

MINORITIES – GENERAL - 2008

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PM to highlight minority welfare schemes in Parliament (7)

New Delhi, January 17: The UPA Government plans to highlight its achievements in specific schemes for minorities during the forthcoming Budget session of Parliament. As a follow up to the recommendations of the Sachar Committee, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday reviewed the implementation of such schemes during a high-level meeting. Sources said that during the meeting, attended by ministers A R Antulay, Arjun Singh, P Chidambaram, Jaipal Reddy, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh and Kumari Shailja, the Ministry of Minority Affairs made a presentation on the achievements in the schemes under PM's 15-point programme for the welfare of minorities. The PM then instructed his principal secretary to get the Government's achievements in such schemes highlighted and presented during the Budget session. The Government had identified 15 specific schemes and action points under PM's 15-point programme for the welfare of minorities. Under the programme, the Government had earmarked 15 per cent of resources under the welfare schemes for minorities. Given UPA Government's proclaimed commitment to the welfare of the aam aadmi, the PM also reviewed the progress on the implementation of Government's social security initiative for the unorganised sector. (Indian Express 18/1/08)

Quota, not religious intolerance, behind Orissa violence: NCM (7)

| New Delhi: Quota politics and not religious intolerance was behind recent violence involving attack on churches in Orissa. This startling fact has been brought out by the report of a high-level team of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) that visited the spot. The team, which included two members of the Commission - Dileep Padagaonkar and Prof Zoya Hasan-among others, found that it was the love for 'quota' among the Christian converts that led to widespread violence, in the process leaving several injured and many killed. The minority panel has concluded that the clash among 'some Christian groups' for quota was of one the main reasons that led to the burning of churches and attacks on fellow brethren professing one common religion. The second "important factor for the violence was the anti-conversion campaign conducted by the VHP and the Sangh Parivar for the last few years', the report said. Violence had broken out at a large-scale on the Christmas eve in Phulbani, Daringbadi, Bamunigaon and Baliguda. "The NCM delegation found that one of the main reasons for the outbreak of violence was the long simmering Kui-Pana conflict. Panas are asking for inclusion in the ST category to benefit from reservation, to which Kuis are opposed," NCM chairman Mohammad Shafi Qureshi told the mediapersons on Thursday. Panas are SC Christian converts, and hence are not entitled to quota as per the Constitutional provisions, while Kuis, ST Christian converts, enjoy quota in both the Government services and academic institutions. This is what pitted Panas against Kuis. "It is basically fight for share in the quota cake. It is an old issue, involving the two communities. The Kui tribals claim that Panas are different from them, and should not be allowed to get ST status," Mrityunjay Nayak, member, National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), said. Experts feel that the violent quota brawl in Orissa is the repletion of what was happening in Andhra Pradesh, where the two powerful SC groups have locked their horns against one another on the issue of sharing the quota booty. The Madigas, the majority Scheduled Caste group in the State with 68-lakh population have accused Malas, the second largest group of SC, of usurping their share in reservation by grabbing all opportunities. The Ministry has decided to set up a committee headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court to suggest ways to deal with such problem. The fight for quota within the quota simply brings forth the lacunas in the country's reservation policy that does not guarantee that the benefits of quota reach the needy first. If

Madigas are the major beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh, Meenas get away with the lion's share in the quota cake of STs. (Piineer 18/1/08)

Debate rages on minority status criteria (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 20: The debate on what should be the basis for determining the minority status of a community continues. It should be determined at the national level is the opinion of some in the minority community. State should be the unit for deciding on the minority status of a community, say others among the minorities. The latest to join the chorus of those not in favour of it is the standing committee of the National Committee for Minorities Education. In its recent periodic report, the standing committee has said in no uncertain terms that the granting of minority status using the state as a unit "will create a chaotic situation". It fears that if state is indeed made the unit, "Muslims will become ineligible for minority privileges in J&K, Christians in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya and Sikhs in Punjab." It also observes, "The minority students of these states will not be able to remain entitled to admission in other states of India when they will be deprived of the national minority status." The standing committee which has been visiting various states and interacting with minority community people says that "minorities are perturbed about this move." The move is a reference to the UPA government's move to amend the Constitution (One Hundred and third Amendment) Bill, 2004 which seeks to change the manner in which minority status is determined from the present where the nation and not the state is the unit. Such a change, for instance, will mean that Sikhs who are presently considered a minority even in Punjab where their population is in majority will no longer carry the minority tag in that state. And Christians in northeastern states where they are in a majority too will be deprived of their minority status if state becomes the basic determining factor. According to sources in the ministry of minority affairs, the Union Cabinet has approved the note for the Cabinet to move the amendments to the amendment bill. But with objections having been received by the government to the many changes proposed through this Bill, the Union ministry of law and justice is reported to be looking into the matter at present. The National Commission had called a meeting of MPs belonging to the minorities early in December to discuss the "definition of minorities". The NCM while pointing out that the term "minority" has not been defined either in the Constitution or in other legislation had said that the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 defines "minority" as a "community notified as such by the Central government". It also drew attention to a Supreme Court judgement and said, "Since Indian states have been reorganised on linguistic lines, therefore, for the purpose of determining the minority, the unit will be state and not whole of India." Among the MPs present at the meeting was Asaduddin Owaisi of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), who told this paper on Sunday, "The state should be the unit. How can you have the nation as a unit. Even the Supreme Court has said so clearly." According to Mr Owaisi, where the minorities are in a majority, as is the case of Sikhs in Punjab or Christians in Nagaland, there are greater chances of them not facing any discrimination. Stating that minority status is basically meant to protect the community and prevent discrimination, he noted that constitutional safeguards are needed only when there is discrimination. (Asian Age 21/1/08)

'Software shakhas' draw IT pros to RSS (7)

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is adding colour to India's booming IT sector: saffron. Efforts to induct young, upwardly mobile IT professionals into its fold have gained momentum in "cybercities" across the country: from Pune to Hyderabad, and from Chennai to Noida. RSS is drawing young professionals in substantial numbers in these cities to events called "IT Milans" with the ultimate aim of using the networking skills of the young to spread its message. These "software shakhas" contain everything - from power-point presentations on RSS's community work to yoga. In fact, video conferences will soon be added to this list. IT professionals gather once a week in these cities and their numbers are rising. "The first software shakha was held in Bangalore in 2003-04. It's a new experiment to connect with emerging sections of professionals," says Ram Madhav, former RSS spokesman. "At the Pune IT Milan, more than 1,000 turned up, which isn't a bad number." "The number of youths joining IT companies is increasing. We've introduced IT Milan to groom professionals towards RSS's way of thinking," says Pune-based Katcheshwar Sahane, western Maharashtra prant sanghachalak of RSS. (The Times of India 28/1/08)

RSS looks to increase activities in colleges (7)

The RSS has launched "software shakhas" in a move to induct young, upwardly mobile IT professionals into its fold. IT Milans aren't typical shakhas involving exercise and games. "These are get-togethers where issues before the nation, its culture and religion, are discussed. We've been looking for professional brains and the Pune IT sector has the potential to provide it," said Sahane. The Pune pracharaks are now planning IT Milans in Kolhapur and Solapur. In Bangalore, the participation of young IT pros and students has reached what the pracharaks call a "respectable 2,000". They conduct 28 IT Milans a week at various locations. Many of these professionals are also volunteering to go into rural areas in Karnataka and work with Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, an RSS outfit which focuses on tribal development. "What has also helped," says Ram Madhav, "is the relaxation in the rules of our uniform. The new lot of IT volunteers no longer come in khaki shorts. We are now focussing on increasing our activities in colleges." "There are many groups of RSS-minded IT youths who hold regular meetings. It's an informal step towards inculcating the RSS thought in young minds," says Niranjana Phadke, an IT professional. Unlike the traditional shakhas on open grounds, the shakhas these days aren't "visible" says Madhav, which has led to the erroneous impression that these are dwindling. "We are now appointing vidyarthi pramukhs at various levels to get the youth involved in our ideas," he says. (Times of India 28/1/08)

Communal forces trying to create hatred: AIDWA (7)

NEW DELHI: The All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) organised a human chain here to uphold communal harmony and strengthen social justice on Wednesday, Martyrs Day. Women assembled at Parliament Street to pay homage to the martyrs who fought for freedom from British imperialism and recalled the sacrifices made by freedom fighters in the struggle for a democratic, secular and equitable India. In a resolution, the AIDWA recalled the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by "Hindu fundamentalist forces," and expressed deep concern over the attempts being made by communal forces to create hatred and disharmony and undermine the rights of all communities to life without violence. The attacks on Christians in Orissa by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) in the aftermath of the Gujarat election results were a dangerous portent of what was in store if the secular parties, organisations and other voices did not assert themselves and fight the communal forces in a sustained manner, the resolution said. (The Hindu 31/1/08)

Approval to scholarship scheme for minorities (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 30: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday cleared a pre-matric scholarship scheme for students belonging to the minority communities the outlay for which is a huge sum of Rs 1,868.50 crores during the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12). And while the UPA government may tout this scholarship as one born only out of concern for the educational status of the minorities, it will surely be hoping to tap the minority votebank, particularly the substantial Muslim population in the country, through this announcement. This scheme is the fourth one that has been announced by the government in the last few months, all targeting the minority communities. Among the ones announced earlier by the government is the "Post matric Scholarship" which is meant for students belonging to the economically weaker sections of the minority communities. Then there is the "Merit Cum Means Scholarship Scheme" for minority community students as also the "Free Coaching and Allied Scheme". Of the amount approved for the scheme, Rs 1,408.40 crores will be borne by the Centre while the remaining Rs 460.10 crores will be shared by the states. In the case of Union Territories, they would be provided 100 per cent Central assistance. The scheme is to be launched during the financial year 2007-08. The scheme envisages the giving away of 25 lakh scholarships during the Eleventh Plan. The scholarships will be awarded to students belonging to the minority communities for studies in India in government or private schools from Class 1 to Class 12. The scholarship will also cover those minority students studying in residential government institutes and eligible private institutes selected and notified in a transparent manner by the state governments/UTs concerned. Keeping in mind the need to encourage girls to get an education, 30 per cent of the scholarships will be earmarked for girl students of each minority community in a state/UT. The

scholarship will be transferable to boy students only if eligible girl students are not available. The maximum ceiling of tuition fee entitlement would be Rs 350 per month, subject to actuals. The rates of maintenance allowance would be Rs 600 per month for hostellers from Class 6 onwards, subject to actuals and Rs 100 per month for day-scholars from class I onwards. Admission fee from Class 6 onwards would be Rs 500 per annum subject to actuals. (Asian Age 31/1/08)

Minorities should be treated on par with SCs, STs (7)

New Delhi : A symposium-Need for minority sub-plan-to discuss issues related to the future of minorities in the contemporary context was organised at the Jamia Milia University on Tuesday in which Members of Parliament cutting across party lines were invited to share their views. Organised by the KR Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies the symposium was chaired by P. S. Krishnan, Advisor, Ministry of Human Resource and Development. Members of Parliament Mohammad Salim (CPIM), JD Seelam (INC), Ilias Azmi (BSP) among others participated. "Issues related to the future of minorities has acquired importance in the backdrop of the Sachar Commission report and there is a wide-ranging consensus across the political spectrum that the Muslims in particular have received step-motherly treatment. It is extremely important that the interests of the minorities be protected in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution," said Mushirul Hasan, Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Milia Islamia University. (Pioneer 27/2/08)

Gujarat minorities facing 'marginalisation': Activists (7)

AHMEDABAD: The minorities in post-Godhra Gujarat are facing "marginalisation" and problems in getting employment and admission to educational institutions, social activists have told UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion Asma Jehangir in Ahmedabad. At a confidential meeting with the human rights activist from Pakistan, who arrived in Gujarat's capital on Saturday on a two-day visit to the state, social activists, lawyers and academicians apprised her of the prevailing atmosphere of "mistrust" between communities and "marginalisation" of minorities by the "power that be", sources said. At a meeting under the aegis of All-India Christian Council, they also told her about the instances of "early warning signs" that were "ignored" by authorities in Gujarat prior to the Godhra riots. The schedule of the meeting was changed on more than one occasion as it was dependent on the time of appointment of Jehangir with Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Those invited to the meeting told Jehangir, who was accompanied by another UN official, about the problems minorities were facing in getting employment and admissions in educational institutions in Gujarat. They said Muslims were viewed with "suspicion" and madrassas were constantly under watch as they were viewed as the breeding ground for terrorists. The activists said even the police, judiciary and the media were not free from "stereotype beliefs" about the minorities and carried "prejudices" against them. They said as many 900 victims of the 2002 violence have not received their compensation cheques. (Times of India 9/3/08)

Gujarat withdraws Freedom of Religion Amendment Bill (7)

GANDHINAGAR, MARCH 10: The state Government was forced to withdraw the Gujarat Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2006 in the Assembly on Monday after Governor Nawal Kishore Sharma returned it on February 20 for reconsideration. However, the Government decided to retain the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003. While the Bill was withdrawn unanimously, the Opposition registered protest over not being given a chance to discuss the withdrawal of the Bill. The Bill had sought to replace Section 2(B) of the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003 with a new clause defining the expression "convert" along with explanations. The provision in the amendment sought to clarify illustratively that Jains and Buddhists were to be construed as denominations of Hinduism, Shia and Sunni as denominations of Islam and Catholic and Protestant as denominations of Christianity. "The provisions shall not apply to inter-denomination conversion of the same religion," it said. The Buddhist and Jain communities had raised objection to this when the Bill was introduced in 2006. Returning the Bill for reconsideration, the Governor had observed that Jainism and Buddhism had been recognised as religions and Jainism had been regarded as a 'special religion' formed on the basis of

quintessence of Hinduism by the Supreme Court. "Although for the purpose of many personal laws, Jains and Hindus have been treated alike, it is not because they are denominations of Hinduism," the Governor had said, adding that the proposed amendment would be in violation of Article 25 of the Constitution of India as it impaired the freedom of conscience and protection against forced conversion. On the move to withdraw the Bill, Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Shaktisinh Gohil said the withdrawal move was brought on a day when no Bills were to be discussed, adding that at least two days should be allowed to discuss its withdrawal. Minister of State for Home Amit Shah countered this, saying that the Bill could be withdrawn at any stage and that there was no scope for discussion on this. Health Minister Jay Narayan Vyas said the House was fully competent to withdraw the Bill. To this, Arjun Modhwadia of Congress said there could be discussion to amend, withdraw or seek legal opinion on the Governor's remark. Speaker Ashok Bhatt ruled that there could be scope for discussion only when the Government wanted to amend the Bill. (Indian Express 11/3/08)

Rajasthan re-introduces religious freedom Bill (7)

JAIPUR: The Bharatiya Janata Party Government in the State on Thursday re-introduced the Rajasthan Religious Freedom Bill (Rajasthan Dharma Swatantrata Bill) in the Assembly, described by many as a draconian measure when it was first introduced. The Bill, introduced by Home Minister G. C. Kataria, has almost the same tone, tenor and text as the previous legislation by the same name passed by the Assembly on April 7, 2006. That Act is now awaiting assent of the President. The new Bill is slated for discussion and passage in the State Assembly next Thursday (March 20). During her tenure as Rajasthan Governor, Pratibha Patil – now the President in New Delhi -- had returned the Act to the State Government in May 2006 asking it to get it cleared from the President of India (then A.P.J. Abdul Kalam) first. After receiving it back from the Governor, the State Government had forwarded it to the President for his approval. Since then it has been pending there. "A Bill to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto," says the introductory paragraph of the Bill, which has only minor deviations from the text of the Act pending before the President. The statement of objectives and reasons remain the same as: "It has been observed by the State Government that some religious institutions and individuals are found to be involved in unlawful conversion from one religion to another by allurement or by fraudulent means or forcibly which at times has caused annoyance in the community belonging to other religion. The inter-religion fabric is weakened by such illegal activities and causes law and order problem for the law enforcing machinery of the State. "In order to curb such illegal activities and to maintain harmony amongst of various religions it has been considered expedient to enact a special law for the purpose." "Introducing a second Bill on the same subject while the first is pending assent of the President of India is not valid. The State has not withdrawn the previous Act," pointed out senior Congress MLA Harimohan Sharma, who had fought the previous legislation within the Assembly and outside. "The fate of the present legislation would not be any different from the previous one and deservingly so," he said. The minor changes in the proposed legislation include one on 30 days' notice to the District Magistrate from a person "intending to convert from one religion to another". The DM then would get the matter enquired into. However, in the case of a person reverting back to his original religion no such notice is required. The new draft has also brought down the minimum punishment to one-year simple imprisonment from the previous minimum of two years. The maximum punishment could be three years and a fine which could extend up to Rs.25,000. However, in the case of the offence committed in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, the minimum punishment would be two years' which could be extended to five years and a fine up to Rs.50,000. (The Hindu 14/3/08)

Cabinet okays sops for minorities, tribals (7)

New Delhi, March 27 : The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved a slew of welfare measures for minority communities and tribal girls, besides allocating a substantial amount to a dedicated fund to implement various social and infrastructure development schemes launched by it. The projects were cleared at a meeting of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Topping the list is a centrally-sponsored scheme — Multi-sectoral

Development Programme (MsDP), first reported by The Indian Express last December. As per the programme, Rs 3,780 crore will be spend for various development schemes in 90 minority concentrated districts in the country, during the Eleventh Plan. The scheme would even allow funding for critical infrastructure projects like roads, basic health facilities, ICDS centres, and skill development which are already funded through separate schemes. However, the release of funds to the state governments under the scheme is conditional upon the respective state's commitment to constitute state and district level committees for the implementation of Prime Minister's 15-point programme for minorities. The CCEA also approved continuation of a dedicated fund — Social and Infrastructure Development Fund — beyond 2007-08, to fund Government's social sector initiatives, which include upgradation of 1,396 ITIs, training of farmers, employment of physically challenged etc. It also approved a revised scheme to ensure better education for tribal girls in 54 districts. These are districts with more than 25 per cent tribal population whose female literacy is below 35 per cent. In fact, even blocks from other districts but with above characteristics would also be covered under the scheme. He assistance per girl student has been increased from Rs 9,000 per annum to Rs 26,000 per annum recurring expenditure. The scheme will be launched from April this year. Meanwhile, as part of its 'Look East Policy,' the Government authorised the RBI to sign the proposed currency swap agreement with the Bank of Japan to exchange an amount of \$3 billion for mitigating short-term balance of payment problem. ... (Indian Express 28/3/08)

SC status for Dalit Muslims, Dalit Christians favoured (7)

NEW DELHI: A study commissioned by the National Commission for Minorities has suggested extension of reservation to Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians. Bringing them under the ambit of the constitutional safeguards that are available to other Scheduled Castes would "not only right a wrong" but also remove an "indefensible anomaly in our politico-legal system that can legitimately be construed as discriminatory," it said. Titled "Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge," the study is based on National Sample Survey Organisation data and other studies on the status of Dalit Muslims and Christians. The study says that there could be no doubt that Dalit Muslims and Christians are socially known and treated as distinct groups within their own religious communities. (The Hindu 5/4/08)

State Commission for Minorities sought (7)

PUDUCHERRY: The minorities' wing of the Puducherry Pradesh Congress Committee on Sunday urged the government to take immediate steps to constitute a separate State Commission for the Minorities to ensure their welfare. Shortly after a meeting of the functionaries of the wing held at the party office, PCC chief A.V.Subramanian told reporters that through a resolution, it urged the government to provide reservation for the minorities in education and employment. Such internal quota system had been implemented in certain States, the resolution said. The meeting also urged the government to implement a special component plan for the minorities so that 16 per cent of the budgetary allocations could be used for their welfare. Another resolution called for setting up a separate welfare board for the minorities in the Union Territory. The wing commended the United Progressive Alliance government for earmarking Rs.1,000 crore in the Union Budget for the welfare of the minorities. It expressed its gratitude to Chief Minister N.Rangasamy for setting up a panel to monitor the implementation of the Prime Minister's 15-point programme for the welfare of the minorities in the Union Territory. The meeting was presided over by chairman of the minorities' wing Louis Kannaya. (The Hindu 28/4/08)

Minority welfare plan to be reviewed (7)

New Delhi, May 1: The government directed the Cabinet Secretary to review the implementation of the showcase programme of the Prime Minister, his 15-point programme on the welfare of minorities in 2007-08, on Thursday. After receiving the status report on the programme till March 31 2007, the Union Cabinet at its meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked the Cabinet Secretary to review the progress for the current financial year. "The Cabinet Secretary has been directed to review the implementation in 2007-08 and bring a report as early as possible," finance minister P. Chidambaram told reporters. The programme seeks to enhance education opportunities and ensure equitable share of minorities in economic activities and

employment. It also seeks to improve the living conditions of minorities and take effective steps for prevention and control of communal riots. The Cabinet gave its approval to obtain full membership of IOM, an inter-governmental organisation dealing with the issue of migration. The Cabinet gave its, in principle, approval to establish a national police university for quality education, research and other related academic activities in police related subjects, including competence in the areas of the physical and social sciences. The Union Cabinet gave its declaration of the year 2008-2009 as "food safety and quality year". The initiative will ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food supply, bring about awareness amongst consumers to demand safe and quality food as well as promote practice of good hygiene amongst consumers, producers and processors. The Centre also approved the introduction of a Limited Liability Partnership Bill, 2008 in the Parliament by replacing the Limited Partnership Bill, 2006. The proposed bill would facilitate creation of another corporate structure which would further enable growth of the economy. The Employees State Insurance Act 1948 will be amended as the Cabinet gave its approval to the bill. The Cabinet also gave its approval to move official amendments in the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2006, introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 23rd August, 2006 based on the suggestions of the Parliament standing committee on home affairs in its 128th report presented on 16th August, 2007. The suggestions contained in the report of the parliamentary committee on home affairs will improve the administration of criminal justice system. (Asian Age 2/5/08)

Can't lay uniform guidelines for minority institutions, says Govt (7)

New Delhi, May 8: The Government has replied in the negative to the recommendation made by the National Commission for Minorities for uniform national guidelines to determine minority status of educational institutions. The NCM had made this suggestion in a meeting with the Human Resources Development Ministry last month. In that meeting, the NCM had argued that the right to determine minority status of a community must be vested with the Union Government to avoid state-wise discrepancies. Government has no intention to lay down procedures for uniform guidelines for determining minority status of communities. "The Central Government can't lay down procedures to be followed by states for the issuance of minority certificates by them," the HRD Ministry said in a written reply to the NCM. The matter is within the competence and jurisdiction of state governments where the Central Government can't intervene, it said. The NCM had pointed out that universities often refuse to affiliate minority institutions located outside the state. In its reply, the HRD Ministry has said that the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions has been empowered to grant minority status certification wherever it is proved that such certification has been denied without reason and minority rights have been violated. However, the NCM is far from convinced. "We are of the view that the Government of India must have a final say on determining the minority status of a community. We can see that regional politics plays a key role in determining minority status of a particular community, which is not fair," said Harcharan Singh Josh, member of the NCM. The NCM had made recommendation for making the right to determine minority status of a community a Central subject, citing the case of the Jains. The NCM had pointed out that the state governments of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have notified Jains as 'minority', in accordance with the provisions of respective State Minority Commissions Act. But this status is denied to the community in other states. Such a disparity creates problems for both the communities and the state governments. Meanwhile, inclusion of Jains in the list of notified minorities is still an issue before the Government. The NCM has given a favourable reply in this regard. However, the Government is going slow on taking a decision, as the community itself is divided over the issue. Those who oppose the inclusion of Jains in the minority list are of the view that Jains may have a separate system of belief but as a community Jains are Hindus only. (Indian Express 9/5/08)

NCM wants minority body in Orissa (7)

New Delhi, May 14: The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) wants Orissa to set up a State Minorities Commission in the state. The suggestion comes following a recent visit by the NCM vice-chairman Michael Pinto to the state. In his suggestions following the visit, Mr Pinto has said that a minorities commission armed with suitable powers and responsibilities must be established as soon as possible in Orissa. Mr Pinto in his report has also said that the state

government should immediately extend the policy of giving relief and assistance for rebuilding damaged properties to religious establishments that have suffered untold damage in the riots. This needs to be done on a war footing. This observation has come in the light of the extensive damage to church and church institutions that occurred in the state some months ago following clashes between the Hindus and Christians in the Kandhmal district of Orissa. The NCM report has also suggested amendments to the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana so that roads can be built under the scheme to provide access to even small villages. Further, the report has said that policymakers should try to address the question of the uneven access to the fruits of development so that economic issues are not allowed to degenerate into communal violence. (Asian Age 15/5/08)

Minority fund unused in UP, Bihar, Gujarat (7)

NEW DELHI: June 22: Mr Narendra Modi's Gujarat has a poor record in terms of fund disbursement to the minorities. But then so do the non-BJP governments of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam. It indicates the irony that despite money being available for disbursement among the minority communities in these states with the National Minorities Development Finance Corporation (NMDFC), it has failed to reach the beneficiaries. The NMDFC provides finance to the poor among the minorities for self-employment. The money is allocated to the states which in turn are expected to provide loans to minority community members through state channelling agencies (SCAs). In 2007-08, NMDFC disbursed funds amounting to Rs 144 crores and in 2008-09 the corporation hopes to touch between Rs 170 and Rs 180 crores. In Gujarat, where Mr Modi has been CM for the last seven years, not only is the fund utilisation unsatisfactory but even the SCAs through which concessional finance is to be made available are enervated bodies, starved of infrastructure and even employees. According to sources, the SCAs in Gujarat have low loan-recovery rates as they hardly have any field staff to work as recovery agents. It all depends on the political will of state governments, sources added. The will seems to be lacking in Mr Modi's Gujarat. Not surprising though with the Gujarat CM criticising the Centre for what he described as its "communal budgeting during the National Development Council meeting in December 2007. The situation seems equally bad in Uttar Pradesh which has a substantial Muslim population. So much so that UP has not even given its equity contribution to the NMDFC for the last three years. Neither has the state drawn any money from the NMDFC for loan disbursement among the minorities during this period. Clearly, neither Ms Mayawati's government nor her predecessor Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's government did anything to ensure that the minorities benefited from what they are entitled to. This is despite both the political leaders claiming to champion the cause of Muslims. In the case of UP, in fact, the situation is so bad that the state has run up debt arrears amounting to over Rs 30 crores. This money should have been recovered from the borrowers and returned to the NMDFC, said sources. (Asian Age (23/6/08)

Minorities got only 5 per cent of Govt jobs: UPA report (7)

New Delhi, June 25: The UPA Government may be making tall claims on the minority welfare front, but a review carried out by the Government itself has found that minority community members figure a mere 5 per cent of the total direct recruitments made by various ministries last year. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, as part of the UPA's much-touted 15-point programme for the welfare of minorities, had announced that special consideration would be given to the recruitment of minorities in Central and state services along with other public sector undertakings. Following this, the Department of Personnel Training (DoPT) had issued a circular in January 2007, asking all the ministries to consider minority candidates during recruitments in C&D categories. It also asked the secretaries to ensure that the selection committees have at least one minority member in it. The circular said that the DoPT intends to soon take up with the state Governments the issue of hiring more people from minority communities in police force. A Group of Secretaries (GoS) was formed to review the selection process every six months. The GoS sat for its first meeting early this month and found that only 5 per cent minority community members were recruited between April and September 2007. Moreover, half of the ministries had not even bothered to furnish the GoS with details regarding the appointments they had made over the period. The Home Ministry figured at the top of the GoS list with 20 per cent recruitment from minority communities, courtesy Assam Rifles, Border Security Forces and Gorkha Regiment. The

banking sections of the Finance Ministry, Minority Ministry, DoPT and Social Welfare Ministry weren't far behind with around 10 per cent recruitment from the minority communities. The Department of Posts under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Railways appeared at the bottom of the list with a mere three per cent minority recruits. "The GoS feels that only a few ministries are serious about the directive. The whole recruitment drive seems so farcical," said one of the official who is part of the GoM. (Indian Express 26/6/08)