

# MINORITIES: CHRISTIANS - 2004

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RSS sees *Shiva lingam* in stone in stone near Panaji church (7)

Panaji, January 4: A BLOCK of carved stone, which was found in the compound of the Bishop's Palace in Panaji, has become the centre of a controversy. Church authorities say the stone was found in the palace premises after part of a wall was broken during renovation. But as rumours spread that the stone was found while the ground was dug up, RSS and allied organisations began to lay claim to it earlier this week. According to Raju Velingkar, in-charge of the RSS Vishwa Samvaad Kendra, the stone was part of a "*Shiva Lingam*" destroyed by the Portuguese and will have to be "located" where it was found. Sources said a group led by BJP councillors Pritam Rane and Deepak Mapusekar and RSS leader Raju Sukerkar had attempted to gatecrash the Bishop's Palace and make away with the stone on Monday. But officials at the Bishop's Palace, located just 50 metres from CM Manohar Parrikar's official residence, prevented them from doing so and insisted that the object would be handed over only to the government. Father Olavo Velho Pereira, director of the Diocesan Centre for Social Communication Media, said a process was underway to establish the stone's authenticity. Department of Archaeology and Archives director M.L. Dicholkar said the object would be shifted to the Goa State Museum and has written to church authorities in this regard. (Indian Express 5.1.04)

Uma warns against conversion (7)

BHOPAL, JAN 5. Hailing the role of Christian Missionaries in spreading education and serving mankind, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Uma Bharti today said there should be no attempt at religious conversion. During a meeting with the Archbishop of Madhya Pradesh Pascal Topno here, Bharti said: "Religion is an entirely personal matter and no one should be permitted to interfere in anybody's religious beliefs and faiths." She said she was neither against Christian Missionaries nor opposed to the Bible but against religious conversion. She promised all cooperation to organisations working for spreading education and welfare of tribals. Describing herself as quite liberal in religious matters, Bharti said: "One needs to undergo conversion to be able to read the Bible and respect it." She said the state government was encouraging progressive social organizations and greater attention was being given to ensure harmony and goodwill in society. (Hindu 6.1.04)

Christian priest shot dead in central Pak city: Police (7)

Multan: Unidentified gunmen shot dead a Christian priest in the central Pakistani city of Khanewal Monday, police said. The priest, Mukhtar Masih, was headed to the railway station to catch a train for Lahore when the gunmen opened fire, Khanewal's police chief Jamil Ahmed told reporters, he said the priest was hit by three bullets and died on the spot. "It is premature to speculate on the motive behind the murder," Jamil said. Christians and non-Muslim minorities form around three per cent of Muslim Pakistan's 145 million population. (Asian Age 6.1.04)

Bharti meets MP Archbishop (7)

Bhopal, Jan. 5: Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti on Sunday reassured MP and Chhatisgarh diocese Archbishop Reverend Pascal Topno and other religious heads of the Christian community that though she had nothing but respect for the teachings of Jesus Christ, attempts at religious conversion would be frowned upon by her regime. Ms Bharti told The Asian Age that Rev. Topno had expressed his desire to call on her, but she decided to spare him the trouble and call on him instead at Bishop House. Problems which the missionaries were facing in tribal areas were raised at the meeting. Ms Bharti assured them that complete cooperation would be extended in all their efforts to promote economic development and education. The Church, on its part, would have to desist from converting the local populace — even through gentle per-

suasion and mind control. The chief minister said there had been considerable misunderstanding about her views on the subject. Being a Hindu, she knew it was perfectly possible to read and respect the Bible without converting to Christianity. In fact, there was an image of Jesus Christ in her private puja. "Every person has the sovereign right to eat the food and worship the God he/she wanted," she added. (Asian Age 6.1.04)

#### Sex workers allege forcible conversion (7)

Mumbai, Jan. 5: The residents of Jamna Mansion near Lamington Road have lodged a complaint with the Dr D.B. Marg police station, against one Anson Thomas for trying to forcibly convert them to Christianity, extorting and blackmailing them. The 55 complainants, most of whom are commercial sex workers and have been staying in the building for over 40 years, alleged that Thomas, "a Christian missionary posing to be a social worker, has been trying to convince them that conversion will prevent them from getting AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases." They also allege that he has been trying to extort money from them, with the alleged connivance of two sub inspectors of the police station. The women informed that despite filing a complaint on November 15, 2003, and forwarding copies of it to the chief secretary, the Mumbai police commissioner, the additional commissioner of Girgaon division, the deputy commissioner for zone two and the state human rights commission, no step has been taken till date. The residents in their complaint said "Thomas approached us about three months back and started distributing the Bible to our rooms. When we refused, he returned with two officers from the police station, trying to intimidate us. He also blackmailed us that if we refuse to accept Christianity, we will get AIDS or other such diseases. When we went to file the complaint, initially the police station refused because of the involvement of two of their Sis. However they accepted it after we threatened to directly approach the commissioner, but are yet to take any action. They have not even looked into the matter or apprehended those guilty. (Asian Age 6.1.04)

#### Parishad attacks missionary school (7)

BHOPAL, JANUARY 14: INCENSED by the alleged rape and murder of a nine-year-old on a Catholic Mission School campus in Jhabua last night, a mob of VHP activists today forced their way into the campus, pelted stones and attacked the priests there. The mob was protesting the alleged rape and murder of a nine-year-old who was found dead on the campus last night. But so far there is no evidence to connect anybody on the campus with the incident. As per reports reaching here, the girl was selling fruits outside the campus with her brother when she was lured inside by a youth on the pretext that the nuns wanted to buy fruit. When the girl did not return, the brother set out to search for her. She was found dead in a toilet on the campus. Father Pradeep Cherian of the Catholic church stationed 15 km away at Meghanagar said, "The mob gathered outside the school today under the banner of the Hindu Jagran Manch. The Collector and SP assured me they would tackle the situation. Over 500 people forced their way in, attacked the priests and damaged vehicles before the police could control them. I am in touch with the school authorities and right now a 1,000-strong mob is gathered outside the school. Police do not have the numbers to control the situation and the IG is rushing to the spot." (Indian Express 15.1.04)

#### Bomb blast near bible society (7)

Karachi, Jan. 15: A powerful car bomb blew up outside a Christian Bible society on Thursday, injuring seven people, damaging the wall of a nearby church- and shattering parked cars, officials said. The attack in the southern port city of Karachi occurred after the police received an anonymous phone warning that the Pakistan Bible Society would be targeted, said the police operations chief Tariq Jameel. He said that shortly after the officers arrived, assailants in a car drove up and lobbed a small explosive device at them. Fifteen minutes later, a bomb hidden in a nearby parked car exploded, Mr Jameel said. At least 10 nearby cars were destroyed in the attack. Television footage showed twisted metal and shattered glass littering the street outside. Fire-fighters doused the burning cars with hoses as thick black smoke billowed into the air. A large crowd of onlookers gathered quickly on a nearby street as the police cordoned off the area, in an upscale area of central Karachi near many of the city's top hotels. (Asian Age 16.1.04)

#### Uma refuses to see beyond law and order (7)

BHOPAL, JANUARY 16: A FRESH bout of violence broke out in Jhabua today, leaving one dead and nine injured. The clash started after followers of Asaram Bapu, following a discourse by a Gujarati disciple Krishna Behn, raised provocative slogans outside a school compound in Aambut, sources said. After an initial round of ' stone-pelting from the school and the church on the compound, the mob dispersed only to reassemble hours later. In the ensuing clash that witnessed gunfire, stone-pelting and the use of bows and arrows, one man was killed. Later, in retaliation, in Alirajpur town, a priest was beaten up and two houses belonging to Christians were torched, the sources added. This is the third such incident within a fortnight in Jhabua. A jeep and two motorcycles were set ablaze at Antarvalia village under Kalyanpur police station in Jhabua on December 30 after a mob attacked a man named Pursan at the village, alleging that he was holding a meeting for the purpose of conversion. Two days ago, a mob comprising VHP activists attacked a Catholic church in Jhabua town following the rape and murder of a child on the mission campus. Chief Minister Uma Bharati today sought to discount any links between the three incidents, saying that the matter should be treated as a law and order issue and will be dealt with firmly. "Only the latest incident is a cause for worry, but we will make sure there is no fallout of any sort due to this." She, however, added that reports of conversions in Jhabua district have surfaced repeatedly. This activity, she added, cannot be allowed. (Indian Express 17.1.04)

#### Communal tension boils in Jhabua (7)

Bhopal, Jan. 17: Tribal-dominated Jhabua is on the boil. Communal tensions have been on the rise for the last few months, following the decision of the RSS-VHP cadres to prevent religious conversions by Christian missionaries. Backers of the latter, belonging to the ferocious Bhil tribe, struck back on Friday night with bows and arrows in the Alirajpur area, killing one person (unofficially three), injuring over a dozen, and setting a few vehicles and buildings ablaze. A state government spokesperson told this newspaper that 13 people, including a Catholic priest, had been arrested on Saturday, and curfew under Section 144 promulgated in the entire district. Sources in the district administration confirmed that the most serious incident had occurred at Aamkhunt village, when a prayer procession of sadhvis attached to a Hindu saint from neighbouring Gujarat, Asaram Bapu, was attacked and the women manhandled. The sadhvis were distributing religious pamphlets when the surprise attack occurred. The local MLA (Mr Nagar Singh) was also hurt. The violence later spread to other places like Meghnagar, Bhavra and Jobat. (Asian Age 18.1.04)

#### Police are silent watchers as terror returns to Jhabua (7)

AMKUT (JHABUA), JANUARY 18: NIGHTMARES are revisiting Jhabua. And police don't seem to be bothered. As many as 12 Christians have been arrested for violence while the Vishwa Hindu Parishad men who led the mobs that terrorised the converted tribals and the Sadhvi from Gujarat who provoked their action still roam free. The facts so far: On January 13, a 9-year-old was found raped and murdered on the premises of the Catholic Mission School. The next day, a mob led by VHP district chief Khum Singh entered the school premises and attacked the priests. The police then took several of the priests and kept them at a police station for days for their "safety." Later, a Hindu was arrested for the rape but no action has been taken against those in the mob. But worse was in store. Three days later, on January 16, a few sadhvis from Gujarat led by Krishna Behn, disciples of Asaram Bapu, went to the village of Amjut, 60 km from Jhabua. After a discourse against conversions, Krishna Behn led a procession to the premises of the CNI mission. The mission has celebrated its centenary. The church was built in 1914, and most of the villagers in this predominantly Christian village are second- or third-generation Bhil converts. (Indian Express 19.1.04)

#### Jhabua fuels VHP anti-conversion mission (7)

ANTARVELIA (JHABUA) JANUARY 19: THE rape of a nine-year-old in a mission school has become the rallying point for Sangh organisations to up the ante against Christian groups here. The local VHP chief sat on a dharna outside the school, demanding the expulsion of all missionaries from the district. The VHP strung banners at the site, asking missionaries to leave. In the villages outside Jhabua, banners and pamphlets are being distributed, peddling outright

lies — "Jhabua ke mission school mein das saal ki bachhi ke saath balatkaar aur hatya, padri our principal farar (Ten-year-old girl raped and murdered in mission school, priest and principal absconding)". RSS district chief Vaibhav repeats charges that have become the truth here even though a visit to Amkut shows facts are on the contrary. 'Amkut was a symbol of Christian atankvaad (terror). A procession of Hindu sadhvis was attacked by the Christians...the laws should be implemented and conversion should be stopped, the padris will leave automatically. But it is only if the padres leave that conversion will stop. This seems to be the aim behind several incidents that have taken place ever since Uma Bharati came to power. The warning signs were clear enough. The first attack took place in Antervalia, 10 km from Jhabua, on December 30. The same house was attacked on January 13 and a priest was assaulted. The attack was focused on a new church being built by a Pentecostal Sewak Pursan. (Indian Express 20.1.04)

Congress politicizing Jhabua incident: Bharti (7)

BHOPAL, JAN. 20. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, today met a huge delegation from Jhabua that had come to meet her in connection with the recent communal incident at Amkhut village in which one person was killed. She asked them to show restraint and stop using offensive slogans. The Chief Minister assured members of the majority community led by the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram that the State Government would take every necessary step to maintain communal amity and peace in the State. Addressing the delegation, Ms. Bharti said that the Opposition Congress was trying to politicise the Jhabua incident in which one Arjun Pal had been killed. The State Director General of Police had told a press conference, which he had addressed jointly with the Chief Minister this past weekend, that there was a group clash after those in a religious procession had started raising objectionable slogans when they came near the Church at Amkhut village. In this incident, Arjun Pal a 25 year old villager was killed after being shot at allegedly by a member belonging to a minority community. (The Hindu 21.1.04)

Jhabua violence a conspiracy: Congress (7)

BHOPAL, JAN. 21. The Madhya Pradesh Women's Congress president, Shobha Ojha, today reacted strongly to the violence that had erupted at a village in Jhabua district last week-end resulting in one casualty. She said the violent turn of events at Amkhut village followed by ransacking of a church and torching of houses belonging to members of a particular community in neighbouring Alirajpur town was a serious matter. Ms. Ojha was talking to The Hindu on returning from Jhabua, where she had gone along with the State Congress president, Jamuna Devi, and the Congress MP from Jhabua, Kantilal Bhuria, to take stock of the situation leading to the series of violent incidents that had rocked Amkhut village and Alirajpur last Friday. Tracing the sequence of events leading to communal violence in Jhabua, Ms. Ojha said it would be wrong to describe the Jhabua incidents merely as a group clash or a law and order problem. The slogan-shouting in front of the Amkhut church by those supposed to be part of a religious group raises questions regarding the intentions of a section belonging to the majority community, she added. Ms. Ojha alleged that the mob attack and torching of houses belonging to members of the minority community at Alirajpur immediately after the Amkhut incident should not be viewed as a spontaneous reaction but part of a deep-rooted conspiracy. Ms. Ojha also took strong exception to the "abusive" slogans that had been raised by the delegation that had come here yesterday to meet the Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, at the Gufa Mandir premises. (The Hindu 22.1.04)

Jhabua: Uma ministers don't meet victims, give Parivar a clean chit (7)

BHOPAL, JANUARY 21: THE two ministers sent by Chief Minister Uma Bharti to look into the anti-Christian violence in Jhabua following the rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl in a missionary school are back, without talking to any of the victims of the attacks but with a clean chit to Hindu organisations. While several Christians are in custody for their alleged role in the violence, not a single representative from the Sewa Bharti, the RSS or BJP who had been named by the victims has been arrested. Ven DIG, Chambal Range, G.R. Meena, who had been rushed to Jhabua to calm the situation, had blamed organisations such as the Sewa Bharti and BJP for the violence in Alirajpur. Blotting out their role, the report by ministers Kailash Vi-aivargi and Kailash Chawla instead suggests a high-level inquiry to probe whether the violence was a

conspiracy to malign the BJP before the Lok Sabha polls. A claim by the DGP at Uma's press conference that the man who died in the violence, Arjun Pal, was shot at from within the church has also not been rectified, though reports now suggest his vehicle was ambushed 2 km short of Amkut. (Indian Express 22.1.04)

#### Security is not secularism: Pope (7)

NEW DELHI, JAN. 31. Sympathetic to the cause of Sikhs fighting the French Government's move to ban students of the community from wearing turbans to schools, Pope John Paul II has responded to the National Commission for Minorities' (NCM) plea for his intervention in the matter and noted that "secularity is not secularism." Without once mentioning France in a letter to the Commission, the Pope said: "unfortunately in recent times, we have witnessed in some European countries an attitude that could endanger the effective respect for religious freedom." Of the view that believers have a right to participate in public dialogue, he said: "Everyone may agree to 'respect the religious sentiment of individuals but the same cannot be said of the 'religious factor,' that is, the social dimension of religions." Elaborating his contention that "secularity is not secularism," the Pope said: "It is nothing other than respect for all beliefs on the part of the State that assures the free exercise of ritual, spiritual and cultural and charitable activities by communities of believers. In a pluralistic society, secularity is a place for communication between the different spiritual traditions and the nation." The papal message was sent to the NCM chairman, Tarlochan Singh, on Friday in reply to his correspondence with the Vatican regarding the ban on Sikh- children wearing turbans to school in France. (The Hindu 1.2.04)

#### Jhabua Christians' plea to NHRC (7)

NEW DELHI, FEB. 1. Christians of Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh have urged the National Human Rights Commission to ensure that adequate security is provided for them as there had been attacks on them by some organisations in the past month. Meanwhile, the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) is approaching leaders of all parties to mount pressure on the Centre to investigate the link between the rape and murder of a minor girl within a church compound in the district and the "blatantly aggressive communal propaganda against Christian missionaries by RSS organisations." Eager to draw attention to the plight of the 22,000-strong minority community in the predominantly tribal district, a 35-member delegation from the district petitioned the NHRC to investigate the attacks on members of the community beginning December 30. At a press conference prior to approaching the Commission here, the Bishop of the Bhopal Diocese of the Church of North India, L. Maida, said the attacks began within weeks of the new BJP Government taking office in the State. The petition mentioned in detail the attacks on Christians in the district and the manner in which a wedge was sought to be driven within the tribal community to disturb peace. Also, according to Rev. Maida, despite all evidence confirming that the minor had not been raped by priests, Seva Bharati and other Sangh outfits continued their agitation against Christian missionaries and members of the community. Besides, the Christian laity was told to convert within a week or leave the country, he alleged. (The Hindu 2.2.04)

#### Panel for communal peace in Jhabua (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 2: The National Federation of Indian Women, which probed the anti-Christian violence in Jhabua, wants the Madhya Pradesh government to investigate the link between the rape and murder of the tribal girl and the "blatantly aggressive communal propaganda against Christian missionaries." The NF1W has sought that Madhya Pradesh government should initiate urgent steps for restoration of communal harmony, safeguarding the constitutionally-guaranteed rights of Christians and ensure that the school functions normally, so that children do not miss an academic year. "No steps have been taken to instill confidence in Christian community that their rights guaranteed by the Constitution will be safeguarded," the report stated. "A virulent attack has been mounted on the missionaries and Christians by fundamentalist organisations. They are urging the people to drive the missionaries out. As a result of the inflammatory literature, rumours and accusations, schools and churches are being attacked," the report stated (Asian Age 3.2.04)

#### Safeguards valid for tribals who convert (7)

New Delhi: It's a win-win situation for members of the scheduled tribes who convert. According to a recent Supreme Court order delivered by a Bench headed by Chief Justice V N Khare, a convert from a ST (necessarily Hindu) to any other religion not based on caste, will retain the benefits of various constitutional safeguards. If the "erstwhile tribe continues to treat him or her as its member" despite the conversion, an apostate will still enjoy the privileges not available to members of his new religion. The SC order came on a Kerala government appeal against an HC order saying a person accused of molesting the daughter of a former ST, now a Christian, can't be charged under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Thus, the girl who was allegedly molested was no more a member of a scheduled caste or tribe, the high court said. The accused could only be tried under ordinary criminal law and not for committing excesses on a class of oppressed and suppressed citizens, it said, thus absolving the accused of committing atrocities on an ST girl because her parents had embraced Christianity. Setting aside the Kerala HC judgment, the SC said whether such an accused is liable to face charges under the specific Act would be decided by the trial court. (Times of India 9.2.04)

Christian charity office set on fire in Sri Lanka (7)

COLOMBO, FEB. 8. Arsonists including Buddhist monks, set the office of a Christian charity on fire today, officials said. More than a dozen men hurled gasoline bombs at a building in Anuradhapura housing the World Vision office, a Christian humanitarian organisation serving poor children and families in nearly 100 countries, police said. "Nine men, including three Buddhist monks and a university professor, have been arrested for the attack," said M.N. Junaid, secretary to the Interior Ministry. He said the attackers were not from the area.

The arrests were the first since the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, ordered the police to take tough actions in response to mounting attacks on Christian places of worship. Attacks on churches have escalated since December following the death of a Buddhist monk, Gangodavila Soma, who led a campaign against religious conversions by Christian groups. Although medical reports said he died of a heart attack, some Buddhists have blamed Christians for his death. (The Hindu 9.2.04)

7 women tonsured for embracing Christianity (7)

BHUBANESWAR: In a bizarre incident in Jagatsinghpur district, a gang of people allegedly tonsured eight persons including seven women who had embraced Christianity seven years ago. The incident took place in Kilipala village under Tirtol Police Station. Several members of the minority community, including women and two infants, are reported to have fled the village apprehending trouble. (Indian Express 16.2.04)

Nine Christians tonsured in Orissa (7)

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 10: At least nine persons, including seven women, were allegedly tonsured and beaten up at Khilipala village, in Orissa's coastal district of Jagatsinghpur, over a dispute on Christianity. The seven women managed to flee their village and reached the state capital, Bhubaneswar, late on Sunday evening. The terrified women, who belong to the minority community, said: "Some rogue elements in the village tonsured us when they did not find our men." The victims said fresh communal tension flared last month after two women and a young man of the village showed an interest in embracing Christianity. Last Sunday, when the three villagers went to church to pray, it reportedly enraged the villagers. Subsequently a pastor, Subhas Samal was attacked at his home. Sensing trouble, 10 villagers belonging to the Christian community reportedly fled the village last Monday. The victims said some of the villagers forcibly entered their houses on Tuesday in search of the men, and then tonsured the women in the houses in the presence of the villagers. "No one protested while the women were being tonsured in broad daylight," said Sumitra Kandi, one of the victims. Pastor Subhas Samal had been missing since then, they said. "Earlier, on several occasions, we were threatened and told to reconvert to Hinduism," said Dolly Bhoi, another victim. (Asian Age 17.2.04)

Probe tonsuring row, says Christian panel (7)

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 18: The All India Christian Council demanded judicial inquiry into the alleged forcible tonsuring of seven women in Kilipala village of Jagatsinghpur district. Expressing concern

over the growing "Christian victimisation" in the state, general secretary of AICC John Dayal said, "Orissa has become a synonym for the persecution of Christians, much as Gujarat is for the killings of Muslims and burning of Churches. The state government, with its own tyrannical record of victimisation and cornering of the Church and the Christian community, has looked on and often connived by its deliberate inaction in the violence against Christians." A day after Hindu Jagaran Samukhya, a sangh parivar outfit paraded one "reconverted" villager of Kilipala in the state capital, the Christian body again presented five victims who were being allegedly threatened by rouse elements of the region. Earlier, a delegation led by AICC secretary visited Jagatsingpur district to take stock of the situation. While briefing local media here, Mr Dayal said, "The administration was hand in gloves with the culprits. Even after a torture incident to such a magnitude happened, the local police swung into action too late." The police had adopted a relaxed approach to receive first information report from the minority, Mr Dayal alleged. (Asian Age 19.2.04)

#### 4 Christian priests join Kerala B JP (7)

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Kerala unit of the BJP got a big boost as four Christian priests from various congregations joined the party. A jubilant Sredharan Pillai, Kerala BJP president, told The Pioneer that this proves that the BJP is a party for all Indians where all are welcome irrespective of their caste or creed. Abraham Thomas, Thomas David, J J Kochuparambil and K Christy John are the priests who have joined the party. Abraham Thomas and Thomas David belong to the Church of South India; Kochuparambil is with the Anglican Church at Kurichi village in Kottayam district and John is a pastor in the Pentecostal Church. This sudden development has given the much needed boost to the candidature of Union Minister P C Thomas, who is contesting the polls as an NDA candidate in a constituency traditionally supporting the Congress. With the Christian voters influencing the election results, Mr Thomas was on a sticky wicket as there were possibilities of the opponents raking up the Hindutva issues which could undermine his chances. Now, after the direct entry of the priests into the party, the anti-BJP propaganda pertaining to Christian beatings will hold no water. (Pioneer 21.2.04)

#### Sister Nirmala, others robbed in Jharkhand (7)

MEDININAGAR (JHARKAND), FEB. 21. The Superior General of Missionaries of the Charity, Sister Nirmala, was among a number of people robbed by a gang near Amjharia Ghati in Latehar district today. The District Superintendent of Police, Maninder Singh Bhatia, said a group of 20 to 25 went on a looting spree on Medininagar-Ranchi Road near Amjharia Ghati under the Chandua police station. They stopped a number of vehicles, including buses, and looted the people. Sister Nirmala, who was on a two-day visit to Palamu district in connection with some functions, was in a vehicle along with five others, the Bishop of Chandwa, Anthony Xevier Lakra, said. (The Hindu 22.2.04)

#### 5<sup>TH</sup> March

##### Judeo reconverts 212 to Hinduism (7)

Bhubaneswar, March 4: Around 212 tribals who had embraced Christianity were on Thursday reconverted to Hinduism in Jharsuguda town, around 350 kms here. The sacred ceremony was presided over by the disgraced Bharatiya Janata Party leader Dilip Singh Judco. At a two-hour-long ceremony in the western Orissa town, the grounds near the Jhadeswari temple burnt with a massive shuddhikriya havan as former Union minister Dilip Singh Judeo washed the feet of the tribal men, women and children with gangajal to bring them back to Hinduism. The temple was the venue for mass reconversion of these iribals under Operation Ghar Vapsi programme. Batik-printed sarees, cotton shawls printed with Lord Ram's name and gamchhas were handed over to over 100 men, 70 women and 30 children from 53 families as the symbolic way of leaving Christianity. The reconversion ceremony was organised by Vishwa Hindu Prishad, Rushikul Seva Trust, Bharat Vikash Parishad, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram and Adivasi Surak-sha Samili. The iribals were transported from Jharsugura and neighbouring Sundcrgarh district. They were told to chant Gayatri and Sri Rain mantra from a group of priests led by Swami Jivana Claitanya Maharaj. Mr Judeo who sat on a low wooden stool washed and wiped their feet. The tribals were later fed with a meal of rice, dal and vegetables. (Asian Age 5.3.04)

27<sup>th</sup> March

Sant denies role in re-conversions (7)

Jaipur, March 26: Asa Ram Bapu today denied any role in re-conversions carried out by Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the Adivasi areas bordering Rajasthan and Gujarat. "I did not re-convert any" said the popular sant who is starting his four-day long discourse here at the behest of Raj Bhavan for raising funds to help the poor. The sant's response came when a journalist quizzed him about his alleged role in re-conversions carried out in the Adivasi belt of Banswara Dungarpur in the past at a press conference here at Raj Bhavan, also was present. Both Asa Ram Bapu and Mr. Khurana were seemingly taken aback for a moment by the unexpected query. The latter even objected to the impropriety of the questions. He is here on a pious mission that is to help the poor. You too have been invited to support the cause, a visibly upset Mr. Khurana told the newsmen. (The Hindu 27.3.04)

5<sup>th</sup> April

Court seeks clarification on Christian harassment (7)

Bhubaneswar, April 4: A division bench of the Orissa high court comprising of Chief Justice S.B. Roy and justice B.P. Das has directed the state government to inform it in detail about the alleged harassment of some converted Christian dalits of Kilipal village in Jagatsinghpur district. The converted dalits were allegedly harassed by some of their villagers on February 10. The high court's decision came following a petition filed by one Prabir Kumar Das, a social activist from Bhubaneswar. In his letter to the high court, Mr Das has sought its intervention and asked it to provide protection to the victims to avoid further assault. Eight persons, who had embraced Christianity seven years back, were forcibly harassed. (Asian Age 5.4.04)

7<sup>th</sup> April

Protest against Gujarat's denial of holiday on Good Friday (7)

AHMEDABAD, APRIL 6. The All-India Christian Council, which held a dharna here today to press its demand for the Gujarat Government to declare Good Friday on April 9 as a public holiday, has threatened to intensify its agitation and "boycott" the Lok Sabha elections if its demand is not met. The AICC joint secretary, Samson Christian, said that though the State Government had earlier rescheduled the examinations due on April 9 in the schools and colleges in the State on a directive from the National Minorities Commission (NMC), it had so far refused to declare it a public holiday. Gujarat University had also scheduled examinations on that day to the disadvantage of Christian students. He said it was the first time since Independence, that Good Friday had been taken out of the list of public holidays and had been declared a restricted holiday apparently to harass Christians. The AICC had earlier brought the matter to the attention of the NMC as well as the president, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and it had asked the authorities to look into the matter but the BJP Government in the State had failed to give a positive response. It was strange, he said, while the Central Government had declared Good Friday a public holiday, the State Government had not. (Hindu 7.4.04)

SC petitioned to stop Easter exams (7)

MAINTAINING THAT Christian students were being forced to choose between their faith and their professions, some Christian groups have asked the Supreme Court to stop medical and dental school exams from being held on Easter Sunday, their lawyer said on Tuesday

Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council and three others filed a petition on Monday demanding that the government and national education authorities change the date of examinations from April 11 (Easter Sunday), said petitioners' lawyer Vincent Panikulangara. The Easter Sunday date will "hurt the religious freedom of Christians in India," Panikulangara said. They, however, did not specify what date they wanted the exams held. (Hindustan Times 7.4.04)

8<sup>th</sup> April

Modi move on Good Friday draws flak (7)

AHMEDABAD, APRIL 7: THE All India Christian Council (AICC), on behalf of the Christian community in Gujarat, has condemned the BJP-ruled state government's decision to cancel Good Friday falling on April 9 as a public holiday. The government, however, has decided to conduct Gujarat University examinations on that day, states a release issued by the Council here. Council joint secretary Samson Christian, argues that never has the holiday been scrapped by any government as Christians throughout the country observe fasts and other rituals on the day. The release alleges that the government had decided to scrap the public holiday despite several representations made by leaders of the Christian community. A letter of the General Administration Department states that the state government has not entertained the representation made by Council for maintaining Good Friday as a public holiday. The letter dated March 23 and signed by section officer A.P. Joshi, says the government has declared the day as a voluntary holiday. (Indian Express 8.4.04)

20<sup>th</sup> April

Vote for secular parties, church tells Catholics (7)

Mumbai, April 19: Catholic Bishop's Conference of India has urged all Catholics to vote for "secular parties." The Mumbai Catholics Secular Forum plans to organise a janjagan abhiyan and a rath to urge the community members to vote for the right candidate. All parties including the BJP and Shiv Sena are targeting Catholics for their vote banks. "However during this election, Catholics have decided to raise their voice against alarming incidents like nuns being raped and atrocities against priests. And the only way is by electing the right candidate," said Archbishop of Mumbai, Ivan Cardinal Dias. "As a step towards electing a person of integrity and one who can guarantee all the constitutional rights of the the people, the Mumbai Catholic Secular Forum and the Catholic Association have appointed 200 representatives to urge Christians across Mumbai and Kerala to come out and vote for the right candidate," Archbishop Dias added. The Kerala Catholic Association which has over 1.5 lakh members alleged that the community has always been targeted for unwarranted atrocities. (Asian Age 20.4.04)

28<sup>th</sup> April

Rape victim threatens to kill herself (7)

BHOPAL, APRIL 27: THE Madhya Pradesh Christian Association today said a victim of gangrape in the riots that followed the formation of the BJP government would burn herself in front of the police headquarters if the community was "denied justice". Association president Indira Iyengar and secretary Anil Martin said the victim had been gangraped and her house burnt in the riots. The criminals allegedly also looted valuables. No FIR has been registered despite several complaints, they said. Accusing the administration of harassing Christians in tribal-dominated Jhabua, Iyengar said the victim had decided to immolate herself in front of the DGP's office on April 29 if justice was not done. Iyengar said representatives of Christians from across the state would hold a two-day meet here from April 28 to discuss the situation. (Indian Express 28.4.04)

1<sup>st</sup> May

Dara Singh gets 1 yr RI (7)

Cuttack: A local court on Friday convicted Dara Singh, sentenced to death in the Graham Staines triple murder case, and five others for assaulting Dara Singh jail employees. The court of Judicial Magistrate (first class) Bikram Patnaik sentenced Ravindra Kumar Pal alias Dara Singh, and five others to one year rigorous imprisonment and fined them Rs 500 each. They have been charged with restraining, assaulting and causing hurt to the staff of the circle jail at Choudwar in February 2003. The court found the accused guilty under Sections 452, 332, 427 of IPC, Section 3 of Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act (Times of India 1.5.04)

4<sup>th</sup> May

Six held for tonsuring Christians (7)

Bhubaneswar, May 3: The Jagatsinghpur police has arrested six persons, including three women, on alleged charges of tonsuring and assaulting eight persons, including seven women who had embraced Christianity in Kilipala village under the Tirtol police station. The arrested persons are

Rebati Das, Santilata Samal, Susama Kandi, Guru Charna Samal, Sukadev Samal and Babaji Das. The police had also arrested two persons in February. The arrested persons were produced before the Jagatsinghpur sub-divisional judicial magistrate on Saturday, who rejected their bail petitions and remanded them to judicial custody. The Orissa high court had recently directed the district administration to take necessary action against the culprits. Following the arrest, tension mounted in Kilipala village. Police officials have rushed to the village to take stock of the situation. The police is guarding the houses of the Christians to prevent any untoward incident. District superintendent of police, Mr Suresh Palasania, said one section of the armed force had been deployed in the village to maintain law and order. As reported earlier, several persons had embraced Christianity in Kilipala and nearby areas two years back, sparking off tension in the area. It was alleged that many poor persons had been lured by the missionaries to convert to Christianity. Subash Samal, a pastor, who had reportedly converted about 20 villagers in Kilipala, was assaulted by some villagers three months back. After the tansuring incident, the victims had left the village and were staying in Bhubaneswar. Recently, they came to the village under tight security to cast their votes in the elections. In yet another development, Jagatis-inghpur district Viswa Hindu Parishad president Premananda Pradhan demanded the arrest of the persons who embraced Christianity without informing the district authorities as required under the Orissa Freedom to Religion Act. (Asian Age 4.5.04)

#### MINORITIES

##### 10. Churches told to play more proactive role (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 29. The Communion of Churches has called upon its constituent churches to play a more proactive role in society to build peace and harmony in society and pledged support to the new Government to fight poverty and corruption. At its executive committee meeting in the Capital on Thursday, the Communion welcomed the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh's statement reassuring that no more incidents like the Godhra carnage or the 1984 riots will take place again. It said the minorities had lost faith in the previous Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government. (The Hindu 30.5.04)

##### 28<sup>th</sup> May

##### Communion of churches calls for peace and harmony (7)

New Delhi, May 27: The communion of churches on Thursday called upon its constituent churches to play a more pro-active role in society to build peace and harmony in society and pledged support to fight poverty and corruption. At its first executive committee meeting held here, the communion welcomed Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement reassuring that no more incidents like the Godhra carnage or the 1984 riots will take place any more. The committee, said that the minorities who had lost faith under the previous BJP-led government, have now been assured. Rev. Dr B.P. Sugandhar, moderator church of South India, speaking on behalf of the communion, said that the committee had taken stock of the situation prevailing vis-a-vis the minorities, especially the Christians in the past few years. He sought an assurance from the new government that minorities should not be exploited and should have equal access to all natural resources. (Asian Age 28.5.04)

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> June

##### Pastor denied bail over conversions (7)

Bhubaneswar, June 1: A local court in Orissa on Monday rejected the bail plea of a pastor and his associates in a case connected to inducing villagers to embrace Christianity. Acting on an FIR filed by some residents of Killipala village, the Tirtol police had arrested the pastor and one Dhaneswar Kandi and produced them in court on Saturday. Seven women of the minority Christian community were allegedly tonsured in February 2004 in Jagatsinghpur. The women fled the village fearing more attacks. Following the incident, two groups had filed separate FIRs with the Tirtol police. The sub-divisional judicial magistrate of Jagatsinghpur, while rejecting the pastor's bail plea, observed, "During investigations, it transpired that the accused persons are involved under Section 3 of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The alleged offences, under Sections 295/506 of the IPC, are non-bailable and can be tried exclusively by a designated court that has special jurisdiction." The judicial magistrate noted, "Materials on record reveal the

alleged destruction and defilement of places of religious worship of the informant community by the accused persons. Considering the serious nature of the alleged offences, the stage of investigation and the nature and sensitivity of the alleged offences, the petition for bail has no merit and the same is rejected." Investigations revealed that when the Tirtol police had registered a case against pastor Subhas Samal and his associate, it had mentioned Sections 294/506/34 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 4 of the Freedom of Religion Act. However, while being forwarded to court, sections 295 and 298 of the IPC and Section 3 of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act were added. (Asian Age 2.6.04)

9<sup>th</sup> June

No need to repeal anti-conversion Act (7)

MADURAI, JUNE 8. There was no need for the Tamil Nadu Government to repeal the Anti-Conversion Act as it aimed at preventing conversions by force or allurements, the convener of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, Dayananda Saraswati, said today. Talking to reporters here, he said religious freedom should not be misused to convert people and it was the duty of government and the society to protect "non-aggressive religions." "There is violence in conversion as it destroyed the roots and emotional connection of a person and completely threw away the culture and tradition of his religion. The Greek and Roman religions were completely ruined in this manner." "Let us not tread upon other religion in the name of conversion because conversion is a type of aggression," Swami Dayananda said and called upon all sections to live in harmony. (Hindu 9.6.04)

12<sup>th</sup> July

Orissa pastor is granted bail in conversion case (7)

Bhubaneswar, July 11: The Orissa high court granted bail to one pastor and his accomplice in connection of an alleged conversion that took place in Kilipal village of Jagatsinghpur of Orissa early this year. They were arrested on charges of converting the Hindus and for hurting the religious sentiments of the people of Kilipal village. The Tirtol police had registered the case under section 294/506/295/298/34 of IPC and section 4 of Orissa Freedom of Religion Act and Section 3 of SC and ST Atrocities Act against the pastor and a family of six persons belonging to Christian community on the basis of a FIR filed by one Babaji Das in the month of February this year. The high court granted anticipatory bail to all the 'accused persons except pastor Subash Samal and Dhaneswar Kandi. The two were earlier denied bail by a district court on the ground of sensitivity attached to the case. The accused persons thereafter had moved the bail application before the high court. The incident had hugged national headline as seven women were tonsured by a group of villagers belonging to the Hindu community. The All India Christian Council had sent petitions to NHRC and demanded a judicial probe be conducted into the tonsuring of seven women. Subsequently some villagers even had tried to forcibly reconvert the women and the pastor into Hinduism. Followed by Orissa high court's intervention through a PIL, the district administration had arrested six persons belonged Hindu community for tonsuring seven Christian women. (Asian Age 12.7.04)

15<sup>th</sup> July

Staines widow leaves India (7)

Mumbai, July 14: Gladys Staines, wife of slain Australian missionary Graham Staines, is leaving for Australia on July 15, five years after her husband and two minor sons were burnt to death by Hindu fundamentalists on June 1999 in Baripada, Orissa. Ms Staines told The Asian Age she is taking a long break and will definitely return. "I am not sure when it will happen, but I will definitely return as I love India and her people. My daughter has finished her education here and wants to pursue higher studies in Australia. Besides, my father is not well and is awaiting my return," she said. It is learnt that Ms Staines is shifting her base to her homeland, though she will visit India frequently. Ms Staines said she would use her time in Australia to reflect on the past and plan the future. "I need time to think about what God wants me to do instead of what I want to do, or what others expect from me." Ms Staines said that after spending over 20 years in India, she feels a part of this culture and has several friends and well-wishers. (Asian Age 15.7.04)

16<sup>th</sup> July

When we forgive, we allow wounds to heal (7)

BHUBANESWAR/KOLKATA, JULY 15. : Gladys Staines, widow of the slain . Australian missionary, Graham Stuart Staines, is leaving the country — but not for good. But one thing is clear: she will now spend more time in Australia for family reasons. "I am leaving India for some time. But I plan to come back," Mrs. Staines told The Hindu over phone from Kolkata this afternoon. Mrs. Staines, who left for Kolkata from Baripada on Wednesday, was due to catch a flight to Australia along with her 18-year-old daughter, Esther, late this evening. Mrs. Staines had visited Australia a few times after Graham Staines and their two sons, Timothy, 8, and Philip, 10, were burnt to death by a mob at Manoharpur village in Orissa's Keonjhar district on the night of January 23, 1999. But this time her stay in Australia will be longer for two major reasons: her daughter, who has finished her schooling in Udhagamandalam, will be pursuing studies in medicine there and Mrs. Staines will attend to her ailing 91-year-old father at home. She said she was leaving India for family reasons. "My reasons for leaving India are personal. I am not leaving India for any other reason, but for some family reasons. I am tired and am looking for refreshment. I also need some time to reflect," Mrs. Staines added. "My 91-year-old father needs care and my daughter will be going to university to study medicine. But I will come back. When, I don't know. Who knows what will happen tomorrow?" she said. (The Hindu 16.7.04)

20<sup>th</sup> July

NCM prevails, Dutch missionary to stay in Valley (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 19: THE National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has recommended extension of the visa for a Dutch missionary, who had been asked to leave, as his presence in Jammu and Kashmir was reportedly fuelling tensions due to alleged reports of conversion. The Commission found no evidence of conversions by any of the organised Christian groups and hence asked that 74-year-old Jim Brost be permitted to stay put in Kashmir till October 2005. The permission was given so that an orphanage and two schools run by Brost for underprivileged Kashmiri children do not suffer. NCM member W Augustine, who visited Kashmir to investigate an appeal of Christian associations on behalf of Brost, told The Indian Express that he was impressed by the work being done by the priest. 'At the schools in Puhvama and Srinagar, I found parents of the children protective about Brost and he seems to be a popular figure in Srinagar. I guess, people should not have any problem.' The member also met J-K Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed to discuss the issue. (Indian Express 20.7.04)

11<sup>th</sup> Aug

Parivar activists stop bus carrying Christians (7)

JAIPUR, AUG.10. A group of Sangh Parivar activists on Monday forcibly stopped a Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation bus taking tribal Christians from Banswara to Ajmer near the Chittorgarh railway station alleging that they were being led to a conversion ceremony. The bus, carrying a group of 28, comprising 10 women, six extension workers and regular passengers on their way to Ajmer, was stopped at Chittorgarh around 2.15 p.m. by the activists. The roadways bus stand at Chittorgarh came virtually under the siege as Sangh workers reached there in large numbers following a call by their leaders. VHP and the Bajrang Dal men got into the bus and manhandled the passengers, including a tribal priest, Stephen Rawat, who is the director of the Banswara unit of the Udaipur-based Sampoorna Jeevan Vikas Samiti. Later, following police intervention, the tribals escaped the fury of slogan-shouting men, but had to return to Banswara. "This is tragic. A bogey of conversion was created to thwart even a no-religious activity. The attempt is to harass and intimidate the minorities so that they are deprived of their place under the sun," the Bishop of Udaipur Catholic Diocese, Joseph Pathalil, told this correspondent over telephone. (The Hindu 11.2.04)

17<sup>th</sup> Aug

Years after church damage, tempers simmer in village (7)

SADADPADA (NASHIK), AUGUST 16: SIX years after a church used by tribals here was partly destroyed by a mob, tempers are once again rising in Sadadpada village in Nashik district's Peth tehsil. Following the conviction of 24 people for damaging the shrine, the 17 families that prayed

at the church are keen to rebuild it. But a section of villagers are opposing them on the grounds that the matter is sub-judice as those convicted have gone in appeal. "For six years, we have been praying in this damaged structure and now since the attackers have been convicted, we want to repair it," said Kusha Bosare, who was attacked by the mob six years ago. "But the villagers say we can't do it." He pointed out that officials had asked them to wait. "We have decided to go on a hunger strike at the district collectorate after two days," he said. Another tribal, Madhukar Nimbare, said the shrine was on the verge of collapse. District SP Raj Vardhan said the matter would be sorted out soon. "I told them that there was no need to agitate because the church is on private land and professing any religion is their right. But I need some time to go through the records and find a solution." The issue has created a division along communal lines. Gopal Jadhav, who had led the attack and was sentenced to a year's imprisonment with 23 others, could not be reached for his reaction. (Indian Express 17.8.04)

29<sup>th</sup> Aug

Parivar Review Christian activities (7)

Bhubaneswar, Aug.28: Sangh Parivar organisations in Orissa on Saturday demanded review of activities of various Christian charitable institutes and churches in the state. Speaking to reporters here, Bajrang Dal state coordinator Subash Chauhan and Vishwa Hindu Parishad state general secretary Gauriprasad Rath alleged that some Christian organisations and missionaries were indulging in conversion activities in the tribal areas of the state and maintained that their functioning should be monitored by the Orissa government. Stating that a number of Christian organisations had unauthorised occupation of government lands, they urged the government to reclaim the surplus and unauthorised lands at the earliest to avert clashes between the local people and Christians. Asked if the VHP and Bajrang Dal condemned the recent attack on Catholic Church allegedly by some local tribals at Raikia town in the Phulbani district, the duo said the entire incident was an outburst of anger against the "unpleasant" manner and activities of the church authorities there. They, however, maintained that the incident could not be described as communal. On Thursday, about 300 people ransacked the Catholic Church at Raikia. They allegedly demolished a fence of the Vijaya High School, run by the Lady of Charity Church, which is 50 years old, and destroyed some statues inside the prayer hall. The mob set fire to the altar cloth and other materials. The Church members then set on fire a truck parked near the school fence. The trouble started when some people moved the fencing in front of the church to plant trees. (Asian Age, 29-8-2004)

12 held for violence in Orissa (7)

BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 28. Twelve persons have been arrested in Raikia town of Orissa's Kandhamal district in connection with Thursday's violence involving two communities.

The arrested persons, who belonged to both the communities, were produced before the court today and remanded to judicial custody. The police have promulgated Section 144 of the Cr.P.C. to maintain law and order in the town. Seven platoons of police have been deployed in the area.

Church desecrated a large number of people, including some local traders, had demolished a disputed fence outside a school run by the minority community and desecrated the adjacent church on Thursday afternoon. This was followed by a clash between the members of two communities. At a press conference here, the general secretary of the VHP's Orissa unit, Gouri Prasad Rath, demanded that the State Government stop giving land to the missionary organisations. (The Hindu, 29-8-2004)

10<sup>TH</sup> September

Orissa CM under fire for attacks on churches (7)

Bhubaneswar, Sept. 9: The Opposition parties in Orissa have decided to tighten the noose around the Navin Patnaik government over its miserable record of handling communal violence. Leaders of five political parties demanded a probe by National Minorities Commission into the recent church attack at Raikia in Kandhamal district. A fact-finding team, comprising of the Congress, the Orissa Gana Parishad, the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Janata Dal(S), visited the troubled Raikia area of , Kandhamal district to assess the situation after the church attack. In a joint statement issued by these five parties, they alleged the state government's go-soft approach

on fundamentalist forces had caused the unfortunate incident. They claimed that the RSS and VHP had converted this under-developed district into a laboratory to experiment their perverted ideas. Orissa PCC president Jayadev Jena expressed concern over frequent planned attacks on churches and missionaries by the fundamentalist forces. (Asian Age 10.9.04)

#### 17<sup>TH</sup> September

##### Reconversion in Staines's district (7)

Bhubaneswar, September 16: NEARLY 50 Christian families in the tribal-dominated Mayurbhanj district will be reconverted to Hinduism on September 19. The ceremony is being organised by the VHP. Baripada, the district headquarters of Mayurbhanj, was the home of the late Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his widow Gladys for a number of years. Dara Singh, main accused in Staines's murder, also used to operate in the area and was eventually arrested in the district. As per the provisions of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (OFRA), Christian families have submitted affidavits stating their intention to change their religion. "It will be wrong to describe it as reconversion," said VHP state secretary Gouri Prasad Rath. "We call it homecoming." Launching an attack on the district administration, Rath said, "When we organise a home-coming ceremony, we have to follow all the provisions of the OFRA. But when these gullible people were converted to Christianity, no permission was required from the district administration." Meanwhile, Christian leaders in the state have voiced their protests against such reconversions. They allege partiality on the part of the district administration in enforcing the provisions of the OFRA. "While the district administration deny permission to those seeking to change their religion to Christianity, they readily grant permission to the so-called 'home-coming' ceremonies," said a Christian leader. The function comes close on the heels of an attack on a church in Raikia, where statues were broken and the Bible was set on fire. (Hindustan Times 17.9.04)

#### 20<sup>th</sup> September

##### VHP converts 75 in Orissa to Hinduism (7)

Baripada (Orissa), Sept. 19: Amidst shouts of "Jai Shri Ram," 75 people belonging to 35 tribal families were reconverted to Hinduism at Sarat in Orissa's Mayurbhanj district on Sunday. All the tribals, 40 men and 35 women, who wore new clothes on the occasion were given panchamruta, nirmalya and sprinkled with sacred Gangajal in the presence of VHP leaders. Bhagaban Das Mahant Maharaj, member of the VHP's Kendriya Marg Darshak Mandal, VHP state secretary Gouri Prasad Rath, Bajrang Dal state convenor Subash Chouhan and BJP MLA Pratap Sarangi were among those who attended the five-hour function. Speaking on the occasion, VHP state secretary Rath said the organisation's campaign against "forcible conversion" would continue. "People are being converted through inducement," he alleged while demanding that all such conversion should stop. Referring to the reconversion, VHP leaders said these people had strayed and were now "coming home." The provisions of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act would "not apply to them as they are returning to their own religion," they said. No untoward incident was reported during the ceremony which was delayed because of heavy rains. One platoon of police stood guard outside the venue. Laxman Singh of Gokulchandrapur village, who went through the "reconversion" ritual, said after becoming Christian, they had been ostracised by Hindus. (Asian Age 20.9.04)

#### 26<sup>th</sup> September

##### Attack on sisters of Missionaries of Charity (7)

KOZHIKODE, SEPT. 25. Two groups of sisters and brothers belonging to the order of Missionaries of Charity were attacked, allegedly by BJP activists, at a Dalit colony, near Pantheerankave here, today. The first incident occurred around noon when two sisters of the Missionaries of Charity at West Hill here, Sister Sirolina (46) and Sister Rose Merlyn (40), accompanied by the driver of their vehicle, Saji (30), were on a visit to the colony ('Mambuzhakkad Mithal Four-cent Harijan Colony') to distribute food. According to sources at the House of the Missionaries of Charity at West Hill, the sisters visited the colony on a request for help from the residents there. A group of five persons, shouting pro-BJP slogans, attacked the sisters and the driver. The sisters were allegedly threatened with iron rods and chains. Sister Sirolina

suffered head injuries. Saii also suffered injuries. A second group from the Missionaries of Charity which arrived at the spot on hearing the news had to face the ire of a larger group comprising over 30 persons. The windscreen of the van in which they came was smashed. The Mother Superior, Sister Kusumam (52) of the Vel-limadukunnu centre, who was seated in the vehicle, suffered head injuries. Brother Superior Varghese (37) of Mercy Home, Brother Varghese, Sister Shalot, Kenyan missionary Bernard (26) and driver Anto (28) had to face the ire of the assailants. (The Hindu 26.9.04)

27<sup>th</sup> September

Attack on nuns: 13 BJP, RSS supporters quizzed (7)

KOZHIKODE, SEPTEMBER 26: SIX'1 KEN persons were questioned by the police in connection with yesterday's attack on members of Missionaries of Charity, at Olavanna. According to sources, police have received evidence about the involvement of three persons, suspected to be RSS, BJP men. Of the sixteen —13 BJP, RSS and three DYFI sympathisers —two were let off after questioning, while the rest are being held for further interrogation. Police have registered three separate cases — one related to an attack on cops, and other two for attacking two groups of missionaries. Nallam CI Pradeep Ku-mar will lead the investigation on charges of "attempted murder". Police also said the raids will continue in the Pantheerankavu area until all suspects are apprehended. The nuns, along with other workers, had visited a Dalit colony for a rice distribution programme. North Zone IG Aravind Ranjan said another aspect that is being investigated is whether a foreigner on tourist visa can engage in evangelical activities. "The Kenyan Bernard arrived on (he scene after hearing about the violence, and not for any evangelical work. If there has been any violation of law in this matter, action will certainly be taken," he added. (Indian Express 27.9.04)

29<sup>th</sup> September

Attack on nuns: Chandy visits Dalit colony (7)

KOZHIKODE, SEPT. 28. The Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, today visited the Dalit colony at Pantheerankavu near here where the volunteers of the Missionaries of Charity were attacked by a gang of miscreants on September 18. After the visit, the Chief Minister said: "It is a heinous act. This is not an issue concerning any particular section of our society. It is a shame for the entire State." (Hindu 29.9.04)

Attack on nuns: Crime Branch joins police in probe (7)

KOZHIKODE, SEPT. 28. The Crime Branch sleuths today joined the local police in investigating the attack on nuns belonging to the Missionaries of Charity on September 25. Though no arrests have been made even three days after the attack, the Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, who was in the city today disclosed that 13 persons suspected to be involved in the incident had been identified. "They would be brought to book," the Chief Minister told media men at the Government Guest House after he visited the Mambuzhakkad Mithal Colony, near Pantheerankavu here, where the incident occurred. The Chief Minister made it quite clear that he was quite satisfied with the progress of the investigation. The Crime Branch was being associated with the probe only because the resources of the local police were fully stretched right now because of the agitations launched in the wake of the incident. (The Hindu 29.9.04)

1<sup>st</sup> October

Attack on nuns: NCW for probe by senior authority (7)

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 30. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has written to the Kerala Chief Minister, Oommeh Chandy, recommending an enquiry by a senior authority into the attack on nuns of the Missionaries of Charity in the Kozhikode district on September 25. Briefing media persons here today, the NCM Chairman, Tarlochan Singh, was critical of the police for not being alert and taking pre-emptive action. "After the first attack — when the driver was hit and the nuns threatened — the police should have been more alert. The second attack took place in the presence of two policemen and still they could not protect the nuns, and have delayed taking action against the guilty." The NCM member, V. V. Augustine, visited the spot and submitted a report wherein the police has been found wanting. As to whether there was any truth in the

allegation that the attackers were persons owing allegiance to the Bharatiya Janata Party/Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh, Mr. Augustine — who had contested a Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket — was non-committal. He said that there was no merit in the contention that large-scale conversions were going on in the area.

In fact, he cited Census data to show that there was no growth in the Christian population in the area. (Hindu 1.10.04)

7<sup>th</sup> October

Reconversions on in Staines' distt (7)

Bhubaneswar, October 6: ORISSA'S MAYURBHANJ district, home to late Australian missionary Graham Staines, is witnessing another proselytisation drive. Close on the heels of last month's reconversion ceremony at Sarat where 75 Christians were brought back into the Hindu fold, a second ceremony will be held on October 20 at Bhajakia in the same district. While at Sarat, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) organised an atma-sudhi yagna, a Hindu Jagaran Dharma Sabha is being planned at Bhanjakia. Six members of one Christian family have already agreed to change their religion. Efforts are on to reconvert more Christians at this Dharma Sabha. VHP state secretary Gouri Prasad Rath, however, told Hindustan Times that his organisation has nothing to do with the forthcoming reconversion ceremony. It is not clear, however, whether legal requirements under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act to change religion are being fulfilled. Parananjan Parichha, president of the Orissa chapter of the All India Christian Council, told the Hindustan Times, "The authorities are not applying the OFRA provisions equally." (Hindustan Times 7.10.04)

22<sup>nd</sup> October

School holidays to be 'detoxified' now (7)

New Delhi: After 'detoxifying' history textbooks, HRD minister Arjun Singh has turned his attention to 'desaffronising' school holidays. Following complaints from Christians over last year's decision by then HRD minister M M Joshi to have the winter break in January instead of December, Arjun Singh has decided to revert to the old system. The 10-day break in all Centre-run Kendriya Vidyalayas will now begin from December 22, instead of January 5. "This (previous government's decision) had caused inconvenience to minority communities, especially Christians. It is hoped the change will assuage the feelings of the minority community," the HRD ministry said on Thursday. While the official reason for change of dates by the NDA government had been "excessive weather conditions" (first week of January being the coldest in northern states), many suspected a "saffron conspiracy". Some major Hindu festivals like Lohri, Pongal and Makar Sankranti occur between January 5 and 19. The decision was criticised as it allowed holidays during Hindu festivals, depriving Christian students and teachers from celebrating Christmas. (Times of India 22.10.04)

25<sup>th</sup> October

Preachers sent to police custody (7)

BARIPADA, OCT. 24. A local court today sent five Christian preachers to police custody till November 4 for their alleged involvement in inciting communal feelings. They were produced on Friday before the Baripada Sub-divisional Judicial Magistrate who rejected their bail application and sent them to custody till November 4, sources said. The preachers were arrested on Thursday on charges of "uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of others and issuing threats or criminal intimidation to several persons." Police said the preachers were active around the tribal belt of Suliapada block in Orissa's Mayurbhanj district. The VHP had earlier sponsored re-conversion ceremonies of the tribal Christian converts into the Hindu fold in Mayurbhanj district. As people in Suliapada were busy with Durga Puja festivities, Mumbai-based Catholic missionaries led by Karl Silva, a pastor, were reportedly preaching, the sources said. (The Hindu 25.10.04)

25<sup>th</sup> Octo

Five Christian missionaries held for inciting violence (7)

Bhubaneswar: Five Christian missionaries have been arrested in Orissa on a complaint by a

group of Hindus that the former were inciting violence among tribal people, the police said on Sunday. Mumbai-based Catholic missionary Karl Silva and his associates were arrested on Friday and have been remanded to judicial custody till November 4. Orissa has been a trouble spot for some time now with Hindu organisations accusing missionaries working among tribal people of attempting to convert them to Christianity. Australian missionary Graham Staines, working among leprosy patients, and his two minor sons were burnt to death by a mob in the state in 1999. (Asian Age 25.10.04)

29<sup>th</sup> October

Reservation for converts: Centre's view sought (7)

NEW DELHI, OCT. 28. The Supreme Court has asked the Attorney-General, Milon Banerjee, to ascertain the Centre's view on a petition seeking extension of reservation benefits for the Scheduled Castes even after they convert to Christianity. A Bench, comprising the Chief Justice, R. C. Lahoti, and Justice G P Mathur, asked Mr. Banerjee, to do this within four weeks on a petition filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL). It challenged the constitutional validity of paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders, 1950 by which these sections of the population professing and converting faith in religions different from Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism were deprived of the reservation benefits. The petitioner contended that the 1950 Order violated the right to equality guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution as the Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity were deprived of the benefit given to people from the same community belonging to other religions. It said that the social and economic liabilities of these people persisted even after their conversion. "There cannot be any distinction between the Scheduled Caste converts to Sikhism and Buddhism and the Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity," it said, seeking the reservation benefits, including job and political reservation, for them. (The Hindu 29.10.04)

9<sup>TH</sup> Nov.

Mangalore church vandalized (7)

Bangalore, Nov. 8: A church was allegedly vandalised by Sangh Parivar activists in Urva in Mangalore on Sunday morning who felt the church was indulging in conversion activities. In another incident again in Mangalore, three persons were stabbed in a clash between two groups belonging to the same church on Sunday morning. The police said the morning prayer service was on at the "New Life India" prayer hall located in Kodihalli in Urva police station limits at 10 am when a mob of 15-20 men barged in. They first scared away the preachers, then broke the chairs, windows panes, microphones, flower pots, and other items in the prayer hall, the police said. According to the police, "New Life India," a group of Christians who claimed to be different from Catholics and Protestants, had recently set up a prayer hall in Mangalore and had been holding occasional meetings. Some residents of the surrounding area had objected to the presence of the prayer hall in their midst and a case regarding this was pending before the local court, the police said. (Asian Age 9.11.04)

20<sup>th</sup> Dec.

Church flays film on Goa liberation

PANAJI, DECEMBER 19: THE Catholic Church in Goa has come out in protest against a government-sponsored documentary on the liberation of the state from Portuguese rule.

The Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, which viewed the documentary, said the film, Goa Ka Swadhinata Sangram, produced by Ramesh Deo, was "highly communal". The Diocesan Service Centre for Social Action (DSCSA) and the Diocesan Society of Education (DSE), in a joint statement, also criticised the state government's decision to screen the documentary in schools across the state. "The aim seems to fan communal hatred and draw a wedge among Goan communities living peacefully and in total communal harmony since hundreds of years," they added. The DSCSA and the DSE have described the move as "shocking" since the Education department "could envisage such a highly loaded" documentary. DSE runs more than 100 schools in Goa. The script committee, originally set up by the Manohar Parrikar Government, comprised mainly of RSS leaders. Subsequently, some changes were made after local historians pointed out flaws in the script. The film, made at a cost Rs 40 lakh, shows atrocities committed by

the Portuguese after the conquest of Goa, reaction of Goans to atrocities, especially from Velim, Assolna and Cuncolim, and the revolt of the Ranés. (Indian Express 20.12.04)

26<sup>th</sup> Dec.

Re-conversions in Orissa (7)

ROURKELA, Dec. 25. - Amidst Christmas celebrations, 113 Christians belonging to 38 families were "reconverted" to Hinduism at a function at Ruguda under Bonai block in Orissa's Sundargarh district today, VHP sources said. The persons belonged to six villages spread over three blocks - Bonai, Lathikata and Lahunipara - in the tribal-dominated district, VHP spokesman Gadadhar Sahu said. A yagna was performed at the village and new clothes were gifted to all of them on the occasion. A procession was taken out carrying water in earthen pots and marched up to the "yagnasthal" for performing rituals, Sahu said and termed the reconversion as a "home coming". Contacted, police said the "reconverted" people had taken prior permission from the district authorities for the purpose. Among others, VHP state secretary, Achyutananda Kar, district leader Mitrbhanu Panda and leaders of the RSS and Durga Vahini were present.

About two months back, 336 persons belonging to 80 families were reconverted to Hinduism at Birida in the district, the sources said. (Statesman 26.12.04)

27<sup>th</sup> Dec.

Missionary assaulted by 3 men in Rajasthan (7)

New Delhi: A missionary was severely injured after he was assaulted by three men at Banswara in Rajasthan on Christmas eve. The victim, Delhi-based Saji Abraham, is currently undergoing treatment at Mahatma Gandhi hospital in the town, according to reports reaching the Capital.

According to sources, Abraham was on his way to the Jaina Merhi church on Friday evening when three youths approached him. They were apparently very cordial to him and sought permission to see the church. Abraham told the police that as soon as they entered the church the youths locked the main door and started abusing him. Two of them then held him and the third man hit him several times on his head with a blunt weapon. "They then pushed him around and kicked him several times in the abdomen. He fell unconscious and these men fled, perhaps thinking that he was dead," said an aide of the victim. He added that he had gone there to oversee the preparations for Christmas when the incident took place. The youths, however, did not rob him of his belongings. "We have registered a case and the matter is being investigated. Nobody has come forward to take responsibility for the assault as yet," said a police officer. The victim has received 15 stitches on his head. (Times of India 27.12.04)