

Hindutva 'battle' in Sangh crystal ball

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Even the RSS has been forced to keep up with the times. For the first time ever, its Hindi mouthpiece, *Panchajanya*, has brought out a year-end issue that will take stock of the events of 2002 in all major spheres: politics, sports, art and literature, entertainment, science and technology et al.

The issue, which will hit the stands tomorrow, has used the Gregorian calendar as the benchmark instead of the *Vikram Samvat* (Hindu calendar), although Sangh sources were defensive about the churning in the parivar. *Panchajanya* editor Tarun Vijay refused to react, saying, "First read the issue, then we will talk."

Saying that "we are always keeping with the times", RSS sources went on to underplay the timing of the special edition. "We don't celebrate New Year but neither do we object to others celebrating the event. In any case, it is useful to review the last 12 months and this is a good occasion. Nothing more should be read into it."

To labour the point, RSS sources said the issue carried signed pieces by RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan and Vishwa Hindu Parishad working president Ashok Singhal, which reinforced the parivar's views on Hindutva and "pseudo-secularism".

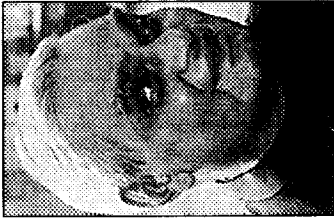
For instance, Sudarshan's piece — "Naya: Is Mahab-

harat main Hritvatva ki vijay hogee" (New: In the Mahabharat to follow Hindutva will triumph) — claimed that the Gujarat poll outcome had forced all political parties to review their policies and quoted a senior non-BJP MP (not from the CPM) as telling him it was high time his party reflected on whether it should concentrate on getting the 85 per cent Hindu votes or the 15 per cent minorities' votes.

"In this country, how long is it possible for any party to disregard the hopes of sentiments of 85 per cent of the population?" the RSS chief asked.

More musings

Panaji, Dec. 30 (PTI): A.B. Vajpayee, who is holidaying here, is working on "musings" similar to the ones he penned at Kumarakom in Kerala in 2000. "The Prime Minister is not merely holidaying in Goa, he is also working on some musings," PMO sources said today. They said the writings would be released tomorrow.



Asserting that India was on the brink of a "Kurukshetra war", Sudarshan said the battlelines were drawn between those who supported Hindutva and those who opposed it. "The Mahabharat was fought 5,000 years ago and it marked the victory of *dharma* over *adharma*. Its impact was felt all over the country but the Kurukshetra battlefield on which we stand today spans the universe," he said.

According to Sudarshan, the starting point for the new Mahabharat was December 6, 1992 (the day the Babri mosque was demolished) and there was no looking back since then. "But the opposition to Hindutva has also grown in direct proportion. We are going through a round of allegations and counter-allegations," he said, adding that the "battle" was being waged on several fronts — education, economy, administration and politics.

The RSS chief, however, rejected the concept of a communal divide along majority-minority lines. "After all, the Christians and Muslims living here have not come from outside. They were born and brought up here. How can those who were born here be considered minorities? The English definition of minorities is flawed. Maybe the Muslims living in Britain may be minorities because most of them migrated from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh," he argued.

Not apologetic about agenda: BJP chief

10/1 By W. Chandrakanth 27/12

HYDERABAD, DEC. 26. "The BJP is not going to be apologetic or ashamed of its agenda and the Gujarat experiment shall be replicated in all the States before the next elections to reach the target of 300 seats," the party president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, said here on Thursday.

"We are not going to be on the defensive any longer. If anything is wrong, it is minoritism," he said hinting at the party's resolve on its Hindutva agenda.

Addressing presspersons here, he said: "What else is your preference? Godhra? You want to replicate Godhra? No, we do not allow it. It is the Gujarat experiment that is to be replicated, with hard work, united and combined effort. Nothing wrong in seeking to re-impose cultural nationalism."

"But then we are not talking in terms of a

theocratic State. It is not going to be a 'Hindu rashtra' like Islamic or Christian countries. Our nationalism is what was preached by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the pre-Independence era. The post-Independence Congress does not have it. We have inherited it," he said.

Mr. Naidu said the efforts of their political opponents to drive a wedge between the BJP and its NDA allies would not bear fruit. There was no truth in the allegation that the BJP was imposing its agenda on anyone as it was against the coalition dharma, he said. "You don't have to teach someone like Chandrababu Naidu do's and dont's. He is matured enough," he said referring to the CPI (M) appeal to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister to reconsider his support to the NDA Government.

The BJP was enthused by its success in

Gujarat but was bound by the NDA agenda, he said, trying to convince his allies probably stung by criticism of its aggressive posture after the Gujarat elections. "Hindutva is a political dharma. Is it not a Hindu country from the beginning?"

Asking the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, to mind his own business (for his comments on Gujarat), he advised him to concentrate on developing his country and improving the conditions of the minorities there.

Those accusing the BJP of playing the Musharraf card here were at best serving the neighbour's purpose and not that of the country, he felt.

Mr. Naidu said the BJP national executive had accepted the resignation of the Jammu and Kashmir party unit president, Dayakishan Kotwal, and said his place would be taken by Nirmal Singh.

Hindutva cannot be poll plank: PM

But Hindu-bashing isn't secularism either, says Advani

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, December 24

PRIME MINISTER AB Vajpayee and his deputy LK Advani on Tuesday wrapped up the BJP's two-day conclave with their own distinctive messages, but stuck to a common refrain: the party must look beyond Gujarat and win the next round of Assembly polls in 2003.

Vajpayee harped on moderation, but Advani warned the BJP's political opponents that Hindu-bashing and secularism were not the same thing.

Vajpayee disowned Praveen Togadia and other VHP leaders' call for a Hindu rashtra in two years, and stressed that Hindutva was a "way of life", never acceptable as a poll plank.

Advani said if the Opposition believed that the BJP's Gujarat cakewalk was a dividend of Hindutva, "let them

realise that if they keep talking derisively about Hindutva, it will continue to cost them dearly".

Making the concluding speech at the party's national executive, Vajpayee reminded one and all that India had existed as a nation of Hindus for more than 1,000 years, and there was nothing new to be created.

He asked the party to "carry all sections of our diverse society with us" and watch out for attempts by enemies abroad to divide Indians along religious lines.

Rejecting Hindutva as an election issue, Vajpayee said, "This is not about winning a few more seats or winning the polls in this State or that. The party must be guided by its lofty goals, to attain which we plunged into electoral politics."

In a clear signal that post-Gujarat, the BJP must now focus on discharging its re-

sponsibility, he said the party must preserve the country's unity, strengthen its security and ensure all-round development.

He hoped Gujarat CM Narendra Modi would fulfil the expectations of his people. (Modi had left for Ahmedabad by the time the PM rose to make his concluding speech.)

Advani warned the BJP's opponents that people would no longer allow the use of secularism as an excuse for Hindu-bashing. "Nor should it become a euphemism for minorityism," he added. Minorityism, like communalism, was a mortal enemy of those who practised it, he warned.

Vajpayee echoed party president Venkaiah Naidu's statement on Monday that "Hindutva and extremism cannot go together. Hindutva and intolerance cannot go together."

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

25 DEC 2002

'A MANDATE FOR HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY'

We shall replicate 'Gujarat experience': BJP chief

HID-1
29/12

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 23. If there were any doubts about the Bharatiya Janata Party harking back aggressively to its Hindutva ideology — not to be confused with Hinduism — the party president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, cleared these completely.

Addressing the party's national executive committee meeting here today, Mr. Naidu declared: "We shall replicate the Gujarat experience everywhere... It was a mandate for the (Hindutva) ideology..." And above all, he said this one victory (after a string of defeats) had "demolished the myth" of a Congress revival. Gujarat would be projected as the "ideal State". In Gujarat the party's "experience" was that "collective work was the key to success", he added.

It seems the party sees the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, as being equal to 14 Congress Chief Ministers. Gujarat is seen as a forerunner of electoral wins in the coming Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Delhi. And these, in turn, would set the trend for the Lok Sabha elections of 2004. "We shall score a hat trick — 1998, 1999 and 2004," Mr. Naidu said.

Focus on terrorism

The BJP's "strategy", as evident from Mr. Naidu's address — the presidential address has always provided the key to the party's thinking — is to aggressively capitalise on the terrorism factor in India and the



The Delhi State unit BJP president, Madan Lal Khurana, felicitating the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, at the BJP national executive meeting in New Delhi on Monday. The party president, Venkaiah Naidu, and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, are also present. — Photo: V. Sudershan

world by equating the Hindutva ideology with "forces of nationalism", and therefore suggesting that those against Hindutva (the secular parties, especially the Congress) are somehow soft on terrorists, even anti-national.

Mr. Naidu said: "As the Gujarat election process peaked, national perception crystallised the central issues as terrorism and extremism and political opportunism. Our political adversaries were rightly recognised as willing to compromise on national interests for short-term votebank considerations. The people... had been watching the country being bled by terrorists... Gujarat elections offered

an opportunity (to the people) to effectively articulate their concerns on these larger issues... the BJP was seen (by them) as a party that understood their anguish... and was determined to address (the problem of terrorism) with firmness and farsightedness."

It was clear that the BJP's core strategy would be to equate itself with "forces of nationalism" and the Congress with "terrorism, extremism" and forces which are "ready to compromise the national interests for short-term votebank considerations".

The suggestion was clear when Mr. Modi campaigned against "Mian Musharraf". A

vote for the Congress was a vote for Mian Musharraf and therefore the minorities were attracted to the Congress which was thus compromising the national interests.

Mr. Naidu also has a word for the new government in Gujarat — get down to governance and development. Years ago the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, had talked of making Gujarat an ideal State, but after intense factionalism in the BJP and after the mess following the earthquake and later the rioting that "ideal" was given up. Now the party wants to project Gujarat once again as the "ideal State ('adarsh pradesh')".

See also Page 11

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Naidu walks Hindutva ^{P.P.P} tightrope ¹¹⁻¹

24/12
Replicate Gujarat spirit: BJP chief

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Playing the BJP's favourite game of calibrated Hindutva, party president M. Venkaiah Naidu on Monday ticked off the VHP—without naming it—while calling on the party faithful “to replicate the Gujarat spirit”. He emphasised that the victory in the state “was a mandate for the ideology that has always held the nation's interest as its core strength”.

Addressing the party's two-day national executive that began here on Monday, Mr Naidu skilfully walked the ideological tightrope. “I would like to appeal to those who speak in the name of Hindutva but whose pronouncements sometimes sound as if they are only reacting to the extremism and intolerance that has taken root across the border. The BJP is firm in its belief that Hindutva and extremism\intolerance cannot go together.”

Having used the VHP in the Gujarat campaign—permitting 20 of its members to be elected to the state assembly, not to mention the special stage for the sadhus at Narendra Modi's swearing-in in Ahmedabad on Sunday—Mr Naidu sought to distance his party from the organisation, something that the BJP has done many times in the past.

But simultaneously, to put the BJP rank and file on track for the forthcoming assembly elections, Mr Naidu said, “If anybody asks us whether we will repeat the Gujarat ‘experiment’ elsewhere, our answer should be: ‘Yes, we shall replicate our Gujarat ‘experience’ everywhere, because in Gujarat we have again proved to ourselves that collective work is the key to success.’” He also said, “The voters..reposed

their faith in the BJP..because the choice before them was..between the forces of nationalism and..pseudo-secularism. Gujarat was..not a mere political victory, it was a mandate for the ideology.”

The Gujarat chief minister came in for praise for electrifying the atmosphere in the country and energising the rank and file by fighting “like a lion in the face of unprecedented calumny against him and our party, and made..his opponents run for cover”.

Repeating what he had said after taking over as president, Mr Naidu said there was no need to be apologetic about the BJP ideology of cultural nationalism nor about its commitment to the NDA agenda. Now the party should campaign for an effective nationwide law against conversion to expose those who sought to defame the BJP and its ideology and compromised on issues that weakened national security, he said.

Describing the Gujarat elections as a “Modi vs Sonia” contest, he said, the results showed “what an unequal bout it was”. The Gujarat elections would be remembered not only for the nature and scale of the BJP's victory, Mr Naidu emphasised, but also for the “viciousness of the anti-BJP, anti-Hindutva..anti-Hindu campaign conducted by the Congress and the communists before, during and, sadly, even after the polls”. According to him, Ms Gandhi had taken the lead by making “offensive and outlandish” pronouncements, the worst being her charge that Gujarat, the land of Gandhi, was turning into the land of Godse. “This was a slur on the asmita and atma gaurav of..Gujarat, forcing Mr Modi to launch his gaurav yatra.”

Modi and his men take charge

CM has his way in selection of 15 ministers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad: Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari on Sunday administered the oath of office and secrecy to chief minister Narendra Modi and nine cabinet ministers and six ministers of state at a glittering swearing-in ceremony held in the presence of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the jam-packed Sardar Patel stadium here on Sunday.

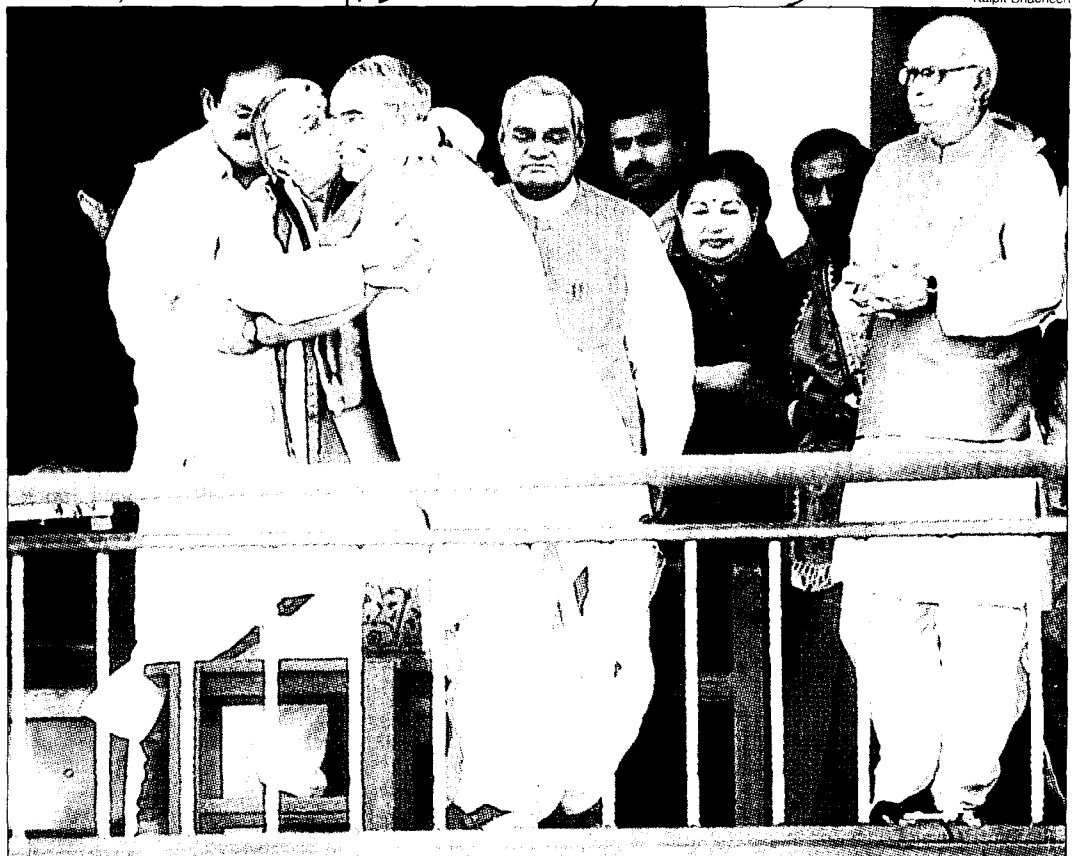
Those who were inducted as cabinet ministers are Vajubhai Vala, Ashok Bhatt, Narottam Patel, Anandiben Patel, Bhupendrasinh Chudasma, I.K. Jadeja and Kaushik Patel. Ramanlal Vora and Mangubhai Patel, who were ministers of state in last BJP regime, have been promoted to cabinet rank in the new ministry.

Three of the six ministers of state in the earlier set-up have been retained. They are Dilip Thakore, Bavkubhai Unghad and Prabhatsinh Chauhan. Three others—Amit Shah, Anil Patel and Saurabh Patel—are making their debut.

While Ramanlal Vora, who was dropped by Mr Modi from his first ministry following the Madhavpura Mercantile Cooperative Bank collapse, has been reinstated at the behest of the sangh parivar, Mangubhai Patel, an adivasi leader from south Gujarat who was minister of state for tribal welfare, has been promoted because of his good track record.

Although the BJP has virtually swept the polls in the central Gujarat region, only one MLA, Mr Chauhan, figures in the ministry. Mr Modi has also denied a ministerial berth to VHP nominee Haresh Bhatt, who won the prestigious Godhra seat. Even Pankaj Desai, who humbled sitting Congress MP Dinsha Patel in Nadiad, is a surprise exclusion.

It is quite apparent that Mr Modi was not subjected to pressure from any quarter in the ministry formation. Even if there was any pressure, he seems to have had his way. With regard to caste equations, the chief minister has, as expected, given prime position to Patels, with six ministers in his team.



MR MODI TURNS THE OTHER CHEEK: Human resource development minister M.M. Joshi kisses Narendra Modi after he was sworn in as Gujarat chief minister at the Sardar Patel stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Others in the picture include (from left) BJP president Venkaiah Naidu (face partly hidden), Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalithaa and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani.

'NM becomes CM, will be PM'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad: It was a starlit show that sent the adrenaline rushing through the veins of the saffron brigade. Breaking with tradition, the swearing-in ceremony of second-time chief minister Narendra Modi was witnessed by the newsmakers of Indian politics, business and media at the packed Sardar Patel stadium here on Sunday afternoon.

It was a show without speeches, sans rhetoric. "Jai Shri Ram," shouted the raucous BJP and VHP activists. "Don't you dare inhibit us today, everybody's here to celebrate!" snapped a sloganeer at some killjoys as he clambered up an iron pipe for a better view of his leader.

Haren Pandya was jostled in the crowd and forced to stand throughout the ceremony. "Till yesterday

we were ministers, today our names did not figure in the lucky draw," one of his former colleagues remarked. They had to remain content with watching the likes of actress Juhi Chawla, star-turned-minister Vinod Khanna, TV personalities Shekhar Suman and Rajat Sharma, Reliance's Anil Ambani, 'Supercop' K.P.S. Gill and other Union ministers join the bandwagon and wave to the crowd.

"Did you see Jaya?" yelled a voice as necks craned over shoulders to catch a glimpse of the Tamil Nadu chief minister, seated along with deputy PM L.K. Advani. She came bearing a green shawl and a huge bouquet for Mr Modi.

When the 'Hindutva hero' made an appearance, the crowd roared. "Aayo re aayo, Gujarat no sher aayo!" Mr Modi greeted every guest in the VIP gallery be-

fore receiving Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in the VVIP pavilion. They were soon joined by Venkaiah Naidu and Murli Manohar Joshi.

Amidst the celebrations, Mr Modi's mother, 85-year-old Hiraben, seemed to have been forgotten. But not for long. She was soon escorted to the dais, where a gallant Arun Jaitley vacated his chair for her. After her son's initiation, Hiraben told TNN, "Crores of people have put their trust in him, he will take not just Gujarat, but the whole of Bharat forward."

Her sentiment was echoed in the banners and placards outside the stadium too. 'Our NM becomes CM, will be PM..of the Hindu Rashtra', said a placard held up by a VHP worker for the benefit of the cameras. Ahead, banners screamed 'Jung abhi bhi jaari hai, ab Dilli ki baari hai'.

Now, BJP focus on cultural nationalism

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 21. — Hindutva is unlikely to figure in talks at the BJP's national executive meeting when it analyses the Gujarat poll results. The focus will be on "cultural nationalism". This and the party's stand on terrorism will be touted as factors responsible for its Gujarat victory.

The national executive meeting will be held on Monday and Tuesday. The generational change in the BJP in the form of party chief Mr M Venkaiah Naidu and his young team is likely to get further legitimacy.

Mr LK Advani has informally taken control of the party through Mr Naidu, who consults the leadership on all issues. For the cadre, Mr Advani's back seat driving is yielding results. For the leadership, it's a tough balancing act to ensure that strident voices from the executive do not

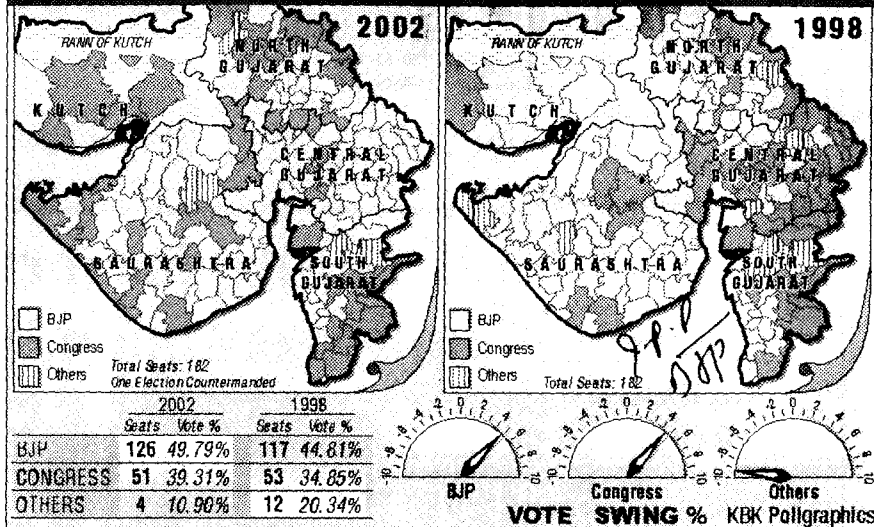
raise alarm bells in the NDA. Most of the erstwhile third front parties are with the BJP on a common anti-Congress agenda and the executive is likely to focus on this.

Mr Narendra Modi is unlikely to be given pride of place at the meet. But he will address the executive about the elections along with state unit chief Mr Rajendrasinh Rana.

The party's top agenda: to try and repeat Gujarat in Himachal Pradesh and begin preparations for Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan and Delhi.

The timing of Mrs Uma Bharati and Mrs Vasundhara Raje Scindia's move back to Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is likely to figure in the talks. Mrs Bharati is slated to begin a *padayatra* in the state to "expose" the Digvijay Singh government, leaders said. The decision may be announced at the meet. Leaders are expected to discuss ways to battle incumbency in Himachal Pradesh.

BJP SWINGS TO A NEW HIGH IN GUJARAT



BJP gets half the votes, 70 pc of seats

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Gandhinagar: The BJP has bagged 49.79 per cent, or 1.01 crore votes out of the total 2.03 crore polled in the just-held Gujarat state assembly elections. This has helped it to win 126 seats in a house of 182.

The Congress, on the other hand, got 39.31 per cent, or 79.99 lakh votes, fetching it just 51 seats. The BJP won 69.61 per cent seats, while the Congress 28.18

per cent of seats.

Independents, who got 5.74 per cent votes, won two seats. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) with 1.17 per cent votes won no seat while the Janata Dal (U) with just 0.86 per cent votes won two seats.

In 1998, the BJP polled 44.81 per cent votes, bagging 117 seats, five per cent less than this time, while the Congress got 34.85 per cent, also nearly five per cent less than 2002.

'LACK OF STRONG CRITICISM OF GODHRA'

Make a new beginning, Vajpayee tells Modi

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 17. Will the Gujarat "formula" be applied by the Bharatiya Janata Party in other States where elections are due next year?

The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who chaired the BJP parliamentary party meeting this morning, answered the question — uppermost in the minds of many people across the country — with a counter question. "Will Godhra be repeated elsewhere? That is what I will say to those who ask the question on the Gujarat formula," he told the party MPs. And then, he added "there should have been stronger criticism of Godhra from Muslims," suggesting that what followed in Gujarat was the result of a lack of strong criticism of Godhra.

The meeting was held in a celebratory mood. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, distributed five "laddoos" to each MP, wishing electoral success in five States — Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — in the new year. In each of these, the BJP's direct rival would be the Congress which is in power in all the States, except Himachal (ruled by the BJP).

The five "laddoos" were all but a reminder of the party's 1993 slogan given by its then president, L. K. Advani — *aaj panch pradesh, kal sara desh* (five States to be won today, the whole country tomorrow) — which proved hollow as victory eluded the BJP even in its bastion, Uttar Pradesh. But the Gujarat win, by a two-thirds majority, has raised the party's expectations sky-high.



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, being felicitated by the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, at the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. The party president, Venkaiah Naidu (extreme left), and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, look on. — Photo: V. Sudershan

The BJP spokesman, V. K. Malhotra, who briefed the press later, said Mr. Vajpayee countered the Opposition's "analysis" of the Gujarat results — that it was the result of communal tension in the State. In Rajasthan, the party had won all the three Assembly byelections, he noted, and there was no Godhra, no communal tension there. In short, the BJP sees a "trend" which it hopes will last till the next Lok Sabha elections.

Mr. Vajpayee praised the Gujarat Government for countering the anti-incumbency factor and preventing hunger deaths in the State despite drought (unlike Rajasthan). He saw the results as people's approval of the BJP's

development works in Gujarat.

The Prime Minister said the results had clearly shown that people did not want the Congress, but asked his partymen not to be complacent, according to a PTI report. "These elections have clearly shown that people don't want the Congress and because of this, the BJP's responsibility has increased." Asking the BJP cadre to analyse the Gujarat results in the coming national executive in the "right spirit," Mr. Vajpayee advised the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, to make a "new beginning" by carrying along even all those who were opposed to the BJP.

The Deputy Prime Minister,

L. K. Advani, reiterated that the people of Gujarat viewed the "false propaganda" against Mr. Modi, the Gujarat Government and the bureaucracy as "an insult to Gujarat" and voted for the BJP "with a vengeance."

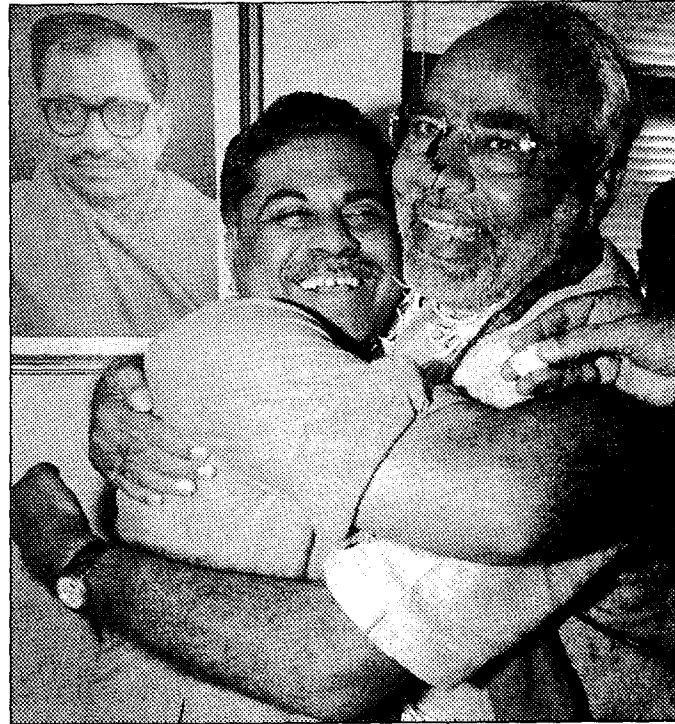
He also criticised those who had propagated against the Gujarat Government abroad and added "we have never done this."

And, finally, he agreed with the party president, Venkaiah Naidu, that the BJP would carry the party flag in one hand and the NDA agenda in the other (*ek haath mein BJP jhanda, doosre mein NDA agenda*), and remain committed to the ruling coalition's agenda.

18 DEC 2002

NDP

The new mix: face of Modi and mind of Togadia



Narendra Modi with BJP state president Rajendra Singh Rana at the party headquarters in Ahmedabad. (AFP)

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ahmedabad, Dec. 15: The BJP may have won the most seats since 1995, but it is the VHP that has emerged triumphant in the historic elections fought on the agenda decided by it. If Narendra Modi was the face and "hero of Hindutva", VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia was the ideologue and architect of his decisive victory.

When Modi returns to office and settles to the task of government formation, Togadia will, predictably, play an important role. In fact, observers say the next Gujarat government will have the face of Modi, but the mind of Togadia.

In fact, when Modi took over from Keshubhai Patel, Gordhan Zadhaphia, the home minister who has been named in several FIRs during the riots, was taken on board at Togadia's instance.

After all, the BJP cannot thank Togadia and his organisation enough. If the party has done very well in central Gujarat and the tribal belt, which used to be the Congress' stronghold, the credit goes to the VHP. Post-Godhra, Togadia ran a shrill campaign for the BJP. The ground had been laid in the tribal belt by his organisation. It had been wooing the local population by starting several welfare activities on

the lines of the Christian missionaries.

As Gujarat burned and the whole world condemned Modi for his inability to control the post-Godhra riots, the VHP stood steadfast by him.

When Modi shed all liberal pretence and struck aggressive postures, attacking the minority community for the population problem, the pseudo-secularists, Miya Musharraf and terrorism, the VHP backed him to the hilt.

At several rallies, ministers of the Modi Cabinet shared the dais with Togadia, whose fiery speeches and aggressive campaign made him a star campaigner. In a concerted effort, Modi and Togadia echoed each other's views on Muslims, Pakistan and Sonia Gandhi, whom they religiously attacked. The duo were projected as "Hindu Hriday Samrat".

The BJP, which is reaping the benefits of the Hindutva plank, could not seek votes openly on the saffron agenda under the Election Commission's code of conduct. The VHP complemented its campaign by aggressively and openly talking about Hindutva. All propaganda material by the VHP had only one message — Hindutva.

Gujarat VHP general secretary Dilip Trivedi interpreted the BJP victory as a slap in the face of the pseudo-secularists

who had unleashed a malicious campaign against the BJP and the state. Trivedi said that though the final tally was less than what he had expected, "the results will be a lesson to all those who have a distorted perception of secularism".

The BJP's landslide victory has not only increased the worry of the minority community, but also shocked the Gandhians who had actively campaigned against the BJP. The liberal elements within the BJP will be sidelined and "the VHP will devour the party", said Prakash Shah, a noted Gandhian.

Now the BJP, he feels, cannot function as a normal political party. Its character will change drastically and it will do what the VHP wants it to do. After all, it is the VHP experiment that has been successful in Gujarat, and the BJP owes its electoral victory to the VHP.

The BJP's "unexpected victory" — even the BJP leaders were not expecting 126 seats — has scared members of the minority community. Having voted for the Congress with a vengeance, the community was expecting that the party would do well. The results have left them aghast.

Prof. J.S. Bandukwala, a liberal face of the minority community in Vadodara, is very disappointed. Because, this election, he says, "was fought on our blood and

tears. We thought our Hindu friends would reject the Modi-Togadia brand of politics, but they have instead given approval to the state-sponsored terrorism. It is a sad thing".

Turning point, cries hawk

The BJP's landslide victory in the elections will prove to be a turning point in Indian history as the experiment of the "Hindutva lab" is set to be repeated in Delhi via Rajasthan, VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia said in Jaipur.

"(The) Hindutva lab has started functioning in Jaipur as the BJP won all the three seats which went to bypolls in Rajasthan and the final result will come by (the) next Assembly elections in the state, due in 2003," he told a press conference.

"When madarasas opened in parts of the country can train jihadis and teach fundamentalism, why can't the VHP set up its Hindutva lab?" Togadia, who has been camping in Rajasthan for the last two days, asked.

"Minorities should decide themselves how they want to live in India.... (The) VHP will not decide their future.... It is a question of co-existence in a Hindu *rashtra*," the VHP leader said. "The creation of a Hindu *rashtra* marks real development in the Indian society," he added.

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A BI-POLAR CONTEST

9.9.12 ✓

THE POLITICAL SCENE in Gujarat has remained unique in the sense that the State is among the few where the effect of social fragmentation on the existing parties has only been marginal. So much so, the electoral battles in the State have remained bi-polar with the Congress and the BJP having had to engage in straight fights and splinters from these two parties have hardly been able to sustain themselves. This, indeed, was because the Congress as a party in Gujarat was able to internalise the caste-based dynamics into its political strategy and cultivate, in the process, a social alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims (KHAM), as its stable support base. This strategy, however, had its fallout and the BJP through the years emerged into a force and various other attempts to forge an anti-Congress political force in the State could not take off. The BJP's growth, in this context, was also accompanied by the growth of Sangh Parivar outfits — the VHP and the various bodies that indulge directly in campaigns against the missionaries and their activities in the tribal regions — thus converting Gujarat into a laboratory for implementing the majoritarian agenda. The rise of Narendra Modi in the BJP's affairs (not just in Gujarat but also in the party's leadership in Delhi) is nothing but the unfurling of this core aspect of the Sangh Parivar's agenda and the December 12 elections to the Gujarat Assembly will put it to test.

The BJP, which has been in power in Gujarat for the past ten years, will look to the outcome of the polls to extract a vindication of its majoritarian agenda in other parts of the country. After having lost in the various States that went to the polls after the BJP-led NDA captured power at the Centre (Goa has been the lone State where the BJP managed to wrest power since 1998 while in Uttar Pradesh, though the party managed to cling on to power, the fact is that it lost the mandate in February 2002), the BJP's stakes in Gujarat are high and its leadership is in no mood to persist with its moder-

ate pretensions. The party's deep commitment to the majoritarian agenda is only too clear from the fact that the BJP leaders (including the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee) have not bothered to restrain the VHP's storm troopers in the poll campaign in Gujarat. Notwithstanding the expressions against Mr. Modi and his role in the post-Godhra pogrom across Gujarat, Mr. Vajpayee has agreed to show up at the election meetings and it is clear that the BJP as a party no longer thinks it needs the liberal mask. The party is aiming at nothing but complete polarisation on communal lines as its election strategy in the State.

It is in this context that the Congress has emerged as a clear option for those people in Gujarat who value the pluralist and democratic traditions that are integral to the constitutional scheme of things. Rather than being a referendum on the BJP's record of governance (as it has been in the various elections to the State Assemblies in the past decade or more), the Gujarat polls have turned out to be a battle of two distinct notions of nation building and the Congress as a party is clearly the force at one end of the bi-polar contest. In this context, it is a pity that the Congress adopted a non-inclusive approach in its election strategy. It may be true that smaller parties such as the NCP, the Samajwadi Party and some of the smaller splinters of the socialist movement do not have much of a presence in Gujarat. But then, the contest could have been made far sharper if these platforms were stopped from floating what has now come to be known as the third front in Gujarat. The third front, after all, can gain (whatever little it may) only from out of the anti-BJP sentiments particularly after the systematic violence against the minorities. While it remains to be seen how far this will happen, the outcome of the December 12 elections will have implications on not just the shape of the polity in Gujarat but also on the political map across the country in the months to come.

Saffron flag flutters in all regions

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 DECEMBER

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WHILE the Congress' bastion of central Gujarat crumbled like a pack of cards in the just-concluded Assembly elections, the BJP emerged largely unscathed in Saurashtra, dealing a blow to the political punditry of past several weeks. The fate of the two contending parties in regions which have till now been considered their citadels, in retrospect, made the crucial difference in their final tally. It, in fact, marked the difference in the BJP's unprecedented success and the Congress' dismal performance. The saffron outfit's ride back to power in Gandhinagar had hinged on one factor—whether its gains in tribal-dominated central Gujarat could be such that it could offset the possible losses in the Patel-dominated Saurashtra. The two regions taken together send 102 MLAs to the state Assembly. In the event, the BJP swept central Gujarat without giving the Congress the chance to make commensurate gains in Saurashtra. In the final analysis, the principal Opposition party had to settle for just minor gain in the rain-starved region.

The Congress' hopes of reclaiming Gujarat centred

on the perceived disenchantment of the Patels, who wield considerable political clout in the region, with the BJP. Their assessment stemmed from a combination of factors, the most important among them being the reported anger among the Patels at the manner in which Mr Keshubhai Patel, the tallest leader of the community, had been elbowed out of power.

It was also argued that since Saurashtra had remained untouched from the communal riots that ravaged large parts of the state in the wake of the Godhra train tragedy, the issue of development would hold centre stage. The BJP was expected to be more vulnerable to the anti-incumbency factor, especially as the benefits of the Sardar Sarovar project had not yet travelled to the rain-starved region.

As the final results show, the BJP's losses in Saurashtra could be contained because Mr Keshubhai Patel, living up to the reputation of the role of the family-patriarch, crafted for him by the party leadership, campaigned enthusiastically.

The elevation Shankarsinh Vaghela, a Kshatriya by caste, as the state Congress president was propelled by the principal Opposition party's determination to reclaim the KHAM constituency. But this only forced Patels to renew their faith in the BJP.

BJP men who did work lose

THE saffron surge has not favoured the men involved in development of economy, reports
Our Ahmedabad Bureau. Modi's finance minister and industry minister lost in the hustings.



While the former chief minister and minister of industry and tourism Mr Suresh Mehta, lost his Mandvi seat by 591 votes to his Congress rival Chabbildas Patel, Modi's finance minister, Mr Nitin Patel lost his Kadi seat to Congressman Baldev Thakor. The chairman of Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation, Mr Mukesh Jhaveri too lost out to his Congress opponent Shivjibhai Dangar in Bhuj. Mr Jaynarayan Vyas, a technocrat and former minister, Narmada and Major irrigation in the Keshubhai ministry, too lost his Sidhpur seat.

16 DEC 2002

Modified India? ✓

5/1/06 Let us not insult the Indian voter 16/12 ✓

Alarmist is perhaps an apt description of the media, so it is not surprising that the "theory" after the BJP's massive victory in Gujarat is that as India gets into election mode in 2003 and 2004, the country will witness riots after riots that will produce Modi after Modi. One TV talking head said as much. He and those in the cosmopolitan media who fancy doomsday scenarios should look at recent history. The short lesson is that Indian voters are cleverer than some prognostications assume. The BJP knows this from experience - their 1992 Ram wave dissipated fast enough to lose four state governments in 1993. The Congress knows it, too - the Hindu-Sikh riots and polarisation following Indira Gandhi's assassination that swept Rajiv Gandhi to power did not help the party when the electorate asked the question on corruption and governance. Some elections have been and in future will be won or lost on a single issue. But the formula is hard to replicate and to assume it can is an insult to voters who threw out Indira Gandhi. When voters feel like it they will deliver a similar judgment on Modi. Loose talk of communal riots in every state in election mode should be dismissed.

So should projections that Gujarat will be a turning point for the BJP nationally as it embraces the hard Hindutva line. Much is made of the fact that the Congress lost three seats in Rajasthan byelections. To explain that, look closer at Ashok Gehlot, the Congress's Rajasthan chief minister, than Modi. Gehlot has run one of the worst state governments in recent times. The BJP's chances in the next round are the brightest in Rajasthan - that would have been true even if Modi hadn't happened. On the other hand, Digvijay Singh in Madhya Pradesh is expected to put up a good fight, anti-incumbency notwithstanding. Why? Because he is one of the better chief ministers. Hence what is crucial is to what extent dissatisfaction with Congress governments can be exploited. It is true that the BJP will highlight the security-terrorism combination that brought such rich dividends in Gujarat. However, it should remember the same trick failed in Uttar Pradesh, where elections were held at the height of India-Pakistan tensions and public condemnation of Islamic *ihadis*. Security and terrorism may well become important public issues post-Gujarat, but if that is all the party offers, it risks replicating the 1993 misfortunes in 2003 - what happened in December the year before does not necessarily point the way.

If the BJP shouldn't start dreaming on the basis of Gujarat, should the Congress, handed a humiliating victory, dismiss it as a special case? No. For, Gujarat has confronted the party with questions it must address. First, can it peddle "soft Hindutva"? Secondly, no matter how emotive Modi's campaign, the Congress's failure to exploit grievances on governance is an indictment of the campaign leadership. It has after all handed the incumbent party a two-thirds majority. Related to these two questions is the issue of Shankarsinh Vaghela. The ex-RSS, ex-BJP leader was supposed to have weaned away the floating votes. He was put above traditional Congress state leaders. The lesson here probably is that the Congress has to identify its leaders and be cohesive at the state and district levels. What disruption was caused by putting a novice like Kamal Nath in charge, above Vaghela? By contrast, Modi's demagoguery didn't stop him from carrying the state BJP with him, with the exception of Haren Pandya, who was mollified by the central leadership. The Congress must also wonder about Ms Sonia Gandhi's vote-catching abilities. She was the party's star campaigner. Either she improves as a communicator or she lets others do the job.

The current winner in the image stakes is of course Narendra Modi. To give the devil his due, Modi has confounded his critics, surprised his party and run a campaign that will doubtless be studied by pundits with interest. He turned criticism of his administration's handling of riots into a weapon of Gujarati "pride". So an incumbent government got a "protest vote". He is now a star. But remember, so was Rajiv Gandhi.

16 DEC 2002

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2002

7-8-P. BJP
x9-10 16/12

HARVEST OF HATRED

THE STUPENDOUS VICTORY the Bharatiya Janata Party under Narendra Modi has registered in the Gujarat Assembly elections clearly suggests that its strategy of retaining political power through deliberate and aggressive communal polarisation — brought about by the Sangh Parivar outfits' no-holds-barred anti-Muslim campaign post-Godhra — has indeed paid off and this is borne out particularly by the fact that the region hit most by the communal rights has returned a sizable number of its candidates. Even a cursory look at the numbers and their regional distribution would show that the impact of the hate campaign has been so overwhelming and sweeping as to drown the admittedly strong anti-incumbency sentiments. Nor do the widely perceived negative factors such as factionalism and the 'pique' of the influential Patel community (on account of Keshubhai Patel's replacement as Chief Minister by Mr. Modi) seem to have made any material difference to the party's overall performance. What the BJP has harvested now are verily the fruits of hate which it chose to spread assiduously and aggressively in pursuance of its agenda of majoritarian communalism. As such, the poll verdict, which is already being gloatingly characterised by the Sangh Parivar camp as a major success of the so-called 'Gujarat experiment' — distinguished as it is by the 'Modi brand' of Hindutva — is not merely unfortunate but extremely ominous for the country's future as a truly secular and pluralist polity and, therefore, a matter of grave concern for the millions of people who remain committed to the liberal democratic values enshrined in the Constitution.

There need be no illusions about what the BJP stands for or about the likely response of its leadership, both at the organisational and governmental levels — not just in the State but at the Centre too — to the latest Gujarat vote, which marks a new alarming stage in the steady march of communalism of the majoritarian variety as a strategy for political mobilisation over the past decade and more. The RSS and the VHP which has made Mr. Modi a cult figure to the

point of juxtaposing him with the BJP veterans are certain to push for the hard Hindutva line exemplified by the 'Gujarat model', the core elements of which were in full play during the state-abetted genocide carried out against the Muslims post-Godhra and during Mr. Modi's 'Gaurav Yatras' and poll campaign wherein he stereotyped the traumatised Muslims as anti-national and insinuated that all those who do not favour the Hindutva line are traitors. Nothing could be more naive than to expect the BJP's central leadership — which had given Mr. Modi a free hand in running the elections and allowed him to decide the strategy — not to go along with the Modis and the Ashok Singhals, although whether the 'Gujarat experiment' could be replicated elsewhere with the same degree of success is a moot question.

The Gujarat poll outcome, undoubtedly a setback to the fight against the Hindutva forces, has a lesson for the secular-minded partners in the ruling National Democratic Alliance at the Centre, who should feel more uncomfortable than ever before. In fact, the argument that their presence in the coalition would act as a brake on the BJP in pursuing its majoritarian communal ideology — too facile a theory to hold water in the first place — stands totally refuted after the developments on the Gujarat front. The paramount need at this critical juncture is one of the secular democratic forces getting their act together by rising above their narrow partisan differences and forging a political platform that reflects their manifestly uncompromising commitment to the secular values. No less imperative for them is to be unflinching in their resolve to operationalise that objective and this primarily implies the formation of an inclusive non-BJP coalition, a count on which the Congress and other parties had failed in Gujarat. And the fight against Hindutva has to be carried far beyond the electoral arena and well into the social and cultural spheres where the shrill communally divisive calls of the Sangh Parivar engendering an anti-minority mindset have come to find a disturbingly growing resonance.

H
HD-11
7/12

Terrorism: VHP divided over U.S. role

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, DEC. 6. The inherent differences within the Vishwa Hindu Parishad over the role of the United States in combating international terrorism came out in the open with its international president, Ashok Singhal and the general secretary, Pravin Togadia, singing different tunes.

While Dr. Togadia, at a rally in Ahmedabad on November 17, before courting arrest on being denied permission by the Election Commission to launch the "Hindupath Padshahi Yatra" from Godhra, praised the U.S. President, George Bush, for his "boldness" in fighting international terrorism, Mr. Singhal today "doubted" the intentions of the U.S. administration.

Talking to presspersons here, Mr. Singhal said even though the U.S. and other countries knew that terrorism was being bred in Pakistan, Washington was not only maintaining the "best of relations" with Islamabad but was also giving support and "encouragement" in all spheres.

"There are doubts about the U.S. Government's intentions in fighting terrorism," he added.

Mr. Singhal, who was here on the occasion of

"Saurya Divas" to mark the demolition of the Babri Masjid on this day a decade ago, claimed that there was no plan to demolish the "structure" but that it just happened.

He said what was demolished was a 4,500-year old "functional temple" which needed reconstruction to "protect the self-pride of the Hindus". He also advised the Muslims in the country to give up "claims" on the Mathura and Kashi Vishwanath temples as a "first step" towards improving relations between the two communities. "You cannot have brotherhood at gunpoint, the Muslims need to show that they are not with the jihadis and are keen to improve relations," he said.

Admitting that all Muslims were not jihadis, he said they must demonstrate affection for their motherland and stop the elements from further destroying the social fabric of the country.

Claiming that the terrorist attacks on various temples was intended at a "second division of the country for yet another homeland for the Muslims after Pakistan," Mr. Singhal expressed apprehension that after Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat, the Pakistan-based terrorists might target Rajasthan.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2002

HO-10
2/12

A CYNICAL APPROACH

G.P.P. SJP

WHILE RELEASING ITS manifesto for the Gujarat Assembly elections now under way, the Bharatiya Janata Party has sought to project the absence of any reference in the document to the Godhra carnage as an earnest of its desire not to use the communally sensitive horrendous episode for political gains. Nothing could be more preposterous than that claim. As the whole conduct and virtually every act of the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and his Government would show, the outrageous event has in fact been exploited fully by the Sangh Parivar outfits to polarise civil society along communal lines through a vicious anti-minority campaign in pursuit of their sectarian agenda, as part of a grand design to help the BJP retain political power. The VHP is persisting with such a Godhra-centric hate campaign as brazenly as ever. In fact, given the Modi regime's diabolical role in the post-Godhra Muslims-targeted revengeful riots — characterised recently by an independent body, Citizens' Tribunal, as "genocide" — the least that the BJP, as a party of government, ought to have done was to voice a sense of remorse, if not an open apology, and display some sensitivity to the hurt feelings of the minority community. Despicably, not only has the party's manifesto been singularly devoid of such sentiments — unsurprisingly, though — but the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, has unapologetically hailed Mr. Modi as the "most popular, competent and successful Chief Minister"!

What has been handed out by the BJP as its manifesto — setting aside those sections that addressed development and growth concerns — is nothing but a carefully crafted plan of action to achieve its majoritarian goals. Running through the various measures promised in the name of ensuring the "safety and security" of the people is an unambiguous anti-minority objective, set against the party's calculated and consistent attempt to identify the disturbing phenomenon of terrorism with the Muslims as a community. Hardly disguised in all the anti-ter-

ror and anti-Pakistan rhetoric Mr. Modi has been indulging in, particularly after the attack on the Akshardham temple, is the bashing of the Islamic community in general. The party's manifesto is verily a documented version of such a sinister camouflage attempt, except of course in areas where its exclusivist ideology stands out sharply and without any facade as, for instance, when it speaks of looking at the "utility of madrasahs (religious seminaries) in the 21st century" and enacting a law against religious conversions by force or allurements. The electoral strategy obviously is that while the VHP, under the dubious pretext of not being a registered political party, would push ahead with its abrasive anti-minority campaign unrelentingly, the BJP for its part would wrap the sectarian agenda in a deceptively irreproachable way, with the cause of combating the scourge of 'cross-border terrorism' serving as a convenient cloak and the phenomenon being played up to jingoistic levels. Witness for example a whole clutch of promised measures — from compulsory NCC training at the college level to creating a second line of defence with what are called "Gram Rakshak Dals" and Home Guards to special training in the use of weapons to the people in border areas.

No amount of sophistry on the BJP's part would help it in obscuring the stark reality that the party, with nothing worthwhile to show by way of 'achievement' during its tenure of governance, hit upon the cynical plan of depicting the post-Godhra communal pogrom (which in itself was largely an orchestration of its affiliates) as a matter of Gujarat's 'Gaurav' and security. What is being attempted by the BJP in Gujarat, with Mr. Modi as its mascot and the VHP as its chief campaigner, is really a political mobilisation on the basis of a platform that constitutes a deadly combination of religious bigotry, chauvinism and communal fascism, something that dangerously militates against modernity and all the cherished values associated with the national ethos, not to speak of the core features of the Indian Constitution such as secularism.

3 DEC 2002

THE HINDU

'PEACE AND SAFETY' FOR MINORITIES ASSURED

HP-1
2/12

BJP manifesto talks of anti-conversion law in Gujarat

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, DEC. 1. The Bharatiya Janata Party today released its election manifesto — a mixture of Hindutva and the constitutional obligation of secularism — for the December 12 elections to the Gujarat Assembly.

The manifesto, which the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, preferred to call his party's "resolve rather than just promises," gives no sops for the members of the battered minority community except assuring them of "peace and safety as well as development and progress" for all religious and linguistic minorities as required under the Constitution. But, the party has promised to enact an anti-conversion law and "study the utility of madrassas (religious seminaries) in the 21st century." It has also promised to set up a Sanskrit University and an Ahimsa University to carry forward the promises made by the previous BJP Government.

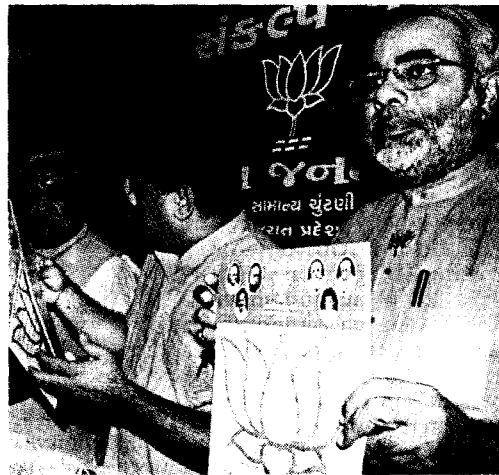
'Shakti grams' planned

Stressing particularly on "security" and the fight against terrorism and cross-border infiltration, which the BJP has been projecting as its "main plank" in the coming elections, the manifesto promises to provide training to youths in combating terrorism, impart compulsory NCC training at the college level and special training to the people in the borders, issue identity cards and licence for weapons to them, set up sainik schools in the border areas, create a second-line defence with "gram rakshak dals" and home guards, and set up "shakti-grams" — a resettlement of retired soldiers in the villages bordering Pakistan, a move which apparently entails the evacuation of the minority settlers.

Besides Mr. Modi, his predecessor, Keshubhai Patel, the Gujarat BJP president, Rajendrasinh Rana, and the national treasurer, Ramdas Aggarwal, who is in-charge of Gujarat affairs, were present during the release of the manifesto.

Mr. Modi reacted sharply to a question on why the manifesto made no mention of the Godhra and post-Godhra riot victims. "No government can anticipate riots but can only guarantee safety and security to all the people." Without naming the Congress, he said "certain elements" were trying to convert Gujarat into another Jammu and Kashmir and as a responsible party "it was our duty to thwart all such attempts."

The "activities" of the madrassas were a matter of "serious concern" because those studying in



The caretaker Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi (right), releases the BJP's election manifesto, with the State BJP president, Rajendrasinh Rana (centre), and the former Chief Minister, Keshubhai Patel, in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — AP

such institutions were not even provided with basic primary education as required under the Constitution. The Government would "go deep to examine the utility of such institutions" in the context of development in the 21st century and take necessary steps accordingly.

Mr. Modi saw nothing amiss in enacting an anti-conversion law which was intended to curb conversions by "force, lure or fear." Such an Act was already in force in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and some other States.

The BJP Government had implemented more than 90 per cent of the promises it had made in the 1998 manifesto but could not fulfil its commitment cent per cent because of natural calamities, "impediments created by the opposition parties" and the shortening of the Assembly's term "due to the Opposition's demand for his resignation." However, "we will carry forward the unfinished promises in the next term."

The 344-point manifesto (as against the 220-point manifesto of the Congress) emphasises the "security and safety" aspects of the people — including security at the borders, security against anti-national and anti-social elements, security for women, and to religions and culture and trade and industry.

BJP cautions Congress: Page 11

2 DEC 2002

THE HINDU

BJP for conversion ban, madarsa scan

20-12-2002

5-1
2/12

Terror shield masks Godhra

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ahmedabad, Dec. 1: The BJP has balked at putting Godhra down in black and white, preferring to pack its Gujarat manifesto with pet themes that cover a ban on forcible conversions, survey of madaras and a citizens' shield against terrorism.

The dominant slogan of the election charter has conferred upon the BJP the title of the "saviour of five crore Gujaratis", playing on the signature tune — Gujarat *gaurav* (pride) — scored by deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani at the campaign kick-off yesterday.

The manifesto makes no mention of the Godhra train carnage — considered the undeclared poll plank of the BJP — and the riots that followed.

The party's state unit was keen to ensure that the election charter make some reference to Godhra — as most campaigners have been doing during public rallies — but the Central leadership advised caution, a senior BJP leader said.

Instead, the 16-page glossy booklet focuses on the threat from across the border and lists a string of steps to make Gujarat a secure state, entrusting a prospective chief minister with the preserve of Advani, who oversees internal security as Union home minister.

Asked about the absence of

THE PROMISES

- Law to ban conversions through force and allurement
- Detailed study of madaras to ensure development of children
- Sudarshan Suraksha Kavach (security shield) against terrorism
- Youths in border areas to be given arms training
- Identity cards for border areas
- No approval for new slaughter houses

Godhra, caretaker chief minister Narendra Modi said: "No political party pledges to enact riots in a manifesto. There is only a resolve to give security. It is unfortunate that the riots have not gone away from the minds of some people who are interested in keeping Gujarat aflame. We will not allow that."

En route to the "secure-Gujarat" goal, the party has pledged

QUOTE

More temples can be targeted

AB VAJPAYEE

to tackle on a priority basis some "concerns" that have been identified as conversions, terrorism and madaras, "which are increasing by leaps and bounds".

Explaining the finer points of the manifesto, Modi said if his party is voted back to power, it will enact a law to prevent forcible religious conversions.

"We will frame the law to prevent conversions in the state. We will study the law already in force in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh and bring the anti-conversion law to stop forcible conversions for fear, lust and greed. It is because of these factors that people are forced to change their religion," he said.

A new BJP government will conduct a "detailed study" of madaras to ensure that the development of children who study there is "consistent with Gujarat's development in the 21st Century".

The party has also proposed a Sudarshan Suraksha Kavach movement — an anti-terrorism scheme under which youths will be trained to use arms and citizen's vigilante groups will be formed in border villages that will be named Shakti Grams.

A second line of defence — to be called Gram Rakshak Dal — will be created for the border areas. Elsewhere in the state, a new state commando force will counter terrorism.

■ See Page 6

2 DEC 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

✓
Cry to avenge post-Godhra 'ignominy'

11/12 98-P-1527

Advani churns Gujarat pride

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN
AND AGENCIES

Bhuj/Rajkot, Nov. 30: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today challenged Pakistan to fight a fourth direct war with India instead of engaging in a proxy war by targeting temples and killing civilians.

Advani, who kicked off the BJP's election campaign in Gujarat with a public meeting at Bhuj in quake-devastated Kutch, which shares a border with Pakistan, was quoted by PTI as saying: "Let us fight it out face to face. We have fought thrice, let there be a fourth war."

Alleging that Islamabad has been nursing a wound since the creation of Bangladesh, Advani said he would have had no reservations had Pakistan fought the Indian security forces. "But killing of innocent civilians by attacking temples like Akshardham and Raghunath is unacceptable."

In his second meeting at Rajkot — the political nerve-centre of Saurashtra — Advani abandoned his war-mongering and took the electoral battle straight to the Gujarati heart by talking about *asmita* and *swabhimaan* (pride and self-respect).

He put up a spirited defence of caretaker chief minister Narendra Modi and said post-Godhra, Gujarat was subject to a series of humiliations. Referring to the train carnage and



Sushma Swaraj at an election rally in Ahmedabad. (PTI)

what followed thereafter, he said: "This year, a tragic event took place on February 27. Some events took place later and I am not suggesting that they were right. But the context in which Gujarat was mentioned was that nobody should think of entering the state. The Gujarat government was insulted, it was said its police force was rotten, its officials bad. But the person who was subject to the worst ignominy was Narendra Modi. It was made out as if such an individual never existed earlier."

Advani threw the gauntlet to the people and asked: "Is Gujarat ready to tolerate such humilia-

tion? No, it will not." Terming the December 12 elections a war between Gujaratis and others, he said: "The elections are very crucial because all that has been said against you and your state cannot be answered with mere words. You have been subject to too much calumny."

Then came the final bugle: "It is Gujarat's *gaurav* (pride) which has inspired me throughout my political career. I started my rath yatra (the Ram rath yatra of 1990) from Somnath. Cast your vote and resurrect Gujarat's pride again."

Although state leaders accused the Congress of "fomenting" terrorism by releasing "militants" in Kashmir, Advani was cautious. "The biggest problem in Jammu and Kashmir is cross-border terrorism. It will have to be tackled together by the Centre and the state government and not unilaterally," he said.

The BJP, which won 52 of the 58 seats in Saurashtra in the last elections, is possibly facing its stiffest challenge in this region. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the water or power crisis afflicting Saurashtra nor of the low procurement price paid to cotton farmers.

The fact that there was not a single round of applause to anything he said — including his praise of Modi — indicates that there are tough times ahead for the BJP here.

■ See Page 6

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2002

CHALLENGING THE PLURALIST IDEAL

THE ASSURANCE BY the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, that India will never be a theocratic state may well be seen as a signal to the extremist fringe in his party which has shown its contempt for the ideal of secularism as defined in the Constitution. But then, Mr. Advani, as an important member of the Union Cabinet, is bound by oath to uphold the secular ideals, which constitute the basic structure of the Constitution. Mr. Advani therefore had to distance himself from any move by his own partymen and his associates in the Sangh Parivar for whom establishing a Hindu Rashtra is an integral part of their agenda. A theocratic state in which Hinduism is the official religion runs contrary to the Constitutionally decreed idea of a secular state where the state is committed to stay neutral between all religions. Mr. Advani, hence, was only stating the obvious. He was, after all, speaking in Parliament and could not have said anything that would be seen as going against the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

✓ 10-10 29/11
The Sangh Parivar's agenda is not just turning India into a theocratic state ultimately. The RSS worldview is based on the definition of nationalism as a cultural notion and at the core of this is the idea of majoritarianism. While the idea of Hindu Rashtra belonged to K.B. Hedgewar, it was M.S. Golwalkar who achieved this paradigm shift in his "We and Our Nationhood Defined" where the Sangh's goals were defined. The majoritarian agenda, indeed, is wider in its scope than the setting up of a theocratic state. Majoritarianism is the opposite of pluralism. True, Mr. Advani and

his colleagues in the BJP have sought to distance themselves within and outside Parliament from Golwalkar's scheme of nationalism and definition of nationhood. But then majoritarianism has been the most important mobilisation strategy for the BJP ever since its inception in 1980 (and earlier for the Bharatiya Jana Sangh). The Ayodhya campaign, for instance, was the most pronounced manifestation of the majoritarian agenda at work. The idea of putting the "faith" of the majority community above that of the minorities and the mobilisation that finally led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid are clear illustrations of the majoritarian agenda. Mr. Advani himself and his colleagues in the BJP are firmly wedded to this agenda and the assurance on the floor of the Rajya Sabha against any attempt to turn India into a theocratic state is for this reason no cause for rejoicing.

The BJP's agenda in post-Godhra Gujarat too is an illustration of the majoritarian agenda at work. The scale of violence and the role played by the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, or the systematic and violent campaign unleashed by the Sangh Parivar outfits in the Dangs (in Gujarat), the tribal parts of Madhya Pradesh or the grisly killing of the Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two sons in Orissa are all evidence of brutal majoritarianism at work. While reducing India to a theocratic state is clearly forbidden by the Constitution itself, the BJP and its other associates in the Sangh Parivar are united in their opposition to the ideal of pluralism and the equal protection for all religious groups that is at the root of Indian nationalism.

29 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

Godhra will be poll issue, insists BJP

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Maintaining that India's political thinkers had always rejected a theocratic state and that every citizen, irrespective of his or her faith, must feel safe and secure, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said on Wednesday that the recent incidents of terrorism in the country were aimed at inciting communal tensions and riots.

Mr Advani's remarks came in a truncated reply to a three-hour discussion on Gujarat in the Rajya Sabha even as the BJP said categorically on Wednesday that it would make Godhra an election issue in the state's assembly elections.

Mr Advani said he would like the new government in the state, irrespective of the party it belonged to, to implement the constitutional provisions as they related to secularism. The killings were a shame, he said, especially for a party which had prided itself on a riot-free tenure of four-and-a-half years. Every citizen, he said in a speech which was interrupted more than once and that finally saw the Left MPs leaving, must feel secure—whatever the caste or religion, irrespective of whether he or she was from a minority or the majority community.

Referring to the attacks on the Akshardham temple in Gujarat, the Raghunath temple in Jammu and the Divali-

time conspiracy in Delhi as examples, he described what was happening as a proxy war. Imagine what would have happened if sacred idols had been damaged, he said.

Voicing pride in India's secularism, Mr Advani said that irritation at the mere mention of the word Hindu wasn't right. The concept of Hindutva, he added, matched the definition given by the supreme court. He was happy that the Gujarat chief minister had said he wanted a state which was "educated, irrigated and electrified".

But he displayed his irritation at interruptions. Given the kind of speeches against the government and Gujarat CM Narendra Modi, "aren't we going to refer to what happened in Godhra?" he asked, as he ended his reply on an abrupt note, stating that Arun Jaitley of the BJP had said whatever needed to be said.

The discussion, polarised on party lines, saw opposition members voicing doubts about the possibility of a free and fair poll in the state, given the divisive and communal issues and processes set in motion in Gujarat.

Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson V.K. Malhotra said on Wednesday that his party could not avoid the Godhra carnage issue in the run-up to the Gujarat polls. "Godhra has become an issue because the Congress has raised it. How can we avoid it?" he said.

28 NOV 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Advani unhappy with defiant Gujarat CM

that Mr Pandya be given a ticket, a BJP leader said.

Mr Modi rejected the peace brokered by party leaders and the RSS. The proposal had envisaged that Mr Pandya take steps to mend fences with Mr Modi and the chief minister should agree to his nomination. Mr Pandya kept his part of the bargain but Mr Modi refused to budge, leaving the leadership with few options.

Officially, the BJP tried to play down the controversy. Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said there was no controversy in the party but admitted minor differences in the

missed reports about a political deal saying "neither has he made any demand, nor have we made any commitment to him. Mr Pandya has promised to do his best for the party."

"Mr Pandya telephoned me today expressing his desire to opt out from the contest before the party took a final decision on the candidate for the constituency. I have accepted his request, and the chapter is closed," Mr Naidu said.

The BJP chief said he was confident the party would win the Gujarat polls and claimed that would mark the beginning of the

Congress decline. The main issue in the state was nationalist versus "pseudo-secularist" forces, he said.

The BJP would definitely raise the Godhra issue, if the Congress decided "to carry the divisive and hate filled campaign against the party," he said. "We cannot keep quiet. Godhra and its aftermath were handiwork of anti-national forces," he said.

On the BJP list, he said discontentment was at the minimum despite 19 sitting MLAs being denied tickets.

Three of them had filed nomination but the state leadership was trying to persuade them to withdraw, he said.

Among the 182 candidates, there are 65 agriculturists, 31 businessmen, 30 social activists, 11 women, 11 educationists, 10 doctors, 10 advocates, eight co-operators, six industrialists, three technocrats. There are 14 Scheduled Caste and 26 Scheduled Tribes candidates.

Q. P. N. B. S. P. ✓
Poll Bill incorporates SC guidelines

NEW DELHI, Nov. 25. — The government today accommodated the guidelines of the Supreme Court while introducing the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2002 in the Lok Sabha. The Bill makes it mandatory for a candidate seeking election to furnish details of his criminal antecedents, if any, in the form of an affidavit, declaration of assets and liabilities. Dr Abdul Kalam had raised queries about the absence of these clauses from the Ordinance on the RP Act before signing the promulgation.

Introducing the Bill, law minister Mr K. Jana Krishnamurthi said: "A candidate contesting a parliamentary or Assembly election would be required to disclose as to whether he is accused of any offence punishable with imprisonment for two years or more in pending case in which charges have been framed and as to whether he has been convicted of an offence in which the punishment has been awarded for one year or more, for the information of the voters." A candidate would also have to declare his assets and liabilities before the presiding officer of the House. — SNS

state unit on who should be nominated from Ellisbridge. The differences were resolved, he said.

That the party leadership was obliged to Mr Pandya for bowing out of the contest was evident when Mr Naidu, said: "Mr Pandya, by opting out, has made the party proud." But he dis-

Ellisbridge at crossroads!

Treatment of Pandya is shameful

The humiliation heaped upon BJP stalwart, Haren Pandya in the process of denying him his Ellisbridge Assembly seat in the forthcoming elections in Gujarat cannot possibly be billed as a compromise. Pandya held his peace until all but one candidate, and that for his seat were announced. He was asked to wait upon Modi in hospital and when he found the chief minister under sedation, or so we are told, he had to go again to apologise. It did not help. His fault, in Modi's eyes was the suspicion that Pandya had appeared before a high-powered Commission enquiring into the Gujarat government's performance during the pogrom, instead of declining to testify as would be expected from a *pracharak* in good standing. Modi is proud of the fact that he neither forgives nor forgets, the mark of a bigoted and intolerant man. In the event, Pandya was denied the seat he had won three times in a row. And he was offered nothing else. How this shabby treatment can be described as a *compromise* is difficult to understand.

Pandya's originating fault was that he was a leading light as Home Minister in Keshubhai Patel's ministry and was always suspect on that count. For all the appearance of a united front Modi hates Keshubhai, whom he replaced as chief minister with little ceremony, even more than he hates Sonia Gandhi and that is saying a lot. The meek surrender to Modi by the BJP leadership will have consequences: whatever the Prime Minister's views on the subject it would appear that Advani and Arun Jaitley, both unashamed admirers of Modi prevailed. It is also the clearest possible proof that all the bonhomie notwithstanding, Modi remains deeply suspicious of Keshubhai and there is little doubt that Keshubhai returns the compliment.

Pandya must conclude that he has little room for manoeuvre and less future in the party, placed as he is at the mercy of Modi — utterly. Rubbing his nose in the dust and getting him to publicly seek out Modi in hospital and tender an apology do not seem to have helped to soften Modi one bit. Notice Modi's retort to the leadership of his own party. If he was not given his head and Pandya was allowed to contest from Ellisbridge, he, Modi would opt out of the elections. It was an empty threat but the leadership chose to take it seriously instead of calling his bluff. For the second time the BJP overlooked the fact that Vaghela must be watching carefully and Vaghela is a resourceful man. Time is no longer on Modi's side, it never was. It has sunk into the industrious people of Gujarat that empty rhetoric and vitriol are no substitute for what they see around them and do not like. The steady erosion of the opportunity of earning an honest rupee, the uncertainty, the climate of hatred and fear, all of which is inconsistent with a peaceful and hopefully prosperous future.

For the first time since Modi embarked upon his reckless adventure of creating a divide between the communities for political opportunism, the wind is blowing from a contrary direction and a defeat for the BJP looks a possibility.

Protege given Pandya turf

Vinay Menon and
Rathin Das
Ahmedabad, November 25

THE WINNER hasn't taken all. Narendra Modi may have won the big fight, but Haren Pandya isn't out of the picture. For, the man the BJP has picked to replace Pandya is his most loyal supporter — the chief of the party's Ellis Bridge unit, Bhavin Seth.

Just five days ago, Seth had threatened a revolt if the BJP failed to nominate Pandya from his home constituency. On that morning, the party had announced its second list that made no mention of Pandya or Ellis Bridge.

An anguished Seth got together a crowd of some 200 supporters before his mentor's home. "We back Haren Pandya completely and will have no one else fight from this seat," Seth had publicly declared.

Today, Pandya stood by his loyalist as Seth quietly signed his papers as the BJP candidate from Ellis Bridge. A subdued Seth left it to his mentor to do the talking.

"Although I have decided not to contest the election, I will definitely campaign for the party and the Ellis Bridge candidate," a crest-



Narendra Modi after filing his nomination on Monday.

fallen Pandya said.

There was a show of unity in Ahmedabad, too, as the day's other high-profile candidate, the Chief Minister himself, filed his nomination. Flanked by former CM Keshubhai Patel, State BJP chief Rajendrasinh Rana, party observer for Gujarat Ramdas Agarwal and Union Minister of State Harin Pathak, Modi said his poll plank would be development and "positive approach".

26 NOV 2002

Discord between Modi, high command

Delhi panic on Gujarat revolt

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Nov. 21: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani has asked BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu to resolve the crisis arising from the rebellion in Gujarat without wasting time.

Alarmed at the growing dissidence resulting from denial of tickets to important aspirants or keeping local leaders like former minister Haren Pandya in suspense, a high-level meeting was convened today at Advani's residence.

Advani, BJP sources said, stressed to Naidu that the Gujarat polls would be a "turning point" for the party and, therefore, he should immediately contain the dissidence. As the party released its third list of 12 names, there was no mention of Pandya nor was another nominee announced from his Ellis Bridge seat.

Sources said caretaker chief minister Narendra Modi was bent on denying Pandya a ticket because he suspected the former minister of deposing before a citizens' tribunal inquiring into the post-Godhra riots and "leaking" details which established the administration's alleged complicity. The other problem Modi has with Pandya, who was home minister in Keshubhai Patel's Cabinet, is that he is a staunch loyalist of the former chief minister.

But sources close to Advani said he and other central leaders, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Naidu, are in favour of mollifying Pandya with a ticket after his supporters reportedly put up an "impressive" show of strength yesterday. At today's meeting, Advani was quoted by sources as saying: "We cannot afford to be too rigid."

Modi's stand, the sources

said, is that if the BJP cannot deal with the rebellion now, how would it cope with similar problems in the future? The subtext is that Modi does not want a potential challenger.

Advani also expressed the fear that it is "not the question of one Ellis Bridge seat or one Pandya" but that if he is left out, it could have a "ripple effect". The sources admitted that the central command is becoming "increasingly impatient" with Modi's projection of himself as the only key figure in Gujarat and giving the impression that everyone else, including Vajpayee and Advani, is "superfluous".

Even the efforts of Modi's closest friend, BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley, to make him soften his stand on Pandya failed. Jaitley was rushed to Gandhinagar on Tuesday, but sources said he returned "empty-handed". (See Page 6)

VHP gives Advani pseudo-secular tag

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: From time to time, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee has been at the receiving end of a tongue-lashing from his Sangh brothers in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. On Tuesday, it was deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's turn. He was hoisted with his own petard when the VHP top brass dubbed him "pseudo-secular", an expression he himself had coined about a decade ago to berate his own political enemies.



L.K. Advani

Incensed by his speech on Monday in parliament where he said that India could "never become a Hindu rashtra" as it was "committed to secularism", and that the "security of the minorities" was a key issue in next month's assembly elections in Gujarat, the VHP's Ashok Singhal and Vishnu

Hari Dalmia took the deputy PM to task. Tuesday's sharp attack—made on the day the BJP released an initial list of 145 candidates for the Gujarat poll—comes in the wake of a series of statements and events in the last fortnight. First came the ban on the VHP's padshahi yatra in Gujarat by the Election Commission, then the strong anti-VHP statement by the Prime Minister on Friday, followed on Monday by Mr Advani's speech, which endorsed the PM's approach that governance, not Godhra, should be the issue in the Gujarat polls.

It was a line that corroborated reports suggesting that Mr Advani did not wish to tie his own political fortunes too closely with those of Gujarat CM Narendra Modi, especially given the BJP's internal assessment that elections in Gujarat will be a neck and neck affair. Indeed, the fact that Mr Modi has been compelled to shift his constituency from Rajkot-II to Maninagar in Ahmedabad, barely six months after he squeaked through in the former, is being

Mr Advani was a "vidwan", his "playing with words" had harmed the image of the "party with a difference", as what he had said was tantamount to "appeasement" (of the minorities). "Mr Advani's secularism is pseudo-secularism," he said.

Earlier, at the VHP's 'sneha milan' organised to celebrate Diwali, in an even more direct fashion, Mr Dalmia referred to Mr Advani's parliament speech and said, "Isn't the security of the majority important?" Continuing, he said, "When the DPM says India cannot be declared a Hindu rashtra because it is committed to secularism, what does he mean? Doesn't he know that Hindu and secularism are synonymous? To make such distinctions is to begin the process of creating vote-banks. Sarvadharama sambhava is the essence of Hindutva." However, the VHP's current poster boy, Mr Modi, will get a campaign boost from both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani. BJP spokesman M.A. Naqvi said on Tuesday that both would tour Gujarat before the polls.

Suman Harkar

Cong, SP will go it alone

Hoshiarpur: The Congress said on Tuesday that it would not forge an alliance for the assembly elections in Gujarat, but did not rule out seat adjustments with Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party.

Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party announced on Tuesday that it would contest 120 seats in Gujarat on its own. PTI

seen as a portent of the tough fight ahead. It was against this backdrop that the VHP leaders—"frustrated", as a Sangh insider put it, "at being repeatedly pushed to the wall" (first when they were not handed over land to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya in March this year, and now, after the banning of their yatra in Gujarat)—hit out at Mr Advani. Emphasising that the deputy PM's speech had sent out a "wrong message", Mr Singhal said that although

Advani flower of accord for Atal

19/11 2-P-1-BJP

Deputy PM speaks in Prime Minister's voice

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 18: Attempting to scotch speculation about a rift between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and himself, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said: "The Prime Minister and I are treading the same path regardless of what you say."

Advani, also the home minister, was replying to a Lok Sabha discussion on an adjournment motion moved by the Opposition on the communal situation in Gujarat. He took the opportunity to "clear his name" and counter the not-so-veiled suggestions levelled by Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Das Munshi about differences between him and the Prime Minister.

"Aap ne bahut chaturayee ke saath kaha ki Vajpayee yeh kahte hain aur Advani yeh kahte hain. Lekin hum dono ek saath chal rahe hain, (Though you have very cunningly tried to suggest that Vajpayee says one thing and Advani another, the two of us are walking the same path)," Advani said.

"We have walked together for long and will continue to do so," he added in an echo of the statement Vajpayee had made at a rally in Delhi recently as Advani had looked on. Today, Vajpayee was in the listener's chair.

Das Munshi had suggested that while the Prime Minister

had spoken out by supporting the Election Commission decision to ban the VHP's yatra, his deputy was silent because he was not able to reconcile his official duties with his political and ideological convictions.

"If the Prime Minister could intervene in the controversy, don't you think you as deputy Prime Minister should have broken your silence?" he asked.

The adjournment motion, defeated by a voice vote, came at the end of a day-long debate. For Advani, who insisted that there was no "need for a discussion" on Gujarat at this juncture, it, however, presented an opportunity to address some of the speculation that was gaining ground within and outside his party.

His "clarification" was an apparent response to reports that he was "unhappy" with Vajpayee's statement backing the commission's order. Sources close to Advani had questioned the logic of making such a statement.

"This is making a mountain out of a molehill. There were apprehensions earlier that the Jagannath yatra (in Ahmedabad) and Narendra Modi's Rath yatra would unleash communal trouble. But nothing happened. Why did the EC then stop the VHP yatra on the basis of a mere presumption?" they asked.

BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu's description of the ban as "inappropriate" and spokesman Arun Jaitley's label of "unprecedented" were believed to

have reflected the Advani line as both are known loyalists.

If there were differences, Advani set out to bury that notion with the thumping endorsement that what Vajpayee had said was "absolutely correct". "The electoral issue in Gujarat should not be Godhra and what happened later but good governance," he said in an iteration of the Prime Minister's statement.

Speaking in one voice, Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi himself affirmed that Godhra would not be an issue. "BJP will seek votes on its performance. Godhra will not be an issue but if it is raised by the Opposition, we will give them an apt answer," he said in Delhi today.

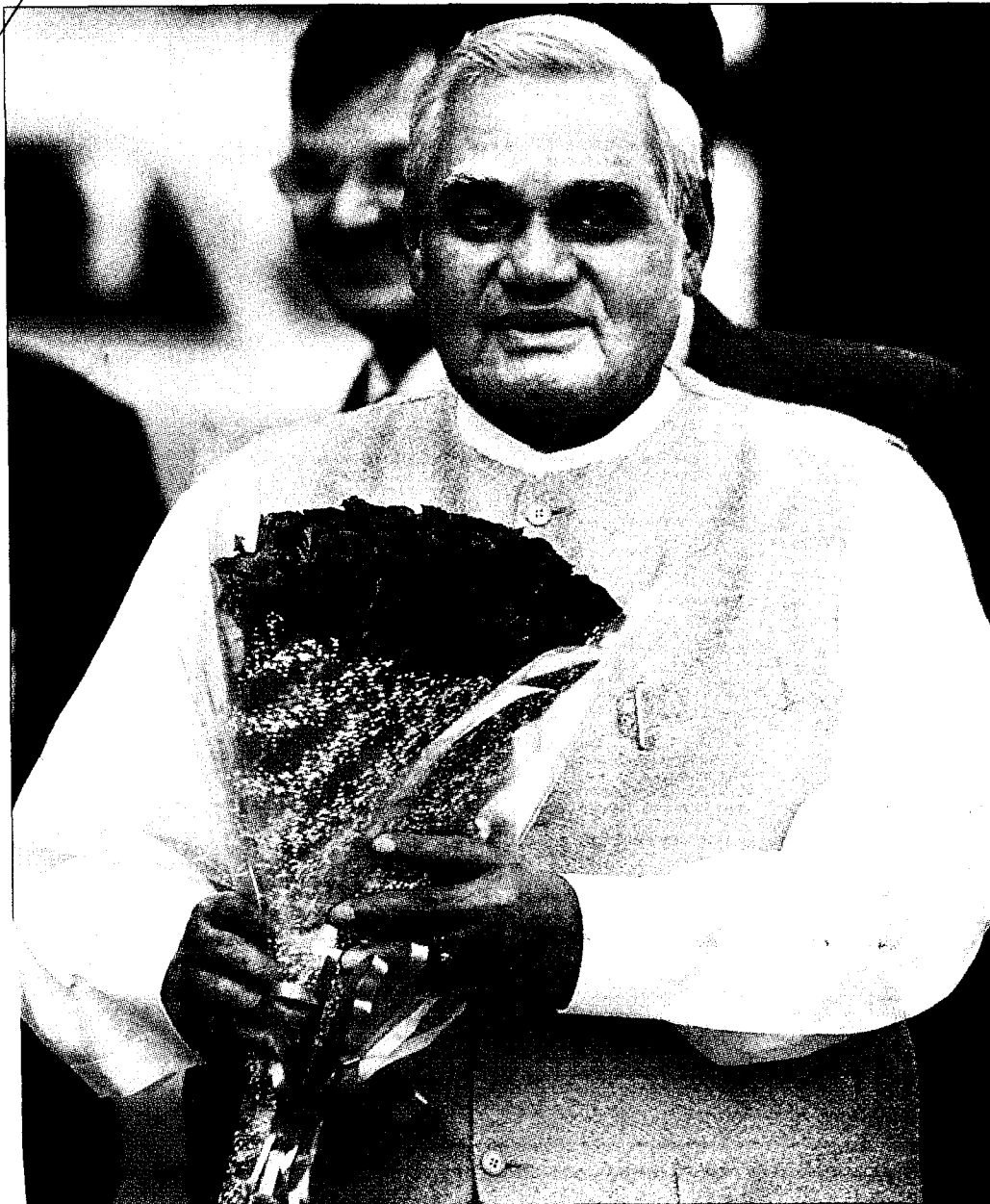
Advani patted Modi on the back, saying: "Before coming here I was reading an interview given by Narendra Modi in which he has focused on the various issues of good governance reflecting his vision of the state."

"BJP and other related organisations should see that the elections are free and fair and that good governance and safety of minorities are key poll issues," he said.

Recalling that India chose to remain secular at the time of Independence when Pakistan became an Islamic state, Advani said those Muslims who remained in India are "sons of Mother India".

India "can never be declared a Hindu state", he added.

■ See Page 6



Prime Minister AB Vajpayee with a bouquet given to him by minister of parliamentary affairs Pramod Mahajan before Parliament for the winter session. (AFP)

THE TELEGRAPH

19 NOV 2002

Barred VHP brushes aside Vajpayee

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ahmedabad, Nov. 16: Breathing fire and refusing to blink even after being barred from entering Godhra, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today said it was ready to face the consequences for taking out its rally tomorrow but nothing could make it swerve off its course.

"The VHP's programme is unchangeable. Neither the chief election commissioner nor the Prime Minister can force us to change it. It is our firm resolve and we saints are ready to face the consequences," VHP leader Acharya Dharmendra declared.

The acharya, along with VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia, is scheduled to lead the Vijay Yatra from Godhra tomorrow. Panchmahal district collector Manoj Agarwal today shut the two out of Godhra after the VHP decided to flout the Election Commission's ban on the march and Atal Bihari Vaj-

payee's appeal yesterday to abide by the order.

Speaking to newsmen after a meeting of the *darshak mandal*, the acharya lambasted the Prime Minister, accusing him of hurting "the sentiments of the Hindus, whose trust he had lost".

"We do not trust the Prime Minister because he does not trust us," the acharya said, quickly adding that the VHP, however, had no differences with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. "We are part of a family," he said.

Next, the acharya gunned for J. M. Lyngdoh, alleging that the chief election commissioner had usurped the powers of the state government and was dancing to the tune of the Vatican.

He accused Lyngdoh of misleading the people, saying the Gujarat government had never said the

rally would spark tension. "It is all imaginary apprehension. His questionable act creates suspicion in the minds of the people about his neutrality and impartiality as the chief election commissioner of the world's largest democracy," he said.

As the acharya continued his tirade, Godhra turned into a virtual fortress with a three-layered security ring being put in place — around the town, the district and the Science College grounds where the VHP has rigged up a stage for Sunday's meeting.

One company of the Rapid Action Force, eight companies of the State Reserve Police and 700 policemen have been deployed. Reinforcements from adjoining districts have also been sent for.

Some preventive arrests have been made.

Apprehending that VHP leaders would be taken into custody, the acharya said he would

blame Lyngdoh but absolve chief minister Narendra Modi in case there is a clampdown tomorrow.

"It is the CEC who is playing the role of constitutional blackmailer and is ruling the state with the blessings of the Prime Minister," he said. "Neither Lyngdoh nor Vajpayee has any business to dictate us — we are not accountable to them."

Tomorrow morning, VHP activists and sadhus will march from Ahmedabad to Godhra after performing a puja at the Somnath temple in the Bapunagar area of the walled city.

Inspector general M.K. Tandon, who is in charge of the security bandobast, said he had instructed Science College authorities to dismantle the stage. But nothing was done till late in the evening.

"We will not allow the VHP workers to enter Godhra town," Tandon said. Additional district collector B.N. Damor said any VHP worker trying to enter the town would be arrested.

QUOTE

We do not trust the Prime Minister because he does not trust us

A VHP LEADER

Upholding the law

The prime minister's rebuke to the VHP carries a message for his party

THE prime minister has spoken on Gujarat, and this time there's no mistaking his message. There is a rebuke in it, loud and clear, for the VHP — for its continued defiance in the wake of the Election Commission's directive to the Gujarat government to ban the proposed Godhra-Akshardham yatra. All organisations, the PM has said, must honour the restraint on religious processions before the December 12 elections in the state; in fact, they must help the administration in discharging its duty. But Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statement is more than just a snub to a wayward VHP. It also admonishes sections of his own party that didn't hesitate to accuse the EC of overstepping its jurisdiction. Though the EC's decision may 'look wrong', the ban is 'alright' given the circumstances in Gujarat, he said. So, are they listening to the prime minister, the VHP rowdies and their promoters in the BJP?

In fact, the prime minister's words are cautionary for more than just his parivar. All parties in the fray in Gujarat would do well to heed his advice to desist from making either Godhra or the carnage that followed into a campaign issue. He has emphasised 'scrupulous obedience of the law' as the only way to enhance the 'prestige and efficacy' of our democracy. And pleaded for all election campaigns in Gujarat to focus

on issues of development and governance. While Narendra Modi's campaign has been the main culprit in this regard, and the VHP has enthusiastically pitched in to further muddy the political discourse, they are not the only culprits in the run up to polls in the state. In Gujarat, there has been no evidence so far of an appreciable effort by the Congress to resist a response in kind. If Modi's rhetoric is communal, his old-time rival and new Congress recruit Shankarsinh Vaghela has attempted to counter it by playing the equally sectarian, equally regressive caste card — when he is not brandishing a softer, me-too Hindutva, that is. In a state that is yet to recover from the gruesome violence that raged unchecked for months, in a state sorely in need of the healing touch, and governance, the sad truth, a month before the polls, is this: there are no positive political agendas the people can choose from.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee has spoken of a 'new beginning' in Gujarat. Dare we hope that after days, months, of the same vicious cycle of allegation and counter-allegation, the same petty rhetoric and innuendo, his words will be seriously heard, that they will infuse some responsibility and moderation in the political campaign for the state? The people of Gujarat wait for the answer.

16 NOV 2002

BJP rebels face the axe

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, NOV. 11. Ten legislators of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh could lose their membership of the State Assembly through disqualification proceedings. The party's central leadership has given a green signal to its State unit to proceed with the action without further delay.

The BJP national president, Venkaiah Naidu, indicated here that in Lucknow, the State unit chief, Vinay Katiyar, had begun doing the necessary paperwork, and would meet the Speaker of the Assembly, Kesri Nath Tripathi, tonight for issuing the necessary orders.

"They have crossed all limits," Mr. Naidu said here today. On Sunday, the party made up its mind after Mr. Naidu had long meetings with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, the former party president, Kushabhau Thakre, and the 'prabhari' of Uttar Pradesh, Kalraj Mishra.

The BJP general secretary and former Chief Minister, Rajnath

Singh, was also kept in the picture. It was suggested by senior leaders that it was "too late now" for the party to accept even an unconditional apology from the 10 who had defied the party directive by signing the nomination forms of the arms dealer, Suresh Nanda, as a candidate for the Rajya Sabha elections — Mr. Nanda's papers were rejected earlier today during scrutiny by the Returning Officer and almost all the major parties in Uttar Pradesh heaved a sigh of relief.

It seems that a "lesser sentence" may be meted out to the other MLAs — some had made public statements against the party, its leaders and the Mayawati Government, some had met the Governor and later stated that they were withdrawing support to the Government, others had met the Samajwadi Party leader, Amar Singh, and given the impression that they were ready to support an alternative government headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav.

It appeared that the BJP would be carefully looking at the arithmetic in the U.P. As-

sembly before deciding what kind of disciplinary action is to be taken, and against how many of its legislators.

Mr. Naidu said that even after the strongest action against the 10 legislators (the hint was disqualification), the Mayawati Government would be "stable" and would continue to enjoy a slightly reduced majority. Others may be given a chance to offer a public apology or "warned" to behave.

Mr. Naidu said that the U.P. imbroglio should also serve as a warning to others that the BJP would not tolerate indiscipline. The BJP has relied on the Maharashtra example where the Speaker disqualified a few MLAs of the Congress and of the Nationalist Congress Party after they met the Governor to withdraw support to their own Government.

Although these disqualifications were upheld by the High Court, the final word has yet to come from the Supreme Court where the case is pending.

Nanda to challenge EC order

PTI reports from Lucknow:

The BJP dissidents' nominee and arms dealer, Suresh Nanda, today said he was going to challenge the Election Commission's order rejecting his nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh.

"My entry was obviously inconvenient to others and I am not going to take it lying down. I am going to fight and going to appeal to the highest courts," he told reporters.

Amar Singh courts arrest: Page 11

11 elected unopposed

LUCKNOW, NOV. 11. All the 11 candidates from Uttar Pradesh were declared elected unopposed for the Rajya Sabha by the Returning Officer, R. P. Pandey, here today.

The candidates are: Rajnath Singh and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi (Bharatiya Janata Party), Amar Singh, Udai Pratap Singh, Abu Ashim and Shahi Siddiqui (Samajwadi Party), Isham Siddiqui, Veer Singh and Gandhi Azad (Bahujan Samaj Party) and Akhilesh Das (Congress).

The Delhi-based hotelier, Lalit Suri, who was supported by almost all the political parties, was also declared elected for the lone mid-term vacancy. — PTI

1 2 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

I WAS INTIMIDATED: SURESH NANDA

Thakre mission fails, BJP to get tough with rebels

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, NOV. 10. The Bharatiya Janata Party's problem of dissidence among its MLAs in Uttar Pradesh is far from over. The former party president, Kushabhau Thakre, returned here today after more than a week's stay in Lucknow without success in working out a compromise formula which would satisfy both the dissidents and the party leadership. The party president, Venkaiah Naidu, was busy in meetings till late at night hoping to work out some face-saving formula ahead of the crucial Rajya Sabha polls in the State.

But there was more than a hint that the BJP may be left with no option but to use its last weapon, disqualification, against the dissident ring leaders. Mr. Naidu said in New Delhi and the BJP State unit president, Vinay Katiyar, was reported to have said in Lucknow, that the MLAs had crossed the 'Lakshman rekha' (the outer limit) and it was time for strong disciplinary action.

The other battle being waged jointly by all the parties in the State against the entry of the arms dealer, Suresh Nanda, in the Rajya Sabha elections has also taken a new twist. Election Commission sources here

confirmed that Mr. Nanda had informed the Commission that he had written a letter "under intimidation" stating that he was withdrawing from the contest and that the letter should be ignored. The letter of withdrawal would not be considered when scrutiny of nomination papers for the elections is taken up tomorrow. "In any case, the technical position is that withdrawal can take place only after scrutiny is completed," Commission sources said.

Mr. Nanda has made allegations of assault, fraud and forgery against some political bigwigs, including those of the BJP, and he has demanded proper inquiry and action against the guilty. His charge is that every underhand method was used to prevent him from contesting the polls.

Mr. Nanda's entry into the contest has created quite a stir among all political parties, as they feared that he would be successful in luring away MLAs from their fold. Especially worried were the nominees of the four major parties in the State. The sense of relief they had felt on Saturday that he had withdrawn from the contest evaporated today.

Apart from the 'Nanda factor', another worry for the BJP is the open support of 12

BJP dissidents to their own nominee, Yashwant Singh, for the lone Council seat. If the ruling coalition were to lose this vote, it would confirm its loss of majority.

Some of the dissidents have said that they were ready to talk to the top two leaders — the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani. But here, the view was that such a meeting cannot take place unless the "ground work is done". In short, some compromise formula is agreed upon.

The fact that today, senior leaders were hinting at steps towards disqualification was an admission that the cancer of dissidence needed radical surgery. The party has hesitated to take this step as it would mean that the majority margin of the Mayawati Government would be reduced, making it more vulnerable to the Samajwadi Party's plan to bring it down.

And if the U.P. Government and the BJP were to "roll back" all the steps taken — suspension, registering of cases and arrest of two MLAs — to pave the way for a compromise, which is the demand of the dissidents, it would only confirm their allegation that the action was politically motivated.

Security beefed up in Godhra for 'yatra'

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, NOV. 10. Security has been beefed up in Godhra town, the scene of the February 27 train carnage in which 58 people, mostly Ram sevaks, were burnt alive triggering widespread riots in Gujarat, as the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, is all set to begin the ninth leg of his 'gaurav rath yatra' tomorrow.

Starting from the pilgrim town of Dakor in Anand district, Mr. Modi is scheduled to reach Godhra later in the evening and address a public meeting on the outskirts of the town.

The Godhra meeting has assumed additional importance in view of the visit of the Chief Election Commissioner, J.M.

Lyngdoh, and the two Election Commissioners, to the State tomorrow to oversee the security arrangements for the elections. The BJP general secretary, Arun Jaitley, talking to mediapersons here, said the gaurav yatra would continue even after the Godhra round and would try to cover the constituencies which had not been covered in the nine legs of the yatra so far.

PTI reports:

Mr. Modi is scheduled to address rallies at five places in Panchmahals district from atop his mechanised chariot fitted with a hydraulic system before reaching Godhra. The Panchmahals SP, Narsimha Komar, said two companies of paramilitary forces had been stationed in the district.

Police conduct searches in Golden Temple complex

AMRITSAR, NOV. 10. Police today entered the Golden Temple complex and searched guesthouses of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) for weapons, as arrest warrants were issued against the former SGPC chief, Bibi Jagir Kaur, and 74 Badal loyalists were arrested in Punjab ahead of Tuesday's election to the top Sikh religious body.

Amritsar came under a thick security cover in the wake of bitter rivalry for securing control of the SGPC, which manages Sikh shrines across the country. Police put up huge barricades around the shrine to prevent violence.

In Kapurthala, a local court issued an arrest warrant against Bibi Jagir Kaur, also a Shiromani Akali Dal MLA, in a power theft case. Preventive arrests continued in the State with 74 persons taken into custody for apprehension of breach of peace in Kapurthala, Muktsar and Faridkot, taking to 725 the number of those arrested in the past three days.

The Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, declared that the steps were necessary to ensure free and fair polls.

In New Delhi, official sources said the Centre was considering a request from the SAD chief and former Punjab Chief Minister, Prakash Singh Badal, to depute observers to monitor the polls. — PTI

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THE HINDU

Dissidence-hit Mayawati suspends MLA

HT Correspondents
Lucknow/New Delhi, Nov 7

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Mayawati has suspended a BSP MLA, Jai Prakash Yadav, after he asked Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri to summon a special session of the Assembly to test the strength of the ruling BSP-BJP coalition. The rebel lawmaker claimed the Government had registered false cases against him.

A BJP rebel, Ravindra Pundir, accompanied the BSP MLA to the Raj Bhawan. Another BJP rebel, Hamirpur MLA Badshah Singh, too sought an appointment with Shastri for Thursday, but did not turn up for the meeting. He was

JP YADAV (BSP)
First BSP rebel. The Gorakhpur district police have registered two cases against him

SACHURAJ PRATAP SINGH (Independent)
Arrested on November 3 by Mayawati's police for threatening

BJP MLA Puran Singh Bundela

AJIT SINGH (BJP)
On Nov 5, Lucknow police seized three vehicles belonging to him from a local hotel

RAJARAM PANDEY (SAMATA)
The police have registered a case of landgrabbing against him in Pratapgarh

supposed to have brought 10 dissident lawmakers with him.

A police team from Gorakhpur reached Lucknow today to arrest Yadav, but the MLA had

by then gone underground.

Mayawati denied the cases against Yadav were motivated, and accused the suspended BSP lawmaker of trying to give "poli-

tical colour to his criminal acts". Mayawati denied that resentment was brewing in her party after the administration acted against Yadav at her behest. Mayawati also met Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani in New Delhi — their second meeting in the past fortnight.

She denied that the meeting had anything to do with the crisis in Uttar Pradesh, saying she had come to New Delhi to submit her party's expenditure reports to the Election Commission.

Lalji Tandon, the BJP legislature party leader in Uttar Pradesh, who has been the target of party rebels, offered to step down if the rebels dropped their other demands.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

RENTAL

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MAYAWATI SHOULD PROVE MAJORITY

THE DECISION BY the 12-member group from within the BJP legislature party in Uttar Pradesh to withdraw support to the Mayawati dispensation (in addition to the eight Independents) has called into question the claims to majority support for the BSP-BJP coalition Government in the State Assembly. The imperative for the Uttar Pradesh Governor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, hence is to convene a session of the Assembly and ask the Chief Minister, Mayawati, to prove her majority on the floor of the House. The Constitution is indeed clear on this — that the floor of the legislature is the appropriate place for counting of heads — and the task of ensuring that the Constitutional provisions are put to effect rests with the Governor. The simple fact that the BJP rebels, constituting themselves into a group, are now out in the public with their position — to withdraw support to the Government in which their own party is a partner — has rendered Mr. Shastri's explanation that they did not convey any such thing before him untenable. Add to this the further twist to the developments with the Samajwadi Party staking claim to form an alternative Government in the State.

True, the Samajwadi Party's claim of enjoying the support of as many as 204 MLAs sounds incredible on the face of it. The 24-member Congress Legislature Party, after all, is yet to declare its support to Mulayam Singh Yadav as Chief Minister. It is also a fact that the Samajwadi Party's claims that it has the support of at least 34 MLAs from the BJP will fail to convince anyone unless their names are listed and they declare support to an alternative under Mr. Yadav. But then, these are issues that could be settled on the floor of the Assembly. The Governor cannot gloss over the categorical ruling by the Supreme Court in the Bommai case that the majority support to a Government shall not be tested from the precincts of the Raj Bhavan. Hence, even if it is true that the BJP rebels had not conveyed their lack of confidence in the State Government when they met the Governor (as Mr. Shastri is making it out to be) and there is very little basis to conclude

that the Samajwadi Party (along with its allies) has managed the numbers, Mr. Shastri is bound to convene a session of the Assembly within the next couple of weeks. Any further prevarication will be seen as defiance of the Constitution. Mr. Shastri has only got to adopt the procedure followed by P.C. Alexander who, as Governor of Maharashtra, asked the Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, to prove majority support to his Government immediately after a handful of MLAs belonging to the ruling Democratic Front informed the Governor of their lack of confidence in the Government. Mr. Alexander had only done his duty then. Mr. Shastri too cannot abdicate this responsibility.

Be that as it may, the developments in Uttar Pradesh, as they have unfolded in the past couple of weeks, cannot be seen as reflecting the dynamics of democracy. The dissidence within the ruling combine, for instance, was not driven by any ideological issues. The rebel camp, after all, consists of those MLAs who could not make it as Ministers in the Mayawati Cabinet. The fact that the rebels are led by such men as Ganga Bhakt Singh, whose association with the BJP goes back to the Jan Sangh days, is indeed a pointer to the cracking up of the party system in Uttar Pradesh, which is a consequence of the ease with which the BJP has been striking opportunistic alliances including the post-poll arrangement with the BSP that has now come under strain. The fact is that the arrangement with the BSP was guided by nothing but the desire among prominent sections in the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit to remain Ministers. Given this, the revolt was only to be expected. There are lessons from this for the Samajwadi Party too. The party's interest as well as the democratic cause will be served better if only Mr. Yadav and his aides resist the temptation of beating the BSP-BJP combine at its game by equally opportunistic means and instead emulate the recent experience in Jammu and Kashmir where the Congress and the PDP could establish that principles and programmes need not at all be jettisoned even while forging a post-poll arrangement.

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THE HINDU

BJP rebels rock Mayawati boat

HT Correspondent
Lucknow, October 31

TWELVE BJP MLAs met Uttar Pradesh Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri this evening to ask for a House session to test the strength of the ruling coalition. They later told reporters they had "withdrawn support" to the Government. But Raj Bhawan said they had said nothing of the sort to the Governor.

Samajwadi Party boss Mulayam Singh Yadav, meanwhile, arrived here with plans to parade his 143 MLAs before the Governor tomorrow. Senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee also arrived in Lucknow.

Going by the rebel BJP MLAs' version, the BSP-



Mayawati
On shaky ground

BJP Government would appear to have lost majority. Seven Independents led by Raghuraj Pratap Singh alias Raja Bhaiyya had pulled out earlier.

Adding today's 12 to this tally, Chief Minister Mayawati would be left with only 198 MLAs in the 403-member Assembly.

In a faxed communiqué, Raj Bhawan said, "the legislators asked for the summoning of the Legislative Assembly so that... certain issues ... (could be discussed), including reaffirmation of faith in the Government".

It further stated, "The delegation did not say anything about either withdrawal of support... or the Government losing majority... But (the MLAs) expressed dissatisfaction over the working of the Government."

The caution exercised by the BJP rebels is obviously for fear of attracting

the provisions of the anti-defection law. The memorandum, believed to have been drafted in consultation with top Delhi lawyers, is in a language that makes it very difficult for Speaker Kesri Nath Tripathi to disqualify the MLAs from the Assembly. The rebels apparently believe that once the House is convened, enough disgruntled MLAs would rally behind them to help them bypass the anti-defection law.

The BJP today suspended its third MLA in the State. Kovid Kumar Singh — one of the 12 who went to the Governor — met the fate of MLA Ganga Bhakt Singh and MLC Ramasheesh Rai as a nervous BJP tried to keep its flock together.

12 BJP rebels pull the plug on Mayawati

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lucknow\New Delhi: The Mayawati-led coalition government in Uttar Pradesh is in distress. A week after six independent MLAs withdrew support to the government, 12 rebel BJP MLAs met governor Vishnukant Shastri on Thursday and told him that they had lost all faith in the government. They urged him to convene the assembly for a trial of strength.

With the government's strength whittled down to 99 in the 403-member House, Mayawati clearly has her back to the wall. But the loss of confidence needs to be proved in a count on the floor of the House. The problem is that the Congress must remain part of the combined opposition during the trial of strength. Therein lies the hitch.

The 12 dissidents, along with Raghuraj Pratap Singh and other independents, who met the governor on Thursday, deliberately avoided saying that they were withdrawing

support to the government, in order to escape the provisions of the anti-defection law. The MLAs said that they would like to form an alternative government and did not want a mid-term poll in the state.

Regardless of the fire-fighting skills of the BJP bigwigs, the poaching capabilities of the Samajwadi Party topshots or the determination of the rebels to stick to their guns, one thing is clear—pushing the government out of power and ensuring the installation of a new one in its place are two different things.

In the face of the prevailing political reality, Mulayam Singh Yadav's SP, which has taken the lead in the toppling game, will require the support of another 34 MLAs if it wants to form an alternative government. The Congress, which has a strength of 25, has thus far completely dissociated itself from the SP's campaign.

The Congress knows for sure that the powers-that-be in the BJP and BSP will get the House dissolved and go in for fresh elections in the state to reap the benefits of a renewed BJP-BSP tie-up. In such a situation, both the SP and the Congress would suffer badly.

Secondly, Sonia Gandhi, who has personally hit the road at the district level, needs at least one more year to revive the fortunes of her party in a state which was its citadel some time ago. She has been getting a huge response wherever she travels in UP. Any open or covert pact with the SP at this juncture would put a halt to the process of exodus from the BJP.

Congress leaders have neither forgotten nor forgiven the SP for its statements against Ms Gandhi during crunch time three years ago. However, there is a lurking fear that any attack on Mr Yadav when the latter is busy toppling the BJP-BSP applecart in UP may alienate Muslims further.

Drama will unfold today: Amar Singh

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lucknow: Stating that what took place on Thursday was merely the trailer of a forthcoming drama in Uttar Pradesh, national general secretary of the Samajwadi Party Amar Singh said that the SP MLAs, along with other allies, would meet governor Vishnukant Shastri at 12 noon on Friday and demand the dismissal of the Mayawati government, which had been reduced to a minority. He added that the governor would be asked to call on the SP to form the government.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 NOV 2002

Rajnath bid to bring round dissidents

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, OCT. 29. The Bharatiya Janata Party general secretary, Rajnath Singh, today started new efforts to resolve the crisis caused by dissidence in the legislature wing of his party in Uttar Pradesh by holding long discussions with the dissatisfied legislators. He persuaded them to agree to put their grievances before the central BJP leadership and patch up their differences in the overall party interest.

The dissidents appeared hesitant in accepting his advice. They put forth two conditions for talks. First, the suspension of two of their colleagues should be revoked. They also demanded an end to the "vindictive action" being taken against the disfavoured group of MLAs — belonging to the BJP as well as independents — by police raids on their houses and 'false cases' against them.

Talking to newsmen after his meeting with the dissidents at the residence of the suspended BJP MLA, Ganga Bhakt Singh, Rajnath Singh said he had requested the legislators to find a solution within the party. He had been assured that the legislators would consider his proposal.

Ganga Bhakt Singh said that Rajnath Singh was a respected leader and that they would communicate their reaction later.

On the demand for withdrawal of the suspension of the two rebels, Rajnath Singh said it was not within his brief. But he



The BJP rebel and suspended legislator, Ganga Bhakt Singh, (left) with the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Rajnath Singh, in Lucknow on Tuesday.

— Photo: Subir Roy

could discuss the issue with other leaders of the party.

In a related development, the Samajwadi Party's principal general secretary, Shivpal Singh Yadav, accused the Chief Minister, Mayawati, and the leader of the BJP legislature party, Lalji Tandon, of alluring his party MLAs to support the coalition government.

Amar Singh meets Arjun Singh

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 29. The Samajwadi Party made yet another attempt to convince the Congress to support the party in its task of forming an alternative set-up in Uttar Pradesh.

Following the meeting the SP

chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, had with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, on Sunday, the SP general secretary, Amar Singh, today called on the senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh.

Briefing correspondents later, Amar Singh said he had placed his party's assessment of the political turmoil in the State. His party had no role in the revolt by a section of the BJP and independent MLAs and said the dissidence was more on account of the contradictions in the ruling coalition.

Amar Singh denied that Ms. Gandhi had suggested that the SP should convince the Congress on the number of MLAs supporting the "toppling move". Arjun Singh said the Congress had not yet held discussions on the U.P. situation.

BJP plays down SC verdict on Gujarat

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 28. — The BJP today played down the Supreme Court opinion that a gap of six months between two sessions of an Assembly didn't apply to a dissolved House. But the party claimed its stand on an early poll and its rejection of President's rule in Gujarat were vindicated.

The Congress, meanwhile, said the court order signaled "the failure of Mr Modi's card number one" to force an early election on the sensitive atmosphere in the state.

The BJP had argued that there should not be a gap of more than six months between two sessions irrespective of whether it was two sessions of the same Assembly or contiguous Assemblies. Based on this assumption, the party had said polls in Gujarat must be held within six months of the Assembly's dissolution.

The party today focussed on the Supreme Court's opinion that sought to make the Election Commission aware of its

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Constitutional responsibility to hold early polls and its observation that the law and order situation should not be used as a ground to delay polls.

The BJP general secretary and spokesman, Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, said the court's observations justified the BJP's demand for an early poll in Gujarat. The party had stressed more than once that law and order was a state subject and hence the EC could not use it as a ground to postpone elections there, he said.

He said that non-completion of the electoral rolls and not the "circumstances" were responsible for the delay in elections. Asked if minorities would be able to cast their votes freely, he said: "The Gujarat government and EC are committed to holding free and fair elections wherein all citizens would be able to exercise their democratic rights."

Mr Naqvi welcomed the EC's announcement of poll dates in the state and said the BJP would win the elections. When

asked if the party favoured allowing foreign diplomats to monitor the state elections as was done in J&K, he said: "We don't find any similarity between the two states."

Briefing reporters, the Congress MP, Mr Kapil Sibal, who appeared for the Congress in the Supreme Court, said: "With today's judgment, the card number one of Mr Modi to force the election in the middle of violence has failed. His second card was Mr Pravin Togadia and that, too, has failed. And with the BJP's defeat in the Gujarat polls, Mr Modi's card number three will also fail."

He said the "conclusions of all three sets of judgments by the five-judge Bench have been unanimous that Article 174 is not applicable to a dissolved Assembly and its application is limited to only a live Assembly."

He said this has been the consistent stand of the Congress and described the judgment as "vindication of the party's position". In this context, he said, even the EC has submitted that Article 174 could be applicable in the case of a "live and dissolved House".

Atal faces hard choice over Brajesh

SEEMAGUHA 28/10

New Delhi, Oct. 27: If his critics have their way, Brajesh Mishra may soon have to choose which of the two hats he would like to wear — that of principal secretary to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee or of the national security adviser.

It will also depend on whether Vajpayee's position in the BJP and the Sangh parivar strengthens or weakens over time.

The Prime Minister is aware that he is the target of the Sangh and that once he gives in on Mishra, it will be baying for his scalp. But, if things get too hot, Vajpayee may be forced to ask Mishra to choose one of the two posts.

The demand is being made not by the VHP and other hardliners in the Sangh alone. Many of Vajpayee's senior Cabinet colleagues, including deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, defence minister George Fernandes and finance minister Jaswant Singh, have been arguing that with the heightened security threat from across the border, the country requires a full-time national security adviser.

This argument more than any other weighs on the Prime Minister's mind, though he knows this is also meant to corner him.

After last December's attack on Parliament, followed by three other similar incidents, Vajpayee realises that internal and external security is on top of the nation's agenda.

Terror strikes anywhere in the country will be used by the Sangh to criticise the government.

Sources close to Vajpayee, however, wonder why he is being targeted when internal security is Advani's responsibility. But the home minister has rarely faced the parivar's wrath.

Government sources said the Prime Minister is in no mood to make changes immediately and be seen as giving in to pressure. At the same time, he is unlikely to go against the parivar completely.

If, however, in the power tussle in the party and the parivar, the Prime Minister's position strengthens over the next few weeks, he will certainly not sacrifice his most trusted official.

As Vajpayee's closest aide, Mishra has been under attack in the past. First, J.K. Jain of the Jain television channel led a sustained campaign against Mishra, hurling accusations of corruption. Later, during Tehelka, anti-Vajpayee sections within the RSS and the VHP went after the principal secretary.

This time, however, the voices of Mishra's enemies in the parivar have found strength in security concerns being expressed by senior ministers with whom the principal secretary's relations are not exactly cordial.

If Vajpayee can, he will delay a decision. But, as of now, he appears to feel he cannot afford to antagonise the Sangh and his ministers.

7 MLAs WITHDRAW SUPPORT

Independents

RP-1
BSR hit back

at Mayawati

Statesman News Service

LUCKNOW, Oct. 25. — Seven Independent MLAs tonight withdrew support to the Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh.

But two more MLAs "are with us", Mr Raghuraj Pratap Singh alias Raja Bhaiya, leader of the Independents, said.

Late tonight, eight Independents submitted a letter to Governor Mr Vishnukant Shastri, formally informing him of their decision. The eighth MLA, Mr Kaushal Kishore, rebel CPI leader now heading the Nationalist Communist Party, is not among the original Independents who supported Miss Mayawati.

The legislators told the Governor that Miss Mayawati should convene the Assembly and prove her majority on the floor of the House. The MLAs decided "unanimously" on the move because the Mayawati government had been "very unfair" to them, Mr RP Singh said. When the BJP needed "our support it had no problems with us, but now we're being treated shabbily".

Some dissident BJP MLAs too attended the meeting where the decision was taken, Mr RP Singh said. Among them were convener of "BJP Bachao Samiti" Mr Gangabhakt Singh, Mr Kovit Kumar Singh and Mr Badshah Singh. The dissident BJP legislators will hold a meeting on Sunday to chalk out their future programme.

Miss Mayawati still claims the support of 205 MLAs in the 403-member Assembly. But Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav will meet Mrs Sonia Gandhi tomorrow to elicit support to form a government if his party gets a chance to do so. Samajwadi Party general secretary Mr Amar Singh said CPI-M general secretary Mr HS Surjeet too might attend the meeting.

But Miss Mayawati and state BJP unit chief Mr Vinay Katiyar both said there was no danger to the government.

Earlier, Mr Katiyar cracked down on the BJP dissidents by suspending "BJP Bachao Samiti" spokesman Mr Ramashish Rai from the party for indiscipline and, police raided Independent MLA Mr Dhanajay Singh's house. Mr D Singh, who allegedly has criminal antecedents, was the disgruntled Independents' spokesman.

But Miss Mayawati said the raid was not politically motivated and police were just doing their job.

The dissident BJP lawmakers and the disgruntled Independents had been working in tandem after Miss Mayawati expanded her Cabinet on 14 October but didn't accommodate them. None of the 14 Independents supporting the government got a portfolio.

Mr Gangabhakt Singh said he wouldn't quit the party, instead he'd "fight immorality and corruption that has crept into the party... My campaign is not to get a ministerial berth."

GOVT VOWS FASTER SOLUTION TO AYODHYA

RSS to be good to Vajpayee

J.P.P.
BJP



Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

Oct. 24. — The Prime Minister today extracted a “good behaviour” commitment from RSS leaders but they demanded that the government “expedite the Ayodhya issue” and consult the Sangh Parivar “at all stages”.

The talks were held at an “informal” dinner meeting at Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee’s residence. Mr LK Advani and Mr M Venkaiah Naidu attended the meeting. RSS chief Mr KS Sudershan, general secretary Mr HV Sheshadri and joint general secretary Mr Madan Das Devi were present.

The meeting comes amid policy and personal criticisms of the government by Sangh Parivar affiliates, especially the VHP. The intention was to begin a consultative process to dispel the impression that the government was constantly at odds with the Sangh Parivar.

RSS leaders distanced themselves from the VHP’s criticism of Mr Brajesh Mishra, the Prime Minister’s principal secretary. They said the VHP needed a “face-saver” as it was an “or-

ganisation directly in touch with its key constituency”. The RSS is likely to ask Mr Ashok Singhal, VHP chief, to stop making personal attacks on the PMO.

RSS leaders reportedly appreciated the BJP’s concerns that in a coalition

RSS appreciated the BJP’s concern that in a coalition ‘the hardcore Sangh agenda could not be pursued vigorously’

government “the hardcore Sangh agenda could not be pursued vigorously”. But there are certain issues that could be taken up within the NDA’s ambit. One such issue, they said, was the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad’s demands, including the one against “steep hikes” in college fees.

The meeting resolved that there should be better coordination between the RSS and the government through the BJP. Mr Madan Das said RSS

leaders wanted to apprise the government that there was need for more interaction with people on various issues. “We are satisfied with the meeting,” he said.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, the BJP president said there was consensus among leaders that “people should respect each others’ point of view and avoid making personal criticism in public. In a democracy, disagreement between two persons is natural but there is a need to resolve it by sitting across the table”. The government should regularly interact with RSS-affiliated and “nationalist” organisations on various public issues, he said.

Mr Naidu said the talks were held in a conducive atmosphere. Matters of mutual and national interests including national security, cross-border terrorism, infiltration and other issues of public relevance were discussed. Similar meetings would be held in future “as and when necessary”.

A senior RSS leader said the Sangh Parivar appreciated the NDA’s priorities but the government should explain the same to Parivar affiliates.

THE STATESMAN

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THE STATESMAN

Uneasy truce in Sangh Parivar ✓

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, OCT. 24. An uneasy truce in the Sangh Parivar was the result of a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's residence here today in which the top RSS Sarsanghchalak, K.S. Sudershan, played the umpire.

After a two-and-a-half hour meeting over dinner and discussions on a wide range of subjects, including Ayodhya, disinvestment, Jammu and Kashmir and terrorism, it was "understood" that the direct personal attacks on the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, coming from some of the leaders of Sangh organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, would cease. At least for now. This is what the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, suggested to reporters after the meeting.

"It is understood," Mr. Naidu said in response to a question whether the personal attacks on the Prime Minister from Sangh organisations would stop. It was decided to have regular interactions with the Sangh, he added. Mr. Naidu made it clear that the BJP leaders "will be talking to all nationalist (read RSS affiliates which includes the VHP) organisations" to sort out their differences. This also indicated that the RSS wanted the BJP to talk "directly" to the VHP and may have refused to intervene.

The meeting's aim was to "understand each other's views" and, more important, from the BJP's viewpoint, call a halt to the almost daily statements of harsh criticism against the party leadership coming from the VHP leaders which were affecting the credibility of the ruling party.

There were three representatives from each side — Mr. Vajpayee, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and Mr. Naidu from the BJP, and Mr. Sudershan, joint general secretary of the RSS, H.V. Seshadiri, and RSS man in-charge of BJP affairs, Madan Das Devi, from the RSS.

A hint that all differences were not sorted out came from Madan Das Devi, who told reporters after the meeting that "there was need for a wider

dialogue (on a number of issues) after three years of the (Vajpayee) Government which has been working on its own agenda". The suggestion was that perhaps the Government needed to take a closer look at its own agenda and what it has achieved and what the people's perception (and that of the Sangh) was in relation to its performance. Mr. Naidu said that "no specific issues were discussed ... and the name of no specific organisation (the VHP, for example) came up during the discussions."

But he did add that issues related to "national security, cross-border terrorism, infiltration, and other national issues were discussed". Although the VHP may not have been mentioned by name, Mr. Naidu did make it clear that the BJP expected the VHP leaders to stop making personal attacks on the Prime Minister and members of his office.

The RSS has been saying that it must and will remain free to articulate its own point of view and the party can have no objection to that, Mr. Naidu said earlier before the meeting today. But what it wanted the RSS leaders to do is to rein in the VHP leaders and prevent them from making personal attacks on Mr. Vajpayee and others.

Another senior BJP leader said that when criticism came from the Sangh organisations it was seen by the public as criticism from within. "If our own friends are critical of us, then what can we say in our defence". That sums up the problem faced by the BJP. The party leadership has also become acutely aware that the kind of language used by the VHP leaders, such as Pravin Togadia, are doing more harm than good to the party and even the RSS. The RSS and the BJP leaders have been having regular interactions in the past and each time the decibel level of discordant noises between the various Sangh organisation rises such meetings are held in a bid to call a ceasefire. But in the past too the truce has been shortlived. Will the ceasefire last longer this time?

PM scheduled to meet RSS leaders

Sangh & health test for Atal

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 23: Health permitting, the Prime Minister will meet the RSS top brass at his residence tomorrow evening.

On the table are discussions on Ayodhya and how the government plans to meet the Sangh-VHP demand for a Ram temple, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's principal secretary and national security adviser Brajesh Mishra's role, divestment, the Jammu and Kashmir elections and the BJP's debacle, and mending Sangh-government relations.

BJP sources said defence minister and NDA convener George Fernandes is likely to join the leaders for dinner after the deliberations. Fernandes' presence is being read as "significant" because, if a decision is made on the suggestion to move a legislation on the Ayodhya land, he will be mandated to speak to the allies and "convince" them.

Sources close to the Prime Minister said doctors would review his medical condition in the morning and, depending on their advice, his schedule would be worked out. But Sangh sources said their leaders were given to understand that the much-awaited meeting would take place even if Vajpayee is advised rest. This is because the RSS leaders

ON THE AGENDA

- Sangh proposal for legislation to hand over Ayodhya land for building temple
- VHP demand for Vajpayee's principal secretary Brajesh Mishra's scalp
- Divestment of government equity in public sector units
- BJP's rout in the election in Jammu
- Repair of Sangh-government relations

are leaving on Friday morning for Indore and another date convenient to either side is unavailable in the near future.

The RSS will be represented by *sarsanghchalak* K.S. Sudarshan, joint general secretary in charge of the political wing Madan Das Devi and veteran leader H.V. Seshadri. Although the RSS wanted to include VHP leader Ashok Singhal, it is learnt that Vajpayee is not keen on meeting him after his recent diatribe against Mishra and the Prime Minister's Office.

From the BJP, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and party president M. Venkaiah Naidu will be present. Party sources said Naidu was instrumental in arranging the meeting after the recent souring of government-Sangh relations on divestment and Ayodhya.

RSS sources said their leaders would seek an explanation from the Prime Minister why nothing had been done on the Ram temple after an assurance was given to the VHP last March that a "solution" would be worked out in three months.

The sources said the RSS' principal objective in meeting Vajpayee was to tell him that while other "contentious" matters like divestment and "US intervention" in India-Pakistan relations did not make them lose sleep, Ayodhya could not be wished away.

"It has become virtually the sole reason for the RSS' existence because divestment and foreign policy are something which must be seen in a larger, global perspective and the Sangh cannot have a direct say at the end of the day," they added.

Apparently prompted by Singhal's claim at a news conference yesterday that the home ministry had nothing to do with Ayodhya's "law and order" last March after the VHP stepped up its agitation, minister of state for home I.D. Swami has stepped in to clarify the matter.

Responding to Singhal's allegation that instructions on security arrangements were issued directly by the PMO, Swami said on TV today that he and his ministry had handled Ayodhya and the PMO had nothing to do with it.

No. need for PMO: Singhal

By Neena Vyas

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NEW DELHI, OCT. 22. "There is no need for the Prime Minister's Office. What is the need for the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (Brajesh Mishra) when there is a Cabinet Secretary?" This was what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader, Ashok Singhal, said here today as he launched another concerted attack on the PMO, and blamed it for the "rift" and the "distance" that had been created between the Sangh Parivar and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

It was the PMO which gave harsh orders during the 'shila poojan' at Ayodhya in March, Mr. Singhal said. "The Prime Minister might not have been aware of what had been going on in his office for 15 days during March this year."

Mr. Singhal, however, gave the Deputy Prime Minister and Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, a good conduct chit, saying "he had no role to play, I don't want to say anything about him." Denying that the VHP had demanded or suggested anything to the Prime Minister on the Ayodhya issue, Mr. Singhal said that if Mr. Vajpayee wanted to improve relations with the VHP "he should do something" to resolve the Ayodhya issue. And by that, the VHP invariably means that

land should be handed over to the trust run by it and allow construction at the disputed site.

Mr. Singhal said he had enjoyed a very "sweet relationship (*madhur sambandh*)" with Mr. Vajpayee, but the PMO spoilt it. Should Mr. Mishra be removed? Mr. Singhal responded: "It is for the Prime Minister to take a decision." Another "issue" which had soured the relations between the Sangh Parivar and the BJP was trifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir. Even now, Mr. Vajpayee could mend the relations. "We will have to take forward the issue of creating three separate states and giving the Union Territory status to Ladakh."

Mr. Singhal demanded that the Congress apologise for "heaping all kinds of insults on us over several years." He blamed that party for the recent "violent demonstrations" against the VHP, in the wake of the foul language used by the VHP leader, Pravin Togadia, against the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. "If anything were to happen to Mr. Togadia, the results will not be good for the country," he warned adding that 'jehadis' were in the Congress and they could do anything. And if Mr. Togadia was harmed, "anything can happen." As for Mr. Vajpayee, all that his officials said was that the Prime Minister had taken note of Mr. Singhal's remarks.

BJP warns dissidents in U.P.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 22. The Bharatiya Janata Party central leadership today sent out a stern warning to dissidents in its Uttar Pradesh unit that strong disciplinary action would be taken against them, latest by tomorrow, if they fail to fall in line.

Indications point to exemplary action against a couple of MLAs, for they are considered politically soft targets. Given the arithmetic in the Assembly, action such as expulsion of MLAs

will not serve the party's purpose at a time when its major political rival, the Samajwadi Party, has openly talked of bringing down the BSP-BJP coalition in the State.

The BJP general secretary and spokesperson, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, said the State party president, Vinay Katiyar, and the 'prabhari', Kalraj Mishra, had already talked to a number of dissidents and that "most of them have given statements in writing that they were not participants in any dissident or an-

ti-party activity." However, Mr. Naqvi was unwilling to say how many MLAs or MLGs might still be defiant. "We have not yet been able to establish contact with all, and at this stage I cannot give you names," he said.

The party leadership had asked Mr. Katiyar and Mr. Mishra to send a report to the headquarters by tomorrow, and after this "strong disciplinary action" would be taken if there was "substantial proof" of anti-party activity against any person. The party had taken the U.P. af-

fair "very seriously," Mr. Naqvi said.

Party insiders here say that the MLAs are angry with the senior leader and Minister, Lalji Tandon, considered the closest to the Prime Minister of all the U.P. leaders.

There is just a hint, nothing more, that the U.P. revolt may be the symptom of the larger game being played out between the "big two" of the party in New Delhi, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister.

Attack Brajesh, target Atal

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Oct. 22: Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal today mounted a fresh assault on the Prime Minister's principal secretary and national security adviser, Brajesh Mishra, demanding he should be "punished" for "keeping Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the dark" last March when the VHP wanted to perform a *shila daan* at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

Singhal also urged the Prime Minister to quickly resolve the Ram temple controversy.

Although Singhal's news conference was convened primarily to voice the VHP's objections to the Congress agitation against Praveen Togadia for his contro-

versial remarks on Sonia Gandhi, he ended up training his guns on Mishra again.

The message was not lost on political circles, which felt Mishra was a surrogate and Singhal's actual target was Vajpayee. The VHP chief reinforced this perception by keeping deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani above reproach.

Singhal reminded Vajpayee not to forget the "forces" that brought the BJP to power and urged him to "consider ways and means of how to bridge the gap between him and us".

"I gave the Prime Minister six months to close this gap but because nothing has happened, I have spoken out today," he said. His quick-fix solution was to "punish" the person who was "responsible for creating

this distance". By "punishment" he meant Mishra's sacking. The Cabinet secretary is good enough. There is no need for a principal secretary in the PMO," he said.

"If there are no officers between us, there will be no gap. It is now for the Prime Minister to take a decision on him (Mishra)."

The VHP chief made it a point to give Advani a clean chit when it was pointed out that as home minister, he was directly responsible for law and order

in Ayodhya in March because Uttar Pradesh was then under Central rule.

Referring to the security arrangements after the VHP intensified its agitation, Singhal said: "It was because of the attitude of the PMO during those 15 days that Atalji's image was ruined. I didn't like the way this happened."

Asked who in the PMO was responsible, he said: "You know the person who's presiding over the office." But he did not name Mishra. A PMO spokesman refused to respond to Singhal's remarks, saying that the office was trying to ascertain what exactly he said.

Singhal recounted how during that fortnight Ayodhya residents could not cremate their dead and move from one area to

another without showing their identity cards. "These were the things that were hotly discussed. Over 20,000 security men were on the job and for what? All because one man from the PMO wanted them," he said.

Singhal insisted that Vajpayee was "bekhabar" (unaware) of what was happening. "I know his nature. He had no idea what instructions were given and who gave them."

The home minister, he said, was as "helpless" as the Prime Minister. "What did Advani have to do with all this? Nothing."

Singhal hinted that there was still scope for Vajpayee to repair his relations with the parivar when he said, if invited, he would attend the meeting between BJP and RSS leaders scheduled for October 24.

QUOTE

If there are no officers between us (the VHP and the PM), there will be no gap

ASHOK SINGHAL

BJP sets up peace meet with parivar

By Dilip Chaware
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The BJP has decided to buy peace with the sangh parivar in the wake of strident attacks by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on the Vajpayee government's handling of the issues of disinvestment and cross-border terrorism.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani set the tone for the patch-up when he reportedly told a closed-door meeting of top BJP leaders on Sunday that "it is not in our interest to air differences publicly. If our own people criticise us, we must review the working of the government over the past three years to introspect to find out if we lack something somewhere".

As a first step in the reconciliation process, over 1,000 MPs, MLAs and senior leaders of the party will meet in Nagpur, the RSS headquarters, next month. The ostensible purpose of the conclave will be to discuss party affairs but in reality, it will be a show of obeisance to the parivar. It is being organised by Mr Advani, who will deliver the concluding speech, party sources said.

The meet will also be addressed by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, who will be visiting Nagpur after almost two years. Mr Vajpayee's last visit to Nagpur, on the occa-

sion of a national executive meeting, was cold-shouldered by the RSS and none of its top leaders was present when Mr Vajpayee placed a floral tribute at the RSS headquarters.

BJP president Venkaiah Naidu later conceded that the issue of BJP-parivar relations was on everybody's mind. He said it was discussed in detail and it was felt that the time had come to "understand" each other, rather than one speaking out against the other.

"We do not want to give an opportunity to the Congress and the Left parties to pick on our so-called differences. Very soon, a meeting will be held between the BJP and the parivar's top leadership to sort out the issue," he said.

Party sources said Mr Advani was obviously worried over the growing rift between the Vajpayee government and the parivar and it was significant that he came down to Mumbai to address the party's top leadership.

In another sign of the BJP's peace overtures, Mr Advani reportedly avoided making any comment during his 40-minute speech against VHP leader Praveen Togadia, who has stirred a hornet's nest with his derogatory statements against Congress president Sonia Gandhi and other leaders of that party.

● Naidu disagrees with Togadia on Sonia remark, Page 3

Sangh Parivar above the law?

By Neena Vyas

J.P. P. VHP

NEW DELHI, OCT. 20. It seems that the laws of the land, or for that matter the norms of any civilised nation, do not apply to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or other RSS offspring. A string of dangerously provocative, communal and casteist statements have been issued by VHP leaders during the last two months.

Some pronouncements by the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, compete in vulgarity with those by the VHP leaders, and, yet, there is no word of condemnation from those at the helm of affairs. Neither the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, nor his deputy, L.K. Advani, have said a word, except that some anguish has been expressed by their associates over the direct attacks made by the VHP on Mr. Vajpayee and even Mr. Advani.

Is the life of a cow more important than that of the Dalits? When this question was put to the VHP leader, Giriraj Kishore, two days ago, his answer was: "according to our shastras, the life of a cow was very precious (*shastron ke hisab se gau ka jeevan bahut moolya hai*)". Given the question, the unambiguous implication was that the taking away of the life of a cow was far more significant than the lynching of five Dalits, as it happened in Jhajjar in Haryana a week ago.

There is a law in the country which forbids any casteist slur against the Dalits, and, yet, a senior leader of an organisation that is closely affiliated to the main ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, can be allowed to get away with such a criminally-provocative statement. It seems that the BJP has totally lost control and is unable, even if it were willing, to take exemplary

action to put a stop to this.

HP-11

On September 3, in Amritsar, and, more recently, here, another VHP leader, Ashok Singhal, threatened to repeat Gujarat throughout the country. He described what happened in the State after the Godhra carnage as a "successful experiment" in which "entire villages were cleansed of Islam". The meaning was clear: those professing Islam as their faith were killed or driven away, and Mr. Singhal approved. And, of course, he warned that this experiment would be "repeated all over India" if the "jehadi mentality" of some Muslims, who he held re-

NEWS ANALYSIS

sponsible for the Gujarat killings, was not checked.

The closest that the BJP came to condemning the VHP was when the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, in a statement on September 29, said that such utterances compromise India's fight against terrorism and gives the international community "a pretext to bracket us with forces of religious fundamentalism", which, he said, was "totally alien" to the party's Hindutva ideology. And it may be mentioned, that Mr. Naidu's remarks came not in response to the Singhal statement threatening a repetition of the Gujarat massacres, but after his critical comments on the Prime Minister.

The tragedy is that the self-styled votaries of Hinduism and protectors of Hindu 'shastras' are themselves thoroughly ignorant of Hindu ethics. Well-known historian, D.N. Jha, who has written a book, "Myth of the Holy Cow", based on references to the cow in various ancient religious texts, had this to say: "The life of a cow belonging to a Brah-

21/10

min was considered inviolable, but there is silence on the life of a cow belonging to the lower castes, especially shudras. In Atrismriti, an early medieval lawbook, killing of a cow was no doubt frowned upon, but was seen as a minor behavioural aberration. The punishment for this 'minor sin' was various forms of penance, not a death sentence (as was meted out to the Dalits in Haryana even if one were to go by the old scriptures)".

The kind of language used by another VHP stalwart, Praveen Togadia, against the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi — he had referred to her as an "Italian dog" (*Italy ni kutri*) — is criminally appalling. And Mr. Modi had referred to *hum panch hamare pachees* (literally, "we five, ours twenty-five") during his 'gaurav yatra' while making inciting comments against Muslims. Mr. Togadia may argue, as he is, that he was not referring to Ms. Gandhi, and the BJP spokesperson, Arun Jaitley, justified Mr. Modi's comments as "general references to family planning".

It is an atrocious comment on the affairs of this nation and an insult to its people that while the country pretends to be part of a global campaign against terrorism, those who are daily terrorising the minorities and the Dalits, those who are heaping insults on women (in the past VHP leaders justified the practice of 'sati') and those who depend on abuse rather than on cohesive arguments. In short, those who are terrorising our own people, are part of the ruling elite in this country. There is no doubt that the VHP (and other organisations such as the Bajrang Dal) are protected by being part of the Sangh Parivar. As some of their leaders are openly saying: "Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani owe their jobs to us".

BJP, RSS to talk out differences

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 20

ALARMED by the increasing criticism of the party by the Sangh Parivar, the BJP today said that senior party leaders will speak to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh leadership at the earliest to resolve what it called "perceptual differences".

BJP national president Venkaiah Naidu told reporters after a two-day party conclave in Mumbai: "The time has come to address the issue at the earliest. We will speak to the RSS to understand each other's problems without giving scope for ideological rivals to take advantage. These are perceptual differences."

Naidu's comments are in response to the VHP and Bajrang Dal's repeated criticism of the BJP and their demand that the Prime Minister take a tougher stance on issues relating to terrorism and national security. VHP leaders have also expressed doubts about the ability of the PM's key advi-

with such references made by Togadia as claimed in media reports. No one should use such language. The BJP feels that the Opposition should be treated as political rivals and not enemies."

Emphasising that there was a need for politicians to maintain certain standards, Naidu however also questioned the silence maintained by the Congress leadership on incidents such as the burning of the Prime Minister's effigies by Chhattisgarh Congress workers two weeks ago.

"Congress workers, in the presence of Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, placed garlands of chappals on the Prime Minister's effigies and burnt them. Why is the Congress silent on this? What culture is this," Naidu asked.

The two-day meeting of BJP national office-bearers which concluded today was called to finalise the strategy for the forthcoming assembly elections in nine states. Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani flew to Mumbai to address the meeting, which was attended by top party leaders including general secretaries and state presidents.



Deputy PM L.K. Advani and BJP chief Venkaiah Naidu in Mumbai. Express
Brajesh Mishra.

The two organisations have supported Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's statement calling for "Hindu suicide squads" even though the BJP has publicly expressed its disagreement on the matter.

The BJP today also joined the

Congress Working Committee members in condemning the reported remarks made by VHP's international general secretary Praveen Togadia, ridiculing Congress president Sonia Gandhi as an "Italian dog" at a rally in Bhubli last week.

Naidu said: "The BJP does not agree

Togadia said it, and he's proud of it



This is the speech that VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia made on Saturday at Lodia village—the epicentre of the earthquake in Gujarat's Bhuj district—in the presence of State Industry Minister Suresh Mehta and Animal Husbandry Minister Devanand Solanki. Excerpts from the speech, which was first reported by *The Indian Express*, as recorded on tape.

WHEN I came here, some friends told me that some organisations have requested that I should not say anything that will offend their feelings. Now they dictate to us what we should say. But my question is, don't you offend us?

At Bhimasar police station, a complaint has been lodged. An 18-year-old boy was taken to Radhanpur six months ago and made a Muslim. If you do this, doesn't this offend us? We don't offend anybody's feelings. But here our feelings have been hurt. Have you agitated against this?

When you attack our Akshard-

ham, does not this offend our feelings? When you burnt people alive at Godhra station, does this not offend our feelings? When you destroy our Somnath temple, does not this offend our feelings?

When the so-called Babri Masjid which was, in fact, a Hindu temple was destroyed, Muslims became unhappy. They (Muslims) clamoured that Hindus had destroyed the masjid which was a Hindu temple. Here, were your feelings not hurt? They were. When Babar destroyed our Ram temple 450 years ago, were we not hurt then? When you burnt people at Godhra station, we have to respect your feelings. When you cre-

ate bloodshed at Akshardham we have to respect your feelings, but should you not respect our feelings in such incidents?

THIS type of mindset has produced the offspring of Gazni in this country. We have always lived peacefully for ages. Do you find any clash between the Parsees and Hindus? Is there any conflict between Hindus and Jews? Is there any fight between Hindus and Buddhists? Do you find any clash between Hindus and Sikhs? Why then there is conflict with some Muslims?

When a survey conducted by the *India Today* magazine asked Muslims whether Mohammad Gazni, Aurangzeb and Jinnah, who was unfortunately from Gujarat, were among their heroes, one-third of the 12 crore Muslims gave an affirmative answer. How we can have a rapport with you when you have this mentality? They certainly cannot be our heroes. If you still think that your feelings are hurt, then you should go to Pakistan. If you have to live in this country you have to respect the feelings of Hindus. We have never hurt your feelings, you have. You are still doing it.

A well known Mumbai-based authority on Islam, Rafiq Zakaria, has written that only jihadis opposed Muslims. Of late, there is seen some protest against this mentality in some Muslims. Zakaria clearly says that Hindus are not at fault here as it is work of only jihadis

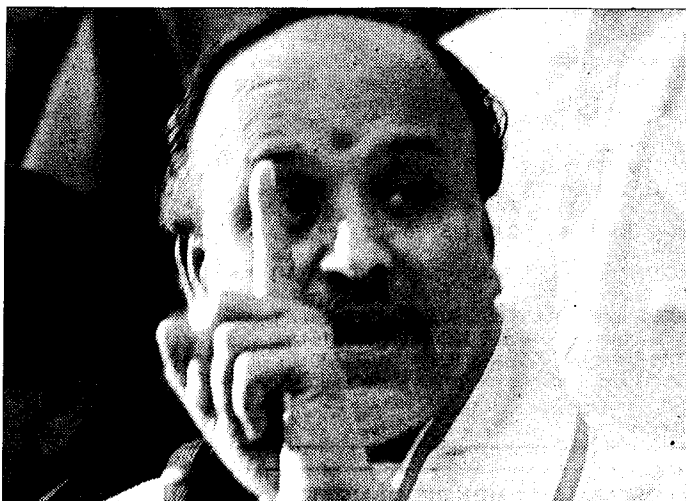
Muslims.

I will give you an example of a village near Viramgam where there was communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus who greet each other with 'Ram Ram' and 'Salaam Valekum' for ages. But then came a maulvi from Uttar Pradesh. One day, on a Friday, a Muslim did not greet Hindus.

When the Hindu villagers asked the Muslim villagers for the reason behind this sudden change in behaviour, they were told that the maulvi had told them not to wish Kafirs on Friday.

WHEN the Godhra incident took place, the so-called secularists of this

'Soniaben is imported from abroad. But Muslims of India are not imported, they are converted. I advise all Muslims to get tested, if their blood is proved to be that of Rama and Krishna, how can there be any dispute?'



RAVI BATRA

'There's been browbeating in Gujarat to delay elections so that Hindu votes get divided, so that supporters of Miya Musharraf could rule here. Therefore, never vote on the basis of caste. Vote on the basis of religion'

country did not condemn it the same day. Those who disrupted Parliament for a whole month on the Ram mandir issue didn't raise this issue in Parliament. Then, the communal violence began from February 28. First, the puppies of Gujarat made noises and started barking. When it was felt that this noise would not do, dogs from all over the country started coming here. Some came from Lucknow, some came from Kerala. Then we heard that a dog from Italy also made the rounds here.

THERE has been browbeating in Gujarat to delay the elections so that Hindu votes get divided, so that people of Lohana community vote for their community candidates, so that the Darbars, Patels and Brahmins do the same. So that the supporters of Miya Musharraf could rule here. Should we permit companions of

'You can't harm the Hindu religion by jihad because we have the tradition of wearing a garland of flowers. But our Hindu deity wears a garland of human heads, we wrongly adopted the tradition of wearing flowers'

Miya Musharraf to rule here?

Therefore, never vote on the basis of caste. Vote on the basis of religion. If you do not vote on the basis of religion, there cannot be unity among the people of Gujarat.

You think that Hindus could be suppressed with bomb explosions or violence? We are five crore Hindus in Gujarat. If 50,000 Hindus get killed in a terrorist attack, the five crore figure will not get

smaller. If you people who number 50,000 die, no one would be left here from you.

OUR Soniabehn is imported from abroad. But Muslims of India are not imported. Indian Muslims are converted Muslims. Therefore, Soniabehn is a foreigner to us but Muslims are not.

Since the forefathers of Muslims are Hindus, how can the blood of Arabia flow in their blood? I advise all Muslims to get themselves tested for their Hindu origin. I request Indian Muslims to get their genetics tested. The blood flowing in their blood vessels will be found to be not of Prophet Mohammed but of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. If it is proved that you have the blood of Rama and Krishna, then how can there be any dispute with you? It is you who are in conflict with us. If in the name of

Prophet Mohammed, you pray in a mosque, we have no objection. But if you talk of jihad, it is not acceptable to us.

Gujarat is not the right place for jihad. You cannot harm Hindu religion and culture by jihad because Hindus have the tradition of wearing a garland of flowers. But our Hindu deity wears a garland of human heads, we feel we wrongly adopted the tradition of wearing a garland of flowers.

Embattled Atal to meet RSS to stem dissent

New Delhi
10 OCTOBER

GROWING internal dissent against the government's economic policies has prompted Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to schedule a meeting with leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) later this month. The RSS is considered the ideological mentor of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The meeting, likely to be held at Vajpayee's 7, Race Course Road residence, will see senior BJP leaders like deputy prime minister L.K. Advani and party president M. Venkaiah Naidu interacting with the RSS top brass, a spokesman for the organisation said.

Leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), who have been openly critical of Vajpayee and officials of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), are also likely to attend, though this has yet to be confirmed. "It will be an informal meeting. Such meetings are held from time to time," RSS spokesman Ram Madhav told IANS. "There is nothing concrete on the agenda though contemporary issues are bound to come up."

Added a BJP leader, speaking on condition of anonymity: "The meeting is basically about the problems faced by the government due to the VHP's offensive, which is sending out wrong signals about the unity of the family."

The last such meeting took place in April, against the backdrop of sectarian bloodshed in Gujarat triggered by the killing of train passengers in Godhra February-end. At the time, Vajpayee had urged the RSS leadership to rein in the VHP, which was accused of fanning communal vio-

lence. In turn, the RSS had advised the BJP to undertake an organisational and administrative revamp to revive its sagging image to maintain its original Hindu nationalistic ideology.

This had resulted in sweeping cabinet changes in July and the elevation of Advani, considered a hardliner, to the number two slot in the government as deputy prime minister. Questioned about the continuing bickering between the BJP, VHP and other affiliates of the Hindu nationalist fraternity, known collectively as the Sangh Parivar, Madhav said: "We belong to the same family and the differences can be sorted out."

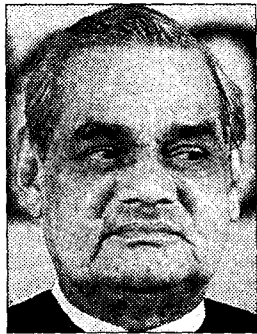
The front organisations apart, Vajpayee has also been facing unrelenting criticism from hardliners in the BJP.

The divestment of loss-making public sector units has pitted the Prime Minister against such key ministers as Murli Manohar Joshi, Ram Naik and Uma Bharti. RSS chief K.S. Sudershan has also been vocal in his opposition to the government's economic reforms and the inflow of foreign investment.

VHP leader Ashok Singhal has even accused Vajpayee of being soft on terrorism. Now, Singhal has charged that National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra, who is also Vajpayee's principal secretary, is running the country by proxy. This is a barb aimed at Vajpayee.

The growing internal dissent has added to the BJP's discomfiture, even as it is grappling with an all-time low in its popular appeal. This was evidenced in its poor performance in the Jammu and Kashmir elections, especially the Hindu-dominated Jammu region, as the party won only one out of the 87 seats in the state Assembly.

—IANS



VAJPAYEE: DAMAGE CONTROL

Family dispute

7.11.08
BJP
5.11.08
MIO
Contradictions surface in the parivar

The dispute smouldering between the BJP and the VHP, causing RSS chief K Sudershan to be drafted as peacemaker, is an indicator of faultlines emerging within the Hindutva "family". The NDA government and even Narendra Modi have handled the aftermath of the Akshardham temple attack relatively well; evidently that rankles with the VHP and its hate agenda. Modi has been at pains to link the attack with Pakistani agents in order to de-link it from the riots sponsored by his government, although intelligence officials have felt throughout that even if the attackers were Pakistanis they would have to be assisted by locals embittered by the violent anti-Muslim pogroms, the subsequent hate speeches and the lack of any serious attempt to provide aid and comfort to the victims. The intelligence people's view is corroborated by the arrest of six accomplices of the attackers, all Indians. The likelihood, therefore, is that Modi's action-reaction theory is now working in reverse, hinted at in prime minister Vajpayee's statement that the cycle of violence and counter-violence cannot be allowed to continue, and terrorism needs to be fought with peace and harmony. There is a depressing but all too familiar pattern also evident during the Mumbai riots, when the Mumbai stock exchange was blown up in response to the destruction wrought by Bal Thackeray's affiliates.

No party of governance, not even the BJP, can allow this sort of thing to continue even though it is incontrovertible that the BJP flirted with this approach post-Godhra in the hope of electoral gains. Ashok Singhal is angry now that the BJP did not welcome his bandh call and the deputy prime minister reportedly wanted him to call it off, when post-Godhra the bandh call had been the signal for riots. More riots now would be winding the clock back to 1947, and the VHP's insistence on proving the two-nation theory would give the hard men of the ISI reason to smile. If one creates within the country an embittered population, for whom there are no avenues of redress and no hope, endless possibilities for subversion are opened up — there are Akshardhams all over the country, and all potential terrorist targets cannot possibly be guarded. The thing to do is to hold the Ashok Singhals and Narendra Modis in leash. Modi looks set to capitalise on a post-Akshardham sympathy wave and there is no desperate electoral reason, either, to foment further riots. Now that cooler heads are beginning to prevail it is imperative that things stay that way, even in the face of possible further terror attacks.

BJP-VHP slanging match

57-1
1/10

RSS to play peacemaker

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 30. — The RSS will play peacemaker in what is turning out to be a bitter dispute between the government/BJP and the VHP. Mr LK Advani is likely to meet RSS chief Mr K Sudershan on Wednesday, BJP sources said. Mr Advani's brief is "to convince" the RSS leadership that the VHP's "intemperate remarks on Gujarat and terrorism are unacceptable".

The RSS had been approached by the BJP during the Ayodhya *shila puja* crisis, too, but had refused to play peacemaker that time. That it has agreed now is linked, sources said, to the "extreme unhappiness of the Prime Minister at being targeted unfairly by the VHP".

Also, VHP chief Mr Ashok Singhal reportedly "had a tiff" with Mr Advani over the bandh called after the Akshardham attack. Mr Advani reportedly wanted Mr Singhal to call off the bandh. Sources said a message to this effect was sent from the Deputy Prime Minister. But Mr Singhal reportedly "did not respond appropriately".

The VHP had said the government was ineffectual in tackling terrorism and had claimed that the Prime Minister had said terrorism was running out of impetus. This,

the VHP had said was indicative of the government's wrong softness on the issue.

The Prime Minister today felt the need to clarify his statement on terrorism: He said at the police chiefs' meeting here that he had not "meant" terrorism was becoming a spent force but that the weight and spread of international opinion against it indicated it had to contend with serious opposition.

Referring indirectly to hard-line criticism of his statement, Mr Vajpayee said, "My statement, terrorism is breathing its last breath, has been misunderstood... World opinion has turned against terrorism... In Afghanistan the world has seen what happens to terrorism. But before it actually dies from the world as a political instrument, it will commit more depredations. We have to be more vigilant against this menace."

BJP sources said the VHP's "aggressive" comments were "unfortunate since the government has handled the temple attack and its aftermath well". The VHP's recent criticism of the government, BJP leaders said, goes against the agreement reached sometime back — at a meeting between Mr Vajpayee, Mr Advani and RSS leaders — that Sangh constituents "will not attack each other".

BJP sources said it was at the behest of Mr Advani that Mr Venkaiah Naidu issued an "unusually strong" statement against Mr Singhal.

Massive turn-out at BSP-BJP rally in UP

By Arvind Singh Bisht
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lucknow: The mammoth BSP rally here on Saturday apparently seemed to mark a shift in the BSP-BJP relation in Uttar Pradesh. And tens of thousands of people that flocked here from remote areas only asserted the fact that the BSP has grown stronger under the leadership of BSP vice-president and chief minister Mayawati.

While the Samajwadi Party and the Congress were roundly criticised by BSP leaders, including BSP supremo Kanshi Ram, the BJP was lauded for showing respect to Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

What lent political significance was not the theme of the rally alone - to condemn the Samajwadi Party which termed the multi-crore Ambedkar Samarak as a "vice-den" - but the presence of prime minister L.K. Advani's. He shared the dais with Kanshi Ram for the first time and addressed the rally that is named as "Dhikkar" by the BSP.

Mr Advani's presence created a ripple in the home turf of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. While the BJP

chose to be defensive on the issue, the BSP took full advantage of the situation. And this was not without reason. Mr Advani not only lauded Ms Mayawati for good governance, but also gave a clean chit to her for the Ambedkar Samarak that costs dearly to the cash-starved exchequer.

Mr Advani was calculated in his remarks when he described the rally as an unprecedented one and said that the massive turnout had made it a part of the movement, particularly against those criticising the Samarak. Further in his well-punctuated and crisp speech, Mr Advani said India had its respect world over due to its democracy and added that the sole credit for this went to Dr Bhimrao Ambedka who gave us a rich constitution.

Mr Advani also said that the BSP-BJP alliance was not opportunistic but well-calculated to achieve the purpose of democracy, the path of which was shown by Ambedkar. Notably, Mr Advani was greeted with frequent clapping from the audience, who otherwise appeared to be unknown about him.

BJP moots steps against terror

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 26. — The BJP today suggested issuing multi-purpose identity cards and compiling a National Citizens Register for an effective check on terrorism. The suggestion was made at an emergency meeting of the party's central office-bearers and national executive.

BJP president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said these measures may not be fool-proof but would be "quite useful to check cross-border terrorism and infiltration effectively". The party will observe 1 October as Anti-Terrorist Day to create more awareness among people on this menace.

The meeting was attended by Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli

Manohar Joshi and former party president Mr Bangaru Laxman.

Mr Advani said the country's "enemies" were disappointed at the fact that the situation was normal even after the terrorist attack on the Swaminarayan Temple. "Our enemies are disappointed that nothing happened after this incident." He complimented the security forces for succeeding in their mission to eliminate the two terrorists and for minimising damage to life and any portion of the shrine.

Delegates stressed on the need for chalking out a long-term view to tackle cross-border terrorism and to take "all steps to focus on the evil design of Pakistan." It reviewed the situation in the wake of the bandh call given by VHP.

The executive which passed a resolution, observed that "the dastardly attack on the Swaminarayan Temple in Gujarat is a part of a larger conspiracy to weaken our country, disrupt our social fabric and bring our polity under strain by instigating social tensions. It is a calculated effort to deflect our nation's march towards development."

It said: "The attack was a manifestation of the frustration of the terrorists and their mentors after their designs to disrupt the democratic and the popular elections had been defeated by people of Jammu and Kashmir." Members emphasised the need to chalk out a strategy to wipe out such secessionist activities from the country.

27 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

Modi, VHP in identity clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ahmedabad, Sept. 26: Pakistani or Indian? Narendra Modi and his admirer-turned-critic VHP are contradicting each other in public on the nationality of the militants who stormed the Swaminarayan temple.

The Gujarat chief minister was at pains today to stress that the militants could be from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and were not "locals".

But he did not answer a question posed by VHP leader Praveen Togadia: How can you tell between Indians and Pakistanis?

"They are definitely not locals. They may be from PoK and from *dushman desh* (enemy country)," said Modi, who has been vehemently dismissing suggestions that the temple attack could have been a fallout

of the riots in March.

But VHP international secretary Togadia has said that the militants could well have been "locals". Contradicting Modi, Togadia said: "It is not possible to ascertain if someone is a Pakistani or an Indian if we go merely by how someone looks. Being from the same stock, we share similar physical qualities, including the colour of our skin."

Asked how he could be so certain about the militants' nationality, Modi said their modus operandi, the ammunition they carried and the kind of training they seemed to have undergone indicated that they were not from Gujarat.

He said the two identical letters recovered from the pockets of the slain militants were aimed at misleading investigations. Their identical shoes were

also meant to mislead investigators, the chief minister added.

The letters in Urdu had claimed that the strike was to avenge the communal riots. "These letters, aimed only to mislead investigations, have made some people happy to spread their theories. It is the same group of people who are spreading rumours that the militants were speaking Gujarati while entering the temple premises," Modi said.

The chief minister has announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh for information on the militants. He also promised compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the relatives of the security personnel who died in the commando operation and Rs 50,000 each for the injured.

"We have to investigate who was the brain behind them and who are those who have provided logistics support to the mili-

tants as they were armed with ultra-modern weapons. They also appeared to be highly experienced, motivated and trained," he said.

Modi highlighted the government's "success" in handling today's bandh, which passed off in relative peace in sharp contrast to the mayhem that marked the strike that followed the Godhra carnage.

Modi said there was no communal backlash today "due to the changed stand of pseudo-secularists", whom he held responsible for the post-Godhra violence.

"Thanks to the pseudo-secularists, this time they have not used abusive language against a particular community like they used during Godhra. And, in the process, they helped me in maintaining peace in the state," he said.

26 SEP 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

BSP bails out BJP on Babri

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND AGENCIES

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati on Tuesday rejected the CBI's plea to issue a fresh notification for the constitution of a special court to try, among others, Union ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati for the conspiracy to demolish the Babri masjid.

Addressing a press conference after the BSP-BJP coalition government submitted its reply on the issue before the supreme court on Tuesday, the BSP leader said there was neither any justification nor necessity to issue a fresh notification.

On February 12, 2001, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad high court had quashed a notification issued by the state government in 1993 constituting a special court to try the case, citing a legal defect. However, it said

that the state government, if it so desired, could issue a fresh notification rectifying it. Later, the special CBI court trying the demolition case dropped proceedings against the three Union ministers and some others in the light of the order.

Quoting extensively from the Allahabad high court's judgment, Ms Mayawati said the non-issuance of a fresh notification did not mean that the accused could not be tried. The CBI was free to go ahead with the case in a competent court and her government had nothing to do with it, she said.

Special courts were constituted for the speedy disposal of cases but in this case a decision was awaited even after 10 years, she said. Therefore, at this stage her government did not deem it necessary to issue a fresh notification, she added.

The CM said she was against constituting a special court to try any important person as in her regime all were equal in the eyes of the law. "The ball is now in the CBI's court," she said, adding that the agency was also free to file its objections to the government's decision in the apex court.

She said the disputed structure was demolished by "antisocial elements" and added that the BJP alone was not responsible for the Ayodhya imbroglio—the Congress and the Samajwadi Party were equally responsible.

The Congress assailed the UP government's decision, saying politics had prevailed over law and justice. "It is most regrettable that a situation has arisen where a case does not even commence against deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and other leading members of the government," party spokesman A. Singhvi said.

Ms Mayawati's conscience

MS MAYAWATI'S decision to bail out L.K. Advani and others involved in the Babri masjid demolition case by refusing to rectify a legal lacuna demonstrates the utility of the BJP's politics of building coalitions. Since neither ideology nor moral scruples play any part in forming these alliances, the focus remains exclusively on staying in power. A cynical calculation of this nature evidently entails saving one another from the long arm of the law. It was natural for Ms Mayawati, therefore, to act in such a brazen fashion in ensuring that Mr Advani and 46 others, including two central ministers, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, can use a technical lapse to evade the consequences of their role during the Babri masjid demolition.

All that was required of Ms Mayawati's government was to issue a fresh notification for a continuation of the trial. But beholden, as she is, to the BJP in the matter of becoming chief minister, she obviously had no qualms of conscience in allowing the case against Mr Advani and others to die an unnatural death. In following the cynical norms of today's unscrupu-

lous band of politicians, Ms Mayawati has confirmed that nothing guides her except crass self-interest. She is obliged, of course, not only to the BJP for helping her to be the chief minister, but also to the old RSS hand, UP Governor Vishnukant Shastri. The latter refused to follow the customary parliamentary practice of calling upon the leader of the largest party to form a government. Instead, he waited till the BJP was able to strike a deal with Ms Mayawati.

The fruits of these endeavours by the saffron camp are now visible in the relief provided to Mr Advani and others in the matter of answering for their deeds on December 6, 1992. Theoretically, the CBI can still initiate steps to continue the case. Aware of the brazenness of her latest act, Ms Mayawati has hinted at this possibility. It will bring great credit to the CBI, of course, if it summons up the courage to proceed against the BJP stalwarts and foot-soldiers. However, although the CBI still has greater credibility than the police and investigative agencies of the states, it doesn't seem too likely that it will take up the cudgels in this case for the sake of justice.

19 SEP 2002

'Daughter of Italy' targeted
as Gaurav Yatra begins

Modi rolls with mud on Sonia

9/9
BASANT RAWAT

Phagvel, Sept. 8: After three false starts, Narendra Modi's Gaurav Yatra finally rolled — not to tom-tom the pride of Gujarat but to splash scorn on the "daughter of Italy".

Virtually kickstarting the BJP campaign for possible year-end elections at the biggest BJP rally in this Kshatriya stronghold of state Congress chief Shankersinh Vaghela, Modi lashed out at Congress president Sonia Gandhi for trying to capitalise on the Godhra carnage to capture power in the state.

"Sonia Gandhi is the daughter of Italy who does not even have knowledge of India's history. Congress is trying to reach Gandhinagar through Godhra, a dream which will never be realised," he told the rally.

He said Mahatma Gandhi had asked the "White people to quit India and "by installing Italy *ki beti*, the Congress people have insulted the Father of the Nation".

Modi asked Congressmen to discard their "Italian glasses" to "sift fact from fiction". "Congressmen will never understand what's Gujarat's *gaurav* as long

as they continue to wear Italian glasses."

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"The people of Gujarat will never forgive Sonia Gandhi for calling them Godse," the chief minister said, adding that the yatra was aimed at "erasing the stigma attached to the fair name of Gujarat by the Congress".

No Central minister attended Modi's yatra, but in the presence of a galaxy of state BJP leaders and some Gujarati actors, party national general secretary Rajnath Singh flagged off the chief minister's hi-tech rath, a modified vehicle painted saffron.

Referring to Vaghela's rally here on September 3, the chief minister declared that "the end of the Congress is the beginning of the BJP. A few days ago, the Congress terminated its yatra in this village, their end is our beginning". Modi chose to defer his yatra and gave his rival the right of way to avoid any confrontation with the Congress workers.

Today, he appealed to BJP workers not to be provoked by Congressmen as it could be a tactic to stop his rath. He thanked the Congress for giving "wide publicity to the Gaurav Yatra" by forcing him to postpone it thrice. (See Page 8)

Sonia being hypocritical on poll Ordinance: BJP

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 28 AUGUST

THE BJP on Wednesday, dragged the Congress down from the moral pedestal that it tried to claim over the electoral reforms Ordinance, by releasing the contents of an affidavit filed by Sonia Gandhi in the Supreme Court. In the affidavit, the Congress chief had opposed the Election Commission's (EC) directive on public disclosure of antecedents of candidates and assets possessed by them.

BJP spokesman Arun Jaitley, who described Ms Gandhi's latest stand on the ordinance as a "text book illustration of political hypocrisy," said the Congress was the only party that intervened before the Supreme Court to oppose the directive. Mr Jaitley, who released the contents of Congress' submission, that formed part of the May 2, 2002 judgement, said the party had opposed the EC directive more vehemently.

Mr Jaitley said Ms Gandhi's counsel had told the court that the Constituent Assembly had discussed and "negatived" the requirement of educational qualification and possession of assets to contest elections. The counsel also opposed the EC's attempt to tread into a terrain that essentially belongs to the law makers and Parliament. The Congress had also

told the apex court that "the citizen's right to know would not mean that citizens have a right to know the personal affairs of MPs and MLAs." Congress' latest commitment to eradicating criminalisation appears strange, since the party had opposed a draft legislation of the law ministry.

This had proposed disqualification of candidates, if involved in heinous crimes.

The Congress had also gone along with the other parties on the contents of the proposed legislation. "The contents of both the ordinance and the consensus were known to the Congress Party all these weeks and yet it has chosen to speak out only after the event. The statement of Ms Gandhi is a clear after-thought that is wholly inconsistent with the utterances of the party," Mr Jaitley said.



Jaitley

An unnerved Congress is now claiming that Ms Gandhi had penned a letter to the Prime Minister after the all-party meeting on the EC directive. But while the party has not made public the contents of this communication, what is in the public domain is its affidavit before the Supreme Court and the stand taken by the Congress representatives at the all party meeting. On both occasions, the party had opposed the Election Commission directive.

29 AUG 2002

BJP's Gujarat strategy worries PM

Stateman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 27. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's reprimand to the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, on the tiff with the Election Commission was yet another indication that he is not comfortable with the party's strategy on Gujarat, sources said.

A senior minister confirmed that the statement was the Prime Minister's own idea and not inspired by "his advisers".

This only proved that he would assert himself whenever needed, the minister added. Mr Vajpayee's failure to turn up in

Parliament to reply to a debate on Gujarat is also seen in the BJP as a sign of disapproval.

While the Prime Minister had given a long rope to Mr Modi in deference to the combined party strategy, he has not appreciated the aggressive posture adopted by the chief minister since then, sources said. He has been insistent that decorum and norms be maintained, they added.

The Prime Minister recently snubbed Mr Modi for trying to link the Chief Election Commission, Mr JM Lyngdoh being a Christian with the decision to defer polls in the state. This

provoked some other leaders too

to come out openly on the issue. The Prime Minister's discomfort on Gujarat was obvious on earlier occasions as well. He was in no mood to have an early election there and had ruled out a mid-term poll, a party leader pointed out. After the Goa national executive meeting, where an attempt by the liberals to replace Mr Modi was foiled by the hardliners, the party got divided into pro and anti-Modi camps.

On the issue of the Supreme Court reference on Gujarat, the Prime Minister was reportedly not keen but allowed it in view of a section of party leaders arguing that the Election Commis-

sion's order was worth an argument in the court, sources said. The liberals wanted the order to be accepted with grace, they said.

Nariman CPM's counsel

Mr Fali S Nariman, noted jurist and member of the Rajya Sabha, will be the counsel for the CPI-M in the Gujarat case before the Supreme Court, added a SNS report from New Delhi.

Two other lawyers representing the CPI-M are Mr Ashok Desai, former Attorney General, and Mr Somnath Chatterjee, a member of the Lok Sabha. The Supreme Court has fixed 29 August for the next hearing.

Kailash new BJP chief in MP
Following weeks of uncertainty marked with hectic lobbying and intense intra-party power struggle, the Madhya Pradesh BJP finally got its new president today. The former MP chief minister, Mr Kailash Joshi, a Rajya Sabha member, has been appointed the new state BJP chief. This was announced by Mr Venkaiah Naidu in Bangalore today. He will replace Mr Vikram Verma, the new sports minister.

Mr Verma's surprise induction into the Cabinet is understood to be a move to pave the way for Mr Joshi to take over the reins of the state BJP from him.

28 AUG 2002

BJP versus Institutions

SOMETIMES I wonder whether the BJP, then Jana Sangh, fought against the Emergency because it wanted to defend democratic institutions or because it was keen to be a part of Jayaprakash Narayan's movement to win legitimacy for itself. During its rule of four and a half years, there is very little evidence from which one can surmise that when it comes to institutions, the BJP does not think of party interests or cheap gimmicks, that it can rise above them to be on the side of the constitution.

The BJP-led government has created an odd situation. The government has referred to the Supreme Court the Election Commission's decision to defer the Gujarat polls. But more on that later. First let me tell you about the to-do over the proposed elevation of Kerala Chief Justice Sri Krishna. The chief justice and the four most senior judges constitute the collegium for the appointment of judges. The government comes into the picture only as a channel through which the recommendation is routed to the President of India. Though the government cannot stop the appointments, it can drag the matter on for quite some time if it wants to play mischief. This goes against the spirit of the constitution.

The collegium approved the appointment of Justice Sri Krishna more than eight months ago when Justice Bharucha was Chief Justice of India. First the government sat on the file for a few months. Then, it sent a message to the Supreme Court that there was no one on the bench from Rajasthan. The implication was that the judge should be taken from Rajasthan. What was the point of the message? Did it not amount to putting pressure on the



How many more sins, in the name of Gujarat?

■ KULDIP NAYAR

collegium? Meanwhile, another vacancy arose and the collegium sent the name of a judge from Rajasthan. Still no appointment has been made to the Supreme Court. The obvious inference is that the government wants to punish Justice Sri Krishna for having given the Mumbai riots report which indicted Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, an old ally of the BJP.

Coming to Gujarat, I do not know how many more sins the party is going to commit in the name of that state. It was an example of open partisanship when the BJP-led government in New Delhi did not impose Central rule after the breakdown of the law and order machinery in the state. Prime

institutional responsibility should have evoked more sensitivity in ruling party members but as one can infer from the reports by the Election Commission and NGOs, the work of rehabilitation is far from complete.

In the same way, for Modi's sake, the BJP has attacked an institution like the Election Commission, which is a product of the constitution. The BJP started running down the commission even before it could decide on the state's request to hold early elections. It is unfortunate that it was former Law Minister Arun Jaitley who fired the first shot. Jaitley, now the BJP spokesman, said that the commission should concentrate only on

The BJP-led government has also unnecessarily dragged the office of the president into the controversy over the Gujarat elections

Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee commented that there can be no place for such violence in a civilised society. Yet, the BJP shielded Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Again, the Vajpayee government gave an undertaking to look after the relief and rehabilitation of the riot victims. But the National Human Rights Commission has said the promise has remained only on paper. I could see in the Rajya Sabha where the commitment was made that the government was only doing so because it had been caught on the wrong foot. The con-

holding elections. He sounded like a schoolmaster telling his pupils to do their homework.

As if that was not bad enough, the BJP's top leaders like L.K. Advani violently attacked the EC after it said the climate was not conducive for the polls. According to Advani, the EC's job is to hold elections and not to stop them. Is this a reminder or a veiled threat? Coming as it does from India's Deputy Prime Minister, how will others connected with key institutions take it? Even Gujarat governor Sundar Singh Bhandari, who is

the custodian of the constitution in the state, has joined the chorus that the conditions are favourable for holding elections. The fact that he was once an RSS pracharak does not mean that he should compromise the position he holds at present in this way.

The manner in which the caretaker chief minister has announced the yatra, which was cancelled earlier in view of the critical communal situation in Gujarat, once again proves that the BJP wants to come back to power on a wave of hatred and bigotry. The party is trying to institutionalise the communalisation of the polity. And the nation must see that this does not happen — it is against the country's ethos. That the Election Commission has stood up to the pressure speaks volumes about the members and the institution they serve. Such examples sustain hope in the country's tottering system. How is the commission supposed to act when it feels that there is so much fear in the state that it is not possible to have a free and fair election? What could Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh say except that "politicians have the freedom to do what they want?"

The BJP-led government has also unnecessarily dragged the office of the president into the controversy over the Gujarat elections. After the cabinet's resolution, he was bound to seek the Supreme Court's opinion. But was it necessary to go over this exercise? All governments should keep in view the dignity of the country they rule. The BJP is setting a bad precedent. A democratic polity is dependent on the independence of important institutions. Once the government starts questioning their decisions, their authority gets eroded.

Silent at the top

Why is the BJP's top leadership indulging Modi?

IT isn't just that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi unleashed what can be mildly described as a particularly tasteless personal diatribe against Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh. It is also, and more, that the BJP's leading lights at the Centre have remained silent so far on the chief minister's public display of disrespect for a constitutional authority. With the honourable exception of Union Human Resources Development Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi. Though even Joshi has taken care to criticise Modi's comments without criticising Modi, couching the rebuke in a very large and very general lament about declining moral values, he must be credited with the only attempt from among the BJP top brass to distance itself from the base insults the Gujarat CM hurled at the CEC on Tuesday. Addressing a rally in a village in Baroda district, Modi repeatedly chanted the CEC's name in full in an unsubtle attempt to draw attention to his religion. Taken along with his insinuations about Lyngdoh's alleged affinity with Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, this latest round of Modispeak, it can safely be said, marks a new low in political discourse.

Given Modi's track record, does this still shock? It must. It is true that Modi presides over a constitutional breakdown in his own state. True also that he wears his contempt for democratic norms on his sleeve. Yet, it would be dangerous to dismiss the vitriolic campaign he has launched against the CEC ever since the EC's order ruled out early polls in his state, with I-told-you-so cynicism. For one, Modi only seems to get more brazen, more unscrupulous. More importantly, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is foolish to blame Modi's rants on Modi alone. His party stands silently behind his hate speech and his outbursts. It noisily rallies to his side when he plots a triumphalist revival of the shelved Gaurav Yatra in his ravaged state.

The BJP high command, and particularly Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, must be held answerable: what has changed on the ground in Gujarat within the last month or so that the yatra, called off at the last minute by the prime minister himself in July, is now given the green signal? The prime minister must answer how a BJP chief minister who shows scant respect to democratic institutions is seen as his party's new mascot.

24 AUG 2002

RULING COALITION KEEPS ITS FINGERS CROSSED FOR A FAVOURABLE VERDICT

BJP takes a gamble on Gujarat

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 19 AUGUST

HAVING referred the Gujarat dispute with the Election Commission to the Supreme Court, the BJP will be waiting with bated breath for the verdict. Though the party is confident that the EC's "grandiose" interpretation of Article 324 and its competence to recommend the use of Article 356 will not pass muster with the apex court, it is ready for the eventuality of the presidential reference getting a negative response.

The BJP is mindful of the fact that an endorsement by the Supreme Court will have the effect of legitimising the "biased" decision of the James M. Lyngdoh-led EC, and will leave it embarrassed. The party, however, took the extreme step of taking the matter to the court because it didn't want to let down its cadre who feel "terribly wronged" by the EC's decision.

This is not the first time that Mr Lyngdoh is finding his ruling questioned in a court of law. The Pun-

jab & Haryana High Court had recently come down heavily on the CEC for verbally directing Haryana chief minister O.P. Chautala to leave Bhiwani parliamentary constituency during the 1999 Lok Sabha polls. "The act of Mr Lyngdoh deserves codemnation and is to be deprecated. The EC is not supposed to act as a super authority. It has to function within the limits of law. No one in this country, however high, can be above the law," the court had observed.



KALAM

In Gujarat, it is the BJP's campaign plans that will unfold and will give a clue to the political dynamics in the state. It is a safe assumption that the BJP will use the EC's "negative" order to ram home the point that the cause of the party, and that of the Hindu community, are being ignored by the Commission. Already, the BJP has been saying that the EC has been adopting different yardsticks for assessing the problems confronting the three lakh "minority" Kashmiri Pandit refugees and around 10,000 people Muslims living in the camps in Ahmedabad.

Cong rallies behind EC

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 19 AUGUST

The Congress on Monday accused the BJP of pursuing its set agenda in Gujarat. It said the decision to refer the EC order to the President showed BJP's intolerant mindset.

Arguing that the controversy did not relate to legal or constitutional issue but regard and respect for a democratic institution and the propriety of making such a reference, the party maintained that the government move only illustrated its "frustration and nervousness" over the EC's rejection of its demand for early polls.

2002

BJP mulls legal challenge to EC order

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 17

THE UNION Cabinet will meet here tomorrow to discuss the Election Commission's decision on Gujarat amid indications that the Government is considering legal action against the panel.

Sources said Prime Minister AB Vajpayee called the Cabinet meeting after consultations with his deputy LK Advani and Law Minister Jana Krishnamurthi.

The Government "will explore all options including a reference to the Supreme Court", a senior official said. This was

borne out by BJP spokesman and former Law Minister Arun Jaitley when he was asked whether the Government might contest the EC order in court. Jaitley replied, "Any order passed by a constitutional authority can be challenged."

But legal experts said the commission's decision not to hold polls in Gujarat is perfectly valid under the Constitution.

Jaitley said the poll panel had disregarded the primacy of the constitutional mandate of Article 174, which says there should not be a gap of more than six months between two sessions of a State legislature.

HT-1 18/8
"It is an obligation of every constitutional authority to act in aid of the Constitution," he argued. "Regrettably, this has not happened (with the EC's decision on Gujarat)."

The commission had yesterday played off Article 324 against Article 174, arguing that the first provision makes the panel the sole authority to decide election dates in a State.

But Jaitley said, "Article 324 only deals with areas which are not occupied by legislations. Areas occupied by legislations or constitutional provisions cannot be overruled by an executive order of the commission."

Senior Supreme Court lawyer PP Rao, however, said the EC took the right decision, for Article 324 makes the panel duty-bound to hold free-and-fair elections. If the situation does not allow fair polls, Article 324 prevails over Article 174.

Former Additional Solicitor General CS Vaidyanathan echoed this, saying the EC was vested with powers independent of any external influences.

Noted lawyer KK Venugopal said the poll panel alone is competent under the Constitution to decide when an election can be held. The Supreme Court, too, has clarified this position.

BJP readies brief for poll battle in court

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Gandhinagar: The BJP is preparing to launch a legal battle if the Election Commission does not grant its request for early assembly elections in October.

The Gujarat government, it is learnt, is anticipating that the commission will declare elections only for early December. This is not acceptable to the BJP. The case to challenge a likely EC order are being prepared in the state capital in coordination with the BJP headquarters in New Delhi.

Elections are due in the state in February 2003. But chief minister Narendra Modi, while tendering his resignation on July 19, had requested for elections in September or October.

Government sources said the EC might turn down the plea for early elections because of the uneasy law and order situation. They added that such a decision may not stand scrutiny in the court because polls had been allowed in the volatile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

A number of retired judges—including T.U. Mehta, P.D. Desai, A.P. Ravani and B.J. Diwan—who met Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh during his recent visit to Ahmedabad had also advised him against postponing the polls

solely on the grounds of law and order. But there is also a feeling in government circles that the polls could also be postponed because of complaints about many people being struck off the electoral rolls.

In fact, political parties in the state have complained that the electoral rolls in many places have not been made available to them, despite an earlier directive that the lists would be provided by May 15.

"We need the rolls to carry out a random survey to find

out if there are major omissions, but so far, we have been able to obtain the rolls of only Bhavnagar and Vadodara," said state Congress vice-president Balubhai Patel.

Said a senior BJP functionary, upset by the CEC's conduct during his visit to Gujarat: "As things stand today, we have a feeling that Mr Lyngdoh may say the commission needs time to put the electoral rolls back in order."

Echoing the party's displeasure with the CEC, spokesman for the government and senior minister Purshottam Rupala said on Tuesday that the CEC's comments, particularly his description of state officials as jokers, "were not befitting the stature of a person holding such a high constitutional post".

But in New Delhi, the party toned down its aggressive posture, saying there was no question of lowering the panel's dignity and adding that it was the commission's obligation to conduct free and fair polls.

"There is no question of anybody lowering the dignity of the EC. It is part of its constitutional obligation to conduct free and fair elections. The party had only stated what should be the correct and appropriate time for polls," party spokesman Arun Jaitley said.

Gujarat plea for forces rejected

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad: The Centre has turned down a Gujarat government request for additional central forces.

The state had asked for forces following last month's withdrawal of all 32 companies of the CRPF that had been deployed in the wake of the communal riots. Eight companies of the Rapid Action Force present in the state now will be withdrawn after August 15.

Jaitley jibe at Lyngdoh

New Delhi, Aug. 11 (PTI): Taking exception to the chief election commissioner's focus on relief and rehabilitation in Gujarat, the BJP today said there are several relief commissioners to do that job and the Election Commission should concentrate on elections.

Terming that 98 per cent of the state was normal, BJP general secretary in charge of the state Arun Jaitley said: "In some areas relief and rehabilitation may still be required and it must be expeditiously done. The relief commissioners must do their job and the Election Commission its own."

"The EC should bear in mind the constitutional requirement of Article 174 which mandates that the next sitting of the state Assembly has to be called in early October.... The job of the EC is to conduct elections. I hope they are able to announce the dates at the earliest," he said.

On the reported adverse remarks of chief election commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh, Jaitley, who visited the state few days ago, said most victims have returned home and trade, business, political and educational institutions, and life had become normal.

"It would be a bad precedent to suggest that elections can be deferred. We have gone through elections during terrorism in Punjab, we have gone through elections and (are) still going through the elections in Kashmir under the shadow of jihadi guns," he said.

Jaitley also pointed out that "we have gone through elections with a minuscule voting percentage in Assam and yet elections restored normality in Punjab and Assam".

"In comparison, it would be too far fetched to suggest that elections cannot be held in Gujarat even though the state had been normal for the past several months," he added.

Advani refutes barbs

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today denied comments on the Election Commission's visit to Gujarat.

"I had not made any comment. I talked to some people and different versions have come in different papers," Advani said, referring to media reports quoting him as having questioned the visit by all three election commissioners to Gujarat.

BJP media cell joint convenor Sidharth Nath Singh also wrote to editors of three city dailies, describing the reports as a "classic case of fiction writing".

"In his 50-minute speech, Advani did not refer to Gujarat and the chief election commissioner. Amongst the various questions in the interaction that followed, a question was asked about some people who adopt double standards about elections in Gujarat and those in Kashmir," Singh said.

"While answering questions collectively, Advani merely made a one-sentence reference to the question by reminding the questioner that in Assam, governments have been formed after two to three per cent voting in some areas. There was no reference to the chief election commissioner or other such matters reported," he added.

Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said: "It is unfortunate that not less a person than the deputy Prime Minister has sought to attack the Election Commission."

Jaswant sole Atal loyalist on key board

Advani troops take over party

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Aug. 9: L.K. Advani's stranglehold over the BJP organisation looks almost complete with three important bodies being reconstituted and the new members named today.

All the three bodies — the parliamentary board and the central election and disciplinary committees — are packed with his nominees, an indication that A.B. Vajpayee's deputy will have his way on party policies and decisions. So far, the Prime Minister has been involved equally, if not more, in organisational nitty-gritty.

Four of the nine members on the parliamentary board — the BJP's second-highest decision-making body after the national executive — are Advani loyalists. Apart from BJP boss M. Venkaiah Naidu, the others are Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj. Advani is also on the board.

Pramod Mahajan, though believed to be close to Vajpayee, is looked upon as "indeterminate" as he can switch over with "imperceptible ease" if power equations so demand.

BJP observers see Mahajan's special mention of Advani's rath yatra — at last week's national council — as the most important factor that catapulted the party into its position of pre-eminence as a sign of "changing affiliations".

The only committed Vajpayee backer on the board is Jaswant Singh. Murlu Manohar Joshi, sources said, can also be relied on if push comes to shove.



LK Advani and AB Vajpayee at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Friday. (PTI)

The most significant omission is of Kushabhau Thakre, who has invariably figured on this board even after he ceased to be BJP president.

Thakre came to be identified with Vajpayee because he marginalised Advani loyalists like K.N. Govindacharya during his term and set up a direct communication channel with the PMO. He personally kept Vajpayee posted on the goings-on at 11 Ashoka Road.

The central election committee — which has the last word on regional alliances and ticket distribution — also has Sushma Swaraj and Sushil Modi, the Bihar leader close to Advani, on

it. In the five-member central disciplinary committee, three leaders are identified with Advani: Ram Kapse, Harish Chandra Srivastava (via Rajnath Singh) and Central minister Bandaru Dattatreya.

BJP sources said from now on, Advani would visit the party headquarters at least twice every week, and additionally on Saturdays, to interact with professionals from every field. Tomorrow, the BJP's intellectual and media cells have organised an interactive session with lawyers, doctors, journalists and teachers so that Advani can get feedback on public perceptions about the BJP. "It is a feedback mechanism to provide for greater flow of information from both sides," a media cell member said.

Other indications of Advani's growing clout are:

- His presence at every meeting called by Naidu, whether it is to finalise his office-bearers and the national executive members or deliberate on policy issues. These meetings are now held at Naidu's, not Vajpayee's, house
- He brokered the Gujarat truce with a sulking Reshubhai Patel yesterday. Vajpayee was out of the picture
- He addressed all BJP parliamentary party meets during the monsoon session. Vajpayee chaired them but kept mum, seen as a sign of a "gradual retreat" from BJP affairs
- He prevailed on Vajpayee to go on the front foot in the petrol pump scam and release the lists of Opposition beneficiaries
- His alleged insistence on replacing K. Jana Krishnamurthi with Naidu.

BJP Takes Fight Over Petrol Pump Allotment Scandal Into Oppn Camp

List of beneficiaries reads like a virtual who's who of Congress

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 8 AUGUST

CONTINUING with its efforts to contain the fallout of the pump scam, the BJP on Thursday released more "dirt" on the Congress, disclosing that Karnataka chief minister S.M. Krishna and many of his Cabinet colleagues benefited from the petroleum ministry's dealership largesse.

Apart from the Congressmen, the list brought out by the BJP for Karnataka also features family members of the former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda as well as the former chief minister S.R. Bommai. The Karnataka list of the Congressmen who, according to the list released by the BJP, got pumps allotted for themselves and their kin, reads like a virtual who's who of the party in the state. The list shows chief minister Mr Krishna's brother, S.M. Shankar running an IOC retail outlet at Maddur, while his



GOWDA: ON STICKY WICKET

colleague and minister for home affairs, Mr Mallikarjun Kharge has got two pumps operating in the name of his brother-in-law.

Giving Mr Kharge company are other members of Mr Krishna's ministerial team — Ms Motamma, minister for women welfare, Mr K.H. Ranganath, the minister of forest and Mr H.C. Srikantayya, the minister for revenue and minister of state Mr S.S. Mallikarjun. The 69-strong list is littered with MPs, ex-MPs, MLAs, both present and former,

members of zila parishad and even aides of AICC functionaries like Mr Oscar Fernandes.

However, it is former Union petroleum minister B. Shankaranand who takes the cake. The Congress leader and a Union minister in successive Congress governments at the Centre has as many as six pumps and gas agencies running in his own name, his sons and his grandson. Ms Anitha, wife of Mr Deve Gowda's son H.D. Kumara Swamy, got, the BJP charged, petrol bunk under the discretionary quota when the former PM was the chief minister of Karnataka. The party said the auction of the land was also rigged. In the list, the Deve Gowda clan is shown running another pump which was allotted to the sister-in-law of the former PM's son-Ramesh.

The BJP also released copy of the request Dr Manmohan Singh made for the allotment of a BPCL petrol pump.

CPM flays tit-for-tat strategy of ruling party

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 8 AUGUST

THE CPM on Thursday reacted angrily to what it called BJP's attempts to denigrate the party by releasing copies of the letters written by its MPs to petroleum minister Ram Naik, recommending the names of their nominees for the allotment of petrol pumps, LPG and kerosene agencies. The anger of the party was articulated by its leader in the Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee, who alleged that the government was resorting to "political chicanery". Incidentally, the day saw the party first denying that any of its MPs, or those belonging to its partners in the Left Front, had misused their authority. It, however, was forced to change tack after the BJP released copies of the letters written by Basudeb Acharia (CPM), Nagendra Nath Ojha and Ajay Chakraborty (CPI) to Mr Naik.

"If something has been done, let it be cancelled," asserted CPM parliamentary party leader Somnath Chatterjee, "the government must say whether Mr Acharia's letter was accepted by the petroleum ministry and a petrol pump allotted. If the government has any sense of honesty, it must come out with the truth." Even if any wrongdoing was committed, the CPM veteran remarked that it was for the party to contemplate action.

However, he fought shy of addressing the BJP's charge that those who wrote letters to the petroleum minister were guilty of trying to manipulate the allotments. Mr Chatterjee told ET on Thursday night: "If you send us to the Lok Sabha as the people's representative, we may send such letters. People are asking us for transfers, granting of pension and other issues relating to public interest," he argued.

The Economic Times

9 AUG 2002

Advani brokers Gujarat truce

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 8: Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi was summoned to Delhi this evening for an emergency meeting with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu.

A compromise formula for the Gujarat elections was thrashed out late in the night at the meeting, which also took stock of two other issues: the fallout of the Haren Pandya quit drama and the impact of the petrol-pump scam on the state.

According to the formula:

- The elections will be fought under the leadership of Modi
- Keshubhai Patel will be the chairman of the campaign committee. The post was given to the former chief minister, who was sulking, to persuade him to join electioneering.

Modi and Keshubhai will jointly launch the campaign when elections are announced. With Pandya quitting as minister and threatening to remain a thorn in Modi's flesh, the high command was desperate to rope in Keshubhai

- Gujarat BJP chief Rajendrasinh Rana will be in charge of allocating work to MPs during elections.

The contentious issue of ticket distribution, however, has yet to be resolved.

The focus now shifts back to the Election Commission, which landed this evening in Ahmedabad for a second recce of the state. A nine-member team toured the state last week, but its report has not been made public.

Chief election commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh and colleagues T.S. Krishnamurthi and B.V. Tandon are scheduled to visit riots-scarred areas and relief camps tomorrow. A visit to the Shah-e-Alam camp is on the cards at 10.30 am but the itinerary is being kept under wraps to shut out media glare. In the evening, the panel will meet political parties and NGOs.

Also present at this evening's meeting in Delhi were Central leader in charge of Gujarat Ramdas Aggarwal, general secretary Arun Jaitley, who is Modi's close friend, Rana and Keshubhai.

Gujarat BJP sources said Modi may have been advised to "tread cautiously" and not antagonise too many leaders in the poll run-up. The high command fears that the longer the poll panel takes to fix poll dates, the greater are the chances of a "revolt" against Modi.

THE TELEGRAPH

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BJP SETS AGENDA TO EXPAND BASE

PM asks Cabinet to be responsive

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 4. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today asked his Cabinet colleagues from the BJP to respond quickly to public representations and feedback from party functionaries on people's grievances. He also approved party president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu's proposal that ministers should visit the BJP central office for frequent interactions with office-bearers.

Mr Vajpayee had a luncheon meeting with the BJP office-bearers and his Cabinet colleagues at his house where Mr Naidu apprised him of the decisions taken at today's meeting at party headquarters. The BJP will emphasise a five-point agenda to expand its base. It intends to launch a major publicity campaign at all levels to motivate the party cadre, continue organisational revamp at the state level, focus on internal discipline, keep the party machinery fully prepared for the forthcoming elections and "change the mindset of the workers from that of opposition to ruling party".

The Prime Minister said the government was doing good work and the party should carry this message to the people.

Mr Naidu said the 'Delhi Pledge' taken at the national council meeting yesterday was "only the beginning of taking up similar exercises from zonal to block level". He further said: "The party will soon announce its new campaign — Go to the Villages."

From 27 August to 12 September, party zonal meetings will be held in Bangalore, Bhopal, Kolkata and Jaipur where the BJP president, five gener-

al secretaries and state and district-level functionaries will be present. Union ministers concerned will be invited for the meetings too.

Gujarat, where the party is expecting polls by the end of September, has been kept out of the purview of the zonal meetings. "The party is fully prepared for taking on the electoral battle and need not be part of this programme. The Gujarat unit has on its own chalked out its programme and could concentrate on that," Mr Naidu said.

Mr LK Advani, and Mr Naidu will meet party MPs in various batches at the party office in the evening for four days from 5 to 8 August. These meetings will be held to accomplish the five-point agenda. The contact programme at the grassroot level is expected to end by March.

Mr Naidu said the leadership is consulting state units and restructuring will soon be executed in some states. He, however, didn't reveal the names of the states. The party will strive to focus on internal discipline. If any leader crosses the *lakshmanrekha*, action will be taken against him.

Maintaining that the recent changes in the Vajpayee government and the BJP itself have generated a "feel good factor" in the party, Mr Advani today said the national council meeting yesterday stood out differently from such exercises in the past, adds PTI from Ahmedabad. Mr Advani said the party cadre had become "despondent and depressed ... after a string of defeats" in the recent Assembly polls. But "a handsome mandate in Goa... together with the shake-up in the organisation and the government... have gone to generate a feel good factor in the party," he said.

Five-point plan

- Expand regional and social base
- Gear up the organisation
- Convey the government message to the people and vice-versa
- Change mindset of workers from that of the Opposition to ruling party
- Create a new leadership wherever required

BJP is now party with differences

4/8
By Smita Gupta
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The BJP's day-long national council meeting at the Talkatora Stadium on Saturday did not really present the picture of a happy parivar, even though the Prime Minister himself looked like a man comfortably ensconced in his gaddi with speaker after speaker heaping praise on him.

But deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, who began confidently, moving the 'Delhi Pledge', which set out five tasks for the party and another five for the government, looked a little on edge later after a minister pointed out that something he said in his speech was being taken to mean that the 'Vajpayee phase' was over. Mr Advani was forced to offer a clarification later.

The PM, in his valedictory speech, focused on the need for a national consensus on the economy, chided smaller regional parties for becoming roadblocks in the development process and appealed to parties to learn to work together for the country. He also hinted at the possibility of some more ministers being drafted into the party.

Mr Advani first gave a historical overview of the BJP's growth, and then referred to the guiding spirits in the party's four phases—Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya from 1952 to 1968, Jayaprakash Narayan in the '70s, Mr Vajpayee from 1980 onwards, and now in the fourth phase "when the focus should not merely be on being a party with a difference but also a government with a difference".

When it was conveyed to Mr Advani that this was being interpreted by many party delegates as meaning that the fourth phase belonged to him, he promptly clarified from the stage that the Vajpayee-guided phase was still on.

But this was not the only discordant note on Saturday, for the dissonance among the BJP's second-rung leaders was only too obvious at the meeting which had been called essentially to endorse the elevation of one among them, M. Venkaiah Naidu, as president. It reflected precisely one of the admissions made in the 'Delhi Pledge'—that the BJP was paying a heavy price for "factionalism, internal bickering for positions/tickets

To each his own—To sleep: perchance to dream

Mohammed Ilyas



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with his deputy L.K. Advani at the BJP national council convention in New Delhi on Saturday

in elections, indiscipline" and the lack of consultation with party workers which had damaged it the eyes of the people.

There was disinvestment minister Arun Shourie taking an indirect swipe at petroleum minister Ram Naik, with whom he has had many differences on disinvestment, and the petrol pump scam by saying "idealism makes good politics" and emphasising that no misdemeanour could be justified simply because the Congress had also indulged in it.

Information minister Sushma Swaraj appeared to be addressing former UP chief minister Rajnath Singh and her other critics in the party when she said there were limits to which Doordarshan could be used for gov-

ernment propaganda.

And if Mr Naidu took a potshot at IT minister Pramod Mahajan, saying that while the well-to-do had mobile phones and access to the internet, the poor did not even have telephones, the latter listed the number of telephones installed and said that by December 25 this year, every village in the country would have at least one phone connection.

Mr Mahajan was also the only leader to pay tributes to Mr Advani, saying that while he had no quarrel with his listing of the party's guiding spirits, one name was missing—that was Mr Advani, the man whose 'rath yatra' had electrified the country and overnight broadened the party's base.

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3/17

BJP meeting discusses Vice-Presidential poll, drought

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 30. The coming Vice-Presidential poll and the spectre of drought in large parts of the country were the two issues discussed at the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary wing meeting this morning.

The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was in the chair — last week he was absent, leading to speculative reports about his health. Mr. Vajpayee did not speak, the party spokesperson, Sunil Shastri, told reporters.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, told the MPs that those who plan to go to their constituencies or elsewhere on the week-end before the poll on August 12 must try and return to the Capital a day earlier. The party expected "hundred per cent attendance on the polling day."

Although the BJP is more

than confident that its candidate, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, will win the contest comfortably, it does not want to take any chance, given the fact that the vote of some 40 plus MPs was invalidated during the Presidential poll earlier this month.

The party has, in fact, also given "lessons" to its MPs on how to cast their ballot correctly.

MPs of both Houses of Parliament form the electorate college for this election and after the vote of the combined Houses on the Prevention of Terrorism Act it was established that the NDA and its friends and supporters have a lead of about 100 votes.

But unlike in the case of a legislation, parties cannot issue a whip on the Vice-Presidential (or Presidential) poll, and theoretically cross-voting is very much a possibility. The combined Opposition candidate,

Sushil Kumar Shinde, is a dalit, and the Opposition parties are hoping to get some additional dalit votes from the ruling party benches.

At the meeting, several MPs talked about the need for steps by the Government to meet the drought like situation in many parts of the country.

They were told that a committee of Ministers had been set up under the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, to monitor the situation and take steps in case of an emergency.

Appeal to Mamata

Mr. Shastri said the party appealed to the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, to treat the railway zone bifurcation issue as a purely an administrative one.

Mr. Shastri pointed out that the move was first made during the United Front Government's tenure in 1996 — which was

backed by the Left Front — and at that time there was no major political controversy related to the move. No party had made it an issue.

On statements issued by the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, he said: "we (India) are the largest functioning democracy, no one can question the fairness of elections here. While anyone is free and welcome to come and watch the process of elections (in Kashmir), the country does not need certification of fairness of polls from any one."

"It would be better if those worried about democracy here take note of the subversion of democracy in Pakistan." The Government had clarified its position in Parliament, and the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, had issued a statement on Monday, the party need not add anything to that."

THE HINDU

31 JUL 2002

DOMICILE POLICY / HIGH COMMAND WILL WEIGH POLITICAL COSTS

HD-11
29/7

BJP sends team to Ranchi

By Our Staff Correspondent

RANCHI, JULY 28. The Bharatiya Janata Party has dispatched two observers to take stock of the situation here, even as the State Government has sought to clarify its stand to the Union Government on Jharkhand's new domicile policy, which is causing disturbance in the plateau region.

Worried over developments here, the party has deputed its vice-president in-charge of Jharkhand Affairs, Kailashpati Mishra, and Devdas Apte, MP, who had worked as a pracharak in the region earlier.

In fact, the BJP had sought to tackle the situation before it went out of control, but in vain. Large scale violence erupted here even as the party president, Venkaiah Naidu, summoned the Chief Minister, Babu Lal Marandi, to New Delhi last Wednesday. Five persons were killed even before the Chief Minister could return from Delhi with instructions that he hold an all-party meeting to discuss

the implementation of the new domicile policy under which settlers prior to 1932 alone were entitled to grade III and IV Government jobs.

The pre and post-1932 settlers have already enforced four bandhs in support of and against the policy, dividing the population on tribal and non-tribal basis. Five police station areas remained under prohibitory orders for over a couple of days. The ban orders have since been relaxed in three police station areas.

The BJP's discomfiture is compounded by the fact that Parliament is in session where the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, is supposed to make a statement on the issue during the week, and in that light the Union Home Ministry has called for a report from the State Government. The latter is said to have taken the stand, in its report to the Centre, that it had merely adopted the prevalent circular in unified Bihar, replacing the name of the State with the nomenclature, Jharkhand. It

remains to be seen if the Centre takes the statement at face value, particularly against the backdrop of the two former Chief Ministers, the RJD President, Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the NCP general secretary, Jagannath Mishra, crying foul and stressing that the circular, issued by the Labour Department about two decades ago, pertained to industrial units to ensure that the locals were given preference in grade III and IV.

The Samata Party and the JD (U), both partners in the coalition government here, are opposed to the new domicile policy. The Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar, has been demanding its revocation, lending strength to the Opposition stand.

The supporters of the new policy, including the Chief Minister, are of the view that the State had been created for the development of the Adivasis and that the primary objective of any policy had to be in their interest and for their development.

The BJP leadership would be weighing the pros and cons before taking any decision. But the Chief Minister does not seem to have benefited much from his actions if one goes by the defeat of the BJP in the by-election for the Dumka Lok Sabha seat, which the JMM President, Mr. Shibu Soren, wrested with greater ease than ever.

Priests extend support

UNI reports:

A delegation of Christian priests, here to attend the Archbishops' Conference, called on Mr. Marandi yesterday and expressed support to the new domicile policy.

The delegation, led by Archbishop Telsphore Toppo, said the policy was in the larger interests of the tribals and the non-tribals, native to Jharkhand.

Sources said that Mr. Marandi apprised the bishops of his Government's stand and told them that some vested interests were trying to engineer ethnic clashes.

Gujarat: PM, Advani beg to differ on polls

NEERJA CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, JULY 24

9h
THERE are signs of differences of opinion between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on the timing of polls in Gujarat. The PM is reportedly of the view that polls shouldn't be held in the riot-torn state till tempers have cooled down.

He has also been under tremendous pressure from allies to ensure that polls should be held later rather than earlier, particularly since the Assembly term expires only next year.

The TDP, Trinamool, Samata, JD(U) and the BSP made no secret of their views on the issue during a debate on Gujarat in Parliament on Tuesday. They say the exercise should be undertaken only after rehabilitation work is over.

The fact that the PM stayed away from the debate is not without significance. Sources say it may indicate his growing unhappiness with the situation.

Nor for that matter did Vajpayee chair the customary meeting of the BJP parliamentary party held every Tuesday.

Advani on the other hand favours early polls and strongly defended Modi's move to dissolve the House. Though he argued that polls would help settle the dust in Gujarat, the BJP



Venkaiah Naidu (R) after meeting the EC. Express

EC promises answer on poll date soon

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission on Wednesday told a BJP delegation led by party president M. Venkaiah Naidu that its demand for early elections in Gujarat would be discussed and a decision taken soon. Naidu said the delegation said the government had a right to recommend dissolution of the Assembly. The group submitted a memorandum stating the polls were a constitutional compulsion.

— ENS & Agencies

would like to derive political mileage from the communal polarisation that has taken place in the wake of Godhra.

Gujarat being Advani's state, the BJP's victory or defeat would naturally affect his own fortunes. The return of Modi, who Advani has staunchly defended, would also be a feather in his cap and further increase his clout in the

party and the government.

Observers say a section inside the BJP and Sangh Parivar wants to make Gujarat a test case before deciding whether to opt for mid-term polls next year, and not wait two years.

The reason is that incumbency would take its toll with time and the Congress would be the natural beneficiary. But the BJP's chances of coming back to power at the head of a coalition go up, if the Congress revives only marginally.

The Election Commission, however, has shown no hurry to come to a decision, and there have been reports that it was not very hot on the idea of holding polls in the state in October along with J-K. The EC is planning to send a team to Gujarat to study the situation before it comes to a decision.

The polls are one more example of the problems the BJP is going to face in the task it has set itself, of carrying the 'BJP jhanda' in one hand and the 'NDA agenda' in the other, as chief Venkaiah Naidu said.

Narendra Modi would have to resign if polls are not held by early October, that is within six months of holding of the last Assembly session which took place on April 6. This would lead to imposition of President's Rule, and ensure that polls, when they take place, are held under it.

Party calls meet to end crisis

BJP adopts middle path on domicile

FROM SALMAN RAVI

Ranchi, July 22: The national leadership of the BJP favours an all-party meeting to end the deadlock over the domicile policy, which has sparked off social unrest in Jharkhand over the past fortnight.

BJP sources today indicated that the leadership was planning to invite all political parties for talks to resolve the issue as it was not happy with the way Jharkhand chief minister Babulal Marandi was handling it. Pressure from partners of the National Democratic Alliance and the state leadership has put senior leaders in a Catch-22 situation.

The sources said on the one hand the BJP leadership does not want to annoy tribals and original inhabitants, while on the other it favours a similar policy for those whose forefathers' names do not figure in the 1932 land survey records — the cut-off year for determining domicile status.

Besides, the party wants to keep its NDA partners in good humour. The central leadership wants to pursue a "middle path" to keep everyone happy, the sources added, but is yet to find one in the absence of an official line. It has replaced the party's pointman for Jharkhand Devendra Pradhan with two heavyweights, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Rajnath Singh and senior leader Kailashpati Mishra.

The duo will now be responsible for working out the party stand after consultations with the Jharkhand state committee, the sources said.

There are four members representing Jharkhand in the national executive committee who have already expressed

their displeasure over the new domicile policy. But the party high command has asked them to maintain restraint till a final decision is taken.

These members — Ranchi parliamentarian Ramtahal Chaudhary, foreign minister

Yashwant Sinha, Union agriculture minister Karia Munda and Saryu Rai — are learnt to have apprised party chief M. Venkaiah Naidu about developments in the state.

Even state president and Rajya Sabha member Abhay Kant Prasad, who is in New Delhi, is learnt to have briefed Naidu. But the sources said Prasad merely repeated the chief minister's stand.

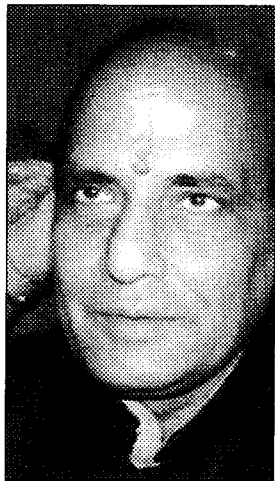
They said the pro-Marandi lobby is trying to convince the high command that with the domicile policy, the BJP has consolidated its position among tribals and *moolvasis* (original inhabitants).

The lobby is also trying to drive home the point that the domicile issue has made the party stronger

politically.

The state party president and the chief minister are set for a crucial round of talks on the matter when they meet in Deoghar tomorrow to mark the inauguration of the shravani mela. Marandi is scheduled to leave for New Delhi on July 24. The chief minister has been asked to bring along the documents related to the domicile policy.

"The leadership favours a policy which can keep everyone happy. They are planning to hold an all-party meeting in Jharkhand. Necessary directions will be given to Marandi once he meets the senior leaders," a party functionary said.



Rajnath Singh and Kailashpati Mishra: Trouble-shooters

THE TELEGRAPH

23 JUL 2002

Thakre out, Rajnath, Jaitley emerge as key leaders

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 21. The Bharatiya Janata Party president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, has reshuffled portfolios in the party, making this the third major change in work allocation in about two years.



Arun Jaitley

Mr. Naidu has retained the pattern introduced by his predecessor, Jana Krishnamurthi. While Mr. Krishnamurthi had introduced the concept of five "zonal heads" each with several States under them, Mr. Naidu has created a team of six for "political management and social expansion".

Significantly, the former party president, Kushabhau Thakre, who has been working almost as a proxy party chief after he demitted office, has been given no responsibility at all. This has triggered speculation that the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, has forced Mr. Thakre's ouster as he had openly changed his allegiance from Mr. Advani to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, during his stewardship of the party.

As part of the team of six, Raj-

nath Singh, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and now party general-secretary, has been given the overall charge of the three Hindi heartland States — Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar — along with the new States of Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand carved out of these three, besides Haryana, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Another general secretary, Arun Jaitley, has been given the important States of Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh (all four will be going to the polls between now and next year) as well as Maharashtra, Goa, Chandigarh and the four Southern States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka — although he has never before done this kind of party work. He will also have more than a finger in the Kashmir pie as the Government interlocutor with the State Government on the issue of autonomy, although a formal notification on this is awaited.

Almost all the States where the BJP has a substantial political base have been shared between Rajnath Singh and Mr. Jaitley. Sanjay Joshi, another general secretary, continues as before to be in-charge of organisational affairs.

The other three in this team are the BJP vice-president, Pyarelal Khandelwal, who has been given the eastern zone comprising Orissa, Assam, West Bengal and the North-East; the newly-elevated general secretary, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, put in charge of party headquarters, programme planning, co-ordination with States, grievances and minority affairs; and the only woman general secretary, Anita Arya, who will handle the

women, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes 'morchas'.

Mr. Naidu has also placed the responsibility of political affairs in each of the States on the shoulders of individual party leaders — Kalraj Mishra, till re-



Rajnath Singh

cently the U.P. unit president, will be the 'prabhari' for U.P.; Om Mathur for Madhya Pradesh; Ramdas Aggarwal for Gujarat and Rajasthan; Gopinath Munde for Maharashtra; L. Ganesan for Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh; Bal Apte for Karnataka; Padmanabha Acharya for Kerala; and O.P. Kohli for Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.

Maya Singh has been made 'prabhari' of the party's women's wing and Sunil Shastri of Sikkim. Both are former general secretaries and have been given comparatively unimportant work. Ms. Singh was also closely associated with Mr. Thakre who has been left with no work at all.

Mr. Naidu has not yet indicated whether the economic and foreign affairs cells in the party will be re-organised.

BJP MPS TO MEET JASWANT SINGH

Pressure to withdraw some 'harsh steps'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 16. Worried about its disappearing middle-class support base, the Bharatiya Janata Party decided at its parliamentary party meeting here today that the Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, should meet party MPs some time next week to listen to their grievances and suggestions and do whatever is possible to give relief to the salaried class.

Several partymen wanted Mr. Singh to withdraw some of the harsh measures announced in the last budget which has hit the middle class hard. However, it was pointed out that while no major change could be made in the budget, the Finance Minister would listen to the party's views, study the party committees' reports on the subject and see what could be done. Members also expressed concern over the plight of pensioners and erosion of interest income on small savings.

Though the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was in the chair, he signalled that the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, should address the meeting.

Mr. Advani told his partymen that after the despondency at the BJP's Goa national executive committee which came after the Assembly elections defeat, more recently the party had begun to experience the "feel good" factor, according to the party spokesperson, Vijay Kumar Malhotra, who briefed correspondents.

Mr. Advani has apparently come to the conclusion that even as there is growing enthusiasm in the BJP ranks, the Opposition is feeling helpless. However, it is conceded that there is the apprehension that the monsoon this year may get further delayed in several States in the North, and that could cause major problems for farmers.

On the Jammu massacre, several MPs demanded that the Government take "strong steps" to prevent such incidents.

Mr. Advani did not respond to this, as an adjournment motion on the subject was to be taken up in the Lok Sabha.

Privately, several party MPs concede that the predominant view in the party is that the Government should hit Pakistan hard. But clearly that is not what the Government is willing to do, given the fact that Pakistan is a nuclear power.

THE HINDU

4 7 JUL 2002

I will provide the link, says Advani

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, JULY 13. Even as the 'new-look' BJP today resolved to regain its "appellation" of being a "party with a difference", and cash in on what it claims to be the "feel-good factor" for the organisation — courtesy the NDA rule — greater coordination with the Government was advocated with the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, providing the interface.

Emerging out of an hour-and-a-half-long meeting of the office-bearers that the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, convened here this morning — the first after the party was given a facelift on Thursday — Mr. Advani said: "The party and Government link should be maintained, and I will do so."

"Specially invited" to the meeting at the party headquarters, Mr. Advani echoed Mr. Naidu's observation that the people had a lot of expectations from the BJP.

"Under the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the country would have 'suraaj' (good governance), and under the new leadership, the party would be able to regain the appellation given to it in 1980 of being a 'party with a difference'".

The party had managed a "smooth" changeover in leadership with two of the "most successful members" of the Union Cabinet — Mr. Naidu, and the spokesman and general secretary, Arun Jaitley — agreeing to give up their ministerial berths to work for the organisation. This was, in the opinion of Mr. Advani, proof that the BJP continued to be a "party with a difference". "This could have

not happened in other parties," he added. There should be no room for indiscipline or factionalism. All party functionaries were expected to tour the country to discharge their responsibilities. Also, they had to ensure that their behaviour was different from that of the politicians of other parties.

Later, briefing the media, Mr. Jaitley said that an observation made at the meeting pertained to the national executive meeting in Goa being a "turning point" for the party.

The NDA had already established a record for good governance and there were several issues on which the message of good governance could be carried to the people. Citing the

Goa election results as an indication of the people's "good opinion" of the BJP, Mr. Jaitley said the return of normality to Gujarat owing to the efforts of the State administration and police, the peaceful Jagannath 'rath yatra', the smooth changes in the party, maintenance of national security, and the economic upturn had created a "feel-good factor" and "this message should be taken to the common man in an aggressive manner".

Mr. Jaitley said the NDA had proved wrong all those who had written off coalition politics. The NDA coalition — which was put together keeping in mind the national and regional interests — was an assertion that

coalitions could work. It was decided at the meet that the party's national council would meet in Delhi on August 3 to ratify Mr. Naidu's appointment. However, there was no mention whether the council would draw up the time-table for organisational elections.

'Centre will consider if T.N. proposes ban on MDMK'

NEW DELHI, JULY 13. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said the Centre would consider if the Tamil Nadu Government sent any recommendation for a ban on Vaiko's MDMK party, an NDA constituent, which has been accused of supporting the LTTE.

"If the State Government sends any such proposal, the Centre will think about it," he told Doordarshan in an interview. He was replying to a question on a statement by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, J. Jayalithaa, seeking a ban on the MDMK.

Referring to Mr. Vaiko's arrest, Mr. Advani said he had told his leaders that the Government would make no comment on the issue as law and order was a State subject.

However, he said, he would not come in the way if BJP leaders commented on whatever they thought was right on the issue. Observing that Ms. Jayalithaa had written to him and also sent a cassette of Mr. Vaiko's speeches, Mr. Advani said he had asked the Home Ministry to submit a full report on it. "But beyond that, I have not done anything." Asserting that the ensuing Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir must be free and fair, Mr. Advani said he was "hopeful" that elections there would be held under Governor's rule.— PTI

Venkaiiah's team shows Advani clout

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 11

BJP CHIEF M Venkaiah Naidu today announced his new team of office-bearers with clear indications of Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani's growing clout in the party.

New, young faces were given key posts to revitalise the organisation and gear it up for the Assembly polls next year in 10 States and the Lok Sabha elections in 2004.

Significantly, Venkaiah made it a point to address what he called rumours about a power struggle in the highest rungs of Government since Advani's elevation as Deputy Prime Minister.

"The Prime Minister is the tallest leader acceptable to the party, the NDA and Advani himself. Vajpayee is my leader. And, I can say this categorically, he is Advani's leader as well".

Venkaiah said he had met Vajpayee after the BJP's electoral rout in UP, Uttaranchal and Punjab with suggestions that Advani be freed to head the party. But the PM rejected the idea, saying he would not be able to spare Advani. Venkaiah said he was greatly surprised when his own name came up for the post.

As expected, former UP Chief Minister Rajnath Singh, former Union Ministers Arun Jaitley and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Delhi MP and former mayor Anita Arya were made new BJP general secretaries.

Sanjay Joshi, BJP general secretary in charge of organisation, was retained among the office-bearers named today by the new BJP chief. But vice-president V Ramarao and Sunil Shastri and Maya Singh — all BJP general secretaries under Jana Krishna-

murthi — were dropped, though Shastri was retained as a spokesperson.

Apparently, it was pressure from Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan that ensured the retention of his brother-in-law Gopinath Munde as a vice-president. The BJP chief also retained veteran leader Kailashpati Mishra as a vice-president. He also re-appointed Pyarelal Khandelwal, formerly a general secretary, as vice-president. Khandelwal was a vice-president in Bangaru Laxman's team.

The BJP chief named four new vice-presidents — former BJP MP Dilip Singh Bhuria, Rajya Sabha MP Bal Apte, former Delhi Health Minister Harshvardhan and former Chhattisgarh MLA Karuna Shukla. Shukla, incidentally, is Vajpayee's niece.

Venkaiah appointed seven new party secretaries — L Ganesan, Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Thawar Chand Gehlot, Om Prakash Dhandkan, Jas Kaur Meena, Lalita Kumaramangalam and Dharmendra Pradhan. Ramdas Aggarwal, a BJP MP from Rajasthan, would replace Sukumar Nambiar as treasurer. Nambiar would get a special assignment, Venkaiah said.

Gehlot is a Dalit MP from Madhya Pradesh and Meena is an ST MP from Rajasthan. Lalita is the sister of the late Rangarajan Kumaramangalam and Pradhan a BJP MLA in Orissa and son of former Union Minister Debendra Pradhan, who had been dropped from the Vajpayee Government.

Venkaiah brought in 12 new faces in the 72-member BJP national executive. They included Vasundhara Raje, Ramtahal Choudhury, Sarju Rai, Kirit Somaiya and Satyapal Jain.

BJP promotes Naqvi, woos minorities

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 11. — Mr M Venkaiah Naidu today appointed Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi as a BJP general secretary. Mr Naqvi is the first minority community member to be appointed to the post. Mrs Anita Arya, a Dalit, has also been appointed a general secretary.

The BJP chief said the party must remove the "wrong perception of the minorities" about the BJP. Mr Naqvi's appointment will send the right message to the minorities, he said.

Mr Naidu announced the party's new executive committee. Former party chief Mr Bangaru Laxman has been inducted into the committee.

In a move that has shocked senior leaders, Mr K Govindacharya has been dropped from the national executive.

Mr Rajnath Singh, Mr Arun Jaitley and Mr Sanjay Joshi are the other three general secretaries. Mr Jaitley has been assigned the job of formulating a team to counter the "anti-BJP propaganda". Mr Naqvi and former general secretary Mr Sunil Shashtri would assist him, Mr Naidu said.

Except Mr Joshi, none of the general secretaries has been retained. Three of them — Mr Sangh Priya Gautam, Mr Shashtri and Mrs Maya Singh — have been dropped from the office bearers' list. Mr Pyarelal Khandelwal has been appointed a vice-president.

Mr Shashtri and Mrs Maya Singh have been asked to concentrate on the party's performance in the Rajya Sabha. Mr Gautam is likely to be inducted as a Cabinet minister, sources said.

Mr Ramdas Agarwal is the new BJP treasurer. He replaced Mr Sukumar Nambiar who was brought to Delhi by Mr Jana Krishnamurthy. Mr Nambiar and Mr MR Garg will look after the party's *Ajivan Sahyogi Nidhi* (life time contributors.)

Mr DS Bhuriya, who joined from the Congress, Mr Bal Apte and Mr Gopinath Munde from Maharashtra and Dr Hashvardhan from Delhi have been made new vice-presidents. Mr Kailaspati Mishra and Mrs Karuna Shukla from Chhattisgarh are the other vice-presidents. Mrs Shukla reportedly made it to the post as she is Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's relative, sources said.

17 02

BJP grip over Govt. total: CPI

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 4. The Communist Party of India (CPI) has written an epitaph for the National Democratic Alliance, declaring that the Bharatiya Janata Party has taken over it.

Commenting on a series of developments culminating in the elevation of L.K. Advani as the Deputy Prime Minister and the latest Cabinet reshuffle, the party said: "The NDA lies dead and buried, unhonoured, unwept and unsung. What remains is the battered signboard, which the BJP spokesman can point to on occasions, to deflect criticism." The viewpoint was reflected in an editorial by the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, in the latest issue of the party organ *New Age*.

After the reshuffle, the BJP now had 56 Ministers, other than the Prime Minister, while the allies did not add up to more than 20 and that these numbers or the relative strength of num-

bers in each had nothing to do with the ratio that prevailed within the coalition. Barring the Defence Ministry, the vital and crucial departments were all in the BJP's hands. "Thus, the grip of the BJP over the Government is now total. It is the BJP, and the BJP alone, which calls the shots. There is no nonsense about consulting its allies in the NDA. They have now been shunted out or cast off as needless burden. There has, of course, been some 'consultations'. But they were all with the heads of the 'mother' organisation — the RSS."

On the NDA agenda, the editorial said that to the critics it was said the BJP was bound by it while the RSS faithfuls were told to wait till the party got a majority. "Then you will have the complete and unabridged BJP agenda," it said adding that if there was any trace of the latter coming into the open, the BJP spokesman would immediately disown it, while winking at

the RSS, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and others in Sangh Parivar

"But for some time now there is nothing to hide, and no attempt to hide. The RSS/BJP real agenda is out in the open. They do not care to hide it any longer. They do not have to hide it any longer for, the situation now is desperate and calls for a fight without any gloves on."

The party said the NDA had served its purpose. The 23 or 24 allies and groups were needed for making up the game of numbers, and climbing to power. "A wishy-washy agenda had to be worked up for deceiving the gullible sections of people for silencing the conscience of all those coalition partners, who were secular in outlook and knew that they were joining hands with an out and out reactionary communal party wedded to its aggressive Hindutva philosophy, only to gain a couple of ministerial chairs and share in power at the throne of Delhi".

VASUNDHARA RAJE FOR RAJASTHAN?

Uma Bharti agrees to head BJP in Madhya Pradesh

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 3. Another small "reshuffle" of the Cabinet may take place sooner than expected as the Minister for Sports, Uma Bharti, has finally been persuaded by the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership to go to Bhopal to assume charge as president of the Madhya Pradesh unit.

There were strong indications today of Ms. Bharti leaving for Bhopal within a week or 10 days.

It also seems that the party is trying to tackle the loud protests in its State unit in Rajasthan before it asks Vasundhara Raje, Minister for Small Industries, to put in her papers here and take up her new assignment as president of the Rajasthan BJP unit.

Both these States are scheduled to hold Assembly elections next year.

Yet another possibility was Vijay Goel, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, being asked to head the Delhi BJP unit, or the current 'prabhari' (in-charge of political affairs) of Delhi, Madan Lal Khurana, being selected for this position.



Uma Bharti

But on this there has not been much movement.

When the new BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, returns here from Andhra Pradesh on July 6, a series of discussions is expected to take place between the senior party leaders before finalising all changes, which will naturally lead to fresh vacancies in the Cabinet.

The BJP seems keen on making these changes as early as feasible to give the new incumbents in the States time to turn around the political climate not considered favourable at present to the BJP.

Some of these issues were to be resolved along with the just-concluded reshuffle of the Cabinet and the reorganisation of the party, but most of the energy was devoted to making the change in the top party slot — replacing Mr. Krishnamurthi by Mr. Naidu.

The result was that issues relating to the States got left out.

Some party leaders emphasised that a national executive committee meeting, or even a national council meeting, could be called later this month to endorse Mr. Naidu's position as party president.

If new party presidents in the crucial States are brought in — as most certainly they will be — the organisational elections due to begin later this year could be delayed, keeping in mind the Assembly elections in nine States next year.

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Venkaiiah takes over BJP reins



Mr LK Advani offers sweet to Mr Venkaiah Naidu after he was appointed the BJP chief. In New Delhi on Monday. — AFP

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 1. — Mr M Venkaiah Naidu took over as BJP president today, on his 53rd birthday. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and the outgoing party chief, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, were there to facilitate the smooth transition of leadership to the youngest ever party chief.

Mr Advani will sit in the party office once a week to guide the party's revival plans. This would also mark his increasing say both in the party and the government, something which was likely to enthuse party workers, a leader said.

Members of the new team, which Mr Naidu will re-organise next week, are all likely to be young. Mr

Arun Jaitley has been appointed the party's interim spokesman. The team appointed during Mr Krishnamurthy's tenure also redesigned. Central office-bearers of the party met today to discuss the party matters. The Prime Minister joined the meeting late.

Mr Advani and a number of ministers felt there was a need to strengthen the organisation.

While Mr Advani recalled Mr Krishnamurthy's contribution and the time he took over (after the Tehelka expose that had battered the party's image), the latter lauded Mr Naidu's dynamism which, he hoped, would take the party to new heights.

Mr Vajpayee said the changes in the party and the government would add to the strength of both. He thanked Mr Krishnamurthy for

accepting his request to join the Cabinet. When several ministers were being shifted to the organisation there was a need to strengthen the government too, he said.

Talking about Mr Advani's new role, he said the Deputy Prime Minister should take "more responsibilities... He (Mr Advani) has always been a source of immense help to me. Without any formality, he has always been helping me. Now, he'll have to shoulder more responsibilities."

Mr Krishnamurthy later said: "In the relay race of politics, where we want the BJP to be number one, the next man should steer the party to greater heights. There is no reason for anyone to feel hurt or upset. It's how you see a glass — half-filled with water or half-empty."

2 111 7052

Divide Jammu and Kashmir: RSS

KURUKSHETRA, JUNE 30. Echoing the views of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh today demanded the division of Jammu and Kashmir and said that the Ayodhya issue was a "matter of faith" and "beyond the powers of the court."

At the end of its two-day national executive here, the RSS adopted a resolution rejecting

autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, calling for holding the October elections to the State Assembly under President's rule and abrogation of Article 370.

The resolution took note of the "blatantly discriminatory attitude" of the National Conference Government towards the Jammu and Ladakh regions, the RSS chief spokesman, M. G. Vaidya, told a press conference.

The "consequent acute dissatisfaction" among the people of the regions had led them to demand a separate state of Jammu and Union Territory status for Ladakh. "The people of Jammu think that the solution to their problems lies in the separate statehood for Jammu region," the resolution said, adding that the RSS "offers its support to the demand." — PTI

THE HINDU

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J-K: Trifurcate says RSS, BJP disagrees

Kashmir, in line with the NDA stand on the issue. However, he said the Jammu and Ladakh regions were being discriminated against in development. The BJP felt it was time their grievances were redressed.

Thus, the Sangh Parivar has now neatly put forward three faces on Jammu and Kashmir — BJP represents the moderate NDA stance, RSS the hardline and the VHP the extreme — tailored to the requirements and constituency of each outfit. Their common goal, however, is to reach out to the Hindus of

Jammu and the Buddhists of Ladakh and consolidate their votes behind the BJP in view of the coming assembly elections.

The RSS resolution rejected the demand for greater autonomy raised by Farooq Abdullah and favoured imposition of President's Rule before the assembly elections and abrogation of Article 370.

The demand for President's Rule was also articulated by Khandelwal, who obviously took the cue from the remark made by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at Lucknow.

If Abdullah felt uncomfortable with the suggestion, he had himself to blame. The way the Jammu Lok Sabha by-election was conducted had left a bitter taste in the BJP's mouth.

RSS spokesman M G Vaidya said, "The people of Jammu think that the solution to their problems lies in separate statehood for Jammu region." The resolution said the RSS "offers its support to the demand. Branding the demand 'communal' would be 'ignorance' or 'motivated prejudice', the resolution said, pointing out that

the region included the Muslim-majority districts of Poonch, Rajouri and Doda. It backed the demand for a Union territory status for Ladakh.

The resolution said the situation in the state "has been aggravated by the slogan of autonomy." It felt that the separatist elements had "taken advantage of" Article 370 and demanded that it be dispensed with. As for a separate state for Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley, Vaidya said the Govt should talk to leaders of the community.

On Ayodhya, Vaidya said

the courts "cannot do anything" to resolve the dispute. Endorsing the VHP stand that it would not abide by a court verdict, he said the RSS too believed that "it is a matter of faith and beyond the powers of the court."

According to him, "No power can make construction of a mosque at the disputed site possible." Vaidya also supported the VHP decision to withdraw its letter given to the Government containing an assurance to abide by the court verdict.

Vaidya did not see anything wrong in the Govern-

ment decision to allow 26 per cent FDI in print media and suggested that the FDI in electronic media be reduced from the present 100 per cent. He said in response to a question that if the electronic media could have 100 per cent FDI, "what is wrong in having 26 per cent in the print media?"

He felt the Govt "has taken adequate safeguards", particularly the one relating to editorial control. Calling for similar safeguards in electronic media, he attributed the opposition to the decision to "capitalist lobby".

22 11 2000

Venkaiah Naidu all set to take over

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JUNE 29. Barring a last-minute hitch, the Rural Development Minister, M. Venkaiah Naidu, is all set to take over as president of the Bharatiya Janata Party after Jana Krishnamurthi vacates the post on July 1, the day he will be inducted into the Cabinet.

Mr. Naidu's new team is expected to include the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister,

Rajnath Singh, the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, and the Urban Development Minister, Ananth Kumar. All the three may be inducted as general secretaries.

Apparently, attempts are also being made to get the Sports Minister, Uma Bharti, to take up a senior position in the party headquarters — earlier, she is believed to have refused to go as president of the BJP's Madhya Pradesh unit.

Mr. Krishnamurthi has called a meeting of the party's central office-bearers here on July 1, when he is expected to resign as president. The name of the new party president may be announced simultaneously and ratified by the office-bearers, and later by a meeting of the national executive committee.

Although Mr. Naidu's name has been more or less finalised after several rounds of meeting at the residence of the Prime

Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and different other levels, the former BJP president, Kushabhau Thakre, has cautioned that "the name of the new party president will be finally decided only after a meeting tomorrow, by when Mr. Krishnamurthi will be back from Chennai."

The BJP leaders have said that Mr. Krishnamurthi is unhappy with the choice of his successor, and it seems there is also resistance to Mr. Naidu at other senior levels in the party.

However, Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, seem to have zeroed in on Mr. Naidu. Some party insiders, in fact, believe that the other names in the reckoning — Pramod Mahajan and Sushma Swaraj — did not find favour with the two most powerful men in the party for reasons other than competence and ability. Mr. Naidu has all along kept himself on the right side of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister.

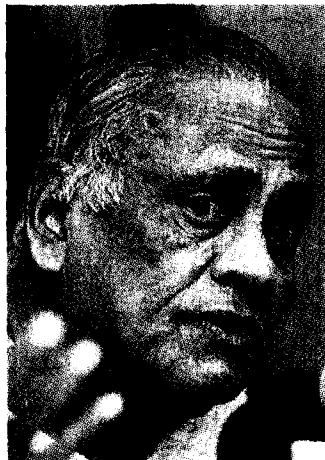
The revamp effort in the BJP is being made with an eye on Assembly polls next year and the run-up to the Lok Sabha election the year after. The party leaders said that it was absolutely necessary for the BJP to be able to win in one or two States next year, when Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi, among 10 other States, go to the polls. The attempt will be to give the party a younger look

BJP chief relents

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JUNE 29. The BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, said today that he had informed the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, that he would abide by "whatever decision they take" since "none of us (BJP men) has failed to carry out his (Mr. Vajpayee's) desires."

He said he had agreed to accept a Cabinet post after much persuasion. Contrary to reports in a section of the media, he had not resigned as the BJP president so far. "If chosen as a Minister, automatically I cease to be the party president." The BJP administrative committee would meet in New Delhi on Monday to decide on the new



office-bearers, if he was named a Minister.

Asked if he was being removed for the party's poor showing in the Uttar Pradesh

and Uttaranchal elections, Mr. Krishnamurthi said electoral reverses were common to any party. In the BJP, the leadership was not the only one held responsible for election results; the entire party took the blame or the glory. By offering him a Cabinet berth, he was not being kicked upstairs. "In our party, nobody gets kicked upstairs."

Pressed further, he said the situation reminded him of the half-full "tumbler." "In your view, I am being removed. But in my organisation's view, I am being taken into the Cabinet."

Asked if he was satisfied with his performance as the party president, he avoided a direct reply: "We perform our work as a duty to our party heartily and willingly."

No discomfort: Page 11

THE HINDU

30 1 1992

BJP'S NEW CHIEF IN UTTAR PRADESH

THE APPOINTMENT OF Vinay Katiyar as president of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP is in keeping with the party's resolve (as declared at the national executive in Goa) to adopt strident Hindutva as its plank in the days to come. Mr. Katiyar, after all, was prominent among those who symbolised the BJP's aggressive majoritarian campaign since 1984 that ultimately led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. As head of the Bajrang Dal, the storm troopers of the Hindutva brigade, Mr. Katiyar's rise during this period was reflective of the transition of the BJP from a party pretending allegiance to the pluralistic and democratic spirit of the Constitution into a platform wedded to majoritarianism. By choosing him to steer the party's affairs in Uttar Pradesh and that too at a time when the VHP is engaged in raking up the Ayodhya issue, the BJP has proclaimed its determination to place its sectarian agenda on centre stage once again.

Mr. Katiyar's choice could be seen in another context too — that of the party's calculations from the point of view of caste equations in the State. After having struck a coalition with the BSP, a party hitherto wedded to the idea of Dalit exclusivism, and having gathered the support of the upper caste groups (supplanting the Congress), the BJP seems to be attempting to enlist support from a section of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) by choosing someone from among the Kurmis as its State unit president. The choice of Mr. Katiyar, in this sense, could lead the Kurmis, politically influential in some parts of central Uttar Pradesh, to look at the BJP as their party. Coming at a time when Mulayam

Singh Yadav is being perceived to be pushing Beni Prasad Verma, a veteran leader in his own right, to the margins of the Samajwadi Party establishment, the BJP's calculations are certainly not out of place. The Samajwadi Party, after all, had managed to retain its hold in the region thanks to Mr. Verma's presence in the fold (as an influential leader) and Mr. Katiyar's rise in the context of Mr. Verma's marginalisation could help the BJP gain.

The change of guard in the party had become imminent soon after the Assembly elections in February 2002. Kalraj Mishra could hardly have his way in the State unit after the party's poor performance in the polls and it became more difficult after the State unit was goaded into an arrangement with the BSP. Mr. Mishra, known for his proximity to the BSP and its leader, Mayawati, found himself coming under fire from influential sections in the Uttar Pradesh unit of the party who found that the arrangement with the BSP could only lead to decimation of the organisation. Mr. Katiyar, in this sense, is the BJP's choice to revive the party and also to try and expand its base among social groups that remain outside the fold. But by positioning a person so closely identified with aggressive Hindutva, the BJP's leaders have only conveyed to the storm troopers in the Sangh Parivar (whose game plan is unfolding, by the day, in Gujarat since February 27) that they continue to be counted upon by the party in its scheme of things in the days to come. This certainly is a cause for concern particularly in the context of the fragmentation of civil society there on the lines of caste and religious identities.

28 JUN 2002

Jana to quit, may make it to Cabinet

HT Political Bureau
New Delhi, June 27

BJP PRESIDENT K Jana Krishnamurthi is learnt to be on his way out of the party and into the Union council of ministers. His post could go to either I&B Minister Sushma Swaraj or Rural Development Minister M Venkiah Naidu. A major organisational assignment is believed to be awaiting Law Minister Arun Jaitley as well.

Principal Secretary to the PM Brajesh Mishra met Krishnamurthi with a message from Atal Bihari Vajpayee shortly after noon today. Vajpayee had been in conference in the morning with Home Minister L K Advani, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan.

Immediately after his meeting with Mishra, Krishnamurthi went into a huddle, first with former BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre, then with former Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. The talks centred on "organisational matters", Shekhawat told *Hindustan Times*.

It is understood that despite having agreed to step down as BJP president, Krishnamurthi has not yet committed himself to joining the government. The Prime Minister, however, is likely to insist, and Krishnamurthi is unlikely to put a spanner in the works of what is almost certain to be a major shake-up in both the party and the Government.

The reshuffle in the Union council of ministers scheduled for July 1 is likely to involve between 15-17 ministers. Though the big picture is expected to emerge only on Saturday evening after the Prime Minister returns to New Delhi from Lucknow, Fi-

WHO GOES WHERE

ORGANISATION DUTY

Party bound

Sushma Swaraj/Venkiah Naidu,
Arun Jaitley

To ministry

Jana Krishnamurthi

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Definite gainers

Mamata Banerjee, representatives
from the PMK and MDMK

Facing the sack

C.P. Thakur, Ananth Kumar, Shanta
Kumar

Strong possibility

Jaswant Singh for Yashwant Sinha in
Finance Ministry

nance Minister Yashwant Sinha looks in definite danger of losing his job. His most likely replacement: Jaswant Singh.

Sinha might either get Jaswant's job or another weighty portfolio. "His replacement should not be seen as punishment; it is only a part of the PM's exercise to refurbish the Government before crucial Assembly elections," said a source.

Mamata Banerjee is a certainty in the new ministry. As are at least two representatives from the PMK and one from MDMK.

The induction of Farooq Abdullah isn't ruled out. But this move may have to be synchronised with Omar's taking over in Srinagar around mid-July.

Advani, Joshi and Mahajan are unlikely to be touched. But the fate of Health Minister CP Thakur, Urban Development Minister Ananth Kumar and Food and Public Distribution Minister Shanta Kumar looks uncertain.

28 JUN 2002

VHP heads for Jammu to carve Kashmir

24/6

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Haridwar, June 23: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today demanded the division of Jammu and Kashmir for the creation of a separate state of Jammu, saying this was the only way of pre-empting a "second Partition and the Mughalisation of India".

A resolution adopted by the VHP's apex decision-making body at the concluding session of a two-day meeting also sought the bifurcation of the Kashmir Valley.

The resolution said the region to the north-east of the Jhelum river should be reserved for Kashmiri Pandits. The Hindu-exclusive enclave should be given the status of a Union Territory and administered by the Centre, it added. The VHP also sought the status of a Union Territory for Leh and Ladakh.

The resolution said a 5-square-km swathe contiguous with the Pakistan border should be declared a "high-security" zone and brought under the army's permanent control, instead of being patrolled by police.

VHP working president Ashok Singhal declared that the organisation would hold a "massive" Hindu *sammelan*

(congregation) in Jammu on August 11 as a "show of strength" aimed at both the militants and Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah.

He said the creation of a separate Jammu state would automatically achieve the Sangh's long-standing call for abrogating Article 370 and would, therefore, be an "ideal" solution to the problem.

It would involve the process of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly first adopting a resolution, getting it ratified by Parliament, taking it back to the state legislature in case amendments have to be moved and then securing Parliament's final seal of approval, Singhal added.

He suggested that in the interlude, the Hindu *sammelan* would build an ambience and a public mood conducive to the creation of a separate state.

"Farooq is dividing Hindus and clear proof of this was when the National Conference wrested the Jammu seat from the BJP (in a recent byelection). His party had no presence in Jammu earlier. This is the beginning of a deeper design to push the Hindus out of Jammu as well.

"In Tripura, when the VHP organised a big congregation to fight terrorists, it had a positive

effect. The Hindus were awakened. We are sure our Jammu gathering will also show the terrorists what stuff Hindus are made of," claimed Singhal.

While Singhal did not say so, another speaker, Swami Vignyanand, stressed that such a meeting was necessary to whip up the "right mood" before the Jammu and Kashmir elections.

The resolution said the "logic" of seeking a separate Jammu state arose as the Hindus were "discriminated" against even in areas where they or other communities like the Gujjars and the Buddhists were in a majority.

"In government jobs, development projects and education institutions, the Hindus and the Buddhists are being denied their rightful share. Administratively, too, Jammu and Ladakh have been neglected. But in reality, Jammu is two times larger than the Valley and in terms of population equal, while Ladakh is four times the size of the Valley," the resolution said.

Other speakers suggested that a Jammu state would restore to its citizens the rights and privileges which they now stand to lose if they settled in any other state.

■ See Page 8

THE TELEGRAPH

24 JUN 2002

Katiyar UP BJP chief

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 24. — The former chief of Bajrang Dal and the BJP MP from Faizabad, Mr Vinay Katiyar, who propagated a hard-line Hindutva line and emerged as the key spokesperson on the Ram Temple issue in Ayodhya, today replaced Mr Kalraj Mishra as the party's new state unit president. Mr Mishra is likely to join the Union Cabinet, BJP sources said.

At a time when the BJP is on the back-foot due to the Gujarat riots and the VHP's revised stand on temple construction, Mr Katiyar's appointment is seen as a last-ditch attempt to salvage BJP's sagging fortunes in the state on the hard-line Hindutva plank. Incidentally, Ayodhya falls in Faizabad, which is Mr Katiyar's constituency.

However, it remains to be seen how he balances the need to assert the Hindutva to please the RSS and a soft political line to keep Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee happy and keep the BJP-BSP alliance

going at least till the Lok Sabha elections in 2004. This could also be the Prime Minister's move to checkmate the VHP, as Mr Katiyar was one of its most forceful spokespersons.

If it was Mr Kalyan Singh (a backward Lodh Rajput) who helped the BJP spread in the state, Mr Katiyar, coming from the backward Kurmi caste, is expected to do the same, a BJP leader said. He is also expected to checkmate the BJP minister in the Mayawati government, Mr Om Prakash Singh (a Kurmi) and prevent consolidation of Kurmis behind the Apna Dal, which is gradually gaining political ground in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, a Kurmi consolidation behind the BJP would give the party a sizeable vote base. So the decision is a recognition of the fact that the BJP must think beyond the high castes.

Immediately after the announcement of his elevation, Mr Katiyar said his focus would be to strengthen the party organisation. However, he had no answer on how he would do it.

THE STATESMAN

25 JUN 2002

Pariyar silver

RSS gets muddled over disinvestment

Disinvestment minister Arun Shourie probably has another fight on his hands. The mindless challenge mounted by Pramod Mahajan over the Tata/VSNL issue was characterised by himself as a war he had to win; this is the measure of the difference between political operators like Mahajan and ministers like Shourie who take their job seriously. Shourie may now be heading for a real confrontation with the RSS. The 16 June editions of two Sangh mouthpieces, *Organiser* and *Panchajanya*, have torn into government's disinvestment policy. To be fair, some points raised by the RSS columnists are valid. The sale of IPCL to Reliance did raise questions, by this newspaper as well, whether a private monopoly was being created in the crucial and lucrative petrochemical sector. Again, the decision to allow oil PSUs to buy each other's shares and treat that as disinvestment was ridiculous, and the RSS is right in saying so. However, the Sangh's arguments are wrong in most other respects. In the Sangh's view profit-making PSUs should not be sold because the "entire disinvestment agenda (is) about getting rid of government sector white elephants". This is a familiar gripe of swadeshis and socialists alike and wholly wrong. They both miss the point — disinvestment is about getting the government out of economic activities where they do not belong. As it happens, most PSUs in the red are so hopelessly placed that putting them up for sale will do no good. RSS critics should ask themselves why the private sector should buy government junk. For such PSUs, disinvestment means selling their real estate. It follows, only PSUs with an economic future can attract bidders, and that is exactly what Shourie is doing, energetically and with a sense of purpose.

On the Tata/VSNL issue, the RSS magazines repeat the charge of a section of the BJP — that of asset stripping. There was no such thing. In fact, the deal between the government and Tatas puts stringent conditions on such activity. All that happened, we must repeat, is that the VSNL board decided to invest VSNL money in another Tata company. If this is asset stripping, RSS is "pseudo secularist". Beyond this dissent on policy, however, is the shadow of a trident — out to get the government's arguably most successful economic policy minister. Conservative RSS and BJP types, don't like liberalisation any more than socialist Congressmen do, and, also, they think policies like Shourie's may cost them the next elections. What RSS does and does not like is of course its own business but it is wrong if it links government withdrawal from certain economic sectors to waning popularity. Millions of Indians who vote do not care whether Maruti is owned by Suzuki or VSNL by Tatas. They do care about whether the government can spend more money and spend it better on necessities. For that, RSS please note, the government, to begin with, needs a good finance minister. Arun Shourie makes a good candidate.

17 JUN 2002

THE STATESMAN

BJP, RSS LEADERS DISCUSS GUJARAT

BJP nod for Mayawati Govt.

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. The Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary board gave its stamp of approval this evening to a power-sharing agreement with the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh paving the way for the installation of Mayawati as the State Chief Minister, possibly by Monday, a day ahead of the crucial discussion in the Lok Sabha on the Gujarat situation under a substantive motion.

The BJP's decision followed a two-hour meeting this morning between top Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and BJP leaders at the residence of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, where the entire gamut of polit-

ical issues was reportedly discussed, especially the Gujarat situation in all its ramifications and the possible political fallout of the tie-up with the BSP in Uttar Pradesh.

The meeting was attended by the RSS chief, K.S. Sudarshan, and top RSS leaders, H.V. Seshadiri and Madan Das Devi. Besides the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, the Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, and the former party president, Kushabhau Thakre, were present.

This was the first such meeting between RSS and BJP leaders after the Godhra carnage and the Gujarat violence and

the first formal consultations on Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Krishnamurthi described the meeting as a "general discussion" where a "free exchange of views took place" and added that this type of meeting could not be held earlier as "all of us had been busy."

However, various aspects of the Gujarat violence were discussed against the background of the demand for the ouster of the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, (a demand also embarrassingly articulated by "friendly parties" like the Telugu Desam and the Trinamool Congress), and the direct allegations being made against Sangh Parishad organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the

Bajrang Dal for their "lead role" in the violence that followed Godhra.

The growing number of critical voices from foreign countries and its direct impact on India's post-September 11 diplomacy was also reportedly discussed.

Although a reversal of the parliamentary board's earlier decision on Uttar Pradesh directing the party to sit in the Opposition was a foregone conclusion, the meeting between the RSS brass and the top BJP leadership was an opportunity to discuss the likely fallout of the new decision, an alienation of the upper castes from the BJP. It seems that the RSS-BJP meeting discussed a strategy to contain this by "uniting Hindus" through the Hindutva ideology.

The party's U.P. leaders — Rajnath Singh, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon — were special invitees to the meeting in the evening.

Coming out of the meeting, Mr. Krishnamurthi said it had been decided to "join hands with the BSP along with our allies" to form a Government in Uttar Pradesh and "Ms. Mayawati will be Chief Minister."

There are indications that Ms. Mayawati will meet the U.P. Governor tomorrow in Lucknow to stake her claim, and in all likelihood she will take her oath of office on Monday. In return, the BSP has promised to vote against the Opposition-sponsored motion on Gujarat to be debated in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Fresh violence in Vadodara

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, APRIL 27. Violence broke out in Vadodara today where at least two persons were killed and 19 injured.

Indefinite curfew was clamped in six police station areas covering almost the entire walled city of Vadodara. The city witnessed a stabbing spree and innumerable cases of arson besides firing and hurling of bombs and missiles.

In the Vadi locality people from the rival communities came out on the streets late last night and hurled stones and bombs at each other. Police said there was no immediate provocation for the disturbances and the violence could be the handiwork of gangs of criminals from the two communities. When the mobs set fire to houses and shops police opened fire killing one. Violence continued today also with hundreds of houses and shops set afire, and nine cases of stabbing,

including one fatal. At least 10 persons were hospitalised with bullet injuries. The curfew clamped in Vadi and Panigate police station areas last night was extended to cover the City, Navapura, Karelighat and Raopura areas today.

In Ahmedabad, disturbances broke out in Devjipura locality adjacent to the police commissioner's office again today. Some shops and a few posh bungalows were set on fire. Police burst teargas shells to disperse the violent crowds but to no avail. A massive combing operation has been launched in Vejalpur and some other localities. Police claimed to have recovered some sophisticated weapons besides large stocks of knives and crude and petrol bombs.

Most other parts of Gujarat by and large remained incident-free with curfew in force in about half-a-dozen towns. The secondary and higher secondary examinations were conducted peacefully.

APR 27 1997

THE HINDU

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28/A

BJP leaders discuss strategy

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 20. With the impasse over the Gujarat issue, continuing in Parliament, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today discussed the situation and strategy with his party colleagues here today.

The meeting held at the Prime Minister's residence emphasised that the Bharatiya Janata Party was open to a discussion under Rule 193 and not under Rule 184, which entails voting. The entire Opposition has been insisting on a discussion under Rule 184 and the deadlock has resulted in Parliament being adjourned the whole of last week without transacting any official business.

The BJP leaders also asked its members to exercise restraint in raking up the issue of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's remarks against Mr. Vajpayee that he spoke in different voices whenever he lost his mental balance. Later, Ms. Gandhi clarified that she did not mean what she said. The BJP MPs demanded in the Lok Sabha an apology from Ms. Gandhi over her comments in

Guwahati against the Prime Minister.

The meeting decided that the question of sending a team of the National Democratic Alliance leaders to Gujarat would be firmed up after the return of the Defence Minister, George Fernandes from the State.

The People's Front has announced that it would send a delegation to the State on March 24.

Those who attended today's meeting included the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, the Disinvestment Minister, Arun Shourie and the party spokesman, Vijay Kumar Malhotra.

U.P. developments

Meanwhile, the senior BJP leader, Kushabhau Thakre said the party should be cautious in entering into any agreement with the Bahujan Samaj Party in the light of its previous experiences.

Mr. Thakre, who is in charge of party affairs in the Uttar Pradesh, said BJP leaders have been holding informal talks with the

BSP leaders, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, but a formal decision would be finalised only after the BJP Parliamentary Board took a view on it. The senior BJP State leader, Lalji Tandon, an advocate of a BJP-BSP tie-up met Mr. Thakre here today.

Talking to correspondents at the party headquarters here, Mr. Thakre, a member of the Parliamentary Board said that the BJP, which had earlier decided to sit in the Opposition in the U.P. Assembly would have to consider the change in the situation, necessitating a relook. He hinted that a formal dialogue between the BJP, BSP would be held after the BJP meeting.

The BJP and the BSP should have a common minimum programme with accent on development. Caste politics in the State should end.

Asked about the objection of its ally, the Rashtriya Lok Dal of Ajit Singh that his party was not consulted on the proposed pact, Mr. Thakre said the views of the RLD would be taken into account.

Modi removal: Don't push it, RSS tells allies

■ 'If violence is reason, Farooq should go'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

98 P 158
19/4
THE Parivar came out in defence of the besieged pracharak-chief minister today. The Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad vehemently opposed any attempt to dislodge Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi from office.

RSS spokesman M G Vaidya in a statement released simultaneously here and Nagpur, at the Sangh headquarters, said the allies of the BJP had no right to demand the resignation of Modi.

They were "crossing the limit," he said, and it was improper since the appointment or removal of a chief minister was "an internal matter of the party concerned." The prerogative to change him rested only with his party, the statement said.

Vaidya said that if violence was the basis for the removal of a Chief Minister, then demands had to be made for the resignations of chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

He said Jammu and Kashmir had been experiencing terrorist violence for several

years, while the People's War Group had killed a large number of people in Andhra over the years.

He claimed that the Modi Government had taken steps to check violence.

The death of 98 persons in police firing explained the scale of force used to control it. He termed the Godhra carnage "pre-planned," having nothing to do with Ayodhya. He argued that had it been otherwise, it would have taken place somewhere at Ayodhya, Faizabad, Aligarh or Meerut, rather than 1,500 miles away in Gujarat.

He did not see "anything new" in the Opposition demand for the resignation of Modi. "Even Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's resignation has been sought many times," he said.

Ridiculing the Congress demand for a ban on the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, the Sangh spokesman said that it was not new.

In fact, the RSS had been banned thrice in the past. He said Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh, who had talked of banning the Jhabua meeting of the RSS, could not do so.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Modi's removal: Don't push it, RSS tells allies

Meanwhile, VHP senior vice-president Giriraj Kishore said in Ahmedabad that the Parishad was "firmly opposed to any demand for the removal of Modi."

19/4
The campaign against Modi, in his view, was "motivated" against the entire Hindu community. Regarding violence after the Godhra carnage, he said the responsibility for maintaining peace did not rest only with

Hindus. The link between an action and reaction was a natural phenomenon.

98-2
He criticised the reported British High Commission report which suggested that the Gujarat violence was pre-planned and alleged that "it only showed the pro-Muslim nature of the British psyche." Kishore said the British, ever since the colonial days, had been pro-Muslim. "There is no change," he said.

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2002

A CYNICAL PLOY

THE WAY THE Bharatiya Janata Party has responded to the demand for the removal of the discredited Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, smacks of contempt as much for political morality as for the groundswell of independent and political opinion that has wanted him to go because of his administration's colossal failure in handling the communal flare-up post-Godhra. What was on view at the party's national executive meeting in Goa on Friday was nothing but a farce, played out in a three-act sequence. Mr. Modi 'offers' to step down; it is promptly 'rejected' by the leadership; and the executive, instead, "advises" him to dissolve the Assembly and seek a fresh mandate. In a typically cynical fashion, the BJP has found it expedient to reduce the 'Modi ouster' call to realpolitik terms — a question of 'BJP versus secular NDA constituents and the Congress' set in the presumed context of the 'destabilisation' game plan — and proceeded to handle it as such, taking recourse to political tactics and sidestepping the substantive issues of political morality involved in the case for leadership change.

By plumping for a snap poll, under Mr. Modi as caretaker Chief Minister, the BJP has made its intention loud and clear to the 'secular' coalition partners and backers. In the immediate context of their 'oust Modi' call, articulated by the likes of the Trinamool Congress, Janata Dal (U) and Telugu Desam, it has indeed delivered a sharp rebuff concealed in the cloak of democracy; after all, the democratic principle of going to the people for a fresh mandate is unassailable. An underlying message is that the BJP cannot be pushed around and will be accommodative only on its terms especially where the party's core ideological platform is at stake. In fact, this has been more than apparent in the Vajpayee Government's consistently — and calculatedly — soft approach to the virulent anti-minority campaigns by the Sangh Parivar elements and, more

recently, in its handling of the March 15 'shilanyas' programme in Ayodhya. At the end of the day, the 'secular' NDA constituents find themselves upstaged by the BJP which has, in a deft strategic move, retained the initiative with itself by going for the 'snap poll' option (at a time of Mr. Modi's choice) and that too, under the regime of the very man whom they (and the Opposition) wanted to be removed forthwith.

The decision on Gujarat also signifies that the BJP leadership is all set to 'capitalise' on the so-called consolidation of the majority community vote which the Hindutva elements are believed to have engineered in the aftermath of the Godhra carnage. Going by the way Mr. Modi, who has emerged as an icon of sorts for the hardline protagonists, was hailed at the executive, it is clear that the party is determined to hark back to its core ideology at least in the limited 'Gujarat' context, where the majoritarian fundamentalist elements have had a free hand in 'translating' it on the ground post-Godhra and this has meant several hundreds of Muslims being killed and close to one lakh members of the community being rendered homeless. Possibly, the string of electoral defeats the party has suffered in the State polls — the more recent and politically very humiliating of them being the one in Uttar Pradesh — has left the leadership so desperate that it wants to draw electoral mileage from the 'success' the aggressive Hindutva line has achieved in Gujarat under Mr. Modi. That a political party in power, after abdicating its constitutional responsibility of ensuring the safety of citizens without any discrimination and having done everything to traumatise the minority community, could feel exultant over the 'consolidation' of the majority vote and worse seek to get a fresh mandate by exploiting the polarised situation is an affront to any civil society that is rooted in a secular and multi-cultural ethos.

ECHO OF ELECTORAL REVERSES

BJP recommends rollback of harsh budget proposals

By Neena Vyas

PANAJI (GOA), APRIL 13. The Bharatiya Janata Party has suggested several amendments to the Finance Bill putting pressure on the Union Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, to reconsider his tax proposals that have particularly hit the middle class alienating it from the party, as particularly evident from the party's rout in the recent Delhi Municipal Corporation elections. In a resolution adopted today, the BJP national executive committee said that when people were expected to tighten their belts and accept higher tax burdens, the Government should "set an example" by adopting "visible" austerity measures.

Mr. Sinha has not denied that he may be "rolling back" some taxes announced by him while pointing out that changes and amendments at the time of adoption of any Finance Bill were "routine" and that every Finance Minister had to be responsive to suggestions and criticisms.

'Restore tax rebate'

Restoration of the 20 per cent tax rebate on savings under Section 88 of the Income-tax Act for those with incomes up to Rs 5 lakhs has been suggested strongly by the party.

The strong opposition to any cut in the rate of interest in the employees provident



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, at the BJP national executive meeting at Panaji on Saturday. — PTI

fund by the Labour Minister, Sharad Yadav, is seen by the party here as a response to the BJP's anger and disappointment with a budget that has taken away the party's middle class voter, once its backbone in urban areas.

If Mr. Sinha escaped harsh open criticism by BJP members at the executive, it was partly because the party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, had himself said in his opening remarks that managing the economy and political management must go hand-in-hand.

It is obvious that the party

is now extremely worried about its middle class voters — elections are now on the cards in Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir — as before the Budget presentation the party leaders did meet Mr. Sinha to give their suggestions, but to no effect.

The string of electoral defeats cannot but force Mr. Sinha to reconsider some of the proposals considered by the party as harsh or at least politically unwise.

Several concrete suggestions were made in the five-page economic resolution: pension scheme for individuals; a monthly income scheme with

higher interest rates for senior citizens; a direct fertilizer subsidy to farmers; flexible PDS system to allow the daily purchase of foodgrain by the poorest families; and a "gradual" phasing out of subsidy on LPG and kerosene over three to five years to end the administered prices regime in the petroleum sector.

The party also suggested modification of the crop insurance scheme to give easy access to farmers.

Finally, it suggested "tough measures" for tax recoveries and keeping the non-performing assets down in the banking sector to mobilise more resources instead of increasing the tax burden on the middle class.

Specifically for Goa (and this would benefit all coastal areas), the BJP suggested the restoration of the diesel subsidy for fishermen which was removed in the budget proposals.

More reports on Page 8

BJP's search for new monarch ends in Modi

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

Panaji, April 13: Narendra Modi has emerged as the BJP's new Hindutva symbol and acquired the same status that Kalyan Singh did after the Babri Masjid demolition. Though the party has to come up with an honorific for Modi, for all practical purposes Modi today is what Kalyan was in 1993 — Hindu *hriday ka samrat* (monarch of the Hindu heart).

A day after Modi's well-scripted resignation drama was enacted at the Goa executive, the members looked visibly relieved not only because the Gujarat chief minister was not booted out, but even the "moderate and liberal" Atal Bihari Vajpayee harked back publicly to hard-core Hindutva.

"When Atalji spoke of the Muslims yesterday, he was clear and coherent and did not pause for even a second. This is because the speech came straight out of a *swayamsevak's* heart. Whenever he spoke of secularism and liberalism, he often had to struggle for words unless the speech was already written," remarked an Uttar Pradesh MP.

BJP sources said they had initially planned to adopt a resolution on Godhra that would contain a line rejecting the demand for Modi's ouster.

However, as an afterthought it was felt a mere one-line mention was not enough to get across the "sense of solidarity" the party felt with Modi. Something "more dramatic" had to be done.

The chief minister offered to step down when the executive was about to leave yesterday for the public rally. Despite BJP president Jana Krishnamurthi's request to Modi to speak later, Modi, it seems, insisted he had to do it then and there. The executive — which was slated to take up the economic resolution for discussion after the rally — deliberated on Modi and backed him.

Sources said the "deliberation" was merely a formality after Vajpayee and Krishnamurthi had declared unequivocal support for Modi.

Asked about the compulsions behind early polls in Gujarat, a Cabinet minister said: "It was a hard choice: either to please the allies by replacing him and risk

angering Gujarat's Hindus or dissolve the Assembly and have snap polls. The latter was a politically sounder option."

The BJP's feedback was, had Modi been replaced by a more "moderate" chief minister, the Hindus "feared" the move would "embolden" the Muslims to organise themselves and hit back at them.

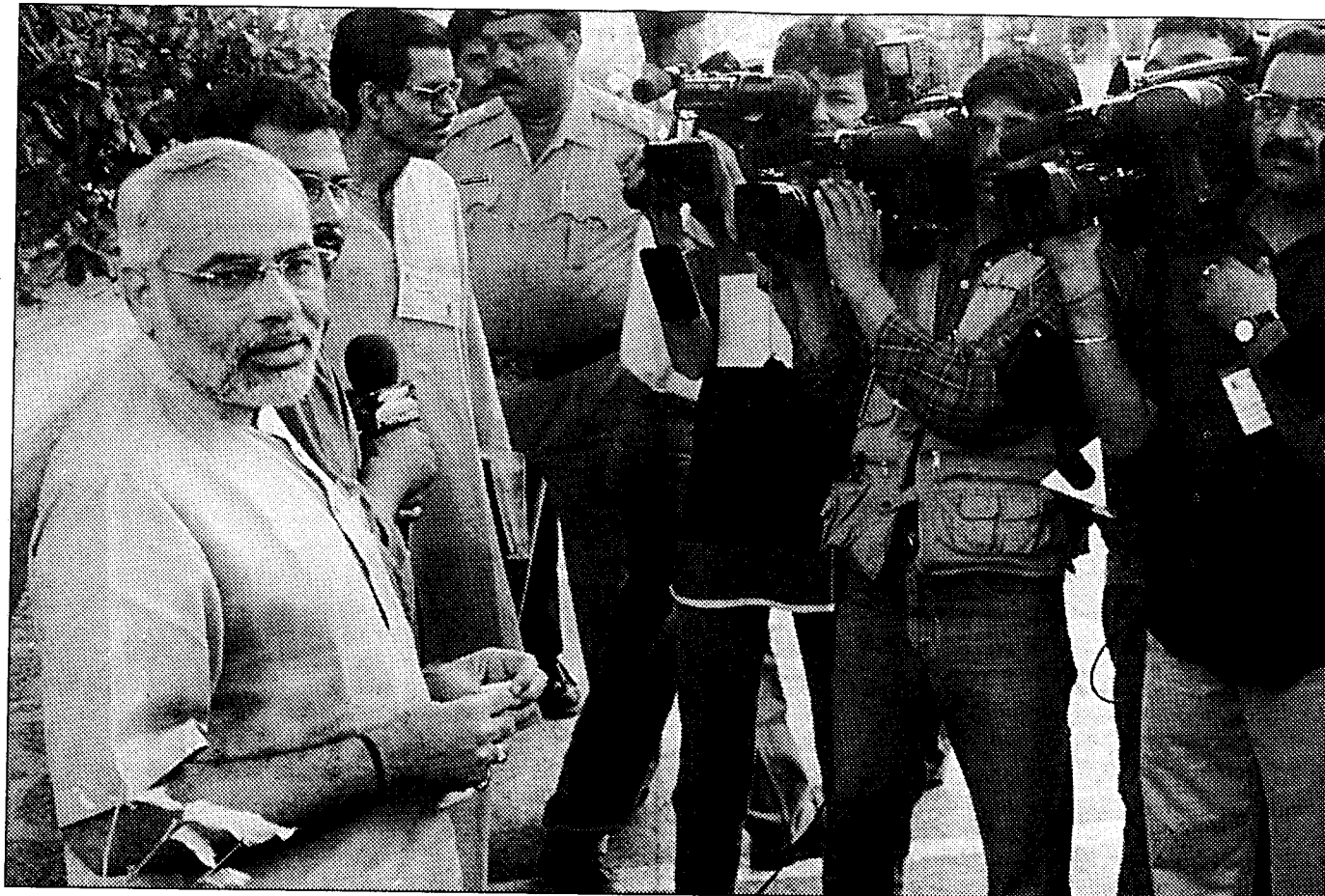
The other reason was to tell the allies that they had no business to interfere in the BJP's "internal" matters so long as the NDA's common minimum programme was not tampered with. "Allies have nothing to do with our internal matter. We have a two-thirds majority in Gujarat. As a party, every party has the right to express its views on Gujarat. If the allies' suggestion was in the larger interest, we would have accepted it, but if it was not our answer is we are sorry," said rural development minister M. Venkaiah Naidu.

"Allies are all the time implementing their own agenda by being part of the NDA. But the BJP cannot allow the NDA to destroy its core spirit. BJP has to be kept alive, that's why we cannot deviate entirely from our path," said BJP youth wing president Shivraj Chauhan.

Other members suggested that just as the BJP had "sacrificed" power twice in the past on the RSS-Hindutva plank, it should be ready to do the same this time too if the allies made Modi an issue.

Some leaders rejected the idea that the Centre was threatened because of Gujarat. "As long as anti-Congressism is there, our allies need the BJP to prop them up in their states and we need them to sustain the NDA. With the Congress winning almost every election we are certain our allies will stick to us," explained BJP vice-president and former Maharashtra deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde.

The other compulsion for backing Modi was, apparently, the Congress' proposed campaign against him. "Our message was meant as much for Sonia because she was trying to take political advantage. If she can do it so can we. Hindus have also to be given their due share. In Godhra you (the Congress) are silent, anywhere else you are violent," said Naidu.



Modi addresses a news conference at Marriot hotel in Panaji. (PTI)

CM plays Gujarati card

FROM BASANT RAWAT AND AGENCIES

Ahmedabad, April 13: A triumphant Narendra Modi today arrived here to a hero's welcome, armed with his party's blessing to lead the state to a mid-term poll that many expect will return the BJP to power.

"Modi is the winner. He returns as a victorious warrior after vanquishing all his critics," said cottage industries minister Ranjit Singh Chavda, reflecting Modi's enhanced image and support base in the state party.

Modi was accorded a red-carpet welcome at the Sardar Vallabhai International airport in contrast to his low-key departure yesterday for Panaji. The smiling chief minister, who reached here with predecessor

Keshubhai Patel, was received by Union minister Haren Pathak, his Cabinet colleagues and MLAs.

In a spirited 25-minute speech, Modi sought to address the sentiments of the people in the state, saying the campaign after the carnage was aimed at "defaming" the BJP and five crore Gujaratis.

Mid-term polls may be bad news for the Congress, but the wishes of the BJP and its Chhota Sardar — Modi — have been fulfilled. It has become clear that in the aftermath of the Godhra carnage Modi was pursuing his own agenda — a well-planned strategy to create a wave in favour of the BJP, which was fast losing its base in the state.

After repeatedly denying any intention of calling early polls, the BJP high command has

asked Modi to dissolve the Assembly and seek a fresh mandate. Clearly, Modi was all along assessing the people's mood.

Having realised that polarisation was complete in Gujarat, it was time to reap the benefits by holding early elections. According to Modi's assessment, the BJP's tally would go up if elections were held in a communally charged atmosphere, a party insider said.

Upbeat with the poll "directive" from Goa, the party's state unit "will draw out a clear roadmap" at a crucial meeting here tomorrow, reports PTI.

BJP spokesman Nalin Bhatt said the meeting would be attended by Modi and Patel. He added "it was premature to say whether we favoured election by June or after monsoon."

poll that will be fought on communal lines. Nobody has any doubt that the BJP will play the communal card to win the elections. "If the BJP is going to hold elections, it only proves that the party is ready to go to any extent to win the elections. It also proves that what happened in Gujarat was a part of an agenda," said Safibhai Memon, a businessman and social worker.

2 die in violence rerun

Two persons, including a woman, were killed and 21 injured after fresh violence erupted in the labour-dominated Danilimda area in Ahmedabad last night, police said.

While a youth was killed in police firing, the woman succumbed to her injuries, sources said.

Party seeks sops to soften budget blow

FROM FREDERICK NORONHA

Panaji, April 13: The BJP today sought to sugarcoat its Hindutva thrust and pander to its middle-class votebank by pushing for several economic sops at its national executive in Goa.

In an economic resolution adopted on the second day of the national executive, the party suggested restoring the 20 per cent tax rebate under Section 88 for incomes up to Rs 5 lakh, review of the proposed service tax on insurance and a new scheme for pensioners affected by a cut in interest earnings.

But even while calling upon the government to soften the bodyblow of the budget, the party refused to castigate Yashwant Sinha's unpopular measures. The national executive asked the Centre to push economic legislations through Parliament and said privatisation should be aggressively pursued as it is key to "sending out signals about (a) commitment to economic reforms".

Putting up a stubborn defence of Sinha's budget, the BJP said it contains "certain measures which may appear harsh to certain sections", but appealed to the "affected sections" to cooperate with the government "at this hour of crisis".

Apart from suggesting the rollback of several budget measures, the party called on the government to distance itself from the pricing process of petroleum products as the administered price mechanism has been phased out from this month. However, it said some subsidy

next three to five years.

Reacting to the demands, Sinha today said changes, if any, would be announced during the discussion on the finance Bill in Parliament.

Voicing concern over falling interest rates on small savings, a step that has met with furious opposition from party MPs, the party asked the government to launch "attractive monthly income schemes" for senior citizens, who could invest their sav-

ings and "lead a retired life peacefully through interest earnings". It sought a pension scheme for individuals, too.

The resolution said steps should be taken to minimise issue prices of PDS foodgrain and ensure flexible distribution so that the poorest of poor would have access to food security.

The BJP suggested providing subsidy support on fertilisers directly to farmers instead of routing it through the companies and modification of crop insurance scheme so that farmers would have easy access. A rethink on the removal of the tax concession on diesel for fishermen was also urged.

Under the one-by-six scheme, the party wanted telephone subscribers to be exempted from filing compulsory returns. However, those with mobile phones could be brought under the scheme.

The party wanted efforts to be concentrated on recovering tax arrears through tough measures. "Goodwill of the general public is crucial for carrying out economic reforms, specially (those of) the second generation," the party said, while pre-



Sinha

CM'S RESIGNATION OFFER TURNED DOWN AS PM, JANA TAKE HARD LINE IN RHETORIC

Modi asked to seek mandate

Sudesh K Verma in Panaji in Goa

April 12. — The high drama over the future of the Gujarat chief minister ended in a whirl of events here today. At the BJP national executive meeting, Mr Narendra Modi offered to resign, which was unanimously rejected by the party with the advice that he seek dissolution of the Assembly and a fresh mandate instead.

At the same time, today's conclave saw a headline shade to Mr Vajpayee's "soft" image when he squarely blamed the perpetrators of the Godhra carnage for events that followed.

After the day's meeting, BJP president Mr K Jana Krishnamurthy said the timing of the recommendation to dissolve the Assembly has been left to the chief minister.

Caught in an oust-Modi pincer wielded by both the Opposition and NDA partners, and coming barely a day after the TDP issued a stern ultimatum to the BJP for the chief minister's scalp, the party allowed Mr Modi an option which many liberals within the BJP were not in favour of. A special resolution rejecting his offer of resignation was passed by the executive in an hour without debate. And those who wanted to speak were reportedly not allowed to.

At the conclave, Mr Modi came armed with a unanimous resolution of his Cabinet recommending dissolution of the Assembly. The strategy was presumably devised by law minister Mr Arun Jaitley, who airdashed to Ahmedabad yesterday and

brought Mr Modi with him to Goa. [Mr Modi later in the day said his priority now will be to "wipe the tears" of the riot-hit. "I am returning to Gujarat with new confidence and strength... my priority will be to wipe the tears off those affected and to rehabilitate them," he said at a TV interview, a late-night PTI report from Delhi said.]

The Prime Minister, too, turned the tables on Mr Modi's detractors with a firmly-worded speech that seemed to throw new light on his perception of events in post-Godhra Gujarat.

In the backdrop of his earlier observations on Islamic terrorism, Mr Vajpayee made certain statements at the conclave and at a public rally here which are difficult to reconcile with his generally-perceived "liberal" leanings.

"Wherever Muslims are", Mr Vajpayee said at the BJP executive, "...they don't want to live in peace (jaha jaha nahin chahie)". He added: "Auron se ghulna-milna nahin chahie. Shanti-purn tarike se prachar karne ke bajay atankvad se dwara dhamka kar apne mat ka prachar karna chahie hain

wh (They don't want to interact with others ... and instead of propagating their message through peace, use terror as weapon)."

Though the Prime Minister did refer to two kinds of Islam — the peaceful and the radical (terrorist) version — these observations appeared to be highly uncharacteristic of

riots, that "advice" should not always be given to the "provoked".

On the economic front, however, Mr Krishnamurthy criticised the Budget and called for a committee to study the impact of liberalisation.

Mr Vajpayee carried his new-found tough stand to the public rally later in the day. There, the Prime Minister championed — for the first time — the argument that riots in Gujarat could have been avoided if kar sevaks were not charred to death in Godhra in the first place. The government is trying to find out who was behind the ghastly act, he said, and did not desist from condemning the incidents that followed the carnage. However, he was quick to point out that one must not forget who lit the fire and how it spread ("Aag kisne lagayi, kaise faili?").

Not all in the party were in the same mood as Mr Vajpayee, however. In the evening, some leaders expressed their disappointment at the attempt by the leadership to scuttle a full-fledged debate on the issue, hinting that they would have preferred the chief minister's resignation.

Those who spoke openly in favour

of accepting Mr Modi's resignation include Mr Shanta Kumar and Mr TN Chaturvedi. They sought a full-fledged debate tomorrow before a final stand is taken. But the BJP called a special session soon after Mr Vajpayee's rally to clear the confusion.

Today's developments place a big question mark on the Prime Minister's credibility, and also cast doubts on his earlier willingness to do something effective over Gujarat, which he had admitted during his visit to Godhra a fortnight back — had sullied the nation's image.

Over the past week, the big question for the BJP was whether to retain Gujarat (read: Mr Modi) at the cost of losing out in the rest of the country. The leadership today put all ambiguity at rest by backing the view that Gujarat must be won to silence a trenchant Opposition.

At the rally, Mr Vajpayee dwelt at length on Islamic fundamentalism in the countries he had visited earlier this week. He said while one version of Islam taught love, peace and compassion, a section of its adherents were using it for purposes of militancy and jihad and trying to bring the world under its influence.

The PM's hard-hitting speech may have surprised admirers and detractors alike, but had an electrifying effect on the cadre. Some said this was a befitting reply to those who were trying to pressure the government. Now the opposition should either "behave or be ready for polls," said a worker.



**On Gujarat riots
One must not forget
who lit the fire and
how it spread**

**On Islamic terrorism
Wherever Muslims
are, they don't want
to live in peace
They don't want to mix
with others ... (they)
use terror as weapon**

D. T. O.

(Continued from page 1)

The Prime Minister also ridiculed the Congress for saying that it does not intend to try to bring down the government. "What should I say: Shall I thank them ... or are the grapes sour?"

Returning to Islamic fundamentalism, he pointed out that even in Singapore some Al-Qaida activists had been arrested and the country taken by surprise that such activity could be pursued there. The same was happening in Indonesia and Malaysia, he said: "*Har jagah jahan Muslims bahut sankhya mein rahie hain, unki chinta hai ki kahin Islam ugra roop nahin le le* (wherever Muslims live in large numbers, the administrators fear Islam could take an aggressive turn any moment)."

Today's events may be sought to be explained along the lines of an internal assessment by the party, wherein it predicts a sweep in Gujarat in the event of mid-term polls.

The Congress' decision at its Guwahati meet that its chief ministers would spur a nationwide agitation to "educate the people on Gujarat" seemed to be the final provocation for the ruling party. The BJP feels the move to include chief ministers in agitprop is a reflection of the Congress' frustration and

MODI STAYS:

also unconstitutional: "It is a double-edged sword which we could also use."

Only recently, the RSS had sparked a row with a resolution in Bangalore saying the welfare of the minority lies in the goodwill of the majority. Though Mr Krishnamurthy did not say the same in as many words today, he set the mood of the conclave with the comment that "every section of society when it thinks is whole of the part must realise that it is simply a part of the whole. ...So much so that its welfare and well-being depend upon those of the entire society."

Former Delhi chief minister Mr Madan Lal Khurana later conceded that there were two views in the party over Mr Modi's handling of the Gujarat cauldron. Mr Modi in anticipation had apparently refused to attend the meeting at first, and relented at the last moment when Mr Arun Jaitley was sent to Gandhinagar to bring him along.

Mr Krishnamurthy, however, did not mince words when he condemned those who wanted Mr Modi on the chopping block. The nation needs to be saved from forces aiming solely at destabilising the BJP

government at the Centre, he said.

This comes as a severe indictment of some NDA allies, particularly the Telugu Desam, which have been demanding Mr Modi's ouster. But the leadership admits that the TDP will have to kept in good humour ... and some "window-dressing" to this effect will be required later.

Mr Krishnamurthy and other headlines doubtlessly have impending elections firmly on their sights. The BJP also cannot ignore its recent reverses in the Assembly elections in UP, Uttaranchal, Punjab and Manipur. Introspection was the call of the day to the cadre. Elections to Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi are due in the next twelve months.

The party president also called upon the government to set up a time-bound committee of competent persons to study the impact of first-generation economic reforms, and spoke of applying correctives if the impression that the Budget contributed to setbacks for the party was found correct.

Mr Krishnamurthy, however, did not call for a rollback of measures such as the surcharge on income tax, cut in interests rates on small savings or hike in price of petroleum products.

BJP stand on Modi harmful, says Cong

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, April 12. — The BJP's rejection of Mr Narendra Modi's offer to resign is an "absolute setback" for Indian democracy, the Congress said here today. Party spokesman Mr S Jaipal Reddy said the BJP national executive, at its meeting in Goa, had taken upon itself to defend Mr Modi "whose position has become indefensible". The resolution only confirms that the BJP does not bother about the NDA's agenda and it is always "willing to go back to its core communal

agenda" whenever the party suffers electoral setbacks, Mr Reddy said.

At the two-day conclave of the Congress chief ministers, Mrs Sonia Gandhi said there wouldn't be any compromise on secularism. "Let me make it absolutely clear: any individual or organisation preaching or practicing the politics of hate and threatening the very existence of our social fabric must be dealt with without fear or favour according to the law. My directive to you is that there must not be any compromise, under any circumstances on this under a Congress government."

She was delivering the opening

speech of conclave, began at a city hotel this morning. This is the third such conference. The first two were held in Delhi in 2000 and 2001.

Launching an attack on Mr Narendra Modi and the NDA, she said the former had "singularly failed" in discharging his constitutional obligations and responsibilities and the Centre had condoned a situation in which Indians were targeted on the basis of their faith. "The Centre sees nothing wrong in a chief minister whose law-and-order is so infected by the politics of communalism that it victimises officials who took a courageous stand against communal violence."

The conclave, held in the backdrop of BJP's declining electoral graph and the Congress adding three more states to its kitty, heard Mrs Gandhi impressing upon the chief ministers that the people were looking towards the party with "high expectations".

She emphasised on good and effective governance and the need for a new administrative culture while stating that the Congress was the "natural party of governance". Good governance, she said, was among other things about ensuring that minimum wages were paid, ensuring the welfare of the work force in the unorganised sector and ensuring law

and order and social harmony.

"I'm very particular that our states start training programmes on a large scale for elected representatives to local bodies as Rajivji believed that empowering local governments was the first step to good governance."

Holding forth a list of dos and don'ts for the chief ministers, she said a "historic responsibility" had come upon them to practise a new politics in which economic growth and social development will have absolute primacy and the welfare of the weaker sections of society overriding priority in their administrative scheme of things.

Sinha gets ready to tough it out in Goa

FM's policies may draw flak at BJP conclave

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

PANAJI: The humiliating electoral defeats suffered by the BJP in the recent assembly elections and the MCD polls in Delhi will cast a long shadow on its three-day national executive meeting which begins here on Friday at a picturesque resort hotel. So will the Centre's unpopular economic policies.

The only man who seems to be in no trouble—although he should be—is Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi.

Even after the PM's tearful comments when he visited that state on April 4, party president Jana Krishnamurthy once again said on Thursday in answer to a question, "Now is the time for everyone to come and support Mr Modi and help him restore normalcy in the state," and ruled out his replacement.

The only bit of good news for the BJP, according to sources, is that a recent poll shows that if elections are held in Gujarat today, the party will get a two-thirds majority. Central office-bearers here emphasised that the poll results would be the focus of discussions at the national meet, the objective being to strategise for next year's assembly polls in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh—where the BJP is in power—and Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—where it is the principal opposition.

The national executive is also expected to draw up a strategy for the general elections in 2004 and to build a "war team" organisationally as well as at the government level. But equally, with anger running high among party cadres against the BJP-led government's economic policies, including the

recent budget, finance minister Yashwant Sinha will be in the eye of the storm.

Indeed, Mr Sinha's efforts at PR in a national daily—where he has defended his budget, hit out at those in the party who want to see him out of the job, and said that he is willing to take any criticism "on the chin"—has raised hackles in the party. A senior cabinet minister even said, "What he really needs is a sock on the chin."

Party sources also indicated that Mr

Krishnamurthy's presidential speech on the opening day would articulate some of the criticism of the cadres. He is likely to attack the hike in petrol prices, the increase in surcharge and the cut in interest rates. When Mr Krishnamurthy was asked at Mumbai airport whether there would be any criticism of the economic policies, he said, "Let's see what comes up in the discussions."

But the criticism is expected to be balanced in the text of the draft economic resolution to be passed at the meeting. Party sources said the resolution would defend the budget saying that it needs to be read in the proper perspective and that it will point to the strategies suggested to promote growth and employ-

ment, agricultural reforms and the development of infrastructure, tourism and housing, as well as social welfare measures. Apart from the economic resolution, the political resolution, which comes up on Saturday, will cover cross-border terrorism, the attack on parliament last December, Poto, Godhra and Gujarat, and will "congratulate" the government for its handling of the Ayodhya crisis.

'Kashiram Rana may replace Modi'

Times News Network

AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI: At



the end of a day marked by confusing signals, it was not quite clear when Narendra Modi would be replaced as Gujarat chief minister, if at all. While PMO officials said that the Prime Minister had decided to replace Mr Modi, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy insisted that the chief minister was not likely to be replaced.

PMO sources suggested that Mr Modi would probably be replaced by Union textile minister Kashiram Rana. Mr Rana, a prominent BJP leader with an RSS background, is also from the backward class. His name has been doing the rounds ever since talks of replacing Mr Modi gained currency.

Modi to face party with RSS shield

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

April 8. — To avoid a direct confrontation with the liberals in the BJP and the national media, Mr Narendra Modi reportedly wanted to skip the party's Goa national executive meeting from 12-14 April on the pretext of the tense situation in the state. Senior leaders, however, advised him to attend the meeting, even if briefly, to scotch speculations about his replacement.

Mr Modi's fate would, however, depend on the Prime Minister's determination to take on the RSS, which is reportedly backing the Gujarat chief minister.

(BJP president Mr Jana Krishnamurthy today ruled out change of leadership in the state, PTI adds. "I don't understand why an individual is being targeted for no fault

of his. My advice to those demanding his removal is that they should appeal to the electorate to reject him when the state goes to polls in February next year." Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, an NDA ally, too said Mr Modi's removal was not a solution.)

The RSS has been trying to paint him as "chota Sardar" (Sardar Patel's successor) for his handling of the post-Godhra situation. Replacing him

without the RSS's consent could cause difficulties for Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee because that might recharge Hindu fundamentalists.

How to remove Mr Modi through a surgery without further disturbing the state's communal atmosphere is Mr Vajpayee's dilemma. There's going to be immense pressure from the Opposition and within the NDA for the chief minister's removal. Opposition parties

Riots help swell *shakhas*

AHMEDABAD, April 8. — RSS membership and participation in the organisation's *shakhas* have seen a quantum leap during and after the communal violence in Gujarat. Sources said the number of *shakhas* in Ahmedabad alone has gone up to 400, while across the state the figure has crossed 1,900.

"The BJP should be happy about it," an RSS leader said. Sources said that even a few months back only 12 members used to attend the *shakhas*. But now in some of the *shakhas* the figure has reached 40. — PTI

have indicated they wouldn't allow Parliament to function till he is removed.

The Samata Party and the Trinamul, too, have demanded Mr Modi's scalp following yesterday's attack on journalists at Sabarmati Ashram.

Though the BJP has taken exception to the allies' demand and ruled out change of leadership, such demands are likely to strengthen Mr Vajpayee's hand in dealing with the

situation. After his visit to Gujarat, he had indicated that Mr Modi was being put on final notice. The attack on the journalists followed his visit.

The BJP's anger is on two counts. One, Mr Modi is a BJP chief minister and NDA partners shouldn't comment on how the party will deal with its chief minister. Second, the two allies have aired their views outside the NDA, embarrassing the BJP.

While BJP spokesman Mr Sunil Shastri gave a convoluted response and said an NDA meeting was likely towards the beginning of the second-half of the Budget session to discuss the allies' concerns, Mr Krishnamurthy said in Ranchi that he would speak to Mr George Fernandes.

The BJP lauded Mr Modi's role and publicly disagreed with the Samata. Mr Shastri said police fired more than

10,000 round of bullets to control the rioters. In all, 130 people were killed and more than 4,000 arrested.

Remand: Former Simi member Hasib Raja, who was brought to Godhra from Jalgaon on a transfer warrant in connection with the train carnage, has been remanded in 10 days' police custody, PTI adds from Godhra.

Editorial: Gujarat unrepentant, page 4

Kashmir BJP dissolves itself

Rashid Ahmad
Srinagar, April 3

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party's entire Kashmir unit has followed the footsteps of its vice-president Abdul Rasheed Kabli and collectively quit the party today. They are likely to join the People's Democratic Party of former Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Syed.

The BJP leaders met at the party's Barzullah headquarters here and resigned collectively from the BJP. In a resolution adopted at the end of the meeting, they expressed full faith in Kabli's leadership and described his resignation from the party as "correct".

Kabli quit the party on Monday after Prime Minister A B Vajpayee ignored his letter in which he had sought response to some of his queries raised in the wake of recent anti Muslim riots in Gujarat, the Ayodhya issue and MP Vinay Katiyar's "blasphemous" remarks about Hazratbal shrine.

Kabli's charges against the Prime Minister and Gujarat Chief Minister.

Poto accused gets bail

IN THE first bail plea under Poto in Jammu and Kashmir, the special judge (Poto) has rejected the police version that a taxi driver was involved in a Rs 40 lakh hawala deal. The court held that the case diary revealed that one of the accused, Zahoor Ahmed Shah, was not involved directly with the alleged offences and that he was a bona fide taxi driver whose vehicle had been hired by the main accused Abdul Rashid Lone from Sopore to Srinagar. It also directed Srinagar Central Jail authorities to release Shah on a personal bond of Rs 25,000.

PTI, Srinagar

Narendra Modi found favour with almost all party cadres. They alleged that Modi's hands were stained with the blood of Muslims and the Prime Minister was patronising him.

No need to be apologetic: Advani

By Our Special Correspondent

PANAJI, APRIL 13. A "reshuffle" of portfolios between those in the Bharatiya Janata Party organisation and those in the Government and a no-nonsense unapologetic stance towards the party's 'Hindutva' ideology were two decisions taken at the party's national executive committee meeting here this afternoon.

The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, categorically stated that "some people from the Government would go to the party and some from the party could go to the Government. The Prime Minister and the party president will discuss this and take a decision."

However, he said he would not move to the party as president; there was no vacancy there and he had a "duty" to perform as Home Minister.

On the confusion within the party on its commitment to Hindutva as well as the NDA agenda for governance, Mr. Advani made it clear that there was "no going back" on the NDA agenda.

At the same time, his message

to the party cadre was that "there was no need to be apologetic about our party's ideological moorings.... enlightened cultural nationalism and positive secularism."

The political resolution of the party will be discussed and adopted tomorrow, but Mr. Advani's "intervention" today during the discussion on the reasons for the BJP's downslide are indicative of the party line.

When Mr. Advani was asked by presspersons whether the violence in Gujarat was a manifestation of "enlightened cultural nationalism and positive secularism" he fumbled for a response before saying that in Gujarat, there had been a "vicious disinformation campaign (against the party and the Chief Minister) but an appropriate response has been given by the national executive".

On the allies' demand that the Gujarat Chief M. Narendra Modi, be sacked, Mr. Advani said that every party in the NDA had the right to run its own State Government.

"They have the right to say something about the function-

ing of the Government at the Centre, but the State Government."

In short, the BJP was in no mood to listen to the Telugu Desam Party chief, Chandrababu Naidu, and the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, although it seemed to blame the decision to dissolve the Gujarat Assembly and hold early elections there on the Congress.

The Home Minister also admitted that the Vajpayee Government had not been able to fulfil the "high aspirations" of the people, who wanted a "Government with a difference", although the Centre had indeed performed well in several areas, including national security and foreign policy. Appropriating for the Vajpayee Government all the political space in matters of national security, he made a direct attack on the Congress, saying, "From Pokhran to Kargil to POTO" the Congress had not stood with the Government on national security issues.

THE HINDU
wishes its readers a happy
VISHU & TAMIL NEW YEAR

BJP mounts save-Modi mission

Riots breach Kutch barrier

OUR BUREAU

April 2: As the flames of Ahmedabad spread to Kutch, an unfazed BJP sprang to the defence of Narendra Modi and claimed that he had handled the situation as best as he could.

"I am sure no other government could have handled it better. If human failures are there, they shall be set right," BJP president Jana Krishnamurthi said a day after the National Human Rights Commission castigated the Gujarat chief minister for failing to control communal violence.

Krishnamurthi dismissed the continuing arson and killings, saying: "Riots have stopped, only individual cases are there."

Even as Krishnamurthi spoke, indefinite curfew was clamped in the quake-ravaged town of Anjar in Kutch, which had remained an island of peace last month when several parts of the state were burning.

More than 25 shops were set ablaze and two places of worship destroyed by a mob which had given the police a deadline to nab those behind desecrating a statue. The police later said a man, who had been sent from Delhi by the ISI to foment trouble in Kutch, has been arrested for vandalising the statue.

In Delhi, the BJP chief lashed out at the Opposition for demanding Modi's scalp. "I have not joined the ranks of the Opposition which were so critical of Modi. Unless political bias is there, such comments on Modi would not have been made," Krishnamurthi said.

To bolster his defence of Modi, Krishnamurthi said: "In

any such riot, business is most affected. When I was in Gujarat, I met chamber of commerce representatives who did not make any caustic comment on the chief minister."

He also noted that it was only the Congress high command which vociferously sought his resignation and not the Gujarat legislature party or the state unit.

In a statement, the BJP later slammed the press for "ignoring" the rights commission's praise of the Modi government. It said the commission had taken "good note" of the relief, rescue and rehabilitation measures and commended the officials and NGOs involved with the efforts.

But BJP general secretary, Sunil Shastri was hard put to answer when it was pointed out that the good words were meant more for individual officials than the chief minister.

Both Krishnamurthi and Shastri ruled out the possibility of Gujarat being a fit case for Central rule.

Reminded that the NDA government had recommended the Bihar government's dismissal after just one caste riot, Krishnamurthi said: "But we asked for Central rule after Patna High Court observed that there was jungle raj in the state..."

Asked whether the BJP had a "Kamaraj" plan to revamp the organisation after the electoral defeats, Krishnamurthi turned defensive and referred to reports hinting that he may be asked to make way for L.K. Advani.

"The chair is always vacant and I will not stand in the way of anyone occupying it. But nobody has approached me so far," Krishnamurthi said.

■ See Pages 5 & 6

MOSQUE STANDS AS MODEL OF BROTHERHOOD



A Sikh stands guard at the Guru ki Maseet mosque at Sri Hargovindpur in Punjab. The shrine, which was in the custody of the Nihangs for about 55 years, was handed over to Muslims last week. (AFP)

Dalit antidote to Gujarat formula

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, April 2: The Sangh parivar's newfound source of footsoldiers in Gujarat is coming under threat from an old challenger.

India's biggest confederation of weaker sections will launch a movement in Gujarat tomorrow — a day before the Prime Minister's tour of the riot-ravaged state — to "save the nation" and prevent Dalits from becoming the sword arm of the VHP.

Among the many new experiments tried out by the rioters in the Gujarat 'lab', one was the mobilisation of large number of Dalits in the rural areas against

targeted victims.

"Dalits are being used for riots. I will tell them not to get involved in this Hindu-Muslim fight. The Dalits should not get carried away by the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. They should desist from being part of any violence," Udit Raj, chief of the All-India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, said here.

Raj, who ran afoul of the Sangh when he converted over 10,000 Dalits into Buddhism on November 4 last year, has called a meeting of all district presidents of the confederation in Ahmedabad tomorrow. The office-bearers are expected to fan out across the state with a mes-

sage to the Dalits to stay away from the Sangh.

"If I can isolate the Dalits and tribals from the VHP, I will be doing a great service to the nation," he said.

If Raj succeeds, he will also hit the BJP where it hurts most — at the hustings. The Dalits, who make up 10 per cent of the population in the state, could tilt the scales in several seats in next year's Assembly elections.

The confederation, which boasts a national membership of three million, will launch the Bharat Bachao Morcha in a fortnight to bring normality to Gujarat, provide relief and isolate fundamentalists of all hues.

Raj said a menacing fallout of the Gujarat carnage was social stratification. "Already, different communities have set up exclusive villages for themselves."

He insisted that the front would be able to make a difference and cited the trend in other states. "Unlike in Gujarat and Rajasthan, Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and the southern states are not enamoured of the Sangh parivar," he said.

"In Gujarat and Rajasthan, Dalit consciousness is low. Ambedkarism could not reach there because of the overwhelming presence of Gandhism," Raj added.

BJP's Goa meet to decide Modi's fate

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 2. — The National Human Rights Commission's report is yet another blow to the Narendra Modi government which is already in trouble for failing to contain post-Godhra violence.

His fate, however, would be decided after the BJP's national executive meeting at Goa, beginning from 12 April, where senior leaders are expected to deliberate the Gujarat situation. The Prime Minister's visit to Gujarat prior to the meeting is now more significant as his observations would indicate the government's attitude towards the NHRC report.

Although the report has closed ranks within the Sangh Parivar whose leaders privately question the Commission's intentions, liberals within the party are worried that this would further damage the BJP's image at the national level. The Goa meeting would decide who prevails over whom.

The party was today on the defensive over the report even as it tried to give a clean chit to the Gujarat chief minister and ruled out his removal or Central intervention. The unofficial line is that Mr Modi continues till the

SC stays PIL against NHRC

NEW DELHI, April 2. — The Supreme Court today stayed all proceedings before Gujarat High Court on a PIL challenging the jurisdiction of the NHRC to probe the communal violence.

A Bench, comprising Chief Justice Mr SP Bharucha, Mr Justice N Santosh Hegde and Mr Justice DM Dharmadhikari, passed the stay order after briefly hearing counsel for the Commission, Mr Nikhil Nayyar. The High Court on 27 March had issued notices to the NHRC, Gujarat government and the Centre on a PIL filed by Ahmedabad-based Karuna Public Charitable Trust challenging the jurisdiction of the Commission under Section 36 of the Protection of Human Rights Commission Act to intervene in the state. — PTI

leadership takes a decision. The leadership is afraid that even a hint of removal could send wrong signal and further entrench the chief minister.

The party president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, while terming the demand for Mr Modi's removal as politically motivated, said even the Gujarat unit of the Congress had not made such a demand. He admitted there could be some drawbacks that needed to be removed. It may be noted here that in the past Mr Krishnamurthy had similarly dismissed reports about Mr Keshubhai Patel's ouster till it actually happened.

The BJP spokesperson, Mr Sunil Shashtri, sounded conciliatory. "We can't sit on judgement on the report," he said when

politburo has asked the Vajpayee government to ensure that the NHRC's recommendations on the Gujarat situation, including a CBI probe into the incidents and setting up special courts for speedy trial, are implemented.

The politburo said the NHRC report is "a serious indictment of the Narendra Modi government... The NHRC has confirmed what is widely known about the culpability of the BJP government in the failure to protect the failures to protect the lives of citizens belonging to the minorities and worse for the convenience of the state machinery in the shameful incident". It said the NHRC findings make it "imperative" that Mr Modi be removed. The CPI-M is planning a national agitation along with other secular parties, demanding the chief minister's resignation.

The Gujarat Governor, Mr SS Bhandari, visited the Shah Alam relief camp yesterday and met the riot victims, adds SNS from Gandhinagar. The Governor said he would consider the demand of increasing the compensation for the victims. The government would provide security to the victims if they chose to return home, he said.

asked about the BJP's assessment of the findings. He asserted the Centre would take necessary action after going through the report. People could complain only if the government failed to take action, he said, adding that the government was competent enough to take action.

The party, however, tried to find some reasons for cheers for the state government and circulated a release saying that the report had lauded the relief and rehabilitation work launched by the government. It tried to ignore the Commission's harsher observations. The Commission has questioned Mr Narendra Modi's claim that violence was controlled within 72 hours.

On the other hand, the CPI-M

RSS spells out dos & don'ts

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 27. — The RSS today re-emphasised its position that welfare of the minorities is dependent on the discretion of the majority. At a press conference supposed to clarify the organisation's Bangalore statement — that minorities should earn the goodwill of Hindus — the RSS gave out a long list of 'dos and don'ts' for minorities, and also espoused its version of what it called Hindu "grievances".

RSS spokesperson Mr MG Vaidya said irritants in the majority-minority relationship must be removed for social harmony. He also clarified that the RSS version of "minority" included Christians, and that they (Christians) must accept that Salvation can be achieved even without the Church. He also asserted that most conversions were due to reasons of allurements rather than a genuine desire to change faith.

Mr Vaidya said Muslims should reinterpret and redefine the meanings of *kafir* (infidel), *kufr* (philosophy behind the term *kafir*) and *jihad*. They should also not play into the hands of Hindu-baiters, but support liberal Muslims such as Mr Asghar Ali Engineer, Mr Sikander Bakht and Mr Mushirul Hasan, he added.

Hindus should not be targeted for worship-

ping idols alone, Mr Vaidya said, since they are not asking the minorities to do so. "We do not want people to be killed when they go on a pilgrimage to Amarnath ... we want Muslims to remove them (the irritants) and then there will be no occasion to disrupt social harmony."

On Mr Vaidya's claim that Godhra had led to the Gujarat riots, it was pointed out to him that about 100,000 people are still living in relief camps there. At this, he retorted saying about 200,000 Hindus are placed in camps in Jammu. He, however, failed to see the finer distinction between terrorists and Muslims, and reiterated the RSS view that all Muslims were not terrorists though many terrorists happen to be Muslims.

Jihad was an Islamic cause, he said, stressing that "being Muslim is an attitude; let Muslims understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority. What is (so) objectionable in this? Does the safety of any minority group lie in the ill will of the majority?"

He cited the example of the Indian diaspora: "Can they live there by earning the ill will of the majority?" Claiming the RSS was not the first to highlight these aspects, Mr Vaidya quoted from GB Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru. He defended the RSS' Bangalore resolution, saying the Sangh was ready to talk to Muslim leaders the way it was doing with Christians.

THE STATESMAN

29 MAR 2002

Delhi dressing-down for Modi

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 27: At the end of a meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani, Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi declared: "Everyone is satisfied."

What he did not say was that he himself was leaving much less than satisfied. Vajpayee is believed to have shot down his proposal — backed by some senior Central leaders — to announce early polls in Gujarat to cash in on the perceived advantage the BJP would enjoy in a communally polarised state.

The Prime Minister told Modi not to paint a rosy picture of the state or unilaterally declare he was satisfied with the outcome of their discussions this morning. Modi was summoned yesterday after he failed to control the communal violence that is raging even a month since the Godhra carnage.

Sources said Vajpayee made it clear to Modi that instead of harping on the Godhra carnage and what followed thereafter, the chief minister should ensure better conditions in the relief camps and rehabilitation of those who have taken shelter there. The Prime Minister told Modi all those who are housed in refugee camps must be rehabilitated before he visits Ahmedabad between April 1 and 6.

Some BJP strategists feel this is the opportune time to go in for polls — scheduled next year — because in the surcharged post-Godhra atmosphere, bread-and-butter issues would weigh far less with voters than the "zeal" to send the party back to power after it had "taught the lesson of their lives to Muslims", as a Gujarat MP put it.

Modi received a good-conduct certificate from the Sangh, too. RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya said: "No government could have done what his government did. Modi did whatever he could and if there is any shortcoming, it will come up in the inquiry

commission's report."

That Vajpayee does not agree with this assessment was indicated by the priorities he set for the chief minister. As part of a confidence-building exercise, Modi was directed to start rebuilding the houses that were burnt and damaged in the violence and restore the livelihood of those who lost it. By Modi's own admission, as many as 97,000 people have taken refuge in 101 camps.

After his meeting with the Prime Minister, Modi said: "They (refugees) can go back only when things are normal."

Vajpayee also conveyed to Modi that during his visit, he would only go to the camps and not have any other engagement.

Official sources said when Modi mentioned Godhra, the Prime Minister cut him short and said he did not wish to delve into what happened in the past but wanted to concentrate on what lay ahead. "How can the situation ever be normal when there are so many people staying in the camps?" he asked Modi.

When Modi expressed reservations about reconstructing the houses, saying it was impossible for the state government to undertake such a huge exercise, Vajpayee told him to find a way out, involve NGOs — as was done during the earthquake — and ensure the victims' lives were secure once they returned to their homes.

Again when the chief minister voiced doubts about ensuring security, arguing it was easier to shift victims out of their villages into camps where there was safety in numbers, the Prime Minister reminded him of his responsibility to guarantee the safety of his people.

When Modi asked Vajpayee if he could tell the media that the Prime Minister was satisfied with his account, he was advised to steer clear of the issue and focus instead on the subjects that were discussed. "Of course, it would be unfair to say the Prime Minister was dissatisfied with the outcome," sources said.



Narendra Modi speaks to Atal Bihari Vajpayee during a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence. (AFP)

Patel to keep Gujarat balance

FROM SEEMAGUHA

New Delhi, March 27: Unable to remove the Gujarat chief minister because of the strong support he enjoys from the RSS and the VHP, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is planning to induct Narendra Modi's arch rival Keshubhai Patel into his Cabinet and create an alternative power centre in the state.

Patel, who was chief minister before Modi, was elected as a Rajya Sabha member from Gujarat today.

Once close friends, the two fell out after Modi realised that as chief minister Patel was refusing to be dictated to. The ri-

valry between the two led to Modi being brought to Delhi and slotted in the party hierarchy. But he continued to needle Keshubhai and finally succeeded in dislodging him.

Modi was in Delhi today to brief the Prime Minister and home minister L.K. Advani about the situation in Gujarat. Vajpayee was reportedly furious with Modi for his failure to control the riots triggered by the Godhra killings, which together have damaged the image of the Central government.

But the Prime Minister is in no position to remove him, first because Vajpayee's standing in the BJP and the Sangh parivar is

not too strong now as he has been unable to deliver election victories, and second, because Modi is being backed by the RSS and the VHP. Besides, Modi has been promising the party bosses that the polarisation of votes in Gujarat will benefit the BJP.

There is no unanimity on the issue, though, with many in the ruling party holding the view that the enterprising Gujarati business community is fed up with the dislocation caused by the continuing violence. Hindus and Muslims want to get back to their everyday routine and are unlikely to favour a government that has done little to ease the tension.

THE HINDU

28 MAR 2002

Karunanidhi puts BJP on notice

announced its verdict against Jayalithaa. "I am not stating this as a curse. I only ask them to take this as an advice." Earlier, the party passed a resolution, among many others, congratulating Vajpayee for announcing that the Centre would remain firm on the NDA's agenda.

The party also decided to take legal action against what it called irregularities in the Andipatti by-election.

Karunanidhi also honoured with shawls K Ponmudi and other former ministers and senior functionaries whose houses had been raided recently.

25 MAR 2002

Seven buses in Baroda set on fire

24/3 PRESS TRUST OF INDIA SF-10

AHMEDABAD, March 23. — Seven private luxury buses were set on fire by a mob at Pipaliya village in Vaghodiya taluka of Baroda district late tonight, police said here.

The mob asked passengers to get down from the buses before setting it on fire, police said.

However, nobody was injured in the incident, sources said adding, fire brigade immediately rushed to the spot. Sporadic incidents of arson were reported from Syedvana Tandalja road in Baroda where a food joint was set on fire by the mob. An STD PCO was also set on fire in Laxmipura area late tonight, police said.

Meanwhile, one person, who was injured in stabbing at Kagadapith police station area on 19 March succumbed to injury in the hospital as one more area in the walled city area was brought under indefinite curfew following incidents of violence and arson this evening.

Police burst teargas shells to scare away a mob indulged in setting afire

(Continued from page 1)

ASHES: collected, he said: "sochenge (we'll think about it)". He refused to divulge the number of urns already collected. However, in Delhi, a VHP spokesperson said the outfit had no plans for an *asthi kalash yatra*, carrying the ashes of those who died in the Godhra incident. The issue was never taken up by the top leadership at the two-day executive meeting held at Ayodhya. He, however, admitted that the ashes might have been kept at a safe place in Ahmedabad or other parts of Gujarat.

shops and houses in Raykhat locality of Haveli police station area this evening, police said.

Indefinite curfew was imposed from 6 p.m. in the area for the third time, as tension mounted.

Meanwhile, curfew was strictly in force in four police station areas of Kalupur, Dariapur, Shahpur and Karanj during the day.

Curfew was imposed in the Gaekwad

Haveli police station area of the city today after sporadic incidents of rioting. Peace in Bhavnagar city was broken as police and the Army fired several rounds to quell rioters.

Incidents of stone throwing and arson in Raikhad locality here forced police to use tear gas shells and fire in the air before imposing an indefinite curfew in the Gaekwad Haveli police station area from 6 p.m.

THE STATESMAN

7 4 MAR 2002

Yatra preparations were on in Gujarat

VHP claim reduced to ashes

ANIL RANA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JADEVPURA (Gujarat), MARCH 23. — The VHP's claim yesterday that it had "never planned to take out an *asthi yatra*" is reduced to ashes in this village. The parishad had put in place all the arrangements for the yatra within a few days of the 27 February Godhra train killings.

Family members of victims, concerned that the VHP has changed its stance, want to know how the "memory of the dead will be respected". "May be they will immerse the ashes in the Saryu river in Ayodhya", they said. If that is done, the problems for the Centre and the BJP will be far from over, pledges made at yesterday's NDA meeting notwithstanding.

Within a week of the cremation of two women kar sevaks — Lalitaben (40) and Manguben (60) — who died in the Sabarmati Express fire, ashes were collected and put in brass urns by VHP functionaries in Jadevpura. "Not just ashes, but photographs and biographical details of the two

were also collected", according to relatives of Lalitaben and Manguben.

The relatives were told that the ashes would be immersed "in all the sacred rivers of the country, including the Sangam (confluence of the Ganga, Jamuna and the mythical Saraswati) at Allahabad." Jadevpura is some 60 km from Ahmedabad, adjacent to Kadi in Mehsana district. Mr Babubhai Kanchwala, chief of the

VHP in the district, said the ashes were sent to the VHP head office at Ahmedabad.

Babubhai's daughter, Hetal Patel (20), says she was in the Sabarmati Express when the attack took place. She and others in the village are not only angry and defiant about "building the Ram temple" but, now, also want to know what will happen to the ashes delivered to VHP head office in Ahmedabad. Lalitaben's family

completed the cremation rituals at the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad. The last rites have been completed by Manguben's

Mass recitation of Koran on Holi

NEW DELHI, March 23. — The All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat has given a call for mass recitation of the Koran after Friday prayers in all madrasas and mosques on 29 March, the day Holi will be celebrated.

The AIMMM president Syed Shahabuddin said the decision had nothing to do with the date. "We just wanted to have it at the earliest," he said. — SNS

■ See ASHES: page 10
■ Editorial: Ordeal continues, page 8

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2002

NDA-Sangh Parivar rift widens

27/3 51
Stateaman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 21. — Another flare-up in the Lok Sabha today over the simmering Ayodhya issue widened differences between hardcore Sangh Parivar members and NDA partners, bringing the government on the throes of yet another crisis.

The Lok Sabha today witnessed ugly scenes over the VHP's proposed *asthi yatra*, which the allies and the Opposition believe may foment communal tension. Mr Vinay Katiyar, BJP MP, had a heated argument with Mr DP Yadav of the JD(U), and dared the BJP's allies to quit the NDA. At this, Mr Yadav shot back: "Who are you to tell us to leave the NDA? ... In any case, we will tell you by tomorrow what we can do."

BJP to showcause MP

NEW DELHI, March 21. — Mr Jaswant Singh is likely to showcause party Rajya Sabha MP Mr BP Singhal, who had demanded Mr Vajpayee's resignation. Leaders feel the demand, an embarrassment for the government, may be deemed as indiscipline. An explanation will also be sought. — SNS

The allies have lined up a strategy session tomorrow to discuss the "future course of action". Asking the Prime Minister to halt the *asthi yatra*, they had reminded the BJP that the government runs on an NDA agenda, and not one of the ... Sangh Parivar. They also turned back Mr Vijay Goel, junior minister in the PMO, who had approached some al-

9-P-1 BJP
liance leaders on a "peace mission from higher-ups". An emergency NDA meeting to defuse the crisis is planned for tomorrow.

The BJP today said differences within the NDA should not be aired in public and that issues should be discussed at a meeting. Saying that differences were inevitable as the NDA is a 24-party coalition, BJP spokesman Mr VK Malhotra said all disputes should be resolved on the basis of the NDA minimum programme.

Mr Raghunath Jha of the Samata Party and Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay have backed Mr Yadav. Leaders of the TDP, Trinamul, Haryana Lok Dal and Janata factions plan to meet in Parliament House tomorrow to chalk out a strategy. Mr Yerram Naidu (TDP) has called a meet at his residence tomorrow.

Editorial: Why the capitulation? page 4

THE S... ..

Sangh getting ready to restrain VHP

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 20 MARCH

THE RASHTRIYA Swayamsevak Sangh is getting ready to restrain the VHP which has caused embarrassment to the BJP government.

As the BJP deals with the recalcitrant voices emerging from the VHP quarters, the intervention of the Sangh - the family patriarch - will help it tackle the strident in-house criticism from Mr Ashok Singhal and his comrades. The Sangh, according to sources, has displayed empathy towards the BJP and the problem it faces in reconciling ideological fidelity and the compromises required for running the coalition. While the Sangh leadership appreciates the reasons for restlessness, it is for giving a larger political running room

to the government.

The Sangh's umiring was evident in the sudden visit to Ayodhya of Ms. Uma Bharti, Union minister and one of the leading lights of VHP. Ms. Bharti made no bones of the fact that she was in the temple city only to get the VHP defer its temple construction plan. She made a public appeal to Mr Singhal and Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans as they held meetings to finalise their response to the Centre's "we will enforce the interim order of the Supreme Court" line.

For the Sangh, the autonomous postures of the VHP, though embarrassing for the government, are to some extent unavoidable. They see the domestic tussle in the light of the deep-seated reservations of those in power who have traditionally placed ideological fidelity over practical

politics. For those who wanted the party to remain a pressure group with a distinct identity, the idea of joining coalitions and the compromises that they entail have always been a source of disquiet. The Samyukta Vidhayak Dal experiment of 1967 which saw the Bharatiya Jan Sangh joining hands with even the Left, caused considerable heartburn among the faithful. Jan Sangh's participation in the anti-Congress movement triggered off by the students' movements in Gujarat and Bihar was preceded by intense debate within, with many resisting the move for fears of dilution of its plank. Of course, the party seriously considered mainstreaming itself by immersing itself in the Janata Parivar once the debate had been settled. The bitterness over the "dual membership" and the failure to find respectable accommo-

modation within even the Chandrasekhar-led Janata rump forced it to strike out on its own again in 1980 under the present incarnation of the Bharatiya Janata Party. It was, however, a good six years later and after the Shah Bano ferment and opening of the Ayodhya box that the party thought it prudent to return to its Jan Sangh basics.

The Sangh cleared the idea of BJP's joining coalitions after the defeat of the first Vajpayee government in 1996, but was not fully prepared for it when the sudden collapse of the Congress-UF arrangement forced it to attempt fashioning one in 1998. "We didn't have the time to sensitise the cadre to the exigencies and compromises that are required and hence the uneasiness. Things would have worked out better if the message had percolated down to those who would still be comfortable with

political isolation," said a senior BJP leader.

With the Sangh taking a pragmatic view of BJP's compulsions and ready to lean on the VHP, Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and Union home minister L K Advani, can hope to have respite after a month of turmoil.

The Sangh has already taken up the matter with the VHP, and the coming days will see it being more pro-active for ironing out the organisational wrinkles. BJP circles estimate that the restoration of familial harmony is expected to be helped by the possible return of Mr Advani as the party president. A fresh innings for Mr Advani in the party will remove the asymmetry in the intra-Parivar equations since Mr Jana Krishnamurthy lacks the stature which can help him hold his own against Mr Singhal and his men.

The Economic Times
21 MAR 2002

RSS statement draws flak

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The Bangalore resolution of the RSS stating that "the safety of Muslims lies in the goodwill of the majority" has evoked widespread criticism and a demand that the Government condemn it to rein in the Sangh leadership.

In a statement issued here today, the secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), Percival Fernandez, said: "In an already charged atmosphere of recent communal violence in the country, particularly in Gujarat, the RSS call to the Muslim community to realise that their safety lies in earning the goodwill of the majority, goes against the pluralistic traditions of India and must be condemned by all".

Also, according to the CBCI, the Prime Minister and the NDA allies must "condemn these statements" and rein in the RSS. Of the view that even in normal times such a statement would be "diametrically opposed to the secular ethos enshrined in the Constitution", the Archbishop of Delhi, Vincent M. Concessao, asserted that "being born in this country, I can claim with conviction that majority of the Hindus do not subscribe to this stand of the RSS".

Describing the RSS statement as "grossly provocative

and anti-national", the former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, Rajindar Sachar, said: "India belongs as much to Muslims as to Hindus... The RSS' action in provoking communal hatred is condemnable. The Government should take legal action against RSS and its leaders. Parliament should pass a resolution condemning this statement of RSS."

In the opinion of the All-India Christian Council, the RSS resolution must be cause for "grave concern not only among Muslims and other minorities in India, but to civil society and democratic and constitutional institutions including the President, Parliament, the Supreme Court, and the Government headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee".

Echoing Mr. Justice Sachar's view that the resolution ought to be condemned, the Christian Council has noted that "brute majoritarianism has never been the standard of India or the ethos of its people".

The "warning" to Muslims, in the opinion of the Christian Council, would "open up standards of political behaviour and action which will cut at the roots of the unity of India by injuring the basic principles of its democratic polity, and will perpetuate a regime of hate and violence which has already cost so much in human lives lost in communal violence".

CHANDER

28 MAR 2002

Differences in BJP over Ayodhya

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The sharp divisions within the Bharatiya Janata Party on the Ayodhya issue, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's aggressive demands on the Ram temple and its attack on the Orissa Assembly were out in the open at its Parliamentary Party meeting today.

After some MPs expressed their views — some virtually approving and applauding the VHP and the others saying that its behaviour had caused the party considerable embarrassment — the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said this issue as well as the fallout of the reverses in the recent Assembly elections needed to be discussed at length, not in passing and in a piecemeal manner. He wanted the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, to fix a suitable date for a full-length discussion of issues worrying the MPs.

It seems the question on the party's mind is whether to stay with the NDA and jettison Hindutva or jettison the NDA and go back to Hindutva. The Parliamentary Party could dis-

miss it provided a suitable date was available but, as of now, it seems that the discussion will take place at the party's national executive committee meeting in Goa from April 12.

Even before Mr. Vajpayee arrived at the meeting, several MPs indicated that they would like to be given an opportunity to speak. Among them was B.P.

Singhal. But when his name was called out, he said he would prefer to speak in the Prime Minister's presence.

Once Mr. Vajpayee arrived, Mr. Singhal expressed anguish that the BJP had gone back on the Ram temple issue, adding that he could not stomach the treatment meted out to the VHP which, after all, had only es-

poused the cause that was also on the party's agenda.

But he was countered by Lal Muni Chaubey, who pointed out that there was no use raking up the issue again and again when the party had agreed to put it on the backburner along with some others.

Mr. Vajpayee made it clear that his Government was "not sticking to power". In fact, there was no other alternative, and the Government could not run away from its responsibilities.

VHP regrets Orissa incident

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today owned up its acts of vandalism in Bhubaneswar, where its activists and those of the Bajrang Dal and the Durga Vahini had ransacked the Assembly premises. It "strongly condemned" the incident and expressed "deep regrets" to the people of Orissa. At the same time, it blamed the police for "misbehaving" with members of the Durga Vahini, saying this had "enraged" the Bajrang Dal volunteers.

The "confession" could embarrass the BJP, whose spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, even today denied that VHP and Bajrang Dal volunteers had led the attack.

Presenting what they called the "correct facts", a joint statement by Sadanand Kakade and Omkar Bhawe, joint general secretaries of the VHP, said, "Regarding the incident on the premises of the Orissa Legislative Assembly at Bhubaneswar on March 16 irrespective of the causes which provoked the members of the VHP to damage public property... the VHP strongly condemns the said acts and expresses its deep regrets to the people of Orissa." The statement also appealed to all activists to maintain discipline.

The Home Minister, L.K. Advani, reportedly expressed "satisfaction" over the manner in which the VHP's demands and its agitation was handled after the Supreme Court's order.

Several other issues were raised — increased postal rates for books (Mr. Mahajan promised to look into this) and the tax burden on the middle class (it was decided that party MPs would meet the Finance Minister before the Finance Bill was voted upon). The party also congratulated itself for completing four years in office, starting from March 1998.

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2002

VHP leader named in riot FIR

Ahmedabad, March 18

THE GENERAL secretary of Gujarat's VHP unit, Jaideep Patel, has been named in an FIR registered at Naroda police station of the city for the attacks that followed the Godhra train carnage.

He has been booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Bombay Police Act, on charges of riot and arson. The FIR was registered on the basis of complaints by some people who lost their homes in the riots and are now living in relief camps at Maninagar in the eastern part of the city.

Babubhai Pirubhai Sheikh and some other complainants

have identified Patel and a few others among the 2000-odd mob that went on a spree of arson and looting in the Naroda-Patia area.

At least 75 people died on February 28 in the retaliatory attacks in Naroda-Patia, basically a working class area.

Jaideep Patel said he had been named in the FIR with an ulterior motive. He said that he was with Acharya Giriraj Kishore on February 28 when the senior VHP leader came down to pay tribute to the victims of the Godhra train carnage.

"I was at Sola Civil Hospital with Acharya Kishore and then went to Janata Nagar to attend

the mass funeral of some of the train victims, whose bodies were brought in the wee hours of February 28," he said.

Police firing in Bodeli

ONE PERSON was killed and two others were injured in police firing in Bodeli taluka town of Baroda district in fresh communal violence in Gujarat.

Police fired and burst teargas shells last night as some people from outside the town tried to start a fire and threw stones at a police party. Curfew remained in force in Baroda city areas, which also witnessed violence. Police fired 23 rounds and burst 11 tear-

gas shells to scare away a stone-throwing mob in Bapunagar, a working class area in Baroda, late last night. No one was injured.

Ahmedabad peaceful

CURFEW IN five police station areas of Kalupur, Karanj, Shahpur, Dariapur and Madhupura was relaxed during the day. Ahmedabad has been peaceful for more than 24 hours.

However, curfew continued in Daulimda police station area where one person was killed in violence yesterday. About 100 people were arrested from the trouble-torn areas yesterday.

Agencies

9.8.88

19/3

HFA

9-P.P.
TDP

BJP's communal agenda not acceptable: Naidu

18/3
HD 12

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, MARCH 17. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, has criticised the BJP and other parties for projecting the Ayodhya dispute as a burning issue, "which has now begun to threaten national unity and integrity".

Addressing the concluding session of a training camp for party activists at NTR Bhavan here, Mr. Naidu said the "communal agenda" being pursued by these parties was not acceptable to the TDP.

The TDP was in favour of leaving the Ayodhya issue to the

courts as there was no consensus among the contending parties and religious leaders. Efforts to bring the political parties around on this issue also did not bear fruit.

"We want to leave it to the court. We are prepared to make any sacrifice to preserve and protect communal harmony," he said.

Expressing concern over the communal riots in Gujarat, Mr. Naidu said his Government had dealt with the communal elements firmly. 'Ram sevaks' from different parts of the State were prevented from moving towards Ayodhya.

The Chief Minister also took a dig at the Congress. "I would like to see the Congress learn lessons from its mistakes. But it looks as if it will never change. Hence there is no threat to our party."

Taking a swipe at Congress leaders who talked about training for their partymen, he said "they may require training in wrestling." The reference was to the squabbles in the party.

Mr. Naidu urged partymen to rebut the "false propaganda" of the Congress about supplying power free of cost to the farmers, which was a ploy to capture power by hook or crook.

THE HINDI
18 MARCH 1982

Please Hindus, RSS tells Muslims

HT Correspondent
Chennahalli, March 17

THE RSS today passed a resolution warning Muslims that their safety lay in the goodwill of the majority.

The resolution, titled "Godhra and after", condemned the Sabar-mati Express carnage but justified the violence that followed as "natural and spontaneous... It is unfortunate that a number of people died in the violence that erupted. But certain political parties in their usual greed to garner en bloc Muslim votes turned a blind eye to the original action and only shouted against the resultant reaction, linking it to the Ayodhya movement".

Asked if the RSS view differed from that of A B Vajpayee, Sangh joint general secretary Madan Das Devi said the Prime Minister had no choice but to condemn

18/3

Five-year plan for temple

RAMCHANDRA DAS Paramhans has said the construction of the Ram temple will start this year and is "expected to be completed in the next five years". Asked what he would do if the land is not handed over to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas, he said he would take it "by force". He added that he had no idea how the Prime Minister would settle the matter given his "compulsions". Meanwhile, VHP president Ashok Singhal began an indefinite hunger strike from Sunday at Karsevakpuram for withdrawal of the security restrictions on Ayodhya.

HTC, Ayodhya

the Gujarat violence.

On Ayodhya, the resolution said the Ram temple issue had become the "core issue" for the country and urged the Government to remove all curbs on Ram sevaks and pilgrims. It regretted that the atmosphere of rapprochement created by the Kanchi Shankaracharya had been vitiated by vested interests.

Referring to the Supreme Court's interim order, the RSS said the judges had overlooked the apex court's 1994 judgment that said the acquired land should be reverted to its owner. It said it was unfortunate that the verdict did not allow Ram sevaks to perform the *shila* puja on the undisputed land, which hurt the sentiment of the Hindus.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAR 2002

Centre should allow puja to continue till June 2, says RSS

Times News Network

BANGALORE: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday said it was happy that the Ayodhya situation had been defused but was adamant that the Centre allow puja (purnahuthi) to continue till June 2.

Speaking to reporters after the inauguration of the annual Akhila Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) being held in Bangalore this time, RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya said the RSS was insistent on three counts. "The government should remove restrictions for performing purnahuthi; it should take into consideration the spirit of the 1994 Supreme Court judgement; and a special judge should be appointed to hear the Ayodhya case on a daily basis to expedite the case," he stated.

Reiterating that the mandir issue was never far away from their agenda, Mr Vaidya said, "No force can remove the mandir to build a mosque. The Muslims should respect the sentiments of the Hindu and vacate the land."

He was also quite brazen in critiquing the supreme court judgement. "I think it was given in haste. Why else would it think it necessary to issue a clarification the next day. I don't think such an action is befitting of the SC," he stated, adding that he was not afraid of contempt.

Asked whether the centre was doing the right thing and whether the RSS would convey its thinking, he retorted, "We have no links with the government. You should ask

the BJP about it."

However, the RSS was extremely critical of the government's role. "While we note the zeal of the saints and Ram Sewaks for the construction of the Ram temple, the hesitation and nervousness of the Ram Bhaktas sitting in treasury benches is also visible," the annual report said.

Referring to the recent Godhra incident and the violence in its wake, Mr Vaidya defended the Narendra Modi-led Gujarat government for its conduct. "No government could have prevented the kind of violence which erupted, and no government can control such an upsurge. But the Gujarat government was able to bring the situation under control quickly," he said.

Although in its annual report, the RSS has stated the incident as 'terrorist violence,' Mr Vaidya said many details were not available when the report was formulated two weeks and stated that all aspects would be discussed in the meet.

Mr Vaidya admitted that the violence in the aftermath of Godhra was unjustified but hastened to add that the RSS would not want to pin the blame on any community. "The entire Hindu society, cutting across caste and creed lines, reacted violently against the incident," he stated.

The ABPS would take up the Godhra incident for discussion and pass a resolution, but its content will be known only after the ABPS passes the resolution on Saturday, Mr Vaidya informed.

MAR 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Centre should have consulted allies; Thackeray

Times News Network

MUMBAI: While pulling up the Centre for not taking the NDA allies into confidence on the Ayodhya issue, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray on Thursday ruled out the possibility of the downfall of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government on the issue.

"The NDA allies are upset, but the MPs are not in favour of a mid-term poll. This government may continue to hobble on," the Sena chief said while addressing a press conference at his suburban residence.

"The government at the Centre is made up of several allies and the BJP ought to have consulted its partners in the NDA on the mat-

ter. You need a government with a comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha to take an unequivocal stand on policy issues. This not being the case in the present era of coalition politics, the Centre will have to weigh every move before taking a final decision," Mr Thackeray said summing up, as if, the dilemma of the Vajpayee government.

Stating that the present situation in Mumbai was "unlike" the one in 1992, Mr Thackeray hinted that his party was in no mood to ignite trouble in the city in the wake of the VHP's call for 'puja'.

The Sena chief, however, urged the Centre to take a firm stand on the Ayodhya issue and to not be swayed by the compulsions of electoral politics. The Centre should request the courts to expedite the long-standing case by taking it up on a daily basis, thus clearing the decks for a final solution to the contentious issue, Mr Thackeray stated in reply to a question.



Bal Thackeray

He said the Sena supported the VHP's plans for the symbolic 'shila-pujan' on the undisputed site in Ayodhya on Friday. "We don't need permission from anyone to perform the 'puja'.

It is our birthright," he declared, adding, "We have strong evidence to prove our claim that there was a Ram temple at the disputed site earlier."

However, the Sena chief refrained from offering his views on the Supreme Court's Wednesday verdict on l'affaire Ayodhya. The Godhra carnage was a "well-planned operation", he said.

Asked about the mediatory role performed by the Shankaracharya of the Kanchi Kama Koti Peetham, Mr Thackeray said the seer's efforts should not have been viewed through the prism of politics. "But it has been turned into a political issue," he remarked.

The BSP's dynamics

By V. Krishna Ananth

149-10

THE DEVELOPMENTS in Uttar Pradesh since February 24, particularly the emergence of the BSP as the second largest party in the Assembly, have implications that go beyond the immediate context of Government formation. It will be in order to make a set of qualifications before delving further into the subject. To begin with, even if it was accepted that the BSP would emerge as a major player in the post-poll situation, hardly anyone expected Mayawati to emerge as the leader of a 97-member Legislature Party — 30 seats more than in 1996. After all, the consolidation of Dalits behind the BSP was complete even in 1996 and there was no scope for further consolidation on this front and hence there was little basis to expect such an increase in the number of BSP seats.

Second, after the impressive performance, there were many who felt that the BSP was vulnerable to poaching. It seemed that Mulayam Singh Yadav, who emerged leader of the single largest party, could land up at the Lucknow Raj Bhavan and hand over a list of 202 MLAs which could include 35 from the BSP, apart from 26 from the Congress(I) and at least a dozen from Ajit Singh's party. This too did not happen.

While it is simple to explain the reasons why the BSP did not split, the factors behind the impressive gains it registered are contained in the complex mosaic that the Uttar Pradesh socio-political discourse is made of. To break the BSP (and manage the numbers with Congress-I support), the Samajwadi Party needed to promise ministerial berths (or positions in the State Government Corporations) as was done by Kalyan Singh in 1996. This would have been possible only if Mr. Yadav was invited by the Governor to be sworn in and prove his majority within a reasonable time. In a sense, the Governor,

Vishnu Kant Shastri, helped Ms. Mayawati keep her flock together by refusing to accept the single-largest-party-be-invited precedent set by Shankar Dayal Sharma in 1996.

Having made these qualifications, it will be pertinent to look at and place in context the meaning of the BSP's rise and consolidation — its strength is higher than the BJP's in

striking the right social balance while choosing the party nominees. Such explanations, however, are based only on the factors in the apparent. It would make better sense to look at the 2002 poll verdict from the overall context of the social dynamics in Uttar Pradesh since the first general elections.

A key factor that guided the politi-

The BSP has taken over the Congress(I)'s place among the Dalits and the forward castes in Uttar Pradesh.

the Assembly now placed under suspended animation. It is necessary to understand the factors that went in the BSP's favour in the elections to make sense of their implications for the political discourse in the State in the next couple of years.

While the BSP was expected (even by those who criticise Ms. Mayawati's Dalit-exclusive agenda) to retain the same number of seats it won in the 1996 elections (67), the additional 30 came as a surprise even to those who empathise with the agenda. In addition to the Dalits (whose consolidation behind the BSP since 1987 when Kanshi Ram founded the party was more or less complete), a substantial section of the forward caste voters had favoured the BSP. It was this shift that helped the party notch up close to 30 seats more. It may be true that in some of the cases the BSP victory was possible because its nominees were men (invariably from the forward castes) who strike terror in their constituencies — Amarmani Tripathi, Uday Singh Doctor, etc.

There is another explanation now doing the rounds that the BSP managed to perform so well because Ms. Mayawati managed to shed the image of her party being a Dalit-exclusive platform and she could do this by

cal discourse of the Gangetic plains since 1952 — a determination among the forward castes to unite against any kind of assertion by the members of the Backward Castes — continued to influence the voting pattern this time too. It was this unity against the many avatars of the socialist platform that kept the Congress(I) going in Uttar Pradesh in the three decades after Independence. The Congress(I), after all, was able to rally around it the Dalits and the Muslims (alongside the members of the forward castes) during this phase.

It was the same dynamics that helped the BJP after 1990; but then, the party could hardly enlarge its social base beyond the forward castes. As over time it became impossible for the forward castes to decide which way the Dalits voted (a non-violent way of rigging elections was in vogue in this region for long), it made ample sense for them to look for a platform led by someone who shared with them an antipathy to all forms of Backward Caste assertion. In other words, the forward castes found in Ms. Mayawati a leader who was as much opposed to the Samajwadi Party as they were.

It is this dynamics, rooted in the complex social chemistry of the Gan-

getic plains, that helped the BSP gain at least 30 seats more this time. The BSP, in this sense, has taken over the Congress(I)'s place among the Dalits and the forward castes in Uttar Pradesh. For this very reason, the Congress(I)'s revival in the State looks a distant dream.

But, for the BSP to ensure further gains in the State and to emerge as the number one party it needs to expand its appeal to the third social segment — the Muslim community as a whole — that constituted the Congress(I)'s votebank. This, indeed, remains a secure votebank for Mr. Yadav at this stage thanks to his having managed to work on a strategy given shape to by Madhu Limaye (in the context of the dual membership debate in the Janata Party). Mr. Yadav could achieve this thanks to his record in dealing with the VHP activists in Ayodhya in 1990.

But then, if only Ms. Mayawati can resist the temptation to strike a deal with the BJP in the months to come and remain steadfast to her agenda, it is indeed possible for her to gather around her party a large section of the minority community in the State. In other words, Ms. Mayawati could enlist behind the BSP a combination of social groups — the Dalits, the forward castes and the Muslims — that enabled the Congress(I) to emerge as the natural party of governance in Uttar Pradesh in the first couple of decades after Independence.

This indeed is the critical message from the BSP's impressive performance in Uttar Pradesh this time. Such a development, however, will come with a crucial difference. While in the case of the Congress(I), the prominent leaders of the platform remained men from the forward castes — N. D. Tiwari, Kamalpathi Tripathi, G.B.Pant, V.P.Singh, etc., — in the days ahead an assertive leader from the Dalit community could finally take charge.

RSS asks VHP to show restraint

J.P.P. BJP
Statesman News Service

SI-6 1573

BANGALORE, March 14. — The RSS today sent out a clear signal to the VHP and other Hindu bodies to ensure restraint at Ayodhya tomorrow and respect the apex court's verdict on the bhoomi puja. It also urged the Centre to remove hurdles for Ram sevaks and pilgrims.

Giving details of the resolution adopted at the Akhila Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal of the RSS, Mr MG Vaidya, said: "The ABMK calls upon the swayamsevaks and the likeminded to continue their struggle in a peaceful and lawful manner." The resolution said workers should talk to people and enlighten them about the real issues till the goal of building a grand temple for Sri Rama at Ayodhya is fulfilled.

Mr Vaidya said even though the court's interim order is effective for the next ten weeks, the "RSS has no intention of violating it". Asked if his assurance applied to the VHP as well, he said the VHP would get "our resolution copy this evening". Without casting any aspersion on the interim order, the resolution said: "We are constrained to say that they have overlooked what the five-judge Bench had said in its final judgement in 1994 (SCC(6)360, para 49,50,56." The resolution noted that para 56 of the five-judge Bench order had said the release of the land need not await final adjudication of the suit. This has been overlooked by the Bench," Mr Vaidya said.

11/3/94

HPD-11

AYODHYA / GOVT. PLANS YET ANOTHER MOVE

Recognition in principle for our demand: VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today sought to raise yet another political controversy by claiming that the Centre had "acknowledged in principle" its demand for construction of a Ram temple on the "disputed land" in Ayodhya by sending the Prime Minister's special emissary, Shatrughan Singh, of the PMO's Ayodhya cell, to accept 'shila daan' by the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas president, Ramchandra Paramhans.

According to some BJP leaders, the Government may make yet another move on Ayodhya. While it was trying to get some sort of negotiations going between the VHP and the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board through the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati, it is now planning to come up with two "maps", one indicating how much of the 67 acres would be given to Muslims if the final judicial verdict is in their favour, and the other showing the requirement of land for a temple if the verdict favoured the pro-temple Hindus. The "maps" would also show the land expected to be surplus after keeping enough for a mosque or temple.

When the matter comes up, the Government could argue before the full bench of the Supreme Court that the "surplus" land which had been acquired from the VHP and the Nyas may be given back to it before the final adjudication in the main title suit of the Ayodhya case.

There are many BJP members who are insisting that the Government "do something" to please the VHP, which, after all, does help the BJP when

it is election time. The VHP's claim today that the Centre had acknowledged its demand for a temple on the "disputed site" was no different from the Opposition charge, and tomorrow when the Lok Sabha is expected to debate the entire issue, the Government will be hard put to explain what a Government functionary was doing with a temple 'shila' in Ayodhya.

Of course, the VHP and the BJP today were trying to snatch victory out of defeat. After having witnessed the sorry spectacle of stands and demands changing by the hour, of the Supreme Court being criticised by its friends in the Sangh Parivar, of listening to voices from the RSS distancing themselves from the BJP, the BJP spokesperson, Vijay Kumar Malhotra, took all the credit on behalf of the Vajpayee Government for the non-event of 'shila daan' in Ayodhya having passed off peacefully.

While the VHP general secretary, Praveen Togadia, claimed that the Centre had acknowledged its demand for a temple on the site of the disputed land (where the Babri Masjid stood before 1992) by sending a representative to accept the 'shila daan', Mr. Malhotra said the Government had shown it was "in total control." The "prophets of doom" who had predicted violence and rioting in Ayodhya and elsewhere had been proven wrong. In making all these claims, the BJP ignored the fact that its hands were tied by the court's directive and that the "security bandobust" in Ayodhya was the result of the combined pressure of the opposition and its own allies.

15 MAR 2002
VISHWA HINDU

VHP won't give SFI up, seeks alternative site

Statesman News Service

9-P-P BHP 14/3

AYODHYA/NEW DELHI, March 13. — The VHP hasn't given up its objective of holding a religious ceremony in Ayodhya and has asked the Centre to find an "alternative site".

Although a final strategy in this regard will be shaped by the Margdarshak Mandal which meets tomorrow, VHP leaders today indicated that they are not "giving up" and are planning to launch a national movement.

Parishad leaders said the court's directive didn't proscribe a puja and *shiladan*. They have asked the government to offer an "alternative site 500 feet away from the disputed site".

The VHP working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, and the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas chief, Mahant Ramchander Das Paramhans, said the Supreme Court had banned puja, symbolic or otherwise, and construction activity in the two disputed plots.

They argued that the other areas in the acquired 67 acres were out of the court ban order and the government had not been given any direction in this regard.

The government could thus use its discretion and offer the VHP an alternative site for the purpose. The court has also not said anything on *shiladan*, VHP leaders said.

Senior VHP leaders kept in touch with the Centre and were "frantically" trying to convince Delhi of their own interpretation of the court order. Mr Singhal hoped that a solution would be found by tomorrow when the Margdarshak Mandal, an extended executive of the Nyas, meets here.

The government, on its part, tried to prevail upon the VHP to accept the court's decision with grace.

The government's position in the court may silence the Sangh hardliners who had been arguing that the government was not taking a stand and that it could transfer the undisputed land through an executive order.

Some legal experts associated with the VHP had given this opinion and it was picked up by some in the government even as Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee took a different line, sources said.

The government has 10 weeks before the issue is taken up by a higher Bench and another six weeks for the summer vacation, a Union minister said.

The government would like the VHP to completely adhere to the court's judgment.

The VHP should prove its credentials to enable the court take a stand on the issue of transfer of the undisputed land — this seemed to be the opinion within the BJP.

Mr Vinay Katiyar, BJP MP, said he would file a petition in the Supreme Court praying that its order be clarified about whether or not puja would be allowed in the 18 temples already existing on the 67 acres. Some officials otherwise might interpret it differently, he said.

More than 50 Vedic scholars from Varanasi and Ayodhya have been invited by the VHP to perform the proposed puja on 15 March. It would go ahead with the programme even if the government did not give permission.

THE STATESMAN

14/3

VHP to go to people's court

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. The so-called Hindutva forces today gave a clear signal that they intended to carry forward the 'Ram temple movement' through mass mobilisation of the people. And both the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party were unabashedly critical of the Supreme Court's orders prohibiting a 'puja' in any form on the Government-acquired land in Ayodhya.

While the Vishwa Hindu Parishad announced it would go to the "people's court" and organise "satyagraha" in every district in the country, the Bharatiya Janata Party stood solidly behind the arguments in favour of a 'symbolic puja' on the acquired land in Ayodhya put forward by the Attorney-General today.

The BJP spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, stated that while no 'puja' would now be allowed on

the acquired land in view of the Court order, "surely heaven would not have fallen if the Court had allowed the 'puja' (*kya koi asmaan to nahin gir jata agar wahan puja ho jati?*). He blamed the "secular brigade" for creating "pressure (*dabav*). And finally, arrogating to the BJP the right to speak for all Hindus, he blamed the "secular brigade" for being "Hindu haters and Hindu baiters." "They, the so-called secularists, would be happy if 'puja' were to be banned in the whole country," Mr. Malhotra added.

The VHP's language was even harsher. Its leaders, Praveen Togadia, Vishnu Hari Dalmia and Giriraj Kishore, issued a statement saying the Supreme Court of independent India had done what even the British did not when they ruled the country. "While accepting the Court orders we say that for the first time the fundamental

right of Hindus to perform 'puja' has been snatched from them." While Muslims were allowed to offer 'namaz' on public roads, Hindus were being prevented from offering prayers on land where 14 temples exist and prayers are said daily."

Mr. Togadia refused to announce the cancellation of a 'symbolic puja' programme for March 15 at Ayodhya. Instead, he said the 'sants' would take a decision on that by tomorrow evening. "The 'sants' had taken a decision on the March 15 'puja' and only they can alter that decision," he said. Mr. Kishore left for Ayodhya this evening and Mr. Singhal is already there. Both will participate in the decision-making by the 'sants.' The other programmes of 'yagna' which is taking place in the VHP's workshop would continue, and if 'Ram sevaks' are stopped from going to Ayodhya, they would offer con-

tinuous 'satyagraha' for 10 days.

But perhaps most significantly, the VHP has decided to take the so-called 'Ram temple movement' forward by going to the "people's court." Describing the Court orders as "most unfortunate", the VHP leaders said they now had "no option" but to create a mass movement in favour of building a Ram temple "at the very spot where Lord Rama was born", which, in their view, was clearly the disputed site where the Babri Masjid stood before it was demolished in 1992.

Like the BJP, and very much in tune with it, the VHP also blamed the "secularists" for creating an atmosphere of tension. "To deal with this" the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and the VHP would soon chalk out its "strategy", the VHP leaders said, indicating clearly that in the future their target of attack may well be the "secularists."

Fingers crossed over hardliners

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 12: Hours ticking away towards the Friday deadline, Uttar Pradesh Governor Vishnukant Shastri today dashed to the capital for discussions with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani.

Though Vajpayee has repeatedly stressed that his government would honour the court's verdict, sources felt this was easier said than done.

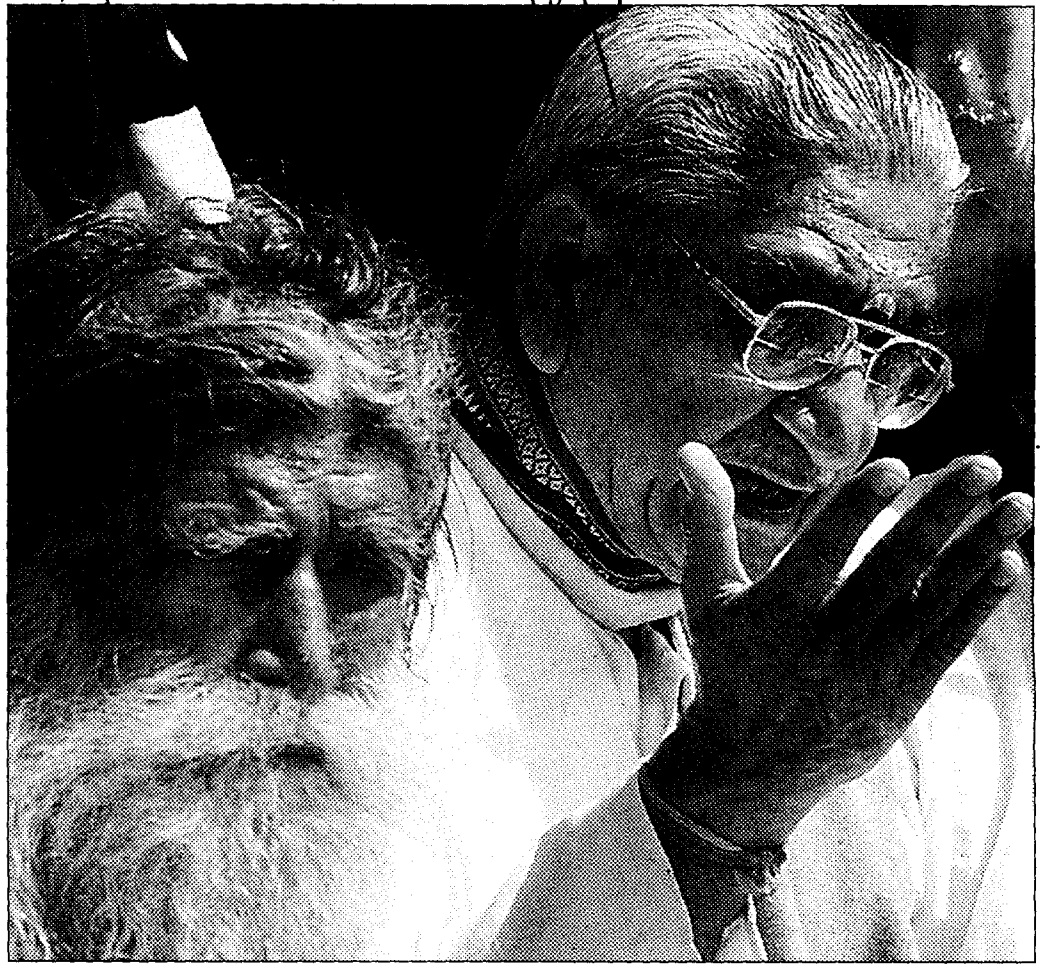
They said the government could plead before the Supreme Court, which is hearing the case tomorrow, to allow a symbolic puja, perhaps watered down more to handing over a pillar to a state official if only for the sake of peace. If the verdict goes in the VHP's favour, it would make things easy for the administration.

Committed to honouring the verdict, Vajpayee might have to take the risk of acting against the VHP, an integral arm of the Sangh parivar, if the two-member bench says no to a puja — symbolic or otherwise.

The Prime Minister, the home minister and senior members of the Cabinet are assessing the risk of taking tough action against the outfit. Shastri has also given his assessment of the situation.

Government sources said the Centre — worried about sharp divisions within the VHP — did not rule out attempts by hardliners like general secretary Pravin Togadia to sabotage the commitment given by senior VHP leaders. The Centre believes that hot-headed elements within the VHP and the Bajrang Dal could spark a confrontation.

For Vajpayee, it is a classic Catch-22 situation. If he does



Ashok Singhal (right) speaks to the media in Ayodhya as Ramchandra Das Paramhans looks on. (AFP)

not uphold the court's dictum, his allies, already critical, could walk out and bring down his government. If he has to take action against the VHP, he runs the risk of being labelled a turncoat.

Shastri, a Sangh parivar veteran, also thinks the way to avoid a showdown is to allow the VHP to go ahead with its puja. But he asserted that the court order on the symbolic *bhoomi puja* will be upheld

and that all security arrangements have been completed.

"The Supreme Court order will be implemented," the Governor told reporters after his meeting with Vajpayee and Advani. He said Vajpayee maintained that the court directive should be implemented.

Asked about the proposed puja by the VHP, Shastri retorted: "How can you stop someone from performing worship? Today being Shivratri, people

will like to offer prayer. Can you stop them? Ayodhya being a pilgrim centre, pilgrims always come. Can (the) Supreme Court prevent people from worshipping in their houses and temples?"

Shastri said the state administration has taken necessary steps to deal with the situation, but refuted reports that troops have been deployed in Faizabad. The army has only been asked to remain on alert, he said.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 March 1992

VHP can't be trusted

Clampdown in Ayodhya necessary

What are the chances of big trouble breaking out at Ayodhya on 15 March? One doesn't know yet. The Faizabad administration says restrictions on train services are in place, in spite of promises made by the Union minister of state for home to the sadhus. Ashok Singhal of the VHP, for his part, is said to have assured the prime minister that he will restrict the movement of kar sevaks but in the next breath states that no distinction should be made between kar sevaks and ordinary pilgrims who should happen to come to Ayodhya before the date. What does this mean? What is the worth of an "informal undertaking"? There are reports of kar sevaks from surrounding areas congregating in Ayodhya. Roughly 80 companies of CRPF and the PAC are in the town, the army has been put on alert and detention centres prepared to accommodate 60,000 people. On paper the arrangements are impressive.

Things could change dramatically. The question whether a bhoomi puja can be performed is sought to be taken to the Supreme Court. We must await the answer from the Court but it has to be said that it is a political question and not amenable to judicial interpretation. Why should the courts bail out the politicians? One way and another the question is likely to be back in the government's lap. In any case, is it advisable to allow a puja at a site where a ritual circumambulation was performed in 1989, perilously close to the "disputed site", in a context that is not only communal, but liable to be influenced by recent communal violence in Gujarat? Ramchandra Paramhans of the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas says that instead of a puja, a pillar and other offerings can be made to the "makeshift temple" and a receipt procured for the same from the district administration. The symbolism of these events is clear enough — all activities will take place in and around the debris of the mosque, instead of in some other corner of the 43 acres being demanded. Why? Because the demolition has to be justified, the "historic wrong redressed". There is, therefore, no change in the VHP position. The impression the VHP has consistently given is that of an organisation speaking in different voices, looking for ways to take the government and everybody else for a ride and achieve its aims through subterfuge. One is thankful that trains to Faizabad are suspended. There are political compulsions in Delhi. The BJP knows that the NDA will fall apart if there is a repetition of 1992. But then, on the other hand, if the VHP succeeds in assembling even half the number threatened, it will create a security problem. It is clear that an effective clampdown should be maintained in Ayodhya.

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Mamata questions Godhra theory

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 11: BJP's allies at the Centre, especially the Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam, today slammed chief minister Narendra Modi for his failure to protect people's lives and properties in Gujarat even as the BJP and the Shiv Sena tried to whitewash the ghastly killings in the state.

Though Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee did not press for home minister L.K. Advani's resignation, she doubted the role of intelligence agencies when *kar sevaks* were burnt to death on Sabarmati Express.

Mamata said as railway min-

ister she used to receive IB reports when there was any major security threat to railways. Mamata refused to believe the role of foreign countries behind the ghastly incident.

Coming down heavily on Modi, she said the Gujarat chief minister cannot say it was a spontaneous reaction. He should have said he would tackle the situation instead, Mamata said, backing former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda's demand for an inquiry into the Godhra massacre by a sitting Supreme Court judge.

Participating in a discussion on Gujarat incidents in the Lok Sabha under Rule 193, which does not entail voting, Mamata

said she was ashamed of what happened both at Godhra and elsewhere in Gujarat.

"I feel ashamed. I feel sorry. I feel disgusted that we are in this dirty politics. Somebody supports Hindus, somebody supports Muslims, why can't we be supporting Indians?" the Trinamul chief asked.

She regretted that the mandir-masjid issue had become the "only issue" while important questions like employment, problems of farmers, women and children were not addressed. "Because of this, there is no philosophy, no vision, no mission, no thinking, nothing for the future generation," she added.

NDA allies saved the government from embarrassment by not demanding the resignation of Modi or Advani.

However, Opposition parties, including the Congress, the CPM, the Samajwadi Party and the BSP, launched a savage attack on the government and the BJP for trying to inject "communal poison" into the society to arrest BJP's dwindling electoral prospects. The Opposition, too, wanted a sitting Supreme Court judge to probe the incidents.

Telegu Desam Party chief K. Yerran Naidu said the state government should have taken preventive steps keeping in mind the history of communally sensitive areas. He regretted that no

preventive arrests were made despite the Vishwa Hindu Parishad giving a bandh call and the situation remaining tense. Demanding action against guilty officers, Naidu said the army should have been deployed immediately.

DMK member S.S. Palani-manickam also criticised the inaction of the state government and said the home minister should take strong action and give up the soft approach.

Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Das Munshi wanted Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to set an example by dismissing Modi and asking Advani to quit as the incidents were a "blot on the nation".

US missile certificate to India

Washington, March 11 (PTI): The US intelligence community has said while India had the ability to build an intercontinental ballistic missile on its own, foreign support would be critical for the success of Pakistan's ambitious missile programme.

"Rumours persist concerning Indian plans for an ICBM programme, referred to in open sources as the Surya," said a report to the Senate subcommittee on possible missile developments abroad till 2015.

"Most components needed for an ICBM are available from India's indigenous space programme. India could convert its polar space launch vehicle into an ICBM within a year or two of a decision to do so," the report added.

Growing experience and an expanding infrastructure are providing India the means to accelerate both development and production of new systems, it says.

Some Indian defence writers argue that the possession of an ICBM is a key symbol to India's quest for recognition as a world power and useful in preventing diplomatic bullying by the United States, the report adds.

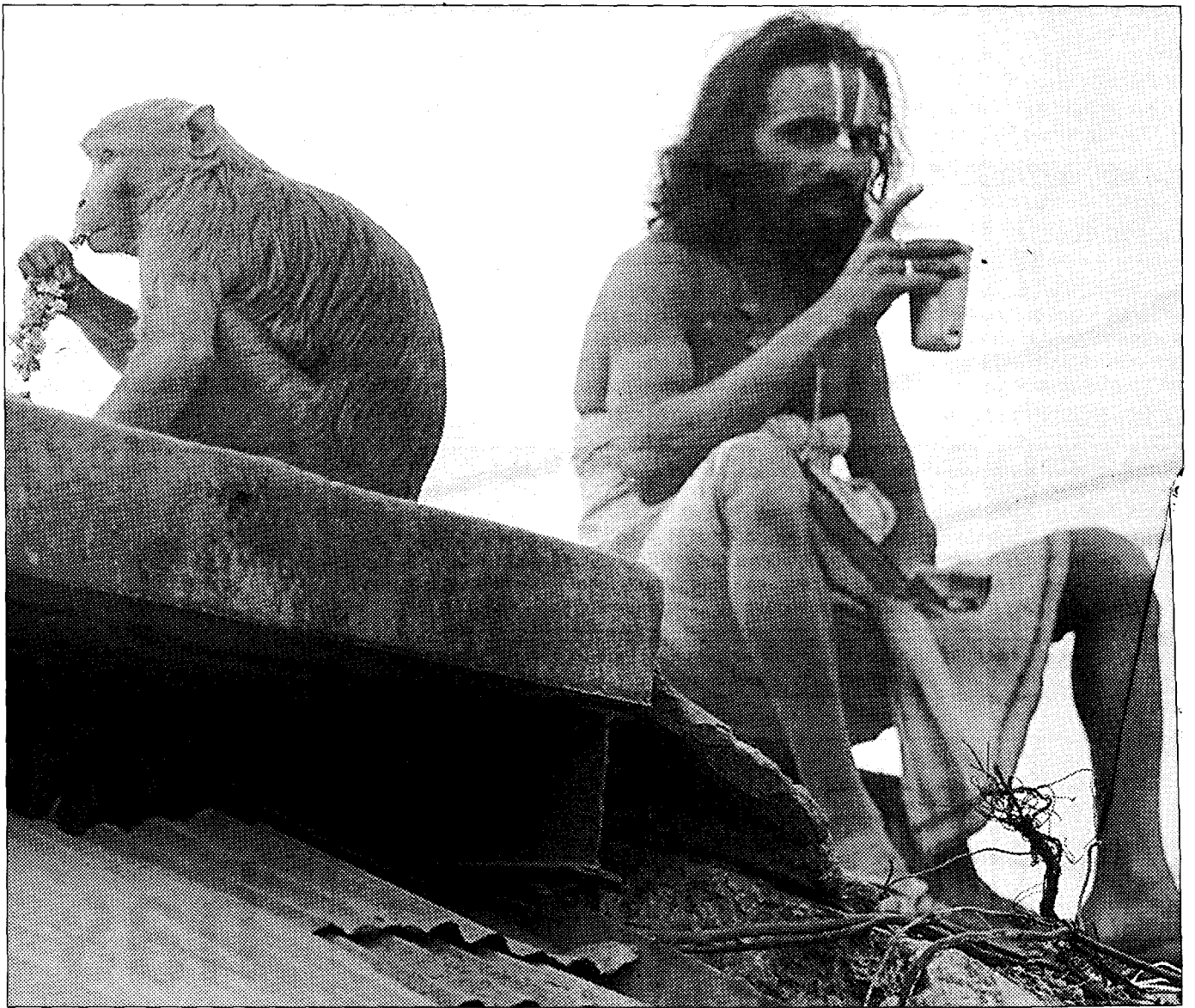
"New Delhi continues to push toward self-sufficiency, especially in regard to its missile programmes. Nevertheless, India still relies heavily on foreign assistance," it says.

The report to the subcommittee says India believes that a nuclear-capable missile delivery option is necessary to deter first use of nuclear weapons by Pakistan and thereby preserve the option to wage limited conventional war in response to Pakistani provocation in Kashmir or elsewhere.

Nuclear weapons also serve as a hedge against a confrontation with China.

Pakistan sees missile-delivered nuclear weapons as a vital deterrent to India's much larger conventional forces, and as a necessary counter to New Delhi's nuclear programme, the consensus report says.

The report said Islamabad would continue with its present ballistic missile production goals until it had achieved a survivable, flexible force capable of striking a large number of targets throughout India.



A monkey and a man share the roof of a Ayodhya house. (Reuters)

House flutter after Sonia sting

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 11: Rival lawmakers traded angry words in the Lok Sabha today after Congress chief Sonia Gandhi caught the government on the wrong foot during a debate on the Gujarat flare-up.

The war of words began when BJP member Bhavana Chikaliya, in a debate on the Gujarat flare-up, said the mastermind behind the Godhra massacre was a Congress municipal councillor from the town. The allegation drew sharp protests from Congress members, but Chikaliya waved a leaflet and said she was quoting from it.

An alert Sonia immediately sprang up to say she saw an officer distributing leaflets to ruling BJP members in the House.

Sonia went up to Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who was in the chair, and personally took up the matter as agitated Congress members rushed to the well of the House demanding a ruling. Heated exchanges followed with BJP members denying the allegation.

As charges and counter-charges flew, Advani, who was not in the House when the uproar began, rushed back to restore calm. The home minister urged the members to continue the discussion and suggested that the chair, in consultation

with the Deputy Speaker, could give a ruling tomorrow.

"I was not here. I am not aware what had happened. I have not seen it myself. Whatever your ruling or of the deputy Speaker will be applicable to members and officers. You can give a considered ruling tomorrow," he said, appealing to members to resume the discussion.

A few minutes before this Raghuvansh said that under the rules members should not talk to officers or exchange any paper with them in the House. He added that under another rule, a member could not distribute literature or leaflets not connected with the business of the House.

Congress members continued to protest and said they had seen that an officer had handed over some papers to BJP member Kirit Somaya, who was sitting near the officers' gallery.

As BJP members, led by Vinay Katiyar, shouted back, denying the allegation, Congress members said when Sonia raised the matter the officer left the House. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi said the chair could see the video recording to verify the allegation.

Congress member Renuka Chaudhury was seen walking towards the treasury bench side and talking to an officer in the officers' gallery, inviting protests from BJP MPs.

Advani refuses to quit, or sack Modi

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 11

L K ADVANI today prompted a walkout in the Rajya Sabha when he rejected the Opposition demands for his resignation and the sacking of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

The Home Minister also turned down a demand for an inquiry into the Gujarat carnage by a Supreme Court judge. He said a judicial probe had already been instituted by the State Government and it was not possible to have a second inquiry.

The speakers from the Opposition benches described the Gujarat violence as State-sponsored, accused the Centre of delaying troops deployment and demanded that Modi be sacked at once.

Even the allies didn't spare the Government. TDP member C Ramachandraiah accused the Gujarat administration of an Intelligence failure that had prevented it from controlling the violence. While stopping short of demanding the Chief Minister's resignation, he asked the Government to introspect why the House had to discuss such matters so often and why it had failed to control the situation.

As the Opposition members clamoured for his and Modi's resignation, Advani shot back that it had become a habit with political leaders to demand "resignations at the drop of a hat". The BJP, he said, hadn't demanded the resignation of the West Bengal Government for yesterday's police firing that killed a man in Taldi. He went on

I won't abide by verdict: Sena MP

SHIV SENA member Sanjay Nirupam on Monday created a flutter in the Rajya Sabha when he said he would not abide by court verdict on the Ayodhya tangle.

"Courts can't decide where Ram puja should be performed. I will not abide by the court's verdict on this issue. I will not allow a mosque to be built on the site," Nirupam said.

Deputy chairperson Najma Heptulla asked him to be cautious while making such remarks relating to courts. Moolchand Mena (Congress) said Nirupam should be asked to leave the House while his colleague, Bal Kavi Bairagi said Nirupam's observations were as good as asking Law Minister Arun Jaitley to leave.

PTI, New Delhi

to praise the Modi Government for bringing the situation under control within 72 hours after the outbreak of violence.

After Advani's 45-minute reply, the Opposition members accused him of making "irresponsible" statements and walked out. Advani, however, promised to punish all those, including police officers, found guilty by the judicial commission set up to probe the killings.

The "disgraceful" incidents in Gujarat, Advani said, had "sha-

med" the BJP Government and tarnished its reputation for maintaining communal harmony, built up in its four-year rule.

"For us, it is certainly a black mark," Advani said, adding that it had affected the entire country's image. But Congress member Ahmed Patel asked the Home Minister why additional companies of paramilitary forces were not rushed to Gujarat after the Godhra massacre and why there was a delay in the deployment of the Army. He alleged that all this was deliberate.

RSP member N K Premachandran said the violence against Muslims was "State-sponsored" and maintained that the Chief Minister had no moral right to continue in office. Saying that "generalised allegations are not justified", Advani criticised the Opposition for levelling sweeping allegations against the Gujarat Government and the police. He said how in Bhavnagar police rescued 400 children and a few maulvis during an attack on a madrasa.

RS nomination for Keshubhai: BJP chief K Jana Krishnamurthi has named former Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel as a BJP candidate for the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat.

Patel's nomination is a kind of rehabilitation for him, because he had been asked to make way for Modi. It is also a confirmation of Modi's authority in Gujarat, for Patel would be the most likely replacement if the BJP leadership had any plans of asking Modi to step down.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAR 2002

VHP to go ahead with puja

5/11/83
9-8-83
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 10. — Minutes after the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today rejected the Kanchi Shankaracharya's proposal for a symbolic *bhoomi puja*, the VHP declared it would go ahead and perform the *puja* on 15 March at the undisputed site in Ayodhya, irrespective of the consequences.

The VHP international general secretary, Mr Pravin Togadia, said that crores of Ram Sevaks would take out processions at 2.15 p.m. on Saturday throughout the country, chanting the name of Ram. In Ayodhya, about 100,000 Ram sevaks would march towards the undisputed site under the leadership of the sants to perform the puja, he said. In a veiled warning to the Centre, Mr Togadia said it should take note of the fact that the Ram sevaks would await the outcome of the march.

(In Ayodhya, the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas president, Ramchander Das Paramhans, said the Nyas would not accept the court's verdict on the disputed site if it went "against the religious feelings" of Hindus, adds PTI. "We will maintain status quo on the disputed land till the court judgment. However, if the judgment goes against our religious feelings ... we will oppose it even if it means shedding blood," he said.)

While adopting a hawkish stand, Mr Togadia, however, did not take into account the Supreme Court's likely order on Wednesday about the VHP's position on the undisputed land.

He refused to commit the organisation in principle to a court verdict, saying that it was the fundamental right of people to perform *yajna* and *puja*.

"How can we accept that the court will not protect our fundamental right? We have the democratic right to agitate peacefully as per the rights given by the Constitution."

But he refused to own the moral responsibility if the agitation turned violent.

Mr Togadia asserted that the AIMPLB had no locus standi on the undisputed land. He also expressed unhappiness with the Centre for not lifting the curbs in Ayodhya even 72 hours after promising to do so.

VHP to go ahead with bhoomi puja

2 P. P. BOP HFI

Muslim Law Board spurns seer's proposal

11/3

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 10

THE VHP today asserted that it would go ahead with the proposed symbolic bhoomi puja at the undisputed site in Ayodhya on Friday even as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board rejected the Kanchi Shankaracharya's proposal to allow the puja.

Rubbishing Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statement that the Supreme Court would decide whether or not to allow the puja, VHP general secretary Pravin Togadia said: "Nobody has the right to encroach upon the religious rights of Hindus to perform puja, *yajna*, *archana* or *upasana*."

Lashing out at the Government for "failing to protect the interests of the Hindus", he said: "The VHP helped the Government and agreed to certain proposals made by the Shankaracharya, but the Government has not helped the VHP."

He urged the Centre to remove the restrictions on kar sevaks so that they can reach Ayodhya. "There is a limit to the patience of the Hindus." He said hundreds and thousands of kar sevaks would move to Ayodhya on Friday and processions throughout the country mark the beginning of temple construction. "On that day, the entire country will turn into Ayodhya."

Asked about the Law Board's rejection of bhoomi puja, he said no Muslim organisation has any right in the undisputed land. "There is no suit or case in court regarding the undisputed land. By interfering in this, Muslim organisations are trying to whip up sentiments."

Rejecting the Kanchi seer's proposal, the Board's executive committee member and Babri

Govt plans to defend puja in court

IN A bid to defuse the Ayodhya crisis, the Centre is likely to put up a strong defence of its decision to permit Friday's bhoomi puja when the Supreme Court takes up the case on Wednesday. At a meeting convened by the Prime Minister at his residence on Sunday night, the Government's defence was discussed in detail. The meeting also finalised the contingency plans if the court does not permit the puja. Sources said the Government's puja defence would be generally based on its stand that the ceremony being a one-day affair, should be allowed. The final defence draft is to be put in place in another two days.

Vajpayee summoned George Fernandes and L K Advani to his residence soon after the All India Muslim Law Board rejected the Kanchi seer's proposal to allow the puja. The meeting, which lasted for nearly two hours, was joined by several other ministers, Soli Sorabjee, Brajesh Mishra, Jana Krishnamurthy and Sudhendra Kulkarni. The participants are understood to have perceived the Law Board's action as unrealistic.

HTC, New Delhi

Masjid Action Committee convener Syed Shahabuddin said: "The Babri Masjid site is not to be sold, gifted or bargained."

After the daylong meeting, the Board issued a statement saying it had "resolved to convey to the Shankaracharya its inability to accept his proposal as being incomplete and incoherent". It also appealed to the Centre to ensure status quo in the acquired land and take effective steps to ensure that no symbolic kar seva takes place in the area. Shahabuddin said there was nothing new in the Kanchi seer's proposal as that has been the VHP's stand since 1989.

Asked why the Board first offered to consider the seer's proposal and then rejected it, Y H Muchala, a member, attributed the initial interest to the Prime Minister's initiative. "However, the proposal became unacceptable to us as we were not provided documents such as the site plan and copy of the undertaking given by the Ram Janmab-

hoomi Nyas to Vajpayee despite the Board's repeated requests."

On whether the Board would continue its dialogue with the Shankaracharya, Muchala said: "We are open to any constructive suggestion from anybody. But we will have nothing to do with the VHP, Bajrang Dal or the RSS, who were behind the Babri Masjid demolition." He complained that the Centre's role in the latest initiative to resolve the controversy was not partial.

Meanwhile in Ayodhya, security has been beefed up in the wake of Intelligence reports of a terrorist group planning to target the makeshift temple in the garb of kar sevaks, said Additional GDP A K Mitra.

With barely five days to go for the VHP's puja, security personnel and Uttar Pradesh police staged a flag march at the temple town to instil confidence among people. The two-hour march crisscrossed the city, with security men dressed in full anti-riot gear.

VHP scrambles to reassure Hindus

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 8

FORCED TO retreat from its aggressive stance on the Ayodhya issue, the VHP finds itself in an embarrassing position with its cadres and the wider constituency of Hindus disillusioned with its role.

Having given a commitment to the Government to abide by the court order, the organisation today launched a damage control exercise to save face. International president Vishnu Hari Dalmiya said he wanted to remove the "misconception" among Hindus who were wondering how the judiciary could decide on a "matter of faith".

"The Hindu society feels that

the VHP has retreated on a matter of faith. I want to emphasise that this is not correct. The limited issue before the court now is to determine whether a Hindu temple existed at the disputed site or it was a vacant plot of land before Babar built a mosque there," he told reporters.

He was confident that the verdict would go in favour of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas since "historical evidence" pointed to the existence of a Ram temple.

He was belligerent about the VHP's claims in Kashi and Mathura, saying the Parishad would take these up once the Ayodhya tangle was sorted out.

The Nyas-Parishad combine, he said, had displayed a desire for friendly ties with Muslims by

paving the way for a compromise in Ayodhya. The Muslims, he said, should reciprocate.

He said the Government's attitude, during Thursday's late night meeting between Vajpayee and top VHP and RSS leaders was "positive". The Government, he said, was "sympathetic" about the demands for permission to perform bhumi puja at the undisputed site on March 15 and removal of restrictions on the movement of kar sewaks.

The Bharat Sadhu Samaj has accused the VHP of "abject surrender" in Ayodhya, a PTI report from Patna says. "The VHP has played with the sentiments of millions. The birthplace of Rama cannot be adjudicated, shifted or altered, a Samaj statement said.

'Govt has not benefited Hindus'

THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad is not happy with the BJP-led Government at the Centre. That is what a top Parishad leader said on Friday, in the middle of negotiations to end the Ayodhya impasse.

The organisation feels that the Government, though led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, has not done enough for the Hindus, while taking care to protect the rights of the minorities.

"We cannot call ourselves happy," VHP international president Vishnu Hari Dalmiya told reporters in New Delhi when asked whether the outfit was happy with the BJP-led Government's performance. The Parishad has put the Government in a dilemma advocating a stand uncomfortable for the BJP in a coalition of several parties of varied ideologies.

"They have not done anything for Hindus even on non-controversial issues such as Krishna Janmabhumi, cow slaughter or on the issue of stopping the flow of Ganga by building the Tehri dam," Dalmiya said.

PTI, New Delhi

WRITTEN ASSURANCE WAS GIVEN: SINGHAL

VHP's U-turn: we will abide by court verdict

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today did a volte-face on the issue whether or not it would accept the court verdict in the Ayodhya dispute. Whereas yesterday its vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, had publicly denied having given any assurance to the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, today its leader, Ashok Singhal, admitted that the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas had indeed given such a written undertaking.

At a press conference this evening, Mr. Singhal, international working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and managing trustee of the Nyas, disowned Acharya Kishore's remarks and accepted that on February 27 he had submitted that "whichever party wins in the court of law, it will be given the disputed place and the necessary amount of adjacent land for use."

The volte-face came about after both the Prime Minister and the Sankaracharya of Kanchi let it be known to the VHP leadership that they had not taken kindly to Acharya Kishore's "denial"; and, consequently, there was a flurry of activity to set the

record straight. While the Kanchi Acharya summoned Mr. Singhal and other VHP functionaries, the RSS leadership is also believed to have got into the act. The latter apparently told the VHP that if "we pretend we are not law-abiding citizens and not a law-abiding organisation, our claim and credibility would disappear."

With the public acknowledgment by Mr. Singhal, the Prime Minister-Sankaracharya initiated dialogue process seems to be back on the rails, though there is the realisation that Acharya Kishore's remarks have created mistrust and suspicion about the VHP's motives. The Prime Minister sent an emissary this evening with a bouquet of flowers and good wishes to Maulana Mujahidul Islam Qasmi, president of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, who has been hospitalised for the last four days.

At the press conference, Mr. Singhal tried to sound rather conciliatory and reasonable. Asked about the VHP's reluctance to change the Ram mandir architectural plan, he said the plan could be altered only in consultation with the architect. However, he pointed out that

even in the existing plan there was provision for a "link route" on the "west side" (for a masjid).

Asked if he was prepared to re-locate the sanctum sanctorum (should the court give an 'adverse' verdict), Mr. Singhal was somewhat philosophical: *Hai to hai, nahi hai to nahi hai* (if it is there, it is there; if it is not there, it is not there). However, those associated with the dialogue attribute the VHP's reluctance to change the plan (which shows the disputed site, where the Babri Masjid stood, as the sanctum sanctorum) in terms of an apprehension that any change would weaken its legal argument. But Mr. Singhal wanted it to be understood that should the court give an 'adverse' judgment, Muslims would be provided access to the site in good faith.

Mr. Singhal, however, was insistent that the controversy over the 43-acre area of the undisputed/acquired land was a matter to be sorted out between the Government (the "receiver" and the Trust. According to him, the Government could and should return this piece of land to the Trust so that "the 100-day purnahuti yagna" could proceed as per schedule. It is believed that the Government is looking closely at the 1993 Supreme Court verdict and is seeking legal opinion whether this 43-acre of land could be given back to the Trust. However, sources insist that any movement forward would have to be in dialogue with the leadership and mutually acceptable "legal modalities" would have to be worked out before transfer of undisputed land could take place.

Positive development, says Muslim law board

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board tonight termed as "positive development" the VHP's commitment to abide by the court verdict on the disputed site but said the outfit should not be allowed to carry out its plan to shift the carved stones to the "undisputed" site on March 15 without reaching an agreement on it.

"It (VHP's commitment) is a positive development. It will certainly make a difference," board spokesman, S.Q.R. Illyas, told PTI.

'NO MOSQUE WILL BE ALLOWED ON DISPUTED SITE'

We never gave assurance on accepting a court verdict: VHP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today virtually undid whatever little progress had been achieved yesterday by publicly announcing that it had "never given any assurance to anyone that it would abide by a judicial verdict in the Ayodhya case." In fact, it stated that under no circumstances would it allow or accept a mosque to be built at the disputed site.

Nevertheless, efforts by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and his men and the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, to find a solution to the Ayodhya dispute continued.

The Acharya met Mr. Vajpayee again for two hours late last night. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, were among those present. This morning, he conferred with the VHP leaders led by Ashok Singhal, and in the evening consulted legal luminaries, including Fali S. Nariman. He also met a delegation of Muslim Imams. Most of these meetings took place under the watchful eye of Sudhendraulkarni, an official in the Prime Minister's Office.

The Muslim Personal Law Board, which met him yesterday, has called a meeting of its executive committee on March 10 to discuss the proposal for a solution to the problem. It is learnt that the Board also wants

the VHP to change its architectural plan for the temple to exclude the disputed site where the Babri Masjid had been demolished in 1992, and, of course, a commitment that in the event of a judgment favouring the Muslims, the VHP would not raise any hurdles in the way of its implementation. Meanwhile, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, charged that the effort was "nothing but a trap for the Muslim community" and it was aimed at "diverting attention" from the mass murder of minorities in Gujarat.

Government sources admitted that no progress could be expected without a "minimum" commitment that the VHP would respect and accept a final court verdict in the dispute. "Without this, the BJP cannot

even approach its own allies, let alone the Opposition," was the comment of a PMO official.

It is also being conceded — and all political parties, barring the BJP, agree — that even if the VHP were to give a commitment to abide by the final judicial verdict, it was no concession at all, as all citizens were duty bound to accept the court judgment. The Government could not and should not allow any organisation to openly defy the law. And as for maintaining the status quo on the 67 acres of acquired land in Ayodhya (including the disputed site) the Government was bound by the Supreme Court to ensure this. One view was that no private settlement can be made without Court sanction.

Difference of opinion among the 'sants' and the VHP leaders

was seen as the main reason for the setback today. But that has not yet deterred the Government from trying to carry forward the process of finding a solution.

The VHP leader, Giriraj Kishore, made it crystal clear: *kisi bhi halat mein wahan masjid nahin ban sakti* (under no circumstance can a mosque be built on the disputed site). In fact, he added that within 'panch kos' (roughly 12 km) of the site where the Babri Masjid was demolished no mosque would be allowed to come up.

"All that Ramchandra Paramhans, president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, had given in writing to the Kanchi seer yesterday was that we were willing to maintain status quo on the disputed site till the final judicial verdict is given," Acharya Kishore elaborated, leaving no one in doubt that even if a final verdict went against the VHP and in favour of the Muslims, it would not be acceptable to the VHP. "No court verdict can stop the uninterrupted 'puja' of Ram Lalla (at the makeshift temple at the disputed spot)," he added as if to drive home the point. "And there was no question of changing the temple's (architectural) plan."

The VHP was asking for permission to hold its 'shila puja' at the 'shilanyas' site on the acquired land in Ayodhya. If the Government were to physically prevent them from doing so, the VHP cadre would offer 'satyagraha', he said.

Centre moves HC

LUCKNOW, MARCH 6. The Centre today approached the Allahabad High Court seeking a day-to-day hearing of the case relating to the Ayodhya dispute. A petition was filed by the Centre before the Lucknow Bench of the High Court, comprising Justices Sudhir Narayan, Rafat Alam and Bhanwar Singh, praying for a direction that the hearing of the case be taken up on a day-to-day basis. The court granted time till March 18 to the parties for filing replies to the application while posting further hearing on it to March 19.

The application was filed before the full Bench through the Additional Solicitor-General, R.N. Trivedi.

Mr. Trivedi impressed on the court that under the Acquisition Act of 1993, the Union of India was the statutory receiver with the obligation to maintain *status quo* till the disposal of the suits. It was spending about Rs. 30 crore annually in this regard. It was submitted that in view of the sensitive issues involved, it would be appropriate if the disputes were resolved as early as possible. — PTI

7 MAR 2002

Wanted: VHP vow to honour court verdict

9 p.m. BJP T-1 673

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 5: The Sankaracharya of Kanchi, who has emerged as the Prime Minister's key Ayodhya negotiator, today went half way to placate the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) by insisting that it should be allowed to perform a symbolic *bhoomi puja* in the "undisputed" area on March 15.

The Kanchi seer demanded that the government hand over the "undisputed" land it had acquired through a Central Act in 1993 to the VHP-sponsored Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas "well before" June 3 to enable it to start constructing the Ram temple. He also endorsed the BJP line on the Gujarat killings — that

the riot was a reaction to the Godhra carnage.

But the Sankaracharya gave an undertaking on the VHP's behalf that *status quo ante* would be maintained on the disputed site in Ayodhya pending a court verdict. He read out a statement issued by Nyas head Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans, that until a decision was given by the court, the VHP would neither tamper with the disputed site nor demand it should be given to it.

The Sankaracharya, who was mandated by the Prime Minister to hammer out a solution which would be acceptable to Muslim representatives as well as the VHP, is meeting Atal Bihari Vajpayee again to discuss the contours of a proposal he has formulated after a meeting with

members of the Muslim Personal Law Board today.

While the board members indicated that they would keep their part of the bargain by agreeing to hand over the "undisputed" land to the VHP, the Parishad has reneged on its word to the seer.

He had reportedly asked the VHP to give a written assurance to the board that it would abide by the court verdict on the ownership of the disputed 80x40-ft plot — which used to house the Babri mosque and, after its demolition, the makeshift Ram temple.

But the VHP refused to play ball. "Paramhans' letter only talks about maintaining *status quo ante* but the minority board was given to understand that the VHP would also accept the

court's verdict even if it went against them. This has created a lacuna which has to be somehow sorted out," said sources close to the Sankaracharya.

The VHP's general secretary, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told reporters today: "We have not taken any decision on it (accepting the court ruling). The *dharmacharyas* will decide on it, if the proposal comes."

Sources close to the Kanchi seer said the issue would be used as a bargaining chip. If the VHP gives a written undertaking to accept a court verdict, the Centre will consider allowing it to perform *bhoomi puja* at the same spot where it had done the *shilaryas* (laying the first brick) in 1989 or somewhere in the proximity.

"But even this is subject to

the approval of the Muslims, Parliament and the NDA allies," a source said.

So far, only Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress has opposed the formula, saying it would aggravate the tension between the two communities. Other allies have adopted a wait-and-watch stand.

The Sankaracharya told reporters that the Prime Minister would make an announcement on the floor of the House where the VHP would conduct its March 15 ritual.

Government sources, however, sounded confident of the VHP being brought around. "They cannot afford to antagonise the Sankaracharya because it would be a loss of face for him. He has committed things on their behalf in a live televised press confer-

ence," the sources said.

On handing over the land acquired by the Centre through a legislation, the Sankaracharya said: "The government will think about it and can give it to them." He said that to secure the disputed spot, a high wall could be erected around it.

VHP sources claimed this proposal would serve their purpose. "If it fructifies, it means things have worked out according to our script. We can start construction from the periphery and encircle the inner portions. Ownership of the disputed site doesn't matter because the idol of Ram Lalla is permanently installed in a makeshift temple where puja goes on regularly. So it's as good as a sanctum sanctorum," a source stressed.

■ See Page 6

WHAT THE SEER PROPOSED

- Hand over 'undisputed' land to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas before June 2
- Undertaking to pledge that the VHP will not tamper with the disputed land until a court ruling
- The VHP to perform *bhoomi puja* on March 15. The Prime Minister to announce in Parliament the site of the *puja*
- Try for no-objection certificate from the Muslim Personal Law Board for giving land to the VHP

WHAT THE COURT SAID

- Disputed site could not be touched until a verdict
- "Undisputed" portion could be handed over if the acquired land is divided into three categories: disputed, essential adjacent (for purposes of access to and security for the disputed site) and superfluous excess.
- But Section 6 of the Acquisition Act says land can be handed over only to a trust created after 1993. The Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas was set up before 1993.
- There's another catch for the VHP. Section 7 says a trust can manage the land as long as *status quo ante* is maintained. Therefore, no construction can be carried out

THE TELEGRAPH

6 MAR 2002

SOLUTION IN SIGHT, BUT MANY ROADBLOCKS

VHP will abide by court verdict: Kanchi Acharya

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. The 50-year-old Ayodhya drama seems to be inching forward towards resolution after the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) were persuaded by the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswathi, to give a commitment that they would abide by a final judicial verdict in the case.

At the same time, the Government seems to be seriously preparing a case for handing over to the VHP 42 acres of the acquired land in Ayodhya, provided the courts do not come in the way and the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board clears the proposal.

However, there are still many roadblocks — the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, which has agreed to consider the proposals, is to meet and get back, the Government has to get the approval of its National Democratic Alliance partners and it may also seek a consensus with the Opposition. And, finally, the Government may opt for parliamentary approval before implementing the details of the peace formula hammered out with the help of the Shankaracharya.

The 'breakthrough' came after a series of meetings the Acharya held over the last two days. He met the Nyas and VHP leaders on Monday and this morning again, he had a 90-minute meeting with the Prime Minister last night, and this afternoon he



The Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswathi, with Muslim leaders during their meeting on Ayodhya in New Delhi on Tuesday.

conferred with a delegation of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board where the former President, R. Venkataraman, the former Chief Justice, Ranganath Mishra, and the former Uttar Pradesh Governor, Romesh Bhandari, were present. The Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, had meetings with him today and the Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, met him last night.

But even before the details of the peace formula were known, a strong objection came from

the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. Objections from the 'sants', who are yet to agree to a commitment to abide by the final court verdict, can also not be ruled out.

The main ingredients of the peace formula, as spelt out by the Kanchi Acharya at a press conference today, were as follows: The VHP and the Nyas must stop using the provocative *mandir wahin banayenge* (we will build the temple on the disputed site) kind of language. "The Nyas has given a written assurance that it will abide by the court verdict," he added. Government sources separately

confirmed this.

"The disputed site at Ayodhya is to be separated by a wall from the rest of acquired land (about 67 acres) by a wall and the status quo must be maintained on this till the final verdict of the court."

"There will be no change in the temple building plan" (whose sanctum sanctorum would be shown to be on the disputed site), "but no construction will be allowed." The Government could then consider giving the Nyas 42 acres of the acquired land (not including the disputed site), but only after approval of the NDA, consensus of the Opposition and, perhaps, parliamentary approval.

The VHP is to be allowed to continue with its ongoing 100-day 'yagna' without hurdles. (Government sources indicated that a verbal assurance from the VHP had been received that the programme would not mean thousands of 'Ram sevaks' coming to Ayodhya. If they did, the Government would prevent them, even arrest them.)

A symbolic 'puja' of the carved stones is to be allowed at the 'shilanyas' site (outside the disputed area where the demolished Babri Masjid stood) on March 15. (Sources at the Prime Minister's Office indicated that the Government was hopeful of even the Congress agreeing to it; after all, they allowed the 'shilanyas'.) And, finally, the Government would get the Law Ministry's opinion on handing over some of the acquired land to the Nyas by mid-May, before the June 2 deadline given by the VHP, and then take a decision.

If the legal opinion is that the status quo is to be maintained on the entire 67 acres, or if the court were to give an interim order on this, the VHP and the Nyas would respect and accept it. Privately, Government sources indicated that there was no intention to allow any full-scale continuation of the VHP's ongoing programme. The VHP had agreed to tone it down. It was agreed that though formally no 'ban' would be imposed on 'Ram sevaks' coming to Ayodhya they would, in fact, be prevented from doing so if they tried. Of course, the VHP is continuing to maintain that there will be no watering down of its programme.

'No compromise on our conditions'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today asserted that it was firm on moving the carved pillars from workshops to the site of temple construction in Ayodhya. It, however, said the Allahabad High Court should expedite verdict on the dispute.

The VHP senior vice president, Giriraj Kishore, said the organisation would not abandon its three-point demand unveiled on Monday. The demands are, removal of restrictions on the movement of "kar sevaks" from reaching Ayodhya, permission for "puja" at the "shilanyas" site on March 15, and handing over 42 acres of acquired land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas by June 3 when the 100-day ongoing "yagna" ends. The VHP, he said, would wait till March 12, the earlier deadline.

Acharya Kishore seemed to suggest that the

VHP was intractable on the three demands, but willing to consider any other proposal that may emerge from the latest initiative of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi, to resolve the issue. He said the VHP had apprised the Kanchi acharya of the three demands. While sticking to the March 15 programme, he said the VHP would not go into the disputed area.

Acharya Kishore said the Allahabad High Court should expedite the case concerning the disputed site on the basis of "documents" and not just rely on witnesses. In the past four decades only 14 of the 100 witnesses were examined. He wondered how could there be witnesses to something that took place hundreds of years ago.

When asked whether the VHP would abide by the court verdict, he said the organisation was yet to take a decision and it was for the religious leaders to discuss if such a proposal came.

ETP

6 Mar 2002

Govt looking at three plans to appease VHP

BJP keen on reviving Hindutva card after poll debacle

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vajpayee government is building a case for handing over to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas at least part of the 67 acres of land in the immediate vicinity of the demolished Babri masjid acquired by the Centre in December 1992.

Highly placed sources in the government say that if the acquired land is divided into 'essential' land—needed to maintain the security of the disputed 40 by 80 feet on which the mosque stood as well as the access to it—and 'superfluous, excess' land beyond it, 'there should be no objection' to handing over the latter to the VHP. Not just that, the sources maintain there are provisions in Sections 6 and 7 of the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993, which entitle the Centre to hand over the land to the RJN.

The reason why the VHP's demand is being given such serious consideration is not merely the organisation's capacity for trouble, but a growing sense in the ranks of the BJP leadership, after the party's abysmal performance in the recent assembly polls, that only the revival of the Hindutva card can infuse fresh life into a moribund organisation. At the same time, a section in the government feels that, given the current surcharged atmosphere in Gujarat and elsewhere in the country, this is not the right time to hand over the land, for which the VHP has now announced a fresh deadline of June 2.

But the question is: If handing over part or all of

the acquired land to the RJN was so simple, why has it not been done thus far? Official sources say there are three options on handing over of the land. The first is handing over the 'superfluous' land as that would still ensure the security and access to the disputed spot. But in 1994, the supreme court, in its advisory opinion on the validity of the Acquisition Act, had said that not just the fate but the extent of the 'superfluous' land could only be determined after the title suit for the disputed spot was decided.

Next comes Section 6, which is also being invoked

as an option and which, incidentally is the one generally touted by the VHP: That the land can be given to any trust created after 1993, provided it adheres to conditions imposed on it by the government. But the RJN was created well before 1993, and it would be a travesty to hand it over to the RJN even if it floated a fresh trust. Not just that, the SC had pointed out in 1994 that extra land had been acquired by the Centre so that in case the title suit was eventually won by the Muslims, "their success should not be thwarted by denial of proper access to enjoyment of rights in the disputed area by exercise of rights of ownership of Hindu owners of the adjacent properties".

And finally Section 7, which says that the acquired land can be managed either by the Centre or a person/body of persons/trust so long as there is no change to the land till the title suit is decided. In short, if the Centre invokes Section 7 to give the land to the RJN, no construction can begin anyway.



Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans (from left), Mahant Ramvilas Vedanti and Ashok Singhal address the press in New Delhi on Monday.

VHP asks Kanchi seer to mediate

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), desperately looking for a face-saver, now only wants permission for a 'token' ceremony at the so-called undisputed land in Ayodhya on March 15. It has already diluted its earlier stand on beginning construction of the Ram temple, and said it would give the government till June 2—when its 100-day yagna ends—to hand over the acquired land so that it could announce the date for construction of the temple.

On Monday, VHP and Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) leaders met Swami Jayendra Saraswathi, the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, who is here, to seek his cooperation in putting across their views to the government. Indeed, the Sankaracharya has replaced the RSS as the mediator between the VHP and the government.

'DMK will quit NDA if temple is built on disputed site'

By Our Staff Reporter

9 - P.P.
NDA
19-11

4/3

KUMBAKONAM, MARCH 3. The DMK will come out of the NDA alliance, if construction of a Ram temple is taken up at the disputed site, the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president, M. Karunanidhi, said here today.

Speaking at a marriage function, (marriage of the son of the former Minister Ko.Si.Mani) Mr. Karunanidhi said the DMK, however, was not against construction of a Ram temple. It was against construction of the temple at the disputed site.

The DMK president said there could not be a secular front and there could only be a secular government. Leaders of political parties in a front could belong to various religions and they could not be expected to be secular unless they were like the DMK or Communists who did not have belief in religion. But it could not be expected of every leader as he might belong to a particular religion and had belief in it. So only religious harmony could be expected of a front.

The DMK allied with the BJP as the National Democratic Alliance had announced that the interest of the minorities community would be protected. If there was any change in that assurance, the DMK would not hesitate to walk out of the alliance.

Violence in Gujarat should not be politicised. Instead of investigating who started first — the minority or the majority — everyone should work for bringing peace in Gujarat.

THE HINDU

MAR 3 2002

NDA is likely to choose new Speaker from TDP

By Mahendra Ved
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: In order to maintain the delicate political equilibrium at the Centre, the ruling National Democratic Alliance is likely to choose a successor to Lok Sabha Speaker G. M. C. Balayogi from the Telugu Desam Party.

The reason for choosing someone from the TDP is because it is the second largest constituent of the NDA. Moreover, TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is said to enjoy an excellent rapport with Prime Minister Vajpayee and the NDA leadership.

Political observers say the ruling alliance would do nothing to disturb the current political equilibrium, especially in light of the dismal performance of the BJP in the recent assembly elections and the all-round criticism that the party is facing for the violence in Gujarat.

Deputy Speaker P. M. Sayeed would be conducting Monday's proceedings in the Lok Sabha. He was the Congress nominee who had garnered opposition support to win the post. Chances of his elevation to the Speaker's post are considered slim, since the ruling alliance

would not like to surrender the crucial parliamentary post to the opposition.

Among the names being mentioned for the Speaker's post are TDP's leader in the Lok

Third black Sunday for LS

NEW DELHI: It was the third black Sunday for the 13th Lok Sabha which on Sunday lost its Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi, the first to die in harness. He is the third prominent political personality in his fifties belonging to the 13th Lok Sabha who met an accidental death on a Sunday.

CWC member Rajesh Pilot died in a road mishap near Jaipur nearly two years ago.

Deputy leader of the Congress Madhavrao Scindia was killed in a plane crash in Uttar Pradesh on September 30 last year when he was proceeding to Kanpur to address a public rally organised by his party. Mr Balayogi was the youngest and first Dalit speaker and it was a quirk of fate that propelled him to office. His name emerged at the last minute as the candidate following an understanding between the BJP and the TDP. (PTI)

Sabha Yarran Naidu, M. Venkateswarulu who was a minister in the United Front government and M. Rajaiah, a member of the backward class. Yarran Naidu is considered to be close to the chief minister and was his nominee in the Union Front governments of Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral. He is also among the more experienced of the TDP members in Parliament.

A surprise choice and a low-profile man, Mr Balayogi was the first Dalit to become the Lok Sabha Speaker. He was also the first to die in office. During the three years plus he held the office, he belied his critics who had accused him of being unknown and faceless. He handled the business of the House with sensitivity and was re-elected Speaker in 1999.

Mr Balayogi displayed fairness during the crucial vote that brought down the Vajpayee government by a single vote in 1999.

The Speaker's post is crucial in the country's constitutional and parliamentary firmament. Notionally, the Speaker ceases to be a member of the party on whose ticket he/she is elected to the Lok Sabha. The role becomes more important when there is an impasse between the government and the opposition on any issue.

VHP terms for withdrawing March 15 stir

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 1

AS THE RSS began talks with the VHP leadership to find a way out of the impasse over the Ayodhya issue, the latter said it was willing to consider postponing its temple construction plan from March 15 if the Government gave a written assurance that it would be allowed to worship the stone pillars of the shrine on the acquired land within a time frame.

VHP senior vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore said if the Government gave such an assurance specifying the date from which they would be allowed to begin *puja* of the carved pillars on the undisputed land, the saints would consider taking back their agitation plans. He said the decision to change or suspend the programme was entirely in the hands of the religious heads.

Acharya Giriraj said his organisation was ready to give the Government some more time, three months at the most, to find a solution to the Ayodhya issue. After a meeting with Vajpayee yesterday, Sangh leaders had agreed to mediate between the Government and the VHP.

RSS chief KS Sudarshan reportedly held discussions with VHP supremo Ashok Singhal at the Sangh headquarters here last night and today as well.

VHP scales down demand to 42 acres

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has scaled down its demand for the Government-acquired land in Ayodhya from 67 acres to 42 acres and the Government is under intense pressure from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh to accept it.

Simultaneously, the VHP announced that there would be no change in its ongoing 'yagna' at Ayodhya and the plan to move some carved stone pillars to the "shilanyas" site in Ayodhya on March 15. It also issued an appeal to "countrymen" to "maintain peace and harmony" as "every human life is precious for the followers of the Hindu dharma."

The VHP has called a meeting here tomorrow of some 'sants' associated with the Ram temple agitation to discuss the situation and take a decision. There are enough hints that the "minimum" and "firm" assurance the VHP and the 'sants' would seek is that within three months, 42 acres of the acquired land in

Ayodhya be handed to the VHP-controlled Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas to enable the commencement of Ram temple construction.

The meeting will also discuss the situation in Ayodhya where the VHP has charged the Government with placing "hurdles" in the way of its ongoing programme, the VHP international president, Ashok Singhal, said today. He and the senior VHP leader, Giriraj Kishore, said a meeting between the "sants" and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was also not ruled out. "If Mr. Vajpayee invites them, they could meet."

Seven of the 10 "sants" who met Mr. Vajpayee on January 27 (when he agreed to refer the demand for acquired land to the Law Ministry) are expected here tomorrow. They include Ramchandra Paramhans, Avaidyanath, Chinmayanand and Nritya Gopaldas. Several rounds of hectic discussions between the Government, the VHP and the RSS leaders, on the one hand, and the lawyers on the other, produced this proposal: the VHP

would agree to getting 42 acres of the acquired land, leaving a plot west of the demolished Babri Masjid in Government hands to "ensure that a reasonable extent of land adjacent to the disputed structure is made available to the Muslim community if and when a decree is passed in their favour in the pending suits." The proposal was submitted to Mr. Vajpayee by Mr. Singhal on February 27 along with a map of the 67 acres of Government-acquired land in Ayodhya. A copy of the letter to Mr. Vajpayee, containing the proposal, was made available to the press here today.

The proposal admitted that only one acre of the land had been "purchased" by the Nyas while just over 42 acres were given to it on perpetual lease by the Uttar Pradesh Government "for an annual nominal rent of rupee one." Of these over 43 acres, the VHP was agreeable to the Government retaining about an acre adjacent to the disputed site (of the demolished Babri Masjid and the makeshift Ram temple that was built on its debris).

The VHP is insisting that the Supreme Court judgment on the acquisition of land does not come in the way of the Government handing over part of the land to the VHP-controlled trust.

Ban orders in Ayodhya: Page 11

THE HINDU

4 MAR 2002

BJP debacle may stymie labour Bill

Sudesh K Verma
in New Delhi

Feb. 26. — The proposed Bill to liberalise labour laws is likely to be the first casualty of the BJP's poll debacle even as the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today tried to prop up the morale of his party MPs by exhorting them to stand up to the Opposition without being apologetic. He said the Assembly election verdict could not be treated as a referendum on the performance of the Central government.

Mr Vajpayee, while indicating his own disillusionment, said at a meeting of the BJP's parliamentary party that the results were *apratayashit* (beyond imagination) but stressed the need to work hard to perform better at the Lok Sabha elections slated for 2004.

The Prime Minister asked them to get feedback from their respective constituencies and come out with a possible explanation for the debacle. A day-long meeting of the parliamentary party is slated on 16 March (Saturday) to discuss the reasons and find out ways to apply

correctives for a better performance in 2004.

The party is contemplating a *chintan baithak* (introspection camp) of senior leaders to decide the new focus. The party is vertically split between hardliners and soft-liners on the Hindutva plank and a new direction is needed to rebuild the cadre morale, a senior BJP leader said. The meeting is likely during the recess in the budget session of Parliament.

The party office-bearers are slated to meet on Saturday to discuss the results.

Despite raising the issue of Poto and terrorism in almost all election rallies, the BJP leaders are now trying to prove that local issues dominated the electioneering.

The Prime Minister said that he raised local issues in all meetings but it was always terrorism which got highlighted by the media.

The mandate was against the state governments, he stressed.

The Prime Minister asked party MPs not to lose heart and reminded them that on earlier occasions also this had happened. Every time the BJP emerged stronger, he said,

according to the parliamentary party spokesperson, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra.

Some BJP MPs, however, appeared worried at the tough measures proposed by the government like allowing easy closure of industries and the talk about a hard budget.

Mr Malhotra reportedly pointed out that the BJP was being discredited as allies had forced the government to roll back the hard decisions.

Instead of the allies taking the credit the party should raise objections and try to present an impression of being pro-poor, he said at the meeting.

Some party MPs demanded that the government should reconsider liberalising labour laws and taxing the poor. The Prime Minister assured that he would convene a meeting of NDA to discuss labour reforms after which the BJP could also discuss them. Party sources said that the proposed Bill was unlikely to be tabled in the Lok Sabha without a consensus.

The Shiv Sena has already informed the NDA that it would be left with no choice but to vote against the Bill if the government tried to introduce it.

MISSOURI

27 FEB 2002

VHP ups the ante, makes life difficult for Vajpayee

9.9.93 - B.S.P.

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 25 FEBRUARY

IF THE embarrassment of the electoral debacle was not enough, the BJP leadership and the Vajpayee government are having a tough time trying to stave off a confrontation with the VHP over the latter's plan to start the construction of temple at the undisputed site in Ayodhya on March 15. Even as the government used President K.R. Narayanan's address to the joint session of Parliament on Monday to stress its commitment to maintain status quo and scheduled a meeting with the Opposition to find ways to defuse the matter, the VHP was sticking to its March 15 schedule to commence the construction. The VHP vice president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore,

asserted that there would be no change in the programme under any circumstances. The belligerence of the saffron outfit came across clearly through his reminder that the BJP had supported the construction of temple at Ayodhya, as well as the admonition that the party had jettisoned the matter out of concern for the longevity of Vajpayee government and because of the pressure from the Muslim vote bank.

Leaders of all important opposition political parties will attend the meeting that the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee has called on Tuesday against the backdrop of VHP's March deadline threat.

Earlier, the government sought to reassure misgivings about its own stance over the matter by asserting that it was "duty bound" to main-



FIRE AND FURY

tain the status quo at Ayodhya and take all measures to maintain law and order in the city. The assurance was conveyed through President

Narayanan who in his address to Parliament said that government, being the statutory receiver, is duty bound to maintain the status quo. The VHP build-up has acquired an additional dimension after the defeat of the BJP in the state, sparking off fears that the matter may spin out of control in case of a confrontation with the VHP. Though the Union law ministry is soon expected to be ready with its opinion on the validity of the VHP's claim to the undisputed land at Ayodhya, it is unlikely to resolve the imbroglio.

The VHP justifies its claim to the undisputed land by pointing out that it is demanding only the portion that houses "Sita ki Rasoi" and VHP's Manas Bhavan which belongs to VHP, and is separate from the area whose title has been

claimed by Muslims. However, a closer perusal of the Supreme Court's observations over the matter suggests that the matter is not as straightforward.

The apex court which looked into the validity of the Acquisition of Certain Areas at Ayodhya Act (1993) had observed: "The interest claimed by the Muslims is only over the disputed site where the mosque stood before its demolition. The objection of the Hindus to this claim has to be adjudicated. The remaining entire property acquired under the Act is such over which no title is claimed. A large part thereof comprises of properties of Hindus of which the title is not even in dispute."

This part of the judgement is highlighted by the VHP to demand the release of the land of which it reverted to its earlier owner."

was the rightful owner. The matter, however, becomes tricky because the same verdict has while upholding the idea of eventual restoration of the surplus land to its legitimate owner, also says that it should take place only after guaranteeing that Muslims would have proper access to the disputed site in the "event of their success in the litigation." "The Manas Bhavan and Sita ki Rasoi both belonging to the Hindus are buildings which closely overlook the disputed site and are acquired because of they are strategic in location in relation to the disputed area.... However, at a later stage when the exact area acquired it would not merely be permissible but also desirable that the superfluous excess area is released from acquisition and reverted to its earlier owner."

BJP decides to sit in the Opp

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 25

THE BJP'S central parliamentary board decided today that the party would "accept and respect" the mandate in Uttar Pradesh and sit in the Opposition.

Party president Jana Krishnamurthi said the board had taken the decision after due consideration of the majority view and outgoing Chief Minister Rajnath Singh's assessment of the post-result political scenario.

He said the leaders felt the situation was too fluid and the party could take stock of the scenario later on. Asked if the BJP would support BSP leader Mayawati's Government-making efforts, Krishnamurthi said, "We are not supporting any party."

The BJP parliamentary board discussed the issue at a meeting at Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's residence. The meet-

ing was attended by top party leaders including Murli Manohar Joshi, Kushabhau Thakre, Kalraj Mishra and Rajnath Singh. There were sharp divisions in the party on supporting the BSP, though a section wanted all possible ways explored to keep Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party out of power.

Earlier, Rajnath Singh and Kalraj Mishra briefed the Prime Minister on the political ramifications of the fractured verdict.

The meeting discussed all options available with the BJP and the pro and cons of trying to form a Government, party sources said.

Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party (SP) went into overdrive to form a 'secular' Government in the State. The party, the single largest group in a hung House, said it was prepared to "build bridges" with any party and cautioned the BSP against

Total seats - 403 Declared - 401

BJP+	107
SP	145
BSP	98
Congress	25
Others	26

"backstabbing" the electorate by joining hands with the BJP.

"We are making all-out efforts for a secular alternative as the electorate has clearly voted against the BJP. We are prepared to build bridges with any party," SP general secretary Amar Singh told reporters when asked if his party would talk to the Congress and the BSP.

The SP needs over 60 MLAs to reach the magic figure of 202 in the 403-member House. Asked if he considered the BSP a secular party, Singh criticised the manner in which Mayawati had

rushed last night to the Prime Minister's residence to meet Atal Bihari Vajpayee. "The BSP should stop hankering after power and do something for installing a secular Government in Uttar Pradesh," he said.

If the BSP joined hands with the BJP for power, it would amount to stabbing the voters in their back because the verdict was clearly against the BJP, he added. Amar Singh said after fighting the polls on an anti-BJP plank, the BSP should not think of sitting in the BJP's lap. It would only expose the party's double standards.

Asked if he was expecting support from the Congress, which had won 20 seats, Singh said, "We need more MLAs to be able to form the Government". SP president Mulayam Singh Yadav has said that with the BJP voted out, it was the duty now of all "secular forces" to

come forward and install a secular Government. On whether he would meet Sonia Gandhi he would seek support, Yadav said he was not opposed to the Congress.

Yadav and Amar Singh will leave tomorrow for Lucknow to meet the party's legislators and elect the leader of the legislature party.

Amar Singh said the party would stake its claim to form the next Government. The Samajwadi Party should be called to form the Government just as Vajpayee had been called to form the Government at the Centre. When Kalyan Singh was not invited to form the Government in pursuance of this principle, Vajpayee was angry, Singh said.

The issue of stability would be resolved on the floor of the House and the SP would respect all constitutional norms. If it failed to prove its majority, it would quit office, Singh added.

Temple, terrorism did not stem BJP decline in UP

By Siddharth Varadarajan
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Stripped of the statistical cover provided by its allies, the Bharatiya Janata Party's individual tally in the UP assembly suggests that a sea change in the politics of the state is taking place. Once the trend-setter in this bellwether state, the BJP—along with its agenda of political revanchism and economic reform—is now something of an 'also ran', puffing into third place behind the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party.

Since the Vidhan Sabha elections of 1991, the BJP has been the single largest party in the state, cornering more than 30 per cent of the popular vote in both the assembly and Lok Sabha polls. Popular support for the BJP reached its peak in the 1998 parliamentary elections, when 36.5 per cent of the state's electorate voted for the party.

The 1999 LS polls saw its vote share fall to 27.6 per cent, but it still managed to best every other party. This year, however, voters in UP have delivered a humiliating blow to the BJP. Its vote share is down to about 21 per cent and its ranking is third. Even if one looks at the BJP's performance together with its allies, the grim reality is that nearly 75 per cent of the voters in Uttar Pradesh decided to vote against the party and its agenda.

Shifting caste equations no doubt explain one part of the story. However, the precipitous drop in the BJP's fortunes since 1998 suggests there is something more fun-

damental the party has got wrong. For one, its strategy of projecting 'national achievements' such as the Pokhran-II nuclear tests, Kargil, Poto and the fight against terrorism as electoral planks in UP does not appear to have cut any ice at all—especially not in a situation where the electorate was confronted with misgovernance and economic mismanagement by the BJP on such a monumental scale.

Second, the desperate attempt to use the Ayodhya card also backfired. Voters cutting across caste

and religious lines saw the move to revive the issue as nothing but a cynical ploy to divert attention away from the BJP's actual record in the state. The irony is that the more they find their hold over the electorate slipping, the more the BJP and its saffron affiliates will be tempted to

reactivate their temple agenda.

Third, while it is tempting to look at the SP and BSP performances as merely an expression of caste solidarity, the attraction these parties have for the socially underprivileged is also a symptom of an underlying economic phenomenon. It is not coincidental that the BJP and Congress—the two parties most closely associated with economic reform—are precisely the ones the UP electorate is turning its back on. Liberalisation is impoverishing one section of the 'lower castes' and making another section politically ambitious. Either way, the political space for the BJP—too closely associated with the existing locus of privilege—is shrinking.

UTTAR PRADESH

No of seats: 403

Results: 401

1996

BJP	88	174
BSP	97	67
SP	143	110
INC	26	33
Others	47	40

119-10

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2002

A MANDATE AGAINST THE BJP

THE DEFEAT OF the BJP in all the State Assemblies that went to the polls is a crucial indicator of the public mood. The verdict from Uttar Pradesh, where the party is down this time by over 50 Assembly seats, is indeed a clear message that the people have refused to get swayed by sectarian concerns that the BJP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar outfits tried to kindle. That the BJP has been voted out in such decisive manner, notwithstanding the strategic distancing by its political leadership from the VHP's moves while at the same time ensuring that the party's ranks were involved with the VHP's activities right through the poll campaign, is indeed a point that needs to be stressed. Similarly, it is of significance that the electorate refused to be carried away by the jingoism that marked the campaign speeches — from the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and his Defence Minister, George Fernandes, to leaders lower down in the NDA set-up. The verdict against the BJP-led alliance in Uttar Pradesh (as well as in Punjab and Uttaranchal) is indeed a reflection of the extent to which the people are indifferent to the war mongering that the Vajpayee dispensation had indulged in during the campaign. It is time that Mr. Vajpayee and his colleagues in the Union Government realised that sectarian passions and war mongering have no place in the democratic discourse.

It is true that even if the people turned away from the BJP, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, that did not help Mulayam Singh Yadav — whose Samajwadi Party has emerged into being the most powerful force in the State against the BJP — secure a majority in the Assembly with a strength of 403 members. And as it has emerged, the BSP has turned out to be the singular hurdle in Mr. Yadav's path. After hav-

ing suffered a series of splits when a good number of its elected MLAs walked out of the party to become Ministers, the BSP's performance this time — with 97 MLAs which is 31 more than the number of seats the party won in the last elections — is indeed a significant achievement. The emergence of the BSP as a major force (the party's contingent will constitute nearly a fourth of the 403-member Assembly if Mayawati manages to prevent an exodus from her ranks in the coming days) is striking. And this indeed is reflective of the fragmentation of the society in the Gangetic valley (and the consequent churning in the political set-up) during the past couple of decades in particular.

There are some ominous signals too in this context. And that emanates from the fantasy that Ms. Mayawati has managed to build among her party's ranks that ideological steadfastness is not a virtue. She has allowed her own ego rather than any firm ideological position to guide the affairs of the BSP. The parting of ways between the BSP and the Samajwadi Party (after the combine swept the BJP out of power in November 1993) took her straight into the BJP camp. It is this agenda — self-preservation — that seems to be guiding the BSP even at this stage. The party's strategic thinking begins with how Ms. Mayawati could become the Chief Minister; and it ends there too. This is what renders the post-election scenario in Uttar Pradesh so much more complex and the larger message from the verdict — the BJP having been dislodged — seems to be getting lost even before the final results are out. The tragedy lies in the inability of the leaders of those parties that sought to take over the secular and the democratic space to place principles and ideology over their prejudices and narrow ends.

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2002

BJP divided on UP strategy

Sudesh K Verma
in New Delhi

Feb. 22. — The BJP is caught in a cleft stick over predictions of a hung Assembly.

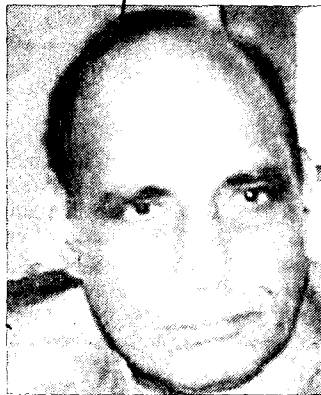
While a section of the BJP, which includes Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, and Mr LK Advani, feels it is better to sit in the Opposition, the other section represented by Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, and Mr Pramod Mahajan reportedly feels the party should do everything including entering into a post-poll alliance with the BSP to retain Uttar Pradesh.

To them, losing Uttar Pradesh would mean the beginning of the process of disintegration. The party has already lost major states — Bihar to Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to the Congress. Also the Congress has governments in 11 states with Punjab and Manipur likely to join this group. The impression of an ascending Op-

position would damage the BJP's claim that it was becoming the country's natural ruling party.

The BJP has the advantage of having a favourable Governor in Mr Vishnukant Shastri. But he is not a Romesh Bhandari who would use his discretion to the extent that it could be questioned openly. The former RSS pracharak is known to be a stickler for rules and is unlikely to do anything that would spoil his reputation. Therefore, the proposal that it can somehow manage its way to power and then split others is unlikely to work. The chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, has reached Delhi realising that the political power play in Uttar Pradesh would be played at Mr Vajpayee's residence.

The Governor's role would assume significance in the context of the general perception that the party that will get the Governor's invitation would be able to prove majority as it would easily split other groups to cobble to-



Mr Rajnath Singh

gether the magical figure of 202. The party which is likely to get the invitation is either the Samajwadi Party or the BJP and the ones likely to split are the BSP and the Congress.

Instead of asking for a floor test, the Governor's job would be to ensure that political parties were not banking on defections through allurement and that a

viable alternative was cobbled together. It is in this context that the possibility of President's rule is also being discussed in government circles. A brief spell of central rule is likely to allow parties to withdraw from their public stand of not supporting each other and think in terms of sharing power.

Also, there are not many takers in the BJP for the proposition that the BSP would split immediately after the elections.

The possibility that it might improve on its figures of 67 in 1996 would make the split more difficult, a Union minister said. The impression that the Congress would support the SP in government formation is forcing the BJP to quickly work out an alternative.

True, it would be difficult for the BJP's forward caste voters to accept Miss Mayawati as chief minister, but she would be better than Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav who could damage the BJP in the

long run like Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav did in Bihar, a senior BJP leader said. Mr Vajpayee is angry with the BSP that it didn't support his government despite an informal commitment and allowed it to lose by one vote. But the alliance with the BSP gives the NDA 14 more MPs and an assurance that it might actually last its complete term.

Those advocating a pro-BSP line argue that after all, the BJP has made compromises for being in power at the Centre. While in Haryana, it has accepted the leadership of Mr Om Prakash Chautala, in Punjab, it has Mr Prakash Singh Badal. In Tamil Nadu it has the DMK and in Maharashtra the Shiv Sena.

In West Bengal it was ready to accept Miss Mamata Banerjee as the leader. And the Telugu Desam Party chief, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, is happy that he can browbeat the state BJP unit of Andhra Pradesh and silence the BJP anytime.

THE STATESMAN

2 FEB 23

Courts have no right to interfere in Ayodhya temple issue: VHP

By Sudhir K. Singh
Times News Network

BHOPAL: Vishwa Hindu Parishad international general secretary Praveen Togadia has said that construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya would begin on March 15 at any cost. This had been decided by the VHP's dharma sansad on January 21, 2001.



Praveen Togadia

More than Rs 16 crore had already been spent on work connected with the building of the temple, Rs 8 crore of which had been raised from public contributions. The final cost of the Ram temple was expected to be Rs 40 crore for a five-year period.

Mr Togadia told mediapersons on Tuesday that the question wasn't merely of building a temple as

Temple not at cost of govt: RSS

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The RSS, alarmed that the VHP's threat to start construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya might drive a wedge between the BJP and allies of the National Democratic Alliance, has decided to ask the VHP leadership to restrain itself. While the RSS is as keen as the VHP on the temple, it is equally clear that it should not be at the cost of the BJP-led government.

Sources said RSS leaders would talk to VHP chief Ashok Singhal, who is seen as "more reasonable" than senior functionary Acharya Giriraj Kishore or Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas trustee Ramchandra Paramhans.

there were scores of temples at Ayodhya. The issue was crucial since it concerned the birthplace of Lord Ram. He said that the temple at the site was a matter of faith for Hindus just as Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, was of great significance to Christians.

No court in the world had the right, moral or legal, to adjudicate on such a matter, he said. There was no question of shifting the location of the temple, no matter who had ownership rights to the land.

Mr Togadia argued that the approach of the courts should be on the lines of the 1985 judgment given in the case of a petition filed by Chandmal Chopra in the Calcutta high court. He had appealed against the reading of the Koran in public on the grounds that the practice provoked riots. Justice Basak had dismissed the petition, saying it wasn't for the courts to decide on such matters.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 11 2000

Mosque can be built near temple: RSS

Press Trust of India

NAGPUR, Feb. 18. — The RSS today said a mosque could be built at a distance from the proposed Ram temple in Ayodhya and expressed readiness to hold talks with the Muslims on the issue. It even offered "kar seva" for building the mosque.

"A mosque can be constructed at some distance from the temple on the banks of the Sharayu," the RSS spokesman, Mr MG Vaidya, said here. Without specifying the distance, he said "may be at a nearby area" and called upon the Muslims to think over the advice.

He ruled out any threat to the NDA government over the proposed construction of the temple.

The RSS is yet to come out with a stand on the construction, though the VHP has announced it'll start building the temple from 15 March. The RSS national executive is scheduled to meet on 14 March, which will be followed by a three-day session of the general council (Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha) from 15 March. The organisation is likely to announce its stand after the meetings.

Mr Vaidya denied the RSS was exerting pressure on the BJP-led government at the Centre on the issue and said the party was free to follow its policies and those of the NDA.

He criticised the parties that had "promised" to build a mosque at Ayodhya after the Babari Masjid was demolished in December 1992. None of those parties, including the Congress and Samajwadi Party, mentioned the issue in their manifestoes for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, he said. On talks with the Muslims, he said these could be held if someone took an initiative. "We are ready."

He denied reports that the RSS was a "remote control" of the NDA government. The organisation is happy with the Centre's overall performance, particularly its handling of the Kargil conflict, decision to carry out nuclear explosions, changes in the school syllabi. It's, however, unhappy with the economic policies and the way New Delhi handled the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814.

RSS general secretary Mr Mohanrao Bhagwat said laws such as Poto and Poca had become necessary because terrorism was now the most threatening problem and India was besieged by enemies on all sides, SNS adds from Kolkata. He was addressing a meeting organised by the South

24-Parganas unit of the RSS.

He said Mr LK Advani's critics, who claimed Poto was sought to be passed on communal considerations, had merely tried to curry favour with a particular community.

'Suicide' at Sangh office

NEW DELHI, Feb. 18. — The security officer of senior RSS leader, Mr Rajinder Singh, was found dead in the organisation's office here. Virender Singh, a Delhi Police constable, had a gunshot wound just above his left eye. The body was found around 11.30 last night in the guard room of the RSS office at Jhandewala.

Singh's revolver was by his side and the body was covered by a quilt. Though it seems to be a case of suicide, no suicide note was found. A probe has been launched. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2002

VHP performs *shila puja* at Ayodhya

Times News Network

LUCKNOW: Undeterred by the Prime Minister's statement on the Ayodhya issue, the VHP on Sunday performed a *shila puja* and began a *Sri Ram Naam Jap Yagna* at Karsevakpuram. This was part of its programme for construction of the Ram temple here.

VHP saints from Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Hardwar, Punjab, Kolkata and Delhi are participating in the *yagna* which will end on February 23.

Both the programmes were organised on the occasion of Basant Panchami in the presence of Mandir Nirman Samiti chairman Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans Das and VHP working president Ashok Singhal.

A carved stone pillar was consecrated at Karsevakpuram to "purify" all stones carved at the two workshops in Ayodhya. With this, the VHP's temple construction programme entered the final phase.

The VHP plans to organise a month-long *purna ahuti yagna* from February 24 and has stated it will start shifting pillars and construction material from March 15.

Speaking to mediapersons, Mr Singhal said he was hopeful that the Centre would hand over the "undisputed land" to the Ram Janambhoomi Trust before March 12 to avoid any confrontation. "We want to

begin the construction peacefully. The Prime Minister is my friend and I hope he will take some kind of decision to transfer the land before the March 12 deadline," he said. Mr Parmahans said the Ayodhya issue was not a matter to be decided by the court as it relates to the religious sentiments of the Hindus.

AFP



VHP president Ashok Singhal (right) and president of the Ram Janambhoomi Trust Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans (left), perform rituals to consecrate carved pillar for the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Sunday.

He disputed Mr Vajpayee's statement that his efforts to resolve the issue had failed because of the unrelenting stand taken by both sides. He said the PM had not held any talks with him.

Meanwhile, the Centre has directed the U.P. government to step up security arrangements in Ayodhya. The Vajpayee government has given an assurance it will maintain status quo at the disputed site at any cost.

IT and parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said on Sunday that no new rituals will be permitted at the site till the court verdict. The minister said the government has asked the law ministry to give its opinion on transfer of the land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust and the government would act accordingly. Mr Mahajan, however, denied that any time frame had been set for this.

Mr Mahajan also denied reports that the Vajpayee government will be setting up a committee to find an out-of-court solution to the imbroglio after the failure of talks.

Temple date in a week: VHP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Feb. 9. — The VHP has queered the pitch over the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya as Uttar Pradesh goes to the polls next week.

"We will announce the date for the start of the temple's construction within two to five days," chief of the Ramjanmabhumi Trust Mahant Paramhansh Ramchandra Das declared today in presence of the VHP president, Mr Ashok Singhal.

"We will start the construction even if we are fired upon and jailed," Mahant Das said. Stating that "there is a limit to our patience", Mr Singhal said: "We will, however, not start the construction before the 12 March deadline fixed by the saints at the Mahakumbh last year."

Criticising Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for threatening to resign over the issue, Mahant Das said: "What will we do with your resignation? You are retracting from your earlier statement of solving the problem by 12 March."

The VHP leaders said they were not interested in the

disputed area of 80 ft by 45 ft where the makeshift temple was already located but the 47 acres of our land acquired by the Centre without paying any compensation to the trust. The Uttar Pradesh government had given the land's lease to the trust for 99 years."

Was the announcement made with the Assembly election in mind? Mr Singhal said: "I am not interested in election campaigns. I don't know if the voters are going to be influenced by this decision". Those opposing the temple's construction were doing so for "political gains", he added.

The VHP president, however, brought in the election angle by saying that voters should consider about the parties which were opposing the idea of construction and blocking discussions on it by creating a "ruckus" in the Parliament. "Such parties should be given a warning," he said.

Mr Ashok Singhal said the Prime Minister alone cannot solve this matter but "all Hindus have to ponder over it".

He said: "The Viswa Hindu Parishad was not interested

in the disputed area of 80 ft by 45 ft where the makeshift temple was located. The Centre had acquired 47 acre of our land and had paid no compensation for it. The Uttar Pradesh government had leased the land to the trust for 99 years."

The reports about the Union law ministry turning down the VHP's plea to return the land acquired by the Centre were false, he said.

Babari panel slams VHP: The Babari Masjid Action Committee today termed the VHP's announcement on temple construction as "contempt of court", adds UNI from Lucknow.

The BMAC's counsel, Mr Abdul Mannan, said the the Supreme Court in its order on 24 October 1994 had said that no land would be handed over to anyone without the court's verdict.

The VHP had deliberately raised the issue on the eve of the polls with the aim of attracting Hindu votes.

Meanwhile, Mr Zafaryab Jilani, the BMAC convenor, has gone to New Delhi to hold talks with senior Muslim leaders over the temple issue.

10 12 22

BJP mentions temple in passing

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

UTTAR PRADESH POLL MANIFESTO

LUCKNOW, Feb. 2. — The BJP mentions the Ram temple issue in its Uttar Pradesh poll manifesto almost in passing. The chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, said the Opposition was "misleading" minorities by promising a masjid on the spot.

The manifesto also mentions terrorism and Pakistani militants who have made the state a "special target".

The party promises that all involved in anti-national activities, however influential, will be dealt with very firmly. It appears to be an attempt to consolidate party's support base.

The 32-page manifesto with the photograph of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee on the cover was jointly released by the state party chief, Mr Kalraj Mishra, and Mr Rajnath Singh. At the end of the manifesto

the party says the Ayodhya issue will be resolved soon by "mutual discussions or through a court verdict." When the BJP comes to power the government would help expedite the matter pending in the court.

Pakistani agents, instigating unrest, feel that if BJP returns to power they'd have a difficult time, the manifesto said. Such agents were active in 32 districts, helped by illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The party will try to identify and deport them.

The manifesto promises that in case Parliament didn't pass the Po-t, the state'd enact laws on its own. Some political parties were opposing such laws just for "vote politics."

Talking of global terrorism, the manifesto mentions the 11 September attack on the USA and the de-

struction of Buddha statues at Bamiyan in Afghanistan.

Mr Rajnath Singh said: "The Ram temple is an issue of faith. It is a national and cultural issue". Mr Singh said the Prime Minister said the dispute would be solved.

"There is no doubt that the construction of a Ram temple is a matter of faith. But a solution was best left to the courts or arrived amicably through mutual discussion," Mr Singh said, adding the Opposition shouldn't deceive minorities by promising a masjid. "The BJP will like to know how that'd be achieved", the chief minister said, mainly targeting the Samajwadi Party.

The Samajwadi Party, the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party were trying to get minorities' support by instilling a sense of

among them. "We want them to get over this feeling and gain their support by instilling a sense of confidence", Mr Singh said. If the Congress was the most communal and caste-based party at the all-India level, then the Samajwadi Party was its regional equivalent, he said.

Mr Singh said the party gained a lot of minority confidence but not through "appeasement". The manifesto mentions various achievements for the benefit of minorities. "Our formula is appeasement to none, justice to all", Mr Singh said.

The party admits that the BJP-led government remained a victim of "uncertainty" as no party gained a majority.

The BJP formed a coalition to save the state from another election. Mr Singh, refuting any post-poll alliance, said, "We will form a government on the basis of the pre-poll al-



Mr Rajnath Singh (right) and Mr Kalraj Mishra release the BJP poll manifesto in Lucknow on Saturday. — PTI

VHP blames PM for temple impasse

New Delhi, February 1

THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad today said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee "did nothing" to resolve the Ayodhya issue in the last one year, while the BJP warned the parivar of stern action if it tried to take the law in its hands.

"We are not happy. We went to him (Vajpayee) with certain expectations and we came back empty handed. All the assurance we got was that he will ask the law minister to examine the legal and constitutional aspects of our demand," VHP president Vishnu Hari Dalmia has said on Karan Thapar's *Line of Fire* programme on SAB TV to be telecast on Saturday.

Dalmia said Vajpayee could



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

have referred the matter to the law minister long before.

"Why was it thought necessary to seek legal opinion at the last moment? There was 12 months' time to take all the legal opinion they wanted, there was 12 months' time to have the court cases expedited. During all this time, they did nothing," he said. On whether Vajpayee was "insincere", the VHP leader said, "That we do not know. He may have his own problems and compulsions we are not aware of. But for the last 12 months, they have been sleeping on this issue as far as we are concerned."

BJP general secretary and spokesman Sunil Shastri, who was participating in the programme, said, "The government

will take action if the VHP tries to take law in its hands."

Dalmia said there was no need for the Prime Minister to talk to the VHP about a negotiated settlement. "All that he had to do was to convince the other side (Muslims) that their claim is unjustified and they should accept the position taken by VHP," he said. He agreed with a suggestion that Vajpayee "has done too little, too late."

Justifying the VHP's opposition to a court verdict on the issue, he said, "The court case is not progressing. It is already pending for the last 50 years and the way it is going on, it will take another 50 years."

"Justice delayed is justice denied. When the courts are not functioning, what else can you

do. You can't go on waiting indefinitely for something which is not going to come," Dalmia said.

Asked whether the NDA Government would fall due to VHP's plan, he said, "If that happens, it will be unfortunate, but we cannot help it." Dalmia said VHP was determined to construct the shrine within a month of its March 12 deadline given to the government to remove the obstacles in its path.

Shastri said the Prime Minister was very keen that this emotional issue (Ram temple) must be solved through mutual dialogue. "We (the government) will act like a facilitator to see that this emotional issue is solved," the BJP leader said.

PTI

VHP WARNED OF 'LEGAL CONSEQUENCES'

Bound by NDA agenda on Ayodhya till 2004, says BJP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 31. The Bharatiya Janata Party has made it absolutely clear that its stand on the Ram temple issue is the same as that of the Government even as it left the question wide open for the future, not ruling out the possibility of the party going back to its old stand — it was a matter of faith and therefore beyond the competence of courts — after 2004.

Whatever may have been the BJP's stand earlier, it was now "bound by the NDA agenda" and it was "left with no choice but to respect the court's verdict or a negotiated settlement", the party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, said here today. As for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, "if it refused to abide by a judicial verdict on Ayodhya, it would have to face the legal consequences of this. I am not bothered", he added.

However, since 1989 when the Ram temple issue had come up on its agenda in Palampur, it had remained "close to the heart" of the BJP. Mr. Krishnamurthi was equally frank that "the biggest restriction" on the BJP was that the Ram temple was not on the NDA



The BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, addressing the press at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday. — AFP

agenda. That meant it would not be on the BJP's agenda till 2004, when the term of the current NDA Government at the Centre ends. After that, it would depend entirely on what alliances the BJP

strikes for the next Lok Sabha poll and what is the agreed agenda.

Mr. Krishnamurthi refused to spell out the party's stand in case the VHP took the law into its own hands after March 12. "We will cross the bridge when we come to it," he stated. The party has virtually decided to ignore the sharp attacks made on the Prime Minister at the VHP rally here on January 27. "We are mature enough to ignore the critics of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister," he said.

The press conference addressed by him became a platform for the BJP to explain why it was maintaining a politically correct distance from the VHP on the temple issue even while sending the message that its "heart" was with the Ram temple issue. Mr. Krishnamurthi supported the Government's reference to the Law Ministry since there were differing opinions on the interpretation of the Supreme Court's verdict on the acquired land. The Government's stand was "practical, realistic and best suited for the present circumstances," he asserted.

The party has asked the Gov-

ernment to take steps to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles, after the success of Agni-II. It has suggested that in the coming Budget, taxes and levies on agri-inputs be removed to make agri-products cheaper and competitive in the global market. Also, "slightly higher" deposit interest rates were needed for older persons, pensioners and small depositors while it has also suggested "a relief package" for the urban middle and lower middle class.

On elections, Mr. Krishnamurthi had "positive feedbacks" even in Punjab, certainly in Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh where the party workers were "highly motivated to accept the challenge."

Mr. Krishnamurthi criticised the Samajwadi Party president, Mulayam Singh Yadav, for his call to lift the ban on SIMI and for giving a terrorist-free certificate to 'madrasas' (Islamic religious seminaries) whereas even the Pakistan President had admitted that these were being used wrongly. Such pronouncements would not help him to consolidate the Muslim vote and it would do no good to the minorities.

VHP won't blink first on Ayodhya

Statesman News Service 5/1

NEW DELHI, Jan. 29. — The VHP today toughened its stand further on the vexed Ayodhya issue and ruled out any more talks with the Centre. It also declared it would go ahead with the Ram temple construction plan anytime after the 12 March deadline given to the NDA coalition for handing over the undisputed land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas. It announced its plan to recruit 10,00,000 "Ram sevaks" (Ram devotees) to execute the temple plan.

To indicate the seriousness of its threat, the VHP declared that there was no question of postponing the deadline. "We are firm with our plan in any eventuality. Our

decision is final. The sants are not coming to Delhi again for talks", the organisation's international secretary-general, Mr Pravin Togadia, told reporters after a meeting of the VHP governing council.

The drive to recruit 10,00,000 "Ram sevaks" for the temple construction would begin from 1 February, Mr Togadia said. This is besides the "Chalo Ayodhya Yatra" in Uttar Pradesh from 1 to 10 March. To mobilise people in favour of the issue, the VHP would organise "Sankalp Sabhas" at 7,000 places across the country. The "Ram sevaks" would start reaching Ayodhya from 24 February, he said. The VHP's plans show that it has lost hope from the Centre after its delegation met Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani on Sunday. The Centre com-

pletely rejected the VHP's proposal but agreed to get the issue of handing over the land examined by the Union law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley. The Centre also clarified that the issue should be resolved either through negotiations or a court verdict.

Mr Togadia today ruled out the possibility of resolution of the conflict through either dialogue or judicial verdict. All such proposals were aimed at keeping Hindu society deprived of the Ram temple for centuries, he said. "If at all it could have been solved through dialogue, it would have been over by now. Similarly, when the courts could not decide the matter in the past 50 years, how can you expect them to do so in another 50 years?"

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Forcing the issue

VHP means business and is looking for trouble

VHP's strategy on the Ram temple issue is clear: to force the issue, no matter what the circumstances. It began first by asking for roughly two acres that it said was undisputed, though acquired by the Central government in 1993 precisely to prevent a clash. How it can make such a distinction between disputed and undisputed becomes clear when we are told that it considers only a 3200 square feet plot on which the makeshift temple, built on the debris of the mosque to be in dispute, not the rest of the land. The Supreme Court has already rejected the task of considering whether a temple existed at the spot; no court will want to go into such unstateable propositions. However, two things need to be said here. One, the VHP's stated intention is to build the temple at the very spot — to right the historical "wrong" — therefore, they rub out the distinction between disputed and undisputed. Secondly, saying that portions of the 67 acre plot were given to it and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas by the UP government in 1991 and the whole property should "lawfully" revert to it, is to pre-empt any court verdict on ownership of the land. The prime minister is therefore right in saying that handing over bits of the plot is a legal, not political issue, since attention has to be first paid to the jurisdiction of the courts and it may be necessary to consult them. That will take time, while the VHP has its machine ready and raring to go, deliberately. One doesn't know whether the fact that temple construction and the swearing in of a new government in Uttar Pradesh will coincide is also deliberate, but Ashok Singhal is definitely interested in exploiting the context. He knows that the UP party is not certain of its position, that the Hindu vote-bank will be eyed covetously by many who, in turn, will apply pressure on the top leadership to concede VHP's demands. Also, if the BJP does not make it, the VHP will strengthen its position. Question is: whether the Hindu vote-bank exists in the same form and whether it can be exploited by people like Singhal, Ramchunder Das, Praveen Togadia and their ilk, whether it doesn't need an Advani or a Murli Manohar Joshi to come alive. The VHP is being naive when it says that the latter are in power because of the temple movement; the opposite is equally true, that the temple movement owed a lot to them. Finally, any communal polarisation in Uttar Pradesh will benefit Congress and the SP who might devise a strategy of unity to counter it since Muslims will be sure to vote en bloc.

From Delhi though, things don't look all that simple, because there is the NDA and there is the opposition. The TDP and the DMK are strenuously objecting to any reopening of the Ayodhya issue because they have their own constituencies to think of. The Congress is waiting to be offered an opportunity to break the alliance and the temple issue is one that is most likely to provide it. Besides which, there is the situation on the border which is surely far more important than absurd assertions of temples under mosques. However, the VHP has considerable organisational strength and means business. It can create serious trouble if it wants to. The government is in a difficult situation, largely of its own making.

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29 JAN 2002

BJP manifesto stuck over temple issue

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 24. — The BJP's manifesto for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections is stuck due to the controversy over whether or not the Ram temple issue should figure prominently in the manifesto. While liberals like Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Jana Krishnamurthy aren't keen to include it to avoid controversy, the hard-liners in the party and the RSS reportedly want it to be mentioned as before.

The former party president and in-charge for Uttar Pradesh, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, said: "There will be nothing in the manifesto that the allies would object to." The party is trying to work out a phraseology that would ensure that the original commitment was diluted without sending the mes-

sage that the issue was altogether forgotten.

That the party is contesting on its manifesto in a state where it came to power due to the Ram temple issue has compounded the problem. The BJP plans to release the manifesto before the last date of withdrawal. The first draft of the manifesto didn't mention the issue but the second draft contains a reference, sources said.

In the party's manifesto for the 1996 and 1998 Lok Sabha elections, it had committed that the government should facilitate construction of the magnificent temple at the site of the makeshift temple in Ayodhya. In 1999, the BJP decided not to have a separate manifesto and hence the main issues identified with the Hindutva party were dropped for the National Agenda for Governance. As the BJP doesn't plan to

have a common minimum programme for UP Assembly polls on the pattern of the NAG, some party hard-liners said there was no reason for the party to leave behind its original agenda. But the possibility that it can vitiate the atmosphere and undermine the Prime Minister's attempt to present a liberal-secular image are also to be taken into account.

The tussle within the party on this was evident when the UP chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, said the issue wouldn't figure in the manifesto but the state unit president, Mr Kalraj Mishra, said: "It could". Both claimed that the PM had already expressed himself on the issue. While Mr Vajpayee spoke about finding a solution before the VHP's 13 March deadline, he later also appealed to everyone to shelve divisive issues to fight terrorism.

THE STATESMAN

25 JAN 2002

The BJP's game plan in U.P.

By Zoya Hasan

The intertwined issue of temple and terror is designed to redirect the electorate's attentions from the problems of governance and economic development.

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UNTIL 12/13 happened, it was clear to most observers of the political scene in Uttar Pradesh that the winds of change were blowing across the State. There was an obvious shift in popular perception that did not augur well for the dominant role that the Sangh Parivar and its political instrument, the BJP, have played in the politics of this key State for the past decade. What explains this pattern? What are its implications?

At the outset, it might be useful to identify two broad trends that emphasise the continued centrality of caste politics. The significant political churning under way since the late 1980s has brought into play the numerous lower castes to restructure the power and caste and class privileges of the upper castes. The political assertion and organisation of the lower castes has created a three-fold division in State politics, with the upper castes going with the BJP, the OBCs with the Samajwadi Party and the Dalits with the BSP. Faced with tough competition from the SP and the BSP, both of which have given the lower castes a share of power in proportion to their population, the BJP attempted to court the OBCs by increasing their representation in the candidate list and the Cabinet. Potentially, it can slice off the upwardly mobile groups but only by outbidding the SP. This has proved to be difficult because it would trigger an erosion of its upper caste vote bank. As an alternative, Rajnath Singh proposed a quota-within-quota for the most backward classes, but this too has not worked.

Though Ayodhya has not dampened caste identities, the BJP has sought to keep the dispute alive, even as it downplayed the possibility of building a temple and highlighted the need for a consensually agreed solution. We have seen the extent to which the BJP reaped electoral dividends from the Ayodhya campaign. However, in the parliamentary elections since 1996 the party shunned controversial issues in order to broaden its base of support. At the national level it is attempting to reconcile two very conflicting aims: widening its support base to include those not interested in temples, while continuing to placate and attract hardcore followers of Hindutva hooked on temples and "Bharat ka ancient gaurav". Hence,

the paradigmatic division of labour between Atal Behari Vajpayee charming the middle classes with his occasional musings and L. K. Advani regularly whipping up enthusiasm for Hindutva. But there is no such disingenuous doublespeak in Uttar Pradesh. An election sans Ayodhya seems an improbability. The media says the temple is being prefabricated off-site in preparation for placement. The FIR filed following the October 17 trespass into the makeshift temple gathers dust. The VHP loudly proclaims: the Mandir would be constructed after March 12 come what may. Yet, all this may not yield electoral gains.

Alarmed by expectations of an imminent decline in political support, the BJP has changed its strategy from Ram temple to the war against terrorism, as its main plank in the Assembly elections. Concentrating on the terror campaign and the diplomatic offensive against Pakistan, the BJP leadership is hoping to turn the tide against its rivals. It is seeking to underplay Hindutva issues to capitalise on the public anger against terror attacks. In Lucknow, the Prime Minister asked various Hindu organisations to put the Ram temple on hold. Political pundits will no doubt interpret this as an attempt to distance the BJP from religious mobilisation signified by the emphasis on the "national agenda of anti-terrorism" and "consensual issues of national security". To be sure, the escalation of rhetoric on the temple would be replaced by escalation on terrorism. For its part, the VHP's religious mobilisers make no distinction between Ayodhya and cross-border terrorism. Indeed, the VHP general secretary announced in Lucknow that war must be declared against Pakistan followed at once by a statement that 500 sants would lead the Ayodhya yatra on January 21 to reach Delhi on January 27. For them the war-like preparations are in sync with the goings on in Ayodhya.

Evidently, temple and terror are the central issues in the election campaign. Common to both crusades will be the de-

ployment of symbolic capital to propagate the message. The BJP's use of its network of VHP-affiliated sadhus and sadhu MPs and MLAs as symbols of Hindutva is part of this projection of the dual messages, as these leaders can act as representatives of both the parliamentary and non-parliamentary wings of the Sangh Parivar. They can adjust the message to fit the venue and the audience. Mr. Vajpayee's appeal to the VHP to defer its temple construction plans in view of the prevailing security environment had the instant backing of the Shankaracharya of Kanchipeeth who wields considerable clout with the VHP. Usually, this type of employment of religious symbols and emotive appeals is situationally determined. Religious specialists in charge of mass mobilisation can ratchet up the tension and exacerbate the communal divide, and the party can periodically water down the function of religion in politics. Such differences and shifting back and forth between rabble-rousing and moderation can be mutually advantageous and can maximise the number of supporters.

Even as the rhetoric of political contestation is focussed on Ayodhya, intellectual and cross-border terrorism, POTO and SIMI, the real politics of the State has centred on distribution of jobs and preferences, privileges and disprivileges. However, the discontent with the BJP Government's performance is all pervasive even among its traditional upper caste vote bank, particularly its inability to provide a clean and efficient administration. What is clear is that the BJP's popularity is waning despite strident appeals to religious identity and patriotism. And so the intertwined issue of temple and terror is designed to redirect the electorate's attention from the problems of governance and economic development to anxiety about national security. The split between governance and elections underlined by the habitual flurry of promises on election eve necessitates it.

While the BJP projected itself as the party that was best equipped to provide a

good and stable Government, it has neither improved governance nor developmental work that can bring about material dignity and social security. The last five years have seen an obvious economic and administrative deterioration. Corruption and inefficiency is so rampant that it has overrun virtually every institution, including institutions such as the police and the Judiciary, which are supposed to take action against it. Speed money to get one's work done is so commonplace that it is not even thought to be a corrupt practice, it is money given "to spur into action a perfectly legal process that would not take place unless a monetary incentive was given".

Uttar Pradesh is the largest State where growth has been slowest. A chronically disadvantaged State, it is home to five of India's 14 most backward districts. Economic growth has decelerated since 1991. The State has made little progress in reducing poverty since the late 1980s, and over 41 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Public services and programmes, particularly those meant for the poor, work hopelessly in the State. The Comptroller and Auditor General's Report (1999) highlights numerous irregularities in the implementation of anti-poverty programmes, such as the Employment Assurance Scheme and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. The upshot of this irregularity and corruption was lower employment than planned, lower remuneration to labourers than justified, and non-employment of women labourers. Several of the State's problems are politically induced. The Public Distribution System is a prime example of the absence of political will.

Whether the collective rage over the bane of cross-border terrorism will prevail over the shared resentment against locally produced poor governance, inequity, poverty and swelling unemployment remains to be seen. War or no war, indications are that Uttar Pradesh's party system will remain fragmented as ever, with no party representing the political will for structural change and the readiness to promote a public discourse of development that can address the vital concerns of the economic majority.

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