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Hindu Temple Plan in India Stokes Tensions

By REUTERS

RAIPUR, India, July 19 (Reuters) — India's governing Hindu nationalists, with an eye on state and federal elections, demanded today that the coalition government approve construction of a Hindu temple on a contested site holy to Muslims and Hindus.

The executive panel of the governing party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, urged the government to pass a law to allow Hindu groups to build the temple in the northern city of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh State, which has been torn by violence between Muslims and Hindus over the issue.

Such a law would bypass the court system, which has been considering the issue for decades, and it is unlikely to find strong support in the governing coalition.

Although the motion is not binding on the government, its timing adds to pressure on the Bharatiya Janata Party from its hard-line Hindu allies ahead of elections in crucial states this year and a national election in 2004.

In 1992, Hindu militants destroyed a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya on the site of what they say is the Hindu god Ram's birthplace, setting off riots that killed more than 3,000 people across the country.