

Black, and white

BJP and its Ayodhya White Paper

S. K. PANDE
in New Delhi

THE mood in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is upbeat, judging by the tone of the White Paper — its version of the Ayodhya developments. The feeling in the rank and file that after December 6, 1992, the BJP has come into its own was corroborated by its leader L. K. Advani at a press conference in New Delhi on April 18 to release the document, when he claimed: "It was because of Ayodhya and the people's perception of it that the BJP increased its voter support." Advani also claimed that the White Paper tabled by the Government was part of a campaign of calumny against the BJP, with all but a small minority of English-speaking intellectuals, the English press, and leaders of some political parties welcoming the demolition of what he called a symbol of subjugation.

In the foreword to the paper, Advani amplifies his claim. He states: "...But the kar sevaks did more. They did not just erase a symbol of our subjugation. They did not just begin building a symbol of resurgence. They showed us as if in a flash, how far we have to travel. For the country reacted in two diametrically opposite ways, as virtually two different peoples. For a handful — those in government, in political parties, and in large sections of the English press, for instance, what happened was a 'national shame', it was 'madness', it was 'barbaric'. For the rest of the country it was a liberation — a sweeping away of cobwebs. The depth of devotion to Sri Rama, the depth of anger at the recent policies, surprised me, as I said; the depth of the chasm between these two nations — the microscopic minority and the people — did not."

The 172-page document goes right on the offensive by justifying the act on the one hand and, on the other, fixing the blame on the Government. It holds P. V. Narasimha Rao responsible for the riots and the violence in Gujarat, Maharashtra and other places, with Advani charging that the televised speech by the Prime Minister on December 6 had in fact inflamed passions.

The BJP holds the courts too, however indirectly, responsible. Thus, in the very first chapter, the "battle" for Ayodhya is projected as a national movement, not just a "plea for a temple for Sri Rama", but reflecting a quest for "national identity". To quote: "The movement is firmly rooted in the inclusive and assimilative cultural heritage of India. It represents the soul of the nationalistic thrust of our freedom movement." Presenting the results of the 1989 and 1991 elections as a mandate for construction of the temple, it argues that Indian culture is basically Hindu, given its 5,000-year line of continuity despite the influence of other cultural streams. It argues that after the death of Sardar Patel, the policy was turned around and secularism was distorted into vote-bank politics.

Chapter two speaks of "the revengeless Hindu struggle for Ram Janmabhoomi" undertaken in three

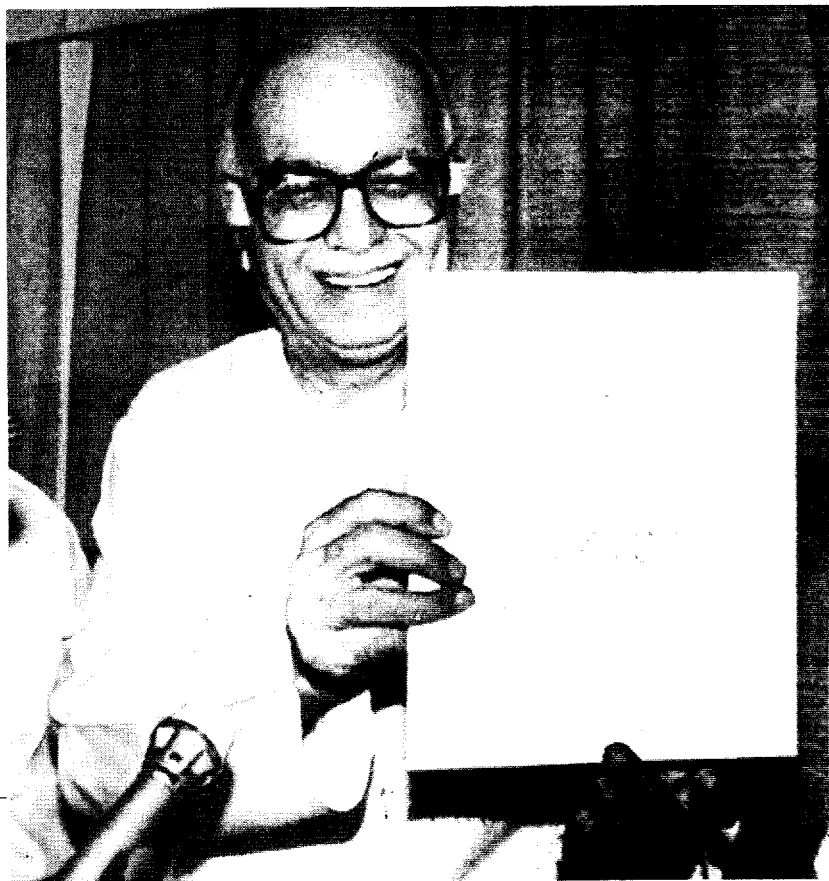
phases: first, by military expedition and war diplomacy when "barbaric aliens" were ruling the country and there was no rule of law; second, by legal means when the British established their model of rule of law (from 1885); and third, by mass movement from 1984 (supported by legal measures) when the rule of law became insensitive to legitimate pleas even under indigenous dispensation.

"...This movement was conceived in 1983," the document states, when at a meeting in Muzaffarnagar attended among others by Gulzarilal Nanda, Prof. Rajendra Singh and Dau Dayal Khanna, the question of the "liberation" of Ram Janmabhoomi was raised. Following this the first Dharma Sansad was organised on April 7-8, 1984, in Delhi.

The document states that a mass movement then led to the opening of the gates of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid by a court order on Feb-

L. K. Advani releasing the White Paper in New Delhi...
obsessed with political power.

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stages, monitors flight safety observances by pilots, management and the NAA.

Indian Airlines itself has several subdivisions. There is the management which writes the operations manual and has it approved by the DGCA. The management has been responsible for the widespread violation of the manual's provisions. Pilots were virtually coerced to fly ignoring the provisions of the manual to ensure the airline did not stop operations. Last year when the pilots decided to 'fly by the book' there were large-scale disruptions as many airports were considered too dangerous to fly even by the management's own reckoning. Till date IA and the DGCA have done nothing to change the manual or ensure that its provisions are followed.

The commercial staff, which books passengers and baggage, is also an important factor in safe flying. It is they who see what loads are put on aircraft and ensure that the number of passengers and baggage booked conforms to the climatic conditions of the airport. All that the pilot gets is a 'trim sheet' which outlines the basic information on the flight and its destination.

The pilot is the last and, in a way, the most important link; thus pilot is also the one who gets blamed for any

snapping of the chain. Inquiry committees find 'pilot error' to be the most frequent cause of crashes, but this is the final error that causes the accident and not always the primary one. It takes all these segments of the aviation world to work together to keep an airline running safely. Therefore, crashes ought to be looked as 'systems failures' rather than as isolated events.

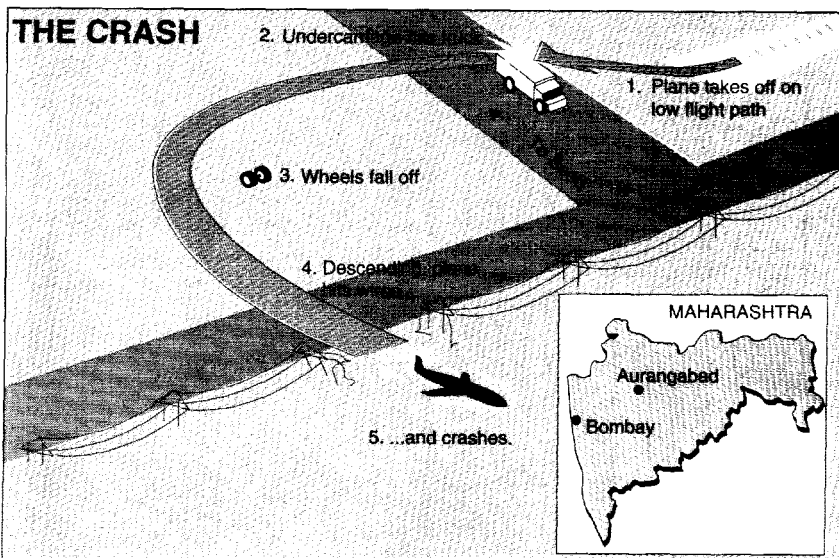
According to a flight safety specialist, Indian aviation operates in a less-than-ideal environment. Airstrips do not have safety margins for aircraft over or under-shooting, many are not equipped with basic landing aids, and the climatic conditions are at various times and places hot, humid and dusty all of which degrade the performance of the aircraft systems. The management is poor and pilots suffer from low morale.

All this reduce the margins of safety and enhance the risks. There is, therefore, all the more need for the Government to ensure that these subsystems work well and that procedures designed to ensure safety are adhered to strictly.

The Union Government is responsible for legislation that govern flying. Naturally, while the statutes are of 'international standards' the implementation is Indian. Then, there

is the blatant disregard for norms. Ministry officials, who are members of the Indian Airlines Board, have been party to the pilots flying outside the operations manual norms. In a sense the Government is part of a conspiracy to prevent safe flying to ensure that the carrier it owns — Indian Airlines — makes profits. Last year when air taxi services were permitted, the Government passed a law insisting that air taxis would not be allowed to operate Boeing 737s which were more than 20 years old or which had done more than 45,000 cycles of take off and landings. Yet the IA aircraft that crashed at Aurangabad had 65,000 cycles to its credit. "You are compromising when it suits you," charges one frustrated pilot.

Now an inquiry commission will sit. It will find out *what* happened not *why*. 'Pilot error' may once again be the verdict. "This is always construed as error or carelessness with total disregard to the psychological state of the mind of the pilot," says a retired IA pilot. In the present conditions, he says IA pilots are demoralised and frustrated. "Their relations with the management are for all to see," he notes, "and these factors are not conducive to good flying. ■



and his son by the scars from an accident."

On April 27, three of the 12 critically injured were brought to Bombay for treatment. At Bombay's Santa Cruz airport, those waiting to claim the bodies of their relatives had their misery compounded by red tape at the coroner's court.

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There were also others who escaped possible death by obeying their instinct. S. Ganeshan, vice-president of Garware Polyesters, was one of nine persons offloaded from the Aurangabad-Bombay flight of April 25 (Sunday) because, according to airline authorities, the plane was "old" and could not have taken off with a heavy load in the heat. They were instead offered seats on Monday's flight.

But watching the beat-up aircraft on the tarmac, Ganeshan felt that perhaps it might be safer not to fly that plane after all. So, rather than wait for Monday's flight, he took a taxi and reached Bombay, blissfully unaware of the tragedy. ■

S. B. Mulherkar, including his wife and two children, perished in the mishap. Mulherkar, 42, a jovial, soft-spoken person, had just a few days earlier said that he wanted to go on a holiday after his daughter finished her examinations.

Many of the relatives had a hard time identifying the charred bodies at the hospital in Aurangabad. An employee of Siyaram Industries said: "We identified our chairman (Mahabir-prasad Poddar) by the gold chain with the Rani Sati emblem around his neck,

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ruary 1, 1986, adding that the speed with which the court acted in this case was in complete contrast to the tardiness of the judicial process as a whole.

Special mention is made of the November 7, 1989, order of the Special Bench of the Allahabad High Court in Lucknow in which the judges had commented: "It is doubtful that some of the questions involved in the suits are soluble by judicial process." In June 1989, the BJP lent support to the movement and made an electoral commitment to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The White Paper charges that the efforts to solve the Ayodhya issue by legislative measures were thwarted by judicial proceedings.

The BJP presents its own version of several meetings held by the Home Minister with leaders of the temple movement and others during April 1987 and May 1989. It also says that a committee of Ministers headed by P. V. Narasimha Rao was set up on April 27, 1987, to suggest ways of solving the issue.

The third chapter touches on evidence and dialogue. It states: "An analysis by Sh. Arun Shourie of the evidence presented during the 1990-91 negotiations shows that the VHP's (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) evidence was consistent and convincing while that of the AIBMAC (All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee) succeeded only in proving the case of VHP." It goes on to say: "The Marxist historians who were supporting the AIBMAC in the negotiations could not find any flaw in VHP's evidence and hence refused to turn up for the final meeting." The document charges that the AIBMAC and the Marxist historians shifted their stand and demanded a different kind of proof every time the VHP presented "clinching" evidence of the existence of a temple, and that a stone inscription recovered from the debris of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid structure is the "ultimate proof".

Further, the document charges that the Ayodhya Cell set up by the Narasimha Rao Government had held the VHP evidence to be irrefutable and had come to the conclusion that according to the Shariat as well as the practice in Muslim countries, a mosque could be shifted. It then goes on to criticise the Government for not acting on these findings.

Assessing the part played by previous governments, the document comes up with the following:

► The Government under Rajiv Gandhi responded only when there was a deadline. Rajiv Gandhi also tried to adopt the theme of Rama by starting his 1989 election campaign from

Ayodhya and promising "Rama Rajya".

► V. P. Singh had set a time limit of four months for the solution of the dispute but instead of making honest efforts to solve the problem, he tried to derive political advantage from the issue by trying to obtain an agreement between the sants and the moulvis by excluding the BJP.

► The present Prime Minister is familiar with the issue as he was chairman of a group of Ministers constituted by the Rajiv Gandhi Government to go into the issue.

► Official summaries of action taken by the previous governments show that the main concern was to keep Muslim leaders in good humour.

► The conduct of the Chandra Shekhar Government was straightforward, but negotiations were interrupted due to the fall of his Government.

The document accuses Syed Shahabuddin of thwarting a bid for an amicable solution by Shia leader Prince Anjum Quder. It accuses Narasimha Rao of delaying the dialogue between the VHP and the AIBMAC; using the dialogue as a means of marking time with no clear purpose; using different and independent channels and circulating different proposals without the intention of owning up to these; attempting to divide the Ayodhya movement by weaning away some of the sants; holding back the evidence collected by the Ayodhya Cell; and taking public positions that showed the Government to be clearly and overtly anti-temple.

The document states that during negotiations the Prime Minister gave signals to Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and Sharad Pawar that he was interested only in the continuation of the dialogue and not in its fruitful conclusion. It says different proposals were floated through former President R. Venkataraman, Environment Minister Kamal Nath, three journalists, and intelligence officials but these were later disowned by the Prime Minister. Attempts were also made through Chandraswami and other emissaries from the movement.

Claiming that relations with the Prime Minister deteriorated as he started referring to the structure as a mosque, the document states that a number of meetings were held with Narasimha Rao and his advisers during November-December 1992 but these were a farce as he had already decided to thwart the kar seva and to go for confrontation. It further charges that the Central Government sought an alibi from the Supreme Court to intervene but failed in its attempts to be ap-

pointed the "receiver" of the structure.

The BJP charges that as a last ditch effort to provide a safe outlet for the aspirations of the kar sevaks, a member of the BJP's national council met Naresh Chandra, Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister, on December 5, 1992, and obtained an understanding that the Centre would support an application to be moved that day by the Government of U.P. to request the High Court to deliver at least the operative part of the judgment. The Centre's counsel, however, did not turn up in court.

The document states that the demolition of the mosque was a spontaneous reaction and that it was not planned. It claims that the kar sevaks, who had shown remarkable restraint in the past, had been provoked into demolishing the mosque. Further, it claims that the demolition took place not in spite of the court orders or Narasimha Rao's actions but "precisely because of them".

While the culturally anglicised elite of the country condemned the demolition as a "national shame," the ordinary people had welcomed it, the document claims, adding that this indicates the strength of the Ayodhya movement. The fact that the Prime Minister had termed the demolished structure a mosque was responsible for the riots and the adverse reaction from some Muslim nations, it claims. In clear and outright defence of its stand, it states that kar seva was carried out during President's rule. As for the subsequent riots, it claims that the clashes were not between Hindus and Muslims, but between Muslims and the police.

The Government was pressured by Arjun Singh to vilify the BJP, it claims. However, the BJP sees in the Government's White Paper four factors that, it alleges, only serve to indict the Prime Minister and endorse the BJP and the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh): one, the fact that the White Paper refutes the Prime Minister's charge of conspiracy; two, its admission that the structure was not being used as a mosque; three, the sustained reference to "disputed structure" and not to "mosque"; and four, the statement that the focus of the Ayodhya movement from October 1991 was to start construction of the temple on the land acquired by the U.P. Government while leaving the structure intact.

The BJP, in fact, admits that 1994 could have been the deadline for the Muslim leadership either to agree to the shifting of the structure or to accept it through legislative pressure or

A tale of two white papers

N. RAM

THE two White Papers on Ayodhya, one by the BJP and the other by the Central Government, are documents of justification, rationalisation and partial cover-up of the indefensible. The first basically justifies the systematically planned act of vandalising and demolishing a place of worship as a project of communal political mobilisation which it seeks to present in pseudo-nationalist colours. The second basically justifies, and partially covers up, the criminal dereliction of duty involved at the top in facilitating this outrage against secularism, the rule of law and civilised social values.

Motives are arguable: *actions* which led up to, or facilitated, the demolition of December 6, 1992 are not. Objectively speaking, it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the authors of the two White Papers, the BJP-RSS high command and the Central Government, have been partners in an unifying enterprise which dealt a deadly blow to India's internal as well as international image as a secular democracy. However, the antagonism between the partners reflected in the White Papers ensures, to a useful extent, that each exposes the other and reveals that aspect of the truth which the other suppresses.

Frontline has, over several issues and also in the feature on the BJP's White Paper in this issue, covered in depth the communal ideology, politics and practice of the Saffron Brigade — and indeed the rise of communal fascism in a populous part of India. Here, I focus on the significance of the official policy of appeasement of the Saffron Brigade whose aggressive post-1984 activities have represented a major threat to national unity.

What clearly emerges from the unity of the two White Papers is that the policy of accommodation and compromise of successive governments provided the *Hindutva* brigade its space and its great opportunity. The factual detail presented in the rival White Pa-

pers enables us to conclude that had there been no such policy, or had there been a consistent and no-nonsense policy of defending secularism and the rule of law, there would have been no Ayodhya crisis of this kind of malignancy and this level of threat.

The BJP's White Paper is a clever, but not clever enough, exercise in proclaiming wrong to be right and in standing everything that has happened on its head. Its key technique is the Big Lie, brazenly and tirelessly reworked: to the effect that communal political mobilisation is the equivalent of a freedom or 'liberation' struggle and that the communal and criminal project of demolishing the Babri Masjid (and, by implication, doing more of the same) is an assertion of majoritarian 'Hindu' self-respect and honour.

The Government of India's White Paper, released in February 1993, is a sanitised and bureaucratised version of the run-up to December 6, 1992. Its presentation of the half-truth, or quarter-truth, takes refuge behind officialese and appendices. At best, the official White Paper passably documents the facts of the Saffron Brigade's communal fascism, perfidy and 'betrayal' without revealing the basic truth about the Narasimha Rao Government's appeasement of these forces of communal fascism, including the Shiv Sena.

Not surprisingly for a start, the official document is silent on the fact, brought to light usefully in the BJP's White Paper, that P. V. Narasimha Rao was chairman of a Group of Ministers constituted by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in April 1987 to work for a solution of the Ayodhya issue. His Group of Ministers met at least twice, in May and October 1987. Narasimha Rao's chosen approach, it appears, was to "solve the problem through local initiatives and to prepare the local opinion for (a) judicial verdict by insulating it from the impact of the controversies." In a report submitted to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in March 1989, the then Home Minister, Buta Singh, cited his colleague Narasimha

Rao's admission of failure of the "local initiative" tack and his tautological observation that, in the light of this failure, "a way out has to be found for defusing the situation."

It is certainly suspicious that the official summary of the post-July 1988 efforts of successive governments, presented in a 'secret' background note prepared by the Narasimha Rao Government in 1992, contains no reference at all to the failed endeavours of the Group of Ministers headed by Narasimha Rao. It is worth recalling, in this connection, that in the farcical intra-Congress(I) skirmish over the letter sent out several weeks ago by two pro-Narasimha Rao general secretaries, issue was taken with the alleged "denigration" of Rajiv Gandhi in relation to the handling of the Ayodhya problem.

Basically, the two sinning general secretaries alluded to the undeniable fact that Rajiv was Prime Minister and party boss when the communal forces headed by the BJP made startling gains in the mass political arena. But they edited out Narasimha Rao's far-from-innocent role in the policy of appeasement of the Saffron Brigade that resulted in the shameful November 1989 "agreement" over shilanyas, the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the temple.

What was Narasimha Rao's intellectual and political understanding of the crux of the Ayodhya issue and what was the approach he favoured to resolve the issue, before he became Prime Minister? Had the BJP really done its investigative homework, it would have discovered a pseudonymous article written by P. V. Narasimha Rao and published in Nikhil Chakravarty's *Mainstream* of January 27, 1990. The interesting article was titled "The Great Suicide" and appeared under the byline "Congressman," whom the magazine described as "a leading figure in the Congress(I)."

This article, written when the Congress(I) was out of power at the Centre, expresses Narasimha Rao's deeply pessimistic reading of the situation and his defeatist approach.

"It was clear from the beginning," noted Rao on the strength of his then-publicly-unknown experience of chairing the Group of Ministers on Ayodhya, "that the matter would lead to a no-win situation for the Congress. A religious question was thoroughly politicised."

He recorded the following criticism of Rajiv Gandhi's leadership on this issue: "The charge that could be levelled against the Rajiv Gandhi government is in respect of its naivety in trying to thrash out an 'amicable' settlement of the question, not realising (or despite realising) that an amicable settlement was *not wanted* by the political parties (and therefore not possible) just then; the electoral stakes were too high."

He noted the political character of the whole Ramjanmabhoomi mobilisation, but naively and dangerously conceded its 'majority' status among the mass of Hindus: "The distressing point to be noted is that the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue has been callously politicised, perhaps as never before... The Hindu community, known for centuries for its catholic approach and reformist zeal, has been fanaticised for political ends... *And once the majority community gets so fanaticised, what remains of secularism?*"

Narasimha Rao, in this analysis, virtually threw up his hands: "The question of questions is: Was the game worth the candle? When (the) communal atmosphere prevails everywhere, no political party is, or can be, totally immune from it."

A year-and-a-half before he became Prime Minister, he seems to have been in considerable awe of the Saffron Brigade: "But unfortunately for the first time, a *countrywide* movement based on the deep religious devotion of millions of Hindus has been organised with an out-and-out political purpose in view, with amazing skill and astounding subtlety so as to touch the Hindu psyche deeply."

His philosophy *vis-a-vis* the challenge of communal fascism is one of hopelessness and defeatism: "While the temporary electoral advantage at one election may not be important, what is going to be disastrous is the possibility of the permanent communalisation of Indian politics and

of national life. Neither V. P. Singh nor Rajiv Gandhi — nor the VHP/BJP and the Muslim Action Committees — will be able to control the spread of this poison."

In other words, the well of electoral democracy had been poisoned.

But the conclusion drawn by Narasimha Rao from this analysis was in direct contradiction with his opening assertion, or assumption, that the situation was hopeless and the problem intractable: "And worst of all, the leaders do not seem to realise this. They are trying to postpone the solution to the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue so as to fester till some other occasion when they hope it will come in politically handy to them. This is an extremely short-sighted and suicidal approach."

The real insight provided by this pseudonymous intervention into Narasimha Rao's understanding of the issue and his outlook on what needed to be done helps us to make sense of the mass of negotiational detail presented in the two White Papers. Here was a leader who desperately wanted the issue to be "defused" by buying time, by temporising, subterfuge and tricks, who fielded a motley cast of "emissaries" ranging from bigoted swamis and sants to his Defence and Environment Ministers in his dishonourable game of appeasement of communal fascism, who simply refused to act in time to uphold secularism and the rule of law despite mounting evidence on the strategy and tactics of communal fascism.

It would be unfair to blame the regime of Narasimha Rao in isolation from other factors and the opportunist acts of successive governments that enabled the Ramjanmabhoomi movement to come all this way from December 1949 — when the original offence and sin against secularism and the rule of law took place.

The Narasimha Rao regime's White Paper alludes to this when in the Background section, on page 13, it admits that "on the night of 22nd/23rd December 1949... Hindu idols were placed under the central dome of the main structure. Worship of these idols was started on a big scale from the next morning. As this was likely to disturb the public peace, the civil administration attached the premises under sec-

tion 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. This was the starting point of a whole chain of events which ultimately led to the demolition of the structure." What else is this except official admission of the original communal and criminal mischief upon which the Saffron Brigade has built a whole pseudo-nationalist movement and a fundamentalist divisive politics?

We know from documentary evidence that not merely Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, but also Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel far-sightedly opposed the communal and criminal mischief committed in Ayodhya in December 1949. However, the Congress(I) Centre failed, at that juncture, to ensure that the right thing was done, in practice, to uphold secularism and the rule of law. It is a reasonable speculation that had Mahatma Gandhi been alive in December 1949, he would have involved himself directly and intensely, perhaps through some kind of conscience-stirring fast, in defence of the fair and right course of action in Ayodhya — thus forcing the Government's hand.

The BJP's White Paper somewhat flatteringly accuses Prime Minister Narasimha Rao (earlier extolled by L. K. Advani, who has long been allergic to Nehru, as the best Prime Minister after Lal Bahadur Shastri) of putting into action a "hydra-headed strategy." It accuses him of shifting from a "conciliatory" mode into a final-act "confrontational" mode — in fact, of giving the "appearance" (as part of the "totality" of this "hydra-headed strategy") that "he was working for conciliation while he had already decided on a confrontation."

This is part of the BJP's Big Lie — that "the Ayodhya movement," which is "not just a movement for a Temple at Ayodhya, but encompasses the greatest nationalist reassertion of India in its known history" (clearly 'greater' in this Hindu communal fascist worldview than the anti-imperialist freedom struggle itself) was forced upon the Saffron Brigade by the Narasimha Rao regime's alleged confrontationism.

As for the Narasimha Rao dispensation, the real evidence presented in the two White Papers does help us to answer the question: is this dispensation secular or communal? The answer is that it is neither — it remains suspended in *Trisanku*-land. ■

A study in mendacity

The BJP and the Big Lie

A. G. NOORANI

HOW and when did the Ayodhya problem, as we know it, arise? The first information report (FIR) lodged by Sub-Inspector Ram Dube, Police Station Ayodhya, on December 23, 1949 answers both questions authoritatively and irrefutably. "According to Mata Prasad (the reporting constable) when I reached to Janam Bhumi around 8 o'clock in the morning, I came to know that group of 50-60 persons had entered Babri Mosque after breaking the compound gate lock of the mosque... and established therein an idol of Shri Bhagwan... Ram Das, Ram Shakti Das and 50-60 unidentified others entered the mosque surreptitiously and spoiled its sanctity" (sic).

Even District Magistrate K. K. Nayar, who was responsible for this foul deed, admitted to the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, Bhagwan Sahay, on December 27, 1949 that it was "an illegal position created by force and subterfuge."

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "White Paper on Ayodhya and the Rama Temple Movement" claims to be "a true and sincere account" of the matter. How does it deal with that sordid episode? It claims that "the idol of Rama appeared on the night of 22nd and 23rd December 1949" (emphasis added). This is no mere flourish. It is a deliberate lie uttered at the outset (p.23) and repeated towards the end (p. 152); "The idols of Sri Rama appeared on..." The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) mouth-piece, *Organiser*, of March 29, 1987 had said it had "miraculously appeared". The White Paper is more sophisticated but no less mendacious.

The questions brook no evasion. If the White Paper could assert so palpable a falsehood, so brazenly, on the *fons et origo* of the matter, which is belied by public and uncontroverted, incontrovertible official records, what is its credibility? What credence can one attach to the extracts it selects for publication from secret official records,

which it has apparently acquired from the Prime Minister's Special Cell on Ayodhya, and, indeed, to its own account of the discussions on the issue?

The chapter on "The Relentless Hindu Struggle for Ramajamabhoomi" divides it into three phases. First, by war and diplomacy "when barbaric aliens were ruling the country and there was no Rule of Law; secondly, by legal means when the British established their model of Rule of Law from (1885); and thirdly by mass movement from 1984, (along with legal steps) when Rule of Law became insensitive to their legitimate plea even under indigenous dispensation."

However, the solitary instance it cites of recourse to the law during British Raj itself destroys the Sangh *parivar's* case completely. It asserts: "On 25th May, 1885 Mahant Raghubardass appealed to the Faizabad District Judge that an order be given for the construction of Temple on the *Ramajamabhoomi*" (p. 22). A remarkable feature of the White Paper is its Goebbelsian repetition of falsehoods. Like the one already cited, this one is also repeated (p. 151) in identical terms: "The first legal case for repossession of *Ramajamabhoomi* was filed... in 1885."

The BJP must be held to its carefully chosen words. The mahant had sued for permission to build a temple on the *chabutra outside* the mosque but within its compound and claimed *that as the Ramajamabhoomi. He did not claim the mosque at all.* He sued for "a decree for awarding permission to construct a temple over the *Chabutra Janam Asthan* situated in Ayodhya." Para 2 of his plaint read thus: "The Chabutra of Janam Asthan is 21 feet towards East and West and 17 feet towards North and South. and therein Charan Panya lies and there also a small temple over it, and which is worshipped."

The Sub-Judge, Pandit Hari Kishan Singh, dismissed the suit. On appeal, the District Judge, Col. F.E.A. Chamier, upheld the judgment, but he

compulsion in the State Assembly.

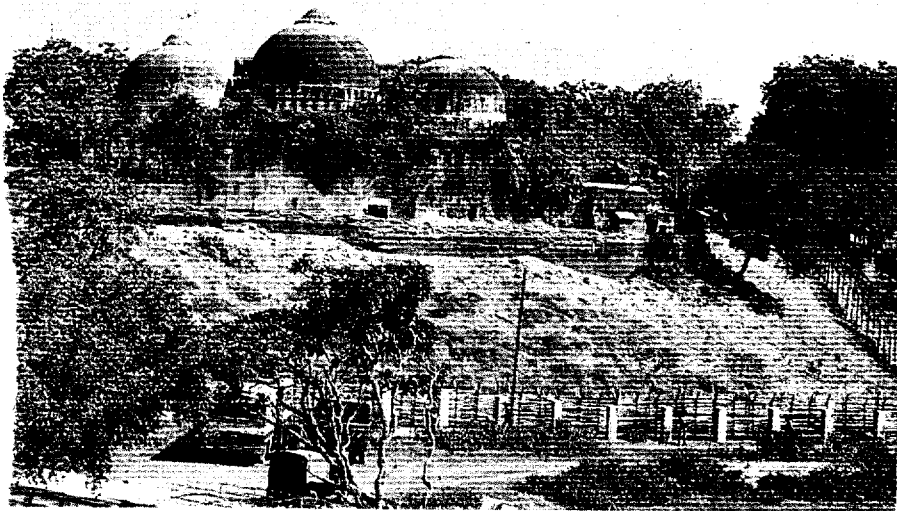
It alleges that the legal system inherited by India from the British is not capable of solving issues like Ayodhya. It further charges that the speed with which the proceedings for opening the locks in February 1986 were conducted shows that the judiciary can and does act fast, if the Government is not opposed to a course of action.

In all this, however, there is no explanation of how the Ram idols suddenly appeared on December 22, 1949, inside the main building which had remained locked for 15 years.

In the final analysis, the BJP's document seems to match the Government's White Paper in its efforts to cover up details of conversations held between the Government and the religious leaders and the BJP-RSS-VHP combine. Much of the truth is clearly hidden. This would include the role played by the Union Government's Ayodhya Cell and that played by, for example, Naresh Chandra, mentioned in part in the BJP White Paper, but denied by him. And it does indeed seem that the details of discussions held with the RSS, in particular, have not yet been completely revealed. That such talks took place is a matter of record. Also, what happened during the talks is, it seems, quite well known, and part of it figures in loose sheets tied together and made available to some negotiators. It is also clear that the Ayodhya Cell was something different from what it actually was.

Naresh Chandra, when contacted, would not take full responsibility for what has been attributed to him. His stand was that he had tried his best to be impartial and would not like to be drawn into a controversy. It is also being denied that there was an agreement on the operative part of the judgment being delivered. Nevertheless, he did indicate that the Cell has now been given an extension and would strive for a solution. This suggests that Naresh Chandra wielded and continues to wield considerable clout. He has been working after superannuation at the Prime Minister's special request, on a "salary" of Re. 1 a day.

All in all, neither of the two White Papers can be said to be comprehensive. And the facts of what went on at select stages of the discussions do not seem to be sufficiently "white" to figure in the documents. Both sides are telling only part of the story. The BJP's "revelations" have been pretty much a damp squib — but one that has been neatly tossed back into the Government's court.



The Babri Masjid... felled by fanatics.

was more impressed by the Gazetteer of Oudh than was the Pandit. The errors in the Gazetteer were fully exposed by Dr. Sushil Srivastava of the Allahabad University first in *Probe India* (January 1988) and also in his book *The Disputed Mosque*. The Gazetteer gave currency to legend and was cited as authority. Relying on the passage, Chamier remarked, "It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on land specially held sacred by the Hindus." The White Paper quotes this repeatedly but not his further observation which has a *direct* bearing on the issue: "This *chabutra* is said to indicate the birthplace of Ram Chandra" — not the mosque.

Be it noted that the first suit filed for the possession of the mosque was on July 1, 1989, by Deoki Nandan Agarwala, a vice-president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The ones filed in 1950 were for the worship of the planted idol.

L. K. Advani writes in his foreword to the White Paper that the place of Ram's "birth has been an object of the deepest devotion for Hindus throughout the millennia" and the Babri Mosque "was for the country the symbol of its subjugation." Yet none of the champions of Hindu rights before Independence — Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and others of that stature — made the demand at all. Not even the likes of Hindu Mahasabha leader V.D. Savarkar. Nor even RSS founder K. B. Hedgewar. Did the RSS, supreme leader M. S. Golwalkar? Why the silence when Ram

"represents the soul of the nationalist thrust of our freedom movement"? But the plea in the mahant's suit of 1885 itself belies Advani's assertion. Significantly, no suit was filed by any Hindu claiming the mosque till 1989.

The talk about "millennia" is therefore puerile. Apart from Advani's admission on September 30, 1990 that "no one can prove that it was the birthplace of Shri Ram," it is a fact of history that, as Prof. R. S. Sharma points out, "no temple of Ram is found in any part of Uttar Pradesh until the 16th century." Dr. Sushil Srivastava cites religious treatises to show that even "the deification of Ram started gaining acceptance in the 13th century."

The White Paper gloats over the fact that only the use of force helped the *parivar* gain its ends. 1949 was the starting point. The next stage was the opening of the locks on the gateway to the mosque by a court order on February 1, 1986. The last stage was its demolition on December 6, 1992.

It says of the 1986 episode: "Once the ultimatum was given, things started moving at lightning speed" (p. 26). Mark the words, "and the judiciary too, responded with lightning speed" (p. 32). Sample this: "So the law could not help the Hindus for more than 60 years, from 1885 to 1949. But when they physically occupied the structure after the idols of Sri Rama appeared on 22-23 December 1949, the same law-enforcing courts — the District Court in 1950 and later, in 1955, the High Court — granted to the Hindus the right to worship..." (p. 152).

Subir Roy

The innuendo is obvious but its implications are altogether different — the courts have failed consistently to redress the wrong done by force. Instead, they legitimised it. The *parivar* never went to the courts till 1989 because it knew that in law it had no case and also because the issue had not arisen politically till 1986.

The objectives of "the Rama Temple Movement" are two-fold, immediate and long-term. Immediately, it is political. "The charge that BJP made the Ayodhya movement and Sri Rama a political issue is incorrect," the Paper asserts but admits that while the VHP launched the movement in 1983, the BJP took it up for the first time in its Palampur resolution on June 11, 1989. It was an election year. That very day Advani said, "I am sure it will translate into votes." He spoke of its vote-gathering capability repeatedly thereafter — on December 3, 1989; February 24, 1991; June 18, 1991; and in July 1992.

The long-term strategy is more sinister than even a Hindu Rashtra. It is imposition of Hindu culture and religion on the other communities in the name of Ram as a "national" figure.

The BJP would have liked the leaders to have "seized the aftermath of Partition to dissolve notions of the separateness amongst Muslims and opened up the gates of cultural and societal assimilation..." It rejects "the composite-culture theory" — unless the various strands "merged" into one. It is opposed to "distinct cultural and even political identities outside the mainstream." Its thesis is simple — "Indian culture is one with continuity and change over 5,000 years and if it has a name it is only Hindu."

The White Paper adds (p. 15): "The nation in India always remained Hindu, whether the State was controlled by Turks... English or Nehruvian secularists..." It decries "the mindless adoption of the Western as the modern" and sets its test for harmony — assimilation and an end to distinct groups, religious, cultural (p. 15): "The Ayodhya movement also clears the confusion as to what is nationalism and what constitutes the ideal basis for inter-religious *harmony*. It asserts that it is not the spiritually bankrupt Western concept of secularism, but the *assimilative Hindu cultural nationhood that is the basis for religious harmony*. The alternative, apparently, is the RSS or Shiv Sena-sponsored pogrom — ethnic cleansing *swadeshi* style.

The assertion is boldly made: "No one — not even those who oppose the Ayodhya movement — can deny the

fact that Sri Rama is not just an idol of worship, but provides cultural and spiritual and even physical linkage throughout India and the psychological glue that animates and integrates the Indian mind cutting across the barriers of language, caste, religion and region." This is manifestly untrue. Non-Hindus respect Hindus' devotion to Ram. His name does not reside in the consciousness of other communities, be they Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew. Hindus revere him as a symbol of rectitude. It is not right to make false assertions in his name, let alone commit the crimes that have been and are being committed in his name.

The White Paper does not stop at Ayodhya. Mathura and Varanasi are also brought in in general as well as specific terms — "ocular effect of invaders' monuments" and "visual evidence of political conquest." No wrath is expended over monuments to British rule. For good reason. It is at Muslims that the BJP's hate campaign is aimed. "In the case of Varanasi and Mathura... positive and unimpeachable proof of demolition of Hindu structures (and) raising of the present mosques exists." But, we are told, they are being spared "on considerations of the religious sensibilities of Muslims."

Why was the Babri Masjid not spared for the same reason? Because it was not a mosque since it had been "abandoned" in 1934 and was used as a temple since 1949. The first is false. The documents given to Home Minister Buta Singh by the VHP on October 6, 1988 belied this: they had two reports by Mohammed Ibrahim (inspector of the official Wakf Board, who had been to the site), dated December 10 and 23, 1949, which proved that the mosque was very much in use. Only persons devoid of any sense of shame would assert that a forcible and deceitful occupation of any house of worship of one community by persons of another can change its character.

The White Paper asserts (p. 134) that the Prime Minister's speech on December 6, 1992 referring to the demolition of the mosque "was a great provocation to violence in India and against India in some Muslim countries because what was actually an abandoned structure was held out by the Prime Minister himself as a mosque." Had Narasimha Rao used any word other than "mosque" to describe the Babri Masjid that fateful day, his name would have been mud in India and abroad.

But at page 72 of the White Paper itself occurs this cameo: "The summary of the Special Cell also sets out

the Government's view that the Muslims might consent to the demolition/shifting of the mosque." Comment is superfluous.

Not surprisingly, the greatest ire is reserved for Narasimha Rao — rather like Saddam Hussein's rage directed at George Bush for withdrawing support at the last minute. But the episode about the April Glaspie (U.S. Ambassador to Iraq at the time of the Kuwait invasion) of this story, Sharad Pawar, who according to Kalyan Singh conveyed Narasimha Rao's proposal hinting at a "face-saving" formula for surrender (*Frontline*, January 1, 1993) is omitted. The entire story about the demolition is demolished by *Organiser's* frank admission on December 13, 1992 — affidavits were filed in the Supreme Court to buy time. The object was to collect a vast crowd and preempt the Government's action. BJP leader Govindacharya confirmed this version of his party's strategy in *The Statesman* (December 30, 1992) (see *Frontline*, January 15 and 29, 1993). There is no attempt at refuting reports in responsible journals about trial runs of Operation Demolition.

Organiser impetuously boasted (December 13, 1992) of the success of the "game plan" of the *parivar* but dropped the theme. Press reports documented the dry runs the day before the demolition. The videomagazine *Newstrack's* story left none in doubt.

On December 10, the Prime Minister told *Eyewitness*, another videomagazine: "I am quite sure it (the demolition) was a result of pre-planning. It could not be spontaneous or

at the spur of the moment." On December 11, he charged the Kalyan Singh Government with *mala fides* — not neglect.

On December 18, in a formal, prepared statement in Parliament, Home Minister S. B. Chavan called it "one of the most dastardly acts committed since it (India) achieved freedom." Such language is used only for pre-planned crimes.

On December 21, Chavan told the BJP members in the Rajya Sabha: "You had a plan of action which you did not disclose. But later you pleaded helplessness." He further charged that the "decision" had been taken in Ujjain, at the RSS conclave. On December 23 he told the Lok Sabha that the mobilisation of kar sevaks in the BJP-ruled States was a pointer to their intentions.

The BJP's White Paper cites none of these but only a report of an off-the-cuff statement by Chavan denying that the Prime Minister had alleged conspiracy. The Government's White Paper does not allege planning. The BJP can draw comfort from this. The alliance is not completely dead. But its White Paper's claim that the demolition was "an unexpected act" is a patent falsehood.

But, of course, the greatest ally of the BJP in all this was the Narasimha Rao Government. There is a laboured effort to explain the BJP's *volte-face* on him. "L. K. Advani who had earlier praised Shri Narasimha Rao as the best Prime Minister after Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, revised his opinion after the Stock Scam and publicly came out against the Prime Minister on Oc-



At a recent Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas Manch function in Delhi, BJP president Murli Manohar Joshi, RSS leader Rajinder Singh, Parliament member Uma Bharti and others... trying to erase the shame.

tober 18, 1992" — six months after both scandals had become known.

Why is the White Paper silent on the evidence of planning? There is not even an effort to refute it. What of the video film made at the instance of and shown to a select audience by the then Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar? On December 18, Rajesh Pilot, then Communications Minister, mentioned the name of a retired brigadier who trained the men. *Indian Express* of December 14 had a detailed report of a "hardcore trained specialist group" which did the job. Both *The Hindu* and *Indian Express* (December 7) reported that Advani was "heard" asking the crowd to seal the roads to Ayodhya to prevent troops from arriving. On February 23, Ashok Singhal of the VHP said demolition was the "only course open to the kar sevaks."

It is fairly evident from the copious quotations from the records of the Special Cell on Ayodhya, including whole minutes, that someone there has been helping the BJP all along. As head of the Cell, Naresh Chandra bears responsibility for the records finding their way to this political party. The summaries prepared by the Cell are clearly tendentious and one-sided.

Advani's statement on April 18 is revealing. Asked if the report on the view of the Cell that the VHP case was overwhelming was authentic, he replied that *the Special Cell had spoken to many eminent persons on these lines*. Who in the cell spoke thus? Naresh Chandra? Advani claims that a group of "scholars" was put together not only to study the documents but also "to obtain records — from within Government too — and to obtain testimony" of the Prime Minister's interlocutors. The second task has been accomplished with the enthusiastic cooperation of someone in the Cell, evidently.

The White Paper is out to wipe out the shame of the crime of December 6, 1992. "The culturally Anglicised elite of India alone came to regard the demolition as 'a betrayal of the nation' and as 'a national shame,' but the ordinary people of India appear to have owned the demolition and welcomed it... The shrill reaction against the demolition orchestrated by the Government, and articulated by the Anglicised Indian intellectuals which singled out Ayodhya to discredit the Hindus, brought forth even greater indignation from the masses. The debate soon turned on what we mean by secularism, communalism, and nationalism." The rhetoric has been used before — when Indira Gandhi embarked on a fascist course. ■

ISSUES IN FOCUS

Economic dilemmas

Appropriating slogans

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

in New Delhi

AFTER some years of exclusive preoccupation with the politics of religiosity, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has awoken to the need for an alternative plank to sustain its image as the prospective party of governance. The "ruling party in waiting" has felt compelled in the last year or two to formulate an approach to economic policy, in the event that it would be called upon actually to exercise authority at the Centre.

As in the matter of the Ayodhya dispute, the BJP sees the way forward in projecting itself as the more efficient and purposive version of the Congress(I). The Ayodhya platform had been fashioned by the Congress(I) as a bulwark against any possible erosion of the Indira Gandhi-Rajiv family's dynastic claims to power. But hobbled by numerous contradictions within, the Congress(I) could do no more than watch in helplessness as the BJP hijacked the plank in 1989.

So, in the matter of economic liberalisation, the BJP has cleverly appropriated the Congress(I) slogans. But it has introduced a concern for reforming and cleansing the administration which, it hopes, will show it up to advantage in comparison to the Congress(I).

The once and future president of the BJP, L. K. Advani, was a star speaker at last fortnight's annual conference of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). He was fulsome in his acknowledgment of the Congress(I)'s role in inaugurating a "new chapter in the history of India's economic thinking." Advani spoke approvingly of the historic turnaround in habits of thought after the Congress(I)'s return to power in June 1991. The recognition that Government could do little justice to a country's talents was welcome to his party. More particularly, the BJP felt immensely encouraged that the Government was for the first time begin-

ning to talk unapologetically about the removal of economic controls, and not viewing these as a prerogative of office.

But the Congress(I) still fails to carry conviction, said Advani. For the P. V. Narasimha Rao Government, economic liberalisation is just a matter of fighting off a major crisis of external payments. As a party, the Congress(I) still remains wedded to the systems of patronage-dispensation that the command economy model instituted. For the BJP, in contrast, liberalisation is a matter of conviction — something it has been advocating for decades.

If the BJP is to come to power, said Advani, it would ensure that the "broad direction of policy which was adopted in 1991 would be maintained unchanged." The liberalisation programme would, if anything, be more firmly placed on course to reflect the greater strength of the BJP's ideological convictions. The BJP would take efforts to weed out corruption in the system of administration, without which liberalisation would be brought to naught. It would, moreover, impart to economic liberalisation the political muscle that it lacks — by decisively shutting the door on the politics of vote banks, which encouraged sectional interests and impeded the evolution of a national identity.

Advani's address to the CII annual conference was uncompromising in its tone. But is the rank and file of the BJP as committed as its supremo? Or was Advani's address a calculated overture towards industry — a tacit acknowledgment that big business support is essential to the BJP in its quest for power? Is the BJP, in other words, seeking to win over big business from the Congress(I) in the manner it successfully deployed the Ayodhya card to hijack the latter's middle-class constituency?

If so, the BJP is struggling with the realisation that it is far easier to present a facade of unanimity on religious issues than to achieve internal accord on matters which have a substantive impact on the lives of the people.

Advani's stature within the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) constellation provides him with great latitude. But a lesser politician like Viren Shah, BJP member of the Rajya Sabha, found himself in hot water for airing very similar views recently. At a meeting with a team from the *Economist Intelligence Unit* of London, Shah was reported to have said that if his party were to assume office, it would not reverse any of the liberalisation measures taken by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh.

Shah was probably speaking for large sections of the BJP — especially for the many luminaries who came on board in the euphoric wake of the Advani rath yatra, when the party seemed the only bulwark against Congress(I) ineptitude and Janata Dal anarchy. But his statement was not received kindly by the more tradition-bound elements within. His retraction came shortly before the party's national executive commenced its last meeting in Calcutta. The wording was ambivalent — the reports which attributed to him the view that his party would persist with the liberalisation process were not filed on any authority, he said.

Perhaps to underline that his was a case of conversion minus conviction, Shah stayed away from the debate of the BJP national executive on the economic resolution. Sources in the party admitted that Shah's views were a cause of acute embarrassment. There was great relief, they said, that he had chosen to absent himself from the national executive session on the economy.

Even if it is conceded that diverse ideological strands can coexist in a party without impairing its unity of action, there have, in recent times been far too many discordant notes emanating from elements of the Sangh *parivar*. Under the direction of its RSS masters, the BJP last year launched a "swadeshi" campaign — complete with an approved list of "swadeshi" brands as opposed to foreign ones. But the entire project was poorly conceived and quickly ran aground.

The economic resolution adopted at the last meeting of the BJP national executive sought to resurrect the "swadeshi" concept. "Any programme that ends up in the disruption of the Swadeshi sector of the Indian industry is not acceptable to BJP, as such disruption will ultimately harm not only our industry but our national economy," it warned. "External liberalisation makes no sense when the Government has not been able to bring down

interest rates and taxes, both of which are crippling," it continued. And it was both "unfair and unwise," it concluded, "to throw industry open to competition from outside.. before lowering taxes and other costs."

As an example of the Government's irrational approach to liberalisation, BJP spokesmen point to the latest Budget, which favours customs duties with a much sharper reduction than excise rates. It passes their comprehension that there is a simple explanation for this — since customs duty rates have generally been higher than excise, they provide greater scope for curtailment. Moreover, the Government also retains the option to levy a countervailing import duty on any commodity that is subject to an excise levy, so that taxation does not impair domestic industry's price competitiveness *vis-a-vis* foreign enterprise.

The BJP cannot be bothered with these subtleties, since being in the Opposition bestows upon it a certain lack of accountability. It opposes the curtailment of subsidies and the containment of defence expenditure. At the same time, it calls for much sharper cutbacks in excise duties, and for curbing the budget deficit. Squaring this circle is a job the BJP does not have to worry about, as long as it occupies the Opposition benches in Parliament. But the political mileage it could derive from these populist slogans may be limited by a certain lack of consistency among them.

Despite Advani's laudatory references to the 1991 shift in economic thinking, an official document of the BJP identifies the current economic policies — branded the International Monetary Fund-Manmohan Singh approach — as a mere extension of the Nehruvian model. And for a party that is thoroughly disdainful of the Nehruvian model, the BJP shows great concern for protecting the industries that have been fostered under its protective umbrella — concerns encapsulated in its slogans about the "swadeshi sector".

Faced with this conflict, Jaswant Singh, Deputy Leader of the BJP in the Lok Sabha, showed little hesitation in contradicting the national executive resolution on the economy. There is no "swadeshi sector" as such, he explained. Rather, the BJP concept of "swadeshi" refers to an attitude of mind, which places self-reliance and national sovereignty uppermost. Jay Dubashi, the BJP's chief spokesman on the economy, took a similar tack, though he was again no less ambiguous on how this concept of self-reliance is

different from the Nehruvian model.

Dubashi reaffirmed his party's commitment to freeing the economy from bureaucratic shackles. But the party could not possibly endorse an open-door policy towards foreign enterprise, he said. The economy had to be liberalised internally, to enable it to overcome the disabilities fostered by over four decades of Nehruvian planning. Prior to that any precipitate move towards an open-door policy would be courting disaster.

The distinction between internal and external liberalisation may be sustainable in the realm of logic. But reality has a way of reducing it to triviality. Advocacy of import liberalisation comes easily to an entrepreneur who does not stand to lose from it. The manufacturer of the finished goods would be favourably inclined towards the liberalisation of raw material and component import — but not so the manufacturers of the latter categories of product. Those who have observed how the urge to please all has often degenerated into the ability to please none, would argue that liberalisation is indivisible and should proceed concurrently on both the external and internal fronts.

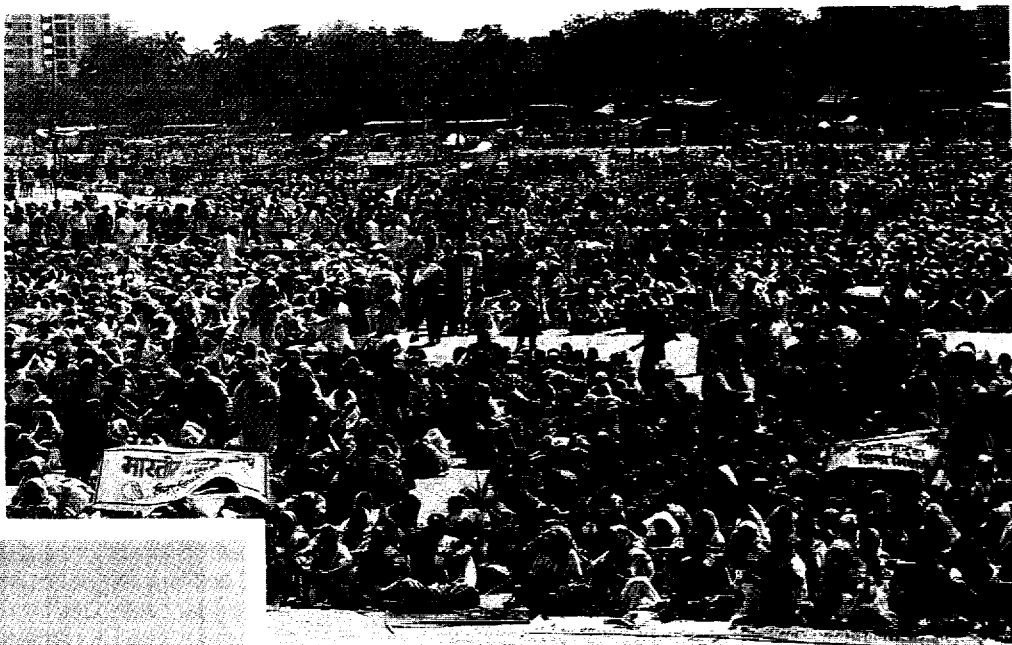
When confronted with this question, Jaswant Singh took refuge in a favoured phrase: yes, liberalisation is indivisible; more so, it is an "attitude of mind," he said. Where that left his interlocutors by way of clarity on the BJP's economic thinking, was a matter of some doubt.

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the labour wing of the BJP, was meanwhile pressing ahead with its efforts to revive the "swadeshi" campaign, beginning with a rally in New Delhi on April 20. Dattopant Thengadi, the founder and leading light of the BMS, chose not to make any comparison between his own version of "swadeshi" and the BJP's construction. The BMS is manned by swayamsewaks from the RSS, as by and large, is the BJP, he said. Though there is a broad identity of views between the various segments of the RSS combine, the emphases could vary in accordance with the practical problems faced by each of these, as could the priorities.

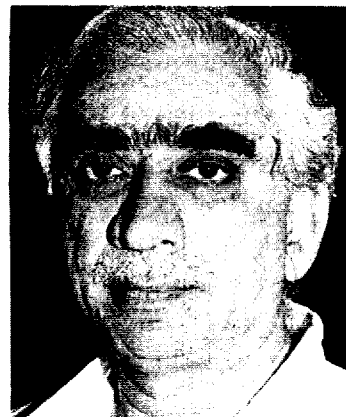
In its advocacy of a national technology policy, however, the BMS comes very close to demanding a return to the bad old days of a command economy. Thengadi explained that the BMS has always demanded a policy formulation under which technologies to be adopted, adapted, developed, and rejected are clearly identified. And presumably, in the implementation of

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh rally in New Delhi on April 20, being addressed by Dattopant Thengadi, its founder and leading light... pressing ahead with efforts to revive the 'swadeshi' campaign.

Anu Pushkarna



Viren Shah... in hot water.



Jaswant Singh... ambiguous statements.

such a policy the Government would concentrate in its hands enormous discretionary powers in the economic sphere — powers that the BJP spokesmen have been vehement in opposing.

The traditional constituency of the BJP — the urban middle-class — has grown enormously in recent times. But its political loyalties have been fickle, and it has seldom made a strong distinction between the Congress(I) and the BJP. It took five years of Rajiv Gandhi, and the inflamed passions of Mandal and mandir, for it to switch loyalties in a significant fashion towards the BJP. But now, under the dispensation of Manmohan Singh's liberalisation programme, the urban middle-class has begun to look at the Congress(I) with greater favour.

The BJP would like to win back this constituency. The "shadow budget" that it presented last February was a thinly disguised overture to these sections. And the BJP could not have been greatly pleased that Manmohan Singh not only matched these proposals, but even surpassed them in certain respects.

While seeking on the one hand to project itself as the true champion of liberalisation, the BJP would also like to leave its options open in the likely eventuality of the reform programme going askew. The "swadeshi" card, with all its vagueness, is designed to win the allegiances of those who find themselves on the wrong side of the relentless push towards a market economy.

Whipping up religious passions to win a few votes might have been the easy part. Now the BJP will have to start formulating a vote-winning platform on the real issues affecting the lives and livelihoods of the people. It if seeks to be all things to all people, it would run the risk of being taken seriously by none. And in seeking to broaden its appeal it may find its close associational interests difficult to shake off. The BJP was comfortable with a politico-religious issue like Ayodhya, which enabled it to fudge the profound differences in interests between the different sections that it was trying to draw into its ambit. But in addressing the question of the economy, its discomfiture is more than apparent. ■