

Finally, junior to Jayendra's defence

Agencies

Kanchipuram, December 28

IN HIS first public comment on the arrest of his senior in a murder case, Kanchi Mutt's junior Sankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswati today said he told the police that Jayendra "would not have done this (conspiring to eliminate Sankaraman)".

The junior seer was addressing the media inside the mutt premises on his return from the special police headquarters, where he was questioned for three hours today. Vijayendra also said he told the police, in response to a question, that the senior seer had advised him not to visit him at Vellore prison.

"They asked me about my plans to meet the seer at the prison. I told them when I informed the acharya about my plans to visit him, he asked me not to. I will go when he



Vijayendra Saraswati
Breaking the silence

permits me," Vijayendra said. Mutt advocates, who accompanied the junior seer, said the questions asked by the police were general in nature.

Bail plea hearing adjourned

Prosecution in the Radhakrishnan assault case today claimed in the Madras High Court that there was sufficient evidence to convict the Kanchi seer of criminal conspiracy and being responsible for the September 2002 assault.

Justice R. Balasubramanian adjourned the hearing to December 31 after senior Supreme Court lawyer KTS Tulsii pointed out that yesterday the prosecution had secured police custody of Ravi Subramaniam, considered a significant link in the assault case.

Tulsii said there was "every possibility of something coming out during the interrogation" that

would benefit the prosecution or even the defence.

Charging the seer with being the prime mover in the assault on Radhakrishnan, a former mutt associate, and two others, Tulsii claimed since Jayendra had set the chain in motion, he had to be held responsible for the whole act.

Tulsii contended that the seer had the motive to do away with Radhakrishnan. Jayendra believed that Radhakrishnan had written letters under a fictitious name alleging irregularities in the mutt's functioning. The assailants had no personal reason to assault Radhakrishnan.

Stating that Jayendra was responsible for the acts of his agents, Tulsii said if the court wanted to grant him bail at this stage, it would have to hold that there was no evidence against the seer and that he was not guilty of the charges levelled against him.

29 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Police issue summons to junior Acharya

Belk. S. C. M. 12/12/71

By V. Venkatasubramanian

KANCHEEPURAM, DEC. 25. The junior Acharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi, has been summoned to appear before the special investigation team probing the Sankararaman murder case and other cases relating to the Kanchi Sankara Mutt.

Enquiries show that the team wanted the junior Acharya to appear before it at the investigation bungalow behind the camp office of the Superintendent of Police at 10 a.m. to-

morrow for questioning in connection with the cases relating to the Mutt.

This is the first time the police will be questioning the junior Acharya in connection with the cases.

Several associates of the Kanchi Mutt, including its Manager, Sundaresa Iyer, who was arrested on December 24 night, the Mutt Administrator, Neelakanta Iyer, a personal assistant to the Kanchi Sankaracharya, 'Neyveli'

Krishnamurthy, and the brother of the junior Acharya, Raghu, have been questioned by the

police in connection with the murder case.

The special investigation team has also summoned 'Bombay' Shankar, an industrialist, to appear before the team here tomorrow since it wants to question him in connection with the cases relating to the Mutt.

Enquiries show that the junior Acharya will be coming to the investigation bungalow around 2 p.m. tomorrow instead of at 10 a.m.

The Kamakshi Amman temple administrator and advocate of the Kanchi Mutt, K.S. Chella-

pa, told reporters later that after receiving the summons, the Mutt's lawyers met the police and explained to them that it would not be possible for Sr Vijayendra Saraswathi to appear before the team at 10 a.m. as he had to complete special pujas being conducted at the Mutt in view of "dhanur masya vratham."

The police then agreed that the Acharya could come to the investigation centre in the afternoon.

Chargesheet likely soon:
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Kanchi suspect takes confession U-turn

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OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Kancheepuram, Dec. 22: On a day when Appu, one of the chief accused in the Shankar Raman murder, was remanded in six more days of police custody, another accused, Rajnikanth alias Chinna, denied having made any confession under Section 164.

Amid these developments, confusion reigned over the whereabouts of the second accused, Chennai-based builder Ravi Subramanian.

The biggest twist of the day was provided by Chinna, a member of the five-man gang — allegedly headed by Appu — which killed Raman, manager of the Sri Varadaraja Perumal temple, on September 3.

Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswati, the first accused in the case, was arrested in connection with the murder on November 11.

Chinna made his statement when he was produced before first judicial magistrate G. Uthamaraj today for extension of remand.

His statement led the magistrate to say: "Do not worry if you have not given any (Section) 164 statement."

Darwin Wisdom, Chinna's lawyer, later said the prosecution had cited his statement as a basis for arresting the seer. The statement of another key accused, Kathiravan, also contributed to the Kanchi seer's arrest.

It would appear that Chinna had only made a statement under Section 161 before an investigating officer — such a statement is not admissible as evidence in court. Wisdom said he would file a separate application tomorrow before the magistrate to get a copy of



(Top) Sankaracharya, Appu: Conspirators?

Chinna's statement.

The judicial remand of Chinna, Kathiravan and two others was extended till January 3 today. Kathiravan had retracted the Section 164 confessional statement he had made before another magistrate here.

Expectations had been raised that Subramanian,

believed to have been already arrested, would be produced for remand but police said the accused was still absconding.

Subramanian is alleged to be the conduit for the funds said to be sent by the Kanchi *mutt* to Appu's gang.

When a smiling Appu, alias Krishnasamy Reddy, was produced in court for extending his police remand, he told the magistrate he had been treated well in custody. He was arrested by a Tamil Nadu police team in Andhra Pradesh last Sunday.

Public prosecutor S. Jayakumar and assistant investigating officer C. Rajamani asked for eight more days of police custody for Appu, saying fresh revelations in the case needed to be investigated.

Asked for his response, Appu said: "I have no objection. I leave it to the court."

Even as Uthamaraj appeared startled by this response, Appu's lawyers stepped in to say that even the seer, the first accused in the case, had been kept in police custody for only three days.

They pointed out that Appu had "made himself available to the police" and had not been arrested as police claimed, saying this should be taken into consideration. The lawyers added that he was cooperating with police.

But Jayakumar argued that though Appu is alleged to have only "conspired" with the seer, he is "the man behind the murder" and is very important as an accused in the case. Police custody should thus be extended to help complete the investigation. Appu was eventually remanded in custody till Monday.

শঙ্কররামন হত্যা-মামলায় আশু তিন দিন পুলিশ হেফাজতে

কাঞ্চীপুরম, ২০ ডিসেম্বর: শঙ্কররামন হত্যা মামলার অন্যতম অভিযুক্ত আশুকে তিন দিন পুলিশ হেফাজতে রাখার নির্দেশ দিলেন কাঞ্চীপুরমের বিচারবিভাগীয় ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট জি উত্তমরাজ। এ দিনই রাধাকৃষ্ণন হত্যা ষড়যন্ত্র মামলায় মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্টে জামিনের আবেদন জানিয়েছেন কাঞ্চী কামকোট পীঠের শঙ্করাচার্য জয়েন্ড্র সরস্বতী।

১১ নভেম্বর শঙ্করাচার্য গ্রেফতার হওয়ার পরেই ফেরার হয় আশু। এক মাসের উপরে গা ঢাকা দিয়ে থাকার পরে কাল অন্ধপ্রদেশের চিত্তুরে বালকৃষ্ণপুরম থানায় সে আত্মসমর্পণ করে। তার এক আত্মীয় এ ব্যাপারে মধ্যস্থতা করেছেন বলে খবর।

গ্রেফতার করার পরে মামলাপুরমে এনে একটি হোটেলে কাল রাতভর আশুকে জেরা করে তামিলনাড়ুর

বিশেষ তদন্তকারী দল (সিট)। সিটের দাবি, তার বিরুদ্ধে শঙ্কররামন হত্যা মামলায় জড়িত থাকার প্রচুর প্রমাণ তাদের হাতে রয়েছে। জয়েন্ড্র সরস্বতী যে আশুকে কাজে লাগিয়ে শঙ্কররামনকে খুন করিয়েছিলেন সে ব্যাপারেও তারা নিশ্চিত। আশুকে সাংবাদিকদের সামনে হাজির করে সিটের প্রধান কে প্রেমকুমার বলেন, অগস্ট মাসে, শঙ্কররামন হত্যার আগে, আশু ১২ বার কাঞ্চী মঠে গিয়েছিল। তার দুই আটক সঙ্গী কাথিরাবণ এবং চিনাও এ নিয়ে স্বীকারোক্তি করেছে।

আশু অবশ্য দাবি করেছে, সে নির্দোষ। তার কথায়, “এই খুনের সঙ্গে আমার যোগ নেই। পুলিশ আর সরকারও সেটা জানে। ওরা বলছে, টাকা নিয়ে খুন করেছি। কিন্তু এ কথা সত্যি নয়। আমাকে বিপদে ফেলার চেষ্টা হচ্ছে, তাই আত্মসমর্পণ করেছি।”

আশুকে সাত দিন তাদের হেফাজতে রাখতে চেয়েছিল তামিলনাড়ু পুলিশ। সেই আবেদন খারিজ করে তিন দিন রাখার অনুমতি দেওয়ার পাশাপাশি প্রতিদিন সরকারি চিকিৎসককে দিয়ে আশুর স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন বিচারক। রোজ বিকালে আশু তার আইনজীবীর সঙ্গে দেখাও করতে পারবে।

ইতিমধ্যে, রাধাকৃষ্ণন হত্যা ষড়যন্ত্র মামলায় জামিন চেয়ে মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্টের দ্বারস্থ হন জয়েন্ড্র। ১০ ডিসেম্বর মুখ্য দায়রা আদালত শঙ্করাচার্যের জামিনের আর্জি খারিজ করে দেয়। এর পর সুপ্রিম কোর্টে আবেদন করেন শঙ্করাচার্য। কিন্তু শীর্ষ আদালত তাঁকে আগে হাইকোর্টে আবেদন করার নির্দেশ দেয়। কাল জামিনের আবেদনের গুনানি হতে পারে। — পি টি আই

DEC 2004

ANADARAZAR PATRIKA

Shankaraman murder prime accused held

Press Trust of India

TIRUPATI, Dec. 19. — Appu, one of the prime accused in the Shankaraman murder case, in which Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi has been held, was arrested tonight from a village in Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh, giving Tamil Nadu police a possible breakthrough in the case.

Appu alias Krishnaswamy, who allegedly arranged for the killers of the former Kanchi Mutt official, was arrested after he surrendered at his brother-in-law's house at Balakrishnapuram, 50 km from here, Chittoor SP Mr V Gopalakrishna said.

Before being taken away by police, Appu told a Telugu TV channel, that "Sankaracharya and I are innocent. The case has been registered to tarnish the Mutt's image".

Appu's relatives confirmed that he surrendered before Tamil Nadu Police at 6 p.m. Immediately after, police took him to Chennai.

Apprehensive that he might be killed by police in an "encounter", Appu's relatives had approached his brother-in-law, Mr Ramachandra Reddy, to broker a deal for his safe surrender, leading the latter to approach Tamil Nadu Police.

Appu came to Mr Reddy's house in Balakrishnapuram this morning, from where he was taken to a police station where he surrendered in the presence of local police officers and relatives. Police had been on the trail of Appu, whose photograph washing the Sankaracharya's feet was splashed in the media recently, and a building contractor, Mr Ravi Subramaniam, who remains untraced ever since the murder in September. The

search for the duo had brought the state police to Delhi.

Appu alleged that there was political pressure to implicate him in the case and said he would disclose the names of politicians at the right time.

Seeking to discount money as a motive for the murder, Appu said: "I am a well-off man and there is no need for me to commit such an act for Rs 3 or 4 lakh."

Contractor's lawyer appears before police

In Kancheepuram, a Chennai-based lawyer, claiming to be the advocate of building contractor Mr Ravi Subramanian, met investigating officials today to find out more about the whereabouts of his client. The lawyer, Mr Ravichandran, later told the media that he had gone there on his own and there was no police summons in the matter.

20 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Sankararaman murder case: a status report

By V. Jayanth

CHENNAI, DEC. 17. With the Supreme Court refusing to provide interim bail or relief to the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, he might have to cool his heels in the Vellore prison till the apex court hears his application on January 6. His remand will come up for extension again next week, but that may be a routine procedure. As the Supreme Court is seized of the matter, no other clue is likely to intervene in the process.

Five weeks have gone by since the Tamil Nadu police flew to Andhra Pradesh and arrested the Kanchi Acharya at Mehbubnagar and made him the prime accused in the murder case. After a spate of arrests and action, the investigation appears to be at a crossroads. Several questions have been raised about the nature, scope and direction of the investigation, but the police are also stunned at the complexity of the complaints that have poured in from all directions.

Basic doubt

The basic doubt that has been raised is: why was the police sleeping over the Radhakrishnan assault case for two years and why did it not take up serious investigation of the Sankararaman murder case as soon as it happened on September 3, 2004. Further, is it because the investigators have not been able to get Appu and Ravi Subramanian that they are pursuing on the sleaze angle? There are also

complaints that the police are calling in for questioning people unconnected with the murder case and are video recording the sessions.

Sankararaman letters

According to the police, the investigating team has built up a formidable case to establish the "motive" for the murder. The 30-plus Sankararaman letters offer the basic material. "We have meticulously and painstakingly worked on every clue and every complaint, which is why the case has proceeded in different directions. But they all add up to cause the murder," explains a senior police official. There are a maze of statements given by the arrested persons under Section 161, and a handful of confessional

statements made before a magistrate under Section 164. Cell phone bills to substantiate the telephonic contacts among the accused are also with the police, backed by corroborative evidence. The sleaze angle came with the complaints that are being probed, police sources say.

"Glaring similarities"

The police say they are struck by the "glaring similarities" in the attacks, not just on Sankararaman and Radhakrishnan (who, according to the police, would have been killed had one of the assailants not been injured) but also on a third individual, Thirukottiyur Madhavan. The possible common links in these cases is being explored in depth. The shocking aspect seems to be the brutal

murder, in broad daylight, of Sankararaman, in the Varadarajaperumal temple in the heart of Kancheepuram.

Unfinished task

The defence is trying to challenge the circumstantial and motive-based evidence being assembled by the police. The Supreme Court has asked the prosecution to furnish some of the documents and materials it has relied on and these will be considered when the court hears the case next month. The prosecution is hoping the investigations will provide the clinching evidence they need to prove the case. For this, they need to get Appu and Ravi Subramanian. There is no getting away from this unfinished task of the investigation.

18 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

SC refuses Acharya bail

ASKS WHY DID HE KNOCK SO LATE

Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Dec 17. — The Supreme Court (coram, Lahoti, CJ, Mathur, Naolekar, JJ) today refused to grant interim bail to the Kanchi Sankaracharya, currently in judicial custody, to enable him to perform a special month-long puja in the Mutt but issued notices to the Tamil Nadu government on his bail petition.

"We cannot grant you any interim relief without hearing the other side," the court observed. The court also sought all information regarding investigations into the case by Tamil Nadu police, including the case diary, the alleged confessional statements of two accused Kathiravan and Rajni alias Chhina on the basis of which the Acharya was arrested, whatever statements they gave which they later withdrew, their confessions, and details of the bank accounts through which the assailants were allegedly paid.

The court directed the Tamil Nadu government to get English translations of all these documents ready by the next date of hearing, 6 January.

The Supreme Court order came after it had heard out the Sankaracharya's counsel, Mr Fali S Nariman. Mr Nariman contested the High Court order denying the Acharya bail as erroneous on several counts.

He said that the bar under Section 437 applies only to the magistrate's court and not the sessions court or the High Court.

"Section 437 does not debar the sessions court or the High Court from granting bail in cases where the crime is punishable with death or life imprisonment," he argued. Therefore, the High Court cannot rely on the Pappu Yadav case to claim that it was "unable" to grant bail in the case, he said.

The Bench wondered why the Acharya had taken so much time to approach the Supreme Court for bail. "Why did you come here so late," the Chief Justice wondered.

Appearing for the state, Mr KTS Tulsi refused to part with any information about the investigations saying that they had to be secret for now.

The court also refused to grant him bail in another case of attempt to murder of a former Mutt official, Radhakrishnan, in 2002. It instead asked the Acharya to approach the High Court. The next hearing is on 6 January.

NDA clean chit

The NDA today gave a clean chit to the Acharya saying that "a person is not guilty till its proven so". The chairman of the NDA committee, Mr Balbir Punj, accused the TN government and the police of launching a vendetta against Jayendra Saraswati.

18 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

BALL NOW IN APEX COURT AS LAW TAKES ITS COURSE

Seer counsel seeks exclusive right over release petition

IN an interesting twist to the efforts to get bail for Kanchi Shankaracharya in Sankararaman murder case, the counsel for the Kancheepuram Mutt and the seer on Friday requested the Supreme Court not to entertain a writ petition filed by anyone else seeking release of the religious leader. "We have the necessary authorisation from the Kancheepuram Mutt as well as the thumb impression of Swami Jayendra Saraswati for filing appropriate petition before the Supreme Court and none else could file such a petition," senior advocate M.N. Krishnamani submitted before the court. A Bench comprising Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti, Justice G.P. Mathur and Justice P.P. Naolekar asked the counsel for the writ petitioner Yogendra Kumar Tiwari as to how he could file the petition on behalf of the seer without his authorisation. The counsel sought time till Tuesday to get the necessary permission for filing the writ petition and the apex court adjourned the matter till Friday. When Mr Krishnamani passed on the documents for the court's perusal, the Bench asked him as to why the Shankaracharya had put his thumb impression on the vakalatnama authorising him and advocate Krishna Kumar to appear on his behalf. "According to the tradition of the mutt, the Shankaracharya never signs a document instead puts his thumb impression wherever his signature is required," he replied. Later, speaking to reporters, the counsel said Shankaracharya would move the Supreme Court on Monday with a petition challenging a Madras High Court



order refusing grant of bail to him in the Sankararaman murder case.

SC issues notice for illegal immigration

THE Supreme Court on Friday issued notices to the Centre and the Election Commission (EC) on a PIL seeking CBI probe into the presence of nearly two crore illegal Bangladeshi migrants and striking their names off the electoral rolls in various states as they adversely affect the security and demographic composition of the country. A Bench comprising Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti, Justice G.P. Mathur and Justice P.P. Naolekar while issuing the notices, admitted the PIL filed by NGO Image India Foundation which specifically pointed out that Assam was worst affected by the illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Appearing for the petitioner, advocate C.D. Singh contended that there was an alarming growth in population due to illegal immigration resulting in change of demographic pattern, their illegal

enrolment in the electoral roll, adverse impact on development as well as posing a serious threat to the national security. "As a result of population movement from Bangladesh, the indigenous people of Assam are being reduced to a minority in their home state," he said and added affected states included Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi, Tripura, Nagaland and Maharashtra. The NGO stated that 85% of the total encroached forest land in Assam was found to be in the hands of illegal Bangladeshi migrants and they have a major say in 43 out of 126 Assembly constituencies of the state. On the security threat from the illegal migrants, the petitioner said Indian establishment believed existence of a close nexus between the illegal migrants and the extremist groups operating in the North East.

Assam prefers court verdict on boundary

IN an embarrassment to the Centre, the Congress government of Assam on Friday said it would rather accept the Supreme Court's decision on its boundary dispute with Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh than accept the proposal of the Union home ministry for its resolution. Appearing for the Tarun Gogoi government, senior advocate K.K. Venugopal and counsel Krishna Sharma contended that Assam "cannot accept" the precondition of the home ministry that the finding of the proposed Boundary Commission constituted by it should be binding on all parties.

11 DEC 2004

The Economic Times

High Court declines bail to Kanchi Acharya

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9/12

By A. Subramani

CHENNAI, DEC. 8. The Madras High Court today declined to enlarge on bail the Kanchi Acharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, in the Sankararaman murder case, saying there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that he was shown to be guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life.

Dismissing the second bail petition of the Acharya, Justice R. Balasubramanian said: "I cannot refrain from saying that the materials relied upon by the prosecution would *prima facie* constitute reasonable grounds to believe that the Acharya is shown to be guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life."

Once such a conclusion is arrived at, the judge said, the Acharya is "legally disabled from coming out on bail," because "unless the court finds that there are no reasonable grounds for believing that a person is guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life, the person accused of such an offence cannot be released on bail. Negation of existence of such a ground is a condition prece-

dent." As per this statutory restriction, found in Section 437(1)(i) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, if there appears reasonable grounds for believing that a person produced in court on arrest has been guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life, then he shall not be released on bail. "The statutory mandate prescribed under Section 437(1)(i) of the CrPC gets attracted to the case on hand," he noted.

Convinced that the condition laid down in Section 437 (1)(i) was *sine-qua-non* (condition precedent) for granting bail under Section 439 of the Code, which confers "special powers" on the High Court in such matters, Mr. Justice Balasubramanian said the special power under Section 439 was only restricted by Section 437(1)(i) and not taken away.

"Materials"

The "materials," which the judge was referring to, included the judicial confession of Kathiravan (since retracted); statements of two witnesses recorded by a magistrate, that the assailants were seen with the Acharya at his office; details of telephone numbers from which calls were made by the

assailants, along with the numbers on which the Acharya received the calls; recovery of 39 letters written by Sankararaman; and the large volume of money withdrawn for disbursing to hirelings.

As for the admissibility of this evidence, Mr. Justice Balasubramanian said, "this court cannot go beyond *prima facie* materials in support of the charge at this stage, and cannot look for sufficiency of the evidence for a conviction." Clarifying that he was "carefully avoiding expression of any opinion on the merits or demerits of the prosecution case based on the materials," Mr. Justice Balasubramanian said the prosecution case was that Sankararaman was the "thorn in the thigh" of the Acharya and that the Acharya was "bent upon on eliminating his tormentor at any cost." The judge pointed out that the Acharya had been implicated in the case only as a conspirator, adding, "conspiracy can be established by direct evidence or by drawing legal inferences from established circumstance."

The judge also rejected senior counsel, I. Subramaniam's oral plea for house custody of the Acharya.

Yudhonoyo calls for action against terror

YOGYAKARTA (INDONESIA), DEC. 6. Indonesia's President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, said on Monday that terrorism is the enemy of all religions and urged regional leaders of the Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist faiths to fight the scourge.

Mr. Yudhoyono, head of the world's most populous Muslim nation, made the remarks at the

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opening of a two-day meeting of Asia-Pacific religious leaders.

"There is one exceedingly heinous form of violence that we must grapple with, and that is the scourge of terrorism," Mr. Yudhoyono told delegates in this court city in the heart of the Muslim-dominated island of Java. "To my mind, terrorism today must be regarded as the enemy of all religions."

Religion
The gathering was co-sponsored by Indonesia and Australia, which is keen to encourage moderate Islam in its giant neighbour. Indonesia has seen three major terror bombings in the past two years. On October 12, 2002, bombings on the resort island of Bali killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. The Australian embassy in Jakarta was hit by a bombing in

HD-15
September that killed 10 Indonesians. The Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, told the delegates from 14 countries that "winning the battle of ideas was key to overcoming terrorism." "The war on terror will fail if it is not prosecuted vigorously in our pulpits, mosques, synagogues, temples and schools as well as in our Parliaments," he said. — AP

07 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

High Court reserves orders on Acharya's bail plea

By A. Subramani

CHENNAI, DEC. 6. The Madras High Court today reserved its orders on the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi's bail petition in the Sankararaman murder case.

The entire issue now revolves round a question of law — whether the High Court could exercise its “special powers” or not under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, unfettered by the conditions laid down in Section 437(1) Cr.P.C. and the guidelines enumerated by the Supreme Court in the Pappu Yadav case.

This, in addition to the “additional information,” which included the originals of 39 letters written by Sankararaman; date, time and duration of the alleged telephone conversation between the Acharya and the assailants; and details of Rs. 50 lakhs, withdrawn from three bank accounts of the Sankara Mutt in three different banks, will now be considered by Justice R. Balasubramanian, who heard exhaustive arguments by senior counsel K.T.S. Tulsi for the prosecution and senior counsel I. Subramaniam for the

Acharya.

Contending that the matter, for which orders were actually reserved on November 30, had been reopened at the behest of the Acharya's counsel, Mr. Tulsi today furnished “additional information” collected during the “last five days.”

“Four different versions”

However, Mr. Subramaniam submitted that the prosecution was unfairly declining to furnish details regarding the alleged “additional information,” and added that “this is not prosecution but persecution.” So far, the prosecution had come out with at least four different versions on the alleged telephonic conversations. As for withdrawal of money, he said that from which account it was withdrawn, by whom and for what purpose would have to be gone into.

When Mr. Subramaniam said the question over the ownership and the exclusive use of the mobile phone was yet to be ascertained by the prosecution, Mr. Tulsi said the investigators had “clinching proof” that it was in the “exclusive possession of the Acharya and that it was

exclusively used by him.”

Earlier in the day, Mr. Subramaniam argued that the embargo on granting bail, as found in Section 437(1), could not be “bodily lifted and transplanted” on Section 439, which confers certain special powers on the High Court in granting bail. He said the bar had no universal application and called for a harmonious reading of the two provisions.

Mr. Tulsi, however, said the Supreme Court, while cancelling the bail of Pappu Yadav, had categorically stated that Section 437 was a *sine qua non* (condition precedent) for Section 439. “There is a difference between appreciating evidence at a premature stage and citing reasons as required under Section 437 (1)(i),” he said, adding that “it was not an incidental observation nor a judgment on concession nor due to ignorance of law.”

Hearing on the Acharya's other bail plea, in connection with a two-year-old assault case, is scheduled to start in the Principal Sessions Court here tomorrow.

**81 additional documents
submitted: Page 12**

07 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

নমনীয় হিন্দুত্ব, পুনবার!

প্রধানমন্ত্রী পদে শপথ লইবার পূর্বে মনমোহন সিংহ ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতার আদর্শের প্রতি তাঁহার অনুরাগ ও দায়বদ্ধতার কথা ব্যক্ত করিয়াছিলেন। সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গা বা উত্তেজনা ছড়ানোর অপচেষ্টাকে কড়া শাস্তিযোগ্য অপরাধ রূপে শাস্ত করিতে তাঁহার সরকার নূতন আইনও প্রণয়ন করিতেছে, সংসদের চলতি অধিবেশনেই যাহা পেশ হইবার কথা। অথচ কাঞ্চী কামকোটের শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারির ঘটনায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী যে রূপে বিচলিত বোধ করিয়াছেন, তাঁহার হাজতবাস ও বিচারের কালে তাঁহার মহিমার কথা স্মরণে রাখিয়া তাঁহার প্রতি যথাযোগ্য সম্মান প্রদর্শনের আকৃতি জানাইয়া তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে যে পত্রাঘাত করিয়াছেন, তাহাতে কিছু সংশয় দেখা দিয়াছে। সংশয় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতার প্রকরণ লইয়া। তাঁহার অনেক পূর্বসূরির মতো তিনিও কি শেষ পর্যন্ত নমনীয় হিন্দুত্বের পথ অনুসরণ করিতে আগ্রহী? অন্যথায় স্বতঃপ্রসোদিত হইয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রী এ কথা বলিলেন কেন? না কি হিন্দু জনমানসকে আশ্বস্ত করিতে এই কাজ?

খুন, খুনের ষড়যন্ত্র এবং সেই ষড়যন্ত্রের প্রমাণ লোপের মতো গুরুতর ফৌজদারি অভিযোগের আসামি শঙ্করাচার্যকে লইয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই প্রকাশ্য উদ্বেগ আরও রহস্যময় এই কারণে যে, হিন্দুত্বের পতাকা তুলিতে ব্যগ্র বিজেপি পর্যন্ত এ ব্যাপারে সে ভাবে ময়দানে অবতীর্ণ হয় নাই। সংঘ পরিবারের অন্য শরিক বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ 'হিন্দুত্বের উপর এই আক্রমণ'-এর ঘটনায় উত্তেজনা ছড়াইবার চেষ্টা করিলেও বিজেপি দ্বিধাগ্রস্তই থাকিয়াছে। হাজতে গিয়া ধৃত ধর্মগুরুর সহিত সাক্ষাৎ, তাঁহার গ্রেফতারির প্রতিবাদে ধর্না ও রিলে-অনশন করা এবং মৌখিক প্রস্তাব গ্রহণের বাহিরে বিজেপি বিশেষ কোনও কর্মসূচি লয় নাই। এমনকী সংসদের শীতকালীন অধিবেশনের প্রথম দিনেও বিজেপি মূল্যবুদ্ধির মতো জাগতিক বিষয়ে মুখর হইয়াছে, সভা করিয়াছে। সম্ভবত বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব উপলব্ধি করিয়াছে, হিন্দুত্বের আর তেমন ক্রেতা নাই, অন্তত জয়েন্ড্র সরস্বতীকে লইয়া বেশি শোরগোল না তোলাই বুদ্ধিমানের কাজ। এই অবস্থায় ঘোষিত ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ মনমোহন সিংহ নমনীয় হিন্দুত্বের তাস খেলিতে আগ্রহী হইলেন কেন? কেনই বা সনিয়া গাঁধীও মনমোহনকে এ ধরনের অবস্থান গ্রহণ করিতে দিলেন?

হয়তো এই প্রশ্ন তেমন কঠিন নয়। বিশেষত যদি স্মরণে রাখা যায়, প্রধানমন্ত্রী থাকা কালে নরসিংহ রাওয়ের (মনমোহন যাঁহার অর্থমন্ত্রী ছিলেন) নরম হিন্দুত্ব অনুসরণের কাহিনি, যাহা শেষ পর্যন্ত সংখ্যালঘুর ধর্মস্থান ধ্বংস করিয়া হিন্দুত্বের উত্থান নিশ্চিত করে। রাওয়ের পূর্বসূরি রাজীব গাঁধীর প্রধানমন্ত্রিত্বে অযোধ্যার বিতর্কিত ধর্মস্থানে রামমন্দিরের শিলান্যাসের অনুমোদনের ঘটনাও স্মর্তব্য। জয়েন্ড্র সরস্বতীর ব্যাপারে স্পর্শকাতরতা দেখাইয়া মনমোহন সিংহ হয়তো এই পূর্বসূরিদের পদাঙ্কই অনুসরণ করিতে চাহিয়াছেন। অথচ এই অনুসরণ তো ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতার আধুনিক বীক্ষার সহিত সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ নয়। বরং ইহা বাবরি মসজিদ ধ্বংস ও তাঁহার জেরে সংঘটিত সাম্প্রদায়িক উপপ্লবের দিকেই দেশকে ধাবিত করে। আর কয়দিন পরেই সেই মর্মান্তিক ধ্বংসকাণ্ডের দ্বাদশ বর্ষপূর্তি। তদুপলক্ষে জঙ্গি হিন্দুত্বের অর্সহিষ্ণু ঝটিকাবাহিনী নূতন করিয়া সাম্প্রদায়িক উত্তেজনা ছড়াইবার চেষ্টা করিবে। জাতিকে তাই আরও সতর্ক থাকিতে হইবে। প্রধানমন্ত্রীও যদি তাঁহার আগের উচ্চারণ সংশোধন করিয়া লন, বলেন— আইন তাহার আপন পথেই চলিবে, তবে তাহাই হইবে যথাযথ বার্তা।

03 DEC 2004

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

25/12
26/12

Acharya issue rocks Parliament

Religion

Press Trust of India

'NO SANKARACHARYA'

NEW DELHI, Dec. 2. — Both Houses of Parliament today witnessed heated exchanges over the arrest and alleged maltreatment of Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi by the Tamil Nadu government even as the Centre asked Opposition parties to desist from politicising the issue and allow the law to take its own course.

The issue was raised during Zero Hour by the BJP-led Opposition which accused the Tamil Nadu government of "ill-treating" the pontiff and forcing witnesses to make statements against him.

Responding to the Opposition's charges, the government made it clear in both Houses that the Centre had no hand in the case which was within the purview of the Tamil Nadu government and the courts there.

In the Lok Sabha, Leader of the House Mr Pranab Mukherjee said the Prime Minister had written the letter in view of "humanitarian considerations" and maintained that since the issue was before the court in Tamil Nadu, Parliament should not interfere in it.

In Rajya Sabha, minister of state for parliamentary affairs Mr Suresh Pachauri appealed to parties not to give political colour to the case.

In a related development, police today began probing the mysterious death of a Vedic scholar and devotee of Kanchi Sankara Mutt, Ayyappa Sharma, whose body was found in a temple tank here two years ago.

This follows police assertion that each and every case of death of persons associated with the Mutt would be inquired afresh in the wake of Shankararaman's murder on 3 September.

VARANASI, Dec. 2. — The Dwarikapeeth Sankaracharya Swami Swaroopanand today asked the beleaguered Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth Sankaracharya Swami Jayendra Saraswati to step down from his post until proved innocent by the court.

Swaroopanand said Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth was not anointed as one of the four peeths of the Hindu religion.

The Adi Shankaracharya had founded only four peeths, Puri, Dwarka, Shringeri and Badrika Ashram Peeth and there was no Peeth of Kanchi Kamakoti in the original order, he said adding Swami Jayendra was a mere priest of a Mutt. — PTI



Meanwhile, the office of the special teams, probing cases against the Acharya, have been shifted to an undisclosed place. The teams were functioning from the All Women's Police Station here till last evening. A special police team has been sent to Andhra Pradesh to arrest Appu alias Krishnasamy, one of the main accused in the Shankararaman case, following reports that he was hiding there.

Andhra Pradesh police today also sought the help of its Tamil Nadu counterpart to arrest Usha, whose name was linked to the Sankaracharya, in connection with a bank cheating case in Srikalahasti, about 40 km from here.

03 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN



Mystery woman appears, defends links with seer

HT Correspondent
Chennai, November 30

USHA RANI, the mystery woman who, the police claim, was associated with Jayendra Saraswati, surfaced today in Kancheepuram and surrendered before the team investigating the murder of Sankararaman even as the Madras High Court reserved orders on the seer's second bail plea since his arrest.

The 41-year-old woman, flanked by her lawyers, was taken to an undisclosed location for questioning. Her lawyers told reporters she hadn't been hiding or absconding; the police had questioned her at Srirangam in October. Usha was a cancer patient who had received generous help from the Kanchi Mutt, and there was nothing unbecoming in her association with the seer.

Usha told a news channel that the Mutt had arranged for her accommodation and used to meet her expenses. Asked about her long conversations with Jayendra, Usha said that as a terminally ill patient, she used to seek "spiritual solace" from the seer. She had nothing to do with the murder and had left her house only to avoid police harassment.

The police, who found Usha's flat in Srirangam locked since October 23, tracked down one of her brothers in Chennai and got him to persuade Usha to appear before them.

01 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

সংঘাতের মূলে নারী আর অর্থ কেঁদে জয়েন্ড্রের দোষ কবুল, দাবি পুলিশের

চেন্নাই, ২৯ নভেম্বর: বরদারাজ পেরুমল মন্দির ট্রাস্টের ম্যানেজার শঙ্কররামন হত্যায় জড়িত থাকার কথা কাঞ্চীর শঙ্করাচার্য জয়েন্ড্র সরস্বতী স্বীকার করেছেন বলে তামিলনাড়ু সরকারের আইনজীবী আজ মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্টে দাবি করেছেন। শঙ্করাচার্যের জামিনের আবেদনের বিরোধিতা করে আইনজীবী কে টি এস তুলসী বলেন, পুলিশ হেফাজতে তাঁকে যখন জেরা করা হয়, তখন এক সময় তিনি ভেঙে পড়েন। কাঁদতে কাঁদতে স্বীকার করেন, তিনিই টাকা দিয়ে খুন করিয়েছেন শঙ্কররামনকে। দশ মিনিটের জন্য সংযম হারিয়ে ফেলেছিলেন বলে জানিয়ে ক্ষমাভিক্ষা করেছেন তিনি।

পুলিশের কথা সত্যি হলে, শঙ্কররামনের সঙ্গে জয়েন্ড্রের বিরোধের মূলে টাকাপয়সা ছাড়া মহিলার ভূমিকাও রয়েছে। জয়েন্ড্র নাকি শ্রীরঙ্গমের বাসিন্দা উষা নামে এক মহিলার সঙ্গে নিয়মিত ফোনে দীর্ঘক্ষণ কথা বলতেন। শঙ্কররামনের মৃত্যুর আগে-পরেও তাঁর সঙ্গে কথা বলেন জয়েন্ড্র। উষাকে বিনা ভাড়ার ফ্ল্যাট আর ব্যাক মারফত দফায় দফায় প্রচুর টাকা দেন তিনি। তাতেই আপত্তি জানান শঙ্কররামন। মহিলা আপাতত বেপাওয়া। পুলিশ তাঁর খোঁজ করছে। তুলসী আজ আদালতে জানান, কাঞ্চী কামকোঠী মঠে একটি রথ তৈরি করার জন্য ৬৫ কেজি সোনা আমদানি করা হয়। ৩৫ কেজি সোনা কাজে লাগানো হয়। বাকি ৩০ কেজির হদিস মিলছিল না। এ নিয়েও শঙ্কররামন জয়েন্ড্রের জবাবদিহি চান বলে দাবি তুলসীর।

শঙ্কররামন ৩ সেপ্টেম্বর খুন হন। ১১ নভেম্বর রাতে অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের মহাবুবনগর থেকে জয়েন্ড্র গ্রেফতার হন। তুলসীর দাবি, ১ সেপ্টেম্বর হত্যা নামলার আরও তিন অভিযুক্ত আশু ব্রহ্ম কৃষ্ণস্বামী, রবি সুব্রহ্মণ্যম ও গাথিরাবণকে ফোন করার কথা স্বীকার করেছেন শঙ্করাচার্য। ফোনে তিনি বলেন, শঙ্কররামন তাঁর উপর অত্যাচার চালাচ্ছে, যে কোনও মূল্যে

তাঁর হাত থেকে উদ্ধার পেতে হবে। পুলিশ-সূত্র জানাচ্ছে, শঙ্কররামনকে খুন করার ঠিক আগে আশু যে তাঁকে ফোন করেছিল তা-ও স্বীকার করেন জয়েন্ড্র। কাজ সারার পরে ফের তাঁকে ফোন করে আততায়ীরা। খুনের জন্য আশুরা যে টাকা চেয়েছিল, তিনি তাতেই রাজি হন বলে জানিয়েছেন শঙ্করাচার্য। পরে সব ফাঁস করে দেওয়ার ভয় দেখিয়ে আরও টাকা আদায় করে আশুরা। যে সেলফোনটি থেকে অভিযুক্তদের সঙ্গে তাঁর কথা হয়, সেটি তিনি একাই ব্যবহার করতেন বলে জয়েন্ড্র জানান।

জেরা-পর্বের সবটাই ভিডিও ক্যামেরায় ধরে রেখেছে তামিলনাড়ু



পুলিশ। জয়েন্ড্র যা বলেছেন, তার একটা অংশ এ দিন আদালতে পড়ে শোনান আর এক সরকারি কৌশলি কে দোরাইস্বামী। তাতে দেখা যাচ্ছে, প্রথম দিনের জেরায় সব অভিযোগই অস্বীকার করেছেন শঙ্করাচার্য। বলেছেন, “শঙ্কররামনকে তো আমি কোতল করিনি।” কিন্তু কোতল করার জন্য পয়সা তো দিয়েছেন, পুলিশের এই বক্তব্যও নস্যাত্ন করে দেন তিনি। আশুকে যে তিনি চেনেন, মানতে চাননি সে কথাও। এমনকী আশু তাঁকে প্রণাম করছে, এই ছবি দেখানোর পরেও। “কত লোকই তো আসে,” বলে এড়িয়ে যাওয়ার চেষ্টা করেন। কিন্তু দু’বছরে

তাঁর মোবাইল থেকে আশুকে কত বার ফোন করা হয়েছে তার তালিকা পুলিশ দেখালে খানিক দমে যান জয়েন্ড্র। সেই রাতটা তিনি নাকি বিনিদ্রই কাটান।

পরের দিন অবশ্য বেশি ঘাম ঝরাতে হয়নি পুলিশকে। জেরার শুরুতেই কেঁদে ফেলেন জয়েন্ড্র। স্বীকার করেন, আশুদের দিয়ে শঙ্কররামনকে হত্যা করিয়েছেন তিনি। পুলিশ সূত্র বলছে, বিধবস্ত জগদগুরু কাঁদতে কাঁদতে বলেন, “আমার মতিভ্রম হয়েছিল। আমাকে ক্ষমা করুন।” এর পর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে কথা বলতে চান তিনি। সরাসরি কথা না-হলেও জয়াকে ভিডিও বার্তা পাঠান জয়েন্ড্র। তাতে তিনি বলেন, “দশ মিনিটের জন্য আমি সংযম হারিয়েছিলাম। আপনি সাক্ষাৎ কামাক্ষী মা। আমাকে মার্জনা করুন। আপনার কাছে আজীবন কৃতজ্ঞ থাকব।”

তবে পুলিশি জেরার মুখে জয়েন্ড্র যা-ই বলুন, তা আদালতে প্রমাণ হিসাবে গ্রাহ্য হবে না বলে জানাচ্ছেন আইনজেরা। বিজেপি মুখপাত্র যশবন্ত সিনহার যুক্তি, পুলিশের কাছে স্বীকারোক্তি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ নয়। আসল হল বিচারকের কাছে দেওয়া সাক্ষ্য। তবে শঙ্করাচার্য নিয়ে এখনই পথে নামছে না বিজেপি। বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ নেতা গিরিরাজ কিশোর জানিয়েছেন, তাঁরা এখনও আন্দোলনের পথ থেকে সরার কথা ভাবছেন না।

এ দিকে, প্রসিদ্ধ তামিল লেখিকা অনুরাধা রামাননের অভিযোগ, তাঁকে হত্যার চেষ্টা করেছিলেন শঙ্করাচার্য। আজ সাংবাদিকদের অনুরাধা বলেন, কাঞ্চী মঠে জয়েন্ড্র তাঁর সঙ্গে অশোভন আচরণও করেছিলেন।

জয়েন্ড্র-সহ মামলায় অভিযুক্ত সাত জনের জামিনের আর একটি আবেদনের শুনানি আজ ৬ ডিসেম্বর পর্যন্ত স্থগিত করে দিয়েছেন চেন্নলপেট্টুর দায়রা আদালতের বিচারক। মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্টে অবশ্য আগামী কালও শঙ্করাচার্যের জামিনের আবেদনের শুনানি হবে।— পি টি আই

Seer confessed, says prosecution

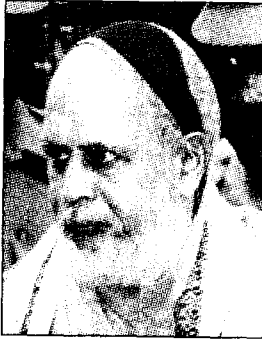
Chennai: The Tamil Nadu government on Monday informed the Madras high court that Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi "broke down" during interrogation and "confessed to his involvement" in the murder of Sankararaman, the temple official.

Appearing on behalf of the prosecution, senior counsel K T S Tulsi informed the court that "Kanchi Sankaracharya had broken down and confessed to his involvement."

Opposing the seer's bail appli-

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cation, the second one filed by him in the Sankararaman murder case, Tulsi said, "He seems to be now realising that it was a mistake."

Normally confessions, even taped ones, made to the police aren't admissible evidence and guilt must be acknowledged before a magistrate to legally qualify as



confession.

Arguments on the bail application before Justice R Balasubramaniam will continue on Tuesday in the Madras high court.

Tulsi said the seer had also "confessed" that on September 1, he had called Appu alias Krishnasamy, Ravi Subramaniam and Kathiravan, who are accused in the case, and told them

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that Sankararaman had been "tormenting" him and he should be got rid of at any cost.

Tulsi said the seer also admitted that he had telephonic conversation with some of the accused prior and after the murder. The seer also admitted that the cellphone from which he made the call was for his exclusive use, Tulsi said.

Meanwhile, a sessions court at Chengalpattu on Monday adjourned the bail plea of seven of the accused in the Sankararaman murder case to December 6. PTI

30 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

For Hindu-Muslim unity a Sankaracharya went to jail

By Mahendra Ved/TNN

New Delhi: At a time when the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Swami Jayendra Saraswathi, is being prosecuted on a murder charge, it may be worthwhile to recall how and why, way back in 1921, Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Puri, went to jail.

He did so for upholding what he considered the "Hindu Dharma" of promoting Hindu-Muslim unity. The Khilafat Movement against the British for having deposed the last Caliph was at its peak. Swami Bharati Krishna Tirath Ji shared the platform with the famous Ali Brothers — Maulanas Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali — Dr Kitchlew, Maulana Husain Ahmed of Deoband and others.

All of them, called "Karachi Non-cooperators", because they delivered their speeches at the All India Khilafat Conference in Karachi, were accused of "criminal conspiracy to seduce Mohammedan soldiers in the British Army".

But they earned Mahatma Gandhi's approval. In his forward to the book 'Historic

Trial' that published the proceedings in court, Gandhi noted, "The prisoners may have lacked dignity, they may have lacked grace. They certainly did not lack courage and truth. They dared to think audibly."

The most strident "defiance" of the court came from

In 1921, the Sankaracharya of Puri went to jail for upholding what he considered the 'Hindu dharma' of promoting Hindu-Muslim unity

Swami Bharati Krishna Tirth, an acknowledged authority on Vedic mathematics. While others made their depositions, the Swami remained seated while answering questions in Karachi City Magistrate S M Talati's court.

Warned repeatedly, he said that his position was higher than that of the judge and that his religion forbade his getting up "before anyone except his Guru". His statement was not recorded and a note to that

effect was made by the judge.

Swami also stood out for his speech that was submitted as an exhibit in court. Regarding Khilafat as "a question of supreme Dharmik importance", he argued that what the British did to an Islamic institution, they could do to institutions of other religions as well.

He quoted Sarojini Naidu, another Khilafat Movement member, that "Mecca ought to be to Hindus as Kashi or Rameshwar". "Going into the technical ecclesiastical point of view, we see that Khilafat is a matter of vital importance to every Hindu who believes in Hindu scriptures," the Swami declared.

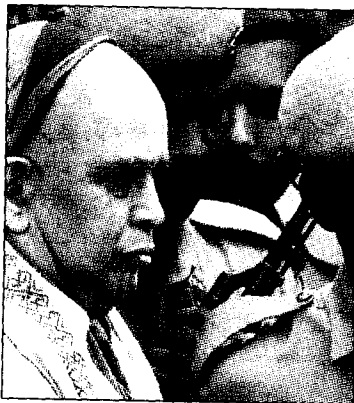
The trial came soon after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the Congress' call for Swaraj. "The Punjab wrongs and the Khilafat wrongs remain unredressed today, as they were in the past. We have no option but to take the matter in our hands," he said. But he wanted to do it through non-violent means.

Records show that rather than punish the popular leaders, the court declared them as hostile and let them off.

Kanchi seer *Religion* *91-1* remanded *27/11* till Dec 10

Kancheepuram: With a court here on Friday morning extending the judicial remand of Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswathi till December 10, the seer was taken to Chennai for being produced

The magistrate had on November 12 remanded the seer to judicial custody in Vellore prison till Friday when he was first produced before him after his arrest in Mahboobnagar in Andhra



Pradesh a day earlier for his alleged role in the murder of Sankararaman, an official of the Varadaraja Perumal temple here, on September 3. Earlier, the seer, brought from the Vellore prison, was produced before the court at 11.10 am and the magistrate told him that his remand was being extended till December 10. The court proceedings lasted barely five minutes and the seer was soon driven to the district police complex where he remained till 1.20 pm.

Pontiff seeks bail

Chennai: Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswathi on Monday filed separate bail applications in the Madras HC and the principal sessions court. Both applications will be heard in the respective courts on Monday. In his bail plea, the second before the high court, the Shankaracharya sought bail on the grounds of "change of circumstances."

The seer contended that a co-accused, Kathiravan, had openly stated in the Kancheepuram court that he had been beaten up at a police station and forced to sign a statement as directed by them in the presence of a tahsildar. PTI

in a court there in connection with an attempt to murder case filed against him by the Tamil Nadu police.

The Shankaracharya, arrested in connection with the Sankararaman murder case, was taken to Chennai, about 70 km from here, at 1.20 pm after a two-hour rest at the district police office complex after first class judicial magistrate G Uthamaraj extended his remand by 15 days on expiry of the first remand.

charged with attempt to murder in the case.

Magistrate uthamaraj remanded to judicial custody two more accused— Ambikapathy and Anilkumar— in the murder case till December 8 and 9 respectively.

Ambikapathy, who had surrendered before a court in Alandur on November 17, had been remanded to two days police custody by the magistrate on Wednesday as against five days sought by the prosecution. PTI

শঙ্করাচার্য-তদন্তে সাবধানী হোন, জয়ললিতাকে চিঠি মনমোহনের

নয়াদিল্লি, ২৫ নভেম্বর: কাঞ্চীর শঙ্করাচার্য জয়েন্দ্র সরস্বতীর গ্রেফতারের ব্যাপারে কেন্দ্রের কোনও ভূমিকা নেই বলে এত দিন বিষয়টি এড়িয়ে যাচ্ছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। কিন্তু আজ তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়ললিতাকে সরাসরি চিঠি লিখে এই মামলার তদন্তে 'যথেষ্ট সাবধানতা' অবলম্বনের পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন তিনি।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেছেন "একান্ত প্রয়োজন ছিল বলেই শঙ্করাচার্যকে গ্রেফতারের মতো চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে রাজ্য সরকার বাধ্য হয়েছে বলে আমার বিশ্বাস। আইন নিজের পথেই চলবে। এবং সে ক্ষেত্রে যেন কোনও বাধার সৃষ্টি না হয়, তা সুনিশ্চিত করা জরুরি।" জয়েন্দ্রের স্বাস্থ্যের দিকেও বিশেষ নজর দিতে রাজ্য সরকারকে পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন মনমোহন সিংহ।

এ দিনই জয়েন্দ্রের বিরুদ্ধে হত্যা মামলার তদন্ত সি বি আইকে দিয়ে করানোর আর্জি আজ খারিজ করে দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। তামিলনাড়ু পুলিশ যথাযথ ভাবে তদন্ত করছে না, এই অভিযোগ জানিয়ে শীর্ষ আদালতে জনস্বার্থ মামলা করেছিলেন প্রাক্তন বি জে পি সাংসদ বি পি সিঞ্জল। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের ডিভিশন বেঞ্চ বলেছে, এই মামলায় সিঞ্জলের কোনও ভূমিকাই

নেই। ইতিমধ্যে ডি এম কে নেতা করুণানিধি আজ চেম্বাইয়ে এক বিবৃতিতে বলেছেন, অবস্থান পাল্টে তিনি মোটেই শঙ্করাচার্যের পাশে দাঁড়াননি। তাঁর বক্তব্য, এই মামলায় তামিলনাড়ু পুলিশের ভূমিকা নিয়ে সংবাদ মাধ্যমে যে খবর প্রকাশিত হচ্ছে, তা উপেক্ষা করা উচিত হবে না।

আজ এই মামলার শুনানির সময় প্রধান বিচারপতি লাহোটি ও বিচারপতি জি পি মাথুর জানতে চান, শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারের ফলে সিঞ্জলের অধিকার কী ভাবে ভঙ্গ হচ্ছে। বিচারপতিরা বলেন, জনস্বার্থ মামলার আবেদনের সঙ্গে কোনও নথি দেওয়া হয়নি। সত্য যাচাই করার কোনও চেষ্টা আবেদনকারী করেননি। উল্টে তিনি বলেছেন, শঙ্করাচার্যকে রেহাই দেওয়া তাঁর উদ্দেশ্য নয়। এই অবস্থায় সংবিধানের ৩২ নম্বর ধারা মোতাবেক শীর্ষ আদালতের বিশেষ ক্ষমতা প্রয়োগ করার কারণ নেই।

এ দিনই শঙ্করাচার্য-কাণ্ডে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে বিবাদের প্রেক্ষিতে নিজের অবস্থান পরিষ্কার করেছেন ডি এম কে নেতা করুণানিধি। জয়েন্দ্র সরস্বতীর গ্রেফতারের সময় তামিলনাড়ু পুলিশের প্রশংসা করলেও পরে রাজনৈতিক বাধ্যবাধকতার কথা মাথায় রেখে সরকারের সমালোচনায় মুখর হন

করুণানিধি। আজ এক বিবৃতিতে তামিলনাড়ুর প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেছেন, তাঁর সমালোচনার অর্থ এটা নয় যে তিনি শঙ্করাচার্যের পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছেন। বি জে পি যে ভাবে বলছে জয়েন্দ্র সরস্বতী নির্দোষ, তিনি তার বিরোধী। শঙ্করাচার্য দোষী কি না তা আদালত বিচার করবে। কিন্তু সংবাদ মাধ্যমে তদন্ত নিয়ে যে সন্দেহ প্রকাশ করা হচ্ছে তা উপেক্ষা করা উচিত হবে না।

এই সন্দেহকেই হাতিয়ার করছে বিজেপি। শঙ্কররামন হত্যা মামলার অন্যতম অভিযুক্ত কাথিরাবণের কালকের জবানবন্দির প্রেক্ষিতে নতুন করে তদন্তের দাবি জানিয়েছেন তামিলনাড়ুতে দলের সম্পাদক এইচ রাজা। কাথিরাবণ কাল আদালতে বলে, এই মামলায় পুলিশের বক্তব্য সমর্থন করে সাক্ষ্য দিতে তার উপরে অত্যাচার চালানো হয়। কাথিরাবণ-সহ কয়েক জন অভিযুক্তের কাছ থেকেই হত্যাকাণ্ডে শঙ্করাচার্যের জড়িত থাকার খবর মিলেছে বলে পুলিশের দাবি।

শঙ্করাচার্য জয়েন্দ্র সরস্বতীর গ্রেফতারের প্রতিবাদে বিদেশেও বিক্ষোভ দানা বাঁধতে শুরু করেছে। আমেরিকার এক উজ্জন হিন্দু ও জৈন মন্দিরের তরফে এ ব্যাপারে ভারতীয় রাষ্ট্রদূত রণেন সেনকে স্মারকলিপি দেওয়া হয়েছে। — পি টি আই

SC rejects CBI probe into Acharya arrest

Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Nov. 25. — The Supreme Court (coram, Lahoti, CJ, Mathur, JJ) today dismissed a PIL seeking a CBI probe into the recent arrest of the Kanchi Sankaracharya in connection with the murder of a former temple official, Shankaraman.

"No prima facie case is made out for invoking the court's extra-

ordinary jurisdiction. The petition is dismissed in limine," the Chief Justice said. The PIL had been filed by former Rajya Sabha MP Mr BP Singhal.

The court also clearly stated the reasons for dismissing the petition. At the outset, it questioned the petitioner's locus standi to file such a petition. "The accused are also not parties to the petition," the court noted. "On the contrary, the petition does not claim any

relief for the accused persons."

The averments in the petition are also based on "newspaper reports" and "no attempts have been made to verify any of the statements", the court said.

The court also observed that none of the cases relied upon by the petitioner help him in any way. The decisions therein deal with the peculiar facts and circumstances of those cases and do not lay down any law in this regard, it noted.

The court order came after it had heard out Mr Singhal's counsel in detail. Mr Singhal's counsel pointed out that the petition only intended to uphold the rule of law in the land and was in no way intended to bring relief to the Kanchi Sankaracharya. "A large section of people are affected by the Kanchi Acharya's arrest. There's a feeling that fair investigation is not being carried out in the case," the counsel said.

Advani music for Sangh ears

Hemendra Singh Bartwal
Ranchi, November 24

SHEDDING ALL its earlier inhibitions, the BJP has now come out strongly in favour of the Hindutva line advocated by the RSS and warned its adversaries to desist from indulging in "anti-Hindu politics" as it was prepared to make "any sacrifice" on the issue.

At its crucial national executive meeting here, the safety net party also reiterated its preference for speedily resolving the Ayodhya temple tangle through negotiations rather than a judicial process, saying there was a growing opinion in the country that there must be no further delay in resolving the sensitive issue.

Having discovered another powerful symbol of Hindutva in the Kanchi Sankaracharya, whom it equates with the temple, the BJP has decided to use the issue of his arrest

to "powerfully counter" its ideological and political adversaries.

In a rather aggressive inaugural address on Wednesday, BJP president L.K. Advani lashed out at the Congress and the Communists, accusing them of "conspiring" to systematically erase the Hindu ethos of the country and obfuscating the "basic Hindu identity of our culture and civilisation".

"The time has come to proclaim with all the courage of our conviction that India is secular principally because of its Hindu ethos. Remove this and there will be no India left. Let us make no mistake..." the BJP chief told the delegates at the conclave, which is being attended by the entire top leadership of the party, including former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

"Let every adversary of ours be warned: If anybody tries to take the cover of secularism to indulge in anti-Hin-

times, Advani said the BJP had decided to associate itself with public protest on the issue after much inner-party deliberation.

On the Ayodhya issue, while maintaining that the party had dispelled its NDA allies' doubts regarding the BJP's stand on the matter, he urged the Congress and other parties to "see the compelling logic and undeniable desirability of a negotiated settlement", and contribute to the firming up of a national consensus on how to resolve the dispute soon.

Interestingly, while the BJP chief raised a sharp Hindutva pitch at the party's national executive, neither he nor Vajpayee made any mention of it or Ayodhya at a well-attended public meeting held at the Morhabadi Maidan here. The idea, obviously, was to avoid antagonising the JD(U) — its principal ally in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Jharkhand and Bihar.



agenda on the backburner during the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

Describing the arrest of the Sankaracharya as an unprecedented event that had jolted the Hindu society like no other event in recent

du politics and statecraft, the BJP will stand in their path like a rock, prepared to make any sacrifices," he said, in a speech that is bound to please the Sangh Parivar, which has been quite critical of the party for putting the Hindutva

du politics and statecraft, the BJP will stand in their path like a rock, prepared to make any sacrifices," he said, in a speech that is bound to please the Sangh Parivar, which has been quite critical of the party for putting the Hindutva

I said so: DMK chief

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, Nov. 24. — The DMK president today said the re-arrest of the Kanchi Sankaracharya in a two-year-old criminal case has only confirmed his suspicion about personal vendetta behind his arrest in the murder of Shankaraman, an official of the Kanchi Mutt.

Reacting to a statement by chief minister Miss Jayalalitha last night, Mr M Karunanidhi said here that he stood by his stand that if the Sankaracharya had committed any offence he deserved to be punished. "There can be no two opinions on that," he said.

Miss Jayalalitha had accused him of doing a volte face after threatening to go on a fast if the real culprits behind Sankaraman's murder were not brought to book. He had also subsequently welcomed the arrest of the Acharya, she had pointed out in her five-page statement.

Mr Karunanidhi said the post-arrest developments made him suspect there was more to the case than met the eye, particularly the re-arrest in a case relating to assault of a Mutt devotee, Mr Radhakrishnan, and his family members in Chennai in September 2002. The DMK chief showed scribes a published photograph of Miss Jayalalitha seated alongside the Sankaracharya, "a rare honour" extended to select people. Mr Karunanidhi refused to react to the charge made by VHP president Mr Ashok Singhal that Miss Jayalalitha fell out with the pontiff over the purchase of a hospital near Chennai by the Mutt — a charge which the chief minister has strongly denied.

In her statement last night, Miss Jayalalitha dismissed as Mr Karunanidhi's charge that the Acharya's arrest was motivated by "personal dealings" between them, as "the height of absurdity". She warned that legal action would be taken if such malicious charges were made. She also termed Mr Singhal's "certain remarks" as "irresponsible". "Such fabricated statements are put out in a desperate bid to deflect attention from the heinous and barbaric crime that has been committed," she said. Dismissing another charge, by senior BJP leader Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, that the arrest was a prelude to the state government taking over the Mutt, Miss Jayalalitha said she had already said in the Assembly that her government had no intention of taking over the administration.

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Religious leaders from Karnataka, Visveswarateerth Swami of Pejawar Mutt, Dayanand Saraswati, Art of Living Foundation founder Sri Sri Ravishankar (third from left), Shivaratri Deshikendra Swami of Sutter Mutt, Balgangadharnath Swami of Adi Chunchungiri Mutt and Tarlabalu Shivamurthy Shivacharya Swami, at a meeting to discuss the arrest of the Kanchi Sankaracharya, in Bangalore on Wednesday. — PTI

Southern seers see unholy mess

Statesman News Service

BANGALORE, Nov. 24. — Nearly 20 religious heads from different South Indian Mutts protested here today against what they termed was the ill treatment meted out to the Kanchi Sankaracharya by the Tamil Nadu government.

While asserting that nobody was above the law, they argued that the Acharya was merely an accused but was being treated as a criminal. They urged the Tamil Nadu government to show proper courtesy and respect to the Acharya.

At the same time, the religious leaders, including Sri Sri Ravishankar of Art of Living, were quick to acknowledge that it was necessary for the law to take its own course.

The meeting, held under the aegis of Sri Ravishankar, was attended by Ms Uma Bharti's guru, Shri Vishveswara Theeratha Swami, Jagadguru Shri Deshikendra Swamy, Suttur, Balagangadhar Natha Swamy from Adichunchungiri, Dayanandasaraswati Swamy, Kudligi Sringeri Swami and representatives of several other religious bodies.

These leaders also urged the Tamil Nadu government to refrain from

opposing the Acharya's bail and to treat the Sankaracharya with utmost dignity and reverence. "He is not a criminal, only an accused. He must be treated with dignity and honour," was the common refrain.

Bharadwaj on CBI probe

Union law minister Mr Hansraj Bharadwaj today said a CBI inquiry into the arrest of the Sankaracharya was possible only on the direction of the court or when the Tamil Nadu government made such a request. "There is no question of the Centre taking any initiative in the matter," he said.

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ROOTS OF HINDUTVA-II

Religion Sir 6 25

11 The Lofty Humanism Is Being Destroyed

By RK DASGUPTA

We may now turn to the question — what is the nature of true Hinduism which the RSS and the Sangh Parivar mean to distort beyond recognition? Any Hindu of some education would know it: he is not required to be a scholar in our scriptures. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, have made the substance of our philosophy and religion so clear that it has entered into our intellectual bloodstream.

Let me put the substance of their teachings in the words of Max Muller whom Vivekananda called a "Vedantist of Vedantists": "What distinguishes the Vedanta philosophy from all other philosophies is that it is at the same time a religion and a philosophy... It is the most sublime philosophy and the most satisfying religion." (*Three lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, 1894).

Vedantic Monism

But this Vedantism as the essence of Hinduism is completely ignored by the RSS and other constituents of the Sangh Parivar. There is not even a passing remark on it in Savarkar's *Hindutva*. In Welter K Anderson and Shridhar Damle's *The Brotherhood of Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh And Hindu Revivalism* (1987) there is a chapter entitled "Ideology, Organisation and Training" which begins with a two-page section on "Belief System of the RSS" where there are some observations on Sankara's Advaita Vedanta, but the idea is not woven into the RSS programme.

Obviously there is no place for Vedantic Monism in the ideology of the organisation of a sectarian and communal Sangh devoted to Savarkar's idea of a Hindu land. There is no room in this ideology for what Sir Brajendra Nath Seal presented as the ideal of Ramakrishna as a "cosmic humanist in religion" in his presidential address at the Parliament of Religions held in Kolkata in March 1937 to celebrate the birth centenary of Sri

Ramakrishna. Where is the place for a cosmic humanism in religion in the programme of a Sangh gathering bricks and mortar for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya?

Let us remember that Swami Vivekananda who never objected to his being called a Hindu monk was not happy about the word Hindu. In his address on

life-time of Vivekananda and if it were shown to him at Belur he would have quietly thrown it into the Ganges.

Scholarship

The ideas of the RSS would have been revolting to our great minds from Rammohun to Sri Aurobindo. What our true reli-



Vedantism at Jaffna Vivekananda said: "The word Hindu, by which it is the fashion nowadays to style ourselves, has lost all its meaning for this word merely meant those who lived on the other side of the river Indus. This name was murdered into Hindu by the ancient Persians. I therefore would not use the word Hindu. What word should we use then? The other words which alone we can use are either the Vaidikas, followers of the Vedas, or better still the Vedantists, followers of the Vedanta" (*Complete Works*). But the Sangh Parivar has a horror of the Vedanta, obviously for its universalism which is inconsistent with their concentration on a particular tract of land, Ayodhya. I can imagine if Savarkar's *Hindutva*, the basic scripture of the RSS were published in the

gion is we have learnt from Rammohun, Sri Ramakrishna, Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. For the average Indian it may not be possible to choose Rammohun's sayings on our religion from his complete works published in several volumes in the thirties of the last century. But we can now read the *Essential Writings of Raja Rammohun Ray* edited by Bruce Carlisle Robertson and published by the Oxford University Press in 1999. This work will convince its readers that Rammohun found the essence of Hinduism in Vedanta.

Sri Ramakrishna too is a Vedantist. Bankim worshipped his God in a temple, but he never reduced his religion to a matter of bricks and mortar. That Vivekananda was a Vedantist has

been already stressed in this article. Few of us can master the 30-volume complete works of Sri Aurobindo published in 1972. But we can read Robert A McDermott's *Six Pillars: Introductions to the Major Works of Sri Aurobindo* (1974) and Stephen H Phillips's *Philosophy of Brahman* (1986) to see that Sri Aurobindo was essentially a Vedantist. Peter Hees's *The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo* (1988) is an excellent guide to Sri Aurobindo's ideas on our religion. But what would we read to understand the religion of Ram Shila?

Hedgewar and Golwalkar have not attracted the attention of the world of scholars. The two-volume *The Saffron Swastika: The Notion of Hindu Fascism* (2001) by the Flemish-speaking Belgian, Moenraad Elst is not read by even those who are expected to appreciate his sympathy for the RSS.

Humanity

Actually the RSS or the VHP or even the BJP have not attracted the world's attention. M Brecher's *Nehru: A Political Biography* was published by the Oxford University Press in 1959, five years before the death of Nehru. The same house last year published Judith M Brown's *Nehru: A Political Life*. It is a large 407-page work by a distinguished Oxford historian who is Beit Professor of Commonwealth History at Oxford. The Sangh Parivar has no presence in the world of scholarship. It seems the civilised world does not care for those whose ideology is to demolish a mosque and build a temple.

Let me end this article with the words of Sri Aurobindo: "The widest synthesis of perfection possible to thought is the sole effort entirely worthy of those whose dedicated vision perceives that God dwells concealed in humanity". This lofty humanism is being destroyed by the Hindutva doctrine.

(Concluded)

ROOTS OF HINDUTVA-I

Religion

No Less Akin To Islamic Idea Of Holy Land

SFB

29/11

By RK DASGUPTA

Who invented the word "Hindutva"? In other words, who is the first to use the word? It is not a Sanskrit word. There is no such word in Vedic or classical Sanskrit. "Hindu" is there in Sir Monier Monier-William's large 1,333-page *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* first published in 1899. There is, however, a very brief entry on the word "Hindu" saying that the word is derived from Persian. Damodar Vinayak Savarkar was the first to use the word in his work *Hindutva* first published in 1923. Within two years it became the battle-cry of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh founded in 1925 as a Hindu organisation.

Savarkar

When the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political wing of the RSS, headed a fragile coalition government at the Centre, Hindutva ceased to be a battle cry because the coalition, the National Democratic Alliance, did not favour the ideology. But LK Advani, the new BJP president, has revived the Hindutva ideology as the central doctrine of the party and has declared in a shrill voice that it is the spirit behind the determination of the party to rebuild the Ram Temple at Ayodhya.

What did Savarkar mean by his Hindutva? I possess a copy of the second edition of *Hindutva* published in 1942 and I know it is an exact reprint of the first. Savarkar defines his Hindutva thus: "A Hindu is he who looks upon the land that extends from Sindh to Sindh, from the Indus to the seas as the land of his forefathers — his *pitribhu*, who inherits the blood of that race and culture, as expressed in their common classic language, the

The author, an eminent scholar, is former Director, the National Library of India.

sanskrita and represented by a common history, a common literature, art and architecture, law and jurisprudence, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals and who above all addresses the land as the Sindhusthan, as his *punya-bhu*, as his holy land, the land of his prophets and seers, of his godmen and gurus, the land of

nanda and Aurobindo.

Advani came to power and became deputy prime minister of India through a movement basically sustained by the RSS ideology of Hindutva. His *Rath Yatra* of September 1990, a procession in a rath from Somnath in Gujarat, winding some 10,000 kilometres through western and northern India and scheduled to



piety and pilgrimage".

Let us not fail to realise that the concept of Hindutva is a geographical concept, a racial concept, a cultural concept, on the whole it is essentially a national and political concept. It resembles Hitler's Germanic-Aryan concept which prompted him to conquer the whole of Europe. It is no less akin to the fundamentalist Islamic idea of holy land.

Rath Yatra

We may now turn to the common Indian idea of Indian identity, an idea sustained by the spirit of our Vedanta, the essence of our religion, which is also our philosophy as it has been presented by our great minds, Ram-muhun, Ramakrishna, Viveka-

end in Ayodhya, was essentially an RSS movement. And he made that clear by flaunting the RSS saffron flag in his chariot without however forgetting to place by its side the lotus symbol of the BJP. The RSS fortnightly called this *Rath Yatra* a *dharma yuddha* (holy war).

As Thomas Blom Hensen, professor in the department of geography and International Development Studies at Roskilde University, Denmark, says in his *The Saffron Wave* (1999) published by the Oxford University Press says: "It left hundreds of anti-Muslim pogroms in its trail". Advani's *yatra* brought a happy turning point in BJP's electoral fortunes. It emerged as the second largest party in our

parliament with 119 seats, expanding its share of the total vote from 11.4 per cent in 1989 to 19.9 per cent in 1991. The demolition of the Babari Masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 ultimately led to the formation of a BJP coalition government at the Centre.

Battle cry

Advani has raised the RSS battle cry soon after his becoming the BJP president because he believes that it is the RSS ideology of Hindutva which once brought political power to the BJP. He now affirms that Hindutva ideology alone can restore the party its political power. He is bent on reviving the Hindu militancy in Indian politics. As Peter van der Veer, professor of Comparative Religions at University of Amsterdam has shown in his *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (first published by the University of California in 1994, later issued as an Oxford India Paperback in 1995), the RSS, the BJP and the Vishva Hindu Parisad are flocks of the same political herd.

What must we now say about the RSS after the BJP president has raised his battle cry of Hindutva? The most quotable remark on the RSS is that of Madhu Limaye, the socialist leader, who used to be adored by the Indian political community for his integrity as no less for courage. Limaye said about the RSS in an article in Sunday (10 June 1979) that "the RSS ideology is very clear. It is a supra-party paramilitary organisation which wants to take over the state and the nation, and establish an authoritarian regime in the manner of the Nazi leader". None of us can improve on this statement in precision and lucidity in a description of the RSS.

(To be concluded)

24 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Court rejects extension of seer's police custody

HC Denies Lawyer's Presence During Interrogation

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai/Kancheepuram: Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi will not stay in police custody till 2 pm on Tuesday. And when he is in custody, his lawyer will not be present.

That was the essence of the legal orders on Monday. The Kancheepuram Judicial Magistrate-I on Monday rejected the petition seeking extension of police custody of the seer by another day. Justice G. Utamraja held that the Acharya had been interrogated enough. He also rejected the contention that further custody was necessary to verify some bank accounts which was not possible on Sunday, on the grounds that the seer's presence for that was not necessary.

Meanwhile, the Madras High Court denied permission for an advocate to be present during the interrogation of the seer while in custody. At the Kancheepuram hearing, the prosecutor had submitted that the seer was co-operating with the police. The magistrate then asked the Acharya what he had to say about this. The seer replied: "They have asked all the questions they want."

Defence counsels Y.T. Thyagarajan and K.S. Dinakaran argued that bank accounts could be verified even in the absence of the pontiff and that there was no need for his presence.

The magistrate, in fact, had asked the seer whether he was tortured, to which the Shankaracharya replied in the negative. Doctors, he informed the court, had been examining him thrice a day. The Madras HC dis-



Jaya vengeful, says Karunanidhi

Chennai: In surprising comments that indicate a turnaround, DMK president M Karunanidhi on Monday said "vengeance" could be seen in chief minister J Jayalalithaa's arrest of Kanchi seer and "doubts" have arisen over many issues.



Karunanidhi, who had welcomed the arrest as an "honest action" earlier, told reporters that one could not "forget" that there had been "many personal matters" between the CM and the seer. "The way Shanakaracharya has been dealt with is too much. The Prime Minister has said the same thing. We appreciated Veerappan's capture and the filing of case against and arrest of Shankaracharya." PTI

missed a petition challenging the Kancheepuram judicial magistrate's order remanding him to three days in police custody. Justice A.K. Rajan, who in the morning granted permission for the Acharya's counsel to be with him during interrogation, modified his ruling in the afternoon denying the permission.

Sources close to the Kanchi Mutt said the decision to approach the Supreme Court for a bail had not been taken yet. The senior Pontiff did not approve of the idea, they added.

BJP president L K Advani on Monday called on Vijayendra Saraswathi, junior pontiff of the Kanchi Mutt in Kancheepuram. "I hope this unfortunate episode of the arrest of Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi will end soon. In this, public and judicial opinion will certainly have a say," Advani told reporters after a 35-minute meeting with the junior Acharya.

Stepping up their campaign in support of the jailed pontiff, a delegation of Hindu religious leaders on Monday met the President in New Delhi and demanded his intervention to secure the pontiff's release. The 18-member delegation, which also included VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Vishnu Hari Dalmia, also demanded a "fair and impartial" CBI probe into the case and shifting of trial outside Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, disturbed over the arrest of the Kanchi seer, a Hindu Munnani activist on Monday committed suicide by consuming poison at Palladam, about 40 km from Coimbatore.

Sankaracharya denied bail, may move SC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Nov. 20. — Madras High Court today denied bail to the Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi, who was arrested in connection with the murder of a temple official in Kancheepuram.

The Sankaracharya is likely to move the Supreme Court tomorrow challenging the rejection of his bail petition.

Sources said the Acharya's counsel would file a Special Leave Petition tomorrow and make a 'mention' of it in the Apex Court on Monday.

Passing his order this evening, Mr Justice R Balasubramanian, who heard extensive arguments by the Tamil Nadu public prosecutor, said bail could not be granted "at this stage."

The defence lawyers had moved the bail application before the High Court on 12 November, shortly after the senior pontiff was remanded to judicial custody by the Kancheepuram magistrate and sent to the Vellore Central prison, about 170 kms from here.

He was arrested on 11 November from his Mehboob Nagar camp in Andhra Pradesh.

On Friday, the Kancheepuram first class magistrate, Mr G Uthamaraj, granted police custody of the Sankaracharya. Even this was challenged by the defence in a separate petition before the High

Advani sees Emergency re-run in arrest

NEW DELHI, Nov. 20.

— Even as the BJP launched a nationwide agitation today to protest the arrest of the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi, the BJP president, Mr LK Advani, equated the arrest with the imposition of Emergency in 1975. He warned the authorities that people would give a befitting reply to this move.

"The Sankaracharya's arrest is as significant in the history of the nation as the imposition of emergency," said Mr Advani. "The Communists were with the Congress government during the Emergency. Today they are with the same government." Mr Advani plans to sit on dharna in Chennai on 22 November to protest against the "treatment" meted out to the Sankaracharya.

— SNS & PTI

Court, which would give its verdict on Monday morning, when the three-day police custody comes to an end. Tamil Nadu police have sought an extension of custody by two more days. The police proposed to move the Kancheepuram first class judicial magistrate's court for extending the custody.

21 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Police remand for Kanchi seer challenged in HC

Pr-1
Ref 11

Religion

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai/ Kancheepuram: The police custody ordered by the Kancheepuram Judicial Magistrate on Friday morning to the Kanchi Shankaracharya Sri Jayendra Saraswathi was challenged by senior advocate B. Kumar in the Madras high court in the afternoon. The plea was admitted in Justice V. Kanakaraj's court and posted for hearing on Saturday.

An order on a bail petition from the Acharya is still pending in the Madras high court. Justice R. Balasubramaniam on Thursday reserved his order indefinitely. At Kancheepuram, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi was sent to police custody from 12.05 pm on Friday to 10.30 am on Monday (November 22) and taken to the all-woman police station. The police are likely to question him on the banking transactions and cellphone calls made and received around the time of the murder of temple accountant Shankararaman.

On the prosecution plea seeking five days police custody, judicial metropolitan magistrate court-I magistrate G. Uthamaraj granted three-day custody. He did not grant the main plea of the defence counsel seeking permission for a lawyer to be present during interrogation.

However, he permitted one lawyer chosen by the Shankaracharya to meet him at the place of custody every day between 6 pm and 7 pm. A government doctor was also ordered to give Shankaracharya a daily medical check-up.

Though the defence counsel sought the court's permission to allow the seer to do daily puja in custody, the order did not touch upon it. The order was delivered five minutes before 12 noon, ending of 'rahu kalam'. The Shankaracharya had on Thursday requested the judgment be pronounced at 12.30 pm, stating that rahu kalam (inauspicious time) was from 10.30 am to 12 noon.

The seer was brought here from the Vellore Central Prison at 10.30 am as directed by the court. When the magistrate came at 11.25 am, defence counsel Y. Thya-

garajan sought permission to argue on the petition filed at the time of remand. The magistrate allowed him to present his case before passing the orders.

Thyagarajan cited a 1978 supreme court judgment relating to Nandini Satpathy vs State of India where permission for the lawyer to be present during police custody was granted. After the arguments were concluded, the magistrate asked the Shankaracharya if he was well, to which the latter merely nodded.



Kanchi seer leaves Vellore prison for the Kancheepuram court

BJP plans 3-day stir

New Delhi: Joining issue with the Tamil Nadu government on the arrest of Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati, an agitated BJP on Friday announced the launch of a three-day nationwide stir from Saturday against the police remand for him with former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and party president L K Advani planning a dharna and fast here.

It accused both the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre of "assaulting and insulting Hindu religion." Advani will lead a day-long dharna and observe fast here on Saturday, followed by senior leaders Murli Manohar Joshi and Jaswant Singh on the subsequent days to protest against the Kanchi seer being sent to three-day police custody. PTI

The mutt's banking transactions are bound to come under intense scrutiny. The police have already taken details relating to the mutt's bank accounts, details of the numerous trusts, their activities and beneficiaries. The police are closely going through all functions of the mutt.

20 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Hard evidence against Sankaracharya: Jaya

CHENNAI, Nov. 17. — The Tamil Nadu police had “shocking information” directly linking the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi, with the murder of Shankar Raman, a temple official at Kancheepuram, chief minister Miss J Jayalalitha told the Assembly today.

Making a suo motu statement, Miss Jayalalitha said some people had questioned “the correctness” of arresting a popular religious leader. “Our government did not make the arrest anticipating any bouquets or fearing any blame... It was done in the spirit that everyone is equal in the eyes of law.”

She added that it was only “proper” that she informed the House first regarding the case’s details as the Assembly session had been convened.

She said: “Certain shocking pieces of definitive information have come to light on the acharya’s



involvement in the murder based on confessions of some of the accused and certain other materials seized from them”. There was also enough evidence to prove that the acharya in 2002 “conspired to kill” Mr Radhakrishnan, a former Sankara Mutt employee.

Police had also found evidence which showed that the acharya was linked to the payment of money from a Kanchi Mutt bank account to hire the killers and had five conversations over the phone with the hit team. — SNS

Another report on page 3

18 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Court wants Seer presence

Statesman News Service

KANCHEEPURAM, Nov. 16. — A sessions court here today directed the police to produce before it the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Jayendra Saraswathi, on 18 November. He was arrested and remanded in judicial custody in connection with a murder case.

The Seer's plea is to come up for hearing at Madras High Court tomorrow.

The Seer was lodged in an ordinary cell with not even an electrical fan and he slept on the bare floor, the Seer's advocates said here. They had met the acharya on Sunday and he looked "normal" but "very tired".

First class magistrate Mr G Uthamarajan gave the direction when a petition filed by the police seeking custody of the Sankaracharya came up for hearing.

When court proceedings began, Mr Y Thiagarajan, counsel for Jayendra Saraswathi, appealed to the court to give him an opportunity to file his objection to police custody. "I only heard about the police filing a petition seeking custody of the acharya in the media. I have not been given any notice or information even though I have been present throughout the day in the court. If there is such a petition then I should be given the opportunity to oppose the same," Mr Thiagarajan told the court, seeking all the documents and case records for perusal.

On its part, the prosecution felt it was not necessary to issue any notice to the de-



NO TANDAVAL THIS: Shiv Sena activists burn effigy of Miss Jayalalitha in Amritsar on Tuesday. — PTI

fence for an application (for custody) of this nature. The magistrate also adjourned till 18 November another petition filed on behalf of the Seer seeking certain special facilities for him while in judicial custody.

In his petition, the Kanchi Seer, who has been remanded in judicial custody till 26 November, had sought certain facilities like hospitalisation, permission to do puja and cook his own food as required by the Mutt traditions.

With regard to the defence's plea for documents relating to the case, the prosecution said the defence was not entitled to documents at this

stage. Mr Thiagarajan contended that he needed to peruse all the documents relating to the case, particularly the FIR and remand report, to effectively argue the Seer's plea at the High Court.

A late night report said he was given a copy of the FIR.

Meanwhile, senior BJP leader Mr Murlu Manohar Joshi, who was granted permission to meet the Sankaracharya at the Vellore Jail, said the Seer had conveyed to him that he would accept whatever the court decided.

Emerging from his 20-minute meeting with the acharya, former HRD minister Mr Joshi told reporters:

"The manner in which Sankaracharya was arrested is most reprehensible. But if there is something, let the court decide it. Even swamiji is saying he will accept whatever the court verdict is."

Stating that devotees across the nation were anguished and angry by certain observations of the prosecution that the Sankaracharya could poison himself if he was allowed to cook his own food in jail, Mr Joshi said: "I think this is a totally absurd notion."

As for the prosecution's claim that the Seer was planning to flee to Nepal, the BJP leader said: "Such talk is sullyng his reputation as

well as that of the Mutt."

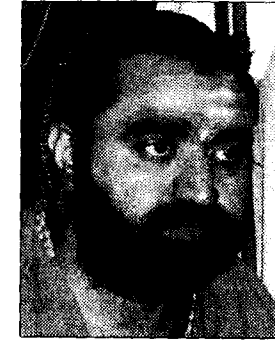
Observing that the Seer's arrest should have been done with the government's approval, Mr Joshi said: "I cannot say what are the reasons behind it. But I can surely say this does not seem to be any ordinary case." While he would not be meeting Miss Jayalalitha, he added: "I might send my report to her. Swamiji only said that God should give wisdom to everyone."

Mr George Fernandes, who also met the Sankaracharya, said the arrest violated "human rights". "For his stature, this kind of treatment should not have been given," he said.

I'm in deep sorrow: Vijayendra

Statesman News Service

KANCHEEPURAM, Nov. 16. — "I am in deep sorrow," a visibly shaken Vijayendra Saraswathi, the junior pontiff and heir apparent to the Mutt, told reporters here after he arrived from Mehboob Nagar near Hyderabad this morning.



Vijayendra Saraswathi at the Mutt on Tuesday. — PTI

The junior acharya arrived at the Mutt for the first time after the arrest of Jayendra Saraswathi in connection with the murder of a temple employee. As he reached the Saruvatheertha Kulam, a temple tank, just outside this small temple town, the junior acharya's car was stopped by enthusiastic devotees, who greeted him warmly with shawls, fruits and flowers.

Looking bewildered by the sudden flash of lights from video and still cameras of mediapersons, Vijayendra Saraswathi, dressed in traditional saffron robes and holding the holy staff, was hurriedly ushered in through the doors by Mutt officials. Mediapersons were pushed back and not allowed to enter the Mutt, even as manager Mr Sundaresa Iyer shouted at scribes to leave the place. He said the junior pontiff did not wish to make any press statement.

After sometime, reporters, however, were allowed in on the condition that the junior pontiff would not be bombarded with questions. Appearing before mediapersons in the central prayer hall of the Mutt, Vijayendra Saraswathi, appearing grave and disturbed, said after a long pause: "I am deep in sorrow. Let us all pray with utmost devotion."

Urged by former Chief Election Commissioner Mr TN Seshan, an ardent Mutt devotee, to wind up the brief show, the junior seergot up, wiping away a tear. There was a sudden buzz of activity as he returned to the Mutt.

Junior acharya wants CBI probe

HTC & Agencies
Hyderabad, November 15

AS VARIOUS Hindu organisations continued their protest against the arrest of Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati, RSS spokesperson Ram Madhav arrived in Andhra Pradesh's Mehboobnagar on Monday to meet the junior Kanchi Sankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswati.

Former BJP MP from Mehboobnagar A.P. Jithender Reddy told PTI that Vijayendra, who is performing a *yagya* in the town, has asked for a CBI probe into the arrest of the seer.

"The swamiji is of the view that only a CBI probe can help get to the truth and ensure justice," Reddy told PTI in Hyderabad. Vi-

jayendra has written a letter to Union home minister Shivraj Patil demanding the CBI inquiry, Reddy said.

In Chennai, the Tamil Nadu government granted senior BJP leader M.M. Joshi permission to meet the seer, who is lodged in the Vellore jail. Joshi said that he had been permitted to meet the seer in prison on Tuesday.

With speculation rife that the police may raid the Kancheepuram mutt, advocates for the mutt have said that the police would have to issue them with a notice before searching the place.

Meanwhile, the police said that two persons, accused in an assault case of a former mutt official two years ago, were arrested and remanded in judicial cus-

tody on Sunday.

In another development, some mutt officials complained that the police was harassing them by frequently calling some official or the other asking them "to assist in the inquiry".

In Kerala, normal life was affected due to a dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the VHP-led Hindu Aikya Vedi, protesting the seer's arrest. Shops remained closed in the early hours in urban centres and private vehicles were more or less off the roads, official sources said in Thiruvananthapuram.

People of Irulneeki, a village where the Kanchi seer was born, have sent telegrams to Tamil Nadu governor S.S. Barnala and chief minister Jayalithaa, seeking his immediate release.

Saffron outfits stage dharna

VARIOUS HINDU organisations under the aegis of RSS and supported by the BJP staged dharna here to mount pressure for immediate release of Kanchi Sankaracharya, now detained in Vellore jail.

The VHP, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Jagran Manch along with rank and files of various Ramleela and Mandir committees have threatened to intensify the stir against the "attack on Hindu religion". A massive mass campaign in Meerut exhorted the people to protest against the seer's arrest and join the movement to ensure the release of the religious leader.

Joonapeethadheeswar Acharya

Mahamandleshwar Avdhesanand Giriji Maharaj, while talking to HT termed the action of the Tamil Nadu government as a "conspiracy to cripple Hindu pride".

Meanwhile, the dawn-to dusk bandh called by the VHP-led Hindu Aikya Vedi affected normal life in Kerala on Monday. In cities and towns shops were closed and private vehicles were off the roads.

However, Kerala state road transport corporation buses were on roads. All government offices reported thin attendances. Except stray incidents bandh was peaceful.

HTC

Arrest a war on Hindus: Togadia

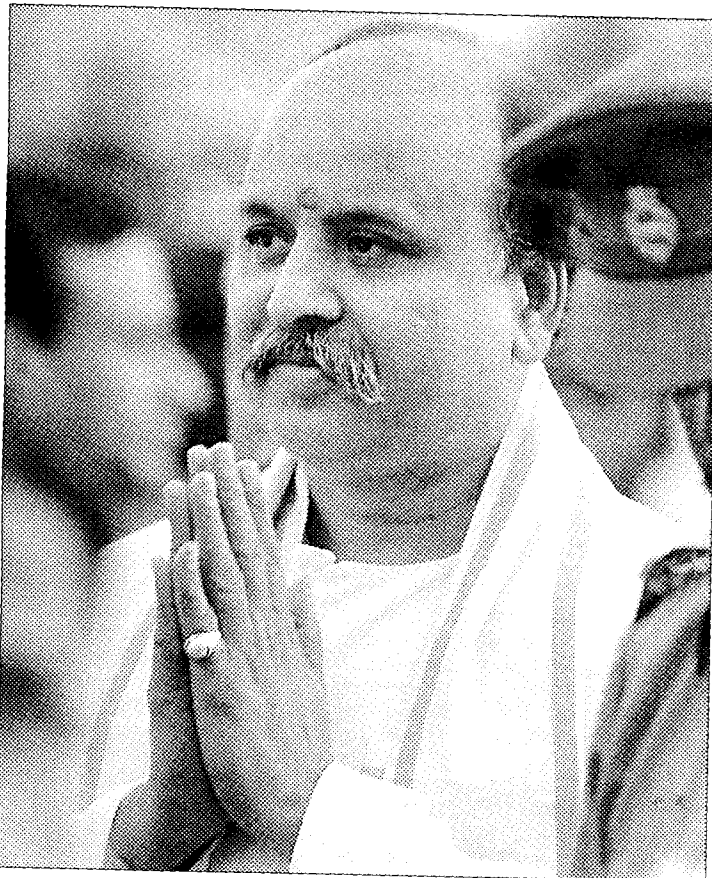
REBRAND VHP leader Praveen Togadia hit the streets in Tamil Nadu for the first time and dubbed the Kanchi Sankaracharya's arrest "an insult and war against 83 crore Hindus of the country".

"Jayalithaa, Karunanidhi and Sonia Gandhi have committed *shidrog* and it is time they were punished with *rudra tandav*," he said, addressing a small gathering of VHP workers in central Chennai on Monday evening.

Togadia wanted to know if the police would dare enter Jama Masjid and arrest Imam Bhukari, though there were many cases against him. "Can one imagine the pope being arrested in Vatican? Jayalithaa thinks that she will lose the DMK's votes after this, but she will lose the votes of Hindus and the minorities," he said.

Pointing out that Manmohan Singh was not consulted, Togadia said if he was the PM only for 12 months he would have consulted the Muslims of the country. He demanded that the Centre should in no way interfere with the activities of the mutts in the country.

HTC, Chennai



VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia in Chennai on Monday.

How mutt made its money

G.C. Shekhar
Chennai, November 15

THE KANCHI Kaamakoti Peetam prides itself as the only mutt where Adi Sankara was the *acharya* and has maintained an unbroken tradition of 69 acharyas after him.

Founded at Kancheepuram by Adi Sankara in the 9th Century after he had established four other mutts in Sringeri, Dwaraka, Puri and Dwarkanath, the Kanchi mutt had relocated to Kumbakonam briefly before returning to its present spot.

While the other four mutts have repeatedly disputed the bonafides of the Kanchi mutt as the seat of Adi Sankara, the Kanchi outfit itself has grown exponentially in terms of its influence, institutions and wealth. While the credit for making the mutt a modern pilgrim centre should go to the Paramacharya, it was Jayendra Saraswati's cleverness in exploiting the brand image of his senior to expand into the fields of healthcare, education and other social activities that saw the emergence of many progenies, mainly in the form of trusts.

With the mutt acting as benefactor, it created a plethora of trusts, with industrialists, educationists, bureauc-

ats, to float hospitals, schools and colleges and even a deemed university at Enathur near Kancheepuram. Apart from Veda Patasalas, seventeen Oriental schools and thirty-eight Sankara Schools are functioning in different parts of the country under the guidance of the Math.

The many stand-alone trusts may own and administer them but no one is left in doubt about who controls them as the official website of the mutt claims "Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam runs hospitals at different places, which includes the Kamakoti Child Trust Hospital in Madras, Eye Hospitals at Coimbatore and Guwahati, hospitals at Madhubani (Bihar), Rathura for tribals (Uttaranchal), Berhampur (Orissa) Hindu Mission Hospitals in many places in Tamil Nadu."

Recently the mutt picked up the massive Tamil Nadu Hospitals complex near Chennai, which had been listed sick, reportedly for Rs 200 crore after a close race with another powerful bidder. Similarly, it had pipped Apollo Hospitals to gain control of the prestigious Childs Trust Hospital in Chennai. Hundreds of crores come up so easily to the mutt's coffers that it requires a detailed scrutiny by the taxmen.

The making of a Sankaracharya

HT Correspondent
Chennai, November 15

THE KANCHI Mutt has emphatically denied reports that there was move to nominate a third Sankaracharya since the senior Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati had been rendered 'inactive' following his arrest.

"Where is the need for a third acharya when Vijayendra is very much in touch with us on important matters and the mutt has always carried on its daily activities even when the two mataathipathis have been travelling?" asked Sundareswara, the senior manager of the mutt. He pointed out that daily *poojas* were being performed, and visitors were coming as usual and that Vijayendra would return to Kancheepuram only after completing his tour in Andhra Pradesh.

In 1987 when Jayendra Saraswati did his vanishing act for 14 days, the senior Paramacharya had transferred the administrative control of the mutt to the present junior Sankaracharya Vijayendra to ensure mutt activities continue without any hitch. Even after the return of Jayendra to the mutt, it was only after one year that he got back administrative control of the mutt, insiders pointed out.

SEER SAGA

- Traditionally, successors to the *peetam* are nominated by the incumbent *acharya* after carefully scouring the many *vedashalas* run by the mutt

- Once a successor is chosen, permission from his parents is sought for his *sanyas*. The boy is then prepared by a group of Vedic experts on what to expect in his new life

- After chanting several mantras in waist-deep water, the new *sanyasin* wears an ochre robe and is baptised with a religious name

- The young seer is strictly instructed not to look at his mother ever again, snap all old ties — '*poorvaashram*' — and then immerse himself fully into the holy order

Traditionally successors to the *peetam* are nominated by the incumbent *acharya* after carefully scouring the many *vedashalas* run by the mutt. When the present junior, Vijayendra, was nominated as the 70th Sankaracharya in 1983, he was barely 14 and for the first time the Kanchi mutt

had a trio of *acharyas*.

Once a successor is chosen, permission from his parents is sought for his *sanyas*. The brahmin boy is then prepared by a group of senior Vedic experts on what to expect in his new life. Then the incumbent *acharya* leads the disciple into the sarvatheertham at Kancheepuram, the temple tank of the Kasi Viswanathan temple.

After chanting the "*prokashna*" mantras, the disciple standing in waist deep water, removes his clothing and brahminical cross thread thus cutting off all his relations with the world. Wearing the ochre robe and receiving the *dhandam* (stick) and *kamandalam* (brass spouted vessel) from the his *acharya* the new *sanyasin* proceeds to the *mukthi mandapam* of the temple where he is baptised with his new religious name and also asked to repeat the "*mahavakyam*" mouthed by his guru.

The young seer is strictly instructed not to look at his mother ever and on behalf of the mutt an official presents his parents clothes, a gold chain and a coral necklace. With that the latest Sankaracharya is expected to snap all ties with his "*poorvaashram*" and immerse himself fully into the holy order.



Jayendra Saraswati

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15 NOV 2004

Sex, scandals and swamijis in Tamil Nadu

Jaya Menon in Chennai

Nov. 14. — Blind faith and superstition have caused many "spiritual" mishaps in Tamil Nadu with its mushrooming *ashrams*, spiritual orders and controversial cult figures. Despite the dominance of rationalist theorists on the political horizon, the state has more than its share of godmen, some of whom have provided fodder to the media with their sordid tales of rape and murder and spicy scandals.

The much-venerated Sankara Mutt in Kancheepuram, in the spotlight now after the Sankaracharya, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi's arrest in connection with a murder case, has a massive following across the globe. Considering the pon-

tiff's powerful clout with the powers that be, even whiffs of controversies in the past had been swept under the Mutt's well-worn cement floor. That is until the Seer's dramatic arrest on 12 November night.

In Tamil Nadu, many high profile swamijis have come under the legal axe on charges of rape, murder and intrigues. Notable among them is the case of the fake *sanyasi* with the kinky hairdo, Swami Premananda, and his secretary, Kamalananda. In December 2002, Madras High Court confirmed a lower court's order sentencing the two to double life imprisonment. The charge against Premananda was that while he put up a front of spirituality and dispensed *bhakti* in his *ashram* near Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu, he raped young



Shri Jayendra Saraswathi

girls and forced those who became pregnant to go for abortions. He also murdered an engineer, Ravi, who attempted to expose him.

Yet another self-styled godman, "*Kalki Bhagwan*", hailing from Tamil Nadu, was in the news some months ago when Madras High Court took up a public interest litigation alleg-

ing misuse of public funds by the various Kalki trusts. The petition brought to public notice the unaccounted wealth of the *Bhagwan* and his family members and their massive financial empire. The litigant, a social activist, Mr Vishwanath Swami, alleged that the godman and his family siphoned off huge amounts of money from public charitable trusts to open private accounts.

Meanwhile, V Vijayakumar, the LIC clerk-turned-godman, claiming he was god incarnate, continued to draw devotees who were mesmerised by his "miracles". At one point he reportedly had as many as six million Indian and one million foreign devotees, who made handsome donations.

In another incident of spirituality turning murderous, the

junior "Adheenam", Kasiwanatha Pandara Sannithi, of the Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt in Mayiladuthurai in Tamil Nadu, was arrested in 2002 for his suspected involvement in a plot to murder the senior Adheenam, Sivaprakasa Desikar. The junior Adheenam, who tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills, was arrested by the Mayiladuturai police soon after he was discharged from hospital.

A godman, Prasanna Venkatcharya Chaturveda Swamy, was arrested on 8 November on charges of abduction. The Central Crime Branch charged him with harassment and abduction after a complaint by a senior executive, who alleged that the Swamy had taken his wife and daughter on a trip to Nepal against their will.

HYDERABAD/CHENNAI, Nov. 14. — Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said the Centre has no role in the recent arrest of Swami Jayendra Saraswathi.

"The Centre has no role in the arrest of Jayendra Saraswathi. It is not correct to say that we were involved," he said at a press conference when asked about the issue. "To say the least it is not our concern," he added.

Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu police have filed an application before the Judicial Magistrate-I, Kancheepuram, seeking 10 days' police custody to enable them to question the Seer in custody and also to search the Mutt premises and his personal belongings in his presence. However, the Seer's bail application is coming up for hear-

Centre has no role in arrest

ing on 17 November and the application for police custody is not likely to be taken up before disposal of the bail petition. In their counter-affidavit to the bail petition, the police said "custodial interrogation" was necessary in this case and that they had sought his remand in police custody.

Meanwhile, DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi has urged the Jayalalitha government to take all steps to protect the mutt from extinction" following the Sankara charya's arrest. He said Hindu religious and charitable endowments department, which administers the temples in the state should ensure that the mutt is "protected" and run "to safeguard the interests of the downtrodden". — SNS

Jaya at once distances herself from Hindutva & reinforces TN police credibility



Sankaracharya supporters clash with a group of alleged DMK members on Madras High Court premises after the hearing of his bail application was adjourned on Saturday. (PTI)

'Double' blessing in seer stroke

M.R. VENKATESH

Chennai, Nov. 13: Facts can be stranger than fiction in Tamil Nadu politics, where the two major Dravidian parties have been at each other's necks for the last 37 years.

This was evident yesterday when DMK chief M. Karunanidhi found himself on the same side of the fence as chief minister and ADMK president Jayalalithaa. What brought the arch-rivals together was the dramatic arrest of Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati in connection with the September 3 murder of a temple manager.

Karunanidhi has been boycotting the Assembly for the last three years, saying there is no democracy in Tamil Nadu. Political observers say if the always-sniping rivals are calling for the law to take its course in the case, there must be more to it than meets the eye.

The seer's arrest is a clear sign that Jayalalithaa, who burnt her fingers by allying with the BJP

in the last Lok Sabha polls, is distancing herself from the larger "Hindutva discourse" that the BJP and Sangh parivar outfits are identified with.

The Kanchi Kamakoti *mutt* that the seer heads was regarded as an "extra-constitutional centre of power" when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance was in power. Opposition parties would criticise him for unduly "influencing" the Tamil Nadu government's policies, particularly the bill banning forcible religious conversions.

The ruling ADMK itself had "close links" with the *mutt*, with Jayalalithaa thinking nothing of attending a huge *yagna* the seer organised in Kancheepuram last year.

Despite the seer's catholicity — most of the political leaders cutting across parties in the middle class look to him for guidance — the *mutt* continues to be regarded as a "symbol of Brahminism aiding the BJP's Hindutva-revivalist agenda in recent years".

When the DMK forged formidable anti-Jayalalithaa alliance comprising OBCs, Dalits and minorities during the last Lok Sabha elections, the ADMK-BJP combine came to be regarded as a "chip off the Brahminical block". Supporters of the DMK alliance resented any revival of "Brahminical forces"; their opposition along with some highly unpopular and repressive measures contributed to Jayalalithaa's electoral rout.

With Assembly polls due in less than two years, Jayalalithaa is reportedly keen to win back this huge "non-Brahmin vote bank" from which the DMK-led bloc derives its strength. Brahmins make up just 3 per cent of the state's population.

With the "Hindutva platform" and the *mutt's* blessings not fetching her votes, the seer's alleged involvement in the temple murder has provided the chief minister the chance to dramatically snap ties with both.

The sankaracharya's arrest has thus come as a "double blessing": it has reinforced the credibility of Tamil Nadu police — even Karunanidhi hailed the arrest as an "honest piece of action" — and has also allowed Jayalalithaa to halt the dilution of "Dravidian ideology" by distancing herself from Hindutva forces. In political terms, it would appear that the state is returning to hardcore 1960s Dravidian politics.



Jayalalithaa

Arrest timing ruffles Centre

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 13: The Centre is awaiting a detailed report from Tamil Nadu governor S.S. Barnala on the arrest of the Kanchi sankaracharya on murder charges but there are indications that Delhi has not taken kindly to the timing and manner of the arrest.

There is a view at the Centre that the Tamil Nadu government could have handled the case in a more sensitive manner and, perhaps, waited till after Diwali to make the arrest.

The top brass of the Union home ministry has been in touch with the state government since late on Thursday

when a Tamil Nadu police team arrested the seer, sources said.

Senior officials at the Centre also spoke to Tamil Nadu counterparts to ascertain if the arrest could have been put off for a few days, said a source. However, they were told that the state police had conducted a thorough investigation and had gone ahead only after collecting irrefutable evidence, including phone transcripts, linking the seer with the murder.

Publicly, the Centre pointed out that the state government was within its jurisdiction to make the arrest.

However, this has not deterred the Vishwa Hindu Parishad from blaming the Left-backed United Progressive Al-

liance government for the arrest and sparing Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalithaa. VHP activists staged a demonstration and vowed to "avenge" the arrest. They also sought a law giving some legal immunity to pontiffs.

VHP working president Ashok Singhal said the sankaracharya's arrest was an attack on the entire community "as grave as the destruction of the Somnath temple centuries ago". The VHP leader linked the arrest to the "government of non-believers in this country", in an obvious reference to the communists.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said the sankaracharya's arrest had shocked the nation and it was the government's responsibility

to ensure that he remained in good health and is able to perform his daily rituals. "The manner in which he (the sankaracharya) was arrested has hurt the people more," said Vajpayee, who hosted an *iftar* this evening.

"The court will do its work, but everyone should keep in mind that he is respected by crores of people. It is the government's responsibility to take care of his health and it should be also kept in mind that he spends maximum time in performing religious rites," he said.

The chairman of the National Democratic Alliance had earlier spoken to Union home minister Shivraj Patil, who is learnt to have elaborated on the case.

HOLY SEER, UNHOLY MESS

The story of the suspect saint

G.C. Shekhar
Chennai, November 13

JUST LAST month, President Abdul Kalam dutifully stood by as Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati (who remained seated of course) blessed him with a shawl and a memento. Just two years ago, a prominent news magazine had named the Sankaracharya as one of the most influential Indians. Today, the holy man sits in a jail cell, denied any special rights, as the prime accused in a murder case.

The Sankaracharya's followers had just finished a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of his ascension to the holy seerage. For, on March 22, 1955, the Paramacharya Chandrasekara Saraswati had nominated him the 69th Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Mutt.

It was a long journey for the man known as Mahadevan Subramanian before he took *sanyas*.

The Paramacharya was considered by many as a walking god; every PM after Nehru made it a point to have his *darshan*. As his handpicked successor, Jayendra was expected to follow in his mentor's footsteps. But it was not to be.

The senior Chandrasekara Saraswati, through strict adherence to the rigours of an ascetic life and a commanding knowledge of the Vedas and worldly affairs, had placed the Kanchi Mutt as a pivotal force in the country's religious sphere after weathering the strident anti-Brahmin propaganda of the DMK through the '60s and '70s. He was keen to make the mutt reach out to the changing world, even if it meant straining at its orthodox moorings.

In 1980, when the nation was rocked by the mass conversions of Harijans into Muslims in the hamlet of Meenakshipuram, Jayendra Saraswati responded with the outreach programme into Harijan colonies.

With the help of the RSS and VHP he launched *shakti ratham*, a small chariot with pictures of gods and goddesses, to visit Harijan colonies. "If Harijans cannot come to temples, the temple will go to them", he had then said.

He also started the Jan Kalyan movement aimed at increasing the mutt's role in education and health care. The numerous schools, colleges and the deemed university along with hospitals in Chennai, Assam and throughout the country are part of his vision to spread the charitable face of Hinduism as a counter to increasing Christian and Muslim influence. His activism led to friction with the Paramacharya and when some of his executive powers were curtailed a miffed Jayendra disappeared from the mutt on the night of Aug 23, 1987 leaving his *dhandam* (holy staff) behind only to resurface at Thala Cauvery in Karnataka after 17 days. The scandal caused massive consternation among

the followers of the mutt and dented his image, though his mentor reinstated him without any fuss.

As the Paramacharya became more recluse and ill, Jayendra's influence grew as he leveraged on the Mutt's network of VIPs starting from President R. Venkatraman and CEC T.N. Seshan to a string of politicians and officials. With the passing away of the Paramacharya, the mutt soon became the captive of a small coterie around Jayendra and his junior Vijayendra Saraswati, with the latter's brother Raghu establishing a vice-like grip.

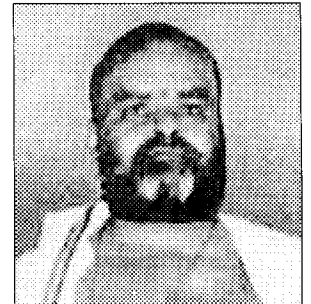
Old loyalists of the Paramacharya, including the murdered Sankaraman were eased out and even banished from the mutt. In 2002, Radhakrishnan, one of Jayendra's closest confidants, was brutally attacked at Chennai by a gang, after he had an angry falling out with the Sankaracharya sending the cold message that loyalists either remain silent or continue to stay loyal. Most preferred the safer option while his critics frowned upon his weakness for publicity and sycophancy.

Other sparse semblances of an ascetic also started to disappear with Jayendra adjusting to the fast life by traveling in air-conditioned Tempo Travellers and flying first class; his mentor used to either walk or take a small cycle rickshaw. On the religious front though Jayendra was instrumental in reviving and refurbishing many of the dilapidated temples of the state urging people to restore neglected temples rather than build new ones. The arrival of the NDA government and Jayendra's mediatory role in the Ayodhya tangle brought the mutt in the spotlight giving it a sheen of all pervasive influence in the corridors of power. Anyone needing a favour, transfer or even customs clearance lined up at the mutt to pull strings with the Union Government. The exit of the Vajpayee government and the Muslim organisations' accusation that the seer acted more as an agent of the VHP than an honest broker saw him gradually sidelined, though the mutt through its network of influence had emerged as a powerful entity that could not be ignored.

Though Jayendra's suggestion was seen as the inspiration behind Jayalalitha government's controversial bill against forcible conversion the relations between the seer and the ruler were never really smooth. The mutt's application to start a medical college was rejected by the state government.

Then came the murder of Sankaraman, once a small cog in the gargantuan mutt's wheel.

More than two months of investigation climaxed in the arrest of Jayendra which also brought about a strange political happening in the state - DMK Chief Karunanidhi actually praised "the honest action" of the state government.



Sankaraman

Watertight case, Jaya informed

G.C. Shekhar
Chennai, November 13

WHENEVER DMK president M. Karunanidhi was asked if his son M.K. Stalin would succeed him as party chief, he would remark derisively: "Neither am I the Sankaracharya nor is the DMK the Kanchi mutt for me to nominate my successor. The party will decide on that in a democratic manner."

Having grown on the back of the anti-Brahmin movement, the DMK has always viewed the Brahminical influence of the Kanchi mutt and the Sankaracharyas as a major irritant in Tamil Nadu's Dravidian polity. No wonder then that when word leaked that the investigation into the murder of Sankaraman was narrowing down to the Sankaracharya himself, Karunanidhi wrote in his party organ: "Why is there no movement on this front? Is somebody being shielded?" He also announced that his party would hold a protest fast in Kanchipuram on November 13. But Karunanidhi didn't have to go so far as Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati was arrested on the night of November 11.

It would be simplistic to assume Jayalalitha blinked only because of Karunanidhi's threats. The Sankaracharya was arrested as the police convinced Jayalalitha they had a watertight case, which she got re-examined by a second SP. "Jayalalitha would not have okayed the arrest unless the police presented her with clinching evidence. It was really a bold decision, though a tough one to take considering its ramifications," observed Cho Ramaswamy.

Why the manager was murdered

EVERY MURDER has two pre-conditions: there must be an opportunity and there must be a motive. In the case of Sankaraman, the expelled mutt employee who was hacked to death on September 3, the hired assailants had no problems finding an opportunity. The man was in an office in the Varadarapuram temple where he now worked. He was unarmed. It would have been easy.

But the motive was another story. Initially, police suspected that a DMK contractor who had been denied a renewal on his lease of a coconut grove belonging to the temple could have done it. Some suspended temple employees suspected of stealing a gold chain. But as evidence came in, the motive became clearer.

HE HAD THREATENED THE SANKARACHARYA WITH EXPOSURE: The manager had written to the pontiff several times saying that there were serious irregularities in the temple accounts. The last letter was in August. In it, he had asked the seer to either do something about the matter or be exposed.

HE WAS PROVING TO BE TOO MUCH OF AN IRRITANT: The manager had crossed the Sankaracharya's path several times. In 2000, when the Sankaracharya had planned a trip to China, Sankaraman filed a writ petition arguing that holy seers shouldn't cross the seas, so if the Sankaracharya wished to travel to China, he should take the land route. The trip was aborted. A year later, the seer asked him to leave the mutt. He served the Varadarapuram temple thereafter but kept on exposing alleged mutt irregularities through pamphlets under the name Somasekara Ganapadigal.

HE AND THE SEER HAVE A HISTORY:

Sankaraman's father was one of four disciples of who walked all the way from Kanchi to Kashi with the Paramacharya-the man who anointed the present Sankaracharya. The loyalties of his family were always with the grand seer. In 1987, when the Sankaracharya left the mutt after a disagreement with the Paramacharya and returned after 17 days, the manager began to distance himself from the Sankaracharya.

WHY STORY

Arrest an onslaught on Hindus, says Sangh

UPA, Cong govts pressured Tamil Nadu, says VHP

H.F. 5
18/11
Religion

Agencies
New Delhi, November 12

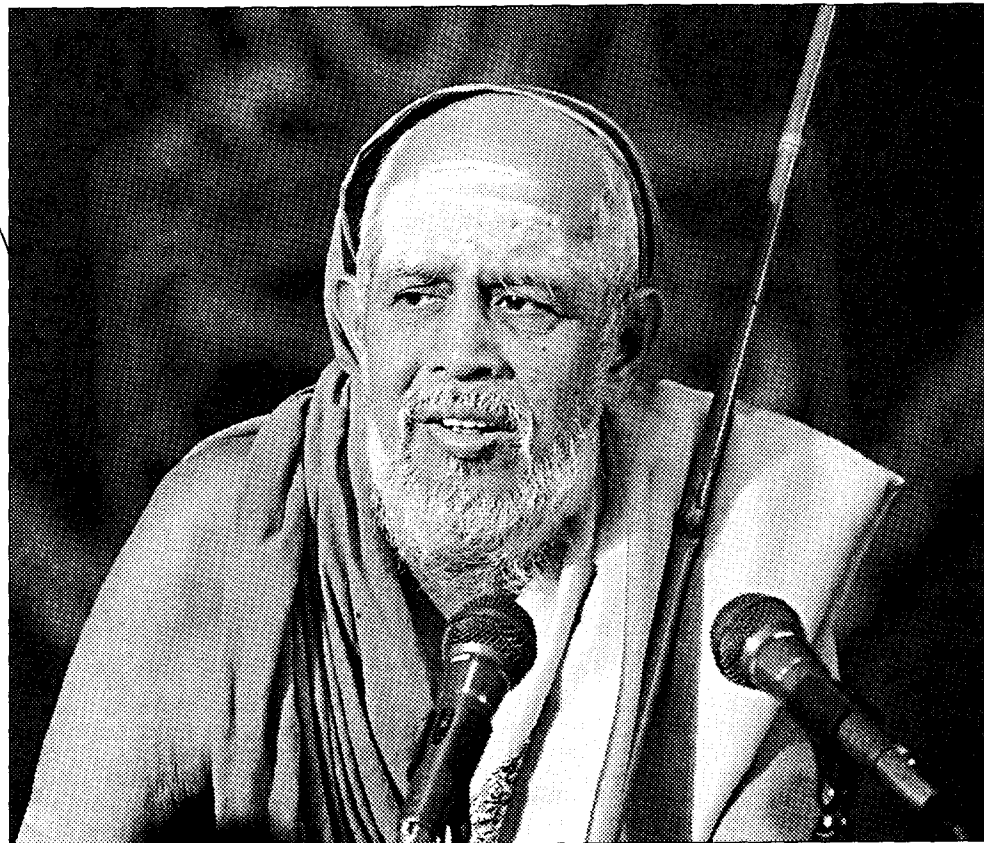
THE RSS, VHP, BJP and the Shiv Sena today expressed outrage at Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati's arrest, questioning the need for such a step. Describing the seer's arrest as "an onslaught on Hindus", the VHP announced two-day countrywide protests, starting tomorrow, against the step.

"This is for the first time in the history of Hindus that a Shankaracharya has been arrested. Why was the seer arrested all of a sudden, while performing trikal puja," VHP leader Praveen Togadia asked over phone from Nagpur.

Alleging that the UPA government, along with the Congress-led governments in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, pressurised the Tamil Nadu government to arrest the pontiff, he asked, "Will they arrest Imam Bukhari of Jama Masjid on Id? There are so many cases pending against him."

The arrest was an Id gift to Muslims, VHP senior vice president Acharya Giriraj Kishore said. "The Shankaracharya has been arrested for political reasons and has been put in jail like an ordinary criminal. The Tamil Nadu government did this because of protests from the Opposition DMK.

He said the VHP would observe a bandh in Tamil Nadu tomorrow and hold protests in all state capitals, to be followed by protests in district HQs on



MAN OF THE MOMENT: Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati speaks at a religious congregation in Kolkata in this March 2003 file photo.

Sunday. VHP international president Ashok Singhal alleged that the Left, DMK, Congress and "other vested interests" had hatched a conspiracy at the behest of the Centre, and added Congress president Sonia Gandhi too appeared to be behind the arrest.

The RSS, while condemning the arrest, asked the Tamil Nadu government to secure his immediate release. "There was no need to arrest him. He would have fully cooperated with the investigating agencies. As a senior monk of a highly respected Hindu Mutt, he deserves a better treatment," RSS spokesman Ram Madhav said.

The BJP expressed shock over the arrest and questioned the step and the "haste" with which it was taken. "The BJP is shocked by the news of the arrest. The arrest has surprised the nation and the party," party spokesman Arun Jaitley told reporters here.

Questioning the "haste" behind the arrest, he wondered why the pontiff was taken into custody late at night and just before the court holidays.

"If his presence was needed for interrogation, we wonder if the arrest was necessary," Jaitley said. The Shiv Sena charged the Tamil Nadu government with "playing with Hindu sen-

timents" and demanded the seer's unconditional release. "By arresting the Kanchi Shankaracharya on Diwali-eve, the Tamil Nadu government has played with the sentiments of crores of Hindus," the party's Delhi unit chief Jai Bhagwan Goyal said.

Recalling the efforts made by the Kanchi seer to solve the vexed Ayodhya issue, he said, "It is surprising that when you have tainted persons with criminal background as Central ministers, a religious leader commanding the respect of millions of people is being dealt with in such an undignified manner."

Karunanidhi lauds Jaya for 'honesty'

PTI
Chennai, Nov 12

DESCRIBING THE Kanchi seer's arrest "an honest action", DMK president M. Karunanidhi today said he congratulated the AIADMK government for taking action against the seer despite having "close links" with him.

Hoping that the trial would be conducted without any 'pressure', he also called for a law to prevent those with "dubious intentions" from taking *sanyas*.

Only those with progressive thinking could think of such a law, the DMK leader said. He also said that the DMK and its allies had postponed a proposed agitation following the seer's arrest.

Kashi seer seeks Prez intervention

Agencies
Varanasi, Nov 12

SHANKARACHARYA OF the Sumeru Peeth Swami Narendranad Saraswati and Shankaracharya of Puri Nischalananda Saraswati expressed concern at the seer's arrest, describing it as a "sad news for the country."

The action was an affront to the stature of Hindu saints, they said. The Kashi seer urged President APJ Abdul Kalam to intervene in the matter by expediting the release of the seer. The state government action smacked of political vendetta as it did not wait for the completion of probe before taking a drastic step. He threat-

ened a nationwide agitation by saints if the seer was not released immediately.

Puri seer Nischalananda Saraswati said, "Arresting the pontiff is a blow to the existence and ideology of Hindus."

Imams regret arrest

ALL INDIA Organisation of Imams of Mosques termed the arrest as "reprehensible". "AIOIM notes with deep regret the actions of Tamil Nadu government," Maulana Jameel Ahmed Ilyasi said in a statement. He said Muslims hold the seer in respect, in view of his "constructive" approach in solving Ayodhya problem.

খুনের দায়ে জেলে শঙ্করাচার্য, বিক্ষোভের ডাক দিল হিন্দু পরিষদ

চেন্নাই, ১২ নভেম্বর: হিন্দুদের কাছে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কাঞ্চী শৃঙ্গেরি মঠের শঙ্করাচার্য জয়শ্রী সরস্বতীর জামিন না হওয়ায় তাঁকে আজ জেলেই থাকতে হচ্ছে। কাল রাতে তাঁকে অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের মেহবুবনগর থেকে গ্রেফতার করে তামিলনাড়ু পুলিশ। তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে শৃঙ্গেরি মঠেরই এক প্রাক্তন কর্মীর হত্যাকাণ্ডে জড়িত থাকার অভিযোগ রয়েছে। ৭০ বছর বয়সী শঙ্করাচার্য জয়শ্রী সরস্বতীর ধর্মীয় জগতের বাইরে রাজনৈতিক মহলেও যথেষ্ট আনাগোনা ছিল। কিছু দিন আগেও দিল্লিতে এন ডি এ সরকারের আমলে অযোধ্যা বিতর্কের মিটমাটের চেষ্টায় তিনি হিন্দু ও মুসলমানদের মধ্যে মধ্যস্থতার চেষ্টা করেছিলেন। তামিলনাড়ুর জয়ললিতা সরকারের ঘনিষ্ঠ হওয়া সত্ত্বেও শেষ পর্যন্ত জয়ললিতার পুলিশই তাঁকে খুনের দায়ে অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ থেকে গ্রেফতার করায় এক দিকে তামিলনাড়ুর বিরোধী দলনেতা ডি এম কে নোতা করুণানিধি যেমন খুশি, অন্য দিকে, সঙ্ঘ পরিবারের বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ ও রাষ্ট্রীয় স্বয়ংসেবক সঙ্ঘ স্তম্ভিত ও ক্রুদ্ধ, ক্ষুব্ধ বিজেপি। অষ্টম শতাব্দীতে আদি শঙ্করাচার্য দেশের চার প্রান্তে চার শঙ্করমঠ প্রতিষ্ঠা করে হিন্দুধর্মকে সাংগঠনিক চেহারা দেওয়ার পরবর্তী ১২০০ বছরে এই প্রথম এক জন শঙ্করাচার্য অপরাধের দায়ে গ্রেফতার হয়ে জেলে গেলেন।

শঙ্করাচার্যের মুক্তির দাবিতে বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ কাল তামিলনাড়ু বন্ধ ও দেশ জুড়ে বিক্ষোভের ডাক দিয়েছে। এখনও পর্যন্ত তেমন কোনও অপ্রীতিকর ঘটনার খবর নেই। তবে ইতিমধ্যেই পুরী ও কাঞ্চী শঙ্করমঠের শঙ্করাচার্যরা কাঞ্চীর শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারের প্রতিবাদে সরব। তাঁরা দাবি তুলেছেন, এ দেশে হিন্দুধর্মই বিপন্ন। শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারকে অমার্জনীয় অপরাধ বলে দাবি করে বাজপেয়ী সরকারের আমলে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রী এবং সঙ্ঘ পরিবারের ঘনিষ্ঠ স্বামী চিন্ময়ানন্দ আগামী কালই হরিদ্বারে সাধুদের আখড়া পরিষদের জরুরি সভা ডেকেছেন। এমনকী, মুসলিম ইমামদের সর্বভারতীয় সংগঠনও

শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারে দুঃখপ্রকাশ করে বিবৃতি দিয়েছে। কাঞ্চীপুরমে 'মাক্কাল মন্ড্রম' নামে স্থানীয় একটি সংগঠন শঙ্করাচার্য গ্রেফতারের খবরে বাজি পুড়িয়ে আনন্দ করেছে।

তামিলনাড়ুর পুলিশ কাল পরোয়ানা নিয়ে অন্ধ্রের মেহবুবনগরে তাঁকে গ্রেফতার করে। তখন তিনি 'ত্রিকাল পূজা' করছিলেন। রাত ১০টা নাগাদ তাঁকে গ্রেফতার করে শুক্রবার ভোর রাতে বিশেষ বিমানে চেন্নাইয়ে আনা হয়। তার পরে সড়কপথে কড়া

গেস্টহাউসে) তাঁকে উপযুক্ত ব্যবস্থায় রাখা হোক। এ ব্যাপারে সরকারের মতামত জানতে চেয়ে হাইকোর্ট কাল শুনানির দিন ধার্য করেছে। ফলে, আজকের রাতটা শঙ্করাচার্যকে জেলেই কাটাতে হচ্ছে। শঙ্করাচার্য অবশ্য নিজেকে নির্দোষ বলে দাবি করেছেন। এ দিকে, ঘটনার আকস্মিকতায় কিছুটা হতচকিত কেন্দ্রও। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল বলেছেন, তিনি এ ব্যাপারে তামিলনাড়ু সরকারের কাছে তথ্য চেয়েছেন।



কাঞ্চীপুরমের আদালতে শঙ্করাচার্য। — রয়টার্স

পাহারায় ৭০ কিলোমিটার দূরে কাঞ্চীপুরমে নিয়ে আসা হয়। ভোর সাড়ে ছটায় তাঁকে আদালতে তোলা হয়। স্থানীয় আদালতের নির্দেশে তাঁকে ২৬ নভেম্বর পর্যন্ত ভেলোর জেলে পাঠানো হয়। শঙ্করাচার্যের বয়স হয়েছে, ডায়াবেটিসের কারণে তাঁকে নিয়মিত ইনসুলিন নিতে হয় জানিয়ে তাঁর আইনজীবী পরে মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্টে আবেদন করে বলেন, জেলের বাইরে কোথাও (সরকারি

কাঞ্চীপুরমের পুলিশ সুপার জানিয়েছেন, এ বছরের ৩ সেপ্টেম্বর বরদারাজ পেরুমল মন্দির ট্রাস্টের ম্যানেজার শঙ্কররমন খুন হন। চার বছর আগে পর্যন্ত তিনি শঙ্করাচার্যের মঠের অ্যাকাউন্ট্যান্ট ছিলেন। কিন্তু মঠের বিপুল অর্থের 'নয়ছয়' সংক্রান্ত অভিযোগ তুলে তিনি সব ফাঁস করার হুমকি দেন। এমনিতে শঙ্কররমন এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়

● জয়ার পাশে করুণানিধি... পৃঃ ৫

জেলে শঙ্করাচার্য

প্রথম পাতার পর

ছোটবেলা থেকেই শঙ্করি মঠের ঘনিষ্ঠ ছিলেন। তাঁর বাবা অনন্তরাম ছিলেন প্রয়াত মহাশয়ী চন্দ্রশেখরেন্দ্র সরস্বতীর ঘনিষ্ঠ। সেই সুবাদেই তিনি পরে সেখানে কাজ পান। কিন্তু শঙ্করাচার্যের শঙ্কররমন আর্থিক অনিয়মের প্রপঞ্চে প্রায়ই মঠের লোকজনকে প্রসন্ন করে অস্বস্তিতে ফেলতেন। সে নিয়ে মঠাধীশ শঙ্করাচার্যের সঙ্গে বিবাদে তিনি কাজ ছেড়ে বরদারাজন মঠের কাজে যোগ দেন। সেখানেই পাঁচ আতায়ী তাঁকে খুন করে।

বেঁচে থাকতে শঙ্কররমন রাজ্য সরকারের হিন্দুধর্ম ও দাতব্য প্রতিষ্ঠান সংক্রান্ত দফতরে লিখিত অভিযোগ করে শঙ্করি মঠের বিপুল অর্থ নয়ছয়ের অভিযোগ করেছিলেন। তারপর থেকেই তাঁকে খুনের ছমকি দেওয়া হচ্ছে বলে জানিয়েছিলেন। শঙ্কররমন খুন হওয়ার পর থেকেই এলাকার মানুষের মুখে খুনের পিছনে কাঞ্চী মঠ ও শঙ্করাচার্যের ভূমিকার কথা শোনা যাচ্ছিল।

করুণানিধি জানিয়েছেন, এ নিয়ে অসংখ্য অভিযোগ শোনার পরে ডি এম কে দোষীদের ধরার দাবিতে অনশন আন্দোলনের ডাক দেয়। অন্য দিকে, পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, তদন্তে নেমে কয়েক জনকে ধরার পরে জানা যায় শঙ্কররমনকে মারতে ভাড়াটে খুনিদের নামানো হয়েছিল। আদালতে শঙ্করাচার্যের জামিনের বিরোধিতা করে সরকারি পক্ষে আইনজীবী বলেছেন, খুনের সঙ্গে যুক্তদের কেউ কেউ খুনের আগে ও পরে শঙ্করাচার্যের সঙ্গে বার বার টেলিফোনে কথা বলেছিল। এ ছাড়া শঙ্কররমন খুন হওয়ার পরের দিনই একটি বেসরকারি ব্যাঙ্ক থেকে প্রচুর পরিমাণে টাকা তোলা হয়েছিল এবং সেই টাকার অনেকটাই ধৃতদের কাছে পাওয়া গিয়েছে।

নিহত শঙ্কররমন আগে শঙ্করাচার্যকে মঠের অনিয়ম ফাঁস করে দেওয়ার ছমকি দিয়ে যে চিঠি দিয়েছিলেন সেই চিঠিটিও একজন ধৃত ব্যক্তির কাছে পাওয়া গিয়েছে। শঙ্করাচার্যের পক্ষে আইনজীবী অবশ্য দাবি করেন, মঠের তরফে ওই টাকা ব্যাঙ্ক থেকে তোলা হয়েছিল কিছু প্রয়োজনীয় খরচ মেটাতে। অভিযুক্তদের কাছে ওই টাকা অন্য পথেও এসে থাকতে পারে। আর চিঠি সম্পর্কে তাঁর কৈফিয়ত, এটা নির্ভরযোগ্য নয়। শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতার ইত্যাদি নিয়ে কোনও সংবাদ প্রকাশ এড়াতে তাঁর আইনজীবী আদালতে আবেদন করেছিলেন।

শঙ্করাচার্যের আইনজীবীর বক্তব্য, সকাল থেকেই সব টিভি চ্যানেলে শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারের খবর সম্প্রচার করা হচ্ছে, এতে তাঁর মর্যাদা ক্ষুণ্ণ হবে। কিন্তু মাদ্রাজ হাইকোর্ট তা সরাসরি নাকচ করে দিয়ে বলে সংবাদপ্রকাশের স্বাধীনতা খর্ব করার কোনও ইচ্ছাই তাঁদের নেই।

গ্রেনেডে জখম ১৩

গুয়াহাটি, ১২ নভেম্বর: অসমের নগাঁও জেলার একটি কালীমন্দিরে আজ রাতে গ্রেনেড হামলায় ১৩ জন আহত হয়েছেন। এই হামলা জঙ্গিরাই চালিয়েছে কি না সে ব্যাপারে পুলিশ অবশ্য নিশ্চিত নয়। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, এ দিন ওই মন্দিরে বেশ কিছু মানুষ জমায়েত হয়েছিলেন। রাত দশটা নাগাদ পূজোর কাজকর্ম শুরু করা মাত্রই গ্রেনেডটি ছোড়া হয়। এই নিয়ে গত ২৪ চব্বিশ ঘণ্টায় দু'টি গ্রেনেড হামলা হল। —পি টি আই

13 NOV 2004

Kanchi seer arrested, remanded in murder case

Kancheepuram (Tamil Nadu): Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi, arrested in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday night in a dramatic development in connection with the murder of a former Sankara Mutt official, was produced before a magistrate here on Friday morning, who remanded him to judicial custody at Vellore prison till November 26.

Shortly after he was brought to Chennai, 70 km from here, by a special police team from Tamil Nadu from Mehboobnagar near Hyderabad by a state-owned aircraft, Jayendra Saraswathi, whom the opposition parties in the state had accused of having considerable clout with the AIADMK government, was brought by road to this temple town, the seat of the pontiff, and produced before judicial first class magistrate G Uttamaraj.

During the hour-long proceedings, the magistrate ordered the remand and told the Shankaracharya's counsel Y Thiagarajan that the jail authorities would decide on the medical treatment to the pontiff since he claimed that he was insulin-dependent diabetic patient.

The sensational arrest of the politically famous 70-year-old Shankaracharya, who in the last two years had acted as a go-between in the Ayodhya issue between Sangh Parivar and Muslim organisations,



Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi being produced before the judicial magistrate in Kancheepuram on Friday

followed investigation into the murder of Sankaraman, who had managed the accounts of the mutt during late Paramacharya Chandrasekerendra Saraswathi's period.

Sankaraman was reported to

have had differences with Jayendra Saraswathi and had left the mutt and worked as the manager of the famous Vaishnavite Varadharajaperumal temple here where he was murdered on Sept 3 last.

Early this year, writing under a different name, Sankaraman had reportedly sent a letter to Tamil Nadu chief minister and the state Hindu religious and charitable endowment department with details of alleged financial irregularities in the mutt.

He had also later claimed threat to his life through anonymous calls. These letters were seized from his residence after the murder. He had also filed a writ in the Madras high court four years back against the seer's then proposed visit to China, which was later called off.

A Vellore report said the seer, brought by road, was lodged in the prison on Friday morning. He did not speak to waiting presspersons.

Strongly denying the involvement of the Sankaracharya in the murder, his counsel Y Thiagarajan told reporters here that the arrest was "politically vindictive" action.

"Some vested interests and political parties had threatened an agitation. That is why he has been arrested. The mutt is in no way connected with the incident. We will seek redressal in law. The charges are baseless and based on confession by a third party," he alleged. PTI

Spirited away: Why the end is nigh

IN the beginning there was the Church. And people liked to dress up in their best clothes and go there on Sundays and they praised the Lord and it was good. But it came to pass that people grew tired of the Church and they stopped going, and began to be uplifted by new things such as yoga and t'ai chi instead. And, lo, a spiritual revolution was born.

Study after study appears to prove that people are increasingly losing faith in the Church and the Bible and turning instead to mysticism in guises ranging from astrology to reiki and holistic healing. If you don't believe it, take a walk around Kendal, Cumbria, population 28,000. Since the millennium dawned, the ultra-traditional home of the mint-cake has been the subject of a spiritual experiment. Linda Woodhead and Professor Paul Heelas, both specialists in religion at Lancaster University, chose the town to measure the growth of the "holistic milieu" and the decline of Christian congregational worship.

The conclusion of their new book, *The Spiritual Revolution*, is dramatic: Christianity will be eclipsed by spirituality in this country within the next 20 to 30 years. Many people believe that this "New Romantics" movement will prove more significant than the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

Kendal mirrors the national statistics with eerie precision: 2,207 peo-

ple in the town - 7.9 per cent of the population - attend church on Sunday while 600 - 1.6 per cent of the population of the town and environs - take part in some kind of holistic activity. During the 1990s, when the town's population grew by 11.4 per cent, participation in the "new spirituality" grew by 300 per cent.

So what does meditation have that conventional worship does not? Neutrality, suggests Elizabeth Forder, who runs a spiritual meditation centre at the United Reformed Church in Dent. "We are not affiliated to any religion and there is no belief system imposed on anybody here," she says. "I was brought up a Christian, but it held no real meaning for me. I would class myself as a universalist, believing that all religions offer the same end. At its simplest, meditation is giving the body and mind a very deep level of rest, freeing us to be ourselves."

If disaffected churchgoers are seeking neutrality, they are also in flight from judgment. "I don't want to be preached at any more", "I'm sick of being made to feel guilty" or "I don't need to be told how to live my life," people will say when asked why they stopped attending church. And when they speak of their spiritual malaise, they use the language of the therapist's couch. One Kendal woman in her Forties summarised her spiritual shift thus: "A one-hour service on a Sunday? It's not really

make themselves better people now."

That is part of the problem, suggests the Rev Brian Maiden, of Parr Street Evangelical Church in Kendal. He believes that the liberalism of Christianity has turned people off it. "The people of Britain have been inoculated with a dead, mild form of Christianity, which has given them resistance to the real thing. It has been diluted with human philosophy. People want to be told what to do and how to do it. Often they don't realise that's what they want until they hear it. The message here is traditional Protestantism. We teach the message of the Gospels and that there will be a Judgment."

Perhaps he is right, but some of those losing their religion were brought up with just the kind of dogmatic beliefs that Maiden is describing. Take Julie Wise, 44 and a mother of two. Three decades of religion failed to touch her, she says, and it was only in her Thirties, when she went to an exhibition in Manchester and saw a man performing Infinite T'ai Chi, that she felt truly spiritually touched. "It was like divine intervention," she says.

But must the rise of new forms of spirituality necessarily mean the decline of Christianity? There are life-long Christians who think not. Among them is Victor de Waal, 75, the former dean of Canterbury Cathedral. He meditates daily and regularly visits the centre at Dent. "I

don't see it as an alternative; I see it as deepening one's faith," he says. "Because it's not committed to a particular tradition, it is open to all."

But isn't it self-indulgent to look inwards? "It is not about discovering your ego, but the divine within yourself," he says. "Most religious traditions make a distinction between the ego and the self. In the New Testament Paul talks about 'Christ in me'. It is about finding one's deepest humanity. People who have been on the fringes or have given up the Church enter into their own spiritual selves and discover it again."

Conservative believers - Roman Catholics and Protestants - are adamant that New Age spirituality is merely a new form of agnosticism which turns the proper order upside-down by putting human beings in the place of God.

But there is no doubt that spiritual language is starting to seep into everyday discourse. The Spiritual Revolution points to terms such as feng shui and yin and yang now being common parlance. By contrast, theistic language has lost its vitality in ordinary language. The word "goodbye", for instance, used to mean "God be with you". It marks the shift away from the Church and towards the social empowerment of individuals in modern times. In other words, it is simply part of a general "flight from deference".

— *The Times, London.*

Christianity will be eclipsed by spirituality in Britain in 30 years, startling new research predicts. CAROL MIDGLEY reports on the collapse of traditional religion and the rise of mysticism

enough time to address your self-esteem issues, is it? I didn't find any help in the churches. I found it in a 12-step programme. That was the start of my personal journey."

Heelas says: "It's a shift away from [the idea of] a hierarchical, all-knowing institution and a move towards [having] the freedom to grow and develop as a unique person rather than going to church and being led. A lot of the comfort of religion is in postponement - a better life after death. But belief in Heaven is collapsing, so people believe it is more important to know themselves and

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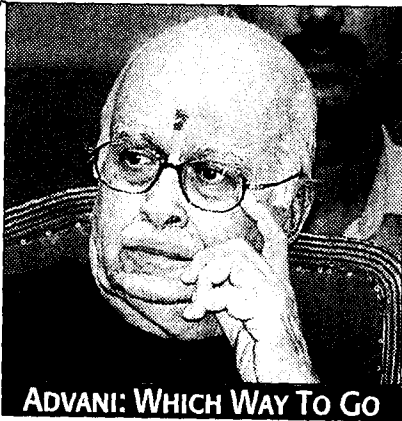
Demand Creates Pressure To Blend BJP Ideology With That Of Allies

RSS wants bold Hindutva stand

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 31 OCTOBER

EVEN as the BJP on Sunday came under pressure for blending its distinctive ideology with the compulsions of its allies, the RSS has stepped in to complicate matters by demanding a bold stand on its Hindutva. In separate editorials, the RSS's Hindi and English organs said the BJP needed to "speak out boldly" on Hindutva. "If it fails to do it, it would be a negation of the objectives behind its formation," the Panchajanya said. This assertion of the Sangh complicates matters for the new leadership, which feels that Hindutva will have to move beyond being an emotive concept. In his presidential address to the national council, Mr Advani had emphasised on the need to make Hindutva a more modern viewpoint—a cogent and enlightened Hindu approach to the demands of the modern world.

But the hard-liners in the parivar, brought up on the staple of emotive Hindutva, are not at ease with political Hindutva. The BJP, which functions in a coalition milieu, will have to be mindful of the sensibilities of its allies. In fact, this compulsion was evident in Mr Advani's address to the national council. While terming the demand for a temple at the



ADVANI: WHICH WAY TO GO

Ram Janmabhoomi a legitimate one, he had conceded that the "environment that made Ayodhya the most potent mass movement in post-independent India has changed." He had also said Hindutva was not an electoral slogan and should not be confused with religion. This assertion has been a source of discomfort for the BJP's allies and they have demanded an NDA meeting to debate the BJP's stand on Hindutva. Although much of it is mere posturing, the party cannot afford to ignore the demand as it has to face another round of state elections in early 2005.

Meanwhile, the RSS organs were scathing in their attack on a section of the BJP leadership, which the Sangh feels is not sufficiently "puritanic" enough in its approach. In an apparent dig at these leaders, it said "this is not the time to hold meetings in five-star hotels and zip around in Mercedes cars to make public contact. Without changing one's own conduct, the party should not expect any change in the behaviour of its activists," the RSS asserted. It may be recalled that the post-mortem of the last Lok Sabha defeat of the party was carried out in the plush ambience of a five-star hotel in the suburbs of Mumbai.

"This is the time to rebuild. The party has shown great vitality, creativity and youthful enthusiasm to take correctives, to reassess its role and reassert its core concerns. This should satisfy large sections of sympathisers," said the Organiser. The RSS organs also advised Mr Advani to concentrate on the health of the organisation. This appears to be difficult because leaders like Uma Bharti, have refused to take up the assignment of general secretary and has begun demanding rehabilitation in MP. Although the leadership has ruled out a change in Madhya Pradesh, her supporters are sure to create trouble for new chief minister Babulal Gaur.

SCA 6/10

Hindutva and changing values!

It was only a week ago that LK Advani made his move suggesting that new days were ahead for the BJP. The occasion was to gather the President-ship of the party in a strong pair of hands and to imprint some new thoughts on running the party organisation.

His two previous attempts to do so had served the purpose quite satisfactorily but the point is that the groundwork of this party organisation is embodied in the philosophy of Hindutva, which was superfluous and not even implemented. They remained ideas and it was not unreasonable to go for the kill in active politics. The one difference between the BJP and the action to support it in practice was surely that the Hindutva policy has since been implemented at length, in Gujarat and elsewhere, and a lot of lessons were set out to be examined in detail instead of being offered for a rapid discussion with judgments on values. I gave full credit to the BJP, a party of idealists and workers who could be trusted to save the party's gains and learn the lessons of the past. There is an element of hopefulness in all this, which may not materialise.

Advani's return to the policy of Hindutva in Gujarat and elsewhere, even after this past, was, let me confess, not very suitable. Let me urge that the party has

no alternative to anything really useful for the future and a great opportunity to take it to the highest has been lost. I wonder whether Atal Behari Vajpayee meant this in his warning that some difficult days would come. On the contrary, we are left with a great sense of déjà vu, it is Hindutva alone and that is at issue.

One is almost tempted to say that to revert to the old policy which has had a run for such a long time, tempts everyone to think that the party no longer believes there is an opportunity to strike the bold new paths of in whispers and in closed corners.

Let me tarry a little over this. To raise the number of MPs for the party remarkable, but not by itself sufficient for Advani. The results may have appeared dramatic but surely the answer is not to live in calculations. Besides it must be noted that the increase in numbers of its members appears to have been given up altogether. Why? Is the ambition beyond the party's capacity to achieve? The sequence of developments gives too little time for a sense of striving or is it to convey that it cannot be achieved? One is driven to the conclusion that the whole effort was restricted to achieve a limited ambition and failure has rushed headlong into a second coming after a long

time and a lost place.

There is only one explanation that Advani must have in mind at his time of life and recently he has expressed himself to say that he is not unconcerned about his own age and what can be done in the short time available. Advani is nothing if he is not a realist. He has shown this quite plainly in the past and contributed to the total distinction with which he is surrounded. It makes sense that Advani has settled this matter at his own wish and if the time-limit is not enough there is always someone who will arrange an extension or substitute. Things do not go forward so much in rhythm as to avoid a reasonable morsel of the unexpected. So what is being planned? Nothing exceptional or unexpected. Go back to the Hindutva line with all its applications, not one to be ignored. The great back up to this will be the sense of the déjà vu. To go back to the Hindutva line and let nothing come in the way to make us change our way. The disadvantage is entirely predictable. Nothing will be allowed to surprise us nothing will be unexpected. And we will wallow in the depths of despair and degradation. This is not all that we will suffer, however. We must allow for the disadvantage of the predictable to be allowed to pass. And not very well argued for a change. Surely this

is not what Advani is planning to do. Then what? He may be able to add something to the line, nothing surprising nothing changing. But we should have to say that this is a singularly unattractive line to follow.

Look at the results of the Hindutva line as practised in Gujarat and elsewhere. Narendra Modi was enthused and admired after the Godhra disturbance. There was a whole list of people who were waiting to enrol him in the election challenges. Advani has himself gone to Ahmedabad twice to congratulate Modi and elevate him to a level that have both cured and cut him down to size. The initiative was supplied by their Lordships of the Supreme Court who did their duty just as it became apparent that a gross miscarriage of the judicial process could be laid at Modi's door. In unprecedented developments, conclusions reached in trials were withdrawn, they were to be argued again and outside the State. This brought the might and reputation of the chief minister down with a rush never to be regained. Suddenly no one wanted Modi to campaign for them and left him severely alone. And Advani was left alone as well. And what is proposed as a remedy for what has been achieved by Hindutva? By Hindutva alone! Doesn't read right!

Suddenly no one wanted Modi to campaign for them and left him severely alone. And Advani was left alone as well

And we will wallow in the depths of despair and degradation. This is not all that we will suffer, however. We must allow for the disadvantage of the predictable to be allowed to pass. And not very well argued for a change. Surely this

Advani invokes Hindustva^{Reunion} Swears By Ram Temple

*Pr
28/10*

New Delhi: A demoralised BJP on Wednesday embarked on a new journey with its old warhorse L K Advani formally taking charge as its president and brought back the Ayodhya issue to centrestage while asking cadres to be prepared for a mid-term poll.

Advani sought to invoke the Hindutva plank, asserting that the party would not compromise on its ideology and that it was committed to the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya even if it had to pay an electoral price for it.

Addressing the party's national council which met here to endorse his appointment, Advani blamed the "disconnect" between good governance and poll outcome, overconfidence and moving away from the party's core constituency, including its activists and the Sangh parivar, for the BJP's debacle in the Lok Sabha and recent Maharashtra assembly elections.

"BJP's growth is reflective of the national will and the desire of crores of people of this country that a magnificent temple be constructed at the Ram Janmasthan in Ayodhya, in the place of the existing makeshift temple. Our desire is to ensure that the temple is built," he said.

In the speech, circulated at the meeting, Advani made some frank remarks, saying the "environment"



that made the Ayodhya movement "most potent" in post-Independence India had changed and the "Hindu anger" of the early 90's had given way to a "patient wait" for the temple.

The BJP-led NDA government had held parleys with Hindu and Muslim leaders to thrash out a lasting solution, he said, adding that the parties involved were in favour of arriving at a consensus after the Lok Sabha elections.

"If the NDA had been re-elected, the construction of the temple would have begun by now," he said to thunderous applause from the 2,500 delegates. He said the party favoured a resolution to the vexed issue through consensus among both Hindus and Muslims as the courts had not been able to settle the issue over the last 50 years. PTI

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 OCT 2004

Britain bans religious discrimination

Press Trust of India
London, October 4

BRITAIN HAS announced a ban on religious discrimination particularly against Hindus and Muslims in securing goods, facilities, services and premises.

An official spokesman said on Monday that the new measures would ensure that providers of goods, facilities, services or premises would not be able to refuse to someone because of their religion or belief. For example, a shopkeeper would be unable to refuse to serve someone on the grounds of

his or her religion or belief.

The new provision would ban direct discrimination under which a person, on grounds of religion or belief, is treated less favourably than another, indirect discrimination where a criterion or practice has the effect of putting people of a particular religious belief at a disadvantage which cannot be justified, the spokesman said.

However, faith-based schools have been allowed to continue to discriminate in favour of that faith in selection policy and charities would be allowed to dis-

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FAIRNESS FOR ALL

criminate in favour of that faith in providing services on the grounds of religious or belief.

At present, the Race Relations Act and case law protects some religious groups like Sikhs and Jews from discrimination in getting goods and services on the grounds of race. But multi-ethnic religions including Hindus and Muslims have so far remained unprotected.

Both in the government's 'Strength in Diversity' consultation exercise on a com-

munity cohesion and race equality strategy, and in the consultation on the recent White Paper 'Fairness for All' (on the proposals for the creation of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights), there were calls for the extension of protection against religious discrimination.

However, providers would not normally be regarded as being discriminatory if they refused requests to provide a wider range of goods or services in order to meet a customer's religious needs.

The Hindu Forum of Britain, the largest Hindu umbrella body in the UK, has welcomed the government's commitment to ending religious discrimination taking place owing to a loophole in the current legislation.

"This is very good news. The Hindu Forum of Britain had drawn the attention of the Government to the anomaly existing in current legislation and the Prime Minister has taken measures to end the religious discrimination against Hindus," Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General of HFB said in a statement on Monday.

Church cries foul over conversions

Priya Ranjan Sahu
Sambalpur, September 25

CLOSE ON the heels of the Sangh Parivar's purported 'homecoming' ceremony, the Catholic Church in Orissa has expressed concern over the "forced conversion of tribal Christians" and the "numerous incidents of violence" against religious minorities in the state.

The latest hosting of two missionary websites — *cathnews.com* and *asianews.it* — mentioned two recent incidents that have apparently got the church worried. First, the attack on a church in Raikia in Kandhamal district on August 26; and second, the "forced conversion" of 76 tribal Christians to Hinduism by the VHP in Sarat village of Mayurbhanj district (where Australian missionary Graham Staines was killed) on September 19.

According to the websites, Bishop Lukas Kerketta of Sambalpur Diocese has "vowed to educate tribal people so that they can defend their rights in the face of efforts by Hindu extremists". Talking to *Hindustan Times*, the Bishop's secretary, Father Alphonse Toppo, said they had no concrete plan to counter the "forced conversions". "But priests under the diocese will step up regular contact with the people."

Bishop Kerketta, in an interview to *asianews.it*, made a scathing attack against the saffron onslaught. "Orissa, a state with the highest presence of Hindu fundamentalists, is governed by the BJP. Together with activists of the VHP and RSS, they have been harassing Christian missionaries and the tribal people for years. The VHP

MINORITY REPORT

ALLEGATION The Sangh Parivar is forcing tribal Christians to embrace Hinduism and also harassing missionaries

REMEDY No concrete plan yet, but missionaries will increase contact with the masses and educate them on their rights under the Freedom of Religion Act

and the RSS do not know the distinction between Protestants and Catholics and most often we bear the brunt of Protestant activities," Kerketta had said.

The Bishop said the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, which foresees legal sanctions for missionaries accused of instigating conversion and official approval of every conversion by the government, was being misused by the VHP to harass Christians.

Father Toppo termed the VHP's "reconversion ceremonies" as political stunts rather than religious activities. He maintained that no Catholic has been "reconverted". "Whoever reconverted in Jharsuguda and Deogarh recently are not active, church-going Christians," he said, adding that they might have accepted Christianity earlier due to benevolent activities of the mission, but their faith might not have been "deep-rooted".

"We are not worried about anybody changing his faith of his free will. What worries us is they (the Sangh Parivar) are creating an anti-Christian atmosphere in Orissa. This is disappointing and this must stop," he said.

"Please don't get angry with your shishya"

401
26/9

Dr. Belien

New light on Godse-Savarkar connection

By Jyotirmaya Sharma

PUNE, SEPT. 19. During the Gandhi murder trial, the Mahatma's assassin, Nathuram Godse, spoke of his casual visits to Savarkar Sadan and the nature of these visits being restricted to access to the Hindu Sangathan office on the ground floor of the Savarkar residence in Bombay. Likewise, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar distanced himself from Nathuram by telling the Court on November 20, 1948 that he was introduced to Godse and Apte, co-conspirator in the Gandhi assassination, as Hindu Sabha workers. Recently, the news weekly, *Outlook*, carried excerpts from a letter dated February 28, 1938 that establishes, to an extent, the close bond shared by Godse and Savarkar.

The *Hindu* now has in its possession copies of five hitherto inaccessible letters written by Nathuram Godse to Savarkar

between 1938 and 1946. They conclusively establish Savarkar's mentorship of Godse — and the latter's acknowledged admiration of Savarkar as his guru.

These letters reveal another aspect of a relationship that has, until now, gone unnoticed. Godse felt that Savarkar was not doing enough to consolidate the Hindu Mahasabha into a viable political organisation. The letters contain startling material about Godse's barely concealed impatience over this. His tone is often beseeching, but also takes on the quality of a harangue. Significantly, Nathuram strongly advocates that Savarkar and the RSS founder, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, ought to make common cause to consolidate the efforts for achieving a Hindu Rashtra.

The letter dated April 2, 1944 is revealing. It begins by describing the work being done by Godse's Marathi daily *Agrani*

to apprise you of certain 'data', he says. He assures Savarkar that he will pay for a third class fare himself and not from the *Agrani* account; and he requests Savarkar to pay the difference, if any. The rest of the letter deals with Godse's efforts to collect money for an ailing Rajabhai Rajwade, and he requests Savarkar to contribute.

EXCLUSIVE

An undated letter, written in 1946 (since Godse mentions the upcoming second anniversary, in March, of *Agrani*, which was founded on March 28, 1944), is the most significant. The letter ends thus: "Whether your answer is yes or no, do not get angry with your *shishya* or hold it against him. This is my entreaty to you."

The word Godse uses for signifying himself is '*shishyavar*', meaning a disciple. The word for entreaty used is '*abhyarthana*'

na', a Sanskrit derivative that means 'request', 'entreaty' or 'petition'. The context: the fate and fortunes of Godse's newspaper.

The first part of the letter is devoted to listing the financial constraints under which *Agrani* is operating. It speaks of Savarkar's handsome donation to the paper. "You have given me a large sum of Rs. 15,000 for the purpose," says Godse, adding that this shows "how close this cause is to your heart." There is a detailed account of the way *Agrani* managed to survive in the face of newsprint shortages, a ban, and a lack of funds. Godse also mentions the hostility of some Hindu Mahasabha leaders who, he claims, are working for the demise of the paper. He asks Savarkar for an additional "loan" of Rs. 10,000, promising to repay the amount at an interest of 3 per cent a month. Later in the letter, Godse tells Savarkar that the terms of repayment signify that *Agrani* does not want to use his intellectual wealth free of cost.

Godse assures Savarkar that *Agrani* is the only newspaper in Maharashtra that is working towards disseminating Savarkar's thought: "In Maharashtra today, the only paper that works towards disseminating your ideas is this, and your contribution of Rs. 15,000 is testimony of your association with it. This is common knowledge and requires little proof." In *Harijan*, notes Godse, there are at least ten articles contributed by Gandhi. He remonstrates with Savarkar for not writing regularly and enough for *Agrani*. Citing the example of Gandhi and Tilak in relation to *Harijan* and *Kesri* respectively, Godse wants Savarkar to emulate their example by writing for *Agrani*. Savarkar must write not only about politics, but also about Hindutva,

revolution, technology, science, psychology, literature, history, philosophy, and poetry. Such writing, Godse feels, will be beneficial to "*puudhil peedhi*" (the younger generation) and also help in making "*avaitirna*" ("immanent") Savarkar's "*vaicharik sampatti*" ("vast intellectual wealth").

Godse makes it clear that *Agrani* and other matters need to be discussed with Savarkar in person. "These matters, and some other matters need to be discussed with you in person," writes Godse, "but I desisted from doing so because of your indifferent health." He fears that there might arise a "distance" in the absence of a discussion, between the two. He asks his mentor to read the letter carefully and adds that he intends to visit him, in the company of Apte, at Walchandnagar the following week to discuss all matters.

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Religious freedom in India has improved: U.S. report

Religion

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, SEPT. 15. The status of religious freedom in India improved in a number of ways; "yet problems remain in some areas," says the State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

Making the point that during most of the period covered by the report it was the Bharatiya Janata Party which was in power, the State Department has said that this party is a "Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu extremist groups that have been implicated in violent acts against Christians and Muslims."

The United States has been critical of the BJP on this issue before and the sixth annual report appears to be no different.

"The BJP-led Government did not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country's federal structure and in part from shortcomings in the law enforcement and justice systems," the State Department has maintained.

"Tensions between Muslims and Hindus and to certain extent between Christians and Hindus were a problem. Attacks on religious minorities occurred in several States. Some extremists saw ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities as signals that such violence could be committed with impunity," the report reads in the executive summary.

'Inclusive rhetoric'

In the section on "Significant Improvements in the Promotion of Religious Freedom," the State Department takes note of the fact that by the end of its governing tenure the coalition led by the BJP "had adopted a

more inclusive rhetoric regarding minorities and took some steps to decrease violence."

And in the context of the changed political dispensation in New Delhi the annual report notes the new coalition government that has come to power pledged "to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance and to pay particular attention to the rights of religious minorities" going on to say that both the Prime Minister and the President of India have spoken out strongly against the 2002 riots in Gujarat.

Repeal of law

"The GOI (Government of In-

dia) has already taken some positive steps. Shortly after the elections, the State of Tamil Nadu announced the repeal of its anti-conversion law.

There also has been some progress on conflict resolution in Gujarat," the State Department says while taking note of the ruling of the Supreme Court in the Best Bakery case and the moving of the trial from Gujarat to Mumbai as a way of "ensuring fairness of the process."

As far as the role of the United States, the State Department has said that officials have continued to discuss with state officials the "implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws"; and that American offi-

cials have also urged that the perpetrators of the Gujarat violence of 2002 be brought to justice.

The report lists the various activities of the American Embassy in New Delhi and the various Consulates including the one in Chennai.

"The Consulate in Chennai organised a roundtable to promote better understanding among Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate also continued to reach out to the Muslim community through Iftar dinners and the International Visitor/Madrassa programmes," the report reads.

'U.S. raised Gujarat riots with BJP-led Government'

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, SEPT. 15. The United States had raised the issue of the Gujarat riots with the BJP-led Government in India when it was in power and if "action" was not taken it was because the 'pogroms' "were not carried out by the Central Government; they were carried out by mobs," says the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, John Hanford.

Mr. Hanford was at a press briefing at the State Department in the context of the Sixth Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

Rise in attacks

"... we have worked very hard on problems such as the Gujarat riots and met repeatedly with officials from the Government of India on this as well as other situations where Hindus have been attacked or Chris-

tians or others. There's certainly a rise in cases of attacks on Hindus and other minority religions," Mr. Hanford remarked, when asked why the BJP was being blamed now for the goings-on in Gujarat during 2002 and not punished when it was in power and why the killings of hundreds of Hindus in Kashmir in the name of religion had not been mentioned.

"One issue is looking at the involvement of the Central Government and my best judgement as to why this designation did not occur over that six-year period is that in many cases the pogroms were not being carried out by the Central Government. The Government abhorred this and they were assuring our Government as well as others that action would be taken to address this, and we've seen this transpire. Now justice moves very slowly, often, in India," Mr. Hanford said.

"... the pogroms in Gujarat, for example, were not carried out by the Central Government; they were carried out by mobs. And, it's true that they appear to have been aided by State or local government officials and the police did not respond in the way that would appear normal. These attacks were obviously coordinated," he added.

"... we don't believe that the Central Government even under the BJP Government was involved in inciting those riots. It's well known that prominent officials of that Government held to a very vocal position on Hindu fundamentalism which conveyed an intolerance for religious minorities. The new Government is determined to go a different route and to return India to a position that is more secular and has respect for all religious faiths. And we applaud that," Mr. Hanford said.

16 SEP 2004

Parties asked not to whip up religious frenzy

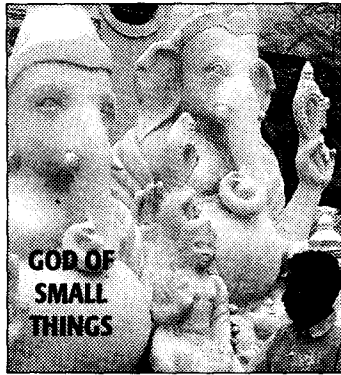
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 10 SEPTEMBER

WITH the popular Ganesh Chaturthi festival coinciding with the Assembly election process in Maharashtra, the Election Commission on Friday warned political parties of action if they were found using religious sentiments

11/9 Retina B.T. 2

namurthy ruled that "religious sentiments should not be used for political purposes...this applies to all political parties." He added that there were enough provisions in the IPC to proceed against any individual or party "if religious celebrations are patently politicised."

The Ganesh Chaturthi festival is celebrated with much gaiety and fervour in the western state and involves organising of lavish pandals visited by huge crowd during the 14-day celebrations. The celebrations come to a close with huge processions leading the idols of Ganesh to its abode in the sea.



GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Asked whether Ms Bharti's yatra would vitiate the atmosphere in Maharashtra ahead of the polls, the CEC pointed out, "the state government concerned has enough powers to deal with

to further their political ends.

Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy, speaking to newsmen on the sidelines of a meeting of election observers for the forthcoming polls in Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh, also indicated that adequate action may be taken if the need arose during BJP leader Uma Bharti's Tiranga Yatra likely to enter Maharashtra over the weekend.

When asked if religious festivals like the Ganesh Chaturthi could be used by political parties in the run-up to the October 13 polls in Maharashtra, Mr Krish-

namurthy ruled out an interference with the yatra, Mr Krishnamurthy said: "We do not proceed on assumptions (that it may vitiate the atmosphere in Maharashtra). When the problem comes, adequate action will be taken either by the state government or by the Election Commission if there is need." Earlier, in his address to around 250 poll observers appointed by the EC for the coming Assembly polls, the CEC asked the observers to maintain neutrality and realise that they were not only agents of democracy but angels of democracy as well."

Panel to review analysis of religion data

Religion
GRI

10/9

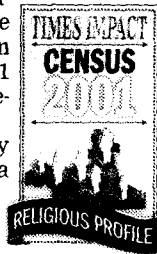
g- see also India

New Delhi: It's now official. The government is taking a "relook" at the analytical comments made in the census report on religion which had conveyed the misleading impression that the growth rate of the Muslim population during 1991-2001 had gone up by 1.5% whereas it had actually declined.

Confirming this, deputy registrar general R G Mitra said, "There is some problem raised on the analytical remarks vis-a-vis the Muslim growth rate. So the commission has decided to have a relook at the analysis part."

The clarification by Mitra comes in the wake of a report in The Times Of India on Wednesday pointing out that the 36% growth estimated for the Muslim population over 1991-2001 was based on

the faulty procedure of comparing the all-India 2001 figures with the 1991 figures which had excluded Jammu & Kashmir.



Mitra said that the Census Commission was exploring ways to address the issues raised on the growth rate of Muslims. He also said there would be a newly published set of reports that might include "qualifying" statements along with the analytical remarks.

However, he added, there was "no question of withdrawal of any data". TOI had not questioned the veracity of the data but had raised questions about their interpretation and how such an important statistical fact as the non-inclusion of J&K in the 1991 census was glossed over by the commission. TNN

French Sikhs upset as schools bar hair coverings

PARIS, SEPT. 7. France's small Sikh community is in an uproar after five of its boys were refused entry to state schools under a new law barring pupils from wearing conspicuous religious symbols in class. Sikh community leaders were negotiating with school officials today trying to convince them the ban, aimed mostly at Muslim headscarves, did not rule out Sikh boys wearing a small cloth to cover their uncut hair.

Sikh leaders say the law

does not apply to them because their turbans and "patkas" — tight cloth headcovers Sikhs wear under their turbans — are practical hair coverings rather than religious symbols. Only their uncut hair was a religious symbol, they argued.

The Sikhs, who number about 5,000 living mostly in Paris, say national education authorities agreed to this last spring but some schools were strictly applying the ban to all. Unlike other minorities, Sikhs were not consulted

before the law was passed. "The teachers wouldn't let them into class,"

community spokesman Chain Singh told Reuters. "They don't understand."

"This was resolved at the government level," said Jasdev Singh Rai, director of the London-based Sikh Human Rights Group. "May be there wasn't enough effort to educate the teachers."

Law controversial

The controversial law, which banned conspicuous religious symbols but left

each school to decide how strictly to apply this, went into effect last Thursday with apparent success. Far fewer Muslim girls turned up with headscarves than usually do.

About 80 Sikh boys were allowed into their schools wearing 'patkas'. But five were left out, including two going into their final year at lycee and preparing for their baccalaureate exam.

"They were convinced their issue was resolved," said Monique Crinon of One School for Everyone, a group campaigning against

excluding pupils from school under the ban. "But there is the issue of equality if they can wear something and others can't."

The Sikhs have mobilised Indian leaders for their cause. Manmohan Singh, India's first Sikh Prime Minister, said last week he expected the issue to be resolved soon.

France's efforts to explain that barring religious symbols from state schools would reinforce tolerance for all faiths have fallen on deaf ears abroad, where

commentators and churchmen see the idea as a secularist push to suppress a religious freedom.

Islamic, Christian and Jewish leaders opposed the ban before it was passed but said afterwards they would respect it.

Sikhs, whose monotheistic religion started in Punjab in the 15th century, wear turbans in armies and police forces or on motorcycles in Britain, Canada and the United States. Germany also lets them ride motorcycles without helmets. — Reuters

A complex hero

■ YD PHADKE

THE controversy over the removal of V.D. Savarkar's quotations from a pillar installed in the cellular jail in Port Blair where he was imprisoned for over 14 years, is absurd. We must understand Savarkar's complex personality before we pass judgement on him.

The RSS didn't hoist the national flag at its headquarters in Nagpur for years (till 2002), but Savarkar had the courage to hoist *tiranga* at his residence despite Hindu Mahasabha's decision of raising black flags on Independence Day. Union Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyer, who has ordered removal of the plaque is perhaps profoundly unaware of Savarkar's life.

It seems to me that he's ignorant of India's history as well and hasn't even bothered to read Mahatma Gandhi's writings on Savarkar. He should close the chapter for once and all by tendering an apology.

A word of caution for political parties and individuals involved in the row: They are insulting an ardent nationalist and patriot who was appreciated by



There are no evidences to prove that Savarkar collaborated with the British for his release from jail. In fact, his appeal for release was a ruse.

Gandhi for his bravery and courage.

I have extensively researched official secret documents and have come to the conclusion that Savarkar was a legendary freedom fighter and a litterateur, who stirred pre-independent India's consciousness with his fiery writings, patriotic poems and inspiring speeches.

■ Savarkar never collaborated with the British

There are no evidences to prove that Savarkar collaborated with the British for his release from jail. In fact, his appeal for release was a ruse. He was well aware of political developments outside and wanted to be a part of it. So he kept requesting for his release. But the British authorities did not trust him a bit.

Ex-superintendent of Cellular jail, J.H. Murray, had observed Savarkar very closely for over seven year. Hence authorities sought his opinion wherein he recommended not to release Savarkar unconditionally. He wrote, "But we can't be sure about his mind. Don't release him unconditionally."

Another British jailer wrote, "His assurance for co-operation is largely illusionary. Revolutionaries never learn and change."

Leaders like Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar too had appealed to the British to lift restriction on Savarkar, who was put under house arrest in Ratnagiri for 13 years. Elected members from various parties — Dr MB Velkar and R.D Pradhan had also forwarded resolutions demanding his release.

Even Mahatma Gandhi had urged the British in his article in Young India (May 1920) to release Savarkar.

■ Why Savarkar, a secularist, turned Hindu fundamentalist

I am extremely critical of his Hindutva philosophy that he had adopted only after his release from jail. Most of us are unaware of this.

The inhuman treatment meted out to him by the Pathans at the cellular jail forced seachange in Savarkar's thinking. There are harrowing accounts of physical and mental torture in his autobiography 'Majhi Jannathep' (My Life). Many Hindus were converted forcefully by these pathans.

However, the young Savarkar was a rationalist Hindu (he remained one till he died), who wrote in his articles that cow was just an useful animal and ridiculed rituals like yagya. Orthodox Hindus hated him.

Savarkar even ridiculed the RSS for its motto 'organisation for the sake of organisation'. Obviously they didn't like his criticism, rationalism and efforts of abolishing untouchability.

Savarkar built Patit Pawan Madir in Ratnagiri exclusively for lower castes. Even Muslims were allowed to visit the temple.

■ Savarkar never hated Gandhi

Gandhi and Savarkar held opposite views. But regardless of their ideological differences both respected each other for their patriotism. Savarkar helped Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa through secret operations from London (Abhinav Bharat moment).

Gandhi had also accepted Savarkar's invitation to the Vijayadashmi programme in London (Oct 1909).

In his speech, Savarkar said, "India, which is like a rainbow, will prosper only if it acquires support from all — Muslims, Parsis and Jews."

"I'm proud to have sat next to Savarkar. India will continue to have sweet fruits of his patriotism," Gandhi spoke from the same dais, adding, "Savarkar's was the fine example of inspiring oratory."

BJP/RSS/Sena are very conveniently exploiting Savarkar's Hindutva.

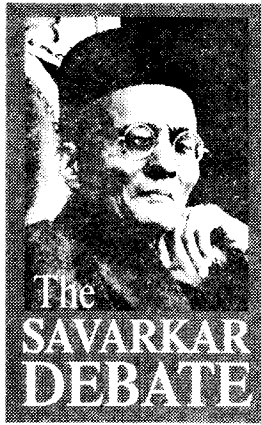
It's sad that Savarkar had to face trial in Gandhi assassination. He was opposed to Gandhi's idea of non-violence and India's partition. The assassin, Nathuram Godse, himself had testified that Savarkar had no role to play in his heinous act.

■ Don't deny Savarkar a place in history

Savarkar fought for independence in his own way. He didn't believe in Gandhi's 'purity of means' theory. Instead he adopted ways of tackling tyrant enemy in a ruthless manner — putting his own life at stake.

Even Lokmanya Tilak, also had ideological differences with the Mahatma, had written in a letter to Gandhi, "Politics is not a game of sadhus."

(The writer is a veteran historian of Maharashtra. He spoke to Dharmendra Jore)



A divisive firebrand

■ SHAMSUL ISLAM

KUMAR Ketkar ("The unbearable pocity of Savarkar", IE, August 27) has not done justice to the ongoing debate on Savarkar's role in the freedom movement by calling it "neither political nor ideological." It is very much political and ideological given the fragmented political life that V.D. Savarkar lived. There were two markedly distinguishable phases in his political life which stood for diametrically opposite ideals. Unfortunately, votaries of Savarkarism are unable to see this difference.

Savarkar began as a revolutionary who believed in an inclusive and composite Indian nationalism. Though he remained rooted in Hindu mythology, he initially believed that India's liberation depended on the united resolve of Hindus and Muslims. In his monumental work *The Indian War of Independence 1857* penned in 1907 in England, he warned against any feeling of animosity against Muslims.

Mangal Pandey, Rani Laxmi Bai, Nana Sahab, Maulvi Ahmed Shah, Tatia Tope, Bahadurshah Zafar and Begum Zeenat Mahal were described by him as national heroes.

Yet the savage incarceration in Cellular Jail broke him completely. Convinced of the invincibility of the British rule, he started writing mercy petitions to his British masters. He wrote the first one in 1911 (immediately after his arrival in the brutal jail) and second one in 1913. The latter petition addressed to the Home Member of the Government of India (November 14, 1913) apart from many other things said: "Therefore if the government in their manifold beneficence and mercy release me, I for one cannot but be the staunchest advocate of constitutional progress and loyalty to the English government which is the foremost condition of that progress..."

During his imprisonment, he kept a safe distance from companion political prisoners. He was released when Non Co-operation Movement was at its peak bringing a high watermark of Hindu-Muslim unity. The British rulers terrified by this development were looking for leaders who could dent this unity. Savarkar who had been working on his theory of Hindutva seemed to be a good option. He was released from the Cellular Jail in 1921 and then interned in Ratnagiri/Yeravda jails (from where he was finally released on January 6, 1924.) on the condition that he would not indulge in any kind of political activity. However, he was allowed to publish his controversial ideas of Hindu nationalism titled *Hindutva* (1923), claiming that only Hindus had the right to be nationals of the country and Muslims and Christians could not be part of Hindusthan. He made an unconditional promise to the British masters "to serve the Government in any capacity", and this he fulfilled by becoming a willing tool in their hands to execute the Two-Nation theory.

Ketkar's article makes no mention of what Savarkar did in the second phase of his political life, when he was free. For an honest appraisal of his role, we must become acquainted with his words and deeds while he was free, guiding the Hindu Mahasabha from 1937-1942. These are available under one title *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* published by the Hindu Mahasabha, Maharashtra. Savarkar like Mohammed Ali Jinnah, believed in the Two Nation theory.

While delivering the presidential address to 19th Hindu Mahasabha session at Ahmedabad in 1937, Savarkar said: "As it is, there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India, several infantile politicians commit the serious mistake in supposing that India is already welded into a harmonious nation, or that it could be welded thus for the mere wish to do so... India can not be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the

its scope." He also declared that he was not bothered about "breaking up the so-called united front against the British Imperialism."

When Netaji and his Azad Hind Fauj were planning to liberate the north east of the country, it was Savarkar who offered full military co-operation to the British. While addressing 23rd session of Hindu Mahasabha at Bhagalpur in 1941, he said, "our best national interests demands that so far as India's defence is concerned, Hindudom must ally unhesitatingly, in a spirit of responsive co-operation with the war effort of the Indian government by joining the Army, Navy and the Aerial forces in as large a number as possible and by securing an entry into all ordnance, ammunition and war craft factories... Hindu Mahasabhaits must, therefore, rouse Hindus especially in the provinces of Bengal and Assam as effectively as possible to enter the military forces of all arms without losing a single minute."



Hindu Mahasabha under the leadership of Savarkar played a highly dubious and divisive role in the 'Quit India' Movement of 1942. Hindu Mahasabha decided to co-operate with the British rulers.

main: the Hindus and the Moslems, in India".

If Savarkar, an ardent advocate of the Two-Nation theory, can be considered an Indian nationalist, then who can stop Jinnah from claiming the same status! Hindu Mahasabha under the leadership of Savarkar played a highly dubious and divisive role in the 'Quit India' Movement of 1942. While large sections of Indian masses faced immense repression and the country was turned into a jail, Hindu Mahasabha decided to co-operate with the British rulers. In fact, he was jubilantly thankful to the British rulers for banning Congress when he said, "As soon as Congress was removed from the political field as an open organization under the government ban, the Hindu Mahasabha alone was left to take up the task of conducting whatever Indian National activities lay within

There is a factual error in Ketkar's article, regarding the relationship between Savarkar and the RSS. Ketkar writes that Savarkar "was still in jail when the RSS was formed in 1925". In fact, Savarkar was freed in early 1924. Here's what Dhananjay Keer, Savarkar's biographer wrote about the close affinity between the two. "Before starting the volunteer organization known as the RSS, Dr. Hedgewar had a long discussion with Savarkar over the faith, form and future of organization" and it was "in consultation with Savarkar and others, that Hedgewar decided to build up an organization to supply the Hindu society with powers and pillars."

The writer is Reader, Department of Political Science, Satyawati College

Muslim schoolgirls face new French law

By Amelia Gentleman
Paris, Aug. 28. Precisely how France's schoolgirls knot scarves and bandanas over their hair when they arrive at school for the first day of the autumn term will be under scrutiny this week from teachers, religious leaders and even the Education Minister.

PARIS, AUG. 28. Precisely how France's schoolgirls knot scarves and bandanas over their hair when they arrive at school for the first day of the autumn term will be under scrutiny this week from teachers, religious leaders and even the Education Minister.

Appeals for calm

Despite appeals for calm from religious leaders, France's teaching community is braced for a wave of tension as schools implement new and controversial legislation banning the wearing of Islamic headscarves

and other 'conspicuous' religious symbols.

A hotline was launched by Muslim pressure groups last Wednesday, advising students on how to circumvent the legislation discreetly. Though officials claim that fewer than 100 pupils plan to defy the law, the Government has warned that radical Islamist organisations are using them as pawns, encouraging them to provoke confrontation.

After months of national debate, the Government ruled in February that from Wednesday any pupil who arrives at school wearing a headscarf, skull-cap, turban, large cross or any other

piece of ostentatious religious insignia will not be allowed to attend classes. Repeat violations will lead to swift expulsion.

Free advice line

Pupils wondering whether or not to conform to the ban will be able to consult a free advice line, set up by the Union of French Islamic Organisations, which opposed the law. Volunteers offer confidential suggestions on how to get around the legislation by wearing discreet bandanas instead of full-scale headscarves, and advice on what to do if a disciplinary process is launched by the school.

"We are not calling for the law to be broken," said Noora, one of the hotline's operators. "But we will tell girls that they may be able to get away with wearing a small, discreet triangle of material pushed far back on their heads."

The Education Minister, Francois Fillon, said the Government would be unflinching. "There will be no concessions in the way the law is implemented, no matter what attempts are made to circumvent it," he said. "But there will be dialogue between those pupils concerned, their families and their teachers with one objective: to make sure that children continue to be

educated within the confines of the law."

Sania, 17, who is about to enter her final year of school in Strasbourg, stressed that she would turn up at school wearing a headscarf. "Teachers and friends have been understanding about my decision to wear the veil for the past seven years, and I hope they will continue to be sympathetic," she said. "Maybe we will be able to compromise eventually on the acceptability of a small bonnet or a bandana, instead. If not, I risk missing the final and most important year of my education."

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THE HINDU

2 AUG 2004



National Conference members shout slogans at the J-K Legislative Council in Srinagar on Thursday. PTI

Savarkar issue continues to rock House

Deletion *95-8* *20/8*

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 19

THE Savarkar issue rocked Parliament for the third consecutive day today, with Shiv Sena and BJP MPs insisting on an "apology" from the government for "insulting" Savarkar and demanding the restoration of his quotation that had been removed from the "Swatantrata Pillar" at the Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The issue first came up in Lok Sabha during Question Hour with Shiv Sena MPs demanding an apology from Union Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar for his alleged derogatory remarks and decision to remove Savarkar's quotation from the monument at the jail.

Shiv Sena MPs were joined by their BJP brethren in the Well of the House, forc-

ing the Speaker to adjourn proceedings for 15 minutes. Later, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee promised to make a statement at 2 pm. At 2 pm, Mukherjee said the decision to remove the Savarkar plaque had been taken by the Board of Trustees of the IOC.

Objecting to Mukherjee's statement, Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani said most government decisions were taken by individual ministers and not the Cabinet. No decision regarding the construction of a memorial in the Andamans could be taken without government sanction, he added.

The discussion got out of hand when JD(U)'s Prabhunath Singh took the floor. He suddenly lost his temper to a remark made by R.K. Rana (RJD) and started abusing him. The Speaker adjourned the House for the day.

JD-U says will quit NDA if BJP returns to Hindutva...

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

JANATA Dal (United) here today threatened to part company with the BJP if it revived its controversial Hindutva agenda. The JD (U) warning came at the conclusion of its two-day national executive.

The meeting coincided with the BJP's *chintan baithak* in Goa, where some 30-odd top party leaders, assisted by RSS joint general secretary (BJP affairs) Madan Das Devi, struggled to draw up a new strategy to drum up mass support for BJP and re-charge the Hindutva-driven Sangh Parivar rank.

With Hindutva emerging as the buzz-word at the BJP

session, the JD (U) leadership sent out a positive signal to Lok Janshakti Party leader Ram Vilas Paswan. It would be still a bit far-fetched to expect a tie-up between JD (U) and Paswan, given the contradictions in their present alignments, but the commonality of RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav as their main enemy, could not be overlooked.

Paswan had already stated that his tie-up with the RJD was limited to Lok Sabha polls, but had maintained along side that the question of his joining hands with JD (U) could crop up only after it broke off with BJP.

The resolution, released by party president George Fernandes, stated: "We joined the NDA only after the three con-

Resolution says JD-U not to compromise with 'religious bigotry', will leave alliance if chintan baithak ratifies BJP's decision to go 'back to basics'

troversial issues had been removed from the agenda of the NDA. If any effort is now made to revive them, we will have to take another road. We shall never compromise with religious bigotry."

Sources said that a majority of the JD(U) delegates were firmly of the view that the party should distance itself from the BJP, and even formally leave the NDA if the BJP's post-election decision to go "back to the basics" was ratified at the party's ongoing *chintan baithak*.

Fernandes, while replying to questions from the media, admitted that many leaders favoured the idea of JD(U) getting out of the NDA. However, he declared that the alliance was "still on."

He said, "As of now, we are all working to see that NDA sticks together and stands by the agenda we had presented to the electorate."

As for the JD (U)'s response in case the BJP reverted to Hindutva, Fernan-

des said, "It is difficult to say when they are engaged in their own assessment of situation." When asked if his party could go along Paswan in Bihar polls, Fernandes said, "I don't know if he (Paswan) is interested. If he is interested, then why not?"

Regarding the Opposition's boycott of parliamentary committees, Fernandes said he was waiting for talks "supposed to take place" between Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee and leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani to resolve the issue.

A reporter sought to know the JD(U)'s stand on the boycott. He responded by saying: "We will go by our collective decision. There is no separate decision. We are part of NDA."

...as Atal pitches for NDA unity

ENS & PTI
DONNA PAULA (GOA), AUGUST 1

ON A day when key NDA ally JD (U) threatened to snap ties with NDA if it returns to Hindutva fold, former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today stressed the need to keep the Opposition alliance intact even as the RSS asked the party to remain firm on its ideology.

Participating in the party's brainstorming session on the second day, Vajpayee said all efforts should be made to keep the NDA united as the party endeavours to grow further, party sources said.



Vajpayee, who is chairman of NDA parliamentary group, however, did not specifically refer to any ally or the threat made by JD (U) at its national executive meet in Delhi yesterday.

In his seven-minute-long intervention, Vajpayee expressed concern over the

functioning of the UPA government which, he said, was "buckling under pressure of communists".

RSS joint general secretary in-charge of BJP, Madan Das Devi categorically told BJP leaders that the Sangh expected the party to remain firm on Hindutva and propagate its ideology confidently and effectively. Devi said the party should not deviate from Hindutva philosophy and train its workers to propagate the BJP ideology. Sangh Parivar outfits, including VHP, had attributed BJP's debacle in the Lok Sabha polls to dilution of its ideology.

BJP leaders debate on Hindutva...

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PAULA (Goa), July 31. — BJP leaders today favoured a harmonious integration of Hindutva with the party's social expansion plans as they got down to analyse the reasons for the Lok Sabha poll debacle and to draw up a strategy for the future. Participating in the first pre-lunch session of the three-day *Chintan Baithak* (brainstorming session) which began here today, several party leaders, including Gujarat chief minister Mr Narendra Modi, felt that the party's pursuance of the Hindutva ideology would not in any way hinder its efforts to reach out to newer sections of society such as minorities and Dalits, sources said.

They felt that the "all-encompassing" Hindutva was not in any way contradictory to the party's programme of social engineering. Acknowledging that a perception has gained ground among BJP and Sangh Parivar cadres that the party had diluted its core constituency, the leaders wanted the party not only to be "unapologetic" about Hindutva but also effectively counter the propaganda of

the party's opponents.

The Hindutva ideology would rather help in bringing the sizeable Dalit population into the larger Hindu constituency, they said. Nationalism should be the party's mantra to prove all sections of society and it was identical to Hindutva, the leaders felt.

Senior leaders, including Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and Mr Venkaiah Naidu, besides RSS joint general secretary in-charge of BJP Mr Madan Das Devi are attending the closed-door conclave at the Goa International Centre, five km from the state capital Panjim, being held amidst tight security.

Besides the social and geographical expansion, the reasons for the poll debacle and its strategy for the coming Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Bihar, Haryana, Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh are expected to come up for discussion later today.

The meeting, which would not take any decision, is likely to convey a strong message of Hindutva and an emphasis on conduct and behaviour to the party's leaders and cadres.

...AS JD-U dangles snap threat

NEW DELHI, July 31. — The Janata Dal-United today threatened to snap ties with the BJP if it returned to the Hindutva agenda.

"We will not be with them then. There cannot be two opinions on this," JD-U leader Mr Digvijay Singh said after the party's two-day national executive meeting which began today. The JD-U may have to carry out its threat.

The BJP *chintan baithak* in Goa which began today is debating how to repackage core issues to attract voters and send the right message to the Sangh Parivar. The party has declared its intention to return to core issues it espoused before jettisoning them for the NDA's agenda for governance.

The discussion at today's JD-U meeting clearly said that secularism was the party's strength. Mr Singh said. "We shall stick to secularism and oppose fundamentalism." Speakers reportedly said that the



(From left) Digvijay Singh Nitish Kumar, George Fernandes, Sharad Yadav in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

party should sever ties with the NDA if it wanted to improve its fortunes. They felt that snapping ties with the BJP would help make a dent in Mr Lalu Prasad's minority vote bank.

When asked about the party's next course, Mr Singh said: "We are

still in the NDA." JD-U president Mr George Fernandes yesterday sought to calm tempers within the party by telling them that selecting alliance partners for the Assembly polls would be taken at the appropriate time. — Sudesh K Verma

...And MLA pulls out of Goa govt

PANAJI, July 31. — The politics of defection came to the fore in Goa today when an independent MLA withdrew support to the Manohar Parrikar-led BJP government, giving rise to speculation that the government might topple.

Even as BJP leaders were huddled in a brainstorming session, the lone MLA of the UGDP (Mikky) faction, former tourism minister Mr Francisco Pacheco, withdrew support to the government and warned that he was "in a position to topple the government any time".

Asked if he had the support of two more independent MLAs in the government, Mr Pacheco avoided giving a direct answer, but said "we in the Opposition are united, and when the time is right we shall make our moves. — PTI

হিন্দুত্ব কী ভাবে, আলোচ্য চিন্তন বৈঠকে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৮ জুলাই: আর্থিক বিষয় এবং হিন্দুত্ব নিয়ে দল কী ভাবে এগোবে, তা নিয়ে খোলাখুলি আলোচনা করতেই গোয়ায় চিন্তন বৈঠকে বসছেন বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব। দল যে ফের হিন্দুত্বের পথেই হাঁটবে তা মুম্বইয়ের জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকেই তাঁরা ঠিক করে ফেলেছিলেন। কিন্তু সেই হিন্দুত্বের চেহারা নিয়ে কথা চূড়ান্ত হয়নি। আগামী ৩০ জুলাই থেকে চার দিনের বৈঠকে সে ব্যাপারেই নেতাদের মত চাওয়া হবে।

বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ ও বিলম্বিকরণ প্রভৃতি বিষয়ে, বিজেপি নেতাদের যথেষ্ট মতবিরোধ রয়েছে। যশোবন্ত সিংহ, যশবন্ত সিনহা, অরুণ জেটলির মতো নেতারা এখনও বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের সীমা বাড়ানো, বিলম্বিকরণের খোলাখুলি সমর্থন করতে চান। তাঁদের মতে, প্রাক্তন সরকারের নীতি সমর্থনে নতুন করে দ্বিধা তৈরি হওয়া উচিত নয়। এ ব্যাপারে চিদম্বরমের সিদ্ধান্তও তাঁরা সমর্থন করতে চেয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু বেঙ্কাইয়া নায়ডু, বিজয়কুমার মলহোত্র-সহ বেশ কিছু নেতার বক্তব্য, বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ প্রসঙ্গে সরকারকে উদ্ধার করার বদলে বিজেপি-র এখন বিরোধী দলের ভূমিকা পালন করা উচিত। আডবানীও বলেছেন, সরকারে

থাকাকালীন এগুলি ছিল আর্থিক প্রসঙ্গ। কিন্তু এখন এগুলি রাজনৈতিক বিষয়। এ ব্যাপারে সরকারকে সমর্থন করলে কংগ্রেস ও বামদেদের মধ্যে বিরোধিতাটা তুলে ধরা যাবে না। বিজেপি সরকারকে সমর্থন করছে না বলেই এই বিরোধিতাটা সামনে এসেছে। সঙ্ঘ পরিবার বিশেষ করে স্বদেশী জাগরণ মঞ্চের নেতারা এই মতে বিশ্বাসী।

তবে সবচেয়ে বেশি গুরুত্ব পাচ্ছে হিন্দুত্বের বিষয়টি। নেতাদের বক্তব্য, অঙ্কে মুসলিমদের জন্য পাঁচ শতাংশ সংরক্ষণ, গোধরা নিয়ে তদন্তের আদেশ, পাঠ্যপুস্তকে পরিবর্তন, ইশরাত জাহানকে সমর্থনের সিদ্ধান্ত এ সবই উত্তরপ্রদেশ-সহ অন্যত্র মুসলিমদের মন পাওয়ার লক্ষ্যে করছে কংগ্রেস। তাঁদের বিশ্বাস, কংগ্রেস তাঁদের পুরনো ভোটব্যাঙ্ক (ব্রাহ্মণ-হরিজন-মুসলিম) ফিরে পাওয়ার কৌশল নিয়ে দ্রুত এগোচ্ছে। গত লোকসভা নির্বাচনে উত্তরপ্রদেশে ব্রাহ্মণ-ভোটও কংগ্রেসের দিকে যাওয়ার প্রবণতা বেড়েছে।

এ অবস্থায় বিজেপি-র সমস্যা, কী ভাবে হিন্দুত্বের পথে যাওয়া হবে? গত ছ'বছরে বাজপেয়ী সরকারের কাজে মধ্যবিত্তরা খুশি বলে বিজেপি মনে করে। বিশেষ করে এই ক'বছরে যে ভাবে

'অর্থনৈতিক উন্নতি' হয়েছে তাতে মধ্যবিত্তদের সমর্থন পাওয়া নিয়ে আশাবাদী দলের নেতৃত্ব। কিন্তু সঙ্ঘ পরিবার ও বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ যে ভাবে উগ্র হিন্দুত্বের পথে তাঁদের নিয়ে যেতে চাইছে তাতে মধ্যবিত্তরাই নারাজ হবেন। আডবানী প্রস্তাব, কেন্দ্র ও কংগ্রেস শাসিত রাজ্যগুলি 'মুসলিম তোষণ'-এর যে সব সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে তা ভাল করে তুলে ধরতে হবে। এই প্রসঙ্গে গুজরাতে উদাহরণও দিচ্ছেন বিজেপি নেতারা। লালুপ্রসাদের গোধরা নিয়ে তদন্তাদেশের পরে দুটি পুর ভোটে বিজেপি বিপুল ভাবে জিতেছে। অথচ, ওই দুই জায়গাতেই আগে বিজেপি-র অবস্থা বেশ খারাপ ছিল।

তাই বিজেপি-র সিংহভাগ উগ্র হিন্দুত্বের বিরোধী। তাঁরা বরং কংগ্রেসের নীতির প্রতিক্রিয়ার উপরই জোর দিচ্ছেন। চিন্তন বৈঠকে আর এস এস নেতা মদনদাস দেবীও থাকবেন। হিন্দুত্ব প্রসঙ্গে বিজেপি-র কী ভাবে চলা উচিত সে বিষয়ে মত দেবেন তিনি। বিজেপি-র ইচ্ছা, ১৯৯৯ সালে মানুষের মধ্যে কংগ্রেসের নীতি নিয়ে যেমন 'যথেষ্ট হয়েছে আর নয়' গোছের মনোভাব তৈরি হয়েছিল, সেটাই হিন্দুদের মধ্যে ফের তৈরি করা। সেই পাথের খোঁজেই বৈঠক।

Centre cool to job quota on basis of religion

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 14 JULY

THE Centre on Wednesday ruled out communal quota in government jobs. Minister of personnel Suresh Choudhary informed the Lok Sabha that there was no proposal to provide reservation to Muslims in government jobs.

In a written reply to a question in the House, Mr Choudhary also said that since recruitment in central government services is not made on the basis of religion, no data relating to the representation of Muslims in these services is being maintained.

The Centre's decision is significant as it comes in the backdrop of a recent announcement of the Andhra Pradesh government led by the Congress, which included a communal quota in government jobs.

Reworking the earlier order to create a separate quota for the socially and educationally backward Muslims, the new state government extended the facilities to the entire community. A significant section of the political spectrum is opposed to communal quota. Besides it will also distort the philosophy of reservations. The Opposition maintains that it is yet another instance of catering to sectarian and communal interests.

Hurriyat talks with UPA still a long way off

Masood Hussain
SRINAGAR 14 JULY

HURRIYAT Conference's maiden round of talks with the UPA seems unlikely to be held, unless it manages to bring the now-divided alliance to its pre-split position. Moderates, who had two rounds of talks with the NDA regime recently, accepted the resignation of Molvi Ansari as chairman and decided to work to reunite the twin factions.

"We believe that dialogue between India and Pakistan and between the Kashmiris and the two countries is vital and the only way to resolve the Kashmir issue. But right now the priority is to forge unity," Professor Abdul Gani Bhat, one of the top moderates said. They already had two rounds with the NDA.

"But we would not go for the third round unless we manage the reunion," he insisted.

When asked if they failed to get the hawkish Hurriyat, led by Syed Ali Geelani, back to the fold, Professor Bhat observed: "It will be the misfortune of the people of Kashmir."

Scarf campaign in Europe

London, July 12 (Reuters): Activists launched a campaign today to protect the right of Muslim women in Europe to wear Islamic headscarves.

The issue of the hijab — the traditional headscarf worn around the head and shoulders — has sparked controversy across the continent and underlined sharp divisions over integrating Muslims. Some 250 delegates from 14 countries congregated at London's City Hall under the banner of a pro-hijab pressure group to campaign over what they see as human rights violations.

Among their most vociferous supporters was leading Muslim theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi who called on France to overturn a ban on headscarves in schools, due to begin in September. "The ban evokes a ghetto mentality," he told the conference. "You are antagonising Muslims."

"Can this be comparable with civilisation? This is certainly a step backwards. It is against religious and individual freedom," he said. The Egyptian-born cleric, who has been banned from entering the US since 1999, has been dogged by controversy on a week-long speaking tour of Britain.

British Jews formally com-



Yusuf al-Qaradawi at the City Hall in London. (AFP)

plained to the police, accusing the theologian, who has condoned some suicide bombings, of inciting racial hatred. State prosecutors decided not to pursue the case.

The conference was picketed by gay rights activists who accuse the cleric of being homophobic and say he tramples on the rights of women.

At the conference, the French headscarf move was also condemned by London mayor Ken Livingstone who said: "The French ban is the most reactionary proposal to be considered by any parliament in Europe since the Second

World War.

"It marks a move towards religious intolerance which we in Europe swore never to repeat, having witnessed the devastating effects of the Holocaust."

But the issue has not just been confined to France. Several German states are to ban teachers from wearing headscarves.

Last month, the European Court of Human Rights rejected appeals by a Turkish student barred from attending Istanbul University medical school in 1998 because her headscarf violated the official dress code.

Abeer Pharaon, co-ordinator of the pro-hijab movement, said there was a worrying trend developing across Europe from France and Germany to Belgium. "The governments of some of these countries have claimed that they are protecting Muslim women from being 'forced' into wearing the hijab," she said.

"They think we are weak and controlled by our husbands and fathers. I assure you we are not. Muslim women are liberated, highly educated." Her words were echoed by British Muslim convert Sarah Joseph who insisted the hijab was a symbol of choice.

"The scarf is just a scarf," she said, "not a ball and chain."



A woman listens to Yusuf al-Qaradawi at the City Hall in London. (AFP)

New religious laws put UK Muslims in a quandary

AMIT ROY *Religion*

London, July 7: Muslim groups were today unsure whether to welcome or oppose legislation they had themselves pressed for — making incitement to religious hatred a criminal offence.

The new offence is likely to be closely modelled on the existing crime of inciting racial hatred which carries a maximum prison term of seven years.

Incitement to racial hatred is already an offence under the Public Order Act 1986, defined as using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent or likelihood to stir up racial hatred. Discrimination on the grounds of race or sex is also illegal.

In Britain, which has about 1.5 million Muslims, Islamic lobbies have long sought new legislation to guard against what they see as "Islamophobia". But today realisation set in that the very laws which offer them protection could also be used against rabble rousers in mosques who advocate jihad

against the western world.

The home secretary David Blunkett said today that making it a crime to incite religious hatred would help to protect minority religions from attack by Right-wing groups. But he made it clear that the law could also be used against fundamentalist Islamists, as well as other extremists, who preach against Christian society.

Blunkett's announcement coincides with the arrival in Britain on Monday of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a firebrand Muslim cleric and an Egyptian who apparently supports suicide bombings and beatings of women — especially "disobedient" wives by their husbands.

The new law would be a "two-way street", said Blunkett, adding: "It applies equally to far-Right evangelical Christians as to extremists in the Islamic faith." The government would introduce the new offence "as soon as possible", disclosed Blunkett.

Some Muslim spokesmen welcomed the proposed law but

among those who expressed reservations was the Islamic Human Rights Commission.

Its chairman, Massoud Shadjareh, predicted: "In the light of the well-recognised institutional Islamophobic society that we have at the moment, this legislation could very well be used against Muslim communities, rather than protecting them."

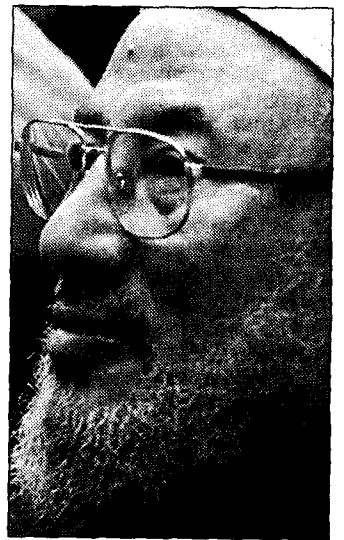
The Labour peer, Lord Meghnad Desai, said the legislation would have "a very, very difficult time" in the Lords. "We will get in a real muddle if we take religion as a basis for prosecution rather than race," he said.

The Tories also opposed the legislation.

Its shadow home secretary, David Davis, called the proposals as "unworkable".

He said: "It will impinge on civil liberties and only serve to make lawyers rich. Perfectly adequate laws against violence or conspiracies to commit violence already exist and should be enforced vigorously."

However, Blunkett received support from the Liberal Democ-



Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi. (AFP)

rats, whose home affairs spokesperson, Mark Oaten, argued: "This plan closes a loophole that has allowed inflammatory language to go unpunished, and the Liberal Democrats will give these plans their support."

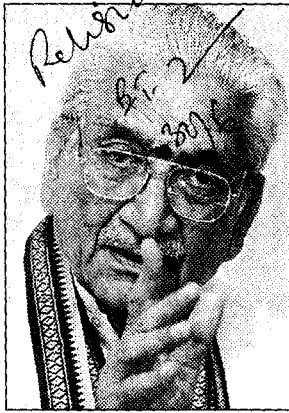
Samaj Sewa: Singhal Says Outfit Will Address Ayodhya Issue

VHP to float new Hindu party

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 29 JUNE

IN what is being seen as a breakdown of ties between BJP and VHP, VHP leader Ashok Singhal said on Tuesday that his outfit was planning to promote a new Hindu party. The VHP brass, which failed to enlist the support of RSS in its fight against BJP, said it was time to establish a Hindu political manch.

Announcing this in Kolkata, Mr Singhal said the proposed outfit would work "aggressively to take up the cause of the 'Hindu Samaj', including fulfilling the long-standing demand for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya." Mr Singhal, who was speaking after a meet-



SINGHAL: MANCH ADO

ing of the core committee before the national executive meet of VHP, said: "A Hindu political

manch is necessary to effectively pursue a Hindu agenda and take on the challenges posed by forces who are opposed to our ideology."

He said BJP had done nothing for the cause of the Hindus and had faced a protest vote from the majority community. "The NDA government's policies did not serve the aspirations of the Hindu community and lakhs of our cadres remained inactive during campaigning for the polls. And the party was kicked out by the electorate," Mr Singhal said. But he remained non-committal about the launch timing of VHP's political platform. "It is going to happen soon," he said.

VHP's attitudinal problems have become a major hurdle be-

fore BJP's attempts to unite Hindus as one political unit. Politically, too, this could hurt BJP. The last Assembly elections in Jammu & Kashmir showed that a rift in the parivar could be electorally damning.

Though the BJP tried to pacify the parivar by asserting that there will not be any ideological infidelity in its future plans, the party is aware that it will have to remain a forward-looking, centrist entity for its support base to go beyond the religious Hindu to sections that are attracted by a Centre-Right agenda. For BJP, reconciling the conflicting aspirations of these two sections — the parivar and the non-parivar constituencies — has been a difficult task.

Disarm
1916

USA, N Korea emerge from talks poles apart

REUTERS

BEIJING, June 26. — The USA and North Korea emerged today from four days of nuclear crisis talks as far apart as ever, with Washington insisting Pyongyang disclose its uranium enrichment programme.

The Communist North denies the existence of such a programme, the issue that triggered the crisis 20 months ago and led to three rounds of inconclusive six-nation talks in Beijing.

The third round closed with a bland agreement to meet again before the end of September and a pledge to take the first steps to resolve the crisis "as soon as possible". Working-level talks would be held in late July, Russia's envoy to the talks said.

China's chief negotiator, Mr Wang Yi, said the main gap was between the USA and North Korea.

"There are serious differences between the two sides over the uranium enrichment programme," Mr Wang told a news conference after the talks closed. "We hope that this question, together with other issues, will be clarified and resolved in future talks." The parties had agreed that a freeze of the North's nuclear activities should be a first step, he said.

North Korea stressed its readiness to freeze plutonium-based nuclear facilities but adamantly refused to accept the US demand that it admit to having a uranium enrichment programme, used for making bombs, a diplomatic source in Beijing said.

North Korea also rejected proposals by the USA and Japan to allow International Atomic Energy Agency experts to inspect its nuclear facilities for verification. The source said Pyongyang had demanded a "different form of inspection".



Mr Wang Yi

THE STATSMAN

27 JUN 2004

হিন্দুত্বের জ্রুকটিতে ক্ষুধা শরিকেরা

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

২৫ জুন: কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকে ফের হিন্দুত্ব ফিরে আসার যে সিদ্ধান্ত বিজেপি নিচ্ছে, তাতে এন ডি এ-র অধিকাংশ শরিক দলই ক্ষুধা। অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডু গতকালই মুম্বইতে ফোন করে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীকে জানিয়েছেন যে বিজেপি যদি আগামী দিনে হিন্দুত্বের প্রপ্লে পুরনো রাস্তায় হাঁটতে শুরু করে, তবে তেলুগু দেশমের পক্ষে তা মেনে নেওয়া সম্ভব নয়। আজ ফোনে চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করা হলে তিনি বলেন, “আমরা বাজপেয়ীর নেতৃত্বের উপর সম্পূর্ণ আশাবাদী। তেলুগু দেশম ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতার আদর্শে বিশ্বাস রাখে। কাজেই উগ্র হিন্দুয়ানা তাঁরা কখনওই সমর্থন করেননি। আজও করবেন না।” প্রসঙ্গত গোথরা কাণ্ডের পরই গোয়ায় বিজেপি-র জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকের সময়ে এন ডি এ শরিকদের মধ্যে চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুই প্রথম নরেন্দ্র মোদীর ইস্তফা দাবি করেছিলেন।

ভোটের বিপর্যয়ের বিষয়ে দলের বৈঠকে বিজেপি শরিক দলের ডুমিকার সমালোচনা চন্দ্রবাবুর দল কিন্তু পাল্টা অভিযোগ করেছেন যে বিজেপি-বিরোধী হাওয়ার জের তাদেরও সহ্য করতে হয়েছে।

মমতা বন্দোপাধ্যায় এখনও প্রকাশ্যে বিজেপির বৈঠকে হিন্দুত্ব নিয়ে কোনও মন্তব্য করেননি। তবে সৌগত রায় বলেছেন বিজেপি-র উগ্র হিন্দুয়ানার ভাবমূর্তি সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়কে তৃণমূল থেকেও

দূরে সরিয়ে রেখেছিল। এমতাবস্থায় বিজেপি যদি ফের হিন্দুত্বকে মূলধন করে, তবে তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস খুশি হতে পারে না। বিজু জনতা দল থেকে শুরু করে এ আই ডি এম কে, জনতা দল (ইউ) প্রত্যেকেই এই বিষয়ে একই ভাবে হিন্দুত্বমুখিনতার প্রতিবাদে সোচ্চার হয়েছে। এ ব্যাপারে তাঁরা আডবাণী লাইনের বিরোধিতা করে বাজপেয়ীর পাশে এসে দাঁড়াচ্ছেন। জনতা দল (ইউ)-এর মুখপাত্র শিব কুমারের কথায়, “হিন্দুত্ব আমাদের বা এন ডি এ-র কর্মসূচি নয়। বিজেপি-র কর্মসূচি। এই সমস্যার নিষ্পত্তি করতে এন ডি এ-র বৈঠক ডাকা উচিত।”

মুম্বইতে বিজেপি-র দলীয় বৈঠকে আডবাণী বলেন, “এই বার এন ডি এ-র ইশতেহারেও অযোধ্যার বিষয়টি রাখা হয়েছিল, শরিকেরা তাতে কোনও আপত্তি জানায়নি। তা হলে এর আগের নির্বাচনে এন ডি এ ইশতেহারে আমরা অযোধ্যার বিষয়টি রাখতে দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত হলাম কেন? আগেও তো শরিকদের সঙ্গে খোলামেলা আলোচনা করে বিষয়টিকে রাখতে পারতাম।”

আডবাণী তাই চেয়েছিলেন, এ বার শরিকদেরও হিন্দুত্বের বিষয়টি বোঝাতে। তাতে এন ডি এ-র আপত্তি হবে না বলেই তিনি আশা করেছিলেন। কিন্তু এ আই ডি এম কে এবং বিজু জনতা দলের মতো দলগুলির পক্ষ থেকে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে হয়েছে, এন ডি এ-র নেতা বাজপেয়ীই থাকুন। তা হলেই কেবল হিন্দুত্বকে ঠেকানো সম্ভব।

Neglect of Hindutva among reasons for defeat: Advani

By Neena Vyas

MUMBAI, JUNE 23. As the Bharatiya Janata Party continued its "soul-searching" exercise to look for the causes of its electoral defeat, the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani, zeroed in on the neglect of Hindutva and lack of political focus on consolidation of its "ideological constituency" as one of the main reasons for the "totally unexpected" election results.

Just before a four-page political resolution was adopted by the national executive committee meeting here on Wednesday, Mr. Advani made a strong case for restoring the party's emotional bond with the Sangh

Parivar led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Speaking for about 40 minutes towards the end of the debate on the political resolution — which was adopted unanimously — he said the party must be always mindful of the Sangh, the *karyakartas* (party workers) and the "core constituency" that had over the years supported the BJP because of its ideological moorings in Hindutva. Senior party leaders present during the debate later said that Mr. Advani felt the BJP had lost some of its support base built up over the years by presenting itself as "the secular party" even while labelling the Congress, the Left and other parties op-

posed to the BJP as "pseudo-secular."

Mr. Advani's was the key address in many ways, for party leaders agree that the party organisation is very much his creature. A point that Mr. Advani underlined — it was also noted by the party president, Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday — was that the BJP was "an integral part of a movement." There was no ambiguity about the fact that he was referring to the RSS as a movement.

Besides Hindutva and the Sangh, Mr. Advani said the party's MLAs and MPs had not nursed their constituencies well — 50 per cent of re-nominated BJP MPs lost — and they had

not maintained proper contact with party workers. Nor were they proper in their behaviour and attitude towards the grassroots-level *karyakartas*.

The party general secretary, Arun Jaitley, who briefed the press later, pointed out that Mr. Advani's message was that while the Vajpayee Government performed well, it was not enough to bring the party back

to power. What was needed was "prudent politics" which keeps the interests of the party's support base in mind while formulating policies.

BJP resolution: Page 11

Modi spared, for the moment

BJP sources say Naidu's photo in Sabha...
Naidu

New Delhi: Embattled Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi on Sunday earned a temporary reprieve with the BJP high command ruling out his removal "at this juncture" in an effort to paper over the deep divisions in the party over the issue.

Party president M Venkaiah Naidu's repeated assertions after a meeting of the parliamentary board on Sunday morning that Modi would not be removed "at this juncture" still left open the possibilities that the party leadership might have arrived at an understanding to get rid of him after a gap when the controversy over former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee linking him and the Gujarat riots to the electoral debacle dies down. It was not clear whether the matter would come up at the national executive in Mumbai scheduled for June 22-24.

The BJP also decided to constitute a committee to go into the rea-

Singh Chauhan and Sanjay Joshi, discussed issues relating to present political situation and decided the agenda for the party national executive scheduled to be held in Mumbai next week. "We analysed the reasons for the defeat of the party in the Lok Sabha polls and it was decided that at the national executive state wise reports on the poll outcome and the political situation would be discussed," Naidu said.

Party sources said that the controversy over the continuance of Modi was discussed in depth at the meeting but none insisted on his removal "at this juncture". The issue of change in leadership in Gujarat could be taken up at a later stage after the completion of the assembly elections later this year, they said. "There was no discussion as to what would be the approach of the party after the forthcoming assembly elections in some of the states," they

said. AGENCIES



sons for the party's electoral debacle in states and the report would be discussed in a "brainstorming session" in July. Naidu said the party would organise a "chintan baithak (brainstorming session)" during the July recess of the budget session of Parliament to analyse various shortcomings. After a three-and-half-hour meeting

of the BJP parliamentary board, which was attended by Vajpayee and L K Advani, he said: "We have learnt lessons from the past and we move forward leaving the past behind."

The meeting, also attended by senior leaders Murlidhar Manohar Joshi, Sushma Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan, Arun Jaitley, Shivraj

CONVERSION DEBATE-II

Need To Review Apex Court's Decision

By FAIZAN MUSTAFA

Conversion is a bogey. The real problem is education and health care of the poor. Those with a vested interest in the poverty of the Dalits and tribals use the Hindutva façade to continue to keep them in bondage. Poverty being their vested interest, any improvement in the lives of the victims of the injustices they perpetrate is a threat to them. So those imparting them education or health care are "missionaries" and they should quit India. The fact that most such "missionaries" have not seen the face of any country other than India is of little relevance to them. It is to be noted that Christian missionaries succeeded in the areas where the government failed to provide good education and health facilities to tribals.

No restriction

As far as laws relating to conversion are concerned, the British rulers in India never imposed any restriction on the right to propagate one's religion and converting others. But outside British India, the number of Hindu princely states did enact anti-conversion laws. Among these the prominent laws were Rajgarh State Conversion Act 1936, the Patna Freedom of Religion Act, 1942, the Sarguja State Apostasy Act 1945, and the Udaipur State Anti-Conversion Act 1946. Similar legislation was promulgated in Bikaner, Jodhpur, Kalahandi and Kota. It is interesting to observe that no parallel laws were enacted in the princely states ruled by the Muslims, e.g., Hyderabad, Rampur and Junagarh.

In 1954 a Congress member moved in Parliament the Indian Converts Regulation and Registration Bill providing for compulsory licensing of the missionaries and for registration of conversion with government functionaries. It was opposed mainly by Christians, the Bill was eventually dropped at the behest of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1960 another Bill was introduced in Parliament — the Backward Communities (Religion Protection) Bill — aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to "non Indian" religions which, as per the Bill, included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. It was soon rejected by Parliament for its apparent

affront on specific religious faiths. No further attempt in this direction was made in Parliament till 1979, when the House witnessed the introduction and an imminent fall of a "Freedom of Religion Bill" seeking official curbs on inter-religious conversion, which was opposed among others by the minorities com-

mission. During 1967-68, two Indian states — Orissa and Madhya Pradesh — enacted local laws called Freedom of Religion Acts. Ten years later a similar law was enacted in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The three state laws on conversion have more or less identical provisions. They prohibit conversion by force, allurement, inducement and fraud — defining conversion as "renouncing one religion and adopting another".



mission.

They, thus, apply to all cases of change of religions. Contravention of the Act is a cognisable offence punishable with imprisonment, fine or both. Those who convert a person — by performing or participating in the necessary ceremony — are required to send an intimation of conversion to the District Magistrate of the locality. Failure to do so is also a cognisable offence as per these laws. The fact which the people like Parveen Togadia and others in Sangh Parivar do not want to see is that these laws are more stringent than these laws but have been passed merely to achieve political goals.

Offence

In support of anti-conversion laws the Sangh Parivar approvingly refers to the Supreme Court judgment of 1977 in *Rev. Stanislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh*, in which it held that Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 and Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 are valid and not ultra vires the Constitution of India even though both these Acts were an hindrance in propagation of one's religion. It was held that right to propagate does not mean right to convert. Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney General of India, had favoured the need for a review of the above decision. The decision clearly denies freedom of conscience. Justice Hidayatullah also expressed his doubts about the correctness of this decision and suggested that the judgment deserves reconsideration and Justice Mathew, observed that all considerations applicable to freedom of speech and expression Article 19(1) (a) are applicable to right to propagate.

The right to propagate one's idea is inherent in the concept of speech and expression. Two vital facts must be kept in mind. First, the verdict was given in an era when judicial activism was still in its infancy and, secondly, today since the apex court has given a very liberal interpretation to other fundamental rights, the highly restrictive meaning given to the word "propagation" in the 1977 case is certainly not in tune with the emerging human rights jurisprudence of the apex court and, therefore, the judgment must be reviewed sooner than later.

Conscience

Thus it is clear that all anti-conversion Acts truly deny the freedom of conscience because freedom of religion has no meaning without freedom of conscience and the freedom of conscience is the freedom to choose between competing values. The Sangh Parivar organisations are working hard to win back converted Christian and Muslims to their fold. But a very serious issue to be considered is that since these organisations are against conversion and are demanding an anti-conversion law at the national level, how can they preach re-conversion. If conversion is not a part of freedom of religion as incorporated in the Indian Constitution, then by the same argument, re-conversion is also forbidden.

Justice Chinnappa Redd rightly observed in the landmark decision of the apex court that "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our constitution practices tolerance; Let's not dilute it". The conversion debate should be settled in the light of the tolerant Indian jurisprudence. The plurality and diversity of India can be maintained by showing tolerance to all religions.

It is necessary to remind our countrymen about the resurgent India that Mahatma Gandhi had dreamt of. "I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, that is, to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want to be wholly tolerant, with all religions working side by side" said Mahatma Gandhi.

(Concluded)

Savarkar millstone around Aiyar neck

Rehman
AYSWARIA VENUGOPAL

New Delhi, June 13: The BJP began it, now the Congress is being asked to inaugurate it. But there is a hitch: Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar might be requested to dedicate a memorial commissioned by his predecessor Ram Naik at Cellular Jail in Port Blair when the Andaman administration was celebrating Savarkar's birth anniversary.

Savarkar, born on May 28, 1883, was incarcerated there after he was sent on a 50-year exile by the British government.

The Congress has been boycotting all ceremonies the BJP has held to commemorate the founder of the Hindu Mahasabha and an advocate of a Hindu *rashtra*, including the unveiling of his portrait in Parliament and the Gujarat Assembly.

As recent as last month, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance stayed away from a function in the central hall of Parliament to mark the birth anniversary of Savarkar.

"The memorial is not to give preferential treatment to any particular individual but to recognise the contribution of all free-



Aiyar: Successor's burden

dom fighters," reasoned a government official in Port Blair.

The memorial with an immortal flame — on the lines of the one at Jallianwala Bagh — has been built with donation from the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), which is planning to request Aiyar to do the honours as it has been completed.

In 1998, the IOC built the memorial at Jallianwala Bagh — inaugurated by the BJP government — and soon after, set up Indian Oil Foundation to take up activities to promote heritage.

In April 2003, Naik visited Port Blair to inaugurate an LPG bottling plant in Hope Town as the authorities were winding up the celebration of Savarkar's birth anniversary. He visited the historic Cellular Jail, a national memorial, and announced the building of a memorial.

The Indian Oil Foundation, of which he was the ex-officio chairman by virtue of being the Union minister for petroleum and natural gas, decided to undertake its construction.

Mumbai architect-artist Uttam Pacharne has designed the memorial. "We called several designers and architects to come up with plans. Pacharne's design was selected as the best aesthetically as it had an Indian look with its bronze casting to withstand all weather and a canopy to shield the flame," said Indian Oil officials. The flame will be kept alight at all times with the help of six LPG cylinders kept in a room nearby and connected to the memorial with a pipeline.

Sectarian violence erupts in Indonesia, 10 die

Ambon (Indonesia), April 25 (Reuters): At least 10 people were killed and nearly 90 wounded today as Muslim and Christian residents of the eastern Indonesian city of Ambon fought pitched street battles, police said.

"The victims are 98 in total, 10 of whom are dead," Moluccas provincial police chief Brigadier-General Bambang Sutrisno said by telephone.

He did not say how the victims had died. "We are still trying to control the situation."

A church and a UN office were torched in the clashes as mobs rampaged through a majority Christian area of the provincial capital of the Moluccas province, witnesses said.

Gunfire and explosions could be heard in several parts of the city. It was not clear who was firing and the mobs were using mostly stones and knives.

Thousands of people were killed in the Moluccas during nearly three years of sectarian conflict before a peace deal was agreed in early 2002.

Civil emergency curbs were only lifted last year.

Today's clashes began after police arrested and then released a number of people for trying to raise the banned flag of a little known and mostly Christian rebel group, the South Moluccas Republic movement.

About 200 police reinforcements are expected to arrive early tomorrow, provincial governor Karel Albert Ralahalu said. The governor, quoted by local radio, said violence was not

sectarian but between independence supporters and their opponents.

Jakarta-based El Shinta radio reported two people had been killed.

Novi Pinontuan, editor of the *Suara Maluku* newspaper in Ambon, said he had seen a church and a local UN coordinating office in flames and that hundreds of people were rampaging through parts of the city. "The office and four UN cars were in flames," he said.

Caroline Tupamahu, the

Revisin

United Nations Development Programme officer in charge in Ambon, said no staff had been injured and only two local security guards had been at the office.

Residents said police fired shots in the air in an effort to break up the clashes.

Some 85 per cent of Indonesia's 220 million people are Muslim.

In some eastern areas, however, the Christian and Muslim populations are about equal in size.



Troops move into the Ambon city main road on Sunday. (AFP)

Agra cleric's fatwa against
Vande Mataram

VIEW

It is a symbol of the
nation, respect it

It is an old debate revisited. Ever since Vande Mataram became part of the national psyche, it has been accused of being anti-Muslim. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote the first two stanzas of the poem in the 1870s and later incorporated it into *Anandmath*. It was set to tune by Rabindranath Tagore and soon became an essential feature of the Congress sessions. The song caught the imagination of the country and translations appeared in most Indian languages. The harmony was broken when Vande Mataram was used as a war cry by Hindu fundamentalists in the 1920s. In the 1930s, the Muslim League demanded that the song should not be propagated for it spread hatred for Muslims and was idolatrous. The controversy kept popping up even after independence.

It is high time we depoliticise the song. To listen to Vande Mataram in the context of the pre-Independence era is to bring in the baggage of Partition politics. The only people who would benefit out of such historicisation would be fundamentalists, both Hindu and Muslim. Vande Mataram is now a symbol of the Indian nation state. Not to acknowledge it is tantamount to an assault on the concept of the modern Indian state. The charge that it is idolatrous does not stand the ground. The mother invocation is only a literary device to give a concrete shape to the concept of nationalism, otherwise an abstract and alien idea in the 19th century India. In the 1930s, Tagore said the song has acquired a separate individuality and an inspiring significance, with nothing in it to offend any sect or community; that holds true even now. Acts like the recent fatwa by an Agra cleric would only aggravate notions of Islam as an exclusionist religion. Outside the purview of its hoary history, Vande Mataram remains a beautiful invocation to the country. That is how it needs to be seen. Not for the sake of the song, but for the well-being of the nation.

COUNTERVIEW

The song cannot
escape its history

It is fatuous to take the position that the Muslim cleric erred in lashing out against Vande Mataram. Rabindranath Tagore might have set the first two stanzas of Bankim Chandra's poem to music, but the flow of history has robbed Vande Mataram of its innocence. Even Tagore agreed that the novel *Anandmath* was anti-Muslim in tenor. Which is probably why he wanted the song treated as an entity in itself. The verse invokes not just the natural beauty of 'mother' India but also the 'shakti' of Goddess Durga. This aspect opened it to misuse by Hindu extremists. The song was irredeemably maimed in the Calcutta riots, when Hindus used Vande Mataram as a war cry. Tagore's music died in the clash of spears and swords.

Today, the Bharatiya Janata Party is trying to appropriate all symbols of Hindu nationalism, in an attempt to reconstruct the liberal nationalism of the Congress. It has succeeded in the absence of a Gandhian current in Indian politics to contest its claim. Therefore, whether one likes it or not, Vande Mataram adorns the cultural stable of the Hindu right and this is a context that cannot be overlooked. Indeed, Vande Mataram's use as a weapon against Muslims goes back to the stormy days of Partition when the Hindu Mahasabha, among others, raised the slogan: *Is desh mein rehna hoga, vande mataram gana hoga*. In this grim scenario, it seems unreasonable to expect Muslim leaders to make an objective assessment of the song. Today, the identity and lives of Indian Muslims are under threat like never before. The sangh parivar and even 'moderates' like Atal Behari Vajpayee believe that Muslims should culturally adjust to the majority to be accepted. Any assertion of their identity through their own symbols or rejection of Hindu forms is not tolerated these days. Yet people choose to call Muslims obscurantist if they oppose a history of subjugation in the name of a poem.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 MAR 2014

SC bar on public tandava

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, March 11: The Supreme Court today ruled that performing "tandava dance" in public is not a "fundamental right to religion and religious practices" as guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution.

The "practice of tandava dance in public" is not "an essential part of" religious practice, said the court, thus upholding a Calcutta police commissioner's order of nearly two decades ago that denied Ananda Margis permission to perform the dance in public.

"There is no need to look into any other arguments advanced before us" for determining whether tandava could be allowed as a "fundamental right to a religious practice", the three-judge bench said.

As a result, not only Ananda Margis, but a sect or sub-sect of the Hindu religious group, too, cannot make a similar claim.

Justice A.R. Lakshmanan, however, disagreed with the majority ruling of Justices S. Rajendra Babu and G.P. Mathur.



Ananda Margis at their ashram in Purulia. File picture

His separate dissenting judgment said tandava dance was a religious practice and duly covered under the Constitution's fundamental-rights chapter as it was essentially an integral part of Hinduism among the followers of Shiva (Shaivites).

The instant case began in 1990 following a running battle between the Ananda Margis and the Bengal government since the

1980s. A similar writ in the Supreme Court in 1987 was answered in the negative.

Writing the verdict for the majority, Justice Babu observed that the Ananda Marga order was founded in 1955 and the tandava dance was introduced as a practice in 1966.

"Even without the practice of tandava dance, Ananda Marga order was in existence. There-

fore, tandava dance is not the 'core' upon which Ananda Margi order is founded," the judges said.

The Ananda Marga "code" called the Carya Carya did not initially stipulate tandava as an essential rite and a later addition could not be construed as an "essential and integral part", the majority judgment said.

The only test, it said, was to determine whether doing away with a practice added in a religion would alter or change the religion's basic character.

The apex court further said Ananda Marga is a religious denomination of the Shaivite order, a known segment of Hindu religion.

The dissenting judge, without ordering payment, said "it is a fit case for awarding exemplary cost to the respondents (Ananda Margis)" and laid down nine regulations for religious processions in public.

He barred participants from carrying weapons, using loud powder, obstructing traffic, and raising objectionable, illegal or provocative slogans.

Fatwa for praising Vande Mataram

HTC and Agencies
Agra, March 10

FIFTY-FOUR MUSLIMS were excommunicated and their marriages nullified by a local *Mufti* after they reportedly said that singing the *Vande Mataram* was not un-Islamic.

While issuing the *fatwa*, Mufti Abdul Quddus Rumi declared that singing of the national song "would lead them (Muslims) to hell."

It was wrong for Muslims to sing *Vande Mataram*, the Mufti said, adding those advocating the song were deviating from the religion. The *fatwa* also nullifies the wedding of those excommunicated.

Muslims who made statements in favour of the national song should offer prayers to renew their faith in Islam and remarry according to Islamic rites, he said.

Among those excommunicated were Mutwallis of the Loha Mandi and Shah-eed Nagar mosques, where a group of pro-BJP Muslims had said that the song praised the motherland and did not mask any religious sentiments.

Of the 54 people who were excommunicated, 13 had sought forgiveness. Meanwhile, alleging Congress hand in the matter,

'Polluted mindset'

THE VHP reacted to the *fatwa* saying it reflected a "polluted mindset." "The *fatwa* by fundamentalists against *Vande Mataram* is a reflection of their polluted mindset," VHP vice-president Giriraj Kishore said.

"Worshipping the mother is not prohibited in any religion," he said, pointing out the song had inspired umpteen revolutionaries during the freedom struggle," Kishore added.

HTC, Agra

the BJP condemned the excommunication. "Nothing could be more fundamentalist and foolish. We strongly condemn the action," BJP spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra said.

He said the Congress engineered the Mufti's action and "we should understand that *Vande Mataram* is not performing of puja but paying respect to the motherland."

"The entire nation, including Muslims, has been singing A.R. Rahman's *Maa Tujhe Salaam*. Saluting the motherland cannot be un-Islamic. "In fact, it goes with Islamic ethos".

13 MAR 2004

Turner as *Shakti* irks British Hindus

LONDON, March 7. — A section of the 1.3 million strong Hindus in UK are up in arms against a proposal to star Tina Turner, the rock star, as an Indian goddess in a new British film production.

Turner is slated to portray *Shakti*, the symbol of female power and energy, in *The Goddess*, a film to be made by Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, the Anglo-Indian duo best known for *A Room With A View*, *Howards End* and *The Remains Of The Day*, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported.

Hindu organizations in Britain are threatening to picket cinemas that show the film, claiming that Turner's sexually charged stage image is inappropriate for the role.

Mr Hasmukh Shah, the chairman of the VHP UK said: "These people would not dare to portray anything to do with Islam, but Hindus are easy targets for them. Our liberal attitude is taken for granted and our tolerance is exploited. But when pushed, Hindus will become intolerant".

Hindu Human Rights, another UK-based Hindu organization, is circulating a petition to be presented to Merchant-Ivory Productions condemning the film.

It criticized the choice of Turner because of her



Ismail Merchant and James Ivory are planning to cast Tina Turner as *Shakti* in their new production, *The Goddess*.

reputation as a sex symbol. "We have no quarrel with Turner as such, but because of her reputation as a 'sex icon' it is improper to cast her."

Turner (65) has already toured India to steep herself in its culture. In the film, she will sing Indian classical songs in English, Latin and Sanskrit composed by Zakir Hussain. She is also learning classical dance for the

According to the report, Turner said: "India is special to me, and I hope I can do the role some justice." Merchant has defended the choice of Turner. "Shakti is the center of female energy, and anyone who has seen Tina Turner on stage knows that the energy she radiates is incredible." — PTI

Judeo converts 212 tribals

Priya Ranjan Sahu
Jharsuguda, March 4

DILIP SINGH Judeo organised a *gharwapsi* programme on Thursday in which 212 tribals from 53 families were 'reconverted'. Last seen on videotape taking bribe and then shuttling to and from the CBI office for interrogation, the ousted Union minister was seen on the day washing the feet of tribals — mostly from Jharsuguda and Sundergarh districts — at the VHP function.

"A total of 53 families, 50 of Sundergarh and three of Jharsuguda, returned to the Hindu fold today," said Achutananda Kar, organising secretary of VHP, Orissa.

After the *suddhi* (purification) ceremony, the 're-

converted' tribals vowed to protect Hinduism. Many of them said they had converted to Christianity after marrying Christian girls. "For a long time I have wanted to return to my fold," said Lalindra Panna. But several tribals told *Hindustan Times* that they had never been Christians in the first place. Some said they had been reconverted several times at other places.

When Judeo was caught on the tape with his hands in the till, he justified it by saying that he needed the money for his reconversion programme. This function is thus widely seen as a bid at political rehab by the disgraced BJP leader, who is angling for a poll ticket.



Judeo washes the feet of a tribal at the function.

Scholars fault Mel Gibson's 'passion'

JERUSALEM, FEB. 25. Mel Gibson's portrayal of the final 12 hours of Jesus in his film, *The Passion of the Christ*, has been hailed as the gospel truth by some believers, but many scholars complain that it is riddled with historical errors.

Their complaints range from inaccuracies about hairstyles and clothes to a lack of gospel context in the film, which has raised a furore among Jewish groups who fear its graphic depiction of the crucifixion will fan anti-Jewish violence. Gibson, who has denied the film is anti-Semitic, has said he consulted scholars, theologians, priests and spiritual writers before scripting the film with the aim of making Jesus's agony during the crucifixion appear as realistic as possible.

Many Christians see the film as bringing them closer to their religion. Evangelical preacher Billy Graham called the film "a lifetime of sermons in one movie."

Gibson, a traditionalist Catholic who funded the \$25-million film himself, was so set on making it authentic that he had his characters speak Latin and Aramaic.

Experts said this was his first mistake as Greek was the language spoken in Jerusalem during Jesus's time, along with Aramaic and some Hebrew spoken by Jews.

"Jesus talking to (Pontius) Pilate and Pilate to Jesus in Latin!" exclaimed John Dominic Crossan, a professor of religious studies at the Chicago-based Roman Catholic De Paul University. "I mean in your dreams. It would have been Greek."

Latin was reserved for official decrees or used by the elite. Most Roman centurions in the Holy Land spoke Greek rather than Latin, historians and archaeologists said.

The mistakes, experts said, did not stop with the wrong language, which Mr. Crossan — who speaks Latin — said was so badly pronounced in the film that it was almost incomprehensible.

"He has a long-haired Jesus... Jesus didn't have long hair," said physical anthropologist Joe Zias, who has studied hundreds of skeletons found in archaeological digs in Jerusalem. "Jewish men back in antiquity did not have long hair."

"The Jewish texts ridiculed long hair as something Roman

or Greek," said New York University's Lawrence Schiffman. Along with extensive writings from the period, experts also point to a frieze on Rome's Arch of Titus, erected after Jerusalem was captured in AD 70 to celebrate the victory, which shows Jewish men with short hair taken into captivity.

Erroneous depictions of Jesus in western art have often misled film-makers in their portrayal of Jesus, experts said.

For some scholars the errors go beyond language or hairstyles.

They said the heart of the problem was the film's script, which interweaves the literal interpretation of four sometimes contradictory gospel accounts of Jesus' last 12 hours with the visions of a controversial 19th century nun.

"This is my version of what happened, according to the gospels and what I wanted to show," Gibson told the U.S. television network, ABC, this month.

But Mr. Crossan complained that the lack of historical context was the movie's "basic flaw."

The film begins not when Jesus enters Jerusalem to the exuberant welcome of thousands of Jews but rather at night in a garden on the eve of the crucifixion when he is arrested by the Romans after being betrayed by Judas.

"Why did they need a traitor? Why did they need the night? Why didn't they grab him in the daytime," Mr. Crossan asked. "Because they did not want a riot," he said, explaining that Jesus was immensely popular among his fellow Jews, which is

why the high priests and Romans felt threatened by him. Those details, he said, were absent in the film. "The lack of context is the most devastating thing for anyone who says it (the film) is faithful to the gospels because the gospels have the context."

One of the most controversial aspects of the film is its portrayal of Pilate reluctantly sentencing Jesus to crucifixion under pressure from a bullying mob and conniving Jewish priests. Scholars acknowledge that the scene is faithful to the gospels, but some experts said a historical perspective was imperative.

"It is important to see the historical context. Not only for the sake of being true to history but for the sake of being true to the gospel passages themselves," said Father Michael McGarry, rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem.

The gospels, he said, were written many years after the crucifixion at a time when the early Christians felt it would be politically wise to "soften Pontius Pilate as a way of placating" the Romans who ruled over them. "Pontius Pilate was a very cruel and brutal man."

And he wouldn't care two winks about executing another Jew. He had killed so many before him," said Father McGarry, who said he had not seen the film and was commenting only on the history of the time. Crucifixion was a common punishment meted out by the Romans to rebellious Jews during Jesus's time.

The Romans crucified so many Jews, said Mr. Zias, that "eventually they ran out of

crosses and they ran out of space."

The depiction of the crucifixion was the part of the film most riddled with errors for Mr. Zias, who studied the skeleton of a crucified Jewish man from Jesus's time — the only remains ever found of a crucified victim from antiquity.

He said Jesus would not have carried the entire cross to the crucifixion as vertical beams were kept permanently in place by the ever-efficient Romans.

"Nobody was physically able to carry the thing (the entire cross). It weighed about 159 kg," Mr. Zias said. "He (Jesus) carried the cross-beam, maximum."

Nor would Jesus have worn a loincloth in the crucifixion as did actor James Caviezel, who portrayed him in the film. "Crucifixion was a form of state terror."

They humiliated the crucified victim. Everybody was naked. Men, women and children," Mr. Zias said.

Jesus, he added, would have been tied or nailed to the cross through the wrists, not the hands as shown in the film. "You cannot crucify a person through the hands because there is nothing there but skin and muscle. It will tear."

Brushing off criticism of inaccuracies, Gibson has said he found contradictory opinions among the experts he consulted. "Since the experts cancelled each other out, I was thrown back on my own resources to weigh the different arguments and decide for myself," he said in an interview. — Reuters

A penchant for pendants

SANTA ANA (CALIFORNIA), FEB. 25. *The Passion of the Christ* not only has people debating the last hours of Jesus' life, but also running out to buy such souvenirs as crucifixes, lapel pins and cards tied to the film's promotion.

A particularly popular item is a pendant fashioned from a single nail made of pewter and attached to a leather strap, say officials of Bob Siemon Designs, which is licensed by Gibson's Icon Productions to produce jewellery tied to the

film. The pendants represent the nails used in the film to fasten Christ to the cross.

"This thing has turned into this kind of overnight phenomenon that we can't believe," Mr. Siemon said. He said his staff is working 10- to 14-hour shifts six days a week to keep Christian bookstores supplied with the pendants, crucifixes and other items.

The company has shipped roughly 75,000 cross pendants and about the same amount of nail pendants, said Dwight

Robinson, the company's marketing manager.

The nail pendant costs about \$17 and contains scaled-down versions of the nails seen in the film.

It was designed by M Siemon, himself a Catholic who said he came up with the idea after seeing a preview of the movie.

"It's the new symbol of the Christian," he said. "It's just a way of identifying perhaps starting a conversation with someone." — AP

France House votes for scarf ban

Paris, Feb. 10 (Reuters): An overwhelming majority of France's National Assembly voted today to ban religious emblems in state schools, a measure Paris wants to keep tensions between Muslim and Jewish minorities out of public classrooms.

Deputies voted 494 to 36 to ban Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses from state schools and threaten pupils who insisted on wearing them with expulsion. It was not clear whether Paris would also ban Sikh turbans, which the 5,000-strong Sikh community in the Paris area says are not religious but practical coverings for their uncut hair.

The government insists the ban does not single out any religion, but cabinet ministers admit its main targets are the Islamic headscarves and anti-Semitic remarks from Muslim pupils that teachers say have become more frequent in recent years. "What is at issue here is the clear affirmation that public

school is a place for learning and not for militant activity or proselytism," Assembly speaker Jean-Louis Debre said.

This was the first reading of the Bill, which must go to the Senate and then back to the National Assembly for final approval in mid-March, which should now be only a formality. The key passage of the law, which schools would apply from September, reads: "In primary and secondary state schools, wearing signs and clothes that conspicuously display the pupil's religious affiliation is forbidden."

The issue goes to the heart of France's self-image as a secular state that keeps faith out of state schools and services to ensure no religion dominates or suffers discrimination. The ban has wide public support but leaders of France's five million Muslims call it discriminatory. It has provoked criticism from Islamic and Christian leaders abroad, including Pope John Paul. Before the vote,

education minister Luc Ferry said France had witnessed a "spectacular rise in racism and anti-Semitism in the last three years" and the ban would help to keep classes from dividing up into "militant religious communities." The ban would also make clear pupils must follow the full official curriculum and cannot object to or skip classes for religious reasons, he said.

Teachers have complained in recent years of problems with Muslim pupils who interrupt history classes to deny the Nazis slaughtered Jews; boycott classes on human reproduction, saying they are immodest; or refuse to attend physical education.

They have also reported that Muslim pupils sometimes repeat anti-Semitic themes they see on Arabic satellite television. Jewish families are increasingly switching their children from state schools to private Jewish schools to avoid harassment.

SC orders Best Bakery retrial

Kelvin
B.P. 2
13/4

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 APRIL

The Narendra Modi government suffered a rude jolt on Monday when the Supreme Court, in an unprecedented step, ordered the cancellation of the acquittal of all 21 accused in the Best Bakery murder case and its retrial in a Maharashtra court.

In a judgement, which is certain to come as a big embarrassment to the BJP

on the eve of the Lok Sabha polls, a Division Bench comprising Justice Doraiswamy Raju and Justice Arijit Pasayat, while allowing appeals filed by key witness Zahira Sheikh and the state government, compared the government functionaries with modern-day "Neros" who kept looking elsewhere while innocent children and helpless

women were burnt alive. The case pertains to the Best Bakery at Vadodra, which was set ablaze by a violent mob on March 1, 2002, resulting in the death of 14 persons. Zahira Sheikh, an eye-witness to the incident, lost her family in the conflagration. Coming as it did just a week before the state goes to polls, the apex court order left the Opposition baying for Mr Modi's blood. Terming the retrial order as "a clear

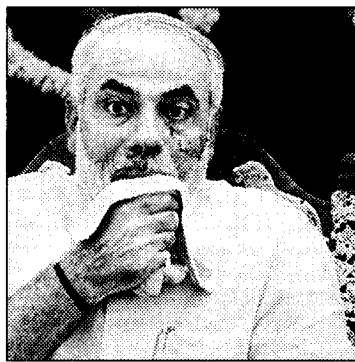
indictment of the ideology behind the massacre," the Congress immediately demanded the ouster of the Narendra Modi government.

"I would request the Prime Minister to ask Modi to resign, and if he doesn't do so, he should sack him," party spokesman Kapil Sibal told reporters here on Monday afternoon, while reminding Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the "follow-the-rajd-haram" advice rendered by him to the Gujarat chief minister in the immediate

aftermath of the riots. The demand was endorsed by the CPM. If, even after this judgement, the other BJP leaders share the dais with Mr Modi during the campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, it would mean, the Congress spokesman argued, they endorse his ideology. The BJP, for a change, went on the defensive, putting a rather feeble argu-

ment that the Supreme Court order was not an "indictment" of Modi government

"If a witness turns hostile and alleges that she has been pressurised, how can you drag the chief minister into it. The Court has merely commented on the trial and not indicted the state government. I cannot be linked to the BJP or the poll process," party spokesman Mr Arun Jaitley said on Monday.



JUDGEMENT DAY

Ram, Ram: NDA

Release 5-11-914

New Delhi: Reflecting BJP's dominance, the NDA on Thursday shed its reservations on Hindutva issues like Ram temple by favouring in its election manifesto an early and amicable solution to the Ayodhya tangle.

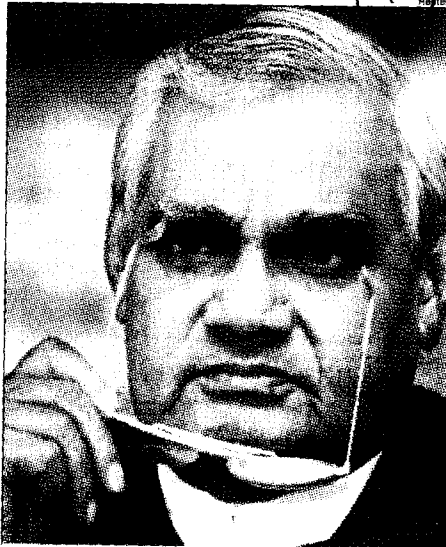
Unlike in 1998 and 1999 elections, when NDA had put Ayodhya, Article 370 and Uniform Civil Code on the backburner, the ruling coalition's agenda for 2004 advocated an early solution, saying it would strengthen national integration.

"We continue to hold that the judiciary's verdict in this matter should be accepted by all. At the same time, efforts should be intensified for dialogue and a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill," the manifesto released by PM Vajpayee said.

The other favourite issues of BJP that find their way into the document — titled "An Agenda for Development, Good Governance and Peace" — are a central law aimed at cow protection (an euphemism for banning cow slaughter), population control with an emphasis on a two-child norm and reservation for poor among the forward classes.

"The Ram temple issue is one of national concern and one cannot go ahead by ignoring it. But we have also suggested how it should be resolved... either through dialogue or a court verdict which will be acceptable to all concerned," Vajpayee told a press conference after releasing the 36-page document.

The agenda reiterated the coalition's earlier commitment to introduce a legislation to



Naidu miffed

Hyderabad: TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said his party was not consulted on Ayodhya issue being included in the NDA manifesto. Agencies

ensure that important offices are occupied only by those who are India's natural citizens by their Indian origin. Agencies

Hamas spiritual leader killed in Israeli missile attack

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● Outrage in Arab world ● U.S. appeals for calm

By Atul Aneja

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MANAMA, MARCH 22. In an early morning strike in Gaza city, Israel assassinated Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the top spiritual leader of Hamas, bringing tens of thousands of grieving and angry Palestinians into the streets and sending shockwaves throughout West Asia.

Israeli helicopter gunships fired three missiles, one of which directly hit Sheikh Yassin, who was leaving a Gaza city mosque in his wheelchair after the dawn prayers. Seven bodyguards, including Sheikh Yassin's son, were killed and at least 15 persons were wounded.

As news of the assassination of the leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement, known by its Arabic acronym, Hamas, spread, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets in Gaza, heading for his home. Protests broke out in other Palestinian areas too, resulting in clashes with Israeli soldiers. Palestinian sources said troops killed a journalist who was covering a protest in the West Bank town of Nablus. In the afternoon, tens of thousands joined a funeral procession through the streets of Gaza, jostling to touch Sheikh Yassin's coffin, which was draped in a green Hamas flag.

Senior Hamas leaders have responded with fury to the killing. "War is henceforth

open with these murderers, these criminals and these terrorists," Hamas leader, Abdal-Aziz al-Rantissi said. Mr. Rantissi condemned what he called a "war against Islam" in Palestine and Iraq and urged Muslims "to wake from their sleep, to return to reason and make the earth tremble under the feet of the Zionists (Israelis)."

The military wing of Hamas, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, vowed to avenge the killing by taking action that would be "like an earthquake." A Hamas statement said "[the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel] Sharon has opened the gates of hell."

The Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Ahmed Qureia, described Sheikh Yassin's assassination as a "cowardly act." "This is a crazy and very dangerous act. It opens the door wide to chaos. Yassin is known for his moderation and he was controlling Hamas and therefore this is a dangerous, cowardly act," he said.

Mr. Sharon justified Sheikh Yassin's assassination saying Israel had a "natural right" to pursue those who would destroy it. Mr. Sharon said Sheikh Yassin was committed to the "destruction of Israel."

Reuters, AP, PTI report:

The United States strongly denied any involvement in the assassination and appealed for calm in the region. The White House National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, said in a round of television

interviews that the U.S. did not have advance warning. "It is very important that everyone step back now and try now to be calm in the region. There is always a possibility of a better day in West Asia and some of the things being talked about by the Israelis ... might provide new opportunities," Ms. Rice said. "I would hope that nothing will be done to preclude those new opportunities from emerging," she added.

Hamas said it believed Washington had given the green light for Sheikh Yassin's assassination but Ms. Rice disagreed. She added: "Let's remember that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and that Sheikh Yassin himself has been heavily involved in terrorism." The U.S. classifies Hamas as a "terrorist" group.

Israel's opposition leader, Shimon Peres, said in Parliament that the assassination was a mistake.

A setback: Blair

The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said the killing was a "setback" for West Asia. "We recognise Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism, but equally any steps should be within international law and should be neither disproportionate nor excessive," he said.

Another report on Page 16
Editorial on Page 10

Christians, Sikhs unite against France ban

PHILIP DELVES BROUGHTON

Bobigny (France), Jan. 24: Christians from Iraq and Sikhs from India expressed outrage yesterday at French government plans to ban the wearing of religious symbols in school — a move which could force them to hide their crucifixes and swap their turbans for shower caps.

"Everything was fine until they decided to have this law," said Joseph Adlun, the head of the Association of French Assyro-Chaldeans, a Christian community which originates from ancient Mesopotamia.

"Now they're trying to create confrontations between us and other communities. We're Catholics, we acknowledge the Pope and when dealing with the state we are secular. Why are they picking on us?"

Slipping into Aramaic, the language of Christ, he summoned one of his young colleagues, Ayten Karatay, who produced a small silver cross from inside her jumper. "Can they really want to ban this?" said M Adlun. "It's ridiculous.

"In Britain if you talk about being part of a community, it's



A girl protests against France's scarf and religious symbols ban in Paris. (AP)

a good thing. In France, if you talk about your religious or ethnic community it is bad, it means you're trying to ghettoise and fracture society."

The Sikh community is similarly agitated since France's education minister, Luc Ferry, proposed that Sikh boys be banned from wearing turbans to school. He suggested they wear a transparent hat, like a shower cap.

"If they make me take off

my turban, I will not go to school," said Bikramjit Singh, 17, who was born in France. "In England, Sikh policemen can wear their turbans. In Germany, Sikhs can ride scooters without their helmets. Every other Western country respects our turban as part of our faith. I will have to finish my schooling elsewhere."

His uncle, Gurdial Singh, 50, a magnificently bearded and turbanned builder, agrees. "When I arrived in France in 1980 from India, people were very warm and friendly. They were curious about my religion. Recently, I went to the Eiffel Tower and people called me bin Laden. Now we're confused with the Muslims. We're caught in the middle of all these problems. If they try to make us remove our turbans, it will be shameful for us and for France."

Dravinder Singh, the head of the Bobigny Sikh association, said: "I would no more take off my turban in public than you would walk naked down the street. I'd prefer to leave this country than remove my turban."

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Moderate speaks up on French ban

Paris, Jan. 18 (Reuters): The official spokesman for France's Muslims urged the community's "silent majority" today to oppose fundamentalism as militants planned to step up pressure against a looming ban on Islamic headscarves in state schools.

Dalil Boubakeur, moderate head of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), said the thousands of Muslims who marched in France yesterday against the ban on all religious symbols in schools were only 0.6 per cent of the country's Muslim population.

Mohamed Latreche, controversial leader of the Paris protest, promised more protests if parliament debates the draft law next month while other small groups said they were organising a demonstration outside the National Assembly on February 7.

The ban on Muslim veils, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses, due to be made law in the coming months and imposed in September, also prompted protests in London, Brussels, Bahrain, Bethlehem, Gaza, Amman and Kashmir.

Speaking of the 5,000 protesters in Paris, Boubakeur said: "I don't think one should see this as a growth of fundamentalism, but of the organisational capacity of these minority movements."

"The big unknown now is how the silent majority, those four or five million moderate and liberal Muslims, can organise," he told the newspaper *Le Parisien*. "I urge these moderates to come out of the shadows and take their turn to speak out," he added.

Boubakeur, an ally of President Jacques Chirac, had urged Muslims not to march yesterday. Other Muslim groups stayed away to avoid being linked to Latreche, who gave a fiery speech denouncing Zionism and accusing Israel of apartheid against Arabs.

But several groups in the CFCM reject Boubakeur's moderate line. The militant Union of French Islamic Organisations (UOIF), second-largest member of the CFCM, has urged its members to protest against the looming ban.

হিন্দুত্ব নয়, উন্নত ভারত

কেন্দ্রীয় শাসক জোটের বড় তরফ ভারতীয় জনতা পার্টি কি ক্রমে ক্রমে হিন্দুত্বকে বিদায় জানাইতেছে? হায়দরাবাদে দলের জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠক চলিতেছে। অথচ সেখানে মন্দির লইয়া কোনও কথা নাই, সংখ্যালঘু তোষণ লইয়া কোনও ক্ষুদ্র উচ্চারণ নাই, পাকিস্তানের বিরুদ্ধে কোনও বিবোধকার নাই, স্বদেশি জাগরণ মঞ্চের কোনও আফালন নাই। পাঁচ বছর, এমনকী দুই বছর আগে যে বিজেপিকে দেখিতে-শুনিতে দেশবাসী অভ্যস্ত ছিলেন, তাহা হইতে সম্পূর্ণ ভিন্ন একটি দল যেন দেশ শাসনের অঙ্গীকার লইয়া হাজির। যেন বিজেপি আর সংঘ পরিবারের রাজনৈতিক বাহু নয়। যেন বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ, বজরও দল কিংবা প্রায় এস এসের জ্ঞাতিত্ব এই রাজনৈতিক দল অস্বীকার করিতেছে কিংবা নিদেনপক্ষে উপেক্ষা করিতেছে। যেন 'গর্বের সঙ্গে বলো আমি হিন্দু' এই স্লোগান হইতে শাসক গোষ্ঠী সরিয়া আসিয়া বলিতে চাহিতেছে— গর্বের সঙ্গে বলো, আমি ভারতীয়। কিংবা হিন্দুত্বকেই বিজেপি নতন করিয়া সংজ্ঞায়িত করিতে চাহিতেছে। ইহা আর কোনও সাম্প্রদায়িক ভাবনা বা গোঁড়া ধর্মীয় বোধের সহিত সম্পর্কিত নয়, ইহা এক শক্তিশালী, পরমাণু শক্তিধর, আর্থিক সংস্কারমুখী, বিশ্বের অন্যতম প্রভাবশালী রাষ্ট্র হইয়া ওঠার আকাঙ্ক্ষার সহিত যুক্ত ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ রাষ্ট্রচিন্তা। যেন বিজেপি সাম্প্রদায়িক রাজনীতি ও সমাজ-ভাবনার সংকীর্ণ পরিসরের মধ্যে আর বাঁধা থাকিতে রাজি নয়। যেন জঙ্গি হিন্দুত্বের কানা-গলি হইতে বিশ্ব-শক্তি হইয়া ওঠার উচ্চাভিলাষের উদার আকাশে ডানা মেলিবার প্রত্যাশী।

প্রক্রিয়াটি সূচিত হইয়াছিল আগেই। দলের মধ্যে অটলবিহারী বীজপেরী ছিলেন তাহার চালিকাশক্তি। তিনি ক্রমশই শাসনপ্রণালীর সহিত, ক্ষমতায়নের রাজনীতির সহিত দলকে অভ্যস্ত করাইতেছিলেন। বহুত্ববাদী গণতন্ত্রে যে বিভিন্ন দল, গোষ্ঠী ও জনসমাজের সকল অংশের কাছে গ্রহণীয় হইতে হয়, কেবল ধর্মীয় সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠের কটর অংশের সমর্থনই পর্যাপ্ত হয় না, ইহা তিনি দলকে বুঝাইতে সক্ষম হইয়াছেন। বিদেশ নীতির ক্ষেত্রেও অতীতের অনাবশ্যক জের টানিয়া অনন্ত কাল প্রতিবেশীদের সহিত বগড়াবিবাদ চালাইয়া যাওয়ার সংকীর্ণতা হইতে তিনি দেশকে মুক্ত করিতে উদ্যোগী হন। নহিলে মাত্র কয়েক মাস আগে পর্যন্ত পাকিস্তানের সীমান্তে যুদ্ধকালীন সৈন্যসমাবেশ ও সমরসজ্জায় ব্যাপ্ত রাষ্ট্রকে তিনি এমন অবলীলায় পাক রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানের সহিত শীর্ষ বৈঠকের চমকপ্রদ সাফল্যে রূপান্তরিত করিতে পারিতেন না। যখন

ভারত পাক সীমান্তে সৈন্য-সমাবেশ ঘটাইয়াছিল, তখন হইতে পাক শাসক গোষ্ঠীর মনোভাব বা অবস্থানে এমন কিছু আহামরি পরিবর্তন ঘটে নাই, যাহাতে ভারতের অবস্থানে এমন আমূল পরিবর্তন ঘটিতে পারে। পরিবর্তন এখানে বাস্তব পরিস্থিতির তত নয়, যত ভারতীয় শাসক গোষ্ঠীর বিষয়ীগত অগ্রাধিকারের, বাধ্যবাধকতার, এমনকী হৃদয়েরও।

আর্থিক অগ্রগতি, জাতীয় উৎপাদনের বৃদ্ধি, উদারনৈতিক সংস্কারের সাফল্য এবং রাজনৈতিক স্তরেও তাহার প্রতিফলন বিজেপিকে পুরাতনের বোঝা নামাইয়া রাখিয়া নূতনের আবাহনে সাহসী করিয়াছে। ক্ষমতায় থাকিতে-থাকিতেই এক ঝাঁক নূতন প্রজন্মের নেতার আবির্ভাবও এ ক্ষেত্রে সহায়ক হইয়াছে। দল ও সরকারের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পদে আসীন এই নেতাদের অনেকেই যাহাকে বলে 'মধ্যরাত্রের সন্তান', অতীতের জের টানিয়া চলা অপেক্ষা আগামীর দিকে অগ্রসর হওয়ার দৃঢ়তা যাহাদের চরিত্রলক্ষণ। সংঘ পরিবারে তাহাদের অনেকের দীক্ষা শুরু হইলেও হিন্দুত্ব লইয়া তাহাদের বিশেষ মাথাব্যথা নাই। বরং বিজেপিকে 'শাসন-পরিচালনার স্বাভাবিক দল' হিসাবে প্রতিষ্ঠা করা তাহাদের কাছে বেশি জরুরি। সেই সূত্রেই হিন্দুত্বের গোঁড়া, ধর্মীয় ও সাম্প্রদায়িক প্রকরণ হইতে তাহাদের পশ্চাদপসরণ। সেই সূত্রেই হিন্দুত্ব অপেক্ষা জাতীয়তা লইয়া তাহাদের অধিক গর্ব। এই জাতীয়তা ভারতীয়ত্ব, হিন্দুত্ব নয়। ইহার মধ্যে ওতপ্রোত রহিয়াছে ভারতীয় হইবার অহংকার, যাহা পোখরান-২ হইতে শুরু করিয়া একের পর এক দূর পাল্লার ক্ষেপণাস্ত্রের সফল পরীক্ষামূলক উৎক্ষেপণে নিহিত। এ সেই অহংকার, যাহা কোনও বিশেষ ধর্মের অনুগামী হইবার জন্য নয়, ভারত রাষ্ট্রের নাগরিক হইবার জন্য আপনাকে চরিতার্থ মনে করে। ভারতীয় গণতন্ত্রের সর্বাপেক্ষা বড় সাফল্য ইহাই যে বিজেপির মতো একটি দলকে তাহার পরিপার্শ্ব ও শিকড় হইতে উত্তরোত্তর বিচ্ছিন্ন করিয়া, তাহার পর্যায়ক্রমিক সংস্কার সাধন করিয়া ক্রমশ তাহাকে একটি ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ রাজনৈতিক সংগঠনে পরিণত করিতে পারিয়াছে, যে সংগঠন বুঝিতে শিখিতেছে যে, মন্দির-মসজিদ, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা-সাম্প্রদায়িকতা, সংখ্যাগুরু-সংখ্যালঘু, অযাধ্যা-কাশী-বারাণসী-ভোজশালা-গোরক্ষা-ধর্মাস্তর, এ সকলই শেষ বিচারে অপ্রাসঙ্গিক, মুখ্য বিচার্য একটিই: উন্নয়ন। ১৯৯৪ সালে নির্বাচনী দ্বন্দ্ব নািমিয়া প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশের (সিনিয়র) রিপাবলিকান দলের উদ্দেশে প্রতিস্পর্শী ডেমোক্রেট বিল ক্রিস্টন যেমন বলিয়াছিলেন: 'ইট'স দি ইকনমি, স্টুপিড!