

## VHP chief for a Hindu political party

Vishwa Hindu Parishad chief Ashok Singhal Sunday gave a call for forming a Hindu political front even as he claimed his organisation had supporters cutting across party lines.

'Our objective is to form a Hindu political front through the mobilisation of a strong army of the Hindu voters,' Singhal told a press conference here on the eve of the VHP-sponsored three-day global Hindu meet.

Incessant rain since delayed the start of the meet that was to be formally inaugurated Sunday morning.

While listing out a number of Hindutva issues that were to be taken up at the meet now commencing Monday noon, he did not mince words in declaring, 'the construction of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya remains on top of our agenda.'

The VHP has for long been campaigning for a magnificent temple in place of the makeshift Ram temple that stands on the debris of the 16th century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The international working president of the VHP, who had all along been claiming that his outfit would have nothing to do with politics, said: 'We believe in building Hindu politics.'

Singhal declined to comment when asked what prompted him to look for the formation of a Hindu party when its political ally, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was already fulfilling that role as a Hindu nationalist party.

To repeated queries if he did not consider BJP as a Hindu political outfit, he shot back: 'Any political party keen to don the mantle of a Hindu party will have to come under our banner.'

'As far as Hindutva is concerned, we have strong sympathisers in different political parties including the Congress.'

Singhal claimed the VHP had 'staunch support of a powerful Mumbai-based Congress leader', though he declined to name the politician.

'One day, you will see the convergence of all such Hindus under the common banner of a united Hindu political front.'

Singhal said the VHP had not invited leaders of any political party, including the BJP, for the global meet expected to be attended by 200,000-300,000 Hindus.

Sources, however, said senior BJP leaders including national vice president Kalyan Singh, state BJP president Keshrinath Tripathi and two of his predecessors Kalraj Misra and Vinay Katiyar were set to participate in the conclave on the sprawling banks along the Sangam or confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers here.

Since the rain led to the collapse of nearly all 14,000 tents erected across the vast 300-acre area allotted by the Uttar Pradesh government for the conclave, tens of thousands of participants drawn

from different corners of the country and abroad were busy shifting to alternative sites in the town.

'We are grateful to the local administration for allowing us to put up 200,000 of our dislodged participants in 38 schools,' Singhal said.

*Sharat Pradhan* ( © IANS / India eNews)