

Babri storm again hits India, parliament in uproar

The ghost of the razed Babri mosque came to haunt India Monday as the opposition paralysed parliament over the leakage of the Liberhan Commission of Inquiry report into the 1992 demolition, reportedly indicting top Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders including Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani.

Faced with an incensed opposition and an aggressive BJP in particular demanding the immediate tabling of the 900-plus page report in parliament, both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha were adjourned following repeated disruptions.

Advani was angry that Vajpayee -- widely seen as a moderate even by his critics and who had expressed regret at the Babri mosque destruction -- had been reportedly indicted in the Liberhan report. Vajpayee was not even summoned by the Commission as there was nothing on record to indicate his involvement, Anupam Gupta, a former counsel for the Commission, said, implying that the Express report was misleading.

Caught on the backfoot, the government pledged to place the report in the ongoing winter session ending Dec 21, but the opposition insisted on seeing it now along with the Action Taken Report (ATR).

At the end of a stormy day, it was not clear who leaked the report to The Indian Express and select television channels, although both NDTV and CNN-IBN maintained that Vajpayee was not indicted in the report.

Both Home Minister P. Chidambaram and retired Supreme Court judge M.S. Liberhan, who took 17 long years to author the report and submitted it to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in June, denied they were to blame for the leakage.

While Chidambaram sought to pacify both houses by saying that there was only one copy of the report and that no one from his ministry had spoken to the media, Liberhan, who lives in Chandigarh, became livid when he was asked by a reporter if he leaked the report.

'Get lost!' Liberhan shouted at journalists who reached his residence. 'I am not that kind of a characterless person that I should leak the report. I have submitted the report to the government.'

Liberhan began work on the report, which cost the government nearly Rs.70 million, shortly after thousands of Hindu activists tore down the 16th century Babri mosque in Ayodhya, a small town in Uttar Pradesh some 700 km east of here.

According to the Indian Express report, the Liberhan Commission had indicted Vajpayee, Advani -- who later went to become the prime minister and deputy prime minister -- and other senior BJP leaders like Murli Manohar Joshi for the mosque razing -- that sparked off terrible communal violence.

The leaked report reportedly labelled the mosque demolition 'tailor made' and blamed Uttar Pradesh's then BJP chief minister Kalyan Singh for failing to prevent the sacrilege.

Advani called the leak a 'shock' and a 'breach of privilege' of parliament but reiterated he was proud of his association with what came to be known as the Ayodhya movement, culminating in the mosque razing Dec 6, 1992.

Leading a scathing attack on the Congress-led government, he said: 'Why is the report not being placed in the house? When we demanded it in the last session, we were told the report would be placed in the house along with ATR. Our demand is that the report along with ATR should be tabled today itself.'

BJP president Rajnath Singh alleged that the leakage of the report was an attempt by the government to polarise voters in the Jharkhand elections starting Wednesday.

The government vowed to table it in the current parliament session.

'We shall table it during the (current) winter session of parliament. It is unfortunate a newspaper has published what purports to be the contents of the report,' said Chidambaram.

Other political parties pitched in.

Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav said: 'The government has been sitting over the report. We want to know why has the government has not tabled it before parliament. How was the report leaked?'

Communist Party of India-Marixst MP Sitaram Yechury said in the Rajya Sabha: 'Both the government and Liberhan Commission are saying that the report has not been leaked from their end but it has to come from one of them.'

The Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) sought action against Advani and others who it said were to blame for the Babri mosque razing. But it went soft on Vajpayee.

The Liberhan probe was India's longest running inquiry commission and took 48 extensions during its tenure.

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