

# Saffron attack on Orissa church

HT Correspondent  
Bhubaneswar, Nov 21

A CHURCH was vandalised and a nun maltreated by suspected VHP and Bajrang Dal activists in Orissa's Deogarh district on Thursday. The police have registered two cases in this connection, though no arrests have been made.

A police team has been deployed at the church and the situation is now under control, an official said. The incident took place after the conversion of four tribal families at Amulpani village of the district.

An official said, "Some preachers belonging to Gospel Asia Believers' Group had come from Jharsuguda to convert the families. After getting news of the attempt to convert the tribals, VHP and Bajrang Dal activists came looking for them, but they had already left". Unable to

find them, the activists forced themselves into the house of one Mandakini Gadanayak where the preachers were staying as tenants.

According to reports, the VHP and Bajrang Dal activists took away religious literature and photographs and posters of Jesus Christ from Gadanayak's home and later burnt them.

The activists later proceeded to the Rajamunda church, situated one kilometer away from Deogarh. Stones were pelted at the church, which damaged the window glass panes. The activists also misbehaved with a nun present at the church. The police have registered two cases relating to the forcible entry into Gadanayak's home and misbehaviour with the nun.

The police said the conversions appeared to have taken place in violation of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act.

# RSS revives Ayodhya proposals once again

By Rajesh Ramachandran  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** There appears to be a possibility of yet another round of negotiations between individual Muslim leaders and the Sangh Parivar as the government seems keen on a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya issue.

Though it is not clear whether the same negotiators would be involved in this round of talks, too, Sangh Parivar sources said that the BJP wanted to begin construction of a temple at the Babri Masjid site before the Vajpayee government at the Centre completed its term.

Any forward movement on this issue could be read from the references to Ayodhya in RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan's Vijaya Dashami speech in Nagpur on Saturday. However, RSS spokesman Ram Madhav said, "Our stand remains the same. The whole area should be handed over to us. And Kashi and Mathura are non-negotiable."

But a senior Parivar leader told 'The Times of India' that "the Pejawar Swami and the Kanchi Sankaracharya have over a month



Ram Madhav

**Our stand remains the same. The whole area should be handed over to us. And Kashi and Mathura are non-negotiable**

ago mooted the idea of handing over a couple of acres of land for the construction of a mosque in the undisputed land in return for the disputed land. There is also another formula of giving an assurance on Kashi and Mathura in return for the disputed land."

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad had announced a grand rally in Delhi on October 15 and a march to Ayodhya on October 17.

Though all these agitational programmes do help the BJP in times of elections, this time the Parivar is keen on a solution.

"Around three lakh people would come to Delhi, every BJP MLA in Gujarat could mobilise 1,000 work-

ers each. Still, it is a question of VHP's credibility. The BJP, too, cannot go back to the people asking for votes in the name of Ram temple yet again. The agitation began in 1983 and there has to be some conclusion," said a Parivar leader.

The RSS is not keen on giving away land in the vicinity of the Babri Masjid site, nor is it ready to give an assurance on Kashi and Mathura. On the first proposal, the Parivar response seems to be that the mosque could be constructed seven to eight km away from the Masjid at Mir Baqi's mazar in a nearby village.

On the second issue of retracting from its claim on historic mosques in Kashi and Mathura, the Parivar seems to be divided. The Sangh, too, knows well that Muslim leaders would be sceptical about the Sangh's promises on Kashi and Mathura as the issue could be raked whenever it suits the Parivar.

But now it seems the Parivar, including the BJP, is keen to break the deadlock and have a temple as a "fulfilment of promises" before they go back to seek votes again.

## Togadia threatens riots if march is stopped

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Monday threatened riots if its Ayodhya march on Friday is stopped by the Central or the Uttar Pradesh government.



Pravin Togadia

On Wednesday, its members will hold a rally at Ramlila Maidan and go around the Old Delhi areas before setting out to Ayodhya. In an attempt to distance itself from the government and occupy the opposition space, the VHP has unleashed a vitriolic attack against Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy PM L.K. Advani and UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav.

The fact remains that even before the VHP announced its programme, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had welcomed the move to hold rallies to press for a Ram temple law, and the BJP, including the PM, had not opposed the VHP programme.

Yet, VHP leader Pravin Togadia on Monday spewed venom at Mr Vajpayee. "We felt ashamed of the PM's statement (asking the UP government to trust the VHP's promise of a peaceful march to Ayodhya). It is a joke that the PM is asking the UP CM's permission. If the CRPF fires at the pilgrims on October 17, it would mean that Mr Vajpayee has fired the shots." Asked whether he was issuing a threat, Mr Togadia gave a rather convoluted explanation for his forecast about riots: "Riots will happen if we are not allowed to proceed to Ayodhya because jihadi elements would get encouraged by the government's actions."

Mr Togadia was repeatedly asked why he was naming Mr Vajpayee all the time when the decision to deploy the CRPF and stop the VHP activists could have been taken by Mr Advani in the PM's absence. Mr Togadia's stock reply was that the PM is the head of the government.

However, Mr Togadia at his press conference failed to explain the timing of the march two months short of the all important assembly elections. He admitted that he had supported the BJP in the past. "I want to remind the BJP that I had addressed 62 public meetings for the BJP during the Gujarat assembly elections. Now, the cadre should put pressure on the leadership to bring the BJP back to the Hindutva path," he said, implying that the BJP has strayed away from its core agenda.

# Temple Tide

## ASI report a green signal for saffron

Religion & Power

Let's drop the charade. The ASI report, which has reportedly found 'evidence' for a temple-like structure under the demolished Babri masjid, has already been seized upon by the mandir votaries as vindication of their claim that tangible historical evidence is on their side as well. Though historians and other experts have questioned the validity of the conclusions reached in the report, their objections are likely to be brushed aside by the fresh impetus given to the temple tide. The 'findings', of course, have no force in law. The court will have to adjudicate as to how, if at all, the report has a bearing on who really has a claim to the disputed site in what is no more than a property dispute. Going by the track record of most judicial processes in the country, the matter, now involving more than half a millennia of history, might easily drag for many more years yet. Unless, of course, the invigorated advocates of the mandir apply political and other pressure to bring it to a speedy conclusion favourable to them. Does this mean that the temple is a fait accompli? Some might be tempted to argue that the mandir had already become a foregone conclusion the day parivar zealots pulled down the masjid in full public gaze on December 6, 1992, in flagrant violation of all constitutional norms and the law of the land.

Though legal proceedings were initiated, not one of the accused has been brought to book. This could be interpreted to mean that an extra-legal sanction for the 'once and future' temple was already established in the public domain. So what is the next step? While the law takes its own protracted course, perhaps it's time for all parties concerned to grasp the nettle and accept the inevitable. However, if the temple were to be built by riding roughshod over constitutional norms — as the mosque was destroyed — it would deal a grievous blow to one of the fundamental concepts on which the republic is founded. For, in effect, it would mean taking the first step on the path of founding a Hindu rashtra. It's time for sober reflection on whether any of us, of whatever community or creed, would want to so radically transform the polity which is our common meeting ground, and, indeed, the basis for all our negotiations with each other. Is such a profound sea-change either desirable or necessary? Perhaps not. A possible way-out would be via a negotiated settlement, which, through a quid pro quo arrangement, would permit work on the temple to begin without compromising the honour and self-respect of the minority community.

# Kalam warns against politics of religion

Jay Raina  
New Delhi, August 14

IN A scathing indictment of the politics of non-issues, President A.P.J Abdul Kalam on Thursday night called for a moratorium on all such impediments to national development. "Future generations will not remember us for how many churches, mosques, temples or gurdwaras we add, but what we do for the growth of a prosperous and safe India wedded to economic prosperity and its civilisational heritage," he said in his Independence Day-Eve speech to the nation.

Calling upon his countrymen to commit

themselves to realising the vision of a developed India, he appealed to political and religious leaders, opinion makers, the media as well as ordinary citizens to avoid wasting their energies on "non-issues".

"We have to prioritise our thoughts on national development and make all other issues 'non-issues'. This will ensure focus and thrust on the development process and prevent dissipation of energy and resources on non-productive issues," he said.

Warning against divisive forces using terrorism to further ethnic and religious fundamentalism and political ambition, he said that

in the context of the emerging global challenges, the prevailing reasons for conflict would become insignificant and unwarranted.

"This change in the global paradigm" called for a change of perspective for "all our neighbours to work for a bigger vision," he said. Referring to the Prime Minister's visit to China, the President said it had paved the way for resolution of some outstanding issues. He mentioned India's peace initiatives without naming Pakistan. Expressing concern over the suicide attacks in J&K, he said that no religion mandated killing others for its own sustenance.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 AUG 2003

## FREE THE COW

In India anything from caste to cows can become issue to be exploited as electoral assets. There is other explanation for the sudden cabinet decision to promulgate a bill to ban cow slaughter. The motives are underlined by the rush to move the bill in this session of Parliament. It would suit secular fundamentalists to put the blame for all this on the door of the Bharatiya Janata Party. It is true that the *sangh परिवार* has, since its birth, carried on a campaign to protect the cow, which it thinks is sacred to Hindus. In that sense, it can be said that the BJP is merely going by a long established agenda. The matter, however, is not that simple. The Congress has not hesitated to cling to the cow in its quest for votes. In Madhya Pradesh, the chief minister, Mr Digvijay Singh, has made the cow the state animal and has begun a campaign to prevent it from being slaughtered. In the race to win Hindu votes, both the BJP and the Congress are equally eager to play the cow card. This might be par for the course for the BJP but there must be some Congressmen at least who are dismayed by Mr Singh's variety of populism. In the pursuit of the majority votes, other sections of the population who prefer to eat beef, often because it is the cheapest meat available, will be further marginalized. The proposal to ban cow slaughter, from whichever quarter it comes, can only be seen as a partisan religious argument. A ban on cow slaughter invokes state power to promote the alleged religious sentiments of one community.

In a democracy, any argument to ban something to pander to a religious community stands on very dubious intellectual ground. It privileges the opinions and practices of one community over those of other communities. If for reasons specific to Hindus, cow slaughter is banned, then Muslims have the right to preserve their own practices and reject the common civil code. The campaign to ban the killing of cows is premised on the utterly mistaken belief that India is a Hindu country. India is not a Hindu country in demographic terms. Nor is it a Hindu country in terms of the Constitution which lies at the very heart of the Indian republic. It is one thing to campaign for the protection of the cow and quite another to use state power to ban cow slaughter. No less a worshipper of the cow than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi once said that "there is no service or protection of the cow in trying to save her by force." To seek intellectual premises of the present proposal is to dignify it. It is an act of graceless electioneering which can only be deplored.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 AUG 2003



HOME AWAY FROM HOME: Qutubuddin Ansari and his family at the Howrah station on Saturday. SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HT

## From one mob to another

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, August 9

AS QUTUBUDDIN Ansari peeped out of his Geetanjali Express compartment, his heart missed a beat at the daunting sight of the huge crowd waiting for him at Howrah Station on Saturday afternoon. Only, this mob wasn't after his life, they had gathered to welcome him to a new one.

Though the CPI(M) laid out a red-carpet welcome for the face of Gujarat riots, Ansari seemed tongue-tied, even scared, and haltingly said he was "happy to be in his new home".

A tired Ansari — wife Tahera Banu and children

Rukaiya and Zeeshan in tow — took some time to get off the train, possibly bracing for the elaborate welcome. Clad in a crumpled blue shirt, Ansari's only belongings were a trunk and a couple of suitcases. The rest will be taken care of by the party.

As the family inched its way to the parking lot, DYFI activists and Mahila Samity members marched along with him, in a sign of things to come. The party is playing the saviour, and won't let anyone forget that.

Back 'home', at 10 Tiljala Road, a hero's welcome awaited Ansari. The area was swarming with people anticipating the arrival of "an im-

portant neighbour", as a person in the crowd put it. As the family got off the car, he was greeted with a shower of petals by DYFI workers, who shut the gates of the house as soon as family got in. The party has patented Ansari, and is in no mood for sharing.

After a quick snack and lots of coaxing, Ansari agreed to meet the media. He seemed surprisingly forgiving for a man who has gone through what he has. Gujarat, he said, has always been used by politicians. "The people of Gujarat are not bad by nature, They have always been manipulated."

Welcome home.

See also Kolkata Live

# Sonia invokes Ram to fight Atal

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Aug. 9: The sky was sombre and overcast. The threat of a downpour hung throughout. At a function marking the 61st anniversary of the launch of the Quit India movement by Mahatma Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi chose equally sombre words to urge the people to throw out the BJP-led central government.

Referring to the BJP's practice of invoking Ram's name whenever elections are round the corner, the Congress chief said the party was hoodwinking Ram himself.

The BJP remembers Ram only at election time. "Yeh sochtein hain ki issey unki asliyat chhup jayegi," Sonia said. "I only want to say 'Hey Ram!' Save the country from such devotees who are bent upon destroying Ram's *maryada*," the Congress chief said to loud cheers from the crowd.

A large crowd waited for three hours at the Laxmi Nagar district centre park to hear Sonia despite the mild drizzle and ankle-deep slush.

The open park in the east Delhi suburb where Sonia launched her party's Delhi poll campaign today is in sharp contrast to the closed Talkatora stadium where deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani will launch the BJP's parivartan rally tomorrow.

Sonia told the crowd that the Congress had never discriminated along caste and communal lines for political advantage. Referring to the "martyrdom" of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, she said: "The language of gun and bullets is easy but many do not have the guts to eat bullets for our society and the country."

The Congress chief attacked the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance for its "failure on all fronts" and for "misleading" and "dividing" people by playing communal politics. Sonia said her party was committed to improving the condition of the people and developing the country.

She spoke a few hours after defence minister George Fernandes accused her party of launching a "motivated and sustained" campaign over the Cen-

tral Vigilance Commission report on arms purchases during the Kargil war. Sonia hit out at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government for its "unprecedented" denial of vital documents relating to the purchases to the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

She accused the Centre of taking bribes in purchasing coffins for soldiers killed in the Kargil conflict. "What expectation can one have from such a government which does not show respect to the nation's martyrs?" she asked.

The Congress chief asked the people to take a pledge to oust the BJP-led government which she alleged had "failed on all fronts".

Senior party leaders, including Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit and her ministerial colleagues as well as Sonia's political secretary Ahmed Patel, Arjun Singh, R.K. Dhawan and party general secretary Anil Shastri, were present during the rally.

In a veiled reference to the alleged dropping of conspiracy charges against Advani and several others in the Babri Masjid demolition case, Sonia slammed the Centre for "forcing" the CBI to drop the charges to "save" its ministers. "What justice can one expect from such a government," she asked.

Sonia said there were many political parties and organisations today which did not show people the right direction and instead, misled youngsters.

Referring to the recent toppling of the Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh, Sonia accused the Centre of dislodging a democratically-elected government in the Northeast and called it part of a conspiracy to fulfil its "selfish political ends".

She alleged that similar attempts were being made in other Northeast states.

The Congress chief prefaced her criticism by saying she did not want to discuss the current political situation at such a solemn occasion. She said she had been compelled to talk politics as the BJP was vitiating the atmosphere all over India.



Sonia Gandhi at the election campaign in New Delhi on Saturday. Picture by Rajesh Kumar



# Gujarat warned against 'eyewash' appeal

# Apex court to monitor riot cases

R. VENKATARAMAN

**New Delhi, Aug. 8:** The Supreme Court today invoked a rarely used constitutional provision to intervene in the Best Bakery and nine other Gujarat riot-related cases and warned it would "monitor" the state's appeal in the high court to ensure it was not an "eyewash".

A bench of Chief Justice V.N. Khare and Justices S.B. Sinha and Arun Kumar issued notices to Gujarat and the Centre asking them why retrial should not be ordered in the bakery case. The Centre and the state were given two weeks to file their replies.

The bench also tagged on the other riot cases — which the National Human Rights Commission wanted tried outside Gujarat — with the rights panel's petition on the bakery case.

Asking for a copy of the appeal the state filed in Gujarat High Court yesterday against the bakery case acquittal, Khare said: "If it is an eyewashing one, so that the high court dismissed it, we will not allow it. We will monitor your appeal."

The panel's petition, the bench said, would be treated as a public interest litigation so that the apex court could "continue to monitor" the Gujarat riot cases and seek an answer from the Centre on the Justice Malimath Committee's recommendations for protection of witnesses in criminal cases.

The bench ordered the Gujarat government to provide security to all victims involved in the riot cases mentioned in the NHRC petitions, including Zahira Habibullah Sheikh.

Zahira's deposition before the rights panel that she was forced to lie in a trial court under threat of life had prompted today's unprecedented judicial act of the apex court intervening in a criminal trial.

The bench invoked Article 142 of the Constitution which says: "The Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for

doing complete justice in any cause or matter."

The trial court hearing the bakery case had acquitted all 21 accused, prompting the rights panel to contend that the Godhra train-burning and eight other related cases would meet the same fate if trials were not held outside Gujarat.

At the outset, Khare, who was the presiding judge, asked NHRC's senior counsel P.P. Rao why the apex court should intervene after the "new development" of the Gujarat government filing a high court appeal against the trial court's acquittal order.

As Rao tried to argue that only the Supreme Court could intervene in such matters under Article 142, Khare called for the state counsel. "Is any one present for Gujarat?" he asked, looking at the empty bench of the opposition.

No sooner had he asked than advocate Hemintika Wahi rushed into the court room, saying she was the state counsel and the government had already filed an appeal in the high court.

"Then you file the memo of appeal with this court. We will examine it," Khare said. The state was also directed to file all evidence recorded, records of the trial court proceedings and the judgment.

Chief Justice Khare observed that the "right to fair trial" is a fundamental right and "the high court has powers to ensure fair trial proceedings".

The bench specifically asked Wahi to furnish the grounds of the state's appeal. "If we find that it was a mere eyewash, we will allow NHRC to intervene in the appeal before the high court," the bench said.

The NHRC was given a week to file its response once the Centre's and the state's replies were in. The bench posted further hearings after three weeks.

Zahira, the prime witness in the bakery case, moved a petition similar to the NHRC's. The bench said it would be taken up in due course. (See P 6)

## QUOTE

**We will monitor  
your appeal**

**SUPREME COURT**  
to the Gujarat government

9 AUG 2003



Ansari at a news conference in Mumbai on Thursday.

## Hunted in Gujarat, toasted in Bengal

Nandini Guha  
Kolkata, August 8

THE FACE of the Gujarat riots will now be the mascot of the CPI(M).

Qutubuddin Ansari, who reaches Kolkata on Saturday, has a new address all right — one that begins with c/o The Party. But he will be saddled with a new job profile as well — trumpeting the communal harmony of the CPI(M)-ruled state, as opposed to riot-ridden Gujarat.

Minister for Minorities Mohammed Selim said all efforts were being made to help Ansari and his family settle down once they get here. Backing Selim are the CPI(M)'s students' and women's wings. While the Mahila Samity has made elaborate preparations for rehabilitating the Ansaris in their new home — with utensils, a gas oven and cylinder, stoves, spices and even a new wardrobe — the SFI has lined up a string of events in

several city and district colleges to welcome him.

In the colleges where the CPI(M) has a strong presence, the SFI will present him as a celebrity speaker to describe his experience of the Gujarat riots. "In a city like Kolkata, we can't even imagine what he went through. Our memories of the 1940s riots are fading. Even the Babri riots didn't touch the city. Our students will benefit immensely from Ansari's experience," said senior SFI functionary Tapas Das.

But the CPI(M) has asked the SFI to wait till Ansari settles down before it begins the secular roadshow. "We'll wait till Ansari recovers from the trauma. Only then will we organise these functions," said Das. But the blueprint is clear: the SFI will take Ansari only to the institutions where it runs the union — Presidency College, Jadavpur University, Jaipuria College and Ashutosh College — as the party's flag-bearer.

'THE PRIME MINISTER IS ALSO HUMAN'

# Temple talk not under pressure

SF1 Religion & Politics

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 4. — Saying that he too was "only human", the Prime Minister today defended his remarks on the Ram Temple at Ayodhya at Friday's funeral of Mahant Ramachandra Paramhans.

Facing the attack of a combined Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee took the floor today to dismiss claims that he had made the statement under "pressure". "I am not under any pressure, I would rather quit this *rajpath* than work under pressure," a visibly upset Mr Vajpayee said at the fag end of an impromptu discussion over his comment that the last wish of the *mahant* (for a Ram Temple) would be fulfilled.

The Opposition charged him with vitiating the communal atmosphere by raking up the issue of building a Ram Temple, which it said was both unnecessary and "unwarranted". Mr Somnath Chatterjee accused the Prime Minister of keeping the issue alive for poll gains.

But Mr Vajpayee insisted that he had done no wrong: "When I said one day the Ram temple will be built in Ayodhya, did I ever mention how it would be built or who would build it?" "I, for one, am in favour of building the Ram Temple and so are a majority of the people," he told the House, adding that he could not have spoken on any other subject on the occasion of the sant's funeral. "Don't forget the Prime Minister is also human with emotions... Instead of appreciating the fact that I was guarded in my statement, you are hurling allegations. Neither the government nor I have deviated from the declared stand - it has to be built either through negotiated settlement or the judicial process."

But Mr Somnath Chatterjee, Mr PR Das Munshi and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav questioned the timing and motive of the statement. Mr Chatterjee said: "Even when the pyre of Paramhans was burning the Prime Minister made the statement on building the Temple". But Mr Vajpayee retorted promptly: "What would you have said at that moment of truth? I just made a brief state-

## Muslim Law Board welcomes clarification

NEW DELHI, Aug. 4. — The All India Muslim Personal Law Board today said it "appreciates" the Prime Minister's clarifications on his Ayodhya statements. The AIMPLB said it shares the stand taken by Mr Vajpayee and the government that Ayodhya could be resolved either through a court verdict or negotiations. "We will abide by the court judgement..." AIMPLB spokesman Dr SQR Ilyas said.

Terming Mr Vajpayee's statements on Friday as "unfortunate", the AIMPLB, however, made it clear that he should not indulge in "doublespeak" on such a sensitive issue so often. While allowing that pre-poll compulsions might have prompted the utterance, the Board said it wasn't aware if negotiations with any "credible" Muslim organisation was on, as claimed by the BJP, after the Kanchi seer's initiative failed. The Board reiterated that it was open to dialogue but stood firm on not handing over the Babari site. — SNS

ment before the thousands...."

Prof. VK Malhotra of the BJP strongly defended the Prime Minister, asking the Opposition MPs not to needle him on an issue which is discussed in Parliament often.

A set of notices of adjournment motions was moved in the Lok Sabha today by the Opposition who wanted the Question Hour to be suspended to take up the Prime Minister's statement. After brief statements from Opposition MPs including Mr SS Owaisi of the Muslim League, the Prime Minister clarified what he had said. Not convinced, the entire Opposition walked out as soon as he had finished. The BJP, in response, said the Congress should call itself a "walkout party". This was the fourth time in quick succession that the Congress had staged a walkout over Ayodhya. Earlier they walked out against the Speaker's ruling and also to protest against Mr George Fernandes, Mr Malhotra added.

5 AUG 2003

Religion &  
Pamhanshi  
ST-1

# Ayodhya stand unchanged: PM

4/8

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 3. — Barely two days after triggering a political furore with his Ayodhya statements, Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today clarified that there is no change in the government's stand that the Ram Temple issue could be resolved either through a negotiated settlement between Hindus and Muslims or in accordance with a court verdict.

Mr Vajpayee today said that the Ayodhya tangle could be resolved by the united efforts of both the communities.

Addressing a group of Delhi BJP leaders at his residence here this morning, he expressed the hope that the current efforts in this direction will prove successful.

Mr Vajpayee had drawn flak from the Opposition parties for his 'controversial' speech at the funeral of Ramchandra Das Paramhans, architect of the Ramjanambhoomi campaign, on the banks of the Saryu in Ayodhya last Friday.

Criticising Mr Vajpayee for pledging to fulfil Mahant Paramhans' 'dream', the Opposition had said yesterday that they will raise the issue in Parliament on Monday and demand an explanation. Even DMK chief Mr M Karunanidhi, an NDA ally, had spoken on similar lines.

Taking note of such criticism, the Prime Minister said there was some "misunderstanding" over his Ayodhya statements. He said there should be no confusion regarding his government's stand on Ayodhya, but "in

a single speech I could not be expected to say everything" (there is) on such a sensitive issue. "It was a condolence meeting on the occasion of Paramhansji's funeral, and I had to make a brief speech. Touching upon all aspects of Ayodhya was neither possible nor required on that occasion."

Mr Vajpayee said one way to resolve the vexed issue is through dialogue between the two communities while the other option is to leave it to the court for a verdict, which should be acceptable to both parties. "There is no other way to find its solution."

Taking the cue, the BJP also echoed Mr Vajpayee's views today. The party said it has already made its stand on Ayodhya clear in Parliament.

The general secretary and spokesman, Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, reiterated that a negotiated settlement or court judgment is the only solution. Union textiles minister Mr Shahnawaz Hussain alleged that the Opposition had twisted and misinterpreted the Prime Minister's Ayodhya remarks.

The Congress, however, kept the heat on Mr Vajpayee even after his clarification. The party said there is nothing "surprising" in Mr Vajpayee's explanation. Spokesman Mr S Jaipal Reddy said it seems to have become a habit for Mr Vajpayee to make a provocative statement first and retract it later. "The point remains that the Prime Minister's statement has undermined the dig-

## Come clean, VHP to Vajpayee

AHMEDABAD, Aug. 3. —

Terming the Prime Minister's Friday's vow to build the Ram temple a mere "repetitive theory", the VHP



today asked the BJP top brass to come clear on its "policy and intention" on all issues ranging from temple to implementation of Uniform Civil Code in the country. "What the PM has said in Ayodhya is a mere repetition of what BJP leaders have been saying on various occasions. But, it is... not practical," VHP leader Acharya Dharmendra told media persons here. — PTI

nity of our Constitution and secular democracy".

Former Prime Minister Mr HD Deve Gowda said in Bangalore that Mr Vajpayee's Friday statements will lead to a "realignment of political parties".

He said the Prime Minister's vow to remove all obstacles in the way of construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya exposed the "true colours" of the BJP. It is a "final signal" to the NDA allies who believed in its common programme of governance that the Sangh Parivar's agenda had taken over.

No need for mosque at disputed site: Shankaracharya

# RSS firm on Ram Temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KANYAKUMARI, July 5. — The two-day RSS national executive began here today with a clear and vociferous demand for construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya and a resolution included demand for temples in Kashi and Mathura too.

The VHP, too, kept up the tough rhetoric on the eve of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board's meeting to discuss the Kanchi Shankaracharya's proposals, saying the unilateral and "personal" moves of the seer were not acceptable to Hindu masses, reports PTI. VHP secretary Mr Dharam Narain said at a meeting in Bharach that "the seer has taken the initiative ... without taking the sants into confidence. He has started a dialogue at a personal level; this will not be acceptable to Hindus."

A resolution at the end of the first day of the RSS conclave said the Sangh would not veer from its course of building the temple: "There will be no compromise or concession on a Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and in Kashi and Mathura as well." The RSS demanded that Muslims give up their claim not just on Ayodhya but also on Kashi and Mathura "in the interest of lasting peace".

The meet was inaugurated by Sarsanghchalak Mr KS Sudarshan at Vivekanandapuram. It was attended by representatives of fraternal organisations including former BJP chief Mr Kushabhau Thakre, VHP president Mr Ashok Singh and general secretary Mr Togadia. About 250 delegates were present.

In another development pregnant with implications, the Kanchi seer today added a twist to his Ayodhya tale ahead of the key meeting of Muslim leaders tomorrow, saying there was no need for a new mosque at the disputed site. This evoked a sharp reaction, with the Muslim Board and All India Babari Masjid Action Committee rejecting this "outright".

Shri Jayendra Saraswati in an interview to NDTV 24x7 said the mosque should be built where it is required. Asked if Muslims would agree to not building a mosque within the *panchkoshi parikrama*, he said: "Panchkoshi is not the issue. The mosque should be built where it is required... locals do not require another mosque. People of Ayodhya cannot leave the site for another location." In response to a question whether Muslims have a reason to build a mosque at the site, he said: "No. Muslims already have eight places of worship. What will happen with one more?"

Rejecting this, Action Committee convenor Mr Zafaryab Jilani said: "We don't want to build a mosque anywhere else. We do not accept the *panchkoshi* proposal. There are several mosques within the *panchkoshi*. Will they demolish them?"

The RSS refuses to relent not only over Ayodhya but also the other two "symbolic" temples at Kashi and Mathura. If Muslims did not give up their claims, the Vajpayee government should explore the option of legislation, today's resolution said. Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi were among thousands of Hindu temples vandalised

by Muslim invaders who pronounced the supremacy of their faith by raising monuments there. "No self-respecting nation would tolerate such symbols of dishonour," the resolution said.

Leaders cautiously welcomed the efforts of the Shankaracharya and some others to find a negotiated settlement, but added that they should keep in mind the stand of VHP and Hindu sants spearheading the Ramjanambhoomi movement.

Most members of the Muslim Board reached Lucknow tonight for tomorrow's meeting to discuss the seer's proposals, which are still being kept under wraps. A spokesman said Liberhan Commission hearings and the Ayodhya excavation would also be discussed by the 51-member panel, SNS reports from Lucknow

## 'RSS, BJP united on Ayodhya'

JAIPUR, July 5. — There is "no difference" of opinion between the RSS and the BJP on finding a solution to Ayodhya, BJP general secretary Mr Pramod Mahajan said. Both organisations want a temple, he said. The BJP is also considering the "legislative solution."

In another development, Jagatguru Swami Swarupanand Saraswati today called the Kanchi seer a "pawn of the BJP". — PTI

## Muslim Board yet to receive proposal

LUCKNOW, JUNE 18. The latest proposal of the Kan̄chi Sankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, to resolve the Ayodhya tangle was yet to reach the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), even as there were reports that the in-charge of the Ayodhya cell in the Prime Minister's Office and top Muslim theologians were arriving here to meet the AIMPLB chairman, Maulana Rabe Hasan Nadvi, ahead of the Board's Babri panel meeting on June 21 in New Delhi.

"The Sankaracharya's formula has not yet reached us. We are eagerly awaiting the same," the AIMPLB spokesman and Islamic scholar, Maulana Sajjad Nomani, told PTI here today.

"Once the proposal is received, it will be referred to the Board's working committee for a suitable decision," Mr. Nomani said.

Reacting sharply to the Board member and Babri Masjid Action Committee convenor, Zafaryab Jilan's statement that the Acharya's formula would be of little help if it talked of constructing a temple at the disputed site since according to Islamic tenets the land of the mosque could not be used for any other purposes, he said that it would be premature to make any comment till the proposal was received. "The Sankaracharya is a great Hindu religious leader while the AIMPLB is an apex Muslim body. Any worthwhile proposal to resolve the tangle should be considered."

He said the panel would not be able to re-include the dropped item even if the Acharya's formula reached the next day or two, as it (formula) would have to be first circulated to the members for which some time was required.

### Acharya declines comment

Meanwhile, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi today declined to say anything on the fresh proposals.

Asked about the formula that he had sent to the Maulana, he said in Kancheepuram: "There is no formula" and declined to entertain any further question.

— PTI

19 JUN 2003

# RSS: BJP plan on Ayodhya is unacceptable

By Smita Gupta  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: A day after the VHP hit out at the BJP-led Union government for its fresh Ayodhya 'initiative', RSS sources said its leadership had endorsed the VHP line—that Kashi and Mathura were "non-negotiable" and no solution was possible without the involvement of all key Hindu outfits, including the VHP.

But the RSS leadership also repeated its dictum to the VHP about the need for "communication" among all its front organisations and cautioned the latter against using intemperate language against the Vajpayee government, the sources said.

The sources said the issue had come up when VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Pravin Togadia called on RSS 'sarsanghchalak' K. Sudarshan here on Tuesday for a pre-arranged meeting. They said Mr Sudarshan told the VHP leaders that the RSS was in agreement with the VHP's position that sacrificing Kashi and Mathura for Ayodhya was "unacceptable" and that the suggestion that several ASI-controlled mosques could be thrown open for worship was "unnecessary" as it would open up a can of worms. But it was also gently suggested that when one Sangh outfit spoke out about another, the language should be "moderate".

RSS spokesperson Ram Madhav said, "On the issue of the three temples in Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura, we are broadly with the VHP. The Hindu demand has been for a return of the three holy places, and we don't mind each of them being dealt with separately. But, if to solve the Ayodhya issue, we have to give up Kashi and Mathura, that is unacceptable."

Meanwhile, BJP sources said HRD minister M.M. Joshi also met Mr Sudarshan on Tuesday before leaving for

## Different chants

### History mystery

Two eminent historians and two anti-Ram temple nominees who entered the Ayodhya excavation site have lambasted a report in an English weekly which had claimed exclusive access to the site. P5

### 'Come clean'

The Bajrang Dal has asked the BJP to clear its stand on what it wants to do on the temple issue.

### Seer's formula

The Kanchi seer has reportedly sent new proposals to the AIMPLB.

the BJP's 'chintan baithak' in Mumbai. Sources said its objective was to convey to Mr Joshi the "sentiments" of the VHP and the RSS on the issue, so that it could be communicated to the BJP's top leadership as they work out the broad contours of the party's poll strategy for 2004.

Referring to the role of the Kanchi Shankaracharya in the current talks, the RSS sources were as circumspect as the VHP was on Monday. "The government, it would appear, is misusing the good offices of the seer to find a formula. Besides, although the Shankaracharya's support means a great deal to the temple movement, he cannot find a solution to this problem on his own. Organisations like the VHP, which have been involved in the movement for close to half-a-century, cannot be left out. It is time everyone came clean."

Asked why the government was pushing a formula which it knew could not work, the sources said, "The BJP leadership knows well that Kashi and Mathura are non-negotiable. Maybe the government is just watching the situation, leaving it to chance."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 JUN 2003

# VHP fumes at BJP formula on Ayodhya

17/6

Times News Network

**New Delhi:** Even before the government's fresh Ayodhya 'initiative' can take shape, the VHP looks determined to sabotage it. Ired at being left out of this latest effort, the VHP's top brass—working president Ashok Singhal, international president Pravin Togadia and vice president Giriraj Kishore—hit out at the BJP-led government on Monday for floating a formula, which it said, compromised the "honour" and "self-respect" of the Hindu community.

The offer to the Muslim community of the use of about 1,000 mosques currently controlled by the ASI, the promise of status quo on the Kashi and Mathura shrines, financial help for madrasas and reservation for the community in return for their giving up any claim to the disputed site in Ayodhya on which a Ram temple can be built was not a fair exchange, said Mr Singhal. "The government must come clean on what has been promised," he said, adding that the Hindus had "already allowed their country to be divided" and given up their claim to the 3,000 mosques that had allegedly been built after destroying the temples that had existed there. "Today the government is offering Kashi and Mathura to the Muslims; tomorrow, it will offer Kashmir to Musharraf. Kashi, Mathura and Kashmir are all non-negotiable," Mr Togadia said, adding, "what the government is attempting will defeat the purpose of the Ram temple movement".

The BJP had put Ayodhya in its manifesto, Mr Singhal said, to win the Hindu vote. Now it should either get legislation passed to get a Ram temple built, or else say that since it had not been able to fulfil its commitment, it was quitting the NDA to seek a

mandate on its own—by telling the people that it could build the temple only after it secured a majority on its own.

Asked about the role of Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati, Mr Singhal said, "The government is using him as a tool. It has kept him in the dark about the bartering that is going on with the Muslims. He is a revered religious leader for the Hindus and he cannot be involved in such barter."

Mr Singhal admitted that the talks had so far involved some Muslim leaders, the government and the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas. To a question as to whether he was upset that the VHP had been excluded, he first admitted that he would later make some revelations on this, and then sought to cover it up by saying that he was also the general secretary of the RJN.

## Cong says no to legislation

**New Delhi:** The Congress said on Monday that it would oppose any legislation by parliament to resolve the Ayodhya issue.

"We have maintained and will continue to maintain that the Ayodhya dispute cannot be settled through legislation by parliament. This is neither politically desirable nor legally sustainable," party spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy told reporters here.

A solution to the dispute was possible only through the judiciary, he said.

In the Shah Bano case, he said, the conflict was within the community and not between two religious communities. PTI



# Govt 'selling out' to Muslims: VHP

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 16. — The VHP today accused the Centre of "bartering away Hindu interests" and "offering sops to the Muslims to return to power after the general elections." It could even compromise on the Jammu and Kashmir issue to stay in power, the party alleged.

"In exchange for a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, the government has offered Muslim leaders *namaz* facilities in over 1,000 mosques under ASI control and nine per cent reservation for Muslims in government jobs," top VHP leaders alleged.

The Centre has also shot down the VHP's revival plan for the temples at Kashi and the Mathura and offered financial help to madrasas, they charged.

Asked whether they were pointing fingers at Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani, VHP leader Mr Pravin Togadia said both were part of the government.

There was no immediate response from the government.

BJP spokesperson Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi refused to comment but restated the party's commitment to resolve the issue through negotiations or the courts.

VHP working president Mr Ashok Singhal said Mr Vajpayee should have asked parties to support the Ram temple construction rather than asking them to keep off the issue. He also criticised the Centre's view upholding the Congress government's ban

on the VHP after the Babari demolition.

Mr Singhal singled out the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Mr Syed Shahabuddin and the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid as the parties with which the Centre was bartering and dared the government to deny it.

However, the Babari Masjid Action Committee of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board said it is "unaware" of any such proposal. The committee spokesman, Dr SQR Ilyas, said the Board would not accept any proposal that can hurt Muslim sentiments. "On this issue, the word bargain should not be used as issues related to religion cannot be bargained," he said.

Reacting to a statement by the Board president, Mr Maulana Rabey Hasani Nadwi, that any good proposal could be considered, he said that any out-of-court proposal that could "guarantee construction of the Babari Masjid at the same site where it stood before 22 December 1949" has not been received so far.

Mr Singhal claimed that even the Kanchi Shankaracharya was not briefed about the informal channel the government had opened up with Muslim leaders. "Shankaracharyaji told me that the Kashi and the Mathura temples were not negotiable," he said.

The Shankaracharya was being used as a tool by the government but would not do anything that would jeopardise Hindu interests, he said.

Another report on page 4

# BJP mulls temple for mosque deal

Sudesh K Verma  
in New Delhi

June 10. — "Hectic negotiations" are on between Hindu and Muslim leaders to work out a deal on all lingering religious disputes, including the vexed Ayodhya issue, that could pave the way for "permanent communal amity", BJP sources said. A solution could involve a bartering of "mandirs and masjids" between the two sides, they said.

Under a deal being brokered by Kanchi Snankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati, Muslim leaders are being persuaded to forego their claims on three sites — Ayodhya, the Krishnajanmasthan temple in Mathura and the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi.

The VHP is being persuaded to relinquish its claims on hundreds of mosques as a reciprocal gesture, sources said.

In public, however, both parties, kept up their opposition to any such negotiated settlement today.

While the VHP said it would mobilise MPs to pass a law clearing way for a temple at the disputed site at Ayodhya, the Babari Masjid Action Committee said the issue could only be resolved through a court verdict.

The VHP general secretary, Mr Pravin Togadia, in fact appealed to Congress chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi for support on the temple issue. His organisation, he said, would mobilise MPs for enactment of a new law to hand over the disputed site to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas for temple construction. The BMAC's local convenor, Mohammed Yunus Siddiqui, said the minority community would respect the court's decision and that all parties and organisations concerned should wait for its verdict.

The BJP spokesman, Mr Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, on his part, made light of the opposition from the VHP, the BMAC and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board to any such move. "They are speaking of their compulsions and will play a constructive role when negotiations reach a decisive stage," he said.

## 'ASI team fabricating evidence'

LUCKNOW, June 10. — The Sunni Central Waqf Board, one of the main plaintiffs in the Babari title suit, and Muslim parties has accused the ASI team engaged in carrying out excavation work at the acquired land in Ayodhya of "fabricating" archaeological evidence there.

In an application submitted to the two observers monitoring the excavation work, Mr HS Dubey and Mr MA Siddique, the SCWB and the Muslim parties disputed the ASI's progress report submitted to the special Bench of the Allahabad High Court hearing the matter, the board's counsel said today. — PTI

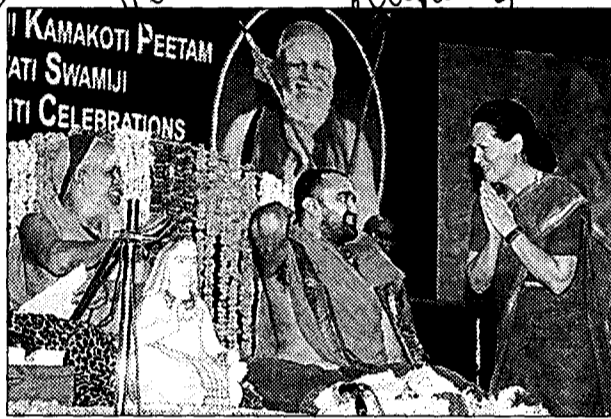
# Kanchi seer hails Cong 'role' to promote Temple

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 8 JUNE

CONGRESS president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday found herself sharing the dias with the Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati when he launched into a vigorous defence of Congress government's "action" in facilitating the construction of Ram Temple on December 6, 1992.

The Kanchi seer, who was speaking at a function organised here to fete him on the 50th anniversary of his appointment as Shankaracharya, said the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao performed an act of piety by not coming in the way of the installation of idols of Ram Lalla at the disputed site after the demolition.

Ms Gandhi didn't respond to Kanchi seer's remark which read like a strong endorsement of the "secularists" charge that Congress had deliberately preferred inaction on the fateful day. Ms Gandhi, who spoke before the Shankaracharya, stuck to "equal respect for all religions and no



**Holy Hai:** Congress president Sonia Gandhi greets Sankaracharya of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

malice towards anyone" theme of her written speech. Two other notable Congress personalities, Mr Rao himself and Delhi chief minister Shiela Dixit, didn't have the chance to set the record straight if they had willed so.

The event also saw Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee renewing his theme that the temple-mosque controversy shouldn't be allowed to linger even as

the Kanchi seer suggested that the controversial matter needed to be de-politicised for a settlement to be reached between the two communities.

Both ideas have been attacked by Leftists and other "secularists" on the ground that an out of court settlement will be tantamount to surrender to majoritarianism and an acquiescence in the December 6 demolition.

*The Economic Times*

— 9 JUN 2003

# Togadia to continue campaign for distribution of 'trishuls'

By Our Staff Correspondent

*Praveen*

**JAIPUR, APRIL 22.** The Vishwa Hindu Parishad general secretary, Praveen Togadia, was today released from the Central Jail in Ajmer to a tumultuous welcome by hundreds of BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal activists outside. He had been granted bail by the Sessions Court on Monday on condition that he would not repeat the offences for which he was booked.

Mr. Togadia, visibly-tired, tried to put up a brave face as his supporters, wearing T-shirts printed with the symbol of the trident, shouted slogans applauding him. A significant number of VHP activists gathered outside the Central Jail were from Gujarat, including many close associates of Mr. Togadia and prime accused in the last year's incidents of violence in that State.

Among others, the State BJP president, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, the VHP vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, the BJP leaders, Lalit Kishore Chaturvedi and Rajendra Rathore, and Mr. Togadia's wife and daughter were present.

The sureties and personal bond for the VHP leader's bail were executed this morning. He was set free around noon after the court order reached the jail authorities. He had been lodged in the Central Jail under judicial custody since April 14 on charges of violating the ban on distribution of modified 'trishuls' and disturbing communal harmony by his inflammatory speeches.

However, Mr. Togadia asserted after his release that his campaign for distribution of 'trishuls' across the country would continue, as it did not violate any law. He said the prohibition on distri-

tribution of tridents amounted to an "assault on the fundamental rights of Hindus".

Before leaving for Ahmedabad, he told reporters that the "Trishul Diksha" ceremonies could still be held in a "democratic and constitutional" way because 'trishul' had not been named in the State Government's notification banning the possession, display and distribution of multi-blade weapons.

He refrained from committing himself to the 'trishul' distribution programmes in future in Rajasthan and denied that the VHP campaign had anything to do with the Assembly elections. "We have distributed five lakh tridents during the past one decade in Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, where no polls are being held," he said.

Ms. Vasundhara Raje Scindia told reporters that the charge of "conspiring to wage war against the State" levelled against Mr. Togadia was baseless. "Under this logic, a case can be registered even against the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, for opposing the Central Government," she said.

The State BJP chief claimed that the Ashok Gehlot Government had foisted "patently false charges" against Mr. Togadia to divert people's attention from development-related issues. She said the BJP would expose the "anti-democratic" designs of Congress during its 'Parivartan Yatra' being launched in the State on April 27 next.

Meanwhile, three local VHP leaders — arrested in connection with the recovery of 65 'trishuls' from the VHP office in Ajmer before Mr. Togadia's "Dharma Sabha" — were released on bail by the Sessions Court today.

# Advani defends Sangh stand on anti-conversion

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 20 APRIL

**T**HE war of words between BJP and Uttar Pradesh ally Ms Mayawati over conversion seems to be hotting up, with deputy prime minister L.K. Advani coming out in defence of Sangh Parivar's campaign for legal measures to stop "forcible and fraudulent" conversions.

Mr Advani, who was speaking at a book release function here on Sunday, said his party was opposed to "forcible and fraudulent conversions" because they were not in the national interest. According to a report, the deputy prime minister differentiated between what he called "natural" conversions from "forcible and fraudulent" ones, saying: "It is the latter that we are opposed to since it is neither in the spirit of true religion nor in the long term interests of the nation."

Mr Advani's defence of BJP's stance comes close on the heels of BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu's



MAYAWATI: GOING IT ALONE

rejoinder to the Uttar Pradesh chief minister over the issue of conversions. Last week, Ms Mayawati had opposed a ban on conversion, as demanded by BJP, leading Mr Naidu to publicly defend the case for an anti-conversion law. This public airing of differences over conversion coincides with the rising tension in the equation between the coalition partners in Uttar Pradesh, with Ms Mayawati rattling BJP over other issues as well.

The past fortnight or so has

seen the chief minister annoying her coalition partner by attacking former chief minister Rajnath Singh just as BJP was trying to overcome its embarrassment following the release of a video in which Ms Mayawati ridicules Hindu rituals. The tensions seemed set to rise higher when she indicated that she might widen the probe into the alleged misuse of discretionary funds to cover the tenures of BJP chief ministers too.

The ban on conversion, though a favourite with the Sangh, has moved up on the priorities pole since Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalitha enacted a ban on conversions in the state. The Tamil Nadu example has spurred BJP to come up with a similar legislation in Gujarat and promise another for Chhattisgarh. The anti-conversion ardour serves the purpose of harassing Congress, which has found it difficult to take an antagonistic posture under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi.

The Economic Times

## THREE PRONGED

<sup>1974 G-12</sup> <sup>9 - Police & P.M.H.</sup>  
**R**eligious extremism, like political extremism, borders on the bizarre, but such is its zeal that it stops at nothing. The leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Mr Praveen Togadia, is a good example of this generalization. After the pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat, he threatened to replicate it in other states. On Sunday, in Rajasthan he carried out another kind of experiment. He carried out a *trishul diksha* ceremony in Ajmer despite a government ban on the distribution of tridents. Mr Togadia defied a prohibitory order by leading a procession of 3000 Bajrang Dal activists. He was subsequently arrested under the Arms Act but not before he had distributed trishuls to over 600 members of the Bajrang Dal. While his arrest is to be welcomed, the fact that he was not stopped from doing what he had set out to do suggests a certain weakness on the part of the state administration. Mr Togadia was deliberately trying to provoke the administration and to spark off a confrontation. A confrontation with Mr Togadia and his cohorts would provide them with an excuse to precipitate violence. The state administration decided not to take any risks. With assembly elections looming large, the Congress government in Rajasthan cannot afford to ignore Hindu opinion. This is Mr Togadia's politics of blackmail.

Mr Togadia's defiance of the law shows that he considers himself either to be above the law or beyond the pale of civil society. This point needs to be underlined for those who claim Mr Togadia to be a participant in the practice of democratic politics. Mr Togadia's religious credentials are equally dubious. Nowhere in the traditions and the rituals of Hinduism is there anything like trishul diksha. Mr Togadia's new-fangled celebration of violence. The whole exercise is aimed at building up greater militancy among the faithful so that they are in a position to strike terror among the minorities. Mr Togadia has no other agenda. He has no respect either for the Constitution or for the traditions of the religion that he claims to uphold. Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the prime minister, has spoken more than once against religious and political extremism. But in most parts of north India, extremism is a threat that emerges from the wider political formation to which Mr Vajpayee pledges allegiance. Beyond words, Mr Vajpayee has taken no steps to quell this kind of extremism. This has indirectly encouraged men like Mr Togadia. A few days as the state's guest in judicial custody is no guarantee that he will be reformed when he is set free. Fanatics seldom, if ever, change their spots.

15 APR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

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15 APR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Public display of *trishul* banned in Rajasthan

Statesman News Service

JAIPUR, April 8. — The Rajasthan government today banned distribution and public display of tridents in the state except in 'certain religious functions', in a bid to curb the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activities.

The gazette notification issued today by the home department directed the district officials not to allow distribution or public display of tridents in the state.

The state government acted after being tipped-off by intelligence agencies that the "Trishul Diksha" programmes of the Bajrang Dal and VHP were creating law and problem, and posing threat to the communal harmony of the state. It was only after hectic consultation for three months with the police officials that the home department came out with the notification. The VHP and Bajrang Dal has so far distributed over 20,000 tridents all over the state. "These were not the traditional trishuls, but sophisticated sharp edged weapons that could be fatal," said the home minister, Mr Gulab Singh Shaktawat, talking about the need for issuing the notification. The tridents have been banned under section 4 of the Arms Act, 1959.

9 APR 2013

THE STATESMAN



# Digvijay fires at BJP's Hindutva, hits Sonia

RASHEED KIDWAI

**Bhopal, May 4:** Election-bound Madhya Pradesh is flush with VIP red faces — and not just because of the searing summer.

First, Union minister Arun Jaitley sought to nail Digvijay Singh by quoting from a report that actually commended the government for its developmental work. Now it is the chief minister's turn to make a faux pas.

Last week, Jaitley circulated a report prepared by the Confederation of Indian Industries and the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Contemporary Studies that showed Madhya Pradesh ranked 25th among states and Union Territories. But Jaitley did not realise that the report acknowledged that Madhya Pradesh had emerged from the Bimaru league with improvements in health and education.

Keen to beat the BJP in its Hindutva game, Digvijay recently circulated a book — *Hindu Hone ka Dharma* — among BJP MPs to inform them about the “true spirit of Hinduism”. But in his zeal to expose the Sangh parivar's distortion of Hinduism, the chief minister probably failed to read those passages in the book where author Prabhakar Joshi questions Sonia Gandhi's credentials on account

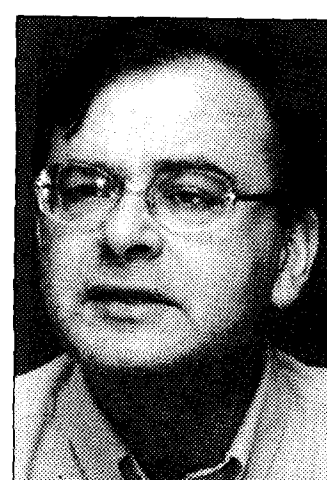
of her foreign origin.

In one passage, Joshi, a former editor of a Hindi daily, says the sacrifices of the freedom fighters would go to waste if the Congress chief became Prime Minister.

He says: “*Woh sab videshi shasakon ko bhagane wale senani the. Unhon ne kabhi socha bhi nahin hoga ki videshiyon ke khilaf sau saal tak tarne wale is desh mein koi videshi mool ka vyakti pradhan mantri hone ka dava pesh karega* (They were all fighters committed to drive foreigners out. They would never have imagined that someone of foreign origin would be in the running for prime ministership in a country that fought against foreigners for 100 years).”

Elsewhere, Joshi asks the Congress to consider if Sonia is greater than the spirit of nationhood. He says: “*Sonia Gandhi is desh aur uske bhavishya se badi nahin hain. Sonia Gandhi Congress se bhi badi nahin hain* (Sonia Gandhi is not bigger than the nation and its future. Sonia is not even greater than the Congress).”

Joshi, who was close to deposed Congress chief Sitaram Kesri, has penned sentences that recall Sharad Pawar, Purno Sangma and Tariq Anwar's letter of revolt. He says even non-



**GOOF-UPS GALORE:** Digvijay Singh, Sonia Gandhi, Arun Jaitley

resident Indians are uncomfortable with the idea of a person of foreign origin leading the country.

Digvijay's supporters have kept silent publicly, but privately some have said that the distribution of Joshi's book was not aimed at endorsing his anti-Sonia remarks. Instead, it was designed to highlight how the Sangh and its allies were distorting Hinduism.

#### Vancouver-bound

The zeal to project himself as a champion of Dalits is driving

Digvijay to Vancouver, Canada, where a conference on the down-trodden will debate whether incidents of casteism and untouchability in India is equivalent to racism.

The chief minister will be in Vancouver from May 16 to 18. The International Dalit Conference in Dalit Vision for the 21st Century, which former President K.R. Narayanan and senior politicians such as Buta Singh, Ram Vilas Paswan and Jabbar Patel, as well as several Dalit authors and activists have been invited to attend, comes

when Madhya Pradesh is gearing up for Assembly elections in November.

Both the Congress and the BJP are concentrating on Dalit votes for the elections. The Madhya Pradesh chief minister's plan to travel to Vancouver becomes significant in this context. The Congress leader has travelled abroad only thrice in his nine-and-a-half-year tenure, while some of his counterparts have gone abroad three times a year.

However, Singh's plan is to get an international mandate, at

the Vancouver meet, for his Dalit agenda and showcase his much-publicised 21-point Bhopal Declaration, which was adopted in January 2001. This could then be used to advantage during the Assembly polls.

The chief minister never misses a chance to emphasise his government's achievement of giving land to landless Dalits and the move to buy a third of the state's requirements from Dalit entrepreneurs.

The BJP, however, claims to have figures indicating that atrocities against Dalits have gone up during Digvijay's tenure. The party recently adopted the Mhow Declaration to counter Singh's Bhopal Declaration. The BJP's statement promises to job reservation for Dalits in the private sector and assures five acres to each landless Dalit.

The BJP's move to woo Dalits is another factor that led to Digvijay deciding to attend the Vancouver conference. Political observers are watching what he will say on the subject as his remarks would have political repercussions in Madhya Pradesh.

Digvijay will be accompanied by his secretary, Amar Singh, who is seen as the prime architect and the brain behind the Congress leader's Dalit politics.

5 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

*Religion & Conversion*

# Bill on religion: Gujarat Governor consulting AG

By Manas Dasgupta

**GANDHINAGAR, APRIL 3.** The Gujarat Governor, Sunder Singh Bhandari, who is yet to give his consent to the Freedom of the Religion Bill, has apparently not accepted the plea of the Leader of the Opposition, Amarsingh Chaudhary (Congress), that he should return all the seven bills, which were recently passed when the State Assembly was "not in order." The Governor has given his assent to the other six bills.

The bills were slated to come up in the House the same day the former Minister of State for Home and Revenue, Haren Pandya, was murdered in Ahmedabad, and as the Opposition created a furor in the Assembly demanding a statement from the Government on the killing, the treasury benches adopted all the seven bills in less than 35 minutes before adjourning the House for the day.

Raj Bhavan sources said the Governor had held up the Religious Conversion Bill to seek legal opinion on the issue and was consulting the Advocate-

General whether the measure was in commensurate with the constitutional provision of freedom to practise any religion.

Though the official spokesmen of the State Government and the ruling BJP said they did not know why the Governor was delaying the signing of the bill when he had given his assent to other six bills passed by the House in similar conditions, party sources said it could be on the advice of the BJP's central party leadership.

A section of the central party leadership is also believed to have formed the opinion that some of the provisions of the bill, particularly those giving "autocratic powers" to the district magistrates, who in Gujarat are also the collectors serving under the State Government, may not stand the scrutiny of law.

The Gujarat bill is harsher than a similar one adopted by the Tamil Nadu Assembly, which only provides for giving "information" to the district magistrate concerned about any religious conversion and does not seek his prior approv-

al. Whereas in Gujarat, even a genuine religious conversion would depend on the whims of the collectors.

Viewed specifically as a measure against the minorities, the bill has also caused considerable resentment among the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, the most vulnerable sections going for religious conversions. While some Christian leaders had called on the Governor requesting him not to give his assent to the bill, which they felt was specifically targeted against the Christian missionaries working in the tribal-dominated districts of Surat and Dangs in south Gujarat, a large number of organisations of the Backward Classes held week-long demonstrations at various parts of the State last week opposing the bill.

The Backward Classes organisations were of the opinion that the measure would take away their right to convert to Buddhism, the path shown by Babasaheb Ambedkar, if they felt that they were not getting justice from the Hindu leadership.

# Islamic scholars oppose excavation

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, March 9. — Islamic scholars and organisations have sought the intervention of the President and Prime Minister to stop the excavation at the disputed site in Ayodhya, describing the move as a “conspiracy to target Muslims across the country”.

The groups that have opposed the excavation ordered by Allahabad High Court include the Jamiat-e-Hamdania, Anjuman-e-Tableeq-ul-Islam and Muslim Auqaf Trust. The Hurriyat is yet to issue any statement on the issue.

While seeking the intervention of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, a Jamiat-e-Hamdania spokesman said the Muslims of the country had always protected Hindu institutions and places of worship. But some communal forces, including the Sangh Parivar, are targeting the Muslims without any justification, he said. The National Conference, a partner in the National Democratic Alliance, has described the decision as a “major conspiracy” to hurt the sentiments of 25

crore Muslims of the country. It also accused the BJP of looking for skeletons.

The party general secretary, Sheikh Nazir Ahmad, issued a statement saying the Centre should immediately reconstruct Babari Masjid and respect the sentiments of the Muslims.

Digging the disputed land, he said, will not achieve nothing. India owes its freedom to the sacrifices of countless Muslims, but “some communal elements are hell bent on weakening the country’s secular fabric. The rulers should analyse the facts and strengthen the secularism. This is the only way to prosperity,” Sheikh Ahmad said.

Former Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq recently chaired a meeting of Islamic scholars in which a resolution was passed asking the Centre to rein in the VHP and Bajrang Dal and provide protection to minority institutions.

The Islamic organisations have resolved that if the VHP and other Parivar outfits don’t stop their anti-Muslim propaganda, the Muslims would “use everything” to foil their designs.

# Ramjanmabhoomi awaits archaeologists

**BHAVNA VIJ-AURORA**  
AYODHYA, MARCH 7

**T**HE Ramjanmabhoomi is waiting for some activity. The entire town is waiting for the team of archaeologists to arrive and start the excavations. Things have been quiet for a long time now.

In anticipation of the excavations, the already tight security around the disputed area is being further strengthened. The place which can probably boast of maximum security in the country, has a permanently stationed Bomb Disposal Squad, four fire tenders and two ambulances. Over 3,000 security personnel from PAC, CRPF and state police form the security cordon around the

place. It is also perhaps the smallest place, in terms of area, having its own additional SP, responsible for its security.

"Things have been quiet and peaceful here. The only activity in recent past was when the team of Tojo-Vikas had come for exploration. Now, with the excavations starting next week, the security is being further strengthened. Things can get tense here. We cannot take any chances," says Avd-hesh Kumar, addl SP, Ramjanmabhoomi.

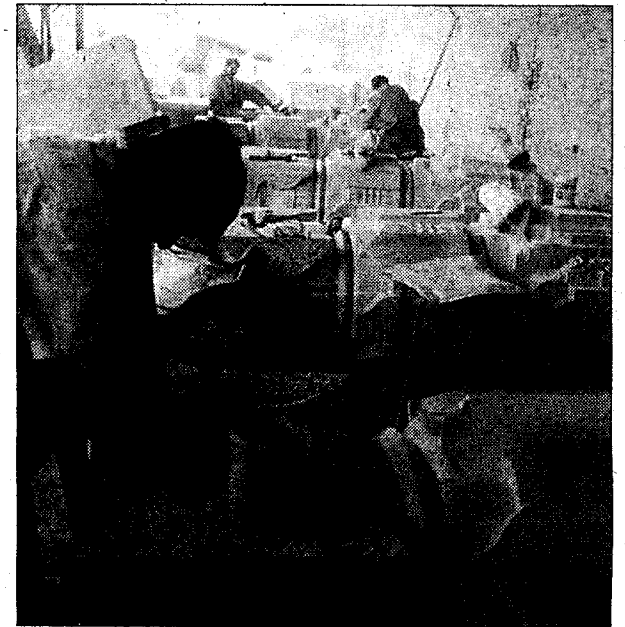
Meanwhile, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is busy deciding on the team of experts to carry out the excavations. Superintending Archaeologist of UP R.S. Fonia is in Delhi, attending meetings at the headquarters. His deputy S.K.

Mishra, who was part of the team accompanying Tojo-Vikas experts, thinks that he may not be going to Ayodhya this time. "Earlier it was only a survey but this time proper excavations have to be carried out. Considering the sensitivity of the issue and also the technical expertise required in complying with the high court order, the team will be decided by the headquarters. It may include experts from anywhere in the country," explains Mishra, adding that the work should start anytime early next week, in keeping with the one week time given by the court.

In Ayodhya, one person who is waiting for the ASI team is Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans Das, president of Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas. Go-

ing around with Z plus security, living in Digambar Akhara, Mahant says it's high time the matter is decided. "It's been too long that Bhagwan Shri Ram has been residing inside a tent, exposed to all the vagaries of nature. We cannot let him suffer for long. We welcome the ASI team, but only as long as they don't start digging near the main sanctum sanctorum. That place is sacred. It will only be disturbed to build the temple," he says, the warning evident.

The work at the Karyashala, where craftsmen from Rajasthan are busy chiselling and carving the pink Dholpur stone, has received a shot in the arm. The model of the temple, lying at Karsevakpuram, will soon be a reality, they think.



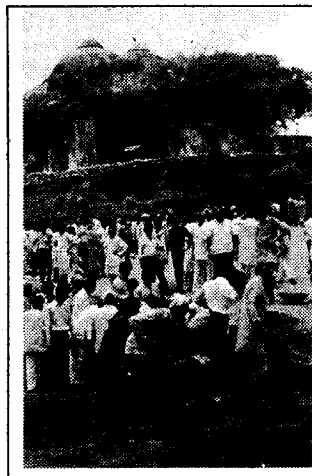
Craftsmen are busy chiselling the pink Dholpur stone

## Divide deep over digging disputed site

**SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

EXPERTS fear the Allahabad High Court order to excavate the disputed site in Ayodhya within seven days to determine whether a temple structure preceded the mosque, may open up a Pandora's Box. Given the antiquity of the civilization, deposits of habitations dating back to 2,500 years can possibly be found anywhere in the upper and lower Gangetic plains. A host of archaeologists and historians responded to our poser on how far we can go on digging the past and whether archaeology can provide the final answer to the Ayodhya dispute:

■ **SATISH CHANDRA**, historian with a Left leaning: At the last meeting of the National Integration Council, I had suggested an excavation at the disputed site to resolve



the decade-old issue. B.B. Lal's report — preliminary or otherwise — was never made public. If a temple is found, and, if it is an ancient temple — it should be preserved. On the other hand, if there's no remnants of a temple, the entire case that a mosque was built by destroying a temple has no relevance. In either case, the question of putting a new temple there does not

### BJP asks Muslims to give up Ayodhya claim

■ **NEW DELHI:** The BJP on Thursday appealed to the Muslim community to give up its claim on the disputed site at Ayodhya and facilitate the construction of a Ram temple to promote communal harmony. BJP parliamentary party spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra said: "If they agree to give up claim before the court verdict, it could lead to an amicable settlement." — **ENS**

arise. On the larger issue, if the remnants of a civilization/habitation is found under a heritage site it should also be preserved.

■ **DEVENDRA SWARUP**, historian, RSS member: Archaeological excavations are part of the discovery process. Unfortunately, the 1953 History Congress took a partisan view and the resolution (taken then) had political

overtones — it tried to stall excavation under existing structures. Construction of a temple is not important, establishing the truth is. Nobody holds the present Muslim youth responsible for the vandalism of the medieval times. But they should integrate themselves with the pre-Islamic heritage of the country.

■ **SURAJ BHAN**, archaeologist: "The question is what the level of excavation will be. How does one distinguish a pre-mosque structure and determine that was temple that had been destroyed in 1528 by Babur? We have to look at the larger question. Supposing the Buddhist demand that Bodh Gaya should be excavated. There are so many places of conflict. Should we go and dig them all?"

■ **S.P. GUPTA**, archaeologist, one of proponents of the Ayodhya temple theory: "It was Narul Hasan — a Marxist and Muslim historian and

minister in Indira Gadhii's Cabinet — who had ordered the first excavation of the Ayodhya site by B.B. Lal. When Lal had said at a conference that he should be allowed to excavate the mosque courtyard, historians like Irfan Habib raised a hue and cry... If it had been allowed then, the mosque could have been saved.

■ **IRFAN HABIB**, Left historian: In 1953, Indian History Congress passed a resolution opposing the Presidential reference to the SC that it should decide on the Babri Masjid issue. The position was that once a monument of archaeological importance exists, the earlier site is not a material for preservation. It seems that Babri Masjid was destroyed first and now we are looking for evidence to justify the act... In archaeology, we dig our past to find out what our culture was like, not to settle property disputes.

### Jhakar nets a few for Congress in UP

■ **NEW DELHI:** In protest against the "anti-farmer" attitude of the NDA Government and the "failure" of the Union Budget 2003 to help drought victims, some leaders of the ruling alliance from Western Uttar Pradesh — including include Omvir Tomar and Kanaklata — have joined the Congress. Dr Balram Jhakar, the chairman of party's Kisan and Khet Mazdoor Department, led a delegation of the farmer leaders who joined the party on Friday and met Sonia Gandhi. — **ENS**

## Controversial Dig

The decision of a three-judge special bench of the Allahabad high court to order the excavation of the disputed Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid site will come as a major surprise to most Ayodhya watchers. Given the long and tortuous legal and political history that already surrounds the dispute, the order is liable to inject a new and avoidable element of uncertainty into the case. The court has asked the Archaeological Survey of India to begin the excavation in a week's time and present a report of its progress by March 24. From a purely legalistic point of view, there can be no question that the court is well within its powers to ask for 'fresh' evidence, including of the archaeological kind. One of the issues framed in the title suits over the ownership of the disputed site was whether a temple existed on the 0.33 acre site prior to the construction of the Babri masjid. That said, doubts remain about whether the order will ensure a quick and just resolution to the long-festering dispute.

For one, archaeology is not an exact science. It seldom, if ever, unearths decisive historical proof. Rather than settle the Ayodhya question, the archaeological 'evidence' might well lead to more partisan political rhetoric. For another, the issue whether a temple existed at the site is hardly a clinching argument in deciding on the title suits. Finally, as early reactions to the order suggest, the excavation is likely to open a Pandora's box, with extremist organisations within the parivar pressing for an identical course of action to be taken in other "disputes" over religious sites. By its own admission, the VHP has a list of some 30,000 such sites. The question that needs to be asked is whether any government or party, even one that has made an electoral fortune out of "righting" historical "wrongs", can sustain the social and political fallout of such widespread upheaval. Any hope that the order might result in an early judgment in the Ayodhya case must, therefore, be tempered by the knowledge of its far-reaching implications. What's more, the stakes in Ayodhya are not just political, because it has the potential of redefining the very essence of the majority faith in this country. Unlike many others, the Hindu tradition has no place for the concept of historical revenge. It's this message that moderate voices within Hinduism must emphasise if they are to stop fringe elements from taking over.

7 MAR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Ayodhya digging to settle temple claim

YOGESH VAJPEYI

**Lucknow, March 5: The scientific exercise to conclude if a temple existed at the site where the Babri Masjid stood before demolition will begin in a week.**

The Allahabad High Court bench hearing the Ayodhya dispute today asked the Archaeological Survey of India to start excavation and report on the progress on March 24, the next date of hearing.

The order came a day before the Supreme Court hearing on whether the undisputed part of the land in the complex should be handed back to its "rightful owners". The land was in the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust's possession before being acquired by

the government.

The court said the excavation should be carried out without disturbing the makeshift temple, which means an area measuring about 10 feet of the *chabutra* (platform) where the idol of Ram is placed. The right of devotees to have a *darshan* at the makeshift temple is not to be disturbed.

Objections by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust as well as the Central Sunni Waqf Board and the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee to the excavation were overruled by the court.

Faced with a fait accompli, the rival parties changed their tune, claiming that since the order had taken note of their misgivings, they saw nothing

wrong in it.

"Prima facie we see nothing to object in the court's order since it notes that the Supreme Court's directive to maintain status quo at the disputed site would not be violated," Zafaryab Jilani, lawyer and convener of the Babri committee, said.

Jilani left for Delhi to consult lawyers representing the Waqf board in the Supreme Court on the implications of the order. "We will express our considered view after discussions," he said.

Ramjanmabhoomi Trust chief Ramachandras Parmhans, who had earlier opposed the court's suggestion to excavate the site and threatened agitation, also fell in line.

"We are happy that the court has ordered that the idol of Ram

Lalla at the disputed site would not be shifted and the puja will continue as usual," he said from Ayodhya.

The bench said excavation had become necessary after the report of a ground-penetrating radar survey conducted by Tojo-Vikas International Pvt. Limited in January.

It said the survey had detected a number of anomalies from 0.5 to 5.5 metres in depth that could be associated with ancient and contemporary structures such as pillars, foundations and walls, but their nature could be confirmed only "by systematic ground truthing, such as provided by archaeological trenching".

The court order implicitly rejected VHP leader Ashok Singhal's claim that the survey had

shown existence of a temple underneath the disputed land.

"It (survey) is only a guidance to an archaeologist where to excavate. We are not recording any findings in regard to any foundation/construction on the basis of the report submitted by Tojo-Vikas International Limited," the order said.

VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia, however, put up a brave face. "If the excavation corroborates our earlier findings of pillars and other remains of ancient temples which were recovered after the demolition of the Babri mosque, it will have a positive impact on the hearings by the Lucknow bench," he said.

The court ordered the ASI to complete the excavation in a

month and submit its report within a week after that.

It asked the ASI and the Union government to provide extra staff, if needed, to complete the work before the deadline. "If they are engaged in other work, it shall be suspended till the excavation in question is complete," the order said.

Tojo-Vikas will assist the ASI by providing technical assistance at the time of excavation, the court said.

The court has asked the ASI to intimate the date of the commencement of the work to the officer on special duty, Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid, so that he can inform the contesting parties. The parties have been allowed to appoint nominees, including archaeologists, to watch

the excavation by the ASI.

"Only one nominee of each contesting party at one time shall be entitled to remain present," the court said.

The BJP, the VHP and government sources conceded that today's order was a "logical follow-up" to the earlier survey.

"It is ultimately the excavation which will establish the direction (of the case) pursuant to the earlier approach. A clear indication that such a ruling would come was apparent from the radar report," said a source.

The last line of the report suggested that if the court thought it necessary, it could confirm the survey's findings by ordering physical excavation.

■ See Page 6

# VHP hawks raise pitch, pillory PM House march to mask red faces

**RADHIKA RAMASESHAN**

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Stung by reports suggesting that it had capitulated to the RSS and the BJP's pressure, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) resorted to a face-saver by announcing that sadhus and sants would "ghe-*rao*" Parliament tomorrow.

VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia claimed the march would be "peaceful" and called on the saffron brigade not to disrupt law and order by confronting the police.

VHP sources said the strategy was to mount pressure on the government to agree to a law for handing over the "undisputed" land in Ayodhya to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas. It would also be a show of strength ahead of the Supreme Court's March 6 hearing of the Centre's prayer for vacation of the stay on religious activity in the complex.

The plan's success in igniting the sadhus could be gauged from the full-throated cries that rose from the Ram Lila Maidan on the second day of the *dharma sansad* each time the star speakers — Acharya Dharmendra and Togadia — attacked Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Sonia Gandhi and the Muslims.

Ashok Singhal and Mahant Avaidyanath, who held centrestage yesterday and sounded do-*vish* in comparison, took a back seat. The mood yesterday was

one of indifference and anger after the meeting unveiled a slew of programmes meant as a build-up to temple construction without specifying the timeframe.

But Dharmendra gave an aggressive spin to the lacklustre resolution, asserting that the March 5-24 build-up would see

## Advani case

Lucknow, Feb. 23: The CBI has decided to begin prosecution of L.K. Advani and 20 others in the Babri Masjid demolition case in the Rae Bareilly special court.

It has moved a petition in the court of Lucknow district sessions judge J.M. Paliwal, seeking permission to begin prosecution of Advani and others in the special court set up for the purpose. The plea will be heard on February 26.

■ See Page 6

"Ram bhakts" visit every village in the country with a one-point agenda of identifying the "anti-Hindu *desh drohis* (enemies of the nation)". "The result will be there for all to see. Gujarat will be repeated everywhere. The benefit of this will go to those who prove their commitment to the Hindu cause," he said.

Turning his attention on Sonia Gandhi, he exhorted her to jump onto the saffron bandwag-

on. "*Bhabhiji* (Sonia) can also take advantage if she declares herself to be part of the larger Hindu parivar. She should stop doing this *nautanki* (farce) in Ambaji temple. *Bhabhiji*, you are our *bahurani* (daughter-in-law) and if you free yourself from the clutches of the Pope's conspiracy and accept Ram as your only God, we will have no problem."

The decision to besiege Parliament was taken last night after the leaders concluded that if the sadhus were not allowed to "vent their pent-up emotions (against the Centre)", the prospect of galvanising them for future agitation was "bleak". RSS joint general secretary Madan Das Devi's presence in today's sitting confirmed that the move had the Sangh's blessing.

Dharmendra's speech unfolded a change of tack. Directly or indirectly, he referred to Vajpayee as a "betrayee", a glutton and a "*rashtra drohi*". "If you want to betray someone, let it be Musharraf. But why our sants? The sants trusted you, but you cheated them. I think all of you know who I am talking about."

Directly addressing Vajpayee, he said: "Prime Minister, history is written not in ink but by the blood of the kar sevaks who were martyred in Ayodhya. This blood was certainly not shed by a poet who polishes off *rasmallas*, *rasmalais* and plates of fish in a restaurant in France."

24 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Babri panel fires contempt salvo

YOGESH VAJPEYI

Lucknow, Feb. 22: The All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee today said it would sue VHP leader Ashok Singhal for contempt of court for claiming that a laser beam survey had established the existence of a temple on the disputed Ayodhya site.

"The VHP leaders are trying to misinform the people and committing contempt of court by selectively leaking a document," committee spokesman Zafarayab Jilani said.

Jilani said all the 26 parties in the main title suit pending before Allahabad High Court were given the sensitive report of the survey with a directive that its contents should not be made public. The report was submitted to the Lucknow bench of the high court on February 15.

"Singhal has defied the court's directives...and the AIB-MAC will be moving an application for punishing him on this count. We will move the application on March 4 or 5," he said.

Jilani refused to divulge what the survey had revealed. "Unlike the VHP leaders, we will abide by the order of the court and say whatever we have to only in the appropriate forum."

None of the lawyers and parties to the dispute were willing to talk about the survey that the VHP working president had referred to. "We have been advised not to air our views and will say whatever we have to say only in

court," an advocate involved in the Ayodhya case said.

He said that last August, the special bench of the high court had suggested that the Uttar Pradesh government order an excavation at the site to determine if any Hindu temple had existed there. But the VHP had publicly opposed the move.

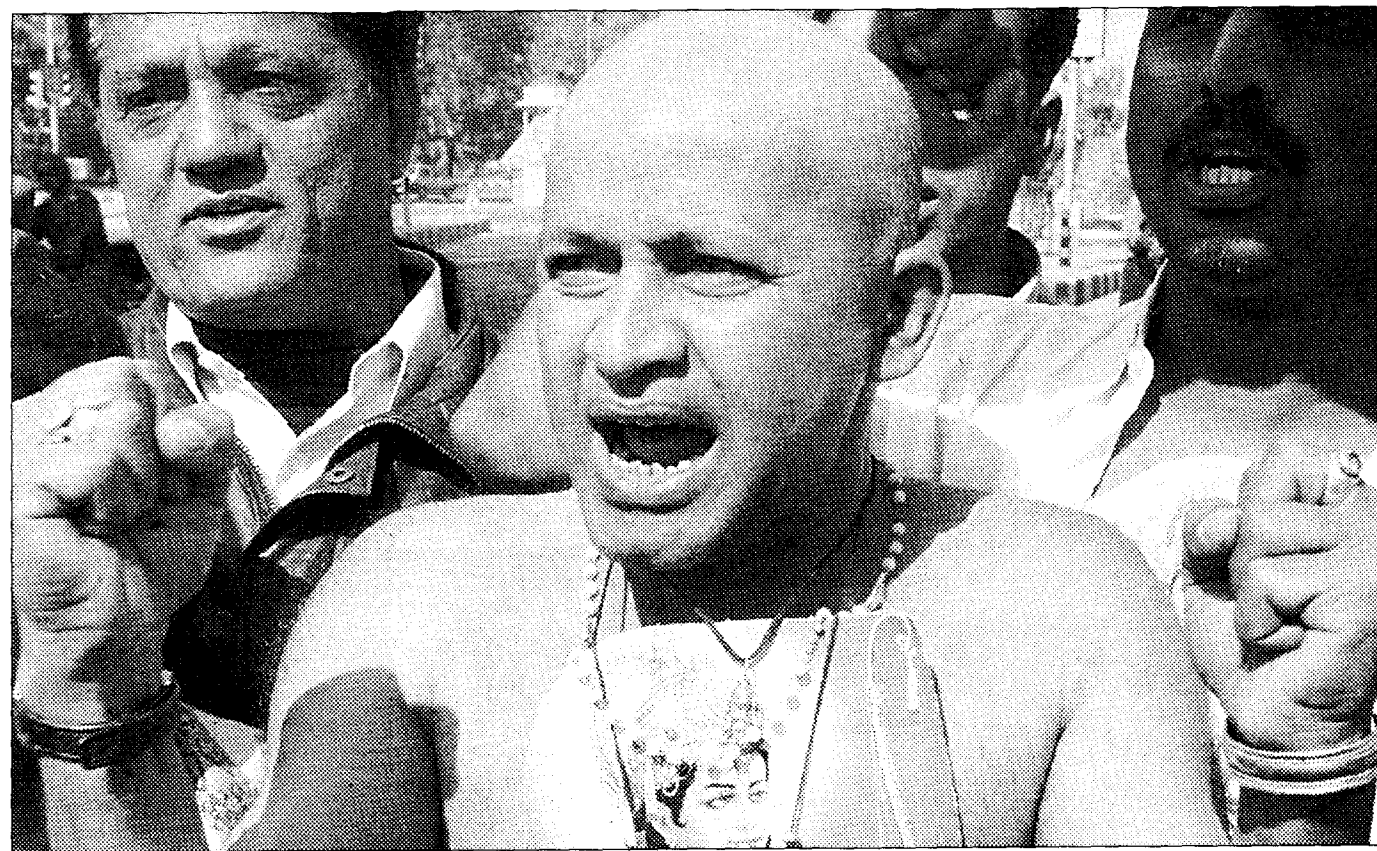
"Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas chief Mahant Ramchandradas Paramhans had strongly objected to the move and threatened to launch an agitation if the idol of Ramlalla is shifted from the *garba griha* (sanctum sanctorum) for the excavation," the advocate recalled.

Singhal and other VHP leaders had taken a similar stand, maintaining that excavations would mean violating the makeshift temple's sanctity. Singhal had claimed that the Archaeological Survey of India in 1992 had proved that a Ram temple had existed there and there was no need for another excavation.

"The court had taken a serious view of these statements and Paramhans and Singhal were hauled up for contempt of court at that time," Jilani recalled. Singhal's latest statement clearly amounted to contempt of court, he added.

Jilani said the Babri panel would exercise "total restraint and will not issue any statement that could vitiate the atmosphere of amity and peace, which the VHP is bent on disturbing".

"It is for the people of the



An activist protests against the use of religion for political gains at a rally in New Delhi on Saturday. (Reuters)

country and Hindus in particular to evaluate the situation and see as to who wants to vitiate the atmosphere and spoil the communal amity," he added. "Creating hatred and barriers between the communities is wrong and

such statements need not be reciprocated as they will further aggravate the situation."

While Singhal was making his claim in Delhi, the special bench on Friday issued guidelines for the reporting of court

proceedings by the media. Justices Sudhir Narain, J.A. Alam and Bhanwar Singh said that while the media was entitled to publish a fair and accurate report of the court proceedings, it should not air opinion of any

person, including the parties, about the merits of the case.

The court's clarification on Friday was issued on an application by the National Union of Journalists on press coverage of the proceedings.

23 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH



# Singhal springs 'evidence' of temple

**RADHIKARAMASESHAN**

**New Delhi, Feb. 21:** A day after Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced in Himachal Pradesh that he was confident all historical and other evidence would incontrovertibly establish that a temple existed at the site of the Babri mosque, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) disclosed what the "evidence" was.

In the middle of the VHP's *margdarshak mandal* meeting, outfit chief Ashok Singhal said

a "deep-penetrating radar system survey" by a Canadian agency, which penetrated the "disputed" land in Ayodhya with a laser beam, discovered the archaeological ruins of a temple beneath the "disputed structure" (Babri mosque).

Singhal said the pillars and broken parts, "dating back 3,000 to 4,000 years", were found at a depth of 5.5 metres and the "evidence" corroborated the findings of VHP historian B.B. Lal in 1978.

The Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government knew about

these findings but had asked him not to speak about them. Singhal said. He, nevertheless, spilled the beans in a widely-released news conference.

"The report is with us and it is favourable to us. Mandir remains were found. The Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government said the report was embargoed but we decided to go ahead and talk about it," the VHP leader added.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court gave the Centre reason to cheer when it set March 6 for hearing the plea for vacation

of stay on the "undisputed land" in Ayodhya. (See Page 6)

Although it was clear that at one level the BJP-led government at the Centre and the VHP worked in tandem on Ayodhya, Singhal and the others who addressed the media tried to sound tough on the Vajpayee dispensation.

Former BJP MP of Gorakhpur Mahant Avaidyanath — who heads a sub-committee on temple construction — asserted that the *dharma sansad*, which begins tomorrow, would come out with an "unprecedented and

significant" decision.

Another sadhu, Parmanand Maharaj, described the impending confrontation as an "*zargar ke ladave*" (fight to the finish). The Prime Minister had earlier pulled up VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia for using the same phrase. But an unfazed Parmanand said: "Our *sangharsh* (agitation) will go on and it will be the final one."

Avaidyanath spoke of how Congress governments in the past had helped the VHP's temple agenda, willingly or unwittingly.

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"First, Veer Bahadur Singh (former Uttar Pradesh chief minister) had the locks of the disputed structure opened. Then the Congress government allowed us to do *shilanyas* after first saying the land was disputed. Then the structure was allowed to come down. Narasimha Rao (former Prime Minister) in his wisdom thought the problem should end," he pointed out.

The former MP said they had hoped the BJP government would restore the *samman* (self-respect) of the Hindu *sama*,

which even the Independence movement could not.

"But today our sadhus and saints categorically stated that this would be the very last *dharma sansad*. If no construction was allowed after this, the sadhu *sama* is ready for any sacrifice. *andolan* (agitation), dharna, *dharma sabhas* (religious meetings), yatras, anything," Avaidyanath added.

Singhal said the VHP was in "confrontation with the government because it is the government that has to give the land".

"It has to decide which is ex-

cess land and which is not, demarcate the areas for building a temple or a mosque, in case the court (the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court) rules in favour of either, and restore the rest to its original owner. It's not the court's job to do all this," the VHP leader said, adding that the *dharma sansad* would focus almost exclusively on Ayodhya.

Government sources said they hoped that Vajpayee's statement and "clarifications" on cow slaughter would help them buy peace with the VHP for the moment at least.

# SC will hear plea on Ayodhya on March 6

## VHP threatens to take 'hard decisions' today

## Opposition trains guns on Vajpayee

By Rakesh Bhatnagar  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The supreme court on Friday deferred until March 6 the hearing of the Centre's plea for allowing religious activity in the acquired 67 acres of land in Ayodhya. The court also made it clear that it would not be pressured.

A bench of chief justice V.N. Khare and Justice A.R. Lakshmanan said the matter would be heard by a five-judge bench. In 1994, it was a five-judge bench judgment that had ordered the freezing of the acquired land until the title suits relating to the disputed site were decided by the lower courts. The bench said on Friday that if the main petition was adjourned for some reason on March 6, the Centre's application would be taken up for consideration.

Faced with the February 23 deadline set by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for resolution of the Ayodhya issue, the Centre moved the court seeking vacation of its order passed in the wake of the 'shiladaan' in Ayodhya on March 13, 2002.

(The VHP has threatened that a crucial meeting of saints in the capital on Saturday will take "unprecedented and hard decisions" on the Ayodhya issue, reports PTI. About 150 prominent saints

### Temple tangle



- Court makes it clear that it won't be pressured
- Mayawati government backs Centre's move

from across the country, who attended the VHP's Marg Darshak Mandal day-long meeting in Delhi on Friday, expressed "anger" and a feeling of being "cheated" by the government.)

While solicitor-general Kirit N. Raval told the apex court that the matter "brooks no delay as the uncertainty prevailing on the acquired land is not in the public interest", various other bodies opposed his stand.

The Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh, backing the Centre, said it was for an early hearing of the petition as well as the application filed by the Centre. Muslim Personal Law Board counsel Kapil Sibal said the government was not stating the actual reason behind the hurry—that it was working under "pressure" from the VHP.

● VHP's claim, Page 8

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The opposition on Friday took the Prime Minister to task in the Lok Sabha for trying to influence the courts on the Ayodhya issue. The reference was to an election speech he had made in Himachal Pradesh on Thursday in which he said there was historical and other evidence that would establish that a temple had existed in Ayodhya on the spot where the Babri masjid was built.

The CPM's Somnath Chatterjee said, "How can the head of the government talk about a matter pending in the court? If a lesser mortal had done it, he would have been hauled up by the court."

Parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said she had spoken to Mr Vajpayee on the subject. "He said that even though there was definite proof that there was a temple, he was still prepared to wait for the court verdict. What greater assurance can the PM give to the nation?"

Meanwhile, the Congress party alleged on Friday that the PM had committed a breach of the election code by raising the issue at an election rally in Himachal Pradesh. However, the party refused to say whether it would approach the Election Commission.

# BJP, VHP back cow slaughter ban

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 19. — Cow protection is back on the nation's political agenda, thanks to Mr Digvijay Singh, Madhya Pradesh chief minister. His letter to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee seeking a nationwide ban on cow slaughter has forced the BJP and the VHP to react on the subject.

The BJP today asked the Centre to bring in a legislation in Parliament during the current Budget session to impose a ban on cow slaughter. Prof. VK Malhotra, party spokesman, also asked the Congress and its president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, in particular to clarify their stand on the subject.

Prof. Malhotra said the Congress is adopting double standards on the subject. While on the one hand, Mr Digvijay Singh writes to the Prime Minister to impose a ban, the Congress clandestinely supports cow slaughter, he said.

Acharya Giriraj Kishore of the VHP supported the demand to impose a total ban on cow slaughter all over India. **VHP stand:** Brushing aside Opposition parties' criticism of its programme to distribute tridents as a "misinterpretation", the VHP today vowed to go ahead with it describing it as part of religious practice, adds PTI.

## Vajpayee and Lord Hanuman

Exuding confidence that Mr Vajpayee will do something for the cause of the Temple, chief seer of the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas, Ramchandradasji Paramhans, compared the PM to Hanuman, who served Lord Ram as a faithful devotee all his life, a report from Ahmedabad says.

*"Jaise Hanuman Bhagwan Ram ke bahut bade bhakt the... aur bina stree wale the... Vajpayeeji aise hee bhakt hain... aur woh bhee bina stree wale hain* (just as Hanuman was a devotee of Lord Ram and was unmarried, Vajpayee is also a devotee and a bachelor too)," Paramhans remarked.

# Curfew in three MP towns as Dhar temple issue hots up

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND  
AGENCIES

**Dhar/Bhopal:** Curfew was imposed in Dhar and two other towns of Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday as violence swept through Dhar and adjoining villages during a bandh called by Sangh Parishad outfits.

Inspector-general of police Virendra Mohan Kanwar said the Rapid Action Force and anti-riot squads had been deployed to bring the situation under control. Additional forces were being brought in from neighbouring districts, he said.

The police was forced to open fire at three places as rampaging mobs hurled petrol bombs and stones at the police. Police vehicles were damaged at several places.

Meanwhile, in a significant development, the district administration on Wednesday recommended the relaxation of restrictions on the entry into Bhojshala.

The BJP claimed that two persons were killed in the firing but the police denied anyone was even injured. Claiming that two persons had died in police firing, BJP MLA Kailash Vijaywargia said in the Madhya Pradesh assembly that the situation was "very tense" in Dhar and urged the government make a statement on the events there. Responding to this, home minister Mahendra Boudh said a statement would be made on Thursday.

However, district superintendent of police K.K. Lohani said an X-ray examination of four persons who were reported injured in police firing revealed that there were pellets in their bodies but these could not be the result of a police firing.

Mr Lohani and district collector Sanjay Dubey told reporters that no one was injured in the firing. When it was pointed out that Mr Lohani himself had earlier said that four persons had been injured, he said he did not have the full facts at that time. They also added that 35 people had been arrested all over the district for the violence.

The Hindu Jagaran Manch, VHP and the Bajrang Dal had called Wednesday's bandh to protest the police action on Tuesday foiling their attempt to storm the disputed Bhojshala shrine.

In Dhar, traffic was disrupted and shops remained closed during the bandh. In Dhar town, Hindu Jagaran Manch activists attacked the police with stones and smashed windshields of police vehicles. There were reports of mobs attacking the police on the Indore-Dhar highway, where a state transport bus was torched.

As violence spread to the neighbouring rural areas of Dedla, Utawad and Tirla, 15 policemen were injured.

## BJP renews call to ban cow slaughter

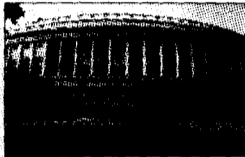
**New Delhi:** Accusing the Congress of adopting double standards on the cow protection issue, the BJP on Wednesday asked the government to enact a legislation banning cow slaughter throughout the country.

"We have asked the government to bring in a bill in the current session of parliament banning cow slaughter," BJP spokesman V.K. Malhotra told reporters here. PTI

# LS to discuss Ayodhya issue on February 26

TIMES NEWS NETWORK (91)

## The debate



- Congress favours status quo on issue
- Left parties and SP seek adjournment of the house on Tuesday
- Later, the opposition defers censure motion till February 26

**New Delhi:** The Lok Sabha will discuss the Ayodhya issue on February 26, the day polling takes place for the Himachal Pradesh assembly and after the railway budget is presented in the house.

While the opposition is still pushing for a discussion under Rule 184, which will ensure voting, the government would like it to be under Rule 193.

The decision on the date was taken in the Lok Sabha's business advisory committee where the BJP expressed its willingness to have a discussion on Tuesday itself since it felt that this could have provided it with a platform for its Hindutva ideology, which could help it in the Himachal elections.

But the Congress was reportedly not keen to have the discussion till after the VHP's dharam sansad on February 22-23. It is hoping the dharam sansad will provide it some more ammunition against the government. Besides, it also reportedly felt that the discussion held after campaigning for the Himachal polls ends lest the speeches by any of its leaders be interpreted as anti-temple and consequently harm its electoral prospects.

Officially, the Congress said its leaders would be out campaigning till the February 26. The Samajwadi Party, on its part, was keen that Uttar Pradesh and the "misuse" of Pota there take precedence over Ayodhya. As for the Left parties, they went along with the Congress and the SP in the interest of opposition unity.

Yet, when proceedings began in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, question hour opened with the opposition vociferously demanding a discussion on Ayodhya. The matter was settled in the business advisory committee meeting which took place at 1 p.m. And

in zero hour, the BJP suffered some uncomfortable moments when Devendra Prasad Yadav, member from the JD(U), an NDA ally, ticked off the government for not taking any of its partners into confidence before filing an application in the supreme court, seeking vacation of the stay banning religious activity on the 'undisputed' land in Ayodhya.

Meanwhile, in her address to the Congress parliamentary party on Tuesday, Ms Gandhi listed her priorities for the budget session: pinning down the government over the joint parliamentary committee report on the UTI scam, seeking stability in the tax policy and long-term savings, and demanding special programmes for rural infrastructure and social security.

Ms Gandhi attacked the BJP's Hindutva campaign, saying, "I am sure that all attempts presently being made to misinterpret the SC judgement on Ayodhya will eventually be frustrated."

But Congress spokesman Satyabrat Chaturvedi later told reporters, "We are not against building a mandir." He refused to comment when asked whether the party wants the Babri mosque to be rebuilt as promised by the former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

# Prez for early judgment in Ayodhya case

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, February 17

HT-1

18/2

Religion & Power

AN ATTACK on Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism and a call for an early judicial verdict on the Ayodhya dispute dominated President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's first address to a joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the budget session on Monday.

The government, Kalam said, is keen to resolve the Ayodhya dispute either through negotiations or a judicial verdict which has to be accepted by all. He said, "While the judiciary should expedite its work and give an early verdict, it is also necessary for political parties, religious leaders and eminent social personalities to promote an atmosphere of mutual understanding, goodwill and accommodation."

The Opposition intends to raise the issue on Tuesday through an adjournment motion following the Centre's "misplaced initiative" in approaching the Supreme Court.

In his exposition of the government's policies, Kalam underlined India's willingness to resume dialogue with Islamabad as soon as it stops cross-border terrorism. He said the threat to India's security was "external" and accused Pakistan of having failed to carry out its pledge to end exporting terror to India.

He said Pakistan had consistently responded with "hatred and violence" to India's efforts to build peaceful and friendly relations, and had flouted diplomatic norms by using its mission in Delhi to finance terrorist groups.

Kalam urged vigilance against an adversary unwilling to

## Shekhawat ill

WHILE DELIVERING the Hindi translation of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's joint address to Parliament, Vice-President B.S. Shekhawat (80) seemed to sway a bit, staggered to his chair and sat down. He was rushed to his chamber, given medicines, and later declared "perfectly fine". Doctors said he suffered a cramp in his legs because he had been standing for a long time.

Details on Page 4

give up its "anti-India stand".

Kalam also mentioned ISI activities in Bangladesh and the illegal migration from there, as well as the use of Bangladeshi territory by insurgent groups operating in the North-east.

"The Government is determined to take all necessary steps to check this problem," the President said.

The Opposition is likely to criticise the address over the government's claim that it is committed to secularism, given the riots in Gujarat. There would also be criticism that the address, which highlighted the government's achievements, was silent on whether the government would introduce crucial legislation — such as those relating to the Lok Pal, Central Vigilance Commission and women's reservation.

Related reports on Page 4

# VHP's Agenda, NDA's Jhanda

This weekend all eyes will be on the Supreme Court. On the eve of the Dharam Sansad the court will decide on the NDA government's plea that the "undisputed site" be returned to the VHP. While **Ajit Kumar Jha** reports on the politics of it, **Manoj Mitta** weighs the court's options



**TIMELINE AYODHYA**

1528: The Babri Mosque is constructed  
December 22, 1949: Lord Ram's idol is surreptitiously shifted from the Ram Chabutra to inside the mosque. The government locks the gates of the mosque and proclaims the area disputed  
January 1950: Two suits are filed by Hindus. A civil judge passes an interim order allowing the idols to remain in place and the puja to continue  
December 18, 1961: The Sunni Waqf Board files a suit seeking removal of the idols  
February 1, 1986: A Faizabad district judge orders opening of the locks for worship by the Hindus following Rajiv Gandhi's intervention  
May 12, 1986: The Waqf Board challenges the district judge's order  
August, 1989: The title suits are transferred to Allahabad High Court  
December 6, 1992: Kar se-waks demolish the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya



January 7, 1993: The Narasimha Rao government acquires the disputed site  
October 1994: The Supreme Court upholds the

ALL it Dharam replacing Sansad. Alternatively, a case of reversal of roles within a family. Or simply call it advantage Vishwa Hindu Parishad. But once you become the breadwinner in a parivar, you invariably end up calling the shots. In politics, if you become the new vote-getter, you end up becoming the agenda-setter.

It is precisely such a reversal of fortunes that has become the tale of India's numero uno family, the Sangh Parivar, after the victory in Gujarat. It has caused some fraternal heartburn and some sibling rivalry. But until now the foster child of the Parivar, the Parishad, has suddenly become the new poster child.

Consider the following: less than a year ago, when

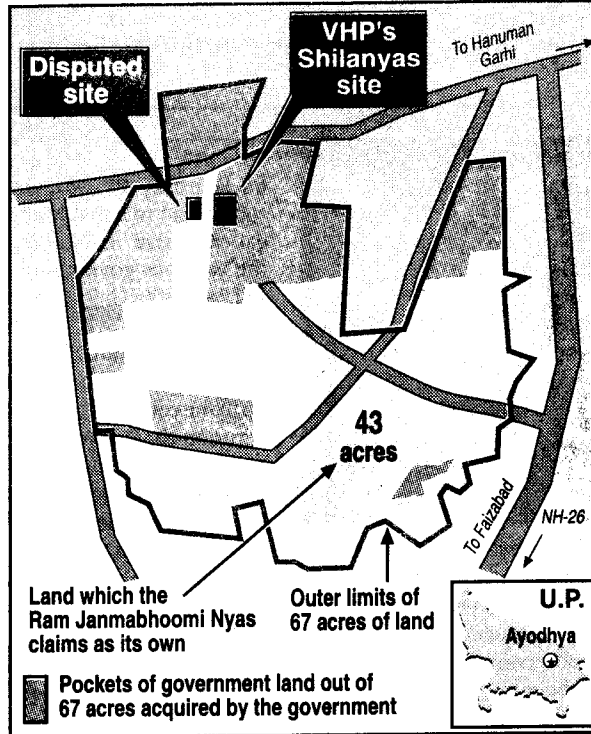
the VHP raked up the Ram Mandir issue by organising the Purna Aahuti Yagya at the Karsevak Puram in Ayodhya, the Prime Minister chose to simply ignore them. In fact, he openly declared that the NDA government would abide by the Supreme Court decision. So incensed were the VHP cadres that several of them abused him openly, calling him a "traitor". An infuriated Ashok Singhal of the VHP even asked for the head of the PM's principal secretary Brajesh Mishra.

Today, the situation has changed 180 degrees. Until recently used by politicians to drum up support during yatras, the Parishad has become the main software programmer for the government today. The NDA government has made a plea to the

Supreme Court on behalf of the VHP to return the "undisputed area". Gushing with pride, Acharya Giriraj Kishore of the VHP says, "After much pressure the government has finally gone to the court praying that the stay of 2002 be vacated and the acquired land be returned to the original owners, the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas."

However, Syed Shahabuddin of the Muslim Personal Law Board is clearly shocked. "The NDA government has been finally unmasked. Instead of being neutral as the Constitution deems the state should be, it is speaking in the voice of the VHP," he retorts.

The situation today is so pathetic for the NDA government that despite such a major concession from the Cen-



IE Graphics/B.K. SHARMA

tral government, the VHP and some RSS leaders are still fuming and fretting. "The NDA government is adept at this game of doing varnishing during crisis, but there is no sincerity in its commitments," admits one seasoned RSS pracharak. "Remember how Shatrughan Singh of the PMO was dispatched last year after the Shiladan, and how the then law minister tried disaster management by taking the issue to court in 2002. What was the consequence? Interim order of status quo by the apex court. The Sangh has no vishwas in the Vajpayee sarkar anymore," he reiterates.

The reasons for the NDA government's climbdown in its stand-off with the VHP are several. The Gujarat victory, piggy-backing the hate campaign unleashed by the 10-

lakh strong VHP cadre, is number one. Last month's popular Bhojsala campaign in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, a crucial state heading for polls this year, is number two.

The Dharam Sangam campaign led by the Hindu Jagran Manch in the drought-stricken Malwa region of western MP has given fresh life to the faction-ridden BJP in the state. It has also forced Congress Chief Minister Digvijay Singh to adopt a soft Hindutva agenda. Ditto is the case in Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Karnataka and other states coming up for polls in the near future. All of a sudden, the Sadhus and Sants of the VHP have electrified the entire BJP campaign machinery.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

acquisition of the land  
December 6, 2000: Prime Minister Vajpayee says the Ram temple reflects "national sentiments"

October 17, 2001: Violating court orders VHP leaders enter the disputed site.

February 24, 2002: BJP's defeat in UP coincides with VHP's Purna Aahuti Yagya

March 13-14, 2002: On a petition by Aslam Bhure, Supreme Court forbids any religious activity and restrains government from handing over the area to anyone

October, 2002: The Centre files a counter affidavit to Bhure's petition, virtually adopting the VHP's agenda

February 4, 2003: The Centre files an application seeking vacation of the March 2002 interim order

## 'Birthplace: issue of faith, not law'

He is 83 years old, suffers from high blood pressure and is often irritable. Yet, few can equal VHP vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore's ability at agenda-setting. Even in his advanced age, he has displayed the same zeal in planning the February 22 Dharam Sansad by directing Dharam Jagran Yatras all over north India for months now as he did when he organised the Ekamata Yatra in the 1980s—the VHP's first large-scale mobilisation. Yet, when hotheads like Praveen Togadia cross the Lakshman Rekha, he is the first to rush with a corrigendum. Having spent 43 years with the RSS, two decades with the VHP and a while with the party, the Acharya is quite adept at mixing politics with religion. In an exclusive interview with AJIT KUMAR JHA, the Acharya explains the VHP's strategy.

INTERVIEW | GIRIRAJ KISHORE, VHP vice-president



Remember, possession is half-right. Today we have the possession over the Ram Janambhoomi, so we have a right over it.

■ Is the Vajpayee government justified in pleading with the Supreme Court that the "undisputed land" in Ayodhya (67 acres) should be returned to the owners?  
Why not. Our land should be handed over to us so that we can start construction work for the

Ram temple. We are only demanding 43 acres, which belonged to the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas. The 1994 judgement of the Supreme Court clearly states that besides the disputed site the government should retain only as much of the acquired land as is required to provide

access to the disputed site. The surplus land should be returned to its original owners. The Vajpayee government is making a plea based on the Supreme Court's earlier judgement.

■ What about the Supreme Court's interim order last year for a status quo on the subject?

The stay is purely temporary. Since no work can be conducted unless the writ petition is disposed, the Government has gone to court praying that the stay be vacated. The court itself said in March 2002 that the matter should be heard within ten weeks.

■ If the "undisputed land" is returned to you by the Court decision on February 21 will you abide by the Supreme

## 'Govt speaks in VHP's voice'

As a left wing student leader at Patna he is said to have led a black flag protest against former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Today he edits Muslim India. The passion of his student days continues although ideologically he has shifted rightwards. The convener of the Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee and a permanent member of the All India Personal Law Board, Syed Shahabuddin is an ex-MP and a former diplomat. In an exclusive interview to AJIT KUMAR JHA he criticises the latest move of the Central government and explains why he cannot negotiate with the VHP.

■ What do you think of the NDA government's plea to the Supreme Court to return the "undisputed land" to

the Nyas?

The Vajpayee government has broken its vow to uphold the Constitution. It is not in consonance with the Constitutional principles of secularism. It is representing the VHP's agenda in both spirit and content.

Furthermore, the Ac-

quisition Act of 1993 under the Narasimha Rao government, prescribes a certain purpose, that of establishing communal harmony. Moreover, the Act prescribes that status quo be maintained in the acquired 70 acres until the purpose of the Act is implemented. The 1994

Supreme Court judgement upheld the 1993 Act.

■ But the VHP's claim is that they are merely asking for the return of the undisputed land which originally belonged to them and was acquired by the Rao government.

It is what they consider "undisputed." Other than the disputed site there is a disputed area, which include 23 plots totalling 6.5 acres which have been under dispute ever since 1961. Moreover, if the site plan includes the disputed site, then any construction is illegal. The 1989 shilanyas was wrong precisely because it fell inside the disputed area. When the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Jayanth Saraswati raised the possibility of building a wall between



INTERVIEW | SHAHABUDDIN, Muslim Law Board

The 1993 Acquisition Act under Rao, prescribes a certain purpose, that of establishing communal harmony

# Muslim cell to oppose Centre plea

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 9: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board has decided to oppose the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's petition to reverse a Supreme Court order freezing religious activity on the controversial land in Ayodhya.

The board also resolved not to talk either to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or any other member of the Sangh parivar.

The decision to oppose the Centre's petition was taken at a meeting called by the board's legal wing this morning to discuss the Centre's latest move on the mandir-masjid dispute.

However, the board will not file a fresh petition before the Supreme Court. The appeal will be made when it is called to give its views on the government's petition.

The board also decided to stick to the February 2002 resolution of not talking to either the VHP or any other member of the Sangh parivar.

"There is also no question of talking to the Kanchi sankaracharya because we realised from our last experience that he cannot be trusted to keep his promise," said former Union minister Syed Shahabuddin, a special invitee to the meeting and counted among the hardliners.

"If the government were to approach us with specific proposals, we will definitely consider them," Shahabuddin said. "The sankaracharya has not approached us this time and we are no longer willing to talk to him as he has broken our trust."

But diverse opinions do exist in the board. The convener and spokesman of the board's committee on Babri Masjid, S.Q.R. Illyas, told PTI that it was

willing to consider any fresh proposal from the seer on the issue. "The board has every regard for the esteemed sankaracharya and considers him as one of the great Hindu religious leaders," he said.

Zafaryab Jilani, a member of the Muslim law board, said: "When Kamal Farooqui, Muslim personal law board member, told the press in Chennai two days ago that we are not against talks, it was misinterpreted to mean we are ready to talk to the sankaracharya. But our willingness to talk will depend on the sankaracharya getting a written assurance from the VHP that it will abide by the court verdict or the Ayodhya dispute. This will be our main condition," asserted Jilani.

"*Baat cheet ka darwaza bandh nahi hua, hamesha khula hai* (The talks door is always open). But last year when the Kanchi sankaracharya came to us with a set of proposals, we asked for certain documents, which would buttress these proposals. Those documents were not given. Even today if he gives the documents, we are ready to talk," said board secretary Mohammad Abdul Rahim Quereshi.

The board members have no problem with the Centre's plea before the apex court to expedite the hearings on the case.

But they feel that if the stay on religious activity is removed, matters may spin out of control and the VHP could exploit the situation in the run-up to the 2004 general elections.

The BJP has opposed the law board's decision. "They have no stake in the issue. Why are they making comments and taking a stand? The government has not taken any move with regard to the disputed land," BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu said.