

MINORITIES: CHRISTIANS-2010

JANUARY TO DECEMBER – 2010

Give us our due: Christians (7)

HYDERABAD: Members of the Christian minority community on Saturday demanded their due representation in the process of the formation of a separate State of Telangana. At a press conference here, Christian leaders including G. David Shanta Raj, B.A. Manoj Kumar, John Ravinder and Phillip Tocher said their voices needed to be heard in New Delhi in the process. In the wake of criticism against the IPS officer Stephen Raj and the attack against Christopher David at his house in the Osmania University campus, the Christian leaders wanted their voice to be heard in the corridors of power. The endeavour was to bring all Christians onto a common platform and focus issues being faced by them so as to get recognition on par with other communities and thus formulate an agenda to be put forth in the coming discussions to be held at the national level on January 5, they said. (The Hindu 3/1/10)

Archbishop's message: Save earth, spread peace (7)

Mumbai, January 01, 2010. The Catholic Church has decided to dedicate 2010 to environment. Like its counterparts across the world, the Archdiocese of Mumbai is going to focus its energies on encouraging the city to take particular care of the environment this year. This decision came after Pope Benedict XVI issued a message for the celebrations of the 43rd World Day of Peace on January 1, declaring the theme for 2010 to be 'If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation'. This message, which was sent out by the Vatican during the Copenhagen climate summit in December, is an appeal to Christian communities and all international leaders to focus their peace activities on protection of the environment. "In Mumbai, 2010 has already been declared as the year of peace, and on Christmas, I encouraged citizens to collaborate effectively in order to curb climate change," said Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai. He added that the lack of awareness about the various aspects of the environmental crisis remains a big problem in the city. "We will soon get the different Catholic commissions in Mumbai to start the work of spreading awareness," said Cardinal Gracias. "Concern for the environment calls for a responsible common effort to move beyond approaches based on selfish nationalistic interests," said the Pope in his official message, while stressing the need to come up with practical, effective solutions for today's "growing ecological crisis". (Hindustan Times 1/1/10)

St Alphonsa comes to Ahmedabad, rests at Loyola church (7)

Ahmedabad: With the relics of two saints of the catholic church being installed in Ahmedabad, the city may well become a major place of pilgrimage for followers of the world's pre-dominant religion. On Sunday a primary relic (piece of the body) of St Alphonsa of Kerala — the only woman Catholic saint of India — was placed in a niche in the main prayer hall of the St Xavier's Loyola Church, Memnagar, as more than 3000 people, some of them non-Christians and including 250 families from Kerala, paid homage. In November, the mortal remains of St Jude, one of Jesus Christ's disciples, were deposited in St Jude's Church, Thaltej. The Rev Father Thomas Macwan, bishop of Ahmedabad who presided over a two-hour High Mass along with 12 other priests at the school's assembly hall, extolled the virtues of St. Alphonsa, who was born in a town near Kottayam on August 19, 1910 and who was canonised on October 12, 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI. "St Alphonsa suffered all her life for the reparation of her sins," he said. "The sacrifices she made all her life enabled her to join the pantheon of Catholic saints who have been revered down the ages in all countries," he added. Father KC Thomas SJ priest of Loyola Church said, "It's a day of great privilege and prestige for Loyola Church to have the relic of St. Alphonsa. There are few churches in Kerala which have relics containing the mortal remains of St. Alphonsa." "Outside Kerala, Ahmedabad is the first city to get the relic of the saint," said Thomas. St Alphonsa, or Anna as she was christened, wanted to devote her life to religion at a young age, but her family wanted the pretty young woman to get married. In order to avoid that sacrament, Anna jumped into a burning pit and got both her legs badly burned. The injuries put paid to the marriage plans and finally, in 1936, after much study and prayer, Anna became Sister Alphonsa. After a life that was largely one of suffering and her death in 1946, miraculous occurrences around her body were reported by the people of her state, country and then the entire world. Her canonisation by Pope Benedict in 2008 took place only 62 years after her death, which is a relatively short period for sanctity. It was due to the efforts of PT Chacko, representative of the Catholics of Loyola Parish, Fr Freddy Desouza, parish priest, and Fr KC Thomas, Malayalee Parish priest, Loyola, that the mortal remains of St Alphonsa could be brought here. It was the only instance of her remains being sent out of her home state. Only a few kilometres away from Loyola

lie the remains of St Jude, Christ's apostle, in St Jude's Church. It augurs well for the small but vibrant Catholic community that two pre-eminent places of Christian worship stand relatively close to each other in our city. (DNA 11/1/10)

Convent school, fifth church attacked in Malaysia (7)

Kuala Lumpur, Jan 10: Arsonists in Malaysia struck at a convent school and a fifth church today amid rising tensions between majority Muslims and Christians over the use of the word "Allah" to describe the Christian God. Police in the sleepy city of Taiping, around 300 km from the capital Kuala Lumpur, said a petrol bomb had been thrown at the guard house of a Catholic convent school but had failed to go off. They also said they had found several broken bottles including paint thinners outside one of the country's oldest Anglican churches, All Saints, Taiping, and said one of the building's walls had been blackened. The unprecedented attacks risk dividing the nation of 28 million people that has significant religious minorities, and could also complicate Prime Minister Najib Razak's plan to win back support from the non-Muslims before elections due by 2013. The issue could pose a longer-term risk of political instability for Malaysia, which has been trailing Indonesia and Thailand for foreign investment and where investors have been frightened off by the prospect of an end to the predictable rule of the coalition that has governed for 52 years. The row, over a court ruling that allowed a Catholic newspaper to use "Allah" in its Malay-language editions, prompted Muslims to protest at mosques on Friday and sparked arson attacks on four churches that saw one Pentecostalist church gutted. Yesterday, Najib visited the badly damaged Pentecostalist church and offered a grant of half a million ringgit (148,100 dollar) to help it rebuild. Government promises to provide police to protect churches were thrown into doubt after Malaysia's top police officer said on Sunday he did not have the manpower to do so and urged the churches to step up security themselves. "We are alarmed with the escalation of violence and urge the authorities to take this seriously," Reverend Hermen Shastri, secretary-general to the Council of Churches Malaysia, told Reuters. Malaysia is mainly Muslim and Malay but there are substantial ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities who mainly practise Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. It was these minorities handed the government its biggest ever losses in 2008 state and national elections in part due to feelings of religious marginalisation and growing disillusionment with corruption. The Catholic Herald says that it needs to use the word "Allah" to describe the Christian God in order to serve Malay-speaking Christians in Borneo. Christians account for 9.1 percent of the population. Some Malaysian Muslims say that the paper wants to use the word to confuse and convert Muslims and by midday today 178,392 people has signed up for a Facebook group that opposes Christians using "Allah". (Central Chronicle 12/1/10)

Catholic Council express concern over violation of rights (7)

NAGPUR: The Catholic Council of India (CCI), the second highest decision making body after Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) has expressed its grave concern over violation of Constitutional rights by some state governments. The CCI which concluded its 10th general body meeting here last night passed a resolution which said great anxiety and concern was expressed over systematic attempt by certain state governments to dilute the Constitutional Rights of religious minorities on lands and conduct of educational institutions. "These acts are against the vision of the founding fathers of the Constitution and CCI regret to note that constitutional history is deliberately ignored and trespassed upon," a release from CCI said today. Another resolution said the Centre should immediately rehabilitate the victims of Kandhmal riots in Orissa. It said the attempts by some state to snatch away the freedom of religion of the individuals through reconversion especially in Orissa, Karnataka and Chattisgarh state. CCI has urged the Government to withdraw attempts to bring in any other system of management upon Church which would go against the wishes of donors who has donated assets to Church with a specific purpose of being utilised under the provisions of Canon Law, the resolution said. (DNA 13/1/10)

Christians beaten during Hyderabad church service (7)

On 10 January 2010, a mob interrupted a church service in Hyderabad and beat several Christians. Police urged the attackers and Christians to reconcile, but with the help of the AICC, Christian leaders have appealed to the police for protection from unprovoked attacks. Soon after Haven's Glory Church started its worship service around 10:30am on 10 January 2010, around 50 women and men interrupted the service. The church is located on the rooftop of a house in Sainagar Colony, Jillelaguda, L.B. Nagar, Hyderabad. Attackers were allegedly members of the BJP. The mob beat several Christians including women and men. The church members fled to the L.B. Nagar Police Station and gave a complaint. Immediately Sub-Inspector Mr. Sudhakar went to the church along with two constables. The next day both parties were called to the police station by the Inspector of Police Mr. Dronacharyulu. The BJP was represented by ward members and Basthi people. Christian leaders included AICC members, the church pastor, and a few church members. The Inspector suggested a meeting with the village sarpanch (village

council chief) to resolve the friction between groups. But the aicc leaders didn't feel this would produce justice and approached the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Mr. Satyanarayana, L.B. Nagar. He instructed the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ASP) to meet five people from each group on 13 January 2010. Also, the DCP promised to protect the church by sending one sub-inspector and four constables for two months. AICC state and local leaders will continue to be involved in the process. (Indianchristians.in 15/1/10)

Rum bottle thrown at Malaysia mosque amid tension (7)

Vandals threw a rum bottle at a mosque in the first attack on a Muslim house of worship after almost a dozen similar assaults on churches in Malaysia the past week, police said Saturday. Police have dismissed the attacks as vandalism, but they have caused disquiet in multiracial Malaysia and raised fears of more widespread religious tensions. One Sikh temple and 11 churches have been hit — most of them with molotov cocktails — since Jan. 8. One church was partially gutted, though the others sustained only minor damages. No arrests have been made. The unrest follows a Dec. 31 court ruling that allowed non-Muslims to use the word "Allah" to refer to God. The verdict upset Muslims who make up 60 percent of Malaysia's 28 million people. The government has argued allowing Christians to use the word will confuse Muslims and entice them to convert. The bottle was thrown at a mosque in eastern Sarawak state late Friday and found smashed near an outer wall inside the compound, said local police chief Abu Bakar Mokhtar. He said they didn't know if it contained any alcohol when vandals threw it. Most Muslims consider alcohol illegal. Abu Bakar blamed "naughty boys" for the incident. In the latest church attack late Friday, vandals smashed a window of a church in southern Negeri Sembilan state, said Saiful Azly Kamaruddin, a district police chief. He said the attack also appeared to be vandalism, and added police have stepped up patrols and deployed more plainclothes officials in the area. The unrest centers on the court ruling, in which the Herald, the main newspaper of the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia, argues it has the right to use the word "Allah" in its Malay-language edition because it predates Islam and is commonly used by Christians in other predominantly Muslims countries, such as Egypt, Indonesia and Syria. It is also used in Malay-language Bibles. The government has condemned the attacks and assured Christians, who make up some 9 percent of Malaysia's population, they are safe. But the attacks aren't abating. The office of lawyers representing the Herald in their legal fight was also ransacked earlier this week. (Sify News 16/1/10)

'Why do you blame Ruchika's school?' (7)

Chandigarh: The Catholic Association Chandigarh on Sunday organised a prayer meet to express solidarity with Sacred Heart School and its principal, indicted by a magisterial probe for 'wrong and malafide' expulsion of molestation victim Ruchika Girhotra. The prayer service was held in Christ the King cathedral to express solidarity with Sister Sebastina, who was the principal when Ruchika was expelled in September 1990, shortly after she was molested by former Haryana DGP S P S Rathore. A magisterial probe had on January 7 indicted the school, saying that its decision to expel Ruchika was 'wrong and malafide' Prayers were also offered to Ruchika, who committed suicide three years after being molested. Ruchika was expelled by the school shortly after she was molested by Rathore Bishops, priests and students who attended the meet claimed that the school's name was being 'unnecessarily dragged into the controversy'. On January 7, a magisterial probe of the Chandigarh administration had indicted the school for taking 'wrong and malafide' action in expelling Ruchika. The probe report also pointed out that 'there was an external influence in the action against Ruchika who had been singled out'. Spokesperson for Shimla-Chandigarh diocese, Father Thomas Anchanikal said the principal and the management of the school are innocent. "How can they blame us?" (Mumbai Mirror 19/1/10)

Church torched, Pastor injured in Hyderabad (7)

Hyderabad: Hindu militants have set fire to a church at Pahadisharif near Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh alleging large-scale missionary activities in the area. The Pastor of the church, who stays nearby, went to control the fire and in the process got seriously injured. According to Pahadisharif police, the believers had gathered together and built the church some time ago. In the afternoon on 22 January 2010, Hindu militants allegedly torched the church by dousing it with petrol, resulting in a huge fire engulfing the whole building. Noticing the fire, Pastor Kumar Nayak (30), and his wife Sushee Bai (25), who were nearby, rushed to the spot. In an effort to control the fire, the Pastor went inside the church and in the process got himself seriously injured. People from the locality also gathered around and brought the fire under control. They also took the Pastor to a local hospital for treatment. Jelpalli sarpanch Sureddy Krishan Reddy visited the Pastor who is still under treatment, and inspected the church. Shamshabad Pastor Leader Pavul Reddy, Balapur Pastor Lajel Nayak, Laxmiguda Housing Board Pastor Ronald John, Rajendernagar Pastor Swapna Kumar and many others also visited Pastor Kumar Nayak and expressed

their solidarity. All India Christian Council has condemned the attack on the church and sought security for Christian establishments in the area. (AICC 22/1/10)

'Orissa target of missionaries' (7)

SAMBALPUR: VHP national secretary Surendra Jain today alleged that terrorist activities in the country are being carried out from mosques and churches. Addressing the Hindu Yuba Sambalan here today, he said the Tripura Government had apprised the Central Government of operation of terrorist activities from churches of the State. He also warned that Orissa was under the target of Christian missionaries. Condemning the killing of Swami Lakshmanananda, Jain said that the Bajrang Dal activists would punish the murderers of Swami if the State Government failed to nab them. (Express Buzz 24/1/10)

2 churches attacked in Karnataka (7)

Mysore/Karwar, January 25, 2010: Two churches were attacked and the statue of Mother Mary damaged on Monday in Mysore and in Uttara Kannada District in Karnataka. Culprits broke the statue of Mother Mary on the compound wall of the Holy Family Church at Hinkal village in the wee hours in Mysore district, police said. In the other incident, glass panes covering the statue of Mother Mary was broken at St. Anthony Church at Pernamakki in Uttara Kannada District. Police said the statue was not damaged. This is the second such attack in Uttara Kannada District after the Mundahalli church was targeted on January 22. The Holy Family church had come under attack in 2002 also when some locals vandalised it alleging forcible conversions were taking place there. Culprits had made a vain attempt to break the cash chest at the church late last year, Mysore Police Commissioner Sunil Agarwal told PTI. "We have already started investigation and are hopeful of booking the culprits soon," Agarwal said. In Bangalore, Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa directed the police to investigate and nab the culprits. Police pressed sniffer dogs into service in both the churches. KPCC president R.V. Deshpande alleged such incidents were on the rise after BJP came to power in the state. "If the CM cannot control the attacks and arrest the culprits, he has no moral right to continue and should better resign," he said. Global Christian Association and Konkani Christian Association have condemned the attack. (Hindustan Times 25/1/10)

CPI(M) demonstration for inclusion of Dalit Christians (7)

TIRUCHI: Cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) staged a demonstration in the city on Monday demanding the Central Government include Dalit Christians in the Scheduled Caste list. The agitation, in which several women took part, was organised on behalf of the CPI (M) District Untouchability Eradication Front near Khadi Kraft junction. The stir was led by CPI (M) district secretary S. Sridhar in which the party's central committee member and MP T.K. Rengarajan and others took part. Notwithstanding various agitations, the party said that Dalit Christians were deprived of their rights. Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission report had recommended Scheduled Caste status for Dalit Christians. Though the Central Government had tabled the report in the Parliament after several agitations, it was hesitant to execute it, the party alleged. The Dalit Christians suffered a lot as a religious minority and on the basis of their community. Without losing any more time, the Centre should include them in the SC list, it said. (The Hindu 26/1/10)

Christians submit memorandum (7)

Karwar: Christian organisations submitted a memorandum to the Government in protest against the damage caused to churches allegedly by members of the Sri Ram Sene. In their memorandum, the organisations alleged that there have been several attacks on Christian religious places by some Hindutva organisations in the last six months. By attacking churches, they were trying to hurt the religious feelings of the Christians. In the last one week, two churches were damaged, the memorandum said. The memorandum said that though the Christians are living in peace with others, the members of the Sri Ram Sene had, in a memorandum to the Assistant Commissioner, threatened to attack Christians if the attack on Indians in Australia were not stopped. (The Hindu 28/1/10)

Church attacks: interim report submitted (7)

MANGALORE: Justice B.K. Somasekhara Commission of Inquiry, probing the attacks on Christian prayer halls in 2008, has submitted its interim report, in which it does not clearly identify the perpetrators. It has said that "a strong impression is created" that Sangh Parivar groups are mainly responsible for the attacks and that the top police officials and the district administration colluded with these groups "directly or indirectly." The commission has favoured withdrawal of all cases "registered, investigated or charge-sheeted against all persons or institutions for the incidents of attacks" in the "public interest," citing power of pardon and clemency as embedded in the Constitution. It has also called for a ban on any literature

that uses "abusive or insulting expressions, either direct or with innuendo, touching religious interests." Justice Somasekhara handed over the 500-page interim report to Abhijith Das Gupta, Karnataka Additional Chief Secretary and State Home Secretary, here on Monday. The 15-page synopsis contains a set of 20 suggestions and recommendations to the government, which he read out. The commission pointed out that "in some incidents there were indications of self-infliction or collusion or make-believe methods to create evidence of attack on churches or places of worship to support such things in other districts or places." It said "in some incidents, there were indications of massive conversions to Christianity by circumstances and inducements but not by compulsion. Such conversions were only of faith and not of religion in legal or technical sense." Stating that the attacks on churches or places of worship had deeply affected the harmony between Hindus and Christians, it said: "A strong impression is created that members belonging to Bajrang Dal, Sri Rama Sene and Vishwa Hindu Parishad are mainly responsible in attacking churches or places of worship mainly in Mangalore and Dakshina Kannada district spreading to Udupi, Chickmagalur, Davangere, Bellary, Dharwad, Bangalore, Kolar and Chickaballapur districts. The other so-called attacks were only make-believe." "An impression is given that the top police officers and the district administration and panchayat heads, specially in Dakshina Kannada, Bellary and Davangere, colluded with the members of the Bajrang Dal and Sri Rama Sene." (The Hindu 2/2/10)

EU team meets police, Christian leaders over Kandhamal (7)

Bhubaneswar, February 04, 2010: An 11-member European Union (EU) team, which is to visit Orissa's Kandhamal district to interact with riot victims, on Wednesday met government officials, Christian leaders, civil society groups and social activists in Bhubaneswar and discussed the situation in the region. The delegation is to Thursday head to Kandhamal, where at least 38 people were killed in communal riots in 2008 after the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati allegedly by Maoists. "Events in Kandhamal had its impact in Europe. Our visit is a reflection of the concern," a member of the team told select mediapersons here. The team is led by Christophe Manet, counsellor (head of political affairs) European Commission delegation to India. The delegation, which comprises members from Spain, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Britain, met the top brass of the state police earlier in the day and discussed the prevailing situation in Kandhamal. According to state police chief M.M. Praharaj, the team was briefed about the steps taken to restore normalcy in Kandhamal after the riots. "The EU diplomats thanked the state government for peaceful celebration of Christmas and New Year's Day by the minority community in Kandhamal and other places," Praharaj told reporters here after meeting the delegation. The delegation also met civil society groups to take stock of the human rights situation in Kandhamal following the riots. The delegation also met some Christian leaders. "During the meet, they asked whether normalcy is there or not (in Kandhamal). We are of the view that normalcy will only return once people who are out of their homes will return to their homes and feel safe," said Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar diocese Raphael Cheenath. VHP and Bajrang Dal activists staged protests at the Biju Patnaik airport Tuesday night when the team arrived here, saying the visit will only flare up the situation in Kandhamal. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said: "It is a short visit for a day or two. The delegation will assess the prevailing situation in the district and check out what had happened during last year's riots." Kandhamal, about 200 km from here, witnessed widespread violence after the murder of Saraswati and four of his aides at his ashram Aug 23, 2008. More than 25,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes after their houses were attacked by rampaging mobs, which held Christians responsible for Saraswati's killing, although police blamed the Maoists. (Hindustan Times 4/2/10)

Atrocities on Meitei Christians of deep concern: Sangliana (7)

IMPHAL, Feb 5: The vice chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, Dr. HT. Sangliana, arrived in Imphal today and he would be campaigning for five days in the state. The VC, after arriving in Imphal met representatives of the minorities, NGOs and official of the state minorities commission this evening at the state guest house, Sanjenthong, Imphal. While noting the complaints of different minority issues during the meeting, the VC assured to take up the issues of atrocities on minority Christians especially the Meitei Christian minorities by holding a meeting with the DGP. He said he would also ascertain the progress so far taken up by the police departments with regards to the issue and also to pressurize the police department if it failed in this duty. He also revealed that above 14 cases have been sent to the commission including the Lamdeng, Thoubal, incident of December 25, 1997, causing disturbances to Christmas celebrations and injuring of a women, assaulting of a Reverend Sunil Kumar of the Church, attack on missionaries in 2005, forced cremation of one Meitei Christian namely one Yumshang, July 13, 2004, burning Church on September 2004 at Phumlou Baptist Church etc. would be produced in the meeting with the DGP. The VC while asserting that even though he is new to the post, he would deliberately do his level best in delivering justice by enquiring different cases adding the visit to Manipur

was also part of the enquiry. He maintained that without peace and tranquility between various communities there would be no development and appealed to live in mutual understanding between one another. MA. Helim Choudury, chairperson of Manipur State Minorities Commission (MSMC), besides presenting a annual reports and recommendations 2009-10 of the MSMC also submitted the reports to the VC. All Manipur Meitei Pangal (Meitei Muslim) Association, All Manipur Minorities Forum, All Manipur Buddhist Association and All Manipur Meitei Christian Forum, also submitted memorandums with charters of demands. (Kangla Online 5/2/10)

EU team meets Kandhamal riot victims (7)

BHUBANESWAR: An 11-member European Union (EU) team on Thursday interacted with riot victims in Orissa's Kandhamal district to find about the situation in the region and heard their accounts, police and eyewitnesses said. Several victims of the riots apprised the visiting team about the steps the state government has taken for their rehabilitation and the difficulties they are currently facing. The team members, led by EU's counsellor (head of political affairs) Christophe Manet, visited several affected villages and rehabilitation camps and saw the restoration work carried out by government and private agencies. They also gave the victims a patient hearing. An eyewitness said that tribals danced to the tune of their traditional music and welcomed the delegation at Nandagiri, a riot-hit village, showering flower petals on the delegates. He said that the team also visited a church nearby. "The government kept us in relief camps... provided food... provided us land... and helped us to build our houses," a victim told the delegation. Some people, including women, were in tears while narrating the hardships they went through and their plight in the aftermath of the violence to the team. Sushama Digal, a woman standing along with over a dozen women at G. Udayagiri village, said: "We are still facing trouble. People are still threatening us." The delegation will also meet local police and district officials and representatives of NGOs working in the region. The team, which comprises members from Spain, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Britain, had earlier met top police officials, Christian leaders and social activists in Orissa capital before heading for Kandhamal. "Events in Kandhamal had their impact in Europe. Our visit is a reflection of the concern," a member of the team told select mediapersons here. Kandhamal, about 200 km from here, witnessed widespread violence after the murder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his aides at his ashram Aug 23, 2008. More than 25,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes after their houses were attacked by rampaging mobs, which held Christians responsible for Saraswati's killing, although police blamed the Maoists. VHP and Bajrang Dal activists staged protests at the Biju Patnaik airport on Tuesday night when the EU team arrived here, saying the visit will only flare up the situation in Kandhamal. There was, however, no such protest in any part of Kandhamal, Superintendent of Police S. Praveen Kumar told IANS. The delegation is scheduled to return on Friday. (Source: IANS, Feb 05, 2010,)

Church attacks: Cop deposes, advocates spar (7)

BANGALORE: After indicting the Sri Rama Sene and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for the church attacks in the state in its interim report, the Justice BK Somasekhar Commission on Monday witnessed an exchange of heated arguments among the advocates as a police witness deposed. Advocates appearing for the Hindu bodies objected to questions raised by HNM Prasad, the advocate appearing for Christian memorialists while cross-examining Raghukumar, sub-inspector of Arsikere police station, Davanagere. Narayana Reddy, an advocate defending police and Madhusudhan Adiga, an advocate representing the Hindu organisations expressed displeasure towards the commission for not allowing them to intervene as Raghukumar was questioned. During the questioning by Jagadeesh, an advocate representing a Christian organisation, Raghukumar admitted accepting complaints from members of the Hindu Jagaran Vedike against Pastor Rajshekar and Shanthamma, who were preaching Christianity at their homes in Uchangi Durga in Arsikere. However, when Madhusudhan Adiga questioned him, Raghukumar denied the complainant Deepak Karnade belonging to Hindu Jagaran Vedike. Meanwhile, TS Vasanth Kumar Bhawani, president of Sri Rama Sene, Bangalore had filed the application before the commission seeking an interim report as it had implicated the organisation in the church attacks. (Express Buzz 9/2/10)

Christians to form forum for protection of schools (7)

MUMBAI: The Catholic and mainstream Protestant Christian organisations in the country, which together run over 5,000 educational institutions, are banding together to form a representative body in New Delhi which will take up issues to protect their educational institutions. Church circles state that attacks on Christians and their institutions in Orissa and Mangalore last year have underscored the need for such an organisation which can take up the cudgels for Christian educational institutions based in different parts of India with the central government. National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) president Bishop T Sagar said they had discussed the issue with the Catholic Church authorities for a long time as they needed a

representative body which could take up issues for the several thousands of institutions across the country. "The time has now come for the body to get a definite shape," he said. The NCCI represents most of the mainstream protestant Christian churches in India while the Catholic Church is represented by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI). The CBCI spokesperson in New Delhi, Fr Babu Joseph, said they would shortly go public with the organisation which would help sort out the problems of many Christian institutions across the country. "We will be able to take up policy issues with the Central government and also point out the problems which our organisations have in different states," he said. Christian educators say that when their school come under undue pressure from vested interests or in some cases attacked by political parties there is no central Christian organisation for education issues which can act immediately. This new organisation will cater to this need, they feel. Catholic circles say that while the prominent Christian colleges and schools in urban areas have some access to government and political parties at the state level they lack access to government and political parties at the Centre. In addition to this are a large number of rural and small town educational institutions run by Christian managements who feel the need of having some access to policy matters in the capital. (Times of India 10/2/10)

Church grotto attacked (7)

ALAPPUZHA: A grotto of the Pius X church near the Women and Child Hospital in the Beach Ward was damaged by unidentified miscreants late last night. According to eye witnesses, two persons who came on a motorbike around 11.45 p.m. pelted stones at the grotto and left as soon as people residing nearby came running out. The glass panes of the grotto were damaged in the incident. Pointing out that similar attacks on grottos of churches in the town area was becoming more and more regular, church authorities have demanded a probe into the issue. Twelve such incidents have been reported from across the district headquarters since February 2009. The Alappuzha South police have registered a case in connection with the Pius X grotto attack and are investigating. (The Hindu 12/2/10)

Christians stage protest over sacrilegious display of Lord Christ (7)

Jalandhar, Feb 18 : Tension gripped the city this morning with hundreds of Christians coming out on the roads to protest against the sacrilegious display of Lord Christ's picture near the welcome gate set up at town hall chowk in connection with the Shobha Yatra to be taken out on February 24 on the eve of Ram Navmi . The picture of Lord Christ was displayed in the hoardings along with other divinities including Lord Rama, Hanuman, Guru Nanak and Guru Ravi Dass . In the offensive picture, Lord Christ was shown with a cigarette in one hand and a glass filled with some liquid in the other hand. As soon as the news about the display of the picture of Lord Christ in an impious manner spread in the city, leaders of many Christian organisations including Punjab Christian movement, Punjab Christian front and father Peter of the Jalandhar Diocess rushed to the venue. The activists of Christian organisations blocked the traffic in town hall chowk and demanded registration of case against the organisers and printers of the picture and their immediate arrest. Police force in heavy strength led by SP city (1) Dr. Surinder Kalia and Dy SP Naresh Sharma rushed to the spot and persuaded the protestors to calm down. A case against Dr. Pritpal Singh, who got the hording prepared and the printer, who printed the picture was registered under Section 295 A and 120-b of the IPC for hurting religious sentiments of the community. Father Peter demanded that the culprits should be brought to justice and such elements should not be spared who were out to fan communal tension. He said, " we respect all the religions and the sacrilege of the picture of Lord Christ displayed along with other divinities was an act of great insult to all the religions which should be condemned and stopped". (New Kerala 18/2/10)

Christians' vehicles set afire in Majitha; situation tense (7)

Amritsar: Tension prevailed in Majitha town in Punjab when irate shopkeepers today set on fire 25 motorcycles of Christians who allegedly vandalised their business establishments during their protest. community were forcing shopkeepers in the town, about 20km from here, to pull down their shutters while they were protesting against an allegedly objectionable picture of Jesus Christ published in some newspapers. When the protesters started vandalising the shops and smashing the shutters and glow signs, local residents and shopkeepers assembled and attacked them. Seeing people assembling in large numbers, the agitating men fled the spot leaving behind their motorbikes. The shopkeepers and residents then set afire 25 of the vehicles. The situation in the Majitha assembly constituency became tense following the incident, police said, adding that a force had been deployed in the town. (DNA 19/2/10)

Christians to continue peace march (7)

LUDHIANA: Members of Christian community blocked traffic at Jagraon Bridge for over four hours on Sunday, against the publication of a picture of Jesus Christ allegedly in an objectionable manner and burning of two churches in Batala. They were also protesting against the arrest of people belonging to their community and demanded that the administration should release them immediately, reasoning that those taken into custody had only been raising voices for the protection of their religion. Around 1,500 demonstrators started their protest at 11.30 am in front of Calvary Church at CMC Chowk, resulting in traffic disruption for more than 2 hours. Later on, they staged a peace march to Jagraon Bridge, where they sat down on the road. President of Christian United Federation Albert Dua said they would continue their protest on Monday also as the administration had not fulfilled their demands till Sunday night. "If we meet with the same response even then, we will resort to chain hunger strike from Tuesday. Our people are prepared to sacrifice their lives to protect the religious sentiments," he warned. Calling for death sentence for accused Dr Pritpal Singh, who had allegedly published the posters, Father Joseph said, "It is not right to make fun of any religion, whether it is Hindu or Christian, as it hurts the sentiments of devotees. Therefore, whoever tries to create tension among communities should be severely punished." Jagraon Bridge is among the most crowded areas and any demonstration held there brings life to a complete halt. "I had to go to civil hospital for medical check-up of my son. But now, I will have to take a route from the other side that will take at least an hour more," said Jitesh, a resident stuck at the Jagraon bridge blockade. The incident reportedly is a reaction against putting up of objectionable posters of Jesus Christ, which were being readied for an all-religious peace march on the occasion of Ramnavami, in Jalandhar on Thursday. Earlier, a Salvation church at Dear Baba was put on fire during a clash between Christians and several Hindu organizations on Saturday. (Times of India 21/2/10)

Victims of attack seek protection (7)

BANGALORE: Victims of the attack on Christians families in Gokulam near Mysore, allegedly by Hindutva outfits, demanded that the Government provide them social security and protection. Addressing presspersons here recently, the victims, including women, narrated the incident of the attack fearfully and revealed the agony they went through. "We were thrown out of homes and my two sons were beaten by up badly by group of people alleging that we indulged in 'black magic' and for promoting conversion," said Laxmi (40), a Christian domestic worker. "The attackers, including women, assaulted us for being Christians," said a sobbing Shankamma, cajoling her 12-month-old baby. Nagaraj (25), Tulasi (19), Basavaraj and Ramachandra, said the attackers abused them in filthy language. The attackers wanted them not to pray on Sundays and threatened them with dire consequences if they went ahead, they said. (The Hindu 23/2/10)

'No one can force Sindhi Christians in Ulhasnagar to change names' (7)

Mumbai: Vice-chairman of state minorities commission Dr Abraham Mathai has come out in defence of neo-Christians in Ulhasnagar. He said the demand to change their names is unconstitutional. DNA had published a report 'Sindhi conversions in Ulhasnagar raises a storm' on February 24. Following that, Sindhi leaders in Ulhasnagar threatened to socially boycott these Christians if they did not give up their Hindu names. "The demand for Sindhi Christians to change their names against their will is unconstitutional. Those pressurising them must be reminded that they are going against the law. It is the same law that permits women to retain their maiden name even after marriage. Force and coercion is not the way to come to terms with the faith that their brethren have embraced," Mathai said Mathai alleged that an attempt was being made to paint those from the Sindhi community practising Christianity in poor light. "Why is it that the testimony of a Sindhi who has suffered bereavement, broken marriage or battled chronic alcoholism, and who now professes a transformation through an experience with Christ, not valid in its own context?," he asked. "A person's choice of personal faith is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. It is not fair to allege some insidious plot being hatched by the Christian community to lure unsuspecting people. Those who have made the change of faith have categorically denied being baited by a promise of a financial windfall. But no one seems to care about what they have to say," Mathai said. (DNA 3/3/10)

Protest against vandalism of church (7)

KANCHEEPURAM: A group of Protestant Christians organised a 'prayer-fasting' demonstration at Pothatturpet near Tiruttani on Tuesday. They urged the State government to arrest those who vandalised the "Prince of Peace" church on a hillock near Pothatturpet on February 25. Enquiries reveal that on February 26 pastor Jeevanandham, who was taking care of the maintenance of the place of worship located atop a nearby hillock, found the roof and windows of the church building and the benches and desks inside damaged. Immediately, a complaint was lodged with the Pothatturpet police. The demonstrators, who assembled at the fasting venue under the leadership of the Ambur area Pastor John

Raj and the Tiruttani area Pastor Johnson, read verses from the Bible and held placards. (The Hindu 3/3/10)

300 dalit christians arrested (7)

CHENNAI: Over 300 Dalit Christians including Chengalpet Bishop and chairman of National Council of Dalit Christians (NCDC) were arrested after they allegedly took part in a protest without police permission, at St Thomas Mount on Friday. Following the arrest, a few other Dalit Christians in the city held a road roko and the suburban police detained them in the military cantonment community hall and later released them. Over 324 Dalit Christians had marched from Kanyakumari to campaign for inclusion of their community in the SC list. The march that started two weeks ago and ended on Friday after a meeting in the city. They were supposed submit a memorandum to the CM asking him for SC status for Dalit Christians. (Express Buzz 6/3/10)

Nuns help women demand education (7)

Sister Vinaya Thomas, a member of the Sisters of Jesus congregation that organized the rally in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh state, said the country could address many problems if its women were educated. "Women are the torchbearers of the family and their education is a must for the strengthening of society and nation," the nun told UCA News after the rally. The rally ended with the women performing dances and short plays for some 500 people, including men and children. A play on female infanticide highlighted how important females are in the family and society. Sister Alice Jacob, the congregation's assistant superior general, urged the women to fight as a group for their rights. "When you go alone to a government office, you may be denied your rights, but go in a group and get what is due to you," the nun said. Sister Thomas said her congregation has been striving to help women lead a dignified life. Geeta Patel, a high school dropout, said the plays made her realize she would have had a better life if she had continued her studies. She had to quit school because she had to find work to support her family after her father's sudden death. Although the Indian government has expressed a strong commitment toward education for all, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. According to 2009 statistics, the percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.5 percent, which means today there are at least 200 million illiterate women in India. This not only has a negative impact on women's lives but also on the lives of their families and on the country's economic development. Studies reveal that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, a poor nutritional status, low earning potential, and little autonomy within the family. A woman's lack of education also adversely impacts the health and well-being of her children. (Source: Indian Catholic, March 8, 2010)

Christians had blocked NH 13, admits witness before Commission (7)

Mangalore, March 8, DH News Service: One of the witnesses among the Christian Memorialists admitted before the Justice B K Somasekhara Commission of Inquiry that the Christian members blocked the National Highway 13 near Kulashekhar church for two hours on September 15, 2008, in protest to the attack on the monastery adjacent to Milagres church. Sr Shanthi Prameela, one of the witnesses, said that the Christian members blocked the highway for two hours but it is false to say that they compelled the passengers to get down from the buses and made them to walk miles together. She was replying to the cross examination conducted by Jagadish Shenava, advocate representing Hindu Memorialists. Justice B K Somasekhara resumed a five-day hearing at Circuit House in Mangalore on Monday. Another witness Sr Selma said somebody among the Christian members had informed the police on September 14 evening itself that they would be holding a peaceful protest on the next morning. "Even on September 15, I had personally requested Circle Inspector Ganapathy to give us protection. It is false to say that Superintendent of Police Sathish Kumar did not scold me. Some police have beaten me too," she said. However, while replying to the cross examination by Jagadish Shenava, Sr Selma said that the Christian members had not gathered near the church to protest but to demand justice. "It is false to say that the church bell was rung continuously to enable assembling of people," she added. To the questions whether the church bell was rung in the evening on September 14, and whether Christian members created a fearful atmosphere in the Kulashekhar church premises both on September 14 and 15, Sr Selma said: "I don't know". During the cross examination by Narayan Reddy, the advocate on behalf of the police, she said the school attached to the Kulashekhar church was not functioning on September 15, but the students had come to the school. One more witness Sr Celine Pethra said it was Bajrang Dal members who came in bikes threw stones at the church first but not those staying inside the church. Francis Leo, another witness stated that Bajrang Dal people posed life threat to him after he was discharged from Fr Mullers Hospital, after a treatment of seven days. J Alben Pinto and Leo Mascarenhas were also examined during the Monday's hearing. (Deccan Herald 9/3/10)

Trouble for Posco: Church joins villagers in opposing Rs 50,000 crore steel plant (7)

BHUBANESWAR: After Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Resources, now it is Korea's Posco that is facing the heat from the Catholic Church, which has declared to stand by the villagers opposed to the setting up of the Rs 50,000 crore mega steel venture near Paradip in Orissa. "We oppose anything that threatens to displace thousands, destroy forests, pollute environment and deprive people of their traditional livelihood. The Church cannot accept projects that would make people refugees in their own land," All India Christian Council secretary general, John Dayal on Tuesday told ET. Villagers are opposing government plans to lease 4,000 acres fertile land to Posco for its three iron mining projects in Kandahar, Kujanga and Paradip. Mr Dayal made it clear that the Church of England is against multi-national companies displacing thousands for mega industrial projects. "The Church of England withdrew all its investments from Vedanta Resources for violating human rights and causing environmental damage near its plant site at Lanjigarh. The Church must support the movement against large projects which are denuding forests, marginalizing tribal people and trivialising human dignity," he said. The Korean company's Indian subsidiary, Posco India, has been facing stiff resistance from locals for the last five years and the promised land still eludes it. With protests growing loud and clear, the biggest FDI proposal may not see the light of the day. Besides, the opposition has now spread to affected villages in Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts. In these villages, locals are guarding their farmlands against the entry of government and Posco officials. Father Nicholas Barla, a tribal leader who has lent his support to Khandadhar Bachao Andolan (Save Khandadhar agitation), said over telephone that the proposed mines would displace 42,493 people in Sundargarh district alone. Of these 32,044 are tribal, dalit and poor Christians. "We have seen displacement at Rourkela, Hirakud and other places due to mega projects. People have become refugees in their own land and many still have not got compensation. We will not allow Posco to set its foot in Khandadhar," Barla reiterated. Corroborating Father Barla, Khandadhar Bachao Andolan convener Aswini Mohanta said people now have become conscious of their rights. "We have organised several rallies and people are guarding their villages and have driven out Posco counselors sometime back. Khandadhar has 26 streams out of which 12 are perennial streams. If mining is allowed these streams will die down and we will have no water for our survival. We are determined to fight against Posco till our last breath," Mr Mohanta added. Former Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MLA Mansid Ekka, who leads the villagers' fight to protect their "water, land and forest" said: "The project is a conspiracy by the state to loot vulnerable tribal and dalit people in the name of development." Activists claim the projects would also seriously damage the ecology, environment and water bodies and about 2,900 acres pledged are forests. Posco recently offered Rs 7000 per decimal of betel vines, but the villagers have not accepted the package as yet. Praful Samantary, who leads Jana Shakti Abhiyan (People's Power Campaign), said the villagers first should get record of rights in their names as per the Forest Dwellers Act. Mr Samantary warned that the captive port would destroy the nesting habitat of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles as well as dolphins, hyenas, jackals and other animals in the forest. "It would destroy mangroves and thereby increasing the intensity of cyclones," he cautioned adding that people across the state would observe March 10 as protest against state repression on peoples' movements. (Economic Times 10/3/10)

Christian group demands apology from Ramesh for speaking against gowns (7)

Bangalore, Apr 4 : A Christian group on Sunday demanded an unconditional apology from Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh for his remark against wearing graduation gown during university convocation. Describing Ramesh's statement as against Pope and Christian Community, the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) president Sajan K George, said the remarks have deeply offended community's religious sentiment. "GCIC strongly condemns such insensitive remarks by the honourable minister. We are all the more concerned that the minister has chosen Bhopal, the epicentre of persecution against Christians in India to demean Pope," George said. "The minister spoke with utter irresponsibility and with lack of respect for the Pope and with a display of incredible cynicism towards the church and millions of people around the world," he added. The GCIC also demanded an apology from Ramesh. "The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) demands from him an unconditional apology for such insensitive remarks," George said. Addressing the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) convocation in Bhopal on Friday Ramesh had called wearing of the traditional convocation robe as a "barbaric colonial practice". "The practice of wearing a traditional coloured gown during a convocation ceremony at any university is a barbaric colonial practice. Why can't we wear simple dress instead of these gowns," Ramesh said. Ramesh had publicly removed his gown and asked: "Why cannot we have convocation in simple dress instead of coming dressed up as medieval vicars and popes." Meanwhile, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday had also called for a nation-wide debate over wearing graduation gown. Former Union Human Resource Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

leader Murali Manohar Joshi also supported Ramesh saying wearing ceremonial gown was a western practice inspired by Christianity and not suitable for Indian culture or climate. New Kerala 4/4/10)

Update on Legal Efforts for Justice in Orissa (7)

Friday, 02 April 2010: New Delhi -- April 2, 2010: The High Court of Orissa decided to move an infamous case from a court in Phulbani, Kandhamal District, Orissa to the city of Cuttack. The case seeks justice for a Roman Catholic nun* who was raped. The transfer decision, given on March 30, 2010, has rekindled dwindling hope for justice for all victims of the unprecedented anti-Christian riots in 2008. One of the lead lawyers in the case, Ms. Lansinglu Rongmei, said, "The best part is that the court instructed that all the witnesses who turned hostile should be recalled. This means the trial will essentially get a fresh start." Rongmei has a private practice based in Delhi but has also served as the National Legal Secretary for the All India Christian Council (aicc) since October 2008. The nun asked for the transfer because she was afraid to travel to Kandhamal due to threats. Also, witnesses were increasingly uncooperative due to intimidation from perpetrators of the riots. The case was moved to a Sessions Court in Cuttack, near Orissa's capital of Bhubaneswar. Currently, there are two fast track courts hearing the majority of cases. There has been a high rate of acquittals which lawyers attribute to several factors including uncooperative witnesses. Last year, the Orissa High Court twice instructed the police to hold line-ups outside Kandhamal so the nun could identify her attackers. Orissa police have arrested over a dozen people for attacking the nun in late August 2008. At least five other women were raped during the riots as well and, according to various sources, dozens were sexually abused. In other legal matters, victims from Gajapati District, Orissa, have a taste of justice due to the efforts of aicc along with Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), a secular collective of lawyers and social activists. While most Christian organisations, NGOs, and the media have focused on Kandhamal District due to its massive needs, the aicc announced an agreement with HRLN in June 2009 to focus on Gajapati's victims. About 700 families (about 3,500 people) were affected, three people killed, more than 20 churches vandalised or destroyed, and 23 villages attacked in August-September 2008. The vast majority of victims were Christians and either Dalits or Tribals. Since then, the partnership has produced the following: -- compensation granted by government for 16 destroyed and looted businesses -- land allotted to 58 families, and 142 other applications pending -- submitted 20 applications for NREGA job cards -- bail granted for six falsely accused Christians -- anticipatory bail granted for seven other falsely accused Christians -- submitted documents to the district administration for compensation of 10 churches -- legal proceedings in over 100 criminal cases/trials -- one police outpost sanctioned by the administration in Jeerango village, a remote area prone to threats by violent Hindutva extremists (Source: aicc email 2/4/10)

Two Pastors attacked in Kerala (7)

Thiruvananthapuram: Activists belonging to the Sangh Parivar have attacked two Pastors in Kerala for promoting the Christian faith. The attack happened during the screening of a film on Jesus at Ambalayur, a tribal colony, in Wayanad district on 29 March 2010. Around 200 activists belonging to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh attacked the two Pastors – Pastor Esow Varghese and Pastor Byju George - who were present at the screening of the film. One Pastor was so severely beaten up that he started bleeding badly. The police who arrived at the venue took the Pastors to the police station and retained them till 3 am. The police also seized their vehicle and all the screening equipment. On hearing about the incident, All India Christian Council (aicc) leaders, including Rev Zac John, rushed to help the victims and also contacted the police officers concerned. According to Rev Zac John, the children who accompanied the two Pastors for the film programme were shocked by the attack on Pastors. This led to the activists attacking the Pastors forcing them to stop the screening of the film. (Source: aicc email 1/4/10)

Hurt Christians want gown rule from govt (7)

New Delhi, April 8: Christian organisations hurt by Jairam Ramesh's comments on vicar-like convocation gowns have asked the government to decide whether graduates should wear the robes or formals. The Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh had said during a convocation in Bhopal on April 2 that the gowns were "barbaric" and "a sign of colonial slavery". "Why do we have to come dressed up as medieval vicars and Popes?" he asked before taking off his robe at the convocation of the Indian Institute of Forest Management. The All India Christian Association, a conglomeration of Christian groups with representation from all denominations, has demanded that the government take a call on the issue. "The minister's words have hurt the sentiments of the entire Christian community all over the world. We are writing to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to take a decision on the issue. Since he was an academician himself, he will be able to take the right decision. The government should take steps to amend the statutes, if need be, rather than insult the community for no fault of its own," said Father Joseph Xavier of the association. He also demanded that the minister apologise to the community. Another Christian body,

the Global Council of Indian Christians, said Ramesh's remarks were "against the Pope and Christians around the world". "The minister spoke with utter irresponsibility and lack of respect for the Pope and with a display of incredible cynicism towards the Church and millions of people around the world," said Sajan K. George of the council. The Catholic Secular Forum, another Christian collective, said: "The remark is unfortunate, particularly at a time when Christians are being stereotyped and targeted by communal forces." Joseph Dias, the general secretary of the forum, said it would have been more appropriate if the minister had removed his convocation robe before the event or represented to the Union HRD minister to do away with the tradition if he felt so strongly about it. "It was in bad taste and smacks of a cheap publicity gimmick," Dias said. Ramesh seemed to be echoing the sentiments of some BJP ministers in Madhya Pradesh, he added. Dias said a photograph in a convocation gown is something many graduating students look forward to. "It may have been a vestige of the British, but so are many other examples — the railways and monuments for instance. At the very least, the minister's choice of words drawing the Catholic clergy into a government decision was regrettable." (Telegraph 9/4/10)

Christians to take out protest march (7)

HUBLI: Dharwad District Minority Christian Welfare Association will organize a rally in Hubli on April 12, to protest against the atrocities on Christians in the state. Christians will take out the march at 9 am from Ambedkar Circle to KC Circle, after which they will submit a memorandum to the tahsildar. In a release, the association said that some anti-Christian elements, protesting the burial of a deceased person belonging to the community, had dumped the body in an isolated place after exhuming the same. The incident had occurred in Virajapura village in Arasikere taluk of Hassan district. Later, the body was cremated in the presence of deputy commissioner and the police. (Times of India 11/4/10)

State Pulse: Tamil Nadu: Banning films or Article 19(1)(A)? (7)

Few months back, incidents of vociferous protests of many Christian communities against screening of films like *The Da Vinci Code* have dominated the press and media. Numerous opinions and counter-opinions of politicians, religious leaders, experts as well as 'aam janta' have been circulated with great zeal on the issue. The outcome we witnessed: one after another seven Indian states[1] imposing a ban on the movie in their territories. The reason cited by almost all the Governments was that the movie is 'blasphemous and offensive' and might hurt the 'emotions' of the people of the minority community; hence, disturb the 'peace and tranquility of the State'. However, this is not an unusual phenomenon. Banning books, movies, art has been 'Indian tradition'. Only fact is that it seems to have taken an upward slope in the recent times. *Da Vinci* is the latest edition on the line of *Water*, *Final Solution*, *War and Peace* and many more which were restrained in the name of maintaining 'public order'. Interestingly, *Da Vinci* was scarped by various State governments even after been cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification (hereinafter referred to as 'Censor Board' or 'Board'). Apparently, those incidents may be pooh-poohed as political gimmicks but there is a much deeper aspect involved freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of speech and expression is the concept of being able to speak freely. It is often regarded as an integral concept in modern liberal democracies. Films have also been accepted as a form of speech and expression. Hence, the banning of the films brings us to the cardinal question do we have the freedom of speech and expression? Films have been banned because of issues related to obscenity, sex and violence but this article does not intend to get into those factors rather it explores into the other factors. Many films are banned or targeted in the name of maintaining public order; respecting beliefs, sentiments and traditions; or for criticizing the state on a certain issues and these are the areas the article primarily focuses in. Again, the article also does not go into intricacies of the subjective matter of the problems; instead, it limits itself to testify the legal validity of the bans in the light of the freedom of speech and expression. In this quest, it presents some controversies in the recent times, highlights certain judgments and relevant legal provisions and finally verifies the legality of such bans. The film which was in the centre of recent controversy is the Hollywood creation, *The Da Vinci Code* based on the bestselling 2003 novel by author Dan Brown[2]. It is a mystery/detective novel with Jesus Christ (his realtion with Mary Magdelene) and Christianity amalgamated into it. Apart from few hicupps and protests, the movie was however released with a bang in most of the Western Christian countries on May 18, 2006[3]. Though the novel is on sale (both original and pirated copies) in India since its publication, there was a huge outcry in many states of India by the Christian communities to ban the film from screening in India for the perceived anti-Christian message. Following special screenings for various Catholic leaders and even the Information and Broadcasting Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, the Censor Board finally gave the film an 'A' certification and cleared it. But the Board forced the distributor, Sony Pictures to insert a 15-second legal disclaimer card [4] both at the beginning and at the end stating that the movie was purely a tale of fiction[5]. However, the saga does not end here. Even after the clearance, the protests by several Christian organizations continued and the movie was gradually banned by seven State Governments. In

some places the Muslims also joined hands in the protests[6]. The storyline was alleged to be to hurt the 'religious sentiments' of Christians as well as Muslims!! Meanwhile, a PIL was filed before the Supreme Court seeking for a complete ban not only on the movie but on the novel as well but the petition was rejected[7]. Afterwards the Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu High Courts have also quashed the ban in the respective states. (Central Chronicle 14/4/10)

Hardliner hindu outfits defaming Church; Archbishop (7)

Bhopal, Apr 15: Archbishop Dr Leo Cornelio has said that some hardliner Hindu organizations are trying to defame Church in the state. Activities of such outfits have intensified since Home Minister Umashankar Gupta took to the ministry. He said several incidences have occurred where these outfits like Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and others have struck integrity of the Church and police stood mute spectator without taking any action despite several complaints. The Rv Fr Carnelio claimed that recent incident of suicide in the seminary has been misinterpreted by interference of such outfits and the case should not be linked to compulsory religious conversion. A political turn has been given to the case for cheap publicity. Speaking to media, the Archbishop openly talked about the false and baseless allegations made upon him in the suicide case of Venu Kumar alias Yesu Babu. The incident was reported on the January 28, 2010 at the Ratibad Christian Training Centre. Deceased's father, Shrinivas Rao alias Arogya Rao had false fully alleged that he never approved of his son taking to the Christian religion and turning into a priest. The father of the deceased also denied writing any letter for acceptance but it was written by his sister. The deceased's father claimed that his son was forcibly converted to Christianity, but this accusation has been termed baseless, as there are genuine records of the deceased family's long history of being a Christian family. Records of Venu Kumar's baptism in the year 1998 at a church in Gundupalli, Rao's second marriage in the year 2002 was held according to the Christian rituals at a church in Gundupalli. All these throw light on the family (deceased) being Christian. Around 90 people living in the village of Gundupalli have written a letter to the M.P Govt. stating that Shrinivas Rao aka Arogya Rao have been Christians since many generations. Venu Kumar alias Yesu Babu had joined the training centre while he was studying in 10th class but he could only take up the decision of becoming a priest after he had completed his 12th. He had regular contacts with his family and had also been to his house twice for vacations. Every time he went for the vacation, his return to the training centre was his own choice he was free to take up decision of leaving the training. The Archbishop stated that " if he ever had any problem or wished to leave the training centre he was free to do so." Now when the family demands compensation the Archbishop says that he is there to help the family but refuses to compensate them. (Central Chronicle 15/4/10)

PR seeks removal of Minister (7)

HYDERABAD: A delegation of Praja Rajyam (PR) led by senior leader C. Ramachandraiah called on Governor E.S.L. Narasimhan here on Thursday and requested him to order withdrawal of GO 765 issued on October 17, 2007. They claimed that it was allowing sale of Christian properties rather than protecting them. The party also demanded removal of Social Welfare Minister Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose from the Council of Ministers for his alleged involvement in such sales. In a representation signed by 16 pastors from East Godavari district, the PR delegation alleged that 2.52 acres of land, belonging to a Christian missionary and managed by Convention of Baptist Churches of Northern Circars (CBCNC) at Ramachandrapuram, was illegally sold by one K. Daniel Gandhi. The same land was sold unlawfully again to one K. Ramakrishna, reported of being a close associate of the Minister. A House Committee which was appointed to look into illegal occupation of Christian properties in 2005 had instructed the revenue and municipal authorities of Ramachandrapuram not to hand over the disputed property. A case was also pending in the High Court concerning the property dispute. However, they accused the Minister Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose of misusing his office to get the land converted and regularised in the name of his associate. The delegation comprised party general secretaries Thota Trimurthulu and C. Uma Malleswara Rao and party leaders S. Raja Babu and Addepalli Sridhar. (The Hindu 16/4/10)

State Pulse: Tamil Nadu: Banning films or Article 19(1)(A) (7)

Few months back, incidents of vociferous protests of many Christian communities against screening of films like The Da Vinci Code have dominated the press and media. Numerous opinions and counter-opinions of politicians, religious leaders, experts as well as 'aam janta' have been circulated with great zeal on the issue. The outcome we witnessed: one after another seven Indian states[1] imposing a ban on the movie in their territories. The reason cited by almost all the Governments was that the movie is 'blasphemous and offensive' and might hurt the 'emotions' of the people of the minority community; hence, disturb the 'peace and tranquility of the State'. However, this is not an unusual phenomenon. Banning books, movies, art has been 'Indian tradition'. Only fact is that it seems to have taken an upward

slope in the recent times. Da Vinci is the latest edition on the line of Water, Final Solution, War and Peace and many more which were restrained in the name of maintaining 'public order'. Interestingly, Da Vinci was scarped by various State governments even after been cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification (hereinafter referred to as 'Censor Board' or 'Board'). Apparently, those incidents may be pooh-poohed as political gimmicks but there is a much deeper aspect involved freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of speech and expression is the concept of being able to speak freely. It is often regarded as an integral concept in modern liberal democracies. Films have also been accepted as a form of speech and expression. Hence, the banning of the films brings us to the cardinal question do we have the freedom of speech and expression? Films have been banned because of issues related to obscenity, sex and violence but this article does not intend to get into those factors rather it explores into the other factors. Many films are banned or targeted in the name of maintaining public order; respecting beliefs, sentiments and traditions; or for criticizing the state on a certain issues and these are the areas the article primarily focuses in. Again, the article also does not go into intricacies of the subjective matter of the problems; instead, it limits itself to testify the legal validity of the bans in the light of the freedom of speech and expression. In this quest, it presents some controversies in the recent times, highlights certain judgments and relevant legal provisions and finally verifies the legality of such bans. The 'Ban' story: The film which was in the centre of recent controversy is the Hollywood creation, The Da Vinci Code based on the bestselling 2003 novel by author Dan Brown[2]. It is a mystery/detective novel with Jesus Christ (his relation with Mary Magdalene) and Christianity amalgamated into it. Apart from few hiccupps and protests, the movie was however released with a bang in most of the Western Christian countries on May 18, 2006[3]. Though the novel is on sale (both original and pirated copies) in India since its publication, there was a huge outcry in many states of India by the Christian communities to ban the film from screening in India for the perceived anti-Christian message. Following special screenings for various Catholic leaders and even the Information and Broadcasting Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, the Censor Board finally gave the film an 'A' certification and cleared it. But the Board forced the distributor, Sony Pictures to insert a 15-second legal disclaimer card [4] both at the beginning and at the end stating that the movie was purely a tale of fiction[5]. However, the saga does not end here. Even after the clearance, the protests by several Christian organizations continued and the movie was gradually banned by seven State Governments. In some places the Muslims also joined hands in the protests[6]. The storyline was alleged to be to hurt the 'religious sentiments' of Christians as well as Muslims!! Meanwhile, a PIL was filed before the Supreme Court seeking for a complete ban not only on the movie but on the novel as well but the petition was rejected[7]. Afterwards the Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu High Courts have also quashed the ban in the respective states. (Central Chronicle 14/4/10)

Masked men attack Christian prayer meet (7)

Betul, Apr 19: A group of masked men attacked a Christian prayer meet in remote Sarni area of Betul district in Madhya Pradesh, police said Sunday. Locals claimed that a man died in the resulting melee after he jumped into a well in panic. According to eyewitnesses, the man died due to the ruckus Saturday night created by the miscreants, allegedly belonging to "rightist organisations". "The incident took place around 8.30 p.m. at Saliya village where around eight to nine masked men forced their way into the Christian prayer meeting, attacked the organisers, damaged their vehicles and fled," Sub-Divisional officer (Police) Abhishek Rajan said. "Later, the police found a body floating in a well, located 400 meters from the prayer venue. According to the locals, the man was attending the meeting and jumped into the well in panic when the miscreants attacked," he said. "The police are yet to ascertain whether his death was related to the attack as his body was found floating within two hours of the commotion while medical experts say that it takes at least 12 hours for a body of a drowned person to surface," Rajan said. Several attacks on Christian meets have been witnessed in the past in tribal-dominated Balaghat district also with the latest one on April 15 when some miscreants, allegedly belonging to rightwing Hindu groups, stormed a function organised by a Protestant group and attended by over 5,000 people. Father Lijo Antony, assistant parish priest of the lone Catholic church in the area, said: "Hindu groups tried to forcibly enter the venue alleging the programme was aimed at converting gullible tribal people." The police imposed prohibitory orders in the area after the incident. The administration also gave protection to 23 Protestant pastors working in the area, the priest said. Although the district is in Madhya Pradesh, it comes under Nagpur archdiocese in Maharashtra.(Central Chronicle 20/4/10)

Congress condemns attack on Christians (7)

Bhopal: Condemning the attack by Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (RSS) activists on the Christian community, the Madhya Pradesh Congress has demanded that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to check the saffron brigades in the State. State Congress spokesperson JP Dhanopia in the statement on Monday said that attacks of RSS activists on minority communities, especially on Christians, was on the rise ever

since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power. He said that recently RSS activists had attacked Christians in Betul and Balaghat districts in which one person was killed. Dhanopia said that attacking children and women of a particular community during prayer was disgusting. He said that no action against these social culprits proved that the district administration and police were giving open protection to them. He said that the Chief Minister was behaving like a mute spectator referring to the incidents, so his role was also objectionable in the whole episode. He suggested that Chouhan should follow Rajdharma, and provide protection to minorities in the State and maintain communal brotherhood. He said that senior officials of these two districts should be also punished along with the attackers. (Pioneer 20/4/10)

India's Catholic church prepares to prevent scandals (7)

Thiruvananthapuram, April 27 : Catholic leaders in India are drawing up procedures to prevent scandals and tackle them if they happen, though the country has been spared the child abuse controversies rocking the church in Western countries, Christian leaders say. "The church is strictly a moralistic organisation, but the sad fact is that aberrations do happen. And this has happened from ancient times when even Popes have faced scandals. The church has to confess and, to start with, it has to show a little more of holiness," said Paul Thelekkat, senior Catholic priest and spokesperson of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church. This is just not an issue of the church in the West. It is a lesson for every member of the church here right from bishops to the laity, Thelekkat told IANS. He said the Catholics Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) is working out a procedure for handling scandals. "I am told that this new standardised procedure would be ready soon. Guidelines will cover complex matters like dealing with psychological, civil and legal issues," said Thelekkat. Christians in Kerala account for around 23 per cent of the 32 million population. The Catholic community accounts for more than 50 percent of the Christians in the state, followed by the Syrian Orthodox church. There are at least half a dozen other churches. The Catholic church in the state is passing through difficult times, though there has been no child abuse scandal. It has seen two priests and a nun being arrested for murdering Sister Abhaya, a bishop losing his job, a nun committing suicide, and another one landing up in a mental hospital. Last but not the least, there was a student studying for priesthood who ended his life after being unable to stand alleged atrocities by senior students. "See, as and when there is a human error committed by those who have to practise high moral values, the church steps in and strict action is taken. Just because someone has done a wrong, he cannot be condemned; instead we send such people for reformation and renewal courses and a huge majority of them realise their wrongs and correct themselves," said Thelekkat. There are church leaders who believe some fundamental issues need to be addressed by the Catholic church. T.J. Joshua, a senior priest of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who for long headed the seminary of the church at Kottayam, says the problem of the Catholic church is the practice of compulsory celibacy. "I would say trying to club celibacy and priesthood is their biggest failure. Look at my church, here the rules are clear - those who are not interested to become a bishop can go on to have a family of their own," Joshua said. "Sex is a reality. I am not saying that scandals are not there in my church. Yes, it is there and the need of the hour is to see that we learn from the mistakes of others," he said. Joshua said, "What is happening in the Catholic church in the West should be a lesson for all others and (all) should learn from that." Known Catholic rebel Joseph Pullikunnel, who has been having a long running feud with the Catholic church in the state, said there are 24 Churches in the world and it is only the Western Catholic Church where celibacy is a must for its priests and nuns and hence the problem. The issue in the Catholic church in Kerala is slightly different, he said. "Look, in Kerala they are the most powerful social organisation with several institutions run by them. More than half the problem would be solved if these institutions are freed from the clutches of priests," Pullikunnel asserted. "And another thing is that unlike in the West, homosexuality is very rare and it is the relationships between priests and nuns that is a problem here," he claimed. (New Kerala 27/4/10)

Conversion: Cops arrest four men (7)

May 1: The Hunsur police on Saturday arrested four people including the Chief Pastor of St Francis Xavier Church in Bengaluru for allegedly trying to convert people in and around Hunsur, near Mysore. Another 70 people were detained on the same charges. Police identified the prime accused as Pastor Robin P. Das, a resident of Anandanagar. According to the police, the accused were distributing pamphlets, books and other materials among residents and encouraging them to convert. "We have recovered books, CDs, and other material from them," said Shashidhar, circle inspector, Hunsur. The accused were travelling in a bus and two Tempo Travellers and left Bengaluru on April 29 to reach Madikeri. "They stopped near Hunsur on their return journey" police said adding that the public alerted them on the alleged conversion attempts. According to superintendent of police Ramsubba, the Christian leaders were going from door-to-door and offering financial support of Rs 1 lakh, besides education to

children and other amenities to families who converted. Other members of the community however claimed that they were only peacefully spreading the message of Jesus Christ. "It's our routine work. We convey the message wherever we are. There is nothing illegal about it. The booklets and other material seized were purely religious and don't carry any inflammatory text," they asserted. Earlier, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh activists and local residents who passed on the information to police, allegedly roughed up the Christian community members. (Deccan Chronicle 1/5/10)

Church formulating guidelines to deal with sexual abuse cases (7)

New Delhi: Rattled by increasing complaints of sexual assault by priests, the Catholic Church in India is formulating "holistic" guidelines for dealing with cases of all forms of abuse of children in its institutions. The guidelines, which will be finalised by June after consulting all dioceses, include reporting of any form of abuse by priests or others associated with Church to police and expelling "guilty" priests. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the apex body of the Catholic Church in the country, has given final touches to the guidelines at its conference in Bangalore recently. "We have a zero-tolerance towards any form of abuse of children. We are formulating holistic guidelines to deal with cases of physical and psychological abuse. This is not restricted to sexual abuse alone," Babu Joseph, a CBCI spokesperson, said. "We will not shield anybody. We will report to police matters which are needed to be reported to them," Joseph said. The Catholic Church is in the eye of a storm over alleged sexual abuse by priests, which include the recent case of Indian priest Rev Joseph Palanivel Jeyapaul who was charged with sexually assaulting a teenage parishioner in Minnesota in the United States. Joseph said those found guilty of sexual abuse or any other form of abuse will have to face the law of the land. "Besides this, we will also take action against them. It can be suspension from duties or expelling him from church," he said. Noting that the Church is not going to take "any hasty step," he said they will be formulating guidelines on how to protect children in church institutions like orphanages, special homes and schools. "The guidelines are not just for punishing the clergy. We will also address the issue of how to ensure the safety of children in our institutions," he said. (Zee News 2/5/10)

Church ire at study law change (7)

New Delhi, May 4: The country's apex body of churches has launched a fresh attack on the right to education law, describing proposed amendments aimed at addressing its concerns as "unacceptable" and threatening legal action against the government. "The amendments proposed by the government are totally unacceptable and do not solve our concerns at all. If our concerns are not taken into account, the Christian community may be forced to approach the Supreme Court for justice," Father Kuriala Chittattukalam, education secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), said. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, implemented from April 1, requires all schools to establish a school management committee (SMC) that will oversee the administration of the school. Guardians of students shall constitute 75 per cent of each committee with the remaining 25 per cent members consisting of local elected representatives and select personalities with the school principal as a convener. Since the majority of students in most Christian schools in India are from other communities, the CBCI and other groups were concerned that 75 per cent guardians would hand control of such schools to non-Christians. This, they argued, would be in violation of their constitutional rights to start and administer their own institutions. Responding to the concern, the human resource development ministry earlier in this Parliament session introduced amendments to the law declaring that the committees would have only an advisory role in minority-run schools. But the proposed amendment will merely lead to a duplicity of management bodies in charge of the school. "Even with an advisory role, politicians on the SMC can try and pressurise us to do what they want. Why should we consider the advice of an SMC," Chittattukalam said. The decision to reject the amendments was taken at a meeting of representatives of the CBCI across the country today. The CBCI is not only the largest Catholic group in the country but also represents most churches that run associated schools. The CBCI today also decided to dare the government's will to implement the law in its current form, refusing to comply with a key provision for the recognition of schools. The right to education law also requires all existing schools to seek re-recognition within three months of the law coming into force. "All schools associated with churches shall boycott this requirement. Why should schools that have existed as recognised institutions for over a century seek re-recognition," asked Chittattukalam. (Telegraph 5/5/10)

100 years of Christianity celebrated in Delhi (7)

New Delhi, May 08 2010: A twoday event to mark the 100 years of Christianity in south Manipur was observed in the capital yesterday at the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church (EBCC) and at IIT Dogra hall today by a conglomeration of various denominations hailing from the south district of Churachandpur Manipur. The collective celebrations was held by the Delhi based Zomi Christian Fellowship, New

Testament Baptist Church, Hmar Christian Fellowship, Kuki Worship Service, Gangte Christian Fellowship, Vaiphei Christian Fellowship, Presbyterian Church of India and the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church. In a symbolic "transformation from Darkness to Light" where the Welsh missionary brought light to the hills of South Manipur in 1910, hundreds of southern Manipuri Christians residing in Delhi hold candle lights and observed prayers at India Gate in the evening of May 7, an occasion also observed as missionary day and a State holiday. A souvenir publication "goscent 1910 2010" was also released on the occasion. With a church member record of over 1400 in the EBCC, Rev Nenglian Vualnam said, "This is the impact of the gospel" while adding that the centenary events back home has helped in maintaining cordial brotherhood in the fragile atmosphere of the district. Adding from Bangalore, Rev Tunson Tunlut said, "To keep intact the reached is equally important as reaching the unreached." On the continued ethnic tension and present situation of Churachandpur district the reverend remarked "After 100 years our spiritual level is lower than expected". The centenary observation beginning from the first Sunday in May will be concluded on the 30th under a collective Zomi Christian Fellowship by the south Manipuris in Bangalore. Prayers observed with Church leaders giving messages and teachings, gospel chorus added to the spirit of the celebration with a concluding community feast. (e-Pao 8/5/10)

Pope blames church's own sins for sex scandal (7)

LISBON: Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday blamed the church's own sins for the clerical abuse scandal -- not a campaign mounted by outsiders -- and called for profound purification to end what he called the "greatest persecution" the church has endured. His strong comments placed responsibility for the crisis squarely on the sins of pedophile priests, repudiating the Vatican's initial response to the scandal in which it blamed the media as well as pro-choice and pro-gay marriage advocates for mounting what it called a campaign against the church and the pope. Speaking en route to Portugal, Benedict said the Catholic church had always suffered from problems of its own making but that "today we see it in a truly terrifying way." "The greatest persecution of the church doesn't come from enemies on the outside but is born from the sins within the church," the pontiff said. "The church needs to profoundly relearn penitence, accept purification, learn forgiveness but also justice." The comments marked Benedict's most thorough admission of the church's own guilt in creating the scandal. Previously he has blamed abusers themselves and, in the case of Ireland, the bishops who failed to stop them. He was responding to journalists' questions, submitted in advance, aboard the papal plane as he flew to Portugal. His four-day visit will take him from Lisbon to the famed Fatima shrine to Portugal's second city, Porto. It is not known whether Benedict would make further remarks about the scandal during the trip, but there have been no reported cases of sex abuse in Portugal, unlike in Malta, where Benedict met with abuse victims on a trip there last month. Despite the Vatican's initial, defensive response to hundreds of clerical abuse reports in Europe, Benedict has promised that the church would take action to protect children and make abusive priests face justice. He has already started cleaning house, accepting the resignations of a few bishops who either admitted they molested youngsters or covered up for priests who did. But critics say he still hasn't done nearly enough to repair the damage or protect children from a culture of secrecy that allowed priests to rape and molest children for decades unchecked. Some have noted that while Benedict has accepted some bishops' resignations, no bishop has been actively punished or defrocked, even those who admitted to molesting children. "Many are tiring of hearing about his 'strong comments.'" They want to see strong action," said David Clohessy, director of the main US victims' group, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. While Portugal has not experienced the surge in reports of abuse by priests that has emerged in other European countries, including Benedict's native Germany, it is facing similar financial problems as other European nations. Portugal's economic growth has been pedestrian for years, averaging less than 1 percent between 2001-2008, and the global downturn brought a steep contraction of 2.7 percent last year. A three-year austerity plan to ease the country's crippling debt load is expected to bring greater hardship to a people already feeling the pinch. Portuguese President Anibal Cavaco Silva referred to the financial crisis in his speech greeting Benedict at Lisbon's airport, saying the pontiff was visiting at a time of uncertainty that had tested Portugal's strength as a community. "In these times, men require someone bearing a message of hope to meet their thirst for justice and solidarity," he told the pontiff. Church bells rang out as the pontiff proceeded through Lisbon from the airport in his popemobile. Several thousand people lined the streets on a rainy day, some shouting, "Viva o Papa!" Some stretches of the route were thinly attended, however. Benedict, for his part, said the crisis demonstrated the need for greater moral responsibility in running the global financial system and noted that he outlined his vision for more ethics in finance in his 2009 encyclical "Charity in Truth." He called for greater dialogue within the financial system about ethical considerations. Similarly, the pontiff called for greater dialogue between faith and the secular world. Portugal is nearly 90 percent Catholic, but only around 2 million of the country's 10.6 million people describe themselves as practicing their faith. As has been the case with much of western Europe, Portugal has also drifted away from church teaching on key issues. Portugal's

center-left Socialist government passed a law in 2007 allowing abortion. In 2008, it introduced a law allowing a judge to grant a divorce even if one spouse is opposed. In January, Parliament passed a bill seeking to make the country the sixth in Europe allowing same-sex couples to marry. Cavaco Silvo now has to decide whether to veto or ratify that bill. In his airport remarks, Benedict sharply criticized Portugal's abortion law, saying public officials must give "essential consideration" to issues that affect human life. "The point at issue is not an ethical confrontation between a secular and religious system, so much as a question about the meaning that we give to our freedom," he said. Benedict also praised Portugal's Catholic heritage, saying it was a "great force of faith" in spreading Catholicism around the globe, from Brazil to Africa, during colonial times. Despite the country's increasingly secular bent, religious sentiment runs deep. At least 500,000 people are expected to attend the pope's Mass in Fatima on May 13, the anniversary of the day in 1917 when three Portuguese shepherd children reported having visions of the Virgin Mary. (Times of India 12/5/10)

Only in India: A Brahmin groom for a Catholic bride (7)

MUMBAI: When Winnie D'Souza wanted to marry her daughter into a 'decent' family, she scanned the matrimonial columns of Catholic periodicals in Panaji. After shortlisting a few young men, D'Souza made inquiries about their caste. She wanted her daughter to marry a Brahmin. Most Catholic publications do not list caste categories as they did 20 years ago, but casteism has not disappeared among Christians. It has merely become more subtle. Unlike Bihar, Orissa and the North-East, which have large tribal Christian populations, the Christians of Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu remain in thrall to the caste categories of their Hindu ancestors. Father Augustine Kanjamala, a theologian in Mumbai, has researched caste among Christians. Caste exists in different forms in various Christian communities, he says. In Kerala the Christians admitted to the faith almost 2,000 years ago are called Syrian Christians. They are better off than Latin Christians, who are mainly from poorer communities. Syrian Christians and Latin Christians do not inter-marry. They even have different institutions to train their priests. In Goa, Christians belonging to Brahmin or Charado (Kshatriya) castes are more privileged than the others. They dominate Church institutions and activities. Father Augustine says that in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Dalit Christians are not given much access to Church festivities. Sometimes they are reduced to having a separate church. Two decades ago, the graveyards had separate sections for upper and lower castes. This is changing because some progressive priests have challenged the iniquitous system. "In Mangalore, a few families of Dalit Christians have returned to Hinduism as they felt humiliated living among Christians who discriminated against them," says Father Augustine. "Caste will not die out in the Church easily, but in cities like Mumbai, the urban situation has led to the breaking down of barriers of caste". (Times of India 16/5/10)

Christian platform urges peace (7)

Imphal, May 20: The All Manipur Christian Organisation has urged chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh to come up with a practical and lasting solution to end the impasse arising out of the economic blockade and the ban on NSCN (I-M) general secretary Th. Muivah's entry into Manipur. Amco had earlier consulted the hills and valley organisations. In a representation to chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh today, its president Rev. Prim Vaiphei and general secretary Rev. Fr George G made the demand after talking to Naga organisations in Senapati district. The leaders of the Christian organisation had met the United Committee Manipur, All Manipur Clubs' Organisation, All Tribal Students' Union Manipur and Ibobi Singh to discuss the prevailing situation in the state. The meeting with Ibobi Singh was followed by the visit of a nine-member team of the Christian organisation to Senapati district on May 17 where they met leaders of the United Naga Council, All Naga Students' Association, Manipur, Naga Women Union Manipur and the Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights. In the representation to Ibobi Singh, it highlighted three grievances of the Naga organisations. The Christian organisation told Ibobi Singh that the economic blockade on the Imphal-Dimapur and the Imphal-Jiribam highways by the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur, would be lifted if the state government deferred the upcoming elections to the six autonomous district councils in the five hill districts. The representation said that the power given to the district councils under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council (Third Amendment) Act 2008 was in contrast to that given to the panchayats in the valley. The Naga forums had told the Christian organisation that the existing act is anti-tribal. The representation further said that the Manipur government had provoked the Nagas by sending state forces to Mao Gate to block Muivah's entry into Manipur. It said the denial of entrance to a team of Naga Students' Federation from Kohima to Oinam village in Senapati district for a meeting had led to a counter blockade of vehicles to and from Manipur. The Tangkhul Naga Long, the apex body of Tangkhuls in Manipur, yesterday lodged a complaint with the deputy commissioner of Ukhrul district, N. Ashok Kumar, demanding cancellation of the autonomous district council election in the district. In a statement, the Tangkhul Naga Long today said Tangkhul headmen and civil society organisations would

hold a meeting on May 25 in Ukhrul town to discuss ways to prevent the ADC elections. (Telegraph 21/5/10)

Peace prayers for Manipur held in Delhi (7)

New Delhi, May 22 2010: Members of the All India Christian Council (AICC) organized a special prayer meeting 'Peace in Manipur' here on Saturday. "You know, Manipur is burning, almost every day, for last so many years. But this time, it's the worst. People irrespective of hill people or valley people, everyone is suffering now," said Madhu Chandra, Regional Secretary, All India Christian Council (AICC) (North India). Earlier this month, the Manipur Government had banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to visit his ancestral village. The prolonged blockade has led to severe shortages of commodities and crippled life in Manipur. Chandra said that the people of Manipur were suffering without food and other essential commodities due to the economic blockade, which is on for over a month now. "The suffering of the people is the highest in the history. It is our concern, those who are living in Delhi. That's why we came forward today. We are not political thing, but we are religious people. We want to respond in prayer," said Madhu Chandra. Manipur is suffering due to a month-long economic blockade spearheaded by Naga groups in protest against the autonomous council elections in the hill districts in April. (E-Pao 22/5/10)

VHP activists attack church (7)

Anantapur: Activists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) attacked a church, which is under construction, in Tadipatri on Sunday, brought down its walls, broke doors and windows, resulting in partial collapse of its main structure, and installed an idol of Anjaneya Swamy at the altar of the church. This act of the VHP activists sent shockwaves among the Christian community. The VHP activists alleged that the church was being constructed in a 'Hindu majority' area with a view to convert people. VHP district president Radhakrishna and his followers allegedly spearheaded the attack and among those who participated in the attack were VHP State executive member Gangadhar and Jayaramireddy. Police arrested the VHP leaders and also removed the idol installed at the altar of the church. A police picket was posted to prevent retaliation by the Christian community. Meanwhile, enraged Christian youths and representatives of Christian organisations in the city warned the VHP and its allied organisations not to take the peaceful Christian community for granted and push it too far. All India Christian Council district leader Ravi Kumar condemned the VHP's action and demanded compensation from it for its act of hooliganism. (The Hindu 25/5/10)

Two Christian aid groups suspended in Afghanistan (7)

Kabul, June 03, 2010: Afghan authorities suspended two Christian foreign aid groups today on suspicion of proselytising in the strictly Islamic nation and said a follow-up investigation would include whether other groups were trying to convert Muslims. US-based Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid will not be allowed to operate while the allegations, aired yesterday on Afghan television, are investigated, said Mohammad Hashim Mayar, the deputy director of the Afghan government office that oversees nongovernment organisations, known as NGOs. An investigation commission including officers from the National Security and Interior Ministries had been appointed, he said. Both organisations denied the allegation, and Mayar said officials did not have any evidence of proselytising beyond the television report. "They are investigating whether the groups were proselytising or not," Mayar said. "They will report back and also assess what is the impact of closing these NGOs. The investigation will include whether other groups or individuals are involved." (Hindustan Times 4/6/10)

Roman Catholic bishop's driver charged with murder (7)

A Turkish man was charged Friday with murder in the stabbing death of a Roman Catholic bishop, the Vatican's apostolic vicar in Anatolia, for whom he worked as a driver, a court said. The killing of Monsignor Luigi Padovese outside his home in the Mediterranean port of Iskenderun on Thursday was the latest in a string of attacks in recent years on Christians in predominantly Muslim Turkey, where Christians make up less than 1 percent of the 70 million population. The 26-year-old driver, Murat Altun, confessed to the killing, his lawyer Cihan Onal said. "The murder is not politically motivated," Onal told the state-run Anatolia news agency. "My client is suffering from mental problems. He confessed to all the details of the killing." Turkish authorities also said the murder did not appear to be politically motivated. The court in Iskenderun ordered Altun jailed pending trial. No trial date has been set. Onal said the driver would undergo medical tests to determine his mental health. "In his statement, at one point he said he killed him after receiving a message from God," Onal said. "He can't explain why he committed the murder. In fact, he is giving conflicting accounts." Onal rejected allegations that Altun, a Muslim, had

converted to Christianity. Padovese had been due to fly to Cyprus on Friday with his chauffeur to meet Pope Benedict, who is going to the island to invite Roman Catholic clerics in the Middle East to a synod in Rome. Turkish authorities and a Franciscan nun, Sister Eleonora de Stefano, who reportedly had spoken to Padovese on the phone less than an hour before his slaying, said the bishop's driver was lately suffering from serious depression. Sister de Stefano said Padovese had asked her "to cancel Murat's ticket for Cyprus as well for himself because he hadn't been feeling well," the Italian agency ANSA has reported. "Since Murat was suffering from a serious depression for at least two weeks. Recently, he frequently met with Monsignor Padovese, who was trying to help him," ANSA quoted the nun as saying. "He had even asked him to accompany him to Cyprus, but the driver refused." Turkish authorities said the body of Padovese could be flown home after an autopsy in the southern city of Adana. The Turkish government has paid tribute to Padovese, who was appointed apostolic vicar in Anatolia in 2004, with Culture Minister Ertugrul Gunay saying he had "made important contributions to the culture of tolerance through his services in Hatay." There has been several attacks on Christians in Turkey in recent years. In 2007, a Roman Catholic priest in the western city of Izmir, Adriano Franchini, was stabbed and slightly wounded in the stomach by a 19-year-old man after Sunday Mass. The man was arrested. The same year, a group of men entered a Bible-publishing house in the central Anatolian city of Malatya and killed three Christians, including a German national. The five alleged killers are now standing trial for murder. In 2006, amid widespread anger in Islamic countries over the publication in European newspapers of caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, a 16-year-old boy shot dead a Catholic priest, Father Andrea Santoro, as he prayed in his church in the Black Sea city of Trabzon. The boy was convicted of murder and sentenced to 18 years in prison. (Sify News 5/6/10)

Politics is part of Church: Bishops (7)

PNS | Kochi: The Catholic Church in Kerala on Thursday objected strongly to Chief Minister VS Achuthanandan's statement last week that Muslim and Christian communalism was gaining strength in the State but reiterated that politics was indeed a part of it. Immediately after the Chief Minister's statement, the Church had termed it as an effort at encouraging communalism by the responsible leaders whose duty it was to promote unity of the State. After a two-day meeting of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) here, its president Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios indicated to newsmen that the Chief Minister's statement could be seen only as one that could endanger religious harmony. He said responsible leaders should abstain from issuing such statements. The KCBC president said that the Church had no intention to interfere in the affairs of political parties. He denied the allegations that senior clergy had mediated the merger of the two Kerala Congress groups led by KM Mani and PJ Joseph. However, he said that the Church would intervene in the politics of issues of national importance that concerned the believers. Politics was indeed part of the Church, the Bishop said. A release issued by the KCBC after the meeting claimed that the minorities of Kerala, especially the Christians, had always viewed the "tolerance and cooperation of the Hindu brothers here with utmost love and gratitude". "It is unfortunate that leaders are issuing statements that could disrupt this situation," it said. The Bishops requested the leaders to stay away from making such statements "for selfish interests". In an effort to send a positive message to the Muslim community, several of whose outfits had recently come under Marxist attack, the council said that adherence to religious customs should be allowed without discouraging the system of uniforms in educational institutions, in an indirect reference to the disciplinary action taken against a Muslim student at a Christian school for wearing burqa. The bishops said there would be no restrictions on wearing burqa at Christian management schools. Immediately after Achuthanandan spoke about the alleged growth of Muslim and Christian communalism in the State, the KCBC had responded to it saying a mysterious effort was on from the part of the responsible leaders for creating hatred among the various religious sections. "Such people should understand that the Kerala society has the cultural maturity not to fall prey to such ill-motivated strategies," it said. (Pioneer 11/6/10)

Hindu radical charged with rape of Orissa nun (7)

Monday, 14 June 2010 : The Catholic nun who was raped during anti-Christian violence in Orissa, addressing a press conference (file photo) Orissa police last night arrested a key Hindu radical wanted for the rape of a Catholic nun. Pandit Bishimajhi appeared before court in Balliguda, Kandhamal, where the nun was raped during the 2008 anti-Christian violence. He faces at least 15 criminal charges. Church people allege that Bishimajhi led several mob attacks during the violence. One of his mobs stripped and paraded Sister Meena and Father Thomas Chellan, director of a pastoral center in the district. Bishimajhi is accused of plotting to murder them both after raping Sister Meena. He is also charged with burning down Jan Vikas, an archdiocesan social service center. Bishimajhi, secretary of a local unit of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, was arrested in Kudutulli, a nearby village where he was hiding. Manasa Ranjan Singh, a lawyer following Sister Meena's case, says the arrest would have "definite impact" on the

case and boost the morale of other victims seeking justice. "He was arrested after two years despite having high-level political connections. He cannot escape now," said Singh. Father Dibya Parichha, the archdiocese's spokesperson on the riot cases, added that the arrest would help bring peace and reconciliation. "He was a terror in the area," he added. (Source: Cath News India, 14 June, 2010, <http://www.cathnewsindia.com/2010/06/11/hindu-radical-charged-with-rape-of-orissa-nun>)

Church attacked, statues broken near Hyderabad (7)

Hyderabad: A church has been attacked at Bandlaguda village in Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh. Some unknown people pelted stones at Don Bosco Church at Bandlaguda village in Ranga Reddy on 12 June 2010. When the Christian community in the area came to know of the incident, they staged a protest near the church demanding action against the culprits and also security for the church.

Near the main gate of the church were the statues of Mother Mary carrying the child Jesus along with Joseph, encased in a glass container. In the attack, the miscreants also broke the statues, and left them right in the middle of the road. The parish priest, who returned from Guntur in the morning, reported the matter to the police on 13 June 2010. ACP Sarweswar reddy visited the place and began the investigations. MLA Prakash Goud condemned the incident and said, "This is a nasty action to attack the church. The culprits should be brought to book." (Andhra Jyothi, June 13, 2010)

Pastor dragged and beaten up in Karnataka

Bengaluru: A Pastor has been dragged and beaten up in Belgaum district of Karnataka for his alleged faith promotion activities in the area. This inhuman incident happened a few days ago at Hukkeri village in Belgaum. Pastor Vasant, who has been working in the area for many years, was surrounded by a group of people belonging to Rama Sena, a Hindutva outfit, and beaten up right on the road in full public view. His clothes were pulled out and torn; and he was attacked mercilessly. Then he was taken to the local police station where he was arrested and detained for many hours. Pastor Vasant was later brought out on bail by other Pastors in the area. It is learned that Rama Sena has plans to attack other churches in Belgaum district. All India Christian Council has condemned the attack on the Pastor and sought action against the miscreants. The Council has also demanded a total ban on Rama Sena for its anti-Christian activities in Karnataka. (AICC 15/6/10)

Census hits roadblock in Mizoram – superstition (7)

The census operations have hit a bizarre roadblock in the northeastern state of Mizoram - superstition. A section of the Christian community believe that the head count, and the allocation of a unique identification (UID) number, would mean being 'identified by the beast'. 'This came to light when Mizoram Chief Secretary Vanhela Pachuau Friday reviewed the progress of the ongoing enumeration of the first phase of the census and door-to-door headcount for the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) in the Christian dominated state,' a census official told reporters Saturday. The meeting was attended by senior state government and census operation officials, besides district commissioners. The first phase of census operation kicked-off in Mizoram May 15 from the residence of Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla and it would continue till June 30. The official quoting the reports of the district commissioners said: 'Some cults and sects of Christians believe the head count exercise, especially the introduction of UID numbers, would be ominous. Getting identified with UID numbers would mean getting identified by the beast (the devil).' 'There are 1,355 families across the mountainous state who have refused to enrol their names for the NRIC,' the official added. Deputy director general of census operations S.K. Chakraborty told IANS: 'These very critical and basic statistics of the NRIC would form the database of every Indian and these would be maintained by the UID, an innovative system to be used as a means of uniquely identifying the residents in the country.' The issue was hotly debated in a religious meet in Mizoram capital Aizawl last week. 'This UID card in any way cannot be the identification with the beast. This UID card is meant to distinguish between Indians and foreigners to safeguard the citizens. It would bar foreigners from buying property in our country,' said a popular Christian scholar P. C. Biaksiana while addressing the seminar. A section of participants at the seminar refused to accept Biaksiana's explanation and walked out of the seminar hall. The Mizoram government and census officials are finalising strategies to launch a campaign across the Christian dominated state to break the superstition. Meanwhile, the Presbyterian Church Synod, the highest decision making body of the largest Church in Mizoram issued a message earlier this week to all members asking them to cooperate with census officials as it was the duty of every citizen to do so. The church also condemned people who were campaigning about the 'number of the beast' and terrifying church members. Over 5.3 million Christians live in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur. 'During the 45 days of the work, the census officials will be collecting personal information on every individual in each family. This would be incorporated in the proposed unique identification card project, which would cover all citizens aged 18 years and above,' Chakraborty told IANS. He said that the

actual population enumeration would be undertaken simultaneously across the country Feb 9-28, 2011 followed by a five-day revision round March 1-5, 2011. (Sify News 19/6/10)

Training programme for minority institutions

ALLAHABAD: A six-day training course in management for the minority institutions was jointly organised by All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE) and All India Council for Christian School (AICCS) at Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (SHIATS). More than 100 representatives from various educational organisations in the country participated in the training programme. Mani Jacob, chancellor SHIATS and general secretary AIACHI was convenor of the programme. He said the religious minorities in India have the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Rajendra B Lal, vice-chancellor, SHIATS spoke on the UGC plan for minorities education with provision that in the higher education sector educational trusts, foundations and non governmental organisations are to be supported and streamlined to cater to the educational needs of educationally backward minorities. He also called for reservation in admission to minorities candidates in all the educational institutions in the country. SB Lal, director research, SHIATS welcomed the representatives and briefed them about the training programme. He said the minority communities enjoy the fundamental rights to manage the property and resources with development of culture and tradition of their respective religion. (Times of India 23/6/10)

Christian council resents recycling of Bibles

The All India Christian Council (AICC) on Wednesday took offence to the 'sale of Holy Bibles' as 'recyclable scrap' after they allegedly found trucks transporting copies of the Bible to a paper mill in Srikakulam. "We are not accusing anyone but we are grieved by this incident, which has hurt the sentiments of Christians across the State," AICC national secretary Sam Paul told mediapersons. He has requested the Andhra Pradesh government to initiate an inquiry so that such an 'unfortunate' incident does not repeat itself. "On May 4, we found that six trucks from Bhimavaram were carrying Bibles to the paper mill," State president M. Prasad said. "We reported it to the police and those who were responsible apologised." A month later, however, two trucks from Rajahmundry were found carrying Bibles to the same paper mill. "There have been reports of demonstrations in some parts of the State," Mr. Paul said. (The Hindu 24/6/10)

Superstition leads 3000 people to be left out of Census (7)

Aizawl, Jul 1 (PTI): Around 3,000 people with 'superstitious belief' could not be enumerated during the ongoing Census in Christian-dominated Mizoram as they failed to cooperate with the authorities, official sources said on Thursday. As the deadline ended on Wednesday, the sources said census officials would seek an extension from the state government to cover them. Reports from deputy commissioners, designated as Principal Census Officers, of all the eight districts said while a few of them relented, the majority refused to enrol themselves saying they were ready to face any punitive action. These people declared they had no objection to being enrolled in the census, but refused to be marked with a Unique ID for fear of the Biblical 'Beast' or the Devil, the sources said. The fear of being identified with the 'number of the beast' stems from the Bible's Revelation chapter 13 Verse 17 which says "...and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name." The Unique Identification Authority of India stipulates that no one can buy or sell property without the UID card among its other key uses. (Deccan Herald 1/7/10)

2 convicted in Kandhamal riots case (7)

PHULBANI (ORISSA): A fast track court today sentenced two persons to six years rigorous imprisonment for killing a polio-stricken man during Kandhamal riots in 2008. Fast track court-I judge S K Das convicted Susant Sahu and Mrutunjay Sahu under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 436 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house), 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting armed with deadly weapon) and 149 (unlawful assembly) of IPC. They were also fined Rs 5500 for the killing of Rasananda Pradhan, a Christian afflicted with polio, during rioting on August 24, 2008 at Rupa village under Tikabali police station area in Kandhamal district, a day after the killing of the VHP leader Swami Laxamanda Saraswati. The police recovered the charred body of Pradhan about a fortnight after his killing. While all the members of the villagers fled from their houses, Rasananda could not. His family members fled to the state capital to take shelter. Welcoming the judgement, Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar diocese Rahpeal Cheenath said "this has helped people to have faith in the judiciary." Meanwhile, Fast Track court-II, Phulbani, Judge C R Das acquitted 20 persons while disposing of two cases relating to the torching of houses on August 25, 2008, at Bapalamendi and Hatapadasahi villages.

Of the total 891 riot cases, the two fast track courts have so far disposed of 201 cases convicting 152 persons and acquitting 656. (Express Buzz 1/7/10)

Controversial question paper: Lecturer's hand chopped off (7)

Thiruvananthapuram: Less than four months after he sparked off a controversy for reportedly insulting Prophet Muhammed in a question paper, a college lecturer, T J Joseph, was attacked by some unidentified men who chopped off his right hand, at Muvattupuzha in central Kerala today. Joseph, 52, Malayalam lecturer at Catholic-run Newman College, Thodupuzha, was returning home after attending Sunday prayers at the local church when he was attacked. He was accompanied by his mother and sister. Police have taken into custody two suspected activists of the right-wing Popular Front of India. Joseph has been admitted to the Specialist Hospital in Kochi. According to Joseph's sister, Stella Joseph, the assailants in a van waylaid their vehicle and pulled out the lecturer, after bursting explosives to create a scare. While Joseph was being attacked, his mother and sister were warned not to step out of the vehicle. The gang fled the scene after severing his right hand. Ernakulam SP T Vikram said the attack seemed to have been pre-planned. A blood-stained van, suspected to have been used by the assailants, has been seized. In April this year, Joseph was arrested after a question paper set by him triggered protests by Muslims. He was later released on bail. The question paper, for an internal degree exam in March, contained a text taken from an article written by P T Kunjumammed, a director of several award-winning films and former CPI(M) legislator. Referring to his film Garshom, Kunjumammed explained in the article that the thread for a scene in the movie, in which the protagonist speaks to God, was picked from his own experience about a madman who used to speak to God. While reproducing the conversation as a passage for punctuation, Joseph replaced the mad man with Muhammed, thus making it seem like a dialogue between God and Muhammed. (Indian Express 5/7/10)

Mizoram seeks extension of Census deadline (7)

About 1000 families of Mizoram have refused to enroll themselves in the Census operation and the State government has requested the Centre to extend the deadline for 15 more days, in order to provide officials more time to persuade them. The deadline for the completion of Census in the State ended on June 30. "Though we are yet to receive any approval from the centre, we expect that the centre would ink its approval in view of the circumstances," the sources said. Majority of these 1000 families of Christian dominated Mizoram refused to include their names in the National Population Register (NPR), taken up along with the Census, to prepare the Unique Identification number. They were afraid that they would be identified with the Biblical number of the Beast, the sources said. The fear stems from Chapter 13 Verse 17 of the Book of Revelations in the Bible which says "... and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the Beast or the number of his name." Now, according to adherents of the belief, since buying or selling of property made one a follower of the Beast, one having the UID card, which authorised property transactions, automatically made one a follower of the Devil. The Unique Identification Authority of India has stipulated that none could buy or sell property without the Unique ID card. Keywords: Mizoram, Census operation, Extension, NPR, Biblical reference (The Hindu 6/7/10)

Caste divide follows dalit Christians even in death (7)

June 8: Humiliating discrimination on the basis of caste does not spare some even in death. In the heart of Tiruchy city, a huge wall separates the burial grounds of dalit and non-dalit Christians at the Warehouse Cemetery in Palakkarai. Though they are all Roman Catholics, the mortal remains of dalit Christians from areas like Uppuparai, Sengulam Colony, Mallikaipuram, Kemp's Town, Kooni Bazaar and Kajapet are buried on the left half of the burial ground while upper caste 'Pillai Christians' are buried in the other half. "We have appealed to the authorities to raze the obnoxious wall but there has been no action yet," said Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam president Kolathur Mani. "We will lock the office of the civil rights protection wing in Tiruchy on August 15 to protest against the inaction." While the state police maintains that untouchability is not prevalent in the state, the PDK has come out with a long list of tea stalls where the 'twin-tumbler system' in which different sets of tumblers are used for dalits and caste Hindus is still followed. According to Mani, the practice is rampant in Oddancharram constituency in Dindigul district and Palladam and Kundadam regions of Tirupur district. "After a detailed field study, we have sent a list of 40 tea stalls in Palladam region alone with the details of the owners," he said. "Untouchability is practised in every other village in Oddanchatram region but the authorities refuse to take cognisance of it." (Deccan Chronicle 9/7/10)

Christians plea to withdraw church attack cases (7)

Mangalore, July 14, DHNS: The Cordel unit of the Catholic Sabha Mangalore Pradesh has urged the government to withdraw all criminal cases filed against Christian youths during church attacks on

September 14 and 15, 2008. In a press release, Catholic Sabha Mangalore Pradesh Political Convener Sushil Noronha said that though Justice Somasekhara Commission, in its interim report, had recommended the government to withdraw criminal cases against the Christians, no step has been taken over the issue till date. "Though the government has withdrawn several criminal cases connected with various other issues, it is not taking any steps to implement the recommendations of Justice Somasekhara Commission, following which many youth and students are facing hardships," he said and added that the government is neither speeding up the investigation nor withdrawing the cases. In the memorandum submitted to Chief Minister, Home Minister and District-in-Charge Minister through Additional DC Prabhakar Sharma, Holy Cross Parish Priest Fr Valerian Pinto appealed the authorities concerned to withdraw all criminal cases against Christian youths as recommended by Justice Somasekhara panel. Unit President Marriet Pinto, Secretary Pauline D'Souza, Henry D'Souza, Alban Pinto, Celestine Crasta, Leo Mascarenhas, Victor Vas were present. (Deccan Herald 15/7/10)

Worshippers at Malad church attacked, 2 detained

MUMBAI: Eight persons allegedly ransacked St Emmanuel in Orlem, Malad (W) on Sunday evening. Joseph Dias, secretary, Catholic Secular Forum, said that the men, who were drunk, barged into the church when a prayer meeting was on. The accused allegedly started molesting the women in the congregation. When the women objected, the accused beat up the worshippers. Ponkumar Nadar, who sustained serious injuries, was taken to Bhagwati Hospital. The others were undergoing treatment at a private hospital. The Malwani police has detained two persons. Abraham Mathai, vice-chairman, state minorities commission, said the police should carry out an impartial probe. (The Times of India, 2/8/2010)

MLA's anti-Christian remark draws flak

BELGAUM: Khanapur BJP MLA Pralhad Remani's "alleged" remarks on Christians has left the community members upset. Christians, besides filing a complaint against him at Khanapur police station, took out a protest rally seeking public apology from him. Remani, in his Independence Day speech, had "allegedly" called upon Hindus to weed out Christianity in the region, saying "these are the seeds left by the British. They are spreading Christianity systematically through educational institutions. I will not rest unless and until the seeds of Christianity are weeded out." Condemning Remani's remarks, the Catholic Christian community of Khanapur and Belgaum on Wednesday took out a huge protest rally at Khanapur town and submitted a memorandum to tahsildar, demanding action against the MLA. In the memorandum, they charged Ramani with intending to disturb peace in society by threatening the Christians. Rev Fr Louis Gonsalves, Robert Gonsalves, Rev Fr Joseph, Fr Paul Fernandes, Fr Michael Fernandes, Fr Cajetan D'Souza, Fr Arul Ashiwrud and Christian leaders were present. (TOI, 21/8/2010)

Priest attacked in Qutabgarh

A group of people allegedly owing allegiance to a political party attacked a priest in the outer Delhi area on Sunday, All India Christian Council (AICC) claimed on Monday. The incident took place in Qutabgarh area in Bawana on Sunday night. Isaac Jaal, the priest, was allegedly attacked by a group when he was returning home after Sunday prayer. The mob allegedly thrashed him, AICC claimed, adding that the group was led by the son of a political party leader. A senior police official said they had received the complaint. A team of police officers' met the priest in evening. The police are looking into the matter but no case has been registered yet, the official added. (dailypioneer, 24/8/2010)

Christians will denounce US preacher's anti-Islam stance

MUMBAI: Christians from different denominations, Catholic and Protestant, will come together to emphasise that Christianity is a religion of peace and brotherhood and will speak out against some extremist Christians in USA, who have been mouthing anti-Islamic slogans. The Catholic archbishop of Mumbai, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, along with bishops of the Church of North India and other Christian groups will hold a meeting on Wednesday to condemn those who preach hatred in the guise of Christianity. "We will speak out against a few Christian fanatics in USA. The tirade against Islam by some extremist Christians groups, particularly a little known preacher, pastor Terry Jones in Florida, is giving rise to misunderstandings. Jones has threatened to burn the Quran to commemorate 9/11. We will send out the message that preaching hatred goes against the tenets of Christianity," said spokesperson for the Catholic archbishop, Fr Savio Fernandes. Gul Kripalani, former president of the Indian Merchants' Chamber and an activist for Christian groups, said, "It is time we told the world that Christians do not believe in violence and hatred. This is evident in the thousands of educational and charitable institutions catering to people of all faiths, that we run across the country. We have to come out openly and stop the

extremists from abroad who are spreading hate," he said. Catholic circles point out that the Church has taken a strong stand against violence and war. "When the US administration decided to go to war with Iraq, it was Pope John Paul II who said it was wrong," they said. Kripalani said that India's tradition was one of tolerance and these few fanatical Christians from the USA should not be allowed to spew venom. "We appeal to Christians across the country to take a stand against this issue," he said. (TOI, 29/8/2010)

Very little done for Kandhamal victims, says Archbishop

The Orissa government has failed to wipe the tears and heal the wounds of the Christian community in Kandhamal even two years after the anti-Christian violence in the district, said Raphael Cheenath, Archbishop of Catholic Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, here on Monday. Addressing a press conference along with Swarupananda Patra, president of the Orissa Minority Forum, the Archbishop said the State government had been making tall claims about rehabilitation and payment of compensation to the victims while very little had been done for the thousands of affected people till date. "The battered and impoverished Christian community now stands vulnerable even as the State government remains in a state of denial, refusing to even acknowledge the crisis, much less taking any action," they said. Stating that members of the Christian community were still living in fear, the Archbishop said although about 12,500 people had been resettled in their rebuilt houses, about 17,500 people were still living away from their native villages. The compensation of Rs. 50,000 for fully damaged houses and Rs. 20,000 for so-called partially damaged ones was also grossly inadequate considering the market rates of construction, they pointed out. Observing that the State government had arbitrarily fixed the compensation amount without consulting the victims, they said Church bodies had helped to rebuild about 2,500 houses from their resources and about 3,500 houses still remained half-built or un-built. While seeking enhanced compensation for the victims, they also demanded that the State government give compensation to the families of those killed and those who were injured in the violence. The government must reopen all criminal cases that had been closed because of want of evidence and order proper probe, they demanded. (The Hindu, 31/8/2010)

State Govt cannot abdicate responsibility in neglected Kandhamal: Minority Forum

The Odisha Minority Forum on Monday alleged that even after two years of the anti-Christian riots in the State, the Odisha Government has failed to 'wipe the tears' and 'heal the wounds' of the Christian community in Kandhamal. Speaking at a Press conference here president, Orissa Minority Forum Swarupananda Patra and Archbishop of Cuttack Raphael Cheenath said while the Odisha Government is proactive about compensating industrially displaced people, the same Government exhibits abject behaviour while dealing with the minorities. The compensation of `50,000 for 'fully damaged' and `20,000 for so-called 'partially damaged' houses is grossly inadequate considering the market rates of construction. The State Government, without consulting the victims, arbitrarily fixed such amounts which ensured that all the houses stay half constructed with walls, but with no roofs. . Everywhere else in the country State Governments have come forward to build houses of minority communities destroyed in similar violence. Similarly, the Odisha Government must follow the example of other State Governments and ensure foolproof investigation of all criminal cases so that the guilty are punished for their heinous crime and are not let of for want of adequate evidence because of shoddy investigations and forensic expertise. The State Government must reopen all criminal cases and order proper investigation with modern investigative techniques and expert personnel. The State must provide adequate protection to victims and witnesses before, during and after the trials in the Fast Track Courts, they demanded. (Dailypioneer, 31/8/2010)

Trial court threatens action against elusive K'mal nun

The Cuttack district sessions judge holding trial in the sensational Kandhamal nun rape case on Tuesday gave a last chance to the prosecution which is seeking repeated adjournments to produce the nun before the court. The court is also learnt to have threatened to take "coercive" action if the nun fails to appear in the court on the next date of hearing. The court was apparently furious when the State crime branch police submitted a time petition on the day seeking at least a month's time to produce the nun as she was indisposed suffering from cerebral malaria. What irked the court most was that the prosecution on Monday had promised to produce the nun on Tuesday. But instead of doing so they produced a medical certificate of August 18 stating that the nun was sick and was advised complete bed rest, informed the defense counsel S C Mohapatra. Refusing to grant the relief as sought; the court fixed next date of hearing on September 23 and 24 and asked the prosecution to produce the nun positively on that day failing which coercive actions would be taken. Lawyers here believe that coercive action could either mean a bailable or non-bailable arrest warrant against the nun. The nun was allegedly raped during the communal riots in August 2008 and it was on her insistence that the trial of the case was shifted by the

Odisha HC. Surprisingly, the nun failed to show up before the court even as three phases of hearing in the case was over here. (Pioneer, 9/9/2010)

BJP MLA convicted in Kandhamal riots case

Sitting BJP MLA Manoj Pradhan was on Thursday sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for six years by a fast track court for a murder during the 2008 communal riots in Orissa's Kandhamal district. Fast track court-II judge C.R. Das convicted Pradhan for the murder of Bikram Nayak from Budedipada of Tiangia village under Raikia police station limits on August 26, 2008. He was convicted under section 304 (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the IPC. The judge also slapped a fine of Rs. 15,500 on the convict, representing the communally sensitive G Udayagiri assembly constituency, for setting ablaze houses of people belonging to the minority community and inciting communal violence. Though Pradhan's name was initially not in the FIR filed at Raikia police station, his involvement in the killing came to light during the investigation. At least 12 cases were registered against Pradhan for his alleged involvement in the riots in Kandhamal which claimed at least 38 lives in the aftermath of the killing of VHP leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. Of the 12 cases, Pradhan has been convicted in two murder cases and acquitted in seven others relating to arson and rioting. Three more cases are pending against him. Pradhan was a close disciple of Saraswati, whose killing on August 23, 2008, had sparked off large-scale violence in Kandhamal and other parts of Orissa. Pradhan said he would move a higher court against the sentence. This was the second case in which Pradhan, arrested from Berhampur in December 2008, has been convicted. (The Hindu, 10/9/2010)

Church defends college's move to sack teacher

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala's Newman College lecturer T J Joseph, whose hand was allegedly chopped off by radicals, is now battling the Church. The Kothamangalam diocese of the Syro-Malabar church on Sunday defended his dismissal from the college saying Joseph was trying to blame the college management for the incident. Popular Front of India (PFI) members allegedly chopped off Joseph's hand on July 4 after he set a question paper which had derogatory references to Prophet Muhammad. Later, the college dismissed him. On Sunday, a circular issued by head of Kothamangalam diocese Mar George Punnakkottil sought to justify the management and said Joseph had not apologized for his mistake. The circular was read in 155 churches affiliated to the diocese. After the question paper controversy, the college had suspended Joseph and appointed a commission of inquiry. The commission found that he had set the question intentionally. There was also a conscious attempt to drag the college principal and the management into the issue, the circular said. Joseph said church was attempting to make him apologize for a sin he had not committed. (IE, 13/9/2010)

Another Kerala church defends action against sacked lecturer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 13 SEPT: Another prominent church in Kerala today backed the dismissal of lecturer Mr TJ Joseph, who lost his hand in a gruesome attack by a radical group, but said he can seek a "lenient" approach by expressing regret or exploring legal means. Syro Malankara Catholic Church (SMC) head major Archbishop Mar Baseliose Cleemis said the action against the lecturer was taken as the question paper prepared by him had hurt the sentiments of a major section in the society. At the same time, he said the Church had outrightly condemned the attack on Mr Joseph, allegedly by activists of Popular Front of India. "Preserving communal and social harmony is not the concern of the church alone. It is something that concerns all the sections of the Kerala society," Archbishop Cleemis said. Mr Joseph, a lecturer in the church-run Newman College, was attacked on 4 July in an apparent retaliation for preparing the question paper with alleged derogatory reference to Prophet Mohammad. Newman College at Thodupuzha, from where Mr Joseph was dismissed, comes under the Kothamangalam Diocese of Syro Malabar Catholic Church. Justifying the issuance of a circular by Kothamangalam bishop on the issue, which was read out in churches under the diocese yesterday, Archbishop Cleemis said it was essential to explain as to why the college management took the disciplinary action against Mr Joseph. However, there was an earlier circular issued by the same diocese condemning the attack on Mr Joseph, which was brought out in July, soon after the incident. These two circulars should be read together to understand the view of the church on the issue in its true perspective, he said. The diocesan circular condemning the "irresponsible action" of Mr Joseph was read out during the Sunday mass in 120 parish churches under the Kothamangalam Dioceses in Ernakulam district yesterday. Reacting to the circular, Mr Joseph had stated yesterday that he had not done anything wrong to apologise to the church and accepts "favours" from it. Mr Joseph said he had decided to approach the University Appellate Tribunal for his reinstatement. (Statesman, 14/9/2010)

Church turns against parties

After asking its followers through pastoral letters not to vote for Independent candidates propped up by political parties with atheistic ideologies in the local bodies elections, the Church in Kerala has now embarked on a campaign against all political parties that worked in traditional styles. A release issued on Tuesday by the Commission for Laity of the Syro-Malabar Church asked the "new generation" to defeat the "age-old political styles" that would lead to the "degeneration" of areas of public work and electoral platforms into something that could be shared among the political parties. Though the veiled references in the release indicate that the target is the CPI(M), it has avoided making any obvious statements in this regard. The release says, "If organizational activity, fund-raising and goondaism become the criteria for selection of candidates, it would amount to putting the axe on the roots of the nation's growth." The release was issued just hours after Kerala State Election Commissioner P Kamalkutty specifically said that the Church or any other religious forum should not take steps that could be seen as interference in the electoral process. Kamalkutty said pastoral letters were all right but they should not be asking the voters how to cast their votes. The SEC said religious bodies did not have the right to tell others to vote for believers and for atheists, adding that such advises would be considered as violation of the model code of conduct. "All citizens, including those who do not believe in God, have the right to be elected to positions in our democracy," Kamalkutty said. The release, issued by Laity Commission secretary VC Sebastian, said the habit of political leaderships and the political fronts of forcing candidates of their choice upon the people to protect their individual and group interests was equivalent to ridiculing the Indian democratic system and culture. The release said that only popular individuals with commitment to ideals and values and who would not succumb to party politics should become candidates in elections. "People with foresight, knowledge and education should reach positions of power if the development perspective and merits of the three-tier panchayat system should reach the society," it said. Observers are of the opinion that the release, issued immediately after the Election Commission's explanation, is an indirect announcement that the Church would advise its believers how to vote. The Church had sometime back declared that it would interfere in politics though it would not have anything to do with party politics. A pastoral letter issued by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council in July had asked believers to take extra care while voting for Independent candidates propped up by political parties. The letter, which asked the faithful to ensure that the Independents they chose to vote were not fielded by parties with the atheistic ideology, had invited criticisms from among the believers themselves. (Pioneer, 15/9/2010)

Muslim Trust restores church

MALERKOTLA: A Trust run by a Muslim industrial house has restored a church targeted by fundamentalists in the wake of communal tensions sparked off by the alleged burning of the Quran. Hars Charitable Trust, being run by Malerkotla-based Sohrab Group of Industries, has tried to undo the damage to the secular character of this Muslim-dominated town. Thanks to the efforts of Sohrab Group and Export House MD Amzad Ali, St Thomas Church targeted last Sunday night is now back to its glory. "Getting the church to its original shape was most important to clear the blot on the face of this town," said Ali. He said by engaging the family-run trust, he carried out the repairs in consultation with the bishop and tried to make the church look more beautiful. Ali had lent a helping hand in its construction in 1990s. An alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University, Ali came down heavily on miscreants and said these misguided youth did not represent the community. The trust on Saturday handed over the refurbished church to Father Maria Selvadass. (IE, 20/9/2010)

Kandhamal nun seeks deferment of trial

The Baliguda Catholic Church nun who was allegedly raped during Kandhamal riots of 2008 has once again approached the Orissa High Court on Tuesday seeking a deferment of trial proceedings of the case currently undergoing in Cuttack district and sessions court here. The nun was given last chance by the Cuttack court to appear before it on September 23 and 24 to record her statements. The court had also warned of coercive actions against her if she fails to turn up in the court again this time as she had defied the summons thrice earlier. The Cuttack court had been holding trail in the case since July this year following high court order. Despite getting summons on three earlier occasions, the nun was avoiding the court stating that she was indisposed due to sickness. But during this period she had participated in a test identification (TI) parade here at Choudwar Jail. On Tuesday, just two days before she was to appear in the court, the nun preferred to seek a deferment of the trial. It may be mentioned here that the nun had earlier approached the HC through a writ petition seeking to shift all her cases pertaining to August 2008 riots to the courts of Cuttack. This petition however, is still pending disposal. (Pioneer, 22/9/2010)

Kandhamal: nun fails to appear before trial court

Even as the fourth phase of recording statements of witnesses and complainant in the Kandhamal rape case began here at the designated trial court on Thursday, the Baliguda Catholic Church nun once again

failed to turn up to record her statements. However, it is expected that the 22-year-old victim will appear before the court on Friday. "Since all her options to avoid the trial proceedings have ended after the refusal of the High Court to intervene, she is left with no choice but to appear before the trial court to depose and state her grievances," said a defense lawyer here. The nun was allegedly raped during the Kandhamal riots of August 2008, and it was at her insistence that the Orissa High Court had ordered the case be tried at the Cuttack district sessions court here. Accordingly, the trial court had issued summons to all witnesses, including that of the complainant. Meanwhile, trial court judge B.K. Mishra recorded the statements of two witnesses on the day. The then Nuagaon police sub-inspector Arpita Khatua and Baliguda-based Jana Vikash Kendra's Latika Devi deposed before the court on the day, sources said. (The Hindu, 24/9/2010)

Minorities flay govt funding for Batukamma

HYDERABAD: The Rs 1 lakh per district state funding for the Batukamma festival has now angered the Christian minority community. Christian bodies are demanding that the state government file an affidavit in the high court to get a stay on funding of pilgrimages to Jerusalem vacated. In July last year, the HC had put a stay on the travel subsidy given by the government to Christian pilgrims in response to a public interest litigation (PIL). The government was until then giving Rs 20,000 to each pilgrim touring holy places. "The government is spending funds on every festival and has now allocated enough funds for Batukamma. Is that not keeping aside money for religious purpose?" questioned Bhaskar Benny of Christian Front, which is making a representation to the state to get the HC stay vacated. (TOI, 8/10/2010)

Anglo-Indian schools seek exemption from new fee structure

CHENNAI: An association of 33 aided Anglo-Indian schools in Tamil Nadu has approached the Madras high court seeking to be exempted from the fee structure determined by the government-appointed committee for private schools. Justice K Suguna, before whom the matter came up for hearing, has directed all the members of the association to furnish necessary details to the committee within a week. Additional advocate general P Wilson told the court that the power to fix fee structure for aided schools was vested with the government, and that the Anglo-Indian schools, which had received the questionnaire from the committee, did not inform the committee that they were aided schools. The committee had, accordingly, determined a fee structure for them. If they submit all relevant details to the committee now, an appropriate order might be passed, he said, adding that till the Anglo-Indian schools complete this process, the committee-fixed fee structure would not be enforced. Recording the statement, Justice Suguna said individual schools must submit all particulars to the committee within a week. The committee shall consider the representations and pass orders within three weeks thereafter, the judge said. In case any school fails to submit the details within the stipulated time, the committee is at liberty to enforce its order with reference to that particular school, she added. In its petition, the association said the Anglo-Indian schools were not covered by the Tamil Nadu Schools (Regulations or Collection of Fee) Act, as they received government aid to the extent of deficit alone. Aided Anglo-Indian schools can claim reimbursement amount from the government after collecting fee as prescribed by the government and adjusting it against all the payments made towards expenses such as salary. The constraint faced by the schools is that the disbursement has to be made first from their own funds, and then they claim reimbursement from the government. All schools have consistently had deficits, which were then bridged by the government to a limited extent, the association said. If the fee structure of the committee is implemented, the deficit will be huge and schools are not in a position to pay the staff in advance and wait for their claims to be processed by the government later, it said. It wanted the court to declare that the relevant provisions of the Act would not be applicable to the Anglo-Indian schools. (TOI, 8/10/2010)

Church gives its hospital doctor a Hindu funeral

The Malankara Catholic Church of Kerala on Tuesday gave a Hindu funeral to a North Indian doctor, who had served one of its hospitals for 28 years. The body of Dr B Brajesh Kumar Singh (61) of Bihar was cremated in the hospital compound at Thiruvalla, Pathanamthitta, about 125 km southeast of Kochi. The Church authorities had broken from their tradition of burying the body to give the doctor a Hindu funeral as per the wishes of the doctor's family. The ashes would be taken to Bihar by the family members. Dr Singh was an orthopedic surgeon with Thiruvalla's Pushpagiri Medical College run by the Church. Dr Singh died of cardiac arrest on Saturday at a hotel room in Kochi where he was staying to catch a flight to Bihar. According to Fr Thomas Kodinattukunnu of the Malankara Church, they decided to honour the request of the doctor's family as it was undeniable. On Tuesday, the body of the doctor was taken to the

hospital compound where the pyre was arranged. The funeral rites were carried out by Hindu priests in the presence of about 25 Christian priests led by Archbishop Thomas Mar Coorilos. The Archbishop also prayed. Both Bhagawad Gita and the Bible both found place in the funeral. Dr Singh is survived by his parents and a daughter, all of whom live in Bihar. His brother and other family members have reached Kerala. Priests of the Church said their bishop had led an ecumenical prayer service on Monday for Dr Singh. (Pioneer, 13/10/2010)

“Listen to the voices of other faiths”

Archbishop of Canterbury also stresses the need for churches to “speak to one another” The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams on Sunday stressed the need for churches to “speak to one another” and to “listen to the voices of other faiths” to build mutual trust and realise the fullness of the Christian truth. Delivering a special address at a reception hosted in his honour by the CSI Diocese of Madras, Rev. Williams said though churches might like to believe that they had assimilated the fullness of Christian truth, none of the churches alone can preach the whole gospel. “The reality is that we need one another’s gifts and to speak to one another. In fact, in the whole world of religious diversity we need to listen to voices of other faiths without letting go of our own convictions,” Rev. Williams said. Terming the life of a healthy church as a combination as much of congregational and presbyterian functions as of pastoral care and evangelical encouragement, Rev. Williams said listening to others was central to pastoral responsibility. “The role of a Bishop is not one of power or dominance...but holding together the deep diversity and bringing out of it good news for everyone,” he said. According to Rev. Williams, there were two aspects of the character of God at the heart of every search for conducting a distinctive life. One was His faithfulness in not abandoning people in need and the other was abject humility, he said. The most important thing to be said about a Church (or a pastor) would be that it did not run away from people in need whether they were Dalits, disabled or people of other faiths, or even if these people did not call themselves Christian, Rev. Williams said. Underscoring humility as a central trait for pastoral or presbyterian leadership, Rev. Williams said if the Church is there for all, the Church had to be a humble institution willing to learn, sometimes even repent, and “prepared not to be safe, wealthy or comfortable but always willing to love.” Social Welfare Minister P. Geetha Jeevan described the Archbishop as a theological scholar, writer and teacher whose visit to Chennai would hopefully lead to a transformation of society, especially in education and culture. N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu, said the Archbishop had been a committed unifier and someone who had consistently progressive positions on issues such as the war on Iraq, nuclear weaponisation or obscurantist doctrines. The visit to India by the Archbishop was one of progressive exploration of all values that are held dearly in India constitutionally and civilisationally, he said. M. M. Rajendran, former Governor of Orissa, said the Archbishop’s message to the Wall Street community about ethical economy and the importance of distributing accumulated wealth had a parallel in Mahatma Gandhi’s own concept of trusteeship. He called upon the Anglican and other churches to work closely with Governments and NGOs to alleviate poverty and ensure that the benefits of development reached the marginalised sections. The Prince of Arcot Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali said Islam was a religion of peace and tolerance and should not be labelled as a religion of terrorism based on the acts of a handful of antisocial elements. A.M. Chinnappa, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, V. Devasahayam, Bishop in Madras Diocese, S. Vasanthakumar, CSI Moderator, G. Devakadasham, CSI Deputy Moderator and M.M. Philip, CSI general secretary also spoke. (The Hindu, 17/10/2010)

Archbishop marvels at unusual ‘Christian diversity’ in Kerala

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, greets Uthradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma, head of the erstwhile Travancore royal family, during the golden jubilee celebrations of the South Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday. At left is J.W. Gladstone, Bishop of the CSI South Kerala Diocese. Photo: S. Mahinsha The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, on Sunday laid out the road map for the growth of the South Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI), emphasising the need to be selfless in its service to society. Delivering his message on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations of the South Kerala Diocese of the CSI here, the Archbishop wanted the Church to be a questioning church and a praying church, one which has learnt to trust in God. He marvelled at the “unusual Christian diversity” in Kerala and said he was convinced that this was based on deep trust and relationship. “Kerala is a land of great religious diversity, but not of conflict. In the last few centuries, it has been a land of unusual Christian diversity. But my stay here in the last few days has shown that it is based on deep trust and relationship. Within the spectrum of Christian differences, the South Kerala Diocese has a special place,” he said. Complimenting the Diocese for growing in numbers and with a vision, the Archbishop said a church with numbers and vision should be doing several things — it should be a praying church, which does not just talk about prayers or going to church. “A praying church is one which knows it cannot do everything by itself. A praying church is one which has learnt to

trust God. A church must be a questioning church. It must be asking questions about itself. A praying and questioning church must also be a selfless church. It does not exist to protect itself or acknowledge itself," he said. Uthradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma, head of the erstwhile Travancore royal family, inaugurated the golden jubilee celebrations. He emphasised the secular nature of the people of Kerala, the highlight of which was the existence of a church, mosque and a temple side by side in the capital city. Bishop of the CSI South Kerala Diocese J.W. Gladstone delivered the introductory speech. Jane Williams, wife of the Archbishop, released the golden jubilee souvenir. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Reverend Vasantha Kumar, moderator of the CSI Synod, Reverend G. Devakadaksham, deputy moderator of the CSI Synod, and Reverend Thomas Samuel, Bishop of the CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese were among those present. (The Hindu, 25/10/2010)

60K Christians will boycott KDMC polls

DOMBIVLI: Over 60 Christians residing in Kalyan-Dombivli have decided to boycott the upcoming civic polls. The community is upset that officials of the Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) have paid no heed to their demand for a cemetery. The KDMC elections are to be held on October 31. As the region has no cemetery, Christians from the area have to travel Vithalwadi near Ulhasnagar, which is 20 km, to perform the last rites of their loved ones. To air their grievances, the community organized a press meet on Tuesday. Officials of the state government as well as KDMC were invited. According to community members, the government had in 1994 allotted an 8-hectare plot at Khambalpada, Dombivli to KDMC for the construction of the cemetery. However, 16 years have passed and the civic officials have done nothing. S J D'Souza, secretary of Christians' Association of Social Welfare, which had organized the meet, said, "Over the years, we have written numerous letters to the KDMC, asking the officials to start work on the cemetery, but to no avail," "Each time we called on the municipal commissioner or the mayor, we were told the work on the cemetery would start. Nothing has changed," said Dr John Devraj, president of the association. (TOI, 27/10/2010)

'Raped' nun again fails to depose

The Baliguda Catholic church nun who was allegedly raped during the Kandhamal violence in August 2008, appeared before the trial court here on Tuesday but did not record her statements pleading she was sick. Filing a time petition, the nun informed the court that she would not be able to give any deposition on the day and urged the court to adjourn the matter to some other day. The counsels for the accused, however, objected to the nun's prayer stating that the complainant had been avoiding the court proceedings and had earlier defied as many as four summons in the matter. Cuttack District and Session's Court judge BK Mishra, who has been hearing the case since August this year, however, allowed the prayer of the complainant but directed her to appear before the court on Wednesday for recording her statements. It may be mentioned here that the following a prayer from the nun, the Orissa High Court had ordered shifting of the case from Kandhamal district and entrusted the Cuttack court to hold trial. Although the trial court in the meantime has examined over 20 witnesses and 10 accused in the case, the complainant nun was giving it a slip in all previous sittings. (Pioneer, 03/11/2010)

Cardinal celebrates 25 yrs as Archbishop

Elated people from across the State assembled to celebrate 25 years of service of Cardinal Toppo as the Archbishop on Loyola Grounds in the city on Sunday. A special mass was organised on Loyola Grounds to commemorate the completion of 25 years of the Cardinal as Archbishop. The festivity also saw the presence of Salvatore Pennachio, Ambassador of the Holy See who came down from Vatican City to bring the message of Pope Benedict XVI. The festivity began with a prayer dance presented by children and welcome speech by Sebastian Turkey. Greetings were also extended to the Cardinal by Albinos Tigga wishing him for his services to the society. A souvenir was released comprising photographs and messages of Cardinal by the representative of the Pope, Salvatore Pennachio, and Father Theodore Toppo, Secretary to the Cardinal. Fathers from the Ranchi Auxiliary gave mementos to the Cardinal. Cultural fiesta was presented by children to celebrate the holy event. Artists from Cardinal's village, Jhargaon arrived to express their happiness over the 25 years of Cardinal as the Archbishop. A modern Nagpuri dance was presented by artists from Gadigoan. Residents from the Cardinal's village came to extend their wishes to him and gifted him with flowers, shawl and mementoes. Muru Paris, a believer gifted a goat to the Cardinal and the Vote of thanks was given by Bishop Binay Kandulna. Several dignitaries were present during the festivity to celebrate the special day including Shiv Basant, director Shri Krishna Institute of Public Administration (SKIPA) and his wife Sunila Basant. Noted philanthropist Hanuman Sarawgi, Mandar MLA Bandhu Turkey and Former Advisor to the Governor, Wilfred Lakra and McCluskiegunj MP GJ Gaulstaun were present during the function. In his message to the people present during the programme, Salvatore said: "This is a very memorable occasion and I thank god immensely for his blessings so that Cardinal gave his service of 25 years to the Ranchi Archbishop. He has been spreading the message of God amongst people of the state to have faith in justice and harmony. This message of peace and harmony was derived by the immense work derived by Father Constant Leivens during his stay in this region." Referring to the works of the Cardinal, Salvatore mentioned him to be a champion of people and has constantly worked for the growth of faith in the Lord. "His works for the development of the state has been remarkable and his synchronised works at the church have led to prosperity. The Pope blesses Cardinal and wishes that God continues to shower his blessings and aspire him to work more for humanity. Earlier he has also worked as Bishop of Ranchi and Dumka and may Mother Mary shower her loving faith on Cardinal and every devotee," summed up Salvatore Pennachio on behalf of the Pope Benedict XVI. "The Simplicity and faith of the people of the city has amazed me and I am very pleased to know about the works of the Bishop. Churches of the state have worked well to help people have faith in God. The fruit has ripened of their efforts as the local auxiliary has worked very hard amongst the people," said Salvatore, praising the Cardinal. Mesmerised by the love and affection of the people during the programme, Cardinal Telesphore P Toppo expressed his gratitude towards people saying, "I am very thankful to God for allowing me to devote my life for the service of God and humanity. I wish to put more of my devotion and hard labour in the service of humanity in coming days. People here have given me great love and support and now I wish for social justice and development of the society in efforts to uplift the backward. Social togetherness will only develop peace and harmony in the society." (Pioneer, 08/11/2010)

FSL report does not support nun's allegation: Defence

Defence lawyers cross examining the 'raped' Kandhamal nun in a trial court here on Thursday made startling revelations pointing out that the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) and medical examination reports do not support the versions of the victim. "While the victim claims that she was a virgin until she was raped on August 25, 2008 and there was vaginal penetration in the alleged act, the FSL reports prepared after examining the apparel worn by the victim do not support it", said defence lawyer Soura

Chandra Mohapatra. The FSL report do not mention about any blood stain or semen stain on the wearing apparels of the victim, Mohapatra said adding that the medical report also do not corroborate about the alleged rape committed on the victim. The defence lawyers after grilling the victim for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday alleged that the nun was giving prevaricated statements about the place where she was allegedly raped. "Although, she claims that she was raped inside Jana Vikash Kendra verandah and was later dragged to a staircase, she was not sure about the place", said another defence lawyer Ajit Patnaik. The nun was also asked on the day as to why she did not disclose about the incidence of rape to the doctor who first treated her and to the local police officer, including the local BDO who was doing magisterial duty at the place on the ill-fated day. The status of the victim as a missionary nun also came for question on the day during the cross examination when the victim was not able to produce any document in support of her employment in the Baliguda Catholic Church. "We doubt whether she was a nun or not as she claims that she did not adhere to any dress code during her services in the Church", Mohapatra said. Similarly, the nun was also asked questions about the Press conference that she addressed in New Delhi on October 24, 2008. To a question she reportedly said that she did not know the person(s) who arranged the Press conference and she did not remember who were surrounding her while she was addressing the newsmen. I read out a written statement in front of the gathered newsmen and I do not know whether the same statement was released as Press handout to news reporters on that day", the nun reportedly told the defence lawyers during the cross examination. The cross examination by the defense lawyers also remained inconclusive on the day and it would resume again on Monday next, sources said. (Pioneer, 12/11/2010)

Prosecution lawyers threaten to boycott nun rape case trial

The trial of sensational Kandhamal nun rape case—currently undergoing at the district court here—is likely to suffer in future as all the three prosecution (crime branch) lawyers on Monday decided not to conduct the case henceforth. The prosecution lawyers have taken the decision for what they called "indifferent" attitude of the State Government in deciding the quantum of their fees and timely payment of the dues. "The quantum of fees approved by the Government for us is highly inadequate and moreover, the Government is making inordinate delay in payments", alleged one of the engaged lawyers in the case. While Laxmidhar Mishra, a senior advocate of the city was appointed as special public prosecution in the case, Sangam Sahu and Akhaya Naik were appointed to assist the special PP. A daily remuneration of `3500 per appearance for the PP and `1400 each for the associates were fixed by the Government. Besides, the PP was to get `3000 for each three hours of consultancy and another `2000 per month as retainer fee. Similarly, the associates were to get `1000 as consultancy fee for each three hours and a monthly retainer of `1000 each. "Although, we agreed with this fee structure under protest, the government had failed miserably in making the payments to us in time", said an associate adding that after much persuasion, truncated payments for July and August were released only recently. The prosecution lawyers have informed about their decision to the Cuttack district sessions judge BK Mishra on Monday and have threatened that if their payments as agreed are not paid immediately, they would not conduct the case henceforth. However, on Monday, a prosecution witness—the doctor who examined the nun for the first time after she was allegedly raped on August 25, 2008—was recalled for cross-examination by the defense counsels. Dr Sangita Mishra during her cross examination informed the court that there were no blood or semen stains found in the wearing apparels of the nun while she was examined by her. She also told the court that she had not mentioned in her report about the place of occurrence of the alleged rape incident. (Pioneer, 7/12/2010)

Catholics join hands to protect church property

MUMBAI: Catholics from some parishes in Mumbai will be watchdogs of their church properties. They have come together to form an "Association of Concerned Catholics" to protect church properties from being sold in a clandestine manner. The parishioners who have come together are from St Anthony's Church, Malvani; St Michael's Church, Mahim; Victoria Church, St Vincent De Paul Church in Khar, Our Lady of Salvation Church in Dadar and St John the Baptist Church in Thane. This group of parishioners will help the Archbishop of Mumbai to help handle issues concerning properties. "There's no transparency concerning church property issues in some cases. We have been writing to the Archbishop about it and have stepped in to function as watchdogs," said Greg Pereira, president of AOCC. The association will find out about various church properties that belong to the Archdiocese of Mumbai. It will then ask the parishioners to keep a watch. "Any property over Rs 4 lakh can't be sold without the permission of the Archbishop," said Arcango Fodder, parishioner of St Michael's Church and secretary of AOCC. (TOI, 12/12/2010)

Nun rape case: Attempt to project ex-IO as hostile witness

The ongoing trial of the Kandhamal nun rape case here was set for a major turnaround on Monday when the prosecution counsels contemplated to project the suspended police inspector KL Rao, the then Baliguda IIC, as a "hostile" witness. Although a petition to this effect was made before the presiding officer of the trial court, it is learnt that the prosecution was unlikely to press for it further. Rao, while officiating as in-charge officer of the police station had received the FIR of the sensational nun rape case along with two other related cases on August 25, 2008. He had sent the victim for medical examination and seized the wearing apparels of the victim. Rao had even arrested two accused persons in the nun rape case. But he was subsequently placed under suspension after the case was handed over to crime branch police. It is believed that the prosecution, in order to make the case stronger, was trying to project Rao as a hostile witness so as to justify the handing over of the case to crime branch. This was however, objected by the defense counsels who insisted that the prosecution should file a petition to this effect. Meanwhile, putting all speculations at rest, the prosecution lawyers in the sensational case attended the proceedings in the trial court here on the day as the stalemate over their fees was resolved by the State Government. "Since the law department duly considered our request over the quantum of fee and released the same, we decided against our earlier decision of boycotting the proceedings," informed one of the prosecution counsel. On the day, the trial court completed the chief examination of prosecution witness KL Rao, who was holding the post of Inspector-in-charge of Baliguda police station during the August 2008 communal riots and was the investigating officer of nun rape case. The cross-examination of Rao by defense counsels is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, sources informed. (Pioneer, 14/12/2010)

Kerala Church sticks to anti-Left stand

Indicating that there would be no change in the position of the Catholic Church on matters of politics and belief, Thrissur Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath, who was on Wednesday elected as the new president of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC), said that pastoral letters would continue to be issued by the Church in times of need. "Such letters could have different contents, like those pertaining to belief, society, etc. We had issued such a letter to the believers before the recent civic polls. Such pastoral letters and circulars will be issued again whenever necessary," Mar Andrews said in Kochi on Wednesday after the three-day meeting of the KCBC. The letter issued by the Church before the civic polls had sparked off a controversy with the peculiarity of the message it conveyed to believers. It had asked the faithful not to support atheists in the election, an indirect call to avoid voting for the communists. Naturally, this had led to the escalation of the standoff between the Church and the CPI(M). A post-meeting release issued by the KCBC on Wednesday called for a review of the reforms being implemented in the higher education sector. It demanded revocation of the decision to allow new courses only to cluster colleges. Autonomous colleges were necessary for the development of the higher education sector, the council opined. The council asked the State Government to review its current liquor policy in the context of the increase in liquor consumption in Kerala and to implement a policy that could lead to reduction in alcohol consumption. It also decided to hold awareness programmes at school and college levels against the use of tobacco, narcotic drugs and alcohol. Observers say that the election of Mar Andrews, known as one of the most vehement opponents of the Left, as the head of the KCBC is clear indication of the Church's resolve to intensify its fight against the communists. The Thrissur Archdiocese under Mar Andrews was one of the first in Kerala to organize protests against the LDF Government's alleged moves against private educational institutions. Mar Andrews Thazhath, till now secretary general of the KCBC, has now replaced Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios, head of the Mavelikkara diocese of the Syro Malankara Church, as its president. Varappuzha Archbishop Mar Francis Kallarakkal was elected as the new vice-president of the council. (Pioneer, 16/12/2010)

Christmas celebrated, Christians not understood

Christmas belongs to everyone now. The Capital City Minstrels, a popular choral group in Delhi, is proof of the widening of a festival once limited to those who believed Jesus was the son of God. Advertising professional Prabhsharan Singh Kang, a practising Sikh, has been part of the choir for 11 years. He says he absolutely loves it and "it's the best thing that happened to my life - it keeps me young and acts as a stress-buster." Maxwell Pereira, former chief of Delhi traffic police is one of the Minstrels' longest-serving members. He says it is a perfect snapshot of change - 20% of its members were not Christian when it began 16 years ago; today, it's half and half. There are some obvious reasons. The first is Christmas's commercial worth. Like Diwali, it's the time of year families expect to spend and most Indian businesses have adapted to the dual festive rhythm of making money. In Delhi's famous spice market, Khari Baoli, shopkeepers have started to sell sealed packets of dry fruit for Christmas cake. It makes the process of baking Christmas cake easier. Arguably, it also widens the appeal of baking cake for those who aren't

Christian. In Bangalore, discounts and gift vouchers make Christmas a season of joy for many. For Kabir Lumba, managing director of the retail chain Landmark Group, it means sales go up by 10-11%. "Christmas has gone beyond the religious connect - it doesn't matter what your background is," says Lumba with satisfaction. For Koshy's, which is famous for its Christmas goodies, the build-up to the big day starts as early as November and it's not as if only Christians are buying. And in Shillong's main Police Bazaar, Christmas season is considered the best time to open a new store or release a CD, particularly cover versions of Christmas songs by local bands. In an interesting multi-faith touch that goes the other way, for Jharkhand's Christian tribals the season means bhajans and arsa - a sweet made out of jaggery and powdered rice. Some parts of Chota Nagpur have a unique celebration that sees the elders of a family collecting flour from different households the night before Christmas. It goes into khullai roti, a bread that is hidden in the forest for a young people's treasure hunt. The winner is felicitated and given gifts. But has the stereotyped perception of the average Indian Christian changed from the view that they were degenerate and dissolute byproducts of colonization? Not really, say experts, even though much of the stereotype was based on myth. Sociologist T K Oommen says it was always wrong to regard the entire Christian community in this way. "Christians are of three types - those who claim descent from St Thomas, one of Christ's apostles who visited India in the first century, converts from SCs/STs/OBCs, and Anglo-Indians. Some 67% belong to the second category." Seventy per cent of Christians live in rural and small town India. "South India, the northeast and tribal areas of Chota Nagpur have 90% of India's Christians, while the Indo-Gangetic plains just 1%", says Oommen. The extent of assimilation is such that names like Reshma, Nirmala and Sushma are common. Many Indian Christians even perform aarti, points out Father Dominic Emmanuel, spokesperson of the Delhi Catholic archdiocese. In any case, India's Christian community is too diverse to be lumped into one category, being a disparate group of 252 denominations. The Christian in Kerala or Tamil Nadu is entirely different from tribal co-religionists in central and north-eastern India and Dalit Christians. Unsurprisingly, says Oommen, the Christian typically doesn't have much nuisance value and lacks political clout. But Roy Paul, former member of the Union Public Services Commission and ex-aviation secretary, says the "quiet Christian" may be more on account of their being better educated than other communities. But Emmanuel says the Christian is valued for running some of India's best hospitals, schools and NGOs but regarded with suspicion for proselytization. "The Census has consistently put the Christian population at around 2%, giving the lie to this," he says, but much of India still believes Christians want to spread the word. With reports from Jaideep Deogharia in Ranchi, Aneesha Bangera in Bangalore and Manosh Das in Shillong (TOI, 19/12/2010)

Rani Devi is organizing a jagran for Yesu

I worked on Diwali but need two days off at Chrishmash," announces Rani Devi, a maid in Amritsar. She's been busy collecting donations from each of her employers for her family's "Chrishmash tree". She is one of many new Christians in Sultanwind, a slum that's home to lower-caste maids, barbers, porters and vegetable vendors. Till two years ago, religious festivals meant no more to Rani Devi or any resident of Sultanwind than an excuse for a holiday and lots of baksheesh. But now, the free missionary school in the locality has taught Rani Devi and many others to adopt Jesus as their God. Almost every Sultanwind family now has at least a few Christian members. Many is the Meera or the Pooja in Sultanwind who has a new avatar as a Mary or a Julie. They have the fierce belief of the new convert. They go to the newly whitewashed church every Sunday. They celebrate Christmas, Good Friday and Easter with gusto. Rani Devi admits Diwali and Holi don't mean much now. "Every Christmas, we organize a jagran for Yesu in our locality and dance all through the night," she says. Delhi academic Dr Ranveer Singh, who does charity work at a school run by Christian missionaries, says new converts routinely reinvent ritual. "New Christians throughout the country have reinvented Christmas celebrations in their own way, with a touch of Hindu rituals," he says. But not all "new Christians" celebrate like the faithful of Sultanwind. It's usually thought that the majority of Indian Christians are Dalit and that they converted for material gain and the chance to belong to a community that does not look down upon them as low-born. But, officially, these new Christians continue to call themselves "SC Hindus" in order to benefit from the government's SC/ST schemes and job quotas. One such is Thankamani of Thiruvananthapuram. She's in her late 40s and converted from Hinduism after the local pastor cured her niece of sickness a few years ago. But she remains Hindu in all government records despite her stated admiration for the priest's "healing touch". Thankamani says she wishes she could come out. "I am a complete Christian now but I hardly go to church or celebrate Christmas openly, because if I am caught doing it, I shall lose my job," she says. With additional reporting by Ananthkrishnan G in Thiruvananthapuram (TOI, 19/12/2010)

Christmas: Hows and Whys

Why is there a small evergreen tree in your living room? This is a German tradition, started as early as

700 A.D. In the 1800s the tradition of a Christmas tree was widespread in Germany, then moved to England and then to America through Pennsylvanian German immigrants. Poinsettias were attached to Christmas starting in 1828. Joel Roberts Poinsett, then the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, imported the plant from Mexico. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica: In warm climates, the poinsettia grows outdoors as a winter-flowering leggy shrub about 3 metres (10 feet) high; as a potted plant in northern areas it rarely grows beyond 1 metre. What appear to be petals are actually coloured leaflike bracts that surround a central cluster of tiny yellow flowers. A milky latex in the stems and leaves can be irritating to persons or animals sensitive to it, but the claim that poinsettias are deadly poisonous is greatly exaggerated. What, exactly, are the 12 days of Christmas? The 12 days of Christmas are the 12 days that separate Christmas day on December 25 from Epiphany which is celebrated January 6. Depending on the church, January 6 may mark Christ's baptism (the Catholic tradition), or it may mark the day that the wise men visited the baby Jesus with their gifts. In the past, there was a tradition of giving gifts throughout the 12 days, rather than stacking them all up on the morning of December 25. That tradition, as you might imagine, has never really caught on in America! We just aren't that patient. The song, however, demonstrates that some people once stretched out their gifts (and gave some fairly elaborate gifts...) over the full 12 days. (TOI, 24/12/2010)

Minority bodies seek action against Nabarangpur MLA

Condemning the desecration of Jesus Christ's dignity, the Odisha Minority Forum (OMF) on Sunday demanded appropriate legal action against Nabarangpur MLA Manohar Randhari. Randhari, a BJD MLA, allegedly depicted Christ with a cigarette and alcohol bottle in a Christmas greeting card that was circulated in the local churches. Following untoward incidents at Nabarangpur, the OMF made a public appeal not to let the issue become a tool in the hands of criminal elements. OMF president Dr Swarupananda Patra said he and his Christian community were deeply saddened by the event on a day when Christ's birth was being celebrated peacefully across the State. Similarly, denouncing the Nabarangpur blasphemy incident recently, Pradesh Congress Committee Minority Cell president Sheikh Abdul Barihas termed it as a deliberate move of the ruling BJD for fanning communal tension and has simultaneously requested the Christian community not to take law in their hands, at a Press statement here on Monday. Demanding immediate arrest of the culprit, Bari has threatened that if the State Government fails to take prompt action, the Congress would take to the streets and step up agitation assuring the Christian community of Congress party's perennial support. Among others, PCC vice-president Sibananda Ray, SK Jalal and Nabarangpur Minority Cell chairman Debasish Pradhan were present. (Pioneer, 28/12/2010)

BJD leader says sorry for anti-Christ ploy

Appealing for peace, Christian leaders today said they have accepted an apology from a local BJD MLA over an alleged blasphemous portrayal of Jesus Christ in greeting cards distributed by him which had sparked protests in some areas of the district. The decision to accept BJD MLA Manohar Randhari's apology was taken after local church functionaries and community leaders discussed the matter among themselves. The Bishop of the local JEL Church, Subas Goud, announced acceptance of the legislator's apology giving him a 'Spiritual Pardon'. At a district citizen committee meeting last night, minority community leaders favoured necessary steps to maintain peace. In Bhubaneswar, BJD supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik told reporters that the party legislator had apologised for the incident. Randhari has already clarified that he had no intention to hurt religious sentiments of Christians and it all happened due to a mistake, Patnaik said. Ads by Google GE Finance All types of loans available Apply Now!www.gemoney.in/htmlSBI Life Smart Performer Highest Daily NAV Guaranteed# Know more details today!www.sbilife.co.in/SmCrucifixion of Jesus Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? Discover the Facts From Scholarswww.y-Jesus.com/Cruc As a precautionary measure, prohibitory orders under section 144 CrPC continued along the National Highway-201 (IE, 28/12/2010)

Goa archbishop Ferrao quotes from Upanishads

During his pre-New Year speech for the Catholic population, Archbishop of Goa, Daman and Diu, Filipe Neri Ferrao, used the Hindu Maha Upanishads extensively and drew parallels between the ancient scriptures and the teachings of Jesus Christ and said that the unity of mankind had been one of the main concerns of Christ. Throughout history, humanity has been searching for unity, the same unity that Christ made his one cherished desire and that the Maha Upanishad teaches about, he said. The archbishop quoted extensively from the Sama Veda to underline the importance of unity and brotherhood of man. In his address, which was released to the media on Thursday, the archbishop said that the genuine development of people depended on the recognition that the human race was a single family working together in true communion for its common good, an underlying trait of the Sama Veda. "The time had

come for him (Christ) to be delivered by a traitor into the hands of his enemies, who then would scourge him and nail him to a cross, until he bled to death. At this solemn moment, he has only one prayer, 'Father, I pray that they may all be one. Unity of humankind his Father in heaven'," he said. Archbishop Ferro stated that Goa, with its 26 per cent Catholic population, was considered a model secular state, which was like one big family. The Maha Upanishad states that the entire world is but one big family: Vasudhaiva kutumbakam. And the Church has consistently proclaimed and defended this universal value of unity of humankind throughout her history, the archbishop said. The Maha Upanishad is a segment of the Sama Veda, considered to be one of the four most sacred texts of Hinduism. (AA, 31/12/2010)

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