the Maha Kumbh Sansad were heard earlier in Parliament. For instance, the parallel the sants drew between the proposed Ram Temple and the reconstruction of Somnath shrine was a straight lift from the PM's Lok Sabha speech on Ayodhya. Only time would tell if the political *jugalbandi* would meet the electoral denouement in UP and elsewhere.

## Allahabad Conclave

Related reports on Page-6

# No date set for temple ✓

By Neena Vyas 2/1

ALLAHABAD, JAN. 20. It was not a bang but a whimper. There was no announcement at the 'dharam sansad' here of a date for the start of construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya. There was no threat to occupy by force the land acquired by the Centre in and around the disputed site.

After all the hype, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-led 'dharam sansad' adopted a resolution today, warning "all relevant organisations" to "remove all hurdles in the way of the construction of a Sri Ram temple at the Ramjanmabhoomi by March 12, 2002, the day of Mahashivatri."

It was a climbdown that left many VHP cadres disappointed. But the leadership has worked out a programme to keep them busy — chanting of the name of Ram is to be organised in villages from November 26. From September 18 to October 16 *jalabhishek* is to be offered in temples. A 'sant yatra' (procession of sadhus) to be taken out from Ayodhya to Delhi between February 18 and 25, 2002 will serve notice on Parliament and the Government to remove hurdles to the temple construction.

For the last two days the VHP leadership had been saying a firm date for the start of construction of the temple would be announced. But apparently, a strong message from the RSS and the BJP to do nothing to destabilise the Vajpayee Government spoilt the

broth that was cooking in the VHP pot. In addition, at a meeting with the Puri Sankaracharya, Nischalanand Saraswathi, yesterday, the VHP leadership was forced to give him an assurance that no date would be announced without consulting the Sankaracharyas if the VHP wanted their "blessings".

The Puri Sankaracharya indicated today that he might call a meeting of the most respected dharmacharyas, vallabhacharyas, nimbacharyas, ramanadacharyas, madhavacharyas and others on

9-  
minutes  
January 22 on the Kumbh Mela grounds here to discuss the issue. The Sankaracharya of the Jyotishpeeth and Dwarkapeeth, Swaropanand Saraswathi, and the Kanchi Kamakotipeeth, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, would be part of this meeting, he indicated.

The Puri Sankaracharya said if the 'sants' were to fix a date for the start of construction of a temple, that "right" would naturally be that of the Sankaracharyas whose peeths are the oldest established religious maths.

See also Page 7

## Sonia visit stalled

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, JAN. 20. The Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's proposed visit to the Mahakumbh at Allahabad scheduled for Monday has come under a cloud with the district administration expressing its inability to provide security.

According to sources in the Congress president's office her programme was prepared in consultation with the security agencies some days ago. And the party had begun making arrangements for her visit by fixing up meetings with the religious heads attending the Mahakumbh. Now all the plans have been sent into a tailspin following the refusal of the district administration to provide security or make arrangements for the

visit. The decision to deny permission appears to have caught not only Congressmen but even senior officers of the Special Protection Group (SPG) off guard. A SPG officer who went to Allahabad for liaising with the local authorities was in for a surprise. They told him that they did not have enough policemen, that they were expecting a mammoth crowd on January 24 and that they would need to block all incoming traffic and hence could not make arrangements for Mrs. Gandhi's visit.

But Congress leaders point out that Mrs. Gandhi was supposed to visit the sangam for a few hours two days ahead of the big rush expected on January 24, and they suspect that there were other reasons for denying her permission.

THE HINDU

21 JAN 2001

# Ram temple construction next year

By Neena Vyas

**KUMBH MELA, ALLAHABAD, JAN. 19.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad-led 'dharam sansad' is expected to formally announce tomorrow that construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya will begin on Shivratri, some time in late February or early March next year, coinciding with the scheduled Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh in March-April 2002.

The 'dharam sansad', which began its three-day deliberations here today, will take up the temple issue tomorrow, but the decision to make this announcement was taken on Thursday night by the 51-member Ram Mandir Nirman Samiti headed by Paramhans Ramachandra Das of the Digamber Akhara in Ayodhya, a leading light of the VHP camp.

The other important decision is that 'sants' and 'sadhus' will march to Parliament from Ayodhya during the coming budget session or the following monsoon session to demand that the Centre hand over the land at the disputed site to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas floated by the VHP.

The announcement of the date is being seen as an ultimatum to the Vajpayee Government. Paramhans said as much today when he elaborated on this and added that he had earlier given one year's "notice" to the former Prime Ministers, Mr. V. P. Singh, Mr. Chandra Shek-

har and Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao. "I will also give one year's ultimatum to Vajpayeeji," he said.

The decision was taken to make a firm announcement of the date of construction as "internal dissatisfaction has grown, we are being asked why we are not announcing the date, the Government is bending its knees before Kashmiri militants, and the country is being sold to the multinationals", a VHP leader said here today. At Thursday's meeting, there was a dissenting leader who did not want a firm date for fear of destabilising the Vajpayee Government, but the large majority of the 'mahants' were firm and did not want a further delay.

Two astrologers — Mr. Narendra Pandey of the Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya and Mr. Kameshwar Pandey of the Banaras Hindu University — are being consulted for an auspicious day for the sadhus' march to Parliament. It was openly admitted here that Uttar Pradesh elections were a factor for the declaration of the date for next year. The 'Ram card' is to be kept ready in the hope that it will work the magic for the BJP that it did before 1992 when the number of BJP legislators from U.P. shot up dramatically.

Other reasons being cited to select Shivratri rather than Ram Navmi is the widespread celebration of Shivratri through the country. The

'mahants' from Ayodhya especially opposed the selection of Ram Navmi as normally Ayodhya receives large crowds of pilgrims on that day and it was felt any "problem" that day would become unmanageable.

Today, the 'sansad' began with a meeting of its steering committee, the Marg Darshak Mandal Samiti, which discussed two resolutions on cow protection and on the waters of the Ganga. The draft resolution demanded the scrapping of the Tehri Dam as it would reduce the flow of the Bhagirathi, fountainhead of the Ganga.

PTI reports:

Paramahans Ramchandra Das said if the land was not handed over to dharmacharyas by Shivratri next year, "we will be forced to take over the Janambhoomi complex and start construction of the temple any day any moment".

"Law is not bigger than faith. If supporters of the Ram temple movement unite, the law will have to take the back seat," he said.

The convener of Ram Janambhoomi Nirman Samiti and BJP MP, Swami Chinmayanand, sought the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's intervention to work out an alternative plan for temple construction within the time-frame to be decided by the dharam sansad.

THE HINDU

20 JAN 2001

# temple time-table today

## Sonia's holy dip makes ripples, rivals smell votebank politics

Swaraj Thapa

NEW DELHI 19 JANUARY

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi's decision to make a trip to the Maha Kumbh in Allahabad for a holy dip in the Sangam next week has created a few ripples in political circles.

While party circles contend that the objective is purely spiritual, it has nonetheless set tongues wagging. Ms Gandhi's plans to join millions of devotees at the Maha Kumbh — either on January 22 or January 24 — have been immediately linked to the party's repeated attempts to rope in upper caste voters, especially the UP Brahmins.

Though arrangements are underway to facilitate her visit to the Maha Kumbh on January 22, it is understood that she is keen to be there on January 24, which is considered the most auspicious day. Called the Mauni Amavasya or the "new moon of the saints," over five million devotees are expected to bathe in the Sangam on this day.

The immediate hurdle in Ms Gandhi's "tryst with spirituality," however, is the Uttar Pradesh government, which may refuse to cooperate on the plea that the security risks are immense. Ms Gandhi enjoys the highest security cover and is a lifelong SPG protectee.

However, the state Congress have already begun making discreet preparations for the visit, which is being seen as an ideal strategy at a time when the Congress has failed to make any political impact in the state. With the BJP on the downslide, the party's

spin doctors have been looking for an opportunity to get back in UP's political centrestage.

In its various conclaves over the last two years, the party leaders have conceded that the Congress could have chances of getting back to power in the Centre only if it made a comeback in five major states, including Uttar Pradesh. Party circles are confident that the symbolism attached to Ms Gandhi's visit is certain to give out a positive message to the upper caste voters in the state, especially since Assembly elections may not be too far away.

The party has been making efforts to regain the confidence of upper castes, which it lost to the BJP after the Ayodhya movement. As a step in that direction, Ms Gandhi visited Varanasi in June 1999 where she had unveiled the statue of Kamalapati Tripathi. She also made well publicised trips to

Tirupathi and other religious shrines in the same way as Indira Gandhi did. To win back the Sikh vote bank, she also visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar and apologised for atrocities against Sikhs.

Ms Gandhi's meeting with BSP leader Mayawati last week in Delhi is being read as a strategy to improve its electoral ratings in UP.

These efforts notwithstanding, the Congress has to face, in its plans of regaining the upper caste vote from a BJP-on-the-decline, some key hurdles. Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party, BJP's strongest rival, has also begun eyeing the votebank.



*The Economic Times*

20 JAN 2001

# Temple construction date today: Singhal

Hemendra Singh Bartwal and Agencies  
Kumbhnagar, January 19

THE VHP today said that the date and action plan for construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya would be announced at the Dharma Sansad here tomorrow even as an influential leader of the temple movement threatened forcible acquisition of the site if it was not handed over by this time next year.

VHP president Ashok Singhal told the sansad, which began a three-day session, that a decision to formulate the action plan tomorrow was taken at the meeting of the VHP's Kendriya Marg Darshak Mandal today.

In a related development, the chairman of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, told reporters that if the land was not handed over to Dharmacharyas by Shivratri next year, "we will be forced to take over the Janmabhoomi complex and start construction of the temple any day any moment".

"The law is not bigger than faith. If supporters of the Ram temple movement unite, the law will have to take the back seat," Ramchandra Das said.

While Das claimed he was speaking on behalf of the entire Sangh Parivar, including the VHP, BJP MP

Swami Chinmayanand said he was speaking in his individual capacity. Singhal, in his address, said the temple issue was connected with the sentiments of Hindus and claimed that "there never was any mosque at the disputed site."

"It was only a *dhancha* (structure) which was demolished by kar sevaks," he added.

Swami Chinmayanand said a concerted mass awareness programme would be launched to pressurise the government for handing over of the land to Hindus.

He sought Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's intervention to work out an alternative plan for temple construction within the time-frame to be decided by the Dharma Sansad.

Explaining the urgency for announcement of the date, Chinmayanand said the issue had been dragged for more than a decade with politicians failing to resolve it.

Meanwhile, the All-India Akhara Parishad and the Bharat Sadhu Samaj have given a call to boycott the Dharma Sansad accusing the VHP of hijacking the temple movement without consulting all the *sants*. Though Swami Chinmayanand denied that the Akhara Parishad had decided to stay away, today's Dharma Sansad session was not attended by all the members of the Parishad.

## Board's meet

THE ALL India Muslim Personal Law Board is gearing up for the battle ahead. It will meet in New Delhi on Sunday to discuss the Babri Masjid issue. The timing of the meeting itself is significant. Clearly intended to signal a unity of forces, it comes close on the heels of the Dharam Sansad that opened in Allahabad on Friday.

HTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JAN 2001



# VHP in dharam sankat as seers chant different <sup>1941</sup> mantras

By Rajesh Ramchandran <sup>111</sup>  
The Times of India News Service

KUMBHNAGAR: The politics of Shankaracharyas is getting curiouser: One is whole-heartedly opposing the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, (VHP) the other is neutral and the third, of a lesser status, is all for it.

The *mahamandaleswars* of various *akharas* are also divided. Thus, despite the Sangh Parivar's projections, the Hindu Samaj or the Sant Samaj remains as disunited as ever.

This is the season for politics even for sadhus. Swaroopananda Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Dwaraka and Badrinath who is close to former prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and had headed the parallel Ramalaya Trust, told this paper that he has his own idea about the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

He denounced the VHP's *dharm sansad* as nothing but politicking: There is no difference between



Ashok Singhal leads a VHP team to the Juna Akhara to forge unity amongst various religious heads on the eve of the dharam sansad in Kumbh Nagar.

the BJP, the VHP and the RSS. When the temple votary gets agitated, the VHP says it will build the temple and when the people are annoyed the BJP says the Ram temple is not on its agenda, Swaroopananda said. As the chief of two *peeths*, Swaroopananda packs a lot of punch and had forced

the VHP working president, Ashok Singhal, to settle the differences between him and the VHP. Though, Mr Singhal fixed an appointment with Swaroopananda at 9.00 p.m. on Wednesday, he failed to turn up.

Directly opposite Swaroopananda's opulent camp is the more modest Nishchalananda, the Shankaracharya of Puri. He however, is non-committal despite being approached by Mr Singhal and other senior VHP men. Though, he is for the temple, he will not say that

he is with the VHP. Neither is he prepared to condemn the organisation. His position is that the Muslims should be spoken to before the temple is built.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 JAN 2007

# Dharma Sansad can 'veto' LS decision on Ram temple date

Sunita Aron  
Lucknow, January 18

CAN DHARMA Sansad, the "super Parliament of religious heads", veto the decision of the Lok Sabha?

Yes, believes the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, whose Dharma Sansad has announced all major decisions pertaining to the Ayodhya temple movement so far. And the Sansad is all set to announce a date for the construction of the Ram temple at its forthcoming session. This is so even after the Lok Sabha decided to leave the contentious issue to the courts or hammer out a negotiated settlement.

Here is how the Sansad functions. A smaller body of saints, Kendriya Marg Darshak Mandal, takes the decisions while the Dharma Sansad only ratifies them. The Mandal has VHP leaders Ashok Singhal, Acharya Giriraj Kishore and Sampat Rai and BJP MP Chinmayanand on its board. However, it is the stamp of approval of the Dharma Sansad which gives religious legitimacy to the programmes.

The present convenor of the

## TEMPLE PLAYERS



Ashok Singhal

VHP's all-powerful general secretary. He is the brain behind the Ram temple movement.



Ram Chandra Paramhans

Represents Digamber Akhara. Shastri in Sanskrit, belongs to Bihar. Has settled in Ayodhya for the past many decades.



Swaroopanand Saraswati

Belongs to Varanasi. Known for his opposition to the VHP. Lacks mass support



Mahant Avaidnath

Former BJP MP from Gorakhpur. Head of Gorakhnath Temple Trust. Chief of the Ram Janmabhoomi Yagya Samiti

Mandal is Acharya Ram Nath Suman, who stays at Sankat Mochan in Delhi. Who is the head

of the Dharam Sansad? The stock reply is "the dharmacharyas (religious heads)". Any "senior dharmacharya can chair the session", is the other explanation.

Questions such as the constitution of the Sansad or the Mandal and its membership evoke a sharp retort: "Do we religious heads have to go the politicians' way?" says a VHP functionary.

However, one-upmanship is prevalent in what the VHP calls its Sant Samaj. It was only on Tuesday VHP general secretary Acharya Giriraj Kishore had told the media about the Parishad's decision to go ahead with the announcement of a date for the temple construction at the forthcoming Dharma Sansad. But on Thursday, a key dharmacharya, Mahant Ram Chand Paramhans of Digamber Akhara, Ayodhya, said, "I will only announce the Ram Mandir strategy, not the date as it alerts both the friends and foes. Temple construction will begin anytime after March 2001".

Mr Singhal is jittery as Akhara Parishad, the governing body of all the 13 prominent Akharas in the country, has been threatening to dissociate from the Sansad.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 JAN 2001

## Allies sore over Kalraj Mishra's claim on Ayodhya issue

40-13  
1311

**By Our Special Correspondent**

**LUCKNOW, JAN. 17.** The comment by the Uttar Pradesh BJP president, Mr. Kalraj Mishra, that the Ram temple issue was on the National Democratic Alliance agenda has triggered protests in the ruling alliance in the State with the non-BJP parties expressing their disagreement.

The State BJP, at its executive meeting at Jhansi last week, passed a resolution urging Muslim cooperation in the construction of the temple at Ayodhya. Later at a press conference, Mr. Mishra was asked how his party had brought the issue on the political agenda contrary to the declared stand taken by national leadership. Mr. Mishra replied that the temple was on everyone's agenda. If it was not so, how was it that the Opposition stalled proceedings in Parliament on the issue on December 6 last?

Mr. Mishra elaborated saying his party agreed that there could be two ways of solving the issue, one through a court directive and the other through negotiations be-

tween the leaders of Hindus and Muslims. He reiterated the statement made by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, that the temple issue was an expression of the national sentiment.

The message is clear that the State BJP wanted to rake up the controversy in a new form with an eye on the Assembly elections. The basic theme has been the same as that articulated by Mr. Vajpayee but emphasis has been

added to indicate the party's new-found zeal.

Mr. Mishra's comments were criticised by leaders of the Loktantrik Congress Party, the Samata Party and the Jantantrik Bahujan Samaj Party, who said the Ayodhya issue was not on the NDA's agenda. They also expressed their determination to foil any attempt to disturb communal harmony in the State. But the protests have no sobering effect on the BJP.

THE HINDU

18 JAN 2001

# Hindu-Muslim meet a damp squib

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mr Katiyar said he would not make any appeal to the VHP to postpone its decision of finalising the date for starting temple construction during the Dharam Sansad in Allahabad.

LUCKNOW, Jan. 13. — The much-hyped meeting of Hindus and Muslim leaders on the Ayodhya issue turned out to be a damp squib with only some leaders from Faizabad including BJP MP, Mr Vinay Katiyar attending it here today.

Mohammed Hasim Ansari, one of the initiators of the dialogue, was conspicuous by his absence.

The meeting decided to resolve the mandir-masjid dispute through talks at the local level and not allow "others" to draw political mileage out of it.

Leaders of both the communities decided to hold the next round of talks in March after holding separate consultations among their respective communities, Mr Katiyar said.

Termining the talks as a positive step, Mr Katiyar said that the issue should be first resolved among themselves and then the two communities should pressure for implementation of their decision.

The All India Babari Masjid Action Committee questioned the credentials of Muslim participants in the meeting. Committee convener, Mr Zafaryab Jilani said no prominent Muslim leaders from Ayodhya attended the meeting.

About 100 Muslim leaders belonging to Faizabad including Imam of Bhagwa Pir, Faizabad and Haji Ahmed Shakeel of All India Muslim Conference participated in today's talks held amidst opposition by prominent Muslim groups, Mr Katiyar claimed.

## MELA GEARS UP FOR SHAHI SNAN

HEMENDRA NARAYAN STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ALLAHABAD, Jan. 13. — If the organisers are to be believed, they are more than satisfied with the arrangements on the eve of the first big day of the month-long Mahakumbh.

The mela administration has geared up for the first 'shahi snan' (royal bath) by sadhus and other devotees here on Makar Sankranti.

People are pouring in from all over the country and the figure could be anywhere up to one crore who will take a dip in the holy waters during the auspicious hour from 5.15 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The most likely problem was that of fog in the early hours, for which the mela administration had fully geared up. The fog with virtually no visibility engulfed the entire area this morning and cleared only by 9 a.m. The rest of the day was sunny.



A sadhu takes a puff of ganja at Kumbh Mela on Friday. — AP/PTI

There has always been a sense of one-upmanship among the akharas over this. Those with a long history have arrived at the Mahakumbh area, their colourful flags flutter at their camps. There was a bitter dispute between Niranjani and Juna at the last Mahakumbh in Haridwar three years ago, creating problems for the organisers.

This time, there has been a written agreement and the dispute has been resolved, the UP minister for urban development, Mr Lalji Tandon, said here this evening. The officers were, however, keeping their fingers crossed.

Many sadhus were using chairs mounted on tractor-trolleys to enter the mela. Many walked, chanting Vedic hymns — a stream of people performing their own rituals with or without the help of the pandas.

## Priest charge against VHP stirs up row

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SAGAR ISLAND, Jan. 13. — The statement of Mahant Gayandas, the head priest of Kapil Muni temple and the representative of Nivani Pancharamanadiya Akhara from Ayodhya, has kicked up a row in Sagar Mela.

In an interview to **The Statesman**, the head priest slammed both the VHP and the Bajrang Dal for inciting a religious war in the state just prior to the election.

The Ram Mandir could be constructed by peaceful means without bloodshed, the Mahant said. The Hindus and the Muslims in Ayodhya are united in opposing any violence on the temple issue, he added.

Many priests at the Sagar Mela have strongly reacted to the head priest's statement. Mr Satyanarayana Morijewala, a VHP leader at the mela said, "VHP is not cashing in on Hindu sentiment by playing Ram temple card. The Muslims too believe in the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya."

"I find no justification of Mahantji to malign our organisation which is trying to uphold the cause of Hindutva, Mr Morijewala added. Muslims should be made aware of the logic behind the construction of Ram temple. Ram temple stands for Hindu culture.

The VHP activists will take out a procession tomorrow morning at Sagar Mela to preach their ideology. The rally will go around the fair ground and end at Sagar where thousands of devotees will take the holy dip.

Mr Arun Kalyani, secretary, Bajrang Parishad commenting on the Mahant's statement said: "The Hindu members, if more in number, will construct the temple and for the Muslims, vice versa".

On their mission at this religious congregation, Mr Kalyani said politics should be kept away from the sanctum sanctorum of the Kapil Muni temple. But the people should be made aware of the original culture of the state shedding political clout.

The Bajrang Parishad does not want to raise any further controversy in Sagar Mela. The parishad is here to provide food and shelter to the pilgrims, and it will continue to do just that, Mr Kalyani added.

Over 60,000 pilgrims thronged the mela grounds till 12.00 noon today, the second day of the mela.

Mr Alapan Banerjee, DM, South 24-Parganas said, "Kumbh Mela has been a major factor for this low turnout. The rush is expected to be high from tonight".

Incidents of shop lifting have been reported from different stalls at the mela.

# No construction of temple until 2002, says RSS

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 12 JANUARY

**P**RIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has earned some more time to settle the Ayodhya dispute. With the RSS declaring that 2002 is an auspicious time to begin constructing a temple at the disputed site, its militant offshoot — VHP — may not initiate any move that could create hassles for the government.

“As per my assumption, the construction work can start only

by 2002. In any case, Dharm Sansad is the only capable body that can decide anything on it. But the only feasible time could be April, 2002,” RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya told reporters here. He said “sacred” work, like construction of a Ram temple, could start only on auspicious occasions — Vijaya Dashami, Ram Navami and Devothan Ekadashi.

“With Vijaya Dashami coinciding with chaturmas, that stands

ruled out. Ram Navami 2001 is too early to organise people and the Ekadashi in November is also untimely,” he said.

The RSS spokesman’s statement comes at a time when VHP has upped its ante and political players — who have been benefiting from identity politics — have joined issue with the Sangh. Although a proposal for dialogue came from BJP MP Vinay Katiyar, Muslim leaders quickly got back into business and said the work

would not be possible unless the idol was shifted out of the disputed structure.

The Prime Minister is keen on a negotiated settlement of the vexed issue. But it appears a tough task as no single Muslim outfit has the necessary credentials or clout to become the voice of the community. Incidentally, the lack of a credible leadership has been harming their interests, making the community vulnerable to pressure from parties

playing vote bank politics.

For the Prime Minister, the RSS statement suits him as any announcement of construction could have derailed his government’s agenda. With his government grappling with crucial economic issues, the resurfacing of the temple issue at this juncture could only mar governance.

The stand of the RSS is a clear indicator that it is indulgent towards the concerns of the Vajpayee government. Mr

Vajpayee’s allies attach a lot of importance to the so-called secular tag and their association with BJP could become untenable if the Sangh put the temple agenda up front.

The issue could lose its potency further if temple construction is put off till 2002. With political parties moving away from the “secular-communal paradigm” that represented politics in the 1990s, the issue has lost much of its potential.

The Economic Time

13 JAN

# POLITICS! POLITICS! POLITICS!

## The Sangh Parivar's dilemma<sup>51-6</sup> over Ayodhya<sup>1211</sup>

WHAT is one to make of the reported concession by the VHP that they will wait for a year to give the government time to do something about the Ram temple at Ayodhya? We have had the statement of the prime minister about the temple being a *national objective*, repeated gratuitously the next day and the engaging admission, hard on the heels of the two-part article written during his short holiday, that it was a slip of the tongue. On the other hand, types like Ashok Singhal and Giriraj Kishore, have been insistent that the matter was out of their hands and in the lap of non-descript sadhus and sants who would meet in a Dharam Sansad this month and decide all by themselves with no interference from any lay person, including Singhal when the construction of the temple would begin. Now from Nagpur comes the welcome news that the matter is put off for a year and that without the participation of the hitherto indispensable sadhus and sants. The announcement is made by the VHP. This recital confirms, if confirmation was needed, that sadhus and sants are parked in various pockets of the VHP and it is this organisation together with others in the Sangh Parivar perhaps, who call the shots. From this proposition it is but a short step to the logical conclusion that the whole temple business is political and action will be guided by politics and political convenience.

Inevitably questions are being asked and equally inevitably the answers vary wildly. From the presence of leading lights of the BJP, the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal at the crucial meeting in Nagpur which decided to grant a year's reprieve, speculation is rife that the Sangh Parivar will use the year to get emotions to rise to fever pitch and call another election. The difficulty with this theory is two-fold. One, you cannot fool the same people in the same way twice; the excitement of Advani's rath yatra was a one time operation. It cannot be repeated. Two, there is evidence to show that the temperature has dropped and resistance from the BJP's allies has increased. The BJP are living dangerously if they think they can go ahead on their own without allies. The wild men in the Sangh Parivar may think that the country is waiting for them to raise mayhem and respond enthusiastically, it is doubtful if the BJP leadership, minus Sudershan, has any stomach for such adventures. Reading between the lines the Sangh Parivar meeting in Nagpur itself recognised that the past cannot be replicated. A year is a long time in politics, even the kind of politics that the Parivar have on offer. If the decision recognises that some solution is possible that includes the rebuilding a new mosque where the Babari Masjid was and a temple in the large vacant area available, maybe we can inch towards a solution.

And as they learn to think constructively for a change, can they please stop these attacks on Christians, their churches, their Bibles, their nuns and their priests. One welcomes the fact that they have stopped saying anything about Muslims proliferating faster and overwhelming Hindus. To continue to urge that conversion to Christianity represents a threat to the demographic composition of the Indian people only raises a laugh. What has not happened since the year 52AD is not likely to happen in the year of our Lord, 2001 or at any time in the third millennium of the Christian era. Attacks on churches are again being reported. Will the Sangh Parivar rein in their wild men please. They are only bringing discredit to the Hindu community, which is basically tolerant and peace-loving. From this moment onwards this despicable activity is counter-productive. Stop it! If you have unleashed a Frankenstein that you cannot control — destroy it!

THE STATESMAN

12 JAN 2001

7 12 2001

# Temple issue: U.P. BJP's call to Muslims

By J. P. Shukla

**JHANSI, JAN. 11.** Plans for construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya dominated the proceedings of the Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party executive which began a two-day meeting here today with the State unit president, Mr. Kalraj Mishra, appealing to Muslims to cooperate in hammering out a solution to the vexed issue.

"If Muslims agree to allow construction of a Ram temple, the mosque could be constructed at some other suitable place. This will be the most welcome situation," Mr. Mishra said in his inaugural address.

Reminding the members of the utterances of the Prime Minister, Mr. Vajpayee, on Ram temple, Mr. Mishra said the sentiments have still not got full expression as construction of a temple was still incomplete.

There were two ways to solve the problem. If Muslims agreed to the idea of a temple, it could pave the way for its construction and the site for a mosque could then be shifted to suitable place, he said.

Alternatively, construction work could be undertaken after a judicial verdict in favour of a Ram temple, Mr. Mishra said and added that for all practical purposes, a temple already existed at the disputed site.

Mr. Mishra referred to the activities of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) which had been "poisoning" the communal atmosphere in the State.

He urged the party to formulate a policy to counter the proxy war of the ISI of Pakistan. The State BJP unit had demanded a ban on the SIMI, he pointed out.

Mr. Mishra gave details of the activities of both the party and the State and Central Governments to solve the problems of farmers. At the organisational level, he himself had undertaken a "kisan jagran yatra" to understand farmers' problems. The Chief Minister had himself held "kisan panchayats" and announced measures to solve agrarian problems. He said a massive rally of farmers ("Kisan Kumbh") would be held soon to demonstrate support for the BJP among the farmers.

THE HINDU

12 JAN 2001

# VHP puts temple before govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — The VHP wouldn't care if the Vajpayee government came down over the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya, and would go by what the Dharma Sansad decides on 21 January.

"Four governments came down because of a demolition. There will be no objection if one government goes for construction," VHP leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore said today. He asserted also that the Prime Minister was free to speak to the dharamacharyas if he wanted them to postpone building a Ram temple.

Acharya Kishore also hinted, according to a UNI report, that

the Sansad may allow a year's time before construction starts. "I think a minimum of 12 months is needed to create awareness among Hindus on the sacred task," UNI quoted him as saying.

Acharya Kishore ruled out joining the talks proposed by BJP MP, Mr Vinay Katiyar, in Lucknow on 13 January until the main litigant in the Babari Masjid demolition case, Mr Hashim Ansari, agrees to withdraw the suit. The temple at the disputed site is not negotiable, he said, referring to the demand by BMAC leaders that the Babari mosque should be built at the disputed site.

He insisted that the VHP was not bothered about the Central

government's survival and would stop at nothing to build a Ram temple. The Babari Masjid Action Committee's threat that 20 crore Muslims would take to the streets to stop the construction of a temple had irked the parishad leader. Such threats, he said, had no impact on the VHP. "If we are stopped physically, we will do everything to defend ourselves and carry on the construction," he said.

The VHP wants an apology from BMAC leaders Syed Shahabuddin, Zafaryab Jilani and Sultan Salauddin Owaisi and will not talk to the action committee otherwise.

Muslims are free to build a mosque anywhere else, but "no

one can remove the idol of Ramlalla from there and no power in the world can prevent the temple from coming upon".

Acharya Kishore finds nothing wrong with the demolition of the mosque built by Babar because it was a symbol of an invader's triumph and hence of slavery. Muslims should remember that they were converts and could not change their lineage even if they wanted to.

Mr Katiyar, meanwhile is reported to have roped in three more Muslim leaders for the 13 January talks — Kazi Shagir Ahmed Kadri of All India Muslim conference, Syed Shahid Ali Rashid and Mr Shaukat Karim of Patna.

THE STATESMAN

10 JAN 2001



# Kamtapuris threaten tax boycott

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Jan. 8. — "The Kamtapuri people in north Bengal will observe a financial boycott by refusing to pay taxes to the state government from February," the KPP president, Mr Atul Roy, announced at a rally in Habibpur today.

The boycott will continue till the demand for Kamtapur state is met, he said.

The KPP will start a prolonged agitation by blocking roads and rail tracks in north Bengal. The date of commencement of the proposed agitation is yet to be decided but door to door campaigning to garner support will begin shortly, Mr Roy said.

JMM leader Mr Siby Soren, addressed the rally and supported the KPP's demand for a separate state. The par-

ty's state president, Mr Ajit Prosad Mahato also supported the demand for a separate Kamtapur.

Criticising the police for its atrocities on KPP supporters, Mr Atul Roy said that hundreds of party workers had been confined in jails illegally. He admitted the existence of the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation but denied that the KPP had any relation with the militant outfit.

Mr Roy said the intelligence reports of KPP being dependent on the KLO for funds collected by the latter through extortions, were totally false. "Such allegations were part of a big CPI-M conspiracy, he added after a brief silence. A large police force was deployed by the administration at the rally grounds to maintain order.

THE STATESMAN

9 JAN 2001

# Few takers for Dharma Sansad nod to temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8. — Despite the VHP's warlike stand, few people in the Sangh parivar are ready to accept that the Dharma Sansad in Prayag on 21 January would come up with anything that could embarrass the NDA.

With Mr AB Vajpayee at the Centre and his protege, Mr Rajnath Singh, in UP, very few could take the risk of calling for construction of the Ram temple. One wrong decision could lead to riots throughout the country. Nobody in the Sangh parivar is prepared to take responsibility for it.

Even RSS hardliners do not buy the argument that the Dharma Sansad will hit upon anything concrete. A BJP

## ALL-COMMUNITY MEET

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8. — The Babari Masjid Action Committee (International) will hold an all-community conference here on 1 February to find ways for a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya issue. The initiative is important as it comes after the failure of the BJP MP Mr Vinay Katiyar's offer of talks with Muslim leaders. — SNS

leader said that VHP leaders knew about the government's predicament and they would not do anything "to make matters worse".

The BJP acted tough by saying that the UP government would take action when

needed. In other words, the state government would act to maintain the court verdict of status quo about the disputed site. The party stood by Mr Vajpayee's statement that there were only two ways to build the temple, court verdict or negotiations, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy said.

The sants are supposed to take an independent stand at the Dharma Sansad. But some senior VHP leaders said the sants would not do anything without taking them into confidence. Mr Ashok Singhal, held in great esteem by the sants, has already announced that the decision to construct the temple has been taken. The sants would have to announce the date for starting the construction, he has said.

THE STATESMAN

9 JAN 2001

# VHP refuses to relent, Babri panel threatens showdown

HT Correspondent  
Lucknow, January 7

HT 8/1

THE STAGE is set for a direct confrontation between the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) with the two sides sticking to their guns and showing no intention to resolve the vexed problem through a dialogue.

Parishad leader Ashok Singhal reiterated that temple construction dates would be announced at the Dharma Sansad in Allahabad on January 20-21. On the other hand, firebrand AIBMAC leaders Zafaryab Jilani and Mohammed Azam Khan threatened that the community would physically prevent any move by the VHP to start construction at the disputed site in Ayodhya "without caring for the consequences".

The two leaders said confrontation is inevitable if the VHP began construction of the temple and, in that situation, they would not be in a position to ask Muslims to restrain themselves and maintain peace and communal harmony. "If the situation goes out of hand", said Mr Jilani, "Hindus would be the worst sufferer as they were in majority".

Talking to reporters on Sunday, Singhal ruled out the possibility of finding a solution to the dispute through negotiations between Hindu and Muslim leaders. "Talks have already failed thrice in the past

*I believe Babri*

mainly because of the rigid attitude of the Muslim leaders", the VHP leader said. He challenged the AIBMAC to provide evidence to establish that any mosque existed at the disputed site before 1528.

Mr Singhal's logic was that since Babar was an "intruder", the only solution to the Ayodhya dispute was that the "trespassers" should withdraw their claim.

Replying to a question, Mr Singhal said the first floor of the proposed temple was ready and stones and pillars required for it had been carved out. A meeting of the Marg Darshak Mandal would be held in Allahabad on January 19 followed by the two-day Dharma Sansad.

On the other hand, Mr Jilani and Mr Khan accused Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of encouraging the VHP by making provocative statements. The Prime Minister's comment that temple construction was a reflection of national sentiment smacked of the "two-nation theory." It was also "an insult to the over 20 crore Muslims who were against temple construction".

Dubbing Mr Vajpayee as the "first Hindu Prime Minister" of the country, they set two conditions for restarting talks with the Hindu leaders. These are: removal of the idols from the disputed site and maintenance of the status quo of August 15, 1947, at the disputed site.

See also Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 JAN 2001

VHP bent on building temple, Babri panel vows to resist

# Hardline hit on Ayodhya initiative

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Hardliners today lined the tortuous road leading up to the Ayodhya talks with tough posturing. A belligerent Vishwa Hindu Parishad declared that the Ram temple would come up at the disputed site "no matter what" and an equally fiery All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee threatened "consequences more dangerous than those seen in the post-Babri mosque demolition period".

Striking a posture tougher than the one adopted by Acharya Giriraj Kishore, VHP chief Ashok Singhal today waved away as pointless the talks set up between Bajrang Dal chief Vinay Katiyar and the principal litigant in the Ram temple controversy, Hashim Ansari, later this week. Three rounds held during P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure had been to little avail, he said, and there was no reason to see light at the end of the tunnel now.

BMAC spokesman Zafaryab Jilani voiced a similarly tough line after the urgent meeting this afternoon. Pointing out "no concrete outcome" could be expected from the talks, he said the only way to resolve the temple tangle was by a court settlement.

Throwing caution to the winds, Jilani warned there would be stiff resistance if the VHP surged ahead with its construction plans.

Any such attempt would lead to a renewal of violence, which could be of a scale larger than that seen in the demolition aftermath, he threatened.

The spokesman said if such a train of events was sparked off, the entire responsibility would lie with the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government. He added that Ansari had not been authorised to hold talks.

Jilani urged secular parties, including BJP allies, to adopt resolutions in Parliament and the Assembly, requesting the Supreme Court and the high court to speed up the temple dispute cases. He said efforts should be made to end litigation in a year so that curtain could be rung down on the controversy.

In Mathura, Kishore, too, sounded adamant, making it clear that it was the responsibility of Islamic groups to adopt a conciliatory approach to the talks. He added that the temple would be constructed at the disputed site regardless of the talks.

The VHP has all along said — despite Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Kumarakon musings on the need to maintain status quo on the temple — that it will decide construction dates at its dharam sansad later this month.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ▶

## Ayodhya talks

▶ FROM PAGE 1

Singhal said in Lucknow the dharam sansad's decision would be binding on the VHP. There are two reasons why he has adopted this stance. One, he does not wish to send out any signal to Sangh hardliners that the VHP is suddenly relenting on the issue.

Two and more important, Singhal is determined to send out the message to Muslim bodies — given that the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board has already taken a defiant stand — that the VHP does not see any future for the talks.

But the fact remains that Vinay Katiyar is the Bajrang Dal chief and the group is quite active, having taken a strong stand during the anti-Christian campaign only a year ago.

Since Katiyar himself is going to take part in the exchange of ideas with Ansari it does indicate that what Kishore is now saying is more like tough posturing. Katiyar also may hold his ground during the talks and adopt a similar hardened stand.

THE TELEGRAPH

8 JAN 2001

# Amartya sees sectarian threat to history

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**Calcutta, Jan. 2:** Nobel laureate Amartya Sen today criticised the Sangh parivar, saying organised attempts are on in the country to tailor history to suit a slanted political agenda.

There are efforts to distort history "with arbitrary augmentation of a narrowly sectarian view of India's past, along with undermining its magnificently multi-religious and heterodox history," he said at the 61st session of the Indian History Congress.

"There is also a systematic confounding here of mythology with history. An extraordinary example of this has been the inter-

pretation of the *Ramayana*, not as a great epic, but as documentary history which can be invoked to establish property rights over places and sites possessed and owned by others.

"The *Ramayana*, which Rabindranath Tagore had seen as a wonderful legend and, in fact, as a marvellous parable of reconciliation, is now made into a legally authentic account that gives some members of one community an alleged entitlement to particular sites and land, amounting to a licence to tear down the religious places of other communities," said Sen, in an obvious reference to the Sangh parivar.

Referring to Thomas de Quincey's essay "Murder Consid-

ered As One Of The Fine Arts", the economist said: "Rewriting of history for bellicose use can also, presumably, be a very fine art."

Aware that "no self-respecting historian will peacefully listen to an economist trying to tell them what their discipline is like", Sen said India's persistent heterodoxy, which includes its tendency towards multi-religious and multi-cultural co-existence, is relevant for the development of science and mathematics.

Speaking on the same occasion, former chief minister Jyoti Basu said: "In some school texts, the map of India is being shown as including not only Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also the entire region of Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet and

even parts of Myanmar. I wonder what our neighbours think of this.

"In a series for the school children, the section on Indian freedom movement eulogises Hedge-war and Golwalkar but undermines the contributions of mainstream national leaders, Muslims and communists.

"The changes proposed in history texts go against our perceived wisdom and certainly do not rest on consensus. Hindutva, now being assiduously propagated, is a direct assault on secularism, a basic feature of our Constitution," Basu said.

The veteran leader said he would produce an audio tape containing a controversial statement by former Uttar Pradesh chief mi-

nister Kalyan Singh before the Lihberhan Commission inquiring into the Babri Masjid case on January 29. "I will submit, among other things, an audio tape containing the overjoyous statement of the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister that while contractors would have taken one-and-a-half months to bring down the Babri structure — *dhacha* as he called it — the *karsevaks* accomplished the job in five hours," Basu said.

Condemning the demolition of the 500-year-old historical structure by a "band of frenzied *karsevaks*", Basu said "there were some who would say the structure was not pulled down, but it collapsed, or that it was an accident and not organised, as Vajpayee told me".

THE TELEGRAPH

3 JAN 2001

## Babri: Basu claims proof of Sangh hand

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, January 2

JYOTI BASU will present to the Liberhan Commission "documentary evidence" that he feels will establish the Sangh Parivar's hand in the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

The former Chief Minister has been asked to appear before the commission on January 29.

Basu told the audience at the inauguration of the Sixty-First Annual Session of the Indian History Congress here that a recording of the then Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh's "overjoyous reaction" to the kar sevaks' action would be an integral part of his evidence.

Kalyan, according to Basu, had said: "While the contractors would have taken one-and-a-half months to bring down the Babri structure (dhanca), the kar sevaks had accomplished the task in a mere five hours." Basu alleged that even as the "entire nation" knew that the Masjid was pulled down, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had "consciously chosen to remain ignorant about the heinous act".

"The structure was not pulled down, but it collapsed. It was an accident, and not an organised exercise. Vajpayee told this to me personally," said Basu.

He added: "I am equally upset to find that the voice of historians who refuse to toe the Government line is being stultified. I have in mind the Towards Freedom episode when the volumes edited by two of the country's leading historians Sumit Sarkar and K N Pannikar were unceremoniously withdrawn. There is widespread suspicion that these volumes were not published because they contained documents that indicate the anti-national role of the RSS and other sectarian organisations during our glorious freedom struggle. The Government should clear this suspicion."

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3 JAN 2001

# PM warns Hindu hawks against Ayodhya folly

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, Jan. 1. — Back to the capital from his year-end break, the Prime Minister has taken on the Opposition and the media, charging both with misinterpreting his recent statements on Ayodhya.

Taking a strong line against his critics inside and outside Parliament and arguing that his position on Ayodhya has remained unchanged, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said the law would take its course in the dispute. Organisations should not try to disturb the status quo; medieval wrongs can't be set right by similar modern follies, he said.

The Prime Minister's comment appears in a two-part article — *My Musings From Kumarakom* — he wrote during his break. It was released to "selected" news organisations, the PMO said, and the news agencies were given a "summary".

The article says Mr Vajpayee's comment that Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiment was misinterpreted. The remark gave a "harder line" taint to Mr Vajpayee. His new year contribution to the debate repeatedly seeks to change the perception.

"The status quo on Kashi, Mathura and other disputed places of worship must remain undisturbed. Far from indicating Hindu society's weakness, this will show the strength of our national ethos of tolerance and religious harmony," the article says.

It strikes an even stronger note when it argues that the "demolition" of the "structure" in Ayodhya in 1992 was a violation of the law and was against Hindu ethos.

The Prime Minister finds fault with commentators for ignoring grammar while analysing his earlier statements. "What is overlooked is the past tense I had consciously used in my statement. In my reply to the debate in the Rajya Sabha, I had clearly stated that although the movement for the construction of a Ram Temple was an expression of our national sentiment, this sentiment became narrow, and its inclusive character became restrictive, because of the unfortunate demolition of the disputed mosque structure on 6 December 1992." He finds more faults with critics. Stating he had consciously not commented on the issue for the past three years, he says he is "sad to note that when I was constrained to speak on the subject after the Opposition stalled Parliament's proceedings for three days in a row, my comments were twisted and turned for no other reason but to gain political advantage."

He writes that he hopes his comprehensive replies to the debate in both the Houses would end the controversy had been belied.

"I must confess that I am pained by some of the comments, observations and speculations in the aftermath of the recent developments in Parliament. My political adversaries are entitled to disagree with me, but they

will not be able to see any inconsistency in my views on the Ayodhya issue," he says.

The media have been criticised too. "Overnight I was transformed by a section of the media and the political class from a 'moderate' to a 'hardliner'. 'Vajpayee unmasked', they said, conveniently masking the fact that my long stint in public life is an open book. Worse still, a campaign was launched to create misgivings about me in the minds of our minority brethren."

As for solutions to Ayodhya, he argues the dispute can be solved either judicially or through talks. His government, he says, will be constitutionally bound by the court verdict.

Mr Vajpayee, however, argued judicial verdict "doesn't foreclose the need for negotiations in a non-governmental and non-political framework". The article emphasises the need for "conducive social atmosphere" for implementing the court's verdict.

But there are some comforts for Mr Vajpayee's hardline friends. Extolling Ram's stature in Indian "culture", he writes "(it's) no wonder...the movement for construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya struck a supportive chord in more than one political party."

He argues Rajiv Gandhi's actions in Ayodhya was proof of the "movement's" support. Rajivji even started the Congress's 1989 poll campaign near Ayodhya with a promise to usher in Ram Rajya. He then makes a more contentious reference — Ram Rajya was also "Mahatma Gandhi's dream."

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2 JAN 2001