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# Bhadralok and Muslim names

Archis Mohan  
Kolkata, March 29

IT DOESN'T happen only in bloodthirsty Gujarat. Many poor Muslims drop their real names for Hindu ones to find a living at Salt Lake's Bengali Bhadralok and non-Bengali Hindu homes.

Numerous Gujarati Muslims changed their names during the recent riots, it made all the difference between life and death.

Things are not very different in the so-called enlightened and secular West Bengal. Poor Muslim families from Malda, Murshidabad and even from across the border regularly find employment in well-off Hindu homes of Salt Lake. For a price, though — the name. They even take care to become 'Hindu-like' in manner and conduct. Here,

it's a choice between death from hunger on Kolkata's streets and the warmth of a home.

Take the case of Manindra Chandra Ghosh of Salt Lake's CF block. A former principal of Guwahati's Bishop Cotton College, Ghosh shifted to Salt Lake some six years ago after his retirement. "I was desperately in need of a good carpenter for some woodwork in my house. One of my neighbours recommended one Raju Mondal for the job."

Raju proved to be a fine worker. One day, Mondal asked Ghosh for a week's leave. "I refused. It was then that he told me that his real name was Habu Shah and he had to go to his village to celebrate Id with his family." Shah is still Ghosh's first choice whenever he needs a carpenter. "I know numerous families with

such experiences," Ghosh says.

Mandira Banerjee (name changed) of FD block appointed a Hindu woman from Malda as her maid. "She was our cook. One day, I discovered her son offering namaz. We did not have the heart to throw her out as she pleaded with us." The point is, she did consider that an option.

The woman still works for the family and called by her Hindu name. The Banerjees are afraid that their neighbours might refuse to eat at their place if they discover the maid's identity. Ghosh says: "In most cases, people tell their maids to look for another job."

West Bengal Minorities Commission Member Secretary M A Bari, however, says it is unlikely that Indian Muslims change their names to Hindu ones.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 03 MARCH 2002

# It has become the fashion to ask me to quit: Modi

By S. Balakrishnan  
Times News Network

MUMBAI: Narendra Modi is easily the most controversial chief minister Gujarat has ever had. With communal violence continuing in parts of the state a month after the Godhra incident, the demand



for his removal has been gathering pace.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is believed to be unhappy about the 51-year-old chief minister's handling of the violence in the state. Times News Network interviewed Mr Modi by e-mail on

Friday. Following are excerpts from the Gujarat CM's first extended interview to the print media.

**You have been quoted as saying that the violence in Ahmedabad was a reaction to the train attack in Godhra. Did you say this or not?**

I would like to say empathetically that severe injustice has been done to me by reports which quoted me as using words like Newton's Law and action-reaction which I have never uttered anywhere. I have always been saying that the Godhra incident as well as its aftermath have to be condemned in the strongest of words. No civilised society would permit such incidents.

The quotes attributed to me

were totally imaginary, politically motivated and with a clear intention to malign me.

**Is it true that you were given a dressing down by the PM when you met him recently in Delhi?**

I have been in constant contact with the Prime Minister and Union home minister since February 27, the day of the Godhra massacre. I am very much thankful to the Prime Minister and the central government for all possible assistance provided by them and for their feelings and sympathies for the people of Gujarat.

On Wednesday, when I met the Prime Minister, he was kind enough to accept my request to provide 50 per cent of the amount as the share of central assistance

for the relief being given to families where deaths have taken place. It is shocking and surprising to see the media indulging in systematic false propaganda and baseless reporting.

**Senior members of the corporate world, like Deepak Parekh of HDFC, have called for your resignation. They have warned that no fresh investments will come into Gujarat because of the recent riots. What is your response?**

Deepak Parekh is a big name in the Indian corporate world and I would not like to say anything derogatory about him. I would only say that it has become a fashion these days to ask for a resignation after any incident.

► Full text of interview on Page 3

'NO TALK OF CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP'

# Narendra Modi gets a reprieve

2 minutes  
HD-1

78/3

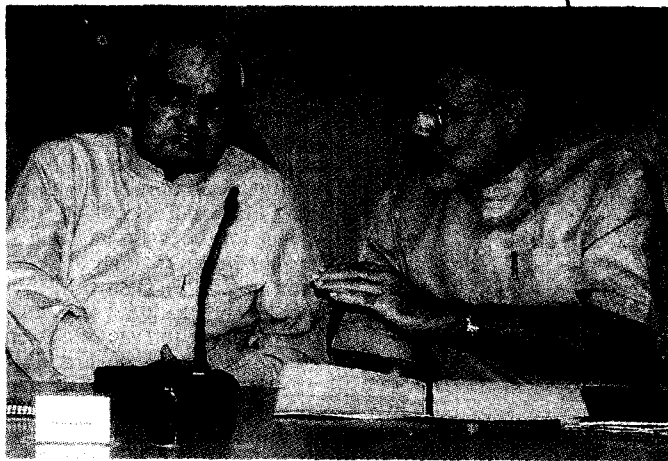
By Harish Khare

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 27.** The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, is believed to have done a bit of plain talking with the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, on the State Government's inability to bring the month-long violence under control. Mr. Modi was making a "presentation" to Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, on the kind of efforts the State Government had made to put in place the relief and rehabilitation measures.

Mr. Modi is believed to have done a hard sales pitch on his own behalf, reeling off figures to suggest that Gujarat was limping back to normalcy and that incidents of violence were few and far between. This was the first time Mr. Modi had found time to travel to New Delhi to brief senior leaders.

Mr. Modi himself has decided to create an impression that both Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani were happy with his performance and that Mr. Vajpayee had given him "guidance" on how to go about the job of bringing Gujarat back to normalcy. The officials in the PMO have a different impression of the interaction.

After meeting Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Modi told mediapersons that there was "no talk of change of leadership" in Gujarat. On the contrary, the Prime Minister had acceded to



**The Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Wednesday.**

— Photo: Sudershan

a request that the Centre should share half of the State's financial burden in compensating victims of the recent violence, he added.

The plain talking is believed to have been administered after the officials withdrew. Mr. Modi had to do a bit of explaining about the large-scale transfers of police officers he had ordered as well as why the riot-victims were still reluctant to move out of the relief camps.

Though it seems that Mr. Modi has got a reprieve of a sort, he has, nonetheless, been served notice that he must clean up his act. In fact, he must have plainly heard from the Prime Minister a note of distinct disapproval about his handling of the post-Godhra

situation.

It is believed that even Mr. Advani had told Mr. Modi that the ways of running the State would have to change. Mr. Modi is understood to have promised to make changes at the senior level in the police and civilian hierarchy.

The opinion among the Prime Minister's aides is unanimous that any talk of "Hindu consolidation" yielding electoral dividends for the BJP, was simple foolishness.

The comprehensive drubbing the BJP has received today in Delhi's civic polls — the typical middle class electorate, which is deemed to have applauded the anti-minority violence in Gujarat — has sobered up the Hindutva hot-heads.

THE HINDU

28 MAR 2002

100-10

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2002

## A SHARP INDICTMENT

9-minute 27/3

WHAT THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission chief, J. S. Verma, has had to say after a visit to the riot-hit areas of Gujarat constitutes a stern rebuke to the State administration for the way it handled the evolving situation in the aftermath of the Godhra horror and, more importantly, it also amounts to a stinging rebuff to the official claim that normality was restored within 72 hours. Telling indeed is Mr. Verma's testimony that three weeks after the gruesome episode he found a pervasive "sense of insecurity" and "fear psychosis" still haunting the people affected by the communal rage, and this surely cannot add up to 'normality'. Rebuffed by him is not merely the discredited Narendra Modi regime, which as the one directly charged with the responsibility of governance has to bear the cross for "inaction" and "inefficiency". The snub he has delivered is as much to the Centre which has had little compunction in giving a clean chit to Mr. Modi. Only recently, Parliament was witness to the Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, making a 'valiant' bid to defend Mr. Modi and extolling him for having brought communal violence under control within such a short time span; a 'feat' few Governments in Gujarat have accomplished before, he proclaimed.

A severe indictment as his observations undoubtedly are, Mr. Verma has however chosen not to go public with his reaction to the numerous independently-sourced complaints of "collusion" between the law enforcing personnel and the rampaging mobs that targeted the minority community ostensibly to avenge the Godhra carnage. Perhaps, he has reserved his findings on this point for the 'full Commission' which is due to take a comprehensive look at the Gujarat developments after getting a report from the Government. But there has been a pile of credible evidence to suggest that behind the so-called "inaction" and "ineptitude" on the part of the administration was, in most cases, a sinister design aimed at serving the partisan cause to which the political establishment is committed.

Nothing else can explain the stark reality that saffron brigades and their associates had a free run for two full days and more, going on a spree of barbaric revenge under the very nose of — and sometimes with support from — the guardians of law. If the State's bureaucracy and the law enforcing machinery have been notoriously communalised, Mr. Modi's insensitivity in citing the Newtonian 'every-action-has-a-reaction' theory by way of justifying the minority-targeted pogrom inevitably led to the phenomenon showing up in its abominable forms. That the police officials in higher echelons should now be 'asking' the Government to "give them a free hand to act" is a telling commentary on the appalling state of the administrative dispensation under Mr. Modi, what with its penchant for unabashed partisanship. It has been given to Mr. Verma to remind the officials that they need no one's "permission" to perform their duty under the law.

The yet-to-abate communal violence, the still pervasive "sense of insecurity", the serious administrative lapses in "anticipating and controlling" communal backlash, the Government's perceived lukewarm response to rehabilitation needs of riot victims (mostly Muslims) and the originally proposed and later abandoned 'selective' application of POTO against the suspects in the Godhra train burning case — all these clearly point to Mr. Modi's 'swayamsevak' mindset that seems to have got the better of his constitutional responsibilities as the head of Government, chiefly the obligations to maintain public peace, ensure the safety of all the citizens and, above all, uphold the rule of law. In fact, with every passing day, since the Godhra massacre, Mr. Modi's continuance in office is steadily becoming less and less tenable. Now that Mr. Verma has come out with a sharply critical assessment after a field visit, the case against Mr. Modi's continuance has acquired a greater force and depth, thanks to the weight that attaches to his views by virtue of his position as the head of the NHRC, a prestigious statutory body.

THE HINDU

27 MAR 2002



10-10  
26/3

# Rewriting history — II

J. m...  
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By R. Champakalakshmi

THE NATIONAL Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) unilaterally deleted passages from the books of Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S. Sharma and Arjun Dev without consulting the authors or taking their permission before the changes were made. No recognised committee of historians recommended the changes. Having trouble finding willing authors from among historians, the NCERT chooses to keep the names of the new authors a closely guarded secret. Interestingly, such passages were identified as "distortions" by one who is a regular columnist for the RSS mouthpiece, *Organiser*. It would be worthwhile for secularists to examine books from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and ensure those distortions denigrating minorities and women are removed from textbooks.

The claim that these passages (like "beef eating in ancient India" and questioning the historicity of Rama, a mythical deity) hurt the religious sentiments of the minorities and the objections emanated from religious bodies that are claiming to speak for an entire religious community hides the real motive, which is to replace mainstream secular history with the "Hindutva" version of history and to make the new curriculum conform to the curriculum of the RSS' Shiksha Mandirs. More disconcerting is the NCERT Director's assertion that he "would consult religious experts before including reference to any religion in the textbooks, to avoid hurting the sentiments of the community concerned". This is the justification for an "official history". For a historian, as neatly put by Satish Chandra, author of the textbook on "Medieval India" with objectionable passages on a Sikh Guru (subsequently deleted), "official accounts are generally full of evasion and dis-

tortion to justify official action".

The state-sponsored communal history revives the periodisation of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British, long abandoned by serious historians. This treatment of history tries to draw legitimacy from the 19th century colonial ideas on Indian history. Examples of the two-nation theory, deriving from James Mill's periodisation of Indian history support-

who believe that Dravidian languages are rooted in Sanskrit. There is least respect for historical methodology and, more importantly, to the rigour of the sister discipline of archaeology and to the science of linguistics in these claims. Either the existing evidence is overlooked or recreated by computer manipulation as in the case of the Harappan horse or new evidence is fabricated as in the case of

nal view of history adopts a religious sectarian approach and establishes a direct link between the history of a religious community and the nation giving a mono-cultural character and single identity to the nation for its own legitimacy. Both Hindu and Muslim communalism is guilty of such an approach. The central question in the present controversy is the relationship between history and the nation. All historiographies have addressed this question. History is implicated in the way the nation is imagined. If the past is reordered on communal lines the nation can hardly remain secular.

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*If the past is reordered on communal lines the nation can hardly remain secular.*

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ing Hindu and Muslim nations; the colonial construction of Vedic culture as foundational to Indian civilisation. The latter is being propagated with the additional recent attempt to argue that the Vedic Aryans were the authors of the Harappa culture, a theory that has little evidence to sustain it. To "strengthen" the belief that India was the home of the Vedic Aryans and that they are the fountainhead of world civilisation, further attempts are being made to trace the Saraswati-Sindhu civilisation (as the Harappa culture is now officially renamed using a Vedic nomenclature), back to an earlier period (7500 BC). This is done by promptly appropriating a chance discovery off the bay of Kambhat, of the remains of a "settlement" reported in all good faith by scientists of the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai, even before any proper exploration was carried out by Marine Archaeologists. There is also a deliberate attempt to ignore the case for a Proto-Elamite-Dravidian association to the language of the Harappan people, which has been put forth more forcefully in recent researches, although not proven. A Dravidian authorship to this culture would be unacceptable, just as much as the presence of Dravidian loan words in Vedic Sanskrit would be, for those

the Babri Masjid. Undue glorification of the ancient period and undue denigration or neglect of the achievements of the medieval period (a whole lot of religious, philosophical, technological, literary and fine arts of the medieval period neglected in school textbooks) are characteristic of the new history which glorifies the "Hindu" period and decries the "Muslim" period, even to the point of representing all well-known monuments of the Indo-Islamic style such as the Taj Mahal as originally built by Hindu rulers.

Communal history is not an interpretation. It is not motivated by genuine concerns of the progress of the discipline through changing interpretations which are integral to the advance in the discipline. It is a religious approach based on falsification and fabrication of evidence. It is in fact a negation of history as it evades those aspects of history which are inconvenient e.g., caste system or eating beef. What is at stake is not the mere distortion of a historical event or the deletion or addition of a "fact" of history. It is the discipline itself. The historians are understandably concerned about the discipline and its scientific practice. The point of debate today is whether the officially sponsored history conforms to the rigours of the discipline. The commu-

Communal history is being disseminated through several "right wing" organisations which are today the most influential organisations in the field of education, courtesy Government patronage. They are no longer fringe right wing organisations but a forum which has wangled respectability, with their proximity to the Human Resource Development Ministry although they have failed to evolve their own school of history. They spread the communal view of history and are engaged in constructing the origin myth of the Hindu Rashtra through seminars, pamphlets and other publications. They are largely run through public funding and by the involvement of NRIs and right wing activists.

One way of countering these ahistorical tendencies, particularly in the field of popular historical consciousness, is through the construction and dissemination of local histories which are backed up by research for which independent research organisations and regional councils such as the KCHR are essential. But more important is the need for the committed scholars and historians of India to uphold their academic freedom of teaching and research with a critical approach to the writing of history.

(Concluded)

# Gujarat rioters followed Sangh Parivar manual

Rathin Das  
Gandhinagar, March 25

THE RULING BJP and the State police top brass are straining to underline the "spontaneous" nature of the post-Godhra mayhem, but the pattern of violence closely adheres to the guidelines laid down in a Sangh Parivar booklet circulated in the State two years ago.

Circulated soon after withdrawal of the controversial order allowing Government staff to take part in RSS programmes, the booklet has specific tips for Sangh Parivar cadres on how to make organised attacks on the minority community look like "spontaneous" people's reaction.

Titled *Hinduno Bachao - Akraman Ane Kayedo* (save Hindus - attacks and laws), the 12-page booklet aims to teach how to frame charges, false and genuine, against minorities under the laws of the land.

"In the complaints we file, we should implicate the top authorities of the mission and if possible foreign missionaries also. They may not be convicted in the court in the end. But they should be made to go up and down the court for months on end..." the booklet explains.

Besides tips on how to file false complaints against minority community members, the

## Atal waits for NHRC report

A DAY after the NHRC indicted the Gujarat Government on the violence in Godhra and its aftermath, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Monday said the Centre was awaiting the rights commission's final report. The PM was asked if the Centre had taken cognisance of the Modi administration's indictment for its failure prevent the violence.

PTI, Shimla

It also cites an incident in Halvad town of Surendranagar district where a crowd had beaten a Muslim boy and a Brahmin girl to death in full view of a judge and court officials and yet no one could be named in the FIR as thousands were involved in the attack. "The Halvad incident is etched

in golden letters in the proud history of Hindu Samaj. Such revenge is necessary against abduction of our girls," the booklet says.

The police have filed complaints reluctantly against some BJP MLAs, their relatives and VHP leaders, but the final charge-sheets are likely to be watered down on the same spurious grounds as listed in the booklet.

Meanwhile, the police's complicity is becoming apparent. Some vital clues, including what had been discussed by those who secretly met on February 27 at the Karanamukteswar Temple, the inspiration behind the Sangh Parivar's de-

mand for renaming Ahmedabad as Karnavati, are not being pursued to their end.

The arrival of outsiders in trucks and buses, the arrangement of food and water for them — everything remains unexplained to the police.

Also the use of gas cylinders and inflammable petroleum jelly-based chemicals cannot have been the work of a 'spontaneous' crowd.

A top police officer said the post-Godhra mob attacks had a close similarity with what has been laid down in the booklet. But State VHP joint general secretary Kaushik Patel denied that the booklet had been issued by the Parishad.

20 MAR 2002

# NHRC indicts Modi govt for inaction, inefficiency

NEW DELHI: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said on Sunday the inability of the administration to prevent the Godhra carnage and the ensuing developments reflected "inaction" and "inefficiency" on the part of the Gujarat government. In a strong indictment of the state government, the commission asked officials of the state not to seek permission to perform duties under the law, but to go ahead and act.

NHRC chairman Justice (ret'd) J.S. Verma's remarks at a press conference here assume significance in view of reports of the Gujarat police brass meeting chief minister Narendra Modi and seeking a free hand to act.

"The police officials should not ask permission to perform their duty under the law. They must act," he said, assuring that he would lend all the help in this regard.

Stating that though the entire episode was a "matter of inquiry", he said, if the administration is not able to "anticipate" and "control" things, "to say the least, it is inaction and inefficiency".

"Things could have been better and all that happened could have been averted," he said, adding if some "unusual" things happen, "it must be because of certain failure."

Justice Verma said the full NHRC commission would meet very soon on the issue and that a "comprehensive" report had been sought from the Gujarat govern-



NHRC chairman Justice J.S. Verma addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

## Woman succumbs to stab wounds

AHMEDABAD: A woman, who was stabbed at Vejalpur on Sunday morning, succumbed to her injuries at V.S. Hospital here later in the day. However, two others who were stabbed along with her are reported to be stable.

Curfew was imposed on Vejalpur at 11.45 a.m. after the stabbing incidents and reports of arson in some of the areas under the Vejalpur police station limits. (PTI)

ment over the incidents to allow the administration to put forth its point of view.

Terming both the Godhra carnage and ensuing developments as "equally gruesome", he stressed that "top most priority" be given

to restoration of peace and harmony, instilling a sense of security among the people of all religions and ensure rehabilitation of the survivors.

Justice Verma said a "fair, impartial and thorough" inquiry should be conducted into the developments and "there should be no distinction of victims on the basis of religion."

"Perpetrators of the crimes were all criminals and offenders and must be classified according to the offences committed. None of these belong to any religion," he said regretting such ugly incidents had taken place in India which has a rich cultural heritage and ethos.

Asked whether the Gujarat government's decision not to use the Prevention of terrorism ordinance (Poto) in the riot-related cases had been influenced by him, he said his views on the controversial ordinance were well known, "but if it is made a law, it should be applied equally and not selectively."

On the government's claims that normalcy had been restored within 72 hours, the NHRC chairman said he had visited the state three weeks after the Godhra incident but found no normalcy.

"Three weeks are enough to bring about normalcy," he said, "but I did not find it anywhere." He said "a sense of insecurity" prevailed among the people of all religions.

Stating that the state government had assured of furnishing a detailed report within a few days, he said the commission will, however, not wait for it endlessly. (PTI)

## Modi gives Delhi twist to violence

Times News Network

RAJKOT: The ongoing violence in Gujarat will end once the Lok Sabha session concludes, according to state chief minister Narendra Modi. The "irresponsible statements" being made by the opposition in the Lok Sabha was one of the reasons why the violence was not abating, he told a gathering of intellectuals here on Saturday.

Mr Modi, whose remark is likely to further incense the opposition, added that the opposition "was keen on keeping the fire burning in Gujarat". "The petrol is being sprinkled from Delhi. Every morning one former prime minister



Narendra Modi

makes a statement which ignites violence here," he is reported to have told the meeting.

The assembly was shocked by Mr Modi's comments, said Bharat Patel, an engineer and factory owner who was present at the meeting. "It was his failure to control the mobs and his active participation and clearance that allowed the riots to spread like wild fire. Now he is blaming leaders from Delhi," he said.

Rachna Pathak, who was also present at the meeting, quoted the chief minister as saying that the English media had launched a systematic campaign against the government, which was trying to bring the situation under control. "I fail to understand what they (the media) are going to get out of this," Mr Modi is supposed to have said.

## Ensure peaceful Holi, Modi told

NEW DELHI: Union home minister L.K. Advani on Sunday asked Gujarat chief minister N. Modi to ensure that Muharram and Holi pass off peacefully in the state. Mr



L.K. Advani

Advani asked Mr Modi to put the police on maximum alert so that no untoward incident took place. Official sources said he suggested that peace committees be constituted in cities and towns. (PTI)

# The need for a law against genocide

By K.G. Kannabiran

ADD-12

We have never given up our adherence to colonial administrative practices and the vocabulary used by them in the administration of the country. A Hindu-Muslim problem is communal and not a problem of religions. It has always been communal violence and not religious violence.

Communal violence has always been a law and order problem and not something affecting public order or security of state. After Partition, Muslims were accorded minority status. Every communal riot was a political statement that the majority community is not willing to accede to the minority more than formal equality. The conflict may be triggered on grounds of lack of equal opportunities for livelihood and may also be on account of claiming equal status. At the bottom of all the violence is the claim and denial of equality by the contending groups in our society.

Formally, there is no mention of the majority community religion in the Constitution though the name given to the country, i.e., Bharat is decidedly Hindu. We have not elected to name the Hindu religion as the state religion. We have constitutional oath for both believers and non-believers. We have given to ourselves the freedom of conscience and not provided, advisedly, security to religious institutions. We have, along with the freedom of conscience, given to ourselves freedom of speech, assembly and association so that these may be exercised to evolve, in the course of time, a culture of tolerance essential for a pluralistic society as ours. We had a reasonably well-written Constitution having a written agenda for social change but all the political and the constitutional institutions failed and a handful of men of superannuated eminence are now appointed for reviewing the Constitution to find out why it failed us.

Over the years we have destroyed the moral and normative contents of the Constitution by interpretation given to it by judges and administrators. We were given the freedom of conscience but a change in religion entails civil consequence. This lim-

itation was not provided for in the Constitution. Personal laws, declared the judges, were not subject to the Constitution. Our courts said we should have a common civil code to prevent Hindu husbands, inclined towards bigamy or polygamy, from opting for Islam! Hitherto, the inarticulate major premise has always been to maintain a low-profile Hindu state and that they managed to maintain despite repeated exposure by Dalits. As politics abandoned the philosophy of social transformation and became a gamble for power, people were categorised into vote-banks and capture of these vote-banks had to be on caste and communal

## OPINION

lines. Secularism and democracy became the immediate casualties. With the disappearance of politics of social transformation, religion stepped into the slot. When V.P. Singh's Government was formed, the BJP unleashed its political agenda. The Ayodhya rath yatra and the anti-Mandal stir were the twin unconstitutional issues which brought down attempted democratic forms of Government in the country. The 1990 rath yatra was a galloping incitement to violence, which the Congress Government failed to control. It is ironical that mass support for the rath yatra came from the very classes against whom the anti-reservation stir was carried on. Narasimha Rao said he could fight the BJP but asked how he could fight Ram. This visual confusion denied him the strength to stem the onslaught of the Hindutva forces. They brought down the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Until then, Ayodhya was linked to the Ramayana. It is now known and will always be remembered for the Babri Masjid that stood there. The violence unleashed after the protest and violence by a few Muslims in Mumbai and other places is not rioting but unilateral killing of a few thousand Muslims. Every 'maha arthi' held by Shiv Sainiks was a signal for a genocide in the area.

It is no longer a communal riot. To call it so is an understatement. It is targeting a

religious group. There are no provisions in the old penal code to cope with this kind of largescale violence and killings. Terrorists would not have killed as many people in 10 years as these religious brigands have in a week. Yet, we do not think of a special law to prevent targeting minorities. This has been happening to Muslims. Sikhs were slaughtered in 1984 and Christians are being targeted.

The laws are such that they do not instil fear. It is time we stopped the massacres in the name of religion. There has to be a re-definition of religion and, meanwhile, we have to include genocide as an offence in a separate chapter in the POTO. Even if it is not passed, a law on genocide has to be tabled in Parliament.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide came into being on December 9, 1948. Genocide is defined as killing members of a targeted group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children from one group to another. The offences indicated are genocide, the conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide; attempt to commit genocide and complicity to genocide. This is the international criminal law on genocide and it has, unfortunately, become necessary to translate this covenant into national law.

When religious violence was unleashed in Gujarat, it was not spontaneous. It was not a backlash. The majority community was being prepared for such carnages. There was direct and public incitement to genocide. Shilanyas and the fixation of the date set the stage for this colossal genocide. There is complicity both at the Centre and the State. If we are not to end up in fascism what happened in Gujarat has to be identified as genocide.

(The writer is the National President of the People's Union of Civil Liberties.)

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2002

# It's horrible: NHRC chief

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23. A <sup>HD-1</sup> "disturbed and shocked" Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), J.S. Verma, today spoke of a sense of insecurity among the people of riot-hit areas in Gujarat and called for "strong confidence-building measures by the State Government". <sup>S. Minwala</sup>

"It will take me two more days to overcome what I have seen and heard in various violence-hit areas in Gujarat," Mr. Verma, who returned from his visit to Ahmedabad, Godhra and Vadodara on Friday, told PTI in an interview. "I cannot even narrate what I have been told by the women victims. It is horrible and inhuman. I am really very disturbed over it." Describing the situation as "far from normal" even about a month since the Godhra rail tragedy, Mr. Verma said the administration should feel a "sense of urgency" towards bringing the situation in the

State to normality. "People <sup>243</sup> should feel secure irrespective of their religion."

Taking a tough stand, the NHRC Chairman, who has already rejected the preliminary report by the Gujarat Government, describing it as "perfunctory", said the Commission had demanded a comprehensive report within the next four-five days. "If they fail to do so, the Commission will rely on the material it has gathered during the visit and pass an order."

Suggesting that an investigation be undertaken in major incidents such as the Godhra tragedy and the Gulburga Housing Society killings in Ahmedabad, Mr. Verma said, "The specifics of the matter will be taken up in the full Commission meeting, considering its urgency and importance. The investigation should be done by a prompt, effective and impartial agency."

Asked if he would

recommend a CBI inquiry into the incidents, he said, "I cannot say specifically but we will take a decision only after discussing the issue in the Commission."

"I do not think the people who perpetrated violence have anything to do with religion, whether it was in Godhra or the carnage after that. They all should be treated as criminals and punished uniformly," Mr. Verma, who conveyed the same views to the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, said. "I am happy that the State Government has realised the same and booked them under IPC instead of using POTO against some and other provisions against others."

On compensation to the victims, he said, "The compensation is a secondary issue; the basic one is to bring the situation to normal and create a sense of security among the people of the State irrespective of their religion."

THE HINDU

24 MAR 2002

## ORDEAL CONTINUES

### No relief for Gujarat Muslims

IT is now three weeks since the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, but the ordeal of the minority community still continues. Incidents keep occurring, not at the scale of the the first three days of attacks, but certainly in small towns and villages where they can pass unnoticed. Even in large cities like Ahmedabad and Baroda killings continue. Contrary to Narendra Modi's claim life has not returned to normal, and Muslim localities are still kept under curfew, people living on whatever rations they had stocked up more than three weeks ago. The minority community has been so terrorised that they are removing any overt signs of their identity — shaving off beards, taking off necklaces with Arabic writing, etc — so as not to attract attention. And these are the lucky ones who escaped the wrath of the goons, and so still have a roof over their heads.

The thousands who have been made homeless and lost their loved ones in the carnage see no hope. Herded into dargahs and graveyards they wait for help. But it doesn't come. The Gujarat government has ignored their plight, as have the Centre and even relief funds of other states. Local Muslims who are in a position to help are working tirelessly. Trucks carrying aid from Muslim organisations are stopped by the administration claiming they have information that they are transporting arms. NGOs wanting to assist the victims are throwing their hands up in despair as they are thwarted at every point by the Government. Till date not a single Gujarat minister has offered assistance let alone visited the relief camps. Instead there are ministers like the civil supplies minister Bharat Barot who want the 10,000 refugees living in four relief camps in his constituency shifted. Why? Because the sheer presence of these ravaged people is frightening the Hindus of the locality, so says he. Where will they go? That is not his concern says Barot. They seem to be nobody's concern! Narendra Modi and his council of ministers were too busy deciding how best to get political mileage out of the ashes of the *kar sevaks* killed at Godhra station. Pressure from the NDA allies forced them to retrace their steps. Instead of sacking Modi Home Minister L K Advani has patted him on the back for bringing the situation under control within 72 hours. It is easy to bring a situation under control when you have created it, all you have to do is call your boys back, and that is what Modi did. We can expect no better of Modi, but what of the government at the Centre. Why is he being allowed to continue? To foment more trouble?

THE STATESMAN

# RSS defends resolution on Muslims

K S Dakshina Murthy  
Bangalore, March 22

THE RSS today refused to comment on the proposed *asthi yatra* of the VHP and stood by its controversial resolution that the real safety of Muslims depends on the goodwill of the majority.

"We must have cordial relations with each other. 'Minorities' must have good relations with the 'majority' for their safety," RSS chief K C Sudarshan said. He added that the RSS never distinguished between the majority and minority. But "those who call themselves minorities should cultivate good relations with the majority".

After talks between RSS and Christian bodies here, RSS *sarsangachalak* Sudarshan abruptly walked out of a media conference when a reporter asked him for his views on the VHP's reported plans for an *asthi yatra*. The VHP itself has denied that it has any plans for a tour across the country with the remains of the Godhra carnage victims.

Earlier, Sudarshan had said that the recent resolution of the All-India General Council of the RSS stating that the real safety of Muslims lay in the goodwill of the majority was nothing new. He claimed that Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and later Indira Gandhi too had expressed the same view on a few occasions.

He claimed that Indira Gandhi had said so when a group of MPs visited her after the Meenakshipuram conversions (when Hindus turned Muslims) in 1982. "Learn to live with the majority," Sudarshan quoted Ms Gandhi.

In other countries too, say in

the UK or France, the minorities have to earn the goodwill of the British or the French for their safety, he said. However, the *sarsangachalak* said, "We don't believe that Muslims and Christians here are from another country. Their forefathers in this country changed their way of worship."

On what exactly the RSS meant by "earning goodwill", Sudarshan gave an example of Kashmir, where the three per cent Hindus were driven out by the majority Muslim community. The Hindus should have been allowed to live there, amid the Muslim majority, he said.

Sudarshan lambasted the media, which he said had ignored the Godhra incident but given wide coverage to the violence in Gujarat that followed.

Meanwhile, Christian representatives today said they were not convinced by the RSS explanation of its resolution that the safety of minorities lay in the goodwill of the majority.

After the meeting, moderator Ken Gnanakan told reporters: "I'm not fully convinced about his views on the resolution. I'd like to talk to him further." The Christian leaders said they were not convinced by the RSS views on conversions and its interpretation of the Bible. "I'm going to spend time to see what Mr Sudarshan means when he talks of the Bible and the scriptures," Gnanakan said.

The meeting concluded with the understanding that Christians and Hindus should earn each other's confidence and remove suspicions to restore communal harmony in the country.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES  
20 MAR 2002

Secular parties should launch a mass campaign to defend the Constitution against Hindutva

# Sack Modi, ban VHP

BY PRAFUL BIDWAI

9 minutes  
HR-8 2/3

**WE** HAVE recently heard much elevated rhetoric about the inherent 'tolerance' of all religions, replete with quotes from Gandhiji. Some of this always sounded unconvincing when mouthed by followers of the same ideological current to which Gandhiji's assassin belonged.

Now that these practitioners of cant have 'settled scores' in blood with their Islamic adversaries in Gujarat in the ratio of 12:1 (704 Muslims officially recorded killed in numerous pogroms vs 58 Hindus killed in Godhra), their protestations stand exposed as dangerous and fraudulent.

But it is important to note *secular* 'tolerance' too, of the variety practised by the BJP's allies in the NDA. They have long equated tolerance with indulgence and condonation of forces in the Sangh parivar well to the BJP's right. They have tolerated their hate-speech and hate-crimes in the name of freedom of expression, and worse, 'sentiments' of certain 'communities'. They have also whitewashed the organic links between these forces and the BJP's parliamentary wing, led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Thus, these 20-odd parties, half of them from former socialist tendencies — who ought to have known better — deluded themselves that the BJP's dramatic jump from two Lok Sabha seats in 1984 to 117 in 1991 could be separated from the temple campaign's success, although L.K. Advani has himself candidly admitted it could not be. They imagined Vajpayee to be a secular 'liberal' although he has never once disowned the Sangh-is-my-soul identity.

They allowed Vajpayee to hijack their agenda on two crucial issues: in 1998 nuclear weapons and reviewing the Constitution — which were never part of their own manifestos. Their response was supine when he implemented that agenda at Pokhran at the RSS's behest — without consulting them, including his own defence minister.

These same 'tolerant' groups, which admittedly have no stake in rewriting textbooks in order to deny India's multi-cultural, multi-religious character throughout history, or in promoting religious hatred, failed to restrain born-again ideological Taliban like M.M. Joshi from embarking on his 'revolution' in education. They did nothing to stop his purge of institution after cultural institution — to sow hatred, prejudice, rank superstition and illiteracy.

True, these allies got worked up in



IN THROUGH ONE EAR, OUT OF THE OTHER: L.K. Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee

September 2000 when Vajpayee declared to a hardcore-Hindutva audience in Staten Island that he would forever remain a *swayamsevak* and work towards building the "India of my dreams", naturally complete only with a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

They were upset, when three months later, he said the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign was a 'national', and not a parochial-sectarian, movement. But they allowed themselves to be pacified with patently specious, transparently disingenuous 'clarifications' typical of Hindutva-style doublespeak and Brahmanical sophistry.

The allies' own commitment to projecting a multi-cultural identity for the NDA seems both limited and compromised by crude power calculations. They have been scarcely bothered that their cabinet has just one Muslim, and that there is a shameful legacy of under-representation and exclusion, for example, of Muslim women. Their cumulative number does not exceed the single-digit figure in all our Lok Sabhas and Rajya Sabhas *put together*.

By the time Vajpayee last year legitimised the VHP's March 12 'deadline' for starting temple construction, and made his shocking February 19 speech in Varanasi, chiding Muslims by telling them the BJP does not need their votes, the allies had succumbed to a well-defined pattern of Hindutva hypocrisy based on low cunning, devious denial and dishonesty.

None of them went beyond *pro-forma* 'tut-tutting'. None seriously objected to that disgracefully sectarian and exclusivist address, which was wholly unbecoming of a prime minister.

Throughout the past three weeks, they have failed to demand

that Vajpayee visit Gujarat, acknowledge the magnitude of the carnage and solemnly promise to punish those guilty of unspeakable barbarities against Indian citizens.

The time has come for the allies to shed this indulgent 'tolerance' bordering on gross appeasement of Hindutva. What happened in Gujarat was not a communal 'riot', but an organised massacre of Muslims with the State's active complicity and connivance. Agency after government agency was suborned and yoked by communal killers to bestial ends. Thousands of officials have been guilty of grave dereliction of duty.

To this day, Narendra Milosevic Modi continues to humiliate and terrorise Muslims. He calculatedly fails to protect their life and property. He has inflicted unbearable conditions upon refugee camps: six toilets for 3,000 people; and 60 grams of wheat in daily rations. His government's existence is an affront to constitutional democracy.

Last week, Ayodhya saw disgraceful appeasement of forces inimical to democracy, through the agency of the attorney general — who demeaned his office by pleading the VHP's case before the Supreme Court, through the Ayodhya cell in the PMO, and politicised civil servants, including a former Faizabad district magistrate and police superintendent.

The court restrained the government from allowing the VHP to symbolically start temple construction. Yet, PMO official Shatrughan Singh officially received the *shilas*, stipulating that they be the first to be used in the building. The Orissa vandalism was a response to the strong signals of appeasement of Hindutva — emanating from the

apex of the government.

Clearly, each day the Vajpayee-Advani leadership continues in power, institution after vital institution of democracy, central to the defence of the citizen's life and limb, gets compromised. Even the possibility of the civil service maintaining political neutrality gets corroded. There is a straight, direct, irresolvable clash between the continuation of the NDA government and the minimal requirements of democracy — one sharper than in 1977, when the Janata Party split on the issue of 'dual membership' and loyalty to Hindutva.

Confronted with this conflict today, the BJP's secular allies are called upon to join the opposition in making two sharp, well-focused, modest demands on Vajpayee: send Narendra Modi packing, and ban the VHP and Bajrang Dal nationally.

The first demand arises from the grim situation in insecurity — and terror-bound Gujarat. The second from the fact that nothing short of proscription can rein in the compromised agencies of the state and signal the Centre's sincerity about defending the Constitution, its own democratic mandate, and its sole source of legitimacy.

The NDA allies should learn something from the first Janata split. Not only was it inevitable: those who joined hands with the ex-Jana Sanghis, like Chandra Shekhar, got utterly marginalised and discredited. The Sanghis, including Vajpayee, stabbed them in the back and formed their own party in 1980.

The NDA was engendered by a cynical calculus based on the BJP's weakness — its inability to come to power without its secular allies. It has shrewdly used the allies to advance its own long-term agendas through the *parivar*, especially the VHP, Hindutva's main instrument today. Asked to choose between them and its own *parivar*, the BJP will discard them like squeezed lemons — as in 1977.

More broadly, all secular parties have a pressing obligation today: defend the Constitutional values of secularism, pluralism, an impartial civil service, social cohesion, and democratic decency. They must take to the streets to fight Hindutva. They must staunchly oppose POTO which in today's circumstances can only be a crude communal weapon. The time has come to choose between bestiality and constitutionality.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAR 2002



# Allies raise storm over 'asti yatra', to meet today

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 21.** The allies and the supporting parties of the Vajpayee Government are determined to ensure that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's "provocative plan" to carry the ashes ('asthis') of the Godhra carnage victims in processions throughout the country is not carried out. Some of them have said that if the VHP is not forced to drop its plan, they would walk out of the ruling National Democratic Alliance.

These parties will meet informally tomorrow — the Bharatiya Janata Party has not been invited — to discuss the issue "threadbare". This, despite the effort of the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Vijay Goel, who spent 45 minutes with Devendra Prasad Yadav (Janata Dal-United) trying to pacify him and persuade him to cancel the meeting. "The meeting will take place," Mr. Yadav said after the meeting.

After today's near-physical clash between some allies and the BJP MPs in the Lok Sabha, matters have come to a head. "We cannot sit back and watch the VHP ignite flames of communal passions that could engulf the whole country," Mr. Yadav, who himself was a party to the verbal duel in the Lok Sabha, said later. Several other leaders of the allied parties — Raghunath Jha and Prabhunath

Singh of the Samata Party, Veran Naidu, (Telugu Desam Party) spoke of their disapproval of the Sangh Parivar's "plan to communalise the Indian polity".

The meeting is expected to specifically discuss the VHP's plan of 'asti yatra' (carrying of the ashes) and other issues recently raised by the Sangh Parivar, including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh resolution saying that the minorities depended for their safety on the goodwill of the majority community. The feeling is growing that every other day the Sangh Parivar outfits are raising one

## PM convenes NDA meeting

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 21.** In the backdrop of a growing rift between the BJP and its allies over the Hindutva issue, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has convened a meeting of the NDA constituents tomorrow evening to sort out the differences. — PTI

communal issue or another, making provocative statements and raising the communal temperature. "If urgent action is not taken to stop this, the fear is that the country could become a cauldron of communal passions," they feel.

The line-up of NDA allies

which are expected to take part in the informal meeting tomorrow is impressive — the Samata Party, the Trinamool Congress Party, the JD(U), the DMK, the Lok Janshakti, the Indian National Lok Dal, the National Conference, and, perhaps, even the Rashtriya Lok Dal. Above all, the TDP, the supporting party of the Government, is among those actively engaged in getting the meeting going.

Mr. Yadav said that those who swore by the "Hindu dharma" did not seem to know that Hindu rites prescribed that 'asthis' (ashes) must always be immersed well before the 13th day of death.

"If they have kept the 'asthis' for over 20 days, let them keep them for two-and-a-half years more till the end of the term of this Government," he said, perhaps implying that the BJP could use them politically to more advantage just before the next Lok Sabha election if the game-plan was to "polarise" the Hindu-Muslim votes.

The allies are also pointing out that since the Vajpayee Government came into office there had been only one meeting of the NDA parliamentary party, where Atal Behari Vajpayee was elected the leader (before he was sworn-in as Prime Minister). The complaint is that there has been a lack of coordination between the allies and on every important issue.

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2002

# The shame of Gujarat

**O**F ALL the foolish things that Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has been saying recently, perhaps the most foolish is this: the Godhra incident was terrorism while the riots that followed were simply expressions of mob fury and must therefore be treated differently. From this distinction follows a whole set of consequences. Hindus killed in Godhra will get double the compensation of Muslims killed in the riots because 'victims of terror' are somehow more special than 'victims of mob violence'. Those accused of participating in the Godhra violence will be held under the draconian POTO while those who were involved in the riots will be held under the less stringent Indian Penal Code. And so on.

It is now clear that what happened in Godhra constituted an inhuman act. Men, women and children were burnt alive. Nobody can, or should, attempt to justify or explain away that barbarism. But equally, there is no moral distinction to be made with the Gujarat riots. According to eyewitness accounts, the barbarism displayed during those riots was of an even greater magnitude than the violence in Godhra. Daughters were gang-raped in front of their fathers and then had their heads bashed in. Their fathers were doused with petrol and set on fire. Their property was looted. Their businesses were destroyed.

And the police stood by and did nothing.

Which sensible person would claim, in these circumstances, that the victims of Godhra were worse off than victims of the riots? Which reasonable man would argue that you need special laws to punish the guilty men of Godhra but that ordinary laws are more than ade-

quate for the murderers, arsonists and rapists of the Gujarat riots?

Mr Modi has said a great many foolish things over the last month — only to then deny having said them at all — but it is hard to believe that even he can be stupid enough to not recognise that a victim is a victim is a victim. All this suggests that there is a method to his foolishness. He was sent to Gujarat, as a last-ditch measure to rescue the BJP, after the Hindutva-inspired madness of his predecessor, Keshubhai Patel, had destroyed Gujarat's reputation as the home of Gandhiji. Once there, he found the situation hopeless. He won his own seat with a reduced BJP majority — an unusual feat for a chief minister fighting an over-hyped election — and soon demonstrated that he has the leadership qualities and administrative ability of a cartoon character.

In these circumstances, the murders in Gujarat have come as a god-send to him. By going easy on his pals in the Sangh parivar, by targeting Gujarat's Muslim minority, and by accusing the 'Delhi-based media' of 'attacking Gujarat's honour', he has made a conscious attempt to polarise Hindus and Muslims. His hope is that communally charged Hindus will vote for the BJP and save his party from the defeat that was staring it in the face. Hence the deliberate foolishness, hence the bogus distinctions between terrorism and riots, and hence his shameful behaviour.

Nobody expected much of Mr Modi or of the Gujarat BJP. But what of L.K. Advani who has given the Gujarat government a clean chit? What of A.B. Vajpayee who is allowing Mr Modi to get away with it?

We expected better of the BJP's top leadership.

## UPROAR IN LOK SABHA OVER GUJARAT VIOLENCE

# Gujarat CM should quit, says Opposition *& minorities*

40-1  
2/1/3  
By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 20.** There was uproar in the Lok Sabha today over the violence in Gujarat, and an irate Opposition forced an adjournment of the House. Demanding action against the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and an explanation from the Home Minister, L. K. Advani, the Opposition forced the adjournment during zero hour.

The issue was raised by Madhusudhan Mistry, Congress MP from Gujarat, who referred to the renewed violence in different parts of the State. He charged the Government with "misleading the nation" by claiming that the situation was under control, and cited instances of fresh violence in Bharuch, Madossa and Baroda. "This Government is not interested in controlling the violence, it is hand-in-glove with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and

the Bajrang Dal."

He was supported by E. Ahmad of the IUML, Ramjilal Suman (Samajwadi Party) and Raghuvansh Prasad (Rashtriya Janata Dal). Demanding Mr. Modi's resignation, the Opposition said the Government was deliberately "looking the other way." The charge was countered by the Treasury benches which accused the Opposition of "instigating the riots." With both sides unrelenting, the Deputy Speaker, P.M. Sayeed, adjourned the House for an hour.

### VHP plans to take out 'asthi yatras'

By Manas Dasgupta

**AHMEDABAD, MARCH 20.** In a move that can lead to tension in other parts of the country, the Gujarat unit of the Vishwa

Hindu Parishad is chalking out a plan to take out "asthi yatras" — urns containing ashes — of the victims of the Godhra train carnage.

According to the VHP sources, the idea behind the proposal is to pay "fitting tributes" to the "martyrs" of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple movement by immersing the ashes of the victims in rivers and seas. But apparently under pressure from the State Government, the VHP has left the final decision on the "yatras" to a committee of "sants."

The VHP State joint general secretary, Kaushik Mehta, said the "sants" from all over the State would meet here later this week to take a decision on the "yatras." The urns containing the ashes of the 58 "Ram sevaks" had been kept at the VHP office here, he said.

The move to leave the decision to the "sants" was apparently aimed at warding off

pressure from the Bharatiya Janata Party Governments at the Centre and the State because as an arm of the Sangh Parivar, the VHP would be more susceptible to such pressure than an independent committee of "sants."

The Narendra Modi Government is trying to prevent the VHP from taking out such "yatras" at least in Gujarat in view of the tensions in the State. Sources said that discussions were on with the VHP leadership and that "we are confident of dissuading them from making such a move."

The Gujarat Minister of State for Home, Gordhan Jhadaphia, in fact, claimed that the VHP had "accepted" the Government's request.

The Centre had also been alerted about the possible VHP move but a decision on whether to allow such "yatras" within their States would be left to the State Governments, the sources said.

RECEIVED

7 MAR 2002

# High court orders daily hearing in Ayodhya case

## Commission proposed to record evidence

Times News Network

LUCKNOW: The Allahabad high court on Wednesday ordered a day-to-day hearing of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri masjid title suit and said that the recording of the testimony of witnesses would be done either by the Lucknow bench or through a commission.

The court gave the direction on a petition filed by the Centre requesting a daily hearing on the matter. The government had made its plea on the ground that being the receiver, it had to spend Rs 30 crore annually for the maintenance and security of the disputed structure.

The bench, comprising Justice Sudhir Narayan, Justice S.R. Alam and Justice Bhanwar Singh, held that the proposed commission would take note of the objections filed against the documentary evidence and later refer them to the court for a decision, without stopping the recording of the evidence and statements of the witnesses.

By allowing the commission to record the evidence and statements of witnesses even when the bench is not available, the court has paved the way for a daily hearing of the case.

The court also recalled that it had passed an order on July 12 last year that the recording of the evidence should be done on a day-to-day basis. The order had been passed on a plea from the Uttar

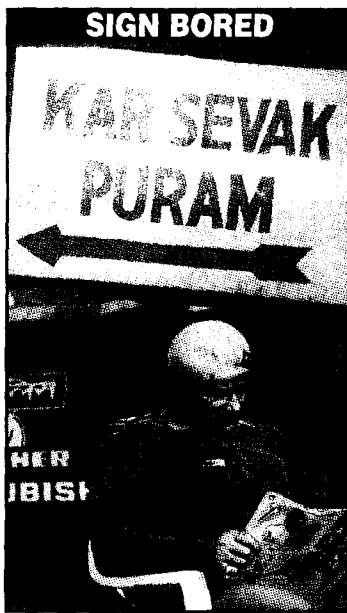
Pradesh government that the case be taken up on a daily basis. However, the bench observed that the order could not be implemented due to a host of reasons.

adding that the panel could comprise a judge or judges of the court, including retired judges or a subordinate judicial officer, or an advocate/advocates.

Regarding the objection to the admissibility of evidence, the bench decided to go by the supreme court's judgment in the Bipin Shanti Lal Panchal vs state of Gujarat and others case. The bench observed that if an objection was raised during the evidence stage, the court could make a note of the objection, question, answer and the name of the party. Such objections, it said, would be taken into account by it when the matter was taken up for hearing.

It further observed that in a scientific era such as this, the commissioner could also take the help of videography while recording the statement of the witnesses.

Another question that came up before the bench was regarding the expenses of the commission. While the additional solicitor general of India categorically submitted before the special full bench that the Centre would bear the expenses of the panel, the additional advocate general, on behalf of the state government, submitted that the state had given an undertaking to comply with the order passed by the bench with regard to the expenses of the commission or witnesses. This, he said, would help in the expeditious disposal of the suit.



A police officer is intent on reading his newspaper while sitting outside Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya on Wednesday.

"Recording of evidence on a day-to-day basis is possible only when it is recorded by the commission on the date when this bench is not holding the court," the judges said,

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 MAR 2002

# HC orders speedy disposal of Ayodhya case

By J.P. Shukla

9-minutes HD-1  
21/3

**LUCKNOW, MARCH 20.** The Allahabad High Court today directed uninterrupted recording of evidence for a speedy disposal of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case.

Even during the period when the Lucknow Bench of the High Court was not hearing the case, recording of evidence could go on by a Commission, the Court ruled.

Any objections regarding the maintainability of evidence could be decided later by the Bench and the Commission could meanwhile proceed with the recording of evidence, observed the High Court Bench comprising Justice Sudhir Narain, Justice Rafat Alam and Justice Bhanwar Singh sitting at Lucknow.

The Bench disposed of the Union Government's petition pleading for a day-to-day hearing in the case without making specific observations whether the petition was accepted or rejected, but noted that the need for a speedy disposal of the case had been emphasised by everyone.

The court was already hearing the case expeditiously and had given detailed directives in

this regard in an earlier order on July 12 last when a similar petition had been filed pleading for a day-to-day hearing of the case.

In that order, the court had stated that looking into all aspects of the case it was not feasible to direct that the evidence be recorded by a single judge alone.

However, with regard to a

speedy disposal of the case, it had directed the parties concerned to cooperate and keep the witnesses ready so that recording of the evidence could proceed on a day-to-day basis.

The Central Government, while pleading for a day-to-day hearing, however, had submitted last Tuesday that it would not be a party to the case. The plea was opposed by various

contenders on the ground that it was nowhere involved in the dispute.

It was argued that the Central Government must come forward to implead itself as a party to the suit to have a locus standi.

The court has already made it clear that the Central Government could not be arraigned as a party in the title suit.

8 14 2002

21 MAR 2002

# The Gujarat carnage — I

By Muchkund Dubey

9/10/10  
10-10-10  
AFTER THE recent carnage in Gujarat, India stands diminished as a nation. Our pride in being Indians and human beings has suffered a massive erosion. What a shame that we could not respond to the anguished and desperate cry of our co-citizens and fellow human beings to save them from the fury of the mob. The fear of death writ large on the visage of innocent men, women and children begging to be left alive will remain etched in our memory for a long time to come.

The Godhra incident in which 58 persons, mostly women and children, were burnt alive was as abhorrent and reprehensible as the arson, killing and destruction that followed in retaliation in Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat. Anyone who pulls his punches on either of these incidents does immense disservice to the cause of Indian secularism and national unity. However, what sets the post-Godhra incidents apart is, by all accounts, the State Government's complicity in them and the Central Government's studied abdication of firmness and resolve to intervene and bring the situation under control. Besides, there appeared to be a design to cleanse entire villages and urban suburbs of their minority population, to cripple them economically by destroying their property and business establishments and to cause maximum hurt to their religious feelings by systematically destroying and desecrating their places of worship. It seemed that those involved had planned the whole thing in advance and were waiting for an excuse to put it into effect. The Godhra massacre provided that excuse. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has described the Gujarat carnage as a "black mark on the nation's forehead" which has "lowered India's prestige in the world". This is correct as far as it goes. However, the consequences go beyond and put a question mark on the very future of India as a secular democratic state. These incidents have undermined our social cohesion, our national

we should not forget that each successive communal riot enlarges and deepens the festering wound, further corrodes the confidence of the minorities and alienates them from the mainstream. In such a situation, it is hardly possible to harness the creative energies of the disaffected, demoralised and insecure minorities for the task of nation-building.

Yes, India has survived in spite of frequent communal riots. But at what cost? Fifty-five years after Inde-

## *These incidents have undermined our social cohesion, our national unity and our chances of survival as a pluralistic society.*

pendence, we are still one of the world's poorest nations. We have failed to deliver to our people most of the promises we made in our Constitution. This is in no small measure because of the absence of social cohesion, national discipline and pride, and of bad governance. Besides, we live in a time when we are constantly in the gaze of outside powers who can decisively influence our territorial security and our economic destiny. Incidents of communal violence witnessed since Ayodhya hardly provide the basis for establishing a good equation with these powers.

If one is to go by the public pronouncements of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the RSS, their agenda seems to be to keep the minorities in a frightened state and reduce them to the *de facto* status of second class citizens. There is, however, no chance of the realisation of this agenda. The 140-odd million minorities simply will not accept a subservient status. They will fight hard to remain equal citizens and will not allow India to be converted into a Hindu Rashtra.

The VHP, Bajrang Dal, BJP and the BJP-led Central and State Governments are all working unitedly to advance the same Hindutva agenda. The Gujarat bandh which triggered the communal violence was spon-

sored jointly by the BJP and the VHP. No BJP leader in the Central Government gave any indication of the Government's firmness to intervene effectively to save minority lives. And when the issue came up on the floor of Parliament, the Union Home Minister stoutly defended the Gujarat Chief Minister.

And in Delhi for the past few weeks the nation has been witness to the bizarre drama of the Government trying to negotiate a compromise with the fascist forces who have placed themselves above the law. It drafted the Kanchi Sankaracharya and the Attorney-General in an attempt to strike a deal with the VHP and persuade it to commit itself to abide by the law of the land. This is regarded as the supreme achievement of consensus politics in India. The fact that the Indian state has put itself fully behind the construction of a Ram mandir was demonstrated by the Attorney-General's argument before the Supreme Court that it was legal to offer a symbolic "bhoomi puja" for construction of the mandir in the undisputed portion of the acquired land and by a senior Government official formally accepting a "shila" for the construction.

It is really nauseating to watch on TV and read in newspapers about the daily drama of appeasement with the criminal communalist forces as though the Government has no other priority, no other burning issue to turn to. And the nation's energy is being wasted on this ungainly and dangerous pursuit. On what strength are these habitual violators of the law of the land holding the nation to ransom? Their strength lies in the BJP-dominated Government being in power at the Centre and this Government being committed to work for the same cause. The concessions made by the Government to the extremists are designed to advance the common agenda. Thus, there is a complete synergy and identity of purpose between the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the RSS, the BJP and its leaders in the Central Government.

9 minutes

# RSS resolution under fire

10-1-03

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 19.** The resolution passed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in Bangalore (it said: "Let the Muslims understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority") came in for severe criticism both within and outside Parliament.

While the Opposition condemned it as an open declaration of the communal agenda of the RSS, significantly, the Samata Party, an ally of the BJP, asked the Government to rein in the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to prevent the country from "irreversible political destabilisation."

Vaiko (MDMK) said unequivocally: "protection of the minorities is the cardinal principle of democracy. The majority has the responsibility to be magnanimous and flexible to promote harmony with the minorities. I am totally opposed to the concept of the RSS resolution."

Many others, including members of the Telugu Desam Party and the Trinamool

Congress, have expressed shock at this blatant threat to the minority community. As for the BJP, its spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, has been claiming ignorance: "I have not yet seen the resolution so I cannot comment," was his answer to questions on what the BJP thought of the RSS view.

The issue was raised in Parliament by the Congress, which demanded an "unequivocal condemnation", and it was supported by the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Muslim League. Raising the issue during zero hour in the Lok Sabha, Priyaranjan Dasmunshi (Cong) said the RSS resolution telling Muslims that they would be safe in the country only if they enjoyed the goodwill of the Hindus, "was a direct challenge to the Constitution... this House must unequivocally disapprove and condemn the resolution."

Mr. Dasmunshi referred to the heightened communal tension in the country and accused the RSS of trying to undermine the nation's unity by creating such divisions within society."

"Parliament must take a strong view on this, we cannot ignore it" he said. He was supported by E.A. Ahmed and Banatwala of the IUML and Raghuvansh Prasad of the RJD. Denouncing the RSS resolution, Mr. Ahmed said it was "atrocious and repugnant to the principles of the Constitution."

"What right does the RSS have to dictate to the minority community? Is the safety and security of the minorities in the hands of the Sangh Parivar or in the hands of the Government, he asked. Mr. Banatwala described the RSS resolution as an affront to the Constitution and asked the Centre to take strict action.

However, it was the Samata Party's strong denunciation that raised many eyebrows. The party spokesperson, Shambhu Srivastva, said his party had taken a serious note of the RSS resolution and charged the VHP and the RSS with undoing the gains of a settlement on the Ayodhya issue. He said the statements were posing a big hurdle to the Government.

10-1-03

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2002

## BAN THE VHP AND BAJRANG DAL

THE STORMING OF the Orissa Assembly complex on March 16 by the trishul-wielding activists of the VHP and its associate, the Bajrang Dal, is yet another reminder of the sinister and dangerous nature of the Sangh Parivar's game plan — not to spare even the hallowed symbols of democratic authority from its intimidatory tactics of physical assault and vandalism while pursuing its Ayodhya agenda. The Vajpayee Government, as also the nation in general, had some sense of reprieve that the much-dreaded March 15 had passed peacefully, what with the scaled-down 'shila daan' having taken place at a spot away from the controversial 67-acre complex following a compromise worked out at the eleventh hour. But the VHP, which has not bothered to conceal its contempt for such Constitutional niceties and basic democratic norms as the rule of law, secularism and minority rights, has left no one in doubt about its intentions. In no mood to wait for the legal tangle to be resolved — this, despite its reported (written) commitment to abide by the court verdict — and having whipped up communal passions calculatedly over a sequenced mobilisation programme spread over a year, the VHP has made known its intention to take the 'temple issue' to the streets.

It must be recognised that for the VHP and others in the Sangh Parivar, building a Ram temple in Ayodhya is a critical part of its revanchist agenda and, more importantly, a high potential emotion-charged rallying point for the majority community, a useful strategy to perpetuate its aggressive design of a Hindu Rashtra. Beyond the general run of hate campaigns associated with the Hindutva forces, the hysteria built up over 'Ayodhya' through a calibrated mobilisation endeavour invoking religious imagery — that included plans to raise a huge army of trishul-toting activists — necessarily had a much sharper edge for the reason that the Muslims have a direct stake in the dispute. The key instrument in all this manifestly unlawful venture

*g-ministry*  
(from the standpoint of public order and communal harmony) has been the VHP, with other saffron outfits such as the Bajrang Dal playing their supportive roles. It is not only that the VHP's provocative and intimidatory ways in the runup to the March 15 Ayodhya event turned most parts of the country, not just Uttar Pradesh, into communal tinder boxes, as it were, but its cadres and activities went on an unchecked minority-specific killing spree in Gujarat under the pretext of 'retaliation' for the Godhra carnage. Post-March 15, the VHP's temple campaign has shown distinct signs of becoming more strident and abrasive, as evidenced by the vicious attacks on the minority community witnessed in quite a few States, not to speak of the continuing violence in Baroda (Gujarat) and the Bhubaneswar incident.

Given such hard evidence of the VHP's blatantly aggressive, law-defying and authority-challenging actions that have grave implications for the core of India's secular and plural democracy, there is an unassailable case for imposing a ban on the outfit. As a matter of fact, the day its international working president, Ashok Singhal, along with a band of his camp followers, barged into the prohibited area of the makeshift temple on the disputed site (October 17, 2001) signalling their intention, the ground for a ban had been laid. Considering that the Indian Constitution has mandated a secular and democratic framework, any organisation that has as its mission the promotion of hostility between religions is patently anti-national in the sense that it seeks to undermine nationhood from within — the VHP and the Bajrang Dal (which are from the RSS stable) doubtless fit into this category. Just as the Vajpayee administration clamped a ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) six months ago for its subversive activities, the overwhelming compulsion at this critical moment is to ban the VHP and the Bajrang Dal for their devastating and destructive challenge to national unity.

20 MAR 2002



# Sikh group hits out at RSS resolution

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2

By Our Staff Correspondent

**CHANDIGARH, MARCH 18.** Seeking a ban on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its offshoots for streamlining and instigating violence against Muslims in Gujarat, a radical Sikh group, Dal Khalsa, has taken strong exception to the resolution passed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and accused it of resorting to "blackmail politics".

In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, copies of which were released in Amritsar, the Dal Khalsa accused the Sangh Parivar of giving tacit approval to Hindu retaliation.

Taking exception to the RSS Sunday resolution that "Muslims' safety lies in the goodwill of Hindus", the Dal Khalsa secretary, Kanwar Pal Singh, described it an "act of exploitation of the minority by the majority".

"Today they have warned Muslims, tomorrow they are going to target Sikhs," the letter said adding that the

recent Gujarat violence has come as a painful reminder to all the ethnic and religious minority community's that the "politics of genocide" approved by a section of majority community never seems to come to an end.

Signed by the party spokesperson, Satbir Singh Sandhu, the letter addressed Mr. Vajpayee as the Prime Minister of the "Hindu" India, condemned the majority community and the Indian leadership for pursuing the "politics of pogrom".

The letter criticised the double-speak of the BJP Government in combating terrorism.

"While the BJP, Shiv Sena and RSS has justified the Hindu retaliation, these outfits have never acknowledged the resolve of Sikhs to avenge the desecration of Golden Temple and Delhi pogrom." It expressed concern that the politics of genocide had become the permanent feature of the Indian psyche

and 'revenge' has become an instrument of state policy.

Expressing its deep concern over the Gujarat bloodshed including the torching of Hindu passengers at Godhra, the Dal Khalsa clarified that what Gujarat has witnessed was not riots but "a genocide, a pogrom. An organised violence perpetrated by the brute majority against minority community".

While equating the Gujarat bloodshed with Delhi pogrom of 1984, the letter stated that for all the parallels between Delhi pogrom and Gujarat carnage, there was one important difference. While the then "so-called secular" Congress patronised the perpetrators and now a chauvinist fringe of the Sangh Parivar has sponsored the communal violence.

The letter quotes Satbir Singh as saying that "after the Delhi pogrom, the sense of insecurity among Sikhs resulted in a desire for freedom in them. This desire culminated into a demand for Khalistan".

THE HINDU

19 MAR 2002

# Singhal breaks fast

## Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya

March 18. — VHP chief Mr Ashok Singhal broke his fast unto death this evening after former chief minister Mr Rajnath Singh delivered a personal message from Mr LK Advani. Mr Singh was accompanied by Ram Janambhoomi Nyas president Mahant Ramachander Das Paramhans.

Mr Singhal said he had been assured by the government that adequate security would be deployed at sensitive railway stations to prevent Godhra-type incidents and that kar sevaks coming here to take part in the *poornahuti yajna* would be treated properly.

The government also restored train services to Faizabad. It was officially announced that "there are now no restrictions on movement of genuine pilgrims" to Ayodhya. In Lucknow, the state home ministry spokesman said curbs on movement of trucks and buses had also been removed. Railway ministry sources said 13

pairs of trains would resume service tomorrow.

Earlier, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in Parliament criticising Mr Singhal's agitational path had reportedly toughened Mr Singhal's stand.

## Custody of shilas

LUCKNOW, March 18. — The shilas handed over to Mr Shatrughan Singh on 15 March now belong to the Centre, the state government said today. The shilas, currently kept at Dashrath Mahal temple in Ayodhya, would remain there until further orders from Delhi, a spokesperson added. The temple mahant, Swami Prasadacharya, claimed the shilas were kept in his temple premises without his consent when he was away in Chhattisgarh. Meanwhile, Ramchander Das Paramhans denied reports that he had refused to hand over the shilas to the Faizabad divisional commissioner because he was a Baniya. — PTI & UNI

He said that in a democracy people had the right to express their grievances.

A VHP office-bearer had quoted Mr Singhal as saying that he would break his fast only after he meets passengers getting down at Faizabad and

speaks to them.

VHP office-bearers have a list of Ram sevaks on board the Sealdah Express, the first train to reach Faizabad after train services were restored. Mr Singhal reportedly wanted to meet all of the sevaks personally.

The VHP has asked its activists in districts throughout the country to sit on relay hunger strikes till their demands are met.

Earlier, about a hundred VHP activists in Mumbai went on a relay fast in support of the indefinite fast by Mr Singhal, adds PTI.

They were demanding protection for kar sevaks visiting Ayodhya for the *poornahuti yajna*. VHP Maharashtra unit chief Mr Ashok Chowghule, Bajrang Dal activist Mr Milind Parande and VHP Mumbai

unit president Mr Ramesh Mehta are among those taking part in the relay fast.

The Maharashtra VHP unit has asked the Centre to allow its activists to reach Karasevakpuram and ensure their safe journey back home.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAR 2002

PRESSURE MOUNTS ON VAJPAYEE

# Party peeved at RSS, allies target VHP

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 18. — The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's not-so-veiled warning to Muslims that their safety depended on the goodwill of Hindus has left the BJP red-faced. Embarrassed and infuriated party leaders said today they would request the Prime Minister to ask senior RSS leaders to clarify their stand.

In Parliament, all NDA partners except the Shiv Sena asked the government and the BJP to rein in the VHP and Bajrang Dal. Some of them even supported the Opposition demand that the outfits be banned. Almost all the allies assailed the Centre over the alleged VHP-Bajrang Dal attack on the Orissa Assembly.

This is the second consecutive day in Parliament that the allies attacked the government (on Saturday they did the same over Ayodhya).

At its annual general council meeting in Bangalore yesterday, the RSS had described the communal riots in Gujarat after the Godhra incident as "natural and spontaneous". The BJP, already under fire from the Opposition and its allies for the Gujarat government's delayed response to the carnage, is under pressure to distance itself from the RSS position.

The BJP, however, was not prepared to take an official stand on the issue. The party spokesman, Mr VK Malhotra, said he had not seen the statement and would not like to comment on newspaper reports. When pressed to spell out the party's stand, he said that members of both the minority

and the majority community should respect each other's sentiments.

For the RSS, the statement is intended to appease hardline supporters smarting at the VHP's climbdown on Ayodhya. "Hindus live and let live. This does not mean they can tolerate insults. They (Muslims) are safe if they win our goodwill... Respect us and we will respect you," the RSS joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das, said yesterday.

The RSS position on other communities is not new. Earlier, it triggered a controversy by asserting that those who converted to Christianity had not changed their ancestors. The RSS chief had advocated that Christians should establish national churches delinked from the Vatican.

On Muslims, the parivar's earlier position was that its population be transferred en masse to Islamic countries, a senior RSS leader said. The RSS held that if Indonesian Muslims could accept Ram and Hanuman as their cultural heroes; Indian Muslims should follow suit.

The RSS's statements are likely to feature prominently in the BJP's national executive meeting to be held Goa in April.

Reacting to the statement, minister of state for external affairs, Mr Omar Abdullah, charged the Sangh with indulging in "dirty politics" and said the move was "only aimed at creating communal tension," adds PTI from Sopore.

Asking the NDA allies and the nation as a whole to be wary of the RSS, the Congress spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said: "The fact that the BJP is in power at the Centre has given the RSS the confidence now."

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THE STATESMAN

11 MAR 2002

RECEIVED

# Activists condemn RSS resolution <sup>9 minutes</sup>

Times News Network

MUMBAI: The assertion by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that the safety of Muslims lies in the goodwill of the majority community is being seen by saffron-baiters and secular activists as a veiled threat. The RSS' highly controversial stand on minorities was contained in a resolution passed at its Bangalore conference on Sunday. The resolution pertained to the recent communal violence in Gujarat.

Although most prominent people here said that the declaration would not heighten communal tensions any further, they condemned its timing. Calling the statement anti-national, former police commissioner and peace activist Julio Ribeiro said, "Anybody with the interests of the country at heart would know that the country needs to be united. And such statements are divisive by nature, coming as they do at this particular point in time."

Contending that the RSS posturing would only add to the "atmosphere of distrust and animosity", he said fanaticism of all kinds should be nipped in the bud.

Concurring with this view, Vivek Monteiro, member of the state committee of the CPM, said, "Any threat to Indian citizens is an anti-national act." The majority of Indian citizens did not see themselves as Hindus or Muslims but as Indians first, he added. "Therefore, the RSS has no business speaking on behalf of the majority."

Mr Monteiro said the incidents of the last few weeks in Gujarat and Orissa should be deemed as "religious terrorism" and treated as such. "The government and the courts should take a tough stand against them. This would be appreciated by all patriots," he said.

Dawoodi Bohra reformist and chairman of the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism Asghar Ali Engineer asked, "How can any community be at the mercy

of another? The majority should also enjoy the goodwill of the minority."

Terming the RSS statement "dangerous", Mr Engineer said, "It negates the spirit of democracy." However, he said it was not for the Muslims to react to such assertions. Rather, he felt that it was for the Hindus now to take up the challenge of the RSS "because the RSS ultimately wants to target all those Hindus who oppose their ideology".

He was of the view that the RSS would one day declare that all those who did not subscribe to their way of thinking were not real Hindus. "This happened in Pakistan and Afghanistan where secular elements within the community were targeted."

Anthony Samy of the Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana echoed this line of thinking when he said that the RSS only wanted to control the majority. He said, "In any civilised society, it is the majority which should enjoy the goodwill of the minority first. They have to respect, tolerate and cooperate with the minority as equal beings."

State Congress president Govindrao Adik said the statement showed the true face of the Sangh Parivar. Calling it "unfair, undemocratic and unethical", he said such assertions amounted to dictating terms to the people.

Arraigned on the saffron side of the political spectrum are the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, both of

which spoke up for their ally, the RSS. According to BJP spokesperson Atul Bhatkalkar, the RSS had merely stated "a fact of life." "The safety of the minorities is ensured only when there is no problem with the majority community." Refusing to see any problem with the resolution, he said, "It does not say Muslims should be treated as second-class citizens, like minorities elsewhere in the world."

Indian history is full of examples of other communities like Parsis, Jews and Christians assimilating with the majority, Mr Bhatkalkar said. "If the Muslims respect the feelings of the majority and give away the land at Ayodhya to the Hindu, especially when Indian Muslims have nothing to do with Babar and it was not a mosque in the real sense, there will be peace," he said.

On the timing of the resolution, he said the RSS had been adopting resolutions every year since 1950 "on the current situation in the country". This resolution was not

new in any sense, he claimed.

Concurring with the assimilation theory, president of the state unit of the VHP Ashok Chowgule said, "The RSS statement is not a new comment." The RSS had to make the statement since the majority community did not feel that its sentiments were being respected. The thrust of the resolution is that "if you don't want to repeat the Gujarat riots, see that Godhra doesn't happen", he added.

# MPs flay attack on Orissa House

## NDA allies call for ban on VHP, Bajrang Dal

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Angry opposition members, along with the ruling benches in both houses of parliament, on Monday roundly condemned the storming of the Orissa assembly by Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists on Saturday, terming the incident an "attack on parliamentary democracy".

A resolution adopted by the Rajya Sabha voiced its deep concern and anguish over the March 16 attack and recommended "stern and deterrent action" against the guilty persons.

In the Lok Sabha, zero hour turned into a nearly three-hour-long impromptu debate on the issue with allies of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)—the Samata Party, the Trinamul Congress and the JD (U)—demanding a ban on the VHP and Bajrang Dal.

While Prime Minister Atal B e h a r i Vajpayee told the Rajya Sabha that he "unequivocally" condemned the attack, which was a blot on democracy, home minister L.K. Advani said in the Lok Sabha that democracy was the nation's greatest strength and "anybody who strikes at its roots needs to be punished".

After several NDA allies had virtually accused the BJP-led government of creating a situation in which the VHP/Bajrang Dal had felt emboldened to attack the Orissa assembly, Mr Advani said emphatically that those responsible must be punished, even if they belonged to his party.

Mr Advani's statement was in sharp contrast to that of his party colleague, V.K. Malhotra, who said the opposition's comparison of the

December 13 terrorist attack on parliament with the vandalism by the VHP in the Orissa assembly was a "perversion of the mind". Mr Advani said, "When parliament was attacked on December 13, I felt angry, but when I read the news of the Orissa assembly incident, I felt ashamed." Mr Advani said the Centre would extend all possible help to the Orissa government in its inquiry into the incident. However, he hastened to add that he was proud to have been associated with the RSS since his childhood.

The two strongest speeches from the opposition ranks came from former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda and Congress deputy leader Shivraj Patil. Mr Deve Gowda wondered why the Bajrang

Dal needed training in arms and who their trishuls and swords were directed against. He wondered whether they were protecting the PM and

the home minister, and asked whether the country did not have an army, security forces and the police. He also questioned the RSS statement that Muslim security depended on Hindu goodwill. He concluded by saying that if the PM was honest in his condemnation of the Orissa incident, he would ban the Bajrang Dal.

An uncharacteristically charged Shivraj Patil took the BJP head on, saying recent events, including the incident in Orissa, indicated that the authority of the constitution, the courts and the police was being challenged with impunity.

He urged the NDA's allies to look into their hearts and minds. "Don't take shelter behind strong speeches in the house while continuing to support the BJP," he said.

### CLOSING RANKS

- ▶ RS adopts resolution calling for stern action against guilty
- ▶ PM calls attack a blot on democracy
- ▶ Guilty will be punished even if they belong to BJP, says Advani

# Allies, Opposition for ban on VHP, Bajrang Dal

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI MARCH 18. The BJP-led Government came under fire from its allies for the second consecutive day today, this time over Saturday's storming of the Orissa Assembly by VHP and Bajrang Dal activists.

The Trinamool Congress, the Janata Dal (United) and the Samata Party added to the Government's discomfiture in the Lok Sabha by joining the Opposition in demanding a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.

The Lok Sabha witnessed an acrimonious debate on the Orissa incidents with the Opposition too unrelenting in its criticism of the involvement of the two prominent Sangh Parivar organisations.

What added to the BJP's problems was that there was little help coming from the allies, save the Biju Janata Dal. Though the Telugu Desam Party, which had taken the lead on Saturday on the Ayodhya issue, stopped short of demanding a ban, it called for "exemplary punishment against those involved".

Today, the pace was set by Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD- U). Denouncing all forms of fundamentalism, he straightway called for a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. He wondered how the nation could fight ISI-sponsored terrorism if some people were allowed to divide society, challenge the courts and defy the state in the name of religion. "Those who are try-

ing to divide this nation on communal lines must be dealt with irrespective of the religion or the party they belong," said Mr. Yadav.

He was also critical of the role played by the saffron brigade in rewriting history and in the demolition of places of worship. "Those doing it must be banned," he said.

## 'Attack from within'

Prabhunath Singh (Samata) was equally unequivocal in calling for action against the members of the Sangh Parivar. He said the Government should use the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) against those involved "even if it meant the VHP and the Bajrang Dal".

The nation was facing an attack from within. Even though it was the Assembly that had been attacked "some people were citing incidents of the past to justify it". Mr. Singh called for a ban on carrying of 'Trishuls' (tridents). How can those carrying 'Trishuls' be any different from those carrying guns," he asked.

Nitish Sengupta (Trinamool Congress) voiced the same demand. He came down hard on the VHP and Bajrang Dal and urged the Government to take stronger action against these organisations.

The attack from the allies came after the Opposition gave the Government a torrid time, lambasting the Sangh Parivar for "spreading the gospel of hate and creating conditions for all kinds of elements to flout the

law". The entire Opposition without an exception demanded a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.

Raising the issue through an adjournment motion, Somnath Chatterjee said there was no difference between the December 13 attack on Parliament, the J&K Assembly incident and the attack on the Orissa Assembly.

"What has happened there is also a terrorist attack," he said.

Shivraj Patil (Congress) made the same demand. "Just because the attack has come from friends of a particular party it does not lessen the gravity of the crime." He described the attack as a challenge to the supreme authority of the state and laid the blame for the attack on the Sangh Parivar.

The former Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar and Deve Gowda, echoed the same views. Mr. Shekhar said the Orissa incident posed a bigger danger because it came from within. He wanted the Government to act fast against all those who were challenging the secular order and the rule of law. "If this Government does not act, I am afraid we are heading towards disintegration." Mr. Gowda was critical of the RSS resolution passed in Bangalore.

Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD) and Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) charged the Government with encouraging fanatical elements. He said a BJP Minister in the Orissa Government had planned the attack on the legislature.

THE HINDU

19 MAR 2002

# Shun extremist leaders,

# RSS tells Muslims

By Our Special Correspondent

**BANGALORE, MARCH 17.** The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) today urged the Muslims of the country to come out of the clutches of their extremist leaders and Hindu-baiters.

A resolution adopted at the three-day conference of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha of the Sangh, which concluded at Chennahalli, near here, today, said: "Let Muslims understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority." Although a few Muslim leaders interpreted 'jihad' as not supporting terrorism, they had not been able to influence the extremist elements, it said. "The Sabha wants to make it clear that it does no credit to the Muslim community to allow itself to be made pawns in the hands of extremist leaders," it added.

Describing the Godhra incident as "horrible and ghastly", the RSS delegates said it had become imperative to present it in the proper perspective. The reaction to the incident was spontaneous. The entire Hindu society had reacted. It was unfortunate that a number of people died in the violence.

But certain political parties in their greed to garner Muslim votes turned a blind eye to the original action and protested only against the reaction, linking it to the Ayodhya movement. This had hurt the Hindu psyche deeply, they said.

Briefing presspersons on the resolutions, the

RSS joint general secretary, Madan Das, said Muslims would be safe in the country provided they won the goodwill of the majority community. They had to accept the law of the land "which they are not doing now." "They should desist from provoking the Hindus." He regretted that the life of Hindus had no meaning in India.

## Plea to media

The RSS urged the media to report incidents in the right perspective and help in promoting national harmony.

From the reports in Gujarati newspapers and information from impartial sources on the Godhra incident, it was clear that the attack was unprovoked and premeditated, it said.

Around 2,000 persons, equipped with petrol cans, acid bulbs, swords and stones, attacked the train. When the passengers closed the doors to protect themselves, they threw petrol bombs inside a bogie, setting it on fire.

The Sangh wanted the Centre to take tough measures against Bangladesh, such as stopping the water flow from the Farrakka barrage as a reaction to the atrocities on Hindus there.

It wanted the Government to demand creation of a separate homeland for the Bangladesh Hindus if the Government failed to respond positively. Such a demand would be in line with the one made by Sardar Vallabhai Patel in 1948.

at a meeting of VHP office-bearers in Ayodhya soon.

He said that the Supreme Court's order on the 'shila puja' programme appeared to have been delivered in haste. "That is why the apex court had to make certain corrections in its orders the next day. The court judgment should convey a message that justice has been done to all parties by maintaining transparency."

Meanwhile, the situation in Ayodhya and Faizabad was peaceful and markets in the temple town remained open. Normal traffic was seen on the roads since morning. — PTI

THE HINDU

18 MAR 2002

# Tension at Taldi

Police ineptitude helps breed communalism

What could easily have been avoided was unfortunately allowed by an inept district administration of south 24 Parganas to snowball into a confrontation and go out of control in Canning on Sunday resulting in large-scale vandalism and indiscriminate police firing from automatic rifles claiming the life of an innocent 18-year-old bystander. For almost a fortnight there were indications that communal tension was mounting in this area where as elsewhere, both the Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists have gained ground by playing on religious sentiments. The covert support from political parties emboldened fundamentalists to pursue their agenda. Nothing was done to counter them either through political campaigns or preventive measures by the district administration whose partisan handling and behaviour actually fuelled the communal passions at Taldi. It started before the Gujarat riots with Muslim clerics, brought from outside, making highly provocative speeches through the public address system whose purpose was to breed ill will. But surprisingly the police chose to remain inactive and this was exploited by Hindu fundamentalists who demanded the holding of a *yagna* to make their presence felt. A non-existent VHP unit suddenly surfaced and was allowed to make preparations for the *yagna*. When the administration sensed that the situation was turning communal it promulgated Section 144 and posted a police contingent armed with lathis and automatic rifles. The contingent had no tear gas for crowd dispersal and no shield for protection from brickbats. So when VHP activists turned violent the police, unable to control a lathi charge, resorted to indiscriminate firing without a magisterial order. It was clearly a knee-jerk reaction of an ill-equipped force unequal to its task and out of its depth. In fact the police by overreacting has helped swing popular sympathy towards the VHP which is making an all out effort to gain ground in south 24 Parganas. It is to placate hurt Hindu sentiments that the Marxists staged a silent march in Taldi on Monday.

The Taldi episode is yet another proof of how a thoroughly politicised district administration in its effort to please political masters has landed them in serious trouble with its overreaction and highhanded behaviour. It is an open secret that both the district magistrate and the superintendent of police have been "hot favourites" of Alimuddin Street for the services they have rendered. There may be truth in what some secular non-left parties are saying that the firing was meant to push the Marxist agenda of winning back the Muslim voters before next year's panchayat election. It is meant to repair the damage that the Marxists suffered over the Madrasa issue. But will it?



SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2002

## FLAWED DENOUEMENT

1673  
THE DAY THAT was awaited nationwide with a heightened sense of dread — as the recalcitrant VHP and its sant brigade had struck belligerent postures and threatened to go ahead with their 'shila daan' in Ayodhya on the 'acquired' land despite the Supreme Court's latest ruling — has passed off peacefully, much to everyone's relief. Luckily, saner counsel prevailed ultimately with the VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas (RJN), which had insisted on performing the 'symbolic' ritual even at the risk of being physically prevented and arrested by the authorities. Of course this did not come before the RJN's rather whimsical chief, Ramachandra Das Paramahans, held out a threat to commit suicide — emotional blackmail of sorts — should he be prevented from taking a carved stone (shila) out to be given as a 'daan' (donation) for temple construction. In the event, the ritualistic 'stone donation and acceptance' came to be staged, not without its compromising moments, as earlier agreed upon at a place away from the 67-acre Ayodhya complex covered by the apex court's injunction. An emissary from the Prime Minister's Office received the two shilas.

At the core of this denouement to an episode that had appeared inexorably headed for a bloody and disastrous confrontation was in fact the Supreme Court's March 13 order firmly ruling out any activity or puja, whether "symbolic or actual", in any part of the disputed or the ('undisputed') acquired land. The unambiguity and emphatic tone of the Judiciary obviously forced the Vajpayee Government to end its visible prevarication and 'persuade' the saints to retract from their perilous course; the BJP's political compulsions and its recognition of the serious Constitutional repercussions that a showdown would have entailed to the coalition regime must have weighed heavily in the Government's ultimate stance.

But a more disturbing aspect of the sordid episode relates to the blatantly partisan responses of the Vajpayee regime to the closely-knit VHP-RJN parivar's campaign for the launch of the temple construction as it unfolded ever since the saints' one-year ultimatum to the Centre for the removal of all hurdles by March 12 this year. The latest

and most devious of them all was its unapologetic attempt to plead (before the Supreme Court) the VHP's case for a 'symbolic puja' on the acquired land and having the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, make the suggestion that the Government was inclined to allow a limited activity, subject to adequate conditionalities and restrictions. In taking such a position, the BJP, as the coalition head, was seen as having played a nasty trick on its partners and friends, like the Telugu Desam and the Trinamool Congress, who made clear their discomfort. For all the talk of a climbdown by the VHP, the fact that it has finally had its way in formally launching the construction on the appointed day and time cannot be missed, nor can be overlooked the Centre's pandering to the RJN chief, ostensibly, in the larger interest of defusing tension.

What 'March 15' means is that the BJP, which dutifully asserts that it remains committed to the coalition's National Agenda for Governance, has ensured that 'Ayodhya' is really back on the centre stage of national politics. In the context of resolving the core issue, the Government has to get the VHP and the RJN to stand by the written commitment they are said to have given (as claimed by the Kanchi Sankaracharya and later by the Prime Minister) to "abide by the court verdict". Now that steps have been taken to speed up the judicial process, these outfits must also be made to stop their temple construction campaign till the Allahabad High Court decides the pending title suit and this implies that they do not, in the meantime, push for the handing over of the (so-called undisputed) acquired land for them to start building the temple. The VHP's latest phase of the Ayodhya campaign together with the Godhra (Gujarat) carnage and the minority-targeted pogrom perpetrated across the State as an act of revenge — horrendous happenings attributable directly to the heightened communal tensions whipped up by it — should underline the chilling reality that the Sangh Parivar's majoritarian communalist agenda under the BJP's benign aegis represents a real danger to the integrity of the nation.

RELIEF FOR RAO

10 MAR 2002

AYODHYA BREATHES EASY

# Central emissary receives shila

8 - minute

16/3

By Anjali Mody

AYODHYA, MARCH 15. The much-publicised "shila daan" ended peacefully here today at the Digambar Akhara, more than a km away from the acquired undisputed land, amid the chanting of Vedic hymns.

Two carved stone slabs were handed over by the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas chairman, Ramachandra Paramhans, to Shatrughan Singh, who heads the Ayodhya Cell in the Prime Minister's Office, at the "akhara" under heavy security cover. Mr. Singh was specially flown in here from Delhi to monitor and supervise the "shila daan" ceremony.

And, ironically, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's "shila puja" and "shila daan" campaign ended with its working president, Ashok Singhal, being shouted down by the couple of hundred supporters who had collected around the 'karsevakpuram' compound this morning. The crowd — of "sadhus," indigent "pujaris" and "mahants" and a handful of young men — said it was incensed at having been "tricked into accepting a deal which fell far short of expectations."

The "deal" ensured that the "puja" and "daan" were performed at the Digambar Akhara, of which Paramhans is the "mahant," and is located just a few hundred metres from the VHP's temple workshop.

The VHP supporters were expecting that they would reach the disputed site or court arrest.

The "deal" was the Paramhans' second climbdown. The "mahant," who, on March 14, declared that he would "kill" himself if not allowed to perform the "puja" on the acquired land, agreed to do so outside the acquired land in Ram Kot Mohalla today.

He would then proceed to the disputed site for a "darshan" at



The Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas president, Ramchandradas Paramhans, handing over a carved stone of the proposed Ram temple to Shatrughan Singh (right), an envoy of the Prime Minister, at the Digambar Akhara in Ayodhya on Friday. — AFP

the makeshift Ram temple, he had declared.

But, a few hours later, as the procession, permitted by the administration in violation of Section 144 of the Cr.PC, traversed the 500 metres from the "karsevakpuram" to the akhara, Paramhans fell in line with the administration's decision to end the procession and perform the "puja" and "daan" right there. The "daan" of the two

Dholpur stone slabs was received not by the Faizabad Divisional Commissioner, A. K. Gupta, as announced earlier, but by Mr. Singh.

Packed inside the front courtyard of the "akhara," angry men jostled and shouted at Mr. Singhal, drowning the chanting of "mantras" which accompanied the brief "shila puja." Mr. Singhal, standing atop his white ambassador, pleaded with the

crowd to calm down, but it shot back, "this is just politics, has the VHP taken money to do this?" Mr. Singhal and Paramhans, from the top of the steps leading to the "akhara," tried to direct the crowd to pay attention to them in vain.

Eventually they were both hustled into cars and escorted, along with the slabs, by the Additional District Magistrate and the City Superintendent of Police to Dashrath Mahal just outside the acquired land. Here, the slabs were placed ritually for the public to see. They would be transferred to a safe place by the local administration, Mr. Singh said.

Mr. Singhal maintained silence on the day's events. It was Vinay Katiyar, BJP MP from Ayodhya and Bajrang Dal leader, who admitted that the VHP's campaign had not gone "according to its plan." And that some things had gone wrong.

The person who appears to have played a significant role in handling the unpredictable Paramhans and was responsible for the peaceful culmination of this drama was Navnit Saigal, a civil servant from Uttar Pradesh and former District Magistrate of Faizabad. Paramhans credited him with saving the Vajpayee Government and the "maryada" of the VHP.

Though the entire exercise was peaceful, there was an incident of stone-throwing and lathicharge by security forces in the Hanuman Garhi area, where some local residents from the Digambar Akhara were prevented from reaching the disputed site. Ayodhya itself seemed to breathe a sigh of relief as the procession and "puja," restricted to the back street linking "karsevakpuram" the VHP workshop and the Digambar Akhara, ended. People who had mostly stayed indoors all day began coming out. They were glad it was over, they said.

MAR 2002

# Nyas chief threatens to end life if not allowed 'shila daan'

## VHP firm on going ahead with puja in Ayodhya

Times News Network

AYODHYA: President of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas Paramhans Ramchandra Das lent an element of drama to the ongoing temple construction programme when he announced that he would end his life if he was stopped from carrying out the 'shila daan'.

At a press conference here on Thursday, the Paramhans made the announcement after voicing his ire at being denied what he described as his right to worship. Working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Ashok Singhal, who was also present, did not say a word other than stating that the supreme court's order passed earlier in the day had clarified that any activity on the disputed as well as undisputed land was barred.

The Paramhans said that at 2.15 p.m on Friday, he would start from the workshop along with some sadhus and proceed towards the Ram Janmabhoomi complex. "If the administration does not allow us to proceed and donate the shila, I will end my life for the sake of the Ram temple with which I have been involved from the very beginning. "You can be sure that this is my last press conference," he said.

Later, speaking to *Times News Network* in his room, he said that he would go ahead with his plan of action. In an attempt to prove that he was serious, he said that he had a chemical—which he refused to identify—that would end his life within a few minutes.

He described as dictatorial the attitude of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government and the district administration for their clamp-down in Ayodhya which, he said, had been turned into a fortress.

However, a later statement by him, suggested that he was ready for a compromise. The Paramhans said that while he would certainly start with a 'shila' at the given time, he was ready to hand it to the receiver of the temple, the commissioner of Faizabad division, anywhere along the way. He also added that he should be allowed to go to the makeshift temple for offering prayers like any other devotee. "If they don't, they'd be committing contempt of court."

Commissioner Anil Kumar Gupta refused to comment on the latest threat from the Paramhans.

"It has not been officially communicated to us, so I cannot say how we are going to handle the situation. All that we know of is the supreme court's order." In a related development, the VHP-Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas combine vowed to go ahead with its plan for a 'shila daan' to the government receiver in Ayodhya on Friday.

In Lucknow, international vice-president of the VHP Giriraj Kishore warned that demonstrations and dharnas would be held across the country on Saturday if the district administration arrested the sants in Ayodhya on Friday.

► See Edit: Red Alert for Peace, Page 10



Mahant D.

### 'Shila daan may be permitted if performed peacefully'

Times News Network

AYODHYA: In a bid to defuse the mounting tension in this pilgrim city, the district administration has offered a compromise package to the agitated VHP saints and leaders, saying they may be allowed to offer a 'shila daan' if it is done in a peaceful manner outside the Ram Janambhoomi complex.

Faizabad commissioner A.K. Gupta told *Times News Network* on Thursday, "We can allow the VHP to organise any such programme if it does not involve any big congregation and is held at a safe distance from the complex. If they want, we can take the donation of a carved pillar from the VHP workshop or Karsevakpuram and give them the receipt."

AYODHYA UNDER SECURITY CORDON

# VHP to go ahead with 'shila daan'

By Anjali Mody

AYODHYA, MARCH 14. In defiance of the Supreme Court verdict, the 'sant mandal' of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has announced that it will continue with the programme of performing a "shila daan" and "puja" on the acquired land around the disputed site here.

At the end of a brief meeting of 'sadhus,' 'pujaris' and 'mahants,' representing four of Ayodhya's some 6000 temples, the chairman of the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas (RJN), Ramachandra Paramhans, told presspersons "after 2.15 p.m. tomorrow I will go... taking a Ram 'shila,' accompanied by Brahmins chanting Vedic mantras."

He was willing to face 'lathis,' tear gas shells or even bullets in his bid to perform the 'puja,' which was "the directive of Lord Ram." And if the Vajpayee Government or the State administration tried to stop him, he would "kill" himself, the 'mahant' said.

(Praveen Togadia, general secretary, VHP, said in New Delhi that 'Ram bhakts' throughout the country would chant "Ram, Ram" at 2.15 p.m. and court arrest if the authorities wished to arrest them.)

In what is being seen as a "face-saving" deal, the Faizabad Commissioner, A. K. Gupta, said he was willing to accept the "shila daan" as long as the VHP supporters accepted the Su-



Paramilitary personnel staging a flag march in Ayodhya on Thursday. — PTI

preme Court ruling and did not violate the provisions of Section 144 of the CrPC which disallowed assembly of more than 3 or 4 persons in public.

And as long as the VHP got the permission of the District Magistrate, he was willing to accept the "shila daan" anywhere in the town except the acquired land, Mr. Gupta said. He would accept the "daan" not in his capacity as the legal receiver of the

acquired land but as Commissioner, Faizabad.

At the VHP's workshop today, "sadhus" and "pujaris" raised slogans in support of the Ram temple. "Pujaris" Yogendra Mishra and Balmukund Srinivas Das asserted that 2000 "select-ed" people, to whom "cards" had been issued, would gather to carry the "Ram shila" to the acquired land. The VHP international secretary, Giriraj Kish-

ore, who hopes to be in Ayodhya tomorrow, said in Lucknow that the Government would be responsible for any violence during the "peaceful shila daan."

However, it seems unlikely that any large group will gather, unless allowed to do so by the administration, and there is nothing to suggest that it will be allowed. Ayodhya resembles a fortress with over 10,000 CRPF jawans, 4000 Home Guard personnel and 2000 policemen guarding it. This morning, a flag march — second since Sunday — was conducted through the main streets of the town, and anti-riot vans and water cannons have been posted at crucial points around the acquired land and the narrow lanes leading to it.

Entering and leaving Ayodhya is an obstacle. Everyone, from pedestrians to press vehicles with entry permits, is stopped and searched. Business establishments in Ayodhya and Faizabad will remain closed tomorrow following a directive from the local administration.

Elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh several "kar sevaks" were arrested, including 250 in Gorakhpur, led by the BJP MP, Adityanath, and the MLA from the town, Radhe Aggarwal.

It seems fairly certain that whatever its plans, the VHP is unlikely to get very far on the 1 km route from its workshop to the acquired land. The "flop-show," as one person described it, is something even the RJN's vice-president, Nitya Gopal Das, and the head of Ayodhya's choti chavani ashram is keen to stay away from, as is another prominent 'mahant,' Devendra-prasad Acharya, of Dashrath Mahal. And the VHP leadership is clearly seized of this. It is already talking of continuing the campaign after March 15. Acharya Kishore said a campaign around the slogan "Ayodhya jaenge, mandir banaenge" (We will go to Ayodhya and construct a temple) would be conducted from March 17 to 27 all over the country.

## Situation under control, says Vajpayee

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 14. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said that the situation in Ayodhya was "fully under control" and sought to allay the apprehension of any untoward incident tomorrow. He reiterated his Government's commitment to implement the Supreme Court's March 13 order in "letter and spirit."

Mr. Vajpayee's assurance came in reply to clarifications sought in the Rajya Sabha over his statement on yesterday's order. Earlier, Mr. Vajpayee made an identical statement in the Lok Sabha.

Mr. Vajpayee maintained that on many occasions — both in and outside Parliament — he had said that the Ayodhya issue could be resolved either through a mutual agreement between the parties to the dispute or a judicial verdict. The Government had reiterated its stand through the President's address this year.

Although efforts by the Kanchi seer had not yielded the desired results, the Government "believes that the dialogue between representatives of the two communities should continue. If negotiations do not produce a mutually agreeable resolution, both sides should abide by the court verdict," Mr. Vajpayee said.

Reflecting what the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, told the Lok Sabha yesterday with regard to the case and the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee's submission in the Supreme Court, Mr. Vajpayee said the Government had not given any direction to Mr. Sorabjee. (The AG's submission led to disruption of proceedings in both Houses yesterday with the Opposition insisting on a clarification by the Prime Minister).

Defending the move, Mr. Vajpayee said it was the constitutional duty of the AG to interpret law or a judgment, when asked by the court to do so. After the latest order, a new situation had arisen with even the "undisputed land" at Ayodhya becoming "disputed." Everyone would have to ponder on its implications, he said, ruling out an appeal against the verdict.

Responding to questions on any "action plan" to tackle the situation, Mr. Vajpayee said while action taken (to control the situation) was adequate, several plans were on the anvil. "All are making plans and even though Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena) makes his own," he said in a lighter vein, perhaps with reference to the MP's suggestion that the symbolic "puja" be allowed. Significantly, he said the Ayodhya issue had been kept out of

the NDA agenda because of a lack of consensus among its constituents.

On the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, he said, it was an organisation and wondered why members, who were questioning its locus standi, insisted that it was an associate of the BJP.

Appreciating the efforts of the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Mr. Vajpayee said organisations outside the Government had a role to play towards resolving the Ayodhya issue. It was imperative to find a solution both in the context of the emerging world scenario and developments in the region. Attempts should be made to discourage extremists and encourage those who promoted amity.

Mr. Vajpayee agreed to a suggestion by the senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh, that the Government be alert against those who were challenging its authority. To an objection of Ambika Soni (Congress) in the Prime Minister's statement that the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas was a permanent lessee of the 42 of the 67 acres of the acquired land, adjacent to the disputed site in Ayodhya, Mr. Vajpayee said he would look into the "technical anomaly." He also appreciated the advice of Ram Jethmalani that it was within the rights of the Government of the day to return the "undisputed" land to its owner.

## Order encompasses entire acquired land, says SC

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, MARCH 14. The Supreme Court today clarified that a part (para 3) of its interim order passed on Wednesday which said that "no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual including 'bhumi puja' or 'shila puja', shall be permitted or allowed to take place" encompassed the entire 67.703 acres of land acquired by the Centre in 1993.

A three-Judge Bench, comprising B.N. Kirpal, G.B. Pattanaik and V.N. Khare, issued the clarification pursuant to an ambiguity pointed out in a newspaper report on yesterday's order.

(On Wednesday, the Bench, in para 3 of the order, said that "in the meantime, we direct that on the 67.703 acres of land located in revenue Plot Nos. 159 and 160 in village Kot Ramachandra, which is vested in the Central Government, no religious activity of any kind... shall be permitted or allowed to take place.

"Furthermore, no part of the aforesaid land shall be handed over by the Government to anyone and the same shall be

retained by the Government till the disposal of this writ petition nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any religious purpose or in connection therewith". "This is subject to further orders which may be passed in this case".)

However, it was pointed out in the news report that the entire 67.703 acres encompassed about 100 revenue plots and not the two revenue plots 159 or 160 as mentioned in the order which reportedly encompassed what is described as "disputed land".

With a view to removing the ambiguity in the order, the Bench today morning requested the Attorney General (AG), Soli Sorabjee, to be present in the court. However, on his suggestion that the matter might be heard in the afternoon in the presence of all the parties concerned, the Bench took up the matter at 2 p.m.

During the hearing Mr. Sorabjee submitted that a clarification was necessary as the order should not be circumvented due to some inaccuracy and that the order had to be obeyed in letter and spirit.

In today's order, the Bench said "after hearing the AG, as

there was some ambiguity in para 3 of our order dated March 13, we correct para 3 as follows":

"In the meantime, we direct that on the 67.703 acres of acquired land in various plots detailed in the Schedule to the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993, which is vested in the Central Government, no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual including "bhumi puja" or "shila puja" shall be permitted or allowed to take place."

Soon after the clarification, the AG submitted that there were 14 temples in the acquired land where 'puja' was going on in those temples for years which should not be stopped under the court orders.

The Bench, however, made it clear that if the AG wanted a clarification regarding 'puja' in these temples, then he should move a proper application along with a proper affidavit and only then the court would consider it. "We are giving this order (today's) only to clarify the minor ambiguity. We are not hearing anything else on this issue," the Bench said.

# Wise and justified Order!

58A Dealing with the VHP is not easy

Of the several aspects and consequences of the landmark Order dated 13 March of the Supreme Court (coram, Kirpal, Pattanaik and Khare, JJ) in the Ayodhya affair, two are of immediate importance. The operative part of the Order clearly says — *we direct that on the 67.703 acres of land ...which is vested in the Central Government, no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual including bhumi puja or shila puja, shall be permitted or allowed to take place.* For Ashok Singhal and Mahant Ramchandra Das to read down this categorical Order to mean that the prohibition applies only to two disputed sites and other areas in the 67 acres are outside the Order and the government can give them a part of it, is an exercise in duplicity and wilfully misinterprets their Lordships directions. We did not know that the VHP, whose locus standi was questioned by the Court, had any difficulty with the English language. They go on to urge that the government could use their discretion and give them another site. Reading the two statements together the VHP are asking for another site within the 67 acres, something expressly prohibited by the Court. This must be so because no permission is required to offer puja outside the 67 acres.

Their Lordships have gone on to say that ~~7~~ <sup>15/3</sup> *No part of the aforesaid land (the 67 acres) can be handed over by the Government to anyone and the same shall be retained by the Government till the disposal of this writ petition, nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any religious purpose or in connection therewith.* The VHP know that they have lost the battle, in effect the situation is frozen for ten weeks and until the petition is decided. The VHP and the Government are clutching at straws. They say the Court has recorded that this Order is subject to further Orders that may be passed in this case. It is elementary that all Orders of Courts are subject to amendment by further orders and this can give interested parties no comfort.

The other aspect is to watch the Government's response. They are clearly enjoined to prevent any mischief in Ayodhya; the prohibition extends to not allowing any puja to take place. Reports speak of kar or Ram or any other sevaks being let loose and plead justification of any mischief by falling back on the old formulation that what they want is a matter of *faith* and not amenable to Court orders. One hopes that better sense will prevail. The Order directly binds the Government to enforce the law. Their seniormost law officer, the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee was present in his official capacity; he was not called in as Amicus Curiae. To Atal Behari Vajpayee's credit, he sees no ambiguity in the Court's Order.

We offer Their Lordships our gratitude and respectful praise for the Order they have passed. Everything considered, including the facts on record and the past experience of the Supreme Court, is relevant. The advice of the Attorney-General not to rake up the past but to redeem the future sounds impressive as an exhortation but there can be no doubt that it would have been dangerous for the Court to act upon it. With respect the Supreme Court cannot be unmindful of the cavalier fashion in which chief minister Kalyan Singh made commitments on affidavit, which it would seem he had no intention to obey. This amounts to learning from the past; otherwise we would lose the future.

THE STATESMAN

15 March 2000

# SC ruling puts Vajpayee in win-win situation

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, March 18

THE SUPREME Court ruling has strengthened the Prime Minister's hands in his dealings with the recalcitrant VHP and the RSS while giving him an opportunity to keep the party's Hinduva flock happy, believe BJP leaders.

Although the allies are livid with the BJP over the pro-puja stand taken in court by Attorney General Soli Sorabjee, the party is confident that none of them will actually desert it on this issue. The allies are seen as only reassuring their constituency.

Aides to the PM and senior BJP Ministers were quick to point out that the Court's order has strengthened Vajpayee's hands to handle the Sangh Parishad more effectively on this issue.

The Court today ruled out any scope for transfer of land before the final verdict on the disputed site. This, BJP leaders say, will put an end to pressure from the RSS or the VHP to transfer land for temple construction. Some BJP leaders also consider that, with the Court's order, the Ayodhya issue has reached "saturation point" for both the BJP and the Opposition to be exploited

any further. As for the Opposition's outcry over the AG's pro-puja stand, many BJP leaders say the controversy will only help to show that the party is the sole upholder of Hindus' interest and may even unite the Sangh Parishad behind Vajpayee's leadership.

Even though the AG tried to bail out the Government by denying any instruction from the PM in favour of puja, the BJP lost no time in openly supporting his contention.

Other BJP leaders said the party could always defend itself before the Hinduva supporters that the Government had done its best to allow puja but the Court had ruled against it.

A senior BJP Minister said there was no threat to the Government, which enjoyed the support of 310 members in the Lok Sabha with an effective strength of 543 members. This includes those participating in the Government and those providing outside support.

If any ally does withdraw support on the Ayodhya issue, the 11-member AIADMK, the 12-member BSP and the eight-member NCP are seen as possible new entrants to keep the alliance going.

Nevertheless, Vajpayee began

a damage control exercise to placate his NDA partners, who were unhappy over the AG's stand. Mamata Banerjee, TDP leader K. M. Mani Naidu and others were briefed by the AG in the PM's presence about the developments in the Court and the stand taken by him.

Still upset, the Trinamool Congress and the TDP did not attend the NDA meeting called at the PM's residence later evening, where a similar briefing was done for all allies to explain that the Government had merely to end confusion over the 1994 judgement on maintaining status quo at Ayodhya.

BJP spokesperson V. K. Malhotra said the AG had only given the legal view and "we are fully supportive of him." He held that the AG had only sought to know from the Court whether puja would be allowed at the undisputed land. "What the AG has done is the right thing and we endorse what he told the court."

He was also quick to add that the Opposition was only trying to please the minorities by attacking the Government for being pro-Hindu. The Congress could not rile against the Government when Shriyanas had taken place at Ayodhya during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as PM, he said.

## WHAT WAS THE CENTRE'S PLAN



**On Security:** In deference to the sentiments of millions of Hindus, the government is thinking of allowing a symbolic puja. The puja will begin at 2.15 pm on March 15 and will last for three hours. It will be performed by saints numbering between 50 and 70



**On Kar Sevaks:** Kar sevaks will not be allowed to participate in the puja and only 1,000 of them will be allowed to witness the same from a distance of 300 metres. Kar sevaks will be allowed in batches of 25 to go near the puja



**On Security:** The Centre will strictly enforce whatever direction the court gives. No carved pillars will be allowed to be moved near the acquired land. Puja will be performed under strict restrictions

## Some interesting arguments

All the trustees of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, who started the Ram temple movement 40 years ago, are over 75 years of age now and their last desire in life is to see a small puja performed there because they feel that the temple will not be constructed during their lifetime

*-VHP's counsel in a last ditch attempt to get permission for the puja*

What are your objectives and what is your legal status? Are you a registered society?

*-Justice B. N. Kirpal to the VHP counsel*

If you allow puja, will you also allow Muslims to perform namaz on the land

*-Justice Kirpal to Attorney General Soli Sorabjee's repeated pleas for allowing the puja*



**DIGEST**

**Sekhon asked to resign**

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** Air Marshal Manjit Singh Sekhon, Air Officer Commanding, Southern Air Command, who had reportedly approached the former Punjab Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badal, for a prestigious posting, is understood to have been asked by the Government to put in his papers.

Air Marshal Sekhon last year asked the Chief Minister to use his influence with the Prime Minister to appoint him as Air Officer Commanding of the Delhi-based Western Air Command. Reports had surfaced recently on the move of Sekhon approaching Mr. Badal with undertones of politicisation in the top echelons of the defence services.

**New savings scheme soon**

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** Ruling out rollback in direct tax proposals, the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, today said the Government is considering a "savings scheme" to benefit employees of both public and private sector, specially those opting for early retirement scheme.

"We are considering a savings scheme for the entire salaried class both in the Government and private sector," Mr. Sinha said at a post-budget meet organised by ASSOCHAM here. — PTI

**Mugabe wins**

**HARARE, MARCH 13.** Zimbabwe's long-time ruler, Robert Mugabe, swept to victory today in presidential elections in a vote that challenger, Morgan Tsvangirai, declared was rigged and unacceptable. — AFP  
— Details on Page 14

**Resolution on Palestine**

**UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 13.** The U.N. Security Council has, for the first time, adopted a resolution specifically mentioning a Palestinian state. The resolution, sponsored by the U.S. last night, was passed by 14 votes to none, with Syria abstaining. — AFP  
— Details on Page 14

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**SORABJEE'S PLEA FOR SYMBOLIC CEREMONY FAILS**

## Supreme Court 'no' to puja, orders status quo

By J. Venkatesan

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** The Supreme Court today turned down the Central Government's plea to permit "bhoomi puja" at the "undisputed site" in Ayodhya, and directed that "no religious activity of any kind by anyone, either symbolic or actual, including 'bhoomi puja' or 'shila puja', shall be permitted or allowed to take place on the 67.703 acres of land" in Ayodhya on March 15.

Even as the Centre made a forceful plea for allowing a "bhoomi puja" at the "undisputed site" as, in its view, there was no prohibition on this under the 1994 apex court judgment, a three-judge Bench rejected it and ordered the maintenance of the 'status quo' in the entire piece of land.

When the Bench reminded the Attorney-General (AG), Soli Sorabjee — appearing for the Centre — of what happened on December 6, 1992, Mr. Sorabjee said "we are aware of the imponderable" but told the Bench "not to rake up the past."

The Bench observed: "We don't want the December 6, 1992, incident to be repeated," adding that the Centre should not do anything that would escalate the situation but take steps to defuse it. Reminding Mr. Sorabjee of the Centre's undertaking in 1992 despite which the disputed structure was demolished, the Bench asked him "what will be the reaction to the symbolic 'puja' in the current surcharged atmosphere?"

The Bench, comprising B. N. Kirpal, G. B. Pattanaik and V. N.

Khare, passed the interim order while admitting a writ petition filed by Mohd. Aslam alias Bhure for a direction to prevent 'kar sevaks' from proceeding to Ayodhya and to hand over the entire land to the Army.

"No part of the land shall be handed over by the Government to anyone and the same shall be retained by the Government till the disposal of this writ petition. Nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any religious purpose or in connection therewith," it ruled and clarified that the ruling was subject to further orders which might be passed in this case.

The judges ordered notice to the Centre, the Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat Governments, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the All-

India Babri Masjid Action Committee and the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and asked them to file the counter within four weeks and the rejoinder within four weeks thereafter.

**Issue for larger Bench**

A larger Bench would consider the correct interpretation of the 1994 judgment, they said and directed the listing of this matter before a larger Bench (of not less than five judges) after 10 weeks. Mr. Sorabjee submitted that his

**'This is not Parliament'**

By Our Legal Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** Even as the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, was making his submissions in the packed court hall in the Ayodhya dispute case, counsel for certain Muslim organisations began airing their points of view, provoking the court to remark "this is not Parliament," where one could go to the well of the House and raise the voice. Counsel would be given full opportunity at the next hearing, the Bench said.

reading and interpretation of the 1994 Supreme Court judgment was that the temporary use of the "undisputed" adjacent land for a brief duration for the purpose of performing "puja" was not *per se* prohibited and would not violate the "status quo" order, which pertained only to the "disputed land." Hence, a three-hour symbolic "puja" with adequate conditions and restrictions could be allowed.

The court, however, said "we are concerned with the 1994 order under which no part of the land vested with the Government can be used for any other purpose. It is very clear. As the situation now stands, is it correct for the Centre to take a stand that such a 'puja' be permitted," the Bench asked.

Even as Mr. Sorabjee was making a forceful plea to allow the 'bhoomi puja', the Bench observed "our fundamental foundation is secularism. We are not going to do anything that will affect secularism."

**It would not have been a violation: PM**

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today made it very clear that "the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, had presented the Government's views in the Supreme Court" in the matter of allowing a "symbolic puja" on the acquired land in Ayodhya.

Although he made no statement in Parliament, speaking briefly to a few correspondents in the corridors of Parliament House, Mr. Vajpayee confirmed that the Government view was that "the status quo at the acquired land would not have been disturbed by a symbolic puja."

On whether he was happy with the court's orders, he replied: "isme khushi ya nakhushi hone ki baat nahin hai, na main khushi hoon, na nakhushi" (it is not a question of being happy or unhappy, I am neither happy nor unhappy). "There are two views on whether a 'puja' would have violated the status quo, our view was that there

would have been no violation, and that was the view presented by the Attorney-General."

The Government had always maintained that it would not allow the status quo to be violated and the court's verdict would be honoured and implemented, Mr. Vajpayee said. There was no change in that stand.

Asked whether the BJP's allies in the NDA were dissatisfied with the Government's views, Mr. Vajpayee said the allies were under the impression that the Government had gone to court on the issue. "We explained to them that Sorabjee gave the Government's views only when specifically asked by the court and they are satisfied."

He did admit that the allies were not consulted on the Government's views on the issue (that it did not think the status quo would be violated if a 'puja' was permitted on the acquired land), but indicated that he did not think it was necessary to do that.

**'Our programme as scheduled'**

By Anjali Mody

**AYODHYA, MARCH 13.** As security was further tightened here today, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-controlled Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas insisted that the Supreme Court verdict had gone in its favour. Ashok Singhal, working president of the VHP and secretary, RJN, said: "I want to make clear that the Supreme Court's verdict has not gone against us."

Ignoring the developments in New Delhi, he said the verdict only referred to two plots of land (including the site of the demolished Babri Masjid) and not to the remaining 67 or so acres of the acquired land. Speaking to journalists, at the VHP's workshop in Ayodhya, he said there was nothing in the court's verdict to suggest that a "puja" could not be conducted on the remaining land.

Asked why was he talking of a "puja," rather than a "shila daan" (offering of a carved stone) — as he had done on Tuesday — Mr. Singhal said the two were the same. He claimed to have got an assurance, on March 12, from the Faizabad Commissioner, A. K. Gupta, that a three-hour "puja" could be held on the land "500 ft from the disputed site."

However, Mr. Gupta denied having given any assurance on conducting a "puja." There was no change in the instructions he had received as far as the acquired land was concerned.

"No religious act, whether it is a 'puja' or a 'shila daan,' can be performed on any part of the land... it is the Government's job to interpret the court's verdict, we follow instructions. The instructions to date cover the entire acquired land."

Mr. Singhal said if the VHP was not permitted to perform the 'puja' on the acquired land, the meeting of its 'sant mandal,'



The Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas president, Ramchandra Das Paramhans (right), and the international working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Ashok Singhal, at a press conference in Ayodhya on Wednesday. — Reuters

to be held in Ayodhya tomorrow, would decide on the course of action for March 15. The RJN chairman, Ramchandra Paramhans, who also heads the 'mandal,' was characteristically contradicting his own stand.

After hearing the Supreme Court verdict earlier in the day, he said he had "no programme for March 15" besides going on his own "where everyone goes for darshan" to make an offering of a carved stone.

If he was stopped by the administration, he would stop. He had no intention of getting into a tussle with the administration which was not to blame for the situation.

But, later at the press confer-

ence (which followed a private meeting between Mr. Singhal and Paramhans) the 'mahant' was all fire and brimstone asserting that his programme for March 15 of performing a "puja" on the acquired land would go ahead, notwithstanding the consequences.

Security here is tighter than on any previous day. Reinforcements of the CRPF and the Home Guard have been brought in to cover the area around the 'karsevakpura'. Riot police have also been posted outside a mosque near one of the entry points to the disputed site. And entry into the temple town is strictly monitored with Section 144 in place.



The Congress president and Leader of Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, the former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, and actress Shabana Azmi during a march to Parliament for secularism and communal harmony on Wednesday. — PTI (Report on Page 12)

**IT IS PM'S COUP: CONG.**

## Allies upset over Govt. stand in court

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 13.** The Vajpayee Government's discomfiture today was complete. The Opposition spoke in unison, it attacked the Government for behaving like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's "handmaiden" when it pleaded in the Supreme Court for allowing "puja" on the acquired land in Ayodhya, while its allies and supporting parties made it known in no uncertain terms that the Government's stand was "highly objectionable".

However, that does not necessarily spell the end of the road for the Vajpayee Government for, most of the allies are loathe to parting company with the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) not as yet. The plain fact is that while none of the constituents is ready to leave his/her ministerial posts, the Telugu Desam Party's difficulty is that leaving the BJP could mean strengthening the Congress, its main rival in Andhra Pradesh.

But the sharp reaction from the allies led the Government to hurriedly convene a meeting of the NDA leaders where it was "unanimously resolved" that the "NDA upholds the Government decision to implement the order given by the Supreme Court in respect of Ayodhya and maintain status quo in the acquired area. The NDA is confident that the Government will take all necessary steps to implement the court order in letter and in spirit." An appeal was also made asking everyone concerned to abide by the court's orders.

The "unanimity" of the NDA, however, did not hide the sharp differences. It was obvious to all that the Government had no option but to implement the court order. During the meeting, the

allies were reportedly sharp in their attack on the Government. Vaiko (MDMK) is believed to have warned that the Government's stance in the court favouring 'puja' could only embolden the 'kar sevaks.' All allies wanted the Government to deal with the VHP in a "stern and firm manner".

The quarrel was not with what the court said. Its clear interim order that no 'puja' or any other religious activity was to be allowed on the acquired land in Ayodhya of which the Government was statutory receiver was welcomed across the board by the Opposition parties as well as the allies (barring the Shiv Sena and the BJP). The allies were, in fact, relieved that the court had not gone along with the Government's view.

It was the Government's attitude which came under sharp attack. The green signal for an attack seemed to have been given by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu.

The Congress accused the Prime Minister of trying to attempt a "coup against the Constitution," while the CPI(M) said the "Government was colluding with the VHP" on the Ayodhya issue. The Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, charged that the Government's conspiracy to allow 'puja' had been fully exposed.

A statement after a late evening Congress Working Committee charged the Government with "double speak and duplicity" and said it was determined to expose this in Parliament. The CWC doubted the Government's ability to maintain public order and communal harmony and appealed to all people to "exercise the utmost restraint" and maintain peace.

Govt. attitude 'objectionable': Page 11

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## Farooq demands arrest of BJP MP

By Shujaat Bukhari

**JAMMU, MARCH 13.** The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, today demanded the immediate arrest of the BJP MP, Vinay Katiyar, for his alleged remarks about the holy relic of Prophet Mohammad at the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar.

Making a *suo motu* statement in the Assembly, Dr. Abdullah tabled the copy of the report published in a Delhi-based newspaper in which Mr.

Katiyar had staked claim to the holy relic saying it was that of a "Hindu seer". Condemning the statement, the Chief Minister said that "it is a wrong statement by the leader of a party (VHP) which has already put the nation on fire". If they continue with such issues, Muslims will have no faith in India.

I appeal to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister to take a serious note of the matter," he said, adding that "he (Mr. Katiyar) should be immediately arrested and put behind

bars". Strong reactions were reported from the Kashmir Valley over Mr. Katiyar's statement. A bandh was observed in Srinagar and shops and other business establishments were closed. Attendance in Government offices was also affected.

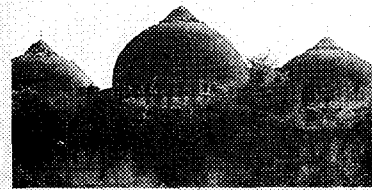
In some areas, people took to the streets and demanded action against the MP. When a procession was taken out in Malsuma, police resorted to lathicharge and later teargas. But as these could not control the situation, they opened fire

in the air. More than a dozen persons were injured in the clashes between the protesters and police. Lawyers in Srinagar also took out a protest march and presented a memorandum to the authorities.

The former chairman of the Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Head Mufti of the State, Bashiruddin, the National Conference provincial president, G.N. Shaheen, the PDP vice-president, Mehbooba Mufti, and others characterised the claim as "rubbish".

## THE AYODHYA ARCHIVE

**1528** Mir Baqi, a noble under Mughal emperor Babar, builds a mosque.



Hindu hardliners claim it was built on an 11th century temple marking Ram's birthplace in Ayodhya

**1853** 75 people killed in Hindu-Muslim clashes in Ayodhya

**1857** A Hindu priest builds an altar on part of the shrine compound

**1859** The British build a wall to separate the places of worship

**1934** Countrywide riots, part of Babri Masjid wall and domes damaged

**1949** Govt proclaims the location as disputed area and locks the shrine after some people break in and instal Ram idols

**1983** Vishwa Hindu Parishad launches campaign to build a temple at the disputed site

**1984** VHP forms a committee to "liberate" the birthplace of Ram and build a temple. BJP leader L.K. Advani takes over leadership of the campaign

*A chronology of events pertaining to the 16th century disputed shrine in Ayodhya*

**1986** Faizabad district judge opens gates of the disputed shrine to Hindus. Babri Masjid Action Committee formed shortly after

**1989** Rajiv Gandhi govt allows *shilanyas* for construction of a temple near the mosque.

Nearly 500 people killed in consequent rioting

Foundation of a temple laid adjacent to the disputed shrine, VHP campaign gains momentum



**1990** BJP president Advani undertakes a rath yatra to win support for temple. Over one lakh *kar sevaks* gather at Ayodhya. Some storm the shrine, 30 people killed in firing

**JULY, 1992** Construction ceremonies begin for the temple, disputed shrine not disturbed

**1994** Supreme Court orders status quo to be maintained on acquired land

**JAN 2002** VHP declares intention to go ahead with temple construction

**FEB 16** Prime Minister Vajpayee says court verdict only way to solve the vexed issue

**MARCH 5** VHP and Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas agree to abide by court order

**MARCH 6** Centre approaches Allahabad High Court to expedite hearing of Ayodhya case

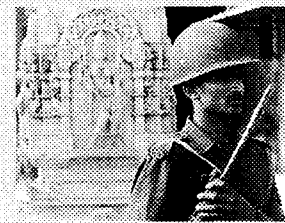
**MARCH 10** Muslim Personal Law Board rejects Kanchi Sankaracharya's formula

**MARCH 11** Vajpayee assures Parliament that govt will abide by Supreme Court verdict on the issue of symbolic puja



**MARCH 12**

Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas says it would "donate" pillars to the Ayodhya land receiver and fails silent on *bhoomi puja*



**DEC 6, 92** Babri Masjid demolished; makeshift temple erected in its place, puja begins. 2,000 people killed in rioting

**1993** Narasimha Rao govt acquires 67 acres around the disputed site and a plan to build a Ram Katha park is mooted

Source: PTI

**MARCH 13**  
We direct that on the 67.703 acres of land located in revenue plot nos. 159 and 160 in village Kot Ramchandra, which is vested in the Central government, no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual including bhoomi puja or shila puja, shall be permitted or allowed to take place.

Furthermore, no part of the aforesaid land shall be handed over by the government to anyone and the same shall be retained by the government till the disposal of this writ petition nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any religious purpose or in connection therewith. This is subject to further orders which may be passed in this case.

The Supreme Court verdict

# Relieved residents spot ray of light

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Ayodhya, March 13: Whatever the VHP says about the Supreme Court verdict — interpreting at will and putting words in the mouth of the judiciary — residents of this temple town are breathing easy. They see a window of hope opening for them.

"Finally, we can now hope that the barricades will be removed and get back the customers who have long deserted us," says Ved Prakash Gupta, who runs a puja *samagri* shop.

Without naming the VHP, he says the "custodians of Hinduism" have crippled Ayodhya and left it to fend for itself. "Things have been going from bad to worse since 1990," Ved

says softly. "But year after year we just live on hope."

Hashim Ansari, too, is happy. The original plaintiff in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case of 1961, Ansari says: "The judiciary has saved India from another division." But more than anything else, the state convener of the Babri Masjid Action Committee feels the verdict has ensured that Muslim pride and dignity have remained unhurt.

"We constantly live in fear as the VHP performs one programme after another, *kar sevaks* converge here periodically. But we never lost faith in the (Supreme) Court," Ansari's cousin Aftab says.

Sad tales abound in Ayodhya. Some have lost their houses,

some have lost their sons, yet others have been struggling since the last decade to make ends meet. Business has slumped and most temples now wear a forlorn look, shorn of *pujaris* and pilgrims.

The *pandas* have, perhaps, been hit the hardest by those promising to build a temple they do not really need.

"It is funny that the district magistrate and even the Governor have directed their men to feed monkeys who are hungry," Pandit Narayan Shastri says. "They read about these monkeys in newspapers. But people, too, are going hungry. Perhaps, they missed that."

After hearing of the court verdict, K.L. Maurya hurriedly

posted himself outside the first barricade leading to Ayodhya. Stopping every journalist coming out of VHP working president Ashok Singhal's news conference, Maurya hands them a cyclostyled piece of paper. "My land was taken over by the government in 1989 to build the Ram Katha Park," Maurya says. "Till today, we haven't received the compensation we were promised. My father died fighting this case. I hope everything will now be sorted out."

There is hope everywhere — hope that triumphs over fear of communal violence, hope that wants to forget hunger and poverty.

"All this thing is not good for us. It has not been good for any-

body," Kirpal Singh, a fruit vendor, says. Kirpal fills barely a half of his basket these days. "*Kya karen, dharam ki rajniti me na to raj bhala hain, na to niti,*" he says, showing the heap of unsold oranges, some of which show signs of rotting.

Kirpal does not know about the court order, but someone has told him his business will pick up soon. He does not know whom to thank.

Ayodhya was virtually deserted after the court ruling with only a handful of people on the main street. About 6,000 police and paramilitary personnel have sealed the city off, ringing with roadblocks to bar anyone but residents or people with special permission.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 MAR 2002



# I did not air anyone's views: Sorabjee

By J. Venkatesan

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NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. The Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, today clarified that the Centre had not asked him to seek permission from the Supreme Court for allowing a 'symbolic puja' at the 'undisputed site' in Ayodhya.

Addressing press conference, Mr. Sorabjee maintained that "I was only giving my own interpretation of the 1994 judgment regarding *status quo* to the court on a specific query from the Bench".

He made it clear that he was not "airing anyone's views" — neither of the Government nor that of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He said the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, had only told him that he should argue the matter as per the law and leave it to the court.

Asked whether he was conveying that he had not at all discussed the issue with the Government, Mr. Sorabjee said that "naturally as Attorney-General, the Government cannot disown the views I gave before the Supreme Court".

But, he made it clear that "he was neither briefed nor told to make the submission regarding the restrictions to be imposed if at all the court were to permit the symbolic puja".

He said that even if the 'puja' was not prohibited by virtue of any previous judgment or order of the Supreme Court, the same could be permitted only under well-defined conditions and restrictions such as location of 'puja', its duration, the number of persons who would perform the 'puja' and restrictions on ingress and egress of 'kar sevaks'.

The AG also stressed that 'kar sevaks' would be merely witnessing the 'puja' from a reasonable distance from the site of puja and not participate in it. He said he had also made it clear to the court that under the guise of performing 'puja' no construction activity of any kind would be permitted nor would the placing of carved stones on the 'puja' site be allowed.

Asked how he could enumerate the number of 'sants' to be allowed to perform the puja as well as the number of 'kar sevaks' to be allowed to witness it, he said "the VHP counsel, Rama Jois, was sitting next to me and I had enquired from him as to how many people would be involved in this".

"However, I had categorically made it clear to him (Mr. Jois) that whether the VHP liked it or not I am going to suggest imposition of stringent conditions and restrictions on holding of such 'puja'," the AG said.

14/3

MAR 2002

# Opp demands statement from PM, stalls House

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 13. — It was the matter of a statement that rocked the Lok Sabha today and led to its adjournment — the statement demanded by the Opposition from the Prime Minister on Ayodhya.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee did come out with a statement, but outside the Lok Sabha — which made all the difference.

He told reporters that the government was committed to the nation and would abide by the Supreme Court order on Ayodhya. "There is no question of being happy or unhappy about it, we will go by the court verdict given today," he said.

Opposition members raised slogans and rushed to the Well of the House when Mr Vajpayee refused to respond and instead asked the law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, to make a statement on behalf of the government over the ruling.

The Opposition rejected the proposal unanimously.

Mr Vajpayee was present in the House when it met after lunch, but he did not oblige the Opposition members, who argued that it was he who had told the Lok Sabha on 8 March that the government had not granted any permission for *bhoomi puja* in Ayodhya on 15 March. He had also told the House that the government was committed to maintain the status quo in the temple town.

The Opposition wanted to know from the Prime Minister that how could the government then give a submission in the Supreme Court today that it wouldn't have any objection if religious leaders performed puja in some form or the other on the undisputed but acquired land in Ayodhya.

The Congress spokesperson, Mr S Jaipal Reddy, wanted to make submissions before the Prime Minister could make a statement. Mr Shivraj Patil suggested that either the Prime Minister could make a statement

first and the Opposition then be allowed to put questions or vice versa.

As the Prime Minister refused to oblige, the members entered the Well, forcing an adjournment for two hours.

When the House reassembled, Mr Vajpayee was not present, though the home minister, Mr LK Advani, was there. The Opposition raised a furore leading to the adjournment of the Lok Sabha for the day.

In the Rajya Sabha, Mr Arun Jaitley defended the government and justified the oral submission made by the Attorney-General, Mr Soli Sorabjee, in response to a query from the Supreme Court Bench. There was no ambiguity in the government's stand which has been saying that it would abide by the court order on puja, external affairs minister Mr Jaswant Singh said in the House.

Outside Parliament, the Opposition hailed the verdict but came down heavily on the government.

## Muslim board, RSS open to talks

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/BANGALORE, March 13. — The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today welcomed the Supreme Court order on Ayodhya, while the RSS termed it "unfortunate". Both the organisations, however, said they were still open to a negotiated settlement of the issue.

The AIMPLB convener, Mr SQR Ilyas, said a conducive atmosphere was needed for talks with the government and the proposals should contain room for the minorities.

The RSS spokesman, Mr MG Vaidya, said in Bangalore that his organisation was open to talks and not averse to the idea of "Muslims building a mosque outside the Hindus' holy place in Ayodhya."

The AIMPLB said the ruling was neither a cause for jubilation nor a provocation for tension.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2002

## MR. MODI MUST GO

9 minutes  
10-10

THE UNION HOME Minister, L. K. Advani, has sought to defend the patently indefensible when he fended off all criticism, in Parliament, of the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat for the way it handled the communal riots that rocked the State recently. If the arguments Mr. Advani has advanced in support of the State Government failed to carry conviction, flying as they did in the face of independently-sourced hard facts, his giving a clean chit to Mr. Modi has clearly added insult to injury. In doing so, Mr. Advani has condoned the rank ineptitude and appalling insensitivity that stood out in the administration's response to the orgy of retaliatory communal violence. Worse still, the Home Minister has, by backing him to the hilt, virtually given credence to the outrageously pernicious theories Mr. Modi had advanced to explain away, if not justify, what by any reckoning was one of the worst communal massacres the country has witnessed since Partition.

The Narendra Modi Government stands condemned on several counts. First, it miserably failed to anticipate the severity of the backlash the horrendous Godhra carnage would trigger, given its sensitive communal dimension. As for the Godhra episode itself, the fact that it was a planned and deliberate attack targeting the VHP activists (returning from Ayodhya) points to a clear failure on the part of intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Second, the administration allowed the rampaging mobs a free run for a full day and more, under cover of a protest bandh called by the VHP, with the police turning the other way as the frenzied mobs raided residential colonies and burnt whole families belonging to the minority community. If the law enforcing machinery in Gujarat has been notoriously politicised and communalised, the corrosive phenomenon showed up in all its alarming dimensions post-Godhra, what with the uniformed men in a plethora of cases — according to credible media reports — unabashedly con-

niving with the saffron brigades as they went about their vicious attacks on the Muslim community. The delayed induction of the Army, which is yet to be explained convincingly, suggests a sinister calculation. Only after the entry of the Union Defence Minister, George Fernandes, into the picture did the law and order situation start showing signs of improvement and this in itself is a 'testimony' to the State administration's level of performance.

13/3 ✓  
The Modi regime's blatantly partisan approach to critical issues of governance such as maintaining public peace and ensuring the safety of the citizenry found its vilest expressions on two occasions. First, when the Chief Minister explained the pogrom in terms of the 'every-action-has-a-reaction' theory, the cynical suggestion being that the Muslim community must pay for the killing of the Hindus in the Godhra incident. In the same vein was the police chief's profound observation, at the height of the revenge killings, that the uniformed personnel cannot remain unaffected by 'sentiments' (read, revenge). Second, when Mr. Modi assigned different monetary values to human lives lost in the Godhra massacre and those lost in the subsequent communal riots, this amounted to crass discrimination betraying his majoritarian mindset. Thus, it is not merely that the governmental authority has miserably failed but that the administration as also the political establishment in office have turned into instruments of terror and persecution, so to say, vis-a-vis the minority community. It is, therefore, not without reason that Mr. Modi is blamed for grave dereliction of Constitutional duties and he deserves to go; after all, there are cases of Governments having to quit for less serious lapses. As long as Mr. Modi is allowed to stay on, Mr. Advani's — and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's — description of the Gujarat riots as a "black mark" on the nation's face will ring hollow.

OFFICE

THE HINDU

MAR 20 2002

# Godhra carnage mastermind arrested

18/3 9-minutes

SFI

## Agencies

AHMEDABAD, March 17. — The alleged mastermind behind the Godhra carnage, Haji Bilal Ismail Sujela, Nagarpalika member, was arrested today. He is also accused of having links with Pakistan-based underworld.

Bilal was arrested by the anti-terrorist squad and the Government Railway Police around 1 a. m. in Godhra, the Panchmahal collector, Ms Jayanti S Ravi, said. "We picked him up when he was moving around in the Vohravad area of the town," police said.

"Bilal is named in the FIR as one of the prime accused along with eight others," said SP Mr Raju Bhargav. The main charge against Bilal is that he prevented fire fighters from coming to the rescue when the compartment of Sabarmati was burning, he said.

"Bilal had been to Pakistan both before and after the Babari Masjid demolition in 1992," the SP said. However, the passport recovered from him does not mention any visit to Pakistan since then. "Preliminary investigations reveal that Bilal had been to Karachi in 1992 once. He was

escorting underworld don Latif's wife," Mr Bhargav said. "So far we have no details about any other false passports he used." Bilal was absconding since 27 February. Mr Bhargav said: "It's too early to establish any Bilal-Dawood connections though the corporator had some Karachi-based links."

The Gujarat urban development minister, Mr IK Jadeja, alleged that Bilal was a "staunch

## Shrines torched

BHIWANI, March 17. — Two shrines and adjoining shops and houses were today set on fire by a group of youths of a particular community in Loharu town of Haryana's Bhiwani district. The youths were agitated over rumours that a cow was amputated in one of the places of worship. Police had to fire in the air to disperse the mob. Officials said the youths prevented fire tenders from Bhiwani and nearby places from reaching the scene. Two persons, injured in stone pelting by the youths, have been hospitalised. — PTI

Congressman" and played a key role in toppling BJP's Mr Rajubhai Darje from presidency of Godhra municipality. Bilal was produced in railway magistrate Mr PC Joshi's court who remanded him in police custody till 1 April.

Meanwhile, in a fresh outbreak of communal violence, three persons were killed in two separate incidents in Baroda district, officials said. Two persons were stabbed to death in Makarpura police station area taking the death toll in violence in the city in the past two days to three. A person was killed and another injured when police fired to disperse a mob as they tried to enter Bodeli town, a taluka headquarters in Baroda district.

Singhal on page

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2002

WE WILL NOT ADD TO PM'S PROBLEMS: SINGHAL

# Govt. keeps its fingers crossed as VHP plans 'shila daan'

By Anjali Mody

18/3  
9 minutes

**AYODHYA, MARCH 12.** In what is being seen as an unprecedented climbdown, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today effectively set aside its much-hyped plans to conduct a "symbolic shila puja" at the disputed site in Ayodhya on March 15. The VHP working president, Ashok Singhal, said here today that in keeping with the announcement made by Ramchandra Das Paramhans, chairman of the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas (RJNI) on Monday, there would be no "shila puja. Instead, there would be a "shila daan" (offering of stone). He insisted that there was "no difference between a 'shila puja' and 'shila daan' because a lot of things were offered to Lord Ram".

Mr. Singhal said "we will take a stone and hand it over to the receiver. The Commissioner of Faizabad Division, A.K. Gupta, is the legal receiver of the acquired land. Mr. Singhal stressed that Paramhans would lead around 2,000 people to the undisputed site on March 15 to offer a shila to the receiver (the Government) against a proper receipt and hold a prayer there... we will not touch the disputed land... it will be peaceful... in fact, we are even cooperating with the Government on this...

He said that if they were stopped from reaching the acquired land, they would court arrest.

The VHP did not want to add to the Prime Minister's troubles, he added. Mr. Vajpayee was already under a lot of pressure from the Opposition, allies in the Government and the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and the bureaucracy.

Mr. Singhal reserved his ire for the bureaucracy saying it



The Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader, Ashok Singhal, addressing presspersons in Ayodhya on Tuesday. The Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas president, Ramchandra Das Paramhans, looks on.—  
AFP

was responsible for the tension in the town and was politically motivated. "This entire atmosphere is an unwarranted act of the bureaucracy... I don't know what their fears and anxieties are... but it seems the bureaucracy is functioning like the political agents of some parties," he said. Although the Union Minister of State for Home, I.D. Swami, had said that the restric-

tions on travel in and out of Ayodhya and the diversion of trains were to be reversed, "officials paid no attention to this".

The Additional Director-General of Police (Law and Order), A.K. Mitra, said that he was not surprised at Mr. Singhal's attack. He said "we are the whipping boys... everyone blames us... but I would have been sorry if he had not blamed us. The

**'Govt. will not allow movement of shilas'**

By J. P. Shukla

**LUCKNOW, MARCH 12.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's proposal to take out the carved stones from their work shop at Ayodhya for donation to the receiver of the acquired land is not feasible as things stand today. The Principal Secretary Home, Naresh Dayal, reacting to the VHP plans said that as orders under Section 144 Cr.P.C. were in force in the temple town no one could be allowed to move with the stones to the disputed site. However, it could be a different matter if the stones were received by the receiver as and where these are and stored according to his convenience, he added.

fact is they want to do a puja, and we have to deny them access."

Mr. Mitra said there was no question of relaxing the security arrangements that have turned Ayodhya into a kar sevak-free zone. There are, according to CRPF jawans on duty at the Ram Sevakupuram encampment, no more than "between 100 and 150 people mostly organisers present at the site." Whatever be the court's verdict tomorrow, police were prepared. "We prepare for the worst and hope that it will not come to that. There are currently 8,500 security personal in Ayodhya.

Mr. Singhal said the VHP was hopeful of a verdict in its favour. Their lawyers had told them that the petitions challenging their claim to the land had "little substance... so we are hopeful of the court's approval". He said that whatever the court's verdict, a meeting of the VHP Sant Mandal, to be held before March 15, would decide the minutiae of the "shila daan".

Mr. Singhal also said that the VHP hoped that the Government, following the court verdict, would hand over what it calls the "undisputed land" to the RJNI by June 2. He insisted that the VHP was of the view that the entire problem in Ayodhya was due to "vote bank politics. He said, "we and Muslims can live together but these politicians do not want this."

In Ayodhya, dissenting voices that have been silent for long have once again begun to be heard. At two separate press conferences today Mahants, Gyan Das (Nirvani Akhara) and Jaganath Das (Nirmohi Akhara), said the VHP was not a party to the dispute but was "running a business in the garb of fighting for the temple. They mocked the decision to have a "shila daan" saying that this was meaningless when the real issue was that of ownership.

THE HINDU

# Puri seer offers alternative



Catch 'em old: Police frisk sadhus in Ayodhya on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 12. — The Shankaracharya of Puri today came up with a counter-proposal to break the Ayodhya impasse. This included adherence to the court order on the dispute and the construction of a Ram temple and a masjid at Ayodhya.

The Shankaracharya, who had almost rebutted the suggestions of his Kanchi counterpart over the issue, announced that a new *nyas* would also be set up, which will "have no place for those who play politics in the name of religion".

The move of the Shankaracharya, Adhokshajananda, comes on the eve of the Supreme Court hearing on the planned symbolic puja at Ayodhya.

Adhokshajananda said that leaders from around 50 religious organizations, including many sadhus and ulemas, had met at the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya on Saturday

and agreed to the proposal on a lasting solution.

He said the leaders had decided to seek expeditious court hearings on the issue.

They also agreed to the formation of a new trust. Its name and office-bearers will be notified soon.

"If the court gives a verdict in favour of (building) a temple, Hindus and Muslims will jointly construct a Ram *mandir* at the disputed site and will also build a masjid on the adjacent undisputed (read acquired) land. Similarly, if the court orders in favour of a masjid, we would jointly build one at the disputed site and will also construct a Ram mandir on the adjacent land. This will help both the communities to live in harmony," he said.

Among the Muslim leaders who attended the meeting were Ulema Kritiya of Ajmer Dargah, Jamait-i-Ulema's Maulana Nameez and the All-India Jamait Islami's

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

MAR 20 2002

SINGHAL SEETHES AT VAJPAYEE'S 'BETRAYAL'

# Sant shifts stand in Ram's name

Statesman News Service

AYODHYA/NEW DELHI, March 11. — The president of the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas, Mahant Ramchander Das Parahans, today made a strategic move which the district administration might find difficult to fend off. He said there would be no *bhoomi puja* as such near the disputed site. Lord Ram came to him in a dream and asked him to start a *havan* and offer a pillar instead of sweets and fruits at the makeshift temple, he claimed.

Meanwhile, the VHP working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, landed in Ayodhya today and accused the Prime Minister of betrayal. He said Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee had not kept promises he made to the Kanchi Shankaracharya to resolve the Ayodhya dispute. At Lucknow airport, he declared that the VHP would go ahead with its scheduled programme on 15 March.

Parahans came out of his Digambar Akhara abode around 9.30 a.m. and went to the VHP workshop where pillars were being carved.

ST-1 12/3 9-minuties  
A congregation of sadhus and their followers held a *Rudrabhish-ck* and started a *havan* which would continue till 15 March.

The mahant didn't reveal when he would actually offer the pillar. But if the Supreme Court

## Muslim board

NEW DELHI, March 11. — The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today discussed whether it should become a party to the PIL coming up for hearing in the Supreme Court on Wednesday. — SNS

Details on page 6

disallows a puja on 15 March, activists might use this method as a kind of "satyagraha".

The Nyas wants the receiver of Ram Janambhoomi and acquired property, the divisional commissioner of Faizabad, to receive a pillar offered by Parahans and give him a proper receipt as is given for cash and other such donations made by devotees and keep it at a safe site in that area.

The Nyas is not breaching the law, but the administration is

caught in a bind. The moment a pillar is received, hundreds of followers might appear in a queue with similar requests.

The VHP had decided to ask Ram sevaks to organise processions chanting Ramkirtans. Now the plan is to ask them to chant the same at one place and not to offer resistance or court arrest.

In Delhi, the BJP MP from Faizabad, Mr Vinay Katiyar, associated with the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, also hinted at a climbdown regarding the *puja*. He said *puja* of the *shilas* (pillars) had been completed at the Ayodhya workshop. What remained to be done was to transport a pillar to the makeshift temple as offering and take a receipt.

"As we offer cows, land and other valuables to the temple and take receipts, the Nyas would do the same with a shila. None can be prevented from offering it as puja at the makeshift temple is being performed as per court orders," he said. The 100-day puja would be carried out in Karsevakpuram instead of the undisputed site.

Govt to go by SC ruling on puja, page 6

THE STATESMAN

# Modi need not quit: Advani

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, today strongly defended the action taken by the Gujarat Government in controlling the communal riots while rejecting the Opposition's demand for the resignation of the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge.

In his reply to a short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the Gujarat situation, Mr. Advani refuted the Opposition's charge of police inaction and cited instances where the police moved in to save many lives.

However, he invited sharp protest from the Opposition which staged a walkout charging Mr. Advani with having made an "irresponsible" statement on the situation.

The debate, spread over two days, ended on an acrimonious note with members of the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the CPI(M), the SP, the RJD and Shabana Azmi (nominated) disputing Mr. Advani's clarification.

The Home Minister said the State Government had already instituted a probe and the Centre normally did not order a parallel inquiry.

Action would be taken against all those found guilty of dereliction of duty.

He said the Opposition had the habit of seeking the Chief Minister's resignation as often as it could and cited a similar demand after the Gujarat earthquake.

Mr. Advani said the thought of his resignation had crossed his mind in the past — after the Amarnath killings, when even some Opposition MPs dissuaded him from stepping down.

He conceded that the Gujarat violence was a 'black

mark' and that it diluted the BJP-led Government's claim that the number of such clashes had come down while the party was in power.

It also cast a shadow on the Government's effort to fight international terrorism which was backed by religious fundamentalism.

Mr. Advani said the reaction to the Godhara incident or the aftermath was "selective".

All incidents were 'shameful' and there was no rationale in killing innocent people on the basis of religion.

"The situation does not permit anyone to indulge in communal violence, it is wrong."

However, it was his defence of the police that led to sharp reaction from the Opposition which charged Mr. Advani with 'misleading' the House.

Reeling off statistics, Mr. Advani said that never before in Gujarat, which had a history of disturbances, had such communal violence been controlled within 72 hours.

To persistent queries, he said a large number of those killed belonged to the majority community.

Even in the housing society, where a former MP was burnt alive, 180 people were rescued by police and in Bhavnagar, some 400 children were shifted to safety from a madarasa after mobs moved towards it.

Earlier, Mirza Abdul Rashid (National Conference), said communal disturbances were creating problems in Jammu and Kashmir also where people were now questioning whether Sheikh Abdullah's rejection of Jinnah's two-nation theory was correct.



TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2002

*P. Minerva*  
**RULE OF LAW MUST PREVAIL** *HD-10 12/3*

THREE DAYS AHEAD of March 15, with the dubious 'peace initiative' of the Kanchi Sankaracharya having run aground and the Vajpayee Government looking up to the Judiciary for a direction, the fate of the 'bhoomi puja', which the Ramjanabhoomi Nyas (RJN) and the VHP are determined to hold on the Government-acquired land in Ayodhya, hinges on what the Supreme Court will have to say on Wednesday (March 13) when the two related petitions that are now before it are to be heard. Coming as it did after a series of official moves that clearly pointed to an unseemly hurry on the part of the Government to act upon the Kanchi seer's formula, the Centre's politically correct decision to go by the apex court's directive marked a significant strategic shift. Given its obvious merit of sounding eminently fair and just, there can be no better way for the BJP leadership to fend off criticism by the Opposition as also by those NDA constituents and friends (such as the TDP, the Trinamool Congress and the Biju Janata Dal) who are totally against the 'bhoomi puja' — even 'symbolic' — or any other activity on the acquired land, pending the court verdict in the title suits related to the disputed site.

At the end of the day, the commitment which the temple protagonists are supposed to have given in writing to the Kanchi Sankaracharya — that they would 'abide' by the court verdict on the disputed site — stands rubbished, with the VHP and the RJN, after some flipflops and prevarication last week, harking back to their well-known stand that the Judiciary has no place in matters of faith. Indeed, the fact that the VHP had 'agreed' to be bound by judicial opinion was touted as a remarkable 'achievement' of the Kanchi seer's mission, the unstated suggestion being that its 'magnanimous gesture' needs to be 'reciprocated' by allowing the 'bhoomi puja' on March 15 as planned and by making available the 'undisputed' part of the acquired land for temple construction. Nothing could be more preposterous than the argument that one has to be reward-

ed for 'consenting' to honour the verdict of a court of law. At the moment, the point at issue has little to do with the substantive temple-versus-mosque question. It is limited strictly to the upholding of the rule of law in the face of the VHP's brazenly defiant approach to commencing temple construction on the acquired land around the disputed site. As such, all the effort ought to have been directed towards stopping these intransigent elements in their tracks. Instead, the Government, in the name of defusing 'tension', went along with their designs, and this it did by inappropriately getting a spiritual leader like the Kanchi Sankaracharya involved in an issue which essentially falls in the temporal domain.

On top of it all is the apparent lack of credibility in the whole exercise, what with the All India Muslim Personal Law Board's serious complaints about the absence of a written assurance that the temple plan would be altered to exclude the 'disputed site' (or of a blueprint thereof) in the event of the verdict going against the temple protagonists. In retrospect, it would seem that the AIMPLB has been led up the garden path by getting it involved in a 'negotiation' that seemed primarily aimed at facilitating and legitimising the obdurate VHP's law-defying plan to go ahead with the temple construction, come what may. Small wonder then that the AIMPLB has rejected the Kanchi seer's formula, even while refraining from shutting the doors on further parleys for ever. For now, however, the entire focus will be on the judicial determination of the constitutionality of VHP's and the RJN's planned 'bhoomi puja' on the acquired land and the related issue of their claim to possession of the so called 'undisputed' land even before the pending suits in the Allahabad High Court are decided. Surely, in making the determination, the larger national purpose of upholding India's secular moorings and acknowledging the hideous wrong committed on December 6, 1992 — objectives sought to be served by the 1993 Act — must not be given short shrift.

'PUJA' WILL BE HELD AS SCHEDULED: TOGADIA

# Muslim board rejects Ayodhya formula, VHP defiant

By Javed M. Ansari and Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 10. The Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati's "formula" for resolving the Ayodhya tangle appeared to be in tatters today with the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board expressing its "inability to accept" it on the ground that it was "incomplete and inchoate" and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad giving notice to the Government and the Supreme Court that there would be trouble if any attempt was made to prevent 'bhoomi/ shila puja' on the acquired land in Ayodhya on March 15.

After a day-long meeting, the Board gave its decision. It objected to the proposed 'bhoomi puja' at Ayodhya, called on the Government to enforce the judgment of the Supreme Court and take "adequate steps to prohibit any symbolic kar seva or puja on the acquired land."

But the AIMPLB said though it could not accept the present formula of the Sankaracharya, it was open to "fresh proposals." The archarya's proposals were at best a "workable agreement but did not offer a solution to the problem in its entirety." In short, the proposals had said nothing about rebuilding a mosque although they offered 42 acres of acquired land to the Ram Jan-



Members of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board during a meeting on the Ayodhya issue in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

mabhoomi Nyas for starting construction of a Ram temple.

The VHP general secretary, Praveen Togadia, went on the offensive soon after the Board's decision became known. There was also a veiled warning of a backlash. At a press conference, he warned of a countrywide agitation, of turning every Indian village, district and town into an Ayodhya. The 'shila puja' would be held on the pre-determined place at exactly 2.15 p.m. on March 15, he said. He also threatened to launch a "Hindu movement" in which "crores of people will participate."

The Muslim Personal Law Board listed the grounds on which it was unable to accept the Sankaracharya formula. Its

statement said that it could not accept the proposal in the absence of altered temple construction plans (to exclude the sanctum sanctorum on the disputed site of the demolished Babri Masjid), and a written commitment from the VHP, the RSS and other affiliate organisations of the Sangh Parivar such as the Bajrang Dal. It also cited the absence of an assurance that in the event of the Muslims winning the title suit, the temple construction plan would be amended to shift the sanctum sanctorum and that they would be allowed to build the mosque on the site without any obstruction.

The Board also did not seem to place too much faith in the

VHP's reported assurance of building a wall around the disputed site in view of its plans to go ahead with its mobilisation and agitational programme. The Board felt that the Sankaracharya's proposal offered little to the Muslims. While the proposal ensured the commencement of temple construction with "immediate effect," the Muslims were being asked to wait for the final judicial verdict. "A solution to the dispute is not possible in a piecemeal manner, it must be resolved in a holistic manner so that a construction of the mosque is also not delayed," the statement said.

Today's meeting of the executive committee of the AIMPLB was held at the Jamia Hamdard Convention Hall, and attended by nearly 70 members. It was not entirely a smooth affair. In its bid to rope in different shades of Muslim opinion, the Board had also extended invitations to the Imams of Jama Masjid and the Fatehpuri mosque, as well as the former MP, Meem Afzal. Significantly, all three stayed away from the meeting.

The discussion focussed on the issue of the Babri Masjid with most members making it clear that there was no question of relenting on the basic demand of building the mosque at the site from where it was demolished provided the courts ruled in their favour. Also, they were opposed to any move to conduct a "symbolic puja" on the Government-controlled, acquired land in Ayodhya. The former MP, Syed Shahbuddin, G.M. Banatwala and Zafaryab Jilani were of the view that as far as the court was concerned, there was no distinction between disputed and undisputed area. "Not a brick can be moved without the permission of the courts" said Mr. Shahbuddin.

## 'I did my best'

KANCHEEPURAM, MARCH 10. The Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati, today remained silent when asked to react to the rejection of his formula by the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board. He told reporters that he had "done his best."

It was now up to those at the negotiating table to sort out the issue. Asked about the contents of the letter in which he had put forward the proposal to the Board, the acharya said the issue involved many legal aspects. He had instructed others not to speak about it and it would not be fair for him to comment on it.

## Govt. still hopeful of solution

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 10. The Prime Minister convened a top level informal meeting here this evening to review the tense situation developing in relation to Ayodhya after the All India Muslim Personal Law Board politely but firmly said "no" to the Ayodhya-related proposals of the Kanchi Shankaracharya and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad made it known that it would launch a countrywide "Hindu movement" if it was prevented from performing 'shila poojan' on March 15 and constructing a temple on 42 acres of Government-acquired land in Ayodhya.

The immediate focus of the meeting was the coming hearing of a petition in the Supreme Court related to the VHP's March 15 programme. The petitioner, Aslam Bhure, has sought directions from the Court to the Government on the deployment of the Army in Ayodhya and the seizure of carved stones which the VHP is proposing to move to the acquired land on March 15. The Court has set March 13 for a hearing.

The Union Home Minister, L.K.Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, the Human Resource development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitely, the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, and the Attorney-General, Soli Sorabjee, attended the meeting.

Later, Mr. Sorabjee indicated that a decision was made on the stand the Government would take before the Court. But he did not divulge what it would be.

Although precisely what was discussed at the meeting was not known, the Government is still hopeful that the effort towards resolving the Ayodhya dispute is not quite over. Sources pointed out that the Muslim Board had not rejected outright the proposals of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswati, but had sought some more assurances and clarifications. Perhaps the Shankaracharya would take the negotiations forward, an official said. He indicated that was the thinking in the Prime Minister's Office.

Reports coming in from Ayodhya suggest that although there is no formal ban on the movement of VHP and other Sangh Parivar volunteers into the city, the police are in fact allowing many 'Ram sevaks' in, especially those coming on foot. The VHP itself has claimed that nearly 20,000 of these volunteers can be expected to be in Ayodhya by March 15.

Meanwhile, the BJP spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, tonight said the Muslim Board had rejected the proposals "under pressure" from the Opposition parties "who do not want communal harmony in the country."



Residents walk with hands raised under the watchful eyes of securitymen. Near Taldi station on Sunday. — The Statesman

# Firing kills one at Canning *yajna* site

Statesman News Service

TALDI (South 24-Parganas), March 10. — A participant at a proposed Shri Ram *yajna*, planned by the Viswa Hindu Parishad, was killed and six injured when police fired at them at Taldi, in the Canning area of South 24-Parganas, this morning.

While one Tapash died on the spot, four of the injured were admitted to MR Bangur Hospital. One of them with critical injuries was later admitted to Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital.

The district unit of the BJP has called a 24-hour bandh in Canning tomorrow.

The incident occurred when police prevented the VHP from going ahead with the *yajna* at the local Harisabha temple.

But the VHP supporters were adamant about holding the *yajna* in spite of prohibitory orders being clamped in the area for the past two days.

Eyewitnesses and police said about 2,000 VHP men and women gathered around the temple at 9 a.m. and insisted they be allowed to enter and conduct the *yajna*. But the police refused.

After talks between local VHP leaders and senior police officers, only women worshippers were permitted in. This did not go down well with the VHP men. As some women entered the temple, bricks and stones were thrown at the police.

The police force, already deployed there in apprehension of trouble, retaliated with a lathi-charge and fired seven rounds of tear-gas shells to disperse the crowd.

At this stage, a train arrived at Taldi station, adjoining the temple. The VHP men squatted on the tracks and prevented it from leaving the station. In the melee, frantic passengers got down from the train and ran for cover. Some in the crowd of VHP supporters, fleeing from teargassing and lathicharge, took shelter in the train.

The VHP people threw bricks at the police from the train, while some of them climbed the overbridge. GRP personnel, posted on the overbridge, found themselves outnumbered and ran down. The VHP men now had a free run and began throwing bricks at the police.

Police fired in the air and then at the crowd. Senior police officers claimed that bullets were fired at people's legs. But

VHP leaders and relatives of the injured said bullets hit people on the chest, stomach and waist. Tapash was hit on the chest and his body was found along the tracks.

Six were injured in the firing while 25 policemen were hurt in the brickbattering. Two police jeeps were damaged.

Parents of Dilip Biswas (21), seriously injured in police firing, said their son owned a *paan* shop on the station platform and ran for cover when trouble broke out only to be hit by a police bullet. Police officers said they had not targeted anyone in particular but did not rule out such an eventuality in the confusion.

Fifteen rounds were fired, senior police officers said. But they refused to state

Turn to page 6

# Ram sevaks keep plan under wraps

Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya

March 10. — The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board's rejection of the Kanchi Shankaracharya's peace formula has galvanised VHP activists, who had been maintaining a low profile for the past few days.

However, they have not yet revealed how Ram sevaks would be able to defy the security checks on their way to the temple town. They have also not disclosed the number of people to be engaged in shifting pillars and the *puja*.

Sources said the VHP's silence over this period had been tactical. They didn't want to embarrass the religious head by saying anything contradictory. The board's response has given them the opportunity to reiterate their stand.

"It's an insult to Hindus. We had authorised Jagadguru who is our Dharamacharya to take all decisions on our behalf in an effort to resolve the issue. He had even gone knocking at their door, but unfortunately the Muslim outfit stuck to its adamant stance, thereby communalising the issue, by saying a befitting response would be given if Hindus went ahead with their announced programme," said the VHP joint secretary, Mr Rajendra Singh Pankaj.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement yesterday that the Supreme Court would give its



A CRPF flag march in Ayodhya on Sunday. — PTI

ruling on symbolic *puja* had given a new twist to the whole situation.

Reacting to this, Mr Pankaj said: "The *puja* was not being done in the disputed area where the court could have a ruling to make. It is scheduled to be done in the undisputed area, adjacent to the Ram Janambhoomi

site, in which only the government and the religious body are parties, and is beyond the court's purview. We've also given in writing that we would maintain a status quo on the disputed land till court gives a verdict. The *puja* would start at the scheduled time, 2.15 p.m. on 15 March."

# Ansari in police custody till 22 March

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 10. — Aftab Ansari, the mastermind of the American Center attack, was today remanded in police custody till 22 March after being produced at the Alipore court within hours of being flown in here from Mumbai.

CID sleuths will take Ansari to the hideouts of his associates in the city and Howrah to help them investigate the American Center attack and the Partha Roy Burman abduction cases.

A CID official said Ansari maintained close contacts with his associates, who had hideouts at Park Circus, Dum Dum, Tiljala and Ballygunge. Officials are also exploring whether Ansari maintains contact with his relatives in Howrah.

(Continued from page 1)

at the site. Speaking about the loopholes in the proposal, they have pointed a finger at the link between the Nyas on the one hand and the VHP and other organisations of the Sangh Parivar on the other.

Even though Mr Ashok Singhal, VHP working president and trustee of the Nyas, had said on Thursday that the court verdict would be abided by, the AIMPLB said they had not yet received any copy in this regard. The Board said by "omitting such commitments", organisations like the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the RSS could go scot free from the "legal dragnet".

"Several organisations compendiously known as the 'Sangh Parivar' are known to act in concert and collusion with each other but they have cleverly

## 11/3 Muslim board: 5/6

disguised their interconnections to escape the dragnet of law. The proposals do not provide any scheme to rope in all the organisations of Sangh Parivar and even if the organisations give the undertakings now, the Board in all likelihood wouldn't entertain those as it has decided to move the Supreme Court on Tuesday," said a senior Board member.

Since the dispute could not be settled in a "piecemeal manner", the AIMPLB has requested for a holistic approach so that the construction of the mosque is also not delayed. They had proposed to Shankaracharya to hand over the disputed site, the adjacent graveyard site and the shilanyas site to Muslims in lieu

of the undisputed site for the temple construction. But it was rejected on the ground that the VHP is a party to the disputed site. Hence, such an out-of-court settlement was impossible.

Sources said the Board was constantly in touch with its people in Faizabad and as soon as they get a signal, they would prepare for a "befitting reply" to kar sevaks' *Bhoomi Pujan*.

However, the Board has not closed its doors for negotiations. It has appealed to the government to maintain status quo.

The Board also demanded dismissal of the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat, accusing it of being part of the carnage carried out there by "fascist forces, including the VHP, the

Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena." The last three organisations should be banned, it said. "The massacre in Gujarat carried out by fascist and communal forces in connivance with the government have wrenched the heart of every citizen of the country," the Board said.

The BJP said the Board rejected Shankaracharya's formula "under pressure" from the Congress, Left parties and the Samajwadi Party. "The rejection of the formula by the Board has been done under pressure of Congress, Left parties and Samajwadi Party," BJP spokesman Mr VK Malhotra said.

Meanwhile, police foiled the All India Babari Masjid Rebuilding Committee's programme to organise a "Save Constitution Rath Yatra" from Delhi to Ayodhya, detaining two of its senior leaders.

6 (Continued from page 1)

who had issued the firing order. In all, 40 VHP men were arrested.

Train services on the Sonarpur-Canning section were disrupted for more than five hours.

Police reinforcements were sent to the area and Rapid Action Force commandos deployed.

By 11.30 a.m., the situation was brought under control. Shops had downed their shutters and a curfew-like situation prevailed. The few who ventured out were made to walk with their hands raised.

Local VHP leaders claimed they were holding the yajna after provocative speeches were delivered at a recent meeting held by members of another community in the area.

The administration had advised them

## 9 minutes 5/6 Canning: 11/3

against holding a large protest meeting they had planned. So they decided on the yajna. But this too was opposed by the authorities as Taldi is an area with a mixed population. A senior administration official confirmed this but contradicted the VHP claim that permission for the yajna had been sought.

The VHP insisted on the yajna in spite of the authorities' firm stand about imposing prohibitory orders under Section 144 in the area.

Last night, VHP leaders had warned the police that they would court arrest and shout Jai Shri Ram slogans.

Probe demanded: Reacting to the firing death, Mr Ajay Nandy, state VHP general secretary, said: "Mr Buddhadeb

Bhattacharjee became a killer today." The VHP demanded a judicial inquiry.

Mr Debabrata Choudhury, state BJP secretary, said the "unprovoked" firing proved that the the Left Front government was trying to disturb communal harmony.

Describing the incident as "unfortunate", Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, chief whip of the Trinamul Parliamentary Party, said the state government should take all steps to maintain communal amity.

The SUCI state general secretary, Mr Prabhash Ghosh, said: "The incident is a matter of concern. All sections of people should remain alert and resist provocations aimed at creating communal unrest."

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, justified the firing, saying that police could not control the mob through lathicharge and teargas shells.

# Muslim board rejects seer's proposal

9 -  
mikeverities

11/3  
SR 11

**Statesman News Service**

NEW DELHI, March 10. — The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today rejected the Kanchi Shankaracharya's proposal outright, terming it as "incomplete and inchoate".

The board has now decided to move the Supreme Court, probably on Tuesday, and "prepare" its own men to counter the kar sevaks' plan for *bhoomi puja* at Ayodhya on 15 March.

After today's deliberations, the AIMPLB concluded that the proposal was lopsided because on the one hand, it ensured commencement of the Ram temple construction with immediate effect and on the other hand, Muslims were "merely asked to wait" for the final court verdict. It said: "At best, the proposal is a workable arrangement, but it doesn't offer solution to the problem in its entirety."

The proposal was also turned down because it didn't assure Muslims that if the title suit went in their favour, the construction plan of the proposed temple would be suitably amended to shift the *garbha griha* elsewhere and that there would be no ob-

struction to rebuilding the mosque. There was no guarantee regarding the dividing wall, the board said.

Alleging lack of sincerity on the part of the other side to re-

**Shankaracharya: I've done what I could**

KANCHEEPURAM, March 10. — The Shankaracharya of Kanchi Mutt, Jayendra Saraswati, today said he had done whatever he could to solve the Ayodhya dispute. "I have done whatever I can", was his remark when his attention was drawn to reports that the AIMPLB had rejected his proposal for a symbolic *bhoomi puja*. — PTI

solve the issue, the board members talked about the "breach of trust" by the Shankaracharya. They pointed out that despite the violence in Gujarat, the board didn't turn down the offer of talks when Mr Sudhindraulkarni, OSD in the PMO, informed them about the initiative. Keeping in mind the Shankaracharya's "exalted moral and spiritual status", a delegation of

the Board met him on 5 March in "private", but the religious head jumped the gun and went public about the meeting.

During the talks, the board requested him to provide four specific items — a formal proposal in writing, a copy of the construction plan, a copy of the site plan in colour and that of the undertaking given by the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas to the Prime Minister and any other document which could facilitate settling the issue.

Despite frequent reminders, the AIMPLB has neither received the construction plan copy nor that of the undertaking given by the Nyas. Therefore, the whole thing "falls short of commitments".

Besides, having apprehensions over the "dangerous" moves on the part of the government and the Sangh Parivar, the board felt that without the construction plan it was difficult for the members to understand the purported written undertaking given by the Nyas.

They have also questioned how the Nyas was entitled to undertake such constructions

Turn to page 6

MAR 2002

THE STATESMAN

# VHP's business boycott won't work: Muslims

Rathin Das  
Ahmedabad, March 10

A WEEK after unprecedented violence in the city, a shell-shocked community is yet to recover from its psychological wounds. The economic fallout has, however, been the first to stand out. Muslims have lost crores in the days of arson and violence that followed the Godhra carnage.

The minorities are apprehensive about their rehabilitation in the economic system that has been fractured to an irreparable extent. Shops and business establishments of the minorities could not be opened a week after the carnage. Members of the community feel the method of attack clearly reveals a motive to destroy the economic backbone of the minorities in businesses over which they held a virtual monopoly.

They pointed out that the selective attack and torching of establishments owned by minorities indicates that apart from causing physical harm, the objective was to destroy the economic security of the community.

Bababhai with his garage and auto spare parts shop in the heart of the city survived the mob frenzy, but is still afraid what the future has in store for him. He thanks almighty for saving him and his family but doesn't know when his business will get going again. Things can't get any worse, he says.

Though the community is apprehensive about the loss in business due to the disturbed conditions, they are not bothered about the recent VHP call for economic boycott of Muslim estab-

lishments. "Such a boycott might work for a short time, but will not last in the long run," High Court lawyer Rashid Qureshi said.

There are certain business and trades which will become unviable if Muslim workmen are driven out, he said referring to garages, carpentry and cloth retailing. Even if some Hindu owner of a garage, coming under VHP pressure, sacks all his Muslim mechanics, his wage bill would increase for relatively inferior workmanship, Qureshi said. And jobless Hindus cannot become auto mechanics overnight while boys from the community have acquired the skills through years of practical experience, Qureshi said.

The roles of the two communities are closely interwoven in many business partnerships which cannot be separated all of a sudden, he said. The high fashion garments trade is a case in point, says Moin Kadri, where the two communities just cannot afford to pick up a fight.

Irrespective of the VHP's renewed campaign for economic boycott of the minorities, the community still has faith that the market economy's reliance on price and cost advantages would keep their place in the configuration intact.

The irony, however, is that the loss of business of the minorities does not at all figure in the estimates of losses prepared by the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Quizzed about the loss due to the burning of Muslim shops, a GCCI spokesman said the figures have not yet been compiled.

# Bengal Assembly urges Centre to curb communal strife

*9 minutes*  
*10-11*  
**KOLKATA, MARCH 9:** The West Bengal Assembly today unanimously adopted an all-party resolution, urging the Centre to take effective steps to curb communal disturbances in the country, as the Chief Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, squarely blamed the BJP for encouraging communalism.

As the House assembled, the Speaker, H. A. Halim, tabled the motion and members from the treasury and Opposition benches participated in the hour-long discussion.

The House noted with concern and alarm the decision of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to start construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya on March 15 on the land by the side of the 'Babri Masjid'.

"A large number of 'kar sevaks' from different parts of the country have started assembling in Ayodhya for this purpose, which has created a communal atmosphere in the country," it said.

The resolution also condemned the attack on 'kar sevaks' in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra station that triggered communal disturbances in various parts of the country, particularly in Gujarat that left several dead and caused huge loss of property.

Expressing concern over the attempts to disturb peace and communal harmony in West Bengal, the resolution appealed to the people of the state to rise to the occasion and protect communal amity, irrespective of religion, caste, creed, and belief.

Participating in the discussion, Mr. Bhattacharjee alleged that the BJP had assumed the same role it played during the Babri Masjid demolition on December 6, 1992, by lending support to the communal forces.

The House called upon the Centre to take effective steps to curb communal strife, particularly in Gujarat, ensure safety,

security and constitutional rights of citizens, prevent recurrence of such heinous activities in interest of harmony, peace and tranquillity.

Expressing concern at the Gujarat developments and its fall-out in other States, the resolution urged the NDA Government to preserve the unity and integrity of the nation as well as its secular and democratic character.

The Left Front Chief Whip, Lakshmi Dey, the Trinamool Congress leader, Saugata Roy, senior Congress member, Abdul Mannan, Tapan Hore (the RSP), Purnendu Sengupta (the CPI) and Subrata Basu (the Forward Bloc), who also took part in the discussion, alleged that the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat miserably failed to tackle the communal situation in time. This, they said, caused widespread communal riots in Gujarat and had its fall-out in other States too. —PTI

PM holds talks with Imams on Ayodhya

# Govt to go by court verdict

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 9. — The Prime Minister today said the government would go by the Supreme Court's order on "the proposed (symbolic) puja by the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas on the acquired adjacent land in Ayodhya". On 13 March, the court is scheduled to hear a PIL that seeks a direction against holding the puja.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee made the comment at a meeting with the All-India Organisation of Imams at his residence in the evening. Muslim leaders are to meet tomorrow to decide on the proposals of the Kanchi Shankaracharya.

(The Shankaracharya today wrote to the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, urging it to "allow the Ram Janambhoomi Trust to construct the temple on the undisputed land in lieu of their agreeing to abide by court's order on the disputed site", PTI adds.)

Civil aviation minister Mr Shahnawaz Hussain, Haj committee chief Mr Tanveer Ahmed and some Muslim academicians were among those who attended the meeting.

Mr Vajpayee said: "The contentious Ayodhya issue that has remained unresolved for a long time

is now on a road to speedy resolution." A conducive atmosphere for expeditious resolution of the issue has been created by two factors: the VHP's commitment to honour the court's verdict on the disputed site and the Shankaracharya's role.

The Prime Minister said: "Swamiji came from far-away Kanchi as a messenger of peace. I'm happy that leaders of the Muslim community have had candid talks with him"

stand."

In his characteristic style, he said "there is *thodi khushi* and *thodi gham*". The *gham* (grief), he said, resulted from the communal violence in Gujarat. He assured the Muslim leaders that the culprits would be brought to justice. "What happened in Gujarat has sullied India's reputation." The *khushi*, he said, was on account of the Shankaracharya's "bold and sincere mediation and the

■ See COURT: page 10

■ Editorial: Retreat from Moscow! page 8



## Rioters used electoral rolls to select their targets

**FEBRUARY 27th**

**GODHRA, 7:40 AM**  
The Sabarmati Express, leaving Godhra en route Ahmedabad, is stopped at Signal Eadla, less than half-a-kilometre from the station. A mob — estimates of its size vary from 1,000 to 2,000 — stones and later burns coach S-6.

**GANDHINAGAR, MORNING**  
It is 7:30 am. Home minister Gordhanbhai Zhadapia drives to official bungalow no. 24 from his house in Ahmedabad. The assembly is to meet later in the day for the budget presentation by finance minister Nitin Patel.

At 8:10, Zhadapia receives a call on his mobile. Ashwinbhai Patel, a *kar sevak* on the Sabarmati Express, tells him the train is being stoned and burnt.

Zhadapia immediately calls the Panchmahal district superintendent of police Raju Bhargava (Godhra is located in this district). Bhargava tells him: "There are so many people and we are so few. If I open fire, things will get out of hand." Zhadapia says he is sending additional forces. He calls state director general of police (DGP) K. Chakrabarty. He is told that a force from the state reserve police (SRP) camp at Godhra has been rushed to the spot. Another force from the Baroda SRP camp is on the way.

Zhadapia next calls chief minister Narendra Modi. But Modi already knows about Godhra — Kaushik Mehta, state VHP joint general secretary, has called him first. Mehta has also told Modi that he, VHP organising secretary Arvindbhai Brahmabhatt and the other joint general secretary Jaidipbhai Patel are leaving for Godhra. Modi has also asked health minister Ashok Bhatt to rush to Godhra and coordinate arrangements.

It is 9 am. The control room in the chief minister's bungalow no.1 is a hub of activity. Reports come in from Godhra. The police are badly outnumbered. Within the hour, it is known that one of the coaches has been burnt.

It is 11:30 now. Zhadapia goes to the Assembly. He is told that four persons have been killed but the toll could go up.

**GUJARAT ASSEMBLY, GANDHINAGAR, AFTERNOON**

At 12 pm, the House assembles. Just outside, Chinubhai Patel, government-appointed chairman of the Cow Protection Committee, tells an MLA that the chief minister should ask the Speaker to adjourn the House as Ram *sevak*s had been killed in Godhra.

Question hour begins. Godhra MLA Bajendra Singh Patel (Congress) is shouting but Speaker Dhirubhai Shah asks him to be quiet and raise the matter during zero hour. Patel is joined by BJP MLA Dr. M. V. G. Gadani. The protests get louder. Zhadapia is forced to make a statement. He tells the House that according to preliminary reports, six or seven *kar sevaks* have been killed. The toll could go up. At 2 pm, chief minister Narendra Modi "condemns Godhra killings" and announces Rs 2 lakh compensation to the victims' kin.

*[By this time, VHP leaders outside were saying 23 bodies had been recovered from the coach. National vice president of Bajrang Dal, Hareshbhai Bhatt, who was in Rajkot and rushing back to Ahmedabad, said 50 were killed.]*

At about 2:30, Zhadapia leaves for Godhra.

**GODHRA, EVENING**

Zhadapia reaches Godhra at 5. A police officer tells him the chief minister is flying down and will land any minute. Zhadapia goes to the helipad. Modi's helicopter touches down at 5:30. Zhadapia, Modi and ministers Bhubendrabhai Lakhaniwala and Prabhat Singh Chauhan set off for Signal Falia. They meet with VHP joint general secretary Jaidipbhai Patel, who is accompanied by the VHP organising secretary and other local VHP leaders. As they are leaving the spot of the carnage, Jaidipbhai tells the chief minister a bandh has been called. Modi says he knows.

"BJP should also support the bandh after this incident," Jaidipbhai says. According to Zhadapia, Modi replies, "Don't do anything in haste. Let us see."

The VHP leaders are clearly incensed. "It cannot be that there will be no reaction to the killings," says Jaidipbhai. Everyone nods. Meanwhile Jaidipbhai gets busy on his mobile.

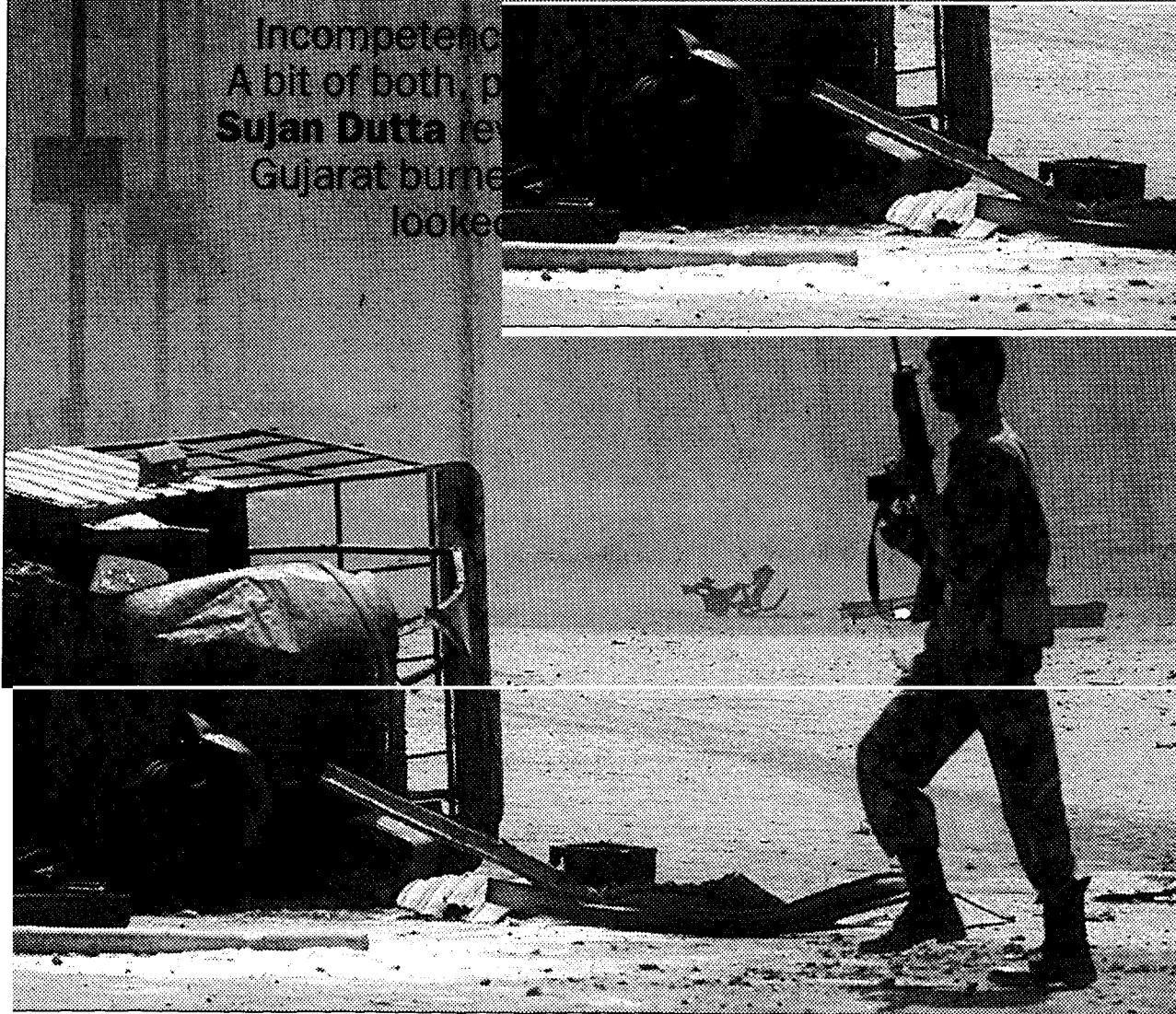
He leaves instructions that photographs of the burning coach — presumably clicked by a local photographer — should be taken by VHP volunteers to all newspaper and news agency offices in the city (he is probably speaking to his VHP office in Ahmedabad). The photograph is carried the next day by almost all newspapers.

*[By this time, the violence had already begun. The Sabarmati Express, carrying survivors from Godhra, had reached Ahmedabad station around 4.50 pm. Four persons were killed in Godhra — three were stabbed and one died in police firing. In Baroda, waiting for the train, mobs had taken over the station, waving sticks, broken bottles, tridents and daggers, raising slogans, swearing revenge. A 35-year-old man is stabbed. In Ahmedabad, a 50-year-old rickshaw driver is stabbed. Seven buses are burnt.]*

Zhadapia refuses to say when he had first learnt about VHP's call for a bandh on the 28th. By 4 pm, Additional DGP (Intelligence) G.C. Raigar had come to know of it. He had told DGP Chakrabarty that the violence had begun and state support to the bandh could make it spiral out of control. It is 6 pm now in Godhra. Chief minister Modi and his entourage, VHP leaders

# DIARY OF A FAILED STATE

Incompetence  
A bit of both, p  
Sujan Dutta re  
Gujarat burne  
looked



included, move to the civil hospital.

*[All through this, mobiles ring almost continuously. This is one riot that is technology savvy. Single-number roaming facilities are available to all mobile users through most of central and south Gujarat. There are calls to and from Delhi, to and from the Vanika Bhavan, the VHP Ahmedabad office and from the police.]*

**GODHRA, NIGHT**

Around 8:30, a meeting is held at the Godhra Collectorate. Modi and Zhadapia are discussing the situation with the local administration and police. The police are instructed to spare no one and to immediately arrest those responsible for the morning's killings.

Says Zhadapia: "There was no report of any violence on the 27th evening."

Was he aware of VHP meetings in the night in different parts of the state?

"No, none at all. But I was beginning to sense the anger in the Hindu society." Zhadapia says that he had known that the VHP had called a bandh. "I will not tell you who told me that, first and I will also not tell you at what time I first learnt about it. I told officers to take precautions in sensitive pockets and it was done as per the available force."

Did he contact religious leaders and politicians to issue appeals for peace? Were preventive arrests made?

"It was not thought to be necessary. The police did all it could."

*[There is little evidence of action taken by the police on the night of February 27. In Ahmedabad, only two preventive arrests were made in the city's 25 police station areas — and not of VHP or Bajrang Dal activists. The two arrested were Mohammed Ismail Jalaluddin and Fateh Mohammed.]*

There are conflicting statements from the VHP leaders about the call for a bandh on the 28th. Kaushik Mehta says he was not in Godhra and that the decision to call the bandh was taken around 5:30 pm.

*[Around 1 pm, at a press conference in Rajkot, Hareshbhai Bhatt said a bandh had been called.]*

Hareshbhai Bhatt says, "By 2 pm, when I was leaving Rajkot for Ahmedabad, I knew about the bandh call for the 28th. By 3 pm, the CM had been told of the bandh. We also asked the BJP to support the protest against the attack on Ram *sevak*s." "The decision to call the bandh was taken around 4 pm with my consultation," says state VHP general secretary Dilip-

hai Trivedi, "and also in consultation with Praveen Togadia and Rana (state BJP chief). Bandhs are not the business of the government."

Zhadapia says, "We did not talk to any VHP leaders on the 27th in Godhra." But Kaushik Mehta has a different story to tell: "Jaidipbhai told Gordhanbhai [Zhadapia] that a bandh has been called and that we had asked for BJP support. Such an attack on Hindus cannot go unpunished. After seeing what had happened in Godhra, no one could disagree."

Hareshbhai Bhatt says, "February 28, 2002 was going to be the day when Hindus would show what they are capable of."

It is 9 pm now. Modi has left for Gandhinagar. Zhadapia spends most of his time in Godhra Collectorate. At 1 am, he retires to the Circuit House. He leaves for Gandhinagar early to reach his official bungalow by 6:30 am on February 28.

**VANIK BHAVAN, STATE VHP HEADQUARTERS, AHMEDABAD, EVENING**

A crowd has gathered in the new, three-storeyed building with its still unfinished exterior. It is not a solemn, grieving crowd but an angry one. Upstairs, in the first floor, Kaushik Mehta, Hareshbhai Bhatt and other VHP leaders are arranging for the funeral of the *kar sevaks* killed in Godhra. Kaushik Mehta leaves the office only after 3 in the morning of the



the procession. At 9, the bodies from Jantanagar are taken in a procession again, this time from Ramula Crossing to the crematorium in Hadkeshwar. Bhatt says there were 25,000 people in the procession. I ask Bhatt if they did not fear an attack on such a big procession. Bhatt says, "How could anyone attack us? Besides, we had police protection."

*[The police were protecting the processionists when they should have been protecting from the processionists. Much of the route was through a Hindu-dominated belt but groups of youth were going into selected pockets, setting shops on fire, as if they knew their targets very well and were rejoining it. Police suspect that some of the gangs had lists — probably electoral rolls]*

Hareshbhai Bhatt says, "Nobody from the procession was attacking anyone. Besides, in Ahmedabad, such lists are not needed. Everybody is a local worker and everyone knows their localities." By 2 pm, Bhatt has returned to state VHP headquarters.

**GANDHINAGAR, MORNING**

At 8:30 am, Zhadapia goes to the Assembly where both the BJP and the opposition propose adjournment. By 9 am, Zhadapia has moved to his office in the Assembly. The phones are ringing. Frantic calls for help. He is speaking over six phones at a time. At 10:30,

Zhadapia talks to Jaidipbhai Patel in VHP office. "The situation is getting out of control." "This is bound to happen. Look at the spontaneity," the VHP man tells him.

Dilipbhai Trivedi says, "Nobody from the government talked to us on the 28th."

At 11, Zhadapia moves to the control room in bungalow no.1. Modi's quarter. Health minister Ashok Bhatt is also there.

**GANDHINAGAR, AFTERNOON**

At 1, in a conversation between Modi, Zhadapia, Ashok Bhatt and the principal secretary to the chief minister, the idea of calling in the army comes up. But nothing is done.

Zhadapia says "I didn't ask for the army getting out of control."

Question: Why did you not ask for the army right away? Zhadapia: The CM talked to Advaniji, Atalji and George.

Q: You got in touch with the army only after they had discussed the matter?

Z: Yes.

Q: What time was it?

Q: I cannot say exactly. It was towards evening.

Q: Why so late?

Z: No, no, no. I told you we began getting in touch.

Q: Who did you get in touch with — the Southern Command in Pune?

Z: That I cannot tell you. It was done from the CM's office.

Q: So the CM got in touch with the army?

Z: He must have. I have told you — he was talking to the defence minister himself.

Q: And the army came...

Z: You see, usually there are six columns (of the 11 Infantry Division) here. But they had gone to the border.

Q: I know the first troops were airlifted to Ahmedabad only at 2:30 in the night.

Z: Yes, but our police was doing a great job.

Q: Where is the evidence when even in Delhi, as Yashwant Sinha was reading his budget speech, television reports were coming in of how quickly violence was spreading...

Z: What more could the police do? You know, it hurts, it pinches now when people say we did nothing. For the last five or six days, I have not been able to go home, I have been sleepless.

Zhadapia now rattles off the numbers: "We had 18 companies of the Border Security Force, four companies of the Rapid Action Force, six companies of Central Industrial Security Force, 40-45,000 border homeguards, 61,000 policemen, 6,000 teargas shells were fired, 92 people were killed and 686 hurt in the police firing."

"But we also had five crore people out in Gujarat — everywhere except in Kutch — in 18,322 villages, 6 cities, 18 talukas, 143 towns.

What could the police do?"

### RIOT SPEAK

**I am Hindu too. If my wife and child are killed, I don't think I can set fire to another family.**

N.R. SHETH, FORMER DIRECTOR, IIM, AHMEDABAD AND LONG-TIME RESIDENT

**When the VHP called a bandh, we immediately knew what Gujarat was heading for.**

G.C. RAIGAR, ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE (INTELLIGENCE)

**I am helpless. Even my men are going on the rampage.**

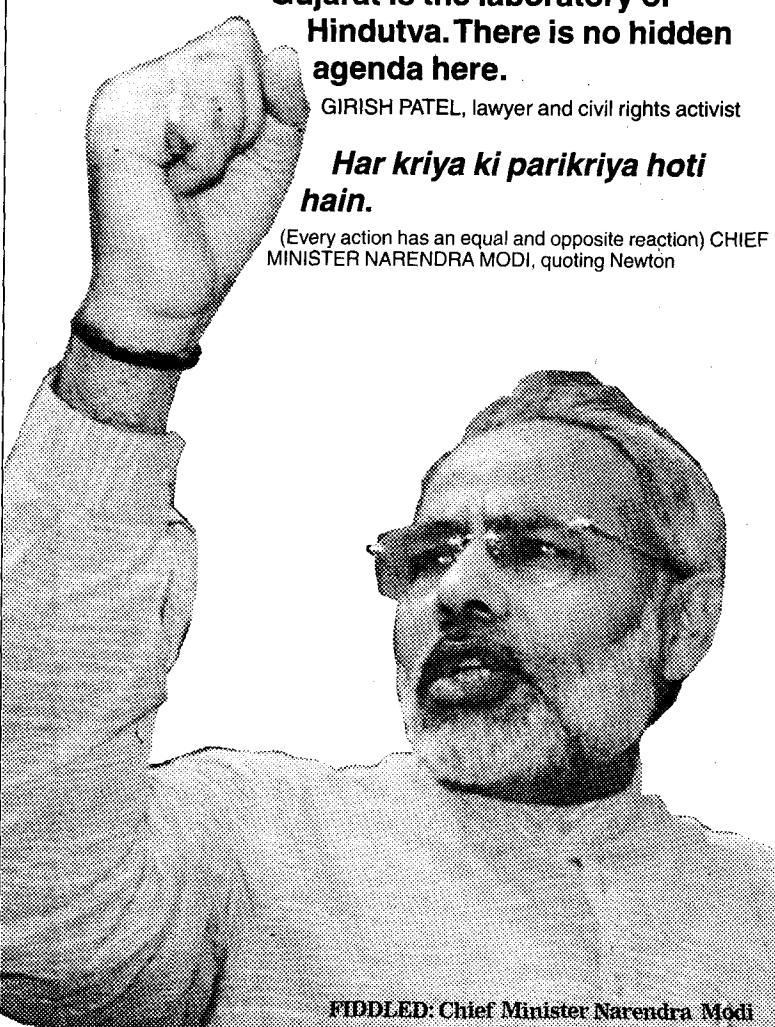
POLICE COMMISSIONER P.C. PANDE over the phone to Girish Patel, lawyer and civil rights activist on the afternoon of February 28. Patel had called him for help to rescue his friend Professor B.M. Prizada

**Gujarat is the laboratory of Hindutva. There is no hidden agenda here.**

GIRISH PATEL, lawyer and civil rights activist

**Har kriya ki parikriya hoti hain.**

(Every action has an equal and opposite reaction) CHIEF MINISTER NARENDRA MODI, quoting Newton



FIDDLER: Chief Minister Narendra Modi

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# Memo submitted to President 9/3

9 minutes  
KD-11  
By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 8.** The President, K.R. Narayanan, today told a delegation of the All India Milli Council (AIMC) that he felt deeply concerned and ashamed of the carnage in Gujarat.

The delegation which submitted a memorandum also claimed that the President had asked the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to deploy the Army after the Opposition MPs had called on him earlier this week.

Briefing correspondents after the meeting, the delegation leaders said the President had also expressed the view that had the police acted many lives would have been saved.

The AIMC urged Mr. Narayanan to dismiss the Gujarat Government and hand over the riot-affected areas to the Army to control the situation. In its memorandum, the council secretary-general, Qazi Mujhaidul Islam Qasmi, demanded that a judicial inquiry by a sitting Supreme Court judge be instituted to probe the Godhra incident and bloody riots elsewhere in Gujarat, and ban the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal.

The Council also protested the Gujarat Government's

move to pay Rs. one lakh compensation to those killed in riots and Rs. two lakh for the victims of the Godhra train fire charging it with "discriminating even in death".

The Council also alleged that the violence that erupted in various parts of Gujarat after the Godhra incident was a "well-planned orgy of violence executed by the VHP, Bajrang Dal and other constituents of the Sangh Parivar in connivance with the State Government".

It said while the State Government claimed to have arrested nearly 4,000 people, there were few belonging to the VHP, Bajrang Dal and BJP.

"There are reports that the State Government is deliberately avoiding the arrests of atleast 150 VHP, Bajrang Dal and BJP workers whose names figure in the FIRs by the police for directly leading mobs, slaughtering Muslims and indulging in deliberate violence", the memorandum said.

The Council demanded that the victims be paid compensation uniformly and that it be paid on the lines of the Delhi High Court judgment on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

THE HINDU

129-11  
9/3

## We will abide by court verdict: Shahi Imam

By Our Staff Reporter

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 8.** The Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, today said the Ayodhya issue should be left to the court and the Muslim community and its leadership would honour its verdict.

Reiterating his stand that no talks would be held with the VHP in this regard, the Shahi Imam addressing the Friday prayer meeting here, said: "We should not be party to the Ayodhya dispute. We will abide by the court's verdict, whatever it is."

He urged the other Muslim leaders including those from the Muslim Personal Law Board to take a similar strong stand on the issue. Stating that the matter was in the court, he said: "Let the court decide on it. This is an issue for the Union Government and it should be solved by them. Why should we be part of the conspiracy hatched by the PMO to put the entire blame on the Muslims."

Syed Bukhari also rejected the VHP's proposal that it would abide by the court's verdict on the disputed land in Ayodhya if they were allowed to go ahead with the Ram temple construction plan in the undisputed area. "We will not accept any VHP

formula (for Bhumi Pooja on March 15). We cannot believe what the VHP says. It has always violated the rule of the land and has openly been saying that it will not honour the court's verdict," he said.

Referring to the mediation by the Kanchi Sankaracharya on this issue, he warned the Muslims to be wary as this was a calculated move to divert their attention from the "naked dance of barbarism" in Gujarat. "They have been successful at it. See the papers of the last few days. Gujarat has been replaced by Ayodhya," he said.

Calling for unity among Muslims on this issue, the Shahi Imam warned the Government and the VHP not to test their patience. "Muslims have never taken the law in their hands. Do not force us to do so," he said.

Devoting a considerable part of his speech to Gujarat, Syed Bukhari compared the carnage with that of the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. "Goonda elements having links with the BJP and the VHP have unleashed terror in Gujarat. We have not lost our courage and even if I lose my life, I will do everything in my power to ensure that justice is done to the victims of the Gujarat violence," he said.



# Ayodhya solutions

By Rajeev Dhavan

*We cannot concentrate on merely building the temple, and ignore the destroyed mosque.*

ANY SOLUTION in Ayodhya must be fair — not just to buy an uneasy peace, but as an enduring tribute to community understanding and secularism. So far, Ayodhya solutions have not been unfair. In 1949, a temple was built inside a mosque. This was purely an act of criminal trespass. A modern day travesty in itself. The ensuing status quo preserved the temple for Hindus but froze the site for Muslims. In 1986, under suspicious circumstances, the temple's locks were opened to allow prayers before Hindu idols in a mosque. On December 6, 1992, the mosque was razed to the ground. But the miscreants were rewarded. A makeshift temple was permitted on the site of the ruins of the mosque. Was this temple removed? No, instead, the Ayodhya Act of 1993 preserved the status quo of January 1993. The mosque remained rubble, the illegal temple survived. In 1993, the BJP White Paper justified the demolition on the basis of the politics of historical revenge.

In 1994, the Supreme Court delivered a majority judgment replete with angularities preserving the Hindu status quo of the 1993 Act. It went further to permit the return of the 67 acres of surrounding Hindu land, if the land was not required for the final solution. Even this goes beyond the normal land acquisition law. The minority judges rightly protested that the solution was one-sided. Meanwhile, the BJP prospered from the politics of Ayodhya to form the Union Government. From the Kumbh Mela in January 2001, the VHP and the sants have uncompromisingly threatened to violate the law to build the temple. Mayhem has followed. Now, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi has suggested another angular solution — to reward a Hindu temple whilst the mosque lies in ruin. What has happened is as gross as unfair. So far, the Muslim community has borne all this with fortitude, amidst violence and fury. What is a fair solution? The test of fairness is that the solution must be just to all

communities and consistent with the secularism that holds India's fragile democracy together. We cannot concentrate on merely building the temple, and ignore the destroyed mosque. Hindu demands and Muslim sentiments have to be aggregated, not set off against each other. No one says the temple should not be built. But the commitment to rebuild the mosque has been ignored. In Afghanistan, we support the restoration of the Bamiyan statues. India cannot have a secular foreign policy for Kashmir and a communal policy for Ayodhya. The Babri Masjid was also a protected monument. So many structures in England and Europe which suffered World War damages were restored — including St. Paul's, the Inns of Court and Parliament. The angular bias remains if we talk of constructing a temple without prioritising the rebuilding of the mosque.

To interpret the Supreme Court's judgment of 1994 to read permission to build the temple first on the undisputed 67 acres is both legally incorrect and unjust. Despite its oddities, the Supreme Court judgment was totally clear that the dispute over the site had to be resolved first and the 67 acres dealt with later. The court said that if the Muslims got the site "...their success should not be thwarted... by exercise of rights of ownership of Hindu owners of the adjacent properties". Further, some of these 67 acres could be allocated to the Muslims to ensure "...the effective enjoyment of the fruits of success of the final outcome". No question arose of handing over the 67 acres in advance of a final solution. In my view the 'final solution' can be adjudicated in the very complex suits or negotiated. There are 22 major issues divided further into another 17 issues covering a huge can-

vas. Many defy adjudication. The real issue is the site. *Prima facie* the mosque stood on the site. Then there are arguments of procedure, limitation and adverse possession. A just solution cannot be evolved on legal quibbles. A negotiated solution is possible. But it requires statesmanship, not guile.

How would a solution be resolved? The first step to any solution must be an apology for the destruction of the mosque accompanied by a declared priority commitment to re-build it exactly as before. This would not only redress the mosque's tragic demolition in 1992 but reward Indian secularism with a clear framework. Both Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani — and especially the BJP — must join this commitment along with the VHP, the sants and the Sangh Parivar. Second, as an act of good faith, the mosque must be built first; or at least simultaneously. This flows from the logic of events. Anything else would be a continuing injustice. These two parts of a final solution require courage and secular clarity. Can our politicians and sants rise to the challenge?

The third facet concerns the location of the sites of the re-built mosque and the temple. There are many alternatives. Both cannot be built on the same site except as a complex for all religions. This may be as unacceptable to the Hindus as the rebuilding of the mosque at the original site. Alternatively, the site could be given up by both communities so that the reconstructed mosque and temple are built elsewhere. But, even an alternative solution of giving up the site for either the temple or the mosque does not defy a negotiated solution. But, a solution cannot come of politics of terror, destruction and mob tactics. A reasonable solution may evolve provided its first two

conditions are accepted for immediate implementation — an apology and commitment to rebuild the mosque, which should be done first or simultaneously.

The fourth strand is that after evolving a negotiated solution, the Centre should intervene in the Lucknow suits and have them settled on the basis of the negotiated compromise. This takes us to the fifth aspect as an alternative. In 1991, the Places of Worship Act put a quietus to all disputes by preserving "...the religious character of a place of worship existing on August 15, 1947". This is a good solution for a new beginning. All pending suits were superseded. But, Section 5 of this Act excluded the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute from this 1947 status quo. Had Parliament intervened in this dispute, all matters would have been resolved. Even so, the Ayodhya dispute now cries out for a fair settlement. The Ayodhya "compromise" could also be included in the Act of 1991 from which it is presently excluded. Once this is done, India can go beyond temple politics to address the real problems of poverty, diseases, violence and cruelty that confront it.

Any solution for Ayodhya is not just a solution for Muslims and Hindus but for Indian secularism — so that India can say to itself and the world that it was fair and just to all. It is not a matter of finding a legal answer. Legal quibbles will neither satisfy the communities nor secular justice. But, a fair and just solution will. A solution which, even if binding, provokes discontent is not a durable one.

Today, death stalks the streets of Indian democracy. The greatest experiment in secular governance the world has ever known is dissolving into chaos. The Government looks on — witness to mass murder, mayhem, arson, and pillage. This is not just a matter for Hindus and Muslims, but for Indian secularism on which the country's future depends. A fair solution credits our future. An unfair solution does not.

9 minutes  
HD-10

9/3

## LAW AND SOCIETY

2001

# All-party delegation refuses

# to meet Modi *9 minutes*

HO-1  
a/3

By Manas Dasgupta

**AHMEDABAD, MARCH 8.** An all-party delegation of Parliamentarians, including the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, which visited riot-torn Gujarat today reportedly refused to meet the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi.

Some members of the delegation are believed to have told the Government protocol officials that they believed that Mr. Modi was the "culprit" in the entire episode and that there was no meaning of listening to his "explanations".

Though the official programme did not include a meeting with the Chief Minister, Mr. Modi was keen on meeting the leaders to give the official version of the events.

While initially it was planned to take the delegation to Gandhinagar for a meeting with Mr. Modi, on being turned down by the members, Mr. Modi offered to come to the circuit house annexe in Ahmedabad, where the delegation was meeting representatives of various organisations, but that too was not acceptable to the MPs.

Later, a team of officials led by the Chief Secretary, G. Subba Rao, called on the delegation and briefed the leaders on the steps being taken to restore normality and providing relief and rehabilitation to the riot victims.

The officials were thoroughly grilled by the Opposition party leaders and



**The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, visiting riot victims at the Daryakhan Gumat relief camp in Ahmedabad on Friday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt**

the meeting, scheduled for about 30 minutes, lasted for over two hours.

The delay forced Ms. Gandhi to leave Ahmedabad without

meeting a Congress delegation and a large number of Muslim leaders waiting for hours to call on her.

**Another report on Page 11**

HO-1  
a/3

MAR 2008

# MPs hear Ahmedabad's tales of horror

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
GODHRA, MARCH 8

A 29-MEMBER all-party delegation, led by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, arrived here this morning to make an assessment of the situation in violence-hit parts of Gujarat. The team included Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan as well.

The delegation first visited the Godhra railway station and examined the charred remains of the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express. Later, they went to the Godhra Civil Hospital to meet riot victims.

The pent-up communal anger in Godhra showed up when Hindu and Muslim leaders had an argument over which community suffered the most. It started when a maulvi from Godhra, Hussain Umarji, and a local lawyer Yaqub Bhatuk, broke down before MP G.M. Banatwala. The maulvi embraced Banatwala, crying out loud: "Hamare aadmi jala diye, sab khatam ho gaya, humein bachao (Our people were burnt alive, everything is gone, please save us)."

As they gave the delegation a memorandum and said innocent people were killed, the waiting local BJP leaders, including Panchmahals BJP president, said: "The Ram sevaks were also innocent. Roney ka natak bandh karo (Stop this drama of crying)." The delegation also accepted memoranda from the BJP, the Congress, the Godhra Relief Committee.

The BJP memorandum spoke of public anger to the heinous train carnage and said passions spread across the Panchmahals region and the whole state. It also alleged that three of those involved in the incident were the local municipality members. Actually, the



Congress chief Sonia Gandhi hears out a riot victim at a camp in Kankaria. Express photo

three were elected as Independents and the Congress supported them from outside. The Congress memorandum condemned the attack as well as its aftermath. The party accused the BJP government of failing to maintain law and order and alleged that the ruling party deliberately allowed the backlash.

Raghuvanshprasad Yadav, RJD MP, told mediapersons that the Gujarat government had failed in preventing the train incident as well as the aftermath. He demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

Mahajan skirted the issue, saying: "Gujarat's prime need today is peace and communal harmony. No statement can be made at this moment." Congress president Sonia Gandhi avoided the media and quietly left the place. The delegation included Somnath Chatterjee, Shivraj Patil, Kapil Sibal, Jaya Jaitely, V.K. Malhotra, A.B. Bardhan, Shankersinh Vaghela, Rashid Ali, G.M. Banatwala, P.H. Pandian, K.P.R.N. Naidu, Sitaram Yechuri, Praful Patel, Vaiko, Yerran Naidu, S.S. Ahluwalia and Raghuvansh Prasad Singh.

## Instead of wedding bells, she now battles for life

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 8

RAFIQA Banu may have survived the Gujarat communal riots, but with four of her children dead and the youngest battling serious burn injuries in hospital, she wonders if it hadn't been better to have gone down with the rest.

Like every mother, Rafiqa had been dreaming of her daughter's wedding, the same 14-year-old girl who is now in hospital. "My dream is shattered," says Rafiqa, attending to her daughter at the civil hospital at Mehanganagar.

The other children died when boys of her neighbourhood set her home on fire. Her daughter Afsana sustained severe burn injuries on her back and hands.

"I know everyone of them (arsonists) by face. All my children grew up playing with them," says a broken-hearted Rafiqa. "I only pray that my daughter survives and I am not left alone in this world."

Lying in her hospital bed, her head shaved for treatment, Afsana fumbles for words as tears roll down her cheeks. "Ab to sab khatam ho gaya (Now everything is over)," she sobs.

INDIAN EXPRESS

9 MAR 2002

# Centre keen to avoid repeat of '92

Sudesh K Verma  
in New Delhi

March 8. — There must not be a repeat of 1992 — that was the consensus at a high-level meeting on Ayodhya at the Prime Minister's house last night as well as in extensive official deliberations today.

Senior government leaders have decided to ease restrictions in Ayodhya while ensuring that there is no reduction in security forces deployed to maintain the law and order and to prevent kar sevaks from reaching there. This was to ensure that even if some kar sevaks managed to sneak in, they didn't resort to the vandalism like that of 6 December 1992, the day Babari Masjid was demolished, an official said.

Under the new arrangement, residents and local sadhus won't be harassed. The VHP on its part has given an informal undertaking that the flow of kar sevaks would be stopped, government sources said.

(The government has decided to restore train services to Faizabad, SNS adds from Ayodhya. Union minister of state for home Mr ID Swami, who visited the holy city today, said there was no need to restrict the movement of ordinary pilgrims, including kar sevaks.)

On the issue of performing

puja at the undisputed site, the leaders decided that if it was allowed (it would be allowed only if there is a consensus), the symbolic ritual would be performed under strict vigil.

(However, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board tonight opposed any move to allow the

## Some new twists

■ Union law ministry has reportedly opined that a way can be found for legal transfer of land by seeking the court's permission

■ A package deal can be given to Muslims by transferring to them the graveyard land as a quid pro quo for accepting the transfer of the undisputed land to the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas.

■ Status quo would be maintained at the 2.77-acre land that houses the makeshift temple on the disputed land.

VHP to conduct the puja at the undisputed site on 15 March, PTI adds. It even threatened to approach the Supreme Court to stall it. The Board's convener, Mr QR Illyas, said the government had no right to allow the puja.)

Apart from the Prime Minister, among those who attended last night's meeting were Mr LK Advani, Mr George Fernandes,

BJP president Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, VHP working president and trustee of the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas Mr Ashok Singhal, and RSS joint secretary Mr Madan Das.

The government has clearly told the RSS that it couldn't violate the spirit of the National Agenda of Governance that spoke of moratorium on controversial issues. "If you wanted to do this why didn't you tell us before," was Mr Advani's refrain at a meeting with Mr Singhal.

The VHP working president today wrote another letter to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, seeking permission for the puja at the undisputed site from 15 March. He has also sought permission from the Uttar Pradesh government and Faizabad district administration.

This has been done to force the government to take a formal stand on the issue. The request is likely to be conveyed to the AIMPLB so that it can take a stand when it meets on Sunday. Government strategists believe the Board might not raise objections to the token puja though it might object to the transfer of the undisputed land. To ensure that no decision becomes controversial, the government plans to hold an NDA meeting after the Board decides on the issue.

More reports on page 6

## Cong. against 'puja' at 'shilanyas' site

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 5.** Adopting a cautious approach on the Ayodhya issue, the Congress today maintained that the problem had to be resolved through the process of law.

On persistent queries if the party was opposed to an amicable, negotiated settlement of the problem, the party spokesman, S. Jaipal Reddy, said "nobody can object to an amicable settlement. But the matter is sub judice and any out-of-court settlement will have to be sanctioned by law."

Mr. Reddy said the party was watching the developments with keen interest. "We are a functioning constitutional democracy. Therefore, it is the

rule of law that shall reign supreme. It has been our party's well-known stand."

The office of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi had, on Monday, contacted the Congress president's office to convey a message in connection with the latest developments on the issue. "The Congress president holds his Holiness in high esteem and thanks him for the courtesy extended to her."

Mr. Reddy said: "So many proposals are being exchanged. We do not want to make comments at this stage. When the process comes to a conclusion, we will react."

In his view, the essence of the 1994 Supreme Court judgment was that the land acquired by

the Government could not be parted with unless a judgment on the disputed land was delivered.

Reacting to the developments, the CPI(M) said the Vajpayee Government was bound to maintain the status quo at the disputed site and the acquired land around it.

Warning the Government against any move to allow "puja" at the "shilanyas" site which was part of the acquired land or handing over any portion of the acquired land to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the party said it would amount to a surrender to the VHP and subversion of the rule of law.

### Unacceptable: CPI(M)

The CPI(M) said the Shanka-

charya's proposal on these lines was not acceptable as the VHP had said that it adhered to the original blueprint for temple construction whereby the sanctum sanctorum of the temple would be located at the spot where the Babri Masjid stood.

The party demanded that the Prime Minister stick to his earlier position that the matter could be resolved only on the basis of the court decision.

### 'Who are they'

The Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, took exception to the Muslim Personal Law Board agreeing to consider a proposal mooted by the Shankaracharya to construct a temple outside the disputed area.



# Opposition trains its guns on Advani, Modi

By Javed M. Ansari

HD-11  
883

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 7.** The Opposition today sent out a strong signal that it held both the Gujarat Government and the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre responsible for the tragic developments in the State. It trained its guns on both the Home Minister and the Gujarat Chief Minister demanding their resignation.

The day began with an hour-long dharna in front of the Gandhi statue in Parliament House. Led by Sonia Gandhi, about 200 Opposition MPs sat in a dharna outside the Parliament House. Those who joined the sit-in included Somnath Chatterjee, Pranab Mukherjee, Banatwala, Saleem Sherwani and Simranjit Singh Mann. The MPs raised no slogans but held placards demanding the resignation of the Home Minister and the Gujarat Chief Minister.

The protest continued within Parliament as well, though it was not as coordinated as the one outside. The Congress and the Left parties raised the Gujarat issue, but the Samajwadi Party combined it with the killing

of its MLA in Lucknow. Led by Raghuvansh Prasad of the RJD, a section of the Opposition waved placards in the Lok Sabha, demanding the resignation of L.K. Advani and Narendra Modi, while SP MPs rushed to the well of the House to protest against the murder of the MLA.

Several BJP MPs also blamed the Opposition, while Adityanath and Ram Nagina Mishra were seen holding posters, demanding an end to the restrictions placed on the yagna in Ayodhya. Sensing the mood, the acting Speaker, P.M. Sayeed, adjourned the House.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Opposition forced adjournments twice, demanding an early discussion on the Gujarat issue, which eventually got underway after the lunch break.

The Opposition continued its pressure outside the House too. Addressing newspapers jointly, the CPI(M)'s Somnath Chatterjee, Jaipal Reddy (Cong.) and P. Jijilal Suman (SP) blamed the Central and State Governments for the communal violence in Gujarat. Mr. Chatterjee said the

State had collapsed in Gujarat while Mr. Reddy said it was time the State Government was dismissed as even Judges were not safe in their homes.

The Opposition plans to corner and expose the Government on the Gujarat issue by forcing the Treasury benches to agree to a discussion on the issue on Monday. Initially, Monday was supposed to be a holiday to allow the MPs a long weekend till Tuesday, which is Mahashivratri. However, at the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting this afternoon, both the Congress and the Left parties prevailed upon the Government to agree to a session on Monday to take up the Gujarat debate.

The Lok Sabha will also meet on Saturday in a bid to make up for lost time and clear some Government business. According to the agenda agreed upon by the BAC, the House will take up Gujarat on Monday and the motion of thanks on Wednesday and Thursday, while the general budget will be taken up on Friday and Saturday.

8 Min 40

8 Min 40

# Pressure on PM for Modi's ouster

Pankaj Vohra  
New Delhi, March 7

PRESSURE APPEARS to be mounting on the Prime Minister to ease out Narendra Modi from the Chief Minister's seat in Gujarat. Major Opposition parties, led by Sonia Gandhi, today staged a dharna at Parliament House to press for Modi's ouster.

The Opposition has also demanded the dismissal of Home Minister L K Advani.

Decibels gave way to decorous behaviour today for about 50 minutes today as a conglomerate of Opposition members staged a silent dharna in the Parliament House complex demanding the resignations of Home Minister L K Advani and Modi for their failure to handle the Gujarat situation.

Led by Leader of Opposition Sonia Gandhi, they sat quietly in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue holding placards condemning the "Killer Sangh" and made a fervent plea for restoration of peace and communal harmony in the State ravaged by gruesome killings.

Vajpayee is in a tight spot over the way the administration in Gujarat handled the communal violence. The VHP's strident postures have not helped either.

Vajpayee's liberal image had helped the BJP garner support from nearly two-dozen parties. The coalition allies are not happy on the Government's management of the temple dispute and the riots following the Godhra carnage. There is a feeling within the NDA that the Prime Minister should wield his power more frequently and visibly.

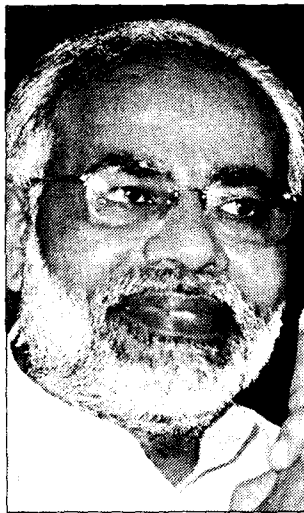
Modi's statements have suggested that he is an RSS

## NHRC notice

THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission on Thursday issued a fresh notice to the Gujarat Government seeking a comprehensive report on steps taken to check further escalation of communal violence in the State.

On March 1, the NHRC had asked the Modi Government to submit the report within three days. The State had failed to send even a preliminary report before the deadline expired. The State then requested more time for preparing the report. The NHRC has said it expects a reply from the Government in response to the fresh notice.

HTC, New Delhi



NARENDRA MODI

pracharak first, Chief Minister next. His lack of experience in governance has come in the way of the administration's efforts to restore normalcy in the State.

Modi came under severe criticism for his declaration of Rs 2 lakh compensation to the next of kin of those killed at Godhra and Rs 1 lakh each to the families of victims elsewhere. The disparity took even the BJP's staunchest supporters by surprise.

Modi has dented the image of the NDA Government along with his credibility. The faction-ridden BJP in Gujarat is unlikely to let the matter pass. Supporters of former Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel are bound to demand Modi's dismissal.

The party has hopped on from one split to another in the State so far. Shankarsinh Vaghela had left the party unhappy over the manner in

which the central leadership tried to minimise his role. Then Keshubhai was cut to size. Now if supporters of Patel or Kashi Ram Rana raise a banner of revolt, the BJP could be in serious trouble. The central leadership may be forced to act to avoid a further split.

Vajpayee has done some damage control, deputing Defence Minister and NDA convener George Fernandes to the State instead of L K Advani in an attempt to present the secular face of his Government.

The Prime Minister and his aides also perhaps realise that even if the opposition parties have not made the demand as yet, Gujarat is a fit case for President's Rule.

Modi's removal will not only redeem Vajpayee's image but release the tension within the State BJP.

And the opposition may just let drop the demand for dismissal of L K Advani.

# VHP to obey court verdict

## Muslim Law Board welcomes decision

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, March 7

IN A major climbdown, the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas today agreed to abide by the court verdict on the disputed site. The development comes barely a day after Nyas member and VHP leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore emphatically ruled out the possibility of giving any such undertaking to the Prime Minister, pointing out that the Nyas had only promised to maintain status quo on the disputed site till the court verdict.

His words sent alarm bells ringing in the Government and, with the Muslim leaders threatening to pull out of the negotiations, it was feared that the Kanchi Shankaracharya's initiative to resolve the dispute was on the brink of collapse. The Prime Minister's Office is believed to have immediately got in touch with VHP chief and Nyas managing trustee Ashok Singhal and insisted on a written assurance that they would accept the court verdict if any compromise is to be reached.

A grim-faced Singhal announced before the media that he was withdrawing the Acharya's statement. He said that in a written submission to the Prime Minister on February 27 — the day the Godhra carnage took place — he had accepted as the Nyas managing trustee 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".

Stated Singhal in the written assurance handed to the PMO today, "This submission makes it clear that we will maintain status quo in the disputed land and accept the judgment of the court of law," after the PMO sought an assurance from him that the Nyas was not backtracking from its commitment made in the petition to the PM.

However, the Nyas has not accepted the other demand raised by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which held talks with the Shankaracharya. Singhal said the Nyas would not make any modification in



A B Vajpayee



Ashok Singhal

the temple site plan to change the location of the *garbh griha* (sanctum sanctorum). In the temple master plan, this is located on the disputed site, where a makeshift temple with the idol of Ram exists at the moment.

"If the judgment goes against us, we will see how the location of the *garbh griha* can be changed. Right now, there is no need to alter the master plan of the proposed temple," he said. He also rejected any "third party role" in handing over to the Nyas the 43-acre of undisputed land currently under the Centre's acquisition.

The Muslim Law Board had no say in the matter of transfer of this land which originally belongs to the Nyas, Singhal stressed. "This matter is exclusively between the Central Government and the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas. The Central Government has the right to hand over the land," he said, urging the Government to transfer it to the Nyas during the ongoing 100-day Purnahuti Yagna at Ayodhya that will conclude on June 2.

The Board termed as "positive development" the VHP's commitment to abide by a 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. Board spokesman S Q R Illyas said the Government should stop the VHP from going ahead with its plan, or else "we will be forced to take a restrain order from the apex court".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 Mar 2002

# Muslim Board wary of VHP

H. Dula Devi in New Delhi

March 7. - Even after the Vishwa Hindu Parishad gave a written undertaking to the Prime Minister to abide by the court verdict on the disputed site, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board is not ready to trust the VHP. For the Muslim leaders, it's 'once bitten twice shy'. Experience has made them so disillusioned with the Sangh Parivar that they are "apprehensive" of taking the risk of believing the VHP.

The 1992 experience still haunts them when even after the Kalyan Singh government gave a written undertaking to the Supreme Court, scores of kar sevaks kept pouring into Ayodhya and ultimately the Babari Masjid was demolished.

For the Muslim leaders, the BJP or Bajrang Dal or VHP are offshoots of the Sangh Parivar. "It is difficult for us to differentiate between the BJP and the VHP as after all their ideology remains the same.

An elected BJP government was in power in the state when the VHP kar sevaks brought down the mosque even after giving an undertaking to the highest court of law," said an AIMPLB member.

With the ball being thrown into the AIMPLB's court now after the VHP has given its undertaking, shouldering the moral responsibility on behalf of the entire Muslim community is putting a lot of pressure on the Board. "If something goes wrong, the whole community will hold us

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responsible," said a senior member. But they are also clear that if there is a law and order problem, it would be the headache of the Central government.

After the U-turn by the VHP today, the feedback that the Board has got so far is not very encouraging. Muslim leaders are carefully looking into the suggestions made by the Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati, on behalf of the VHP.

Certainly the Board members feel that the climbdown by the VHP after 24 hours is a "positive" signal. "The situation has changed since yesterday. The VHP's hardline approach was affecting our meetings also but we still have apprehensions," they said while adding that on Sunday the Board might come out with some more suggestions or a different formula altogether.

They might even suggest that if the VHP is allowed to construct a temple in the undisputed site then the Muslims should be handed over the disputed site along with the adjacent graveyard site and the *shilanyas* site. "Wouldn't that give the right kind of harmonious signal throughout the country if the matter gets resolved like this," asked a member.

According to the AIMPLB, the Kanchi Shankaracharya, who is touring Gujarat, would give a written assurance to the Board tomorrow on the basis of the VHP's undertaking. The agreement would be between the Board and the Kanchi Shankaracharya and not with the VHP.

ME STATECOUN

# Govt. attitude led to violence: Opposition

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 7.** Discussing the carnage in Gujarat for the first time in Parliament, the Opposition today lashed out at the Government for creating an environment that ignited communal passions in the State.

Rajya Sabha members belonging to the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the RJD and the Left accused both the Central and Gujarat Governments of being indifferent during the past few months while the atmosphere was being vitiated in the name of Ayodhya. They also accused the two Governments of inaction when murder and looting continued all over the State for a week. On the other hand, the BJP's allies, barring the Shiv Sena, trod a thin line by appealing for communal harmony and condemning both the train burning incident at Godhra and the brutality that followed.

The BJP, fielding the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, among others, wanted the House to ponder over how a mature society should respond to such events and ensure that violence of such magnitude was not repeated.

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The BJP, along with the Shiv Sena, did not appreciate the Opposition's charge that rising passions due to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's insistence on performing "puja" at the disputed site in Ayodhya was the genesis behind the violence that has claimed over 600 lives so far. Instead, they subscribed to the view that the Godhra incident was the "epicentre" and sought to turn the tables on the Congress by reminding it of its role during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. The BJP and the Shiv Sena also accused Godhra's municipal councillors, allegedly aligned with the Congress, of having played a pivotal role in burning down the passenger coaches and delaying rescue efforts. However, the Congress members refuted the charges.

The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, is scheduled to reply to the short duration discussion tomorrow.

Opening the proceedings in the afternoon, after the morning was spent in working out the sequence for discussing events of national importance, senior Congress leader, Pranab Mukherjee, recalled the week-long "temporary insanity" in Gujarat

10-11  
leading to "blood curdling atrocities" triggered by the atmosphere built up over the past few months. Urging the Government not to jeopardise the security and overall image of the nation because of political compulsions, he said that the NDA should remit office if it could not measure up to its primary responsibility of ensuring security of Indian citizens. The Left and other secular parties also spoke in a similar vein.

Criticism by the BJP's "secular" allies — the DMK and the Telugu Desam — was expectedly muted but the former made it clear that it stood firmly with the Government. P.N. Shiva (DMK) was confident that the NDA would remain united and urged the Opposition to make common cause with it in ensuring against bloodshed and butchery in the name of religion. In a terse two-sentence observation, TDP's Y.V. Rao condemned the violence in Gujarat and urged the Government to see that such incidents do not occur in future.

Making a similar plea, the AIADMK's P.G. Narayanan was of the view that the Army should be deployed in all the trouble spots but disputed the Opposi-

9 minutes  
tion's call for the resignation of Mr. Advani and the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi.

Social activist, Shabana Azmi, said though the train burning incident was "heinous", the State Government's apathy, while killings took place all over Gujarat, was equally shameful. She felt that the BJP and the Shiv Sena's contention that riots took place because none of the secular formations criticised the train killings was "weak" and "meant to put the Opposition on the defensive".

In the morning, tempers ran high and the Opposition too was divided on which of the issues should be discussed first — the Gujarat massacres, killing of a U.P. MLA or the U.P. Governor's recommendation for President's rule. Backroom parleys and an open offer by the Leader of the House, Jaswant Singh, to discuss all the issues, capped by a meeting of the Business Advisory Council, ensured that the members were given the opportunity to air their views on the Gujarat killings. The Samajwadi Party was assured that the U.P. situation would also be discussed.

# VHP climbdown on Ayodhya

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Centre of controversy: From sacred town to a city at the core of conflict, Ayodhya awaits an uncertain future. A securityman on patrol in the holy city on Thursday. — PTI

**Statesman News Service**

**NEW DELHI, March 7.** — The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today made a significant climbdown on its Ayodhya stand, declaring that it would abide by the court verdict on the issue. "We will accept the judgment of the court of law," the VHP's internal working president and managing trustee of the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas, Mr Ashok Singhal, said.

The VHP's new stand, which came by way of a clarification, came after intense pressure from the Prime Minister and other people. They tried to impress upon the organisation that the Shankaracharya-mediated solution for Ayodhya should be given a chance. Mr Singhal wrote to the Prime Minister before breaking the news to the media, informing him about the new stand. Now the ball is in the court of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

The VHP leader also indicated that the site for the proposed temple could be changed if the court decided that the disputed plot should be handed over to the Muslims. "We will see when the situation arises," he said while asserting that the temple would be constructed at the site only if the VHP got a favourable judgment from the court. "*Nahin to nahin banega.*"

An impression had gained ground that because of the VHP's tough

stand, the proposal of the Kanchi Shankaracharya was not taking off. The stand apparently provoked leaders of the minority community to view the proposal with suspicion. government sources said. The Shankaracharya had conveyed his displeasure to the VHP and had even informally hinted that he would appeal directly to the Hindu community if the organisation did not mend its ways.

The VHP's announcement is a rejection of its earlier stand that the court could not adjudicate on matters of faith. The Ramjanambhoomi Nyas, in its recent letter to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, had spoken about maintaining status quo at the disputed site till a court judgment, but did not clarify whether it would abide by the verdict. The VHP's stand had always been: "*Hum kasam Ram ki khatre hain, hum mandir walim banayenge* (We swear by the name of Ram that we will construct a temple at the disputed site)".

The government's decision to petition the court for day-to-day hearing of the case gave a face-saver to the VHP. Mr Singhal expressed the hope that the case would be adjudicated and resolved within a year. He welcomed the step to appoint a single judge with the responsibility of recording statements of the witnesses.

Mr Singhal said he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister on 27 January,

informing him that the VHP would abide by the court verdict. "The Prime Minister's Office expressed doubts and sought to know if I had changed the stand and hence, the clarification."

Mr Singhal said that the VHP's vice-

president, Mr Giriraj Kishore, was aware of the 27 February letter. When asked why Mr Kishore took a tough stand despite the letter, Mr Singhal said: "I withdraw the statements of Mr Kishore."

The government thinks the VHP

has been isolated after the Shankaracharya's statement that the latter is not concerned with the construction of the temple.

The BJP today alleged that Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Mr Somnath Chatterjee and Mr Mulayam Singh

Yadav were not interested in maintaining peace between the Hindus and Muslims.

They want to keep alive the communal divide for vote-bank politics, the party spokesman, Mr VK Malhotra, said.

Chatterjee and Mr Mulayam Singh said.

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Chatterjee and Mr Mulayam Singh said.

## Security now the core issue

**Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya and Sudesh K Verma in Delhi**

**March 7.** — After the VHP's climbdown on Ayodhya, security arrangements in the holy city has become the next contentious issue. The differences are not only between the VHP and Centre, but also within the government.

Sources said that unlike the PMO, the Union home ministry's stand on the issue was "flexible". The PMO's line has prevailed so far, though VHP leaders in Ayodhya have been "bitterly complaining" against it. They had conveyed their views to Mr LK Advani too.

The VHP today appealed to the Prime Minister to lift travel restrictions to and within Ayodhya. Thirteen BJP MPs from Uttar Pradesh, too, have written to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, urging him to relax the security. They said they would march to the city if their demand was not met.

For the last three days, sources said, Mr Advani had issued verbal orders to the state government to relax restrictions on the movement of items of daily use. But the orders were not carried out; on the contrary more barriers have come up.

Officials said if the VHP gave a guarantee that no kar sevaks would be sent to Ayodhya, security could be relaxed. Besides, steps would be taken to ease the residents' hardship. But VHP leaders in Ayodhya are not convinced. Neither are they willing to say that no more kar sevaks will come. They instead complain that security-men are stopping all vehicles, including rickshaws. Less than 1,000 kar sevaks are in Ayodhya, the district administration said.

VHP sources said Mr Advani had apparently told them that the security arrangements would be changed. Mr Advani will send his deputy, Mr ID Swami, to Ayodhya tomorrow to take stock of the situation.

# Opp to gun for Advani, Modi

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 6. — The Budget session is set to resume tomorrow on a stormy note, with the Opposition all set to gun for the Narendra Modi government and Mr LK Advani.

Fifteen Opposition parties, including the Congress, Left, SP, RJD, NCP and Mr Simrajit Singh Mann's Akali faction, today met at Mr Somnath Chatterjee's residence to finalise the strategy they will adopt on the floor of the House. They plan to stall the proceedings tomorrow over the Gujarat and Ayodhya issues. The murder of the SP MLA in Lucknow has strengthened their armoury.

Mr Chatterjee accused the Centre of keeping the Opposition in the dark about the "dealings" on the Ayodhya issue and warned against flouting the Supreme Court direction. The option of an adjournment motion was discussed.

Congress spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy said the conduct of Mr Narendra Modi — "from doing

nothing to control the riots and killings to treating the victims on communal lines — clearly established that "Mr Modi is the model chief minister of BJP" and the his government "has truly made Gujarat a laboratory for communal experiments".

While Mr Chatterjee asked the NDA partners to show their "so-called secular concern", Mr Reddy urged the Samata Party to explain whether Mrs Jaya Jaitley's defence of Mr Modi, which "is a return of her compliments for Mr Modi earlier rushing to defend her during the Tehelka scam", was indeed the party stand.

The CPI-ML general secretary, Mr Dipankar Bhattacharya, and the party's Lok Sabha member, Dr Jayant Rongpi, who returned to Delhi after visiting Gujarat alleged "a calculated and well-executed attack on Muslims in the state".

They also asked the Centre to adhere to the Supreme Court direction on the Ayodhya issue and questioned the "credentials of the so-called religious heads to speak for the entire Hindu and Muslim communities".

THE STATESMAN

# Centre approaches HC for daily hearing on Ayodhya

**Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi**

March 6. — The Vajpayee government today proposed that the VHP either amend its temple site plan or postpone construction plans till a court verdict, besides committing that it would abide by the court decision.

The proposal came after the government met a VHP demand that the court case be expedited on a daily basis. The Centre approached the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court to hear the case on a daily basis.

The court has granted time till 18 March for parties to file replies to the application. Further hearing will be held on 19 March.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee deputed Mr George Fernandes to brief the NDA allies on the develop-

9. minutes  
ments regarding the Ayodhya issue and keep them posted on the situation. The message to the allies is that they should not put a spanner in the works by making political statements as they would be consulted before the government takes a final decision, sources said.

Both the DMK and the PMK welcomed the initiative taken by Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati to solve the temple issue.

Mr M Karunanidhi appreciated the Kanchi Shankaracharya's efforts, adds SNS from Chennai. "The DMK welcomes any efforts to solve the Ayodhya issue. The Kanchi Shankaracharya's efforts to mediate in the matter is laudable," he said.

If both Muslim leaders and the VHP come to a negotiated settlement, the DMK would welcome it, Mr Karunanidhi said.

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## AYODHYA:

(Continued from page 1)

As a face-saver to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, the government has apparently conceded the point that the VHP should either postpone its construction plan till a court verdict or amend its temple site plan. The key players in the negotiation feel this would allow the AIMPLB to accept the proposal for transfer of land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas.

However, the senior VHP vice-president, Mr Giriraj Kishore, said there was no question of altering the site plan. He pointed out that the VHP had merely committed itself to the status quo till the court verdict. The president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas said: "The fact that we fought a court case proves that we have respect for the court."

The VHP can get exposed if it fails to commit itself to a court verdict, a senior BJP leader said. After all the government had done its part and it was the VHP's turn to respond, he said.

The Shankaracharya has reportedly told the Prime Minister that if the VHP doesn't agree to abide by the court judgement, he would appeal to Hindus to dissociate themselves from the VHP. Sources said the VHP posturing might be due to the assumption that the AIMPLB would not accept the transfer proposal, he said.

# Sankaracharya meets Imams

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 6.** In his continuing efforts towards finding an amicable, negotiated solution to the vexed Ayodhya problem, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswathi, today met a delegation of the All-India Organisation of Imams of Mosques which sought time till March 13 to consider the compromise formula.

Talking to presspersons after a 50-minute meeting at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, the Sankaracharya and the president of the Organisation of Imams, Jameel Ahmed Ilyasi, stressed the need to build mutual trust and brotherhood to help arrive at a consensus on the Ayodhya problem.

The Sankaracharya and the Imam appeared satisfied with their "direct contact" with the latter claiming that they had, together, cleared the "air of hatred" between the two communities. The communal violence in Gujarat and the killing of innocent people — in Godhra and Ahmedabad — also came in for sharp condemnation during their discussions.

The Sankaracharya reiterated that the case pertaining to the title of the disputed land in Ayodhya was pending before the court. He hoped that both the parties would abide by the court's

verdict. On the proposed compromise formula of handing over the acquired land to the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas for beginning the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya, the Sankaracharya said it would be much better if Hindus and Muslims together found a way out. "I have invited the Imams to visit Kanchi on March 14 and we will find a way out."

Maulana Ilyasi said Muslims were not concerned over what the Government did with its acquired land in Ayodhya but the stake of the Wakf Board would need to be taken into account. The case was going on for the past five decades and in due course the locks were removed, idols placed and finally, the Babri Masjid demolished. Condemning the efforts to make "mandir-masjid" an issue for grabbing power, he said that it was the desire of the Muslims that the masjid should be reconstructed on the original site.

Well-placed Government sources said the written undertaking to abide by the court verdict case was given by the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas and not the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The Sankaracharya had acted as a catalyst to begin the process of dialogue that could lead to peaceful resolution of the Ayodhya issue though it could turn out to be dotted with hurdles.

7 MAR 2002

# Ayodhya formula could prove to be non-starter

By Smita Gupta  
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vajpayee government finds itself in a spot of bother with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Wednesday refusing to give a clear-cut assurance that it would accept the court verdict in the Ayodhya case. Senior vice-president of the VHP Acharya Giriraj Kishore said, "There is no question of giving an undertaking that we will accept the court verdict. In fact, there is also no question of a mosque being built at the site where puja has been going on for 52 years."

Worried sources in the Prime Minister's Office said that for Mr Vajpayee to sell the formula to his allies and parliament,

the least he would require was a commitment from the VHP that it would accept the court verdict. "It is on this premise that the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) agreed to consider the proposal put before it by the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram, Jayendra Saraswati. Without it, the formula will be a non-starter," a PMO official said.

The Shankaracharya has extended his stay in the capital following a request from Mr Vajpayee to convince VHP leaders and sants to give a categorical assurance. The Kanchi seer met Mr Vajpayee on Tuesday night. On Wednesday morning, he spoke to VHP chief Ashok Singhal and briefed him about his talks with the Prime Minister.

On Wednesday, the Prime Minister asked NDA convenor and defence minister George Fernandes to apprise the party's allies in the government of the dis-

cussions held in the last couple of days. However, sources emphasised that the PM was not trying to sell the Centre's formula, but only clearing confusion on the issue.

On Tuesday, optimism rose as the Kanchi seer's reference to the VHP "awaiting" the court judgment was mistakenly read as its readiness to "accept" the court verdict and maintain the status quo at the disputed site. However, realising the mistake on Wednesday, Mr Vajpayee requested the Shankaracharya to make a fresh attempt to get an assurance from the Hindutva outfit.

Meanwhile, the developments have also come as an embarrassment to leaders of the MPLB. Sources stated that with the seer going public on the issue, the position of the board leaders had been compromised vis-a-vis their community.

► See Edit: Ram Ka Nam, Page 10

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 MAR 2002

# Riot survivor thought his world was ending

REUTERS  
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 6

**N**ASERUDDIN thought his world was ending. Stranded on the balcony of a blazing building, cut off by an enraged mob, he put the palms of his hands together and pleaded for help he thought would never come.

A widely-used photograph of Naseruddin last Friday summed up the terror of those caught up in India's worst communal riots in a decade — his eyes narrowed in fear, his face blackened with soot, his shirt blood-spattered.

He was very nearly one of the over 600 who died.

But on Wednesday, he told the tale of how he ended up alone on that balcony and how the Army saved his life.

Naseruddin, a 29-year-old Muslim and father of two, said that he knew there would be trouble when he heard 58 people had been burned to death when their train was torched in Godhra.

He did not dare go to work in a tailor's shop, staying at home with his wife, four-year-old daughter and two-year-old son.



Qutbuddin Naseruddin, 29, pleading for his life after being surrounded by rioters on March 1 and after surviving the attack. Reuters photo

Enraged Hindu mobs, bent on avenging the train deaths, reached his Muslim-dominated area of Rehmatnagar, on Ahmedabad's outskirts on Friday.

"By 11 in the morning, stones

were thrown at our house. I picked up my children and ran with them and my wife to a community hall," he said.

"Then I went back to see whether my friend and his family were safe," he said, speaking first on the street among the broken glass and burned out vehicles and later at his house.

By the time he got there, his friend, 35-year-old Rafik, his wife, and two boys aged 12 and 10 had fled from the two-storey building where they live above Rafik's motorbike showroom.

The showroom was already on fire and Rafik's family too were rushed to safety and both men returned to try to fight the blaze.

"First we tried to pull out some valuables. We wanted to save as many things as possible. We were trying to douse the fire," he said.

At some point, Naseruddin got separated from his friend and found himself alone on the balcony, confronted by a Hindu mob.

"The fire was raging from below and I could not get down.

"The mob was almost 50,000 people. They were carrying oxygen and LPG cylinders, iron rods and swords and were setting on

fire everything that came across their way."

He remembers police firing but this had little impact.

The mob was too well-organized, egged on by elders, some wearing saffron. They'd even thought to bring water to quench their thirst.

"I was stranded on the first floor of the building for two-and-a-half hours. I was begging everyone who was passing by to help me. I thought the whole world had come to an end for me."

Then the Army, deployed after police failed to end the riots, arrived with a ladder, and brought him safely to his family. "I owe my life to the Army which helped me. Had they not come I would have been killed," he said.

Apart from some bruises on his upper lip and left thumb from the stone throwing, he was unhurt. But he does not expect to go back to work for another month — like many he is too afraid of more violence. And for him what trust that existed between Ahmedabad's Hindus and Muslims has vanished. "I don't think the people from both communities will ever be the same again," he said.

# The guilty men of Ahmedabad

9 mi winter  
HD-10 By Harish Khare 713

*Never before has a State Government been so guilty of siding — emotionally, politically and administratively — with the rioter as happened in Ahmedabad and the rest of Gujarat.*

AHMEDABAD HAS been there before. The city is no stranger to violent conflicts. 1969, 1981, 1985, 1990 and 1992. But 2002 is different; fundamentally different. Plainly put: This time the State administration has turned rogue. Never before has a State Government been so guilty of siding — emotionally, politically and administratively — with the rioter as happened in Ahmedabad and the rest of Gujarat for three days. Never before, perhaps not even in 1984, has the line between the administrator and the arsonist got so blurred and so deliberately. If the violence has tapered off it is only because the vandal has run out of incendiary energy. There are three obvious reasons for this collapse of state authority in Gujarat.

First, the presence of an activist kar sevak in the Chief Minister's post. Narendra Modi was rewarded with the Chief Minister's post because of his famed "dynamism". There was and continues to be an inherent conflict between his training and political persona as a grand kar sevak, and his constitutional role and obligations as a Chief Minister. In fact, by training and experience Mr. Modi was best equipped to deal with the post-Godhra carnage situation. After all, he is the best known product of the Hindutva school in Gujarat, and is well-versed in the art of calibrating violence. As Chief Minister, Mr. Modi could have anticipated — and mobilised his administration to frustrate — every single move the so-called "angry Hindu community" made after the Godhra incident. But he preferred to be a kar sevak and wilfully ignored his constitutional obligations. No wonder then that Ministers and ruling party legislators could with impunity lead the mobs in their murderous forays.

Second, there was this inexcusable abdication by the administrative and police hierarchy of its professional duties. Senior IPS and IAS officers have blood on their hands. In particular, the Director-General of Police and the Ahmedabad Commissioner

of Police are guilty of connivance with the rioter because the two of them simply did not have the courage of the uniform they wear to tell the Chief Minister that his "illegal" orders would not be complied with. Had the DGP walked out of his office rather than allow his police force to be enlisted in the cause of teaching a lesson to a section of society, the state-sponsored violence would have simply not taken off. Just a minor outbreak of professional conscience and an intellectual awareness of statutory authority would have stymied the revenge-brigade's appetite for retribution. Or, take for instance, the excuse that the Army could not be out on the streets earlier because it took time to find the magistrates to accompany the soldiers' column. This in a regime that preens itself as a "nuclear power". No doubt a judicial commission, sooner or later, would have to fix the culpability of these IAS and IPS officers.

And, third, the political and constitutional ambivalence in New Delhi towards the events in Gujarat. Both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister failed the nation. Mr. Vajpayee watched helplessly as Mr. Modi treated him as nothing more than a Bahadur Shah Zafar, to be respected but not to be heeded. And, Mr. Vajpayee himself behaved like a Bahadur Shah Zafar. The nation did not hear for the first 48 hours now the Prime Minister was reacting to the news of medieval barbarity and of the State administration's procrastination. And, when Mr. Vajpayee did speak up, he was more sad than angry that a State Government could so besmirch India's name, bringing this country on a par with the Taliban.

Not to be left behind is Lal Krishna

Advani. As Home Minister, he must have been getting the ubiquitous "intelligence" reports on how the kar sevak were being a nuisance on their to and fro journeys to Ayodhya; as an administrator he was obliged to alert the law and order machinery throughout the country to the potential of a violent eruption like the one that took place at Godhra. But, in his ambivalent mind, the kar sevaks can do no wrong. This thinking percolates down the line, and the police and intelligence officers turn off their antennae.

Then, on February 27, Mr. Advani found himself constrained to issue an uncharacteristically categorical and blunt statement, telling the VHP crowd that as Home Minister he was obliged to uphold law and order and enforce the law of the land in the matter of the Ayodhya dispute. This resolve simply melted into thin air when his party men began organising collective retribution for the Godhra massacre; throughout those four violent days the Union Home Minister forgot his constitutional obligations. On the contrary, he acted as if he found nothing amiss in a State administration treating a section of society as hostile elements. This is the same regime that only a few months ago became hyper-actively aware of its obligations under Article 355 that ensure that Government in Tamil Nadu was carried on in accordance with the Constitution. The same Law Minister, the same Home Minister and other voluble BJP Ministers are now busy finding excuses for Mr. Modi.

Because of the dereliction of duty in Gandhinagar and the ambivalence in New Delhi, the Indian state has not only lost its sheen but also stands

depleted considerably of its legitimacy. Unless the ruling establishment is compelled to rectify its mistakes, we would be taking the first irreversible step towards a civil war. In fact, in his clarificatory statement (of the we-do-not-need-the-Muslims'-vote fame) of February 21, the Prime minister had reported verbatim his Varanasi speech (of February 19): "Our Government is there at the Centre. There has been no discrimination, there is no insecurity — we have treated all sections of society equally. Moreover, there is the Constitution; a Human Rights Commission has been set up; there is the Judiciary; and, there are newspapers. If there is any injustice against anybody, then that injustice can be removed by recourse to these institutions."

Mr. Vajpayee's own prescription would have to be applied against the Modi Government. In particular, the Vajpayee establishment could initiate steps to punish those senior officers who connived, directly or indirectly, in the systemic violence. The bureaucratic leadership itself must generate sufficient peer pressure to blackball those officers who give in to the political leaders' criminal demands. The PMO must find ways and means to send out a signal to the IPS/IAS cadres that promotions, postings and pensions can be denied to those who flirt with administrative illegality. This message is the minimum requirement and has to be heard and heeded in every State capital.

Moreover, the Prime Minister and others have to realise that "Ahmedabad" has undermined the minorities' faith in the constitutional arrangement. And though the sense of insecurity in a section of society takes its own toll and complicates the task of governance, the frightening development is the gathering belief in the BJP that there may be rich electoral dividends after all in Gujarat's State-blessed dance macabre. Cultivated lawlessness is an antithesis to governance and peaceful conduct of collective affairs.

THE HINDU

7 MAR 2002

# Carnage in Gujarat

## Telling Silence, Mr Vajpayee

By SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN

PRIME minister Vajpayee's attempt to blame the people of Gujarat — and their supposed lack of "harmony" — for the mass killings in their state is a disingenuous manoeuvre aimed at absolving himself, his party colleagues and the state machinery they control, of any responsibility for the crimes.

Instead of using national television to tell the people of Gujarat that the genocidal mobs would be put down with a firm hand — and that policemen failing to protect the life and liberty of all would be punished — Mr Vajpayee delivered a sermon on the need for religious tolerance. Considering that it took him two whole days and over 300 deaths to come up with such tepid fare, he might at least have used his poetic skills to compensate for the lack of political will. Who knows, if the poet Amrita Pritam could have delivered her 'Waris Shah' on television in 1947, she might have shamed a killer or two into dropping his weapon. Sadly, our prime minister could not even do that much. Though he has described the violence as a "blot on the nation", there was little passion or feeling in what he said, no words of succour for the victims, no anger or opprobrium for the killers. If Vajpayee the statesman failed the nation, Vajpayee the poet fared no better.

Like Rajiv Gandhi in November 1984 and Narasimha Rao in January 1993, Mr Vajpayee will go down in history as a prime minister who preached the virtues of tolerance even as his cohorts turned a blind eye to the massacre of innocent citizens. Had he gone on television to denounce those using the Godhra incident to justify attacks on Muslims — including chief minister Narendra Modi, who said, "*Har kriya ki pratikriya hoti hi hai* (Every act produces a reaction)" — he would have alienated a handful of fanatics but earned the gratitude of the entire nation in return. One Arab and one Sikh were murdered in the US following the terrorist massacre of over 3,000 people at the World Trade Center and the public outcry forced president Bush to state that anyone attacking Muslims and other minorities would be severely dealt with. In India there was much self-righteous anger when a Sikh in the US was 'mistakenly' killed for being an Arab. In Gujarat, however, more than 450 Muslims have been hunted down and murdered

after Godhra — that too by elements inspired by his own party-men with the complicity of the state government and police — yet Mr Vajpayee could not bring himself to say, as the leader of India, that he would not allow anyone to attack Muslim citizens, as Mr Bush did in the US context.

There have been communal massacres before but never has such a concerted attempt been made to destroy not just a minority community but its economic foundations as well. Already, more than 450 Muslims have been killed. Tens of crores of rupees worth of property has been torched, and when the ashes settle, it may well be that no Gujarati Muslim business — from the smallest tea stall to large hotels and film studios — will have survived. Muslims from all walks of life have been targeted and even prominent members of the state and ruling apparatus — sitting high court judges, senior police officers and politicians — have not been

### IN BRIEF

- By calling for 'harmony' instead of enforcing the law, Vajpayee is shirking responsibility for the Gujarat violence
- As prime minister, he must be above any suspicion of partisanship
- He must ensure that the guilty of Gujarat are punished

spared. The fact that the BJP government in Gujarat devalued Muslim lives is well known; but by announcing compensation of one lakh rupees per riot victim as compared to two lakh rupees for the Godhra victims, Narendra Modi has arithmetically quantified his bias.

Ever since the hijacking of IC-814, the prime minister has become something of an expert in the fine art of capitulating to blackmail. Today, his government is indulging in 'negotiations' on the Ayodhya issue with a group that is responsible for the pogroms of Gujarat and openly flaunts its contempt for the law. Press reports are piling up by the day that the mobs were led and orchestrated by local leaders of the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Whether the ban on the Islamic group SIMI was justified or not, there was certainly no incriminating evidence against it of the kind that is publicly

accumulating against the VHP. If suspicion and intent were grounds to ban SIMI, why is the Union government unwilling to move against a group that is a walking advertisement for mass violence?

Asked by a citizens' delegation last week why his government could not ban the VHP when General Musharraf had managed to ban several religious extremist groups in Pakistan, Mr Vajpayee is said to have replied, "(Musharraf) is a dictator and can ban anyone. We are a democracy". This appeal to 'democracy' has an uncomfortable resonance with the controversial remark Mr Vajpayee made last month during the final phase of campaigning for the Uttar Pradesh elections. Speaking at a rally in Allahabad, he urged Muslims to vote for his party but added that the BJP was going to win even without their votes. Though Mr Vajpayee subsequently went out of his way to stress that he did not mean to say the BJP wasn't interested in Muslim votes, the import of his message to Indian Muslims couldn't have been clearer: You are either with us or you are against us. It could have been interpreted as a velvet-gloved threat, which the Bajrang Dal and VHP in Gujarat have come good on.

Even at this late stage, Mr Vajpayee can work to retrieve the situation. First, he must use his party channels to dismiss Narendra Modi as chief minister and replace him with a man who will arrest those leaders, political activists and police officials who through their action, inaction and incendiary speeches have led to so much carnage. Second, the law of the land must be made to apply to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and all other organisations which are involved in inciting hatred and violence. Far from giving the VHP respectability, the Centre should state unequivocally that there is no question of giving in to blackmail over Ayodhya, now or in the future.

Finally, the prime minister must realise that what has happened in Gujarat is not abstract, amorphous violence but the targeted killing of Muslim citizens with the tacit backing of the state administration. Godhra was a terrible crime but the government at least did not help the murderers; what happened afterwards, however, suggests official complicity. Unless the guilty are punished, the Central government will have relinquished its moral right to hold office.

6 MAR 2002

## Respite in Ayodhya

The reported willingness of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to abide by the court's verdict in regard to the Ayodhya dispute brings them on a track from which they should never have deviated: Although only time will tell if the organisation will remain true to its word or if there is an unseen catch in the reported agreement. This outcome — which will provide respite to the beleaguered Vajpayee government — is largely a result of the intensive discussions that Swami Jayendra Saraswathi, Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram, and other moderate spiritual leaders like Sri Sri Ravi Shankar have been holding in the Capital with leaders of the VHP and the Muslim Personal Law Board as well as with the prime minister and his emissaries. The impact of this development in Gujarat will command immediate attention. It has been clear all along that no amount of mutual recriminations over the killing of Hindu pilgrims by Muslim hoodlums at Godhra and the killing, on a far more dreadful scale, of ordinary Muslim citizens by Hindu goons in Ahmedabad and elsewhere in Gujarat could provide solace to the families of the victims or bring about a measure of harmony between the two communities. The insidious attempts made largely, if not exclusively, by some leading lights of the Sangh parivar to explain, and even justify, such brutality in terms of action-and-reaction only served to create more fissures in society.

In the weeks ahead, investigations will reveal the identities of those who engineered the murderous incidents and shed light on their motives. The culprits will hopefully receive their just desserts in an even handed manner. In the meanwhile, however, it is of the utmost urgency to address some critical issues, including, creation of conditions that provide physical and psychological security to all citizens. A nervous calm already prevails in Ahmedabad. But reports of vengeance wreaked on Muslims, particularly in the rural areas, continue to trickle in. Unless such violence is stopped forthwith, the danger of the communal virus contaminating other regions of the country cannot be ruled out. These steps, however, can do no more than address the symptoms of the horrendous malady that afflicts the country, namely the intractable conflict between two visions of India. One that upholds the supremacy of the nation's democratic and secular Constitution and posits its trust in the rule of law. The other, espoused so far by the VHP and its allies, that places 'faith' above the Constitution, above Parliament and above the courts and equates nationalism, culture and much else besides with an imagined Hindu majority. The Muslims, to their credit, have always stated in explicit terms that they are willing to abide by the verdict of the courts and, should it go against them, to accept it without rancour. No such commitment had unfortunately been forthcoming until now from the leaders of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Its willingness to respect the verdict of the court should hopefully mark the beginning of a durable settlement of the Ayodhya dispute which has left in its wake a trail of death and destruction, besmirched the Republic and blackened the image of India as a land of tolerance in the eyes of the world. //

6 MAR 2002



## NOWHERE TO GO, NARODA SURVIVOR RETURNS TO MASSACRE SITE

# Lonely search for way back to life

FROM CHANDRIMA BHATTACHARYA

**Ahmedabad, March 5:** Miraben, stepping out gingerly from her charred house, is the one sign of life flickering. Otherwise, nothing remains even to burn in Patia, a sprawling Muslim neighbourhood in Naroda on the outskirts of the city where the count of death by fire exceeded the 58 people burnt alive in the Godhra train.

The only noise is of a plastic bag fluttering in the wind; then it settles down — like the obstinate burning smell that stays on even after five days.

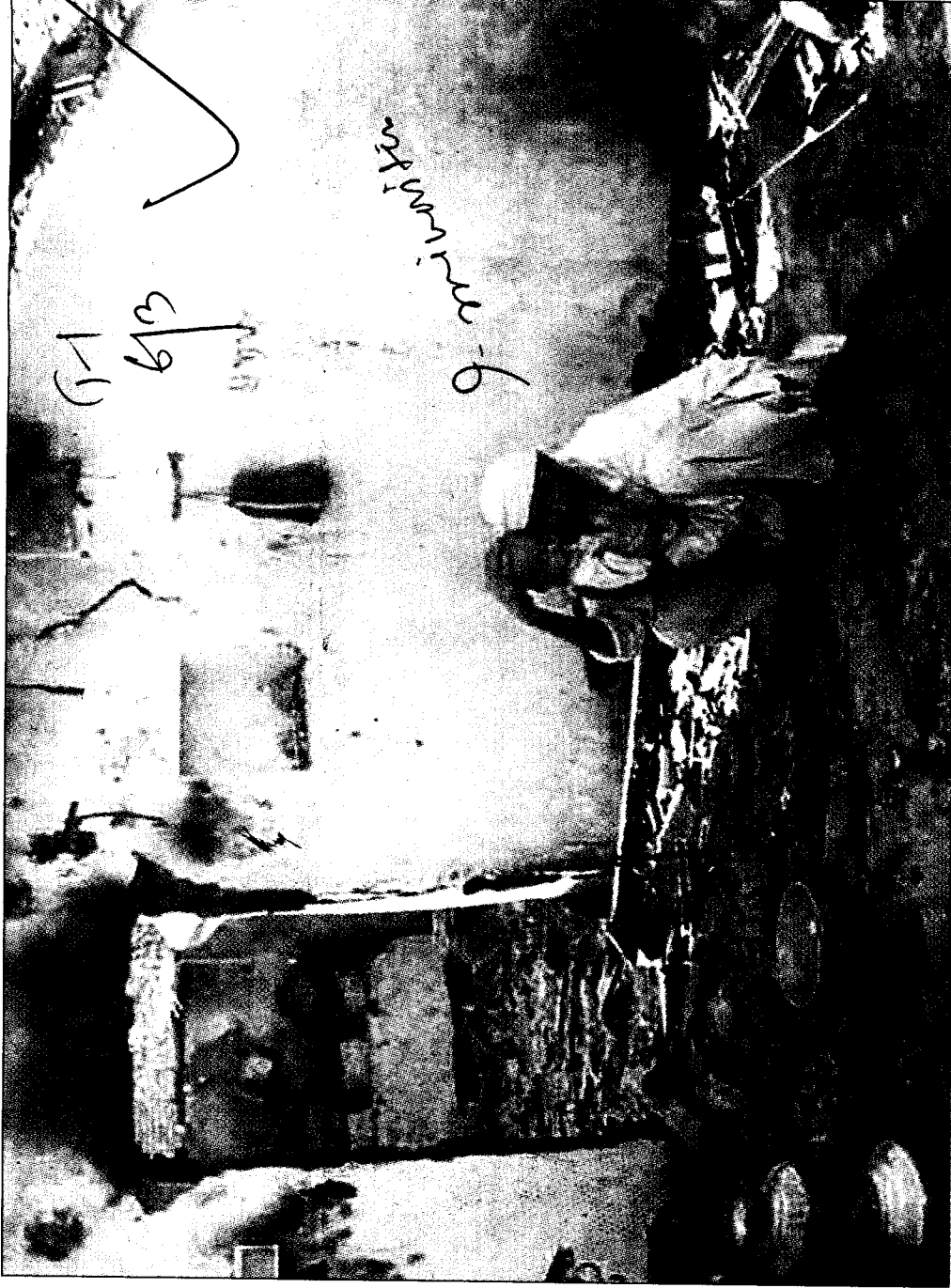
Miraben, who works as a domestic help like many of her neighbours, has nowhere to go. So she has come back when no one else has. She tried a relative's place; it didn't work out. Her husband's health is impaired; her son is not old enough to work. She couldn't stay on with such "liabilities".

She hasn't even had a proper bath in five days. Her face is covered with the ash that is flying out of the charred furniture; her saree caked with dust.

Her home is a burnt one-room concrete structure with an asbestos sheet on top. There are about 500 houses like that in the colony, where some 4,000 people lived. Only the structures remain like gaping black holes.

According to unofficial estimates, more than a 100 people were burnt alive here last Friday. The official toll is 67. The rest have fled or are at relief camps.

Some of Miraben's neighbours did return, but only



A man huddles with his grandson amid the debris of his house in Sasen Nava village near Ahmedabad. (Reuters)

for half-an-hour or so, to see if anything remained of their houses.

Miraben could return with bigger plans because, "after all, like the 20-odd families in the neighbourhood, I am a Hindu". "They thought I was a Muslim too. I didn't have photographs of gods or goddesses inside my house as I had just taken them out for cleaning," says Miraben.

"But then I shouted 'Jai Sri Ram' as the crowds started to set fire to everything."

"My Muslim neighbours who were clever also shouted 'Jai Sri

Ram'. That saved their lives. But those who were stubborn would only cry 'Allah'. Even small children would only say 'Allah'. So they slit their throats first with *usthras* (razors), then doused them with kerosene and set them on fire," says Miraben.

"Sometimes they set fire to a

### QUOTE

**I don't know which of my friends is alive or who is dead**

A RIOT SURVIVOR

family and closed the door from outside," says Miraben.

"Those who came to kill were all from outside. We didn't know any one of them," she said.

She doesn't know whether she will last the night, though. From the remains of a chicken shop, a few feathers blow out. The birds, after the shop was set aflame, were burnt inside the two huge cages.

Just after the shop, there are two *khatriyas*. They are the dividing line: "Muslim territory" ends there. But the "Hindu territory" also looks deserted — except for a huddle of people gath-

ered in a courtyard.

There's no certainty these people can be trusted, for the handful of policemen are convinced that they have remained to rob the houses.

Miraben's house has been swept clean. "I was saving for my son's marriage. There were a few ornaments and some money. Nothing remains," she says.

"I didn't look when they were on the killing spree. I would have to see so many of my friends with whom I have lived for more than 30 years die. I don't know which of my friends is alive or who is dead."

# Mosque plan on table

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

**New Delhi, March 5:** If moderate in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board have their way, there will be a mosque around the Ram temple in Ayodhya as part of a negotiated settlement.

In protracted talks with the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, the board team promised to explore the possibility of an amicable settlement, pleading for a mosque near the disputed area as a "symbolic gesture" of tolerance and peace in exchange for paving the way for a Ram temple.

The Muslim delegation confirmed that a proposal to build a mosque was made to the Sankaracharya on behalf of ailing board chief Qazi Mujahid-ur-Islam. The board team told the Sankaracharya it was prepared for a settlement in "national interest" and expressed full confidence in his "good offices".

Caught unawares, hardliners and political leaders on the board and outside reacted strongly. Syed Abdullah

Bukhari, Syed Shahabuddin and Zafaryab Jeeilani and others said they were not ready for a compromise.

The next few days will see a war of attrition between hardliners and moderates among Muslims, culminating in a meeting on Sunday of the board's general body. Almost all Muslim sects are represented on the board and it will be an uphill task for Bukhari (who is not even a member), Jeelani and Shahabuddin to successfully oppose plans for a negotiated settlement.

Board chairman Qazi Islam favours one. He is even prepared to take on the likes of Bukhari. Islam feels this is an opportunity to tie the VHP down to a commitment to abide by a court verdict on the disputed land. Moderates on the board said the Gujarat riots should serve as an eye-opener as communal conflicts tend to hurt Muslims more.

The hardliners are unwilling to resolve the issue under what they see as duress. They feel the Sankaracharya's proposals are a

trap, a script written by the Sangh parivar. According to them, the VHP and the BJP have made Muslims a party to a dispute that essentially involved the government and the VHP.

The moderates countered the argument, asserting that the board should not get mixed up in politics.

"We are concerned about the safety and security of millions of Muslims in India. That is our top priority. What happens in the political arena is beyond our realm," said Kamal Farooqui, who was part of the board's negotiating team.

The last time the board witnessed a showdown was over reform of laws pertaining to women.

In Bangalore that time, the hardliners had won, but Islam had vowed to continue the fight.

A similar test awaits him on Sunday, though much would also depend on how the VHP and the Sangh parivar react to the board's proposal for a mosque.

## Modi and ministers stay away from riot relief camps



(Continued from page 1)

part of the police.

What rankles many at the refugee camps is that the government has decided that the families of victims of the Godhra carnage will be paid Rs 2 lakh as compensation while relatives of those killed in the "revenge" attacks across the state will receive Rs 1 lakh each. Ataullah Khan, a camp resident, asks in anger: "Are Hindus worth more than Muslims? Why this discrimination in compensation?" Reports such as these, and rumours that the perpetrators of the Godhra attack will be booked under Poto while the rioters who led the revenge attacks will be tried under less draconian laws, confirm the worst suspicions of many in the camp.

The general feeling is that some financial compensation would help to repair damaged homes and shattered lives. But their hopes have been dashed by what they see as the bias of the Modi government. "Some of us

## Gujarat:

are third or fourth generation Ahmedabadis; we don't deserve to hear 'send these Muslims to Pakistan'. Now, we do not trust even Mr Vajpayee - and we voted for the BJP last time," says Inamul Bhai, from Iradi.

Some of the younger male refugees spoke of retaliation. They said they were forced to chant "Jai Shri Ram" (and other Hindu religious chants) by the rioters. Nearly all of them point out that members of their community did not retaliate in the Shahibaugh area (where the camp is located). "We were at the receiving end but all we sought was safety; we did not fight back," Dawood Bhai, a camp supervisor, asserts.

"The area around the relief camp is predominantly Muslim (of the approximately 25,000 residents of the area only 5000 or so are non-Muslims. But members of the Hindu community were not attacked, not a single temple or Church

touched, or any shops looted," he adds.

There are some 3,500 men, women and children in this camp, most of whom say they ran for their lives with just the clothes on their back. No government aid for this refugee camp, being run by the community, arrived till Monday. "Today, a bag of flour and another of rice has been sent to us by the government," one of the refugees said.

"Normalcy," of sorts, may have returned to Ahmedabad. But for the traumatised residents of the camp, that is a word in a lexicon long since forgotten.

**All-party delegation:** Government managers today got in touch with the Opposition to finalise the latter's demand for an all-party delegation visiting the riot-hit areas of Gujarat, adds SNS from Delhi. According to sources, "the process of consultations have begun and most likely an all-party delegation will visit Gujarat on Friday or Sunday."

## Kar sevaks:

(Continued from page 1)

humanity and peace, has encouraged me... Ibrahim Lodi used to rule Ayodhya prior to Babar and he was also a Muslim. He never felt the need to demolish a temple and turn it into a mosque, because he was a good Muslim."

According to Mr Syed, Babar was an 'offender' as he had defamed Islam by demolishing a Hindu sacred place.

"The demolished structure at Ayodhya could never have been a mosque as it lacked a podium for *azan* and appropriate facilities for *ozu* (washing and cleaning) before prayers, which are mandatory in a mosque. Rather, the structure had idols engraved on walls - which is forbidden in Islam," he added.

What will Muslim kar sevaks do in Ayodhya?

"We will participate in the 'Ram nam kirtan' without any hesitation provided, of course, the sadhus allow us," he said. This is how Mr Syed and his 14 colleagues want to rectify the 'great blunder' of history.

Asked whether it was their way of showing loyalty to the majority Hindu community, Mr Syed replied: "What loyalty? It is a lesson in love and peace that we want to teach the people."

It is obvious that these Muslim kar sevaks know the opprobrium that will be heaped upon them by members of their community.

While Mr Syed was willing to disclose his identity, his two fellow kar sevaks were not. One of them is a resident of Khandoghosh, the other of Raina.

They said they were afraid of being "harassed and tortured" by locals if news of their impending trip to Ayodhya leaked out. All three, however, are confident of making it to Ayodhya and Mr Syed said he was in constant touch with the other 12 'Muslim kar sevaks', "all of whom will definitely make the trip".

On 7 March and 23 March about 123 kar sevaks will leave Burdwan for Ayodhya. These groups would include at least 15 Muslims, confirmed Mr Biplob Bejoy Das, secretary, VHP, Burdwan. According to him, the organisation is 'sponsoring' the Muslim kar sevaks.

The VHP says it is allowing Muslim kar sevaks to head for Ayodhya after obtaining a written declaration from them that they (the kar sevaks) are not doing so under pressure or provocation.

These "soldiers", the VHP points out, want to join the Ayodhya venture of their own "free will."

## Seer moots security wall

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 5. — The Kanchi Shankaracharya today assured the government that the VHP would not touch the disputed site at Ayodhya till the Supreme Court gave a verdict.

On behalf of the VHP, Jayendra Saraswati also said that the organisation would accept the court ruling as well as status quo at the site.

He said the All India Muslim Personal Law Board would give a written undertaking that they would not object to the transfer of the undisputed land to the Ramjanambhoomi Trust for temple construction.

To ensure that there was complete trust between the two communities, the Shankaracharya suggested that a security wall be constructed around the disputed site for safe passage of devotees for regular puja at the makeshift temple.

The Shankaracharya has been acting as the chief negotiator between the government and the

VHP for the last three days. "The VHP has agreed to status quo at the disputed site as ordered by the Supreme Court, and it is now up to Muslim leaders to form their opinion about handing over the undisputed land to Hindus," he said after meeting senior government leaders and members of the law board. The AIMPLB's members will announce their decision tomorrow, he said.

"After an emergency meeting with other members, they will give a written assurance to me which will be passed to the government for final decision over the yagna," the Shankaracharya said. The government, he said, was seeking opinion from the law ministry and NDA members to grant permission for yagna on 15 March.

He said the VHP had assured that the disputed site would not be touched during the 100-day long yagna in Ayodhya. "The temple construction will be started only after the undisputed land is handed over to the Ramjanambhomi Nyas, which should be before the deadline of 3 June," he said.

SHANKARACHARYA'S TEMPLE-FOR-NOW FORMULA

# Govt insists on VHP guarantee

Sudesh K Varma and H Bula Devi in New Delhi

March 5. — Guarantee you'll follow the law, a solution may be possible — this was the message from both the government and Muslim community leaders to the VHP today.

PMO sources said a firm guarantee from the VHP that it would obey a court verdict on the disputed site in Ayodhya was necessary before the government agrees to any "peace formula", including the Shankaracharya-sponsored one of handing over 67 acres of undisputed land for temple construction.

Muslim leaders, who have sought time till Sunday to react to this proposal, are likely to reject it and recommend that all sides wait for the court verdict.

The VHP, for its part, has said the status quo should be maintained in Ayodhya till the court verdict. The distance between that and agreeing to abide by the verdict, even if it goes against the VHP, was not covered today.

The temple-for-now formula, a result of day-long hectic negotiations involving a large cast of mediators, was suggested by the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. The Shankaracharya conveyed to the Board the proposal that while waiting for the court verdict, temple construction begin outside the area where the Babari Masjid stood.

He was accompanied by former President Mr R Venkataraman, former Supreme Court Chief Justice Mr Ranganath Mishra, former UP Governor

Mr Romesh Bhandari and Samata Party leader Mr Shambhu Shrivastava. PMO sources said Mr Venkataraman had been in touch with the Prime Minister "for a long time".

Other mediators included Mr

## PLAYERS

Kanchi Shankaracharya, R Venkataraman, Justice Ranganath Mishra, Fernandes, Advani, Joshi

## RESULT?

Shankaracharya: Hand over 67 acres minus the disputed site for temple construction till court verdict comes

PMO: But VHP must abide by court verdict

Muslim leaders: Assurance on building a mosque

VHP: No firm assurance on abiding by court verdict

## REFEREE'S OPTION

Govt stands firm with VHP. Allows puja on undisputed land. Transfers undisputed land before 2 June.

George Fernandes, Mr LK Advani and Mr MM Joshi, all of whom met the Shankaracharya. An interesting addition was Ravi Shankar Maharaj of the Art of Living Foundation.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and other representatives of the government are unhappy at the VHP's failure to say that it would abide by the court verdict and its insistence that it would merely maintain status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya till a court decision.

A government delegation comprising Mr Vajpayee, Mr Advani, Mr Fernandes, Mr Arun Jaitley and Mr Brajesh Mishra met the Shankaracharya at the Prime Minister's residence late tonight

to discuss the new situation.

A letter from the Ramjanambhoomi Trust president, Mahant Ramchander Das, to the Prime Minister only commits that status quo will be maintained till a court decision about the disputed site. It didn't say whether it would abide by the court verdict, VHP sources said.

Some senior members of the NDA government calculated that the moral authority of the Shankaracharya will force the VHP to accept the proposal. A refusal will divide the VHP and the sants and might endanger the temple movement.

VHP vice-president Mr Giriraj Kishore welcomed the proposal to transfer the land to the Trust and said it would go ahead with its temple construction plan. He carefully added that the court should take a decision on the basis of documentary evidence because examining witnesses would take time.

It's understood that the Muslim leadership will demand that the VHP revise its temple site plan to exclude the Babari Masjid site. They will also want provisions for a mosque to be built on the land adjacent to the makeshift temple. This land, Muslim leaders said, didn't belong to Ramjanambhoomi Trust.

Muslim leaders said the Shankaracharya's proposal had to be pitted against the "larger community's wishes".

"The entire community has to be taken into confidence," a leader said. AIMPLB leaders will consult "intellectuals and other personalities outside the Board" before taking a decision.

Seer moots security wall, page 6



Mediator's day: Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati (right), at a meeting with the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

## The Muslim kar sevaks heading for Ayodhya

Kanchan Siddiqui in Burdwan

March 5. — Fifteen Muslim kar sevaks from the red bastion of Burdwan are all set to join the VHP contingents heading for Ayodhya to begin temple construction on 15 March. Three of them, while speaking to The Statesman, said they viewed their participation in the Ayodhya agitation as an "expiatory move" for 'Babar's offence in 1528 AD.'

Meet 55-year-old Syed Anisur Rahim, a watch-shop owner from the Bara Bazar area of Burdwan town. Devout Muslim and kar sevak, he is the architect of the move to encourage Muslims to join the VHP's agitation and the only one of the three kar sevaks spoken to who was willing to reveal his identity. His shop near the BC Road mosque is these days crowded with triumphant VHP activists. Bemoaned officials from the Intelligence agencies have been keeping an eye on the place ever since he disclosed his plans.

Asked what prompted him to join the kar sevaks heading for Ayodhya, he said: "My own religion, Islam, which preaches

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## From hype to helplessness

Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya

March 5. — At dawn, VHP activists and small batches of Ram sevaks who managed to reach here dodging the security men were in their usual belligerent mood. But by the evening, their mood had changed.

Not having heard anything from their bosses in Delhi, they didn't know how to react to some swift developments that had taken place in the Capital. The few who were present groped for words that didn't sound as if they had been let down. This was especially true for the sevaks from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

"We haven't had a talk with the sants and top leaders. We couldn't connect a call to Delhi and have no idea what happened there. Everything will take place as scheduled. Lakhs of kar sevaks will reach here by 15 March and pillars will be moved from the workshop to the construction site," Mr Sharad Sharma, a VHP spokesperson, said in the evening.

Senior VHP and Ram Janambhoomi Nyas leaders have been away in Delhi for the past two days. And they didn't bother to

inform their cadre here about the compromise formula they had worked out and about which the entire nation, except those in Karsevakpuram and Ramsevakpuram, has come to know.

To boost the sagging morale of the kar sevaks, the organisers have even disowned the BJP MP from Faizabad and former Bajrang Dal chief, Mr Vinay Katiyar.

## Bengal kar sevaks on the move

MALDA, March 5. — Despite Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's announcement that kar sevaks from the state wouldn't be allowed to proceed to Ayodhya, several of them from across North Bengal are preparing to leave for the holy city.

Small groups of sevaks have started gathering at railway stations in Malda and North Dinajpur despite the stepped-up vigil by police. The North Dinajpur SP said: "We're detaining suspects for at least 10 minutes before the schedule departure of the trains... if the situation demands, we'll arrest the sevaks." He admitted that it's impossible to detect each and every kar sevak. — SNS

In the thick of the Ayodhya movement once, Mr Katiyar hinted things could change in the next 24 hours. The security in and around the city would be relaxed and there wouldn't be any movement of pillars on 15 March as had been announced by the VHP, he suggested.

The statement of the person who has been quietly mediating between the government and Sangh Parivar despite publicly maintaining a hard line didn't go down well with the activists. "He isn't associated with the movement. He doesn't represent the VHP or the Bajrang Dal. He represents BJP and thus has no authority to make such statements," Mr Sharma said.

Narain Das Maharaj of the Kendriya Margdarshak Mandal said: "If the VHP lets us down, the sants aren't going to tolerate it. Why did they create such a hype?"

## In search of refuge in their own land

Anil Rana in Gandhinagar

March 5. — Despite a few instances of violence, Ahmedabad is, to use the official phrase, 'limping back to normalcy'. Shops and offices are reopening, buses have begun plying and some banks are conducting transactions. But, for thousands of members of the minority community who have become refugees in their own city, these welcome measures have made little difference.

The violence which gripped this ancient city on the day of the VHP bandh led to thousands fleeing to the 'relief camps' which have mushroomed in the city over

## Gujarat toll crosses 500

GANDHINAGAR, March 5. — The death toll in the communal riots in Gujarat touched 513 today. Of the dead, 90 have been killed in police firing. Curfew was relaxed for various periods in 12 districts.

An all-religion prayer was held at Kirti Mandir, the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi. In Ahmedabad, people organised a silent march to Sabarmati Ashram.

The PCC chief, Mr Amarsinh Chaudhury, sought a judicial probe into the communal riots. — SNS

the past week. Seventeen camps have come up in various areas and even on Tuesday people seeking refuge and safety were trickling in. Their sense of hurt, even betrayal, is palpable.

The Statesman visited one such camp

located behind the police commissioner's office at the Shahibaugh Municipal School near Dariyakhani Ghummat.

The refugees, asked when they hoped to return home, replied almost in unison — "where do we go? To the burnt out shells

of our houses which we have no money to repair?" A persistent cry is for the immediate sacking of the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi. "We do not feel safe under his rule," says Faruq Shaikh, normally a resident of Tavdipura.

The Modi government is accused, at the very least, of looking the other way when the carnage began. "The police did nothing to stop the rioters as they killed, burnt and looted," he alleged. Senior officers at police headquarters, however, insisted that their men were "heavily outnumbered" by the mob at many places and deny any laxity on the

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# Temple hawks go soft on Kanchi push

Nyas sets terms for holding fire

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, February 5

HOPES OF a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya dispute brightened today with the Prime Minister and two Muslim organisations agreeing to consider a formula worked out by the Shankaracharya of Kanchi with VHP and Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas leaders.

The objective of the Shankaracharya's meetings with Hindu and Muslim leaders was to get the VHP-Nyas agree to maintain the status quo at the disputed site on which the Babri Masjid had stood, and get a commitment from the Muslim leaders that they would not object to a *bhoomi puja* on the undisputed land.

The Nyas gave the seer a written assurance that it would await the court decision on the status of the disputed site. It said the site would remain untouched if the trust was given permission to start construction on the undisputed plot.

But the Nyas assurance will take effect only if the Government allows it to perform a *bhoomi puja* on the undisputed site on March 15. The Nyas wants the Centre to lift restrictions on the movement of kar sevaks and ensure that the undisputed land, which was the property of the Nyas before it was handed back to it by June 2.

The Shankaracharya yesterday told AB Vajpayee that the VHP wanted a written assur-

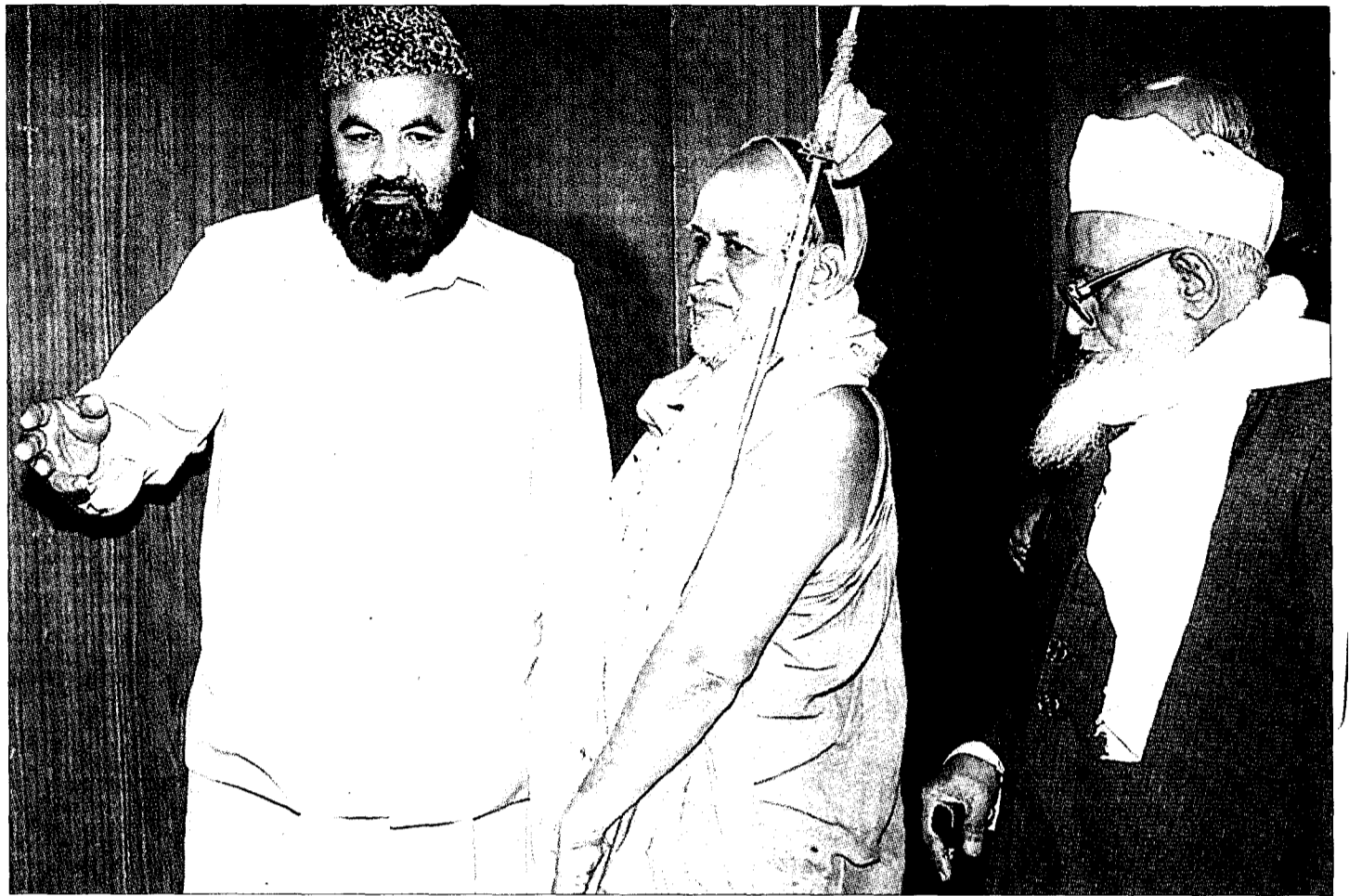
ance that the Government would consider transferring the undisputed land to the Nyas, which Vajpayee refused to give.

The seer told Hindu leaders that he would negotiate on its behalf only if it was willing to make some concessions. He said he had met leaders of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Babri Masjid Action Committee and discussed the proposal. Their leaders said they would talk with other Muslim organisations and take a decision by Sunday.

He said the Muslim leaders were "satisfied" with the talks. He said the Government wouldn't face legal hurdles in giving the Nyas the undisputed land. Being in session, Parliament can pass appropriate measures to facilitate this. He was optimistic of a solution by March 15.

He said Vajpayee would discuss the issue with NDA allies for a consensus on allowing the Nyas to perform the *bhoomi puja* on March 15. Vajpayee would announce the final decision in Parliament, he said. Among leaders present in the talks between the seer and the Muslim leaders were former President R Venkataraman, former Chief Justice Ranganath Mishra and Vajpayee aide Sudheendra Kulkarni.

Later, the RSS indicated that a breakthrough was on the cards, but VHP leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore struck a discordant note, saying the VHP had not taken a decision on accepting a court verdict.



Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati with Babri Masjid committee members in New Delhi on Tuesday.

AFP PHOTO

## Shankaracharya: A seer shot at deal making

Swati Chaturvedi  
New Delhi, March 5

THREE CELL phones at the ready and surrounded by lesser swamis, the Kanchi Shankaracharya sat resplendent at the Kamakshi temple with former PMO official Sudheendra Kulkarni at his elbow, former Governor Romesh Bhandari at his feet and former President R Venkataraman playing personal aide.

The Shankaracharya seemed to be all over the place: one moment he was boasting to Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray about

the settlement, the next he was on three phones together announcing he would meet the Prime Minister in the morning, and then he was receiving the Home Minister.

Sources say the seer has been negotiating for nearly three months and had been assured by the VHP as well as the PMO that some concessions would be made. He told the Prime Minister that the VHP would negotiate the March 15 deadline only if he gave a personally hand-written undertaking that the Government would consider handing over the

undisputed land to the VHP.

But Vajpayee refused any such undertaking. A token puja would be allowed and if the VHP does not press matters, three months later a settlement on the undisputed land could be considered. And the VHP would have to be content with his word on all this.

The Shankaracharya then called the VHP on his indispensable cell phone and told them this was the best deal they could get. He told *Hindustan Times* later: "The VHP had taken the position that it would not negotiate. I was saving their face and how

can you not trust the PM, I told them. I have taken the same position with the Muslim leaders, who are considering my offer."

Before announcing the face-saver, the PMO made one last effort to get the VHP to climb down further by putting off the temple construction until the court verdict came in. But the VHP refused, saying some construction would have to start after the 100-day *yagna*.

However, it will be in the undisputed part of the site and a passage would be allowed to the disputed site.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 MAR 2002

'ALLOW SYMBOLIC PUJA AT SHILANYAS SITE'

# VHP willing to give three months' time to Govt.

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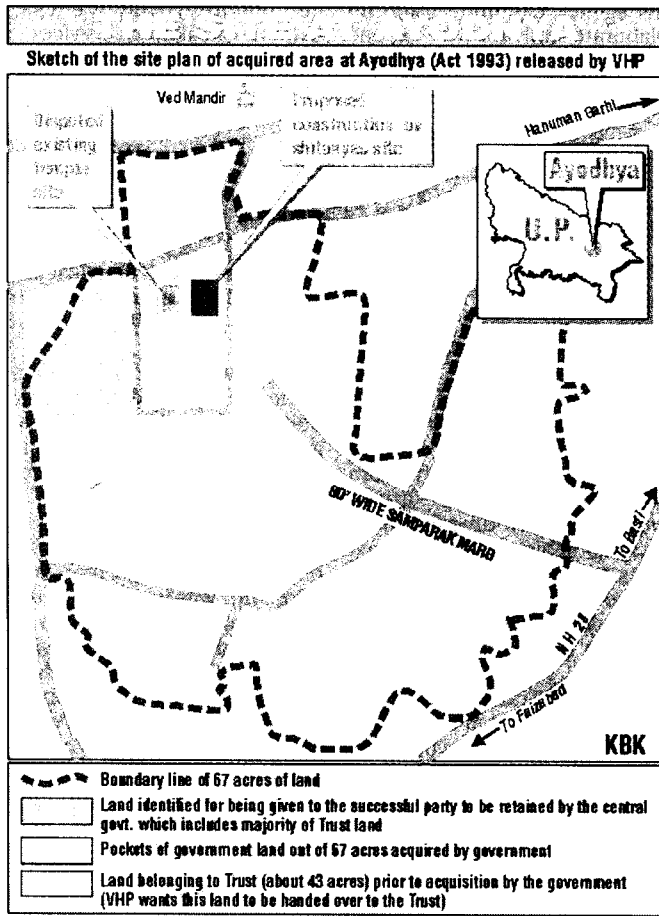
By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 4.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was today desperately trying to get the Government to give it a face-saving formula by allowing it to carry out a "symbolic puja" of carved stones at the 'shilanyas' site in Ayodhya on March 15.

For this it enlisted the help of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswati, who met the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, late today. The VHP leaders, Ashok Singhal and Giriraj Kishore, met the Shankaracharya this morning along with some 'sants'. And they will meet him again to get feedback on his meeting with the Prime Minister before taking a "final decision" on their current programme.

Mr. Singhal announced that the VHP would be agreeable to giving the Government three months more (till June 3 when its ongoing 100 days 'yagna' will end) to hand over 42 acres of the acquired land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas controlled by it. A 'mahurat' would be worked out and then the construction of the Ram temple would begin.

Mr. Singhal claimed that the VHP had never announced the start of construction on March



15 (although this had been announced loudly and clearly not once but repeatedly). Only a "symbolic puja" of carved stones was planned for that day. Other VHP leaders indicat-

ed that the 'mahurat' date could be "after October".

However, the Government seems firm on not allowing anything, symbolic or otherwise, within the boundaries of the 67 acres of the acquired land. After Godhra, and the communal carnage in Gujarat, it cannot risk a bloodbath in the country.

The Government suggestion is that the VHP should perform its 'puja' within the precincts of the workshop where the carved stones are kept.

A lot of confusion was caused at a press conference today due to contradictory statements by VHP leaders and the 'sants' invited by them for a day-long meeting. Ramchandra Paramhans, president of the Nyas, said that there would be no going back on the announced programme, and his comments on Mr. Vajpayee bordered on the abusive. But Mahant Avaidyanath of Gorakhpur, a former BJP MP, said the 'sants' would be agreeable to giving the Government three months more if it gave them an assurance that it would hand over part of the acquired land by then.

Mr. Singhal's tone was more conciliatory. While indicating that the programme would continue, he added that there

will be no attempt to occupy any land forcibly. The indication was that if the Government were to arrest those coming for the 'yagna' or if it were to physically stop the VHP from moving the carved stones, it would not resist.

He insisted that even now — without handing over any land to the VHP — the Government could agree to allow a "symbolic puja" of the carved stones at the 'shilanyas' site (which is close to the site where the Babri Masjid was demolished in 1992) since the Government was the owner of the acquired land.

The VHP demanded that the Government lift the restrictions placed on 'Ram bhakts' coming to Ayodhya for the 'yagna', give permission for a 'puja' at the 'shilanyas' site on March 15 and hand over 42 acres of land to the Nyas by June 2. The 'Ram bhakts' have been advised to court arrest in their districts if they are not able to leave for Ayodhya.

The Government's effort is to arrive at an agreed formula for a 'puja' outside the 67 acres to avoid any possibility of a clash. The fear is that if thousands of saffron-clad 'sadhus' were to come out on the streets, there could be a problem.

# Muslim board keeps options open

H Bula Devi in New Delhi

March 4. — Muslim leaders are debating whether they should march towards Ayodhya as a last resort to stop the VHP's call for kar seva on 15 March.

In a meeting yesterday, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board decided to wait and watch the evolving situation before taking a decision by 12 March. The meeting was convened to discuss a "strategy to meet the threat and challenges posed by the VHP," according to board members. If all constitutional and democratic means fail, then "we will be forced to march to Ayodhya. But we won't march alone and will take other secular forces with us. After all, why should we abdicate our claim to rebuild Babari Masjid at the site," a board member said.

Board leaders are holding discussions with the Congress, Samajwadi Party and the Left parties besides several NGOs. They are even planning to move the Supreme Court for a restraining order to stop the "aggressive postures by the VHP and thwart its plan to

symbolically start construction of a temple on the acquired land". Even as they termed the VHP's decision "fraught with serious portents for communal harmony" in the country, they took a moderate approach by wanting to know the VHP's plan content.

Alleging that the Centre had a "hidden sympathy" towards the Sangh Parivar, a board member said the government had scant regard for the imperatives of communal harmony. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's decision to refer the case to the Union law minister to examine the legal aspects of the "undisputed" land "has revealed the Centre's plan to appease the VHP and other members of the Sangh Parivar," Mr Yusuf Hathim Mulacha, a board spokesman, told reporters today. "Such appeasement will embolden the VHP and the Bajrang Dal to adopt pressure tactics and vitiate the communal atmosphere. This policy of appeasement is detrimental to democratic values of our polity and the rule of law," he said and urged Mr Vajpayee to "stick to his words that only a court verdict can solve the issue." Other leaders including former MP Mr Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait and the board's general

secretary, Syed Nizamuddin, were also present at the press meet.

Mr Mulacha criticised Mr Vajpayee for his comment that talks on the Ayodhya dispute had failed. He said: "The Committee on Babari Masjid emphatically states that no emissary of the Prime Minister contacted the board and the Centre never invited us to present our case. Therefore, it's incorrect to say that talks failed between the board and the government."

He said the board is feeling totally "neglected and ignored" by the Centre as its members were not consulted all along while invitations for discussions were extended to the VHP and the Sangh Parivar. But, the board, too, had not sought an appointment with the Prime Minister? "Why should we seek an appointment? It is for the government to invite us for discussion," he said.

Meanwhile, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid Syed Abdullah Bukhari and other Muslim leaders condemned the communal violence in Gujarat and demanded the arrest of the chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, under Poto and an inquiry by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court into the violence.

THE STATESMAN

5 MAR 2002

# Modi refuses to include riots in probe

**Times News Network**  
AHMEDABAD: Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi has refused a demand to extend the terms of reference of the proposed judicial inquiry commission into the Godhra massacre to include the subsequent bloody riots in the state.

Sources said that at least three judges, including a sitting judge of the Gujarat high court and a former acting chief justice of the Bombay high court had been approached by chief minister to probe whether the Sabarmati Express massacre was a pre-meditated one. But Mr Modi has made it clear that the riots in Ahmedabad and the rest of Gujarat will not be a subject of investigation. A clear indication of this came when Union home minister L.K. Advani said in Ahmedabad on Sunday that "these two are separate matters, they should not be linked together". A section of the people here believe that Mr Modi and Mr Advani's refusal is because an all-encompassing judicial probe will have to consider aspects like the

BJP's support to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's bandh on Thursday, the soft approach towards the rioters on the first two days and the sluggish reaction of the entire administration to the violence.

Meanwhile, stray incidents of violence continued in Gujarat on the sixth day even though the scale was reduced considerably. The toll in the last six days stands at 544, and includes the 58 victims on the Sabarmati

Express which was attacked in Godhra last Wednesday. The state police control room in Gandhinagar confirmed that 486 deaths had taken place in the post-Godhra aftermath, including 84 killed in the police firing.

Fresh violence has been reported in several north Gujarat areas, particularly in Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts where mobs were targeting some communities. Trouble broke out in Halad and Danta towns of Banaskantha and Vijaynagar in Sabarkantha where the police had to open fire at violent mobs.

**GUJARAT TRAGEDY**  
► Gandhinagar police say death toll stands at 544  
► 84 were killed in police firing  
► Ahmedabad quiet but violence breaks out in north Gujarat

► Where humanity is the religion, Page 7



# Temple should be built through a consensus: Uma Bharati

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BANGALORE, MARCH 3

UNION Minister for Sports Uma Bharati today said that the Ram Temple should be constructed at Ayodhya through a national consensus and a peaceful solution on the lines of the Somnath temple.

Addressing a VHP rally here to protest the Godhra train carnage,

Uma Bharati lashed out at the Congress and other "so-called secular parties" who, she charged, were "differentiating between



Hindu and Muslim blood".

"Congress chief Sonia Gandhi went in a team along with other parties to the President demanding the resignation of the Modi government but did her husband quit as the Prime Minister when 10,000 Sikhs were massacred in the Delhi riots," she asked. "They are differentiating between lives of Hindus and Muslims," she alleged adding that "whether it is Hindus or Muslims, it is the innocent lives that are being lost".

She said that no words were "strong enough" to condemn the Godhra incident as also the violence that followed. Uma Bharati, who made an unscheduled appearance at the rally saying she came to meet the Visweshathirtha Swami of Pejawar Mutt, a front-ranking VHP leader.

INDIAN EXPRESS

MAR 2002



# Ayodhya's 'disputed' land: First, a few ground rules

M. RAMA JOIS

**T**HIS ARTICLE is intended to remove the wrong impression created in the minds of the people that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad is proposing to commence construction of Ram Mandir on the disputed area at Ayodhya against the court order, which has created tension among the people. In fact and in truth, the VHP is only proposing to commence construction on totally undisputed land belonging to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, which is at present in the hands of the Central government.

This fact, beyond a shadow of doubt, arises from the judgment of the Supreme Court in *Dr Ismail Faruqui vs Union of India* [1994] (6) S.C.C.360]. While upholding the validity of acquisition of lands by the Central government, the Court made a clear distinction between two categories of lands thus:

(a) Disputed land, namely small area on which Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid, as described in the white paper, stood, including the inner courtyard and outer courtyard of the structure before it was demolished on December 6, 1992.

(b) Large extent of about 67 acres of undisputed land in the locality, belonging to various persons, including 43 acres belonging to Rama Janmabhoomi Nyas.

As regards the disputed land, the Supreme Court held that the disputed land shall be with the Central government as a receiver and it shall be handed over to the party succeeding in the suits pending before the Allahabad High Court. The VHP is not proposing to touch even an inch of that disputed land. As far as the undisputed lands are concerned, the relevant portion of the judgment reads:

"The narration of facts indicates that the acquisition of properties under the Act affects the rights of both the communities and not merely those of the Muslim community. The interest claimed by the Muslims is only over the disputed site where the mosque stood before its demolition. The objection of the Hin-

ble but also desirable that the superfluous excess area is released from acquisition and reverted to its earlier owner. The challenge to acquisition of any part of the adjacent area on the ground that it is unnecessary for achieving the objective of settling the case the superfluous area is not returned to its owner even after the exact area needed for the purpose is finally determined, it would be open to the owner of any such property to then challenge the superfluous acquisition being unrelated to the purpose of aquisition. Rejection of the challenge on this ground to acquisition at this stage by the undisputed owners of any such property situated in the vicinity of the disputed area is with the reservation of this liberty to quash. There is no contest to their claim of quashing the acquisition of the adjacent properties by anyone except the Central government which seeks to justify the acquisition on the basis of necessity. On the construction of the statute made by us, this appears to be the logical, appropriate and just view to take in respect of such adjacent properties in which none other than the undisputed owner claims title and interest." (Para 50)

The conclusion at Para 96 reads:

"The challenge to the acquisition of any part of the adjacent area on the ground that it is unnecessary for achieving the professed objective of settling the long-standing dispute cannot be examined in this stage. However, the area found to be superfluous on the exact area needed for the purpose being determined on adjudication of the dispute, must be restored to the undisputed owners."

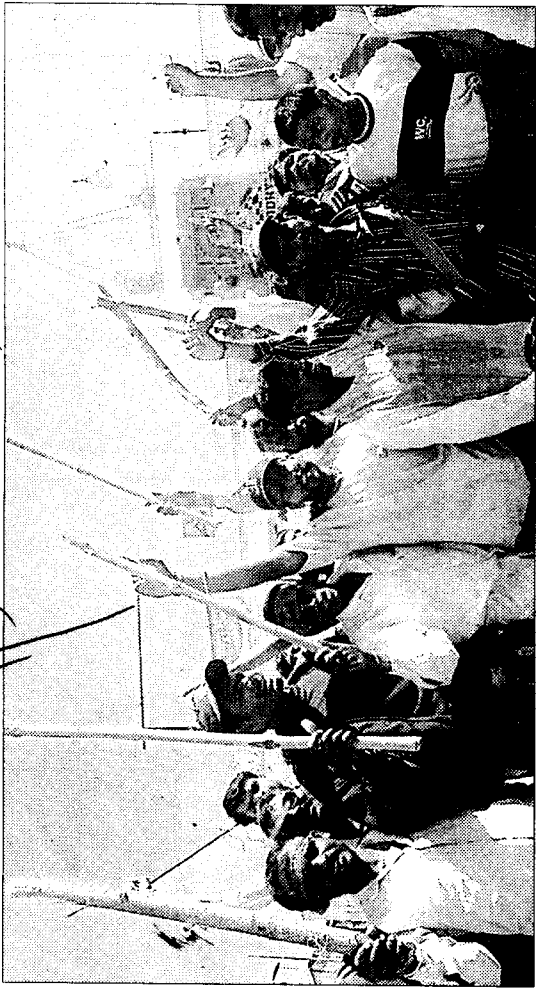
From the above portion of the judgment, it is clear that under the Act the Central government acquired large extent of lands which are undisputed lands, major portion of which belongs to Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and the purpose was for ensuring effective implementation of the decree in the event of the decree of the Court in the pending suits going in favour of Muslims.

The Supreme Court clearly stated in Para 50 of the judgment that there was no contest to the claim of quashing the acquisition of the

adjacent properties by anyone except the Central government which seeks to justify the acquisition on the basis of necessity. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that at a later stage the Central government has to retain in its hands only some portion of undisputed lands adjacent to the disputed land necessary for use of disputed area to be given to Muslim community for effective implementation of the decree of the Court in the pending suits before the Allahabad High Court, if and when the suit is adjudicated in their favour. The Court has also expressly stated that after specifying the land required for the above purpose, the rest of the undisputed land should be handed over to the undisputed owner. The Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas is the undisputed owner of 43 acres. It is on this undisputed land only that the VHP is proposing to commence construction, stating that it is necessary to fulfill the aspirations of billions of people as Central government has not returned the undisputed land, as indicated by the Court, though eight years are over from the date of judgment. It is this undisputed land on which *shilanyas* was done during November 1989. The controversy can be solved either by handing over unwanted surplus land belonging to Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas or by granting permission to the VHP to use it pending specification of the extent. Whatever that may be, the Muslim community has no interest at all in this land and their right and interest is only in respect of the disputed land, as clearly stated in the judgment of the Supreme Court.

The above fact is made clear in the representation given by the VHP to the Hon'ble Prime Minister on February 27. This fact should be made known to the people in general and Muslims in particular by all to avoid unnecessary tension, enmity and social disharmony by creating non-existent dispute over undisputed land.

*(The writer is a former chief justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court and a leading member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad)*



## The Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas is the undisputed owner of 43 acres of land in Ayodhya. It is on this undisputed land that the VHP proposes to start construction of the Ram temple to fulfill the aspirations of the people

access to, and enjoyment of rights in, the disputed area by exercise of rights of ownership of Hindu owners of the adjacent properties. Obviously, it is for this reason that the adjacent area has also been acquired, to make available to the successful party, that part of it which is considered necessary for proper enjoyment of the fruits of success on the final outcome to the adjudication. It is clear that one of the purposes of the acquisition of the adjacent properties is the ensurment of the effective enjoyment of the disputed site by the acquisition of the adjacent area is incidental to the main purpose and cannot be termed unreasonable. (Para 49)

"However, at a later stage, when the exact area acquired which is needed for achieving the professed purpose of acquisition can be determined, it would not merely be permissi-

# VHP says it will keep its date with Ayodhya

Times News Network & Agencies

NEW DELHI: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) said on Sunday that it would go ahead with its plan to shift the carved stones for a proposed temple to the Ram Janmabhoomi site at Ayodhya on March 15.

VHP international working president Ashok Singhal told reporters here that top Hindu religious leaders would meet in the capital on Monday to discuss the obstructions they face in the smooth conduct of the ongoing *puṇahuti yagna* at Ayodhya.

"Our programme regarding the shifting of the carved stones on March 15 remains unchanged as decided by the religious leaders. As in the past, the VHP will continue to carry out all its activities in a non-violent and peaceful manner," Mr Singhal said.

Participants in Monday's meeting at the VHP headquarters here will also discuss the deliberations VHP leaders had with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and RSS leaders who are mediating between the VHP and the government.

Asked whether the religious leaders would be meeting Mr Vajpayee, Mr Singhal said, "If necessary, but no such meeting is scheduled."

Mr Singhal said among the religious leaders who will participate in Monday's meeting are seven of the ten religious leaders who had called on Mr Vajpayee on February 27, including Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, president of the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas Trust and BJP MP Swami Chinmayanand.

The VHP leader also released a copy of a letter submitted to the Prime Minister on February 27, in which the trust had enclosed extracts from relevant court judgments and a site plan of the Ram Janambhoomi area, and demanded that the government return to it 42 acres of land belonging to it, which was acquired by the government. Mr Singhal held talks with RSS leaders on Sunday morning as part of the ongoing efforts to end the impasse in Ayodhya.

RSS joint general secretary in charge of BJP affairs Madan Das Devi and his colleague S.V. Seshadri briefed Mr Singhal about their talks with Mr Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani here on Saturday evening, Sangh sources said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

RIOT VICTIMS DEPRIVED OF RELIEF, MEDICARE

# Ahmedabad quiet, toll 431

By Anjali Mody

**AHMEDABAD, MARCH 3.** The orgy of violence in Gujarat appears to have ended. Today only two deaths were reported, one from Godhra. Officially the death toll is 431, more than half of them in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad was quiet, apart from two major arson attacks on a Muslim-owned petrol station and warehouse.

Curfew has been lifted in most areas of the 40 towns and cities where clashes were reported, including Naroda and Meghnadinagar in Ahmedabad, where hundreds were killed. The state administration says that curfew will be relaxed in more areas tomorrow.

There was a 'sense of normality in the State' today. But, the smouldering remains of burnt-out buildings and the acrid smell of burning rubber, five days after the violence began, are a reminder that 'normality' in Ahmedabad is a very long way off.

Huddled by a pillar in the city's Shah Alam Mosque Abdul Aziz, a 25-year-old tailor, from Naroda is trying to get accustomed to a new kind of 'normality'. When the mob attacked his neighbourhood on Thursday they killed his wife Sabira and two of their three children. His one surviving son, four-year-old Sabir, has bad burn injuries on both arms and one leg. Aziz is one of some 1,000 families, from some of Ahmedabad's worst affected areas to have found shelter at the mosque.

They queue up to give their names, addresses, the number of their family members with them, the numbers dead or missing. The macabre count goes on as more and more people continue to arrive. Medicines at the camp are in desperately short supply, as is food. Local residents of Shah Alam can offer little help. They are fenced in by the curfew, and fear that the guns trained on their homes may actually work. And, the state administration, which absented itself as the violent mobs laid waste to this city, continues



Homeless Muslims waiting for a meal at a dargah in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — AFP

to ignore those most in need of help.

Prasad Chacko, part of a group from St. Xaviers Social Service Society, able to go around the city for the first time since the rioting started, to see if they could help, asked angrily "is there actually a government in Gujarat? A senior civil servant answered this question for us, "as far as this Government is concerned, it's Muslims who have died, or been injured. This is a Government that does not even consider them citizens".

Those who have been able to reach the few shelters like the one at Shah Alam are the lucky ones. In Vatwa, in the south east of Ahmedabad, where many Muslim families displaced by the riots, following the Babri Masjid demolition settled, even the injured have not been able to reach hospitals. Ansari Israr Ahmed and Mohammed Shafi, both rickshaw drivers from Alifnagar in Vatwa, are lying in a makeshift infirmary with grotesque burns all over their bodies. They were walking home on Thursday, the day of the VHP bandh in Gujarat, when they

were set upon by a group of young men who poured fuel over them and set them alight.

Twice people from the neighbouring Ali Madina Society tried taking them to the nearby Vadilal Hospital, and twice they were turned back. The second time with the warning that if they came again they would be burnt. There are more in this small settlement who lie with just a sheet covering their burnt bodies. Like thousands of others in the city, forced to flee their burning homes the residents of Vatwa's Roshani Society, Tufer Park Burhani and Bismillah societies are crowded into 'refuges' in dargas and under hastily-erected shamianas.

Why they cannot get help is abundantly clear. As we tried to leave, past the burnt-out remains of cars and machinery, we were stopped, not by police, but by a crowd of men from the Narol village armed with iron rods, stones and glass bottles. "How do we know you are really 'press'?" "Cars with press stickers are being used to carry arms and we will stop them: They accept the identity card. The

name of the newspaper seems to help.

The curfew that keeps the Muslims of Vatwa and Shah Alam confined to their homes does not seem to stretch to the Patels of Narol. Nor to the Hindu family in Gupta Nagar that amid the rubble and burnt offerings of communal hatred was setting out, all dressed up, in a wedding procession, or the young men in Navrangpura who were out playing cricket.

## Advani's priorities

The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani visited Ahmedabad and Godhra today. In a state torn apart by communal hate, he laid out his priorities: "First we have to arrest the guilty, second, to prevent recurrence of any kind of violence and third, to ensure peace and security to all sections of people." He said the Godhra attack was "premeditated, and "those who are guilty and the key planner of the entire act should be apprehended". But, the State-wide mayhem was simply "nothing but communal violence".

'Outside elements': Page 11

# It's a black mark, says PM

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 2.** Appealing for calm in Gujarat and the rest of the country, the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, today described the violence in the State as a "black mark on the nation's forehead" and conceded that the senseless massacre of women and children had "lowered India's prestige in the world".

In a televised address, Mr. Vajpayee invoked the joint appeal issued by the all-party meeting on Friday and expressed the hope that the country would come through the current crisis. The Prime Minister, however, neither patted nor indicted the Gujarat Government for its handling of the post-Godhra situation.

Later, Mr. Vajpayee consulted the Sangh Parivar leaders on how best to avoid a confrontation with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on the Ayodhya issue. He and his Ministerial and party colleagues — L.K. Advani, Jana Krishnamurthi and Kushabhau Thakre — held talks with the RSS leaders, Madandas Devi and H.V. Seshadri.

Mr. Vajpayee had enlisted the help of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to mediate between the Government and the recalcitrant VHP. After the confabulations at the Prime Minister's residence, Mr. Devi announced that "religious leaders" would meet Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani and expressed the hope that a solution could be round the corner.

It is believed that the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust leader, Mahant Paramhans, is likely to be here tomorrow, but the Mahant is reported to be reluctant to travel to the Prime Minister's residence. Though the RSS leaders are confident of a "solution", they feel that the onus is on the Government to make an offer the 'sants' could accept.

## VHP demarche to Govt.

Notwithstanding the RSS optimism, Mr. Vaj-

payee's efforts to make the VHP see reason appear to have run into trouble. Even though a VHP spokesman expressed concern of sorts over the unending violence in Gujarat, what he had to say about the Ayodhya imbroglio brought no cheer to the Government. The spokesman, Veereshwar Dwivedi, issued a kind of demarche to the Government, making three demands: first, that the VHP be allowed to carry out its March 15 programme; second, that the Government return within three months the 43 acres of land acquired by it at Ayodhya to the VHP; and third, that all the restrictions on the movement of 'kar sevaks' in Ayodhya be removed. For good measure, the spokesman wanted a written undertaking from the Prime Minister and only then could the organisation consider his appeal for "suspending" its "movement".

Similarly, the Prime Minister received mixed comfort from the RSS chief, K.C. Sudarshan. In a statement from Bhatinda, Mr. Sudarshan said that the senseless violence should stop because Pakistan-inspired elements were "trying to destroy our national unity". He appealed to Muslims not to "tolerate people who indulge in such heinous activities in the name of Islam".

## Curbs on 'kar sevaks' criticised

If this plea for sanity did provide some comfort to the Prime minister, the RSS chief nonetheless warned that the Governments — Central or in the States — had no business curbing the citizens' democratic right to travel to Ayodhya. Restrictions imposed on the 'kar sevaks' were an affront to the "Hindu sentiments" and the Government was duty-bound to provide security to all those who wanted to make a pilgrimage to a holy place, he said.

This part of the statement is being explained as part of the RSS leadership's effort to humour the VHP.



A Hindu family looking out of its burnt home in a Muslim-dominated area in Ahmedabad on Saturday. Many people were scared to leave their homes because of the curfew and continuing violence in the streets. — AP

# Sonia not for any concession to VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

**BANGALORE, MARCH 2.** The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today criticised the "tardy manner" in which the Gujarat Government handled the disturbances in the State, and felt that it should have taken effective steps to deploy the Army in the areas affected by riots. During a brief stopover here on her way to Bellary, Ms. Gandhi told presspersons that she did not foresee mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha in view of the prevailing situation in the country. "I am not an astrologer to foresee the future," she said. PTI reports:

Urging the Vajpayee Government not to make any concessions to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Ms. Gandhi said she did not favour the Government making any "bargain" with the Sangh Parivar outfit on the Ram temple issue.

"I do not believe in bargains", Ms. Gandhi said when asked about a VHP demand for a written assurance from the Government on the Ayodhya issue. The VHP had said on Friday that it was willing to consider postponement of its plans to construct the temple from March 15 if the Government or the RSS gave it a written assurance that worshipping of pillars would be allowed on the acquired land in Ayodhya within three months.

## 'Steps not taken to restore law and order'

By Our Staff Correspondent

**TORANAGAL (BELLARY DT), MARCH 2.** The Gujarat Government has not been responding to the challenge and maintaining law and order in the State, Ambika Soni, AICC general secretary, said here on Saturday. Ms. Soni, who accompanied the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, to the district, told presspersons that steps had not been taken to restore law and order in Gujarat and make the people feel secure. Unfortunately, the State Government had not been responding to the challenge, she said.

Stating that the Congress was the first party to condemn the killings in Godhra, Ms. Soni said that it was premature to come to a conclusion about the involvement of Pakistan's ISI in the incident. "The first item on the agenda should be restoration of law and order," she added. Asked whether the Congress would support the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, she said Ms. Gandhi was in the process of consultation on that issue.

# 86 killed in fresh incidents in Gujarat

By Manas Dasgupta

**AHMEDABAD, MARCH 2.** As many as 86 people were killed in fresh incidents of violence in different parts of Gujarat today with disturbances spreading to newer and remote rural areas, even as the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, claimed that the situation was "fast returning to normalcy" in the State.

In yet another incident, 27 persons were burnt alive at Sadarpar village in Vijapur taluka of Mehsana district, while seven persons met a similar fate in a bakery near Dabhoi town in Baroda district. Four persons were also burnt alive at Por village and one was stabbed to death in Kalol town in Gandhinagar district. At least 47 persons have been killed in police firings in different cities and towns since last night, including 19 in Ahmedabad city alone where the police had to open fire repeatedly to disperse violent mobs engaged in pitched battle. Eight people were killed in police firing in Godhra town.

For the first time, disturbances have spread to the capital district of Gandhinagar and Surat and Bhavnagar cities where indefinite curfew was clamped after 22 people were killed in stabbing and police firing. Curfew, however, was partially lifted from 14 cities and towns, including Ahmedabad, to give a semblance of normalcy, but at least 40 cities and towns in the State were under indefinite curfew.

The death toll, according to Mr. Modi had reached 289, including 160 in Ahmedabad, but unconfirmed reports put the toll at above 350. Mr. Modi de-

nied that 30 persons were burnt alive in Pandarvada village near Godhra yesterday and claimed that nine persons belonging to both the communities were killed in clashes in the village.

Mr. Modi said the incident in Sadarpar was sparked by rumours that the minorities had collected in a building and were preparing to attack and in retaliation, the majority community set fire to the building.

In Surat, two mosques, at least 15 houses of the minorities and a timber market were set ablaze in Pakhinawad. Five people were killed in stabbing in Gopipura and some other parts of the city following which an indefinite curfew was clamped in five police station areas. In Bhavnagar, one person was killed in police firing and four were stabbed to death forcing the police to impose indefinite curfew.

Mr. Modi said Border Security Force units had been despatched to Surat to assist the civil authorities to maintain law and order and the Government would consider sending the army to the diamond city after the promised second brigade reached Ahmedabad.

The situation, however, has improved in Ahmedabad today where no major incidents of arson were reported since last night though members of the two communities were engaged in pitched battles pelting stones and acid bulbs necessitating the police to open fire at several places. In the only case of the patrolling army units opening fire to disperse violent mobs, two persons were injured in the industrial belt of Odhav.



The Army patrolling a street in Ahmedabad on Saturday. — AP

In the interiors of the western suburbs of the city, some shops and other business establishments reopened today after two days.

Even while claiming that the situation was improving, Mr. Modi said the police fired at least 1,031 rounds in different parts of the State since last night besides bursting 1,614 teargas shells to disperse violent mobs. While 19 people were killed in police firing in Ahmedabad and eight in Godhra, six people were killed in police firing in Baroda, five in Anand, three each in Mehsana and Gandhinagar, two in Kaira and one in Bhavnagar.

The toll in stabbing and arson was officially put at 242 in which Ahmedabad alone ac-

counted for 131 killings and Mehsana, the home district of the Chief Minister, 40. Even the tribal-dominated districts of Sabarkantha and Dahod accounted for 15 and 10 deaths respectively. Strongly denying that the police had failed to act in time, Mr. Modi claimed that "90 per cent areas" in the State remained incident-free because of the pro-active role played by the police. The presence of the army had created a "salutary effect" in bringing the situation under control in Ahmedabad, Baroda and Godhra.

Mr. Modi convened a meeting of the leaders of political parties here this evening to discuss the riot situation but it was boycotted by the Congress.

# 1600 kar sevaks moved out of Ayodhya

**AYODHYA, MARCH 2.** With the arrival of 'Ram sevaks' here coming to a halt today due to diversion of trains, the administration has started moving out those already here, with 1,600 of them transported out of the temple city by this evening.

About 1,600 Ram sevaks have been moved out of Ayodhya in buses to the nearest railway stations to enable them to return home, official sources said here.

The Uttar Pradesh Principal Secretary (Home), Naresh Dayal, told reporters in Lucknow that there were about 5,000 to 6,000 Ram sevaks in Ayodhya and 3,000 of them would be moved out by tonight.

He claimed that not a single Ram sevak could reach the tem-

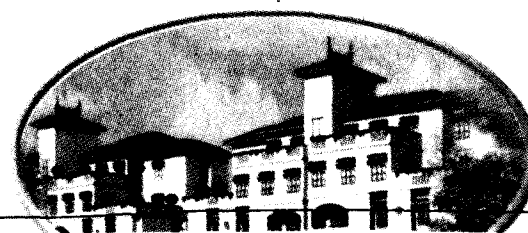
ple city today as all trains passing through it were diverted.

The Ayodhya railway station, which usually witnesses a lot of hustle and has particularly seen heightened activities in the last one week, wore a deserted look.

Asked whether there were orders to arrest the volunteers, Mr. Dayal said there was no point arresting them as they were leaving without any pressure. He said a nodal officer had been appointed to make arrangements for the safe departure of the ram sevaks.

About 1,500 Ram sevaks heading for Ayodhya from Maharashtra were detained at Sultanpur and were being sent back, he added. — PTI

*New editions of timeless e*



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\* 1620 to 2  
\* Swimming  
Plant \* Gym \*  
Garden



# In state, at Centre, Oppn has one refrain

The situation is beyond the control of this incompetent government...

...<sup>for minutes</sup> (but) President's rule will not help, it will only mean Advani's rule

Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee president Amarsinh Chaudhary has alleged that the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat is hand-in-glove with the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, which are responsible for the communal frenzy across the State. In an interview with BASHIR PATHAN, the former chief minister alleged that the entire state machinery, including the intelligence network, has collapsed.

was asked to remain a mute spectator to the violence in Muslim-dominated localities all over the State.

■ **The government claims the situation across the State is under control and that peace will return soon. Do you agree?**

The claim is hollow. The situation is beyond control of this incompetent government; the chief minister does not know how to react to this. The deaths and damage to private and public property in the violent incidents are increasing with every passing day. Miscreants even attempted to burn down my house in Ahmedabad, and the VHP/Bajrang Dal goons are now planning to target my residence in Gandhinagar. The government says only 136 people have died in the communal violence till Friday, but the toll is over 300, with over 150 deaths in Ahmedabad alone. It is a government-sponsored carnage.

■ **What do you think are the factors responsible for the carnage in Gujarat?**

A group of so-called kar sevaks travelling on the Sabarmati Express started raising provocative slogans just ahead of the Godhra station. The government had enough indication of the aggressive mood of VHP activists returning from Ayodhya. But it failed to gauge this.



■ **Do you think the government could have prevented the violence?**

The government failed miserably to anticipate the trouble. Its entire machinery, including the intelligence network, has collapsed. When Modi claims that the Godhra train attack was premeditated, why did he fail to anticipate it?

The government should have taken note of the surcharged atmosphere in Gujarat, in fact, in the entire country, because of the Ayodhya-related developments. Since a large number of VHP workers were being mobilised for Ayodhya from Gujarat, the government could have had adequate security on trains as well as at railway stations.

■ **So, the Narendra Modi Government has erred in not doing this?**

The BJP regime has not only erred, it deliberately delayed its decision to requisition the services of the army, allowing the Sangh Parivar workers and anti-social forces to wreak havoc in the State, particularly in Ahmedabad. This apart, the police

■ **How do you view the performance of Minister of State for Home Gordhan Jhadaphia?**

Jhadaphia is a henchman of the VHP's international general secretary Pravin Togadia, who is responsible for the violence after Godhra. In fact, the home minister had instructed the police force not to act and is now instigating VHP/Bajrang Dal workers to continue riots across the State.

■ **Do you think Narendra Modi will dissolve the Assembly and opt for the fresh elections in the state and play the Hindutva card?**

I don't think so. But even if he does so, he will not succeed. The people have seen through the BJP game. After the recent electoral reverses the party has suffered, it may try to play the Hindutva card. But, the people of Gujarat will reject this, as they did in Uttar Pradesh recently.

One of the most senior parliamentarians and the CPI(M)'s leader in the Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee believes that legally and morally, there is no case for handing over the acquired land for temple construction before a court verdict. In an interview with SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA, he expresses concern over Godhra and its violent fallout, and traces its origin to the Ayodhya imbroglio.

■ **You have questioned the Narendra Modi government's complicity and role in the post-Godhra mayhem. Do you plan to ask for President's rule in Gujarat? What's the difference?**

In principle, we are against President's rule being imposed on any state. It would only mean the Centre's hegemony. It would mean (L.K.) Advani's rule. The Modi government is there, it has not performed, it has connived with the communal forces. Television footage of the past two days shows police inaction. But we cannot wish it away. The Centre has certain responsibilities, which it has to keep. Actually, all this is a direct effect of the communal politics they (the BJP) have been playing. As if the country has no other issue before it than building a temple.

■ **The BJP says that your party, the CPI(M), did not condemn the Godhra killings and, in fact, tried to justify it in the name of the VHP build-up and consequent tensions in Ayodhya.**

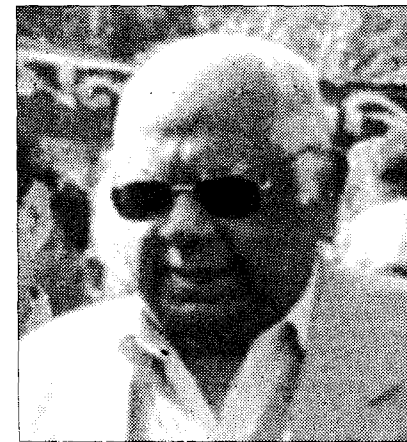
This is an abominable game of the BJP and its cohorts. They are knowingly spreading falsehoods. There's no question of justification. We have condemned the Godhra killings in Parliament and in our politburo statement. It appears to be a fallout of Ayodhya. That doesn't mean that we justify the killing of 60 innocent people. Ayodhya does not justify Godhra, and Godhra does not justify the killings happening now.

■ **The Home Minister suggested on Friday that the ISI may have been involved in the Godhra attack and there was a larger plan to spread mayhem throughout the country which has been foiled.**

Maybe it was caused by the ISI. I am in no position to dispute that. The home ministry may be having some indication. But the point is, where is his POTO? How can the ISI do these things time and again? What was his ministry doing? He has shown no signs of containing riots in other parts of the country.

■ **Do you think the acquired land can be handed over to the VHP at some point, since it is not part of the disputed territory?**

It cannot be given. The Supreme Court has appointed the Central government as receiver. Besides, why should the government hand it over to a particular section of the population to build a temple? Who are they? What is the VHP's locus standi?



■ **But how does one defuse the present crisis in Ayodhya?**

The government should do something to isolate them (kar sevaks) and flush them out. They can barricade the entire town of Ayodhya and stop any new kar sevaks from entering. They always act after the event. After the attack on Parliament, they have surrounded it and turned it into a fortress.

■ **You have often called the temple a non-issue, why do you then stall Parliament on that issue?**

This is the tragedy of India. The government is fomenting communal and fundamentalist tensions! That is why the temple comes to the centre of the political core. Whatever happens in the country finds reflection in Parliament. The present situation is a crisis of such a nature. Remember, all business was transacted. Nothing was held back.

# Violence dents nation's image

NILOVA ROY CHAUDHURY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 2. — The incidents in Gujarat over the past three days, have in one sweep, severely dented the high moral standing India had acquired in the international arena.

The Prime Minister admitted as much today when he called the outbreak of communal violence a *kalank* which has hurt the nation's reputation in the international community, involving as it did the killings of innocent children and women.

Appealing for an end to the communal frenzy, he said this crisis has put the nation in a trial.

Since the events of 11 September in the USA, and since the attack on Parliament House on 13 December, India has widely been perceived as a vital part of the comity of "civilised" nations, where violence is not encouraged and whose

## Protect minorities, Musharraf tells Delhi

ISLAMABAD, March 2. — President Pervez Musharraf tonight said communal clashes in India had caused deep distress and concern in Pakistan and called on the Indian government to strengthen security of the minority community. Terming the Godhra attack as "deplorable", Gen Musharraf said the incident could not provide a licence for reprehensible brutalities and violence against the minorities, reports PTI.

**Bangla alert:** Security forces have been put on alert to defend Hindus in predominantly Muslim Bangladesh in the wake of the communal violence in India which has left more than 300 dead, police said today, reports AFP from Dhaka. Police have been posted at Hindu temples across the country to avert any incident, a police officer said. Security has also been strengthened in business establishments owned by Hindus, the *Independent* reported today.

strong democratic credentials make it susceptible to terrorist attacks.

It was increasingly seen as a restrained, responsible country fully able to conduct itself with dignity, from which others sought advice.

The brutal violence in Gujarat has managed to call those civilised norms into question, with countries like Canada and France urging restraint, and the USA warning its citizens against travelling to Ayodhya.

And it has provided Pakistan, under severe international censure for the recent murder of Daniel Pearl by 'jihad' elements, and for providing safe haven generally for terrorists, with just the lever it required to tell the world "see, India isn't much different", a diplomat said.

With the scrutiny shifting to how effectively and how soon the Indian government can quell the violence, it gives Pakistan breathing space.

Despite disliking any equa-

tion with Pakistan, privately, foreign ministry officials admit that months, even years, of carefully nurtured diplomatic gains, hard work and image-building have been largely undone.

The Commonwealth summit beginning today, to which Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, perforce, had to cancel his visit because "his presence in the current situation was vital", and rightly so, will also bring some adverse focus and embarrassment, in that the gov-

ernment will be seen as unable to exercise adequate control.

And all of those international warnings to move troops back from the border and about potential 'flash points' along the border, with troops in forward deployment, will become that much more difficult to brush off, a senior official said.

For the economy, too, it is bad news, because, as a senior government official said, "the main difference between the Indian and the Chinese economy is in the amount of foreign direct investment they attract. Situations like this frighten off potential investors," and further stall the economic turnaround.

Although no one doubts that "the self-correcting mechanisms of Indian democracy", as one senior official said, will ultimately contain and control the situation, what will take much longer to do is pick up the pieces after the fall.

## Govt to blame for rights violations: Sorabjee

NEW DELHI, March 2. — The Attorney-General, Mr Soli Sorabjee, today said the government was responsible for all kinds of human rights violations within its territory even if not perpetrated by state machinery, hinting that the state of Gujarat cannot absolve itself from the carnage it witnessed.

It was the state's responsibility if individuals or groups acted with impunity to the detriment of the rights of citizens, Mr Sorabjee said in his key-note address at a seminar organised by the International Law Association here.

— PTI

## Modi has no time to visit riot-hit areas

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, March 2. — One thing can be said about Gujarat's new chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, is that there is not even a pretence at secularism. Four days into the riot situation and the RSS pracharak-turned-chief minister has no words of condolence, leave alone any kind of reassurance to the members of the minority community of his state.

Busy as he has been in "controlling" the situation which was allowed to spiral out of control, the chief minister hasn't yet taken time off to visit any of the riot-affected areas even in Ahmedabad, which is just 25 km from his

## 'Rajasthan may be next target'

JAIPUR, March 2. — Intelligence agencies has warned that after Gujarat, Rajasthan could be the next victim of communal violence. Taking no chances, the Rajasthan Police today held a high level meeting and intensified its patrolling in and around the sensitive areas. It reviewed the law and order situation in the state and directed the district officials to deploy special forces in trouble-prone areas. Curfew continued in the town of Madan Ganj in Kishan Garh and Simanwara in Dungarpur. Barring stray cases, no major untoward incident was reported. — SNS

official residence and office in Gandhinagar, and where he daily holds press briefings. He regularly informs the media about his government's resolve to "take the strictest action, including under Poto and Pasa" against the hood-

lums. He also mouths his appeal for "peace", after the day's frenzy of killing, looting and burning. But this is just about it.

Police action has been limited and began only on the second day. On the first day of ri-

oting the "revenge killings" were given a free hand. The Army, which could take a neutral stand, was deployed only on Friday afternoon, some 57 hours after the gory incident at Godhra railway station.

Mr Modi, along with his minister of state for home, Mr Godharn Zaphadia, reached Godhra by 5.30 p.m. for an on-the-spot study of the situation after the Sabarmati Express coach was set on fire. Both faced hostile crowds even as singed, curled up bodies of men, women and children were pulled out and lined on the platform. After a meeting with senior officials a compensation of Rs 2 lakh for each of the "innocent victims" was announced.

THE STATESMAN

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# Hand over Gujarat to Army: People's Front

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, March 3

A PEOPLE'S Front delegation which visited Ahmedabad last evening has demanded that Gujarat be handed over to the Army immediately. The front has sought an appointment with the President — Supreme Commander of the Army — in this regard.

The delegation, led by Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh, included CPI(M) Politburo member Sitaram Yechury and MPs Raj Babbar and Shabana Azmi.

Addressing a press conference on their return, the members of the

delegation said that under Article 355 Gujarat could be declared a disturbed area and handed over to the Army as had been done in Tripura and some places earlier. They also demanded a ban on VHP and Bajrang Dal like Simi.

With the Home Minister "stating" that ISI may be behind these events and Minister of State for External Affairs "saying" Pakistan was not involved, they wanted the Government to clarify its position.

The delegation alleged that it had spent hours in the Police Commissioner's office but no senior police officer met them, nor was their request for police protection to visit

the riot hit areas acceded to. They were also advised against going to the sensitive areas as they were well known personalities.

In a letter to Chief Minister Narendra Modi, the delegation said it was returning to Delhi with a feeling of "hopelessness" after witnessing the rule of "jungle raj". The credibility of the administration had been lost and the police had shown total incompetence.

The members of the delegation met the victims of the riots and the Godhra at hospitals. They said they received frantic calls from frightened people on telephone from several areas.

Amar Singh alleged that the State BJP Government, administration and the police were in league with the communal elements. Yechury said what is happening in Gujarat is "State-sponsored terrorism."

Urging for a fight against the "communal mindset", Babbar said the delegation had gone to Gujarat not to get statistics but to spread communal harmony.

Azmi blamed all parties for inciting riots and building up an emotionally surcharged atmosphere to create riots as part of vote bank politics said people must refuse to become "cannon fodder".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

March 2002



# Minorities panel to visit Gujarat

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, March 2

EVEN AS sporadic violence continues to rock Gujarat, the National Commission on Minorities (NCM) has decided to send a team to the riot-torn State.

The NCM has already issued an appeal to all communities to "stand together and prevent divisive forces who are trying to fragment the country and spoil its secular image".

West Bengal Minorities Commission (WBMC) chairman Justice K M Yusuf told *Hindustan Times* that he had requested

NCM chairman Justice M Shamim to ask the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister to take "all possible steps to stop the mob frenzy forthwith and protect the lives and properties of Muslims in Gujarat". Justice Shamim had told him that the NCM had decided to send a team to Gujarat.

In its appeal, a copy of which was sent to Justice Yusuf, the NCM said it was extremely shocked at the recent carnage in the country.

"We have taken pride in our secularism and internationally-recognised peaceful coexistence.

In this context, the Commission makes a fervent appeal to all communities to stand together to prevent divisive forces from fragmenting our country and spoil its secular image. We cannot allow the concept of unity in diversity and of *basudhaiba kutumbakam* (universal brotherhood) to be driven out by such forces, an NCM statement said.

"Let us all take a pledge that we will foil any and every attempt made to destabilise and destroy these very concepts which our country has stood for since time immemorial," the NCM statement said.

# Bandh: Stray violence, 113 held

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, March 1

STRAY INCIDENTS of violence were reported from North Bengal during the Bharat Bandh called by the VHP today. In all, 113 people were arrested for trying to block roads, railway tracks or raising inflammatory slogans. Examinations were held as scheduled.

In Hasnabad, North 24-Parganas, police fired to disperse VHP activists who blocked rail tracks from 6.30 am. The police removed the protesters at 8.00 am. Half an hour later, the mob re-assembled to block the tracks again, this time swelling in strength to about 150.

When police intervened, they threw stones at them. Eight policemen, including the SDPO, and some railway

officials were injured. Police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the mob. Many VHP activists were injured. Later police fired five rounds in the air and four rounds of teargas shells. One of the bullets hit the cabin at Hasnabad station and a train driver was injured. It was only after a hot chase that police rounded up 40 of the VHP supporters.

In Kolkata, 34 VHP activists were arrested from Burrabazaar and Posta for trying to block the road. Seventeen kar sewaks were arrested while trying to board the Jammu Tawi Express this morning. DIG (HQ) Narayan Ghosh said that those arrested were shouting inflammatory slogans and carrying VHP festoons, objectionable leaflets and literature. Railway sources

said that Intelligence reports had warned them kar sewaks would try board Jammu Tawi express.

Arrests were also made from Asansol, Nadia and Burdwan. Twelve people were arrested from Bankura. In Howrah, six VHP activists were arrested from Golabari and Uluberia for trying to block roads the GT road and NH 6.

The State administration has identified the districts of North and South 24-Parganas and Burdwan as communally sensitive and additional forces have been deployed in these areas.

Shops were shut down in parts of North Bengal. Offices and business establishment that opened as usual surprisingly shut down later though no untoward incidents were reported. Rai-

gunj remained closed for most of the day.

In Kolkata, special reserve forces have been deployed in the three sensitive divisions of Central, Eastern Suburban and Port areas.

Ravi Shankar Bhattacharya, organising secretary of VHP, claimed that the kar sewaks arrested had valid tickets. He said the Centre had taken an impulsive decision. "The incidents of Gujarat are a direct reaction to the Sabarmati Express carnage," he said.

The State Jamiat-e-Ulema has called Muslims not to get provoked. Deploring the train carnage and the riots in Gujarat, it has demanded the resignation of the Central and the Gujarat Governments. It has also called for a ban on VHP and Shiv Sena.

## Ban VHP, Bajrang: FB

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, March 1

THE FORWARD Bloc today demanded ban on the Bajrang Dal and VHP. It held BJP responsible for outbreak of riots in Gujarat.

The Forward Bloc and CPI(M) criticised the Centre's handling of the present crisis. The Left Front constituents would observe March 6 as National Unity Day.

"If the Centre can ban Simi, why can't it ban the Bajrang Dal and the VHP? They listen neither to Parliament nor the Supreme Court. BJP and other Sangh Parivar members have deliberately stoked this communal fire as they found themselves losing power everywhere," said FB general secretary and MP De-

babrata Biswas.

Condemning the Sabarmati Express carnage, Biswas said: "Its seeds lie in VHP's renewed call for temple construction. The situation would have never reached such a stage if VHP had been reined in."

The FB general secretary said Army should have been deployed much earlier in Ahmedabad.

Requesting people not to pay heed to rumours, CPM State secretary Anil Biswas said: "The Centre is responsible for this tragedy. However, all political parties in the State have acted responsibly. We need to combat this menace unitedly."

The SUCI appealed to the State Government to remain alert to the possibility of outbreak of riots. "Bengal pioneered the renaiss-

sance and the swadeshi movement in the country. We have yet again the historical responsibility to herald an era of communal harmony in the country at this juncture," said party general secretary Prabhat Ghosh.

Mamata Banerjee appealed to all citizens to maintain peace and harmony. "This is no time for weighing political gains. Political parties should not play with fire," said she.

She asked Trinamool workers not to organise any peace rallies or marches for that might add to the prevailing tension.

## Gujaratis in Kolkata worried

THE TENSION was palpable at the Bhowanipore Gujarati Education Society on Friday. With several students having friends and relatives staying at various places in Gujarat.

"A majority of our students are Gujaratis. We are saddened by the incidents in Gujarat and those who have relatives in that State are concerned," said Heena Gorsia, secretary of the society.

Members of the Gujarati Relief Society have offered all help though the extent of damage is not known.

HTC, Kolkata

**Young guns of the eastern world :**

**An association of Kolkata's young,  
successful entrepreneurs**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Nightmare without end

*Handwritten:* HPI 2/3 9 minutes

30 killed in fresh violence in Narod; shoot-at-sight orders issued; Army stages flag march; fresh cases of arson, looting; blast in Bapunagar area

Places of worship attacked; houses set on fire in Uktupur village

30 killed in fresh violence; Army deployed

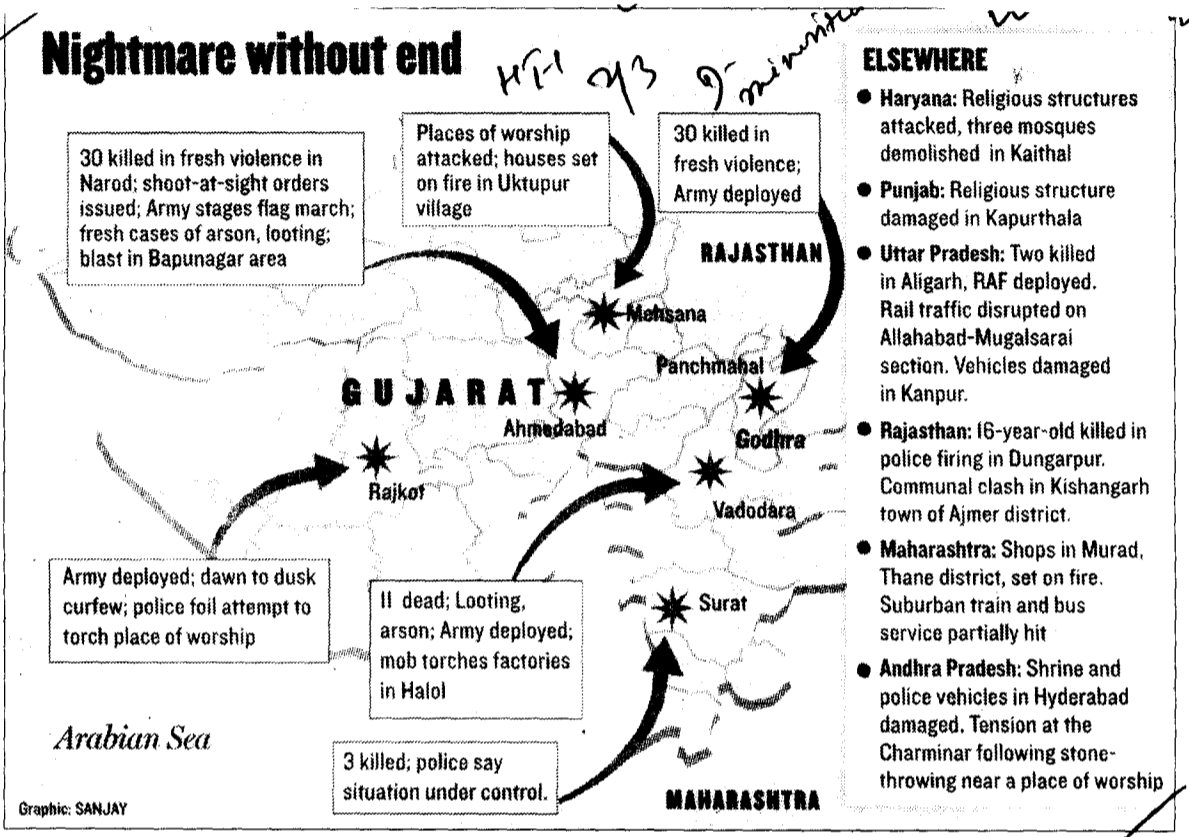
Army deployed; dawn to dusk curfew; police foil attempt to torch place of worship

11 dead; Looting, arson; Army deployed; mob torches factories in Halol

3 killed; police say situation under control.

## ELSEWHERE

- Haryana: Religious structures attacked, three mosques demolished in Kaithal
- Punjab: Religious structure damaged in Kapurthala
- Uttar Pradesh: Two killed in Aligarh, RAF deployed. Rail traffic disrupted on Allahabad-Mugalsarai section. Vehicles damaged in Kanpur.
- Rajasthan: 16-year-old killed in police firing in Dungarpur. Communal clash in Kishangarh town of Ajmer district.
- Maharashtra: Shops in Murad, Thane district, set on fire. Suburban train and bus service partially hit
- Andhra Pradesh: Shrine and police vehicles in Hyderabad damaged. Tension at the Charminar following stone-throwing near a place of worship



Graphic: SANJAY



# VHP bargains with PM, RSS in a bind

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

SF 1 73

March 1. — The VHP said it would reconsider its agitational plan of 15 March if the government gave a written undertaking that it would allow worshipping of pillars on the acquired land in Ayodhya within a stipulated period of time. The VHP senior vice-president, Mr Giriraj Kishore, said this would be three months. He warned that the doors of talks were open till 12 March after which the VHP would go ahead with its plan.

It remains to be seen whether Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee would persuade the Opposition to allow sants to perform puja at the pillars in the land without permitting construction. A symbolic puja by some sants is likely to satisfy the VHP, sources said.

The RSS is in a bind over how to make sants withdraw from the path of agitation. One proposal is to request the Prime Minister to send a special emissary to the sants in Ayodhya asking them to meet him for talks.

*for ministry*  
(The Ram Janambhoomi Nyas president, Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans, today said he was ready to meet Mr Vajpayee, to discuss the Ayodhya issue provided security forces were withdrawn from the temple town, adds PTI from Ayodhya. He ruled out postponement of the temple construction date, 15 March.)

There is an understanding in the parivar that if the Prime Minister makes a personal request to the sants, there might be a climb-down. The emissaries could include Mr Rajnath Singh who shares a good equation with Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans, sources said.

Deliberations between the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudarshan, and the VHP chief, Mr Ashok Singhal, yesterday failed to come up with a face-saving solution.

While both sides reportedly wanted to withdraw, they were unable to devise a face-saver that would be acceptable to the government. The government is ready to appeal to the court to expedite the case on a daily basis.

Mr Kishore said there was no question of VHP leaving its claim to the undisputed land. On being pointed out that an all-party meeting had decided that the status quo would be maintained there, he said, "We can't compromise on that." However, he clarified

that the government should talk to the sants if it wanted further relaxation.

The sants are reported to be angry that the government had slighted them all the time and they needed to be shown some respect, an RSS source said. The RSS can withdraw from the movement but that would mean a permanent blow to the Ram temple movement.

THE HINDU

- 2 MAR 2002



# Delay in Army deployment made the difference



Armymen patrol an Ahmedabad street on Friday. — AP/PTI

**Keith Flory in New Delhi**

March 1. — Were truly precious hours lost — 12 according to some calculations — in getting the troops out on the streets of Gujarat? That is the question that just about everybody sought to duck or deflect today. Each of the entities involved sought to offer its own brand of explanation, which did not quite add up to a convincing whole, setting off speculation, some of it "loaded."

What cannot be disputed is that though it was early on the morning of 27 February that the Sabarmati Express was torched at Godhra, the Army first showed the flag in Ahmedabad around noon today. And whether its role had expanded beyond route marches and static deployment remained unclear till late this evening.

Two brigades from a reserve formation have been airlifted to the state. They arrived around 2.30 a.m. today but obviously could not go into action immediately. While transfer of a battalion each to Baroda and Rajkot was quick, there being no airport at Godhra meant that the soldiers had to travel by road. And not enough trucks were available for the onward journey. For a variety of reasons, some technical ones were valid, the Army was "late".

**Madhyamik in normal gear**

Was this yet another of those infamous "intelligence failures?" The areas in Ahmedabad that have witnessed the worst violence — Darnipur in the old city, for example — have a history, so according to one expert "common sense" would have sufficed to order a heavy police presence there. Today the grapevine ran riot with stories of the state government initially failing to assess the explosive potential of a rapidly deteriorating situation and not seeking Army assistance until things blew up. Or of differences at the highest level of the Central government over taking its own initiative.

Those were the charitable stories. More sinister theories were advanced, albeit by critics of the safety from brigade, that it was a deliberate ploy to permit those seeking to avenge the Godhra killings to have an unrestricted run for a given period — and crack down only when scores had been settled.

When pressing that argument, parallels were drawn to the massacre of the Sikhs in the Capital in 1984.

Then too no effective measures had been enforced by the police and the Army until it was decided that calm had to be restored prior to the funeral of the assassinated Prime Minister.

Turn to page 6

## Timeline

28 February:

- Late afternoon: The Gujarat government wants the Army to be deployed. Requests the Centre.
  - 6.30 pm: Opposition leaders request the Centre to deploy the Army to check the violence.
  - 8.00 pm: The Cabinet Committee on Security meets to discuss the situation. After the meeting Mr LK Advani says Army is on standby.
  - 11.30 p.m.: Army begins flying into Gujarat.
  - Late night: The defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, leaves for Gujarat.
- 1 March
- 2.30 am: Army arrives in Ahmedabad.
  - 11 a.m. — 12 noon: Flag marches in affected areas.

**VHP bandh partial in city, districts** ~ Page 1

**Anil for all-party peace front** ~ Page 1

**Mamata urges restraint** ~ Page 1

**Madhyamik in normal gear** ~ Page 1

**Ignorance is bliss at shopper's paradise** ~ Page 5

## 2/3 **Opposition MPs** H.D. 11 **petition President** 9- minutes

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 1.** Leaders of Opposition parties today petitioned the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, urging him to ensure that the Army was deployed immediately in violence-hit Gujarat. Before going to Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Opposition parties forced adjournment of both Houses of Parliament.

The Congress leader, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, led over 200 MPs to Rashtrapati Bhavan. The MPs urged the President to prevail upon the Government to deploy the Army in Gujarat and to take firm and decisive measures to prevent recurrence of violent incidents.

After the 30-minute meeting with the President, the Opposition leaders told presspersons that they tried to share with him their perception of the gravity of the situation and the "ineffectiveness" of the Narendra Modi Government.

Flanked by other leaders, Ms. Gandhi said they had conveyed their deep anguish at the Gujarat developments. She pointed out that they had knocked on the doors of the Prime Minister

and the Home Minister requesting them to deploy the Army. "We have been in touch with them throughout yesterday, but nothing has moved," she said, adding that the President was aware of the situation.

The CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, said the Opposition parties had deliberately refrained from asking for the resignation of the State Government, because at the moment their priority was getting the Army deployed so that the "communal carnage can be brought to an end in Gujarat."

### 17 'kar sevaks' held in Sealdah

**KOLKATA, MARCH 1.** Police arrested 17 Ayodhya-bound 'kar sevaks' from the Sealdah railway station minutes before they were to board the Mahananda Express and the Jammu-Tawi Express today.

According to the police, additional vigilance was being maintained in new Jalpaiguri, Dalkhola and several other railway stations on the movement of 'kar sevaks'. — PTI

THE HINDU

2 MAR 2002



# 'Police have played crucial role in communal riots'

By Akshaya Mukul  
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: On Thursday, as mobs ran riot in Ahmedabad and other cities of Gujarat burning and looting Muslim establishments and attacking Muslim citizens, the state police looked the other way. Was it a mere failure, or was the police hand-in-glove with rioters, letting them launch "revenge attacks" for what happened in Godhra?

Riot after riot, it has been proved that passive police forces have played a crucial role in allowing the situation to get out of hand. Says Vibhuti Narain Rai, IG, Vigilance, Uttar Pradesh, one of the first police officers to admit police-bias during communal riot, "What happened in Godhra has to be condemned but the police inaction in Ahmedabad on Thursday proves my belief that 'anti-Muslim rioters' see the police as 'allies' during riots. Their common enemy is always the Muslims."

In fact, the reports of various riot commission prove his contention. Barring a few cases, action against erring police officials has never been taken. In Gujarat, the police inaction is legendary. The Justice Jagmohan Reddy Commission report on the Ahmedabad riots of 1969 clearly said, "This commission of inquiry has cited more than half-a-dozen instances where Muslim religious places adjoining police lines or police stations were attacked or damaged. The argument advanced by the police officers that because they were busy quelling riots at various other places, these police stations were shorn of adequate strength and hence these attacks on religious places could not be punished, did not impress the commission. It has made this observation because not

a single case of damage to a Hindu place of worship near a police station was reported to the commission."

Advocates of police reform say that it is precisely because punitive action is never taken for dereliction of duty that men in khaki continue to play a negative role during riots. In addition, they often receive informal instructions from the party in power to turn a blind eye to the killing of minorities. Delhi witnessed a passive police force during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots which was clearly spelt out by Justice Ranganath Misra

**Advocates of police reform say that it is precisely because punitive action is never taken for dereliction of duty that men in khaki continue to play a negative role during riots**

Commission. "The riots occurred broadly on account of the total passivity, callousness and indifference of the police in the matter of controlling the situation and protecting the people of the Sikh community," the report noted. Despite the Mittal Commission naming several police officers, action was not taken and most of the guilty policemen retired after getting promotions.

Similarly, the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Commission on Mumbai riots of 1992-93 wrote, "The response of police to appeals from desperate victims, particularly Muslims, was cynical and utterly indifferent. On occasions, the attitude was that one Muslim killed was one Muslim less...police officers and men, particularly at the junior level, appeared to have an inbuilt bias against the Muslims..."

Justice D.P. Madon Commission on Bhiwandi, Jalgaon and Mahad riots of 1970 had the same conclusion. "The working of the Special Investigation Squad is a study in communal discrimination. The officers of the squad systematically set about implicating as many Muslims and exculpating as many Hindus as possible irrespective of whether they were innocent or guilty," it said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 2 MAR 2002

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2002

## HORROR IN GUJARAT

HD-10

THE HORRIFYING SCALE of violence reflecting in the communal carnage as angry mobs launched vicious reprisals for the Godhra train massacre which has seen several cities and towns of Gujarat go up in flames has also shown a virtual collapse of Governmental authority. The singularly inept and slow response to the scenes of destruction and death raises disturbing questions about the Gujarat State Government's approach. True, any administration will necessarily require some lead time to react to a sudden and potentially explosive development. The Narendra Modi regime however showed little signs of having come to grips with the situation as late as Thursday evening, leaving the field absolutely free for rampaging mobs to go about their 'business' — looting, pillaging and setting blocks of houses afire at will — and there appeared to be a clear design behind all the 'senseless' violence, going by the targets they had chosen — shops and houses owned by the minority community in revenge for the Godhra incident. But shocking was the police personnel's blatant failure to intervene even in cases where such outrageous attacks were taking place in their very presence, as tellingly brought out by the electronic media. If the law enforcing machinery in Gujarat has been notoriously politicised and communalised, the fact that all the current lawlessness that has been unleashed in the name of a VHP-sponsored 'bandh' to protest against the Godhra carnage more than explains the State BJP regime's deliberate lack of firmness in containing the orgy of violence. There has also been an inexplicable delay in calling in the Army. Such a partisan approach to critical issues of governance like maintaining public peace and ensuring the security of citizenry will seriously undermine the legitimacy of the Modi administration.

In fact, given the VHP's plans to organise such 'protest bandhs' nation-wide and the sort of religious frenzy the outfit has whipped up over the Ayodhya temple issue, there is the real danger of

the country being plunged into a communal holocaust of the kind that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Impelled as the VHP and its allies in the Sangh Parivar are by atavistic passion and revanchism, their high-voltage protests are potential flashpoints, given the hate campaign being aggressively mounted against the minority community in the pursuit of their political agenda. In a State like Maharashtra, which was witness to the most horrific ever communal conflagration in December 1992-January 1993, the mischief potential of a bandh is all the more because of the chauvinist Shiv Sena's support to the VHP's call. The Governments of various States, as also the Centre, owe it to the democratic polity and the Constitution that the Godhra carnage is not exploited to create an atmosphere of terror and to fragment civil society more sharply on communal lines.

23

Viewed in this perspective, the support extended by the BJP — the party heading a coalition at the Centre and running Governments in a few States — to the VHP's call for protest bandhs is very disturbing, raising as it does serious misgivings about the BJP Governments' readiness to take necessary stern action against the disruptive elements. If anything, the way the Narendra Modi Government has handled the situation goes to strengthen this construction. Armed as it is with special laws to deal with terrorist groups and organised criminals, the Government will have no excuse for not invoking them against the likes of the VHP, should they refuse to listen to voices of sanity and reason and instead push ahead with their insidious game of targeting the minorities under the pretext of protesting the Godhra killings. The BJP leadership, especially that which is vested with the responsibility of governance, ought to remember that what is at stake is the nation's integrity and uniquely pluralistic character and that it cannot be sustained if a section of the people feels insecure or threatened by another more numerically dominant group.

# Bandh violence drives people and traffic off the roads

ENS & AGENCIES

**T**HE dawn-to-dusk bandh called by the VHP in protest against the Godhra incident evoked a mixed response in the country, being more pronounced in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

In Aligarh, two persons belonging to the minority community were killed in separate incidents prompting the authorities to deploy Rapid Action Force (RAF) in sensitive areas. SP Brij Bhushan said these were not related to communal violence and were "routine crime cases."

Rail traffic was disrupted for several hours on the Allahabad-Mughalsarai section of Northern Railway after VHP activists squatted on the tracks, throwing rail movement out of gear for over four hours, sources said. Stray incidents of violence were also reported from Kanpur, Gorakhpur and Etawah.

In Maharashtra, twelve incidents of stone-pelting of vehicles were reported



from several parts of Mumbai and suburban trains were stopped at more than seven places in the city. In Thane, a mob set afire six shops. The situation is under control now. In Madhya Pradesh, shops and other

commercial establishments remained closed and normal life was affected. However, essential services continued as normal amid high alert and heightened security. The CBSE and the state board annual ex-

aminations began peacefully under tight security. The state Assembly was adjourned for the day after Opposition BJP members raised a furore on what they termed as an "undeclared emergency" in the state during the bandh.

In Rajasthan, most markets and schools were closed and traffic on roads was thin with people staying indoors. Official sources said there were no reports of violence from any part of the state. However, curfew had to be imposed in Kishangarh town of Ajmer after two communities clashed there.

Stray incidents of demolition of religious structures marred the bandh in Haryana and Punjab. At least five religious structures were partially demolished and one was set on fire by a mob in Kaithal in Haryana, reports received here said. A religious structure was partially damaged in Kapurthala in Punjab. However, no one was reported to be injured in these incidents, they said.

Minor incidents of stone-throwing were reported from various parts of Andhra Pradesh. About ten persons, including two BJP corporators, were taken into custody

when they tried to stop buses and deflate the tyres near Falaknuma bus depot.

In West Bengal, police opened fire and lobbed teargas shells to disperse VHP activists who blocked trains at Hasnabad in North 24 Parganas district. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya said that no one was injured in the firing.

In the national capital, the bandh evoked partial response with traders downing shutters, but public transport buses ran normally. The presence of taxis and autos was less than usual.

Stray incidents of violence were also reported from Kolar in Karnataka. A company of RAF has been rushed but the situation was under control, DGP V.V. Bhaskar told mediapersons. Life was normal in Bangalore which was exempted from the bandh call. The bandh evoked a near-total response in Chhattisgarh even as police rounded up 215 people from various parts of the state. Four persons were arrested for pelting stones at buses this morning. The IGP said 215 people were arrested in the past two days as a preventive measure.

## All of UP peaceful other than Aligarh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
LUCKNOW, MARCH 1

SPORADIC incidents of violence, resulting in the death of two persons from the minority community in Aligarh, marked the VHP bandh in Uttar Pradesh today. The response to the bandh was partial to near-total in the state.

One person was killed on Railway Road and the other on Naurangpura overbridge of Aligarh. One person has been arrested in this connection. The first killing took place at around 7.30 am. According to details some people were taking a stroll after namaaz when two-three motorcycle-borne youth opened fire on them.

A 55-year-old businessman died in the spot. In another incident an hour later, another person was killed. Three vegetable sellers were going in a rickshaw when some miscreants stabbed one of them. He died on the spot. Two others are allegedly missing. But police were unable to confirm the report. Although curfew has not been officially imposed, residents were asked to stay indoors.

The situation was tense and heavy patrolling was on. As a result the shops were all shut and the otherwise bustling town wore a deserted look. In Meerut too, the bandh was total. All shops and business establishments remained closed. The streets wore a deserted look. The situation remained tense throughout the day as VHP, Ba-



Riot police on guard in a deserted Ahmedabad street on Friday.  
Reuters

jrang Dal and BJP Youth Wing activists took to the streets and burnt effigies against Islamic terrorism at several places.

At Mathura, a mob caught a truck driver coming from Bharatpur and tried to burn him alive. He has been hospitalised with about 40 per cent burns and his condition is serious. Some incidents of stone pelting were reported from some Lucknow localities. But no one received serious injuries.

In Agra, all shops, except those supplying essentials remained shut. Schools also remained closed. Some people tried to burn an effigy of terrorism, but were immediately arrested for violation of prohibitory orders. Some 9 people were arrested in the city.

## A Gujarat town that bucked the trend

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
RAMOL, MARCH 1

WHILE armed mobs were creating havoc in Ahmedabad, 20 kilometres away in Ramol, Hindu and Muslim residents of a small town, in a peaceful ceremony, paid homage to 10 people who lost their lives in the attack on the Sabarmati Express on Wednesday. Jantanagar has a 50-50 population of Hindus and Muslims. Yet, it remains unaffected by the rising communal tensions, which have already taken a huge toll on the state. The two communities have never shown hatred for each other and they have been living in perfect communal harmony for years now. And the Godhra incident has not changed their lives.

At Hatkeshwar crematorium, Barkat Vadmania, a resident of Jantanagar, kept a close watch over the bodies of 10 people who lost their lives in the train Wednesday's attack. Escorted by VHP men, the bodies were brought to Jantanagar in an ambulance on Thursday after post-mortems were conducted on them at Sola Civil Hospital. Members of both communities took part in the funeral procession. Five hundred metres away, houses were set ablaze and shops looted but they were least bothered. "We are confident that nothing will happen here. So we have not posted many policemen even though this has been called a sensitive spot," said Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) C.L. Vora.

VHP workers who brought the bodies of the dead shouted slogans, which slowly faded away as they approached Jantanagar. "We do not want to create tension here since several Muslims too live in the area. Some people from the other community may have caused the death of many from our community but there is complete peace and harmony here," said Amit Panchal, assistant secretary of the VHP's Ramol unit.

"Year after year, riots have shaken the city but they have never affected this area. Even during the 1992 riots, which broke out in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, this area remained free of communal tensions," said Barkat.

## SC stay on syllabi

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. The Supreme Court today stayed the implementation of the controversial National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE) termed by many educationists an attempt to "saffronise" school syllabi.

The interim order was passed by the court on a PIL filed by Aruna Roy, B. G. Verghese and Meena Radhakrishna Tyabji alleging that an important decision to change school syllabi was taken without consulting the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), the apex body on education policy. — PTI

## Bail for Tiger Memon's brother

MUMBAI, MARCH 1. A designated TADA court has, on medical grounds, granted bail to Yusuf Abdul Razak Memon, serial bomb blast-accused and brother of Tiger Memon who masterminded the 1993 explosions in Mumbai.

The designated judge, P.D. Kode, yesterday released Yusuf, on a sum of Rs. 10 lakhs. He was already on interim bail.

The court also extended the interim bail of Tiger Memon's mother, Hanifa, on health grounds. — PTI

## New HC Judges

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. The President has appointed Krishan Kumar Acharya to be a Judge and Fateh Chand Bansal to be an Additional Judge of the Rajasthan High Court.

# Shoot orders in many Gujarat towns, toll over 200

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 1. The Army began flag marches in the worst-affected areas of Ahmedabad, Baroda, Rajkot and Godhra cities and the 'shoot at sight' order was extended to all 34 curfew-bound cities and towns in Gujarat as the orgy of violence in the aftermath of the Godhra train carnage continued unabated for the second day today.

The toll in the violence has been officially put at 136, including 119 deaths being reported from Ahmedabad city alone of which at least 17 people were killed in police firing. But unconfirmed reports put the toll at over 200 with more bodies still being extricated from the minority housing colonies set ablaze in Meghaninagar and Naroda localities on Thursday.

Five persons were killed in police firing during fresh incidents of violence in the labour-dominated Bapunagar locality where at least five persons were burnt alive in a car in one of the gruesome incidents during the day. Eight persons were burnt alive in their car on the outskirts of Juhapura locality. A policeman was stabbed to death and his body set afire by a mob in Naroda locality.

The official sources admitted that the casualty in the Meghaninagar and Naroda burning incidents was much higher than originally estimated and so far over 105 bodies had been recovered from Gulmarg society in Meghaninagar and Naroda which alone accounted for at least 65 deaths. But hospital sources said at least 163 burnt bodies had been recovered from the two places in one of the worst-ever mass murder incidents in the history of the State since the 1969 riots.

The entire pandal of the Gujarat-Expo exhibition, where various State Governments and co-operative organisations had their stalls on the Gujarat University ground, was on fire. It, however, was not immediately clear whether the fire was accidental or was caused by some miscreants who looted the



A Hindu mob waves swords at an opposing Muslim mob during street battles in Ahmedabad on Friday. — AFP



FACE OF FEAR: A Muslim seeks mercy from rioters. — Reuters

of Ahmedabad, the flag march had a "salutary effect". He said one Army brigade, airlifted from the border areas and which arrived early this morning, began flag march later in the day while another brigade was expected to arrive in the night. He said if the situation demanded, the Army would be deployed in the affected areas to help the civil authorities restore normalcy.

Though Gujarat was "emptied" from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's national bandh call for today, life remained paralysed in most parts of the State for the second day today because of the prevailing tension or due to the imposition of indefinite curfew. Even outside the curfew-bound areas in

out the night and during the day today in the walled city and labour-dominated eastern parts of Ahmedabad. But unlike Thursday when one community was entirely at the receiving end, the minority backlash caused further worsening of the situation.

Police presence had little impact on the two communities pelting stones at each other in Bapunagar, Gomtipur, Dariapur, Shahpur, Naroda and other areas from where incidents of firing had been reported. But there were no reports of casualty. Pitched battle was continuing between the two communities late in the evening.

The official sources said timely arrival of the police foiled a retaliatory attempt to break into

sions were burnt alive today at Pandarwal village in Panchmahal district of Gujarat, official sources said here. Curfew has been imposed in the area and rapid action force personnel have been deployed.

## Killings in U.P., Rajasthan

A New Delhi report said three persons, including a teenager, were killed today as arson, communal clashes, demolition of shrines and police firing marred the 12-hour country-wide general strike called by the VHP.

Two persons belonging to minority community were killed in the communally-sensitive Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh triggering tension prompting

## ALL-PARTY TEAM TO VISIT GUJARAT

# Govt. will act tough: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. Even as the Government heaved a sigh of relief that the VHP-sponsored "bharat bandh" passed off without any major trouble, a determined and angry Opposition (and some allies) kept up the pressure on the Centre to ensure that the Gujarat Government fulfilled its obligation to protect all citizens.

In the evening, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, received a delegation of non-NDA political leaders and heard from them the Narendra Modi Government's acts of commission and omission. It was decided that the Government and the Opposition issue a joint appeal.

dent, Sonia Gandhi's suggestion that an all-party delegation visit Ahmedabad as soon as possible. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, told the leaders about the measures, including deployment of the Army, put in place. Among those met Mr. Vajpayee included I.K. Gujral, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, A.B. Bardhan, Jana Krishnamurthy, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Ms. Mayawati and Yerran Naidu (TDP). The TDP leader had earlier met Mr. Vajpayee and urged him to hold discussions with political leaders. The TDP leader was particularly unhappy with the reported remark of Mr. Modi that the anger of people (over the Godhra incident) was understandable.



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## DIGEST

### SC stay on syllabi

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### Police plea rejected

**GHAZIABAD, MARCH 1.** A city court today rejected the police plea for the custody of Vikas and Vishal, son and nephew of the Rajya Sabha member, D. P. Yadav, held in connection with killing of business executive Nitish Katara. During interrogation, the duo reportedly confessed to having bludgeoned Katara to death. — PTI

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● England beats India — Page 19

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● Sonatas from silence — Page 2

● CPI(M) won't be rigid on keeping out Congress — Page 4

### YOUNG WORLD

● Climb every mountain — Page 1

### ALL IN THE GAME



## ARSON, LOOTING CONTINUE; MORE BURNT TO DEATH; ARMY STAGES FLAG MARCH

# Shoot orders in many Gujarat towns, toll over 200

By Manas Dasgupta

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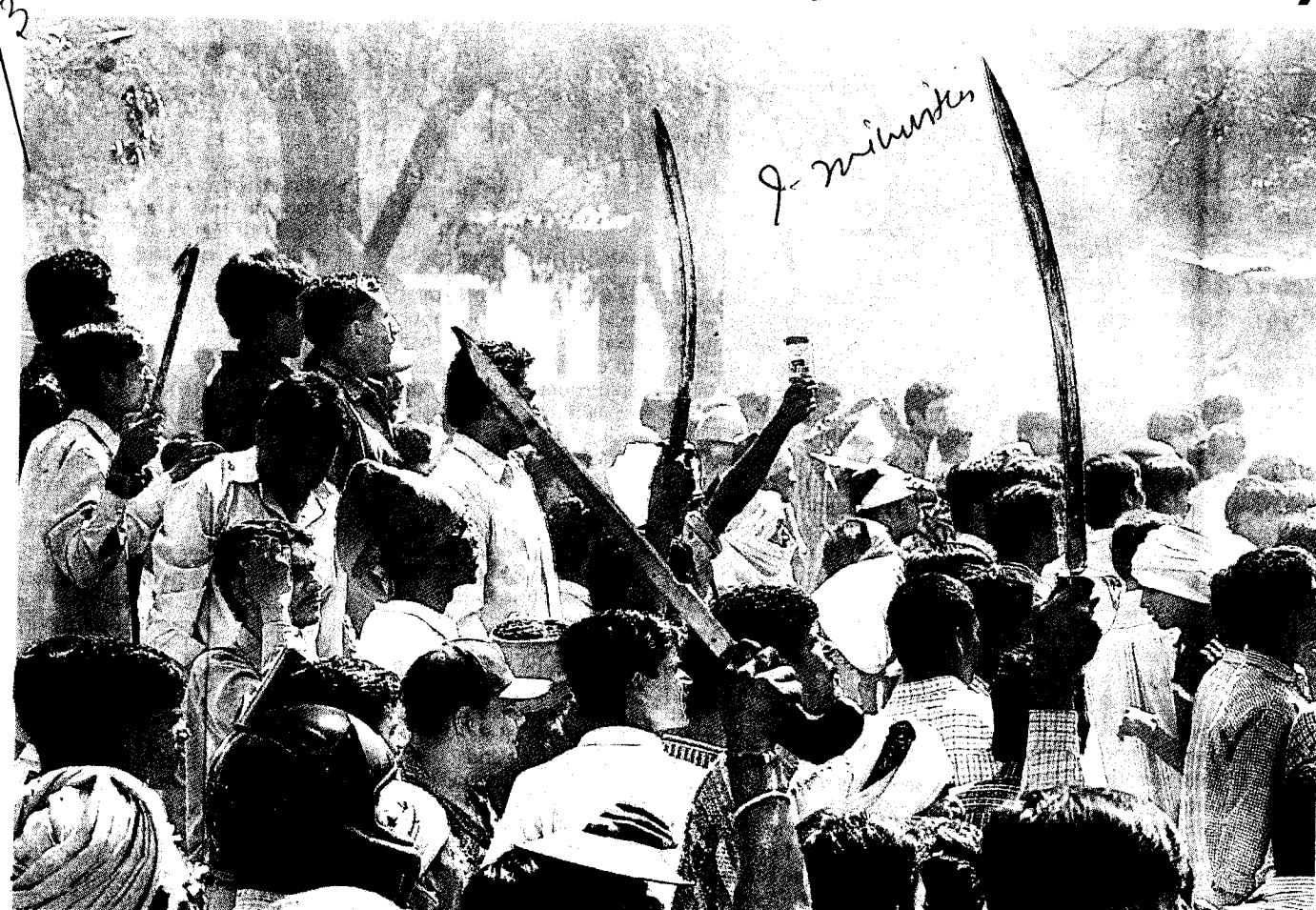
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The Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, however, claims that the situation was "improving" and the intensity of violence was "much less than what it was yesterday". He was confident that the situation would be brought under control soon.

He claimed that despite the prevailing tension in the walled city and labour-dominated ar-



A Hindu mob waves swords at an opposing Muslim mob during street battles in Ahmedabad on Friday. — AFP



FACE OF FEAR: A Muslim seeks mercy from rioters. — Reuters

ear of Ahmedabad, the flag march had a "salutary effect". He said one Army brigade, airlifted from the border areas and which arrived early this morning, began flag march later in the day while another brigade was expected to arrive in the night. He said if the situation demanded, the Army would be deployed in the affected areas to help the civil authorities restore normalcy.

Though Gujarat was "exempted" from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's national bandh call for today, life remained paralysed in most parts of the State for the second day today because of the prevailing tension or due to the imposition of indefinite curfew. Even outside the curfew-bound areas in Ahmedabad, none of the shops, cabins and other business establishments were opened today. Banks, schools and colleges, cinema theatres and most other institutions remained closed while only a few private offices functioned with minimum staff.

Despite the imposition of indefinite curfew, sporadic incidents of violence, group clashes and stoning continued through

out the night and during the day today in the walled city and labour-dominated eastern parts of Ahmedabad. But unlike Thursday when one community was entirely at the receiving end, the minority backlash caused further worsening of the situation.

Police presence had little impact on the two communities pelting stones at each other in Bapunagar, Gomtipur, Dariapur, Shahpur, Naroda and other areas from where incidents of firing had been reported. But there were no reports of casualty. Pitched battle was continuing between the two communities late in the evening.

The official sources said timely arrival of the police foiled a retaliatory attempt to break into a prominent temple in Jamalpur locality in the walled city. But at least 15 places of worship of the minority community in Ahmedabad and some other parts of the State were vandalised and were converted overnight into 'temples' during the last two days.

### 30 burnt alive

PTI reports  
A Baroda report said 30 per-

sons were burnt alive today at Pandarval village in Panchmahal district of Gujarat, official sources said here. Curfew has been imposed in the area and rapid action force personnel have been deployed.

### Killings in U.P., Rajasthan

A New Delhi report said three persons, including a teenager, were killed today as arson, communal clashes, demolition of shrines and police firing marred the 12-hour country-wide general strike called by the VHP.

Two persons belonging to minority community were killed in the communally-sensitive Allahabad district of Uttar Pradesh triggering tension prompting authorities to deploy rapid action force.

A morning-walker was shot dead by unidentified assailants at the railway road and another stabbed to death at Naurangabad, police said.

A 16-year-old boy was killed when police fired to disperse warring communities near a place of worship at Simalwara town of Rajasthan's Dungarpur district.

## No accord unless Govt. allows 'puja': VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 1.** As the toll in Gujarat and elsewhere rose, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's senior vice president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, described the violence there as "a little violent reaction", and added that today the level of violence in the State was "negligible".

Asked if he was justifying the violence, he said, "The Government and other people have said that Godhra happened because of the Ayodhya campaign... I say Gujarat has happened because of Godhra."

Acharya Kishore, who was talking to presspersons, denied that an agreement had been re-

ached between the Government and the VHP. "An agreement is possible only if we get a written assurance that within a certain period we will be able to place stones on the land and perform a 'puja' (for 100 days) and later build a temple." Elaborating on what was meant by "a certain period", he said "no more than three months".

Would the VHP would then scale back its temple movement? He said they would try to persuade the saints led by Ramchandra Paramhans, to do so. A written assurance had to come either from the Prime Minister or the Home Minister. Reminded that Ramchandra Paramhans

had on Thursday said that things would not be allowed to reach a point that would force the Government down, he said "we don't want the Government to fall... Ayodhya will not impact on the Government."

Retreating from his attack on the Prime Minister — calling him "criminally negligent" — Acharya Kishore targeted Muslims, saying, "I don't hold the Prime Minister responsible... I hold the Muslim psyche responsible for what is happening in Gujarat."

Muslims were "taught by the Quran to have hatred for non-Muslims," he added. On whether the Godhra attack might be "po-

litically motivated" rather than communal since it was alleged that "a Congress corporator" was involved, he said: "A Muslim in any party is a Muslim first." His colleague, Om Prakash Singhal, president of Delhi VHP, told the journalists "why don't you concentrate on Godhra."

Acharya Kishore insisted that there was "a difference between a planned attack and mob psychology, what happened in Godhra was planned... what is happening now in Gujarat is mob psychology."

He said the VHP planned to take the ashes of those who had died in the Godhra attack to Ayodhya.

## TAMIL NADU / SECOND SLOT FOR PANEERSELVAM

### 10 ministers axed, 12 new faces find berths

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

**CHENNAI, MARCH 1.** The Chief Minister-designate, Jayalithaa, is giving her ministry a new look, dropping 10 ministers and bringing in 12 new faces.

The 27-member council, to be sworn in tomorrow, will have the outgoing Chief Minister, O. Paneerselvam, as No. 2. R. Viswanathan, who was axed within a month of his appointment in May last, is making a comeback.

Although all senior ministers have been retained, there will be no representation for Muslims. Anwer Rhazza, Minister for Labour, makes way for V.D. Natarajan, who will also look after Wakfs. A. Miller, junormost in the ministry with Tourism portfolio, is a Christian from Gudalur, Nilgiris. Ms. Jayalithaa also shuffled the portfolios. She will retain Home, Public, General Administration and Minorities Welfare.

However, contrary to initial indications, Ms. Jayalithaa chose to expand her Cabinet when the general expectation was that she would set an example in the context of the financial situation of the State, downsizing it from the present 23. The size is the same she had during her earlier stint as Chief Minister in 1991-96. The only Scheduled Tribes community

minister, R. Saroja, bows out following the change at the helm. But the weightage in favour of the Dalits continues. Although the Adi Dravidar Welfare Minister, V. Subramanian, lost his berth, S. Karuppusamy, one of the four AIADMK MLAs who were elected in 1996, is to be inducted in his place.

Apart from Ms. Jayalithaa, there are two women ministers: B. Valarmati and Anitha Radhakrishnan. The ten axed ministers are: Anwer Rhazza (Labour), K. Pandurangan (Industries), S.S. Thirunavukkarasu (Information), R. Saroja (Tourism), V. Subramanian (Adi Dravidar Welfare), S.P. Shanmughanathan (Handlooms), K.P. Rajendra Prasad (Fisheries), R. Vaithilingam (Rural Industries), C. Shanmughavelu (Dairy Development) and C.Ve. Shanmugham (Commercial Taxes).

The new entrants, apart from Ms. Jayalithaa and R. Viswanathan (Transport), are: S. Karuppusamy (Adi Dravidar Welfare), P. Mohan (Forests and Environment), R. Vilwanathan (Rural Industries), M.C. Sampath (Housing and Urban Development), Anitha Radhakrishnan (Animal Husbandry), K. Sudarsanam (Backward Classes), V.D. Natarajan (Labour and Wakfs).

S. Ramachandran (Milk and Dairy Development), K.K. Balasubramanian (Information), V. Somasundaram (Handlooms), M. Radhakrishnan (Fisheries) and A. Miller (Tourism).

### Regional balance intact

Ms. Jayalithaa has maintained the regional balance, giving representation to all regions. For every minister dropped, there has been compensation from the same region.

The number two in the outgoing Cabinet, C. Ponnaiyan, now pushed to number three after Mr. Paneerselvam, sheds the Law portfolio, and would be saddled with Information Technology, apart from Finance.

Mr. Paneerselvam will look after PWD, Highways, Prisons, and Prohibition and Excise.

The Education Minister, M. Thambi Durai, retains Sports and Youth Welfare, and Tamil Development. D. Jayakumar sheds Electricity and gets Law.

P.C. Ramasamy retains HR and CE. There appears to be no guiding principle for the changes. The rational seems to have been to drop the junior ministers and give an opportunity to the untested others in the AIADMK legislature party.

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## DEADLY SPIRAL

11/2

THE GRISLY GODHRA (Gujarat) episode of arson on Wednesday that left 50-odd passengers of the Sabarmati Express dead — most of them Kar Sevaks returning from Ayodhya — and the backlash of mindless violence it had triggered elsewhere in the State, as rampaging mobs have in a series of reprisals hit back at the minority community and its properties, are clear, disturbing pointers to the explosive communal buildup across the country as a direct consequence of the VHP's provocative and destructive campaign for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. What happened in Godhra, about which there are different and conflicting versions, is a dastardly act and it deserves to be condemned unequivocally and in the strongest of terms, and no provocation can even remotely be brought in to justify the slaughter of innocent people. No effort should be spared by the Government to track down the culprits and bring them to justice at the earliest, even as quick measures are taken to ensure that the vicious spiral of violence does not get out of hand and a sense of security is restored among the people.

This said, one cannot but pinpoint the harsh reality that events such as the horror of Godhra were tragically predictable as a result of the wounding and aggressive communal campaign of the VHP. It has been ruthlessly pursuing its agenda of commencing the temple construction on March 15, "come-what-may", and whipping up communal passions through mass mobilisation of Ram Sevaks — some one million of them — across the country. The whole buildup, which started gaining momentum about a month ago — with the VHP and its 'sant parivar' giving an ultimatum to the Vajpayee Government to hand over the so-called 'undisputed' part of the acquired land — has been typical of the much-too-familiar strategy of the Sangh Parivar, providing an ominous throwback to the runup to the Babri Masjid demolition on December 6, 1992. As a consequence of the audaciously provocative ways of the Ram temple proponents — as evidenced by their determination to start moving the carved stone pillars to the building site from March 15 and

HO-12 J. minix

the regular convergence of frenzied Kar Sevak contingents on Ayodhya from different parts of the country daily since February 24 — the situation on the communal front rapidly deteriorated, with sharp polarisation of the majority and minority community, becoming explosive by the day. The dangerous implications of such a trend for a State like Gujarat — known for its high vulnerability to communal riots and its perceived status as a laboratory of Hindutva political doctrines — are alarming. In many respects, the evolving milieu resembles what obtained during L. K. Advani's rath yatra, an event that generated communal disturbance all along its route.

To all the open and persistent threats by the VHP to flout governmental authority, judicial injunctions and the law of the land, the Vajpayee regime's response has been singularly devoid of any inclination to preempt a potential disaster. There has been on its part a shocking disinclination to make such interventions. Its attitude suggesting the maintaining of status quo at the disputed site strongly hinted of a narrowly partisan calculation that had to do with the just-concluded Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. That the strategy did not pay off is a different story. It required a horrendous episode of Godhra's dimensions for the Vajpayee Government even to make an appeal to the VHP to stop its temple construction agenda. It is only now that the Government appears moved to take such elementary preventive steps like barring entry of Kar Sevaks in Ayodhya and screening passengers of Ayodhya-bound trains. The Vajpayee administration's response is a clear case of 'too little, too late'. The need of the moment, post-Godhra and given the ominous portents of the worst fears of a communal conflagration proving true, is decisive action nation-wide that asserts a 'no-nonsense' approach to the VHP's law-defying Ram temple construction plan and also inspires public confidence that the Government is indeed serious about upholding the rule of law. The present political uncertainty in Uttar Pradesh following a terribly fractured mandate only casts a greater responsibility on the Centre in this regard.

THE HINDU

1 MAR 2002



# Gehlot turns to PM as BJP backs bandh in state

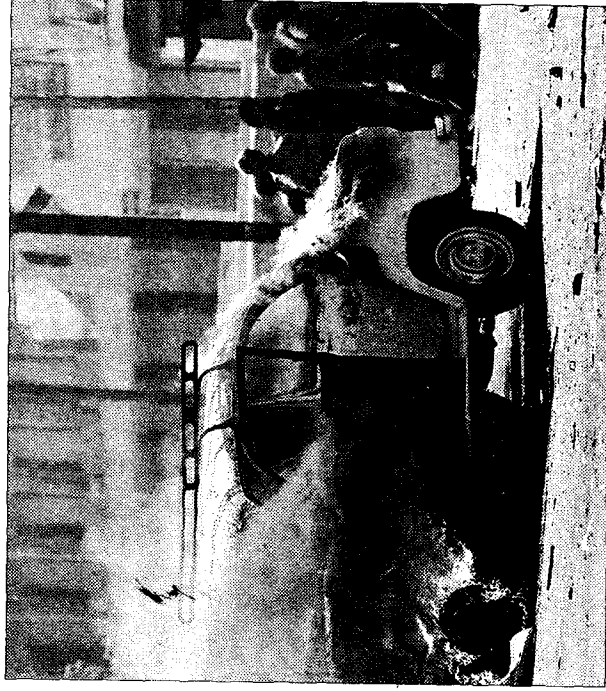
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
JAIPUR, FEBRUARY 28

**T**ENSION hangs heavy across Rajasthan in the wake of the VHP's call for a countrywide bandh tomorrow and its open support by the state unit of the BJP. Since last evening, the RSS and VHP have launched a massive mobilisation drive to make their bandh a success.

Worried, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has written to the Prime Minister, complaining about the BJP's support of the bandh, which is a contradiction of the party's stand at the Centre. According to IG (Law and Order) A.K. Jain, contingents of the RAC, STF and Home Guards have been deployed across the state since last night. Officers from police training institutes have also been requisitioned, along with those from unimportant locations in the state.

But VHP is undaunted. Says Harihar Lal Parikh, joint secretary for Rajasthan and Gujarat: "Thousands of our workers will be out on the streets tomorrow, convincing shopkeepers to down their shutters. We want to give a message to the society that no attack on democracy will be tolerated."

The state BJP is helping the VHP ensure the bandh is a success



A car set on fire by rioters in Ahmedabad on Friday. Reuters photo

by talking to shopkeeper unions. Says Om Prakash Mathur, organising secretary of the party and a RSS pracharak: "A big crime has been committed, every citizen of the country should condemn it. Nothing like this has happened since 1947. I have personally spoken to 28 district chiefs. Since last evening, we have been holding meetings with ward members in every corner of the state."

The militant mood was in full display at the Jaipur railway station, where a 500-strong group of kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya got off this afternoon. They claimed their train had been stoned at Bandikui in Dausa district and that they had pulled the chain thrice to get off and take the attackers on, but the train had not stopped.

In the group was 75-year-old Radha Bai from village Chohita

near Udaipur. "Those who are stopping us from making the Ram mandir will be finished," she said. "We will keep going to Ayodhya till the mandir is built."

The large number of Bajrang Dal workers among the group warned there would be a war if incidents like Godhra's were repeated.

Herded into a room at Bharat Mata Mandir, guarded by a large contingent of riot police, the kar sevaks are furious at the Centre's "inaction". Said 19-year-old Vineet Dwivedi: "The PM should respect the *janata* — it is the *janata* which elected him as PM. We cannot wait for any court order."

Parikh enumerated what Rajasthan is up against. He revealed the state had the highest number of VHP members after Gujarat and Maharashtra. The current membership hovers at four lakh, a rise of 1.5 lakh in the past year since the mandir issue was revived. Around 1,500 have visited Ayodhya in three batches. Of the total kar sevaks, he boasts, 60,000 are armed with trishuls.

The Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind state unit is cautious about the bandh. Says state secretary Dr Mohammed Iqbal: "We have demanded a high-level probe into the Godhra incident and condemn it in the strongest possible terms."

## Rly police ran for their lives: Ticket checker

AGENCIES  
RATLAM (MP), FEBRUARY 28

MANY lives could have been saved yesterday, when the Sabarmati Express was set ablaze by arsonists at Godhra, if the Railway Protection Force jawans had not left the spot following stone-pelting, according to an eyewitness account.

Travelling Ticket Examiner Sajjanlal Ranival, who was in charge of S-3 and S-4 three-tier coaches of the train, said here on Friday an RPF party, armed with rifles, had reached the spot soon after getting information. Ranival claims the jawans fled in panic as soon as the goons started throwing stones.

He was recounting the events in the presence of Sabarmati Express's driver Rajendra Rao and assistant driver Mukesh Pachori. After the jawans fled, Ranival said the attackers attacked passengers for over an hour and set ablaze S-6.

## MP towns shut down, state bandh today

YOGESH VAJPEYI  
BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 28

A NEAR total bandh was observed on Thursday in Ratlam, Dhar and Jhabua areas of Madhya Pradesh in protest against Wednesday's killings in Godhra. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal have called for a statewide bandh on Friday.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh expressed shock at the killings and warned any attempt to whip up communal hatred during the bandh will be strongly dealt with. The police has been put on red alert and precautions are being taken in the communally-sensitive areas of Indore, Ujjain and Bhopal divisions. The bandh call has cast a shadow over secondary school exams of the Madhya Pradesh Board starting Friday.

Markets in Ratlam and other towns adjoining Godhara in Gujarat did not open in the morning as the VHP and Bajrang Dal started mobilising people immediately after word of the Godhara tragedy reached them on Wednesday. The

bandh was partial in Dhar and Jhabua where the markets opened in the afternoon.

Tension prevailed in Ratlam this morning when VHP leaders wanted to bring out a protest procession. Later, they were persuaded to submit a memorandum addressed to the Union Home Minister to the District Collector.

## Missionaries hit

AGRA: Christian missionaries were attacked in Sulahkul town of Agra on Thursday during a wedding in Arjun Nagar locality. They were reportedly preaching their faith to a crowd when around six men from a local organisation demanded that they stop. When they refused, the men roughed them up and damaged furniture. Chairs were hurled around, hurting a few. Shahganj police tried to pacify the people. No case has been registered. **SIRAJ QURESHI**



MOB SETS FIRE TO SABARMATI EXPRESS AT GODHRA; 25 WOMEN, 14 CHILDREN AMONG VICTIMS; VIOLENCE, ARSON IN AHMEDABAD

# 57 kar sevaks die in train inferno

Anil Rana in Godhra (Gujarat)

Feb. 27. — Fifty-seven VHP kar sevaks, including 25 women and 14 children, were burnt to death when a mob set fire to a coach of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra station, about 150 km from Ahmedabad, today. At least 43 people were injured.

More than 1,000 armed people attacked the train, which was carrying 3,000 kar sevaks from Ayodhya, witnesses said. The incident took place around 7.20 a.m.

The train, on its way to Ahmedabad, had halted at the station for five minutes. The kar sevaks got down to have tea. They reportedly raised slogans like *mandir wahin banayenge* and *Jai Shri Ram*. As the train proceeded, it was stopped by a signal about 500 metres down the line. A mob gathered in front of the engine and began throwing stones.

The passengers pulled down the window shutters and locked the doors from inside.

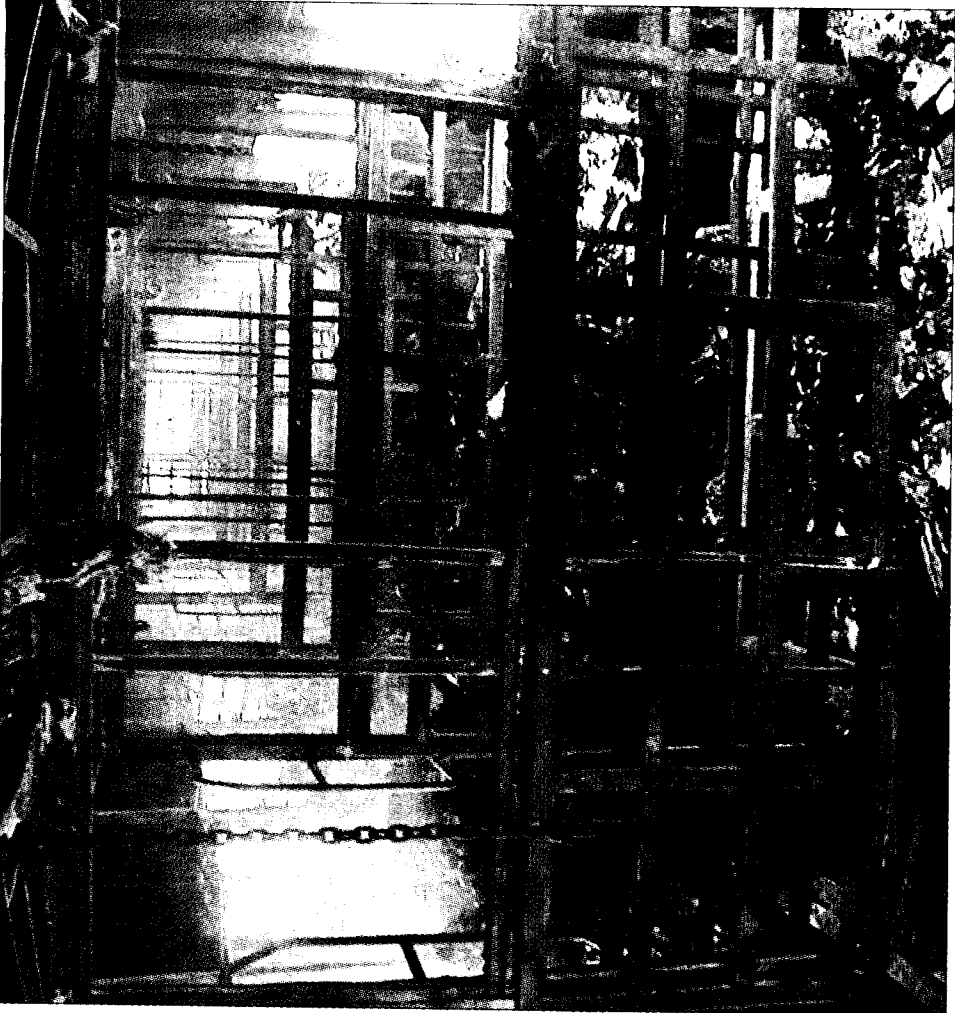
The assailants managed to open a shutter of the coach (S-6), threw a bedding soaked in petrol and set it on fire. The passengers were trapped inside. The coach was gutted killing most of the people. The adjacent coaches too were damaged.

The first fire engine which rushed to the spot was stopped by the mob, reportedly led by a local councillor. Police arrived on the scene and fired several rounds to disperse the mob.

The burnt coach was detached from the train, which was allowed to head for Ahmedabad.

Later, when the train reached Vadodara station, a group of passengers with sharp weapons attacked three people waiting on the platform. One of them succumbed to injuries in a hospital. At Anand, some passengers got off the train and killed a man waiting on the platform. The train reached Ahmedabad station around 4.30 p.m.

At least half-a-dozen buses were burnt and a shop set ablaze



Horror in Gujarat: (Left) The burnt coach of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra station. Rescue workers bring out a charred body. — PTI

## Stop Ayodhya movement, PM tells RSS

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

Feb. 27. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today asked the RSS and the VHP to suspend the Ayodhya movement following the developments in Gujarat.

The Prime Minister has asked the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, to firmly deal with the situation and prevent further escalation of violence.

Mr Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani have appealed to the RSS to dissociate itself from the VHP-sponsored movement. The BJP has been sounded out to openly ask its members not to participate in the temple construction movement.

About 100 pracharaks, including senior RSS leaders, are slated to meet in Jhunjhouni (Haryana) on Friday to take a stand on the issue. The RSS has backed the VHP's plan of *yagna* and temple construc-

tion. A withdrawal would need arguments to convince its cadres.

The RSS joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das Devi, the VHP international president, Mr Ashok Singhal, and former judge Mr Ram Jois, didn't seem happy when they came out of the Prime Minister's house.

Mr Singhal refused to speak to reporters waiting outside. They had sought a meeting with the Prime Minister to try to win him over to the VHP's claim to the undisputed land. Mr Advani, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Arun Jaitley were also present.

Earlier in the day, the government's determination to uphold law and Constitution was evident in Mr Advani's statement that the VHP exercise could lead to defiance of court orders.

He stressed that the government would not hesitate to take action. His statement prevented them from reaching Ayodhya.

came after he spoke to senior RSS leaders over phone, government sources said.

"Crores of our countrymen want the Ram temple to be built at Ayodhya but they want it to be built lawfully and peacefully," Mr Advani said.

"As a person who has always felt proud of his association with the Ayodhya movement, I feel the VHP is currently engaged in an action which can only cause great damage to the movement. If, however, they persist in their present approach, the Government of India would not hesitate to take action against those who defy court orders or create problems for law and order," he said.

There was a consensus among the government's key ministers that the confrontation with the VHP on the Ayodhya issue was entering into "the final phase" by which they meant arrest of the kar sevaks to prevent them from reaching Ayodhya.

## Vajpayee not to attend CHOGM

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — The Godhra tragedy prompted Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to cancel his visit to Australia to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Mr Jaswant Singh will lead the delegation to CHOGM, to be held between 2 and 4 March.

The Faizabad district administration sealed Ayodhya restricting movements of kar sevaks to pre-empt any law and order problem.

The UP Principal Secretary (Home), Mr Naresh Dayal, said in Lucknow that the state government was fearing that the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba might carry out a Kolkata-type attack in Ayodhya. — SNS/UNI

## AB Vajpayee

'Violence cannot help in resolving the Babari Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue. What happened ... will be investigated'

officials at Godhra to assess the situation.

The government will give Rs 2,00,000 each as compensation to the families of those killed.

The attack on the Sabarmati

## LK Advani

'The VHP has embarked on a course of action in Ayodhya which is fraught with dangerous consequences'

officials at Godhra to assess the situation.

The government will give Rs 2,00,000 each as compensation to the families of those killed.

The attack on the Sabarmati

Turn to page 6

# 57 killed as mob torches train in Gujarat

By Manas Dasgupta

**GANDHINAGAR, FEB. 27.** Fifty-seven persons, mostly women and children, were killed and 43 sustained burn injuries when a coach of the Faizabad-Ahmedabad Sabarmati Express carrying 'Ram sevaks' was set afire by a group of people on the outskirts of the Godhra railway station, about 200 km from here, this morning. The 'Ram sevaks' were returning from Ayodhya.

The incident led to tension in other parts of the State as a relief train, carrying passengers of the affected train, reached these stations on the way to Ahmedabad. At least two persons were stabbed to death in the Anand and Baroda railway stations, from where three more incidents were reported. Two incidents of stabbing were reported in the Ahmedabad railway station and in the Meghanagar locality despite heavy police bandobust. A municipal bus was set afire in the labour-dominated Bapunagar locality of Ahmedabad. A dozen cases of arson were also reported from here.

## VHP calls for bandh

An indefinite curfew has been clamped in Godhra town and a 'shoot at sight' order issued following the incident. The authorities are keeping their fingers crossed in view of a call by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its sister organisations for a 'Gujarat Bandh' tomorrow to protest against the 'ghastly' incident. The State Government has appealed to the people to maintain peace.

The Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, who rushed to the spot along with the Minister of State for Home, Gordhan Jhadaphiya, and the Health Minister, Ashok Bhatt, said the Government had ordered a 'high-level inquiry'.

Making a brief statement in the Assembly, which is holding its budget session, Mr. Modi condemned the incident and said he had spoken with the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee.

He also announced an immediate compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs to the next of kin of the deceased.

## Attack was planned?

Mr. Modi hinted at the possibility of the attack being a "planned" one, pointing out that the train was "attacked" at the Godhra railway platform, where it halts for only about three minutes.

Even as conflicting reports about the sequence of events kept pouring in, the Home Secretary, K. Nityanandam, said a group of people had thrown stones at the train as soon as it halted at Godhra, forcing the passengers to bolt the doors from inside. As soon as the train left the platform, it stopped in the yard, which the railway authorities said was because someone had pulled the chain. It was not clear who pulled the chain, but someone from the attackers having climbed into the train before it left the platform is not ruled out.

As the train stopped, the miscreants virtually gheraoed the train and a flurry of stones poured in on the passengers. One of the coaches was doused with petrol and kerosene brought from a nearby petrol pump and set on fire. Also, burning rags were thrown in through the windows. The fire soon spread to at least four contiguous coaches, forcing many passengers to jump out. Those who could not — some 25 women and 15 children — perished in the fire.

Eyewitnesses said that about 1,200 'Ram sevaks' were travelling in the train. The local people in the Muslim-dominated Godhra town had been "irritated" by the "abusive language" used by the 'Ram sevaks' while they were going to Ayodhya by the same train a few days ago. They had reportedly raised slogans as the train approached Godhra on the return journey this morning.

Senior police and railway officials, who rushed to the spot,



**Bodies of those killed in the attack on the Sabarmati Express kept near a burnt coach in Godhra on Wednesday.** — Reuters

found it difficult to recover the bodies, most of which were charred beyond recognition. The authorities said they had estimated the number of dead by merely counting the bones, adding that the exact number was not known immediately.

A relief train was sent from Ahmedabad and the State Government arranged for 30 State buses to carry the stranded passengers to their destinations. The Home Minister said the Government was taking necessary steps to ensure that the disturbances did not spread during the bandh tomorrow.

PTI reports: Among the injured in the attack were 31 men, nine women and three children. Of them, 20 passengers, who sustained serious burns were admitted to a hospital at Godhra, Mr. Nityanandam said.

Mr. Vajpayee, who spoke with Delhi, has asked him to firmly deal with the situation arising out of the attack. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, has also spoken to Mr. Modi.

By Harish Khare

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 27.** The Vajpayee Government and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today found themselves inching towards a confrontation over the Ayodhya dispute. The dominant official mood seems to be to ensure that the demands of law and order take precedence over any past or current soft corner for the VHP leaders and their cause.

In an effort to impress upon the VHP leaders the seriousness of the Government's constitutional obligations, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, called the VHP leader, Ashok Singhal, for a discussion.

Mr. Singhal was accompanied by the RSS leader, Madan Das Devi (who liaises between the BJP and the Sangh Parivar) and Rama Jois, a retired judge who is said to be well-versed with the legal entanglements of the Ayodhya dispute.

Besides the Prime Minister,

the Government side was represented by the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, (who recently had confabulations with the Kanchi Sankaracharya) and the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, (who has been asked by the Prime Minister to examine the 'legal' aspects of the dispute).

On their part, the "mandir" leaders are believed to have pressed their point of view that the Centre could easily — and without any legal complication — hand over the "undisputed land" in Ayodhya to the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust.

The Prime Minister told them that the Government would find it a difficult demand to concede. Nonetheless, undeterred by the rejection of an earlier appeal by Acharya Giriraj Kishore, the Prime Minister once again appealed to the VHP to suspend their "movement".

Earlier, both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister

came pretty close to warning the VHP that the "karsevaks" would not be allowed to disturb the status quo in Ayodhya. Both appealed to the VHP leaders to suspend their move to start "mandir construction" in Ayodhya on March 15.

## Advani's warning

But much more significant was the statement issued, early in the day, by Mr. Advani. He warned that "if, however, they (VHP leaders) persist in their present approach, the Government of India would not hesitate to take action against those who defy court orders or create problems for law and order".

Even though he acknowledged his "proud association" with the Ayodhya movement, Mr. Advani noted that "it is the duty of Government — in this case, both the Central as well as State — to ensure that the court orders are not violated by anyone".

# We cannot change dates: VHP

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 27.** As riots erupted in Gujarat, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, made a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to get the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders to withdraw their call to gather "Ram bhakts" at Ayodhya and start construction of a temple on March 15.

After an hour-long meeting with Mr. Vajpayee, senior VHP leaders virtually rejected his appeal and said he should speak to the "sants" who had fixed the Ayodhya programme.

Later, Mr. Vajpayee called the Bharatiya Janata Party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, for a meeting to discuss a suggestion

from some very senior BJP leaders in Government and outside that the party should immediately issue an appeal to all its members not to join the so-called "Ram bhakts" in Ayodhya.

However, neither the appeals made by Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, nor the shocking incident in Gujarat today and the eruption of communal violence in the State seem to have impressed the VHP.

While both the BJP and the VHP strongly condemned the violence let loose on slogan shouting "kar sevaks" and stated they suspected "an ISI backed fundamentalist" con-

spiracy to destabilise the Government, the VHP leaders also let it be known that this would not deter thousands more from joining the ongoing "yagna" in Ayodhya and the construction work that would follow.

The senior VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, had this to say: "Revered sants had met the Prime Minister on January 27 and asked him to hand over the acquired land in Ayodhya to the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust so that we could begin building the temple peacefully. But the Prime Minister refused and that led the sants to decide on a date to start the construction. The VHP cannot change the dates."

# Opp stalls Houses over temple issue

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, February 26

27/2  
9 minutes  
HT-2

THE AYODHYA issue rocked both Houses of Parliament today, with Opposition MPs pressing the Government to spell out how it meant to deal with the "grave" situation at the disputed site.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's assurance that measures had been taken to guard against untoward incidents at the disputed site failed to pacify the members.

Both Houses adjourned for the day after noisy scenes and a spate of interruptions with Congress, Left, Samajwadi Party and RJD MPs showing no sign of relenting on the issue. Earlier, the Opposition raised the issue in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha as soon as the two Houses assembled and demanded suspension of the Question Hour to have a debate on the issue.

Buckling under Opposition pressure, Vajpayee said in the Lok Sabha that the Government was prepared for a discussion but there was no need for suspension of the Question Hour.

The Opposition allowed Railway Minister Nitish Kumar to present the Railway Budget but raked up the issue again when the House reassembled after the lunch recess.

Vajpayee said the Government's position on the matter had been clarified yesterday in the President's address to the joint session of Parliament. "People are going to Ayodhya, but nobody is permitted into the disputed area. Some 'yagnas' are taking place outside. The Gov-

ernment does not consider it necessary to stop them now".

"I assure you that Parliament will speak in one voice on this issue. We will not tolerate illegal activity. A solution will be found either through negotiations or through the court", the Prime Minister said.

Congress member Shivraj Patil said the Ayodhya controversy was so important that Question Hour ought to be suspended. The Speaker did not agree to this. He adjourned the House when it was clear that the Opposition would not yield on their demand.

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned thrice on the issue with Opposition members bent on seeking a statement from the Prime Minister. The agitated MPs trooped into the well after the House assembled in the morning.

They asked the Government to seize all construction material including the stone pillars and arrest the "kar sevaks".

The House was adjourned twice by chairman Krishan Kant. Finding the Opposition MPs in an unrelenting mood, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh of the RJD, who was in the chair, adjourned the House for the day. With tomorrow being a public holiday, both Houses will now meet on February 28.

Arjun Singh of the Congress said the President had said yesterday that the Government was "duty bound to maintain status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya" and "will ensure that all necessary measures will be taken to ensure the preservation of law and order".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 FEB 2002

# 1992 Ayodhya replay will not be allowed, <sup>PM</sup> <sup>27/2</sup> <sup>2 minutes</sup> govt assures oppn

Times News Network & PTI

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Tuesday night declared that it would not allow a repeat of 1992 but would maintain law and order and the status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya. Undeterred, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) announced that it would go ahead with the temple construction from March 15.

At a two-hour all-party meeting, home minister L.K. Advani said it was the primary responsibility of the Centre to maintain the status quo at the disputed and acquired land, and it would duly fulfil it. Mr Advani said, "We are aware of what happened in 1992 and we assure you that we will not allow 1992 to be repeated. We will not do anything which will make us repent at a later stage."

The meeting was convened by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee after both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha were rocked by the developments in Ayodhya,

with the opposition forcing an adjournment demanding that the Centre spell out the measures it planned to deal with the explosive situation in the wake of the VHP's plan. Barring the tabling of the economic survey and the railway

benches, Mr Vajpayee's said the matter could be solved either by negotiation or in the courts, and his government would ensure that the status quo was not disturbed.

However, his remark that there was no reason to stop the yagna unless it created a law and order problem infuriated the opposition, which immediately demanded that the government list the steps it had planned to deal with Ayodhya developments.

Deputy leader of the Congress Shivraj Patil said, "We consider this one of the most important issues because of what happened in the past" (a reference to the demolition of the Babri masjid despite the assurances of the Kalyan Singh government). Congress spokesperson S. Jaipal Reddy said Mr Vajpayee had only reiterated what had been mentioned in the President's address, without spelling out a future course of action.

budget in the Lok Sabha, no legislative work was transacted in both houses. The opposition demanded that *kar sevaks* be arrested and the construction material seized.

While the Rajya Sabha was adjourned three times on the issue, opposition MPs raised the temple issue as soon as the members assembled in the Lok Sabha. Trying to calm the agitated opposition

## TEMPLE TANGLE

- ▶ VHP says it will begin temple construction from March 15
- ▶ Oppn demands to know Centre's plan of action
- ▶ Yagna can go on if there's no problem: PM

# We'll maintain status quo on Ayodhya: Govt. *9- minutes*

APD-1  
27/2

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 26.** The Government today assured an all-party meeting that it would maintain status quo in Ayodhya and take appropriate steps to prevent recurrence of 1992-like situation, even as the Opposition and some allies of the ruling National Democratic Alliance expressed dissatisfaction that measures had not been initiated or outlined to prevent the build-up of 'kar sevaks'.

Briefing correspondents after a two-hour meeting called by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the Ayodhya developments, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, said both Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, said the Government was duty bound to maintain status quo and ensure that no law was violated either at the disputed site or on the land acquired by the Centre.

Mr. Vajpayee said no construction work would be al-

lowed. The VHP had threatened to start the work on a Ram temple on March 15.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Advani said the Centre shared the concern expressed by leaders over the developments in Ayodhya and it would take all necessary steps at appropriate time to prevent any untoward incident. Irrespective of the political developments in Uttar Pradesh, it was the primary responsibility of the Centre to see that status quo was maintained at the disputed site and on the acquired land.

The Home Minister informed the meeting that till now 14,000 kar sevaks had assembled at Kar Sewakpuram in Ayodhya and the number altered with some leaving and others joining each day. He said that as a precaution the central police forces which were deployed for the elections duty had been retained and if required, more forces would be deployed.

Earlier in his opening remarks, the Prime Minister said

the Government had made its position clear that the Ayodhya dispute could be solved either through a negotiated settlement or through a court verdict.

The meeting also urged the Centre to implead itself in the Ayodhya case and request the court to expedite the case. Mr. Mahajan said though the Centre was not a party to the dispute, the leaders suggested that it move the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court which was hearing the matter to expedite hearing.

Allies including the Janata Dal (United), the Trinamool Congress, the Indian National Lok Dal and the MDMK asked the Government to take firm steps to prevent the kar sevaks from reaching Ayodhya, while the Opposition expressed dissatisfaction that the Government gave no categorical assurance that it would not allow the build-up of kar sevaks in Ayodhya. The Indian Union Muslim League suggested that the Army be deployed.

THE HINDU

27 FEB 2002

9-min 1/2

## Temple can be built on undisputed land: Kanchi Acharya

10-12

By Our Staff Reporter

**GUNTUR, FEB. 25.** The Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Math, Jayendra Saraswathi, says he has made suggestions to the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, on "how to go about" the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Talking to presspersons who called on him here on Monday in the wake of Mr. Fernandes' meeting with him at the Ganavaram airport on Sunday, he said the temple could be built in the "undisputed land" provided the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) worked out a "mutually-agreeable" formula.

He defended the setting of

the deadline — March 15 — by the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas for taking up of the construction of the temple. The date was not fixed overnight. It was fixed by the Nyas, which met last year during 'Kumbh Mela'.

"Mr. Fernandes called on me and asked me to offer suggestions on how to go about the temple issue. I told him that the temple can be constructed in the undisputed site and that the Government, if desires, can hand over the land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas by applying to the court receiver. Of course, any decision should be agreeable to the Nyas, comprising various religious leaders and the AIBMAC. Syed Shahabuddin wrote to me saying that there should be no objection, if

the temple is built in the undisputed land. But, I and Shahabuddin are just individuals," he said.

To a question on what the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should do in the present circumstances, as the temple issue was not part of the National Democratic Alliance agenda, he said, "The BJP is not doing anything. Everything is being postponed by the Government. The country is getting into a debt trap. The Government is selling companies owned by it to run the show every month."

"If they ensure at least the construction of the temple, they would get a good name. At least, this will remain as one good work done by them."

THE HINDU

10-12

# Temple tensions may rise now

Hemendra Singh Bartwal  
New Delhi, February 24

IF THE Samajwadi Party manages to cobble together a government in Lucknow, its first challenge would be to check the VHP's threat to start building a Ram temple on March 15.

The Vajpayee Government is committed to carry out the NDA's agenda. But it would, on the whole, suit the Sangh Parivar to keep any secular conglomeration on the tenterhooks on the temple question.

Some sections in the parivar have already started preparing ground for such a scenario by emphasising the need to consolidate the BJP's Hindu vote. Their contention: BJP lost out because it put the temple on the back burner to be able to retain power at the Centre.

If the SP does form a Government, it wouldn't allow the VHP to execute its temple programme. The consequences of the ensuing con-



**ASHOK SINGHAL:**  
*Will the smile last?*

frontation could be revived tensions in communally sensitive UP.

VHP leaders are now gearing up for a probable face-off, that may be equally inevitable if the BJP decides to prop up Mayawati. Security in Ayodhya is the State's responsibility.

The VHP's Purna Ahuti Yagna, meant to mark the conclusion of the nationwide *Ram naam jap* campaign

and signal the final phase of the temple movement. Over the next three weeks, the VHP plans to mobilise over 100,000 devotees in Ayodhya for the beginning of construction. A hostile regime in Lucknow is likely to stall its move by putting hurdles in the way of movement of large groups of people across the state. It may also place restrictions on transporting the stone pillars and other construction material to the undisputed land where the VHP proposes to start building the peripheral portions of the temple complex.

The VHP leadership is hopeful, nevertheless, of "positive development" soon on its demand for the handover of the 67 acres that the Centre acquired in 1993.

A VHP leader said if the land is eventually transferred, the Parishad would be able to carry out a symbolic initiation of the temple construction by starting to build on the periphery of the proposed complex.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 FEB 2002



# Thousands descend on Ayodhya

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

**Ayodhya, Feb. 23:** More than 15,000 people from across the country have poured into the temple town to join the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Poorna Ahuti Yagna, which will signal the "spiritual beginning" of the construction of the proposed Ram temple at the disputed site.

Beginning tomorrow, the *maha yagna*, organised by the VHP and performed by the sadhus, will continue for the next 100 days and is expected to involve nearly 20 lakh people.

"It is obvious that in the hearts of millions of Hindus the Ram temple issue still reigns supreme. Now the people have shed the shackles of politics. The country is asserting itself, (and) there will be no peace till the Ram temple is built here," said VHP chief Ashok Singhal.

But Meghan Das does not know why he is here. He was herded into a train with his fami-

ly of eight for the 13-hour journey from Samastipur by the *mukhiya* of his village. He was told a great event is being held at Ayodhya. Asked why he was here, he smiled and said: "*Mela dekhwa ke liye.*"

Meghan is not the only one. Chanaradevi, 88, from Begusarai, said: "We were told something very big is happening in Ayodhya. I don't know anything else, though I have been promised good food and warm clothes." Several said they have gathered "in the name of Ram".

A 60-acre plot has been acquired to house the devotees. Feeding the hungry will be five kitchens, each with a capacity to serve 5,000 people at a time. The mammoth habitation of tin sheds and hay-bedding has been christened Ramsevakpuram.

Sharad Sharma, a VHP activist and in-charge of the temple movement's media cell, said at least 10,000 people are expected to attend the *yagna* every day.

A new group of devotees will join the puja as those who have participated head home.

On the eve of the gigantic religious exercise aimed at motivating Ram *bhakt*s, Singhal said he was satisfied with the response. VHP international secretary Pravin Togadia, too, was upbeat.

Asked how serious his organisation was about the March 15 deadline for starting construction, he said: "We said there will be *shilanyas* in 1986 and we performed a *shilanyas*. We promised a *kar seva* and held one in 1990. Then we said the masjid will be removed and we did exactly that on December 6, 1992. Temple construction will begin on the date promised by us."

The VHP and the sadhus have strictly divided their areas of action. While the VHP bosses are handling the "politics of the temple movement", the sadhus are looking after the *yagnas* and pujas. The sadhus overseeing

the *yagna kunds* will not talk about the construction, nor will they allow the media to photograph or film their puja.

But the younger sadhus are in no mood to let the VHP hijack the "momentous event that will take place on March 15". "There are 14,000 mandirs here and be sure that on March 15, there will be more than 15,000 of us marching to the disputed site. The sadhus will not be left behind," said Rakeshdas, 35.

Hovering around the *kund* site in mufti, an officer from the intelligence department said the administration, though prepared for any eventuality, is adopting a "wait-and-watch" policy.

"It is obvious that they (the VHP) are very serious this time," he said. "But it is also true that much of their programme will take shape keeping in mind who forms the next government in Uttar Pradesh."

■ **Bajrang threatens trishul march, Page 6**

THE TELEGRAPH

# VHP in brief: The Sangh's right fist

Born as a response to a perceived threat from proselytising religions, the VHP is again set to push the country to the brink with its Ram Temple campaign. **VANDITA MISHRA** traces the Parishad's long trek to spotlight.

UTTAR Pradesh is going to demand all our attention today. The nation must track not just every heave and turn of the power equations at Lucknow as the Assembly election results pour in, it must also keep an eye on Ayodhya. After prolonged threat-making, February 24 is the date highlighted on the VHP calendar — the day the 'Ram bhakts' are scheduled to march into Ayodhya from all over the country, to begin temple construction after March 14.

For the VHP, it's been a long trek to national spotlight. Its biography will most certainly be read in two parts — before 1984 and after. It was in 1984 that its first Dharma Sansad unanimously adopted the resolution demanding the 'liberation' of the Ramjanmabhoomi at Ayodhya.

Founded in August 1964 by RSS leaders, the Vishwa Hind Parishad was mainly a response to a perceived threat from proselytising religions in India. The "enemy's" strength

was seen to come from its organisational solidity and transnational character. So the attempt to equip Hinduism with a multinational ecclesiastical body of its own. So, the effort to use the adversary's own weapons against it.

"The declared object of Christianity is to turn the whole world into Christendom — as that of Islam is to make it 'Pak'," warned Shiv Shankar Apte, who had joined the RSS in 1939 and who became the first man to head the VHP in 1964. "Besides...there has arisen a third religion, communism...and all these three consider the Hindu society a very fine rich food on which to feast and fatten themselves. It is therefore necessary in this age of competition and conflict to think of, and organise, the Hindu world, to save itself from the evil eyes of all three."

The three enemies were not to be looked upon as equally evil, though. The principal example cited by Apte in support of his argument was the autonomist movement of Naga tribes in the North-East, who were seen as Christianised, and to whom a separate Nagaland had been granted in 1963. The RSS attributed this fact to their "denationalisation" by the missions.

The collaboration in those early years be-

tween Apte and Chimmayananda, a journalist turned swami and founder of the Sandipany Academy in Bombay, to provide training to Hindu preachers symbolised the association of pracharak and 'modern gurus', which has remained the VHP's USP since. In his classic study on the Hindu nationalist movement, French academic Christophe Jaffrelot points to Chimmayananda as being representative of the 'modern guru' active in the VHP. His spiritual practice is based on discourses in English — both language and message are adapted to the urban middle class. He accords the guru-shishya relationship less importance than that of mass contact. He attends conferences all over the world.

It soon became obvious the VHP had great political potential. It had a core of cadres formed in the RSS. Influential notables with large landholdings and personal wealth, traditional patrons of Hindu institutions had gravitated to it. Add to that a huge religious network of sadhus and leaders of sects, and the VHP was the prime agent for a Hindu mobilisation. The Jana Sangh could see this too.

Analysts have pointed out that the political moment was also ripe for a mobilisation

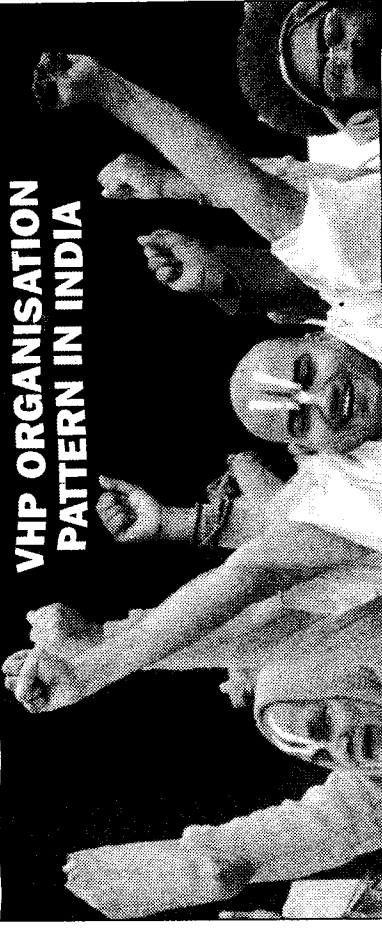
of this kind. Nehru's death in May 1964 had opened up some space for Hindu activism. The Centre seemed less certain than before to repress it. Indira Gandhi who became prime minister in January 1966 was too inexperienced and too busy fending off the Congress 'bosses', many of them Hindu traditionalists themselves, to counter it.

In 1966, the VHP first tested the political waters. It became one of the main protagonists in the campaign against cow slaughter, which the Jana Sangh tried to exploit to cobble a 'Hindu vote' in the run-up to the February 1967 elections. The slogan, in many places, was 'Vote Jana Sangh to protect the cow'.

But it was in the early '80s that it really began to succeed. The conversion of Dalits to Islam in Meenakshipuram, the Shah Bano affair and the development of Sikh separatism came together to provide the backdrop to a renewed Hindu activism, read militancy. And the VHP became its spearhead. It was no coincidence that this phase also marked the launch of a new strategy by the BJP in pursuit of the 'Hindu vote'.

Once again, the VHP proposed a "minimum code of conduct for the daily life of every Hindu", something it had spoken of in

## VHP ORGANISATION PATTERN IN INDIA



...and their numbers in India



Source: VHP/ORG

the late '60s (see box). Hindus were to be given a sacred book and a sacred church on the model of semitic religions. A series of Hindu conferences were held. The objective on every occasion: to call for 'Jan Jagran' and solidarity among Hindus against the "threatening Others".

In 1982, it formed a Central Margdarshak Mandal whose members would "direct and guide the religious ceremonies, morals

and ethics of Hindu society". Its 39 members represented different sects of Hinduism. Alongside, almost like an executive committee, a Sadhu Sansad came up, whose 17 sadhus would enable the "shakti of the sadhus to play an enlarged role in the activities of nation-building".

By the '90s, the Central Margdarshak Mandal had grown into a permanent institution, a twice a year gathering of around 200 members. The Sadhu Sansad became a Dharam Sansad in 1984, with hundreds, thousands, of participants who meet at irregular intervals to deliberate on "vital problems".

Cleverly playing upon the two symbols of Ganga and Bharat Mata, the Ekamata Yatra in 1983 was the first campaign of the resurgent VHP. Three processions — from Kathmandu in Nepal to Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, from Gangasagar in Bengal to Somnath in Gujarat, and from Hardwar in Uttar Pradesh to Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu — distributed water from the Ganga (50 centilitres for Rs 10). Jaffrelot points out that the yatra represented a tactical innovation: till then, the only symbol that had been manipulated for political purposes was the cow.

Then, the first Dharma Sansad unanimously adopted the resolution demanding the 'liberation' of the Ramjanmabhoomi at Ayodhya in 1984 and there was no looking back for the VHP, and the BJP. The Bajrang Dal was formed under the leadership of Vinay Katiyar, organisational secretary of ABVP in 1970-74 and RSS pracharak since 1980. Ram Janaki Rathis toured Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in November-December 1985. The gates to the Babri Masjid were thrown open in February 1986 to facilitate 'puja' and 'darshan' in the presence of a crowd of VHP supporters and a DD crew. The VHP organised Ram Shila Pujans in 1986. The Congress government permitted it to conduct the shilanyas in 1989. BJP leader L.K. Advani led the Rath Yatra. And from 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had climbed to 86 seats and 11.5 per cent votes in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections.

Then came December 6, 1992, when the Babri Masjid was demolished at Ayodhya in the presence of senior BJP and VHP leaders.

### An Undivided Hindu Family: Just 4 examples

**Jaibhan Singh Pawaiya:** BJP MP from Gwalior. Joined RSS in 1973; Secretary VHP, Madhya Pradesh, 1983 onwards; General Secretary Bajrang Dal, 1983; President Bajrang Dal, 1985-97.

**Swami Chimmayanand:** BJP MP from Jaipur. Was associated with several spiritual, cultural and educational organisations (read VHP).

**Uma Bharati:** BJP MP from Bhopal and Union minister. Was engaged in VHP activities — is the official description

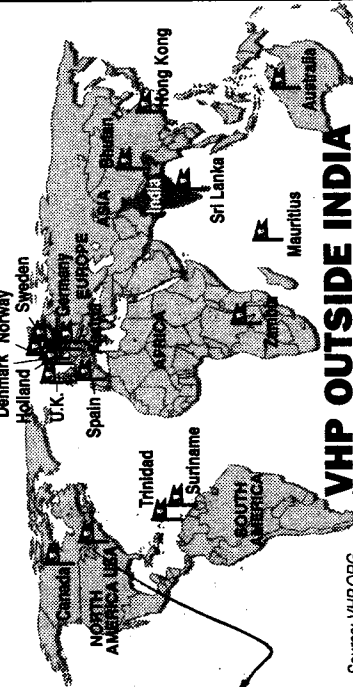
**Vinay Katiyar:** BJP MP from Faizabad Was RSS pracharak, 1980-83; Founder and

### Central office-bearers

- President Vishnu Hari Dalimiya
- International Working President Ashok Singhal
- International Senior Vice President Acharya Giriraj Kishore
- International General Secretary Pravin bhal Togadia
- Joint General Secretaries: Omkar Bhaway, Sadanand Kakade, Balkrishna Naik, Shyam Gupt.

### Code of conduct proposed by the VHP in the late '70s

- Article 1 called for all Hindus to venerate the sun every morning and evening, Article 2 for the regular use of the symbol 'Om' (as a pendant and on visiting cards, for example).
- Article 3 laid down that 'Bhagvad Gita is the sacred book of the Hindus irrespective of various sampradayas (sects) which contains the essence of Hindu Philosophy and way of life. Every Hindu must keep a copy of the Gita in his house.'



Source: VHP/ORG

### VHP OUTSIDE INDIA

IE Graphics/B.K. SHARMA

# Sonia to PM: let's all meet over Ayodhya

■ Attends MP conclave where Dwarka Shankaracharya backs Congress stand

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/DIGHORI (MP), FEB 22

WITH the VHP's deadline for the Ram temple's construction to begin — March 15 — less than a month away and few able to predict the contours of the new regime in UP, the Congress today indicated that it would pin down the Government on the issue.

In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has asked for an all-party meeting to be convened at the earliest to discuss the issue. She said all secular forces in the country were concerned about the developments in and around Ayodhya and the plans announced by the VHP had heightened their anxiety.

PMO sources said Vajpayee would be happy to call a meeting on the subject, provided a convenient date could be found. He is leaving for Aus-



tralia on February 28 and calling an early meet could be difficult.

The sources said the PM would

welcome an opportunity to reiterate his point of view and send a signal to the VHP that the Centre would have to abide by the majority political opinion in the country.

The letter stressed that there seemed to be a convergence of opinion across the political spectrum that the dispute must be left to the courts to settle. "It would be in the fitness of things that you kindly convene an all-party meeting at the earliest and consolidate the opinions of all sane elements," she wrote.

And in faraway Dighori in MP, in a show sponsored by Chief Minister Digvijay Singh, Badrikashram and Dwarkapeeth

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 FEB 2002

# 'I said the BJP will win even if they (Muslims) vote against the party'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

UNDER increasing criticism from Opposition parties over his reported remarks that the BJP didn't need Muslim support to win the elections in Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today issued a two-page clarification saying that what he had said was that the "BJP is going to win even if they (the Muslims) vote against the party."

Saying that he had never "played the communal card" and that his "complete statement" wasn't verified, Vajpayee said that Opposition parties had not verified his "complete statement." It is unfortunate, the Prime Minister said, that the "level of political discourse in our country has dipped so low as to be devoid of even elementary concern for facts."

Giving the context of his remarks, Vajpayee's clarification quoted his speech at Varanasi: "...To urge our Muslim brothers to vote in such a way as to defeat



the BJP, that connotes a very wrong way of thinking. For one thing, the BJP is going to win even if they vote against the party. But my question is: why should they vote against us? During our tenure we have established good relations with Muslim countries across the world. The way we have governed...is a testimony to the truth that we do not discriminate on the basis of religion. For us, Muslims are not merely Muslims. In our eyes, they are human beings. And not only human beings, we look upon them as *bharat mata ki santan*...Muslims are in a majority in Kargil,

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

# PM's Muslim remark: Party does damage control

he said, but they did not side with Pakistan. Even Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir do not want to secede from India."

As part of the government's damage-control, Civil Aviation Minister Shanawaz Hussain and general secretary Maya Singh, too, clarified the PM's remarks although they couldn't explain why the BJP had fielded only one Muslim among its over 320 candidates in UP.

Vajpayee said that his statement didn't indicate that the BJP did not need the support of Muslims. "On the contrary, in rally after election rally, I have stated that we would very much

like them support us on the basis of our performance and promise. Far from seeking to divide the people of India, it was aimed at fortifying their unity."

Shahnawaz Hussain claimed that Vajpayee had never said that the BJP could win the UP elections without the support of Muslims. Hussain told reporters in Hyderabad that the Prime Minister did not make any such remark. He criticised opposition parties for "distorting" his remark to derive political mileage. Vajpayee, according to him, had merely said that he was opposed to some organi-

sations asking Muslims "to resort to tactical voting to defeat BJP."

Maya Singh told a press conference here that the Samajwadi Party and other "pseudo secular" parties, seeing their defeat in the UP polls, were trying to twist Vajpayee's speech out of context. She said Vajpayee had made the remark in "a special context," which had been twisted and blown out of all proportions. "They had resorted to these tactics when it was imminent that the BJP and its allies were winning the race in UP."

Meanwhile, the NDA allies

played down the controversy with the Samata trying a fine balancing act. Its spokesman Shambu Srivastava told *The Indian Express* that the "Prime Minister's credentials as a liberal democrat have never been in doubt" but did not wish to commit himself to anything on the specifics of Vajpayee's statement.

"We don't know the context in which the statement was made and about its representation in the media. We will be able to react only after knowing the exact context in which it was made," he said.

But the Janata Dal

(United)'s Mohan Prakash was convinced that the Opposition parties had twisted the Prime Minister's words out of context. "They have not looked at the statement in its totality," he said.

However, some sections of the non-BJP NDA were finding themselves uncomfortable over Vajpayee's "politically incorrect" statement. "The Budget session of Parliament will start next week and the Opposition is certain to train its guns on us. We could have done without the new controversy sparked off by the statement," said a leader of one of the allies.

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 FEB 2002

'10 LAKHS WILL CONVERGE ON AYODHYA'

# VHP warns of 'Hindu backlash'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 20.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today warned of a "Hindu backlash" against those daring to oppose the proposed construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, even as it made it clear that nothing would now delay the work slated to begin on March 15.

Several VHP leaders spoke simultaneously from different parts of the country — Ashok Singhal and Acharya Giriraj Kishore here, Praveen Togadia from Jaipur and Sadanand Kakade from Kochi — as if to hammer home the point that they are determined to start gathering the crowds of 'kar sevaks' (voluntary workers) at Ayodhya from this weekend to get a 10 lakh-strong crowd by March 15 when construction would begin at the 'pravesh dwar' (entrance of the temple), where 'shilanyas' was performed in the late Eighties.

## 'Sonia anti-Hindu'

Mr. Togadia, VHP general-secretary, lashed out at the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, for refusing to entertain a delegation although time was sought from her. Describing her as "*Hindu drohi*" (anti-Hindu), Mr. Togadia said that other political leaders such as Jayalithaa of the AIADMK and Sharad Pawar of the NCP had met VHP leaders to listen to their point of view even if they did not agree with it. Parties opposing the proposed temple would face a "Hindu backlash".

The VHP leaders did not spare even the Prime Minister. Acharya Giriraj Kishore said the Ayodhya cell set up by Atal Behari Vajpayee was "useless and powerless", and there had been "no move by the Government" to try and resolve the issue. He dismissed the suggestion that perhaps the date for the start of construction was decided with a view to creating problems for the new government in Uttar Pradesh. "It is not a question of which government; it is a question of our faith." The hint was that the VHP would not change its programme irrespective of whether a BJP government or another was installed in Lucknow.

Acharya Kishore dismissed the RSS suggestion that a mosque could be built on the banks of the Sarayu in Ayodhya. There was nothing new in that; the VHP had offered to move the Babri Masjid "anywhere" away from the disputed site even before its demolition in 1992. However, Mr. Singhal said no mosque would be allowed to come up anywhere near the proposed temple as it could lead to confrontation between the two communities.

It was Mr. Kakade who disclosed that the plan was to start construction from the 'pravesh dwar'.

In direct opposition to what Mr. Vajpayee said recently, the VHP leaders rejected the idea of a solution to the issue through a court verdict. No court could decide where Lord Ram was born. It was a matter of faith, they emphasised, repeating what they have been saying for the last 15 years.

THE HINDU

21 FEB 2002

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# VHP posing 'fascist threat': IUML

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By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 18.** The defiant attitude of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on the issue of construction of a Ram temple posed a "fascist threat" to the country and its democratic polity, the Indian Union Muslim League, said today. It strongly criticised the VHP's refusal to recognise the judicial process.

In such a situation the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh Government cannot "stand transfixed with political paralysis", they have to act and prevent an ugly situation, G.M. Banatwala, president of the IUML, stated.

His demand was that the carved pillars and other materials for the construction of the temple being moved to the vicinity of the disputed complex in Ayodhya must be "immediately confiscated" and the complex should be "handed over to the Army."

19 FEB 2002



10-10 20/2 ✓

## DISTURBING TREND *9-10*

THE VICIOUS ATTACK mounted last Sunday on a church near Mysore by a rampaging mob cannot be dismissed as an isolated or localised act of vandalism by miscreants or small-time criminals. True, the damage caused — both in human and property terms — does not amount to much. With the police investigation still in the preliminary stage, it is indeed premature to come to any firm conclusion about the various aspects of the dark deed; as for instance: the identity of the perpetrators, their motive, whether they were acting at the behest of any organisation and so on. Initial reports, however, point to the possibility of the vandals belonging to the saffron brigade. There is a distinct suggestion of a simmering communal irritant within the local population which had erupted rather mildly around the Christmas festivities last year. Presumably, the administrative and law enforcing agencies have been remiss in assessing the problem and initiating the necessary correctives. The Government's response needs to go beyond the immediate tasks of apprehending the culprits responsible for the heinous attack on the church and bringing them to justice. It must particularly look for the cause of disaffection at the local level and seek to remove it so that there is no recurrence of the Sunday-type episode.

Much more critical, however, is to see the Mysore incident in the wider perspective of the sustained campaign of hatred and intolerance the Hindutva forces have been running brazenly against the minority communities as part of their exclusivist majoritarian agenda. Given the pervasive anti-minority milieu such a systematic hate campaign has inevitably generated, there can be no surprise in the minority communities having become increasingly vulnerable to harassment and physical attacks. In fact, the likes of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have felt increasingly emboldened in their vicious campaign, especially

since the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre, and started indulging in highly provocative anti-minority activities with impunity. For its part, the BJP leadership has, true to style, been playing the RSS tune, modifying it on occasion according to the political exigencies determined by the party's overweening objective of staying in power as the head of the NDA coalition. What is more, its top-ranking Ministers have always been too ready to give a clean chit to the Sangh Parivar outfits and absolve them of any culpability whenever they came under a cloud in cases of violence targeting minority communities, whether it is physical attacks on missionaries, burning of holy books or vandalism of places of worship.

Given this stark reality, it would be perilously self-deceptive to dismiss as sporadic and of little consequence a seemingly 'minor' anti-minority attack where no 'organisational' nexus is established. Less than two years ago, there had been a string of bomb blasts in places of worship elsewhere in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Goa and the police had traced the phenomenon to a lesser known non-descript fundamentalist outfit called Deendar Anjuman, a perceived linkage that was sought to be worked upon by the Sangh Parivar to vindicate itself. But the bottom line is that if some anti-social elements or the so-called 'lunatic' fringe or a bizarre outfit like the Deendar Anjuman could strike at will at their chosen target of a minority group, it is essentially because of the vicious campaign of animosity and calumny the Sangh Parivar has been carrying on relentlessly under the benign BJP-led Government in New Delhi and with the active support of the party regimes at the State-level. It is here that the apprehensions voiced by the representatives of the Christian community are highly relevant and the Mysore incident itself becomes a matter of grave national concern, even if it does not have any 'organic' linkage with any outfit but happens to be the handiwork of a few lumpen elements.

20 FEB 2002

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2002

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**STOP THE VHP** 119-10 19/2

WITH THE 'CONSECRATION' of a carved stone pillar and the launch of another yagna, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) destructive and wounding campaign to build a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has acquired an even more perilous momentum. With the obdurate leadership of the organisation neither prepared to be reasonable nor willing to see reason, the prospect of a violent surge in communal temperatures as the Ides of March draw closer seems dangerously real. As March 15 (the VHP's date for commencing temple construction) approaches and as stone pillars begin to be transported towards Ayodhya, the carefully calibrated campaign — starting with the 'ultimatum' served by the Dharam Sansad on the Centre a year ago and followed by a series of mass mobilisation programmes — appears to be heading towards a hazardous and climactic end.

The question that has arisen now — and one which is bound to assume a burning character as the days roll by — is what the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and his NDA Government propose to do about this. With March 15 approaching rapidly and with the VHP showing no signs of being persuaded to back down from its lawless and sectarian agenda, the customary assurances are beginning to ring extremely hollow. When questioned about how he proposes to deal with the VHP threat, it is no longer enough for the Prime Minister to respond with an ambiguous "whatever is necessary will be done at the proper time". In the face of the grave and imminent threat, routine declarations that the VHP will have to face the legal consequences of its actions are beginning to sound hollow and unconvincing. If the Vajpayee Government is keen on preventing the VHP from taking the law into its own hands, then it had better make categorically clear that it will have no hesitation in dealing sternly with those violating the rule of law.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid was a result of the failure, or unwillingness, to adopt preventive measures. The question, as the VHP whips up the Ram temple campaign to a shrill crescendo, is what the Vajpayee Government is willing to do before the stone pillars and the misguided throngs of VHP volunteers start moving menacingly into Ayodhya. The answer, from the worrying look of things, is precious little. For much too long, the Centre and the VHP have appeared to be playing, as one Opposition leader aptly put it, "a friendly match" on the Ram Temple issue. After all, this hardly seems like the relationship between an entity vested with upholding the law and a potential saboteur of that very law. Rather, there have been times when it has appeared very much like a secret compact, between two entities which are prepared to play the dangerous game of stirring communal passions.

Until now, the Centre has treated the VHP with kid gloves. Two cases in point: agreeing to study the organisation's demand that almost all the land acquired in 1993 could be handed over to it even before the court verdict and adopting an unjustified mild posture when VHP activists forced their way into the prohibited area of the disputed site. The VHP's reiteration of sticking to its plan of commencing temple construction next month has come a day after Mr. Vajpayee declared that the only solution to the Ayodhya dispute at this juncture is to wait for the verdict of the court. The Prime Minister was absolutely correct when he said this. But what was really needed from him at this time was not so much an appraisal of how Ayodhya should be resolved but how the VHP will be stopped in its tracks. The imminent threat posed by the Parishad's campaign cannot be overlooked in the expediency of winning the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. It also cannot be evaded any longer with either ambiguous or nominal assurances.

THE HINDU

19 FEB 2002

# Court verdict will be final: Advani

LUCKNOW, FEB. 18. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, today said the court verdict would be final on the Ayodhya issue. Mr. Advani, on way to Varanasi for an election campaign, said here that while *status quo* would be maintained on the site, the court's decision would be final.

The Law Minister's report on land acquisition was not time-bound. It was upto the Law Ministry to give its views and further discussions could be held later.

Mr. Advani claimed that while the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders and the saints had a three-hour meeting with the Prime Minister, in which he was also present, there was no formal discussion on the issue with any other party.

"We have never said we were talking with the Babri Masjid Action Committee on the issue", he added. People gave open suggestions, but the Government had talks only with the VHP, Mr. Advani said.

## 'A matter of faith'

The Union Minister, Uma Bharati, today said the Ayodhya issue would remain unresolved if it was left to the court to de-

cide the birth place of lord Rama. "The matter would remain hanging in the court and as it is there, it would remain unresolved and continue to be a national problem," she told *Aaj Tak*.

The court would have a problem proving the birth place of lord Rama, she said. It was a matter of faith.

## Ritambhara unhappy

The VHP leader, Sadhvi Ri-

tambhara, has exhorted people to respond to the VHP's 'chalo Ayodhya' call as "a powerful expression of Hindu solidarity to give a fitting reply to the politics of appeasement".

Addressing a rally at Patwardhan Grounds at Nagpur last evening, Sadhvi Ritambhara criticised the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's admission that he had failed to resolve

the temple issue and that the court would take a decision. "These are dilly-dallying tactics," she said.

The VHP would begin construction of the temple from March 15, she asserted.

The construction would be postponed only if the nation was engaged in a war with Pakistan, she added. — UNI, PTI

# PM helpless because of NDA: VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 18. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today blamed the Prime Minister's "helplessness" on the Ram temple issue to the fact that he was heading the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre.

There was time till March 12, and if the Government had the political will, it could still resolve the issue, the VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told the press today. Though Mr. Vajpayee had recently referred to "failed negotiations," the fact was that the VHP had not been invited to participate in any negotiation.

The VHP leader reiterated that the organisation would go ahead with its plan of starting the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya on March 15. "We are ready to face any conse-

quences," he said, once again suggesting that the Government could hand over the acquired land in Ayodhya which was not disputed.

The Bharatiya Janata Party general secretary, Maya Singh, condemned the killing of innocent people in the Poonch sector of Jammu. It appeared that the Pakistan-backed terrorists had timed the massacre to coincide with the Indian visit of the chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Richard Myers, just as the Chattisinghpura killings were carried out to coincide with the former U.S. President, Bill Clinton's visit, she said. The party has also alleged that in violation of the moral code of conduct, the Samajwadi Party had distributed a booklet to the 'namazis' in Allahabad asking them to vote for it. Ms. Singh hoped the Election Commission would take note.

carved pillar for the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Sunday.

# PM didn't talk to me: Temple trust chief

HT Correspondent  
Lucknow, February 17

THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad (VHP) has begun a 93-day *Poor-na Ahuti Mahayajna* at Karsewakpuram in Ayodhya, in preparation for constructing a Ram temple.

Responding to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statement that negotiations on the Ayodhya issue had failed and only the courts could now resolve the matter, Ram Janmahoomi Trust President Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans today said: "The Prime Minister held

no talks with me to find a solution to the Ayodhya issue."

"This isn't a matter to be decided by the court because it is related to the religious sentiments of the Hindus," he told a joint Press conference with VHP president Ashok Singhal.

Reiterating the VHP demand for transfer of the 67 acres of undisputed land to the VHP, Singhal said there was no legal hurdle to it. He said the temple would be constructed under the directions of the Sant Samaj.

As the State gears up for the second phase of polling on Mon-

day, the VHP launched its three-month long *Poor-na Ahuti Mahayajna* by worshipping a stone pillar at Karsewakpuram, which is planned to be part of the Ram temple.

Both Paramhans and Singhal attended the *yajna*, a culmination of the countrywide *Ram naam jap* which began on November 26. Paramhans performed a pooja of the temple foundation stone at the Ramghat workshop.

*Ramsewaks* are due to start gathering in Ayodhya from February 24 to participate in the *yajna*, which will continue till

May 20. The VHP media in-charge Sharad Sharma said that around 5,000 devotees would assemble at Ayodhya for *mahayajna* and then stay on to construct the temple after March 15.

Sharma said the sadhus' Margdarshak Mandal would meet here during the *yajna* to make further plans.

At the workshop, work for the ground floor is complete. Workshop in-charge Annu Bhai Som-pura said of the 1.75 lakh sq feet stone to be used in the temple, pieces measuring up to 90,000 sq feet were already made.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 FEB 2002

# VHP defies PM, begins yagna

<sup>HO-1</sup>  
**AYODHYA, FEB. 17.** Brushing aside Prime Minister's statement that all concerned should await the court verdict on Ayodhya issue, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today began a 100-day "Sri Ram Naam Jap Yagna" at Karsevakpuram as part of its programme for construction of the Ram temple here.

A carved stone pillar was consecrated at the workshop at Ramghat on the auspicious "Basant panchami" day and moved to Karsevakpuram where the yagna began in the presence of the VHP president, Ashok Singhal, and the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust president, Ramchandra Paramhans.

Mr. Parmahans said "it is not a matter to be decided by the court as it relates to religious sentiments of the Hindus".

Disputing the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that his efforts to resolve the issue had failed due to unrelenting stand of both

sides, he told reporters in the presence of Mr. Singhal that "no talks were held with me by the Prime Minister".

Both Mr. Singhal and Mr. Paramhans said "the VHP would go ahead with temple construction programme" and start moving the carved pillars

**PM cheating: Surjeet; Attempt to hoodwink people: Somnath: Page 11**

to the Karsevakpuram for the purpose from March 15.

Mr. Vajpayee had on Saturday said his efforts to resolve the Ayodhya tangle had not made progress "due to unrelenting attitude of both the parties" involved in the issue and "the only course left to resolve the imbroglio now is to await the court verdict". — PTI

18 FEB 1992

18 FEB 1992

Holy Family Church in Hinkal

## Church attacked near Mysore

By Our Staff Correspondent

**MYSORE, FEB. 17.** A mob stormed a church in Hinkal on the outskirts here and went on the rampage, injuring four persons, including a woman.

According to police, a group of 70, sporting saffron 'bandanas' and wielding lathis, barged into the Holy Family Church after the Sunday mass at 9.30 a.m.

Confronting the parish priest, Williams, the mob shouted slogans against the alleged attempts by the church authorities to convert the locals. The priest was abused and threatened, it was alleged.

A few miscreants hurled bricks at the church and devotees as they ran helter-skelter. Several people, including women, were chased and assaulted, said Maxim, a seminarian.

"The mob came armed with blades, knives, iron rods and other lethal weapons. Several people, including women and children, suffered bruises. Four persons were sent to the local hospital."

The mob smashed the window panes of the church and ransacked the priest's room. It started disbursing after police arrived on the scene. However, Fr. Williams, speaking to *The Hindu* alleged that police constables watched the attackers hurl bricks at the church.

"Only after the intervention of the local people, including the village head, Papanna, did the activists leave," Br. Maxim said. Denying allegations of conversions, he claimed "the attack was not carried out by local people. It was instigated and

carried out by outsiders."

He said the church catered to 700 Christians in the vicinity. "It is enough if we take care of the existing Christians. How can we take care of more people," he asked. *9 minutes*

A complaint has been registered in the Vijaynagar police station. The Inspector of Police, Marikale Gowda, said the church authorities had identified a few persons. "We will take action as per law," he said. Personnel of the Karnataka State Reserve Police have been deployed in the church.

All Christian priests in the city, including the Vicar General, Marie Joseph, visited the church and took stock of the situation. They are expected to meet again to decide on further course of action.

✓ 'I HAVE FAILED IN MY EFFORTS'

# Court verdict only solution to Ayodhya dispute: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

*9-  
minutes*

**LUCKNOW, FEB. 16.** The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said here today that his efforts to solve the Ayodhya dispute through negotiations had failed as both the parties concerned were equally rigid in their stance. The court verdict was the only way to solve the dispute, he said.

Talking to newsmen here, Mr. Vajpayee said he had expressed the hope of solving the problem through negotiations by March 12 but his efforts had failed. However, there was no need to take any step in view of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's declaration that it would start the construction of Ram temple from March 15. Whatever was necessary would be done at the proper time, he said.

When reminded of the VHP's announcement of sticking to its plans of temple construction, even if it meant the ouster of his Government, Mr. Vajpayee said he expected only this kind of sentiment from the 'sants' and religious leaders, adding that the people's support to his own stand was increasing.

On his talks with the VHP leaders at the conclusion of their "chetavani yatra" last month, Mr. Vajpayee said the VHP had demanded the transfer of the undisputed land in the vicinity of the make-shift temple at Ayodhya. The Government was examining the issue — it was studying files and verifying

*HP 1*

ownerships. On the delay in giving a court verdict, he said two more judges were needed on the Ayodhya Bench and hoped the vacancies would be filled soon. As for the VHP's March 12 deadline to start the temple construction at the disputed site, he said "let the deadline come."

## 'Dec. 6 won't repeat'

Asked whether there would be a repeat of December 6 (when the Babri Masjid was demolished in 1992), given the unrelenting attitude and the threatening postures of the VHP, Mr. Vajpayee replied in the negative. "No, no. It will not

be allowed this time." And he did not give any assurance of resolving the Ayodhya tangle by March 15. To another query on banning the VHP, the Prime Minister said "there is no need to ban the organisation."

Mr. Vajpayee said the Government was awaiting the report of a Parliamentary committee on the issue of allowing foreign direct investment in print media. "A Parliamentary Committee is examining the issue and we are awaiting the report." The Information and Broadcasting Ministry had referred the issue to the Standing Committee on Information Technology.

Expressing the confidence that the BJP would gain an absolute majority in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, he sidetracked all the questions on a post-poll alliance.

On the question of his describing the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, as a foreign woman, Mr. Vajpayee said he had made only a statement of fact and it was not a personal attack. She was an Indian citizen and also the Leader of the Opposition. He had only described her status.

## 'Kashmir, integral part of India'

UNI reports:

Addressing an election meeting in Gorakhpur, Mr. Vajpayee said Kashmir was an integral part of India and there could be no dispute over it. He rejected the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf's offer of talks on Kashmir.

The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly had ratified the State's accession to India after Independence. Pakistan had staked its claim for Kashmir on the basis of its being a Muslim-dominated State but did not realise that the Muslim population in India was more than the total population of that country.

Pakistan was occupying one-third of the Indian territory and talks would be held only on that issue and not Kashmir.

'Musharraf's credibility at stake': Page 8

## VHP 'surprised'

**LUCKNOW, FEB. 16.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today expressed "surprise" over the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's remarks that his efforts to find a solution to the Ayodhya issue had failed, saying it had no knowledge of "where and how" the talks had failed.

"I have no knowledge where and how the talks failed," the VHP president, Ashok Singhal, told the organisation's mouthpiece samvadharati.com. Another leader, Giriraj Kishore, in his reaction to Mr. Vajpayee's observation that the VHP was "unrelenting", told Aaj Tak that the VHP had announced the date for the construction of Ram temple during the Kumbhmela last year and was only sticking to it.

"I am surprised how we can be called stubborn when we announced the date a year ago and are sticking to it." It was the Babri Masjid committee that was "stubborn" as it was not ready for talks. Mr. Singhal said there was no "legal or third-party" hurdle in handing over the "undisputed land" to the saints for the construction of Ram temple. The land demanded by the religious leaders during their recent meeting with Mr. Vajpayee had only two parties — the Government and the Ram Janmabhoomi trust. And so, there was no need for holding talks with

Muclime — PTI



*me but*  
**Temple tantrums** *H.T.S*

**T**HE SIMILARITY is too striking to be missed. In Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf is trying — or at least pretending — to control the fundamentalists. In India, the government is also facing a similar challenge from another set of fundamentalists represented by the VHP. As in Pakistan, where the establishment was hand in glove with the *jehadis* till the US forced a delinking, in India the fraternal ties between the BJP and the VHP are no secret. There is little doubt that this relationship has constantly emboldened the VHP to up the ante on the temple issue. Till now, it had only threatened to start the construction work. Now, it has adopted an even more belligerent posture by announcing that it will start transporting the material to Ayodhya.

Like fundamentalists everywhere, the VHP has no time for the law of the land. What held it back till now was the government's promise to resolve the dispute through negotiations or via a court order. Even then, there was never any doubt that the VHP would flout

*Mr*  
the court order if it went against its demand. So, the conflict essentially is between the forces of law and order and those of anarchy. After the recent meeting between Mr Vajpayee and the VHP leaders, a BJP spokesman did take a somewhat tough stand by saying that the VHP would have to face the consequences if it went ahead with its plans.

It may be that the VHP wants to test the government's resolve by announcing its programme of building the temple in the middle of March. The organisation is probably hoping that a period of uncertainty in UP at the time, especially if the voters do not give a clear verdict, may help it to implement its plan. But the ultimate responsibility is the Centre's. It has to make it clear in no uncertain terms that any move to take the construction material to Ayodhya will not be tolerated. It goes without saying that even an attempt to do so will revive fears of what happened when the Babri masjid was brought down. India cannot afford another nightmare of that kind.

GOVT SURE OF SURVIVING TEMPLE ONSLAUGHT

# PM takes firm line against VHP

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

Feb. 11. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has reportedly decided that a Ram temple will not be constructed at Ayodhya, despite intense pressure from the VHP and the sants.

Though the VHP has declared that it'll start moving carved stones to Ayodhya from 15 March for construction of the proposed "grand temple", the Prime Minister's stand comes with the confidence that the NDA government will survive the temple brigade's onslaught. Mr Vajpayee is also "very angry with the VHP" for its shrill rhetoric.

For the government's crisis managers, the temple issue is "dead for all practical purposes". They argue that the VHP, which is the only group to raise the issue, has "found little support".

"Let the VHP get a parliamentary majority and change the Constitution," a senior BJP leader and confidant of the Prime Minister said. "Until then, MPs will not swear by the name of Lord Ram," he added.

The Prime Minister said VHP leaders had not spoken to him about the decision to start construction from 15 March. Some of his Cabinet colleagues said it was impossible for any government, even a BJP-led one, to allow the VHP to transport pre-fabricated structures to the temple site. "The VHP is following its agenda and so is the NDA government," a minister said while indicating that legal action would follow if law was violated.

Mr Vajpayee said he had referred the issue to the

law ministry and the report had not come yet. When told that the VHP was apparently angry with him for not handing over the land around the disputed site to the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas, he refused to comment. A source close to him said the Prime Minister was "equally angry with the VHP".

A BJP minister said that even if legal opinion favoured the VHP, it would be impossible for the government to oblige. The BJP will be in a minority on this issue even in the Lok Sabha, where most of its allies may desert it.

Another BJP minister said the issue raised by the VHP was unlikely to get the electorate's support even in Uttar Pradesh. He denied that the VHP's raising the issue was part of the Sangh Parivar's strategy to garner votes. The Prime Minister was also of the same view: "People know what we stand for," he said, adding that the VHP's agenda will not affect voting in Uttar Pradesh.

**Opp criticism:** The Congress and the CPI-M today criticised the VHP's announcement of beginning temple construction at Ayodhya on 15 March. Opposition parties termed the VHP's announcement politically motivated and asked the Vajpayee government to immediately check any disruptive act by the outfit. Congress spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said while the VHP has declared the date for temple construction, the BJP has been saying its government would bring to book law-breakers. The CPI-M politburo said: "It's the connivance of the BJP and the patronage extended by the Vajpayee government which is allowing the VHP to play this dangerous game."

12 Feb 2004

# Ram temple will not be allowed: Basu

By K.V. Prasad

**MORADABAD, FEB. 11.** The People's Front leader and veteran Marxist, Jyoti Basu, today sought support for the formation comprising the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party.

Addressing a public rally here in Hindi, Mr. Basu poured scorn over the BJP, its policies and programme. "The nation has no religion, but the BJP is out to destroy it," he said. Assailing the attempts of the BJP to rake up the Ram temple issue, he said the Front members would prevent its construction, if required, with their lives.

When inclement weather, which resulted in cancellation of several rallies in the State, eased for a while, the Front put up a 40-minute show and enabled the leaders to catch up with the rest of their schedule.

The Samajwadi Party chief and Front convenor, Mulayam Singh Yadav, kept up his tirade against the BJP Government both at the Centre and the State. He said it was unfortunate that the Centre talked only of madrasas receiving aid from abroad. "Will



The Samajwadi Party leader, Amar Singh, the former West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, the CPI(M) leader, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and the Samajwadi Party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, in Moradabad on Monday.— PTI

the Prime Minister institute a probe into funds received in the name of mandir?"

The CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, criticised the Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal.

He expressed doubts about the ability of the Congress to take on the BJP.

He said the results of Uttar Pradesh, which would be in favour of the Front, would shake the Vajpayee Government in Delhi.

2002 FEB 11

12 FEB 2002

# Temple work from 15 March: VHP

SRM  
11/2  
State'sman News Service

LUCKNOW, Feb. 10. — The construction of Ram temple will begin on 15 March. The chief of the Ram Janambhoomi Trust, Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans, had said here yesterday that the date for the construction to begin in Ayodhya would be announced in "two to five" days. Today, in the presence of the VHP chief, Mr Ashok Singhal, the Mahant said in Ayodhya that he would be carrying a carved stone on his head to start the work on 15 March. The Mahant dared the government to stop the construction.

The "kar sevaks" will start arriving in the holy town on 13 and 14 March, he said adding, "the work will start the next day".

"We ran short of patience and had given enough time to the government to remove the hur-

dles for the construction of a grand Ram temple," he said. The sants would wait till the original deadline of 12 March fixed last year, he added.

The astrologers would be consulted to fix the auspicious date.

They said that the temple's foundation stone was laid in 1989 and it has been a long wait of more than 10 years. The VHP chief maintained that there was no problem in transferring the 67 acres of the trust land acquired by the Centre. Claiming that the land was not disputed, he said the Centre had taken over it in the aftermath of the Babari Masjid demolition in December 1992.

Replying to a question on the VHP's ultimatum on Ram temple construction, Union minister Mr M Venkaiah Naidu told reporters in Chennai that the government would go by the court verdict on the matter, adds PTI.

THE STATESMAN

11 FEB 2002

# VHP to begin moving pillars from March 15

By J.P. Shukla  
**LUCKNOW, FEB. 10.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has announced that it will begin moving carved stones and pillars to the disputed site at Ayodhya from March 15 for the construction of the proposed Ram temple.

Talking to press persons in Ayodhya today, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad working presi-

dent, Ashok Singhal, and the Ram Janma Bhoomi Trust chairman, Paramhans Ramchandra Das, said the VHP was under severe pressure from the Hindu public opinion to go ahead with the construction programme. While the actual construction work would commence on any day after March 15, the movement of material would start on the very date.

The Hindu saints had given

time to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to remove the obstacles in the temple construction till March 12. They were not ready to wait any more.

Rejecting the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthy's suggestion that the Hindu leaders postpone the issue till 2004, Mr. Singhal said the VHP was not ready to accept any suggestion from the BJP in this regard.

He said there was no legal problem for the Government in taking the decision to hand over the 67 acres of acquired land around the disputed site to the VHP.

Sections 6 and 7 of the Ayodhya Land Acquisition Act 1993, made it clear that the Government was the trustee receiver of the acquired land with absolute right over it. Also, it had held that the Hindus had unfettered right of 'darshan' at the makeshift temple. The VHP was, therefore, not ready to wait for the legal opinion being sought by the Centre in this regard.

If the Government wanted to sort out the problem through negotiations, it should hold talks with the Shias, which alone had a right of negotiations on the issue. The Sunnis had no locus standi in this regard.

In the meanwhile, a large number of Hindu saints would start converging at Ayodhya from February 24 to participate in the "Ram nam jap purnahuti yagna". The 'yagna' would continue for the next several weeks.

## Centre remains unruffled

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 10.** The Vajpayee Government remains unruffled by the VHP announcement that the construction work at Ayodhya would begin on March 15.

The inclination, for now, is not to engage the VHP leadership in any kind of verbal exchange; instead, the accent is on firm reiteration of the Government's known position that the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was bound by the NDA manifesto.

Mr. Vajpayee has already made it clear that the Government did not have the luxury of deviating either from the Supreme Court-decreed conditionalities on Ayodhya or from its obligations to

ensure that law and order was maintained.

Government sources said the Centre was bound to ensure that the status quo remained unchanged in Ayodhya.

The confrontation, if any, would be provoked by the 'sants' and would be appropriately dealt with. At the same time, it is learnt that the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, is yet to send any kind of legal opinion on the possibility of the 'sants' being given some portion of the undisputed land in Ayodhya.

Mr. Jaitley was asked by the Prime Minister, last month, to examine whether any legal lee-way was possible to accommodate the 'sants' demand without running afoul of the judicial strictures.

THE HINDU

1 1 FEB 2002



The CM's remarks on madrasas have raised a storm. But what are these schools all about?



Muslim boys study at the Darul Quran Madrasa Azmatia on Zacharia Street. "Do they look like terrorists," asks Qari Fazlur Rahman, Mohtamin of the madrasa.

SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

# The great madrasa Muddle

Arindam Sarkar

**A** NORMAL day at the Darul Quran Madrasa Azmatia on Zacharia Street in central Kolkata. A nondescript, run-down structure with tall iron gates. The building on the narrow, congested thoroughfare hardly catches the eye.

At 12.30 pm, the courtyard wears an empty look. Hemmed in by living quarters, the only sign of activity is in the kitchen, where a meal for 200-odd cooks. Narrow, dimly-lit stairs take you to where the classes are held. It's lunchtime and some young boys sprawl on the floor. Others learn verses from the Quran by rote.

Many of these kids will grow up to be imams, qaris or hafiz. They are the Taliban - students who take lessons in madrasas. Look into their eyes. You see uncertainty and fear. Shaken by the recent talk of a crackdown on schools of Islamic learning, they're insecure. What has hurt them most is that the tongue-lashing has come from unexpected quarters - Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, otherwise perceived as a secular man.

"Look at their tender faces. Do you see terrorists? Do they look like ISI agents? How can children who spend hours learning the Quran and the Hadis grow up to be terrorists? It's sad that our schools of learning now face the CM's wrath. Why this suspicion," asks Mohtamin of the Darul Quran Madrasa Azmatia

Qari Fazlur Rahman. He heads one of the thousands of madrasas in Bengal, which aren't affiliated to the West Bengal Madrasa Board of Education.

If the January 22 American Center attack sent tremors through the world, statements attributed to the Chief Minister have forced Muslims to come out on the streets and protest. It has caused a grievous hurt to a people who now live in dread.

"By making madrasas his target, Buddha babu has committed a grave mistake. He should realise that his remarks have shocked Muslims. To say that the madrasas are a hotbed of ISI and terrorist activities is unfair," says member of the State Advisory Committee of Jamat-e-Islami Hind Syed Ali.

"The allegations are baseless. Let the police come out with proof. His stand against unaffiliated madrasas doesn't just constitute an attack on Muslims, but also on Article 30 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of education. The consequence has been disastrous. Policemen now enter madrasas and pick up our boys on flimsy grounds. What has happened in Afghanistan and Pakistan can't be repeated here," asserts State secretary of Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind Maulana Siddiquilla Chowdhury.

The Chief Minister, however, has clarified that his statements weren't aimed at all madrasas. He talked of some specific instances of Islamic schools being

misused for nefarious activities. Most of these are in Malda, North and South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North 24 Parganas, Nadia and Murshidabad. He says he only talked of modernising the madrasa curriculum.

But Muslims aren't convinced. They perceive the Chief Minister's statements as a frontal attack on their qum and an attempt to tamper with the syllabus of the madrasas. "These are traditional institutions. If they are closed down or their curriculum changed, then a time will come when the qum won't have an imam to conduct prayers. The madrasas teach the Prophet's words, peace and harmony. We don't churn out terrorists in our schools. We can't," says the Nakhoda Masjid imam, Sheikh Mohammad Shabir.

"Did those dreaded Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Hizbul-Mujahideen militants go to madrasas? Osama bin Laden never studied in a madrasa. He's a civil engineer by training - a creation of the Americans. I would urge Buddhadebbabu to visit the madrasas before coming to any conclusion," Imam Shabir adds.

Most of the madrasas follow the same syllabus, where apart from Quran and Hadis, Islamic jurisprudence, science, mathematics, Arabic, Urdu and other languages are taught. After completing their studies in the junior madrasas, the boys move to the higher madrasas - the most famous of which are the Darul

Ulum Deoband and Mazhar ul Ulum at Saharanpur and Nadawat ul-Ulema in Lucknow.

Texts like Talimul Islam, Baghdad Qaida, Shirin Urdu, Sandal Quran, Din-i-Talim, Quran Sharif, Hadis and Aapna Samaaj are taught in the Islamic schools. After passing out from higher madrasas, many get admitted to universities such as the Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia and the Milli al-Amin.

"Do you think after learning the Prophet's words one can become a terrorist? These jihadi groups and Bin Laden are using the name of the religion to sell themselves. Madrasas have nothing to do with them," says Qari Fazlur Rahman. "Madrasa education is mandatory for a complete Mussalman."

But why this opposition to modernisation? If there's a funds crunch, then how would one explain the mushrooming of madrasas in the border districts, where the density of Muslim population is high? Most Muslim hardliners believe that this clamour for modernisation is a sinister design to stop Islamic teaching. "This is unacceptable," thunders Imam Shabir.

Moderates such as Urdu columnist Syed Ali say: "More such Islamic schools are needed. That's the only way of reaching basic education to more community members. In the 21st century, when immorality in the society has risen so alarmingly, madrasas give education that's pure and ethical." Madrasas of

Pakistan and Afghanistan could be churning out terrorists, but to capture the Islamic schools here in the name of modernisation will be disastrous.

As for the flow of funds from "shady and unreliable" sources, the maulvis say: "It's true that madrasas run on donations. Besides aid from all parts of the country, petro-dollars too fund these schools. Zakat (the 2.5 per cent of savings that every Muslim is bound to donate as tax), Fitra (the price of 1 kg and 750 gm of wheat that all Muslims who keep Roza donate) and Qurban (money collected from the sale of skin hide) are sources of income for the madrasas," explains Qari Fazlur Rahman.

However, the Muslim clerics concede that since money flows in the form of donations, not all accounts are audited. It's even difficult to get the exact number of madrasas in the State. While 507 of them are affiliated, Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind State secretary Maulana Siddiquilla Chowdhury claims that there are about 5,000-odd unaffiliated primary madrasas in Bengal and around 1,000 higher madrasas.

"There are around 38,000 villages in Bengal, of which Muslims live in 35,000. Wherever Muslims live, there are masjids and madrasas. The small ones associated with the local masjids are called makhtabs. But why point fingers at funds reaching the madrasas only? What about the Christian Missionaries and the institutions that profess Hinduism? Does the State Government take account of that money," asks Siddiquilla Chowdhury.

But can community leaders vouch that no sinister activities take place in the madrasas along the borders and in the interiors of Bengal? Union Home Ministry findings show that more than 200-odd madrasas and 400-odd masjids have come up along the border districts along the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bangla borders. They've been receiving clandestine funds from West Asia. Intelligence reports say many of these have become havens for the ISI agents and terror merchants.

None of the community hardliners disagrees. "Let the CM's police and the courts take action. If he can establish that any madrasa have given refuge to an anti-national element, he should immediately identify those responsible and put them behind bars. We will back him to the hilt," says Imam Shabir.

How can the CM forget that more than 50,000 maulvis sacrificed their lives during the freedom movement and that the Father of Pakistan - Mohammad Ali Jinnah - never went to a madrasa. He has hurt the Muslim psyche," says Syed Ali.

Buddha, perhaps, has disturbed a hornets' nest.

## 'At madrasas we teach students to be good human beings'

The 90-year-old masjid on Zakaria Street, eastern India's biggest, was founded by Maulana Kheiruddin, former Union Education Minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's father. There is anger among the Muslims congregating here over the Chief Minister's recent remarks about madrasas. Nakhoda Masjid Imam Sheikh Mohammad Shabir, incensed with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, told Hindustan Times that Muslims won't forgive the CM unless he apologised. Excerpts from the interview:

**Q: Are the Muslims angry with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee for saying some madrasas are safe havens for terrorists?**  
A: We are very hurt. It is a direct attack on our Qaum. For 23 years, Jyoti Basu was Chief Minister. He never made such sweeping statements. But Bhattacharjee has suddenly discovered that Muslims have become anti-nationals. How can we accept it?

**Q: But he did not attack the Muslims, he only talked about madrasas.**  
A: Can there be madrasas without Muslims? Are not the madrasas educational institutions for us Muslims? How can you say his attack is not directed against Muslims? Does the CM know what is taught in madrasas? In madrasas, we teach a Muslim how to maintain peace and become a good human being.

**Q: What could have prompted the Chief Minister to make such a statement?**  
A: He has fallen into the US trap. Probably some madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan had become home to anti-nationals. So President Musharraf banned some madrasas in his country. It seems the same policy is being practised by the Centre, which is ruled by a communal party, at the instance of the Americans.

**Q: You mean to say the Centre asked Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to launch an attack on madrasas?**  
A: Yes. After the American Center shooting, LK Advani instigated Bhattacharjee to shut down madrasas indiscriminately. And it is the Chief Minister's subsequent statement against madrasas that caused his policemen to go on the offensive. There is method to this madness: If madrasas are closed down, it will affect the Muslims directly.

**Q: What if Bhattacharjee proves that madrasas harbour terrorists?**  
A: We want him to prove it. Investigate and catch everyone from madrasas who are involved in anti-national activities. We are with the Chief Minister in this.

**Q: But why make such a huge issue of a mere statement?**  
A: To Muslims it is a very sensitive issue and we are very sorry with the way this Left Front Government has treated Muslims. We have always been with this Government because of the security it gave us minorities. But now we feel let down.

## A tale of two views

"TO SAY that some non-affiliated and unrecognised madrasas in Bengal have become soft targets for the ISI is by no means generalising things. And to construe that I intend to hurt the sentiments of Muslims and disturb their traditional schools of study is a complete misinterpretation of facts," says Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

The CM's intentions of modernising the madrasa education system may be pious, but the maulvis and imams angered by his statement say Buddha has committed a sacrilege.

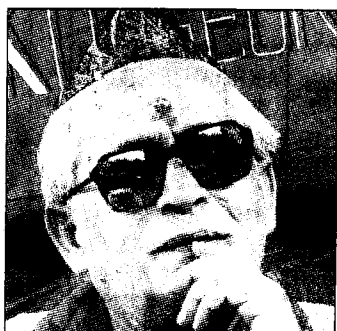
Today they are suspicious of Buddha's notion of modernisation. "In modern times, if the madrasas do not upgrade their syllabi, how will the young boys fend for themselves? Modern syllabi must be introduced in madrasas," the CM said.

But ask the maulvis. They believe this is another way of tampering with the madrasa syllabi and getting rid of the teachings

of the Quran and Hadis, which Muslims have learnt down the ages.

The documents of the West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education, however, tell a different story. The Board's suggestions clearly indicate that Bhattacharjee is seriously thinking of introducing modern subjects in the State's 507 Board-affiliated madrasas.

"The State Government has already extended the facility of computer education to some madrasas for vocational and educational training of students. The Board is trying to extend computer learning and introduce awareness programmes in madrasas. To improve the quality of teaching, teachers in madrasas at all levels are to be appointed through the School Service Commission. Moreover, a Madrasa Education Committee has been set up under the chairmanship of former Bengal Governor Dr AR Kidwai, to recom-



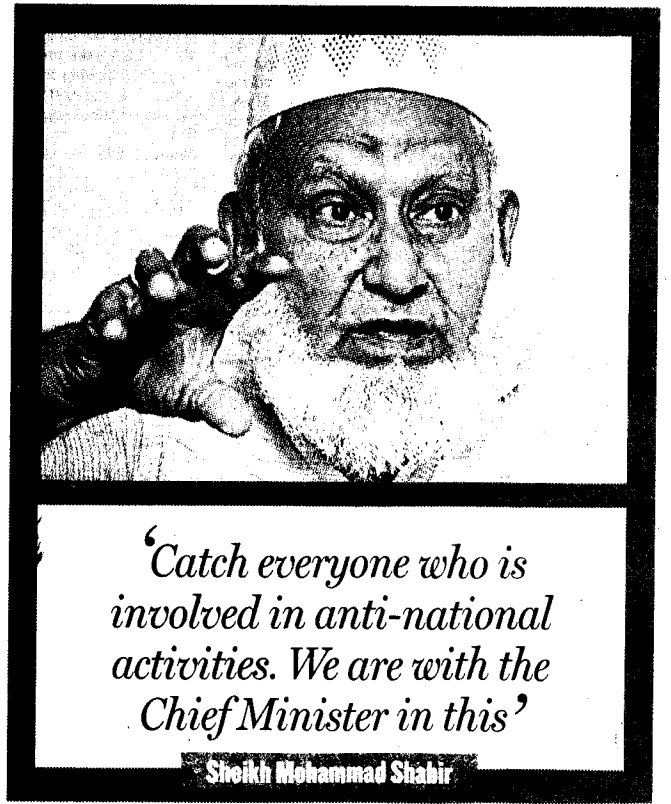
Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

mend more modernisation if necessary," the President of West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education, Dr Abdus Sattar, said.

The State Government has also introduced quality improvement programmes for Board-affiliated madrasas. To provide orientation-cum-workshop training to all science teachers, it has suggested collaboration with the SCERT. To provide financial and infra-

structure assistance to the madrasas, an arrangement has been reached with the WBDPEP. Unicef too is being invited to get involved and undertake projects in areas such as female education and child labour. Steps are being taken to bring dropouts under the Open School System. Besides, endowment schemes are being implemented for meritorious students.

"All this is very impressive on paper but the real situation is totally different. The State Government-affiliated madrasas lack proper science laboratories; there is a dearth of science teachers and computers. Government grants may be coming in, but nothing much is being done for madrasa students. They complain that at the end of their studies, they have only a certificate to show. We agree that the syllabi need to be upgraded, but we are unable to do it because of lack of funds," said Qari Fazlur Rahman.



'Catch everyone who is involved in anti-national activities. We are with the Chief Minister in this'

Sheikh Mohammad Shabir



# Jana snubs VHP on temple issue

Amitabh Srivastava  
Dehra Dun, February 9

"HOW CAN an outsider decide the fate of the Union Government as a Government runs on the strength of its majority in the House," says Jana Krishnamurthi. He said the NDA Government faced no threat from the VHP.

The BJP president was reacting to a VHP leader's statement that the outfit could sacrifice a hundred Governments on the temple issue. During their recent meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi, VHP leaders had demanded that the disputed land be handed over to them. They had also asked Vajpayee to hasten the temple cases pending in courts.

Krishnamurthi said the Prime Minister has asked the Law Ministry to look into the legal issues but the Government can only request, and not order, the courts.

Campaigning for the Assembly election in Uttaranchal, the BJP leader said that after losing the 1999 elections the Congress had shown that it does not believe in parliamentary democracy.

"They have held up the working of Parliament because they do not have the guts to listen to Defence Minister George Fernandes. If you accuse some one you must give the accused a chance to clear himself, but the

## 'Temple dates soon'

THE PRESIDENT of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple Trust said on Saturday that the dates for construction of the Ram temple would be announced in "two to four days".

The construction will, however, not begin before March 12 — the deadline set by the VHP for the Government. But VHP workers will start moving material for the construction work. VHP president Ashok Singhal said he was still hopeful that the Prime Minister would be able to resolve the issue before March 12, paving the way for the temple construction. "Atalji has a very tall stature and I am sure that he can persuade those opposing it," he said.

HTC, Lucknow



JANA KRISHNAMURTHI

Congress refused Parliament to function with the result that for the first time the Budget could not be discussed and had to be passed by voice vote," he said. Krishnamurthi said the BJP would win the elections in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal despite the poll surveys. "I don't question the credibility of the poll surveys but we have our own assessment," he said when asked about reports that the BJP was trailing in UP and Punjab.

"I have just come back from UP and let me tell you that the

Samajwadi Party and the BSP may have their influence in some pockets but the BJP will form a Government there as Rajnath Singh has managed to bring the people closer to the BJP" he said.

He predicted that the party, under the leadership of Koshiyari, would win with a two-thirds majority in Uttaranchal. In Manipur, he saw political instability after elections but said that no Government could be formed there without the support of the BJP.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 FEB 2002



# Modernity and madrasa

**T**HE CPI(M) may have chosen to snub its chief minister in West Bengal for his unkind comments on *madrasas*, but the point which he made will not go away in a hurry. It is nobody's case that the *madrasas* are hotbeds of terrorism. Indeed, an overwhelming number of them perform their routine task — which they have done for countless years — of educating the poor children about the basic tenets of Islam. There was even a news item some time ago about a Hindu family sending its children to a *madrasa* to avail of educational facilities which were otherwise not available in that locality.

Even then, there is ground for suspicion that some of them are used by anti-social elements to avoid the prying eyes of the authorities. Equally, it has to be admitted that the kind of subjects that are taught in the *madrasas* may have served a purpose in an earlier period of time, but certainly cannot help a young person in today's world. These are matters which should be of concern to those Muslims who have the welfare of their community in mind.

No one is advocating that science and computers should replace the holy books of Islam, as a cleric in Kolkata has sarcastically said. But the case for adding modern subjects to the traditional curriculum cannot be denied.

Instead of trying to pull wool over people's eyes by saying that Buddhadev Bhattacharjee has been misquoted, the CPI(M) should have devoted greater time to ascertain what the chief minister had in mind and considered the issue from a wider angle. But given the tendency of all politicians to play safe, the Marxists have obviously decided to accept the views of clerics like the Imam of Kolkata's Nakhoda mosque as representing the opinion of the entire community. This attitude of the Left is vastly different, of course, from that of organisations on the Right belonging to the Sangh parivar which try to exploit the prevailing concern over terrorism to paint all Muslims as unpatriotic. But the Muslims themselves seem to have been caught between mindless placatory noises on one hand and motivated vilification on the other.

Don't know

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Buddha balm for miffed maulvis

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, February 7

THE CHIEF Minister today sought to assuage the hurt feelings of the Muslim community saying his remarks were directed against all fundamentalist and anti-national forces, not against any particular community.

"Fundamentalists - Hindu or Muslim - are the same. Just as there are sections in the majority community such as the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal, there are groups like the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba among the minorities. Both are disruptive and reprehensible. They are two sides of the same coin and there's no question of compromising with them," he asserted.

Addressing reporters after his 90-minute meeting with Muslim religious leaders and intellectuals, he hoped that the controversy over his remarks on madrasas would now be cleared. "I've assured them that not a single person from their community would be harassed. I have instructed the



SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee meets a delegation of Muslim leaders on Thursday.

police." Twenty-two Muslim leaders attended the meeting.

Bhattacharjee tried to set the record straight saying he had talked of two separate issues — modernisation of madrasa education and anti-national activities of some Muslims and some

madrasas. The media mixed them up. "I don't know how it happened. It may be partly because of the media. It was partly my fault as well."

Probed further on whether he was withdrawing his earlier charges against "certain mad-

rasas", he said: "I stand by what I have said today.. When I talked of modernising the madrasas, what I really meant was that these schools must join the mainstream of modern and scientific studies.

But Bhattacharjee's party co-

league and Minorities Development and Welfare Minister Mohammed Selim went a step further. "There's not a single madrasa in the State which indulges in anti-national activities."

Even as Bhattacharjee talked of a "complete understanding" emerging from the discussions, Abdur Sattar, president, Board of Madrasa Education, doubted if all fears among Muslims would go away this easily.

Sattar said the CM had promised to be "more careful in choosing his words while making statements on Muslims. Now that he has clarified his position, we are happy."

Maulana Qari Fazlur Rahman, Imam-e-Edain, said he was satisfied with today's meeting, but criticised the CM for causing "a deep hurt to the minority community."

The Nakhoda Mosque Imam, Maulana Mohammed Sabir, said the CM's remarks has created a situation in which the entire community is now being looked at with deep suspicion.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 FEB 2002

# RSS tells VHP to stop tirade against Centre

g - nationalist intellig

**Statesman News Service**

NEW DELHI, Feb. 6. — The RSS has asked the VHP to stop its tirade against the Vajpayee government on the Ram temple issue. The RSS missive to the VHP international working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, came after the "dharam sabha" in Delhi which brought the sadhus and the government on confrontation course.

The temporary truce is likely to last at least till 12 March, the VHP's deadline for the Centre to hand over the land around the disputed site to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas for temple construction. The RSS stand explains the conciliatory statements of senior VHP leaders after the fiery ones by its leader, Mr Pravin Togadia, who said there would be no further talks with the government on the issue.

A senior BJP leader said, "The RSS has taken out the plug from the fuse to rein in the aggressive VHP," which means that the aggression would not return till the RSS renews its support. Senior RSS leader and former chief, Mr Rajendra Singh "Rajju Bhaiya", who shares a good rapport with Mr Vajpayee, reportedly intervened to ask the VHP to shut up, sources said.

Mr Vajpayee was reportedly

hurt at the barbs of some VHP leaders against himself and brought this to the notice of the RSS leaders. The RSS too had realised that the VHP-sponsored "dharam sabha" had exceeded the brief which was to present a show of strength and issue a mild warning to the government to take the issue seriously.

## No apology to VP: BJP

NEW DELHI, Feb. 6. — The BJP president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, today asserted that the party's decision to withdraw support to the VP Singh government in 1990 was a well considered decision and, therefore, there was no question of offering either "apology or sorry" to the former Prime Minister. — SNS

The RSS leadership felt that the meeting which had raised the expectations of the sadhus would bring the VHP in direct confrontation with the government. Even now the issue is not resolved but the fact that the government has referred the matter to the Union law ministry has become an alibi for the VHP to go soft.

No one in the RSS wants the government to go even when the former has serious differences on many issues. The RSS leadership is equally worried about the BJP's poll prospects in Uttar Pradesh and the various uncontrollable factors it would unleash after the Assembly polls, the senior BJP leader said.

Meanwhile, the All India Babari Masjid Action Committee has requested the Centre that no decision should be taken on the VHP demand of the transfer of land adjacent to where the Babari Masjid stood at Ayodhya without its consent, SNS adds from Lucknow.

# Buddha runs into madrasa storm

## Left Front slams Chief Minister

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, February 6

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's crackdown on "unlisted" madrasas rebounded on him today, when the Left Front censured his views, reported widely in the media.

While internally the partners criticised the Chief Minister, the Left Front publicly blamed it all on the Press. LF chairman Biman Bose launched a broadside against the Fourth Estate and blamed it for landing Bhattacharjee in the midst of a raging controversy. He even had some harsh words for *Ganashakti*, his party organ.

Dismissing all that had come out in print as bunkum, Bose went a step further and denied that the State Government had gathered ammunition against some unrecognised madrasas to clampdown on them. "The Chief Minister has never accused unrecognised madrasas of harbouring anti-national forces. His appeal to them was to join the mainstream. The media put words in his mouth and misinterpreted all he said," he added.

"He made two statements - one on the need to upgrade the madrasa curriculum and another on the increasing terrorist activity in Bengal. The media mixed it all up," Bose added.

Earlier, up against a barrage of protests at the Left Front meeting, the Chief Minister too insisted that he hadn't said much of what had been attrib-

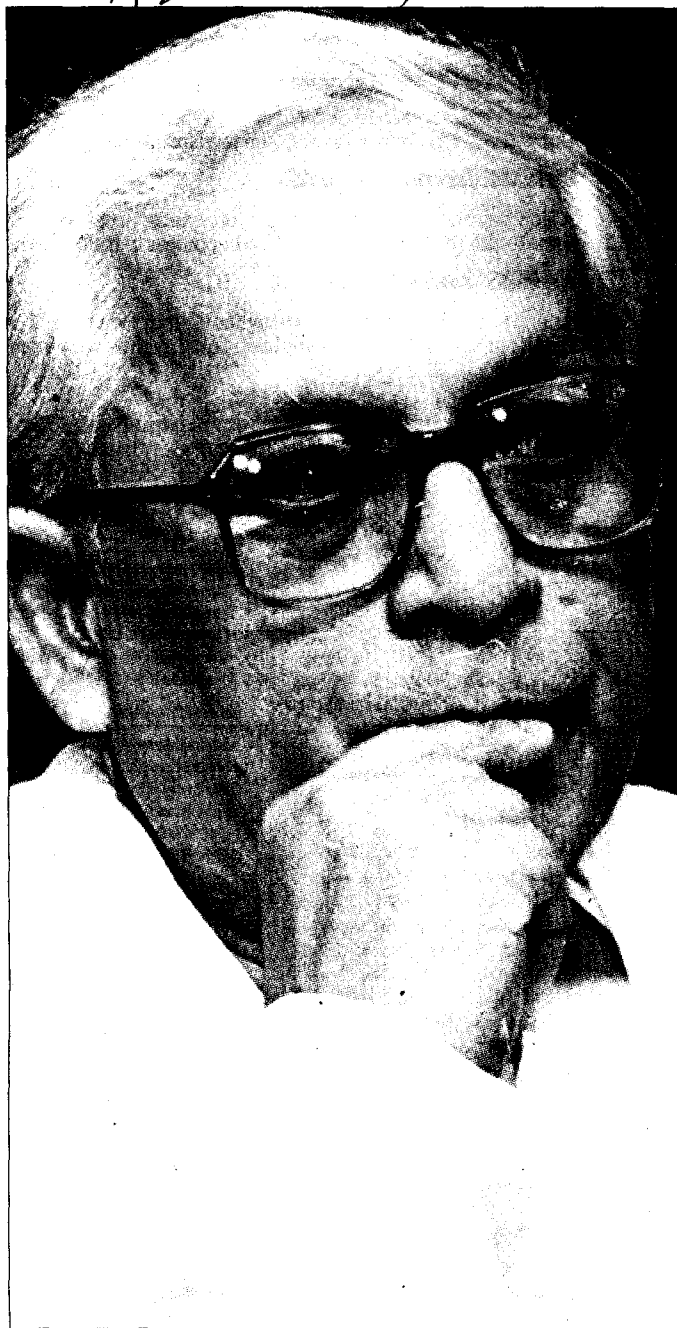
uted to him. Considering that even former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu had some harsh words for him, Bhattacharjee had a tough time defending himself. Other Front partners clamoured that they hadn't been taken into confidence over the crackdown. Some said the Chief Minister had been far too brusque with a sensitive issue.

Despite Biman Bose's tirade against the media, Jyoti Basu reportedly said he couldn't quite disbelieve what had appeared in *Ganashakti*. He asked the Chief Minister to explain himself. "If the party organ conceded such a major goof, it ought to carry a corrigendum. How's it that it remains silent? Whatever the truth, the issue has caused damage," said Manju Mazumdar, CPI State secretary.

Other Front leaders complained that even over the Poca issue, the Chief Minister had acted in splendid isolation. "This is the second time you ignored us," one leader said. He suggested that a Front core committee be set up to ensure better coordination. The Chief Minister assured he would.

Forward Bloc leader Asoke Ghosh proposed that unrecognised madrasas be brought under the education board in phases. "We can't compel them," Bhattacharjee told him.

After the meet ended, the LF chairman began his damage control exercise. The Government hasn't lined up any crackdown against unrecognised madrasas, he said.



BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE: Drawing flak

## IB report shares CM's worries

Chandan Nandy  
New Delhi, February 6

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE has drawn flak for his reported statements against madrasas, but a recent Intelligence Bureau report shows his beliefs aren't without basis.

The report, shared with the West Bengal Government after the January 22 strike on the American Center, provides a picture of the growth of mosques and madrasas within sensitive 10-kilometre stretches of the border Bengal shares with Nepal and Bangladesh.

A fresh study dealing with unregistered madrasas and mosques is now on in several border States, but the scenario in West Bengal has come into sharp focus for the Left Front Government now appears to be sharing the Centre's perception that the spurt in the number of these institutions poses a grave threat to the country's internal security.

The report has identified 208 madrasas and 458 mosques in 10 districts and there are several illegal ones that to have mushroomed too close to the border.

The growth has been the highest in Malda, where 172 mosques and 55 madrasas have been identified, followed by North Dinajpur (33 and 34), Murshidabad (40 and 20), Jalpaiguri (35 and 23), Cooch Behar (55 and 12), South Dinajpur (45 and 19), North 24-Parganas (24 and 18), Nadia (29 and 12), Darjeeling (15 and 11) and

South 24-Parganas (10 and 4). The IB document says that in nearly all these cases, the mosques and madrasas have come up with funds from the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank, channelled through the Jamia Mohammediyah Education Society, Mumbai, and the Islamic Education and Welfare Trust, Kolkata.

The Home Ministry said preliminary inquiries have shown a "phenomenal" growth in the number of illegal mosques and madrasas in West Bengal. It is suspected that a great deal of the funds "received by Muslim organisations (in the State) are by way of personal contribution or through clandestine/hawala channels," the document says.

To prevent this, the IB has suggested an "active interface" between itself and agencies such as the CBI, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Enforcement Directorate, the Research and Analysis Wing and State Intelligence branches as a "necessary" step to exchange intelligence and for follow-up action.

This envisages setting up of an "effective non-discriminatory mechanism" for auditing of accounts of mosques and madrasas receiving foreign donations.

The IB report recommends a thorough scrutiny of all cases for prior permission and registration for receiving foreign funds by political and religious organisations irrespective of the amount of monetary contribution involved.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 FEB 2002

## MANIFESTO PROMISES 'CLEAN ADMINISTRATION'

# BJP sticks to NDA agenda on Ayodhya

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, FEB. 2. The Bharatiya Janata Party's election manifesto released here today says the Ayodhya dispute would be settled either through a court order or an agreement between the parties concerned, basically swearing by the NDA agenda. "It is hoped that a solution to the problem would be found soon. The BJP Government would try to expedite the Ayodhya case," it said.

Asked by presspersons if this

meant a substantial change in the BJP policy on the temple issue, the Chief Minister, Rajnath Singh, said the party did want a solution to the problem. It still believed that a Ram temple should be constructed but that could be done either through a court verdict or mutual understanding.

Mr. Singh challenged the Samajwadi Party and the Congress to make their stand on the issue clear. These parties had gone on record favouring the restoration of the Babri Masjid. The people

had the right to know if they still stood by their commitment.

The party promised to provide political stability and a clean administration. "Despite practical problems, the BJP-led Government did not allow the chariot of progress to stop during the past five years and kept the State free from terrorism, fear and riots. This is proof that the party has the capability of running a government in quite adverse situations," the manifesto said.

It promised to bring the office

of Chief Minister under the jurisdiction of the Lok Ayukta as one of the measures to end corruption. "Within 90 days of getting elected, the new government would make it obligatory on the people's representatives to submit details of their income and wealth. Steps would also be taken to bring in transparency in government decisions involving public money and wealth," it said.

Releasing the manifesto at a press conference jointly addressed by him with the Chief Minister, the State BJP unit president, Kalraj Mishra, said the slogan of the party was "Aa-tank, asthirata aur hinsa se mukt raj; shanti, samriddhi evam samrasta se yukt samaj" (A State free from terror, instability and violence and a society having progress and harmony).

Mr. Singh alleged that competition was on among the Opposition parties over garnering the minority votes. The Congress and the Samajwadi Party were trying to create a feeling of insecurity among the minorities to win them over. "Every year on December 6, they invariably indulge in such an exercise. During the current elections also, they were up to their old tactics. As far as the BJP is concerned, it believes in the oft-repeated principle of justice for all and appeasement of none."

He described the Congress as "the most communal party at the national level" and the Samajwadi Party as "the most communal party at the regional level."

## Will defy court order on SYL canal: Badal

CHANDIGARH, FEB. 2. Taking a tough line on the Sutlej-Yamuna canal issue, the Punjab Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal president, Parkash Singh Badal, today said they would defy the Supreme Court direction for completion of the canal in one year and were even ready to face contempt of court proceedings.

Talking to presspersons after releasing the party's manifesto for the February 13 Assembly elections, Mr. Badal said, "we will defy the Supreme Court decision if need be and will not go a step forward towards completion of the canal".

Asked what would be the course of action if the Supreme Court initiated contempt of court proceedings, he said, "we are ready for that also. Maximum they can do is send us to jail for which we are prepared". Even if the review petition to be filed soon was rejected, the canal would not be completed, he added.

He said the Akalis had been struggling for three issues, transfer of Chandigarh, transfer of the Punjabi-speaking areas and water sharing with Haryana.

To a question, he said the Congress had com-

pllicated the issues to such an extent that he in Punjab, Om Prakash Chautala in Haryana and Atal Behari Vajpayee at the Centre had not been able to resolve these inter-State issues.

Mr. Badal said the "anti-Punjab policies" of Congress resulted in the State not getting Chandigarh at the time of reorganisation even though it was the parent State and not getting its share of water on the riparian principles.

"Chandigarh is complicated in the way Kashmir has been complicated in Indo-Pak. relations", Mr. Badal said. The Akalis had launched the "Dharam Yudh Morcha" to oppose the "injustice" done to Punjab at the hands of the Congress.

The manifesto promised top priority to "peace, Punjabi unity and communal harmony" and assured justice to the victims of the 1984 massacre.

It also promised various welfare schemes — farming, employment generation, power, development of backward classes and Dalits, border areas development, promotion of education, trade and industry — in the State. — PTI

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3 FEB 2002

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2002

149-8 2/2  
**CYNICAL MANOEUVRES** 9-*minutes*

IN REITERATING THAT the BJP is "bound" by the agenda of the National Democratic Alliance (wherein 'Ayodhya', like other contentious issues, does not figure by common agreement), the BJP chief, Jana Krishnamurthi, has evidently sought to reassure the coalition partners on the party's position vis-a-vis the current heightened campaign of the VHP and its sant brigade to commence temple construction any time after March 12 as announced. But, if Mr. Krishnamurthi's assertion that the VHP would have to face the "legal consequences" if it refused to abide by the judicial injunctions was meant to convey a stern message, the calculated evasiveness palpable in his response to a related query about the BJP's prospective stand should the VHP take the law into its hands — where he said 'we will cross the bridge when we come to it' — has indicated the BJP's true intentions. That the VHP itself does not particularly feel deterred by the BJP chief's 'warning' has come out loud and clear from the way its international president, Ashok Singhal, stood his ground, harping on the outfit's well known position — that the temple issue is a matter of faith, not justiciable, that a court verdict is of "no importance" and, above all, that the construction would start after March 12, whether the Centre handed over the acquired land or not. It may, however, be of some consolation to the BJP and to the Government that it heads that Mr. Singhal, unlike the VHP's general secretary, Praveen Togadia, is not against talking with the Government, until the March 12 deadline, on the question of the '(undisputed) land handover', in the context of the Prime Minister's decision to have it examined by the Law Ministry in all its "legal and constitutional aspects".

What needs to be noted, however, is that Mr. Krishnamurthi has left no one in doubt that the "only" constraint now on the BJP pursuing its goal of constructing a Ram temple at Ayodhya — something that remained "close to its heart" — is the NDA's commonly agreed agenda. It is one thing for the party to periodically articulate its

allegiance to the coalition's National Agenda for Governance (NAG) and nominally distance itself from the VHP's 'temple' campaign, but quite another for the Government (which it heads) to ensure that the VHP and those of its ilk who are pursuing the temple agenda in brazen defiance of democratically established authority and rule of law do not have their way. Right from the day the Dharam Sansad gave an ultimatum at the Maha Kumbh a year ago to the Centre to "remove all the hurdles" that may stand in the way of temple construction before March 12, 2002, there has been a sequenced and structured programme of action — resource mobilisation, carving of pillars, raising an army of volunteers etc. — the climactical phases of which are ahead in the next few weeks. The way the Government, particularly its BJP component, has responded to the VHP's provocative initiatives on this front so far and the articulations its leadership has been making on the very issue of the 'Ram temple' have been hardly reassuring. The downplaying of the October 17 episode when VHP activists barged into the prohibited area and the Centre's readiness to 'study' the VHP's outrageous plea for the handing over of acquired land are only the more recent examples.

Given the sort of momentum that has already been built up over the year and the certainty of the communal temperature rising further as the target date draws closer, the evolving scenario seems all set to acquire the horrifying dimensions of the runup to the Babri Masjid demolition a decade ago. Critical indeed is the question whether the Vajpayee regime will, true to its professed commitment to the NAG, stop the protagonists of the temple in their tracks through firm pre-emptive action. After all, what the VHP and its sant parivar are doing in effect is to whip up communal passions on the basis of a majoritarian agenda, a dangerous game at a time when the nation is going through a highly difficult and sensitive phase in its relations with the western neighbour.

THE HINDU

2 FEB 2002

## Madarsa

► FROM PAGE 1

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Officials, however, say the balance sheet does not really tally for most of Murshidabad's madarsas. "Some do really pull through somehow," a senior intelligence official said. "But you can distinguish between the madarsas having legal and illegal sources of funding," he claimed. "The strain of having to pull through hundreds of students and teachers and retainers without any unknown source of income has to show," he said.

According to information the administration has, much of the foreign money coming into madarsas and mosques is routed through the hawala trade. Another source of funding, according to the administration, is the flourishing trans-border smuggling in cattle-hide.

According to police estimates, every truck that goes illegally to Bangladesh carries hide worth more than Rs 5 lakh. "If the 2.5-per cent zaqat theory is true, just calculate the amount of money that goes into the madarsas and mosques if even 100 trucks cross over every day," the official explained.

Besides, there's "incontrovertible" proof in the form of the sprouting madarsas and mosques, say officials. Murshidabad has at least 10 times the official madarsa figure of 70; and the official figure of 428 mosques in the district is even farther off the mark. 9 - million plus

"If madarsas and mosques are really unprofitable, as almost every other madarsa managing committee tells us, why at least one of either keeps coming up almost weekly?" a senior home department official posted in Murshidabad asked. A sound, logical explanation would stop the visits and interrogations immediately, he promised.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 FEB 2002



# Money murmurs refuse to go away

FROM SUNANDO SARKAR AND ALAMGIR HOSSAIN

Murshidabad, Jan. 31: *It is the largest madarsa in Beldanga, the madarsa belt of Bengal's madarsa district, Murshidabad. It has around 250 residential students, none of whom needs to pay any monthly or annual fee. It maintains, besides the students, a large three-storeyed, L-shaped building in an area where three-storeyed buildings are talked about, not built. It has finalised plans to buy a 54-cottah mango orchard. Local people estimate the cost of the land at more than Rs 35 lakh.*

*Source of income, according to those who run the institution: donations from the "poor and devout".*

*Source of income, according to the administration, if the expenses are kept in mind: "unknown". In troubled times, the word "unknown" almost always point westwards, more specifically, West Asia-wards.*

Not every madarsa in Murshidabad is as rich as the Madarsa Jalilla Islamia Dar-ul-Huda. Some, like the Jamia Anwar-ul-Ulum in Dhullyan, are poor and show it. But, with whispers about "big Gulf money" becoming officialese in these troubled times when suspected ISI agents are fished out of Murshidabad's mosques and madaras with amazing frequency, the district's centres of Islamic study are under the scanner as never before.

"Check our accounts. This is what we tell the intelligence officials whose visits have grown more regular," says secretary of Al-Mahadus-Salafi Educational Complex Md Nayeemuddin. The madarsa, the only one in the district having a separate

computer section for its students, is somewhere near the top when it comes to the list of suspected Gulf-funded madaras.

"Yes, we have received money from the Islamic Development Bank," says Nayeemuddin. "The grant was routed through the government of India," he explains. "We have now grown used to keeping our documents ready for intelligence officials," he says. The documents, however, have not slowed down the visits, he adds ruefully.

The very economics of running a madarsa — illegible to intelligence officials who most often are not from the minority community — adds to the "problem", says Surulla's Madarsa Dar-ul-Ulum head maulana Mufti Abdul Quddus.

The madarsa with 300 students and 20 teachers needs a quintal of rice everyday. Muslims of 65 neighbouring villages — the madarsa's hinterland — account for most of that. "Ashur," the maulana explains, "makes it compulsory for every Muslim to give over 2.5 per cent of his produce from the land to nearby religious institutions if he produces more than 40 maunds of crop every year."

Then there is the *fetra*, which requires Muslims to pay anything between Rs 15 and Rs 22 every day of the Ramzan month, and the *zayat* that is 2.5 per cent of a Muslim's cash and movable property and has to be donated by every believer every year, he adds. "Add that up and you will understand how we can afford annual expenses of about Rs 10 lakh," says the maulana.

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THE TELEGRAPH

- 1 FEB 2002

# Court verdict will be of no importance: VHP

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 31.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today quoted chapter and verse from the Supreme Court judgment of October 1994 to buttress its case for transfer of the acquired land in Ayodhya to the trust controlled by it. At the same time, it said the Ram temple issue was "not justiciable" that it was "a matter of faith" and that even the final court verdict in the Ayodhya case would be of "no importance" as its temple plan included a sanctum sanctorum on the 80 feet by 40 feet of the disputed land.

Sticking to the position that construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya would begin anytime after March 12, with or without a Government decision on handing over the acquired land to it, Ashok Singhal, international president of the VHP, said that "faith

was not justiciable" and that the VHP was not prepared to abide by any court decision.

"In matters of faith, how can we accept the court verdict? We did not determine where Kaushalya (mother of Rama) gave birth to Ram Lalla," Mr Singhal said. If the courts had failed to give a verdict for the last 50 years "we Hindus are not responsible", Mr. Singhal added.

Mr. Singhal said the VHP temple plan included a sanctum sanctorum on the very site where the makeshift Ram temple stands today and where the central dome of the Babri masjid was brought down on December 6, 1992, and therefore any court verdict in the Ayodhya case in relation to the disputed area "would have no importance" as far as the VHP was concerned. In short, it would not be bound by it. While admitting that there was a Supreme Court order directing the Govern-

ment to maintain a status quo at the disputed land (where the sanctum sanctorum would be), the VHP saw no harm and no illegality in the Government handing over the land. "Unlike private buildings, temple buildings do not have to have the plans passed by any municipality," the VHP leader, Giriraj Kishore, emphasised.

Avoiding a confrontationalist posture, Mr. Singhal said the door for talks with the Government would remain open till March 12. This was contrary to the stand of the VHP general secretary, Praveen Togadia, who said two days ago that there would be no more talks. Mr. Singhal said he would also meet the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, who had been asked by the Prime Minister to give his Ministry's opinion on the "legal and constitutional" possibility of transferring some of the 67 acres to the VHP.

*India - mienita HD 1*

VISHWA HINDU

# Saffron siblings in temple pact

VHP to cry Ram, BJP to bag the votes

Shekhar Iyer  
New Delhi, January 31

THE BJP and the VHP have struck a deal of sorts on the Ram temple issue, though both sides are pretending a confrontation is on the cards.

Despite the sants' ultimatum to the Centre that it hand over the more than 67 acres of land acquired by it in 1993 to facilitate construction of the temple after March 12, the immediate objective now seems to be "consolidation of Hindu votes" in favour of the BJP.

Both sides are stressing that the issue has nothing to do with the UP Assembly polls, but, senior BJP and VHP officials have conceded that the current stir is being orchestrated to help the BJP and, if possible, get the main rival, the Samajwadi Party, to champion the minorities' cause, thereby triggering a backlash that should suit the BJP.

Senior BJP leaders are sure the VHP will do nothing to inconvenience the Government. They say the RSS won't let them to do anything that might endanger the coalition.

But if the VHP tried to start construction in a frenzy, the Government wouldn't think twice to use force and stop it, a senior BJP leader said.

In fact, BJP chief K Jana Krishnamurthi stressed today that the Ram Temple would not be on the party's agenda till 2004. He warned the VHP of the "legal consequences" if it refused to accept the court's verdict on the issue. He also did not feel the VHP's March 12 deadline was the last straw.

But a few hours later, VHP chief Ashok Singhal said courts could not decide matters of faith. Sounding milder than his habitual self, he disowned the VHP's

## PARISHAD CLIMBDOWN

THE VHP on Thursday said it would keep the doors open for talks with the Government on building the Ram temple at Ayodhya till March 12. Construction would begin on any auspicious day after that, the VHP said. "We will continue to have meaningful dialogue with the Government till March 12," Parishad president Ashok Singhal said. The rather conciliatory statement came only two days after the VHP's international secretary Pravin Togadia ruled out further talks.

PTI, New Delhi



ASHOK SINGHAL

earlier statement that the Parishad won't have further talks with the Centre.

The January 27 meeting between VHP leaders and Prime Minister AB Vajpayee was the culmination of the Sangh leaders and the BJP's efforts towards this end.

The VHP sought and obtained an assurance of sorts from the Government that the issue would no longer be kept on the backburner just because it was sub-judice.

Vajpayee was upset at first that the VHP was out to create problems for his Government. But later, senior RSS officials assured the Prime Minister and his party that the Parishad wouldn't let things spin out of control. The BJP too assured that it would uphold status quo at Ayodhya at all cost.

The PM's reference to the Law Minister for an opinion on the "legal and constitutional aspects" of handing over 'indisputable parts' of the acquired land to a VHP-controlled trust

was meant to convince the sants that efforts would now be made to expedite the court hearing, RSS officials said.

Careful to prevent an impression that the BJP had given up its earlier stand on the Ram temple, Krishnamurthi explained that the party's earlier stand that *Ramjanmasthan* be handed over to the Hindus was in the context of the situation prevailing at that time.

Now, the BJP was bound by the NDA agenda and had no option but to respect the court's verdict or a negotiated settlement, he said.

Will the issue be taken up after 2004? The BJP chief's reply was, "It depends on the circumstances and how we (NDA partners) are able to persuade each other."

The BJP understood the VHP's demand that court proceedings be expedited and had asked the Government to take steps "to the extent possible," Krishnamurthi said.

Related reports on Page 9

# Madrasa storm refuses to die down

g - no writes Hi-3

## ● Subhas supports ● Biman defends ● Pranab critical

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, January 31

THE CHIEF Minister's comment about madrasas got surprise support from Subhas Chakrabarty and mixed, but predictable, reaction from other quarters on Thursday.

Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty took his critics by surprise by endorsing the tough posture taken by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and State CPI(M) secretary Anil Biswas was on the "anti-national activities" at some of the madrasas.

Speaking to reporters at the Writers' Buildings, Chakrabarty said that though all madrasas should not be tarred with the same brush, it was an open secret that many of them were engaged in undesirable activities.

He said the main challenge to the national security and sovereignty at this moment was from a particular section of the society, and this should be firmly dealt with. "We must not forget that it is the responsibility of the majority community to be generous and tolerant towards the minorities. Non-Hindus should be favoured with special privileges in accordance with our tradition," he said.

### JAMAAT MOVES MINORITIES PANEL

THE STATE unit of the Jamaat-e-Ulema described as "highly irresponsible" CM's recent comments on madrasas, and urged the State Minorities Commission to take "serious note" of such remarks. Jamaat-e-Ulema general secretary Maulana Md Siddiquilah Choudhury said Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had "generalised madrasas in spotting the source of terrorist activities".

### HTC, Kolkata

Asked if his party's and the State Government's reproach to the Muslims would put a dent in the Left Front vote bank, Chakrabarty contended that minorities "knew quite well what all we have done for them so far. They would not desert us just because of some statements".

In Midnapore, Left Front chairman Biman Bose backed the Chief Minister's stand and clarified that Bhattacharjee had not said unregistered madrasas would be shut down. In fact, Bhattacharjee has only expressed his desire to probe whether

these madrasas impart religious education only, he said.

The West Bengal Government, Bose said, would not allow any madrasa, approved or not, to teach religious matters when it spends crores of rupees on madrasa education. Till the Left Front came to power in 1977, there was only a paltry annual allocation of Rs 5 lakh for the madrasas in the State Budget, Bose said.

While Minister for Minorities' Development and Welfare Md Selim preferred to be non-committal and said: "Ask the Chief Minister if he was biased. I cannot comment on his statement."

He reiterated that the media was responsible for creating the controversy and advised it not to concentrate on the "insane voices among the Muslims".

The Chief Minister's comments drew flak from Congress as expected. Pranab Mukherjee said it was unfair of the Government to make "sweeping statements" that madrasas are promoting anti-national activities.

"It (such remarks) gives out the wrong signal," Mukherjee said at the relaunch of the Congress party organ, Congress Bara. "Instead, the Government should crack down on those specific madrasas, which it believes



SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES  
PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee hands over the Congress organ to Somendra Mitra after relaunching it.

are carrying out anti-national activities in the State."

He cautioned the State Government against "harassing innocent people", asking the authorities to target only those madrasas identified as unregistered.

He alleged that the State Government had "time and again" tried to wrest control of schools run by the Ramakrishna Mission and Christian missionaries, but had hardly paid any attention to the mushrooming of madrasas in West Bengal.

### MADRASA CONTROVERSY

# Muslim seminar blames media

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, January 31

WEST BENGAL Minorities Commission organised a meeting of Muslim intellectuals in the city today, apparently in a bid to clear recent remarks on madrasas.

While it failed in its aim, it cleared one thing — not many among the gathered intellectuals including Minister for Minorities' Development and Welfare Md Selim — approved of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's comments.

However, none was ready to openly criticise the Chief Minister, choosing to blame the media for "misinterpreting the comments".

Many intellectuals on anonymity maintained that the situation has arisen due to Bhattacharjee's lack of interaction with the Muslim community. "Unlike his predecessor Jyoti Basu, Bhattacharjee has very little knowledge of the community. He cannot feel their pulse. It seems he was provoked into saying it," said a prominent Muslim intellectual.

Commission chairman KM Yusuf blamed the media for "blowing the CM's statement out of proportion". "We have removed all misgivings on the issue in the meeting," he said.

Selim said media was responsible for creating the controversy. "Much of the writing has been misinformed. Not all madrasa can be painted with the same brush," he said.

Some other intellectuals, while ready to give the CM the benefit of the doubt, wanted him to come clean on the issue. "Let him make a statement on this. These madrasas produced people such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hasrat Mohani and even country's first President Rajendra Prasad," said Ahmed Hossain, a writer.

The intellectuals agreed that the Government should act on specific instances of madrasa harbouring terrorist elements, rather than making generalised statements. "Presidency College was the hub of Naxalite movement at one time. But nobody cried for its closure, why are such voices being raised now," said Hossain.

Qazi Fazlul Rehman said madrasas try to make children better humans and better Muslims. "No madrasa in the state or the country is involved in terrorist activities. The administration should investigate before jumping to conclusions. Even madrasas should remain vigilant that such elements do not find shelter there," he said.

Visit us at

# Muslim law board seeks ban on temple-related activity

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 30.** The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board has demanded that the Central and Uttar Pradesh Governments ban all activity and meetings related to construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The Board wanted them to take into their possession all construction material collected near the disputed site and the 67 acres of land acquired by the Government.

The Board said that as per the order of the Supreme Court, not a square inch of the acquired land could be disposed of or given to anyone or anybody till the main suit in the case was settled. In its view, the Prime Minister's assurance to Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders that he would try and resolve the issue by March 12 was an indirect pressure on the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court where the dispute is being heard.

However, the Board said it would welcome an application for a daily hearing on the case and its quick disposal.

In a statement, it said that it

was a representative body enjoying the confidence of Muslims, and any negotiation on the Babri Masjid issue would be "a fraud" unless it was also invited to take part.

Criticising the "provocative and law-defying statements of VHP leaders" at the rally on Sunday, the Board alleged that the RSS, the VHP and the BJP were polluting the communal atmosphere for electoral gains.

The BJP had been forced to rake up the temple issue as its Government had failed miserably on all fronts — water, electricity, law and order, farmers' issues, corruption and unemployment, it said.

## 'VHP ready to sacrifice Govt.'

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 30.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today ruled out any climbdown on the Ayodhya issue and declared that it was prepared to sacrifice the NDA Government at the Centre, for that matter any number of Governments, to realise its dream of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

"We are ready to sacrifice even ten Governments. But no compromise on the Ram temple is possible," senior VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said in reply to a question whether the VHP would compromise with the stability of the BJP-led Government at the Centre.

He said the VHP, its functionaries and followers wanted the temple at Ayodhya at any cost and there was no question of reconsideration. "Governments will come and go. But there is no compromise on our stand."

Asked whether he trusted the Centre, he said the activists of the Ram temple movement were prepared to fight for the cause.

"Even Kauravs and Pandavs had fought for their right... so we would move ahead with our struggle".

However, he avoided terming the present Government as 'Kauravs'. "I do not want to say who is a Pandav or Kaurav in the present struggle."

He rejected any suggestion of discussion on the issue with the Government saying that once the deadline had been fixed, it should be acted upon. — UNI

31 JAN 2002

# Temple at Ayodhya will end secularism: CPI

By Our Staff Reporter

**PALAKKAD, JAN. 29.** The State secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI), Veliyam Bhargavan, has said that if the BJP Government at the Centre permits the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Sangh Parivar to construct the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, it will end secularism in the country.

Addressing a press conference on the deliberations of the ongoing State conference of the party here today, the CPI veteran said the growth of fundamentalism in the country was threatening its very existence. The people of the country were greatly concerned about the threat to national security.

He said that the RSS chief, who was using every opportunity to foment communal extremism in the country, was now demanding the review of the Constitution. When the NDA Government came to power, nobody suspected that it would create such serious problems that would threaten the secular and democratic foundations of the country. Now, the BJP was pursuing its own policies making the NDA ineffective. Its constituents were opposing some of the policies pursued by the Government to suit the interest of the BJP and the RSS.

Regarding the growth of communal extremism in a State like Kerala which was

known for communal harmony, the CPI leader said extremism had been growing in Kerala in recent times. The BJP-RSS could not succeed in creating a communal divide in Kerala earlier because the Keralites had not permitted it. But with the entry of the NDF and the PDP, religious extremism started raising its ugly head in places like Pathanamthitta and Marad.

Though the RSS and the NDF were fighting each other openly, in effect, they were helping each other. The recent communal flare-ups helped both the organisations to garner more support. This was a most dangerous situation, Mr. Bhargavan said.

He said the Congress-led UDF Government under the Chief Minister, A. K. Antony, had failed to curb communal flare-ups as it had sought the support of communal forces like the RSS, PDP and the NDF to come to power.

When the Pattanathitta incident occurred, the CPI wrote to the Chief Minister asking him to call an all-party meeting to discuss the dangerous situation and take a firm united stand by all democratic and secular forces against it. But the Chief Minister did not bother to respond.

The CPI secretary said the State conference had decided to conduct a powerful campaign in Kerala against communalism and religious extremism by

uniting all Left, democratic and secular forces in the State.

Answering questions on the CPI and CPI (M) merger, the CPI leader said the differences, which had resulted in the split of the Communist Party in 1964, no longer existed. The CPI was striving for unity with the CPI(M) but their merger would take more time.

The CPI wanted all the Communist parties and groups to unite to combat the situation where the WTO and the World Bank were imposing conditions resulting in more burden to the common man.

He said the Congress-led Government in Kerala was following the same policies of the BJP Government at the Centre. The Government was withdrawing from social services sectors such as health, education and infrastructure.

Thus, there was no difference between the policies followed by the BJP-led Government at the Centre and the UDF Government in the State.

Both were challenging the people and had declared a war on them. The CPI had accepted this challenge and would unite all the Left and democratic forces to fight against the anti-people policies of the Centre and the Antony Government, he said.

2 minutes

## Warning bells

96-8 29/1

The VHP must heed the sounds of its own irrelevance

**T**HE VHP's Ayodhya-Delhi roadshow has mercifully wound up. Mercifully too, at the end of the Sant Chetavani Yatra, the 'chetavani', or warning, has been served not so much upon the Centre, nor on the law abiding people of this country, or on the delicate skeins that weave communities together, as some had feared, but on the VHP's rabblers instead. Much as they may bellow ultimatums and issue temple-or-else threats, and for all the clenched fists raised in the air, they cannot evade the truth. The fact is that the VHP's frantic exertions have failed to rouse. Its grim cavalcade of vehicles and partyworkers brandishing swords, trishuls and gadas, could not summon the crowds. Even the BJP-led government at the Centre did not offer it an overly sympathetic hearing. Atal Bihari Vajpayee reportedly gave the visiting VHP delegation a bit of a talking-to on Sunday, in which constitutionalism, rule of law, NDA manifesto and court verdict figured as the keywords. He fobbed them off by pointing them in the direction of the Law ministry. No, underneath the loud triumphalism, the VHP's leading lights cannot be feeling very satisfied about the way this past week or so has gone for them.

By all accounts, the prime minister has managed the VHP's challenge with a welcome touch of deftness and firmness. He has reiterated that there are but two ways out of the Ayodhya tangle — through negotiations or by the court verdict. He has deigned upon the questionable timing of

the VHP's march to Delhi — at a time when the nation must be united to fight the scourge of terrorism. As for those two demands — the transfer of an undisputed 47 acres of the 67 acres of land around the disputed site at Ayodhya and the speedy disposal of the original ownership dispute case pending in the court, and especially the former — the prime minister has only offered that the Law ministry would examine the legal and constitutional aspects. By demanding the transfer of the undisputed 47 acres, the VHP is slyly seizing upon a chink in the Act that facilitated the Centre's acquisition of the 67 acres of land in Ayodhya in 1993, as well as the Supreme Court judgement of October 1994. The Act demarcated the disputed and undisputed portions of the area acquired by the Centre; the court upheld the distinction. Clearly, the VHP hopes to insinuate itself into that crack and manipulate it into an opening for its own advantage.

The Law ministry will hopefully point out to the VHP the absurdity of its position, of stretching a legal point too far. It must point out to the VHP the untenability of its demand for permission to begin construction of a temple around the disputed site. The process of justice cannot be reduced to quibbling of this schizophrenic kind; it must be tempered by a larger, and coherent, perspective. Basically, the process of the resolution of the Ayodhya dispute, if it is already afoot, must proceed at its own pace. It cannot allow itself to be disturbed by the nuisance value, fast diminishing, of a bunch of hoodlums.

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 JAN 2002



TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2002

## TREADING DANGEROUS GROUND <sup>10-8</sup>

IT WOULD SEEM that the Vajpayee Government has bought time on the demand of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its 'sant parivar' — that a big chunk of the Government-acquired land in the disputed Ayodhya complex be handed over to them — by offering to have its "legal and Constitutional issues" considered by the Law Ministry. But there is very little in the articulations of the pro-temple leaders at the rally marking the culmination of what was provocatively called the 'sant chetavani yatra' to suggest, even remotely, that they are in a mood to resile from their much-vaunted 'temple-at-any-cost' stance or their 'resolve' to go ahead with the construction any time after March 12, even if it entails taking possession of the land by force. In the immediate context, of course, the development means that, while appearing to avert a 'showdown', the BJP-led Government and the VHP have ensured that the Ram temple remains centre stage during the crucial Assembly polls now under way in Uttar Pradesh. Although for the record the BJP leadership has maintained, at least thus far, that Ayodhya will not be a poll issue, the Centre's response is tinged with electoral overtones — that of retaining its traditional vote base in the majority community.

There can absolutely be no quarrel about the Government's move to examine ways of expediting the judicial process in the pending title suit concerning the disputed site in Ayodhya. The initiative, which should in fact have come much earlier, makes a lot of sense, given that a national consensus of sorts has emerged across the main political spectrum in favour of the judicial route as a practicable way out of the Ayodhya tangle, not reckoning of course the idealistic negotiations route. But its response to the VHP's other plea — of 'land handover' — is open to serious question. For all the seeming reasonableness of the argument that the title suit related only to the site where the Babri Masjid had stood and that therefore there could be no bar on the Gov-

ernment parting with the rest of the land it had acquired in 1993, it deserved to be rejected outright for the simple reason that it was only the thin end of the wedge which the VHP and its associates have planned to drive. Their game plan — and they have left no one in doubt about it — is to build structures as per the temple design on the so-called 'undisputed' portions of land in the complex and present a *fait accompli* which would be difficult for the Government to ignore and would possibly have the effect of forcing the hands of the Judiciary. The very objective of the Supreme Court vesting the Centre with the functions of a 'statutory receiver', implying a duty to maintain the status quo pending court decision in the suit, is evidently to preempt such devious designs. Given this context, the Vajpayee regime's response has amounted to giving credence to the VHP's demand and, in a way, has rendered itself vulnerable to the charge of encouraging the VHP in its communally provocative ways.

29/1. 9-minutes  
On a different plane, Mr. Vajpayee would have to do a lot of explaining to his partners in the ruling coalition because the palpably soft line the Government took at its interaction with the sants-VHP delegation ran counter to the dominant mood of the National Democratic Alliance leaders whom the Prime Minister had consulted earlier. He was expected to take a tough line on the 'land handover' issue, reiterate the Government's 'court verdict or negotiated settlement' stand and make it clear that there was no question of altering the status quo or allowing anyone to disturb it. Perhaps Mr. Vajpayee was acting under pressure from within his own party or the RSS elements when he deviated from the NDA-agreed line. But the acid test is yet to come and in stages — that will be when the VHP pushes ahead with its remaining crucial elements of the temple construction project slated to commence any-time after March 12.

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2002

# Govt. appeasing VHP, says Opposition

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN 28.** Opposition parties today accused the Government of "appeasing" the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) by referring to the Law Ministry the question of handing over the land acquired by the Centre in Ayodhya to a VHP-run trust. They said they were opposed to the handing over of any part of the land to anyone or any body before the final resolution of the Ayodhya dispute by the court.

However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said it would react "after the Law Ministry's report becomes available". The party general-secretary, Sunil Shastri, argued that the Law Minister would examine the feasibility of handing over to the VHP-run trust only the "undisputed land" acquired in Ayodhya. While reiterating that the party was for settlement of the dispute through negotiations or a judicial verdict, the BJP created more than enough manoeuvring room for itself on an issue that was once its pet theme.

Strangely, it refused to react to the abusive language used by the VHP-supported 'sant' rally against the Prime Minister on Sunday, with its leaders pleading they did not know what had been said. Nor was the party willing to say a word against the leaders who attended the rally and kept silent even as the Prime Minister was being attacked.

The Congress ruled out handing over any land to the VHP, including the area adjoining the disputed portion. Citing the 1994 Supreme Court judgment to support its stand, the party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, said, "The Supreme Court judgment prohibits any decision on the matter until there is a final judgment." The Government was only a receiver of the 67-acre piece of land and it could decide

about it only after the dispute was settled by the courts.

The party was conscious of the timing of the "VHP demand", coming as it did during the campaigning for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. The Congress does not want to be viewed as being ambivalent on the issue; hence the unambiguous assertion. It also sought to nip in the bud the VHP's attempt to create the impression that the Congress was in agreement with it because of Sonia Gandhi's decision to depute Arjun Singh and Mr. Reddy to meet with VHP leaders.

Mr. Singh said the Congress had agreed to meet the VHP leaders because it did not want to be seen as shutting the door to talks. The meeting was called off after the VHP announced its 'chetavani yatra'.

"We made it clear to them that since they had announced the 'yatra' — that too in the middle of the elections — their mind appeared made up and there was little point in talking at this stage. We would consider it a later stage." The party emphasised that unlike the Government, which was willing to explore the legal possibility of handing over some of

the land, the Congress was opposed against it as the VHP's temple construction plan included the disputed area on which the Babri Masjid earlier stood.

The CPI pointed out that the Government had clearly given in to the ultimatums issued by the VHP and the 'chetavani yatra', which had challenged the authority of the rule of law and the Supreme Court. The party warned that efforts were on to create a situation in Ayodhya similar to that on December 6, 1992 when the Babri Masjid structure was pulled down. If the temple construction was allowed, it would "break the social fabric" and cause immense fear and insecurity in the minds of the minorities.

The CPI(M) politburo hit out at the Government for appeasing the VHP and taking steps towards helping the "illegal moves for construction of a temple at the disputed site". The reference to the Law Minister was seen by the party as a way of keeping alive the "patently disruptive demand of the VHP" and it could only worsen communal tensions. The move had "dangerous implications for the country's unity."

## Jaitley studying legal aspects

By Our Legal Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 28.** Within a day after the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, told the VHP leaders that their demand for handing over the land around the disputed structure in Ayodhya to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas for construction of a Ram temple would be referred to the Union Law Ministry for its opinion, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, began the

exercise of examining the various legal issues connected with the dispute.

According to highly-placed government sources, Mr. Jaitley will seek the opinion of experts in the next few days before finalising the Ministry's opinion. But sources declined to indicate whether such an opinion would be tendered before the Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh to be held next month.

# Govt to examine legal hurdles to land transfer

Statesman News Service and agencies

NEW DELHI, Jan. 27. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today decided to examine the legal and constitutional hurdles in handing over the land around the make-shift temple in Ayodhya to the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas.

He held talks with a delegation of VHP-backed sants.

The VHP seemed to be trying to redraw the battle-lines regarding the temple issue. It iterated its demand that the land be given to the Nyas by 12 March.

Immediately afterwards, the government came under pressure from two of its key southern allies on the Ayodhya issue. The DMK and the TDP strongly opposed any deviation from the NDA's stand on the temple.

In Chennai, the DMK president, Mr M Karunanidhi, said the NDA government would not alter the stand taken at the time of formation of the alliance to exclude the Ayodhya issue from its common agenda.

"I have no such information", he told reporters when asked to comment on reports that the Union government had decided to examine the legal and constitutional aspects of handing over of the land.

The TDP, a key outside ally of the NDA government, has called for stern action against anybody attempting to build the temple at the disputed site, saying "this will amount to violation of Supreme Court orders".

The TDP urged the Centre to forbid any activity at the disputed site and await the Supreme Court judgment on the issue, says a report from Hyderabad.

The party spokesperson, Mr Chandrasekhara Reddy, said today the TDP would not compromise the secular credentials of the country.

The TDP politburo, chaired by the Andhra Pradesh chief minister, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, met last night to affirm that all parties concerned must

conform to the final verdict of the Supreme Court or resolve the vexed issue through talks.

The politburo said no one was above the law and urged the Union government to prevent any breakdown in the law and order machinery.

In keeping with the government's decision, the Union law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, will examine ways to expedite the court cases for an early resolu-

## VHP barbs

NEW DELHI, Jan. 27. — Mr Dharmendra of the VHP used the choicest of phrases to poke fun at Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for not being firm on either *Hindutva* or in curbing terrorism. He also targeted the RSS for diluting its commitment to hardcore *Hindutva* for the sake of "two or three leaders."

"Six December ko sharmnak ghatna batane wale agar us din wahan nahin hote to aaj yahan nahin hote...Lahore jane ka itna shauk tha to tank par baith ke kyon nahin gaya...Jina nahin aata to mar kyo nahin jate. Darte ho to kasti se utar kyon nahin jate (If Mr Vajpayee had not shared the dais at the Boat Club at the time of launch of the Ramjanambhoomi agitation, he wouldn't have been the Prime Minister... If you wanted to go to Lahore why didn't you go in a tank... If you don't know how to live, why don't you die. If you are afraid, why don't you leave the boat)," he said. — SNS

tion of the Ayodhya tangle.

The government expressed its inability to hand over the land till a consensus was reached or the legal obstacles were removed.

Mr LK Advani and Mr George Fernandes attended the meeting with the VHP sants. Mr Fernandes was present to press the point that the NDA was not one on the issue and the government couldn't take any decision unilaterally because it was bound by

the NDA's national agenda for governance which did not speak of the Ram temple. The meeting continued for about three hours.

The VHP working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, the president Mr Vishnu Hari Dalmia, and the president of the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas, Ramchander Das, were among those who represented the sants.

After the meeting, Mr Fernandes told reporters that the government would examine the "legal and constitutional aspects of handing over the undisputed plots of land to the Nyas." The delegation pressed that the government should at least consider the legal ways to hand over the land which the Central government had acquired in 1993.

The delegation told the Prime Minister that the sants would wait till 12 March for the government to meet their demand. They would begin construction any day after the deadline. Ramchander Das said, "We didn't bring much pressure on the government as there is still time before the deadline expires."

However, Mr Fernandes said the government or the Prime Minister had never given any assurance that the dispute would be resolved by 12 March. "He (Mr Vajpayee) had only expressed a possibility and it (time limit) was not an assurance, but a proposal that this should be done at the earliest."

The VHP appeared torn between the desire to put pressure on the government to allow it begin construction of the temple and the fact that no government would be able to do so without hurting people's sentiments.

The conflict was apparent at the conclusion of the *Sant Chetavani Yatra*. The RSS, which was working from behind the scene and wanted the rally to become a show of strength, was able to gather a huge crowd.

The VHP leaders said the government had earned a temporary reprieve.

Turn to page 4

THE STATESMAN

28 JAN 2002

# VHP may soften stand after meeting PM

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**Sudesh K Verma**  
in New Delhi

Jan. 25. — The VHP is likely to tone down its rhetoric after meeting the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Sunday.

The get-together of "sants" (religious leaders) later is likely to lose its sheen as VHP leaders are then likely to engage themselves in working out a face-saving formula, sources said.

VHP leaders are slated to submit a memorandum to Mr Vajpayee urging him to facilitate the process of construction of the

Ram temple. When these leaders met the Prime Minister earlier, they received a deadline of 12 March by which time Mr Vajpayee claimed he would resolve the issue. The sants said they trusted the Prime Minister.

Some party sources claim that after meeting the Prime Minister, the sants and also the VHP leaders are likely to soften their stand to allow Mr Vajpayee to ensure that the Ram temple is-

## Sudarshan comment

BANGALORE, Jan. 25. — The RSS chief, Mr K S Sudarshan, said here today that the controversial Ramjanmbhoomi issue will not be a decisive factor in the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. Nor would the elections be a referendum on the performance of the BJP-led government at the Centre.

Addressing newsmen immediately after the inauguration of the organisations' three-day Samarasata Sangama or social harmony meet here, Mr Sudarshan said that the RSS as also the VHP wanted the Central government to remove the obstacles in connection with the Ram temple at Ayodhya by 12 March, a Shivratni day. — SNS

sue didn't become an electoral plank in Uttar Pradesh and that the main focus was terrorism. The Prime Minister is keen not to allow the plank to dent the

NDA's much touted secular image. The party's manifesto for the election is likely to say that it would accept the court verdict if a solution was not found through negotiation.

By meeting them, Mr Vajpayee would address their major objection that they should be directly spoken to rather than through the press. His appeal to all to shelve divisive issues had come through the media to which the VHP responded angrily. The VHP senior vice-president, Mr Giriraj Kishore, had said Mr Vajpayee could speak to them directly.

Immediately after getting an appointment, the VHP working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, appeared to be diluting the agenda by saying that the 12 March deadline to the Prime Minister was for handing over the land (not in dispute) to the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas and not the date for start of construction of the proposed grand temple. Also, the organisation postponed its agitational plan till the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections.

THE STATESMAN

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2002

## YET ANOTHER YATRA

9 - *an integral membership*

THE 'CHETAVANI YATRA', a programme involving the sants and orchestrated by the VHP, is only one more attempt by the Sangh Parivar outfits to whip up communal passions. The timing of the campaign, aimed at aiding the majoritarian agenda, is certainly an effort to help the BJP consolidate its voter base through the communal rhetoric once again. It is for this reason that the BJP's stated position — that the party will not be associating in the formal sense with the 'yatra' — assumes significance. It is difficult to take this stated position at face value simply because the BJP as a party is known to have adopted the same strategy — to wait for the passions to be worked up and step in just at the appropriate moment to gain from that — even in the past. Apart from this, the BJP is certainly not an independent outfit but a close associate of the RSS just like the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. This was borne out so clearly in the build-up to the Ayodhya campaign since 1986; after having watched the VHP and the other Sangh Parivar groups build up passions, the BJP joined the campaign in a direct manner only after the Palanpur session. The rath yatra conducted by L. K. Advani provoking communal violence across the country in 1990 was only a part of this strategy.

It is in this context that the nuanced stance put out by the party's general secretary, Maya Singh, in the immediate wake of the sants taking out a procession from Ayodhya (to reach Delhi on January 26) raises concerns. Ms. Singh's statement that the BJP MPs and other elected representatives are free to join the sants in the campaign is indeed a clear signal to the party intends making full use of the VHP's programme by stating that the party will not act against them for their association in this communal campaign. And the refrain that the cam-

paign for the construction of a temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood was one integral to culture is the same old stale argument that the BJP's leaders have come out with ever since they chose aggressive hindutva in place of democratic pretensions as their political strategy in the mid-1980s. In this sense, the BJP's position is hardly different from the beaten track it had been adopting since 1986. And for this very reason, one finds one more instance where the partners in the NDA will be hard put to explain their continued association with the BJP. The claim that they were a part of the NDA only because the BJP had agreed to give up its majoritarian agenda cannot hold even after this.

Be that as it may, the BJP as a party cannot let the VHP and its associates carry on with their 'yatra' at this stage. In the immediate context, the campaign by the sants could lead to a communal flare-up in Uttar Pradesh, given the intense fragmentation in the civil society in the State. Add to this the elections for the State Assembly and the potential for violence thanks to the entrenchment of men with criminal records in the parties. It may be true that all these tensions cannot be dealt with as mere concerns of law and order. It requires the political establishment to indulge in honest introspection. The least that was expected from the BJP in this context (going by the spirit of the views expressed by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in his musings) was to firmly distance the party from such a divisive campaign. Instead, the party has decided to let its members associate themselves with the 'yatra' if they choose to. By doing so, the BJP's top brass is guilty of abdicating its responsibility. For, being the party in power at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP needs to discourage such campaigns rather than remain a "passive" observer.

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2002

## SANTS' BOYCOTT MARS 'CHETAVANI YATRA'

# BJP to keep a safe distance

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 21. Unsure about the capacity of the Ram temple issue to sway the Uttar Pradesh voter, the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders are sending conflicting signals about the ongoing "chetavani yatra" organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

While the BJP MPs are free to join the "yatra" and no disciplinary action would be taken against them for doing so, the party would keep a safe distance, it was stated today. "The Ram mandir issue is one of national identity and is a cultural issue, it has been a big issue for us, but never a political issue," Maya Singh, general secretary, said today. She added that the "BJP has never seen the Ram temple as an electoral plank".

Even as the "yatra" left Ayodhya and is now on its way to Delhi, reports suggest that several important "sants" have stayed away. These include Nritya Gopal Das and Paramhans.

With the party's State election manifesto yet to be finalised, it is

not certain whether the Ram temple issue will figure in it or not. It seems that the central leadership is not in favour of including it, and there has been more than a hint to that effect from the Prime Minister.

### 'Final assault'

AYODHYA, JAN. 21. Launching a "final assault" in its campaign for

*9 minutes*  
the Ram temple construction, the VHP today kicked off a saints' procession from here to Parliament but it was marred by a boycott by the chief of Ram Janam Bhoomi Trust, Mahant Ramachandra Paramhans, who said he would oppose the BJP in the Assembly elections.

The 'Sant chetavani yatra' set off in a saffron cavalcade to press

the Centre for handing over the land for temple construction in Ayodhya amidst chanting of "Jai Shri Ram" and declaration that the temple construction would begin any time around March 12.

Hundreds of sants, including 90 from Nepal, led by Shankaracharya Divyananad Saraswati and VHP international working president, Ashok Singhal, left for Lucknow.

As news of the sulking Paramhans reached the venue, Mr. Singhal stayed back in a bid to persuade him, who is annoyed over the strong security measures in and around the make-shift temple here and also in Ayodhya imposed by the Government.

At the start of the yatra, which reached Lucknow in the evening and is slated to converge in Delhi on January 26, the VHP leader, Praveenbhai Togadia, declared "the temple will be reconstructed at any date around March 12. We cannot wait beyond a point. Now it will be a fight to the finish". — PTI

### Curbs relaxed in Ayodhya

AYODHYA, JAN. 21. In the backdrop of serious misgivings expressed by VHP leaders about the heightened security in this temple town affecting normal life, the Uttar Pradesh Principal Secretary (home), Naresh Dayal, rushed here today and agreed to relax restriction on entry of heavy vehicles on national highway passing through Ayodhya.

Mr. Dayal, who held more than two hours of talks with Mr. Paramahans and local BJP leaders and district administration officials, said the other demands like relaxing the curbs on the entry of cars and small vehicles from national highway to Hanuman Garhi temple, Kanak Bhawan and the make-shift temple in the acquired land would be considered.

He told reporters that alternative security arrangements at the important temples and vehicle parking areas near Hanumangarhi temple and Kanak Bhawan temple would be finalised after considering the security perceptions in Ayodhya. — PTI

THE HINDU

22 JAN 2002

# VHP gets Govt to relax temple town security

Ayodhya, January 21

THE UTTAR Pradesh Government has agreed to relax curbs on the entry of heavy vehicles into Ayodhya. The VHP had recently expressed its worries that the heightened security was affecting normal life in the temple town.

Uttar Pradesh principal secretary (Home) Naresh Dayal held more than two hours of talks with Ramjanmabhumi Trust chief Ramchandra Paramahans and local BJP leaders and district administration officials on the issue. He said the other demands like relaxing curbs on the entry of cars and small vehicles from national highway to Hanuman Garhi temple, Kanak Bhawan and the makeshift temple in the acquired land would also be considered.

Alternate security arrangements at the important temples and vehicle parking areas near Hanuman Garhi temple and Kanak Bhawan temple would also be decided.

Dayal, who flew here along with the director general of police R K Pandit, drove straight to Digambar Akhara to meet mahant Ramchandra Paramahans who had boycotted VHP's dharma sabha yesterday. He also refused to join the *Sant Chetawani Yatra* today protesting "unnecessary security" which was causing problems for devotees.

No vehicles are allowed to enter Ayodhya city and checkpoints are set up at all entry points to reduce terror threats.

Mahant Ramchandra Paramahans told reporters later that he was satisfied with the assurance given by Dayal, who also promised to consider his other demands, including permission to hold the *Sri Ram Prakatotsava* and offer puja and darshan to the deity of Lord Ram

in the makeshift temple. The function is being held every year for the past 50 years.

VHP president Ashok Singhal said he was against "impractical" restrictions on residents and devotees in Ayodhya. He talked to the Chief Minister last night in this regard and apprised him of the difficulties faced by people in the holy city.

He said he would soon speak to Union Home Minister L K Advani on the question of allowing 'Ram Prakatotsava' in Ayodhya.

Singhal admitted that the decision of Ramchandra Paramahans to back out of the *Sant Yatra* today was "not an ordinary matter" but hoped that he would join it at Kanpur on January 22.

Mahant Paramahans said he would continue to be a part of the agitation for the temple construction and urged the Centre to remove legal obstacles to allow temple construction after March 12, as promised by the Prime Minister.

**Cong slams Sangh 'spectacle':** The Congress today slammed the BJP and Sangh Parivar for raking up the Ayodhya issue once again when Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh were round the corner.

The party, however, has expressed hope that the people of the State would snub the "shameful spectacle" of the saffron family. "We are once again witnessing the pathetic and shameful spectacle of reviving the temple issue. Whenever it is election time, it's temple time for the Sangh Parivar," Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy told reporters.

Peeved with the VHP's *Chetawani Yatra*, Reddy said the Congress considers VHP, RSS and BJP as the "indivisible" unit of one organisation.

PTI



# Christian leader briefs Advani on the 'danger' of Jhabua rally

By Sudhir K. Singh  
Times News Network

BHOPAL: Alarmed by the massive turn out at the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) anti-conversion Hindu Sangam of Adivasis at Jhabua, president of the Madhya Pradesh Christian Association, Indra Ayengar, has written to union home minister L.K. Advani on the long-term dangers posed by such a naked show of "muscle power".

Ms Ayengar's letter to Mr Advani stated that such display of religious fervour against a minority community was no less reprehensible than terrorism since both put the fear of God in those who were the targets of the attacks. Jhabua and its neighbouring districts had for the last three years been facing an acute food and water shortage which compelled many tribals to migrate. Filling their stomachs was therefore the first priority of anyone seeking to help. The RSS, on the contrary, was trying to ignite religious passions. "But how can a half-starved, naked person think of anything but food?" she asked.

Ms Ayengar in her letter criticised RSS chief Sudarshan for confining his diatribe at the 'sangam' on conversions which, he felt, were behind societal conflict in Adivasi areas. Focussing on the wretched condition of tribals and Dalits might have been a better option. A recent survey conducted by a local agency had pointed out that semi-feudal forces still held sway in villages even 55 years after Independence. Dalits continued to be subjugated and

humiliated. Caste discrimination was widely prevalent. What's worse, they were denied entry inside temples. The overwhelming majority of them were landless labourers who were not even paid their statutory wages. The survey covered Raisen, Vidisha, Indore, Shahdol and Sheopur districts.

The survey team had visited Gwali Palasia village in Indore district where Patidars ran amuck and 45 Dalit houses were burnt merely because the body of a Dalit woman was cremated at a crematorium meant exclusively for Patidars. In the tribal dominated district of Shahdol, medical facilities were not available in villages. A person affected by gangrene was compelled to cut off his foot with a blade.

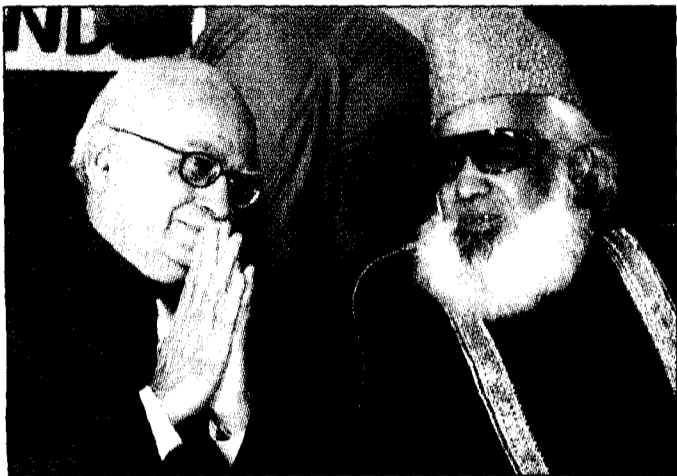
Under such circumstances, could the tribals be blamed for putting their trust in missionaries who had been working for their material and spiritual welfare for over a century, Ms Ayengar's asked Mr Advani in her letter. The Indian Constitution gave the minorities the right to propagate their religion. Then, there is the law known as the "M.P. Dharma Swatantra Adhiniyam, 1968" in which anyone using force or seeking to convert by fraudulent means could be prosecuted. "What more does the RSS chief want?" Complaints of unlawful conversions, if any, should therefore be lodged with the district administration, the letter said. Reacting to the letter, BJP-RSS sources said some leading lights of the Christian community seemed hell bent on spreading canards about their organisational agenda.

Home minister applauds minorities' participation in war against terror

# Diplomat Advani demolishes label

*J. M. M. M.*

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN



LK Advani at the meet. (AFP)

New Delhi, Jan. 19: L.K. Advani, whose political profile is inseparable from the Ayodhya movement, today lived up to his newfound role of globe-trotting diplomat by making his first serious effort to reach out to the minorities.

Flanked by clerics and intellectuals, Advani attacked Pakistan at a function organised by the Islamic Council of India but took care to make it clear that his criticism was not a reflection on Muslims living in India.

Among those present were the vice-chancellors of the Jamia Millia Islamia and Hamdard universities, the *shahzada nasheens* (head priests) of the Dargah Nizamuddin and Ajmer Sharief, as well as diplomats from Islamic countries.

Describing the December 13 attack on Parliament as a "turning point for India", he said the war against terrorism was not between Chris-

tians and Muslims or Hindus and Muslims but between a "civilised society and barbarians".

"In the eyes of Islam, the killings of innocents was a sin and a crime," Advani said. Pointing out that India had more Muslims than Pakistan, he said that despite the terrorist strikes and the border tension, Hindus and Muslims were living peacefully.

He also appreciated the increasing participation of Muslims in the anti-terrorism campaign in India — the most vital "test" of nationalism from the Sangh parivar's point of view.

The head priest of Dargah Khwaja Nizamuddin reciprocated Advani's sentiment by admitting that clerics had "failed" to educate the people on the real meaning of Islam. Islamic Council chairman Qazi Mohammad Mian Mazhari asserted that Indian Muslims would not allow Pakistan to succeed in its designs in Kashmir, which he called a "symbol of Indian secularism".

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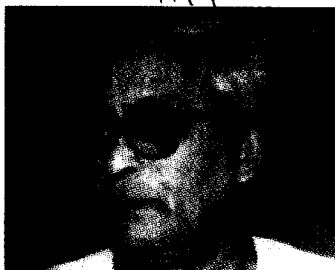
# CM vows crackdown on rogue madrasas

HT Correspondent  
Siliguri, January 19

THE STATE Government will crack down on madrasas teaching and preaching terror. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said here today that his Government, with help from central Intelligence agencies, had drawn up a list of such madrasas.

Calling the mushrooming of madrasas in some districts along the Indo-Bangla border a "new and grave problem", he said such institutions had come up with funds from abroad. "These are not even affiliated to the West Bengal Madrasa Board, and many are involved in subversive activities. They have been preaching hatred and terror and encouraging people to indulge in anti-national activities. My Government, with cooperation from central Intelligence agencies, has drawn up a list of such madrasas and we will close them down," he said.

Work on the crackdown had begun, he said. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was active in North Bengal and ISI agents had been taking advantage of the Siliguri corridor to establish a direct link between



BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

Bangladesh and Nepal to carry out anti-Indian activities, he added. "ISI agents have been arrested from Kolkata, Murshidabad, Malda and Siliguri, and thanks to our stepped-up vigil, we hope to arrest more such agents soon". Kathmandu had become a major base for the ISI, he added.

He pitched for a review of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty. "This is necessary in view of two developments — setting up of ISI bases and the growth of Maoist insurgency in that country," he said. Though he did not specify which parts of the treaty he wanted reviewed, party sources hinted that the free flow of people across the border allowed by the treaty was a major clause the CM wanted altered.

## Arjuna revamp, sports schools on Govt agenda

Sourav Sanyal  
Kolkata, January 19

THE GOVERNMENT will slacken its grip on the selection of Arjuna awardees, letting eminent sportspersons sit on the judges' panel rather than politicians, Sports Ministry sources said here tonight.

Earlier on Saturday, Union Sports Minister Uma Bharati told *Hindustan Times* about "a complete revamp of the Arjuna awards scheme... (to end) all allegations of favouritism". Last year's awards were steeped in controversy with Milkha Singh turning down the Arjuna, alleging favouritism in selection.

Bharati also said her ministry was keen to set up sports academies in every State under the Tenth Plan. They would be joint ventures between the Centre, the States and private parties, who could get management control if they claimed 51 per cent stake.

Talks have been held with representatives of the chambers. "The Finance Minister has promised an enhanced sports budget."

Detailed report on Page 16

the conference in New Delhi. (AFP)

# Advani meet

► FROM PAGE 1

9-6 2002 J. Minister

Within the BJP, it is an accepted fact that Advani is Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's "natural successor". But there were doubts whether he would be accepted by a coalition of ideologically disparate entities or, for that matter, by the liberal sections because of his hawkish image.

Even the BJP had appeared convinced there was little point in projecting him as a minority-friendly leader as his image of a Hindutva hardliner had raised what seemed like a well-entrenched mental block among the minorities against him. Today, however, the home minister himself indicated he was ready to shed the ideological baggage of the past.

In his Nagpur declaration of 2000, former BJP chief Bangaru Laxman had described Muslims as the "blood of our blood and the flesh of our flesh". This was perceived as the first serious realisation on the BJP's part that it would not help to alienate a community that accounted for nearly 16 per cent of the population.

But the speech did not go down well with Advani loyalists, who felt Laxman had alienated the party's traditional supporters.

After Laxman's exit, the Nagpur message was buried. The hard-line-versus-moderation polemics continued to rage, with one section being of the view that issues like the Ram temple should be kept alive in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh elections.

But Advani's presence at a Muslim function is a sign that for the moment, moderation is likely to prevail in the BJP's political responses.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 JULY 2002

## Temple issue: VHP rejects PM's appeal

By Our Staff Reporter

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 16.** Asserting that there was no question of reconsidering the Government's plea to put the contentious issue of Ram temple construction at Ayodhya on the backburner, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) today said prominent saints and VHP leaders from all over the country would converge on Delhi on January 26 for over a week to chalk out programmes for the temple construction.

Addressing a press conference here, the VHP's senior vice-president, Giriraj Kishore, said they would not pay heed to the appeals by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Bharatiya Janata Party president, K. Jana Krishnamurthy, not to raise contentious issues at this crucial juncture. "If there is a war-like situation, then first cancel the forthcoming Assembly polls and other important government engagements, then only can we consider postponing our Ram temple construction programme," he added.

Cautioning the Government against blindly trusting the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, Mr. Kishore demanded that an ultimatum be served on Pakistan to hand over the 20 terrorists wanted by India, failing which Pakistan should be declared an "enemy state" and all necessary action taken against it.

Welcoming Gen. Musharraf's statement on the misuse of "madrasas" and mosques in Pakistan, the VHP leader said the Government should also act on the same lines and close all such institutions that were encouraging terrorism.

**THE HINDU**

17 JAN 2002

# Kerala Council of Churches criticises talks with RSS

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN. 7. The Kerala Council of Churches, affiliated to the National Council of Churches of India (NCCI), has expressed reservations about the dialogue between the RSS and the NCCI and urged its parent body to reassess the process.

The executive committee of the Kerala Council took the stand as back as in October last that the NCCI should have invited a cross-section of the Hindu Community for a dialogue instead of exclusively talking to the RSS.

The RSS, it said, did not represent the entire Hindu community and by talking to its leaders, the NCCI would be bestowing on them credibility that they did not deserve on any count. Intolerant of other religions, they had demolished the Babri Masjid, threatened to construct a temple in the place of the masjid and continued to propagate religious fundamentalism, communalism and cultural nationalism, it said.

The committee said the call of the RSS Chief some time back to reinterpret the scriptures of the minority communities implied S. Golwaker's definition of nationalism according to which the Muslims and Christians must change some of their religious principles, to be in tune with Hindu faith. Such statements of the leaders of the RSS were very much suggestive of their hidden agenda.

The pertinent question, hence, was the kind of response Christians should make to the forces represented by the RSS whose chief had questioned the loyalty of the churches and called for Indianisation of the religious minorities and a reorganisation of their structures.

The basic concept of democracy, secularism and pluralism should be affirmed as the ground for a dialogue.

The strategy adopted by the RSS for a dialogue with churches, the committee observed, appeared to be intended to divide the churches. No compelling reasons had been outlined for the dialogue.

The motive behind the role played by a member of the Minority Commission in the matter needed to be ascertained.

The lack of clarity on the agenda for the dialogue,

coupled with hasty arrangements, raised many questions. The admiration of the RSS chief for the Orthodox and the Mar Thoma Churches as the "only Indianised churches" appeared to be an attempt in dividing the Indian churches as swadeshi and videshi. Sankritisation was the only model which the RSS could accept in India.

These important issues were not raised in the dialogue. Besides, basic issues such as commitment to democracy, secularism, fundamental and civil rights were not in focus.

The churches, it said, were duty-bound to strengthen secular democracy in its own interest and in the wider interests of the nation, when religious fundamentalism is on the rise, threatening the basic structure of the society.

"There had been no emphasis during the dialogue on the social order of the Indian society and the faith relations thereof. The great divide in our society based on caste and the plight of the lower caste, Dalits, tribals and women were never aired. It is well known that the Dalits and other lower castes were never part of any major religion with full equality and they have suffered untouchability and atrocities. We have to emphasise the need for religious renaissance that grants full fundamental rights including religious rights to all citizens."

The committee felt that the NCCI failed to confront the RSS and the extremist elements of the Hindutva project. There was no spirited rebuttal of the RSS allegations about Christian churches and their missions in India. There was also a conspicuous absence of a strong defence of the right to conversion as a fundamental human right, guaranteed under the Constitution.

The Dalit and tribal awakening as the real concern behind the conversion issue was hardly touched and focussed.

The whole process of dialogue, it added, reflected an apologetic church, constrained by its minority complex pleading for charity from the majority religious leaders.

The RSS leaders, on the other hand, took it as an opportunity to reaffirm their slogan of cultural nationalism and its intolerance to plurality.

## Christian council seeks U.K.'s intervention

*9-11-2002*  
**BANGALORE, JAN. 5.** The Global Council of Indian Christians has sent an open letter to the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, urging him to prevail upon the Indian Government to protect the country's pluralist tradition and multicultural fabric and preserve and defend the Constitution in its entirety as enunciated by the founding fathers.

The letter, written by the Council's national convener, Sajan K. George, also called upon Mr. Blair to press the Government to take all measures to contain the politics of hate and misinformation, setting one community against the other. Other pleas were to press the Centre to stop communalisation of national democratic institutions, education and history and a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.

Mr. Blair was also asked to prevail upon the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, to take steps to address India's apprehensions about cross-border terrorism and close down all terrorist training camps in Pakistan and occupied Kashmir.

*HD B*  
Mr. George said: "I am taking liberty to write this letter because of our fear and concern about the people of our country and for everlasting peace and harmony in the subcontinent".

*8/11*  
The Council said it was perturbed by the extensive distribution of arms and training carried out by Hindu militant organisations in the name of "Trishul Diksha Samarohs".

The letter accused the Human Resource Development Ministry under Murli Manohar Joshi of unleashing intellectual terrorism by rewriting the history of India.

There is a need to root out terrorism from India but the attempts by a section to define terrorism along religious and communal lines will seriously undermine the very purpose. Instead of enacting draconian laws such as POTO, the Central Government may be advised to increase effectiveness through participation of the international community, the Council added.

- 6 JAN 2002



# Remote-control temple leash on VHP

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

**New Delhi, Jan. 4:** With the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) ambivalent in its response to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's appeal to put the Ram temple on the backburner and focus on the fight against terrorism, the government may try and enlist support from other quarters to pressure its leaders.

Official sources said the Shankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth, Swami Jayendra Saraswati, may issue an appeal urging the VHP to put off its agitation for the construction of

a Ram temple on the disputed site in Ayodhya, for the moment at least.

Sources said the appeal, like Vajpayee's, is expected to stress that the nation must be united in fighting terrorism exported from across the border and not allow its attention to be distracted by other issues.

The VHP had declared that if the issue was not sorted out before March 12, the deadline set by its *dharam sansad* last February, it would go ahead and start building the temple.

The Kanchi Shankaracharya is considered to be the most powerful of the four Shanka-

racharyas presiding over the important Hindu religious orders. He has been politically inclined, too, and has performed a *havan* in Delhi over the past six days for the well-being of people and protection against terrorist attacks.

Jayendra Saraswati and his second-in-command Vijayendra Saraswati had presided over the "Prathyanya Devi" *havan*, which concluded today at the Kamakoti Kamakshi Meditation and Cultural Centre.

Though the Shankaracharya has not associated himself openly with the VHP — he did not turn up at the last *dharam sansad* during the Kumbh Mela

despite the VHP's announcement — he has issued statements supporting the Ram mandir.

He has also backed the BJP agenda of reviewing the Constitution and opposed cow slaughter, urging for a ban on it. But unlike Swami Saroopanand, the Shankaracharya of Dwarikapeeth and Jyotishmath, who has publicly supported the Congress and is seen with its leaders, the Kanchi Shankaracharya has kept a relatively low profile.

This, government sources maintained, added to his credibility. They had reasons to believe that if the Kanchi

Shankaracharya worked on the VHP it could defer its temple-building programme and spare the Centre a major embarrassment.

Though VHP general secretary Acharya Giriraj Kishore had yesterday said there was no way they would reconsider their plans, unless the country went to war, working president Ashok Singhal indicated in Hyderabad today that he could soften the stand.

Asked if the VHP would rethink its March 12 deadline, Singhal sounded circumspect. "It is a matter that will be reviewed by the *dharam sansad*

and only the sants can decide. We (the VHP) do not have a separate view on this," he said.

While agreeing that the country's safety, security and unity were the biggest issues now, the VHP chief said "upholding dharama was equally important".

## Gita Jayanti

Hindu organisations in collaboration with the Singapore government are organising the two-day Gita Jayanti celebrations in the island state tomorrow and on Sunday. Senior BJP leader and minister of state for railways O. Rajagopal will attend the ceremony.

THE TELEGRAPH

5 JAN 2002

## VHP writes to parties on temple construction

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, DEC. 31. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has sought support from a cross-section of political opinion to get possession of the land for construction of the proposed Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Letters have been sent to the Samata Party leader, Mr. George Fernandes, the Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalithaa, and the Shiv Sena supremo, Mr. Bal Thackeray, seeking their support while efforts were being made to enlist the cooperation of the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, the VHP international general secretary, Mr. Pravinbhai Togadia, said here today.

He told reporters that if the Centre failed to hand over the land in the vicinity of the disputed site by March 12, it would have to face an agitation by the VHP. The Parishad was determined to start construction from the announced date and there was no going back on the promise.

The VHP made only two categories of the country's political opinion — those who supported the cause of the Ram temple and others who supported "terrorist Babar".

The second group "was a slave to the Muslim vote bank, and the VHP would expose it".

Mr. Togadia claimed that only a piece of land measuring 80 feet by

40 feet at Ayodhya was disputed. The rest of the 42 acres with the Union Government was free from all disputes and could be handed over to the "Hindu society for construction of the Ram temple".

Giving details of the VHP's next programme to recover the Ram temple site, Mr. Togadia said that on the birth anniversary of the Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, on January 21, a march by Hindu sants would start from Ayodhya.

It would pass through Lucknow and Kanpur where public meetings would be held to create public opinion in favour of the temple construction. The march would arrive in Delhi on January 27. Five hundred religious leaders would be present at the start of the march and the number would swell to 5,000 later.

Extending all support to the Government's fight against terrorism, Mr. Togadia said as a result of Pakistan-sponsored "Islamic Jihad" more than 50,000 people had been killed during the past 20 years. Terrorism had taken a toll of 6,100 security personnel. More than 25,000 young men had been trained by Pakistan. In 150 districts, Pakistan's ISI had established its own network with the help of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). He wanted the Government to take all steps to end the menace of terrorism without paying heed to pressures being brought in this regard.