

Rajasthan Governor asked to dissociate himself from 'Ram Katha'

By Our Special Correspondent

JAIPUR, DEC. 28. The ongoing controversy over the propriety of the Rajasthan Governor, Anshuman Singh, in organising a "Ram Katha" — recital of Lord Rama's story — for mobilising funds for drought relief has hotted up with the Left parties and other organisations asking Raj Bhavan to dissociate itself from the programme at the earliest.

The groups, after a discussion this evening which was joined by the veteran Gandhian Nirmala Deshpande, passed a resolution deciding to ask the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, to dismiss the Governor, Justice Anshuman Singh, if he does not distance himself from the recital, slated to start here on January 4. "Drought relief is only an excuse to hold Ram Katha and promote Hindutva," the resolution alleged.

"The Governor's act is fascism's first knock on the door of Rajasthan," warned

Ms. Deshpande, who quoted the Gujarat instance to show how fascist powers operated. "Before it all starts on January 4, we should go for organised protests all over," she suggested. "This is Ram Katha natak. You should stop it. Morari Bapu is welcome but those responsible to uphold the Constitution themselves cannot trample on it," she said.

The gathering, which comprised activists of the PUCL, which initially took up the issue by writing to the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, pointing out that the Governor's action "compromised" on the secular character of the Constitution, made it clear that they were not against "Ram Katha" as such or Morari Bapu who is scheduled to conduct it.

"The Governor's is a Constitutional offence and the Governor holding a public religious function is tantamount to a religious

function being sponsored by the State itself," said Prem Kishen Sharma, the PUCL president. The activist groups and the leaders of the CPI(M), CPI and CPI(ML) who spoke were of the view that the Governor's ambitions had prompted him to go out of the way to promote "Ram Katha" in the guise of arranging funds for drought relief. The Governor was doing it as he wanted to please the powers that be in Delhi and secure a second tenure as Governor, they charged.

In fact, the decision to hold a discussion of all groups today instead of going ahead with a dharna they had announced earlier, was a sort of second thoughts on the part of the activist groups, perhaps giving the Governor time to come out of it all. As it was revealed by Justice Singh soon after the controversy broke out, two Ministers of the State Government are also involved in organising the "Ram Katha".

29 DEC 2002

Church attack on Xmas

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, December 25

A GANG of about 20 armed men raided a church at Malipota near the Indo-Bangla border in Nadia on Tuesday night and robbed the crowd that had collected for the Midnight Mass.

The miscreants used firearms and robbed the congregation, including chief priest Father Abraham, of Rs 2 lakh in cash and an unspecified quantity of jewellery and valuables, before they bombed their way out into the darkness. Six people including Father Abraham were injured during the operation.

Five men were detained for interrogation, but only after several failed appeals by villagers for local-level police help and eventual intervention by IG Prasun Mukh-

erjee. The criminals apparently came from Bangladesh.

Angry villagers put up a road blockade and attacked a police jeep when it arrived late on the scene, injuring four policemen.

The raiders, their faces covered, shot their way into the church around 11.45 pm just after the mass had begun, and split into small groups. One group stood guard at the gate while another walked up to the altar where Father Abraham was conducting the prayer with Father Newton, Father Robin and Brother Sukumar.

The attackers held the priests at gunpoint and took them to Father Abraham's quarters. They forced Father Abraham to open his office and started looking inside the chest of drawers for valuables.

When they found just a

few coins, they forced Father Abraham upstairs and began prodding him to open the church safe.

When the priest refused, they attacked him with a sickle, injuring him. The youths collected around Rs 2 lakh in cash and led the priest down. Soon they returned to the church and forced the women devotees to hand over their jewellery and valuables. The operation lasted about 45 minutes.

Villagers said they had called up the Tehatta Police Station for help and then approached a mobile police van, but on both occasions were refused help. A shocked Father Abraham later described the incident as unprecedented. The police haven't ruled out the involvement of fundamentalist forces from across the border.

2 6 DEC 2002

BJP endorses Gujarat experiment

29/12/02

But opposes VHP's extremism

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, December 23

A TWO-DAY conclave of top BJP leaders got under way on Monday with the party swearing by Hindutva and claiming it would replicate the Gujarat success in other states. But it cautioned Sangh Parivar hardliners, saying, "Hindutva and extremism cannot go together."

In his address to the party's national executive, party president M Venkaiah Naidu said, "Gujarat was not a mere political victory for the BJP, it was a mandate for the ideology that has always held the nation's interest as its core strength. Hindutva is a noble and elevating concept as the Supreme Court has rightly declared. The BJP (knows) Hindutva and extremism cannot go together; Hindutva and intolerance cannot go together."

Even though the VHP played a big role in the BJP's success in Gujarat and future electoral collaboration is not ruled out, it is significant that Naidu sent out a

cautionary message to the likes of VHP leader Praveen Togadia, whose speeches have been laced with hatred.

Naidu indicated that the BJP, being the leader of the NDA Government, cannot be expected to support the outrageous utterances of Hindutva militancy.

Elaborating on Naidu's address later, BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley refused to say whether the message was directed at the VHP. But he said the BJP was clear that "any statement that smacks of intolerance is not in consonance with Hindutva."

Naidu said there was no need to be apologetic about the BJP ideology of cultural nationalism or about its commitment to the NDA agenda. "If anybody asks us whether we would repeat the Gujarat 'experiment' elsewhere, our answer should be: 'Yes, we shall replicate our Gujarat experience everywhere.'"

The BJP chief said the party should campaign for an effective nationwide law against conversion by fraudulent means to ex-



THE TASTE OF SUCCESS: LK Advani greets Narendra Modi at the BJP meet in Delhi on Monday.

24 DEC 2002

'HINDUTVA CAN'T BE A POLL ISSUE'

Vajpayee fires salvo at hawks

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 24. — A day after the BJP leadership said it was not apologetic about its 'Hindutva' agenda, the Prime Minister spoke in a different voice. He castigated those who spoke about making India "a Hindu *rashtra* within two years" and told the BJP national executive that "Hindutva can't be an electoral issue". He indicated that development and performance alone would give the BJP victory in the 2002 Lok Sabha polls.

"India has been a Hindu *rashtra* for years and it should be taken as such." He wondered whether those who talked of converting it into a Hindu *rashtra* meant that they would convert it into a theocratic state. "Hindutva is a way of life and it can't become a political agenda. Religion can't become the basis of a *rashtra*," he reportedly told the national executive.

Delivering the valedictory speech, Mr

Atal Behari Vajpayee admitted that the Gujarat polls had produced the "poison" of hatred besides giving the nectar of victory to the BJP. This needed to be overcome through good governance.

Which is true?

NEW DELHI, Dec. 24. — The Prime Minister and his deputy today attributed the Gujarat victory to different reasons. While Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said it was the result of "many decades of *tapasya* by party workers and the good work by our governments," Mr LK Advani described it as "Narendra Modi's victory".

The Prime Minister reportedly said the party would have won "even without Godhra" and Mr Advani said the jibes against Mr Modi "made the electorate very angry and gave us this landslide victory". — SNS

Quoting from Hindu mythology, he said the BJP must act like Lord Shiva who drank the poison that came out during the churning of ocean. "It'll be the BJP's special endeavour to carry along all sections of our diverse society... This is not a game of winning a few more seats or winning the polls in this or that state. The party must always be guided by the lofty goal, for whose attainment we have plunged into electoral politics."

He asked BJP leaders to be careful about the interpretation of "Hindutva." While referring to his statement that there was not enough condemnation of Godhra, he said he had received letters from various people. "I only said the condemnation was not enough."

Turn to page 2

From page 1

PM:

He asked the people to be vigilant against India's enemies abroad who were trying to divide the society on religious lines and "make brother fight brother". The Prime Minister warned partymen against the impending dangers to the nation if the BJP failed to come up to the expectations. "Mrs Sonia Gandhi is trying hard. She has some influence as well. But the victory will come to the BJP."

The country's major political problem was the

Congress' inability to provide an alternative to the NDA. At a time when the nation was facing problems on many fronts it needed a strong government, he said, and feared that a failure of the BJP could create a political vacuum. In this context, he asked partymen not to become complacent and work tirelessly to achieve victory in the states going to the polls next year. Mr LK Advani sounded positive when he pointed out that 2002 began with despair for the BJP in the form of electoral defeats in Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab but ended in hope in the form of the spectacular victory in Gujarat.

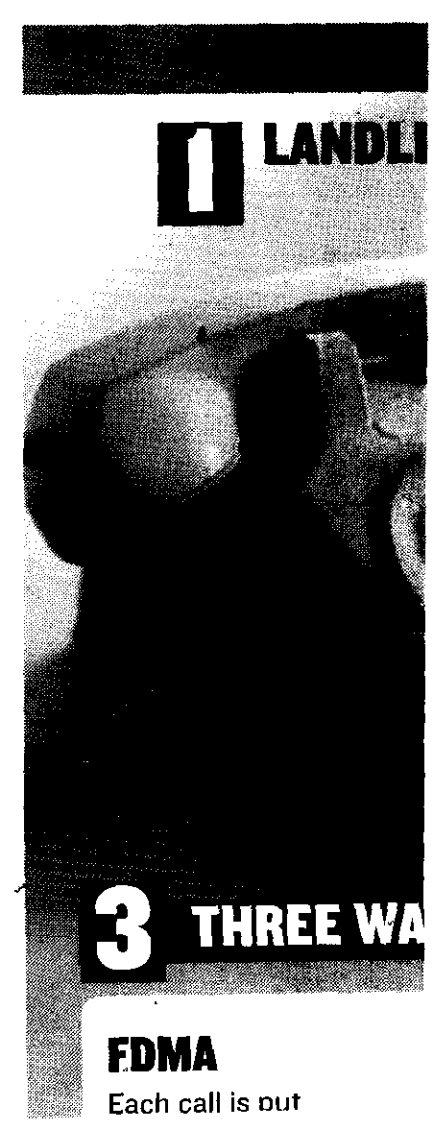
23 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

THE HINDU

Ringling in the future

The war for the mobile services marketplace takes a futuristic turn as limited mobility takes on the established GSM industry



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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Release
11/17

Pope clears Mother's beatification

SF1



Associated Press

VATICAN CITY, Dec. 20. — Pope John Paul II brought Mother Teresa closer to sainthood today when he approved a miracle attributed to her. With the miracle, Mother Teresa can now be beatified in a ceremony scheduled for

19 October in Rome. A second miracle is needed for her to be made a saint, or canonised.

Pope John Paul II, who has elevated more than 460 people to sainthood in his 24 years as Pope, waived the customary five-year waiting period and began the process that can lead to sainthood a year after Mother Teresa died in 1997.

A Vatican committee approved a reported miracle attributed to Mother Teresa's intercession, a finding that was seconded by the Pope today in a ceremony in the Apostolic Palace.

Mrs Monica Besra of Raiganj was cured of her abdominal tumour after an image of Mother Teresa was placed on her stomach. This was judged to be without any medical explanation by a panel of doctors consulted by the Vatican.

In Kolkata, the Missionaries of Charity said: "After three-and-a-half years of investigation, the Vatican confirmed that Mother Teresa heroically lived the Christian life and that God has lifted her up as both a model of holiness and an intercessor for all", adds SNS.

THE STATESMAN

21 DEC 2002

Is Hinduism facing a crisis?

As in Gujarat, the Sangh parivar is targeting the minorities, including Dalits, on the ground that Hinduism is threatened. Is this threat perception real? Or is this nothing but a bogey?

HR-6
10/12
P. Srinivas

MODERN DEMOCRACIES have been protective of minority communities and their special rights. All democratic constitutional States have consciously tried to harmonise the special rights of socio-cultural minorities along with the universal rights of every citizen irrespective of caste, creed, race, sex or religion. The secular Indian Constitution, a product of the fine philosophical thinking of our nationalist leadership, has made legal clauses for the protection of minority rights to protect them against any kind of hegemonisation. Since democracy is based on a 'majority rule', minorities have to be safeguarded.

The Sangh parivar is hostile to any special minority rights. Cultural pluralism is unacceptable to those who believe in 'one country, one culture, one nation'. How does one explain the violent attitude of the self-appointed custodians of Hinduism against Muslims and Christians? Why is the *parivar* worried about protecting the 80 per cent population from small and scattered minority groups?

Belief in a religion or conversion is an individual right. The *parivar* targets missionary schools for spreading the message of Christ. Even if it were a fact, the Hindutva leaders need not worry because the Christian population is hardly three per cent in India. Can Hinduism be threatened by this three per cent?

Similarly, marriage between two consenting individuals is a matter of personal choice. Why are the Hindutva groups targeting inter-religious marriages? The carnage in Gujarat was also directed against some couples who were considered 'guilty' of inter-religious marriage. Do Hindus really feel threatened by the isolated cases of Hindu-Muslim marriages?

B.R. Hedgewar and his successor M.S. Golwalkar organised the RSS to train young men in the 'self-defence' of Hindu religion. The RSS *shakhas* are conducted to prepare the youth to act as protectors of 'threatened Hinduism'. The 'victim' image of Hindus is propagated by demonising other religions. Witness Praveen Togadia's statement: "While Godhra reflected the *jehadi* mentality of the Muslims, the subsequent events in Gujarat were proof of the Hindu awakening." Said Ashok Singhal: "Our *sadhus* will prepare the Hindus in the art of self-defence."

Is this threat perception imaginary or real? Hindus have nothing to fear from other communities. The *parivar* has invented a bogey.

In the 20th century, India had witnessed powerful anti-Brahmin, Sanskrit-based Vedic interpretations of Hinduism by many sections of Hindu society all over the country. The philosophical postulates of every variety of Hinduism have been consistently critiqued by different Hindu communities. The fact is, unlike other religions, Hinduism does not accept even at an abstract level the principle of human equality. The status of a Hindu is determined at the time of birth and he earns his 'social status' on the basis of his *karma* of the previous life. The transmigration of soul and *karma* decide the social fortune of a Hindu.

Since Hinduism and its caste structure are inherently inegalitarian, the believers of human

equality among the Hindus have always challenged this domination. Ramaswamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu launched a massive anti-Brahminical and anti-temple movement to liberate Hindus from the tyrannies of a priest-controlled authoritarian religion. B.R. Ambedkar was apprehensive of independence from British rule because it would have meant a 'new rule' by repressive high caste Hindus (currently hyper-active in the Hindutva fronts). Ambedkar thought of liberation of the majority of low caste Hindus by abandoning Hinduism in favour of Buddhism.

The Brahmin-controlled Hindu religion as represented by the high caste leadership of the *parivar* is threatened by powerful Dalit movements. The democratic spaces provided by the Constitution have been used by Dalit leaders and scholars to challenge several philosophical postulates of Hinduism. Dalits are struggling for their rights as Hindus to enter temples, and the so-called custodians of Hindu religion are not ready to provide an inch of space to the *shudras*. As late as September 22, 2002, 30 policemen including a DIG and SP were injured when high caste Hindus in a village near Jaipur blocked the entry of Dalits to a temple.

Meanwhile, the government wants to inculcate religious values in our education. What kind of religious values will be taught to children?

Will high caste teachers teach that caste hierarchy is an integral part of *Sanatan Dharma* and humans are not equal because Hinduism believes in inequality and segregation? Is the RSS organising its Shishu Niketans to teach the defects of Hinduism so as to make it more inegalitarian? Will high caste teachers tell the students that low caste Hindus are not allowed to enter temples, while any Christian or Muslim



MAYA OR MOKSHA: Buddhist monks in Delhi

can offer prayers freely in churches and mosques?

The Sangh is a protector of status-quoist Hinduism. But diverse communities within Hinduism are challenging the discriminatory practices and rituals within the religion. That is one reason behind the latest Hindutva hyperbole.

The *parivar* is in serious trouble. Progressive Dalit writers and Hindu women are questioning the fundamental 'cruelties' committed by high caste Hindus in the name of a patriarchal religion. The internal challenge is becoming formidable; it is difficult to defend this decadent and cruel inheritance.

Thousands of followers of Ambedkar and Naicker in the rural interiors are pointing out the serious sickness within this form of Hindutva, arguing that since this religious sectarianism cannot be reformed, it must be abandoned. The Sangh *parivar*, as a custodian of Brahminical domination, finds itself in a minority among the Hindus. To save its precarious existence, it has found aggressive anti-minorityism as a safe passage to keep the attention away from the sickness within its own family.

The choice before Hinduism is clear — either drastically reform itself or perish. Because the struggle for human equality is unstoppable.

The writer is a former Dean, School of Social Sciences, JNU

NIGERIA'S RIOTS

Beauty and extremist politics

IT had seemed that many contestants would opt out of the Miss World contest in Nigeria, to protest against the death by stoning sentence awarded to a Nigerian woman on grounds of adultery. In the end the tables were turned as Miss World contestants did make it to Lagos, but were driven out by religious riots in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna, triggered by frivolous remarks in a newspaper column about Prophet Muhammad. There was hardline Islamist opposition to the holding of the beauty contest itself, to which the column had alluded. There is a cultural disconnect between Nigeria's Muslim north, where Sharia law applies in 12 provinces, a consequence of which was the barbaric sentence on Amina Lawal, and the largely Christian south which desires international tourism and contests like Miss World. What is horrifying, albeit perhaps depressingly familiar in the Indian subcontinent, is that 215 people should have been killed in riots triggered by a newspaper article, and that provincial authorities in Zamfara province, taking a leaf out of Ayatollah Khomeini's book, has issued a *fatwa* calling for the murder of the offending newspaper columnist. Religion

The cultural disconnect between north and south Nigeria may have been exacerbated by the decision to allow Sharia courts, which shows that the kind of liberalism that allows religious laws to intrude into secular matters is seriously flawed. What one usually has on hand is heightened intolerance and the ghettoisation of communities, results not unfamiliar in India. Strangely, some feminists have been echoing this rhetoric of intolerance. If feminist agitprop is to be believed the apparel donned by contestants for the pageant will be dripping with the blood of riot victims, even though its venue has been shifted to London. It is one thing not to like beauty contests, it is quite another to blame the organisers for riots triggered by fundamentalist hatred. Not all feminists would agree that Miss World contests represent a more serious threat to women's rights than acts like stoning a woman to death for adultery, yet it is the fundamentalists who are being implicitly defended when feminists like Muriel Gray and Germaine Greer attempt to shift the blame and nail the enemy they are fixated upon. Extremes of left and right often coincide, on the beauty issue as well.

THE STATESMAN

1 DEC 2002

'India will never be a theocratic state'

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, NOV. 27. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today maintained that India would never be a theocratic state and asserted that for the Vajpayee Government, the concept of Hindutva was the same as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

Replying to a short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the recent developments in Gujarat, Mr. Advani said that 50 years ago, even in the backdrop of Partition, Indian political thinkers had rejected the idea of India being a theocratic state, which held good now and would be so in future.

In his short but spirited reply, Mr. Advani tried to balance his Constitutional obligations with his party's political priorities in Gujarat. He ended up praising the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and asserted that today's discussion would bring political dividends to "our leader".

The three-hour discussion saw both the

BJP and the Opposition raise points which reflected the mood in their camps in the run-up to the December 12 Assembly polls. If the BJP members referred to threat of terrorism casting its long shadow over Gujarat, the Opposition stressed on the need to ensure free and fair polls, the sense of insecurity still prevalent among the minorities and the inadequate relief work for riot-hit victims.

Mr. Advani clarified that he echoed similar views last week in the Lok Sabha that attracted criticism and later an apology from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He said that for the Government, Hindutva was a concept that was acceptable to people and not one which "develops allergy" towards every other religion.

Asserting that so far as secularism was concerned, the Government accepted the Constitution in letter and in spirit, Mr. Advani advised the next government in Gujarat that it too should follow the

Constitutional position. One of the essential facets was that every citizen, irrespective of caste or religion, should feel safe and secure and should be afforded equal opportunities.

Disagreeing with the Opposition's sharp criticism of Mr. Modi vis-a-vis the minorities, Mr. Advani said that on the contrary the Chief Minister was going ahead on a positive note talking of "educating, irrigating and electrifying" Gujarat.

However, he said that if the Opposition sought to raise controversial issues, then it might not be inappropriate for the BJP to refer to the Godhra incident. The remark did not go uncontested, with the CPI(M) members protesting that as the Home Minister, he should not have said it.

Earlier, Mr. Advani's interpretation of the Marxist ideology was disputed by the CPI (M) and other Left members who insisted that they be allowed to set the record straight. They later staged a walkout.

28 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

105 dead in Nigeria anti-Miss World riots

AGENCIES
LAGOS, NOVEMBER 22

MORE than 105 people were stabbed, bludgeoned or burned to death during violent demonstrations in the northern city of Kaduna triggered by a newspaper article about the Miss World beauty pageant in Nigeria.

At least 500 others were seriously injured and four churches were torched yesterday, Nigerian Red Cross President Emmanuel Ijewere said.

Many of the bodies were taken by Red Cross workers and other volunteers to local mortuaries. But many more remained inside homes that were set alight by the demonstrators, Ijewere said.

Schools and shops hurriedly closed yesterday morning as hordes of young men ignited makeshift street barricades made of tires and garbage, sending plumes of black smoke rising above the city.

Others were heard chanting, "down with beauty" and "Miss World is sin."

Hundreds of police and soldiers were deployed to restore calm. Riding in pickup trucks, they fired tear gas at protesters marching through otherwise abandoned streets waving tree branches and palm fronds.

State government officials declared a night curfew. The latest demonstrations began Wednesday with the burning of an office of *This Day* newspaper in Kaduna after it published an

article questioning the reasoning of Muslim groups that have condemned the Miss World pageant, to be held December 7 in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Muslim groups say the pageant promotes sexual promiscuity and indecency.

Residents of Kaduna said sporadic shooting could be heard on Friday morning as soldiers and police battled rioters burning churches and mosques despite a curfew, which had now been extended to 24 hours. City streets were completely deserted.

Rows over the decision to host the pageant had been simmering but the riots in the city, about 600 km northwest of Lagos, were triggered by a newspaper article linking the pageant and the Prophet Muhammad.



Some of the Miss World contestants at Nigeria's capital Abuja on Friday. AP/PTI photo

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 NOV 2002

Governor asked to withhold assent to Bill on conversion

Sam Rajappa in Chennai

Nov. 13. — The Forum for Inter-Faith Initiatives, an organisation of thinkers from all faiths and beliefs, today submitted a memorandum to the Governor, Mr Ramamohan Rao, requesting him to withhold assent to the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill passed by the Assembly recently under Article 200 of the Constitution and reserve it for the consideration of the President.

Mr MG Devasahayam, convener of FIF, said the AIADMK government of Miss Jayalalitha did not have the people's mandate to pass the anti-conversion legislation as it was voted to power on a secular plank which it had reneged.

The manifesto of the ruling party for the May 2001 Assembly election under the head Religious harmony, said: "The policy of the AIADMK is all are one community, all are one caste and all are rulers of this country. Action will be

taken to strengthen secularism and remove communalism and caste discrimination. Our goal is to promote respect for all religions, advance religious tolerance and endeavour love, unity and harmony between castes and communities so that Tamil Nadu could be a garden of peace wherein all people could live in a congenial and conflict free atmosphere."

Mr Devasahayam said that parties like the Congress, Tamil Maanila Congress (since merged with the

Congress), Muslim League, Indian National League, CPI and the CPI-M, joined the AIADMK-led front because of its commitment to secularism as opposed to the DMK-led front which had the communal BJP as a major constituent. And for the same reason, people belonging to the minority communities overwhelmingly voted for the AIADMK, enabling it to form the government on its own.

The memorandum said there was no shred of evidence to substantiate the

reasons given in the explanatory statement of the Bill that it was brought forward to act as a deterrent against anti-social and vested groups exploiting innocent people belonging to depressed classes and to nip in the bud the attempts by certain religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension in the garb of religious conversion."

Section 4 of the Bill providing harsher punishment and penalty for conversion of minors,

women, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes was discriminatory and unconstitutional, the memorandum pointed out. And Section 5(1) and (2) conferred authoritarian and penal powers to agents of the state to supervise and regulate religious beliefs and faiths of citizens which were violative of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution.

The real purpose of the Bill, the memorandum said, was to place Hindutva at the center-stage for the

electoral battle in nine states in 2003 and the Lok Sabha in 2004. "This is borne out from the fact that within hours of promulgation of the Ordinance on 5 October (prior to passing the Bill to replace it by the Assembly), all the front organisations of the Sangh parivar had launched a vigorous campaign for similar legislation in the entire country. The hidden agenda is blatantly communal that militates against "the secular character and fabric of India".

1 4 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

EC asks Gujarat govt to ban VHP's yatra

State is told to ensure peaceful run-up to polls VHP says it will defy 'biased' Lyngdoh order

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

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New Delhi: The Election Commission on Wednesday directed the Gujarat government to prevent the Vishwa Hindu Parishad from proceeding with its plan for a statewide yatra from Friday.

The VHP had earlier announced that it would take out a yatra from Godhra, which would culminate in Ahmedabad on December 6, the 10th anniversary of the demolition of the Babri masjid in Ayodhya.

The unanimous decision of all three EC members—chief J.M. Lyngdoh, T.S. Krishnamurthy and B.B. Tandon—was taken at a full meeting with their deputies here after their return from a two-day visit to the state.

The commission had received a report on the VHP plan from state government officials, who anticipated law and order problems on the VHP's proposed route.

The EC noted this report and the VHP plan to use replicas of the Sabarmati Express coach burnt on February 27 at Godhra, besides the "likelihood of intemperate speeches being made during the course of the yatra". So, it said, it had decided that the proposed yatra should not be allowed.

"Any activity," added the panel, "which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred, disharmony, illwill, etc between different communities..will not only vitiate the election process..but will also seriously jeopardise the law and order situation conducive for the conduct of free and fair elections" in the violence-hit state.

It said, "the maintenance of law and order is the responsibility of the state government and the commission expects the administration to take all such measures for maintaining an atmosphere conducive for the conduct of peaceful, free and fair polls." It ordered similar "preventive and punitive action" to be taken against any person or group making "provocative speeches, posters and pamphlets that incite communal tensions".

Ahmedabad: A defiant Vishwa Hindu Parishad on Wednesday said its yatra would go ahead despite the ban imposed by the Election Commission even as the state government said it would have to obey the directive of the EC not to allow the programme to go ahead.

While the political leadership of the BJP maintained a studied silence on the issue, chief minister Narendra Modi, after hearing about the EC's directive, convened a meeting of senior officials to discuss the fall-out of the decision, which was based on the report of the state government.

After an hour-long meeting with the CM, chief secretary G. Subba Rao and additional chief secretary (home) Ashok Narayan said they had not yet received the formal order from the EC. Mr Rao, who had sent in his report to the EC on the yatra, however, said, "We will cooperate with the EC and take into account whatever directive that we receive from it." Mr Narayan said he did not apprehend any violence on account of the ban on the yatra. "The security forces are ready to deal with any eventuality," he asserted.

"We are not bothered about the decision taken by the EC and we are going ahead with the yatra as scheduled," said Dilip Trivedi, general secretary of the VHP's Gujarat unit, even as the VHP's international general secretary, Praveen Togadia, said he would make his stand clear at a press conference on Thursday.

"The decision is an absolute violation of fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution," Mr Trivedi said. Terming the EC's decision as "pre-mature and immature," he said, "Accepting every demand raised by the Congress party shows that Mr Lyngdoh has a pre-conceived bias against the VHP."

Dr Kaushik Mehta, state joint general secretary of the VHP, said that "our yatra was aimed neither at appeasement of nor opposition to any party or group and the commission should not have banned it."

14 NOV 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Rights of minority institutes not absolute, says apex court

Times News Network

GM
New Delhi: Setting at rest the long drawn controversy over the rights and privileges of Minority Educational Institutions (MEIs) in the country, the supreme court on Thursday ruled that although they had unfettered rights to establish an institution of their choice, the right to administer it was not absolute.

The state could apply regulatory measures for educational excellence even when the MEIs were unaided, a fractured 6:5 judgment said.

The bench, however, declined to answer two questions—what is meant by the expression 'religion' in Article 30 (1)? Can the followers of a sect or denomination of a particular religion claim protection under Article 30 (1) on the basis that they constitute a minority in the state, even though the followers of (that) religion are in a majority in the state?

Delivering the majority judgment, Chief Justice B.N. Kirpal said in matters concerning the day-to-day management or administration of the unaided MEIs, the government should not interfere and full freedom should be given to the management of the institution.

As far as disciplinary proceedings against the staff of the institution were concerned,

11/11
the court said, that also rested with the management. But in cases of disputes on employment in unaided MEIs, a tribunal headed by a person of the rank of district judge should be set up to resolve the same.

Besides Chief Justice Kirpal, Justice G.B. Pattanaik, Justice S. Rajendra Babu, Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, Justice P.V. Reddi and Justice Arijit Pasayat gave unanimous views.

The court also recorded its appreciation for the assistance rendered to it by attorney-general Soli Sorabjee, who made submissions on the matter in his individual capacity that ran counter to the view taken by the government.

Five judges—V.N. Khare, S.S.M. Quadri, Ruma Pal, S.N. Variava and Ashok Bhan—gave four separate judgments but mostly agreed with the majority view except on regulations on the unaided MEIs. Justice Khare and Justice Quadri agreed with the majority judgment but differed on the applicability of Article 29 (2) to Article 30 (1). Justice Quadri said the right to admit students by an MEI could not be affected by receipt of aid from the state government.

● Please see www.timesofindia.com for more

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 NOV 2002

Nod to conversion Bill amid protests

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, Oct. 31. — The controversial Bill to replace the Ordinance prohibiting conversion from one religion to another by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means, was passed by the Tamil Nadu Assembly today amid vociferous protests by the Opposition which insisted on a division.

In view of the absolute majority enjoyed by the ruling AIADMK in the 234-strong House, the Bill was passed with 140 members voting in its favour and 73 opposing it.

The BJP and the TMC supported the Bill. The Opposition, including the DMK, Congress, PMK, CPI and the CPI-M voted against.

On 5 October, barely three weeks before the Assembly session was to begin, the Governor promulgated

the anti-conversion Ordinance, which said that those violating the provisions could be imprisoned for a maximum period of three years and fined up to Rs 50,000. In the event of the converted person being a minor or woman, the punishment is more rigid with imprisonment extending to four years and a fine extending to Rs 1 lakh.

Dismissing Opposition charges that the government was introducing such a legislation "only to please certain people", the chief minister, Miss Jayalalitha, said she had received reports from several parts of the state that conversions from one religion to another were being made by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means.

"Bringing in a legislation to prohibit such conversions will act as a deterrent against anti-socials and vested groups who exploit the

depressed classes."

Moreover, the legislation will be useful to maintain public order and to nip in the bud attempts by religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of religious conversion, Miss Jayalalitha said.

Allaying fears that the legislation may be misused against any particular religion, she pointed out that no religion has been mentioned in the Bill.

Seer supports Bill: The opposition to the anti-conversion Bill was "only political" as it didn't prevent anyone from voluntarily embracing another religion, the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi, said today, adds SNS. The seer urged the Hindus to give up untouchability and help in "the economic and social emancipation" of Harijans.

1 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

Sri Lanka to form panel for Muslims

By V.S. Sambandan *felwin*

COLOMBO, Oct. 29. The Sri Lankan Government today decided to form an advisory committee to ensure the safety and security of the island's Muslims in the northeast.

The Minister for Muslim Affairs and leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, would head the committee, the State-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said, adding that Muslim MPs from the northeast would be in the committee.

The panel would aim at ensuring the participation of the Muslim community in the current efforts to chalk out a negotiated political settlement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

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The sensitive Muslim question looms large over the second round of talks, scheduled to begin in Thailand later this week. Muslims have lived under insecure conditions fearing attacks by the LTTE, which evicted all Muslims in the north, a decade ago. The Tamil-Muslim animosity, triggered by mutual distrust, has been a long-standing problem, resulting in the build-up of a Special Task Force in the east.

The Tigers recalled all Muslims earlier this year, forcing them to resettle in the north. At last month's first round of talks, the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, said the entire northeast was the homeland for all Tamil-speaking people. However, these have not yet won the confi-

dence of Muslims, who continue to feel insecure in the face of extortions by the Tigers.

Moreover, the SLMC is also going through a political crisis, with some MPs bringing pressure on Mr. Hakeem to ensure the safety of the Muslims in the east. The ethnic mix in the east, with an equal spread of the three main communities -- Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese -- makes it a potential hotspot.

The seriousness of the eastern question in determining the course of the negotiations is evident from the inclusion of the LTTE's eastern military commander, Karuna, in the Tigers' team for the second round of talks.

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THE HONOR

The issue of conversion

By Atind P. Datar

The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance has attracted widespread condemnation. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees to every person the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion. This right is subject to restrictions of public order, morality and health. The draft of Article 25 was the subject matter of considerable discussion in the Constituent Assembly. The main objection was to the inclusion of the word "propagate" and several members wanted this word to be dropped. However, after a detailed discussion, it was decided to retain this word. K.M. Munshi observed that every religion had full liberty to propagate its faith. The freedom of speech in the Constitution also guaranteed every religious community the right to persuade other people to join their faith. "As long as religion is religion, service by free exercise of religion, OPINION

The Tamil Nadu Ordinance prohibits conversion on three grounds: by force, fraudulent means and by "allurement". The last word has been further defined to mean temptation in the form of gifts or gratification in cash or kind or the grant of any material benefit either monetarily or otherwise. Any conversion in the State must now be intimated to the District Magistrate in a form which is to be prescribed. The Tamil Nadu Ordinance is not the first on the subject. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967, and the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhinyam, 1968, were similar enactments and were challenged before the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa High Courts. The former upheld the validity while the latter held the Act to be unconstitutional. In these two Acts, conversion by force, fraud or by inducement was prohibited and made punishable. The conclusion of the Orissa High Court is interesting and can be summarised briefly: (a) The right to propagate religion includes conversion which is a part of the Christian religion. (b) Prohibition of conversion by force or fraud as defined by the Act was valid. (The Christian missionaries who were the petitioners before the Orissa High Court stated that conversion by force or fraud was not permissible under their religion). (c) Prohibition of conversion by "inducement" was invalid as the term was vague; many proselytising activities would come within inducement. The Madhya Pradesh High Court held that prohibition of conversion on the grounds of force, fraud and inducement actually established the equality of religious freedom for all citizens by prohibiting conversion through objectionable means. The matter was taken up in appeal to the Supreme Court in the Stanislaus case. The court held that the word "propagate" in the context of religion would mean to transmit, carry forward, diffuse or extend a particular religious belief or practice. The fundamental right of a person to transmit or spread his religion by explaining its tenets cannot be questioned. But there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion. The Supreme Court pointed out that the freedom of religion is not absolute but subject to public order and the two State Acts were constitutionally valid. The founding fathers of the Constitution were very clear that any conversion has to be voluntary and cannot be through coercion or other unlawful means. The whole difficulty has arisen because the right of propagation is treated as synonymous with the right to uncontrolled conversion. The first amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits Congress from making any law respecting and establishing of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The U.S. Supreme Court has zealously guarded against any attempt of any kind of compulsion in religious matters. The U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Courts have consistently made a distinction between religion beliefs and opinion and religious conduct. In Reynolds v U.S., 98 U.S. 145 (1878), it was held that laws could not interfere with mere religious beliefs and opinion but they could with regard to religious practice. Although the Tamil Nadu Ordinance is legal, two aspects are disturbing. First, an Ordinance is usually issued when there is an extraordinary urgency and one cannot wait for the next legislative session. When the Tamil Nadu Assembly was to meet in the latter half of October, there is no explanation for the need to issue the Ordinance on October 5. Second, the Explanatory Statement to the Ordinance refers to attempts of religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of religious conversion. The Explanatory Statement does not provide any factual details as to the extent of conversion and whether there have been any incidents of force or fraudulent conversion in the recent past that have necessitated this Ordinance. In the present controversy, no religious or political leader has been able to point out any specific provision that offends the fundamental right to practice, profess and propagate religion. There is also no evidence that similar enactments in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa have been misused. It is indeed unfortunate that religion is increasingly becoming a divisive force. Individual religious groups have their personal agenda and common values of truth and compassion are completely ignored. (The writer is a senior advocate of the Madras High Court.)

The ordinance on conversions

By Rajeev Dhavan

WHY ARE laws passed? Surely, not because they are always in the public interest? Statutes wear many disguises to serve those who enact them. Gusfield's marvellous book, *Symbolic Crusade*, on America's whisky amendments serves as a common sense reminder that particular laws are passed for both 'symbolic' and 'instrumental' reasons. In all this, the politics of a law transcends its contents. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalitha's Ordinance on religious conversions is designed to assert her social and political power and to threaten minorities with oppression if they do anything more than quietly pray in their mosques and churches. The effect of the Ordinance is to project Ms. Jayalalitha as the protector of a dependent Hinduism who will use the power of the state if a single conversion takes place in Tamil Nadu.

Why an Ordinance? Ordinances subvert democracy by presenting legislatures which represent the people with a *fait accompli*. When the Ordinance was presented to him for signature on October 5, 2002, Tamil Nadu's Governor, P.S. Ramamohan Rao, had a duty to advise Ms. Jayalalitha that the Assembly was due to meet in three weeks on October 24; and that measures of this nature deserve to be fully discussed on the floor of an elected legislature. But, he failed to do so. Both democracy and secularism are the poorer as a consequence. The Ordinance was a skin reaction to the recent 'mass conversions' of poor Dalits in Madurai to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Dalits have more than cause to reject Hinduism. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism. Mass conversions by Dalits protest centuries of continuing oppression.

The cruelty has not stopped. On May 21, 2002, in the village of Thiniam in Tiruchi district, two Dalits, Murugesam and Ramaswamy, were branded with hot irons and forced to eat human excreta. Unfortunately, stories of oppression of Dalits — each more vile than the other — attract less attention than their conversion. The cause of the conversion is forgotten; the symptom of conversion has acquired priority on the political agenda. A Hinduism unable to cope with its injustices can hardly

blame other faiths from accepting 'refugees' into their attractively egalitarian folds. But, the Ordinance touts Hindu politics for future electoral advantage. Ms. Jayalalitha announced free lunches accompanied by spiritual education in the Kapaleswar and, subsequently, 150 other temples. This is the state flaunting the 'faith' for popularity among Hindus and for their votes. It helps to explain the timing and purpose of the Ordinance.

The Ordinance surpasses its Orissa and Madhya Pradesh prototypes in its timing, intent and content. Section 3 states that "No person shall convert or attempt to convert either directly or otherwise any person from one religion to another either by use of force or by allurements or by any fraudulent means". Abetment of conversion is also prohibited. Each magistrate virtually becomes the Lokpal — prosecutor of all offences because the Ordinance specifically requires anyone who is converted or who officiates in the conversion to inform the local magistrate. The Act targets conversions — criminalising attempt to, abetment of, and participation in, conversions. The word 'either' in Section 3 enlarges an already wide ranging offence which attracts fines up to Rs.50,000 and imprisonment up to 3 years. To add insult to injury, this punishment is enhanced not just for minors but for women, Dalits, and tribals — who have undisputed experiential reasons to reject a Hindu faith that has shown only cruelty to some, if not all of them.

India's Constitution protects not just the freedom to believe and practise one's faith, but also to propagate it. This decision came after much deliberation. Not included in the Constitutional Committee's Draft Report of April 3, 1947, the right to propagate found inclusion in the suggestions of the Minorities Sub-Committee of April 19-22, 1947, to occupy its place in the Draft Constitutions of October 1947; and, then, February 1948. A

spirited debate on December 3-7, 1948, in the Constituent Assembly led to a permanent inclusion of the right to propagate one's religion in the Constitution after duly considering any "dangerous implications" — with K.M. Munshi explaining that such a right was also inherent in the free speech provisions.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Stanilaus case in January 1977, approving similar Madhya Pradesh and Orissa legislations, declared that the right to propagate one's faith does not include the right to convert others to one's faith. The Stanilaus verdict is an unsatisfactory and cursorily written judgment — with

Emergency haste written all over it. Relying on dictionary meanings of the word 'propagate', the judgment rests on the distinction between "transmitting or spreading one's faith" and conversion. Surely, the latter flows from the former as a possible consequence. If a Hindu has a right to his own faith, he also has the right to choose another. Hinduism does not falter to convert others. Or, indeed, convert back into the fold in various subtle ways.

The Supreme Court's judgments on Hinduism (1965), *Hindutva* (1995) and *Teaching Text Book Dharma* (2002) underline how an expansionist Hinduism obfuscates reality. If the distinction between 'spreading' one's faith and converting people is thin, the terms indicating 'coercion' in the form of 'force', 'allurement' or 'fraud' are no less ambiguous. In the Ordinance, 'force' includes 'threat of divine displeasure' and allurement includes 'grant of material benefit, either monetary or otherwise'. As soon as a conversion takes place, a *prima facie* case is made out against both the converted and the faith converted into. The prefix "any" to fraudulent means enlarges the offence of conversion. Once this starts, this process becomes the punishment. And the punishment of one becomes a potential threat to all —

including those who bona fide leave the Hindu faith to enter another. The Stanilaus case passes over important questions as to whether 'conversions' are connected to public order which is a necessary requirement for the state to legislate on the subject. Conversions would give rise to public disorder only if Ms. Jayalalitha's political cohorts or mischievous pseudo-fundamentalists create such disorder.

Neither the converts nor the priests act disorderly. The Stanilaus decision does not examine the issues confronting it with the care or concern due to such an important controversy. That the Supreme Court upheld the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh legislation does not mean that such legislation should be enacted — still less so in our hopelessly fragile and troubled times. The Ordinance sets up every District Magistrate in Tamil Nadu as a prosecuting Lokpal on conversions. Every single convert and participating priest has to be reported the conversion to the local magistracy. Such a close scrutiny of any faith has not taken place since the Inquisition. All converts inevitably wear a crown of thorns as they present themselves for inspection — to be ruthlessly interrogated and persecuted. The Ordinance creates a strong interfering mechanism intruding into people's choices about their faith in every district in Tamil Nadu.

The Tamil Nadu Ordinance is not a simple statute for "truth, justice and the Hindu way of life". It is a kind of Hindu fatwa exhorting Hindus not to convert to any faith on pain of imprisonment and fine. Only flogging is left out. And, even that takes place in prisons and police stations. No less, the fatwa warns all the non-Hindu faiths that if their teaching yields a convert, the Big Sister Tamil Nadu state through its magisterial cavalry will subject them to inquisition; and, if needs be, punishment. Of course, the Ordinance does not mention Hindus and Non-Hindus. But, is there any doubt that this is what the Ordinance is all about? Hypocrisy triumphs. Indian secularism is reserved for international meetings on Kashmir; and, bruised at home. Hinduism's enviable capacity to learn is replaced by an aggressively defensive bigotry.

18 OCT 2002

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2002

H9-10

VICIOUS AND INCENDIARY

17/10
Religion

EVEN BY THE standards Bal Thackeray has set for himself and his outfit, Shiv Sena, for minority bashing, the tone and tenor of his latest anti-Muslim tirade is outrageously provocative, intimidatory and, worse, an open invitation to minority-targeting acts of terrorism. Mr. Thackeray's vituperative outburst has come from two platforms — one, a public meeting to mark the Dussera festival and, the other, the columns of the Sena mouthpiece, *Saamna* — and the message itself has two distinctive strands which together espouse the majoritarian communal agenda. The first, which is in the nature of a call to the Hindus to refer to India as 'Hindurashtra' and an authoritative claim of primacy to the Hindu religion, is an unmitigated affront to the secular and pluralistic doctrines that are the core planks of the Indian Constitution. Much more vicious and incendiary is Mr. Thackeray's clear suggestion that the Hindus also, like "them" (read the Muslims), organise 'suicide squads', and the target alluded to here is obvious. Add to these his other remarks — such as his expressed desire to "wipe out" trouble-making Muslims and his proposition that throwing out the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants would make the country "secure". Clearly, Mr. Thackeray has, in effect, declared what amounts to a 'war' against the minority community. If all these do not constitute attempts to create communal hatred and incite violence — acts that attract penal provisions of the law of the land — what else will? And, remember, the hate campaign run by the likes of Mr. Thackeray against the minorities is by no means sporadic but a systematic and institutionalised programme rooted in 'ideology'.

A subtext of the Shiv Sena supremo's suggestion for 'Hindu suicide squads', a manifestation of the 'we versus they' syndrome characteristic of the Hindutva line of thought, is a deliberate attempt to see acts of terror in communal terms, as determined by the reli-

gion to which the perpetrators belong. Nothing could be more perverse than this. Yet, for its part, the Sangh Parivar has always tended to take such a view and has clamoured for retribution on that basis, as has been borne out by the post-Godhra killings in Gujarat earlier this year. If the VHP and other RSS affiliates had made bold to talk of "repeating the successful Gujarat experiment" countrywide, they became even more brazen and strident in holding out threats to the minority community after the more recent terrorist attack on the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in Gandhinagar (Gujarat). In a sense, Mr. Thackeray's latest anti-Muslim diatribe has to be seen in this overall context of the Hindutva forces' heightened intolerance. No party of governance can allow such pernicious rantings, which seek to divide the Indian polity on the basis of religion and give credence to the discredited two-nation theory, to go unnoticed if it is not to forfeit its Constitutional right to govern. The sort of freedom Mr. Thackeray and those of his ilk (Ashok Singhal, for instance) enjoy in carrying on their hate campaign against the minorities and in a manner that is palpably inflammatory is a damning testimony of the Atal Behari Vajpayee regime's ineptitude. And the contrast is striking — and in a cruelly ironical way — when it is set against the fact that some small-time activists allegedly of the outlawed Islamic outfit, SIMI, are held under the overly stringent provisions of POTA for having pasted stickers with provocative slogans. The irony is further compounded by the fact that the Shiv Sena is a constituent of the NDA coalition — one with an ideological affinity with the leading partner, the BJP — and Mr. Thackeray himself enjoys tremendous clout with Mr. Vajpayee. What needs to be realised is that the Thackerays (and the Ashok Singhals, not to speak of Narendra Modis) are a veritable threat to any democratic and secular society and have to be treated as such, if India is not to sink deeper into a morass of lawlessness.

17 OCT 2002

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Tamil Nadu's ordinance shows Hindutva is now bigger than the BJP

Fascism, Chennai style

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

The recent ordinance issued by J. Jayalalithaa banning conversions "either by force, allurement or fraudulent means," is more proof, if any were needed, that for all practical purposes Jayalalithaa's current term in office signals the extent to which *Hindutva* is sinking deep roots within Tamil Nadu. Many of her public actions, from needlessly inviting controversy over the issue of conversion, to her open use of state power to organize "Annadhanam" at temples, and her apparent soft corner for Narendra Modi all suggest that Jayalalithaa has not only made her peace with the Bharatiya Janata Party, but will also court the most diehard *Hindutva* elements. Of course the style in which all this is being done is vintage Jayalalithaa: escalated rhetoric, an "I dare you to challenge me" attitude, and basic disregard for all the civilities and proprieties of a liberal democratic society.

Much of this bluster is of course being driven by political compulsions, particularly her need to solidify an understanding with the BJP. But the real significance of the draconian and ill considered anti-conversion ordinance is this. It reminds us that many of the incendiary issues that the BJP has capitalized upon have acquired a life independent of the political fortunes of the BJP itself. *Hindutva* in Gujarat now transcends Narendra Modi and has infected the Congress within Gujarat to a great extent. Anti-Christian sentiment in Rajasthan is fomented by many political groups in the state, and many anti-conversion measures were in the past sponsored by the Congress itself. Jayalalithaa's open advocacy of the BJP's political agenda is simply part of a pattern that suggests *Hindutva* has become larger than the BJP. Periods of relative calm must not lull us into the complacency that a serious assault on liberal values is not being legitimized by parties other than the BJP as well.

The Tamil Nadu conversion ordinance is, like most anti-conversion ordinances, a draconian directive. It requires that all conversions be reported to local magistrates, and imposes stiff penalties on those who "abet conversion". The penalties are even higher if the targets are scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It has to be said that such basically anti-liberal legislation has been facilitated by

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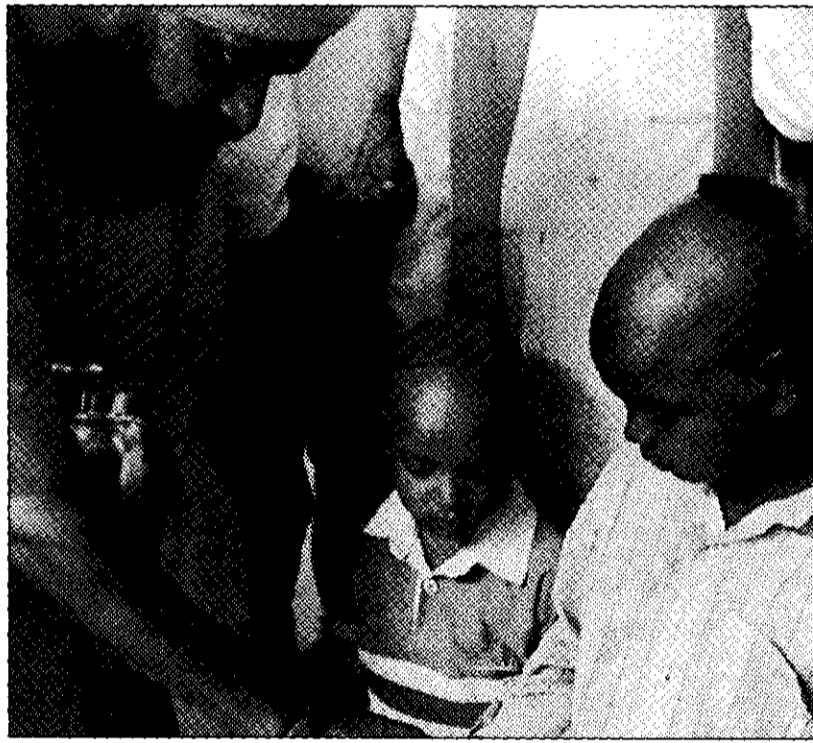
the Supreme Court through its decisions in the Stanislaus case that some years ago upheld the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh anti-conversion legislations. The court's reasoning on that occasion now provides some of the staple assumptions of anti-conversion legislation. These assumptions are evident in the Tamil Nadu ordinance as well.

The first assumption is that one can make a distinction between the freedom to propagate one's religion on the one hand, which Article 25 of the Indian Constitution expressly protects,

that selling one's soul seems like the most humane thing to do.

But the deeper worry about this attitude is this. In a liberal society the state ought not to be in the business of saving anybody's souls. It really is irrelevant to the state what people's motives behind choosing their religious confession are. We may find the fact that people choose their religion for all kinds of motives uncomfortable, but frankly it really is none of our business.

Third, there is the assumption that



and attempts to convert someone of another religion. This is an extraordinarily obscure distinction. Second, there is an assumption that most conversions happen because of some material allurement being offered by the converting parties. The Supreme Court, and I suspect, many Hindus at large, think that this is scandalous. The idea that people should trade away their religion or consciences under some inducement is considered reprehensible.

All this may be true enough. But it ought to be even more scandalous that we feign horror at the prospect that people might convert for anything other than religious motives, but are barely offended by the fact that we live in societies where people are routinely put in such positions of deprivation

tude towards the scheduled castes. It sets up the state as their benefactor and protector of their beliefs. It is ironical that parties associated with anti-Brahmanism can endorse the kind of condescension that has Brahmanism written all over it. Read the Tamil Nadu ordinance, read the Stanislaus decision of the Supreme Court, and you cannot but help thinking that all of our worries about conversion often stem from our patronizing attitudes to the poor and marginalized.

Fourth, there is the bizarre assumption that if force is being deployed to convert someone, we need special legislation. I would have assumed that it is illegal to force someone to do something against their will anyway, whether it is getting them to convert or to do something else. Allurement is too vague a term and doesn't *prima facie* strike most people as a crime. Fifth, the argument that conversion is a threat to law and order is curiously self-fulfilling. It is a threat to law and order only because groups interfere with the right of individuals to exercise their free choices, for their own reasons.

Finally, in our political climate, there is a steadfast refusal to see conversion for what it might be. It might be a form of political dissension, a form of social protest, and an act of choice in a world which gives many of those who exercise it very few choices. In effect, anti-conversion legislation is an abridgment of fundamental political freedoms as well. Anti-conversion ordinances of the Tamil Nadu variety are illiberal at their very core. Its only purpose is to consolidate a supposedly Hindu constituency; Jayalalithaa cares neither for the scheduled tribes, nor genuine religious piety.

The Tamil Nadu ordinance is a harbinger of the fact that *Hindutva* can gain ground without the BJP as well. It signifies that we don't understand the basic premises of our liberty, so we are often ready to excuse such measures simply because they do not stem from our favourite enemy. It is a sign that in India, as the Supreme Court has often exemplified, the state is not averse to regulating people's beliefs for them, often in the name of protecting them. And it is a sign that if we deify our politicians they will, as Jayalalithaa is beginning to, claim god's mantle. That, like most gods, they will be very fickle, condoning *Hindutva* violence one day, and anti-Kannada sentiment the next, should be of little comfort. We should have a debate on conversions, and defeat every anti-conversion ordinance that jeopardizes our liberties.

In our political climate, there is a steadfast refusal to see conversion for what it might be

particular groups need protection. But again, there is something disquieting about the underlying assumptions. The Tamil Nadu ordinance, like other such ordinances and pronouncements of the Supreme Court, assumes that groups like the scheduled castes and tribes cannot manage their own beliefs and are more susceptible to being duped than everyone else. This is an extraordinarily condescending atti-

Jaya defends Ordinance... As Mayawati mulls another

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Oct. 12. — Chief minister Miss J. Jayalalitha has claimed her government's Ordinance, banning religious conversion, is not directed against any minority community, and that no religion has been cited in the Ordinance. The purpose of the Ordinance is only to prevent exploitation of the poor in the name of religion, she said. "The law would apply as much to a Hindu as to a Christian or Muslim if he resorted to conversions by force or allurements."

The Ordinance was issued in the wake of reports of conversions from various districts, involving ignorant, poor and oppressed people. A similar law enacted in Madhya Pradesh had been upheld by the Supreme Court, the chief minister said, wondering why successive Congress governments there had failed to repeal the law. Dismissing charges that the AIADMK has joined Hindutva bandwagon, Miss Jayalalitha said her party followed its own ideals drawn from those of Annadurai and

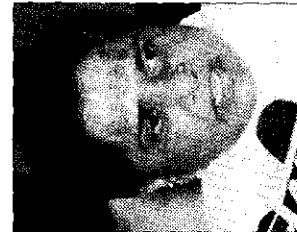
Periyar. "Ours is a value-based party which does not hitch itself to Hindutva or any other bandwagon."

HC dismisses plea: Madras High Court has dismissed a petition seeking to restrain the authorities from allowing Rev. Lee Jae Rock, a South Korean missionary, from going ahead with his "miracle healing" session on the Marina. But the court asked the city police to check if conversions were taking place at the meeting.

"In India, which is multi-religious, a soft state is not a viable model if its democratic and secular structure has to be protected. To shy away from making laws to protect vulnerable sections of society from inducements that interfere with their freedom of choice and pursuing their religion and by raising the bogey of misuse of authority is not liberalism but an enemy of liberty," Miss Jayalitha said. India could not be allowed to be exploited by unscrupulous forces often funded by dubious and anti-national forces from foreign countries to destabilise its social structure, Miss Jayalitha said.



Miss Jayalalitha



Miss Mayawati

SANJAY SINGH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — Miss Mayawati is thinking of doing in UP what Miss J. Jayalalitha has done in Tamil Nadu. She "is considering" a legislation against "forced" and "fraudulent" conversions, on the lines of the Ordinance in Tamil Nadu.

For the BJP, the conversion issue is turning out to be a political gun being repeatedly fired from the allies' shoulders. The next to follow suit may be Mr. Navin Patnaik. Orissa has a conversion statute. The chief minister, BJP leaders said, may "strengthen" the provisions. Getting friends and allies to take the initiative on the conversion issue has two advantages for the BJP, party

strategists say. The party has few big states in its kitty. In this way, ally-ruled bigger states can be brought into play. Tamil Nadu and hopefully, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, are significant on this count.

Also, if allies are kept busy in legislative work, it will deflect attention away from the BJP and allegations about its Sangh Parivar compulsions. BJP leaders feel when a non-BJP party takes such an initiative on issues like these, the "political dust" generated is less, and opposition "less heated".

BJP leaders say the fact that some Congress-ruled states had brought in similar statutes will come handy in this debate. BJP-ruled states (except Gujarat) would "wait and see" the fallout of this

legislative effort in ally-ruled states before going ahead with their lawmaking on conversion.

Eventually, the BJP hopes to "smoothen" the way for the Centre to take a "proactive role in this matter". Leaders feel the "advantage" of this "wait and see" policy is that the "plan" could be shelved or downplayed if political and popular response in Tamil Nadu, UP and Orissa is "adverse".

There is a "broader picture" in this strategy. "recapturing state-level political initiative". BJP leaders said both Miss Jayalalitha and Miss Mayawati have been "very cooperative". "Unlike the earlier relationship with AIADMK and the stormy alliance with Miss Mamata Banerjee," said a BJP leader.

Jaya springs decree on conversion

GA OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Chennai, Oct. 6: The Jayalithaa government has pushed through a midnight Ordinance banning religious conversion by "force, allurement or fraudulent means", winning accolades from the BJP and triggering potshots that she is drifting closer to the Central coalition.

The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2002, stipulates a prison term extending up to three years and a maximum fine of Rs 50,000 for forcible conversion. The punishment is stiffer for converting a minor, a woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes — a maximum jail term of four years and fine extending up to Rs 1 lakh.

The Ordinance, issued by Governor P.S. Ramamohan Rao late last night, came into effect immediately, taking political circles by surprise.

Parties are intrigued by the timing and the haste with which the state government has pushed through a law that could have far-reaching effects. When the Assembly's monsoon session has been convened for October 24, why this haste, asked senior CPM secretariat member G. Ramakrishnan. He said the move looked to "be one more step" in the direction of the ADMK getting closer to the BJP.

Few seemed convinced by claims in official circles that one of its objectives is to deter religious fundamentalist terrorist outfits from using conversion as a tool to gain strength. "When constitutional provisions are already there against forcible conversion from one religion to another, there is no need for such an Ordinance or law at the state level," said Ramakrishnan.

Welcoming Jayalithaa's move, senior state BJP leader L. Ganesan contended that the constitutional provisions might be against forceful religious conversion, but there is no law to punish such offences. Hence, there was a need for a state-level legislation and states like Orissa and Madhya Pradesh already have such a law in place, he said.

The Orissa law — the Freedom of Religion Act — was introduced by a Congress government after the uproar that followed the murder of Christian missionary Graham Staines and his sons.

Ganesan said such a law at the state level has been the BJP's demand from its Jan Sangh days. "I appreciate Dr J. Jayalithaa for her bold decision."

THE TELEGRAPH

7 OCT 2002

Striving for social justice

By Ram Puniyani

SEVENTY-FIVE years after B. R. Ambedkar led his Dalit colleagues to Chavdar Talab in Mahad to claim access to drinking water and was greeted with stones while returning, matters do not seem to have changed much in some places of the country. This stark truth dawned upon the Dalits of Chakwada village, Rajasthan, when they planned to take out a "sadbhavana yatra" to expose caste discrimination. The Dalits of Chakwada, to this day barred from bathing at the public pond or entry to Hindu temples, planned a march from Chaksu to Chakwada to challenge the oppression of the Hindu upper castes. As news about the yatra spread, the upper castes started forming illegal assemblies near the pond and blocked access to the venue.

The journey of the Dalits' quest for social equality, which began with the movements initiated by Jyotirao Phule, has traversed a long and painful path. Their strongest articulation came during the lifetime of Ambedkar. His Chavdar Talab agitation, Kalram Mandir entry effort and burning of the Manusmriti are the three major landmarks in this arduous task, which apparently remains incomplete till date. The denial of these "identity related practices" is the surface phenomenon hiding the deeper deprivation of justice to these "children of a lesser god", the failure of land reforms and the persistence of Brahminical values in society. During the freedom struggle, Ambedkar's emphasis on issues related to social justice forced the leaders of the national movement to take these up as part of the agenda associated with the main demand for unshackling the country from the chains of colonialism. It was no coincidence that Gandhi, who had some differences with him on the issue of a separate electorate, suggested Ambedkar's name to head the committee to draft the Constitution.

With Nehru in the lead after Independence, the national policy was geared towards land reforms and heavy industrialisation (public sector). The latter ensured the policy of reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The rapid industrialisation and reservation policies ensured a change and Dalits

began entering the industrial, urban arenas and Government services in large numbers. But things were not as simple. Apart from the public sector and Government jobs, most other avenues remained closed for them. Even in the implementation of the reservation policy, many subtle hurdles were placed with the result that the desired results could not be achieved. Land reforms were brought in bits and pieces and the goal of land to the tiller remained a distant dream. The 'benami' subterfuge ensured that the land remained in the hands of an elite few and their close relatives. Dadasaheb Giakwad led a massive movement for land

rights but the results were far from satisfactory. The efforts of the naxalites in the late 1970s were, in a way, aimed at bringing the issue of land rights to the fore. But, neither that movement nor other groups could back it up. The result was the failure of the goal of land to the tiller. Even the potential rebellion of Dalit Panthers was co-opted by the highly efficient upper caste formations, which have been guarding their privileges irrespective of the Government in power. It also saw the emergence of groups such as the Ranvir Sena whose sole aim was to suppress the rights of the Dalits, who were becoming more and more aware about them. With the coming of globalisation and the decline of the public sector, the earlier spaces available for Dalits began shrinking. The closure of industrial units played havoc with the employment scenario of the populace as a whole and of the Dalits in particular.

The rise of Hindutva politics is the reassertion of pre-modern hierarchies... the main point being to push back any gains in the process of social transformation.

From the 1980s, the Nehru-Ambedkar (industrialisation plus efforts for social justice) policies started caving in and new social phenomena began setting the clock of social development back. The rise of the Hindu Right was the most concentrated expression of opposition to the possibility of social transforma-

tion of caste and of gender. The social space, which till the 1980s had some place for the problems related to 'this world', started getting sidetracked and the issues of temple and mosque were thrust upon an unsuspecting society. The core political agenda of this change of track was to curtail the development of the deprived sections of society. The first symptoms of the upper castes' discomfort with the Dalits' rise came in the form of the anti-reservation riots in Gujarat, first in 1980 and then in 1985. It is no coincidence that the Hindutva agenda started its upward journey precisely during this phase and appeals on behalf of Lord

Ram started becoming more assertive to begin with and more aggressive in due course. The clever ploy employed was to change the terrain of the battle. Instead of snubbing the Dalits, an enemy was manufactured first among the Muslims and then among the Christians, and sections of Dalits began getting co-opted into the Hindutva stream. Implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations demonstrated this clearly. The counter-reaction of the upper castes, which was picking up momentum through various Yatras, transformed itself into a huge avalanche, resulting in the 'success' of L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the anti-Muslim pogroms of 1992-93.

With the rising assertion of Hindu Rashtra politics, the transformation towards social equality has become a distant dream. It appears as if the whole flow of the current has been frozen in space and time. The Dalits in the villages suffer not only the pangs of hunger but all social deprivations. Untouchability, the curse of our society, persists in vast masses of villages. In Dalit bastis in the urban centres, unemployment is worse. In such a situation, the identity politics being imposed by the RSS is playing havoc with the issues of bread and butter, housing and clothing, which

have been relegated to the background. Atrocities against Dalit women persist and many a time are used as tools to punish those who 'dare' raise their voice to get justice in society. The Human Rights watch report points out: "More than one-sixth of India's population, some 160 million people, live a precarious existence, shunned by much of society because of their rank as 'untouchables' or Dalits — literally meaning 'broken-people' at the bottom of India's caste system. Dalits are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of police and higher-caste groups that enjoy the state's protection. In what has been called India's apartheid, entire villages in many Indian States remain completely segregated by caste. National legislation and the Constitution serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below "pollution line" (From Broken People, Page 2, Human Rights Watch, 1999).

The figures of atrocities against Dalits also point to a rise in the pattern. Murders, grievous hurt, rape and other crimes all show close to a three-fold rise during the last decade and a half. It seems that though Manu's edicts do not rule in an uncompromising way today, the fact is that Manusmriti prevails in a subtle, yet highly concentrated way. The prevalent contradictions at one level are a carry forward from the past; at another, they continue because of the 'weakness' of our freedom struggle, which could not sidetrack the powers of the 'pre-modern' social forces of zamindari and clergy. In many countries, the end of the 'feudal-serf' relationship, a relegation of clergy to the backyards of society did bring in the modern values of liberty, equality and fraternity. The rise of Hindutva politics is the reassertion of pre-modern hierarchies laced in the modern language of glorious tradition and ultra-nationalism, the main point being to push back any gains in the process of social transformation during the decades of the 1950s to the 1980s.

(The writer works for EKTA, Committee for Communal Amity, Mumbai.)

23 SEP 2003

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BJP raises hot pursuit bogey

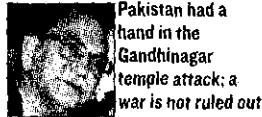
HT Correspondents
Ahmedabad/ New Delhi/
Srinagar, September 26

THE AIR resounded with war cries as the entire BJP establishment today rushed to shift the temple terror focus from Gujarat riots to Pakistan, the temple of terror. While Narendra Modi claimed the two temple raiders were foreigners, the BJP demanded a hot pursuit across the border. Union Minister of State for Home ID Swami duly complied, saying a war with Pakistan couldn't be ruled out.

Modi pooh-poohed the contents of the pamphlets found on the two slain desperados that said the Akshardham attack was revenge for the atrocities on the minorities during the riots. "They were deliberately kept in their pockets to mislead our investigations." The attackers were residents of either PoK or Pakistan, but definitely not locals, he added. He also denied the Delhi Police Commissioner's statement that the Gujarat Government had been alerted about a possible temple attack.

The Delhi BJP took the cue from Modi, urging the Centre to exercise the option of a "limited strike" on PoK to curb the menace of terrorism. The party organised a march to the Pakistan High Commission in Chanakyapuri in protest against the temple attack. Demanding immediate "action" against Pakistan, the

CRY WAR



Swami

Pakistan had a hand in the Gandhinagar temple attack; a war is not ruled out

The terrorists came from Pakistan or PoK. The attack is not linked to the Gujarat riots



Modi

The PM keeps saying we will not tolerate terrorism but never does a thing about it

Thackeray

party warned Pakistan with a "befitting response" if it doesn't desist from sponsoring terrorism. Police had to use water cannons to disperse the surging BJP congregation.

State unit president Madan Lal Khurana said it's high time the country cracked down on the neighbouring country, but added that the party was not asking for a "full-fledged war" against Pakistan. He said the State unit would urge the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to consider tough action.

BJP Parliamentary Party spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra criticised the Congress, the Left and the Samajwadi Party for their speeches during the Gujarat violence, saying that these gave a fillip to the terrorists. He said the Opposi-

tion was reluctant to condemn the Godhra violence and the Akshardham killings. He, too, called for a "pro-active" policy on Pakistan.

Swami echoed the hot pursuit chorus in his party, saying the option of a war against Pakistan was still open. He held Islamabad responsible for the Swaminarayan temple attack and said it was a desperate reaction to the smooth conduct of elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

He dismissed the notion that the incident was linked to the post-Godhra riots and said it was a reflection of the "frustration of the militant groups that face defeat in Kashmir".

He said preliminary investigations revealed that the two militants were not from Kashmir or any other part of India. The technique and the modus operandi pointed to the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, he said.

Adding to the war cries, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray threatened to pull out from the NDA Government as the Prime Minister had failed to control terrorism. "He keeps saying that we will not tolerate terrorism, but he never does a thing about it," Thackeray said. "How long can this be tolerated? It is better to pull out of such a weakling government than be a part of it."

Related reports on Page 7

27 SEP 2002

Terror tamed at dawn

Vinay Menon
Gandhinagar, September 25

AS THE first rays of sunlight soaked the Akshardham complex, NSG commandos moved in for the kill. In a swift operation, they brought to an end the temple siege by gunning down the two *fidayeen* who had kept an entire nation on tenterhooks for 13 gruelling hours.

The two seemed to be in their early twenties and had 180 rounds of ammunition with 25-odd grenades strapped to their bodies. Their bags stacked with dry fruits, they were clearly prepared for a lengthy hostage plan.

They were carrying photocopies of a hand-written Urdu pamphlet in which a little known terrorist outfit, Tehrik-e-Kasas, claimed responsibility for the attack. It said the outfit wanted to avenge the atrocity on Muslims during the Gujarat riots.

The terrorists entered the temple complex through Gate no 3. Atul, a temple volunteer, saw them and informed another volunteer, Nishit, who monitors in-house telecommunications. Nishit dialled up every hall and asked volunteers to shut the doors.

Sensing their plan was going awry, the terrorists tried to enter the main temple. But the volunteer there outran them and shut the massive wooden door before they could reach it, thus saving some 200 lives.

Though Gujarat Police and CRPF personnel had engaged the terrorists in the evening, the tempo picked up as NSG commandos landed from Delhi and launched their operation, codenamed Vajrashakti.

Armed with Heckler-Koch automatic weapons loaded with four magazines each, night vision glasses, sniper cover and superior Glock automatic pistols, the team hemmed in. Also at hand were grenade and rocket launchers, though temple au-



HOW NSG COMMANDOS BROKE THE SIEGE

1.00 AM A search of the temple complex throws up the body of a constable. Terrorists hiding nearby begin firing, giving away their general location

thorities insisted on minimum collateral damage.

Till 1 am, the NSG men crawled across the 23-acre complex, looking for the enemy. They found the body of an SRP constable. This provided the vital lead on the terrorists' position. But little headway could be made as tall trees blocked their sight despite the night vision goggles. "The terrorists were crouched in a dark spot whereas we were moving in from light to dark, giving away our positions," said Brig Raj Seethapathy, Force Commander of the Special Action Group that led the operation.

The commandos decided to wait for daybreak. Till that came, they kept up the sporadic

2.30 AM A brief encounter helps pinpoint the militants' exact location. But it still isn't enough and the commandos decide to wait for daybreak

exchange of fire to monitor the terrorists' location. At 5.30 am, a team led by Seethapathy spotted the assailants.

Commando Suresh got closest to them, taking potshots from behind a tree. But he was hit by a retaliatory bullet in the throat, the only area in the body not covered by the protective gear. Suresh died on the spot.

Undeterred, Seethapathy and seven other NSG men rushed in with rapid fire. The Brigadier pumped nearly five rounds into one of the terrorists while one of his colleagues riddled the other with four. By 7 am, Vajrashakti was called off. Our soldiers had saved the day yet again.

5.30 AM The commandos move in and wind up the operation in a few minutes, shooting down the two terrorists (photograph of a slain militant above)

Atal-Sonia duet

THE TEMPLE attack brought Prime Minister AB Vajpayee and his deputy LK Advani onto the same platform with Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday as they condemned terrorism in one voice. Vajpayee said the successful J&K polls had forced militants to choose Gujarat as target. He and Sonia visited the civil hospital and met those injured in the attack.

HTC, Ahmedabad

25 SEP 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 Christians killed in Karachi attack

AAMIR ASHRAF
KARACHI, SEPTEMBER 25

96-10 2679 Pakistan

TWO gunmen burst into the offices of a Christian charity in Karachi on Wednesday and tied up and gagged seven Christians before shooting them at point blank range, police said.

The attack was the latest in a series of bloody assaults on Christian or Western targets since Pakistan's military government sided with the US-led war on terror last year.

Six men died instantly, and doctors said a seventh died shortly afterwards at Karachi's main hospital. Police said the seven, all Pakistanis, were shot through the head at point blank range with a pistol. Doctors said an eighth man faced permanent paralysis of his left side from a head wound and needed an operation, while a ninth was under sedation after being beaten up in the attack.

The attack took place at the centre offices of the Idare-e-Amn-o-Insaf, or the Organisation for Peace and Justice.

"The gunmen first roped all the people inside the room, they also taped their mouths," a police officer said. "After, they fired straight at their heads."

"The dead bodies were found lying on chairs," Provincial Police chief Syed Kamal



Relatives mourn the death of a Christian charity worker in an attack by unknown gunmen in Karachi. Reuters

Ultras holed up only in pockets: Musharraf

■ ISLAMABAD: Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has claimed that a major part of the country was cleared of foreign terrorists and the militants were hiding only in "some pockets" in tribal areas. The security forces are hunting down Al Qaeda and Taliban militants holed up in the tribal areas, Musharraf said. The terrorists are hiding only in small pockets with the assistance of some well-wishers in the tribal area. There is no question of any major foreign element within our territory," he added. —PTI

Shah said. "It appeared that they were forced to sit there. Their hands were tied and their mouths were also taped." "We found eight empty bullet shells of a TT pistol which means that they were shot point blank," he said.

"Apparently it's an act of terror," Shah added. "But we are investigating it with an open mind and don't rule out a pos-

sible link with recent attacks on minorities and foreign nationals."

Father Archie D'Souza, personal assistant to the Archbishop of Karachi, said Idare-e-Amn-o-Insaf is a Christian organisation. "It's a sort of NGO. It's Pakistan-based and run by Pakistani Christians. It's for justice and peace." —Reuters

Racism
19-12

U.N. panel condemns caste

By W. Chandrakanth

HYDERABAD, AUG. 26. The United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) has condemned the descent-based discrimination practised as caste in India and passed a resolution against it. The Indian Government had vehemently opposed the move arguing that the country had on its own initiated several measures that were having a positive effect, hence it was against the very discussion.

The resolution came at its convention in Geneva (the meet was held from August 5 to 23). An important spin-off from this would be that caste-based discrimination would be addressed by the U.N. bodies and within the parameters of inequities being experienced by the Dalits and similar communities across the world.

This is bound to be a major set-back to the Indian Government which had maintained that caste cannot be equated to race all these years. At the same meet the Indian Government even suggested that the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, would not have risen to such a high office if discrimination had ever continued without checks.

The CERD meet in its General Recommendation No. XXIX dated August 22 said "that discrimination based on descent includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status, which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights".

Several organisations which fought for the inclusion of caste in one form or the other on the U.N. agenda all these years are happy over the developments. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) which received a copy of the recommendations on Sunday night termed the triumph as a "certain defeat" of the Indian Government which argued that descent-based discrimination should be interpreted within the framework of race only and not be diluted with the inclusion of any other form.

The following are some of the committee's other recommendations: educate the general public on the importance of affirmative action programmes to address the situation of victims of descent-based discrimination, encourage dialogue between members of descent-based communities and members of other social groups,

ensure relevant judicial decisions and official actions take the prohibition of descent-based discrimination fully into account and take measures to address the special vulnerability of children of descent-based communities to exploitative child labour.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, national convener of the NCDHR, Paul Dnyakar, on Monday said though the recommendations were welcome the ground realities would not change unless the Government strictly enforced the Constitutional provisions and laws.

He appealed to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to set an example to the rest of the world by ensuring equal opportunities for Dalits for development. The NCDHR called upon the NHRC to ensure the compliance of the U.N. Committee declaration by the State.

Mr. Dnyakar also urged the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes commissions, the Women's Commission and the Election Commission to uphold and protect Dalit rights.

The NCDHR decided to coordinate its work with many Asian and African nations, which have discriminations of similar origins to collectively address the issue in future.

Militant leader on trial

JAKARTA: Amid cries of "God is great!" Indonesia's best-known Islamic militant went on trial on Thursday on charges of inciting violence against Christians in an eastern province divided along sectarian lines. Jafar Umar Thalib's supporters staged a noisy demonstration outside a court in the Indonesian capital. Many wore red vests with the words, "Muslims unite! We will not be beaten!"



Thalib is the leader of an Islamic paramilitary group — called Laskar Jihad or the Holy Warrior Troops — that has been blamed for violence in several Indonesian provinces. He faces six years in prison for allegedly making a speech in April imploring his followers to ignore a peace agreement between rioting Muslims and Christians in the Maluku islands. As many as 9,000 people have been killed since 1999 in sectarian violence in the region, 2,600 km east of Jakarta. The trial is being closely watched by the U.S., which hopes Indonesia can serve as a bulwark against terrorism. "The defendant was inciting a riot in front of 2,500 people by saying, 'From today onwards there will be no more talk of reconciliation. From today there will only be talk of how much land have we occupied and how many bombs have we made,'" prosecutor Slamet Rijanto told the court. *(the picture shows Thalib in the court on Thursday).* — AP

Pak jihadis target Christians again

Mubashir Zaidi & Agencies
Islamabad, August 9

FIVE PEOPLE — a suicide attacker and four nurses — were killed and 23 injured today in Taxila when Islamic militants lobbed two grenades at a crowd of women leaving a missionary hospital chapel in what was the second assault on a Christian target in the country in less than a week.

Doctors said 23 people, mostly female nurses, were wounded and two were in serious condition. The office manager of the hospital said besides hurling the grenades, the assailants also fired at the security guards.

Three men had been waiting by the hospital gates for the daily morning service to end before they struck, the police said. One attacker died when a grenade blew up in his hand.

Three of the dead nurses have been identified as Joel, Naziran Bibi and Bushra Parveen.

"The nurses were coming out of the chapel when someone threw explosives," Clement Bakhshi, an accounts officer at the hospital, said. "Three of our nurses have expired," he added.

Islamic militants, angered over President Pervez Musharraf's support to the US-led war on terror, have stepped up attacks on Christian and foreign targets in Pakistan in the past year, killing dozens of people.

The victims have been mostly Pakistanis but have included 11 French engineers and a US diplomat's wife and daughter.

This week's attacks — the first was on a school for the children of foreign missionaries — show an increasing focus on soft targets.

Minister for Information Nisar Memon condemned the killings, which he said was "a sinister attempt to drive a wedge between the Muslim and Christian communities of Pakistan."

The killings would not deter the country from supporting the



Relatives of nurses killed in a grenade attack on the hospital chapel mourn in Taxila on Friday.

international crackdown on terror, he added.

The grenades left two small craters on the brick path leading to the chapel. There were blood stains at the entrance to the building, with broken glass strewn across the aisle and pews.

Shoes, clothing, shredded umbrellas and a woman's hairband were scattered among the surrounding debris.

Relatives wailed and beat their heads with their hands in grief

as hundreds of bystanders crowded around the hospital.

The body of the assailant lay on a trolley, and people pressed to glimpse the lifeless corpse of the young unshaven man.

Pearl's body back in US: The body of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, recovered from a shallow grave where, it was abandoned after his slaying by Islamic militants, was returned to his family for burial.

The body was flown from Pakistan on Thursday on a Cathay Pacific flight to Los Angeles International Airport, said James Lee, a spokesman for Pearl's parents, who live in a suburb of the city.

The plane, which had stopped in Hong Kong, taxied to an isolated gate where media access was restricted. The family plans a private funeral service next week. Lee declined further comment, citing the family's desire for privacy. Pearl's body, in an

oak casket covered with red flowers, was transferred on Wednesday by police convoy from a mortuary at the Edhi Foundation, a Pakistani relief organisation.

Pearl, 38, was kidnapped on January 23 in Karachi while working on a story about links between Pakistani Islamic extremists and Richard C Reid, who was arrested in December after he allegedly tried to light explosives in his shoes while on a flight from Paris to Miami.

A few days later, e-mails announcing the kidnapping were received by Western and Pakistani news organisations from the previously unknown National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty.

Last month, four men, including British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, were convicted of the kidnapping and slaying. Saeed was sentenced to death by hanging and the others received life sentences. All have filed appeals, and seven others are being sought in the case.

Pak army officer shot at

A SENIOR army officer was shot and wounded on Friday in a suspected sectarian attack in Pakistan's southwestern Quetta city, police and military hospital sources said.

Two unidentified assailants opened fire on the car of Brigadier Bartar Hussain Naqvi, a Shiite Muslim and an official of the National Database and Registration Authority, while he was on his way to his office.

"He received bullet injuries in the shoulder and is being operated upon," an official at the city's military hospital said. The attackers fled the scene after incident. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, but police suspect a sectarian motive.

Hundreds of people have been killed in sectarian violence involving militant organisations from the majority Sunni or minority Shi'ite sects of Islam.

Agencies

Dead PoK militants behind church attack

Islamabad, Aug 7 (Reuters) Pakistani police said today they had evidence that three men who blew themselves up yesterday in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir were the same gang that killed six people in an attack on a Christian school this week.

The trio were challenged by police when they tried to enter the village of Khabadar in PoK about 20 km from the scene of Monday's attack, police said yesterday.

Police freed the suspects after they threatened to explode a grenade. Then the three men walked to a nearby river where they blew themselves up.

"We have overwhelming evidence that they are involved in the (church school) attack," deputy inspector general of police Israr Ahmad told Reuters from Murree, the hill town northeast of Islamabad that was the scene of the school shootings.

However, a spokesman of interior ministry said it was premature to say the three were the attackers.

"They could be related (to it), but it's pre-mature to say definitely," the ministry spokesman said.

Israr said police had recovered one body from the Jhelum



A volunteer adjusts the coffin containing the remains of Daniel Pearl before it was taken to Karachi airport for a flight back to US. (AP/PTI)

river last night.

A Pakistani intelligence officer said another body was recovered from the river today afternoon. Police were searching for the third body.

Six Pakistanis were shot dead and several wounded when three young, masked men burst into the Murree Christian School, firing AK-47 rifles.

None of the 146 foreign pupils

or 35 foreign staff were hurt. The attackers escaped after a 15 minute gun-fight.

Monday's attack was the latest assault on a foreign target in Pakistan since the military government of Gen. Pervez Musharraf incensed militant Muslim groups by siding with the US-led war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Man stoned to death for blasphemy

Islamabad, July 6

HUNDREDS OF villagers on Friday stoned to death a man accused of blasphemy near Chak Jhumra town of Punjab province, Pakistan.

Zahid Shah, 40, was dragged out of his home in the presence of his wife and brother and beaten with iron rods and sticks. When he fell unconscious, Shah was dragged to the village square where the local religious leader, Maulvi Faqir Mohammed, ordered the mob to stone him, according to a report in the daily Dawn.

The terror-struck family of the victim begged for mercy and promised to banish him from the village, but the mullah stood his ground, residents said. Shah died on the spot. The family buried the body in nearby Faisalabad without complaining to the police fearing

reprisals against them. The police reached the spot four hours after the incident and said the matter was being investigated.

"We have started a probe into the incident and we may order exhumation of the body to find out the cause of death," a police officer was quoted as saying.

The man, who was mentally ill, had claimed to be the "last prophet of Islam". Shah had earlier been jailed for blasphemy in 1994, but freed three years later on the ground that he was mentally ill. After his release in 1997, Shah left his village to live with a brother in nearby Faisalabad city with the case still pending against him.

Last week, he returned to his village and had an altercation with the residents during which he openly used blasphemous remarks against Prophet Mohammed.

A village tribal council immediately banished him. Shah then left the village and returned on Thursday following which the residents complained to the mullah who issued the order to kill him over a mosque loudspeaker.

Cop held for gangrape

Pakistani police said on Saturday they had arrested one of their own officers for failing to prevent a woman from being gangraped by four men on the order of a village jury.

"We have arrested assistant sub-inspector Muhammad Iqbal and charged him with criminal negligence for failing to follow the procedure," Muzaffargarh's senior superintendent of police (SSP) Farman Ali told. Mukhtaran Mai says she was raped by four men on the order of a village jury of panchayat because her brother, Abdul

Shakoor, had a love affair with the girl of a higher class tribe. Police say she is 30 years old.

The incident in a remote village in the central province of Punjab on June 22 has sparked a national outcry. Earlier, the woman's brother Shakoor had also been kidnapped by the Mastoi tribe. A police team led by Iqbal freed him but failed to arrest the tribesmen, who later took their revenge on his sister, the SSP said.

"It's a criminal negligence," Ali said. "If the ASI had recovered the kidnapped boy, he should have proceeded against the accused tribesmen according to the law."

Police arrested one of the four alleged rapists on Friday and said they were hunting for three others. The government has given Mai a check for 500,000 rupees (\$8,200).

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JUL 2007

UK Sikhs claim separate ethnic identity

5/17/02
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, July 6. — A 100-strong Sikh delegation has made a plea to the British government to recognise the community as a separate ethnic group in the country.

The Sikhs voiced their demand in a memorandum submitted to the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, at his residence at 10, Downing Street, a spokesman of the group said today.

The issue also figured in the House of Commons where Junior Home Office Minister Hillary Benn said: "Under the Commission for Racial Equality's code, Sikhs have the same status as other ethnic and racial groups." "However, in the 2001 census the only option for Sikhs was 'general Asian background', while Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were all represented," he said. Raising the issue at Lords question time, crossbencher the Earl of Sandwich said that in view of the commitment of "the Sikh people to this country, is it not time we had a turban in this House?" Benn said it was an "interesting and important question" that would be "noted".

THE STATESMAN

7 JUL 2002

How did Godse hail Savarkar as the most faithful advocate of Hindutva?

Hindutva vs Hinduism

BY A.G. NOORANI

EACH IN his own way, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani have justified the worst fears of what lay in store for the nation were the BJP to win power and belied the hopes of those who thought that, under their leadership, the BJP would "moderate", that is loosen, if not cut, its umbilical cord with the RSS and become a national party. The duo's reaction to the attacks on Christians since 1998, to the Staines' murder, and to the Gujarat pogrom revealed them in their true colours. Their recent statements on Savarkar and Hindutva dispel all doubt.

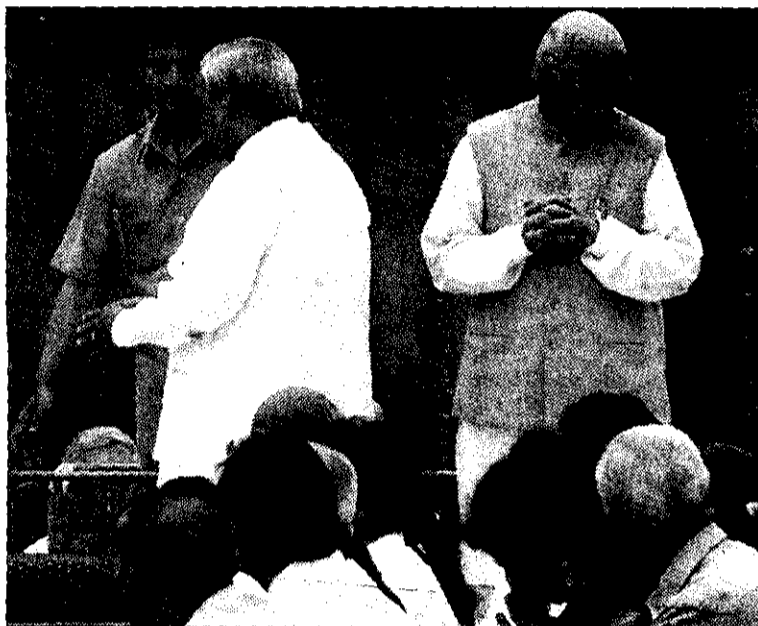
The contrasting styles explain why people were deceived for so long. Advani was forthright but adroit. Vajpayee was cleverly ambiguous. The message was identical — they are Savarkar's Hindutvaites.

Vajpayee praised Savarkar while releasing a book on Bhagat Singh who broke with his mentor, Lala Lajpat Rai, on Hindu communalism. On March 27, he said that "when Swami Vivekananda speaks of Hindutva, nobody can call him a communalist". But some "defined Hindutva in such a manner that it is better to keep a distance from it".

The truth, of course, is that Swami Vivekananda did not speak of Hindutva but of the profundities of Hinduism. It was V.D. Savarkar who coined the word Hindutva in 1923 to propagate a cult of hate. Hinduism is noble and ancient. It teaches man the very technique of Self-Realisation. Hindutva is modern and ignoble. It debases man by arousing his worst emotions, hatred and fear.

Vajpayee tried once again to square the circle on May 6 saying, "I accept the Hindutva of Swami Vivekananda. But the kind of Hindutva being propagated now is wrong and one should be wary of it." This style is typical of the man. Vajpayee knows that Vivekananda never spoke of Hindutva. He distances himself from Hindutva without repudiating it and falsely attributes the ideology to Vivekananda.

Advani bared his outlook and style at Port Blair on May 4. "There is no reason to feel shy of Hindutva, propounded at great length by Veer Savarkar. It's an all-encompassing ideology with its roots in the country's heritage." Not for him the gloss of Vivekananda. "We must remember that the pioneers of Hindutva like Veer Savarkar and RSS founder Hedgewar kindled fierce, nationalistic spirit that con-



GODSE'S GHOST: Vajpayee and Advani at Rajghat on Gandhi Jayanti

tributed to India's liberation." In a dig at Vajpayee he asserted: "There is no need to redefine Hindutva." Its propagation in Gujarat did not create an atmosphere of mistrust which led to the carnage. "Our views on Hindutva are held against us as if we have done something terrible."

That, the BJP has. It is set to do much worse. It is re-writing history to depict the RSS, a rabidly communal force which opposed the freedom movement and supported the British during the Quit India movement, as nationalists. It is determined to use State power to change the moral and intellectual climate of India.

As Dr B.R. Purohit's work *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism* ably points out, "With the growth of Mahasabha and RSS ideologies, a new current of nationalism — the Hindu Nationalism — grew powerful in the country. Hindu nationalism, instead of supplementing the forces of Indian nationalism, tried even to supplant it. The opposition of Indian nationalism by 'Hindu Rashtravad' was detrimental to the steady growth of the former... The two nationalisms, as Dr Beni Prasad puts it — the Hindu and the Indian — were fundamentally in opposition to each other with respect to their ideals."

In his pamphlet *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* published in 1923, Savarkar emphasised that "Hindutva is not identical with what is vaguely indicated by the term Hin-

duism". There is "a clear line of demarcation between the two... Hindutva is not identical with Hindu Dharma; nor is Hindu Dharma identical with Hinduism."

Its publishers, S.S. Savarkar wrote in the preface: "Veer Savarkar had to coin some new words such as 'Hindutva'..." Vajpayee has said that RSS supremo M.S. Golwalkar's *We Or Our Nationhood Defined* (1938) was "withdrawn". Golwalkar acknowledged that Savarkar's book *Rashtra Meemansa* was "one of my chief sources of inspiration". An application by the RSS to the district judge, Nagpur, signed by Rajendra Singh and Bhaurao Deoras in 1978, criticised Gandhi and the Congress and swore by the book *We* (Para 10) as well as Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts* (Para 7). The latter rejects "Territorial Nationalism" (Chapter X), espouses "Cultural Nationalism" and brands (Ch. XII) Muslims, Christians and communists as "Internal Threats".

The BJP's founder, S.P. Mookerjee, was finance minister in the League ministry headed by Fazlul Haq ("loyalty to my leader"). His party was also in coalition with the League in Sind. Mookerjee advised the governor "how to combat this 'Quit India' movement in Bengal". Savarkar himself wrote abject apologies and assurances to the British.

Morarji Desai was no devotee of the Nehru family. In February 1979, he declared the jail complex in Port

Blair a national memorial but studiously ignored Savarkar. Why?

He had, as home minister of Bombay, assigned his police and his advocate-general, the celebrated C.K. Daphtary, to the prosecution *inter alia* of Savarkar in the Gandhi murder conspiracy case. Asked by Savarkar's lawyer, L.B. Bhopatkar, on August 24, 1948: "Did you have any other information about Savarkar besides Prof. Jain's statement for directing steps to be taken as regards him?", Desai replied: "Shall I give the full facts?" The question was swiftly withdrawn.

Savarkar was acquitted only because the approver, Digamber Badge's evidence, which damned him, did not have independent corroboration as the law requires. But Judge Atma Charan accepted Badge as a truthful witness. "He gave his version of the facts in a direct and straight-forward manner. He did not evade cross-examination or attempt to evade or fence with any question." His version was that on January 17, he went with Godse and accomplice Narayan Apte to Savarkar's home and that he heard Savarkar, while bidding them farewell, declaim "Yashasvi houn ya (be successful and come)". On the way back, Apte told Badge that Savarkar had predicted that "Gandhiji's 100 years were over — there was no doubt that that work would be successfully finished..."

If a person charged with conspiracy to murder one's friend is acquitted on a similar ground, would one shake hands with him? Gandhi was no ordinary mortal. Godse hailed Savarkar in the court as the "most faithful advocate of the Hindu cause". The BJP's election manifestoes of 1996 and 1998 extolled Hindutva and Vajpayee and Advani have high praise for its author, Savarkar. Vivekananda would have despised him and his Hindutva.

In a perceptive essay entitled *Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism*, Prof Tapan Raychaudhuri, Emeritus Professorial Fellow, St. Antony's College, Oxford, recalled that "he was among the earliest nationalist thinkers to claim the Indo-Islamic past as part of the Indian heritage". He noted with disgust that "the VHP has the audacity to claim him as their own". The scholar remarked, "It is difficult to imagine him as the ideological ancestor of people who incite the ignorant to destroy other people's places of worship in a revanchist spirit."

Pervez snaps lifeline to madrasas

Islamabad, June 20

TO REGULATE the functioning of thousands of madrasas, Pakistan yesterday approved a new Ordinance mandating these religious schools to register with the Government, failing which they would be disbanded and have to forgo State benefits.

"The new Ordinance, Madrasa Registration Ordinance 2002, is intended to bring them under the normal educational system of the country," Federal Information Minister Nisar Memon told reporters after a Cabinet meeting yesterday.

"One of the objectives of introducing this regulatory mechanism is to control those religious schools which had been subjected to militancy," Memon said.

Describing madrasas as part of Pakistan's culture and tradition, Memon said, "We want to control them".

Under the Ordinance, all madrasas would have to register with the "Pakistan Madrasa Education Board" and their respective provincial madrasa education boards, he said.

Under the Ordinance would any madrasa, contravening any of its provisions would be disbanded or

fined, or both. "The details of fine are being worked out," he said.

They have been prohibited from receiving 'zakat' or financial assistance, grant, donation or other benefits from the Federal Government or provincial Governments unless registered under the Ordinance.

The process of implementation was expected to be completed in six months, he said.

The Cabinet meeting, presided over by President Musharraf agreed that the madrasas should also facilitate teaching of science, mathematics, English and Urdu. This would let the students enroll in professional educational institutions if they so wished, it said.

Every registered madrasa would have to maintain accounts and submit annual reports to the respective education boards.

An unregistered madrasa would not be permitted to receive grant, donation or aid from any foreign source, allow admission to foreign students or make appointment of teachers without valid visa and a no-objection certificate from the Interior Ministry, Memon said.

Agencies

THE HINDIISTAN

21 JUN 2002

'Muslims in Europe suffer increasing attacks'

The Times, London

Crackdown on illegal immigrants

BRUSSELS, May 24. — Muslims across Europe have suffered more hostility and physical attacks since 11 September, according to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. "A greater sense of fear among the general population has exacerbated already existing prejudices and fuelled acts of aggression and harassment across Europe," Mr Bob Purkiss, chairman of the monitoring centre, said on Thursday as his Vienna-based organisation released its report.

Britain had seen a significant rise in the number of attacks on Muslims, with numerous incidents of violent assault, verbal abuse and attacks on property. Muslim women had been spat on and physically assaulted and mosques had suffered attacks from minor vandalism to serious damage through arson and firebombs.

Asylum seekers, political refugees and immigrants were another group to have attracted increased hostility in recent months. The report pointed to the "sensationalist and often vitriolic campaign being waged by

LONDON, May 24. — Britain is considering plans for a huge crackdown on illegal immigrants trying to enter the country, including the deployment of navy warships to intercept people-traffickers, according to a report published by *The Guardian* here today.

Under the radical plans, seen by the broadsheet, bulk deportations of rejected asylum seekers could be carried out using army transport planes, while development aid to countries of asylum origin could be tied to commitments to take back illegal immigrants. Such countries would include Somalia, Sri Lanka and Turkey, said *The Guardian*. Following talks with Mr Tony Blair on Monday, his Spanish counterpart Mr Jose Maria Aznar said his government was drawing up tough measures against illegal immigration to put before EU leaders at their June summit. — AFP

Anglo-French deal: Hundreds of illegal migrants from the Sangatte refugee centre may enter Britain as part of a deal with the French to secure its permanent closure, adds Times, London.

many of the (UK's) national tabloid newspapers against asylum-seekers and refugees". The report said that, by blurring the differences between asylum-seekers and the events of 11 September, sections of the media crudely portrayed those seeking asylum as "potential terrorists who were willing and capable of inflicting similar attacks on Europe as others had on New York".

Only Portugal and Luxembourg, with their tiny Muslim

populations, had escaped the phenomenon. Muslim women, with their highly visible hijab head covering, had been routinely verbally and physically abused in many European countries — Belgium, Germany and Denmark in particular — and had had their head scarves ripped from their heads.

Men with turbans had also become targets of public hostility, even though the headgear is not necessarily Islamic attire.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2002

Muslim law experts hail HC check on talaq

K S Manojkumar
Aurangabad, May 7

IS THE tightening of Muslim divorce rules by the Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court an interference in personal law? Many Muslim law experts in this city do not think so.

"No, it's not the court decision but the Prophet's tenets themselves that provide the biggest hurdles to divorce," said Kazi Moinuddin. "It is another thing that people have blatantly misinterpreted them to serve their selfish motives."

As the city's head Kazi, he is worried about the growing number of divorce cases coming up before him. He knows that the High Court verdict may encourage more women to approach

the courts for divorce. Yet Kazi Moinuddin welcomes the judgment as a check on the prevailing anarchy in divorce cases.

"Divorce is not something just between a man and his wife. It has a direct bearing on the future of the children," he said. "It cannot be child's play, as it had become in recent times."

Might the average Muslim see the judgment as anti-Muslim — an extension of what is happening in Gujarat? The court took care to pre-empt this. The judges, keeping in mind that all of them were Hindus — as were all the lawyers in the case — appointed two Muslim lawyers as amicus curie. Gulam Mustafa Vajapuri and K. G. Khader briefed the court on the nuances of Islamic law and practices.

Nothing in the judgment goes against the suras in the Quran that deal with marriage and divorce, Gulam Mustafa told *Hindustan Times*. This isn't judicial activism, but implementation of the law as the Prophet Himself meant it to be.

"Muslim divorces, thankfully, have now become justiciable. It's a natural evolution or arbitration. First, it was the Caliphates; then came the Kazis and now we have the courts who would settle divorce cases," Mustafa said.

Ruksana Ali Baig, a college student, said: "The Quran has given several rights to women as daughters, wives, mothers. The problem lies in the implementation of these rights because of the lack of awareness, especial-

ly in India where most Muslims are illiterate. But when judgments like this are publicised, they do help women. Men too are discouraged. And if the religious leaders support the judgment, I think there will be fewer divorces."

The Urdu poet, Bashir Nawaz (of Bazaar fame) praised the court verdict, saying: "The decision surely gives a much-needed jolt to the 600-year-old orthodoxy that has set itself up as the final authority on Muslim laws."

Kaka Wahiddin, the man who issues the fatwas in Aurangabad, refused to comment when told that his certificates will no more be the last word in divorce cases.

But Hindu lawyer Sanjay Hiwrekar, who pleaded for peti-

tioner Dagdu Pathan, was unhappy with the judgment. "I feel putting a Muslim divorce to the scrutiny of the civil procedural code and the Indian Evidence Act amounts to interference with the Muslim man's right to divorce," he said.

Several Muslims who agree with the judgment, however, wondered whether it might encourage the courts and the State to try and tinker with other Muslim personal laws and pave the way for a common civil code.

One of them quoted from a parliamentary debate in 1973: "We should wait for the Muslim public opinion on these matters to crystallise before we try to change this customary right or make changes in their personal law".

What else do you get when Modi's indispensable, Sinha expendable?

The Hindutva Rate of Growth

ONE simple — if sometimes simplistic — way of assessing a government's health is to see who it is willing to sacrifice and who it considers indispensable. Most governments also invite this test when they are at a turning point midway through their term (as did Rajiv Gandhi when Bofors broke) or at the edge, towards the end of the term (as Narasimha Rao with hawala) and we will talk more about them later. This one, even if not yet on a downward escalator, is at least in the about-turn mode exactly halfway through its term. And if it clings to an indispensable new saviour in Narendra Modi and is willing to abandon poor Yashwant Sinha, it must tell you something not only about the state of bankruptcy and cynicism but also the total lack of any intellect or ideas.

In the dust (or the surf, considering that this happened in Goa) raised by the prime minister's momentary lapse of reason on Modi we seem to have ignored the truly ludicrous resolution passed by the BJP on the economy. To anybody figuring out the future of this government this should be essential reading because there cannot be more clinching evidence of the fact that the old guard has seized control of the party at a difficult time. The government, the resolution says, should withdraw the LPG and kerosene subsidies only over a period of time. What this implies is, leave the tough part for the next government which, they obviously concede, won't be theirs. Yes, lower interest rates are better for growth. But for the old people, make special schemes, offer higher rates so they can continue to live on their interest incomes.

Now how many senior citizens have the luxury of being able to live on interest earned from their savings in a country where nearly 30 per cent of all people still live below the poverty line? It may actually be a good idea since we are so lacking in a social security net for the aged. But a government-subsidised higher interest rate for people (young or old) with sizeable savings is the exact definition of robbing the poor to subsidise the middle class. But do the BJP's golden oldies bother? When they look around themselves all they see are retirees and you cannot fault them for thinking that the votebanks are full of retired people.

EACH one of the concessions the BJP resolution has demanded amounts to

a subsidy for the middle class. The Indira Gandhi-type populism was at least smarter in that it at least pretended to be pro-poor and even anti-rich. Nationalisation, *garibi hatao*, abolition of princely titles and privy purses. This is a straightforward case of dipping into the till to pay yourselves. But that is not the entire problem.

The problem is, when a resolution of this kind is passed by the dominant party of the coalition while midway through the Parliament session where the budget is yet to be debated and passed, it completely destroys the credibility of the government and its finance minister. It is silly enough for the other coalition partners to ask for roll-

back that it might even turn the next election into an *ashvamedh yagya* under the leadership of Narendra Modi if not into a communal riot altogether. So far it had three achievements to talk about with justification: speeding up of economic reform; management of foreign policy, particularly after 9/11; and maintenance of inter-

communal peace and overall law and order. Two of three now lie in the past. The reform agenda has been punctured so thoroughly that anybody who saw poor Yashwant Sinha justifying post-budget rollbacks, quoting past precedents, even before rollbacks have been effected this time, could figure out that henceforth this will

fooled by the politicians is a question others in the IAS might one day ask Sinha. But today, his party seems to believe that survival lies in making its voters an offering of not merely the corpses of Muslims but also the head of Sinha who dared to pick the pocket of its most vocal, though by no means the most numerous, middle class supporters.

BUT can you really fault the BJP alone? The rise of the Modi factor has galvanised the Opposition. It has even got Sonia Gandhi and Mulayam Singh Yadav to be on talking terms. It has brought back to our front pages the pictures of Surjit, Gowda, Bardhan and other fossils with clasped hands, raised in a new show of unity and hope, howsoever premature. They all want Modi out. You can then work out the corollary as it might work for the BJP think tank: the man my opposition hates most must be the one my voters love most. Nobody is even shedding a tear for Yashwant Sinha. The Opposition is not criticising him, nor is it complaining about his being downsized in so brutal a manner.

The political debate has now moved out of the realm of reform, development, growth and other such mundane, governance-linked issues. Secularism, real or pseudo, sounds much more like an election slogan than better governance. For the Congress, this has the promise of bringing back the Muslim vote. For the BJP it might be the ticket to Hindu consolidation. For Mulayam the crucial issue, in fact the only issue, is the preservation of his Muslim vote. So how is Yashwant Sinha, his budget, or economic reform in general, relevant to any of this? We now face the prospect of our politics receding into the 1989/90 phase of bankruptcy and stagnation when we kept on fighting over *mandir* and *Mandal* while an interim government had to airlift gold reserves to prevent a sovereign default. Mercifully, given the momentum reform has given our economy over the past decade, it is unlikely we would lapse into the old Hindu rate of growth (2-3 per cent). The band in this phase of bankrupt politics will be 4-5 per cent. And if it comes to be described as the Hindutva Rate of Growth, remember who coined that phrase the first time.

NATIONAL INTEREST



SHEKHAR GUPTA

This government thinks it is so impossible for it to live up to its promise of good governance that it might even turn the next election into an 'ashvamedh yagya' under Narendra Modi's leadership

backs. You would normally imagine that the right forum for that would have been the cabinet meetings where the budget was passed and where the partners are represented, particularly in this cabinet which happens to be the largest ever in our history. But if even the dominant party, to which the fi-

be a government run on the principles of largesse and handouts rather than hard-headed reform and economic management. No finance minister before Sinha has been made to look so lonely, pitiable, so defeated, to lay out such a pathetic pre-emptive defence of rollbacks in a budget he should have been de-

We now face the prospect of our politics receding into the 1989-90 phase of stagnation when we kept on fighting over *mandir* and *Mandal* while an interim government had to airlift gold reserves to prevent a sovereign default

nance minister also belongs, starts making these demands, it at once confirms the impression of this being a lame duck government. A lame duck government, halfway through its term!

So lame, actually, that it now thinks it is so impossible for it to live up to its promise of good governance

fending with conviction against the Opposition in the nation's Parliament. This is not a criticism of Sinha. We must sympathise with him because it seems the poor fellow actually bought the slogans of good governance and reform that his party had been shouting so far. How a lifelong bureaucrat could be so easily

Muslims seek autonomy in N-E Lanka

P K Balachandran
Kathankudy, April 19

THE SRI Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), now recognised as the sole representative of the Muslims of the North Eastern Province, will fight for an autonomous Muslim unit within the Tamil-dominated province.

"We cannot have federalism only at the centre. We have to have it in the regions too," said Rauf Hakeem, the National leader of the SLMC here on Thursday.

He told visiting newsmen that neither the Sinhala dominated Government nor the Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could ignore the Muslims, who have determined the fate of several Governments at the centre.

"The question of an autonomous south eastern council for Muslims within the North Eastern province would have to be taken up at the forthcoming talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE," Hakeem said.

The SLMC would be participating in the talks to be held in Bangkok in May or June this year. A third of Sri Lanka's Muslims live in the Southeast part of the Northeastern province.

"While the common people of Sri Lanka want peace at any cost the Muslims want peace with dignity," Hakeem said.

Asked if the Muslims would take to arms like the Tamils, Hakeem said; "I would be the last person to ask for it though the ground is fertile for the growth of militancy." If the Muslims are to secure their rights they have to be seen as being neutral between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Unfortunately the Muslims had given the impression that they were with the Government for certain benefits.

"If Muslims are neutral they

can be a credible third force and act as power brokers", Hakeem said. Asked about the sincerity of Prabhakaran with regards to his promises to the Muslims Hakeem said the LTTE leader 'appeared to realise his follies'.

US won't lift ban: The United States has said its ban on the LTTE will remain in place, even if Sri Lanka decided to lift its domestic ban. US deputy secretary of State Richard Armitage reiterated that Washington's policy would be unaffected, should the government of Sri Lanka decide to remove its ban on the LTTE.

20 000 200

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

BJP's flip-flop on Hindutva

By Neena Vyas

PANAJI (GOA), APRIL 14. The Bharatiya Janata Party's palpable fear that the carefully-knitted National Democratic Alliance coalition of over 20 political parties may be about to unravel has led it to once again do a flip-flop on Hindutva — for the last two days the message was that the party would not be apologetic about its Hindutva "ideology", but today, the concluding day of the party executive committee meeting, the emphasis was on its commitment to the NDA agenda of governance.

The threat of the Telugu Desam Party's withdrawal of support and the fear that it may begin an exodus from the NDA forced the party to remember its Chennai Declaration, which had said it had the NDA agenda before it. The party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, today announced at a press conference that a committee, to be set up soon, would identify the issues to be taken up for a mass contact programme, to be led by him, from May. The issues would be selected from the Chennai Declaration.

However, the pronouncements of party leaders before the TDP threat suggested that the party had decided to be explicit about its Hindutva identity. Mr. Krishnamurthi's

opening remarks on April 12 virtually endorsing the RSS line that the "provoked" Hindus in Gujarat were in fact the "victims"; the Prime Minister's direct attack on Muslims saying that wherever they are they refuse to learn to live with others peacefully; and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani's advice to cadres not to be apologetic about Hindutva; and finally, the Godhra resolution giving a good conduct certificate to the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and rejecting his offer of resignation all pointed to a stronger articulation of the BJP's core ideology, Hindutva, which the party describes as "cultural nationalism" but which has been ex-

posed more than once as a plan to consolidate a Hindu votebank.

However, after Saturday's developments and lack of assurance from the TDP that its support to the Vajpayee Government would continue, Mr. Krishnamurthi said the party was committed to the NDA agenda and as for Hindutva, "it stands where it always has". He refused to bite the bait when asked about the Ayodhya issue, saying it was not on the NDA agenda.

The party's decision — announced by Mr. Krishnamurthi — to maintain discipline in the party at all levels is also being seen as a new desire to henceforth deal firmly with those who

dare to speak outside the line sanctioned by the NDA agenda for "good governance". Mr. Krishnamurthi said that all state units were being told to take firm action against anyone at any level guilty of indiscipline.

But firm action against Mr. Modi was totally ruled out. He did not think there was any need for Mr. Modi to step down while a judicial commission looks into the violent incidents in Gujarat, in which 800 lives have been lost even as serious allegations have been made that his government deliberately allowed the massacre of the minorities after the Godhra carnage in which 60 Hindus were killed as a "natural reaction" to "an action".

15 APR 2002

THE HINDU

The crisis within Hinduism

By Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Religion HD-10 283
TO SPEAK of a crisis in Hinduism at a time of the continuing and militant ascendancy of Hindutva would strike many as odd. But we ought to consider seriously the proposition that the creed and practices the VHP signifies, represent not just the actions of fringe groups but are sustained, legitimised and given momentum by a wider crisis within Hinduism. This crisis can be described in several dimensions. While many people were rightly aghast at the public calamities that were visited upon citizens of this nation, in Godhra and elsewhere in Gujarat, articulate voices of the Hindu sants and yogis, gurus and sadhus, in opposition to the VHP were scarce. There were occasional ritual denunciations of violence, but these were quickly lost in the hideous politics of recrimination that followed. There were half-hearted attempts to broker peace by reaching a deal on Ayodhya, but the terms of any deal that leaders such as the Sankaracharya had on offer rested on whitewashing out the constitutional usurpations that were carried out in the name of Hinduism, in Ayodhya less than a decade ago. Communal violence has a long history, but the ease with which its condemnation is made to go along with the thought that "the other community had it coming" is striking. The Hindu leaders cannot now be reliably considered exemplars of a large and delicate tolerance in the way in which many of the Hindu reformers at the turn of the century could.

But the depth of the crisis within Hinduism is signified by the fact that even many well meaning Hindus, who would have no truck with the VHP, have internalised a narrative of victimhood. On this narrative, Hindus have been for centuries at the receiving end of onslaughts from others, Christians and Muslims. Hindutva, for many who have internalised this narrative, represents a

There is something seriously amiss with a Hinduism that seeks to protect and disseminate itself... by committing the very wrongs that it claims were done to it in the past.

coming to grips with history, an assertion of the will that will finally put Hindus in charge of their own destiny, invulnerable to takeover or corrosion by outside forces. To be fair, this is a narrative to which there are analogues in most religions, insofar as they have political leanings. Versions of Islam tout the same sentiments vis-a-vis the West, and even the Christian Right in as Christian a nation as the United States thinks of itself as threatened by the United Nations, or worse, the Jews! These narratives represent a wider failure of these religions to give a meaning or teleology to everyday life under the complex conditions of modernity, and their inability to accept the facts of difference.

In the Indian context, this narrative not only sustains groups such as the VHP and the RSS, it makes even those otherwise ambivalent about those groups hesitant in their denunciations. In fact, the crisis of Hinduism is signified by the fact that so much of contemporary Hindu identity is vested in this narrative. I do not mean to deny that we often witness genuine acts of faith, or a religiosity that runs deep, or even that Hinduism provides an astonishing grammar with which to comprehend life and creation. But increasingly, being a Hindu is coming to be identified with participation in the creation of a communal identity that can now fully, and often furiously, discharge its role in history. It is an identity constituted by a sense of injury, a sense of always having been on the losing side, a sense of innocent victimhood. Much of the understand-

ing of history that sustains this sense of injury is simplistic if not often false. But of greater import is the fact that Hindu identity, in so many ways, is coming to rest upon a sense of resentment. It can no longer define itself by its achievements, the vitality of its thought and the creativity of its aspirations.

It is not an accident that it is precisely at the moment of greater militancy that we see Hinduism at its intellectually and spiritually most moribund. Hinduism, however one may choose to define it, was nothing if not creative in its ability to constantly transcend its own limitations, through a diversity of forms. Like all great traditions, it not only placed limits, sometimes oppressive ones, on individuals, but also gave them the means to escape them. A vital culture is one where individuals are energised by the thought of bettering themselves, not by a tissue of resentment and a pathetic sense of victimhood. At the turn of this century for instance, Hinduism responded to the challenge of modernity in different ways. It produced the eviscerated ideologues of Hinduism such as Veer Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar who would confine its best aspirations to a pinched up sense of territorial identity. But it also produced Tagore and Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi. No matter how much condescension of posterity we may impose on the latter group, it would be difficult to argue that their identities were constituted negatively: as if the only way of being a Hindu was beating up someone else, or protecting yourself. They produced, for all its

flaws, a version of Hinduism, which at least tried to face the moral and political challenges of their time, without rancour, without weakness and with what in retrospect seems an astonishing self-confidence.

The shrillness of contemporary Hinduism, its even greater moral vacillation in the face of violence, is not, with all due apologies to V. S. Naipaul, an act of self-assertion. The insistent rhetoric that many well meaning Hindus are buying that Hinduism is in danger, betrays above all a lack of self-confidence, a recognition that somewhere Hinduism has lost its vitality to the point that it can be sustained only by the fervour of a will directed against others. It is never fair to indict a whole people, but there is something seriously amiss with a Hinduism that seeks to protect and disseminate itself, not by internal reform, or an inner strength of conviction, but by committing the very wrongs that it claims were done to it in the past. All religions may be undergoing a version of this crisis. But a religion that requires the ghosts of exaggerated or imagined injuries to sustain itself is conspiring to create a darkness where we will not be able to recognise each other as citizens, as human beings. Instead, we will be defined by our resentments rather than achievements, by our wilfulness rather than the moral quality of the objectives to which our will is directed. No wonder Hinduism in its public face seems nothing more than a creed endlessly rehearsing its own truisms. The trouble with defining oneself through historical wrongs is that the past will imprison us by its very perpetuation, like a disease with chronic malignity. I used to think the whole point of Hinduism is that we suffer from too much history and should aim to transcend it. How far have we come from its ideals?

(The writer is Professor of Philosophy and of Law and Governance, JNU.)

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2002

Govt, Sangh in peace deal

VHP plays the guessing game

HT Correspondent
Ayodhya-Lucknow, March 11

PM assures House: Court's verdict will be enforced

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, March 11

BEHIND THE strident voices, confusing signals and tough posturing, there is an understanding of sorts. The Government, the RSS and the VHP have decided to defuse the crisis over holding of a puja near the disputed site at Ayodhya.

Anxious to avoid any situation that may cause the allies of the NDA to re-examine their support to the Government, the Sangh and the Government have decided after hectic parleys that, notwithstanding the hype, a scaled-down puja would be held after the necessary approval from the Supreme Court.

After consultations with Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee

the Government is confident that the apex court will not stand in the way of holding a "small" puja that does not disturb the status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

Indications of an understanding became clearer today when Prime Minister Vajpayee termed as "totally under control" the situation in Ayodhya while assuring the Lok Sabha that the Government would not do anything without the approval of the court. Vajpayee's assertion today came after nearly 45 minutes of heated exchanges in the Lok Sabha between the Opposition and ruling NDA members.

Significantly, VHP leader Ashok Singhal, who had locked horns with the Government, was given permission today to visit Ayodhya to supervise arrangements for the March 15 puja.

Also, two key figures of the temple movement said they would be only be "donating" the carved pillars to the makeshift shrine. Diluting the scope of the puja, Ram Janambhoomi Nyas chairman Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das said *shilas* (carved stones) would be donated at the makeshift temple.

Bajrang Dal founder-president and BJP MP Vinay Katiyar told the Lok Sabha that the March 15 puja would be a "small" affair and nothing untoward would be allowed to happen. He also said later that no bhoomi puja would be performed but only a pillar would be donated.

BJP spokesperson VK Malhotra said with the Prime Minister's assurance, no Opposi-



Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das performing a puja at the Ayodhya karyashala on Monday.

REUTERS PHOTO

WHO STANDS WHERE IN NDA

PRO-PUJA

BJP, Shiv Sena (198 MPs) Expect court to say yes to puja. Curiously, also have the support of AIADMK (11).

FENCE-SITTERS

Samata Party (12 MPs). George Fernandes' involvement in the negotiations has cramped their secular style.

STATUS QUOISTS

The 'secular' allies (79 MPs). Leading the anti-puja pack are TDP, Trinamool, JD(U) and DMK. But they will be quiet if the court okays puja.

tion leader should have any apprehension nor create any hurdle for the "small" puja should the court give permission.

Senior Government leaders apparently succeeded in convincing the RSS top brass that any further toughening of the VHP's stance will scare away the allies, who could not be taken for granted. BJP leaders also assured NDA allies that the PM was in control of the situation at Ayodhya and they need not fear a repeat of the

1992 episode.

Nevertheless, NDA allies led by the TDP and the Trinamool Congress kept up pressure on the BJP today. Welcoming the PM's stand, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said status quo should be maintained in Ayodhya till the court's verdict and it was the "responsibility" of the Centre to do so since there was no popular Government in Uttar Pradesh. The TDP was also against the BJP

and the Sangh Parivar speaking in many voices. Trinamool leader Mamata Banerjee said in the Lok Sabha today. "We request the Government to take steps to ensure that there is peace in Ayodhya and that there is no repetition of 1992."

Meanwhile, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board today said it would move the Supreme Court on Wednesday, seeking status quo at the acquired land in Ayodhya.

RAM JANMABHOOMI Nyas (RJN) chairman Paramhans Ramchandra Das is keeping the Government guessing about his bhoomi puja plans. He shifted his base on Monday to Karsevakpura, from where the RJN's programmes for March 15 are being directed, but announced that he would only donate a *shila* (stone) to the 'receiver' of the acquired land in Ayodhya.

Paramhans indicated that an emergency meeting of the Ramjanambhoomi Nirman Samiti would be convened. A meeting of the Marg Darshak Mandal, the highest decision-making body of the VHP, has also been convened for March 14 to chalk out the future strategy.

Paramhans said he would hand over the *shila* to the receiver, the Faizabad Divisional Commissioner, and take a receipt. Whether Paramhans will take the *shila* on Tuesday, Shivratri, when he will go for a darshan of Ram Lalla, to pre-empt the administration from taking preventive action will be decided at meetings of VHP leaders.

The pace of activity quickened as VHP leader Ashok Singhal arrived in Ayodhya, after being permitted by the State Government to go there, and held closed-door meetings with other Sangh leaders to review the situation and discuss future plans.

Meanwhile, kar sevaks had begun converging on Ayodhya from all over the State. There were reports from Gorakhpur and Kanpur that the first batch of kar sevaks had left for Ayodhya. Both the groups were 500 strong. From Varanasi, there were reports that local VHP and RSS leaders were mobilising workers, to be ready for directions from the high command to move swiftly.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 MAR 2002

Muslim board rejects seer's puja proposal

Religion
Gr-1
**'Offer is incoherent
and incomplete'**

11/3
**Defiant VHP makes
BJP allies uneasy**

By Rajesh Ramachandran
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The All India Muslim Personal Law Board on Sunday rejected the proposal of Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati for a symbolic bhoomi puja near the disputed site in Ayodhya on March 15 and the construction of a temple there.

After a day-long meeting, the board issued a statement, saying, "It has been resolved to convey to the Kanchi Shankaracharya our inability to accept his March 8 proposal as it is incomplete and incoherent." The board then appealed to the Centre to help maintain a status quo on the land acquired by it and take effective steps to ensure that no symbolic kar seva or puja took place in the area.

Addressing mediapersons later in the day, executive committee member of the board Y.H. Muchala

said all the parties concerned must abide by the supreme court verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Explaining the reasons behind the board rejecting the Kanchi seer's proposal, he said it did not offer any solution to the problem in its entirety to Muslims. "The proposal contained no commitment that the VHP will abide by the court verdict," he said, adding that certain documents, including a copy of the building plan of the temple, the site plan and the undertaking given by the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust to Prime Minister Vajpayee, had not been made available to the board despite repeated requests.

According to Mr Muchala, the board was not aware of the extent of the trust's links with the VHP and other Sangh Parivar bodies and if it was entitled to undertake the temple construction.

Meanwhile at New Delhi, the police detained Mohammed Yunus Siddiqui, president of the All India Babri Masjid Rebuilding Committee which was planning to take out a 'rath yatra' from the capital to Ayodhya on Sunday. Deputy commissioner of police P. Kamaraj said Siddiqui was picked up from his Zakir Nagar residence in South Delhi on Saturday night. (PTI)



All India Muslim Personal Law Board leaders discuss the Kanchi seer's compromise formula in New Delhi on Sunday.

NEW DELHI: With the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) adamant on holding a bhoomi puja on the acquired land in Ayodhya, the BJP's allies at the Centre are looking to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and the supreme court to avert a political crisis, failing which they will decide their stand on the issue.

Considering the VHP's determination and pace of planning, the apex court seems to be the only hope for the NDA members. The court is scheduled to hear a contempt petition against the VHP programme on Wednesday. If it restrains the VHP and forces the Centre to stop the outfit's plans, a crisis that may see many of the NDA constituents withdrawing from the coalition will be averted.

Most of the BJP's allies see the crisis as a sabotage from within the Sangh Parivar aimed at the PM.

Speaking to this newspaper, a senior leader of an NDA party said, "We fear that in the name of a symbolic bhoomi puja, the VHP may carry a few carved pillars and establish that it has actually begun construction. In that case, we will be forced to pull out of the government." However, there is

considerable doubt within the NDA as to how far the allies will go against the compulsions of power politics.

Taking a tough stand, the Samata Party on Sunday spoke of "an unforeseeable sequence of events" if the kar sevaks gathered in Ayodhya was not dispersed. Party spokesman S. Shrivastva said, "If it is not permitted by the apex court or agreed upon by minority community leaders, the status quo at the acquired site should not be altered even in the form of a symbolic puja."

The TDP, DMK, Trinamul Congress, Janata Dal (U) and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Jana Shakti have already made it clear that it would be difficult for them to support the government if it permitted the construction of a temple on the acquired land without a mutual agreement between leaders of both the communities or the approval of the supreme court.

1 1 MAR 2002

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