

The New York Times, November 24, 2009

India Officials Angered by Leak of Attack Report

By [LYDIA POLGREEN](#)

NEW DELHI — The leaking of a long-awaited confidential report on one of the most divisive attacks in modern Indian history raised a furor in [India](#)'s Parliament on Monday, with lawmakers demanding to know how the report made its way to a newspaper and cable news channel.

The report, 17 years in the making, is an investigation of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a mosque in the town of Ayodyha, by radical Hindu activists who claimed the site as the birthplace of the god Ram. They claimed Muslim rulers had destroyed the temple and replaced it with a mosque in the 16th century.

After years of heated protest over the site, a Hindu mob stormed the mosque in 1992, reducing it to rubble. The destruction of the mosque set off violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims that left more than 1,000 dead, mostly Muslims.

The scale of the violence was among the worst since the partition of British India, and bitterness and recrimination over the event have reverberated for years.

According to the [Indian Express newspaper](#) and NDTV, a private cable news channel, the report portrays the destruction of the mosque not as a spontaneous act by grassroots activists but as something planned and carried out with the implicit approval of senior members of the Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., which was at the time a relatively small, right-wing party.

But the destruction of the mosque galvanized many conservative Hindus, who helped propel the party into national prominence, and eventually into a [coalition that defeated the long-governing Congress Party](#).

The Liberhan Commission, named for the judge who oversaw the inquiry, was set up shortly after the destruction of the mosque to investigate the destruction. Last June, nearly 17 years later, it handed its report to the government. But the report had been kept secret.

Senior members of the B.J.P. accused the government of leaking the report for political gain. P. Chidambaram, India's home minister, denied the accusation and said the report had been very closely held.

L. K. Advani, the octogenarian standard bearer of the B.J.P., whose political career took off when he took up the cause of the Ram temple, denied that the destruction was planned. "It is completely untrue that it was a meticulously planned conspiracy," he said. "There was no plan, no conspiracy."

BBC NEWS

Ayodhya report put to parliament

The Indian government has presented in parliament an inquiry into the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque.

Parliament was in uproar on Monday with the main opposition BJP party reacting angrily to reports that its top leaders were implicated in the demolition.

Excerpts leaked from the inquiry report blamed senior BJP figures, including Atal Behari Vajpayee and LK Advani.

The mosque was brought down by a Hindu mob and some 2,000 people died in riots across India after its demolition.

The 900-page Liberhan commission report was submitted to the government in June but its contents were not made public.

Led by former high court judge MS Liberhan, the inquiry took 17 years to complete its work, at a cost of more than 65m rupees (\$1.3m).

Scuffle

Home Minister P Chidambaram submitted the report in parliament at 12 noon (0630GMT).

A scuffle broke out in the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of parliament) immediately after the report was presented.

Angry BJP lawmakers shouted slogans and many of them ran into the well of the House. The Rajya Sabha was adjourned till 2 pm.

LIBERHAN COMMISSION

- Set up in December 1992 days after Ayodhya mosque demolition
- Led by Justice MS Liberhan, a sitting high court judge
- Had about 400 sittings, 48 extensions and lasted almost 17 years
- Questioned powerful figures including former prime ministers
- Submitted its report to the government in June 2009

Details about the commission's findings appeared in the Indian media on Monday.

The inquiry is believed to have said that the build-up to the demolition of the mosque had been meticulously planned and described BJP leaders as "pseudo-moderates".

The report apparently exonerated the Congress prime minister at the time, PV Narasimha Rao, of any responsibility - it said the federal government could not act in the absence of any recommendation from the state governor.

BJP leaders accused the Congress party-led government of "selective leaks" to distract attention from the economy and corruption - and demanded parliament see the report immediately.

Home Minister P Chidambaram denied his ministry was behind the "unfortunate" leak.

The site of the 16th Century Babri Masjid had been a focus for Hindu-Muslim hostility for decades. On 6 December 1992 a mob of Hindu militants tore the mosque down.

Rioters claimed the site had been a temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram.

The destruction of the mosque was one of the most divisive events in Indian history and led to Hindu-Muslim riots across the country in which more than 2,000 people were killed.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/8375612.stm

Published: 2009/11/24 07:38:35 GMT

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BBC NEWS

Timeline: Ayodhya mosque crisis

The religious site where the Babri mosque was destroyed in 1992 in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya has been a flashpoint between Hindus and Muslims for years. BBC News looks at the troubled history of the disputed holy site.

1528: A mosque is built on the site which some Hindus say marks the spot where one of the most revered deities in Hinduism, Lord Rama, was born.

1853: First recorded incidents of religious violence at the site.

1859: British colonial administration erects a fence to separate the places of worship, allowing the inner court to be used by Muslims and the outer court by Hindus.

1949: Idols of Lord Rama appear inside mosque allegedly placed there by Hindus. Muslims protest, and both parties file civil suits. The government proclaims the premises a disputed area and locks the gates.

1984: Hindus form a committee to "liberate" the birth-place of Lord Rama and build a temple in his honour, spearheaded by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad party (VHP).

Then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Lal Krishna Advani, now home minister, takes over leadership of campaign.

1986: District judge orders the gates of the disputed mosque opened to allow Hindus to worship there. Muslims set up Babri Mosque Action Committee in protest.

1989: VHP steps up campaign, laying the foundations of a Rama temple on land adjacent to the disputed mosque.

1990: VHP volunteers partially damage the mosque. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar tries to resolve the dispute through negotiations, which fail the next year.

1991: BJP comes to power in Uttar Pradesh state, where Ayodhya is located.

1992: The mosque is torn down by supporters of the VHP, the Shiv Sena party and the BJP, prompting nationwide rioting between Hindus and Muslims in which more than 2,000 people die.

1998: The BJP forms coalition government under Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

2001: Tensions rise on the anniversary of the demolition of the mosque. VHP pledges again to build Hindu temple at the site.

Jan 2002: Mr Vajpayee sets up an Ayodhya cell in his office and appoints a senior official, Shatrughna Singh, to hold talks with Hindu and Muslim leaders.

Feb 2002: BJP rules out committing itself to the construction of a temple in its election manifesto for Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. VHP confirms deadline of 15 March to begin construction. Hundreds of volunteers converge on site. At least 58 people are killed in an attack on a train in Godhra which is carrying Hindu activists returning from Ayodhya.

Mar 2002: Between 1,000 and 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, die in riots in Gujarat following the train attack.

Apr 2002: Three High Court judges begin hearings on determining who owns the religious site.

Jan 2003: Archaeologists begin a court-ordered survey to find out whether a temple to Lord Rama existed on the site.

Aug 2003: The survey says there is evidence of a temple beneath the mosque, but Muslims dispute the findings. Mr Vajpayee says at the funeral of Hindu activist Ramchandra Das Paramhans that he will fulfil the dying man's wishes and build a temple at Ayodhya. However, he hopes the courts and negotiations will solve the issue.

Sept 2003: A court rules that seven Hindu leaders should stand trial for inciting the destruction of the Babri Mosque, but no charges are brought against Mr Advani, now deputy prime minister, who was also at the site in 1992.

Oct 2004: Mr Advani says his party still has "unwavering" commitment to building a temple at Ayodhya, which he said was "inevitable".

Nov 2004: A court in Uttar Pradesh rules that an earlier order which exonerated Mr Advani for his role in the destruction of the mosque should be reviewed.

July 2005 Suspected Islamic militants attack the disputed site, using a jeep laden with explosives to blow a hole in the wall of the complex. Security forces kill five people they say are militants, and a sixth who was not immediately identified.

June 2009: The Liberhan commission investigating events leading up to the mosque's demolition submits its report - 17 years after it began its inquiry. Its contents are not made public.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/1844930.stm

Published: 2009/11/23 10:36:43 GMT

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The Telegraph, 30 Sept 2010

[India](#)

Muslim v Hindu Ayodhya verdict: the history of the dispute

The destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in 1992, demonstrated the power of religious fundamentalism in India, which prides itself on its democracy and religious tolerance.

By Dean Nelson in New Delhi 11:02AM BST 30 Sep 2010

Then, 150,000 Kar Sevaks, or volunteers, followed LK Advani and other leaders of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party to Ayodhya, where they destroyed the Babri Mosque and electrified Indian politics for the two decades which followed.

In the immediate aftermath, riots claimed more than 2,000 lives in cities throughout India. In Mumbai, Islamic terrorists killed more than 250 people in a series of bombings believed to have been in retaliation for Muslim deaths in the post-Ayodhya riots.

Riots flared again in Gujarat in 2002 after Muslims burned alive 59 Hindus they believed were returning from desecrating the mosque at Ayodhya. More than a thousand people were killed in riots throughout the state.

Today, more than 200,000 troops have been deployed in Northern India to prevent similar violence after the expected High Court ruling on who owns the site at Ayodhya, the Muslim Central Sunni Waqf Board, or a Hindu organisation that wants to build a temple to Lord Rama on the plot of the former mosque.

The dispute dates back to 1853, more than 300 years after the mosque was built by one of Emperor Babur's generals following their defeat of a local Hindu king.

According to Hindu campaigners, Lord Rama, one of their most revered deities, was born on the site, and an 11th Century Ram temple stood there until it was destroyed by troops loyal to Babur, the Muslim conqueror and India's first Mughal emperor. The general, Mir Baqi, named the mosque in his emperor's honour, but it became more commonly known as 'Masjid -i-Janmasthan' – Mosque of the Birthplace – in acknowledgement of Rama's birth there.

Since the first Hindu-Muslim clash was recorded over the issue in 1853, there have been intermittent protests and petitions by each side to establish their claim to the site.

The case which will be decided at Allahabad High Court today was launched in 1992 and seeks to determine the rightful title owner of the plot, whether the site was the birthplace of Lord Rama, and whether the mosque was built on the site of an ancient Hindu temple.

The ruling is politically explosive. If it finds in favour of Hindus who want to rebuild a Ram Temple on the site, it will alienate India's 140 million Muslims, many of whom already feel marginalised in Indian society.

It will also cause anxiety over their property rights – most plots and mosque sites in India were once owned by Hindus.

More than the ruling itself, public reaction to it will be another test of how far India has travelled from its dark, communal recent history. The government is hoping those on either side of the divide now care more about their rising wealth and their stake in India's growth than settling ancient religious scores.

Later today, we will know the answer.

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India

Muslims and Hindus told to share disputed holy site

Muslims and Hindus have been ordered to share a disputed holy site which has caused riots throughout the country and the deaths of more than 3,000 people.

Dean Nelson in New Delhi 5:59PM BST 30 Sep 2010

The decision, by the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court, which followed years of legal wrangling, awarded two thirds of the two acre site to two Hindu groups despite the role of Hindu extremists in destroying the historic Babri Mosque, which had stood on the Ayodhya site since the 16th century, in 1992.

Its destruction provoked riots in cities throughout the country in which more than 2,000 people were killed. Related riots in 2002 claimed more than 1000 lives.

The Sunni Waqf Board, which owned the Babri Mosque site, said it rejected the decision to award it one-third of the plot and would appeal to the Supreme Court.

Hundreds of thousands of paramilitary police were on stand-by throughout India last night amid fears that Muslim disappointment over the decision would boil over into anger and violence. The government was so concerned at the prospect of violence on the eve of the Commonwealth

Games, which opens in Delhi on Sunday, that the prime minister, Manmohan Singh, published an appeal for calm in the country's newspapers.

The early signs however were of peaceful disappointment and a commitment to pursue the case through the courts. Zafaryab Jilani, lawyer for the Sunni Waqf Board said it would not surrender its claim to the site.

"We will appeal against the division of disputed land among three parties.

The High Court's formula of one-third land is not acceptable to the Waqf Board and it will appeal against it in the apex court," he said.

Hindu leaders said they too would challenge the decision and that they were disappointed they were not awarded the entire site.

The dispute over the site dates back to the 19th century when Muslims and Hindus clashed over the ownership of the site, which Hindus believe to be the birthplace of their deity Lord Rama. They claimed the Babri Mosque, was built by a general in the conquering army of Mughal emperor Babur on the site of a 13th century Ram temple.

The judges agreed that the area included Lord Ram's birthplace but differed over the earlier site of a Hindu temple.

Their ruling, which clears the way for Muslims to rebuild their mosque and for Hindus to build a Ram temple, included a moratorium on any construction for 90 days pending appeals.

Mr Zafaryab Jilani said there was still room for a negotiated settlement between the two groups, while Congress leaders said the ruling was a positive development.

"Congress has held that the controversy should either be solved through talks or the verdict of the court should be accepted. The court has given the verdict. We should all welcome the judgement," said party general secretary Janardhan Dwivedi.

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New York Times

September 30, 2010

Indian Court Divides Disputed Ayodhya Holy Site

By [JIM YARDLEY](#)

NEW DELHI — In a case that spanned centuries of religious history and languished in the legal system for six decades, an Indian court issued a historic ruling Thursday on the ownership of the country's most disputed religious site by effectively handing down a split decision: granting part of the land to Hindus and another part to Muslims.

The unorthodox decision by a three-judge panel in the state of Uttar Pradesh provided a Solomonic resolution — if one likely to be appealed to India's Supreme Court — to a case the authorities had feared might unleash religious violence across India.

Nearly 200,000 state and federal officers were deployed across Uttar Pradesh as a precaution, as almost every major political figure in the nation, led by Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh](#), appealed for calm and harmony.

The case was considered especially combustible because the contested site, in the city of Ayodhya, was the scene of a searing act of religious violence in 1992 when Hindu extremists tore down an ancient mosque known as the Babri Masjid on the property. The destruction sparked riots that spilled into the following year and have been blamed for about 2,000 deaths.

Yet that violence did not repeat itself on Thursday evening, as the Indian public absorbed the ruling with a calm that leaders framed as evidence of the nation's maturation and commitment to religious tolerance.

"I have full faith in the people of India," Mr. Singh said in a statement issued after the decision, even as he cautioned against "mischief makers." "I also have full confidence in the traditions of secularism, brotherhood and tolerance of our great country."

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., which rose to national prominence in the 1990s partly because of its advocacy of rebuilding a Hindu temple on the contested site, issued a statement Thursday praising the public's controlled response as "a new chapter for national integration and a new era for intercommunity relations."

"The B.J.P. is gratified that the nation has received the verdict with maturity," the statement added.

The unexpected decision to divide the property initially suggested a political solution as much as a legal one. But Harish Salve, a former solicitor general of India, said the court had apparently based its decision on historical accounts suggesting that for centuries Hindus and Muslims had worshiped together at the site before they were segregated during British rule in the 1850s.

With this legacy, the court concluded that the entire property should be considered jointly held by Muslims and Hindus and distributed under relevant Indian property statutes, Mr. Salve said, which divide contested properties on the principle of fairness.

"It looks pretty good," Mr. Salve said, rating the decision as "9 points out of 10."

Under the court's ruling, two-thirds of the land will go to Hindu groups while the remaining third will be awarded to Muslims. Lawyers for Hindus and for Muslims expressed dissatisfaction and promised to appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court.

"There is no reason of any loss of hope," said Zafaryab Jilana, a lawyer representing one of the Muslim parties to the case, speaking on national television. "We do not agree with the formula of giving one-third of the land to Muslims."

The case required the judicial panel to wade deeply into India's contested religious history. Lawyers for Hindu groups had argued that the Ayodhya site was the birthplace of one of Hinduism's most revered deities, Ram. They contended that a temple to Ram had existed on the site until it was demolished to make way for the Babri Masjid, constructed in the 16th century by India's first Mughal ruler.

Soon after the judges read the decision in a closed hearing, lawyers rushed to hundreds of reporters waiting outside the courthouse in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh. “The judgment is in favor of Hindus,” said H. S. Jain, a lawyer for one of the Hindu groups in the case. “The belief of Hindus that this is the birthplace of Ram is upheld.”

But each of the three judges issued a separate opinion, diverging in interpretation of certain facts, including over whether Ram was born precisely on the contested site. Yet the court did hand a significant victory to Hindus, who had argued that Ram was born beneath the central dome of the destroyed structure. That portion of the contested property was granted to Hindus as part of their two-thirds share, presumably to erect a new temple to Ram.

The original case was filed in 1950 and then expanded over the years as more parties claimed title to the property. The Indian government now controls the property, and the court ordered that the status quo remain intact for the next three months. Assuming both sides follow through with filing appeals to the Supreme Court, the case could continue indefinitely.

The initial quiet public response was a relief to Indian officials. Earlier, Palaniappan Chidambaram, the home minister, had predicted that the public would respect the court’s finding.

“I think India has moved on, young people have moved on,” he told the Indian news media.

The oldest plaintiff, Hashim Ansari, 90, a Muslim tailor who had prayed at the Babri Masjid as a boy, said he would not take part in any appeal. He joined the case in 1961 and had looked forward to a ruling as a matter of closure. He called Thursday’s decision a good judgment and hoped that efforts could soon begin to rebuild a mosque on the land granted to Muslims.

Of course, he added, the timing will depend on appeals.

“It took 60 years to get this decision,” he said by telephone. “I do not know how many years the Supreme Court will take. At least I could hear this judgment on my own. Will I hear the Supreme Court judgment in my grave?”

Hari Kumar contributed reporting.