

Kashmiri Sikhs protest police raid

By M. Saleem Pandit

The Times of India News Service

SRINAGAR: Hundreds of Kashmiri Sikhs staged a demonstration in the Sikh-dominated Alochibagh locality here on Sunday to protest against a state police team's attempt to raid the house of a Sikh family in the middle of the previous night. However, the senior superintendent of police (SSP) said the police party had gone there under court orders to rescue a kidnapped girl.

The demonstrators pelted stones at senior police officers who visited the area soon after the news of the police raid spread. About seven policemen, including two woman police personnel, were injured in the incident, the SSP said. Police had to resort to baton charge to disperse the agitating mob when it attacked the district magistrate, the SSP and

some BSF officers.

Talking to this newspaper, Roshan Singh, whose house was reportedly raided by the police party, said more than ten policemen, including two woman police personnel, tried to enter his house at about 11.30 p.m. on Saturday. The male constables were in civvies while the two women were in uniform. When Mr Singh refused to let them in, the policemen forcibly entered his house by scaling a fence, he said.

Members of the household said they were frightened by the nocturnal knocks and thought that militants had come to kill them. They raised an alarm by beating drums. Soon, neighbours came to their rescue and overpowered the intruders who were later identified by Border Security Force personnel as personnel from the Shergarhi police station.

However, the SSP denied Mr Singh's claim and said the police party had gone to recover a girl, Nazhat of Lal Bazar, who had reportedly been kidnapped by her lover Mehrajuddin Bhat and kept at Mr Singh's house in connivance with the latter's family.

The girl's brother had lodged a complaint at the police station concerned on May 24. After acquiring a court order to search the house, the police tried to conduct the search in the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday, the SSP said.

Instead of cooperating, the inmates of the house refused to let in the policemen and raised a hue and cry. They gathered people of the locality and attacked the police party, the SSP said.

The police have ordered an investigation into the incident.

Sonia Gandhi favours disclosures by MPs

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Congress president



Sonia Gandhi says she favours mandatory disclosure by each member of Parliament of their income, assets and liabilities.

She has said so in a letter to ex-prime minister Chandra Shekhar, who heads the Lok Sabha's committee on ethics. He had sought her views on the subject, early in April.

In her reply to him, dated May 24, Sonia also said that she favours a code of conduct for MPs.

These are points where Chandra Shekhar's committee would like to recommend action by Parliament.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 MAY 2001

Tyagi, 16 others charged for role in 1993 riots

By Swati Deshpande

MUMBAI: The past finally seems to be catching up with them. On Friday, former Mumbai police commissioner R.D. Tyagi and 16 other policemen were charged with the murder of nine innocent members of the minority community at Suleman bakery at Mohammed Ali Road during the communal riots of January 1993.

Acting at long last, the special task force (STF) registered a first information report (FIR) against Mr Tyagi and others under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code and other allied sections. The matter had earlier been referred to noted counsel P.R. Vakil for his opinion before the registration of the offence. Mr Vakil was appointed by the state government in February this year as the legal advisor to the STF.

Additional police commissioner K.P. Raghuvanshi, who heads the STF, confirmed that the FIR against Mr Tyagi and others was registered on Friday evening. He said the next step now would be investigation. "There is no question of arresting anyone at the moment," he told this correspondent but refused to speak further on the issue.

Mr Tyagi, it may be recalled, was the joint police commissioner (crime) at the relevant time. The case against him centres around the gruesome death of nine minority community members killed by gunshots at the bakery during the communal riots following the Babri masjid demolition.

Police sources said a special operations squad (SOS) supervised by Mr Tyagi had stormed into the bakery and, within 15 minutes, finished the operation. According to the police, Mr Tyagi later said the police had acted in self-defence as the men inside the bakery, armed with AK-47s, stenguns and SLRs, had opened fire.

At that time, the police had also arrested 78 persons from the bakery and prosecuted them for various offences, such as assaulting the police. However, investigations by

the STF showed that none of the deceased were armed and not a single weapon had been recovered from the entire bakery. It was also revealed that the victims had been shot from behind. One of the victims was the head of the Chunabhathi mosque situated next to the bakery.

Significantly, the post-mortem reports showed that in most of the cases there were injuries either to the lungs, brain, heart or other vital organs, the police said.

Apparently, there was no proper investigation into the cause of the deaths of the nine persons except for sending their bodies for post-mortem, police sources said. Eight of them were dead before admission to hospital, one died later while another survived.



R.D. Tyagi

The post-mortem showed blackish marks near the chests of some of them. No investigation was, however, carried out to verify if the marks could be due to charring, which would mean that the shots were fired at point-blank range.

The report of Justice B.N. Srikrishna, submitted on February 16, 1998, had referred to the Suleman bak-

ery firing. Justice Srikrishna had noted, "...the police firing appears unjustified, excessive and resulted in (the) killing (of) innocent citizens".

The report also quoted Mr Tyagi as saying that although he had gone to the bakery, he "did not go inside at all". His instructions to the SOS staff were to enter the bakery and arrest the persons firing therefrom. According to him, he did not order any firing in the bakery and it was reported to him that the miscreants wielding firearms had managed to escape through an escape route, a report which he believed.

With the police taking the initiative, albeit delayed, in implementing the Srikrishna report, the next item on their agenda is to contemplate the prosecution of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray for his outbursts against the minority community on January 8, 1993, to a journalist.

PAST CATCHES UP

- FIR against Tyagi, others for murder in Suleman bakery incident
- Move vetted by STF's legal adviser
- STF chief rules out immediate arrest

Ayodhya case: Court rejects writ petition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, MAY 21

THE Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court today rejected a writ petition requesting the court to direct the Uttar Pradesh Government to issue a fresh notification in the Ayodhya case to try several accused, including three Union Ministers, L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice S K Sen and Justice A N Trivedi, while rejecting the petition filed by veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar and others, ruled that the court could not give any direction to the State Government with regard to the issuance of a no-

tification at this stage.

The court observed that the CBI was the appropriate forum to decide the issue and proceed according to tenets of law.

The writ had prayed for a directive to the State Government to take steps to issue a notification after consultation amending the notification of September 9, 1993.

It had otherwise sought issuance of a fresh notification conferring jurisdiction on the special court to try the case relating to crime number 198 of 1992 registered at the Ramjanmabhoomi police station soon after the demolition of the disputed structure.

Earlier, the Uttar Pradesh Advocate General (A-G) R P Goel submitted that the court could not

issue mandamus on the issuance of the notification in the Ayodhya case.

"The case crime number 198 of 1992 was well investigated by the state CB-CID before being handed over to the CBI for further investigation and now it was left to the CBI to proceed in the case in accordance with the law," Goel said in his submission.

"The CBI is the right agency to take appropriate decision in the matter in accordance with the tenets of law," Goel argued further. The counsel for the petitioners, Atul Setalvad, Abdul Mannan and Zafaryab Jilani, however, pleaded that the persons accused in the particular case crime number should not escape conviction or trial on technical grounds.

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 MAY 2011

Advani was jubilant: Babri witness

New Delhi, May 16 (UNI): A journalist who witnessed the demolition of Babri Masjid told the Liberhan Commission that it was "planned" and BJP leaders were "jubilant", with L.K. Advani describing it as "historic".

Ruchira Gupta, who had gone to cover the event for *Business India*, said when Advani saw some kar sevaks climbing up the mosque's domes on December 6, 1992, he had said: "*Unko upar nahin chadhna chahiye. Dhan-cha to girne hi wala hai. Unko chot lag sakti hai* (They should not climb up. The structure is soon to fall down. They might get hurt)."

Advani had appealed to the kar sevaks to come down, instead more people climbed up, she said. After that, BJP leaders Uma Bharti and Acharya Dharmendra made similar announcements.

Gupta was present at the terrace from where the BJP leaders were overseeing the demolition.

When the first dome fell,

Bharti hugged veteran BJP leader and "master of the ceremony" Vijayaraje Scindia, who was "weeping with joy".

Sadhvi Rithambara told Advani: "*Sarkar to girne hi wali hai to sasuri masjid ko kyon bachayen* (When the government has to go why save the mosque)." Scindia, who was standing nearby, agreed and said "you are right", Gupta told the commission.

"There was a mood of jubilation on the terrace. While the domes fell, Advani kept quiet and did not exercise any restraining influence over the crowd which was very responsive," the former BBC correspondent said.

She also accused Advani of not stopping the attack on journalists. Instead he offered her sugar, saying, "*Itna bada din hai, chini khao* (It's a big day, have sugar)."

Advani had asked the kar sevaks to put up benches and lie down on the roads to block the entry of Central Reserve Police

Force. "Nobody from the armed forces has any right to touch the kar sevaks," she quoted him as saying.

Gupta said a VHP activist, who showed the journalists around the kar seva site on December 5, had told her that an engineer had come from Orissa to tell the "designated kar sevaks" where the mosque should be attacked to bring down the domes.

When she asked whether the mosque was to be demolished, he said: "We have done all the planning, and now it is left to the leaders to take a decision."

Gupta, who is working with Unicef, told the commission that Acharya Dharmendra, after consulting Advani, had made an announcement that photographers would not be allowed to take pictures of the demolition.

Disclosing names of photographers beaten up by the crowd, she said she was assaulted by kar sevaks — who called her a Muslim — when she went inside the

mosque to see what was happening there. She was saved by a kar sevak who knew her, Gupta added.

When approached for help, police advised the photographers to hand over their cameras and flee, she recalled.

Gupta said after seeing some houses and shops being burnt, she asked Advani why they were being torched. He replied that "Muslims are burning their own shops for compensation".

Earlier, during rallies on December 3, 4 and 5, Advani had urged kar sevaks to assemble in Ayodhya on December 6. "We are going to Ayodhya not to do "*bhajan and keertan*" or "*jharoo and pochcha*" but for "*kar seva*," he had said.

Gupta told the commission that Advani had asked the people to take a vow: "*Kasam Ram ki khate hain ki mandir wahin banayenge* (We swear in the name of Ram that the temple will be constructed in the same place)."

THE TELEGRAPH

37 MAY 2001

Delay in Ayodhya case led to demolition: Advani

NEWS AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

GIVING a new dimension to the Ayodhya controversy, Home Minister L K Advani today said that the Government's "refusal" to request the Allahabad High Court to give an early verdict on the land acquisition case was a "signal" to delay the judgements which resulted in public outrage leading to the demolition of the disputed structure.

Deposing before the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry, he said he did not think the analysis that the Centre's signals to the Allahabad High Court to delay the judgement "is factually wrong".

He said "throughout the month of November 1992 from our side we had been making direct approaches to the High Court for an early verdict as the arguments have been complete for over a month."

"Vajpayee met the Prime Minister (P V Narasimha Rao), I met the PM and we urged him to request the High Court to give an early

verdict. After all it was entirely upto the High Court to time its verdict," he said.

Advani added "The Government, like any other authority, could request it. When it is publicly known that the Government has conveyed to Vajpayee, Advani and others that the Government is not going to make even a request for an early verdict what is the message conveyed to Judiciary except what I said in the statement."

Earlier on Monday, L K Advani put the VHP in the dock when he said that the Ayodhya movement had been led not by the BJP — which, he said, picked up the issue after the Shah Bano case — but by the VHP, which had taken all the decisions and made all the programmes and schedules.

"But it would be wrong to say that we were led by them," Advani clarified. "We participated in the movement in our own way." For the VHP, the movement was religious but for the BJP, it was, he said, political.

Deposing before the Liberhan Commission for the third time, Advani said he did not

know much about Ayodhya when the problem started. In fact, he said he and the BJP thought of getting involved in the Ayodhya movement only in the late Eighties when the Rajiv Gandhi government capitulated to the Muslim fundamentalists on the Shah Bano issue and the Babri Masjid Action Committee and the Babri Masjid Action Committee.

Govt will not pay for temple: Advani

HOME Minister L K Advani today said that Government money should not be involved in the construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya, and favoured an action plan similar to one adopted for construction of the Somnath temple. Depositing before the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry, the Home Minister said he would favour a similar approach towards the Ayodhya Temple as was adopted in constructing the Somnath Temple in early 1950 by the Nehru Government. He said this when the Commission counsel reminded him of his statement earlier about a trust created for the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple after Mahatma Gandhi objected to state funding. About the make-shift temple at the disputed site, the Home Minister said "I do not know who paid for the make-shift temple. It would not have cost a lot of money. As things stand, the State Government is responsible for its security, it is likely, whatever cost is incurred in this regard is being paid for from the exchequer," he said.

started making threatening noises. Advani said the BJP would not have thought of participating in the movement "if the Shah Bano episode had not taken place, if the government had not actively facilitated the Shilanyas and the opening of Ram Janambhoomi temple gates".

Stressing the difference in approach between the BJP and the Congress, he said while the Congress sought to play 'vote bank politics,' the BJP saw Ayodhya as an opportunity to strengthen nationalism. He reiterated that there was no need for the VHP to build a temple on the dispute site because there was already a "de facto temple." This is however a deviation from his controversial claim last month that the make-shift temple de facto as well as de jure.

Advani dodged the question when the Commission's counsel, Anupam Gupta, asked him if he believed the VHP claim that Ram's idols materialised inside Babri Masjid in 1949 by a miracle.

'Shilanyas, Shah Bano forced BJP to start Ayodhya movement'

By Our Special Correspondent ¹⁰⁻¹³

NEW DELHI, MAY. 14. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today named three factors which had prompted the BJP to launch a movement in support of the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

He said the Rajiv Gandhi Government's decision to allow the 'shilanyas' and open the doors of the Ram temple and its *volte-face* over the Supreme Court's verdict on the Shah Bano case were crucial factors which forced the BJP to get involved in the Ayodhya movement.

Deposing before the Liberhan Commission, probing the December 6, 1992 demolition of the Babri masjid, Mr. Advani said: "If the Shah Bano episode had not taken place, if the Government had not actively participated or facilitated the shilanyas or opened the Ram temple gates, may be this would not have weighed with us when we were thinking of the Ayodhya Resolution in 1989."

He said the movement was launched by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Centre was more active in facilitating the movement.

The 1989 campaign of the ruling party was launched from Ayodhya and the then Congress president spoke about giving Ram Rajya to the country, he said.

"The BJP joined the movement as it was another occasion for the party for strengthening nationalism in the country," he told the Commission.

'Court order binding'

Dissociating from the VHP's claim that it would go ahead with the temple construction whatever the

^{15/5} court's verdict may be, Mr. Advani clarified that the BJP was committed to abiding by the court's decision.

"Occasionally, VHP leaders have said irrespective of the court verdict they would proceed with the Ayodhya movement, but as far as the BJP is concerned we have always said that the judicial order is binding on all citizens unless legislature decides otherwise," Mr. Advani said.

Mr. Advani said whenever the VHP leaders made an announcement regarding the temple construction he felt odd as a make-shift temple already existed in Ayodhya.

Quoting the court's decision to maintain the status quo in Ayodhya, Mr. Advani said he could not understand why those interested in the temple were making statements of this kind.

For the BJP it was a political movement unlike the VHP which considered it a religious one.

"Whatever a political party does is political," he said when asked a specific question by the Commission's counsel, Mr. Anupam Gupta whether the BJP's involvement in the Ayodhya movement was "political or religious."

Describing the demolition of the Babri masjid as an "illegal and forceful action", he said the Ayodhya matter should be resolved peacefully by securing the consent of the Muslim community.

Reiterating that India traditionally remained a secular country, Mr. Advani said India like Pakistan could have become a theocratic state immediately after attaining Independence but it would have gone against the "culture, history and tradition of the country."

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2001

No need for fresh notification on Ayodhya case: BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, MAY 7

BRUSHING aside Opposition demand, the Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday maintained there was no need to issue fresh notification to try the 21 accused, including Union Ministers L K Advani, M M Joshi and Uma Bharati in the case related to demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya.

Reacting to the Opposition demand for issue of a fresh notification rectifying the technical flaws in the earlier one that led to the dropping of proceedings against accused, the BJP state unit chief Kalraj Mishra said the senior party leaders were "innocent and were wrongly implicated" in the case.

If the Opposition insists on a proper debate it could be held in the State Legislative Assembly, he said.

Mishra reiterated the demand for a ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) alleging it was an "ally" of ISI and was "actively participating in disruptive activities."

"It is the stand of BJP that SIMI should be banned and the government too is gathering proof of its anti-national activities", Mishra said.

Reacting to BJP's stand on Ayodhya demolition case, Samajwadi Party Vice-President Bhag-

Naked cover-up: Cong

■ NEW DELHI: THE Congress today described as a "naked cover-up" the "refusal" by Uttar Pradesh Government to issue a fresh notification in Ayodhya case and demanded the state government perform its duty so that those who conspired in the demolition of Babri Masjid were not allowed to get away without trial.

"The decision of the UP Government not to go in for a fresh notification is nothing but a naked cover-up of the implications it would have. We demand the state government should perform its duty as the law of the land cannot be put in cold storage by any government", party spokesman S Jaipal Reddy told reporters.

wati Singh told reporters his party would oppose this "tooth and nail" both within the State Assembly and outside.

If need arises the Samajwadi Party might approach the court to force the government issue a fresh notification in connection with the Ayodhya demolition case keeping in view the CBI's special court verdict that technical flaws could be removed by issuing a fresh notification to try the 21 accused.

When approached for his comments, Kalraj Mishra said if Opposition approached the court, BJP would fight it out there.

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 MAY 2001

Church condemns Bihar blasts

New Delhi, May 7 (UNI): The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) today condemned the May 5 five blasts in a church in the Muzaffarpur diocese in Bihar by "some unidentified miscreants" and demanded action against them.

"It appears there is a conspiracy against us and the Christian community feels terrorised with this incident.... We feel insecure," Archbishop Vincent M. Concessao of Delhi and Bishop John B. Thakur of Muzaffarpur said in a joint statement here.

They said the miscreants triggered three strong blasts between 7 and 7.20 pm after the evening worship in St. Francis Assisi Cathedral in Muzaffarpur. The blasts were accompanied by anti-Christian hate campaign on hand-written posters in Hindi.

The pamphlets read: "Christians leave India", "Whole of India has to be painted with the colour of Hindutva", and "Christians should stop conversion in the name of service".

Bishop Thakur said the incident was immediately reported to police who have so far failed to apprehend the culprits. "We feel there is a conspiracy against us.... We need police protection for the Christian community," he said.

Archbishop Concessao, also the first vice-president of the CBCI, urged the people to condemn such incidents, "which spread communal poison in a society which faces its own struggles to cope with its multi-religious character".

He said the CBCI had decided to urge President K.R. Narayanan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi to protect the minority community.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 MAY 2001

Church blast damages Christ statue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUZAFFARPUR, May 7. — Cracker explosions by hoodlums in a church here has caused partial damage to a statue of Christ. This has sent shock waves among the Christian community in the Bihar town, official sources said today.

The unidentified hoodlums burst three crackers one after another on Saturday evening in St Francis Church which ripped off the head of a statue of the infant Jesus seated on the lap of St Joseph, sources said.

The hoodlums also left behind pamphlets which said "*Seva ki aar mein dharmantaran band karo* (stop religious conversions in the garb of service)," "*Isaiyon Bharat choro* (Christians leave India)" and "*Poore Bharat ko Hindu rang mein rangna hai* (Hindus should prevail in entire India)."

An FIR was lodged at the local police station by Father Julius Lazarus of the church.

Top district and police officers remained tight-lipped over the incident but said investigation was on. A police contingent has also been posted at the church, they said.

When contacted, the state DGP, Mr RR Prasad, talking to reporters in Patna ruled out the possibility of the explosion being triggered by bombs and said police was looking into the matter.

Father Lazarus said the Christian community was terribly hurt by the incident and described it as "extremely serious."

Security beefed up: All churches in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district were brought under tight security following the blast in St Francis Church, official sources said today, adds UNI from Patna.

MONDAY, MAY 7, 2001

THE AYODHYA REPRIEVE

A PROCEDURAL FLAW should not be permitted to become the basis of a remittance — particularly, in a matter as significant as that of the letestable conspiracy to demolish the Babri Masjid. Apart from the cause of justice, a fair trial in this case is important as a reaffirmation of the country's secular faith and its readiness to hold everyone — irrespective of rank or office — accountable to the rule of law. This is why it is imperative that the legal defect, which has resulted in a clutch of Sangh Parivar heavyweights being let off the hook, is rectified as soon as possible. The Special CBI court's decision to drop criminal proceedings against three Union Ministers (Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti) and some camp-followers was not unexpected. The decision is an outcome of an earlier judicial ruling — the Allahabad High Court's order setting aside the notification for the trial of Mr. Advani and seven others on the ground that it was technically defective. However, it is not very clear at the moment why the CBI special court decided to put on hold — apart from the eight covered by the High Court order — the trial of 13 others who were not covered by the defective notification.

The Allahabad High Court was constrained to set aside the decision to frame charges against the eight persons, who were named in one particular First Information Report (FIR), because the prosecution had failed to take its statutory prior consent before referring the case to the CBI special court for trial. The High Court had explicitly acknowledged that this procedural defect was "curable" and made it clear that to revive the case, all that is required is a fresh notification adhering to the legal formalities. The defective notification was issued during the period Uttar Pradesh was under President's Rule and so the

procedural bungle cannot be attributed to political machination. It was a plain and simple botch up — although an extraordinarily serious one in the circumstances. However, the Ayodhya case is not free from the shadow of unforgivably partisan politics. All that is required to revive the Babri Masjid demolition conspiracy case is a fresh notification issued by the Uttar Pradesh Government which states that the prior concurrence of the High Court has been taken before reference to the special court. But the BJP Government headed by Mr. Rajnath Singh has refused to commit itself to issuing such a notification. When confronted directly, the Chief Minister's ambiguous and wholly unsatisfying response is a 'promise' to take "appropriate legal action".

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the BJP Government in the State is committed to preventing those accused of the Ayodhya conspiracy from undergoing trial. At the same time, Mr. Advani, Mr. Joshi, Ms. Bharti and their saffron fellow-travellers seem to have no qualms about exploiting a procedural infirmity to avoid judicial scrutiny. It will be a tragedy if they are allowed to get away with it. To fail to issue a fresh notification is to be a willing participant in halting the search for the truth. Pressure must be brought on Mr. Rajnath Singh to issue a fresh notification and the CBI must take the appropriate steps to challenge the special court's order legally. The Babri Masjid was pulled down over eight years ago and the fact that the trial has not even begun is shameful enough. The last thing the nation needs is for it to be further obstructed by a partisan State Government which would allow its misplaced political loyalty to totally obliterate its commitment to the rule of law.

Rajnath subverting Constitution: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 6. The Congress today criticised the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, for refusing to move the court and remove the technical flaw in the Babri Masjid demolition case against the 21 accused persons.

"A Chief Minister who has taken oath under the Constitution is expected to uphold it and not subvert it," the Congress spokesman, Mr. Anand Sharma, said. He charged the BJP with thwarting the due process of law in pursuit of its communal agenda. The Lucknow Bench of the Al-

lahabad High Court while letting off the three Union Ministers had not pronounced them innocent. It had merely pointed out a technical flaw, Mr. Sharma added.

Instead of rectifying this flaw, the BJP in a brazen show of disrespect to the criminal justice system, had sought to demonstrate its total lack of respect to the law of the land, he said.

The CPI(ML) has termed dropping of criminal proceedings against the accused as a "deliberate and calculated attempt on the part of the BJP-led Government and the Uttar Pradesh Govern-

ment to hush up the case".

It also accused the RSS and the BJP of "shamelessly misusing their position of power, both at the Centre and in the State, to stop the court and the investigating agency from arriving at any verdict against their leaders".

'Govt. can't be forced'

LUCKNOW, MAY 6. The Bharatiya Janata Party today said that the Uttar Pradesh Government could not be "forced" to issue a fresh notification, following the recent judgment of the special CBI court in the Babri Masjid demolition

case. "The Government cannot be forced to issue a fresh notification," the BJP spokesman, Mr. Hriday Narain Dixit, said in a statement here.

He also condemned the Congress, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) for asking the Uttar Pradesh Government to issue a fresh notification on the issue.

Mr. Dixit alleged that the Government of the day had conspired to implicate the senior BJP leaders in the case and that was why the case could not stand in the court. — PTI

U.S. panel links lifting of sanctions against India to minority status

WASHINGTON: Taking up cudgels on behalf of Christians and Muslims in India, a U.S. commission has linked lifting of remaining economic sanctions against New Delhi to improvement in the condition of minorities.

Indo-U.S. economic trade ties should be linked to greater religious freedom for minorities and removal of any restrictions on conversion, U.S. commission on international religious freedom said in its report released on Monday.

"Should the U.S. government continue to waive economic sanctions against India and promote greater trade and investment, the implementation of our economic policies should take into account progress of the Indian government on protecting religious freedom, ensuring safety of religious minorities, and promoting the rule of law", the commission, set up to make recommendations to U.S. Congress and the government, said.

Claiming that there had been "disturbing increase in the past several years in severe violence against religious minorities" in India, the report linked it with increase in political influence at the national and state level of "Hindu nationalists" identifying them with the RSS, ruling BJP and associated organisations.

"Although the BJP-led government may not be directly responsible for instigating violence against religious minorities, there is concern that the government is not doing all that it could to pursue the perpetrators of the attacks and to counteract the prevailing climate of hostility, in some quarters of India, against these minority groups."

Ayodhya remains a live issue with persistent calls from the RSS to build a temple there, the commission said, adding that friction over other holy sites has intensified in recent years.

It claimed that mosques had been vandalised and violence against Christians had increased dramatically.

Since murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his sons in Orissa, attacks on Christians have continued with reports of renewed attacks on churches, priests and ministers, particularly in Gujarat, the report claimed. "A prominent example of government's failure to adequately act against those associated with communal violence was the controversial decision of a Shiv-Sena government magistrate in Maharashtra to dismiss charges against Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray for his role inciting violence against Muslims in the riots following destruction of Babri Mosque", it said.

The commission also recommended that the U.S. government "allocate funds from its foreign assistance programmes for promotion of education on religious toleration and inclusiveness in India." (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

BJP hails CBI court order

HPJ By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 5. The Bharatiya Janata Party today welcomed the order of the Special CBI Judge putting on hold the trial of 21 accused in Ayodhya case, saying the case was "politically motivated and fraudulent." Addressing presspersons here, the BJP spokesman, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said the Uttar Pradesh Government "is advised to see the desirability and futility" of pursuing such a "fraudulent case" and refrain from issuing a fresh notification. There was no need for another notification.

Asked if he was pressuring the U.P. Government, Mr. Malhotra said, "If we wanted to put pressure on the State Government, we could have done it three years ago." The Congress had withdrawn all cases from the Shah Commission when it came to power in the post-Emergency period, he pointed out.

Mr. Malhotra contended that the BJP-led coalition Government had been "too soft on its opponents and too hard on itself."

He claimed that senior BJP leaders and Central Ministers like Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, were "falsely implicated" in the additional chargesheet which was brought up in a hurry and smacked of political motives and vendetta.

Mr. Malhotra criticised the Congress for rapping the Central Ministers involved in the Ayodhya case and repeatedly demanding their resignations. "It does not behove the Congress to take recourse to such action, particularly when the party has aligned with Ms. Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu and is unabashedly backing her for Chief Ministership even when she has been convicted and sentenced to two-year prison term," he argued.

Referring to the pre-poll scenario in Assam, the BJP spokesman feared that the Congress-ULFA links, along with the Bangladeshi infiltrators, could prove "fatal" and "detrimental" to the interests of national security.

Left for fresh notification: Page 8

THE HINDU

28 MAY 2010

Court drops charges against Advani, Joshi in Ayodhya case

Says 'legal defect' in notification needs to be rectified

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: The special sessions judge of a CBI court, S.K. Shukla, on Friday dropped criminal proceedings against 21 accused in the Ayodhya demolition case, including three Union ministers, L.K. Advani, M.M. Joshi and Uma Bharti, until the "legal defect" in the notification constituting the court was rectified. The judge directed the government to rectify the defect as observed by the high court earlier.

The judge held that the trial against the eight accused, including the three ministers and 13 others, brought within the ambit of this case could not be proceeded with on the basis of the consolidated chargesheet filed by the CBI which had already been quashed by the Allahabad high court earlier.

The high court had cited a legal defect in the government notification constituting the special court to try the case when it quashed the notification. Besides the three ministers, others against whom the proceedings were dropped include Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, former U.P. chief minister

Kalyan Singh and VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Giriraj Kishore. The judge also directed the rest of the 26 accused, including the then district magistrate, R.N. Srivastava, and SSP D.V. Rai to appear before the court on June 8 for framing charges against them.

It may be recalled that the special judge (Ayodhya Prakaran) had summoned all the 49 accused in the case on September 9, 1997.

The order was challenged on behalf of 33 accused in four revision petitions before the high court. The high court had held the entire proceedings relating to the case as void as the special

court for hearing the cases was not constituted with the consultation of the high court.

The special judge, in view of the order of the high court, dropped the proceedings against the 21 accused on the ground that they were the accused in the FIR lodged in respect of case crime no. 198/92, and as such no proceeding could take place against them.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said his government would do "whatever is lawful" in the Ayodhya case and denied that it was trying to protect "some people".



L.K. Advani

M.M. Joshi

Bal Thackeray

SC tells Centre, states to stop female foeticide

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Anguished by the indiscriminate misuse of advanced technology for effecting female foeticide, the supreme court on Friday asked the Centre and state governments to implement the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act sincerely to end this menace. It also asked the authorities to launch a vigorous media campaign against female foeticide and the practice of pre-natal determination of sex.

It asked the Central Supervisory Board (CSB) to issue directions to all states and Union territories to furnish quarterly returns to the CSB, giving a report on the implementation and working of the PNDT Act.

A bench comprising Justice M.B. Shah and Justice S.N. Variava said these reports would include action taken against non-registered bodies operating in violation of

Section 3 of the act, inclusive of search and seizure of records. The bench directed the state governments and UT administrations to appoint fully empowered appropriate authorities at the district and sub-district levels and also advisory committees to aid and advise the appropriate authority.

On attorney general Soli Sorabjee's suggestion, the bench also directed the CSB to meet every six months to review and monitor the implementation of the act.

The significant order is the fallout of public interest litigation filed by activist Sabu George of the Centre for Enquiry Into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT) and the Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MAUSAM) alleging that the male-female ratio in the country was dropping alarmingly due to the unchecked practice of determining the sex of a foetus, which invariably resulted in female foeticide.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 MAY 2001

CBI court breather for Babari trio

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, May 4. - The special CBI court of Mr Shrikant Shukla hearing the Babari Masjid demolition case, today dropped proceedings against 21 of the 47 accused till the "defect" in the government notification establishing the special court is rectified.

Apart from three Union ministers - Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms Uma Bharti - the others against whom proceedings have been kept in abeyance include the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mr Kalyan Singh and VHP leaders Mr Ashok Singhal and Mr

Giriraj Kishore.

The others are the BJP MP from Faizabad, Mr Vinay Katiyar, the VHP general secretary, Mr Vishnu Hari Dalmiya, former BJP MP from Gorakhpur, Mahant Avaidyanath, Ms Sadhvi Ritambhara, and the chief of the Ram Janam Bhoomi Trust, Mahant Paramhans Ram Chandra Das.

In its 33-page ruling, the special court brought 13 other accused into the ambit of the case (crime number 198 of 1992) over and above the eight listed by the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court on 12 February. The High Court had said the state had not taken its consent in constituting the special court to try case No.198.

The High Court had said that the "defect" was curable by the government. However, no step has yet been taken by the Rajnath Singh government to rectify the position though the chief minister has been saying all along that "all possible legal action will be taken".

The special court, however, asked the remaining 26 accused covered under crime No. 197 to appear before the court on 8 June for framing of charges. (The High Court had said that the constitution of the special court to try those listed in case crime No. 197 was in order).

Also among the accused were the then Faizabad DM, Mr RN Shrivastava, and senior police

superintendent, Mr DB Rai. The court rejected their plea that they were also covered by the High Court ruling. The judge has used strong words against the two officials and mentioned that the two had "intentionally reduced the police force so that the destruction became easy".

Ayodhya incidentally falls in Faizabad district.

The CBI counsel, Mr PK Chaubey, said after the court ruling that it would be studied. "We still have time to go against the HC ruling," he said, adding that the charges against the accused stood. Only the matter had been kept in abeyance till "the defect in constituting the court was cured".

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2001

Dara sought my help to kill Staines: witness

HT Correspondent
Bhubaneswar, May 4

PURNO MAHATO, prosecution witness in the Staines murder case, said today before the Khurda District and Sessions Judge that on January 20 in 1999, two days before the missionary and his sons' murder, Dara Singh and one of his associates, Dipu Das, had plotted the murders.

A roadside vendor in the Banabiara daily market under Patna police station limits in Keonjhar district, Mahato also identified Dara as the person who had asked him to assist him in his bid.

"Dara asked me to organise 10 to 15 people from our Mahato community to oppose the Christian missionaries allegedly involved in conversion activity in the area, but I refused. He then tried to convince me that the missionaries were misleading the tribals and trying

to increase the strength of their religion through the conversion bid," Mahato said before the court.

The next day, on January 21, Dara and Dipu were cycling around the market talking to various people, he said.

Mahato said before the court that he had known Dara for more than five years.

Apart from teaching Hindi in the Maliposi School, Dara was a part-time vegetable vendor in the Talapaka daily market, about 40 km from Manoharpur village.

Whenever he visited Banabiara, he used to stay in the house of the Banabiara School's headmaster.

On January 20, Dara and Dipu had visited the village to attend the annual fair organised by the Mahato community on the banks of the Tel river and searched for people who could join them in eliminat-

ing the Christian missionaries in the Manoharpur area, the witness said.

During cross examination, Mahato said 10 days after murder of Graham Staines and his two minor sons, the Orissa Police had taken him to the spot of the incident and interrogated him there.

Answering a question from the defence counsel, Mahato said he had never been to Manoharpur village nor had any knowledge of the conversion process.

However, he had heard from fellow traders that one Saheb (Graham Staines was popularly known as Saheb) used to visit the tribal village and propagate his religion.

It was also widely known that Staines Sahib was treating leprosy patients and giving financial assistance to the poor and needy in the surrounding villages, Purno Mahato said before the court.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

35 MAY 2001

← *for minibus*

Double standards *HG-8 9/5/*

THERE CAN be no question that organisations that work to weaken the fabric of India by vitiating the communal equilibrium, and disrupting defence and other sensitive installations, need to be dealt with sternly. But it isn't clear that a ban is the answer. The government has outlawed the Deendar Anjuman, an obscure 75-year-old Islamic organisation based in Andhra Pradesh which is said to have caused explosions in churches in some southern states at the behest of a hostile alien outfit last summer. But the point is whether the perpetrators of such nefarious deeds will simply be driven underground by the ban.

Bans have been imposed on a number of organisations — the RSS for one after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, during the Emergency and following the Babri masjid's demolition. And on the undivided CPI for another. But, at different times, the saffronites as well as the communists came to be part of governments at the Centre. The effectiveness of neither was blunted, at least not for long. In more recent times, the ULFA in Assam, Ranbir Sena in Bihar and sundry other outfits have been declared illegal. But this has hardly meant a decisive suppression

of their activities. Indeed, bans have often worked as administrative mirages. Experience suggests that official alertness often slackens with respect to bodies that are declared unlawful, and checks against them remain in better place if the undesirables are kept under constant watch. In any case, enough laws exist to checkmate even openly subversive organisations if the government means business. So, bans are usually the lazy, and generally ineffective, way out.

In the present case of the Islamic outfit, the proscription can well raise questions concerning double standards even if the government has a good case. This is because the NDA government is widely perceived as being less than proactive on communal outfits that espouse majoritarian values. Recently when the government wished to ban the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh suggested that the move will carry conviction only if a body like the Bajrang Dal was similarly dealt with. There is no doubt that a government must retain the power to ban an outfit, but the authority must be invoked with circumspection and without being influenced by political considerations.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 MAY 2001

BJP hails special court order, Muslim Forum cries foul

Sunita Aron
Lucknow, May 4

UP BJP spokesman Hriday Narain Dixit was overjoyed that proceedings against 21 prominent BJP-VHP-Shiv Sena leaders in the Ayodhya demolition case have been dropped.

Though the grounds for dropping the cases against the leaders are both "technical and rectifiable," every twist in the sensitive case has got a political hue.

The special court judgement, dropping cases against the prominent leaders till the State Government issues a fresh notification, has raised questions whether the case would ever reach a logical end. The incident took place in 1992.

With the BJP Government at the State, its political intentions are doubtful. Though the High Court order setting aside the

notification on technical grounds came in February last, the State Government kept on sitting pretty and did not issue a fresh notification.

"The High Court order is under examination" is all the State Government officials have to say. The Allahabad Bench of the High Court had set aside a State Government notification of October 8, 1993 in which the special court was empowered to cover the case involving BJP-VHP-Sena leaders.

It is unlikely that the State Government will make any early move even after today's judgement. Thus the other options are only going to complicate the case.

"The BJP may get some political advantage in elections. But there is going to be no impact on the case itself. Prima facie order is illegal and against the High court judgement, therefore it is

most likely to get quashed".

All-India Muslim Forum has dubbed the dropping of the charges in demolition case as a black spot on the rule of law. The forum has demanded the BJP Government to issue a fresh notification without any delay, or they will file a writ of mandamus in the HC, seeking a direction to the Government.

BSP leader Mayawati has accused the State Government of shielding people responsible for demolishing the mosque and demanded immediate issuance of fresh notification so that proceedings could continue against the accused. She has also challenged to launch an agitation if early decision was not taken in this regard.

Samajwadi Party leader Bhagwati Singh accused both the UP Governments and the NDA at the Centre of protecting the guilty.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 MAY 2001

MAY 2001

CROSS TO BEAR

US criticism right on target

27/5/01 *SF-6*
4/5

THE most damning information provided by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, whose annual report dwells at length on India, is not New Delhi's lack of suitable response to persecution of minorities, but that the government refused permission to visit this country for a first-hand assessment. Indian officials will be quick to point out that refusing such requests is "proper" since the alternative is tantamount to infringement of sovereignty. This has been the official argument of every government every time and everywhere. And usually the apprehension has meant that government has something serious to hide. Conversely, governments confident of their own record grant permission for outside scrutiny as a matter of form, or even indifference. New Delhi's refusal to allow the US Commission to visit India, therefore, shows pretty much conclusively that it loses sleep thinking what the Americans may find - for example, if they were to talk to Christian priests and poor Christians in Gujarat villages. The ugly reality the Indian government wants to hide from US lawmakers however poses a far bigger problem for this country itself. Which is that to date the NDA government, especially the BJP, has not been able to take a firm line on provocative religious activism. The policy should be clear. Any individual or any group has the right to preach, proselytise, cajole and convince but no one can take the battle of faith into the arena of violence and intimidation. On that front the Centre as well as BJP state governments have failed miserably. Because the crossing of the acceptable line has always been done by Hindu organisations. Consider this hypothetical situation: if Christian missionaries started attacking temples and forcibly converting Hindus, would a BJP state government and the Centre take days to issue a painfully cautious statement, and then take months to identify the perpetrators, as happens every time Sangh fanatics go on a rampage. Surely not. Then how come the arsonists, rioters and, in some cases, killers targeting Indian Christians have not been brought to justice; not even one of them, unless one considers Dara Singh the elaborate farce after Graham Staines was brutally murdered.

These questions will not go away simply because the government disallows Americans a fact-finding visit. Indeed the report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom makes it clear that a certain strong and entirely rational perception about current official treatment of minorities have gained ground outside India. This wasn't the case before, and the fact that it is now, is squarely the BJP-led government's responsibility and fault. On this matter, the current government has reduced India to the level of countries long infamous for undemocratic politics and institutionalised persecution. The US Commission says that it does not find the government directly responsible in the sense that there are no official orders for treating minorities differently. Remember, there were no official orders to demolish the Babari Masjid either.

THE STATESMAN

- 4 MAY 2001

Union govt. bans Deendar Anjuman for fomenting communal trouble

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Union government has imposed a ban on the Deendar Anjuman on the ground that it engineered the bomb blasts in churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa between May and July last year.

Asked why the government had taken so long to impose a ban, a home ministry spokesman told *The Times of India* on Thursday, "It takes time because first, a thorough investigation is done and a prima facie case is made out, and the ban is imposed only after consultations with the states concerned." He said that the Centre had to be sure of the case as the ban was adjudicated upon by a tribunal. This, he said, caused a time lag between the incident and the ban.

The organisation in question was found to be indulging in fomenting communal tension and it had links with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the home ministry official said. In short, Deendar Anjuman's activities all added up to being prejudicial to India's security, the home ministry contended.

The organisation, active in the Deccan areas, was engaged in distribution of anti-Christian literature, in espionage activities and had "the potential to disturb peace, and the communal and secular fabric of the country", the ministry spokesman said.

He said the Anjuman had "links in Mardan in Pakistan and has been organising a band of disgruntled Muslim youths in India into a

militant outfit for launching a jihad (holy war) with the avowed objective of total Islamisation of the sub-continent".

The organisation had planned to create disturbances, especially by promoting hatred, fomenting suspicion and ill-will among the Christians and Hindus as well as among other communities, he said. It had directed its activists to attack Christian institutions with the objective of embarrassing the government, especially in the international arena, and weakening it internally, he said.

The decision to ban the outfit followed a meeting in Bangalore between the Centre and representatives of the police forces of Andhra Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka. The meeting emphasised that there was a grand design of Pakistan's ISI to foment trouble by pitting one community against another to weaken the moral strength of the country and its secular fabric.

Stating that the Anjuman had been outlawed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the home ministry spokesman said, "The organisation had plans to target major infrastructural installations, including the railways, telecom networks, electricity grids, oil refineries and defence installations."

Deendar Anjuman Siddique, a little-known and obscure sect, was founded 75 years ago by Maulana Syed Siddique Hussain, who died in October 1952 in Hyderabad. His eldest son, Syed Ziaul Hasan, who is heading the sect, is reportedly staying in Pakistan.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 MAY 2001

India under US minority watch

Human Rights

FROM K.P. NAYAR

Washington, May 1: The US warned on Monday that India was close to being labelled a "country of particular concern" (CPC) for violating religious freedom and failure to safeguard the rights of religious minorities.

In a strongly-worded, 188-page report released here, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom called upon the Bush administration to take up the twin issues of religious freedom and human rights with Delhi "as the US government pursues greater engagement with India on a full range of issues".

The repeal of economic sanctions against India and promotion of American trade "should take into account the progress of the Indian government on protecting religious freedom, ensuring the safety of religious minorities and promoting the rule of law", the report demanded.

The annual report is a fallout of a 1998 legislation aimed at making international religious freedom an integral part of the US foreign policy.

Labelling a country as a CPC is an equivalent in the 1998 law of designating a state as a sponsor of terrorism. China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Myanmar and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan have been CPCs since the setting up of the commission, which last year added North Korea, Laos, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan to the list. It has also written to the US secretary of state demanding "careful monitoring" of religious freedom in India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The religious freedom report is produced by a 10-member commission. Three of its members

are appointed by the President, four by Congressional leaders of the party which is not in the White House and three others by the President's party. In addition, the administration chooses an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom who is an ex-officio member.

In its latest report, the commission is highly critical of the Indian embassy in Washington for not facilitating what many Indians regard as an intrusive attempt by the panel to directly investigate allegations of minorities being persecuted in India.

"In October 2000, initial enquiries were made to the Indian

Praise for Pak

Washington, May 1: Within hours of releasing its annual report on global terrorism which contains adverse remarks on Pakistan, the US state department yesterday complimented the country for its cooperation with the US in fighting terror.

■ See Page 6

embassy in Washington about an invitation (to visit India), but there was no response. After meeting with the Indian ambassador to the US in December, the commission was assured that inquiries would be made to New Delhi, but nothing more has yet been heard in official channels".

In a section on "Hindu nationalism and the BJP", the commission's report accuses "the Sangh parivar" of propagating the view that "only Hindus are 'real' Indians, suggesting that non-Hindus are foreigners and thus deserving suspicion and even attack".

In this context, it is sharply cr-

itical of what it describes as RSS leader K.S. Sudarshan's call last year to "nationalise" minority religions in India and have "an Indian church" like the one in China.

The commission demanded that "the Indian government must continue to make absolutely clear its opposition to any move towards establishing 'nationalised' churches or state-controlled religious institutions or to interfere improperly with relations between Indian religious communities and their foreign co-religionists".

In addition, "the US government should make clear that it views with concern any attempt by the Indian government to control or regulate religious communities and their institutions to promote or protect such national values".

In a proposal which will be seen in Delhi as a US attempt to interfere in its internal affairs, the commission has said: "The US government should allocate funds from its foreign assistance programmes for the promotion of education on religious toleration and inclusiveness in India."

It has also proposed that Washington should review its economic engagement with India to determine how it can promote law and order and a "stable society with legitimate institutions".

"Evidence of improvements" should be a factor in determining the level of US assistance through the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the like.

The commission was appointed during the liberal regime of Bill Clinton and its term is set to expire later this month.

With Christian conservatives in charge in the Bush White House, a new commission to be set up shortly is expected to be more vocal on India.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 MAY 2001

Dara Singh identified

BHUBANESWAR, May 2. — A prosecution witness in the Staines murder case, Bhakta Marandi, today identified Ravindra Pal, alias Dara Singh, as the person who led a mob on 22 January 1999 in attacking a vehicle in which the Staines were asleep.

Marandi said the leader of the mob was "tall and slim" and had an axe in his hand. When the CBI counsel asked if he could identify the person from among the accused, he pointed at Dara. He also identified another accused, Rajat Kumar Das alias Dipu Das, as a member of the gang that attacked the Staines' vehicle. — SNS

■ Details on page 2

THE STATESMAN

MAY 2001

Ayodhya: Joshi lays blame at VP's doorstep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

UNION Human Resources Minister Murlidhar Joshi today said VP Singh during his Prime Ministership miserably failed on the Ayodhya front despite his promise to solve the problem within four months.

"Instead of solving the problem, he sometimes formed a Committee of Ministers, offered certain solutions, changed them and withdrew them," Joshi told the Liberhan Commission probing the sequence of events leading to demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.

The Minister criticised the VP Government for going back on the issue handing over about 2.7 acre of undisputed land to a trust and refer only the issue of disputed site to the Supreme Court.

Senior BJP leader L K Advani had requested him for a nearly solution to the problem and the former was all the time available for

reacting and responding to the offers made by the Government "but he (Singh) failed miserably," Joshi said. He said the BJP always wanted an amicable solution and "attitude of Advani was always to respond constructively to the suggestions made by V P Singh Government through his ministers and other emissaries, he said. The Minister said

LIBERHAN PANEL

the crux of the matter was that the land measuring about 2.77 acres which was undisputed be taken over through an order and handed over to a trust with a neutral receiver, he said.

The Government was to acquire the rest of the disputed structure as well as 30 feet land around it, Joshi said.

The 2.77 acres of land was to be separated from the disputed site and whenever the dispute regarding the structure would be settled, the construction of temple would take place. But in the meantime the undisputed land of 2.77 acres could be handed over to a trust, he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

2 MAY 2001

Kanpur riots, a wake-up call

By Asghar Ali Engineer

49-12
1879

COMMUNAL RIOTS in Kanpur should not be taken lightly. They should be treated as a wake-up call by all committed secularists. After Coimbatore in 1998, they were the first major riots after the immediate post-Babri Masjid demolition period. After the demolition and its immediate aftermath, communal violence had gone down considerably for various reasons. The lull since made people complacent again. But, Kanpur is once again changing the contours of communal violence.

As pointed out earlier too, the 1980s were the worst decade of communal violence. Several major incidents from Moradabad in 1980 to the Bombay-Surat riots in 1992-93 took place during this decade. The 1980s became so violence-prone mainly because of the politics of communalism adopted aggressively by the BJP, initially in response to Indira Gandhi's limited communal manoeuvres and later to discredit the Congress(I)'s politics among the middle and upper class Hindus in which it succeeded considerably.

It was during this decade that the BJP began to describe Nehruvian secularism as pseudo-secularism (though it vowed to pursue the same kind of secularism after coming to power in March 1998) and also accused the Congress(I) of pursuing a policy of appeasement towards minorities (the BJP of course continued the same policies towards the minorities). This aggressive propaganda greatly appealed to the upper caste, upper class Hindus and they became the BJP's votaries in ever greater numbers.

It was as a result of all this that communal violence erupted in several sensitive towns, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Ramjanabhoomi issue also incited communal passions as never before. The BJP, while describing itself as a party with a difference, resorted to all such communal controversies in its quest for power. After coming to power at the Centre at the head of a coalition it began to pursue apparently the same secular

policies as those of the Congress(I) but — it is important to note — with a difference.

Though there were no major planned communal riots, the BJP continued to pursue its hidden communal agenda quite aggressively. It handed over very sensitive Ministries such as Human Resource Development and Home Affairs to those very close to the RSS. All educational and research bodies since then have been stuffed with diehard RSS and VHP elements who are communalising and saffronising the educational institutions.

poor and backward Muslims are easily excitable on sensitive religious issues as they hardly have any stake in life. This factor makes Kanpur communally extra-sensitive.

The demolition of Buddha Statues in Afghanistan became a flashpoint as far as Kanpur and places in Maharashtra such as Aurangabad and Pune were concerned. Though Indian Muslims unanimously condemned the demolition of the statues in Bamiyan, the fanatics of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal burnt copies of the Quran in Delhi and later in Amritsar

Secular forces should be proactive rather than reactive in fighting the re-emerging communal monster. For, post-Tehelka, desperate politicians may provoke communal violence to divert attention.

The minorities have been living with a sense of insecurity because of such openly-pursued communal policies. This had to manifest itself in some or the other communal incident especially where the BJP is in power. Kanpur, being a communal flashpoint, erupted. Kanpur has a history of communal violence from the early 20th century. It had witnessed major communal riots in the British period too, particularly in 1914 and 1932. It witnessed major rioting after the demolition of the Babri Masjid too.

Kanpur has a large population of Brahmmins, on the one hand, and of Muslims, on the other. It is also one of the main centres of criminal gangs in Uttar Pradesh. It was in this city that Kalabachcha, a known criminal allied to the BJP, operated. He was quite active in various communal riots in Kanpur including those following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Kanpur is an industrial area and most of the Muslims work in the leather industry and are poor and illiterate; these days they face a great deal of unemployment because of industrial recession. All this makes a fatal combination as far as communal violence is concerned. The

and Patiala. Though this was denied there was photographic evidence and the Central Government has ordered an enquiry and some people have also been arrested. It is to be noted that the Buddhists protested against the demolition by the Taliban with a sense of dignity.

The SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India), which was founded after the Emergency in 1977 to fill the void created by the arrest of Jamat-e-Islami leaders, is an organisation of young fanatical students. It admits youth in the 15 to 30 age group. These students are quite closed-minded and fanatical in their approach and easily excitable. Being young they have no vision or fear of consequences. The Kanpur riots as well as riots in Maharashtra began after the SIMI members organised demonstrations against the burning of the Quran. The administration in Kanpur alleged that members of the SIMI had sophisticated weapons supplied by the ISI of Pakistan. A magistrate was killed allegedly by shots fired from inside a mosque. It has also been alleged that the riots were further aggravated because of a clash between senior officers in the police. The truth about the whole situa-

tion can be established only through a full-fledged judicial inquiry.

The PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary), which is notorious for its anti-minority bias, was called in to control the situation. The result is well-known. It opened fire indiscriminately resulting in the loss of a dozen lives and injuries to many more people. The PAC is invariably called out to control communal riots in Uttar Pradesh despite its known anti-minority bias. This force had killed several youth from the minority community at Hashimpura and Malyana during the Meerut riots in 1987. No action has been taken against the PAC for these killing by any Government, including that headed by Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav. This time too the Rajnath Singh Government did not call out the Army and instead deployed the PAC.

The SIMI leaders claim they are not responsible for the riots and that they were totally unarmed and that the police ignited the situation by firing on unarmed protesters. But the SIMI cannot disown responsibility for the riots. It could have achieved the same objective by submitting a memorandum peacefully to the Collector or meeting the Governor. The students, however, preferred street demonstrations, in a communally-charged situation, triggering events beyond their control. One does not expect the SIMI leaders to have wisdom but the senior Muslim leaders should have known better and done everything possible to restrain the youngsters in time; and if they did not listen to them they should have publicly disowned the unwise actions.

Secular forces should be proactive rather than reactive in fighting the re-emerging communal monster. For, post-Tehelka, desperate politicians may provoke communal violence to divert attention. And, even otherwise, the communal situation in the country should not be treated lightly. All those who are interested in strengthening the unity and integrity of the country should actively work for promotion of secular values and to meet the communal challenge.

THE HINDU

18 APR 2001

HOSTILE WITNESSES

5x6 Who's protecting Dara Singh? 19/11

SHOULD one read any meaning into the fact that one prosecution witness after another is turning hostile in CBI's case no. 7/S/99 which came up for hearing in the first week of March, after the chargesheet had been filed in June last year? One Parvati Hembram had great difficulty in identifying Ojjen Hansda, an accused who also happens to be her nephew. Then, the Tudus — husband, wife and son — failed to recognise Mahendra Hembram or his handwriting, while Mrs Tudu apparently contradicted her earlier statement before the CBI that a certain letter received by her had been written by the accused. All of them might be acting out of good faith, it is not our intention here to project our views on pending proceedings. But, the Dara Singh case has had a long history of political interference. First, it took almost one year to arrest the man. The man apparently had a strong following among the Mohanta community in Keonjhar to whom he gave away the cattle he looted in the name of cow protection. He had an extensive network of protection in the villages. Besides which, he has contacts with influential members of the local units of the BJP and other Sangh Parivar outfits. Several of them spoke out in his defence.

One has, therefore, good reason to be suspicious about the behaviour of prosecution witnesses in a case where a trail of political protection has been obvious right from the beginning. It is for the court and the CBI to establish whether they are perjuring themselves or not, but they must be provided with adequate protection in order to ensure that they are not being intimidated by Dara Singh's numerous supporters in the superstition-ridden Orissa countryside. This is a case in which there is an explosive combination of religion and politics situated in a context of absolute and thorough backwardness. Most of the witnesses come from the tribal village of Manoharpur and live surrounded by elements well-disposed to Dara Singh and his cronies. That is where they go back after deposing in public before the judge, and not privately before CBI officers. The risks are all too evident. Dara Singh is accused of a heinous crime, there must be a free and fair trial. Lastly this case illustrates all too well what happens to justice when it is inordinately and deliberately delayed — time is given to the predictable people to defeat the law. And thereby hangs a tale!

THE STATESMAN

14 APR 2000

'No circular on Good Friday'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 13. The Union Sports Minister, Ms. Uma Bharti, today denied that she had ordered issuance of a circular directing all her Ministry employees to be on duty on Good Friday. A controversy sought to be created on the subject only reflected a 'perverted mentality' which deserved to be condemned, she said.

"I respect all religions. Baisakhi falls today as also Good Friday. Baisakhi is a holy festival of the Hindus. To link every issue with religion and to read an intolerant motive in it is indicative of a perverted mentality which I condemn," she said in a statement

expressing surprise over media reports on the issue.

However, Ms. Bharti said she did ring up the Secretary of her department, Mr. N. N. Khanna, from Bhopal and told him that he and some other officers should remain in Delhi today so that she could call them "if the need arose".

Elaborating further she said, "I also told my private secretary that he and some members of the staff be present in office today. I never gave any direction for issuing a circular to call all employees on duty today."

The Minister also sought to emphasise that she had given these instructions in view of the Budget session of Parliament recommencing on Monday as also in view of several holidays during the past fortnight.

Ms. Bharti's clarification came a day after a circular issued by Mr. S. M. Das, Joint Secretary (Administration) of the Ministry, said, "(the) Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports will be attending office tomorrow (April 13). Secretary (of the Ministry) has desired all officers and staff to attend the office as the Ministry will remain functional tomorrow."

The decision was denounced by the CPI(M) which



Ms. Uma Bharti

termed it "communally motivated and a deliberate insult to the Christian minority."

Christian council 'hurt'

The All-India Christian Council said that Christians were deeply hurt at the circular. "What has deeply hurt us is the not-so-subtle message of the Ministry's order, smacking as it does of arrogance and a complete disregard for the feelings of others. We did not expect such insensitivity from a Government department headed by a person of Sadhvi Uma Bharti's religious commitment."

Reminding that inclusion of important religious days of the

country's many religions is a manifestation of "our plural culture and testimony to the nation's commitment to secularism as enshrined in both our Constitution and our culture", its statement said that the birthdays of such founding fathers of our nation as Baba Saheb Ambedkar are commemorated as national holidays in solidarity with the Dalits of the country.

Wondering what urgent work the Sports Ministry did which could not wait and must be done on Good Friday, the council said both the Prime Minister and Ms. Bharti owed an explanation.

The council said the Sports Secretary, Mr. Khanna's denial that the circular was issued on any specific instructions from Ms. Bharti and the justification given by him for the Ministry's action had made matters worse. Mr. Khanna while issuing the denial was reported to have said that "not much should be read into our working tomorrow. The Government is not a shop which can be closed any time. It works round the clock, even on holidays like Sundays, if there was some urgent work to be done."

THE HINDU

14 APR 2001

Misuse of Religion is endemic!

L K ADVANI is in difficulty before the ^{5/1} Liberhan Commission. On 10 April 2001 he appeared in sackcloth and ashes and said he regarded the demolition of the Babari Masjid as an ^{18/4} *unfortunate and painful event, which distressed me greatly that day*. Of course he also made excuses for the kar sevaks who had hoped to get a Ram temple built by due process of law. Impatience with due process of law is not a recognised defence for committing a crime. Nor does characterising the Masjid as a *disputed structure* help to justify the vandalism. India does not recognise anyone's right to destroy any structure, disputed or otherwise, which does not belong to him. He balanced this by stressing that the BJP believed that constructing a Ram temple in Ayodhya was a *symbol of national self-respect*. Without necessarily agreeing with the proposition, it is possible to ask why the Ram temple was not built elsewhere in Ayodhya; there is plenty of space. Why does it have to be at the very spot where the Babari Masjid stood? Advani did not address this issue but on earlier occasions he has sought to dismiss it as a matter of faith.

Advani then proceeded to rely on the White Paper of the Rao government whose hands were not exactly clean. Even that Paper records that the Masjid was a functioning mosque until the night of 22 December 1949. The affidavit of the UP government says so and adds that the Masjid stood on wakf land and the mosque and the land were notified as a Sunni Muslim Wakf by 1944. In the light of this evidence it is not understood why the White Paper should insist that all references to the Babari Masjid should be to Ramjanambhumi-Babari Masjid structure and Ramjanambhumi-Babari Masjid complex. For the benefit of Mr

Advani and the Commission before whom he appeared, the Babari Masjid was a functioning mosque until 22 December 1949 when it was desecrated by the introduction of idols by stealth and deceit after which namaz could not be performed because of the presence of the unwanted idols.

WITH all its careful phraseology, Advani's evidence marked an advance on the untenable positions he held earlier and there was hope that it represented a change of heart. Hope was promptly dashed the next day when he appeared before the Commission again. Whether he was got at by predictable elements in the RSS overnight is not known; if he was, it was his affair. What I

C R IRANI

CAVEAT

am concerned about is the volte face. He now describes the desecrated Babari Masjid — before demolition — as a temple, *de jure*. Why? Because of the idols inside. This is to justify strong-arm methods, trample upon ownership rights, put a premium on dishonesty and vulgarity of the worst kind and when caught out insist that it is all covered by the expression — faith. Faith is not a preserve of one community; the Sangh Parivar are mistaken if they confuse faith with brute force of the majority.

Advani is in another difficulty if he insists that the desecrated temple was already a *de jure* temple. What was demolished was, by this logic, a functioning temple. This is a new one for the Sangh Parivar. Religion is being reduced to the level of tactics. It has been

urged that once idols are installed, they may not be moved. Now Advani is party to the proposition that idols could be removed from functioning temples because this was undoubtedly done when they were removed for the duration of the demolition and brought back later to adorn the make-shift temple that stands where the Babari Masjid stood.

I have prayed in Hindu and Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, Christian churches and Sikh gurudwaras, apart from Parsi temples because I respect them all and believe that all paths lead to the same God. Prayer is thanksgiving to the divine for what we have received, it is not to bargain for one's advantage nor a plea to ask for more. When religion descends to the level of asserting superiority it becomes an instrument of oppression and as a student of comparative religions, I am outraged as I was when the Babari Masjid was brought down. If you were rabid, you would agree with Swami Vamdev who asserted that the Babari Masjid fell down on its own and went on to claim that as the demand was for the destruction of three mosques, the Jama Masjid in New Delhi should take the place of the mosque that forgot to stand up. No religion teaches you to use it to build a power base.

IN a phrase dear to Mahatma Gandhi, may I suggest that the time has come to turn the searchlight inwards. We will be surprised at what we find. I plead for the wonderful mosaic that is India and I plead with all my countrymen. Chief Justice J S Verma began his judgment in Writ Petition (c) No 186 of 1994 with these words from Swami Vivekananda and they bear repetition — *Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is in being and becoming, it is realisation.*

18/4

18/4

New-look Secularism

A Dialogue of Religion and Politics

The Cr

Life &

By RAHUL SHIVSHANKAR

11-10 13/4
THE recent communal riots in Kanpur that claimed more than a dozen lives raise some disturbing questions.

After more than 50 years of independence, why should communal violence be increasing in India which is institutionally committed to the ideals of parliamentary democracy, secularism and rationalism, social justice, science and technology, industry and a modern way of life?

After all, didn't Jawaharlal Nehru — while imposing an urban-industrial-secular vision upon India — lead us to believe, "If we lay stress on it (the economic factor) and divert public attention to it we shall find automatically that religious differences recede into the background and a common bond unites different groups. The economic bond is stronger than the national one."

So what's happened?

Has Nehru's vision of a secular modern India failed to take hold, or have we, by laying down modernist and rationalist impositions like secularism failed to respect the pluralist and tolerant traditions that existed in Indian society for thousands of years? And thus, by logical extension can it be argued that our modern polity has actually created more problems than it has solved?

Indeed, there are a few political scientists who believe that this might, in fact, be the case. To buttress their argument that the modern secular state has failed to check the forces of communalism, they furnish reliable statistical data that establishes that in earlier centuries, communal conflagrations were rare and localised. And that immediately after independence, instances of inter-religious violence increased sharply.

Apart from brandishing statistics, these political scientists have also advanced a compelling critique of Nehru's secular vision. The critique begins by drawing attention to the fact that religion in South Asia has split into two: faith and ideology.

In other words, the critique distinguishes between religion that exists as a way of life — a tradition that is non-monolithic and plural, and religion as a constructed ideology — a sub-national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for political or socio-economic interests.

The Rashtriya Swyamsewak Sangh's version of Hinduism, for instance, represents this latter end. Former RSS sarsanghchak, the late MS Gowalkar's had written in his book *We or Our*

Nationhood Defined, "In Hindusthan, Religion is an all absorbing entity...it has become eternally woven into the life of the Race, and forms, as it were, its soul. With us, every action in life, individual, social or political, is a command of religion. Naturally, therefore, we are what our great religion has made us...all those not belonging to the national, that is Hindu race, Religion, Culture, and language, naturally fall out of the pale of real 'National' life".

Gowalkar's writings clearly demonstrate how those that identify with 'religion as ideology construct' not only think its normal to practice politics, "as one of the commands of religion" but that they also seek to semitise these ideologies such that they become intolerant of one another and also of their inherent liberal elements.

Some sociologists believe that it is the state's institutionalisation of

total subservience to the modern state...orthodox secularists have no clue to the way a religion can link up different faiths or ways of life according to its own principles."

It's obvious that these social scientists are implying that rising religious intolerance has something to do with the urban-industrial vision of life as espoused by the modern state. Besides, they seem to be suggesting that perhaps the time has come when people should distance themselves from Nehruvian secularism which has done little to integrate communities and is nothing but an ideology imposed upon a people who never wanted to separate religion from politics in the first place. They conclude that religious tolerance can only be built by "exploring the philosophy, the symbolism and the theology of tolerance" in the various faiths that have existed in pre-modern India.

Though the arguments presented by these social scientists are indeed compelling and there is a lot wrong with the Nehruvian vision of secularism, it is rather impractical to suggest that in today's political climate Nehruvian secularism should be junked for a pre-modern conception that seeks the spiritual integration of religion and politics. Besides, this critique on modern secularism cannot also be a critique of modern statehood itself.

What needs to be understood is that although Nehru's secularism was an imposition, it wasn't an imposition in the sense that it failed to respect the religious traditions of the population, but because it was a doctrine that was imposed without engaging the existing cultures in any substantive dialogue.

Indeed, Nehru's secularism, as Bilgrami writes was "not in there with Hinduism and Islam as one among substantive contested political commitments to be negotiated...it must emerge from the bottom up with the moderate political leadership of different communities negotiating both procedure and substance."

This proposition needs to be considered. For this negotiated and emergent form of secularism would be quite different from the non-negotiable Nehruvian form. For one, it would be just like any other ideological construct, open to examination and debate. And, of course, it would also, by virtue of being a negotiated ideology, take note of the fact that in modern political life religion and politics cannot exist independently and would, therefore, evolve to be more accommodative than the holding process that Nehruvian secularism has turned out to be.

IT is when things go our lives that we ask questions about God and about life and about pain and the world.

This was the experience of Lewis, a well known religious writer. In the early 1950s he wrote a book, 'A Grief After Watching His Wife Die'. His mother had died. And the disease had taken the lives of some of his friends. It is surely not unique to have experienced or senseless and undeserved that we could not understand.

The same author also wrote another book, 'The Problem of Suffering', which is still a well meaning friend's confrontation with the suffering.

Now celebration of the crucifixion of Christ, which is about the crucifixion of Christ, revolves around the theme of suffering. It is about doing good and the manner of disease. He taught the way to live.

Whoever heard of Him remarked, "No man spoke like this man".

He spoke against the religious leadership and exposed their hypocrisy following the external religion while violating even faith in their daily life.

The Bible tells us that nailed to the cross by Him and the hung there be other crosses of criminal humiliating end to the claimed to be the Son of God. We also read that all his left him at the hour of crucifixion.

Perhaps recalling the the crucifixion we may see Reality better. Here we went about doing good in all manner of disease: crowds rewarded Him with death on the Cross. I willing to set free in one Barabbas, who notorious bandit.

What do we make of which the innocents are suffer? What do we see in the world in which the wicked and injustice meets us at the end of the way? There is something in man's nature — selfishness, pride, covetousness and which defiles justice and sows seeds of inequity. Stand, and thus to overcome.

IN BRIEF

- Religion in Asia takes two forms — faith and ideology
- Social scientists feel that religious intolerance is linked to the urban-industrial vision of life
- A negotiated secularism would be an open construct

modernist constructs such as territorial nationalism and individual freedom that forces some (the RSS, the Muslim League) in traditional societies to respond in this way. Akeel Bilgrami, in his essay, *Two Concepts of Secularism* writes, that by making this distinction between religions as faith and religion as a constructed ideology, "the critiques target by implication is modernity itself, for its claim is that it is the polity in its modern conception of nationhood and its statecraft which is the source of such ideological constructions that distort the folk traditions of religion which amount to 'ways of life' rather than systems geared to political advancement...once one accepts the inevitability of these ideological constructions then there is nothing left to do in combating sectarian and communal sentiment and action than to formulate a secular vision which itself amounts to an oppressive nationalist and statist ideology."

Ashis Nandy in his work, *A Critique of Modernist Secularism* states, "Secularism has little to say about cultures, it is by definition ethnophobic...unless of course these cultures are willing to show

Structure a de jure temple, Advani tells commission

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, April 11. — Mr LK Advani today described the disputed structure in Ayodhya as "not only a de facto temple, but also a de jure one".

Appearing before the Liberhan Commission of Inquiry for the second day today, the Union home minister said *namaz* had not been offered at the site since the 1950s and Muslims were not treating it like a mosque. The courts too had accepted that no *namaz* was being offered there, he added.

However, when asked by the commission's counsel whether by describing the structure as a "de jure temple", was he not legitimising the physical fait accompli of the structure's demolition as a legal fait accompli, Mr Advani said that as far as courts were concerned, he was a humble citizen.

He said that by describing the structure as a "de jure temple" he was not ruling out the possibility of the courts deciding something else finally

in this regard.

All he meant was that political parties which were emphasising that a mosque should be re-built at the same spot had also not raised this demand during the 1996, 1998 and 1999 general elections as also the last UP Assembly poll.

Even the White Paper brought out by the then Narasimha Rao government at the Centre described it as a "disputed structure" and not as a temple or a mosque. "this is significant," he added.

Mr Advani claimed that the entire Ayodhya movement was aimed at strengthening the concept of nationalism in the country. "We believe in cultural nationalism and not just geographical or political nationalism," he said.

Quoting Nehru that religion was the silken bond of the Indian culture, Mr Advani said that while participating in the Ram janambhoomi movement he believed in Nehru's view and tried to strengthen the bond which he called as Indian-

ness, Bharatiyata or Hindutva.

Lauding the Supreme Court's definition of Hindutva, Mr Advani said he believed in sarva panth sambhav which had its origin in the tradition of Hindutva. Mr Advani will again appear before the commission on 15 and 16 May.

Left angry: The Left parties took strong exception to Mr Advani's remark that the disputed structure in Ayodhya is not only a de facto but also a de jure temple.

The CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet, said the statement was part of a calculated gameplan to hoodwink the people. From the very beginning, he (Mr Advani) advocated that the temple case should not be taken to the courts, he added.

The CPI general secretary, Mr AB Bardhan, said Mr Advani's comments were "contradictory" because if it was a temple why were they keen to demolish it.

■ Another report on page 8

THE STATESMAN

12 APR 2001

Courts made the *de facto* Temple *de jure*: Advani

M 2
HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 11

g-minister HT-1

IN A statement that has the potential of rattling protagonists on either side of the Ram Temple divide, Union Home Minister L K Advani today argued that a "*de jure* temple" already existed at the disputed site as a consequence of the December 6, 1992, demolition and the court's directions to maintain *status quo*.

Appearing before the Liberhan Commission for the second successive day, Advani said the BJP's Hindutva philosophy was a synonym for nationalism. It was in this spirit that the saffron party associated itself with the construction of a Temple in Ayodhya.

Adding a new dimension to the contentious issue, he maintained that a *de facto* temple had existed on the site covered by the disputed structure before the demolition. The court's orders to maintain the



status quo — after the construction of a make-shift temple — has made the *de facto* temple *de jure*.

"Prior to 1992, it was a temple by virtue of a court injunction. The structure was a mosque," he continued. Responding to a question by the commission's counsel Anupam Gupta whether his remarks not amounted to legitimising the demolition as a *fate accompli*, he observed: "I am a humble citizen. I cannot even contemplate presenting to the court a *fate accompli*."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 APR 2001

Advani kills two birds with one temple

FROM OUR LEGAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 11: A day after expressing regret for the demolition of Babri masjid, home minister L.K. Advani today rekindled the debate by arguing that in the eyes of law, a temple already stood on the disputed site.

"For the last 51 years, from 1950 to 2001, what stands there (at Ayodhya) is a temple... first a de facto temple...and today a temple both de facto (in practice) and de jure (according to law). Prior to 1992, by virtue of worship, it was a temple and the super-structure was a mosque," Advani told the Liberhan commission investigating the December 6, 1992, destruction.

Referring to a Faizabad civil court order of 1950 in which the judge noted that Muslims had not offered prayers at the site for many years but Hindus were worshipping there, he added: "This is an order which in a way confers on the place recognition as not only a de facto, but a de jure temple as well."

By interpreting earlier court orders to insist that the worship of Ram Lalla had been going on for a

long time before the demolition, Advani sought to send the message to hardliners that they should realise it was difficult to build a temple at Ayodhya and there was no need for a new structure.

At the same time, he was trying to play on Hindu sentiments by insisting that the mosque had lost its importance as a place of worship.

Advani's statement was not based on any archaeological finding but on court rulings. Yesterday, he had suggested that the legal process took time and one should not depend on the judiciary for finding a solution to the Ayodhya tangle.

Reading extensively from the 1950 order, Advani said: "From 1936 onwards, Muslims have neither used the site as a mosque nor offered prayers and the Hindus have been performing puja. This is not something that someone else has pronounced but the courts have decided...The court's order is that status quo cannot be changed."

Advani said that following the 1950 order, "it had not become a major issue so much so that the Central government and

the state government, both belonging to the Congress party, seemed to cooperate in the locks on the temple being removed and *shilanyas* being performed".

At this, the commission's counsel, Anupam Gupta, asked Advani how he could say that a "de jure" temple existed at the site and whether he was legitimising the demolition as a legal fait accompli.

"So far as the courts of law are concerned, I am a humble citizen. I cannot at all contemplate presenting the courts a fait accompli. But I can say that what I have in mind that various organisations and political parties, who have all been party to the dispute, all along prior to 1992...even they thought it was a temple by virtue of a court injunction," Advani said.

Defending the use of the phrase "de jure temple", he said: "I used the word somewhat loosely... describing it also as a de jure temple. I would like to emphasise again that I am not using this phrase as against the possibility of courts deciding something else finally in that regard."

■ See Page 6

Demolition distressed me: Advani

New Delhi, April 10

THE DEMOLITION of the Babri Masjid was an unfortunate incident, L K Advani told the Liberman Commission today.

"The painful incident distressed me," the Union Home Minister told the panel when he testified in front of it as a witness in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Advani appeared before the commission having skipped the hearing twice. The commission had warned him that if he failed to appear this time no further adjournments would be granted to him.

The BJP leader's testimony is crucial, for he along with Murlidhar Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati have been charged by the CBI in the case. "I regard it as an unfortunate and painful event which distressed me so greatly that day," Advani told the commission.

The kar sevaks pulled down the structure for they felt that the Ayodhya movement leaders wouldn't be able to get the Ram temple constructed through the due process of law. "In their impatience they took to a wrongful course," Advani said.

The "wrongful" course of demolition undertaken by the kar sevaks could not have been endorsed by any person believing in the rule of law or by a democratic Government.

Referring to the December 6, 1992, incident, he said: "December 6 remains one of the most depressing days in my life. Many others there were ecstatic — a mood I just could not share."

"I have seldom felt as dejected and downcast as I felt that day," Advani said about his immediate reaction on December 6, 1992.



Home Minister L K Advani arrives at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi on Tuesday to depose before the Liberman Commission.

The Home Minister said: "I would add that whatever happened was unfortunate from the point of view not only of the country, but even from the point of view of the cause which my party, the BJP, was promoting when it supported the Ayodhya movement."

Advani endorsed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's view expressed in his musings written on January 2 during his holidaying at Kumarakom in Kerala that the wrongs of a medieval past could not be righted by a similar wrong in modern times.

He said: "If medieval wrongs are to be corrected, that too would have to be done through

the due process of law, which is precisely what we had committed to people when we spoke about constructing the Ram temple at Ramjanam Bhoomil."

Advani said the BJP firmly believed that construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya as a symbol of national self respect and it was committed not to allow vested interests to give it a sectarian and communal colour.

"We had proposed to do it through legislation or negotiated settlement as we felt litigation is not an answer to this problem," he said. Taking at a dig at the slow judicial process, he said as far back as 1955 the Allahabad High Court had expressed regret

that this particular issue had been dragging along for so many years.

The court had said the matter ought to be dealt with "forthwith". "The word forthwith was used by the judiciary in 1955. And the fact is that today, even in 2001, the issue which arose from the first petition or motion remained unresolved so far as courts of law are concerned."

"Therefore, the BJP kept telling the Government and people there are only two ways in which this issue can be sorted out. The two ways are negotiated settlement failing which by appropriate legislation," he added.

Babri demolition was painful: Advani

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Union home minister L.K. Advani began his much-awaited deposition before the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry on Tuesday on a predictable note. Referring to a newspaper article he wrote from prison immediately after the Babri masjid's demolition, he said, "I have seldom felt so dejected and downcast as I felt that day (December 6, 1992)."

When commission counsel Anupam Gupta asked if he was the author of the BJP's Ayodhya white paper, Mr Advani said, "It is the work of scholars who had been following Ayodhya. It is an earnest document to point out the lacunae in the government's white paper."

When his attention was drawn to the white paper's foreword, in which he had written about two kinds of reactions to the demolition—one calling it "barbaric", the other, "liberation"—Mr Advani said, "I belong to neither (side). The happening was unfortunate not only for the country but even for my party." He then explained how his party had only joined the Ayodhya movement in 1989 and blamed the Congress government for failing to ensure that the Allahabad high court gave its decision before December 6, 1992, the date announced for the *kar seva*.

Mr Gupta persisted and asked Mr Advani to square his foreword—"the *kar sevaks* showed us in one flash how far we have to travel" in the white paper—with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's musings from Kumarakom, where he had said that the "wrongs of the medieval past cannot be righted by a similar wrong in modern times". A diplomatic Mr Advani replied, "I entirely agree with Vajpayeeji. Wrongs cannot be corrected illegally. Therefore, we said demolition of the structure in Ayodhya was

painful." He then gave the example of how the statues of British rulers were removed by due process of law after Independence.

But when Mr Gupta mentioned Mr Advani's statement in *Panchjanya* of January 24, 1993—"I am not ashamed about what happened on December 6. I don't regret the demolition for which such a hue and cry should be made"—he ducked the question, saying, "Though the words here are different the thrust remains that I was pained."

At this point, Mr Advani tried to draw an analogy to the public perception towards the Bhagalpur blindings. According to him, "When dacoits were blinded by police in Bhagalpur, I, as a person believing in the rule of law, was outraged, but when I visited Bhagalpur I found that the overwhelming majority endorsed it. In fact, lawyers took out processions in support of the police act. This proves how common people react."

Almost anticipating a question on the trail of violence that his rath yatra had left in 1990, Mr Advani chose to quote from *Saffron Swastika*, a book by the right-wing publicist Koenraad Elst. To establish Elst's credibility as a source, Mr Advani first read his bio-data, emphasising his Catholic background. Then he read out paragraphs devoid of any academic rigour, saying, "Advani's yatra was an island of orderliness. There was no violence wherever Advani went." If all this was not enough, Mr Advani gave an instance of how Jayaprakash Narayan was dissuaded by his friends in 1975 from addressing a meeting of the "fascist" Jan Sangh. "When JP came and saw our discipline, he said, 'If the Jan Sangh is fascist, I am also a fascist.'"

His deposition continues on Wednesday.

► Advani does a turnaround, Page 7



Advani says kar sevaks took wrong course in Ayodhya

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 10 APRIL

UNION home minister L.K. Advani, the prime figure behind the BJP's Ayodhya movement, told the Liberhan Commission on Tuesday that kar sevaks had taken the "wrongful course" of demolishing the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992 because of their impatience with the P.V. Narasimha Rao government over its failure to seek an early verdict from the Allahabad High Court on the temple issue.

Mr Advani, who was testifying for the first time before the Liberhan Commission probing the Babri demolition on December 6, 1992, described the kar sevaks' action as "unfortunate", saying

that the BJP "as a party always aimed at achieving the objective of constructing the Ram temple by lawful and legitimate means."

"May be the kar sevaks in Ayodhya felt that the leaders of the movement, who hoped to get the Ram temple built by the due process of law, will not be able to do so and in their impatience took a wrongful course," a calm Advani told the Liberhan Commission on Tuesday.

It may be recalled that the Union home minister had failed to appear before the Commission on two earlier occasions, citing other official engagements. Mr Advani will continue testifying before the panel on Wednesday. At the hearing on Tuesday, Mr Advani who



TRUE TONE: Home minister L.K. Advani arrives to depose before the Liberhan Commission in Delhi on Tuesday. —AP

has earlier been charged sheeted by the CBI in the Babri demolition case said: "December 6, 1992, has been one of the depressing days in my life."

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

The home minister said the BJP had suggested the alternative solution of the Ayodhya issue either through negotiated settlement or legislation, as litigation had failed to sort out the issue despite a direction from the

Allahabad High Court in 1955 that the matter be "decided forthwith."

On the immediate events that caused the kar sevaks to resort to demolition, Mr Advani said their anger had been swelling owing to the then government's failure to get the Allahabad High Court to settle the dispute. Even if the court ruled against the Ayodhya movement, actual and not symbolic kar seva could have taken place on the 2.77 acres of land adjacent to the disputed site.

Admitting that he and others had failed to gauge the anger of the kar sevaks on the fateful day, Mr Advani said the Rao government's failure to ensure physical kar seva at the adjoining site caused the situation to explode.

The Economic Times

The Economic Times

11 APR 2001

Communalisation of the state apparatus

49-12

11/4

By C. P. Bhambri

If the problem of Hinduisation of the state apparatus is not tackled, the induction of minority groups in Government will not help.

A BELIEVER in the impartiality of the custodians of rule of law receives a shock when he finds that they are guided by religious-communal considerations while dealing with situations of inter-religious community conflicts. The issue of discriminatory behaviour by the "men in uniform" has been raised once again by some Muslim leaders from Kanpur. A section of the minority community in Kanpur feels that the Provincial Armed Constabulary of Uttar Pradesh did not behave in an even-handed manner while dealing with Hindu-Muslim riots. It has alleged that the Uttar Pradesh police has a bias in favour of the majority community.

It is not the first time that the police and the civil bureaucracy involved in maintaining law and order have been perceived as anti-minority while dealing with situations of social conflict. The Srikrishna Report on the Mumbai riots clearly identified important police officials who acted very aggressively as partisan Hindus while performing their public duties. Ms. Nirmala Deshpande in her deposition before Justice Liberhan Commission of Inquiry on the events of December 6, 1992, at Ayodhya stated on February 8, 2001, that "...it looked as if the police and the administration were commanded by the 'organisers'...the local police told the workers of (her organisation) the Akhil Bharat Rachanatak Samaj, 'You also pick up a hammer and give it (the dome) a blow'." Ms. Deshpande clearly stated before the Commission that many district officials were working in favour of the forces of Hindutva and that "those who did not subscribe to their ideology were under pressure".

The above-mentioned facts and observations bring into sharp focus the important issue of the ongoing process of communalisation of the apparatuses and functionaries of the Indian state. How can 'secularism', a foundational principle of our Constitution, be safe in the hands of state functionaries who are practitioners of religion-based communalism? Such a question has also attracted

the attention of the believers in the rule of law in Western democracies in relation to racial biases of the state functionaries and many serious efforts have been made to deal with open or clandestine racial prejudices of the guardians of the rule of law. It deserves to be mentioned that the Western democracies have brought the issue of 'race' into public discourse but Indians feel shy about discussing the ongoing communalisation of society, polity and bureaucracy.

A systematic penetration of communal ideology among the state functionaries began with the post-election scenario of 1967 when the Congress was defeated in all the major States and the voter had not given a clear verdict in favour of any alternative. The post-1967 phase of politics witnessed the emergence of unstable and opportunistic alliances of parties and, for the first time in post-independent India, the Jana Sangh shared power with the faceless and shapeless Samyukta Vidhyayak Dal. The Jana Sangh treated Uttar Pradesh as a social laboratory for the extension of its ideological base among the state functionaries by joining the State Government of a crowd of parties.

Hence, it should not come as a surprise to liberal democrats in India when the police are found instigating the so-called kar sevaks to destroy the Babri mosque or when the functionaries of the state are found to be Hindu partisans while dealing with Muslim or Christian minorities during and after riots. Mr. Justice Srikrishna came face to face with the practitioners of aggressive Hindutva during the post-Babri mosque demolition riots in Mumbai because Shiv Saniks and RSS workers were comfortably sitting in public office under the protective umbrella of Mr. Bal Thackeray and the Sangh Parivar in Maharashtra.

The 1990s witnessed the growth of

Hindutva and also public demonstration of communal bias by the state apparatus which has failed to protect Muslims and Christian minority groups especially in Gujarat under the Keshubhai Patel Government. Mr. Keshubhai Patel and the Sangh Parivar emerged on the public scene in Gujarat when the Nava Nimna Samiti launched a movement in 1974 against corruption in the Chinambhai Patel-led Congress(I) State Government. The Sangh Parivar has not looked back since and is now firmly entrenched in Gujarat. It is not without reason that Mr. Keshubhai Patel as Chief Minister of Gujarat enthusiastically welcomed state functionaries with an RSS background. Like Uttar Pradesh from 1967, Gujarat from 1974 has witnessed the penetration of the RSS in Government agencies.

Hindu communal organisations are successfully spreading their ideological message among the state functionaries under the umbrella provided by the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government at the Centre. How can destroyers of churches or Christian missionary schools be punished when the Hindutvawadis allege that Christians are involved in large-scale conversion of Hindus? How can minorities feel secure with the practitioners of the politics of hate and also in the absence of neutrality of the state apparatus?

The experiment of minority representation in agencies of the state is of doubtful utility because any communal representation in the Government cannot ensure secular functioning of the state functionaries. If the problem of Hinduisation of the state apparatus is not tackled, the induction of minority groups in Government will not help cleanse the system because the real issue is to get rid of the believers and practitioners of communal ideology and make the state apparatus an instrument of secularism.

Western democracies have created autonomous inter-race committees which citizens can approach with complaints and grievances about race-based discrimination.

In Western democracies every institution, Government or autonomous, has provisions and clearly laid down procedures for tackling race-related grievances of employees or citizens. Indians have to tackle the problems of communalisation of state functionaries not only at the levels of Central or State Governments, but also in towns and cities because every city is inhabited by multiple religious, linguistic and other minority groups.

The visits of the National Minority Commission members to Gujarat to investigate the complaints of Christians against state employees had a very limited impact. If Mr. Justice Srikrishna's specific report on the misconduct of the Mumbai police remains unattended for eight years, the significant interventions of the National Human Rights Commission or the Minority Commission are going to be very time consuming.

Government employees in India work under 'rules and conditions of service' and their violations are institutionally punished. A quick punishment of a properly identified biased and prejudiced Government functionary is required to clean the corridors of power of communal elements. This goal can be achieved if every city or town of India has quasi-judicial commissions for dealing with the complaints of minority communities against the local administration. The larger issue of secularism versus communalism in India can be resolved only in the mega political society but the day-to-day issue of communal bias of the state functionaries should be tackled immediately to restore the confidence of the minorities in the majesty of the rule of law. An alienated and insecure minority always adopts the path of violence and becomes anti-democracy.

(The writer is a former Professor of Political Science, Centre for Political Studies, JNU.)

Kalyan govt. had taken masjid as hostage, says Rao

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 9. - Mr PV Narasimha Rao today said Babari Masjid had become a "hostage" in the hands of the UP government and the Centre had "no control" over the situation that led to its demolition.

Deposing before the Liberhan commission of inquiry, the former Prime Minister explained why he didn't "implement the contingency plan", prepared by Mr Madhav Godbole, then home secretary, to prevent the demolition by imposing Article 355 for a brief period, followed by imposition of President's rule in UP.

"It was clear that the masjid had become a hostage in the state government's hands and the government of India had not even a toe-hold on the situation. The hostage situation became even more serious when kar sevaks assembled in Ayodhya, courtesy the state government. The logistics of the situation had ruled out any operation which could take longer time such as promulgation of President's rule. Whatever was possible in the hostage situation was adopted, the effort was to keep talking to the state government to persuade it and this we kept on doing till the last," he said.

The Kalyan Singh government had even objected to the despatch of Central forces on 24 November 1992. The then home minister was thus forced to write that it was meant only to assist the state government and its deployment depended on the state. "This was the con-

stitutional and legal position that the home minister could have adopted and he could not have done anything beyond."

"The Central forces, stationed at a distance of 10 to 15 minutes, could have saved the structure had they been deployed. There was no meaningful response from the state but procrastination without outright refusal. The same tactics were adopted by it even before the Supreme Court which, despite its best intentions, had to trust the state government until it was too late," Mr Rao said.

Since the formality of Article 356 would have taken time, the contingency plan suggested holding a midnight Cabinet meeting to decide use of Article 355 to enable the Centre to take over the structure and then pass a proposal to impose Article 356 at the same meeting, he said. But the contingency plan had loopholes, for it was not possible for the Centre to take over control of the masjid when the rest of the state was under BJP rule.

Advani: Mr LK Advani will appear tomorrow at 12 noon as a witness before the Liberhan Commission.

The commission had earlier held that no more adjournments would be provided to him after he failed to appear before it twice. Mr Advani's counsel informed the commission that he would not be able to make it in the morning as he has to see off the Prime Minister, who will leave for a four-day visit to Iran.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2001

Meet to discuss Muslim personal laws

SREELATHA MENON
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

MUSLIM Personal Law Board is holding a unique conference here today in which feminists and women activists rub shoulders with *ulemas* and discuss matters ranging from verbal triple *talaq* to women's property rights.

The board has invited 10 Muslim women's groups from across the country. The two-day meeting will have sessions on marriage and property on the first day; the second day will have a public hearing on *talaq* and *kula* (woman's to seek divorce) and on issues related to deserted, separated and widowed women.

According to a board official, about 200 people will participate in the conference.

Hasina Khan, leader of *Awaaz-e-Niswaan*, a feminist group from Mumbai, said the standing argument against improvement in laws for Muslim women was that injustice occurred only in a few. But solutions have to be found even if the problem is restricted to one per cent of Muslim women. Among the problems she listed, one was that the *nikahnamah* is not a standardised and legal document guaranteeing women certain rights though Islamic law is progressive enough to make marriage a contract.

A man can divorce a woman without her consent and get away without paying any mainte-

nance. But when a woman seeks a divorce or *kula*, she has to part with her *meher* and dowry. Besides, there is no guarantee she would get a share of her parents' property after divorce, she said.

Sayeeda Hameed of the Muslim Women Forum said she supported seeking a ban on verbal triple *talaq*. This is the opportunity to come to an agreement on what should be done about it. Hameed said she would tell the board how the system was giving the religion a bad name.

Though the board has invited feminists and women's groups, the job is tough, said a participant, because most *ulemas* are orthodox. So the participants should not be confrontationist, Sayeeda said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 APR 2001

J&K police prevent Muharram processions

Srinagar, April 5

POLICE USED force here today to foil repeated attempts by Shia community members to take out processions marking the end of the 10-day Muharram mourning in defiance of restrictions and detained 50 people, including four senior Hurriyat leaders. However, Muharram was observed peacefully in other parts of the valley.

Despite restrictions imposed by the Government on the main Muharram procession traditionally taken out from Abiguzar to Zadibal Imambara here to pay homage to martyr Hazrat Imam Hussain, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, three groups led by senior Hurriyat and Shia leaders made separate bids to start processions from Lal Chowk and Badshah Chowk, official sources said.

Aga Syed Mohsin, before being detained, told reporters that his brother Aga Syed Hassan had been placed under house arrest this morning. He had returned to his Badgam residence from Mirgund from a religious function when police cordoned off his house and asked him to stay indoors, Aga said. Police confirmed having placed Aga Hassan under house arrest.

Even as police were busy maintaining law and order in Lal Chowk and Badshah Chowk,

another group of Shia mourners took out a procession from Habakadal area and began marching towards Zadibal in downtown Srinagar. However, police again swung into action and used lathis and lobbed teargas shells to frustrate their attempts at Khankhai mohulla, sources said, adding several processionists were detained.

The Jammu and Kashmir Government had clarified yesterday that though there is no blanket ban on Muharram processions throughout the valley, two processions in Srinagar had been disallowed considering the prevailing law and order situation.

Official sources said police and paramilitary forces swung into action and took into preventive custody 50 mourners. They were deployed in Shia-dominated areas and Lal Chowk following an announcement by Vice-President of Anjuman-e-Shariat e Shia, Aga Syed Hassan Alsafvi Almoosvi, that they would take out a procession from Abiguzar in defiance of the restrictions.

Prominent among those detained were Javid Ahmad Mir, Bashir Ahmad Tota, Mukhtar Ahmad Sofi, Nissar Ahmad (all Hurriyat leaders), Aga Syed Mohsin, younger brother of Aga Syed Hassan, Ghulam Ahmad Nath and Mohammad Maqbool Hussain, the sources said.

PTI

Four ultras, woman killed in violence

Srinagar, April 5

SIX PEOPLE, including a woman and four militants, were killed, while security forces averted a possible tragedy with timely detection of an improvised explosive device (IED) in Kashmir last night, an official spokesman said today.

Two Hizbul Mujahideen militants and an Army jawan were killed, and two soldiers injured in a fierce encounter at Adeena village of Badgam district last night, he said.

The encounter broke out when troops raided a militant hideout following information on the presence of militants there, the spokesman said.

The BSF, in a joint operation with special operations group of local police, gunned down a militant at Sonbari in Anantnag district last night. An AK assault rifle, a grenade launcher, two grenades and some ammunition were recovered from the slain militant.

In another incident, he said troops of Rashtriya Rifles killed a militant Shabir Ahmad of Gan-



A woman consoles her neighbour after their homes were destroyed in an exchange of fire between militants and security forces at Breewah in Kashmir on Thursday.

doh village of Doda at Mattan in Anantnag late last night.

Militants shot dead a woman Gulshana Bano inside her house at Wadipora-Handwara in Kupwara early today. Bano was killed on the suspicion of being an informer for the security forces.

He said security forces detected and defused a powerful IED at Amargarh in Baramulla district early today, thus averting a major

explosion.

Unidentified militants lobbed a grenade towards the house of one Ghulam Rasool Dar at Varihama in Beerwah area of Badgam district in central Kashmir last night. However the explosion did not cause much damage, the spokesman said.

He said police arrested a Hizbul militant, Mohammad Aslam Sheikh, and recovered

five hand grenades from his house at Kamad in Anantnag last night.

Security forces also arrested a suspected militant, Ghulam Nabi Sheikh from Sunderbar in Anantnag yesterday.

Meanwhile, a Hizbul militant surged forward with arms before the army at Haptnar in Anantnag today, the spokesman said.

PTI

A message from Kanpur

Perhaps if West Bengal could have loaned its chief minister to Uttar Pradesh for just that one week in March, Kanpur could have avoided the terrible suffering it went through. According to official figures, 14 people, including the additional district magistrate, lost their lives between March 16 and 19. Twelve of the killed were from the minority community, one a 12-year-old boy, all shot dead by the police. Property worth crores was looted and burnt. The warm fraternizing between communities jointly celebrating the festivals of Id and Holi, witnessed only a few weeks earlier, was overshadowed by the sight of deserted streets under curfew.

Although there is little doubt that in the post-Ayodhya decade, deep rifts — if not polarizations — on a communal basis have taken place in Kanpur, it would be a complete misreading of the situation to call the March incidents “communal rioting”. Communal riots presume the participation of large sections of communities in hostile actions. There were no such clashes between the two communities in Kanpur. In spite of grave provocations from fundamentalist groups of both communities, the people at large refused to be drawn into expressions of mutual hostility. This was evident in the numerous stories of solidarity and help extended to each other by members of the two communities related to the joint delegation of women's organizations, of which the present writer was a member, which visited Kanpur on the first day that the curfew was partially lifted.

Fundamentalist or communal forces, although claiming to represent different religions, have a common denominator, which is, reactionary interpretations of religious texts as the guide to social action and public life. The effort is to create national or community identities based on such interpretations. Intrinsic to these efforts is incitement of hatred for the “enemy”, the non-believer. If the taliban, in the name of what can only be described as one of the crudest and most objectionable interpretations of the Islamic texts, bombed the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, in a typically communally motivated response, a group of saffron-scarved men publicly burnt copies of the *Quran Sharief* in the streets of New Delhi. The photograph of the *Quran* being burnt, attributed to a foreign news agency, was put out on the internet.

This is where the politics of the dominant parties in the affected states plays a crucial role. Should not the burning of any book considered holy by its believers be universally condemned and swift action taken to send home the message that such deliberately communally provocative acts will just not be tolerated? This is exactly what Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the West Bengal chief minister, did when he rushed to the Nakhoda *masjid* in Calcut-

ta on hearing that the *Quran Sharief* had been desecrated, ensured the miscreant was arrested and ordered a probe. In contrast, it took the prime minister over two weeks to even issue a statement condemning the burning of the *Quran*. Meanwhile, Kanpur was burning.

As far as the Central government is concerned, it did not even bother to find out the identity of the criminals who

on the walls of Kanpur, using the language of the taliban by one such group which preferred to remain anonymous, the only byline in the poster being the “Muslims of Kanpur”. Once again the administration, this time run by the Bharatiya Janata Party government of the state, chose to ignore the poster and isolate the troublemakers. On the contrary, on March 16, when a group of

istrate, was caught in the crossfire and was killed. The rumour, found later to be a blatant lie, spread like wildfire that he had been shot from the roof of a *masjid*. What followed was the mass violation of human rights of the minority community in Kanpur. The entire Muslim community was termed the aggressor and found itself targeted by the forces of the state.

Instead of an impartial administration determined to stamp out the flare up of violence of a communal nature initiated by extremists, what happened in Kanpur was the subversion of the administration itself by the communal agenda of the sangh combine. The indisputable evidence was a video film widely watched on the 16th evening, telecast by a local television channel, which showed the provincial armed constabulary and the Bajrang Dal mounting a joint operation against the minority community. Notably, Buddhists, a large number of whom are Ambedkar followers, distanced themselves from such objectionable acts.

In minority-dominated areas curfew was declared. During the curfew hours, sections of the PAC and the local police went on a looting and burning spree. Property owned by small shopkeepers, poultry-market stalls, readymade garment shops, bangles and shoe shops were irreparably damaged or destroyed. In one bizarre incident, the commissioner had to retrieve looted goods from a PAC van in Beconganj. At the other side of the city, where Muslims were in a minority, several *masjids* were attacked. Thirteen live bombs and ammunition were recovered from the house of a BJP corporator, Janaki Gupta, from Vijaynagar, but in spite of the incontrovertible evidence against her and her whole family, only one of her sons was arrested.

With the transfer of the district magistrate and the superintendent of police there has been some improvement in the situation. But with the communal agendas of the government firmly in place, it is difficult to predict future developments. Can the country survive such policies?

The lessons from Kanpur go beyond the confines of that wounded city. There is little doubt that fundamentalist groups of both communities have grown in all parts of India, including states like West Bengal. To some extent, this can also be attributed to the politics of crass opportunism of centrist parties who ally with such forces for short term gains, thereby presenting them with an entry point into areas where they do not exist. Only a strictly impartial secular administration by parties and alliances committed to fighting fundamentalism of all hues can ensure the prerequisite for any advance: mutual trust, harmony and peace between communities. On such a scale of measurement, the rule of the BJP and its allies has proved to be a disaster.

BRINDA KARAT



‘ The lessons from Kanpur go beyond the confines of that wounded city ’

burnt the *Quran*, leave alone prosecute and arrest them. When governments, supposedly pledged to uphold constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, do not respond against such outrageous acts, the field is left open for the advance of divisive agenda. The message sent is that the burning or desecration of a holy book or place of worship of a particular community only concerns that particular community and it is up to them to react or protest.

This provides fertile ground for fundamentalist forces within those communities to utilize the spontaneous and entirely legitimate anger against such acts. Thus one fundamentalism breeds and strengthens the other. In the particular case of Kanpur, the incidents showed that the acts of the *sangh parivar* against minority communities has and is reflected in the formation of mirror image organizations and groups within the Muslim community.

A most provocative poster was pasted

young men sought to burn an effigy of the prime minister in protest against the inaction on the burning of the *Quran*, the police charged at them with *lathis*, injuring several of them. This triggered off the ensuing violence. The extremist forces, which were waiting for just such an opportunity went into action, reportedly with arms.

Within a span of three hours, the Bandukeshwar temple and three small roadside ones in the Choubey *gola* area were damaged, four Hindu-owned shops and a house belonging to a poor vegetable-seller, Rakesh, were set alight. Shri Pathak, an additional district mag-

I only signed police statement, says key witness

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, April 3. — Pastor Rolia Soren, who was the first to inform police about the murder of Graham Staines and his two children on 22 January 1999, today said he had not given any written complaint. He had only lent his signature to a prepared statement written by the local police.

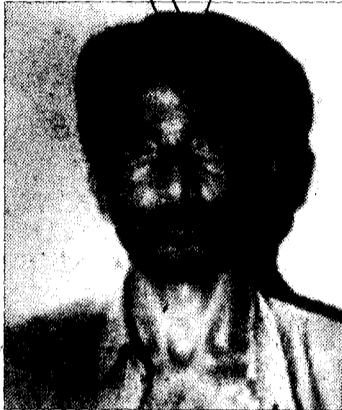
Deposing at the district and sessions judge court where the Staineses' murder case trial resumed today, Pastor Soren, formerly of Manoharpur church, said he had rushed to Thakurmunda police station to inform police who in turn directed him to Anandapur police station.

Pastor Soren said he was accompanied by Mr Joseph Marandi to Thakurmunda police station which is close to Manoharpur.

From there they telephoned the district level authorities at Baripada and informed them about the murder, he said.

The prosecution witness, however, said he had not given any written FIR. But when he returned to Manoharpur village after going to Anandapur police station, the next day, some police officers interrogated him and then asked him to sign on a paper.

"The policeman showed me a paper, said it was the FIR and asked me to sign on it," he told



Dara Singh

the court. He asserted that he had not identified nor named anyone of the assailants.

The Staineses' murder case trial resumed today with the CBI counsel informing the court that the High Court had relaxed the timetable set by it earlier and from now onwards trial to the case can be taken up on the first 20 days of every month instead of the first 10 days as had been specified earlier.

The High Court had fixed the first 10 days of every month for the Staineses' murder trial and the second half of the month for trial to other cases involving Ravindra Pal alias Dara Singh at Karanjia court.

CBI had moved the High Court seeking extension of this timeframe to more than 10 days of a month.

THE STATESMAN

4 APR 2001

On their trail all the way

SR-3
31/3
DINDRILLA MUKHERJEE
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LF GOVERNMENT WOOS MINORITIES

KOLKATA, March 30. — As the countdown to the Assembly elections gets under way, the Left Front government is pulling out all stops to woo the minority community.

Minority issues seem to be receiving special attention, with organisations like the West Bengal Minorities Commission and the Confederation of Minorities and Dalits pressing the chief minister to solve their problems.

An advertisement on the front page of *Ganashakti* — the CPI-M mouthpiece — on 22 March indicated that most of the measures cater to Muslims. The WBMC chairman admitted that other minority communities “don’t have too many problems”.

Two housing complexes are being constructed specifically for minorities at Rajarhat New Township and Kolkata. Eighty four cottahs of land have been set aside at Rajarhat for 125

flats in 12 buildings.

While the housing minister, Mr Gautam Deb, was unavailable for comment, housing department secretary, Mr R Roy Choudhury, asked this correspondent to speak to HIDCO officials, who in turn reverted the matter to the minister. The WBMC chairman, Mr Justice KM Yusuf, said that housing was a long standing demand of the minority community.

Apart from flats, shops are also being constructed at Rajarhat of which some are to be set aside for minorities.

At a seminar recently organised by WBMC on ‘The problems of minorities in West Bengal and remedial measures’, Justice Yusuf lamented that orders issued by the state government in 1981, to the effect that “the Urdu language should be increasingly used for official purposes for the benefit of the Urdu speaking population in

Calcutta, Asansol, Islampur sub-divisions... Garden Reach and Metiabruz police stations” had not been implemented.

The chief minister, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, who was present at the seminar said that in the aforementioned areas letters written to government officials in Urdu would receive replies in Urdu. He said that district authorities had been informed about the matter and that it had not been implemented thus far, due to “calousness of senior officers”.

Another demand of the minorities that is ‘in the process’ is the abolition of reservation for SC/ST and OBCs in the case of appointments to teaching posts in minority-run schools, colleges and institutions.

Mr Dinesh Chandra Dakua, backward classes welfare minister, said: “They have been saying that the reservation laws are not applicable to them

because they are protected by the Constitution. We have referred the matter to the law department. The matter is awaiting clearance.”

In response to a long standing demand for modernisation of Madrasah education in the state, the government has recently set up the Madrasah Education Committee under the chairmanship of former governor, Prof AR Kidwai. The committee will submit its recommendations in six months.

In other developments, four hostels for Muslim girls are under construction “to facilitate higher education among them”.

Boundary walls have been erected in 20 Muslim graveyards, to prevent encroachment, and construction of seven boundary walls would be taken up in the current financial year.

The *Ganashakti* advertisement also highlighted the fact that arrangements had been made for 19,841 Haj pilgrims in West Bengal and adjoining states, in the month of March.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2001

UNEDUCATIVE TIMES

Catholic schools under threat in Manipur

THERE are obstacles in practically every sphere of public life in Manipur. The queues at tubewells and watertaps grow longer, petrol and kerosene are scarce because militants do not allow oil tankers to use the 213-km Dimapur-Imphal national highway, Manipur's lifeline. About 35 of these were said to have been burnt when demands were ignored. Many Roman Catholic school staff have reportedly fled following extortion threats. The situation has come to such a pass that teachers and parents talk about running the institutions themselves. Missionary schools have been under pressure for several years. In 1992 one priest was killed when he refused to cough up Rs 60,000. The outfit which made the claim alleged he was involved in some "rackets". Five years later, the principal of Maram Don Bosco College was murdered. The culprits could not be traced. Standards of education in government schools being what they are, middle class families send their children to missionary schools. The affluent, prefer to send their wards to schools and colleges outside the state — to ensure an uninterrupted education and their safety from the drug menace.

No one can deny that extortion has become a way of life in the North-east. Unless drastic measures are taken, there is little prospect of improvement. But even if missionary schools are to buy peace, like Assam's tea gardens, the question remains: for how long? Beyond temporarily strengthening security at schools, the new Samata-led coalition is incapable of finding a permanent solution. That the insurgents are made to understand the implications of their action on the future of thousands of young hearts is of ultimate importance. Teachers and parents should play a crucial role.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2001

WOONG MINORITIES

9.4.3 Housing projects for Muslims 5.6 2001

THE West Bengal government's plan to construct two housing projects exclusively for Muslims sounds bizarre. Other measures, announced through an advertisement issued by the government are the kind of routine welfare measures to which no one can object. But to house Muslims separately looks like ghettoisation, especially since it sets them off against their neighbours which, in turn, tends to reinforce mutual mistrust and suspicion. Wouldn't it be better to integrate Muslims into a normal housing project where they could live side by side with people from other communities?

Anyhow, what is clear is that the Left Front is sufficiently frightened by Mamata Banerjee and her vigorous campaign to woo the Muslim electorate in the state, not to pay heed to larger questions of communal integration. The Left Front hasn't had to bother much about the Muslim electorate so far, since its pro-poor stance took care of them as well, they didn't need to develop a separate rhetoric aimed at them. Also, the Congress and the CPI-M have had their own Muslim constituencies, they didn't fight their battles there. But the CPI-M understands that Mamata Banerjee needs to pick a sufficient number of Muslim votes, independently of the Congress, in order to have a Trinamul-led government. Therefore, the Front needs to enhance its minority profile, even though in many ways such an approach contradicts its own basic ideology. But then the CPI(M) has been in politics long enough to understand that when it comes to winning elections, the methods are mostly tried and tested ones. They are not trying to create a new citizenship are they?

THE STATESMAN

30 MAR 2001

Churches ready for dialogue with RSS

Udayan Nambodiri
New Delhi, March 28

9 - minutes
HR-9 28/3

THE LEADERSHIPS of the Catholic and Protestant Churches have jointly agreed to a structured dialogue process with Hindu spiritual and social organisations, including those of the Sangh parivar, as they believe there has been a marked fall in the number of violent incidents against Christians in recent months.

"The atmosphere has improved," Archbishop Vincent Concessao, the first Vice-President of Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), said today. He pointed out that Christians had always been ready for dialogue with all parties to explain their point of view on all vexed issues, including conversion.

However, the modalities for the dialogue would have to be first worked out. Rev. Iype Joseph, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), a grouping of 20 Protestant and Orthodox Churches, said: "We have proposed a series of meetings and not just a one-off among heads of religions."

The Church had agreed for a dialogue with the RSS in December 1998 on the conversion issue, which had been raked up by the RSS. However, the Dangs incident followed soon after that and the process went into limbo.

Since then, there have been over 400 cases of violence against Christian priests and vandalism of Church properties. Last year, the National Commission of Minorities tried to organise another round, but without consulting the Catholic leadership.

The dialogue structure now proposed by the CBCI and NCCI calls for three levels of talks through 'dialogue units'. These would first meet to thrash out a unified Christian position. At the second level, mid-ranking Church leaders would confer with their opposite numbers among Hindu organisations. Finally, the top leaders would meet.

"The dialogue process can be helped by a meeting of Church leaders and Hindu seers such as the Shankaracharya. This will help develop a vision statement," said Father Donald D' Souza, deputy secretary-general of CBCI.

He said the CBCI and the NCCI had agreed on this before Monday's meeting between members of the NCCI executive body and the NCM. "There is no division among us on this."

The Church leadership continues to reject the RSS as the sole representative of Hindus.

But in an adjustment of its former posture, they are now willing to accept it as "one of the Hindu organisations".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2001

Riot after Riot

The embers have cooled but the pain remains. Kanpur, once the 'Manchester of the East', today flares up at the slightest excuse. It comes as no surprise then that Kanpur went up in flames over an unconfirmed report of the Koran being burnt in distant Delhi. So, who was behind the arson and murder? By all accounts, the protest started in a small way. Two mysterious posters come up against the alleged Koran burning incident. This is followed by a group of Muslim youths burning the effigy of the prime minister. Soon a shop is burnt, and the police fire into the crowds. And then it is murder and mayhem as the PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary) arrives, property is looted and bullets are fired selectively. The devastation over, 30 lie dead, most of them Muslim, and property worth crores of rupees is destroyed. Whatever the reasons for the genesis of the riot — rumour-mongering typical of communal situations being one — it is clear that it could not have escalated into arson on this scale without the involvement of the PAC, Uttar Pradesh's notoriously sectarian police force. Such is the PAC's reputation that its mere mention is enough to spread panic among the minorities. As our special correspondent notes, for two entire days, the PAC ran riot, burning shops and attacking chosen targets, even as the district administration looked the other way. One Muslim leader was arrested from the room of our correspondent, who was told to understand that "Muslims are like this".

The trigger-happy PAC has a reputation that precedes it — from Moradabad to Meerut and Hashimpura, its record in riot after riot speaks for itself. So, what explains the PAC's peculiar character trait? One school of thought has it that the PAC was raised as a Hindu police force in the early years of freedom. If this was indeed the PAC's brief, it has stuck to it faithfully. It says something for the notoriety of the PAC that the Kanpur riot this time was hardly between Hindus and Muslims. If anything, Kanpur resounds to stories about members of the two communities helping each other. Evidently, not much has been done to change the profile of PAC, though as chief minister, Mayawati did order that Muslims be recruited into the force. However, she failed to achieve this in her short stint. The time has perhaps come to disband the PAC. But that may not solve anything in a climate where the smallest rumour becomes a grave provocation. Partisan policing must be recognised as a symptom rather than as the disease. The disease being the excessive secrecy that first prevents truth from reaching the people and then allows dubious elements to take advantage of the confusion. Outfits like the Bajrang Dal and Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) thrive in a communally charged atmosphere where rumour breeds rumour. SIMI complements the Hindu fundamentalist forces in many ways. Their language and methodology are the same. Hatred unites them. In fact, SIMI's growth as a Muslim fundamentalist force in UP and a few other states in the past few years needs seriously to be probed. If through all this Kanpur was saved, it is thanks to the ordinary citizen who remained the only voice of sanity.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 MAR 2001

Sudarshan wants federation of Indian Churches

Nagpur, March 26

BUILDING UP on his earlier call for Indianisation of churches in the country, RSS chief K Sudarshan today urged Christian intellectuals to set up a 'federation of Swadeshi Churches'.

Churches should have no foreign links or financial transactions with them and their management and properties should be solely under the control of Indian devotees, Sudarshan said. He added that his predecessors, like Guru Golwalkar and Balasahab Deoras, too had expressed similar sentiments.

Calling upon Christians to join the mainstream, Sudarshan accused church leaders of discriminating against Dalit Christians while providing jobs in institutions run by missionaries. "When Christianity believes in equality, why not give priority to Dalit Christians in their own institutions instead of asking the Government?" he asked.

Christian intellectuals in the country should initiate the process by discussing the shape of such a federation, he said.

Sudarshan also criticised the recent Vatican admission of sexual exploitation of nuns.

He was speaking after releasing a book "The Indian Church," written by Virag Pachpore, a scribe who worked as RSS pracharak in the North-East. Maharashtra Legislative Council Opposition leader Nitin Gadkari was also present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Protestant and Orthodox church leaders today took strong exception of the RSS chief's remarks describing them as "foreigners" and said they were ready for a dialogue with representatives of any faith or religious group to remove the "misunderstandings".

Leaders representing all 29 Christian denominations in the country met National Commission for Minorities here to discuss their concerns and said "By no means are we foreigners. Some of the churches are as old as 2,000 years.

How can we be foreigners?" The leaders, reportedly reluctant to be part of any kind of dialogue as proposed by NCM few months ago, said "we have also discussed the modalities of the dialogue as proposed by the commission." They, however, declined to reveal the suggestions put forward by NCM for the dialogue.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2001

Christians attacked in Andhra Pradesh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

ACTIVISTS allegedly belonging to the RSS and BJP raided a Christian congregation at Chevella in Andhra's Rangareddy district, beat up people and burnt religious scriptures late Thursday night.

In another incident in the Old City here, youth, who assembled at the Mecca Masjid for prayers, pelted stones on passersby following reports that holy scriptures were burnt in Patiala. This led to tension in the area but police took quick steps to prevent further trouble.

According to a report from Chevella, the alleged reason for the unprovoked assault was that Christians were encouraging conversions. Three persons were arrested in connection with the incident.

Christian religious leader Ranjit Opeer was addressing a meeting when 15 miscreants raided it. Raising slogans, they ransacked the meeting premises. Damaging the

public address system they pulled down the tent.

In the 15-minute-long raid, the miscreants also burnt holy books. Alleging that the leaders were encouraging conversions, the mob pushed down the speakers from the dias. When Pastor Shouril tried to intervene, they bashed him up. Three persons were injured. On being tipped off, police rushed to the spot but by then the miscreants had fled.

Home Minister T. Devender Goud visited the town this afternoon and assured stringent action against the accused. Condemning the incident, Goud said that all necessary steps would be initiated to restore normalcy in the town.

Chevella Congress MLA P. Sabita also visited the town and demanded that the state government take action against the accused. Police said three accused — G. Srikanth Reddy, B. Ram Reddy and B. Srinivas Reddy — were arrested and efforts are on to trace the remaining accused.

THE ASIAN ACE

25 MAR 2001

Hindu rashtra & Indian nationalism

By Asghar Ali Engineer

THE RSS, despite the BJP's denials, is out to create Hindu rashtra in India. Its chief, Mr. K. S. Sudershan, a known hardliner, repeatedly asserts his ideas of Hindu rashtra, Hindu culture and Hindu values. He has been demanding 'Indianisation' of Islam as well as of the Christian Church. He maintains that Muslims are converts from Hinduism and they should respect Hindu gods as their own and also that they should rename themselves as Muhammad Prasad or Muhammad Das. He says Indian Muslims should emulate Indonesian Muslims who, according to him, have adopted Hindu culture.

The problem is Mr. Sudershan is neither conversant with Indian reality nor with that of Indonesia. There are thousands of Muslims in this country with indigenous names already and this has been in existence for centuries. There are Muslims with names such as Dahyabhai, Ratanbai, Manikbai, and Kutty and surnames such as Deshmukh, Deshpande, Patel or Patil. Mr. Sudershan is reported to have said that if Indian Muslims adopt Sanskritised names communalism will subside. Has the existence of such names among Muslims for centuries helped reduce tension now? Among Christians also such names exist. Did this help in reducing communal violence against Christians? Will Mr. Sudershan recommend to Hindus settled abroad to change their names and adopt western culture? Should their loyalty to those countries be judged by Christianisation?

Any social scientist will corroborate the observation that the causes of communal tension do not lie in personal names but are much deeper and part of the struggle for political power and political hegemony. The graph of communal violence shoots up or falls depending on the political situation in the country. Several communal catastrophes took place from early 1980s to the 1990s as the BJP had decided to capture power by consolidating Hindu votes by provoking communal feelings raising emotional controversies such as Ramjanmabhooni. The Sangh Parivar did capture power but thousands of innocents lost their lives. Their names had nothing to do with all this. Nor were they involved in any political controversy. Nor were they less Indian.

Those killed were the poorest of the poor. They were not even aware of renaming controversies or controversies about Bharatiya culture. They were just immersed in their struggle for survival. A year after the demolition of the Babri Masjid we held a meeting at Behrampada in Bandra east, Mumbai. Behrampada had been the worst affected by communal violence. I asked the Muslims at the meeting whether they would like the Babri Masjid to be rebuilt in Ayodhya. A

young Muslim stood up and said "We do not know about Babri Masjid but we are worried who will rebuild our hutments which were burnt down during the riots. We are still leaving without these huts."

Mr. Sudershan knows very well that even if all Indian Muslims change their names to Hindu names, communal violence will continue to take place. The next demand may be to convert to Hinduism and even if all Muslims convert to Hinduism and Christians stop proselytisation totally, the saffron family's aggressive postures will not change. They will be targeted as former Muslims and Christians.

There are many such examples in the world. In former Yugoslavia, Bosnian Muslims were targeted by Serbian Orthodox Christians even though they Muslims neither had any distinct culture, religious identity or even awareness that they were Muslims. The awareness came only after they were targeted so ruthlessly. They wondered why they were being killed. They were not even loyal to any other country. They had not even created any separate Muslim country like Pakistan.

The Indian Muslim community is not homogenous, if Mr. Sudarshan cares to know. The rural Muslims in India are highly integrated with the local milieu. Many of them wear dhoti and kurta like the Hindus in those areas and they speak the same rural dialect. Their names are also indigenous. They cannot even recite the *kalima* (Islamic confession) let alone read the Quran. Today these Muslims are

also being targeted. Rural areas are also being penetrated by communal forces. The VHP is converting many rural Muslims saying their ancestors were Hindus.

It is only in urban areas that middle class Muslims may assert their Islamic identity and may show awareness of having distinct religio-cultural practices. And what is wrong with that? Mr. Sudershan is not fully conversant with the Indonesian reality either, whose example he never tires of giving. It is only Javan

much Indian. Who can deny the contribution of Tansen as far as Indian music is concerned? He was a Muslim and medieval India has not produced a greater singer and inventor of several ragas. Even Khusro, the celebrated poet laureate of the Sultanate period, not only wrote Hindi duhas, which are tremendously popular even today, he was a great musician in his own right. He invented some musical instruments too.

There have been several poets who wrote in Hindi and Avadhi such as Raskhan and others. And who wrote 'Padmawat'? A Muslim poet, of course. These poets are considered founders of Hindi poetry. A great Sufi saint from Punjab, Baba Farid, was the first to write poems in Punjabi and Sikhs are proud of him; his verses have been quoted in the 'Adi Granth'. For his seminal contribution to Punjabi literature, the Punjab University in Chandigarh has established the Baba Farid Chair and a lot of work is being done on him. Many Sufi saints wrote in regional languages. Everyone in Maharashtra knows about an eminent Sufi saint, Sheikh Muhammad, who wrote in Marathi.

In contemporary India also, there are eminent Muslim poets and writers in all regional languages such as Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Kashmiri, Assamese, Oriya, Bengali, Mithili, Rajasthani, and Malwi and several other dialects. What is Indianisation if not all this? What kind of Indianisation does Mr. Sudershan want after all?

The real agenda of the Sangh Parivar is to completely 'hinduise' all Indians and Sanskritise all Hindus to create total uniformity. The RSS hates diversity and pluralism like all fundamentalists, including Islamic fundamentalists. They want uniformity as defined and understood by them. The RSS does not like even indigenous Hindu cultures; it wants to disseminate only Vedic Sanskrit culture. It is not only Muslims and Christians in the firing line of the RSS; Hindus following non-Vedic cultures will be on the chopping block next. Demands to Sanskritise names or 'hinduise' culture go against our diversity. And without diversity there can be no democracy. Only the enemies of democracy would like one people, one language, one culture.

The real agenda of the Sangh Parivar is to completely 'hinduise' all Indians and Sanskritise all Hindus.

THE HINDU

24 MAR 2001

PM condemns Koran burning

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, March 22. - The Prime Minister, unlike other Sangh Parivar leaders, has condemned the burning of Koran and desecration of a mosque in Amritsar yesterday. "I strongly condemn such heinous acts, even though they are isolated and aberrant in nature." He urged the state government to take "swift and stern action" against the culprits.

The Punjab Assembly too has condemned yesterday's incident. The state local government minister, Mr Balram Dass Tandon (BJP), said three of the five culprits had been arrested. They are Harvinder Sharma, Alok Kumar and Rakesh Sharma.

A similar incident was reported today from Patiala. Five people, claiming to be members of Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Suraksha Samiti (the group responsible for yesterday's incident), burnt books which they claimed to be copies of the Koran. One of them was arrested.

However, unlike yesterday's incident, this did not take place near any mosque. Senior police officers said the incidents might be related to the ones in Kanpur.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said such acts were "aimed at weakening national unity and communal amity. The Holy Koran is sacred not only to Muslims but also to all other communities in India."

The VHP, however, dismissed the reports as "rumour mongering" by Islamic fundamentalists. Its working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, said the ISI and other Muslim terrorist organisations had decided to create instability in the country.

The BJP too echoed the VHP line, saying it looked as if there was a planned attempt to disturb communal peace. Senior leader, Mr JP Mathur, said the controversy kicked off with the publication of an incident, which probably didn't occur, on a website.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

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Bajrang Dal alleges attack on temple 21/3

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 20. The Ahmedabad unit of the Bajrang Dal has cautioned the State Government of "trouble" if the administration failed to bring to book alleged pro-Taliban elements who reportedly attempted to set fire to a Hindu temple in Manekchowk locality in the heart of the city.

The outfit's city unit chief, Mr. Harshad Giletwala, claimed that some Islamic fanatics, following the example of the Taliban attacks on Buddha statues in Afghanistan, attempted to set fire to a Hanuman temple in Manekchowk locality on Sunday night following a communal clash between two groups of people.

The police and the Rapid Action Force fired at least six rounds and burst over 175 teargas shells to disperse the warring groups indulging in heavy stone throwing

and brickbatting, injuring two persons. Police sources, however, denied knowledge of any attempt to set fire to the temple.

'Buddhas to be replicated'

PTI reports from New Delhi:

Meanwhile, the RSS-backed cultural outfit 'Sanskar Bharati' today said it would "replicate" the demolished Bamiyan Buddhas in the Kulu valley of Himachal Pradesh, if possible, with the debris of the statues from Afghanistan.

The outfit has identified a monolith stone of the same size in identical surroundings and a team of 16 sculptors led by Sanskar Bharati's Delhi art unit chief, Mr. Advait Gannayak, would begin work on the project from Buddha Purnima later this year, the outfit's spokesperson, Mr. Dev Mani Tripathi, said.

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2001

20 MAR 2001

VIOLENCE IN KANPUR

THE SHARP ESCALATION of violence in Kanpur, that has already left about a dozen people including an Additional District Magistrate dead, is a pointer to the extent to which the polity in the town is divided on communal lines. And it will not be improper to conclude that the events in Kanpur in the past few days are only a fallout of the insidious campaign carried out across the country by sectarian outfits on either side of the Hindu-Muslim divide. That mere rumours about the holy text of the Muslims being burnt in the capital are enough to provoke a violent outburst in Kanpur highlights the extent to which men who belong to the lunatic fringes of both the communities can go. But then, violence on the scale witnessed in Kanpur since Friday last could not have taken place if only the civil administration in the district and the political leadership of Uttar Pradesh had agreed to act in time. The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, cannot be absolved of his responsibility in letting things slide to the extent that it has.

The fact that a section belonging to the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which had orchestrated the protest on March 16 (ostensibly to protest against the "burning" of the Quran), was carrying sophisticated firearms that Friday afternoon underlines the failure of the civil administration in the city. After all, it is not all that simple for members of such outfits to procure such sophisticated firearms (for it is now evident that the Additional District Magistrate succumbed to bullets from an assault rifle) without the law enforcing agencies coming to know of it. Add to this the reports that large number of crude bombs, country-made guns and other weapons have been found from the city's localities during the raids in the past couple of days, and it is clear that the communal violence in Kanpur was in the making for some time. Yet the Government did nothing.

Indeed, the incidents in Kanpur cannot be

seen as mere problems of law and order. In the same way, there is no way one can concur with the claims by the Chief Minister that the violence is the fallout of a conspiracy. Instead, the turn of events in Kanpur during the past few days cannot but bring to mind the situation across Uttar Pradesh when the BJP and the other arms of the Sangh Parivar were engaged in whipping up passions around the Ayodhya controversy. It is a fact that throughout that phase — from the time of Mr. L. K. Advani's rath yatra to the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 — most towns in Uttar Pradesh were caught up in communal violence, arson and looting of property. The civil administration had, even at that time, failed in its duty. The incidents in Kanpur are a cause for concern in this context rather than being mere issues pertaining to law and order.

It is for this very reason that the situation in Kanpur needs to be contained from a larger standpoint. And the imperative for the personnel in the civil administration and the political leaders — cutting across the parties — is to put in place a machinery that can intervene as and when forces wedded to religious sectarianism raise their heads to foment trouble in the State rather than let them procure such large quantities of firearms and bombs as they did in Kanpur. At another level, the men in the law enforcing agencies in the State — the PAC in particular — will need to be sensitised about the need for them to gain the confidence of the members of the minority community (it is a fact that the memory of the Meerut riots is still fresh). Meanwhile, it is also important for Mr. Rajnath Singh, as long as he is the Chief Minister of the State, to realise that attributing the violence to any conspiracy will not do. And even if it is a conspiracy, it is his duty as head of the State Government to bring out the truth and prevent such violence.

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2001

Conspiracy behind riots: Rajnath

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, MARCH 18. The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, today found a political conspiracy responsible for the Kanpur riots that claimed eight lives since Friday last.

Unofficial sources, meanwhile, put the toll at 12.

Talking to newsmen after reviewing the riot situation with officials here, Mr. Singh said besides the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and the Students Islami Movement of India (SIMI), internal political forces were also behind the Kanpur disturbances. The immediate priority of the Government was to restore normality after which an inquiry would be held to find the conspirators and they would be exposed.

The civil and police officials had been given strict instructions to control the situation. The local administration at Kanpur had been provided enough police forces to deal with the rioters and there was some visible improvement in the situation, he said.

Mr. Singh appealed to the people to extend their fullest cooperation to the authorities to bring normality in the disturbed city. He rejected suggestions that there was a failure on the part of the authorities to gauge the communal situation which had resulted in a flare-up of violence.

The Government, by a late night order, yesterday transferred the district magistrate and Superintendent of Police, Kanpur, but Mr. Singh said this was only to revamp the administrative machinery. Mr. B.S. Bhullar and Mr. Arun Kumar have been appointed the new District Magistrate and Senior Su-

perintendent of Police in place of Mrs. Anita Jha Bhatnagar and Mr. G.P. Sharma respectively. One Additional Director General of Police, one SP and 12 DSPs have been rushed from other districts to assist the local police.

The Chief Minister confirmed that isolated incidents of violence had continued in the curfew-bound areas on the third day today with groups of rioters indulging in arson and firing. The number of those killed stood at eight, including the Additional District Magistrate, Mr. C.P. Pathak. Besides ten persons have been injured during the riots.

Indefinite curfew remained in force in eight police station areas of the disturbed city.

He said there was no need to call in the Army as the state police forces were enough to control the situation.

Asked if the State Government was considering to ban the SIMI, allegedly responsible for sparking current disturbances, Mr. Singh said first the situation would have to be brought under control. Ban on the organisation could be considered only after a full inquiry was conducted.

The police have, meanwhile, started intensive search operations to bring out hidden arms and, according to reports a large number of unauthorised weapons have already been unearthed.

All educational institutions in the city have been indefinitely closed. Kanpur University has cancelled its current examinations till the return of normality.

THE HINDU

19 MAR 2001

Sudarshan renews call to minorities

Dehra Dun, March 8 (PTI): Asserting that "Indianisation of Islam and Christianity" is a must, RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan has said Muslims and Christians should sever links with Mecca and the Vatican and become "swadeshi".

"The time has come when both Muslims and Christians who are living in India should Indianise their religions. They should sever their links with Mecca and the Pope and, instead, become swadeshi," Sudarshan said at a function in Hardwar last night.



Sudarshan

Even if Muslims and Christians did not "consider" Ram and Krishna as "their gods", they should give "due respect" to Indian ethos and religion, he added.

Condemning the vandalism of Buddha statues in Bamiyan by the Taliban, he said: "They (Taliban) are doing what the first Mughal emperor Babar had done in India. I don't see much difference between Babar and the Taliban."

THE TELEGRAPH

9 MAR 2001

Advani skips hearing again, angers Ayodhya commission

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

THE Justice M S Liberhan Commission today deplored the repeated failure of Home Minister L K Advani to depose before it on his alleged role in the Babri Masjid demolition.

When the Commission assembled this morning for Advani's examination, his counsel, Satya Pal Jain, moved an application seeking adjournment on the ground that the minister had to leave for Andaman and Nicobar Islands to attend an urgent meeting at the Raj Ni-



Courting adjournments

was in Port Blair. On the last date of hearing, the adjournment was granted as the witness had to attend an important meeting in the North-East because of the special situation prevailing there."

Observing that the repeated adjournments sought by Advani were "regrettable," Liberhan called him again on April 10 and 11 clarifying that "no further adjournments will be granted".

This despite Advani's plea that despite his "best efforts, the visit could not be avoided because of the importance of the issue involved during his visit."

INDIAN EXPRESS

6 MAR 2007

State minorities commission condemns Taliban move

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 5

HT-3
673

THE WEST Bengal Minorities Commission Chairman Justice KM Yusuf has described the Taliban as 'lunatics' and asked the world leaders to "stop their lunatic acts".

In a statement released here on Monday, the chairman condemned the demolition of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan as unislamic. "The demolition of historic statues of Buddha in Afghanistan by the Taliban is not only sacrilegious but also against all canons of Islam," Justice Yusuf said. The cardinal

point of Islam is to respect all religions and not to hurt the sentiments of the followers of any other religion, Yusuf said.

"It is the duty of the commission to condemn in unequivocal terms the destruction of valuable Buddhist heritage."

The Taliban's act is unparalleled in world history, the chairman said. "Buddhism has been associated with Afghanistan from Ashoka's period. A good number of Buddhist relics are still preserved in the Kabul museum."

Justice Yusuf cited the names of those who had invaded other countries but did not destroy the

ancient statues and religious sites. "Caliph Omar conquered Persia in the 7th century but the historic pyramid still stands there untouched.

Mahmood of Ghazni invaded India many times but only to take away the wealth from this country. His objective was not to demolish idols. Similarly, Chengis Khan also did not touch the 2000 years old statues of Buddha," he said. Expressing his astonishment at the irresponsible fatwa issued by the Taliban, Justice Yusuf said, "The fatwa would tarnish the image of Islam and send wrong signals to non-muslims about Islam."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 MAR 2001

Minorities panel for more power

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

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New Delhi, March 3: The National Commission for SCs and STs has demanded powers to prosecute and punish the culprits committing atrocities on SCs and STs.

The commission has also held the states responsible for non-utilisation and misuse of funds allocated for their welfare.

Chairman of the commission Dilip Singh Bhuria told a news conference on Saturday that the fifth report of the commission for 1998-1999, has been submitted to the President K.R. Narayanan.

He said that so far the commission has only been playing an investigating and recommendatory role and in a large number of instances its directions have been ignored by the authorities.

"The rights we have are restricted to investigation and placing our findings. We need more powers, especially power to prosecute, to ensure that the culprits are punished," he said.

He said that both in the case of criminal offence and violation of service codes against the members of the SC and ST communities, the offenders often go scot free, giving rise to instance of atrocities.

Talking about the utilisation of funds allocated for the welfare of the SCs and STs, Mr Bhuria said a large number of state governments have not been utilising the money for which it is.

"Instead these funds are being diverted elsewhere," he said.

He added that, "The problem is not of funds. But they do not reach the person for whom, they are meant."

A statement released by the commission said, "It is evident that though the constitutional and policy framework and institutional mechanism have been put in place for protecting the interests of SCs and STs and for their socio-economic development, the manner of implementation of these programmes leaves much to be desired."

THE ASIAN AGE

MAR 2001

Dara Singh trial begins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BHUBANESWAR, March 1. —

The trial in the Graham Staines murder case began here today at the court of the District and Sessions Judge, Mr Mahendra-



Dara Singh

nath Patnaik, with the examination of a prosecution witness.

Thakurdas Murmu, sarpanch of Manoharpur panchayat, was examined by CBI counsel and further cross-examined by the defence counsel Mr Shyamananda Mohapatra.

Dara Singh alias Ravindra Kumar Pal, the main accused in the case and 13 other accused were present at the court.

Graham Staines, an Australian missionary, and his two minor sons were brutally burnt to death at Manoharpur in the night of 22 January 1999.

Murmu, who belongs to Bakusupada village close to Manoharpur, said that he was informed about the incident in the morning of 23 January 1999 and rushed there.

He found two vans had been totally burnt while the charred remains of an adult and two children were lying in one of the vehicles.

Asked by the defence counsel as to whether there was tension in the area between Hindus and Christians, Murmu said tension had arisen in the locality over the observance of some local festivals and rituals in the early 80s. But there had been no violence, he said.

The judge ordered that Dara Singh, who was brought here from Baripada circle jail, would be lodged at the Bhubaneswar jail till March five for the duration of the trial.

Militants in conversion confession

23/2
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FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, Feb. 22: The outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura has admitted that its policy of forced conversion of Hindu tribals to Christianity had backfired. The outfit also blamed a former advisor for its religious policy.

The admission came in the form of a statement faxed to a local daily, which said religious insurgency had created rumblings of dissent among NLFT cadre. This also resulted in "senior commander" Nayanbasi Jamatya deserting the outfit along with a few followers.

In the statement issued yesterday, NLFT's "information secretary" M.R. Tuijang blamed its political secretary and advisor, Joshua alias Jogendra Debbarma, for the religious mission.

He said Joshua had left the outfit after Nayanbasi and captive Bru National Liberation Front leader Suryamoni escaped from the outfit's hide-out early this month. "Differences with Joshua over the issue of religious policy reached a flashpoint and led to a clash in which 'lance corporal' V. Mukul was killed...", the statement read.

The outfit held Nayanbasi Jamatya responsible for Mukul's killing. The statement added that NLFT rebels — at the instance of Joshua — made the abortive bid on the life of Jamatya *hoda okra* (head priest) Bikram Bahadur Jamatya last year. Apart from con-

verting Hindu tribals at gunpoint, Joshua had also planned to attack Roman Catholic Christian minorities. Regarding Nayanbasi's announcement that all the four RSS pracharaks had been executed, the NLFT said it was "false and we have nothing to do with it".

However, it is well known that the four pracharaks were kidnapped by the NLFT and taken across the border to the outfit's base camp at Thangnan in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The outfit also charged Nayanbasi Jamatya with "womanising" and said his wife and children have not been taken hostage by the outfit. The family would be handed over to him or his representatives at any time.

The outfit described Joshua as "politically over-ambitious". He had joined the outfit after being denied nomination by the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), a tribal political party, it added.

TUJS sources confirmed that Joshua had served the party for a brief spell. "We had to part ways because of his schizophrenic ways," a party source added.

Police sources said the NLFT's tell-tale missive was a form of "nervous reaction" and added that if the RSS activists were indeed dead, the NLFT "cannot plead ignorance".

Sources said a string of police operations and the "firm stand" taken by Jamatya leader Bikram Bahadur Jamatya had cornered the outfit.

THE TELEGRAPH

23 FEB 2001

Attacks on Christians stray incidents: Minorities panel

Special police squad may be revived

HT Correspondent
Cuttack, February 22

HT Correspondent
Bhubaneswar, February 22

RECENT ATTACKS on Christians in the country were "stray incidents" and not "organised acts of violence against the minority community", the National Minorities Commission said here on Wednesday.

"We have inquired into almost all incidents of violence in different States and found they were stray cases of attacks on Christians for which no organisation or group can be held responsible", a commission member told reporters on Wednesday evening.

"Some problems are simple accidents or incidents of theft or robbery. I request the majority Hindu community to protect the minorities", said John Joseph, who is part of the visiting three-member delegation.

He requested his fellow Christians not to blame any Hindu organisation or community for "whatever was happening."

Joseph said the commission would hold a national level inter-community dialogue in March or April this year where leaders from the Christian community, Viswa Hindu Parishad and RSS would be invited. Vice-chairman Tariyochan Singh said the prob-

lems "besetting the communities" were "not so acute as the media projected." "The few irritants could be resolved if leaders from both communities discussed them across the table."

The delegation said it favoured dialogues between leaders of Christian and Hindu communities to ensure communal peace.

Justice Shamim Mohammad Shamim said the commission had had drawn Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's attention to the amendments made to the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967. Shamim doubted if the Act had been "tested in the court of law."

STATE POLICE are thinking of reintroducing the special squad system to detect trafficking in illicit liquor, narcotics and other contraband goods after the hooch tragedy that claimed 26 lives in Puri, Bhubaneswar and Jagatsinghpur.

The special squad system was introduced on March 20, 1999. The squad comprised an inspector, a assistant sub-inspector and four graduate police constables under the direct control and supervision of the superintendent of police of each district.

The SP would give a monthly report to the police headquarters on the functioning of the squad.

Governor had warned against Central rule in U.P.: Rao

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 20. Explaining why the Centre did not impose President's rule in Uttar Pradesh, the former Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, today told the Liberhan Commission that the Governor had warned it that such a move "will result in largescale violence not only in U.P. but also in some other States".

Continuing his deposition before the panel, Mr. Rao said, "a clear warning against imposition of President's rule was contained in the Governor's letter to the Centre. The Governor had also stated that in the event of violence in view of the congregation of lakhs of karsevaks at Ayodhya, the possibility of damage to the disputed structure could not be ruled out."

During his cross-examination by defence counsel, Mr. Rao said several leaders, including the former West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav had suggested imposition of President's rule in the State. But, the Centre went by the Governor's warning, he said. "The time is not right for taking such a drastic step like dissolution

of the State Assembly or imposition of President's rule," the former Prime Minister quoted the Governor as having said.

Reading out the letter, Mr. Rao said the Governor had listed six points: large congregation of karsevaks, provocative slogans by them, repeated assurances of the State Government to the Supreme Court and the Centre to protect the disputed structure, tense atmosphere all around the structure, expectation of lawful karseva as permitted by the Supreme Court and agreed to by the State Government.

Mr. Rao said he was of the view that none of these points nor a combination thereof could be termed a situation wherein the constitutional machinery had broken down in the State. He also felt that President's rule should be imposed only in rarest of rare cases as suggested by the Sarkaria Commission and reiterated by the Supreme Court in the Bommai case.

Asked whether the Centre had intelligence reports that the structure would be demolished, Mr. Rao said, "there were some rumours to that effect but there was no mention of any specific date.

Whatever information was received, I passed it on to the Home Ministry for necessary action."

When pointed out that the white paper had stated that the news of demolition had reached him around noon on December 6, 1992, he said "what he had stated was the final report about complete destruction of the disputed structure was received by him between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on that day. After the initial news came around noon, I had asked the Home Ministry to collect details from the U.P. Government, which was sending reports now and then on the incident." On whether there was intelligence failure, Mr. Rao said, "it is precisely to find this out this Commission has been appointed."

When counsel for the All India Muslim Personal Law Board wanted to know whether Mr. Rao was "totally indifferent" to the motivations of the people by the BJP that a temple would be built after the demolition of the Masjid, he said, "I was not indifferent, if I was indifferent, I would have done nothing, because of my concern, I did everything possible to save the structure." He will continue his deposition on April 9.

THE HINDU

21 FEB 2001

Advani to file revision plea

By J. Venkatesan

HD 1
19/2

NEW DELHI, FEB. 18. With pressure mounting on the Uttar Pradesh Government to issue a fresh notification rectifying the defect pointed out by the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court to pave the way for a trial in the Babri Masjid demolition case, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and others have decided to file revision petitions in the High Court to get their names cleared of the charges.

Indicating this in Lucknow on Saturday, counsel for Mr. Advani and others said the High Court order left them with no other option as the criminal charges against the eight accused stood unchanged.

It should be noted that the Union Ministers, Mr. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, and others did not file revision petitions challenging the framing of charges against them. But after the quashing of the notification pertaining to the transfer of the second FIR from the regular sessions court to the CBI special court, they wanted to take advantage of the order and seek to get their names deleted from the chargesheet.

According to legal experts, the fact that Mr. Advani, Dr. Joshi, Ms. Bharti and five others are contemplating moving the court would show that they have not been absolved by the High Court while quashing the notification.

The charges were framed against the eight ac-

cused by the special court in September 1997 on the basis of both the FIRs (197/92 and 198/92). And the first FIR, while not naming the accused, dealt with conspiracy, demolition, rioting, inflammatory speeches, etc., of the political leaders. As Mr. Advani and others would come within the ambit of this FIR, they would have to face trial for the said offences.

Mr. P.S. Mishra, former Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh and Kolkata High Courts, found fault with the High Court for quashing the notification on technical grounds. Once the court found it was a curable defect, there was no reason the notification should be struck down.

According to Mr. Jaspal Singh, retired Delhi High Court judge, the State Government has no other option but to issue a fresh notification to take the criminal proceedings to its logical end.

Mr. M. N. Krishnamani, vice-president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, however, feels there is nothing wrong if the State Government takes a view that the issuance of a fresh notification is barred by the law of limitation as the punishment for the offences alleged in the second FIR is less than three years.

Mr. P.P. Rao, senior Supreme Court lawyer, says a public interest petition can be filed in the Allahabad High Court seeking a direction to the State Government to issue a fresh notification.

THE HINDU

19 FEB 2001

BJP euphoria premature, trial far from over

Lucknow, February 18

THE RECENT High Court judgement on a notification issued by the state government in 1993 has stirred a hornet's nest. There has been a flood of controversial declarations but few have studied the 153-page judgement, still less, understood its ramifications.

The notification was set aside on mere technical grounds eight years after it was issued. Rajnath Singh's statement that his government was not responsible for the delay and Justice Jagdish Bhalla's observations on the pace of the trial have not corrected the focus. And the BJP's euphoric reaction is nothing but realpolitik.

Justice Bhalla had recalled the apex court's observations in case of Ganesha Narain Hegde vs S. Bangarappa and others (1995): "The slow motion becomes much slower motion when politically powerful or rich, influential persons figure as accused."

He said: "The concept of joint chargesheet and joint trial has been adopted by the prosecution and accepted by the courts. I am afraid this may add to the slow motion becoming slower which is evident from the last eight years.

AYODHYA

Sunita Aron

TOTAL RECALL

- In all, 49 FIRs were lodged after the demolition of the Babri mosque
- Crime Number 197/92 was lodged against kar sewaks. This forms the main demolition case today
- Crime number 198/92 was lodged against eight BJP-VHP leaders. They were charged with delivering inflammatory speeches
- 47 more FIRs were lodged between December 7-14 pertaining to assault on media personnel
- Crime Number 197 was handed over to the CBI
- Crime number 198 handed over to CB-CID of the UP govt.
- CB-CID filed a chargesheet with special judicial magistrate, Matatila on Feb 27, 1993. Court took cognizance on March 1, 1993. Matatila Court thereafter shifted to Rae Bareilly
- Investigations into crime number 198 also handed over to the CBI on August 26, 1993
- Notification issued on October 8, 1993 to cover crime number 198. This alone has been set aside by HC in its latest order
- CBI files a joint chargesheet against all the 49 accused on October 5, 1993. This case will continue

Graphics by SANJAY

the case is moving at snail pace... it occurred to my mind that the above circumstances could further delay the completion of trial. In the light of the above I am of the considered opinion that the trial court should ensure speedy trial and in the process take necessary steps." Nonetheless, the Sangh was ecstatic. The same parivar which gloated over the Babri masjid demolition, is now pushing for the acquittal of its top leaders.

But the BJP satraps forgot the three Union ministers are chargesheeted even after the judgement, which had also upheld the consolidated chargesheet filed by the CBI in the special court. They also forgot the chargesheet filed by the CID against the eight accused in the Rae Bareilly Court, which though defunct today, could be revived.

The BJP missed those parts of the judgement in which Justice Bhalla had observed: "I am of the opinion that no illegality has been committed by the courts below while taking cognizance of a joint consolidated chargesheet on the ground that all offences were committed in the course of the same transaction and to accomplish the conspiracy, that the evidence for all the offences is almost the same

and because these offences cannot be separated from each other irrespective of the fact that 49 different FIRs were lodged on the basis of which 49 criminal cases were registered by the police."

The Opposition suspects Rajnath Singh's intent and the prosecuting agency, CBI's integrity. Legal experts argue that the special court, when it will meet on February 23 next, has to issue summons for the framing of charges. Though the HC has said that the special court did not have the jurisdiction to try one of the 49 FIRs filed on the day of the demolition against the above mentioned eight accused, the High Court has also held the joint consolidated chargesheet valid.

Even if the accused now want their case to be excluded from the joint chargesheet in light of the judgement, will it be possible for the prosecuting agency or the court to delink the name of the eight heavyweights from the consolidated chargesheet?

This is the question which will decide the fate of the BJP-VHP leaders and not whether the UP government will issue a notification or not.

HC clears decks for trial of accused in Babri masjid case

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, FEB 16

THE Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has dismissed the contention of those accused in the Ayodhya demolition case that the dispute pending in court was "civil in nature" and the CBI had "wrongly shown it as a criminal case".

"Litigation regarding title over a disputed structure is no doubt a dispute of civil nature but demolition of a structure is a criminal offence," Justice Jagdish Bhalla observed in his 153-page verdict in the Ayodhya demolition revision petitions, delivered on February 12.

"These two things are separate and are not relevant to each other. In criminal law "intention" plays a vital role. It is "intention" which is considered while deciding criminal cases. "Therefore, in the present case, it is not the question that the structure which was defiled in the present occurrence had already been defiled 42 years ago," the high court observed, clarifying that "the question which has to be considered is as to what was the intention of the culprits at the time of occurrence which led to the demolition of the disputed structure".

With this, the HC cleared the decks for the trial of 40 accused including Shiv Sena Chief Bal Thackeray.

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 FEB 2001

36 convicted in Bhagalpur riot case

FROM TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Bhagalpur, Feb. 12: In the second conviction in the Bhagalpur riots case, 20 accused were handed prison sentences today.

The verdict follows close on the heels of the first conviction on February 7, when 16 people were sentenced to life for the riots that killed more than 1,000 people and maimed double that number more than a decade ago.

The third additional district and sessions judge of Bhagalpur, M.N. Singh, held 20 of the 36 accused guilty of involvement in the riots spread over a month in October 1989. They have been given varying jail terms for violating prohibitory orders and attacking the police in Bhagalpur city.

The first ruling came on a

case relating to the killing of 61 members of the minority community in Chandri village on the outskirts of the city.

Though much delayed, the two successive guilty verdicts have come as a relief to the ruling Congress-RJD combine which was committed to bringing the guilty to book. But the victims' families are dismayed by a "term of jail which is not in proportion to the nature of the crime".

The life term for the 16 was "outrageous", they said, asserting the guilty should have been given a death sentence.

"So far, they have pinpointed the jokers in a card game of communal politics and let the kings go," said Bibi Badrunnisa, who lost five sisters and her mother-in-law in Chandri on October

27-28, 1989.

Several top politicians, policemen and administrative officials were allegedly involved in the riots. A commission set up to look into the role of the police indicted a D/G and a superintendent of police, but a second panel appointed to re-examine the issue exonerated them.

Following the Chandri conviction, members of the minority community alleged that they were receiving indirect threats from relatives of those sentenced. The government has posted a police picket in the village.

A peaceful locality dominated by Muslims and Yadavs, Chandri exploded in communal violence on October 27, 1989, when women and old men were sawed to death and dumped into

a well, open fields and a pond filled with water hyacinth.

Of the 40 houses rebuilt after the riots subsided, only 15 are inhabited. Occupants of the remaining houses have fled the area. Bibi Mustari, a 40-year-old housewife, is one of the few who stayed on. "I challenged death and dared its agents to come to me," she said.

Thirty-five-year-old Mallika Begum, another survivor, lives alone. She was struck unconscious with a sharp weapon and dumped into a pond along with other women.

An army officer who got her out of the pond married her, only to desert her two years ago after taking the compensation money. "What is left to say? The riot has taken away everything and everyone in my family," she said

softly. But if Chandri has been given a faint sense of justice, other villages have not got even that.

In Logain, 127 people were killed and their bodies buried in the soil which was covered with cauliflower plants. All the bodies were found two months after the massacre. Eleven years on, no one has been held guilty.

"We had to depend overwhelmingly on circumstantial evidence," said a prosecutor in one of the 320 cases out of the 800 registered by the police, for which chargesheets were filed. The total number of accused is over 2,000.

Nothing seems to have changed. As one of those convicted was being led out of court today, he shouted "Jai Shri Ram".

GOVT. NOTIFICATION IMPROPER: HC

Cases against Advani, others quashed

HD-1
1992

9-
minutes

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, FEB. 12. The Allahabad High Court today set aside a decision by the special CBI court to frame charges in the Babri Masjid demolition cases against eight of 49 accused including the Union Ministers, Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti. The court found that these persons were being tried on the basis of an improper notification issued by the Uttar Pradesh Government.

Besides the Ministers, those who got immediate reprieve are the VHP leaders, Mr. Ashok Singhal, Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalmia, Sadhwi Ritambhara and Mr. Giriraj Kishore, and the BJP MP, Mr. Vinay Katiyar.

Mr. Justice Jagdish Bhalla of the Lucknow Bench, however, upheld the special CBI court's decision to frame charges against 40 other accused, including the former Chief Minister, Mr. Kalyan Singh, and the Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Bal Thackeray.

The name of Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia was deleted as she died during the intervening period.

The special court had on September 9, 1997, ordered framing of charges against all the 49 finding that there were sufficient grounds to proceed against them



Mr. L.K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Ms. Uma Bharti.

for their role in the December 6, 1992 demolition. But, the orders were challenged in a number of revision petitions by 33 of the accused. The High Court, disposing of the petitions, found that the special CBI court decision to frame charges against eight of the accused was not proper for, the government notification on their prosecution itself was defective.

The court did not find anything wrong in the constitution of the special CBI court through the original government notification in September 1993 for the trial of the 40 accused. It, however, said the way another notification was issued for including the names of eight others for trial by the special court in October 1993 was improper and defective as prior con-

currence of the High Court was not obtained.

The defect could, however, be removed and the State Government, if it so desired, could issue a fresh notification for prosecution of these eight accused by the special court.

As for the prosecution of the other 40, the special CBI court could go ahead with the trial.

Advani declines comment

PTI reports:

In Ahmedabad, Mr. Advani declined to make any comment on the judgment. "I have not yet read the copy of the judgment to be in a position to make any comments," he said at a news conference.

'PM stand vindicated'

In New Delhi, the VHP hailed the verdict as a "vindication of Mr. Vajpayee's stand that the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiments."

"The Prime Minister stands vindicated. The court has respected the sentiments of crores of people," the VHP senior vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told PTI.

On the High Court's decision to uphold the Special CBI Court's decision to frame charges against 40 other accused, Mr. Kishore said, "popular sentiments should be taken into account in their case as well."

'Justice done'

Ms. Uma Bharti today said justice had been done to her in the case.

"I don't say there should be no cases against us. We only say we know that this kind of justice would be done to us since we were not a part of the conspiracy. We have learnt a lesson from the December 6 incident in that we are not sheep which can be driven by remote control and we are human beings," she said.

Main case intact: experts

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, FEB. 12. The setting aside of the notification for trial against the eight accused, including Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Ms. Uma Bharti and others, in the Babri Masjid demolition case is no cause for rejoicing by the BJP stalwarts as the main chargesheet stays, say legal experts.

Sources in legal circles note that the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court has set aside the notification purely on "technical grounds", observing that the defect was "curable".

Considering that the case has proceeded over the past eight years at snail's pace and the legal challenges it has thrown up, there are ample possibilities of yet another argument coming up. The next question could well be whether the trial has been vitiated or not by the High Court's order. A legal tussle on this aspect alone appears likely to go on in the courtroom. The next hearing be-

fore the special court is slated for February 25.

CBI sources say the Lucknow Bench has not made any comment on the merit of, evidence or the chargesheet filed in the main case — 197/92, registered on December 6, 1992 at the Ramjanmabhoomi police station at Ayodhya. It is a comprehensive case dealing with conspiracy, demolition, rioting, inflammatory speeches and slogan shouting.

The second case, 198/92, also registered the same day named Mr. Advani, Dr. Joshi, Ms. Uma Bharti, Mr. Vinay Katiyar and four others.

Today's order sets aside the notification on the ground that it was not issued in consultation with the High Court which, legal sources point out, is a "technical defect." It is only the "corollary" which has been found defective, while the main case of conspiracy, rioting, inflammatory speeches and demolition remains intact.

HC gives reprieve to Advani, seven others in Babri case

111 minutes
*Prosecution set aside
on technical grounds*

By Our Law Reporter

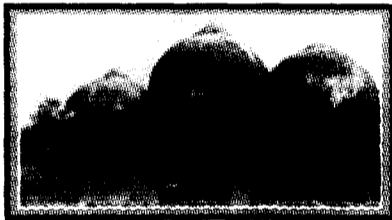
LUCKNOW: The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad high court on Monday affirmed the summoning order of the special sessions judge, CBI, for framing charges against all the accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case at Lucknow, but set aside the prosecution of eight accused, including L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Ashok Singhal, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, V.H. Dalmiya, Vinay Katiyar, Uma Bharti and Sadhvi Ritambhara on technical grounds.

It said the special court was not constituted with the consent of the high court relating to the offences charged.

Justice Jagdish Bhalla said that the mistake in issuing the notification dated October 8, 1993 for the creation of the special court without the permission of the high court was curable and it was open to the state government to cure the legal infirmity.

It was further stated that 423 injured accused persons were arrested on the spot during the incident and later released on bail, and that their identity was known to the prosecution, but no chargesheet was filed against them. Under the scheme of criminal jurisprudence, it was specially provided that immediately after the investigation, the prosecution should file a report on the basis of evidence, a chargesheet under Section 173 of the CrPC or a final report under Section 169 if the evidence was not sufficient, the court added.

The court abated the case of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia due to her death.



11 Sessions
*Ruling opens up new
battlefront for Centre*

By Siddharth Varadarajan
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Far from resolving a thorny political problem for the BJP, the Allahabad high court's ruling that L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and five others cannot immediately be prosecuted for the demolition of the Babri Masjid will open up another battlefield for the Vajpayee government.

When parliament convenes next week, the opposition—which has been demanding the resignation of Mr Advani and the other two ministers—is likely to demand that the government appeal Monday's ruling or take the administrative steps necessary to revive the case.

Indeed, Justice Bhalla, while setting aside as "improper and defective" the manner in which the special CBI court was set up, has himself emphasised the 'technical' nature of his ruling and stated that the government could issue a fresh notification for the trial of Mr Advani and seven others.

Eight years after the historic mosque was demolished by activists and supporters of the BJP and allied organisations, the Babri case continues to be a crime without criminals. Prosecutions have been stymied by procedural wrangles, incompetent investigation and legal indulgence towards the accused, most of whom have never set foot in court, citing one excuse or another. Since the BJP has always held that the prosecution of Mr Advani and other leaders was "politically motivated", it would be unusual for the Vajpayee government to seek to reinstate the prosecution.

High Court reprieve for Babari trio

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Feb. 12. — The Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court today held as 'invalid' a state government notification for trial of eight accused — including Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms Uma Bharati — in the Babari case.

The others to get technical reprieve are BJP MP Mr Vinay Katiyar, VHP leaders Mr Ashok Singhal, Mr Giriraj Kishore and Mr Vishnu Hari Dalmiya, and Sadhvi Rithambara.

The court of Mr Justice Jagdish Bhalla ruled that the statutory consultation with the High Court, which conferred the Special Court of Additional Judicial Magistrate to enquire, try and commit case no.198 of 1992 in which the eight were named, had not been done.

But the Bench said the mistake in issuing the notification dated 8 October, 1993, is 'curable' and the state government can cover the legal infirmity. The Bench had reserved its judgment on 1 November last year.

Mr Justice Bhalla said the court had been consulted before issuing all other notifications for creation of courts and their jurisdiction. So the court upheld 48 cases and the special court's decision to frame charges against 40 other accused, including former chief minister, Mr Kalyan Singh, and Shiv Sena supremo, Mr Bal Thackeray.

Vijayaraje Scindia's name has been deleted from the list of accused after her death.

The UP chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, said his government would take a 'legally proper' decision when the copy of the judgment is made available.

BJP leader, Mr JP Mathur, said: "We welcome the verdict of the court and their acquittal shows that the names of the eight persons were added as an afterthought making it clear that the government of the day and officials had deliberately sought to get them convicted." He said with this ruling "the Opposition demand for the resignations of Mr Advani, Mr Joshi and Ms Bharati would come to nought."

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 1994

Babri case: We'll go by statute, says Rajnath

PTI and HTC
Lucknow, February 12

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Rajnath Singh today said his government would take a decision in conformity with the Constitution with regards to issuance of a fresh notification for initiating trial against the eight accused, including three Union Ministers, who were given a reprieve by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

"The government will take a decision on the issue as per the law," Singh told newsmen here. The Chief Minister said he was happy over today's decision.

To a question regarding the earlier notification in this regard that was found "improper and defective" by the court, the Chief Minister wondered how the then government issued a notification in October 1993 to include the name of eight others for trial in the case.

"Let us have the copy of the full judgement and we will examine it under the law to proceed further," Singh said.

Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh refused to comment on the court verdict. Union Home Minister L. K. Advani too preferred to remain mum.

Asked for his reaction by newsmen in

Ahmedabad, Mr Advani said: "I have not yet read the copy of the judgement to be in a position to make any comments."

Union Sports Minister Uma Bharti, however, wasn't cagey. Justice, she said, had been done to her.

"I don't say there should not be cases against us. We only say we know that this kind of justice would be done to us since we were not a part of the conspiracy. We have learnt a lesson from the December 6 incident in that we are not sheep who can be driven by remote control and we are human beings," she said.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad too welcomed the judgement. Its senior leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore termed the court verdict as a "vindication of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's stand that the construction of Ram Janmbhoomi temple at Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiment."

"The court has respected the sentiments of crores of people," said the senior vice president of the outfit.

Referring to the court verdict that the notification for trial of eight accused, including Central ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti, was "improper and defective", Acharya Kishore expressed the view that the CBI should not have filed the chargesheet in the first place.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 FEB 1994

Court hasn't exonerated Babari trio, insists Opp

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 13. - The Opposition today said the decision of Lucknow High Court, setting aside the framing of charges against eight accused, including Mr LK Advani, Mr Murl Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati, in the Babari case, shouldn't be "misinterpreted" as their exoneration in the case.

The Congress said the court verdict was only a "temporary and conditional relief on technical grounds" for them.

Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma said "the High Court hasn't gone into the merit of the case, nor has the court pronounced the accused innocent. We would like to term it only a temporary and conditional relief on technical grounds."

Pointing out that the judge himself had been "good enough to suggest the manner in which the technical fault could be corrected", the Congress spokesman said the onus was now on the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh to issue a fresh notification, so that "truth and jus-



Mr Murl Manohar Joshi



Mr LK Advani



Miss Uma Bharati

tice could prevail".

Citing an "inexplicable delay on CBI's part" to expedite the case, Mr Sharma said, "It is yet another manifestation and proof of the effect of the presence of the charge-sheeted ministers in the government and the influence it has on justice and dispensation of justice".

The CPI-M politburo said: "It's totally wrong to portray the verdict as an exoneration of the eight accused in the case. It is incumbent upon the CBI to ensure that the case against the eight accused is pursued and

brought to trial". The party said the state will have to remove the technical defect and get a fresh notification issued. It added that the Centre cannot evade its responsibility for ensuring that all the guilty are brought to trial as per the law.

The CPI central secretariat, while terming the order a technical matter that could be corrected, said the accused and the BJP shouldn't misinterpret it as an absolution of these eight people in the Babari case. The party has asked the Uttar Pradesh government to imme-

diately issue a fresh notification to correct the technical fault in the case.

The Indian Union Muslim League leader, Mr GM Banatwalla, demanded the immediate resignation of the three Union ministers or their removal by the Prime Minister, since "the substance and thrust of the High Court decision is to uphold the framing of the basic charge against all the accused. The eight people, including the Union ministers, have received a temporary respite on a removable technicality".

THE STATESMAN

14 FEB 2001

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2001

THE REPRIEVE AND WHAT IT MEANS

THE FIRST THING to note about the judicial reprieve earned by Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Ms. Uma Bharti and some other heavyweights in the Sangh Parivar is that it deals purely with the procedural aspect of the trial. The Allahabad High Court's order setting aside the decision to frame charges against eight people in the Babri Masjid demolition case is not a result of a substantive weakness in the prosecution's case but a procedural flaw in its approach. The failure lay in not seeking the prior concurrence of the High Court before sending up the eight names, accused in one particular chargesheet (198/2), to the special CBI court for trial. It so happened that those accused in this particular case include a clutch of Sangh Parivar bigwigs. The Lucknow Bench of the High Court has itself acknowledged that its order was based on a technicality by maintaining that the defect was "curable" and that the Uttar Pradesh Government could initiate steps for the issue of a fresh notification to prosecute the reprieved eight if it so desired.

Against this background, it is strange for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other like-minded organisations to suggest that the High Court's order is a vindication of the accused or a reflection of popular sentiment. It is nothing of the kind. What it does illustrate is the danger of not paying adequate attention to procedural detail; in a case that has already been frustrated by numerous and time-consuming legal wrangles, this is an enormous setback. The other worrying aspect is that although the procedural flaw is curable, it is unlikely to be treated. Although the Opposition parties are likely to demand that the necessary steps be taken to remedy the defect, it is extremely unlikely that much will be done in this direction in the present political circumstances. Reviving the prosecution of the reprieved eight is, to understate the obvious, not

going to be a priority with either the Vajpayee administration at the Centre or the Rajnath Singh Government in Uttar Pradesh.

Having maintained all along that the Babri Masjid demolition case was politically motivated, it will be no surprise if the BJP leadership attempts to use the High Court order to score political points. But it must be kept in mind that despite the setting aside of the notification for trial of the eight accused, the Allahabad High Court upheld the special CBI court's decision to frame charges against 40 accused including the former BJP Chief Minister, Mr. Kalyan Singh. Therefore, it is extremely inappropriate for anyone connected with the Sangh Parivar to attempt to twist the court's order and give the impression that it exonerates those who were accused of conspiring to pull down the masjid.

On a different plane, the High Court order is another painful reminder of how the legal process in the Ayodhya demolition case has been retarded and stymied. Although special courts are set up to hasten the judicial process, legal challenges over the validity of setting up such courts and over the correct procedure for their constitution have sometimes resulted in holding up trial. In Tamil Nadu, such a challenge resulted in holding up the trial in a number of cases filed against the former Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha, and her erstwhile Cabinet colleagues. The reasons for the delay in the Ayodhya demolition case are multifold and complex. It has been eight years since the masjid was brought down and it seems we still have a long way to go before reaching a judicial conclusion. It may be in the interests of many to delay this even further but all those concerned about the protection of the country's secular consensus are looking towards the Judiciary to establish the truth about who was responsible for the shameful act of political vandalism on December 6, 1992.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2001

Babri case: Opposition turns the heat on Govt.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. The Opposition parties today demanded that the BJP-led Government in Uttar Pradesh remove the technical flaw pointed out by the Allahabad High Court order in the Babri Masjid demolition case by issuing a fresh notification. ^{NO}

The Congress called on the U.P. Government to immediately file a fresh notification. Reacting to the judgment of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court, the Congress spokesperson, Mr. Anand Sharma, said the judge had not faulted the chargesheet. "He has merely granted them (eight accused including three Union Ministers) conditional and temporary relief on technical grounds which is a curable defect". ^{NO}

The CPI and the CPI(M) shared this view and said the court decision rested on technical grounds and could not be interpreted as exoneration of the accused.

The CPI(M) and the CPI said it was incumbent upon the CBI to ensure that the case against the eight accused was pursued. The CPI(M) said the Vajpayee Government could not "evade its responsibility" for ensuring that all the guilty were brought to trial.

The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) demanded the resignations or sacking of the three Union Ministers by the Prime Minister. It appealed to the U. P. Government to straightway remove the technical defect. It was also the Centre's responsibility too to see that the High Court observations received due attention and action was taken without delay to rectify the defect. Otherwise, it would launch a nationwide PROTEST movement.

The Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee echoed the view, stating it expected the U. P. Government to take steps to further the cause of justice.

The BJP vice-president, Mr. Janna Krishnamurthy, did not indicate what action the U. P. Government would take, stating a copy of the court order was awaited. However, he said, three options were available: respecting the court judgment (which meant the State Government made no move), appeal to a higher court or to rectify the procedural flaw in the notification.

On the other hand, the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, maintained that it was for the State Government to decide what it should do in the case.

PTI reports:

The U. P. Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, said "I have asked the Law Secretary to examine the judgment and report to me about the same for taking necessary action". The Government had already initiated steps in accordance with the High Court's observation in the case, Mr. Singh said replying to questions.

He, however, described as ridiculous the BSP national vice president's remark that BJP and Congress were hand in glove in issuing a defective notification earlier and dragging the Babri demolition case for years.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2001

Safe for now

UMA BHARTI may have spoken a little too early when she hailed the latest judicial verdict on the Babri masjid demolition case. Some of the others who are still in the dock have been more circumspect. All that has happened is not that the 'justice' of their pleas has been appreciated, as Ms Bharti believes, but that a technical hitch has led to the scrapping of a notification for the trial of eight people, including L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi. At the same time, the court has held that the hitch can be rectified and seems to expect the Government to do so.

The focus is now on the UP Government. It is reassuring to learn from Chief Minister Rajnath Singh that his administration will abide by the law in this respect. Nowadays not all those who are in power can be trusted either to follow the law or their conscience. What is of interest, therefore, is to see how long it takes for Mr Singh to remove the glitch that has saved his seniors in the BJP from facing prosecution at the moment. It is obvious that if he is seen to be dragging his feet, the BJP's opponents will be handed an excellent propaganda point. In any event, since the Liberhan Commission will continue its inquiry, the respite provided by the High Court will not be of much use to Mr Advani and others.

What the latest turn of events emphasises, however, is the long and complicated judicial process which is operational in this country. Perhaps it is all to the good in the sense that it precludes hasty judgments. But it is also true that as long as a case drags on, the accused will generally be perceived to be guilty, especially if they are not overeager to appear before an inquiry commission. The law's delay, therefore, can be a two-edged weapon: it can help one to evade indictment for a while but not suspicion.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 FEB 2001

FOREIGN OBJECT

16/2 Missionary ordered to quit India 5/16

AFTER living in and serving in West Bengal for 35 years, British national Reverend John Thwaytes has been asked by the government to "quit India" in 15 days. The authorities who issued the order — Foreigners Registration Office — can give no reason as to why after so many years the missionary who has dedicated his life to the underprivileged children of the backward areas of North Bengal has suddenly become an "undesirable". The directive has come from the Union ministry of Home Affairs. The RSS/VHP/Bajrang Dal's attacks on Christians is a pointer to why Rev Thwaytes has received this unwarranted order. Is Mr Advani's ministry following the dictates of Ashok Singhal and quietly carrying out a cleansing of Christian missionaries? Rev Thwaytes is just one of hundreds of foreign missionaries who are being harassed. They are asked to appear before the FRRO, sit for hours and provide the most inconsequential of documents. Even then their fate is always in the balance never knowing when the government may decide to revoke their permission to stay. Minorities from the subcontinent have it worse.

Apart from obvious political connotations, sheer bureaucratic ineptness causes foreigners or NRIs to suffer stress and trauma. More often than not officers deputed to deal with foreigners are shunted here on a punishment posting. They are ignorant of the law and refuse to give information mostly because they themselves don't know. The foreigner is made to run from pillar to post because officers insist on confusing them. Expecting bribes is common. On the one hand, the government is trying to woo NRIs and foreigners of Indian origin to invest in India, and when they do decide to come back this is the treatment they receive. If the government wishes to entice NRIs then the place they need to focus on as the first point of reference is visa and registration offices.

THE STATESMAN

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Rajnath non-committal on Babari ruling

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Feb. 13. — The Uttar Pradesh chief minister remained non-committal today on when he would take steps to correct the anomaly pointed out by Allahabad High Court in the Babari Masjid case.

"There may be many interpretations of court rulings. A decision will be taken only after reading the whole text of the judgment. I'll look into it," Mr Rajnath Singh told a press conference here.

"We have to find out and do what exactly the court desires in the ruling," he said.

The Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court yesterday said the statutory consultation with the High Court had not been done in the case. The Bench authorised the special court of additional judicial magistrates to enquire, try and commit the case No. 198 of 1992. Eight persons including three Union ministers were named in the case.

The Bench headed by Mr Justice Jagdish Bhalla had, however, said the mistake in issuing the notification on 8 October 1993 without consulting the High Court could be corrected.

When Mr Singh was told that the Opposition has demanded a quick decision, he said: "I will do what I have to do irrespective of the Opposition demands." It would be "legally proper", he said.

According to yesterday's ruling, the special judge could take cognisance of only those cases which had been mentioned in the state government notification of 9 September 1993 and not those originating out of the case on Crime No. 198 of 1992 which was mentioned in the notification of 9 October 1993.

But some lawyers said there was no need for another notification to try the eight accused because they were already covered by the 9 September 1993 notification.

Shahabuddin reaction: In Delhi, the Babari Masjid Movement Coordination Committee convener said the court had given only a reprieve to Mr Advani and seven others on a technical point. Syed Shahabuddin urged the UP government to remove the technical defect and issue a fresh notification to further the cause of justice.

■ Another report on page 8

THE STATESMAN

14 FEB 1994

Ayodhya twin tips on Advani shortlist

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Feb. 15: A high-level BJP strategy session is believed to have found a way out for Union ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti, implicated in the Babri masjid demolition case.

Two escape routes have been tentatively identified by the BJP's legal eagles even as the party claims it is studying the Allahabad High Court ruling, which set aside the notification for the trial of the three ministers and five others on technical grounds.

The state government can argue that the case is barred by a time limit and charges related to an event that took place eight years ago cannot be opened for a fresh trial.

Alternatively, the cases of the eight accused, including Advani, Bharti and Joshi, could be delinked from the remaining 40 for which trial could continue. Once delinked, the eight cases can re-

main on the backburner.

The CBI had originally filed the notification for the trial of 41 accused and added the eight names later. Following Vijayaraje Scindia's death, the first list of accused numbers 40.

The meeting was attended by Union law minister Arun Jaitley, Advani, Bharti and additional solicitor-general K.K. Sood, who had fought the Ayodhya case for the BJP leaders. Those present felt that if no fresh notification was issued or the state government pleaded that the "case is barred by limitation", a lot of political heat and dust would be generated.

Advani is reported to have then said that he was ready to face anything on the Ayodhya issue, even if it meant another round of legal-political battles.

Any state government has to seek permission of the high court to transfer a trial to a special court. In the case of the 40 accused, including Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray, the notification

was obtained with proper sanction and the cases continue.

However, the CBI added the eight names to the list under Section 173(8) of the Criminal Procedure Code without seeking the sanction of the high court.

Under law, the CBI or any prosecution agency, after filing an FIR, can keep on adding names of accused. But if special trial courts are established, permission of the high court is needed to transfer a criminal case from a normal court to the special court.

The CBI can now file a fresh petition, seeking the high court's permission to delink the conduct of trial of the 40 accused from the eight and then apply for a fresh notification.

Only the state government can take a plea that the case is time-barred, sources said. In a murder case, there is no period of limitation. But in a conspiracy case, the time limit will apply. In the present case, Advani and the others are facing conspiracy charges.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 FEB 2001

Allies, Opp vow to nail govt over Babari trio

SANJAY SINGH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 15. — The ghost of Ayodhya will return to haunt the Vajpayee government in the coming Budget session. The stability of a fragile but hitherto stable National Democratic Alliance could be strained as it is likely to face severe pressure from within to prove its secular credentials.

Lucknow High Court ruling setting aside the "improper and defective" notification against eight Sangh parivar leaders, including the three Cabinet ministers, Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati, will provide the Opposition a fresh opportunity to rake up the Ayodhya issue.

Sources in the NDA said despite the devastating earthquake in Gujarat, the Ayodhya issue is bound to rock Parliament.

While the Opposition is expected to raise the issue, as they did in the last session of Par-

liament, the alliance partners will wait for a BJP response.

The biggest loser in the exercise this time will be the BJP. The court ruling setting aside the notification for trial against the eight leaders purely on "technical grounds" and leaving the onus on the Uttar Pradesh government had limited the options for the government and put the BJP between the devil and the deep sea, a senior NDA member in the Lok Sabha said.

During the winter session the BJP had turned the debate on Ayodhya in its favour because the questions raised by the Opposition were devoid of a solid punch and were limited to one issue, whether the three ministers should relinquish office on moral grounds.

The BJP is now faced with the biggest ever dilemma. The party has limited options before it — to dilly-dally till the issue fades, ask the UP government to issue a fresh

notification or to withdraw the case. The party always maintained that the charges against the leaders were politically motivated and if the government now allows filing of fresh notification, it will virtually mean a reversal of the BJP's stand which could trigger internal strife. And hardliners could make it a Vajpayee versus Advani affair.

If the party goes for the other two options then besides the Opposition trying to make capital out of it, there are chances that a PIL could be filed in a court, the NDA leader said.

Another NDA MP said the Trinamul Congress, Telugu Desam Party and the DMK will like to protect their secular credentials particularly in view of the forthcoming elections in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Pressure from them on the government to issue fresh notification would only invite uneasiness in the ruling alliance, he said.

THE STATESMAN

16 FEB 2001

'Migration is no solution'

By Our Special Correspondent

JAMMU, FEB. 5. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, despite the strong protests from the Sikhs when he visited the Mehjoor Nagar Gurdwara in Srinagar, tried to maintain his cool. He reminded the protesting Sikhs who were chanting "we want migration" of the plight of Kashmiri Pandits who fled their homes in 1990.

"You will be playing into the hands of Pakistan and militants by migrating." He said he would not stop them, but this was not a solution to the problem.

The angry youth shouted slogans against the Chief Minister holding him responsible for the killings of six Sikhs on Saturday. While they were opposed to Dr. Abdullah's entry into the Gurdwara, they escorted the other leaders, including those of the Central team, in.

Dr. Abdullah said the Sikhs were a courageous community and they had faced a horrible situation in 1984 as well. The Chief Minister told the protesters how his workers, too, were being killed; his Power Minister was blown to pieces.

"We had devised a plan of security for you after Chattisinghpura and we will look into the loopholes in it," he said. "This is part of the ploy to separate Kashmir from India... I will die but never allow this to happen." But the angry Sikhs heckled the Chief Minister when he was leaving and even tried to stop him. The security

personnel, however, intervened.

The Sikhs continued with their anti-Pakistan, anti-militant and anti-Hurriyat slogans saying they would migrate soon from the Valley. Last March in Chattisinghpura, too, Dr. Abdullah was not allowed to speak.

The Governor, Mr. G.C. Saxena, asked the Sikhs to control their emotions. He told them that over 11,000 civilians had been killed in Kashmir in the last decade, a majority of them were victims of militant violence. He cautioned the Sikhs about the designs of Pakistan. The Union Minister for Fertilizers and Chemicals, Mr. S.S. Dhindsa, also impressed upon them not to take any decision in haste. He extended sympathies to the community on behalf of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee.

Hurriyat leader calls

The JKLF vice-chairman, Mr. Javed Mir, was the only Hurriyat leader who visited Mehjoor Nagar to extend sympathies. Mr. Mir told *The Hindu* over phone from Srinagar that he reminded the Sikhs of the designs of vested interests to derail the peace process. "The Sikhs are part of our movement and I had a number of Sikh jail-mates." He said the killing was part of the conspiracy to divide Kashmiris on communal lines, which the Hurriyat would not allow. The former APHC chairman, Syed Ali Geelani, condemned the killings and demanded an impartial probe by an international human rights body.

THE HINDU

6 FEB 2001

Remove hurdles in temple construction: VHP

By Our Staff Reporter

BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 11. Construction of a Ram temple would begin at the disputed site in Ayodhya any day after the March 12, 2002 deadline fixed by the Dharam Sansad at Kumbh Nagar, senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader and central committee member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Mr. K. Suryanarayana Rao, said here today.

Addressing presspersons, Mr. Rao urged the Centre to clear all hurdles in the way of construction of the temple as "it was a question of regaining the self-respect of the majority community. It is the Government's responsibility to complete the legal proceedings pertaining to the Ram Janambhoomi dispute before the deadline," he said.

Maintaining that the issue of construction of temple was similar to that of re-building the Somnath temple in 1951, Mr. Rao blamed "a section of politicians" for giving the issue a communal colour.

Observing that there had been inordinate delay in disposal of the dispute case, Mr. Rao blamed the Centre for playing with the sentiments of the majority community.

"The BJP was not against the construction, but the party was not able to take up the issue because it was a member of the ruling National Democratic Alliance."

The VHP had decided to organise two programmes before the temple construction next year. In the first programme, the diamond jubilee of the consecration of Somnath temple would be celebrated by offering "jalabhisheka" in temples across the country between September 8 and October 8.

HD-15
The second one would be to organise "Ram Taraka Mantra" recitation throughout the country from November 18 to December 18.

Bajrang Dal condemns BJP

NEW DELHI, FEB. 11. The Bajrang Dal today condemned the NDA Government's decision to hike the subsidy for Haj pilgrims and appealed to the Muslims not to avail of the "extravagance". "India is a secular country and the Government should not show such blatant generosity towards any particular community," Mr. Surendra Jain, national convener of the Sangh Parivar outfit, told PTI.

Launching a broadside against the BJP, Mr. Jain said, "The BJP should remember that the appeasement policy has only served to intensify fanaticism in the minority community. If this is not vote bank politics, then why are they not extending the subsidy to the Mansarovar and Nankana Sahib pilgrims. We urge the Government to withdraw it immediately."

The Bajrang Dal would submit a memorandum to Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, in this regard. Mr. Jain urged the Government to use the subsidy for the benefit of the quake victims in Gujarat. The Bajrang Dal leader denied charges of communal bias against the Sangh Parivar outfits engaged in relief operations in Gujarat and termed the reports as "mischievous".

Bajrang Dal activists would be collecting old newspapers from houses across the country from February 16 to 25 and auction them on February 26 for the benefit of the quake victims. — PTI

THE HINDU

12 FEB 2001

Temple construction after *Shivratri*: VHP

'Government testing the patience of Hindus'

Bhubaneswar, February 11

THE VISWA Hindu Parishad has apparently decided to begin constructing the Ram Temple at Ayodhya soon after next year's Maha Shivratri, which falls on March 12.

VHP Central Advisor K Suryanarayan Rao said here on Sunday, "We believe that all impediments to construction of the temple will be removed by Maha Shivratri next year and work will start on any auspicious day thereafter."

The decision had been taken by the Dharma Sansad during the Kumbh Mela, he said. There was a whole year to the proposed date and VHP had chalked out some plans for the intervening period, he said.

Asked what the VHP's stand would be if the legal tangle were not resolved by March 12, Rao remarked, "Nobody can wait endlessly." "The Government is trying

the patience of Hindus," he said.

Replying to a question on whether there was any danger to the NDA Government on the Ram Temple issue, Rao said "no one should regret" if the Government fell on the issue."

Saying that construction of the

The Dharma Sansad
believes that all
impediments will be
removed by
Maha Shivratri
next year

Ram Temple was being "unnecessarily given a communal colour," Rao remarked that though politicians had backed the consecration of the Somnath Temple, present day politicians were opposing the Ram Temple.

He warned the BJP against dis-

tancing itself from the Ram Temple issue saying that people would not vote for the party in the next elections.

Rao said, "We understand that the BJP, on its own, is all constructing the Ram Temple but the subject does not form part of its agenda since it heads a coalition of several parties."

The VHP would celebrate the diamond jubilee of the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple from September 1, he said, adding that Ram Tarak Jap Yajnas would be held in various panchayats to "enable Hindus to gain spiritual power."

Orissa was presenting VHP President Ashok Singhal a purse of Rs. 75 lakh during the Vanavasi Sammelan to be held at Rourkela on March 10 and 11, he told reporters.

The fund would be used for developmental activities undertaken by VHP, he added.

(PTI)

Centre decides to step up security for Sikhs in J&K

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Union government will enhance security for Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir, especially those living in unprotected, far-flung hamlets, as well as generate employment for them.

These are among the confidence-building measures that the government has decided to take after an hour-long, high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at his residence here on Friday. These decisions come in the wake of



A BSF jawan in an armoured personnel carrier patrols a Sikh-dominated area on Friday.

the killing of Sikhs last Saturday in the Kashmir Valley and the panic in the community, leading to apprehensions of a large-scale exodus. The Centre is also sending Union ministers George Fernandes, S.S. Dhindsa and Chamanlal Gupta, all of whom attended Friday's meeting, to the affected areas on Saturday to assure the Sikhs that the government—both at the Centre and in the state—will do its best for the community.

Briefing the press, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah, who has come in for a fair share of criticism for the incident, with the Delhi unit of the Akali Dal demanding the dismissal of his government and President's rule in the state, said it would be Mr Dhindsa's responsibility to ensure that the decisions taken on Friday were implemented by the Centre.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 FEB 2001

98-6 Muslims in free fall
7/2
A minute

Myths of appeasement

THE Central government allocated Rs 9,568.68 crore in the ninth five year Plan (1997-2002) for the 'empowerment' of the 145.31 million Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. The ministries of human resources development and social justice and empowerment also administer a number of welfare schemes for them. The Maulana Azad Foundation, with a corpus of Rs 30.01 crore, exists for promoting education, so does the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) for providing concessional finance for setting up self-employment ventures.

If you are prepared to introduce sciences and mathematics in your curriculum, apply for government funds for modernising your 'maktab' and 'madarsa'. If you live in one of the 41 minority-concentrated districts, take advantage of the community polytechnics and the industrial training institutes. If you require pre-examination coaching, look out for the 380 NGOs that would train you to compete for various jobs. The good news is that 27,770 candidates have already benefited from this scheme.

So, go out into the wide world for the pickings and grab the opportunities. This is easier said than done. For one, whereas funds are available in plentiful, there is inadequate data on the beneficiaries of various schemes. The NMDFC, for example, claims to have disbursed credit worth Rs 114.70 lakh, but nobody knows whether the funding has been extended fairly and judiciously. It would appear that government agencies are keen to dole out monies and not monitor the impact of various development measures on the minorities and suggest remedial measures.

It is true that state governments are guilty of routinely furnishing insufficient information; one awaits the outcome of the multi-sectoral development plan that was launched in 1995-96. Equally, the reports of the National Commission

for Minorities, a statutory body, are hardly ever tabled in Parliament. Surely, this is not good enough if we were earnest about 'affirmative action', i.e., reducing the imbalances or inequities that exist in the distribution of the nation's resources. Surely, a government seeking to empower the minorities as the agents of socio-economic change and development must not abdicate its responsibility of undertaking surveys and preparing status reports. Indeed, now that the 10th five year Plan is being discussed, my plea to the government is to initiate, with the help of academic institutions and NGOs, extensive surveys and field reports on the social and economic profile of the

poorer sections among the Muslims in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The report also furnished information on widespread illiteracy and a higher drop-out rate at the elementary stage of education. The average literacy rate among Muslims was 47 per cent, less than half the national average of 52.11 per cent. Muslim women — more than half the total Muslim population — did not receive even school education, let alone higher education. If you turn to the report for limited Muslim access to government-sponsored welfare projects and to the small share in private public employment, you may well begin to question the representation of a privileged Muslim community



MUSHIRUL HASAN

The more important issue is to review the existing approaches and strategies, to identify those areas for minority uplift that require immediate attention

minorities. The vice-chairman of the Planning Commission needs to be reminded that such an exercise was last undertaken in 1983 by Gopal Singh. That is when the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had stated: "The India of our dreams can survive only if Muslims and other minorities can live in absolute safety and confidence."

The results are for everybody to see. Let me remind you that Gopal Singh found a large majority of Muslims living in rural areas. More than half of the Muslim urban population, approximately 35 million out of nearly 76 million, lived below the poverty line. The rest were self-employed. Fewer urban Muslims worked for a regular wage than members of other religious groups. The report pointedly referred to a rather alarming percentage of the

that was woven around a palpably false theory of Muslim appeasement.

My engagement is not with the causes of Muslim backwardness, for explanations range from the general to the specific. The fundamental issue is to ask if the picture is any different now. It may not be appropriate to describe the Muslim communities as "the hewers of wood and drawers of water", but the harsh reality is that there is not much to write home about their progress since 1983. It is true that regional variations exist, especially where Muslims, along with Christians, enjoy benefits in the shape of liberal institutions and scholarships, or in Bihar where job opportunities have increased after Urdu earned its rightful status.

In general, however, widespread illiteracy, low income, irregular employ-

ment and high incidence of poverty point to a low level of human development. The literacy level is on an average 10 per cent less than the national level: in states like Bihar it is as high as 98.1 per cent in rural areas compared to 21.8 per cent in Kerala. In J&K, the percentages of illiteracy among Muslims in rural and urban areas are 86.9 per cent and 43.2 per cent respectively. The ninth Plan document itself concedes that the Muslims, their women and girls included, remain educationally backward and their traditional institutions like 'madaras' are yet to adopt the modern syllabus to get integrated into the mainstream education.

In 1983, the Muslims were not only grossly under-represented in public services, but were predominant in the 'self-employed' category. The report of the subgroup on minorities (1996) constituted by the Planning Commission illustrates that there are no signs of any significant improvement. Whether it is the police or the railways, the state or the all-India services, the representation of Muslims is very low. Relatively fewer urban Muslims work for a regular wage or salary, and their representation in the 'casual labour category' is higher than of other communities. Abusaleh Shariff's seminal study reveals that, in urban India, 53.4 per cent of Muslims are self-employed as against the figure of 36 per cent amongst Hindus. In rural areas, the annual household income for Muslims as a social group is below the all-India average, as well as below that of the Christians.

We will continue to debate why this is so. The more important issue at hand is to review the existing approaches and strategies, to identify those areas for minority uplift that require immediate attention and to devise mechanisms that would lead to the implementation of government schemes. For the time being, one can draw comfort from an official document that refers to "a more pro-active state intervention for empowering the minorities."

Vajpayee to meet Advani, Farooq on Sikhs' exodus

BY SHUBHABRATA BHATTACHARYA

New Delhi, Feb. 8: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has convened a meeting on Friday which inter alia will discuss confidence-building measures to stop the exodus of Kashmiri Sikhs from the Valley.

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah is coming from Srinagar and Union home minister L.K. Advani will return from Gujarat to join the meeting, which is likely to send a team headed by defence minister George Fernandes to Srinagar on Saturday. Mr Fernandes could defuse the tense atmosphere prevailing among Kashmiri Sikhs in the aftermath of last weekend's killings at Mehjoor Nagar in Srinagar.

Mr Fernandes' proposed mission will be crucial, coming just two days before a meeting called by Sikh leaders in the Valley on Monday during which the exodus call is likely to be given.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee president Jathedar Jagdev Singh Talwandi and other prominent Sikh leaders are likely to accompany Mr Fernandes.

Significantly, in a statement issued in Srinagar, the Hizbul Mujahideen condemned last Saturday's killing of six Sikhs and appealed to the Kashmiri Sikhs not to migrate from the Valley.

In another statement, Jammu and Kashmir home minister Mushtaq Ahmed Lone assured the Sikh community that the National Conference government would ensure

the security of Sikhs in the Valley and appealed to the community to abandon their idea of migration.

Even as the Prime Minister's peace efforts are being renewed, the BJP leaders indulged in sabre-rattling. Speaking at Kozhikode, BJP president Bangaru Laxman advocated that the Centre should "take a second look" at the unilateral ceasefire in view of the Mehjoor Nagar killings.

Accusing Pakistan CEO General Pervez Musharraf of playing a "double game," he said the ceasefire was being seen by the militants as "weakness of the Indian government."

BJP vice-president and spokesperson echoed the sentiments in at the daily briefing here and said that it was wrong to say that Atal Behari Vajpayee was a "dove" among the "hawks." He laid the blame for the killings on Pakistan.

Highly-placed sources say that when the situation in the Valley was reviewed in a meeting held at the Prime Minister's residence at 6 pm on February 6, Mr Vajpayee had stood his ground in favour of continuing the Kashmir ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the traditional rivalry between the BJP and the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir is coming to the fore. Union minister of state for civil aviation Chaman Lal Gupta, who hails from Jammu, along with BJP leaders Vijay Kumar Malhotra and Surinder Singh Ahluwalia, who recently visited Srinagar, are blaming the Farooq government for "lax security" which has made the Sikhs feel insecure.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 FEB 2001

Babri demolition was pre-meditated: Nirmala Deshpande

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. Ms. Nirmala Deshpande, Gandhian, today described as "pre-meditated" and "planned" the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, by 'kar sevaks' with the active connivance and support of the State administration and police.

Deposing before the Justice Liberhan Commission of Inquiry, she said "I have seen the face of fascism in Ayodhya, and what happened on that day would put any Indian to shame. I could not believe that such ugly things can happen in a great country like India". She denied the 'bomb theory' and said the statement attributed to her by a newspaper and repeated by some witness (the RSS chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan) "is false and has been made deliberately and mischievously".

She said the newspaper which carried the report refused to publish her protest. Therefore, she complained against that newspaper to the Press Council.

"I did not hear any explosion at the time when the dome of the masjid fell down. The masjid did not fall from the top but seemed to fall on its side from the base; and perhaps that was the reason why those 'kar sevaks' who had climbed to the

top were asked to come down by the organisers so that the 'kar sevaks' might not be hurt". Ms. Deshpande said it looked as if the police and the administration were commanded by the 'organisers'. It seemed as if experts who had knowledge of structural engineering had executed the demolition and they were acting at the behest of those who organised the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

She said the local police told the workers of her organisation, the Akhil Bharat Rachnatmak Samaj, "you also pick up a hammer and give it (the dome) a blow".

Asked who the 'organisers' were, she said "the RSS, the VHP, the BJP, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena and some other small groups" were involved in mobilising the people to participate in the 'kar seva'.

She said a 'mob frenzy' was built up for a week before December 6 to pull down the disputed structure. "I also heard dirty anti-Muslim slogans and also against Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao." Despite this, the local people had maintained cordial relations with the Muslims and were not aware that the masjid would be demolished.

She would continue her deposition on April 10.

THE HINDU

39 FEB 2001

Simmering Sikhs flash quit-Valley threat

FROM MUKHTAR AHMAD

Srinagar, Feb. 5: Angry Sikhs told chief minister Farooq Abdullah today that the community has decided to migrate from Kashmir in the wake of the Mehjoor Nagar killings.

"We want to migrate from Kashmir. This place is no more safe for us. Arrange transport for our journey to Jammu," shouted a group of Sikh youths as Abdullah, accompanied by Governor G.C. Saxena, stepped into the Mehjoor Nagar gurdwara.

"We have all decided to migrate from here and the announcement will be made on February 11, during the Bhog ceremony," said Harpal Singh, general secretary of the Gurdwara committee, while trying to silence the youths.

But more slogans followed as the chief minister and the Governor were mobbed by Sikhs protesting against "the government's failure to protect us".

As Abdullah was leaving, some of the youths hurled stones and slippers at his bullet-proof car. His security guards immediately encircled the vehicle.

Abdullah and Saxena arrived in Srinagar this morning and drove to Mehjoor Nagar, where six Sikhs were gunned down by militants on Saturday evening.

A central team, led by chemicals and fertilisers minister S.S. Dhindsa, also reached Mehjoor Nagar minutes after Abdullah's arrival.

With the slogan-shouting youths crowding around Abdullah, the chief minister and the Governor went inside under tight security.

The gurdwara general secretary read out a memorandum in which he said after a meeting of all the heads of various gurdwaras, Kashmiri Sikhs have decided to migrate en masse to Jammu and other places immediately.

Harpal Singh requested the chief minister to open a separate counter in Jammu for Sikhs migrating from here. "We should also be provided all the facilities which are being given to the Kashmiri Pandits and Muslim migrants in Jammu."

Sikhs in Kashmir were feeling insecure and that "the civil administration in Kashmir has col-

lapsed completely", Harpal Singh said. "The tragedy is that the Kashmir police chief Ashok Bhan told us that we should be ready for more such sacrifices if the Sikhs have to stay in Kashmir," he added.

Asking the Sikhs to remain calm, Harpal Singh said that the community had informed the police three days before the killing about threats to their lives. "But they did not take any action."

The Governor, chief minister and the central team members requested the Kashmiri Sikhs not to "act in haste but discuss the issue threadbare before taking any decision."

"We cannot stop those who want to migrate," Saxena told the Sikhs. He expressed shock over the killings and said the "entire country was one with the bereaved families in this hour of grief."

The Governor said so far militants have gunned down 8,800 civilians of whom 85 per cent were Muslims.

"Your migration from here will only suit Pakistan," Abdullah said.

JAMMU BANDH TODAY

Srinagar tense as Sikhs violate curfew

By Shujaat Bukhari

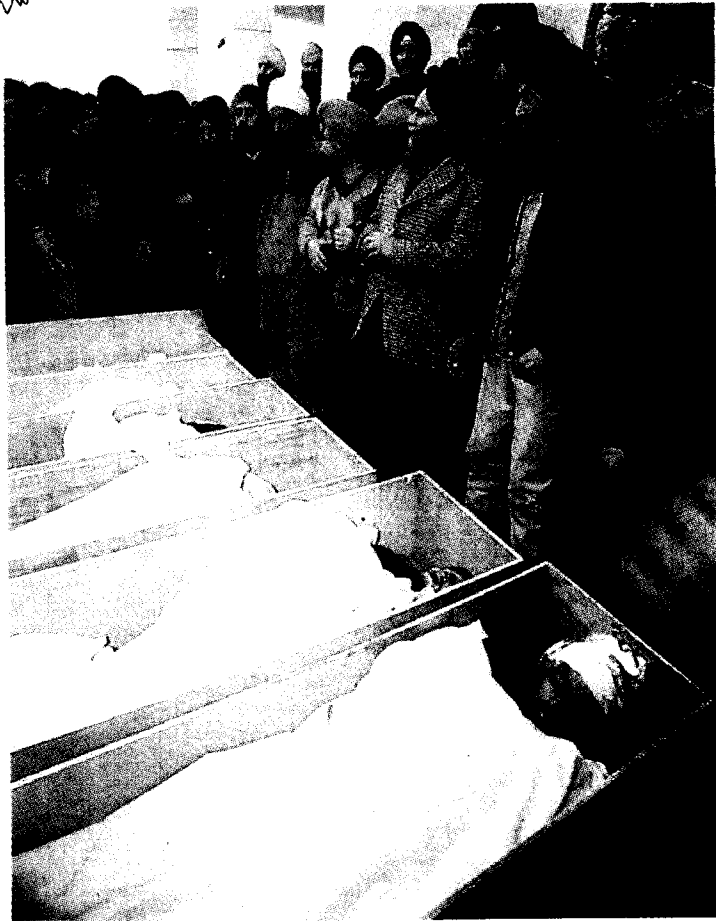
SRINAGAR, FEB. 4. Violating the curfew imposed in Srinagar, hundreds of Sikhs today cremated the bodies of six members of their community, killed by unidentified gunmen on Saturday evening, amid chanting of religious slogans. (A PTI report said the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) in Jammu and the district Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee gave a call for a Jammu bandh tomorrow. A meeting of the Sikh Sangat in Jammu also decided to take out a protest march in the city.)

To prevent the bodies from being taken to Jammu for cremation, an indefinite curfew had been clamped in the areas of Parimpora, Batmaloo, Shergarhi, Maisuma, Kothibagh, Ram Munshi Bagh, Rainawari, Shaheed Gunj, Saddar and Ranbagh, since last evening.

However, a group of Sikhs managed to reach the police control room and took possession of the bodies, which were then taken in a procession with police escort to the Mehjoor Nagar gurdwara.

Initially, the Sikhs insisted on taking the bodies to Jammu, but several leaders led by Mahant Manjeet Singh arrived here and persuaded them to control their emotions.

The Minister of State for Home and Law, Mr. Mushtaq Ahmed Lone, and the Director-General of Police, Mr. A. K. Suri, flew in from Jammu to take stock of the sit-



Sikhs mourning the death of six of their brethren in Srinagar on Sunday. — PTI

uation. Mr. Lone later visited the hospital, where those injured in yesterday's shootout are under-

going treatment. A curfew-like situation prevailed throughout the day in Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, Pulwama and Tral towns of the Kashmir Valley.

In the Gandhinagar locality of Jammu, a group of Sikhs raised slogans against Pakistan and militants, and threw stones at some shops forcing the owners to down the shutters. A few Muslim shops were also looted. Curfew has been imposed on Jammu too.

A conspiracy: Hizb

Al Qasim, a hitherto unknown militant outfit, claimed responsibility for the attack, while the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen said it was a conspiracy to disturb communal harmony.

PM sends team to Kashmir

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 4. Even as the massacre of six Sikhs in Srinagar yesterday evoked a sharp reaction from political parties and there were reports of growing tension in the Valley, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asked a four-member team — the Akali Dal leader and Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers, Mr. Sukhdev Singh Dhind-

sa, the BJP leader and Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Mr. Chaman Lal Gupta, the Minorities Commission member, Mr. Tarlochan Singh, and the BJP MP, Mr. S. S. Ahluwalia — to rush to Srinagar. They have been asked to conduct an on-the-spot inquiry into the incident, try and cool down tempers and be with the Sikh community at this time of shock and grief.

Parties' reaction: Page 13

THE HINDU

5 FEB 2001

Case against former minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BANGALORE, Feb. 1. — Police today registered a case against Mr T John, a day after he quit as minister in Karnataka over his controversial remarks on the Gujarat earthquake, based on a BJP complaint alleging that he "incited communal feelings."

A top police official told reporters "an FIR has been filed against Mr John."

Mr John had resigned yesterday after his reported outburst that the earthquake in Gujarat was god's way of reacting to alleged attacks on Christians in that state, had triggered a controversy.

The complaint was lodged in the Cubbon Park police station by Shivajinagar MLA, Mr Katta Subramanya Naidu and nine others, police said.

Stepping up its campaign, the Karnataka BJP sought the arrest of Mr John, who was in charge of the infrastructure

development and civil aviation department, citing various sections of IPC for offences including inciting "communal feelings."

The state BJP president, Mr Basavaraj Patil Sedam, said as they were awaiting action on their complaint, the party had deferred its plans to call a statewide bandh but would continue its protests against Mr John.

Meanwhile, Karnataka information minister Mr BK Chandrashekhar said that Mr John had not resigned because of pressure from the BJP, but had stepped down after Karnataka chief minister Mr SM Krishna and senior ministers advised him to resign.

"The controversy should end now," he said.

He hit back at the BJP, saying that they had no moral right to accuse others of inciting communal feelings when "that is precisely what they are doing all over the country."

THE STATESMAN

2 FEB 2001

Basu reveals a dithering Rao before Ayodhya riot panel

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 29 JANUARY

THE CENTRE should have used Article 356 in Uttar Pradesh to prevent the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992, former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu told the Liberhan Commission on Monday. He said that the suggestion had been made by him to the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in November 1992.

Mr Basu also told the Commission that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was a BJP leader in 1992, had refused to pay heed to the CPI(M) leader's warning on the inflammatory speeches of Kalyan Singh, who was the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh at that time.

The BJP leader had also contended to him at the time, Mr Basu said, that the demolition was "an accident and not organised." In the face of this, the former West Bengal chief minister expressed surprise at Mr Vajpayee's decision to recently contend

— eight years after the demolition — that "the Ram Mandir movement is an expression of an unfulfilled national aspiration."

Mr Basu told the probe panel that he and CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet had in fact told the then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in November 1992 that it may be imperative for the Centre to use Article 356 in the state to prevent communal tensions from escalating into a full-scale riot leading to the demolition of Babri Masjid.

"There was no way other than the use of Article 356 of the Constitution (to prevent demolition). After restoration of peace, the government could have been handed over to the BJP," he said. In response to this suggestion, made during the National Integration Council meeting on November 23, 1992, Mr Rao had held: "How can I disbelieve the state chief minister (Kalyan Singh) who has told me that there will be no danger to the structure."

The Economic Times

30 JAN 2001

Are we not a soft state?

By Rajinder Sachar

MS-12 29/11

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29/11

MYRDAL, SWEDISH economist, when he called India a soft state was not thinking of its coercive powers. What he talked of were the lack of a work culture among public officials and in society and the atrophy of political will to correct these distortions. The recent musings by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the Ayodhya issue, insofar as they committed the Government to honouring the court verdict at any cost, were a welcome development. Had the secular commitment of our present political parties been as firm as that of Gandhi, Nehru, J.P. and Lohia, who controlled the more inflamed passions of communal fire in the wake of the Partition (1947), we would not have even tolerated the wild suggestion of any attempt to build a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid which existed for over 400 years. But then even the tallest in the Opposition are pygmies and, notwithstanding the bluster, they look for soft options. This is what must have persuaded the Prime Minister to suggest in the same breath that if possible the matter may be settled by mutual talks — a suggestion agreed to by Opposition, which clearly disclosed a mindset to avoid a correct but hard decision.

Who has given the authority to the VHP and a band of cellular phone-holding 'Sadhus' to speak on behalf of Hindus. The cowardly act of demolishing the Babri Masjid is condemned by a large majority of Hindus. I am surprised that the Opposition should fall for this ploy of putting the perpetrators of crime and the victims on the same side. This suggestion seeks to cloak the wanton attack on the secular base of our democracy by purporting to present it as a case of misunderstanding between the two communities. The goons who demolished the mosque cannot be allowed to don the role of judges. With Muslims almost unanimously saying that if the court finds that the mosque was built by demolishing a then existing temple, even if not a Ram temple, they would withdraw their objection because the Quran forbids construc-

tion of a masjid by pulling down any religious building, the only respectable alternative is to await the verdict (which may be sought to be expedited by mutual request). That is why the BJP game plan of mutual negotiations is nothing but a veiled threat to coerce the Muslim community to agree to give up its rights — a course totally unacceptable.

It is in this background that the tensions created by the VHP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar using the occasion of Maha Kumbh are a dangerous portent. This is an attempt at 'Talibanisation' of the Hindu religion. It is time that average non-political, sensitive Hindus realised the harm this will do to the cosmopolitan philosophy of Hinduism and to the social reform, in personal laws and the position of women, won after a Herculean effort by secularists.

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Maha Kumbh are a dangerous portent. This is an attempt at 'Talibanisation' of the Hindu religion. It is time that average non-political, sensitive Hindus realised the harm this will do to the cosmopolitan philosophy of Hinduism and to the social reform, in personal laws and the position of women, won after a Herculean effort by secularists.

This spread of hatred and discord being sought to be projected at the Maha Kumbh endangers the real essence of Hinduism and its philosophy of stoicism. I do not deny that the history of a people, a state or a nation is part of its culture, its tradition and its identity and can no more be forgotten than an individual can forget his or her personal history. But those mentally fixed in the past cannot grow, cannot develop and cannot adapt to new circumstances. The events of the past can be remembered in a way which preserves historical rivalries or carefully nurses the idea of alleged past injustices. But this is not the only way. The future is a page of history that has not yet been written. If we allow it to be determined by reliving the past, it will simply be a repetition of that past with its sad record of religious rivalries, of bloodshed and human misery. But there is a choice and with a mature attitude to history it does not have to be like this. A correct and impartial reading of

history will show us that the people who can learn to look forward instead of backwards need not be condemned to relive the past and will consequently learn to live with one another in harmony. The Maha Kumbh is an occasion for the so-called saviours of Hinduism to give thought to ameliorating the condition of the starving millions for, as Karl Marx said, "poverty is the greatest sin and the biggest blot on human race". What better timing than the Maha Kumbh to try to wash off this sin of poverty by heeding the millennium message of the Pope that "our world is entering the new millennium burdened by the contradictions which offer immense possibilities to a fortunate few while leaving millions of others living in conditions far below the minimum demanded by human dignity". Let the 'dharan sansad' engage itself in improving the conditions of the poor. Lord Ram has a presence throughout the universe. Why must the VHP restrict him to a particular site — "gabhgrha".

The proceedings of the VHP-managed 'dharan sansad' purporting to fix the outer date for temple construction to coincide with the Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh are a cheap gimmick, betraying the political motivation of the temple movement.

In this context, the visit by the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to the Kumbh Mela with a view to making a dent in the same obscurantist, fundamentalist religious section of the Hindu electorate is unfortunate. That may help her in getting some votes. But the secular fabric of the nation has been further weakened by this open and shameless effort at mixing religion with politics by both the major parties for their electoral gains.

Another issue. A creeping paralysis was the government's response to the nation-

al postal strike. So when the High Court directed it to apply the Essential Supplies and Maintenance Act against trade unionists, the government caved in and hid behind judicial skirts. Sadly, Mr. George Fernandes, who challenged in the Delhi High Court the applicability of the ESMA to him when he headed the railway strike in the 1970s, chose to keep an eerie silence.

The Centre has announced the extension of ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir and, in my opinion, rightly. But it was somehow afraid of reactions from the hawks and that alone can explain why it floated a trial balloon using the strategic office of Chief of the Army Staff. The government did a disservice to the prestige of the Army Chief by persuading him to go public on a political decision, obviously to ward off any adverse comment against extension of the ceasefire from other political quarters. Thus it sought to hide behind the General's trousers — a case of political impropriety and administrative perversion.

The bungling in the matter of issue of passports to the Hurriyat leaders is a manifestation of the absence of a thought-out Kashmir policy. This arrogance ill-behoves the government after it has accepted Hurriyat Conference as one of the groups with which it will have dialogue on Kashmir. The government by unnecessarily making an issue of denial of passport to Syed Ali Shah Geelani has played into Pakistan's hands and this may strengthen militancy. What damage could Mr. Geelani's visit to Pakistan cause? None. If Mr. Geelani has to be coached by Pakistan his open interaction with the Pakistan Ambassador can serve the purpose. Again, the government shows itself to be overwhelmed by the inter-service intrigues and the hawks of the RSS Parivar. The sufferers will be the masses, especially of Jammu and Kashmir. Such pusillanimity manifests a weak political armour.

(The writer is a retired Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.)

Dalai Lama's mistake

PERHAPS UNWITTINGLY, the Dalai Lama has entered a controversial field which can become even more complicated as a result. By arguing that "conversion is outdated" and has a "negative effect", he may have been voicing his own considered opinion. But since the subject has acquired a political dimension in India, it is necessary to weigh one's words very carefully when saying anything in this context, especially if the person is someone as widely respected as the Tibetan pontiff. Not unexpectedly, therefore, his words have been promptly seized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal to reiterate the Sangh parivar's familiar grievances against Islam and Christianity.

It is this very danger of the Dalai Lama's views being exploited to condemn Islam and Christianity as 'aggressive' of which the Tibetan spiritual leader should have been aware. Not only has the VHP criticised Islam and Christianity for waging a "religious war against us", but it has also called for a "common platform to counter... the aggression" of these two religions. Clearly, this wasn't something which the Dalai Lama had in mind, for while saying that "it's not proper to change religion", he also said that his "main interest is to promote human values and religious harmony". Yet, the end result may be the exact opposite not only because of the Sangh parivar's deliberate misinterpretation of the Dalai Lama's remarks, but also because of a few among the Buddhists like the priest of a Varanasi monastery who has lauded the formation of a "joint front of Hindus and Buddhists to fight Islamic aggression".

All this will be music to the ears of the hardliners in the saffron camp who have stepped up their campaign against Christianity in addition to their usual diatribes against Muslims. Any suggestion, therefore, of a combined effort by the two 'indigenous' religions against the 'alien' ones will be disastrous for social and religious harmony. Besides, it has to be remembered that conversion is a constitutional right which can be criticised but not denied. While a change of religion through enticement or fraud is condemnable, no government can outlaw a genuine change of heart. Perhaps it is this undeniable fact which made the Dalai Lama concede that Mauryan emperor Asoka had sent out preachers to spread the message of Buddha. To ban such endeavours is a negation of the right of individual choice.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JAN 2001

Centre to keep off Ayodhya dispute

Kalyani Shanker
New Delhi, January 24

THE CENTRE may not respond to the Muslim Personal Law Board's statement that it was ready for dialogue with the government on the Ayodhya issue.

Although the Dharam Sansad has put the government on notice with regard to the construction of the Ram temple, but with no date being specified, the government has got a breather, sources said.

BJP leader J P Mathur has ruled out the possibility of the government taking part in negotiations. "At the most, the government can be a mediator or a facilitator and it can not adopt any other role," he said.

It suits the government as well as the BJP to not to precipitate the matter at this juncture.

A source close to the Prime Minister confirmed that he might not make any move until after the budget session.

"He will certainly like to resolve the issue but the timing is also very important. Vajpayee wants to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir and the Ayodhya issues and has taken initiative on both," the source said.

According to BJP sources, the temple issue will be kept alive till Assembly polls are held in Uttar Pradesh.

"We have not brought it to the forefront but since it has become an issue, it will certainly remain.

The BJP has already identified religion and farmers as the poll issues," the sources said.

Interestingly, it was the RSS chief Sudarshan who visited Kumbhnagar to ensure that things did not go out of hand. Before leaving for Allahabad, Sudarshan had called on the Prime Minister. Various issues, including the temple issue, were discussed, the sources said.

Sudarshan could have reached an understanding with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders without going there, but it was necessary for someone to personally see to it that the VHP-sponsored Dharam Sansad spoke the same language.

The Prime Minister, during his

recent Udipi visit, also held discussions with the Pejawar swami.

It is also pertinent to note that the VHP leader Ashok Singhal had said that the outfit would not like to topple the Vajpayee Government. For the Sang Parivar, the bottom line was not to rock the boat.

Recently, VHP leader Vinay Katiyar's offer for a dialogue was rejected by the Muslim Personal Law Board. The board insisted it will have nothing to do with the VHP.

However, in a resolution the board agreed to give due consideration to any central initiative for a meaningful discussion to resolve the Ayodhya issue in a conducive atmosphere.

No talks with VHP, says Muslim Law Board

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 21. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today indicated that it was prepared to consider the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi issue, albeit with a proviso that the negotiations would only be held with the Central Government.

The AIMPLB executive committee, which met here today, later issued a statement saying, "the Government must take the responsibility and create the right environment by reining in the hardliners." The Board, however, rejected the idea of negotiating with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or the Bajrang Dal. "There is absolutely no question whatsoever of negotiating with those who demolished the Babri Masjid and are now planning to challenge and defy the law," Syed Shahbuddin, AIMPLB member, later told reporters.

Today's meeting was held in the backdrop of the VHP-sponsored "dharam sansad" in Allahabad and in the wake of reports that it would announce the date for construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The Board put the onus of controlling the hotheads in the Sangh Parivar on the Government, rather than join the VHP in a war of words. The AIMPLB resolution described the VHP's threat to forcibly build a temple at the disputed site next year as a "challenge to the state and the Constitution and not just a problem of the Muslims".

Making it clear that it was the

sole body authorised to negotiate on behalf of the Muslim community, the AIMPLB said any attempt to coerce local Muslims into negotiating with Mr. Vinay Katiyar, BJP MP from Faizabad, would be prove a non-starter.

A five-member committee comprising Maulana Nizamuddin, Mr. Yusuf Muchhala, Syed Shahbuddin, Maulana Sajjad Noman and Mr. Zafaryab Jilani was formed to monitor the situation.

VHP unveils action plan

KUMBH NAGAR, JAN. 21. Outlining the action plan for Ram temple construction at the disputed site in Ayodhya, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today declared that the "faithfuls" who had demolished the structure could build a temple there. The action plan to generate public opinion for temple construction would commence with *Shivarchana* (prayer of Lord Shiva) and *jalabhishek* at temples across the country on September 18 this year, the VHP international president, Mr. Ashok Singhal, told reporters here.

The *Shivarchana* would continue till October 16. In the second stage beginning November 26, "yagnas" would be organised across the country.

If the Government failed to hand over the land at Ayodhya for construction of the temple before the deadline of March 12, 2002, the sants would "certainly compel the authorities to do so", Mr. Singhal said. — PTI

CPI(M) flays VHP: Page 13

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2002

Muslim leaders ready to talk Ayodhya with govt

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 21: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today said it is willing to negotiate on the Ram temple if the Centre "disciplines anti-national forces" again threatening to take the law into their hands.

Speaking in favour of talks with the Vajpayee government, the law board suggested that the Centre take the initiative to create a "conducive atmosphere" for dialogue.

"You cannot hold negotiations with organisations trying to browbeat and intimidate you," a member said, in an obvious reference to the VHP's temple resolution and the views of other Hindutva hawks.

He added that the board would go for an out-of-court settlement if the government agreed to build a mosque along with the Ram temple on the disputed site. But the VHP and the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas have been unwilling to let a mosque come up

within *panchkosi* (five km) of the site.

In its meeting today, the board working committee adopted a resolution ruling out talks with the VHP and those responsible for the Babri masjid demolition. But insiders said the majority opinion was for exploring options for a negotiated settlement.

Several speakers lamented that "secular" parties had fallen silent on rebuilding the mosque and implementing the court verdict if it favoured the Muslims.

Secretary Maulana Nizamuddin said the board was prepared to give "due consideration" to any government initiative for talks provided it "acts sincerely to create a conducive atmosphere for the same". But he denied the board had got a talks offer yet.

"In the absence of any structured agenda or recognised representation, the talks cannot be held. Who do we talk to and talk about what?" a member asked, stressing that the law board was the sole recognised body autho-

rised to hold talks.

Following belligerent statements from the VHP and other outfits over the past few days, the board also decided to set up a five-member panel under Maulana Nizamuddin to monitor Ayodhya developments and submit monthly reports. Other members are Yusuf Mucchala, Maulana Sajjad Nomani, Syed Shahabuddin and Zafaryab Jeelani.

The board resolution reiterated its known position on the dispute: "The land dedicated as a mosque shall always remain a mosque and every effort shall be made for its restoration."

The board accused the Sangh parivar of launching a "persistent and well-orchestrated hate campaign" and voiced concern over its alleged attempts to mar communal harmony.

It also resolved to evolve an action plan to interact with people at the grassroots so that they are not misled by the "hate campaign". The move is aimed at countering the RSS' Rashtriya Jan Jagran Abhiyan.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 JAN 2001

22 JAN 2001

PM may have to intervene as both sides harden stand

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, January 21

PRIME MINISTER A B Vajpayee may have to step in to initiate a dialogue between Hindu and Muslim religious leaders on the Ayodhya dispute.

Many BJP leaders believe that the stand taken by the VHP and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board leaves scope only for a negotiated settlement if an initiative is taken at the highest level.

Mr Vajpayee alone commands that authority to move a dialogue between the two sides, they say.

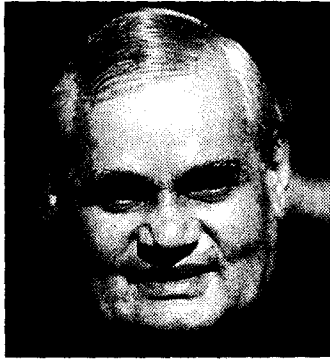
An intervention by the Prime Minister or interlocutors, who enjoy his confidence, will not only include the two sides but also other religious leaders, who have so far kept away from the controversy.

The VHP has given the Vajpayee Government a year's time to remove all hurdles for the Ram temple.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board today ruled out talks with the VHP but said it was prepared to consider any initiative for talks by the Government if it was sincere.

In fact, the Prime Minister is said to have discussed the issue with Tejavar Swami Vishveshwar Teerth, head of the Udipi Mutt on January 18.

The importance of Mr Vajpayee's



Ayodhya issue

meeting with the Swami was underscored by the fact that former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao had also approached him in his attempt for a negotiated settlement before the events of December 1992.

It is no secret that it was only under considerable pressure from the BJP and the RSS that the VHP decided not to announce a firm date for the construction of the Ram temple.

After months of temple talk, the dharam sansad ended by giving time to the Centre until Shivrathri next year to remove "legal and administrative obstacles" in the path of the temple.

Apparently, the BJP leadership

managed to impress upon the "doves" among the VHP hawks not to bring the matter before the Prime Minister before Parliament's budget session.

Similarly, according to BJP leaders, a few Muslim leaders appear willing to talk, even though at this stage any talk of transfer of the Babri Masjid site to the Ram Mandir Nyas is inconceivable.

Some BJP leaders believe that the deliberations at the All India Muslim Personal Law Board today reflected this position. It ended by saying that its doors were open for talks with the Government if it created a conducive atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue.

Some BJP leaders are said to be in touch with Imam of Fatehpuri Masjid of Delhi's Chandni Chowk, Mufti Mohammad Mukarram and Jawed Habeeb, a member of the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC), who parted ways from the rest long ago. Rajya Sabha member Obaidullah Azmi is also considered to be favouring talks on the temple issue.

Striking a hard note are Samajwadi Party Rajya Sabha member Mohammad Azam Khan, Zafaryab Jilani, the new Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid in Delhi Ahmed Bukhari and Babri Masjid Coordination Committee convenor Syed Shahabuddin.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2001

No specific date for construction

VHP sets one-year deadline for temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
AND AGENCIES

ALLAHABAD, Jan. 20. — The Dharam Sansad today failed to fix a specific date for Ram temple construction, setting the government a deadline of 12 March next year to clear "all obstacles" after which work would begin at any "auspicious" time. "All obstacles" includes handover of the disputed land for the temple. The unanimous resolution setting the programme for temple building was adopted on the second day of the VHP-sponsored Sansad of about 4,000 saints and religious leaders amid full-throated cries of 'jai Sri Ram'.

The BJP made light of the VHP deadline, saying it was not an ultimatum to the government. The party president, Mr Bangaru Laxman, said: "Myself and the Prime Minister had appealed to VHP not to fix any date. I am happy that they didn't."

The Sansad resolution also chalked out an extended awareness campaign for temple construction. *Shivarchan* and *jalabhishek* will be organised across the country from 17 September to 16 October this year. Collective *japyajnas* will be held to "take Lord Ram to every Hindu home and heart" from 26 November.

A *sant yatra* will be held from Ayodhya to Delhi from 18 February to 25 February, 2002, to 'convince' the government to hand over the disputed land.

The resolution was read out by Acharya Dharmendra on behalf of the Ram Janambhoomi Mandir Nirman Sa-

miti chairman, Mahant Par-amhans Ramchandra Das.

The four-paragraph resolution was approved by all prominent Akharas which were present at the Mahakumbh, scotching speculations of a boycott by some Akharas. The presence of all Akharas could be a reason for the soft open-ended deadline.

The VHP chief, Mr Ashok Singhal, said starting temple construction would not amount to contempt of court as the disputed land was in the Centre's possession.

The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha said it will not support any organisation breaking the law to build the temple. "We will firmly oppose any move taken without a consensus," said its president, Mr DC Tyagi.

The Babari Masjid Action Committee termed the Sansad decision "a challenge to the court", but said Muslims would not take any decision in haste. "We will wait for the judiciary and the government to intervene," said its convener, Mr Zafaryab Jilani.

"Muslims will act on their own to stop temple construction at the disputed site only if government agencies fail to safeguard their interests," he said. He hoped the Supreme Court would take suo motu cognisance of the move.

The Muslim Personal Law Board will meet in New Delhi tomorrow to discuss the VHP "threat".

On page 10

- Deadline will hasten solution, hopes BJP
- Mela rejects Sonia visit

'Clear hurdles in temple path by March 12, 2002'

Hemendra Singh Bartwal
Kumbhnagar, January 20

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9- midwiser

THE DHARMA Sansad of top Hindu sants and dharmacharyas today warned the Vajpayee Government to clear all hurdles in the path of constructing the Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya by Mahashivratri on March 12 next year, after which the work would be started on an auspicious date.

While allowing the government a one-year reprieve, the seers however made it clear that if the issue were not resolved to their satisfaction by the given deadline, they would adopt a path of confrontation and carry out their mission forcibly.

Neither the government nor any other force could prevent them from carrying out their mission, the religious heads asserted while striking a note of caution to the Muslim community.

Loud slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" rent the air at the packed venue of the Dharma Sansad at the

Dharma Sansad

Mahakumbh here as a resolution on the temple issue, moved by Acharya Dharmendra, was unanimously passed by the mahamandaleshwars, dharmacharyas and acharyas present at the gathering.

"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 Janmabhoomi Nyas.

The 90-year-old mahant said Vajpayee had become the prime minister thrice on the strength of the temple movement. If he wished to retain the position for the fourth time as well, he would have to facilitate the construction of the Ayodhya shrine.

"Though he (Vajpayee) keeps chanting that the temple issue is not on his government's agenda, even

he has conceded that the movement is an expression of a national sentiment," the mahant said referring to the prime minister's statement in Parliament.

Acharya Dharmendra, in a spirited speech, pointed out that the Dharma Sansad had never backtracked on any of its announcements before. The dates for temple construction and the mass campaign before that were final and there was no going back on them, he emphasised.

The temple resolution passed by the Dharma Sansad today also unfolded a plan of action for mass mobilisation of Hindus across the country during the current year. This would be followed by a "Chetavani Yatra" of sants from Ayodhya to Delhi in February next year, it was decided. All the dates had been fixed after consulting three eminent astrologers of Kashi, VHP leaders said here.

The Dharma Sansad's announcement is seen in many quarters as a political decision to benefit the BJP-led government in UP as the Mahashivratri deadline coincides with the timing of state Assembly elections which are due in early 2002.

Significantly, three of the four Shankaracharyas, supreme Hindu religious heads, kept away from the Dharma Sansad besides many Akharas heads as they had expressed displeasure with the VHP for hijacking the movement and politicising it. Only the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Swami Jayendra Saraswati, attended the meet.

Mahant Paramhans informed the gathering that the work of carving the stones for the proposed Ram mandir was being carried out at a hectic pace in seven workshops and was expected to be complete by March-end.

After that, the sants would demand from the government that the land adjacent to the disputed Babri site acquired by it should be returned to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, which was its original owner, so that construction could be started.

It's not a challenge to Muslims, but to polity: Shahabuddin

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 20

HT 8
REACTING TO the decision of the Dharma Sansad to begin construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya after March 12 next year, Syed Shahabuddin, member, All-India Muslim Personal Law Board executive, has said the move is "not a challenge to the Muslim community but a challenge to the Indian State".

Shahabuddin said the personal law board executive will meet tomorrow and will look into the statements made by the Sangh Parivar members and the Prime Minister on the Babri Masjid issue. The meeting assumes significance in view of the Dharma Sansad today asking the Government to remove all "obstacles" in the way of the temple.

The former MP, who is also the convener of the Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee, said the declaration

of the VHP-sponsored sansad amounted to a "war against the Indian State". He said, "If the Prime Minister really means business and is true to his oath of office, he must take due notice and act according to the law of the land."

The resolution was a challenge to Parliament, judiciary and the executive, he said. In fact, the announcement was a challenge to the very existence of a civilised society.

"Why can't the Prime Minister put them behind bars. Are the sadhus or the VHP or the Sangh Parivar above law," he said.

Shahabuddin said there was no question of any negotiations with the VHP, the Sangh Parivar or any private party. "The only competent authority on the matter is the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and no board member shall agree for any negotiations in any form with these hot-heads," he said.

The board, he said, was not aware of any Government initiative on the issue. If the Government picked up just anybody for talks, it will be nothing but bluff and bluster, he added.

Another member of the board executive, Zafaryad Jeelani, said in Lucknow the sansad's statement was "politically motivated". "The manner in which the date has been fixed for starting the construction shows the State Assembly elections will be held on time. The VHP would have gone ahead with the programme, if the present environment was considered conducive.

M I H Qureishi, a founder-member of the personal law board, said the setting up of a date was a move to gain time and "save" the Union and the State Governments. The decision, made under pressure of the hardliners, will enable the whole Sangh Parivar to do some preparatory work.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 JAN 2001

Dharam Sansad differs on D-Date for Ram temple

The Times of India News Service

KUMBHYNAGAR: It was a day of contradictions as leaders of the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) expressed incongruous views on the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Giving the Union government an year to resolve the Ram Temple-Babri Masjid dispute, president of the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas Parmahans Ramchandra Das said, "If the land is not handed over by March 12, 2002, we will forcefully occupy it and begin construction." VHP working president Ashok Singhal was present when Mr Das spoke "on behalf of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the RSS" at the opening of the Dharam Sansad on Friday.

Later in the day, the VHP's Ramjanmabhoomi Mandir Nirman Samiti's spokesperson and BJP's Jaunpur MP, Swami Chinmayananda said, "It was

just his (Das's) personal opinion. The date for temple construction will be decided and announced only on Saturday's Dharam Sansad." Mr Singhal, too, said that the date would be announced only by the Dharam Sansad.

Mr Das had jumped the gun, said a senior VHP leader. "He had not reached the Margadarshak Mandal meeting on time. So, when Mr Singhal was talking to the media, Mr Das came in and blurted out the earlier decision, making the Dharam Sansad redundant." According to the information available, there wasn't any discussion at the Margadarshak Mandal meeting and the Ram temple was merely mentioned while former RSS chief Rajju Bhairya was felicitated.

Though the leaders deny it, the talk of the temple construction around March 2002 coincides with the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 JAN 2001

Imam hardens Ayodhya stand

New Delhi
19 JANUARY

WITH THE Dharam Sansad (Religious Parliament) of saints getting underway at Allahabad, Muslims on Friday hardened their stand on the Ayodhya issue with the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid cautioning that if Hindus refused to obey court orders it would be difficult to make Muslims adhere to the same.

"It will be difficult for us to convince Muslims to obey court orders. Even I will not be able to convince them," the Imam told a congregation after Friday prayers at the sprawling Jama Masjid com-

plex in the walled city.

Charging VHP and other Sangh Parivar outfits with "playing dirty and heinous games and flaring up communal frenzy", he said Muslims have so far kept the Ayodhya issue as confined to a "fight" with the government and

HEY RAM

avoided any confrontation with Hindus at large. "But if you keep throwing tantrums at us, we also accept the challenge."

All India Babri Masjid Rebuilding Committee (AIBMRC) on Friday staged a demonstration

here near the Parliament, to demand the reconstruction of the mosque at the original site.

Addressing the demonstrators, speakers including Subhash Chowdhary, who is also Indian Youth Congress general secretary, asked the government to rebuild the mosque, or refer all the cases related to the Ayodhya issue to the Supreme Court for a time-bound and binding solution.

President of Aalami Roohani Markaz Maulana M A Rabbani said his organisation would abide by the court verdict "even if it meant construction of temple at the disputed site". — PTI

The Economic Times

20 JAN 2001

49-12 ✓ SATURDAY, JANUARY 20, 2001 ✓

A TACTICAL SHIFT? 20 ✓

IN ACCEPTING SIKHISM as a "separate religion" and its votaries as a community with an identity of their own — distinct from that of Hindus — the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is only recognising an established fact. However, it marks a significant departure and a paradigm shift of sorts from what the Hindutva outfit has been propagating vigorously in Punjab over the past two years and more. In a devious attempt at subsuming Sikhism within the Hindu fold, the RSS and its offshoot — Rashtriya Sikh Sangat — have been projecting, through a calculated revanchist campaign, the idea that Sikhism is a branch of the Hindu religion and the Sikhs are but the sword arm of the Hindus. Its retraction from that position, which came about at the interaction an RSS delegation had with the National Minorities Commission on Tuesday, has to be seen in the context of the looming threat of a backlash from not only radical Sikh elements but also the religious establishment of the community. Although the Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, reacted sharply in mid-2000 by issuing an edict condemning the "sinister designs" of the anti-Panthic forces to create confusion about the "unique and distinct" identity of the Sikhs, it was the RSS' outrageous move to observe Guru Purab and install the Guru Granth Sahib in Hindu temples that proved the proverbial last straw; to the Sikhs, who do not believe in idol worship, nothing could be a greater affront than to see their holy book placed in the sanctum of a Hindu shrine. That the plan had to be dropped ultimately is however a different matter.

The RSS' initiatives, aimed at 'integrating' the Sikhs with the Hindus by appropriating their religious texts, symbols and apostles, are but part of its overall strategy to realise its objective of founding a Hindu Rashtra. Tactically speaking, this approach differs from what the Sangh

Parivar is seen to adopt towards other communities, notably Muslims and Christians, which is marked by a mix of animosity, intimidation and conciliation. The 'assimilation' route in the Punjab context, one must realise, is fraught with serious consequences for the reason that at the back of the Khalistan movement was the perceived threat to the Sikh identity from what was seen as a majoritarian hegemony. At present, the State may be free from the scourge of militancy, but anything that tends to rekindle in the Sikhs the fear of their religious identity being invaded or subsumed is bound to give a handle to the extremist elements which, as of now, remain marginalised. Worse, even the moderates might feel compelled to swing to the far right. The fact that the RSS went about its calibrated, well-crafted Sikh-embracing game plan only since the coming to power of the Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP coalition is very significant. It used the Central Government-aided tercentenary celebrations of the Khalsa to step up campaign and the Chief Minister, Mr. Prakash Singh Badal, himself chose to play along with it, evidently for reasons of political expediency.

Given the definitive signs of the RSS' plan becoming too much of an embarrassment even to the centrist elements in Mr. Badal's SAD, the reversal of the Sangh's position vis-a-vis the Sikh faith could, one suspects, well be a tactical shift, dictated by the compulsions as much of the SAD as of the BJP itself. Apart from being too good to be true, the claim of the RSS spokesman that the organisation had a "firm belief in the plurality of religions" and that denying the distinctiveness of different faiths went against "the very grain of the RSS" flies in the face of the Sangh's declared ideological plank and its track record. Its credibility on this score is all the more strained when considered against the known penchant of the Sangh Parivar leadership, including the leading lights of the BJP, for indulging in prevarication.

THE HINDU

20 JAN 2001

VHP threatens to confront Centre

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^{19/1}
"We will begin Ram temple construction on Govt-acquired land"

Hemendra Singh Bartwal
Allahabad, January 18

ON THE eve of the Dharma Sansad, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today indicated its firm resolve to begin construction of the Ram temple on the undisputed portion of land near the site of the demolished Babri masjid. This undisputed land was acquired by the Centre.

Striking an aggressive posture, VHP leaders stressed that the government may be forced to hand over the undisputed portion to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas through a strong public campaign that they intended to launch after the Dharma Sansad fixed the date of construction of the temple.

"It is possible that if the government does not allow it, we may have to confront it," VHP international president Vishnu Hari Dalmia stated. Referring to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's caution that no one would be allowed to take law in their hands, Mr Dalmia said his stand was not binding upon the VHP if it conflicted with their objective.

VHP vice president S.C. Dikshit, a former Director General of

Police of UP and another senior leader Devakinandan Aggarwal, a former High Court judge, emphasised today that construction on the undisputed portion would not

puted structure, where worship of Lord Ram's idol was continuing, nor the land surrounding it where construction is proposed, were in the possession or receivership of

demolished Babri structure had stood.

"The Central Government has not been appointed as receiver of the disputed area by any order of the court in the said suits... The property vests in the Central Government only for managing it," he said.

Pointing out that the land around the disputed site belonged to the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas before it was acquired by the Centre, Mr Aggarwal said it must be returned to the Nyas.

The VHP leaders stated that they had no expectations from the court for resolving the issue. The case had dragged on for the last 50 years and was likely to continue for many more years, they felt.

The three-day Dharma Sansad begins here tomorrow during which top leaders and sants of various Hindu sects will deliberate the issue of temple work at Ayodhya and fix a date to begin the work. They may not publicly announce it.

Mr Dalmia said it would take about two to three years to complete construction of the temple.



Referring to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's caution that no one would be allowed to take law into their hands, VHP International chief Vishnu Hari Dalmia said his stand was not binding on the party if it was in contrast with its objective

amount to contempt of court as was being made out.

According to Mr Aggarwal's legal interpretation, this was because neither the site of the dis-

puted structure, where worship of Lord Ram's idol was continuing, nor the land surrounding it where construction is proposed, were in the possession or receivership of

any court. The dispute before the Allahabad High Court only related to the title of the site where the

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 JAN 2001

VHP will 'coerce' Govt. on temple

KUMBH NAGAR, JAN. 18. Indicating its strategy over the Ayodhya issue, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today said it would convince or even "coerce" the Vajpayee Government to give away the disputed land acquired by the Centre in Ayodhya for construction of the Ram temple. *18-1-1991*

On the eve of the 'dharam sansad', convened by the parishad to fix a date for starting construction of the temple, the VHP leaders here said that to begin with the construction work would be taken up at the 'shilanyas' site in accordance with the programme given by the dharmacharyas and the Government would be persuaded to give the acquired land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust so that the sanctum sanctorum of the proposed temple could be built there. If the Government did not accept their demand, the VHP leaders said they would 'coerce' it to do so through protests and demonstrations.

Reacting to the Prime Minister, Mr A. B. Vajpayee's recent remark that medieval wrongs could not be righted by committing similar wrongs in the present, the VHP president, Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalmia, said, "the statement is not binding on us."

Admitting that the VHP move to go ahead with the construction of the temple could lead to confrontation with the Government, Mr. Dalmia said, "we are prepared for the worst."

Akhara Parishad raps VHP

Meanwhile, the All-India Akhara Parishad (AIAP), has said that it would have nothing to do with the 'dharam sansad' and warned that saints attending the meeting would be 'boycotted'.

Blasting the VHP for what it called "politicising the temple issue", the publicity secretary of the parishad, Shree Mahant Govindanandji said, "the VHP has no right to talk about temple issue since it is not a party in this case." *9-mlunika*

The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board will meet in New Delhi on January 21 to discuss ways and means for countering the VHP's plans. Maulana Sajjad Nomani, the executive member of the board, told UNI in Lucknow That apart from routine matters, the meeting would discuss steps to counter the VHP move. — UNI, PTI

THE HINDU

19 JAN 1991

Vajpayee's remarks & history

By Asghar Ali Engineer

180-12
1811

HISTORIANS TELL us that for every historical event there are many narratives and they choose any one of these in keeping with their ideological predilection. No one can, however, be sure which narrative is correct. The motivations of human actors are very complex and much more so those of the rulers. This can best be illustrated with the statements, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, made recently about Ramjanmabhoomi and Babri Masjid.

When the Opposition stalled Parliament proceedings demanding the resignation of the Union Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case, Mr. Vajpayee made a statement that construction a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya was in "keeping with the national sentiment". This drew the ire of even some of his NDA allies. He then clarified that the Ayodhya problem should be solved either through dialogue or the court verdict. This silenced his allies but did not satisfy them as they were answerable to Muslims in their States. They continued to convey their concern about Mr. Vajpayee's statement. The Opposition, of course, could not be satisfied with such obfuscation on the part of the Prime Minister.

When the Prime Minister went for a holiday to Kumarakom in Kerala he issued his 'musings' to the press. He took yet another stand in his 'musings' about the Ayodhya issue. He said his Government would accept, and was constitutionally bound to implement, the judiciary's verdict, whatever it might be. He also said emphatically that the law would take its own course should any organisation attempt to disturb the status quo. What was more, he categorically said that it was a "flagrant violation of the law" to demolish the "disputed mosque structure" without waiting for the court verdict. He went on to add that "the wrongs of the past cannot be righted by a similar wrong in modern times".

Now the crucial question is which of his statements should a future historian take seriously? His earlier statement that building of a Ram temple was in keeping

with the national sentiment? Or the one in his 'musings'? Naturally different historians will choose to focus on one of these statements depending on their view of Mr. Vajpayee as a 'Hindu fanatic' or as a 'liberal democrat'. A particular historical narrative is chosen depending on the historian's view of the person he/she is writing about. Historical actors say or do something under certain circumstances and compulsions. What one says or does is as important as why one says or does it.

History should not be used in the contemporary context to promote hatred between communities.

Mr. Vajpayee made the above two contradictory statements under different compulsions. When the Sangh Parivar put pressure on him and also the coming elections in Uttar Pradesh bothered him he made one statement. But when he saw that his image as moderate took a severe beating and his allies felt alienated, he revised his statement and donned the earlier mask again. A political actor cannot ignore her/his compulsions while saying or doing something. This is true of all, historical actors, rulers and politicians. Human behaviour is not determined by ideals and religious beliefs alone. Its main determinant is 'interests' and much more so when it comes to a ruler or a politician who has to reconcile contradictory interests. Thus, history should not be used in the contemporary context to promote hatred between communities.

If some temples were demolished by Muslim rulers one should not draw the conclusion that they did so solely on account of their hatred for Hindu religion and idol worship. It is for historians to discuss the circumstances which led to the demolitions for which there are different narratives. An objective historian will take all these narratives into account and decide which is nearer the truth. Dr. Romila Thapar, for example, points out different narratives about the Somnath temple. In a lecture, she cautioned people against attempting a history of the Somnath temple with a black-and-white interpretation of evidence. Dr. Thapar said

9
minutes

there were five different and mutually contradictory sources for reconstructing the history of the temple which was raided by Mahmud Ghaznavi in 1026 A.D. These sources, she pointed out, were Turko-Persian literature, Jain texts, Sanskrit records, British colonial writings and nationalistic readings of the temple's history. Each of these sources, Dr. Thapar said, highlighted the interests of the sections it represented and thus arriving at hard and fast conclusions based on any one of

them alone was faulty. She also challenged the colonial reading of history that the raid by Ghaznavi had caused a deep rift between the two communities. Had the raid traumatised the Hindu community, she argued, the temple committee two centuries after the event would not have donated land to a Muslim trader to build a mosque close to the temple.

Even Aurangzeb while demolishing some temples has given *jagirs* (landed estates), the records show, to many temples. While he demolished one Shiva temple (where the Gyanvapi mosque was built) in Varanasi he gave a jagir to another Shiva temple (the Jangambadi shrine) in the same city. He has issued *firman*s giving such grants to other temples as far away as Guwahati. Like our modern rulers, the medieval monarchs also acted under contradictory situations and political compulsions. Such acts should not be ascribed to those rulers' hatred for Hinduism and idol worship. Such a black and white reading of history has done enough damage to Hindu-Muslim ties

A historian from Hyderabad, Mr. Ziauddin Shakeb, found that many temples in the Brindavan area such as Krishna Damodara and Govinda Deva had in their cellars centuries-old copies of the Koran and Mughal administrative documents in calligraphy dating from the time of Babar. The documents relate to the land and financial aid given by Mughal kings to the temples in Brindavan. The religious books of the Muslims are kept

with great respect by the temple priests and they are in good shape, says Mr. Shakeb. More importantly, Mr. Shakeb says that many Muslims leaving the country at the time of Partition deposited their documents including these scriptures with the temples believing that they will be safe there. Quoting the temple priests, Mr. Shakeb says that the Islamic heritage collection was handed over to the temples by Muslims who were migrating to Pakistan.

Today, history is being misused for political ends. History has become a powerful tool for some politicians. It is as powerful as religion for inciting passions. The Ayodhya controversy has been raging for more than a decade and is still far from being settled. It has incited religious passions on both sides of the communal divide. The BJP has come to power mainly by using history for political ends. This controversy is being revived with full force once again in view of the coming elections in Uttar Pradesh.

It is unfortunate that a section of the educated middle class gets carried away by these sentiments. It is high time we used wisdom rather than emotions to resolve the controversy. The Sangh Parivar has developed strong vested interests in keeping the controversy alive not only for political purpose but also as a powerful tool for religious revival. Religious revival benefits the VHP sadhus by helping them retain their hold over powerful sections of the Hindu community and brings them undreamt of financial resources. But it is as detrimental to the national interest as it is beneficial to the VHP leaders. It is for the people of India to decide which interests are dearer to them, the national interest or the interests of a few religious fanatics. The judiciary should also play its part by expediting its verdict. It is not any individual but the entire nation which is paying the price. The court verdict also may not ultimately solve the problem as the Parivar will reject it if it goes against them. So, some fair-minded Hindus and Muslims should come together to find a solution in a spirit of give and take and allow the nation to concentrate on real issues.

'Sikhism, a separate religion'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 16. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh today officially recognised Sikhism as a "separate religion" and Sikhs as having a "separate identity" from Hindus.

The RSS view, placed before a meeting of the Minorities Commission here, represents a total retractment of the earlier stance that Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism were branches of Hinduism, a view put in print by old RSS "gurus" such as Golwalkar.

The decision to close this chapter comes after widespread resentment among the Sikhs and the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, which had objected to attempts by RSS workers in Punjab to subsume Sikhism. Whatever the history of the birth of Sikhism, clearly, the Sikhs were not amused by the RSS trying to portray their religion as only a branch or an offshoot of Hinduism.

In Punjab, RSS workers had tried to get all temples to keep the Guru Granth Sahib and wanted gurudwaras to reciprocate by allowing prayers to Hindu gods.

They had also tried to enlist Sikh youth as swayamsevaks.

Mr. M. G. Vaidya, RSS spokesperson and member

of the delegation that deposed before the Minorities Commission, later said: "The RSS has a firm belief in the plurality of religions, denying the distinctiveness of different religions goes against the very grain of the RSS, and we appreciate the diversity of religions." "If we deny the diversity we will cease to be Hindus."

"We stressed on unity, not uniformity," he noted, though the RSS Sarsanghchalak's call to Muslims and Christians recently at Agra to "join the national mainstream" was seen as a desire to see them merge their identities with the majority Hindus.

Mr. Vaidya said that it was during the RSS mass contact programme that he met Mr. Tarlochan Singh, vice-chairman of the Commission, and when asked he had said that there would be no problem for him to meet the full Commission. Today after a discussion of about 90 minutes with the Commission, the RSS agreed to make public its view that Sikhism had a distinct identity separate from Hinduism. Mr. Vaidya hoped the air would be cleared now and the "wrong notions" stand corrected. Next month an RSS delegation will meet the Commission to clarify its views on Christianity and conversions.

THE HINDU

Hindu, Muslim leaders meet on Ayodhya

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, JAN. 13. The much-publicised meeting called by the Bharatiya Janata Party MP and Bajrang Dal leader, Mr. Vinay Katiyar, to solve the Ayodhya dispute today took off without Mr. Mohammed Hashim Ansari, first petitioner in the Babri Masjid case. However, a group of Muslims, including some Imams of local mosques in Faizabad district, turned up at the State Guest House here, venue of the talks.

Later, Mr. Katiyar told presspersons that today's talks were preliminary and the two sides expressed their determination to find a solution to the problem at the local level. The next round of talks would be held in the first week of March, he added.

Those who took part in the talks included Haji Sagir Ahmed Siddiqui, Imam of Bhagwamir mosque, Syed Tauheed Asharafi Asharaf, Imam of Pure Kamgar, Mr. Mohammed Meer, Pradhan of Hainsi village, and some other village-level Muslim leaders little known in the context of the Babri Masjid dispute.

Mr. Katiyar, however, did not give much importance to the fact that known minority leaders were absent from his talks. The leaders from Lucknow and Delhi had a little role to play as the dispute affected mostly the people of Ayodhya and Faizabad. Mr. Katiyar's version was supported by those who had come



The BJP MP, Mr. Vinay Katiyar, holding talks with Ayodhya Muslims for an amicable settlement of the Ram Janmabhoomi issue in Lucknow on Saturday.

from Faizabad and some present at the press conference.

Asked if they were ready to forgo the mosque, Haji Sagir Ahmed said he wanted both the temple and the mosque. Mr. Katiyar said many Muslims had not even seen the disputed site. He pleaded that those who

wanted to have a look at the place should be allowed to do so.

He said Muslim leaders playing politics on the temple issue had tried to sabotage the talks but more than 100 Muslims had attended the meeting.

THE HINDU

14 JAN 2001

Negotiating Ayodhya

By Rajeev Dhavan

HD-12 ✓
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N O AMOUNT of recrimination or explanation can mitigate the damage caused by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's intemperate, partisan, communal but authoritative pronouncement on building a temple on the site of the desecrated Babri Masjid. He did more than set a cat amongst the pigeons. He emboldened communal Hindu forces to harden their stand. Just as the call for "kar seva" led to the demolition of the Masjid in 1992, Mr. Vajpayee's statement was a political call to construct the temple at all costs. The parliamentary debate may be over, but the menace remains.

Although the call for negotiated settlement comes from some of the parties in the case, it has resulted in both an exercise in kite flying and a show of strength to tell the Muslim community that they must back down in response to what Mr. Vajpayee's calls the 'national sentiment' to build the temple. But, other than yielding to the demand to construct the temple, what is there to negotiate? Negotiated settlements must be made in a non-coercive atmosphere, by free and willing parties anxious to do justice to each other. It is difficult to believe that a negotiation can take place in conditions of shrill hostility in which politically motivated groups have not only declared the inevitability of building the temple, but started sending the pillars and artifacts on their way to Ayodhya.

Earlier, there had been two attempts at negotiation. The first negotiation took place between December 4, 1991, and February 1992 between the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in the presence of a Union Minister (Mr. Subodh Kant) and the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh (Mr. Mulayam Singh), Rajasthan (Mr. B. S. Shekawat) and Maharashtra (Mr. Sharad Pawar). The BMAC took a very conciliatory stance and agreed to an exchange of historical documents. The object of this was to ensure that the VHP case on Babri Masjid was genuine and not motivated by political vendetta in the form of a historical revenge against Muslims. If the real purpose of the temple campaign

Ayodhya has now been brought to a state of irresponsible and frenzied mal-excitement. It cannot be negotiated in this way in this climate.

was vendetta, no Muslim or other religious site could ever be safe from the avalanche of hate. So, the BMAC agreed that if the genuineness and historicity of the claim could be established, they would back down because, as Mr. Jilani put it, Lord Ram was held in the highest esteem by Muslims. The two focal questions were whether (a) the exact spot of the Babri Masjid was in fact the Ramjanmabhoomi (birthplace of Lord Rama) and (b) whether an existing temple was actually destroyed to build the Babri Masjid.

The BMAC reiterated its stance in a letter of January 25, 1991, but expressed surprise that the VHP did not want to discuss the Ramjanmabhoomi question at all. The negotiations broke down.

The second negotiation through the then Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, began with the then Union Home Minister, Mr. S. B. Chavan, writing a letter on September 27, 1992, to the previous negotiating parties. The atmosphere was tense. Kar seva was in flow. The Union's half-hearted attempt to stop the kar seva on July 23, 1992, had failed. The Supreme Court's cautionary orders fell on deaf ears. A terrorising battle situation had been created. On October 2, 1992, the BMAC reiterated its earlier stance and expressed dismay at the situation. A meeting took place on October 3, 1992. Some exchanges took place whilst the kar seva continued menacingly. By November 8, 1992, the BMAC reiterated its earlier stance on the two focal questions of Ramjanmabhoomi and proof of destruction of the temple. But, it also warned that it could not participate in any further discussions if the kar seva was not stopped. The kar seva did not stop. The mosque was razed to the ground. All this is relevant for the year 2001. Unless the call for construction in February 2001 is withdrawn, no negotiations are possible.

The negotiations can be linked to the

judicial dispute. Before the Supreme Court in 1995, the 'secular' lawyers were able to show that in the first set of suits filed by Gopal Visharad (No. 2 of 1950), Param Hans Ram Chandra Das (suit 25 of 1959) and Nirmohi Akhara (Suit 26 of 1959), there was no mention of a temple being destroyed. In fact, the later emphasis in Shri Gopal's statement in reply to the Sunni Waqf Board case (No. 12 of 1961) was on showing that the Muslims

were never in possession; and, no battle took place in Ayodhya. In the state-

ment of the Nirmohi Akhara in the same case, a similar denial was made that the Masjid was built by Emperor Babar. The 'demolition' theory was first alleged by Shri Dharam Das in his Written Statement to the Sunni Waqf Board in December 1989, even though his predecessor had stuck to the view that there was no battle in Ayodhya and no Masjid was built by Babar. The demolition theory was further fortified in Justice Deoki Nandan's suit on behalf of Bhagwan Sri Ram (Suit No. 236 of 1989).

All this is important to understanding the somewhat courageous stance taken by the BMAC even at the risk of alienating some voices within the Muslim community. The crux of the issue was whether the claim was genuine or just one that had been trumped up from time to time over the decades as part of local, regional and national politics.

The issue was serious because if the logic of the claim was conceded similar claims could be made for other mosques. Indeed, in 1947-48, the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's papers show how he quashed takeovers of mosques in Delhi. Much more menacing was the thought that the real purpose behind the Mandir movement was (a) the acquisition of property for religious leaders, (b) to set a precedent for historical revenge against the Muslims by whatever tactics; (c) the

terrorising of Muslims to induce a sense of guilt and non-belonging in them as part of the politics of post-Partition (d) to undermine Indian secularism and (e) to gain political mileage to bring the BJP and its allies in power. If there is any doubt about all this, we just have to note the vituperative tone of the BJP's White Paper of 1993 on the broad issue of historical revenge.

Ayodhya has now been brought to a state of irresponsible and frenzied mal-excitement in 2001. It cannot be negotiated in this way in this climate. If genuine negotiations are to take place, certain parameters have to be set. Firstly, all concerned — led by the BJP-led Government — must declare that the re-construction plans and their implementation must be brought to a grinding halt. Today, the Government is accommodatingly silent. Second, the negotiation cannot be between two litigants but the various representative parties in the secular presence of others. Third, a starting point of the negotiations must be the genuineness of the 'nativity' and 'destruction' claims which were the focus of the first negotiations in 1990-91. Fourth, it must be declared by all concerned that this is a one-off discussion and not a precedent for discussions on other sites. Fifth, it should be categorically stated that no attempts will be made to question or destroy any other site of any other temple and the status quo as on August 15, 1947, will be preserved. Sixth, due credence must be given to the view that if no conclusion is reached, neither a temple nor a masjid will be reconstructed on this site but will be relocated nearby while the disputed area would become a secular site to celebrate Indian secularism's respect for all faiths.

We are now heirs to the 21st century. It is time to set aside the parameters of historical revenge which have so far animated the so-called Ayodhya temple movement, and to look to Indian secularism to provide an enduring secular solution for India which is the most varied and culturally rich civilisation state in the world.

LAW AND SOCIETY

VHP answers Atal temple prayer

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The VHP today granted a reprieve to the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government by announcing that the construction of the Ram temple had been put off until 2002.

It had earlier threatened to begin construction immediately after the Allahabad *dharam sansad* ended.

The parishad's leaders said they had requested the sadhus and sants, who officially constitute the Ram Mandir Nirman Samiti, to give them a year's time to "create the right ambience" before construction of the temple on the disputed site could begin.

In the process, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government seems to have bought time to either clinch

the dispute through a negotiated settlement with Muslim representatives or await the court verdict.

VHP joint general secretary Onkar Bhave denied that his outfit had done a somersault on the issue. "We never said we will announce the date of construction (at the *dharam sansad* on January 19, 20 and 21)," he said. "We have requested the sadhus and sants that we need a year's time to awaken the hearts and minds of the Hindu *samaj* which seem to be in deep slumber. We are sure they will grant our request and not ask us to do anything in haste."

The climbdown indicates that the much-hyped *dharam sansad*, which will be held on the Kumbh mela venue, may now be a mere formality, full of sound and fury, signifying little.

BJP sources heaved a sigh of relief at the decision. "If they had gone ahead and announced a date for construction this year itself, the Uttar Pradesh government would have had a major law and order problem on its hands, not to speak of the Centre," sources said.

The Assembly's tenure ends in October. But the BJP government hopes to postpone polls till March 2002 by using the legal complexities arising out of the fact that the House was kept in suspended animation for nearly six months after results were announced in 1996.

The VHP's turnaround means that not only will the Uttar Pradesh government be spared the threat of instability, it would also give the party enough time to test the waters vis-à-vis the temple plank. A section of BJP hardlin-

ers have staunchly advocated reviving the "temple card" to counter anti-incumbency sentiments.

"It may work to our advantage or it may not. But we need at least a year to test this out," BJP sources said, confirming the perception that the VHP's decision was influenced largely by the impulse not to rock the Vajpayee boat.

However, for the record, VHP vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore denied this. "If the sadhu *samaj* orders us to begin construction tomorrow, we will obey them," he said. Asked how the VHP planned to raise the popular pitch on the temple issue, Kishore said: "Kar sevaks will fan out into three lakh villages and exhort Hindus to chant Ram's name and take a pledge to build the temple on the disputed site."

THE TELEGRAPH

11 JAN 2001

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2001

NOT A CREDIBLE EXERCISE

THE ATTEMPT BY a hardcore Sangh Parivar functionary, Mr. Vinay Katiyar, to start a dialogue on the Ayodhya temple issue has understandably, and quite legitimately, met with stiff resistance from those sections of the Muslim community that are directly involved in the dispute. The seemingly individualist initiative, for which Mr. Katiyar had apparently enlisted the support of Mr. Hashim Ansari (a litigant in the Mandir-Masjid case) from the other side, was in fact a trial balloon of sorts aimed at buying time or projecting a facade of 'conciliation', even as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was pushing ahead with the temple construction project. Presumably, the inspiration for the 'dialogue' idea came from the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's 'Kumarakom musings' wherein he had said the judicial route and the negotiations option were not mutually exclusive, but were in fact complementary to each other. Eminently sensible as that proposition might sound on paper, any talk of negotiations will not only lack credibility but will appear devious, given the VHP's very high stakes in putting up the Ram temple at the disputed site and the sort of momentum the preliminary construction work has picked up.

Whatever potential the negotiations route might have had as a way of settling the vexed Ayodhya dispute has entirely dissipated in the post-Masjid demolition context; the outrageous act of pulling down of the structure on that fateful December 6, 1992, had brought about a fundamental, qualitative change in the situation. And, worse, the option stood utterly discredited when the P. V. Narasimha Rao Government encouraged the two communal groups, the VHP and the Babri Masjid Action Committee, to engage themselves in an exercise based on highly questionable parameters, aside from the fact that the process gave recognition and authority to these groups to speak and decide on behalf of their respective communities. The dialogue, intended for an exchange of archaeological evidence on whether or not a temple pre-existed the

mosque (since demolished), in a way sought to legitimise the unreasonable stance of the Sangh Parivar and was premised on a totally unwarranted concession to its revanchist frenzy. No democracy anchored to secular and pluralist principles can afford to ignore the dangerous consequences of allowing fanatic communal groups to get away with their attempts to avenge what they perceive as historical 'wrongs' and thereby helping them gain political space and credibility. It is noteworthy that the 'pre-existence' theory as a basis for dispute settlement ceased to be canvassed with any degree of seriousness after the Supreme Court's decision returning the Presidential reference on the subject.

In any search for a fair solution to the Ayodhya tangle, the bottomline to be recognised is the necessary reparation that is called for in the context of the injustice done to the Muslim community when the Babri Masjid was razed to the ground eight years ago — an act of national shame. And this logically points to a restoration of the *status quo ante*. As things stand, however, there is a political consensus nationwide — excluding of course the segments constituting communal chauvinists — that the judicial verdict (which is awaited) should be accepted as the final word by all sides. For his part, Mr. Vajpayee has, in a faintly-concealed retraction from his controversial statements backing the 'temple at the disputed site' line, committed his regime to maintaining the *status quo* in Ayodhya and accepting the judicial verdict, "whatever it might be". However, with the Hindutva elements working overtime to use the Maha Kumbh mela in Allahabad for whipping up communal frenzy on the temple issue and the drummed up prospect of a firm date for construction of the temple being announced on the occasion, it is Mr. Vajpayee's assurance on maintaining the *status quo* in Ayodhya and his warning against any attempt to disturb it that will be subject to a litmus test in the immediate context.

THE HINDU

9 JAN 2001

VHP, Babri panel toughen stance on temple issue

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: Vishwa Hindu Parishad president Ashok Singhal said on Sunday that the 'dharam sansad' of saints would announce a date for the commencement of the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya on January 21.

On the other hand, convener of the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee Zafaryab Jilani warned that Muslims will physically resist any attempt by the VHP to construct the temple without a court order, setting both the organisations on an apparent collision course. He cautioned that the confrontation could be bloodier than the 1992 riots.

Asserting that "the temple would be constructed according to the guidelines of the saints", Mr Singhal said, "This Maha Kumbh will chart out a new political history" for India. He added that it might even lead to a "political change", as if suggesting that the VHP would go ahead with its plan even if it had to sacrifice the BJP-led government at the Centre as well as those in the states.

"The decision has been taken to construct the Ram temple," he said while delivering a lecture after the release of a magazine on the Maha Kumbh. "A sufficient number of pillars have been engraved to construct the first floor of the proposed temple. We only need the green signal from the saints—which we will get in this year's Kumbh," he said.

The Kumbh Mela has always been important for Hindus, Mr Singhal said. During the last Kumbh, saints had called for 'shilanyas', which ultimately led to the demolition of the Babri masjid on December 6, 1992. This year the sadhus would call for the construction of the temple and their wish will be fulfilled, he said.

Mr Singhal said that this work required mobilisation of the masses, and to ensure that 'Ram japs' and 'Ram yagnas' would be organised in every village across the country. They would continue till the construction started, he added.

It appears that the VHP chief has turned down the Prime Minister's appeal to reconsider his decision to announce the date for starting the construction of the temple as Mr Singhal said there would be a change of fortunes for the BJP after the Kumbh Mela.

The Prime Minister had said he was unable to construct the temple as he did not enjoy the requisite majority. Mr Singhal said, "The Kumbh has come at an opportune moment for Mr Vajpayee. Hindus

will have to think about constructing the temple, which, in turn, will help the BJP politically," he said.

Mr Singhal also said that the VHP was

not averse to holding talks with Muslims leaders on the issue even though similar exercises in the past had not yielded results. He felt that if talks were held again, the chances of failure would be far greater. He urged Muslims to forgo their claim on Ayodhya and said that in doing so they would give Hindu-Muslim friendship a boost.

Even as the VHP chief talked about constructing the temple, Mr Jilani warned of a confrontation which could be bloodier than the 1992 riots. Speaking to the press after a meeting of the state unit of the BMAC convened to take stock of the current developments, Mr Jilani said if the VHP forcibly constructed the temple, the BMAC would not appeal to Muslims for peace. The Centre and the states would be responsible for any trouble that followed, he added.

"Muslims had been cheated by the then state and Central governments in 1992, but we will not allow this to happen again," Mohd Azam Khan, Rajya Sabha MP of the Samajwadi Party and BMAC member said.

The BMAC appealed to all secular parties within the NDA government, like the TDP, the Trinamul Congress and the DMK, who have the backing of Muslims in their respective states, to dissuade the Sangh Parivar from taking this confrontationist course.

► See Edit: Temple Tactics, Page 10

MANDIR MATTERS

- Saints will lay down the guidelines
- 'Ram jap', 'Ram yagya' to begin in every village
- BMAC urges courts to settle dispute within a year
- Forgo claim on Ayodhya to boost friendship, Singhal tells Muslims

Ayodhya talks proposal runs aground

AYODHYA, JAN. 6. Attempts to initiate a 'Hindu-Muslim dialogue' on the Babri Masjid dispute ran aground today with the main players modifying their statements. While the main appellant in the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, Haji Mohammad Hashim Ansari, denied that there was any proposal for talks with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or any other organisation to resolve the Ayodhya dispute, the senior VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said he would not attend the meeting of Hindu and Muslim leaders at Lucknow on January 13.

Mr. Kishore, in fact, said the construction of a Ram temple would proceed in accordance with the programme to be announced by the Dharam Sansad during the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad.

Mr. Ansari said such an important issue, involving Muslims and Hindus, could not be resolved through individual efforts and it would require a broader spectrum and forum. He said though the BJP's Faizabad MP, Mr. Vinay Katiyar, was in touch with him informally, no concrete proposal had emerged.

Mr. Ansari said the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, the VHP leaders, including its president, Mr. Ashok Singhal, and the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, had expressed divergent views on the issue sending confus-

ing signals to the people. He said there were many constraints including personal and security problems for him to indulge in such talks.

Mr. Kishore said though he would be present at Lucknow on January 13, he would not attend the meeting. "The question of joining the talks would arise only if there is a hope that the meeting would yield a positive result."

Senior leaders of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, including Mr. Ashok Singhal, Mr. Kishore, Mr. Praveen Jain and Mr. Surendra Jain, held a meeting Delhi to discuss various issues, including the proposed talks with Muslim leaders. The Bajrang Dal convener, Mr. Surendra Jain, said the Lucknow meeting had not been convened by the VHP or the Dal. It was the result of the personal initiative of Mr. Vinay Katiyar. "While we are not opposed to any positive outcome of the meeting and will welcome it, none of our leaders would attend the meeting." — PTI, UNI

Shahbuddin rejects move

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 6. The convener of the Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee (BMMCC), Syed Shahbuddin, today said the

Ayodhya question was a national issue and "could not be negotiated by a few individuals who could be bought". He termed the efforts at dialogue "an obfuscation campaign that will not succeed".

Ruling out the possibility of the BMMCC participating in the VHP-sponsored talks, Mr. Shahbuddin said the community had decided in 1993 that the only recognised body which could deal with the issue on behalf of the Muslims was the All-India Personal Law Board. The VHP's attempts to secure the services of "some non-entities to sign on the dotted line will have no legal or moral sanctity".

The Imam of the Delhi Jama Masjid, Mr. Ahmad Bukhari, echoed his view. "There is no question of any negotiations under the present circumstances; not one of us will participate." If the Sangh Parivar was "willing to return the mosque it had demolished, I may consider talking to them about it."

The BJP welcomed the idea. "If negotiations start, they are welcome to the extent it goes," said Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, vice-president.

In Lucknow, Mr. Zafaryab Jilani, convener, All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee, disowned the proposed talks between Mr. Katiyar and Mr. Ansari, saying the AIBMAC would boycott any such move.

THE HINDU

7 JAN 2001

Ayodhya talks: Babri panel boycotts, BJP dissociates

■ Katiyar's individual bid: BJP ■ VHP defers construction till March

AGENCIES
LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI, JAN 6

THE proposed talks on Ayodhya suffered an initial setback following the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) announcement to boycott them even as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad said construction of the Ram temple could take place only after March. In another interesting twist, however, a report from Delhi said the Bharatiya Janata Party dissociated itself from former Bajrang Dal president and BJP MP from Faizabad Vinay Katiyar's initiative to organise a meeting of Hindu and Muslims leaders to resolve the Ayodhya issue.

Party spokesman K. Jana Krishnamurthy reiterated that the party would go by the court verdict on the issue. "Katiyar is doing it as an individual and in his behalf. Party is not taking any interest in it," he said.

Krishnamurthy however added that any amicable solution to the Ayodhya imbroglio would be welcome.

BMAC state convener Za-

faryab Jilani told UNI that the committee would not participate in the talks and added they would take place only when the level of the negotiation team was decided.

He dismissed Bajrang Dal leader Vinay Katiyar's statement that the all important meeting between the two parties would take place on January 13 after he had reportedly spoken to Mohammad Hashim Ansari, one of the litigants in the Ayodhya case.

"What transpired between Katiyar and Ansari was part of their 'private talks' and had no basis, he added.

Both of them were close friends and whatever they said was out of friendship, Jilani said and added Ansari had no right to participate in the talks as he was just a litigant.

Jilani said the BMAC would meet tomorrow in Lucknow to decide the future course of action.

He sought to challenge the VHP which according to him was seeking pretext to defer the announcement of date for commencement of construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Earlier, the VHP had announced to decide the date of commencement of construction of the the Ram temple during the Mahakumbh in Allahabad.

Jilani criticised the VHP for using Ansari through Katiyar as and when it wants. Earlier also, Ansari had spoken to Katiyar but that had failed to yield any results, he added.

He said the nation wanted peaceful solution of the Ayodhya problem. The BJP and the Hindu organisations attached to it should show their resolve to end the impasse, Jilani added.

"If they are serious, they should display concerned efforts," he said.

Jilani said he had spoken to Salauddin Obaidi and other BMAC leaders about January 13 talks but all of them were of the opinion that Katiyar's statement had no meaning.

He expressed satisfaction that the VHP wanted to defer the date of construction of temple. "It could be because the VHP is indulging in its face saving device but overall gain would be of the country," Jilani added.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 JAN 2001

Babari panel spurns Hindu-Muslim talks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI, Jan. 6. — The All India Babari Masjid Action Committee today pooched the idea of a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya issue.

The AIBMC convener, Mr Zafaryab Jilani, said there was no likelihood of any negotiation with the VHP, RSS or the BJP over the issue.

He said the reported statements of Mohammad Hashim Ansari (an AIBMAC member and a main litigant in the Ayodhya case) and Mr Vinay Katiyar were of no consequence since the AIBMAC, All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Babari Masjid Movement Co-ordination Committee had decided in 1993 that the issue

could be solved only through adjudication and not by negotiation.

Mr Jilani said Mr Katiyar's idea of settlement was "totally false and does not have any basis." He said: "Perhaps VHP leaders want to postpone at Kumbh Mela the announcement of a date for temple construction by giving the impression that some talks are being held with Muslim leaders."

Mr Katiyar said leaders of Hindus and Muslims would sit across the table in Lucknow on 13 January to try and solve the Ayodhya issue.

There are not many in the Sangh parivar who say the talks would be successful. "We are not very hopeful about the talks," Mr Surendra Jain, chief of the Bajrang Dal, said in Delhi.

He, however, welcomed the move in the hope

that Mr Ansari might withdraw the case and this could lead to a resolution of the problem.

Mr Jain asserted that the outcome of the talks won't affect the VHP if the "dharam sansad" at Allahabad announced a date for temple construction. The announcement is slated for 21 January.

The VHP tonight said Acharya Giriraj Kishore won't attend the Lucknow meeting and temple construction would proceed according to the "dharam sansad" decision.

Mr Javed Habib, considered a liberal in the AIBMAC and close to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, took a strong posture, saying the talks should find ways to reconstruct the masjid. Mr PV Narasimha Rao had promised rebuilding the masjid at the disputed site and Mr Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani had

condemned the demolition, Mr Habib said. The natural course would be to reconstruct the masjid.

He said none should reject the proposal for talks. Mr Habib said Mr Sahabuddin and Mr Jilani were trying to manipulate the BMAC.

The government appears to keep its hands off the proposal for talks. The BJP vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said it's more important that some people were trying to break the ice. The BJP secretary, Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, said those who opposed talks had vested interests.

Mr Katiyar today met the Rajya Sabha member, Mr Obaidullah Azmi, on Ayodhya. Sources said Mr Azmi's response was positive. Mr Katiyar said he knew there would be hurdles and expressed his determination to go ahead.

THE STATESMAN

7 JAN 2001

Snubbed Sangh Parivar awaits Jan. 13 deadline

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: The Sangh Parivar has asserted that its efforts to construct a Ram temple at Ayodhya will continue, the outcome of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's talks with the original plaintiff in the Babri masjid case at Lucknow on January 13 notwithstanding.

This change in the parivar's stance follows the rebuff it received from leading Muslim organisations on the January 13 talks. Bajrang Dal convenor Surinder Jain, who arrived in Delhi on Saturday, said efforts for temple

construction would begin should the VHP Dharam Sansad at Allahabad announce a date for it.

That sets a deadline for the interlocutors of the January 13 meeting who, Mr Jain indicated, have just over a week to hammer out an agreement before the Dharma Sansad meeting.

Mr Jain, who said that he too had had talks with Muslim leaders earlier, was not optimistic about Bajrang Dal leader Vinay Katiyar's scheduled January 13 meeting with Mohammed Hashim Ansari, the original petitioner in the Ayodhya case. "Nothing much will come out of it," he said.

Interestingly, VHP chief Ashok Singhal said in Himachal Pradesh that temple construction would begin after March.

To balance Mr Katiyar's peace initiative with a hardline stance seems to be the new VHP strategy. The parivar is keeping its options open on Ayodhya and may not declare a date for the commencement of the temple's construction during the Allahabad Kumbh

Mela, sources suggest. For, to announce the date would be to embarrass the government or even create a stir among the NDA partners. So, some in the parivar find it prudent to wait for an out-of-court settlement before embarking on

the temple construction. Earlier, on Saturday, major Muslim bodies rejected talks with any organisation affiliated to the Sangh Parivar, a day after the proposal was mooted. While the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) termed the VHP "unreliable and untrustworthy",

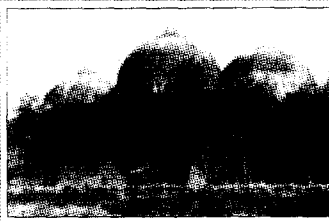
the Babri Masjid Movement Co-ordination Committee (BMMCC) said, "The Muslim Personal Law Board is the only competent body to negotiate the issue."

The convenor of the AIBMAC, Zafaryab Zilani, said, "Only the court can resolve this issue. Bipartite talks cannot solve it." Mr Zilani also questioned the credentials of Mohd Hashim Ansari, with whom a VHP delegation is expected to hold talks in Lucknow on January 13.

Mr Ansari had filed a suit in 1961 on behalf of the Sunni Waqf Board for the title of the disputed site. Mr Jilani said that Mr Ansari had no backing from the Muslim community. "Mr Ansari is just a convenor of the BMAC's Ayodhya unit and even local Muslims are not with him," he said.

The AIBMAC had decided way back in 1993 that it would not enter into any negotiations with the Sangh Parivar on the issue. A meeting of the AIBMAC will be held on Sunday to discuss the latest developments.

TEMPLE TROUBLE



- Muslim bodies reject talks with VHP affiliates
- Temple construction will begin after March: VHP chief
- Only court can resolve the issue: Convenor of the AIBMAC

The Statesman

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TAKE SEN SERIOUSLY!

But certainly not the ICHR Chairman.

OF course, Professor Amartya Sen is not a historian, but this was known before he was invited to open the Indian History Congress in Calcutta. He was invited for his high intellect and accomplishments. As a man of wide-ranging interests and a rare commitment to certain forms of social and political transformation, there can be no doubt that his knowledge of the history of his own country qualifies him to address a congress of historians. We take him seriously, more seriously than we do the Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, BR Grover or his sister who says "British authors have testified to the existence of the temple at the site". Grover goes on to say that he does not "agree with politicians passing a verdict", obviously referring to Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, which is all right with us. But then his sister goes on to defend "this government" on whom "the onus for the demolition of the Babri Masjid cannot be (placed) as the controversy existed even during British rule", which is political reasoning of a kind we find difficult to fathom, unless she is trying to say that the Sangh Parivar did not initiate the quarrel. An acute example of arguing from the conclusion to the premise!

That Grover has an agenda to push, an agenda that is not only ideological but very obviously backed by the dominant party in Delhi, has been clear for quite some time. The executive council of the ICHR was literally purged in June 1998 and reconstituted with those directly involved in inventing and pushing an historical basis for the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Their effort is to ensure that state-funded writing of history serves to propagate politically useful mythologies in preference to a rational and objective understanding of the past. As Patrick French, the British historian, said earlier this year, "what was political by default (under the Leftists) is now deliberately political". This may be due to the fact that the progress of education among the masses, especially in North India, has brought about a rudimentary historical awareness of which Ayodhya and the rise of the BJP to political pre-eminence are primary expressions. What is of concern is that this awareness is trying, through people like Grover, to make claims on history as a serious academic discipline and push quack archaeology for real. This is what Professor Sen meant when he said that the Ramayana had been converted from an epic into a historical document to be read literally. And Professor Sen is right. Which is why, having invited him, the organisers could not stomach what he had to say.

THE STATESMAN

6 JAN 2001

hold talks next week

First step for Ayodhya consensus

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 5: For the first time since the demolition of the Babri mosque eight years ago, Hindus and Muslims have agreed to sit at the negotiating table to try and resolve the Ayodhya dispute.

The talks are expected to take place on January 13 in Lucknow. The principal representatives are the Faizabad MP and former Bajrang Dal chief, Vinay Katiyar, and Mohammad Hashim Ansari, the main litigant on behalf of the Muslim Waqf Board in the title deed cases over the disputed site in Ayodhya.

A senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader said lawyers from both sides are also expected to be at the meeting, which has the Centre's go-ahead. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had expressed his keenness on an out-of-court settlement of the dispute on the floor of the House and in his recent Kumarakom musings. The Lucknow meeting seems to be the first step in this direction.

However, the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee, the main body representing Muslims in the mandir-masjid dispute, is not likely to participate in the talks. The committee is meeting in Lucknow on Sunday to discuss the Ayodhya developments in the context of Vajpayee's statements as well as the VHP's forthcoming *dharam sansad* which is

expected to announce a schedule for the temple construction.

VHP sources said efforts may be made at the meeting to persuade Ansari to withdraw the legal cases and clear the way for acquisition of a portion of the disputed site for the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas or trust which looks after matters related to the proposed Ram temple.

"If Ansari withdraws the cases, the ill-will between the two communities will reduce vastly and at least the path to a mutual settlement will become visible," said sources.

Asked if the VHP was optimistic of a concrete outcome, the sources said: "We are not too hopeful, but at least we can put the ball in the Muslims' court."

Ansari and Katiyar were quoted by agencies as having said in Faizabad that if negotiations could be started on Kashmir, the two sides in the Ayodhya dispute could also hold talks.

Asked what he would do if the Babri Committee refused to accept Katiyar's proposal, Ansari replied: "I have fixed the date for the talks and, if required, I will talk alone because it is an issue concerning Ayodhya."

The court case over the disputed land is being heard for the past 39 years and so far only 14 witnesses have been examined.

Of late, the BJP has been saying that since the legal tangle is so complex, the option of a negotiated settlement is far more "tenable and practicable".

THE TELEGRAPH

6 JAN 2001

Minority attacks on US agenda

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Jan. 3: The US is concerned about the attacks on Christians and the intolerance towards religious minorities in the country.

Visiting Republican Senator Arlen Specter raised the issue with senior Indian officials today and asked what steps were being taken to end the attacks. Foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh was among the officials Specter met.

The Senator is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and foreign minister Jaswant Singh tomorrow. He said he would like to discuss the issue with the Indian leadership. In an article yesterday, Vajpayee had expressed concern over the growing intolerance in the country.

Specter, who is on his fifth visit to the region, will leave for Islamabad on Friday. Predictably, Indo-Pakistan relations is another key item on his agenda.

The Senator indicated that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was not a dead issue and is likely to be revived, though not immediately, by the Republican government.

He stressed that despite serious opposition to the verification aspect of the treaty, one should not underestimate its positive side, especially its possible contribution to arms-control.

"Once some of these concerns are taken care of, it may be revived, perhaps after four years or in the second term of the Bush Administration," Specter added.

In an informal chat with journalists this afternoon, Specter said religious intolerance continues to be an important issue with him and the new US govern-

ment. "I raised the issue during my talks with Indian officials today. The statement issued by the Prime Minister against such attacks is encouraging, but we need to continue to watch the situation."

About five years ago, Specter was instrumental in initiating a resolution in the US Senate to impose sanctions against countries whose record on religious minorities was questionable. He said today that the new government might appoint an ambassador to monitor human rights abuse against religious minorities.

Indian officials claimed such a move was not new and was aimed mainly at China for its persecution of the Buddhist minority in Tibet. They argued that Delhi's track record on religious tolerance was time-tested and though the recent attacks were unfortunate, they did not take away the sheen from India's secular credentials.

Specter asserted that there will be no change in the attitude of the Republican government towards South Asia. Washington would like to see the ceasefire announced by Vajpayee to continue, he added.

"We don't want to see a nuclear build-up in the region. The Kashmir dispute continues to be of concern to us and like the rest of world, President George W. Bush also sees it as a potential hotspot."

"The lack of democracy and the continuance of a military regime in Pakistan continues to bother us," the Senator said.

Though Specter accepted the Indian argument that terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere in the country had to be curbed before talks could be held, he said one should not become too rigid.

THE TELEGRAPH

4 JAN 2001

VHP instructs Bajrang Dal to mobilise support for temple

U.P. Dal chief told to set up dharam samitis

BJP chief asks VHP to reconsider agenda

By Biswajeet Banerjee
The Times of India News Service

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh unit of the Bajrang Dal has been instructed by senior functionaries of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to get ready to ensure the mobilisation of people for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya in October, the Dal's state convenor, Ved Prakash Sachan, has said. Although the date for starting construction is still being kept under wraps, the buzz in Bharat Bhavan, the VHP office here, suggests that it will start from October-end this year.

Ostensibly, the 'dharam sansad of the sadhus' will decide the date, but in reality it is the VHP which is calling the shots. The three-day dharam sansad, starting January 19 in Prayag, will declare the construction date on January 21.

Explaining the rationale for choosing October as the month in which construction will begin, a senior state-level VHP leader, seeking anonymity, said the construction would need stupendous mobilisation for which six months was not enough time.

Concurring, Mr Sachan said, "In the first stage of preparation, we have been asked to set up 'dharam samitis' at the block level. Members of these committees will tour rural Uttar Pradesh to apprise the people about the construction of the temple." Similar committees have been planned all over the country, he added.

The VHP plans to train about 1,000 samiti members in February. They will spread out to different districts and meet again in Karsewakpuram in Ayodhya in May 2001 to report their progress. VHP supremo Ashok Singhal has, in fact, prepared the blueprint of the training programme. At his last meeting held in October 2000 at the Janaki Mahal Trust, Ayodhya, Mr Singhal had asked VHP workers to get ready to make frequent visits to Ayodhya. "The tempo has to be built up before the final assault," he is reported to have said.

The construction date has a political significance as well. In February 2002, Uttar Pradesh is likely to go to the polls. With the BJP's popularity taking a nosedive, the party has left it to "Lord Rama to boost its sagging image". The recently held urban civic polls have confirmed the slide in the BJP's vote-bank which has become a matter of concern for the RSS bosses.

NEW DELHI: BJP chief Bangaru Laxman has urged the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to reconsider its decision to construct a Ram temple in light of the most recent statement by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on the Ayodhya issue. Mr Laxman was referring to the PM having categorically said that the government would not tolerate any violation of the law in relation to various disputed sites, including Ayodhya and Kashi.

Extending Mr Vajpayee's viewpoint, Mr Laxman told this paper on Tuesday that the climate had been so vitiated that every effort was needed to see that the situation did not get out of hand.

Mr Laxman said the PM's latest position on the mandir issue could have been a response to a request from some Muslim leaders to take the initiative in resolving the issue. "Perhaps some Muslim leaders approached the PM to ensure that the issue is settled through a dialogue," he said.

Mr Laxman said there were two choices—settling the issue via a dialogue outside the court and accepting the judicial verdict. "The Prime Minister's appeal deserves serious consideration by VHP leaders," the BJP president said.

Asked to comment on the preparations being made by the VHP for the construction of the temple, like carrying construction material to Ayodhya from various sources, Mr Laxman remarked, "That is not a big issue. What is important is to prepare both sides in the dispute psychologically for an amicable settlement."

Mr Laxman said he 'felt' VHP functionaries might review their position in the light of Mr Vajpayee's statement. "I hope the VHP *dharam sansad* will take note of the PM's appeal," he said.

The BJP chief also indicated that there was a possibility that the party would reiterate its 'Nagpur line' at its national executive meeting to be held later this week.

► **Vajpayee's statement on Ayodhya is an eyewash: Mulayam, Page 6**

► **See Edit: Present Tense, Page 10**

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 JAN 2001

Vajpayee's statement on Ayodhya is an eyewash: Mulayam

By Bhaskar Roy
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav has challenged Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to sell his latest position on the Ayodhya issue to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal first.

"He should first make the VHP and Bajrang Dal accept his new position on the temple issue," Mr Mulayam Singh told this newspaper in an interview here on Monday. "Can the Prime Minister convince the Sangh Parivar of the need to maintain the status quo in Ayodhya?" he asked.

Rejecting Mr Vajpayee's statement as an "eyewash", Mr Yadav pointed out that the VHP was busy bringing pre-fabricated parts of the temple structure from Jaipur to Ayodhya. "Preparation for the temple construction is already on," he said.

Expressing doubts about the BJP leadership's hold over the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, the Samajwadi Party leader remarked, "It is the Prime Minister's responsibility to restrain his allies in the Sangh Parivar."

Mr Yadav said that during the VHP's initial campaign in Ayodhya in 1990, he had called for a solution either through a dialogue between religious leaders from both sides or

by accepting a court verdict. "The Prime Minister is saying the same thing now. Why didn't they take this position at that time?" he asked.

Mr Yadav felt that while the Prime Minister had made the initial statement on December 6 last year to keep the Sangh Parivar in good humour, he had subsequently modified his position to please his allies in the NDA. "He wrote that article when he felt that the NDA partners were getting restive," he said.

Mr Yadav claimed that Mr Vajpayee's purpose behind reviving the Ayodhya issue was to rebuild the BJP's vote-bank which had been eroded considerably. "They have no option but to raise this issue keeping the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections in mind," he remarked.

The SP chief, however, felt that the temple issue would not be able to boost the BJP's electoral prospects. "People are hungry, small traders have been hit hard, they are not going to walk into the temple trap once again."

He disagreed with the view that the division of the anti-BJP vote would help the ruling party in the state. "It is a sharply polarised situation in UP now, people will vote either for the Samajwadi Party or for BJP, there is no third pole," he marked.



M.S. Yadav



A.B. Vajpayee

VHP: We'll listen to *sants* not Vajpayee

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 2

UNRUFFLED BY Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's warning on the temple construction, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is sticking to its guns and plans to go ahead with its proposal to place the matter before the dharam sansad for a final decision at the Allahabad *Mahakumbh* later this month.

"The Prime Minister has expressed his feelings on the issue in his way. We will do things in our own way, by putting the matter before the *sants* and abiding by whatever decision they take on when to begin construction of the temple at Ayodhya," senior VHP leader Omkar Bhave said today.

"If the apex body of *sants* gives the green signal to begin construction of the shrine, I don't think any force can stop the Hindu community from fulfilling their aspiration. There is a limit to the tolerance of any community. I urge all concerned not to push the Hindu society towards the path of extremism," Bhave said. He was referring to Vajpayee's remark that the law will take its course if any attempt was made to disturb the status quo at the disputed site.

He rejected Vajpayee's suggestion that the vexed issue be left to the courts for a final decision, saying that the court would not be

able to resolve the matter in a 100 years. Stating that the ownership case relating to the disputed site had been dragging on in the Allahabad High Court for the last 40 years, the veteran leader said the judiciary could not provide any solution to the deadlock. Only the religious heads could decide on where Bhagwan Ram was born.

However, the PM's suggestion on negotiating with the Muslims was

acceptable.

Bhave stated they were ready for talks with the representatives of the Muslim community but the initiative must come from them or the government should mediate to set the ball rolling.

The VHP will not take the first step as the

Muslims had backed out when the Chandrashekar Government had brought the two warring sides to the table, he added.

That the VHP is skeptical about talks was clear from what Bhave said next. "But what decision can be arrived at by a dialogue? I don't think anyone has the courage to build a *masjid* there, no matter how loudly the so-called secularists shout. The disputed site is the birthplace of our God. Only a temple can be built there," he said.

When asked whether the VHP's actions would not endanger the stability of the government, Bhave dismissed the question by saying that they were not concerned whether the government stayed or fell.

'Sants firm'

THE SRI Ramjanabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti chairman and the head priest of Gorakhnath temple, Mahant Avaidyanath said on Tuesday that the *sants* were firm in their resolve in announcing the date for construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya during the *Mahakumbh* at Allahabad.

UNI, Gorakhpur

VHP slams PM's status quo call on temple

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The VHP today rejected Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's call to maintain status quo on Ayodhya and said it would abide by the dharmacharyas rather than the Prime Minister or the court.

"What should we believe — the Prime Minister's statement in Parliament or outside it?" said VHP vice-president, Mr Giriraj Kishore, reacting to an article by Mr Vajpayee. He said Mr Vajpayee's statement was probably propelled by votebank politics. "We are not concerned with votes. They are doing it for votes," he said.

The court had ordered only two *namazes* a year at the Krishnajanamsthan temple at Mathura, but now the number has increased to five, Mr Kishore said. The government should try to restore status quo and implement the High Court order there, he said.

"We want justice," he said, adding that the *Shringar puja* at the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi was stopped after a court order in 1992, but the government changed the court's order in the Shah Bano case. The government had not implemented a court order to shift a Shia graveyard at Gosaipura in Varanasi, he said.

He iterated the VHP's stand that no power in the world could prevent Ram temple construction. The replica of the proposed temple had already reached Kanpur from Jaipur and would soon reach Allahabad, he said. The replica would be open for viewing by devotees during Kumbh Mela at Prayag and they would be allowed to offer puja at the replica temple too, he said.

He rejected the BJP's suggestion that the VHP should not announce anything about the temple at the Dharam Sansad at Allahabad this month. It was for the dharamacharyas to take a stand, he said. "We will implement their decision."

But the BJP backed Mr Vajpayee's stand. The party vice-president and spokesperson, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, clarified that Mr Vajpayee's statement that the law would take its course should any organisation attempt to disturb the status quo applied to every organisation or person. When asked if that included the VHP, he said: "The BJP agrees with whatever is stated in the article."

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

Kerala priests, govt criticise Vajpayee

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Jan. 2. — The euphoria generated by the Prime Minister's week-long stay in Kerala is over.

State BJP leaders have turned defensive over the 'faux pas' by PMO officials in fixing his appointment with some Christian bishops, including the strong Catholic clergy.

The move has proved counter-productive because different sections of the Church are blaming Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for failing to stop the attacks on Christians in different parts of India.

The much-touted Kerala package announced by the Prime Minister, especially for the agriculture sector, has been termed a farce by the ruling Front.

The chief of the Evangelical Church, Bishop Sadgunam, came down heavily on the Centre minutes after Mr Vajpayee's departure. He said Mr Vajpayee should resign if he planned to continue as "the Prime Minister for the RSS" alone.

Many Christian priests in Kerala believe that the BJP's toning down on

Ayodhya as suggested by Mr Vajpayee's statement after his Kerala holiday suggest that Muslims will be better treated by the Sangh parivar than Christians.

They think the Sangh parivar agenda against the Christian Church on the conversion issue continues with the blessings of Mr Vajpayee. The assurances given by the Prime Minister to the priests who visited him aren't being taken seriously.

The CPI-M politburo member and president of the All-India Kisan Sabha,

Mr S. Achandran Pillai, has said that Vajpayee's Kerala package is a farce not to please the state BJP. No governmental decision has been taken on any of the programmes announced. The Kerala government hasn't received any information on the package. No solid assurances were given to the chief minister when he called on Mr Vajpayee at Kumarakom.

Moreover, Mr Vajpayee didn't make his Kerala package official. It was just discussed at a meeting with BJP workers. He didn't reveal anything when EK Nayanar submitted a memorandum to him on issues afflicting the state.

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

Ram temple movement not communal, asserts Vajpayee

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI, 1 JANUARY

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has promised to move away from the beaten track for tackling the vexed Kashmir problem and emphasised that issues like Ram Janmabhoomi needed to be resolved.

"A self-confident and resilient nation should not postpone the inconvenient issues of yesterday, to a distant tomorrow," Mr Vajpayee said in an article written during his week-long holiday at Kumarakom. The Prime Minister said the two issues were a legacy of history and they cannot be allowed to linger on.

While holding on to the position that talks with Islamabad

was possible only if it abandoned cross border terrorism, the Prime Minister said his regime was willing to hold talks with the militant outfits. Following up on his defence of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, the Prime Minister said that there was nothing communal about Gandhiji's vision of Ram Raja or Rajiv Gandhi's initiatives in Ayodhya.

In what appears to be an attempt to frustrate the attempts of the Congress to abandon its Ayodhya past, Mr Vajpayee said the demand for temple had the support of various political parties. "Few could deny that Ram occupied an exalted place in the country's culture... No wonder then, that the movement for con-

struction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya struck a supportive chord in more than one political party."

Mr Vajpayee said had it not been the case, the Rajiv Gandhi government would not have taken the steps to facilitate the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya.

"Rajivji even inaugurated the Congress Party's 1989 election campaign from the vicinity of Ayodhya with a promise to usher in Ram Raja, which was also Mahatma Gandhi's dream. There was nothing communal about either Gandhiji's vision or Rajiv Gandhi's initiatives at Ayodhya," Mr Vajpayee said.

He said this showed that there was no dispute over a Ram

temple at Ayodhya being an expression of national sentiment in the same way that reconstruction of a temple at Somnath was recognised as an expression of national sentiment.

At the same, the Prime Minister said he would not allow any organisation to disturb the

FREEWHEELING

status quo in the Ayodhya dispute. "I wish to make it absolutely clear that the law will take its course, should any organisation attempt to disturb the status quo. The government will not remain a silent spectator and adopt delaying tactics, as unfortunately happened eight years ago," Mr Vajpayee said.

Asserting that wrongs of medieval past could not be set right by a similar wrong in modern times, the Prime Minister said the status quo at Kashi, Mathura and other disputed places of worship must remain undisturbed. "Far from indicating the Hindu society's weakness, this will show the strength of our national ethos of tolerance and religious harmony," he said.

On Kashmir, the Prime Minister said India was willing and ready to seek a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. "Towards this end, we are prepared to recommence talks with Pakistan at any level, including the highest level, provided Islamabad gives sufficient proof of its preparedness to create a conducive atmo-

sphere for a meaningful dialogue."

The Prime Minister said Islamabad's attitude was not favourable. "It is not doing enough to rein in terrorist organisations based on its soil that are continuing their killing spree, targeting both innocent civilians and our security personnel in Kashmir and other parts of India."

Outlining the contours of the government approach to the issue, he said "in our search for a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem, both in its external and internal dimensions, we shall not traverse solely on the beaten track of the past. Rather, we shall be bold and innovative designers of a future architecture of peace and prosperity for the entire

South Asian region. In this search, the sole light that will guide us is our commitment to peace, justice and the vital interests of the nation," he said.

Describing the Kashmir problem as an "unfortunate inheritance" from the tragic partition of India in 1947, he said India never accepted the pernicious two-nation theory that brought about the partition.

"However, the mindset that created Pakistan continues to operate in that country. That is why it is continuing with its untenable policy on Kashmir, disregarding the considerations of both good-neighbourly relations with India and the well being of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Economic Times

2 JAN 2001

Do not disturb status quo on temple sites, cautions Vajpayee

In musings from Kumarakon, PM

urges nation to move on past debate

The Times of India News Service NEW DELHI: Ruminating at his Kerala retreat over the resurgent Ayodhya controversy set off by his "expression of the national sentiment" remark, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has now warned against any attempt to "disturb the status quo" at Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura and other places. "The government will not remain a silent spectator and adopt delaying tactics, as unfortunately happened eight years ago." What is being seen as a warning to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, which announced plans to build the Ram temple at the disputed site, is contained in his two-part 'Musings from Kumarakon', written during his year-end holiday in Kerala. The 'musings' have been released to various newspapers.

Termining the demolition of the "disputed mosque" on December 6, 1992, as "unfortunate" and "a flagrant violation of the law", Mr Vajpayee said the Ayodhya issue was one of the two "problems that are a legacy of our history". The other, expectedly, was the dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir.

Observing that the Ayodhya issue should not be allowed to remain unresolved too far into the future, Mr Vajpayee said there "are only two ways to resolve it—official route or the route of mutual understanding. The government will accept, and is really bound to imple-

ment, the judiciary's verdict, whatever it might be".

However, this did not foreclose the need for negotiations in a non-governmental and non-political framework, he added. Reiterating the government's readiness to seek "a lasting solution" to the Kashmir problem, he offered to recommence talks with Pakistan, "including at the highest level", provided that Islamabad "gives sufficient proof" that it is prepared to create an atmosphere conducive to a meaningful dialogue. He described the government's unilateral Ramzan truce and its extension until January 26 as "well-conceived steps to normalise the situation in J&K", and declared that New Delhi would soon initiate talks with "various representative groups in the state".

He blamed a section of the media and the political class for transforming him overnight from a "moderate" to a "hardliner", and said a campaign had been launched to "create misgivings about me in the minds of our minority brethren". He said he had consciously used the past tense in his statement that Ayodhya was an expression of the national sentiment. This sentiment, he said, "became narrow, and its inclusive character became restrictive, because of the unfortunate demolition of the disputed mosque" eight years ago. However, clearly wishing to wash away the controversy, the PM said, "We cannot forever remain shackled to the debate on demolitions either of the distant or (of) the recent past. India must move on."

POSTCARD FROM KERALA

- Govt. will not remain a silent spectator, warns PM
- Ayodhya, Kashmir part of India's legacy of history
- Govt. will implement judicial verdict, asserts Vajpayee
- We cannot forever remain shackled to the debate on demolitions

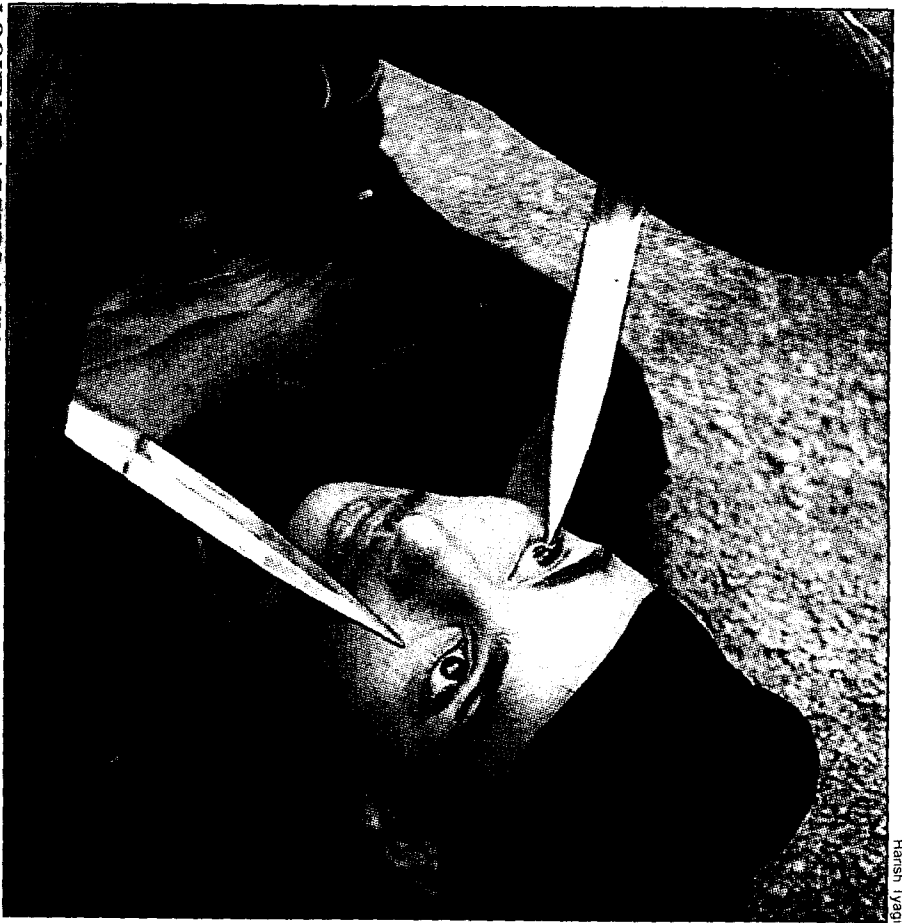
VHP dismisses warning

By Rajesh Ramachandran

The Times of India News Service NEW DELHI: Responding to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's musings from his Kerala retreat, especially his stern warning on Ayodhya, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore remarked, "Koi farak nahin padega" (It won't make any difference). The PM's refrain, "the law will take its course, the government will not remain a silent spectator", was evidently in reference to the coming Kumbh Mela later this month when the VHP and its 'sadhus' are expected to announce a date for the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. There is even speculation within the Sangh Parivar that the Vajpayee government might fall if the VHP's Ayodhya movement gains momentum, forcing some NDA allies to withdraw support.

Dismissing Mr Vajpayee's warning against disturbing the status quo as a bid to placate the BJP allies in the NDA, Mr Giriraj Kishore said, "We will go ahead with our programme and the 'dharmacharyas' will decide the course of action."

The opposition, though not exactly dismissive of Mr Vajpayee's statement, is not convinced about the PM's turnaround. Congress leader and party spokesman Prithviraj Chaudhan said, "The PM's flip-flop makes one wonder which is the real Vajpayee. Will he change his tune again after coming back to Delhi?" Mr Chaudhan said it appeared that the Prime Minister's earlier statements in favour of the temple had been made under duress from the Sangh Parivar and that he was now trying to re-do the "mask of a moderate".



LOOKING DAGGERS: A Sikh youth displays his skills as he stares unflinchingly at a pair of daggers during a procession outside Gurdwara Bangla Sahib in New Delhi to mark the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh on Monday.

Hurriyat's Pak visit suffers setback as Lone backs out

SRINAGAR: Fresh tremors hit the Hurriyat Conference on Monday, a day ahead of its crucial executive meeting, as moderate leader Abdul Ghani Lone decided to back out of the proposed team to Pakistan, accusing the hardliners of ganging up against him. The powerful Hizbul Mujahideen also challenged the Hurriyat's prerogative to act as a mediator between India and Pakistan.

"I will not visit Pakistan as a member of the Hurriyat delegation proposing to hold negotiations with the militant leadership in Islamabad," Mr Lone, who heads the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples' Conference, told the working committee meeting of the party. He said his step had not been taken under duress and was voluntary.

Referring to the Centre's offer for talks with the Hurriyat, Mr Lone said there had been no talks between the two as yet "nor does the Centre appear serious about talks".

He said certain elements had launched a campaign against the Hurriyat, accusing it of a sell-out. His remark was an apparent reference to the supporters of pro-Pakistan constituents in the Hurriyat who had gone on protest on December 17. He said those elements were reading the 'jehad' wrong and were bent on derailing the political approach of the People's Conference.

Mr Lone said peace "will be a bigger jehad" at this crucial moment.

Earlier, Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani said the composition of the membership of the delegation to Pakistan would be decided by consensus. (PTI)

Temperatures rise over import of toxic mercury from U.S.

By Rahul Gupta

NEW DELHI: Environmental groups in the country are up in arms against a U.S. move to export used and toxic mercury to India.

The 118-tonne stockpile is the largest in the U.S., and the government does not want it on its territory. The stockpile, therefore, is being exported to India under a veil of secrecy. A Maine-based chemical factory, HoltraChem, had sold it to an Illinois-based trader, D.F. Goldsmith and Metal Corporation, who is planning to send the mercury to India.

The entire transaction has been kept under wraps. Not only is the name of the Indian importer not known, but the city in which the mercury will land has also been kept secret. What has also led to raised eye-

brows is the probable use to which such a large consignment of used mercury in India will be put. Maine, where the mercury originated, does not want it as it does not have storage facilities for such toxic substances. After protests by NGOs in Maine, the state's governor specifically asked the U.S. government to stop its export to India. He even suggested that the U.S. defence department take over the cargo and add it to its stockpile.

Meanwhile, NGOs in India and the U.S., including Greenpeace USA, Toxics Link in India and the Basel Action Network (BAN), are closely monitoring the movement of the cargo.

Greenpeace USA's Lisa Finaldi accused the U.S. government of being an accomplice in poisoning the poor for profit.

YOU SAID IT

by Lakshman



He was complaining about too much security and lack of privacy. Still it was your duty to see His Honour didn't escape!

Nationalism & communalism

By Asghar Ali Engineer

During the national struggle, leaders who knew the pulse of the people remained firm about secularism as a national ideology while fully respecting religion.

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IF THE 20th century was all about nationalism, the 21st century will be the age of globalisation, though nation and nationalism will not disappear altogether. In geographical sense, nation-states will continue to exist for a long time to come though nation as a concept and as a sentiment too will continue to be weakened. Nationalism dominated during the 20th century mainly because of colonialism and it is declining now due to globalisation. The European countries have come together and formed the European Union. The nationalist feeling in the west is fast declining. However, it is yet not so in most of the so-called third world countries. The origin of nationalism in the west and in the east was quite different. Nationalism in the west arose as a result of a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church. The bourgeoisie had secularism as their ideology and it became stronger with the feeling of nationalism.

It was quite otherwise in the colonial world where nationalism emerged in the struggle against the imperial powers and the main ideology was not always secularism. In many cases there were no bourgeoisie worth the name leading the struggle. Struggle against colonialism was led by an assortment of forces — religious, feudal and weak bourgeoisie — and in many cases religious forces were more assertive.

In India too, colonialism led to religious revivalism and a sharpening of religious identities. India was a pluralist country with several religions, cultures and languages of which Hinduism and Islam were the main. A feeling of political competitiveness and hostility, aided and abetted by the imperial power, surfaced during the anti-colonial struggle itself. Problems of power sharing fuelled the hostility.

However, the leaders of Indian National Congress were also determined to use secularism as the leading ideology of the nationalist struggle. There was one more important difference between the nationalist struggle in Europe and that in colonial countries. In Europe, secularism was not only a lead ideology but was also hostile to religion. It did not accommodate religion. In colonial countries, on the other hand, even where secularism was a lead ideol-

ogy, religion had to be accommodated. There was no question of ignoring it, let alone being hostile. And this made all the difference. Often serious compromises had to be made with religious ideologies.

During the freedom struggle, Islam and Hinduism often clashed and ultimately the nation was divided and Partition accompanied freedom. The British rulers often generated hostility between Hindus and Muslims where it did not exist and followed policies which would further accentuate differences. Thus in 1909 the British rulers introduced separate electorates for which there was no serious movement. And it is no exaggeration to say that the separate electorate was the first step in the direction of Partition. It is ironical that the VHP is now demanding introduction of separate electorates in India.

During the national struggle leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who knew the pulse of the people remained firm about secularism as the national ideology while fully respecting religion. However, communal forces not only rejected secularism but based nationalism itself on religion. Though both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League had irreconcilable differences, they agreed that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations. Like Jinnah, Golwalkar also maintained that nationalism was not geographical but cultural and religious. Even today the RSS talks of cultural nationalism.

Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad were unique personalities of the national movement. Both were firm believers in religion and at the same time great votaries of secularism. It was not a matter of mere strategy for them but a deep-rooted conviction. It was such a political approach which brought the two communities together despite a strong communal trend to the contrary. It is such a wise approach which is needed even today for making India stable and strong. Unfortunately, like the strong presence of communal forces

among Hindus and Muslims in the pre-Partition days, there is a strong presence of communal forces 50 years after independence. Our politics is getting more and more communalised.

Recently, Mr. Bal Thackeray of the Shiv Sena and Mr. Ashok Singhal of the VHP gave statements which cannot be lightly dismissed though some people think they do not deserve serious consideration. Mr. Sharad Pawar of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) dismissed Mr. Thackeray's statement as of no consequence. I do not think this is the right approach. There is strong need to counter such dangerous thinking. Mr. Thackeray maintains that the policy of "appeasement of Muslims" will continue unless they are disenfranchised. He thinks that Muslims are a powerful votebank and for that reason political parties try to 'appease' them and the best way is to disenfranchise them.

This is nothing but anti-Muslim hostility; in this country which caste and tribe is not a votebank. If this logic is adopted should we disenfranchise Dalits also? Or because they are Hindus can they be appeased and treated as votebanks? And if the largest minority of India, whose numbers (130 million) are more than the population of many Muslim countries, is disenfranchised what will be the consequences? Can we run Indian democracy? To add fuel to the fire, Mr. Manohar Joshi of the Shiv Sena, who is also Union Minister of Industries, says only "traitors and anti-nationals" among Muslims should be disenfranchised. Who will determine who is a traitor and an anti-national and how? Will the accuser be judge also? If Mr. Thackeray and the VHP had their way, they would disenfranchise all in India except a few upper castes — the twice born. It may start with religious minorities but can end up with all weaker sections of Indian society. This is also implied by what the BJP-Shiv Sena never tire of calling "national mainstream." According to them, the national mainstream is ultimately constitu-

ted by upper caste Hindus and the real culture of this country is Vedic culture and all other cultures are either alien or subsidiary to it. No one has anything against the Vedic culture. But in a pluralist democracy no culture can claim a hegemonistic position.

Mr. Singhal suggests that if Muslims cannot be disenfranchised then let there be a separate electorate for them and "let them elect their own leaders". Pakistan had already introduced, he said, separate electorate for Hindus and other minorities. First, what happened in Pakistan is definitely wrong and all minorities are protesting against it and most of the people of Pakistan belonging to the majority community do not want it. It was introduced by a military dictator, Zia-ul-Haq, who was disliked by the people. And even if Pakistan did, its very ideology has been religious nationalism. Why should India — a secular, democratic country — imitate it? Such a concept should be strongly rejected. Why this obsession with Pakistan? Let Pakistanis do what they please and Indians follow their own saner course.

On top of all this, no less a person than the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, says construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya is in keeping with the "national sentiment." The three statements — by Mr. Thackeray, Mr. Singhal and Mr. Vajpayee — send a chill down one's spine. Where are these leaders of the Hindutva leading India? Can India remain a secular democratic country under them? Is it not time that all secular democratic forces challenged these leaders out to destroy India's composite secular character? It is unfortunate that many parties claiming to be secular are propping up BJP rule in this country for some short term gains. They should realise that after just one year in power, the communal forces have become so bold as to issue statements challenging the very basis of the Indian polity. They have saffronised our education, have communalised Indian history, have spread their network throughout India and now are openly talking of establishing Hindu Rashtra. Like in Germany, it could be too late before the secular forces realise their mistake?

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2001

RITUAL ASSURANCES

THE RESPONSE OF the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to the concern voiced by a group of Kerala bishops — who met him during his sojourn at Kumarakom — over the “increasing atrocities” on the Christian community has a familiar ring about it, going by the bishops’ version. If his claim that “steps” had been taken to deal with the issue sounds rather too ritualistic to carry conviction, his point that the incidents had “no ideological angle” to them is typical of the ruling establishment’s attitude towards such episodes; it has tended to treat them as nothing more than acts of criminality perpetrated by anti-social elements or attributable to local factors. And the Centre, in particular, has constantly sought to absolve itself of any responsibility by taking cover under the Constitutional provision that assigns ‘law and order’ to the charge of the State Governments. There is nothing concrete in Mr. Vajpayee’s apparently reassuring response to suggest any significant change in these two aspects concerning the perception and approach of the BJP leadership in Government (at the Centre) to the genuine apprehensions of the Christian community.

The stark reality that cannot be wished away is that, while Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. L. K. Advani make it a point to declare periodically their ‘commitment’ to this country’s secular and pluralist traditions, the BJP’s cousins in the Sangh Parivar are vigorously engaged in whipping up a campaign of hatred against religious minorities. Witness, for instance, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan’s patronising call for the “indigenisation of the church” and his preposterous theory that the minority communities could have a “sense of belonging” only when they integrated themselves with the ‘culture of the land’ (read Hindu culture), a proposition which in effect equated patriotism with the culture of the majority community. The other outfits, such as the Bajrang Dal and the

VHP, have been drumming up an anti-minority campaign in their own insidious ways and even holding out physical threats. What such an aggressive campaign will mean is very much in evidence in Gujarat where the Christian places of worship are vandalised and members of that community attacked systematically, evolving into a pattern since 1998. The role of ‘culture police’ which they have assumed for themselves — clamping a ‘ban’ on the celebration of St. Valentine’s Day — now even the New Year’s Day — and organising aggressive protests against those participating in such festivities — is yet another audacious, and no less dangerous, dimension of the creeping intolerance.

What is of real concern is that, for all the professions by the likes of Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani of adherence to the secular principle, there is no palpable sense of indignation or outrage against the growing trend of attacks on the Christian community and, for their part, the BJP Governments, whether at the Centre or in the States, refuse to see beyond the superficial causes of such incidents. Equally significant is that the phenomenon has emerged sharply only since the advent of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre. Worse is that the two top leaders have, off and on, lent credence to the Sangh Parivar’s anti-minority campaign by their words or deeds, for whatever reason. Mr. Vajpayee’s call for a national debate on ‘religious conversion’ and Mr. Advani’s presence at the Agra conclave of the RSS (where Mr. Sudarshan asked the minorities to “recognise” their Hindu cultural roots) are just two of the cases in point. And the latest of course is Mr. Vajpayee’s controversial statement on ‘Ayodhya’. Given this context, the Prime Minister would need to do much more than giving the religious minorities ritualistic assurances — as the one on steps to check atrocities against them — if they are to be really convinced about his ‘secular’ credentials.

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MEETING COMES OFF EVEN AS SOME BISHOPS ABSTAIN

Steps taken to curb attacks on Christians: PM

By George Jacob

KOTTAYAM, DEC. 31. The much-awaited meeting between the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and Kerala Church leaders, which was hanging fire till Saturday night, took place today. However, the meeting was a low-key affair, with many of the Catholic bishops failing to join the delegation. 9 minutes

The meeting had run into rough weather as contradictory interests had developed in both camps. It appears that both the parties at last agreed to take the least favoured options they had — the Prime Minister met them in a delegation, and the bishops agreed to meet him on Sunday morning. And, contrary to their earlier stance, the bishops did not submit any memorandum.

Speaking to presspersons after the meeting, they said they had taken up the issue of increasing atrocities against Christians and asked Mr. Vajpayee to "rise above party considerations" as he was the Prime Minister of all Indians. The bishops said they had also taken up the issue of crisis in the agriculture sector in the State.

According to them, the Prime Minister said the incidents had no ideological angle and steps had been taken to deal with the issue. He assured them that he would take necessary steps to deal with the crisis in the agriculture sector.

According to sources, a final decision regarding the meeting was taken on Saturday night and the invitation for most of them materialised this morning. At least



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with bishops who called on him at Kumarakom on Sunday. — Photo: H. Vibhu

three of the bishops who were intimidated of the audience with the Prime Minister expressed inability to attend it as they were preoccupied.

Those who met the Prime Minister were the Catholicos of the East, Baselius Marthoma Mathews II, head of the Malankara Orthodox Church; Joseph Mar Irenius Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church; Bishop

Thomas Mar Dionysius, Catholicos-designate of the Jacobite faction; Bishop Yoohanon Mar Phelixinos (also of the Jacobite faction); Bishop Abraham Mar Clemis of the Knanaya Orthodox Church; and Bishop Kuriakose Kunnassery of the Knanaya Catholic Church.

Those who were invited, but could not accept the invitation, included Bishop K.J. Samuel,

Moderator of the Church of South India; Archbishop Daniel Acharyparambil of the Latin Catholic Church and Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, Mar Varkey Vithayathil.

The Prime Minister also received the Chief Minister, Mr. E.K. Nayanar, who submitted a memorandum seeking necessary policy initiatives to ensure remunerative prices for agriculture crops, development of the Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram international airports and sanction for a new airport at Kannur.

Others who met the Prime Minister included Swamy Athuradas, Mr. Vellappally Natesan, general secretary, Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, and sports star, P.T. Usha.

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