

MINORITIES: SECULARISM/GENERAL- 2009

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Compiled By
K. SAMU

Human Rights Documentation,
Indian Social Institute, Lodi Road, New Delhi (India)

NCM statutory status unlikely (7)

NEW DELHI: Jan. 5: It's a promise made by the UPA government in its common minimum programme that's unlikely to be fulfilled — one which said that the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) would be granted constitutional status. This despite the government having cleared at least one hurdle, the Cabinet, which gave its nod to the proposal in November last year. The aim of enhancing the status of NCM was to give it more teeth to deal with minority concerns. It would also have helped the UPA government present a pro-minority image. At present, the NCM has no powers to even ensure that if it seeks a response from a state government on a complaint, it will get one. Further, state governments rarely bother to reply to the notices sent to them by the NCM on time. The Union ministry of minority affairs isn't too hopeful about seeing the status of the NCM being changes from its present statutory one to a constitutional one now that the present government is in the final months of its tenure. While the Cabinet also gave its approval to the bill which would need Parliament's approval if the NCM is to be granted constitutional status, the possibility of seeing the bill being enacted are now extremely remote. The reason being not only the short session but also the fact that the Constitution 103rd Amendment Bill providing for the granting of constitutional status to the NCM will need a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha. Further, given the politically sensitive nature of the proposed amendment, the government would have to work hard to ensure it has the numbers to see the bill through, provided it isn't referred to a parliamentary standing committee. After the bill was cleared last November, it had been expected that the government would bring the bill before Parliament when it met in December. Ironically, minority affairs minister A.R. Antulay's statement on the killing of ATS chief Hemant Karkare that saw little business being transacted in the last few days of the session. While the government did manage to push through eight bills in 17 minutes, the 103rd Amendment Bill wasn't one that could be passed in such haste. (Asian Age 6/1/09)

Persecution of minorities not allowed: SC (7)

NEW DELHI, Jan. 5: The Supreme Court today asked both the Union government and the Orissa government to ensure the safety of minorities while making it clear that it will not allow persecution of minorities in any part of the country. A three-judge Bench of Chief Justice Mr KG Balakrishnan and Justices Mr Markandey Katju and Mr P Sathasivam, while hearing a petition seeking a CBI inquiry into the Kandhamal violence and an early rehabilitation of violence victims and restoration of their properties, said it wanted the state government to reconstruct the churches damaged in violence-hit Kandhamal district. Mr Justice Katju, responding to senior counsel Mr KK Venugopal's contention that Christians' security in the district should not be the sole responsibility of the state, said what he had meant was both "Centre and the state" and asked the counsel for the two governments to work out between them the exact requirement of forces needed for maintenance of peace. Earlier, counsel for the petitioner submitted before the court that the Orissa government was not giving compensation to the victims of Kandhamal violence and places of worship demolished and damaged during communal riots against tribal Christians were not being rebuilt. Mr Venugopal, however, denied the allegation and contended that the state had done and was still doing everything possible to rehabilitate the victims of Kandhamal violence apart from reconstructing the places of worship. The SC adjourned the hearing of the petition by Cuttack Archbishop Raphael Cheenath, seeking Christians' safety in Kandhamal district that was ravaged by anti-Christian violence following the killing of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his associates on 23 August 2008. (Statesman 6/1/09)

Minority panel all praise for Bengal (7)

Kolkata: The National Minorities Commission, which came to Kolkata on a two-day visit, praised the state Government for its efforts to ameliorate the condition of poor Muslims. The six-member team, headed by

its Chairman Md Safi Qureshi on Tuesday met Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee who apprised them of the initiatives taken by the state to improve the condition of the Muslims. "There are mainly two problems that are plaguing the Muslim community — lack of educational development and dearth of representation of the community in government jobs — and we are focusing on this. The chief minister admitted this and said they were trying to reverse the situation in the state," Qureshi said after the meeting. (Indian Express 14/1/09)

37 state plans for minority areas get nod (7)

NEW DELHI: Jan. 18: The BJP may dismiss it as "minority appeasement" but the states, regardless of the party at the helm of affairs, aren't complaining. Rather, they are busy drawing up individual plans for targeted intervention in minority concentration districts (MCDs) in their region. So far, the Centre has given its nod to plans for 37 of the 90 MCDs in the country and is all set to give approval to another six. The decision to target 90 MCDs in the country was taken after the seminal Sachar report had suggested targeted intervention in districts with poor developmental parameters. In working out individual plans for each district, the state government and the Union ministry of minority affairs are keeping in mind the objective that both basic amenities like water and electricity and employment opportunities are improved. With the scheme for targeted intervention in 90 MCDs approved only in June last year, minority affairs ministry officials are visibly pleased with the progress it is making. While the basis for identifying the 90 MCDs was the 2001 census, the ministry got done a study by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) in October 2007 to find out for each district where they were lagging behind in terms of development parameters. This was followed by another survey in October 2008 to update the data on the development deficits, said ministry officials. Among the states whose MCDs figure in list of approved plans are Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and the Andaman and Nicobar islands, ministry officials added. Importantly, the targeted intervention is not confined only to the minorities living in an MCD. It is as much applicable to members of others communities who may be lagging behind in development parameters and lacking civic amenities. Each plan has been tailor-made for a district keeping in mind its requirements, said ministry officials. So while an MCD in Manipur will be providing solar lanterns to girls studying in the high school, yet another district might be provided more anganwadi centres in order to impact the health and nutrition levels of children. Similarly, with the aim of reducing maternal and child mortality, another MCD can be given more money to build additional rooms in its primary health centres. Keeping in mind eight development parameters, among them literacy levels, employment, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, etc the aim is to address the gaps that may exist when compared to the national average, said a ministry official. (Asianage 19/1/09)

US-based Hindu group praises Obama for his remark on religions (1)

New York, January 21, 2009: US President Barack Obama drew appreciation and expression of gratitude from a US-based Hindu group for his inaugural speech where he mentioned Hindus along with Christians, Jews and Muslims who form part of this "great nation." "His words provide us with hope that the Hindu American voice will not only be heard but valued," Hindu American Foundation's Director of Development Sheetal Shah said. "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and non-believers," Obama on Tuesday said in his speech after taking oath as America's 44th president. He also urged fellow Americans to user in an era of responsibility. Shah said that foundation would continue to reach out to the new (Obama) administration and provide a voice for Hindu American community. It had sent a letter to Obama and his transition team providing "concrete suggestions" to foster unity in diversity in the new era, Shah said in a statement. (Hindustan Times 21/1/09)

Purohit has contempt for secularism: charge sheet (7)

Mumbai: The key Malegaon blast accused, Lt. Col. Prasad Shrikant Purohit, and co-conspirators hatched plans and envisioned operations that went beyond what happened in the Maharashtra town. They were up against the Indian Constitution and the diverse and secular fabric of the country, according to the charge sheet filed on Tuesday. The transcript of a discussion among the key conspirators, as part of the charge sheet, quotes Lt. Col. Purohit as saying, "We will fight the Constitution; will fight this nation; this nation is not ours." During the conversation, Lt. Col. Purohit, Sudhakar Dwivedi alias Dayanand Pandey, Ramesh Upadhyay and others identified as Dr. R.P. Singh and Sharma detailed the "foundation principles" of their agenda of a "Hindu Rashtra." Suffused with a bigoted outlook towards the idea of India, the conspirators envisioned the prevalence of the Vedic culture as a monolith, standing for "Bharatiya

Culture.” They opposed “cultural and religious diversity.” “We are being held hostage to the agenda of the secularist, so-called secularist parties. The so-called Hindutva parties have betrayed the cause of Hindutva by using Hindutva as a political tool. There is no alternative to the Hindu nation, nationalism. Well actually there is, it is called disintegration of the nation,” says Lt. Col. Purohit in the transcript. The front organisation, Abhinav Bharat, formed with the idea of creating a parallel government, had a well-planned agenda, from policy-making to achieving the social goals of education and caste eradication. The organisation’s stand was consciously aggressive. In the various policies discussed in the transcript, Lt. Col. Purohit speaks of using the term “War Ministry,” instead of “Defence Ministry.” He favours the presidential form of government of “one accepted leader.” Lt. Col. Purohit’s theocratic worldview, stated in the charge sheet, aimed at forming a “Hindu nations union” and at “unification of Buddhist and Hindu nations to fight Islamic and Christian invasions.” He speaks of a union with Nepal, Thailand and Cambodia. According to the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), the Malegaon blast, which targeted Muslims, was the first step in this direction. From the charge sheet, it became evident that the Malegaon plot had its roots in a greater conspiracy, which was brewing in the myriad meetings and discussions of Abhinav Bharat members and sympathisers, the ATS said. (The Hindu 25/1/09)

Rush for minority board seal (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 5: Minority leaders have asked the government to grant legal sanctity to India’s minority education monitor to guard it from a future political dispensation that might want to neglect the watchdog. Both Muslim and Christian leaders today asked human resource development minister Arjun Singh to make the National Monitoring Committee for Minorities’ Education a statutory body, ministry sources said. It had been created to monitor the implementation of minority education programmes under the National Education Policy of 1986. But the committee was disbanded in 1994 and was only resurrected in 2004 after the Congress-led UPA came to power. “The minority leaders expressed concerns that a future dispensation unfriendly to their interests in New Delhi may disband the committee, which is the national watchdog for minority education,” a top HRD ministry official said. Minister Arjun Singh has asked his officials to draft a law to transform the committee into a statutory body. The government may, however, not have adequate time to introduce a bill for the new body in the brief session of Parliament starting on February 12. Speaking to reporters after the monitoring body’s annual meet here, Singh said he hoped the right to education bill would be passed in the coming session of Parliament. The bill, which makes free and compulsory education for every child between 6 and 14 a legally enforceable right, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in December. It is yet to be cleared by either House. Singh said a committee under school education secretary Anshu Vaish was examining a proposal made by Christian educational institutions to extend the midday meal to unaided schools, especially in tribal areas. He also confirmed the ministry’s plan to set up a national textbook council to scan non-government school textbooks. (Telegraph 6/1/09)

Attackers asked me not to speak to Christians or Muslims’ (7)

MANGALORE: “They wore tilak on their foreheads and kept telling me that non-Hindus are inhuman,” Shruthi, a student of St. Aloysius College here, who was attacked by suspected Hindutva activists on Friday for speaking to a Muslim boy while travelling in a bus, said on Sunday. She was reacting to reports that the group which attacked and abducted her was from the Democratic Youth Federation of India. She said that they asked her not to speak to Christians or Muslims because they were “inhuman.” “They insisted that only Hindus are human beings and others are not,” she added. This is the third such attack reported in the city in the recent past. On August 24, a bus was intercepted at a prominent junction in the city. A Hindu girl and her Muslim fiancé were dragged out of the bus and assaulted by a group. On August 8, activists of Bajrang Dal stopped a bus in the city and assaulted Syed, Zulfikar and Ameen. The activists took offence to the fact that these youth helped a few girls with their bags as they did not get seat in the bus. Bajrang Dal leader Sudarshan Moodabidri had claimed responsibility for both the attacks. Ms. Shruthi said that the people, who had attacked Shabeeb (her friend), had taken away his cellphone. Shabeeb tried to call his friends when the group surrounded him. She said that she was not able to contact Shabeeb to find out his whereabouts and condition. (The Hindu 9/2/09)

Mangalore suicide: affiliation being probed (7)

MANGALORE: The police are looking into all aspects of the suicide of a 16-year-old girl on Wednesday in Mulky in Dakshina Kannada, after her public humiliation allegedly by a Hindutva fringe group on February

10, according to Inspector-General of Police A.M. Prasad. He said that the post-mortem report on the girl was awaited. The police are also investigating the organisational affiliation, if any, of the group of 10 to 15 persons, who publicly insulted the girl for going out with a youth of a different religion. Describing the incident as "unfortunate," Mr. Prasad said that based on the complaint by the girl's father, a case of rape had been taken up and the youth had been arrested. He said until the investigation brings out the "facts", the question of the police looking for the members of the group does not arise. Meanwhile, Criminal Lawyer Sharat Shetty has come forward to defend Abdul Salim (27) who has been accused of rape and abetment of the suicide of the girl. He told The Hindu that he would be moving a bail petition before the court on Monday. Rafique, the helper of the bus that was attacked allegedly by a second Hindutva group, has gone into hiding. Speaking to The Hindu from an undisclosed location, he claimed that his attackers took away Rs. 3,000, a watch and a cellphone from him. He also said that he had lodged a complaint with the Venoor police about the attack. However, sub-inspector of Venoor police station, Manju S., said he had not received a complaint. Mr. Rafique also claimed that the police forcibly discharged him from the hospital where he was admitted. (The Hindu 13/2/09)

UN rings Godhra alarm (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 17: The United Nations has warned of a "very real risk" of a repeat of the 2002 Gujarat riots in the country unless politicians stop exploiting communal distinctions, in a report that presents a dim picture of religious intolerance in India. The world body's latest report on religious freedom paints India as a country suffering from communal divisions and mob-inspired persecution, and dwells at length on incidents like the recent violence against Christians in Orissa and the 2002 riots. Scheduled to be discussed by the UN Human Rights Council on March 10, the report was prepared by special rapporteur on religion Asma Jahangir, a Pakistani human rights activist. The UN prepares reports on various countries once in every decade. The last one on India was in 1996. The report says the law enforcement machinery in India was "often reluctant" to take action against individuals or groups that "perpetrate violence" in the name of religion or belief. "This institutionalised impunity for those who exploit religion and impose their religious intolerance on others has made peaceful citizens, particularly the minorities, vulnerable and fearful." After detailing the incidents of violence, it says "organised groups claiming roots in religious ideologies" had unleashed an "all-pervasive fear of mob violence in many parts of the country". On Gujarat, the report says the state government had done little to help victims who live in perpetual fear and insecurity and pointed to the "increasing ghettoisation and isolation of Muslims in certain areas". However, it has some good words, too, for India, citing the "positive impact of secularism as embodied in the Constitution" and the "high degree of human rights activism in the country". The report also praises several initiatives of the Congress-led government at the Centre, such as the Prime Minister's 15-point programme for the welfare of minorities. It also mentions reports that various committees — like the one headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar — had come out with, suggesting ways to improve the lot of minorities. "Such committees mandated by the government are good examples of mechanisms put in place to analyse the situation and put forward recommendations for government action," the UN report says. The world body makes a series of recommendations to both the Centre and state governments. It says Dalit Christians and Muslims should also be given benefits of affirmative actions like reservation. The report asks the government to act against "mob violence". It encourages specific legislation to prevent communal attacks but cautions that the laws should take into account concerns of religious minorities so as not to reinforce the "impunity of communalised police forces at the state level". (Telegraph 18/2/09)

Demand for quota for Dalit Christians and Muslims raised in LS (7)

New Delhi, Feb 25 (PTI) A range of issues including reservation in private sector, need for jobs quota to Dalit Christians and Muslims and a fair deal to refugees from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir were raised in the Lok Sabha today. S Ajaya Kumar (CPI-M) made a strong plea that there should be reservation in private sector. This, he said, was necessary in view of the fact that there has been privatisation of even some public sector undertakings and that the scope of reservation was thus eroding in the government sector. K Francis George (Kerala Congress) wanted the government to accept the recommendations of the Rangnath Mishra Commission which had favoured reservation to the Dalit Christians and Muslims. He said that economic status does not improve even if any Dalit embraced Christianity or Islam and therefore the reservation facility should be continued to such people. His contention was supported by Ilyas Azmi (BSP) as also Jaya Prada (SP). Congress member Lal Singh pleaded for a fair deal to the refugees from

PoK, saying they have been a "neglected" lot for the past 60 years without having any citizenship rights. PTI (PTI 26/2/09)

NCM seeks State-level minority commission (7)

KOCHI: Zoya Hasan, member of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), has said the commission will raise the issue of setting up a State-level minority commission and a minority welfare department at a meeting with Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan on Friday. Talking to mediapersons on the sidelines of a public hearing of the commission at the Collectorate here on Wednesday, Ms. Hasan said these were the two prominent issues raised at the hearing. Dileep Padgaonkar, commission member, said the commission had last year sent a draft of the model for a State-level minority commission to all State governments. He said it was "remarkable" that almost 90 per cent of the issues raised at the hearing were related to education. He said the commission would find out whether there was some kind of an agreement between the State government and minority educational institutions regarding allotment of seats. Muslim, Christian and Anglo-Indian communities placed their grievances before the commission at the hearing. The issues that came up before the three-member commission led by vice-chairman M.P. Pinto ranged from usurping of properties of the minorities, infringement of their constitutional rights, including the right to establish and operate educational institutions, to the absence of a minority welfare ministry and a minority commission at the State-level. E.K. John, member of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, alleged that the State government was determined to deprive the minority communities of their rights and privileges enshrined in the Constitution. He questioned the intention of the Kerala Christian Church Properties and Institutions and Trust Bill brought about by the government. The Muslim Employees Cultural Association gave a 27-point memorandum to the commission for due recommendation to the Central and the State governments. N.K. Ali, general secretary, called for the expeditious constitution of a State minority commission and a minority development finance corporation. Charles Diaz, representing the Union of Anglo-Indian Associations, decried an order whereby the 1.25 lakh-strong community in the State had to share the quota in admission to professional colleges with Jews. K. Jainie, secretary of the Muslim Educational Society, sought a directive to the State government to issue minority status certificates to minority educational institutions on a permanent basis rather than issuing it on a yearly basis. The commission will hold a hearing in Kottayam district on Thursday. (The Hindu 26/2/09)

] Major communities in city log lower birth-death ratio (7)

MUMBAI: An analysis of the number of births and deaths registered among different religious denominations in the city shows that the birth-death ratio is on the decline for all major communities, indicating perhaps greater awareness of family planning. Public health department records of the number of births and deaths in Mumbai reveal that for every 100 Muslims who died in 2008, around 290 were born. For every 100 Hindus who died in the same period, around 180 were born. While 1.28 lakh infants were born into Hindu families in 2008, 70,558 Hindus died in the same period, a Right To Information (RTI) query filed by activist Chetan Kothari revealed. In the same year, Muslims registered 45,654 births and 15,936 deaths. A similar query by Kothari last year had revealed that among Hindus, the birth to death ratio for 2005-07 was over two, and among Muslims over three. Both ratios have thus dipped. Sociologists attribute the higher ratio of births to deaths among Muslims to socio-economic factors like poverty, illiteracy and lack of adequate family planning. "The infant mortality rate amongst the poorer sections of society has generally been on the higher side. So they tend to have more infants. But the overall mortality rate will be lower as compared to other sections of society, as they tend to have a larger family," S Parasuraman, director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, told TOI. He said poverty was a major factor and studies have already shown the strong link between poverty, illiteracy and population growth. Reformist community leaders like Asghar Ali Engineer agree. "Many lower middle class families who live in slums are not exposed to the concept of family planning. They have more than two or three children in every household. They believe that even though there is one more mouth to be fed in the family, the two hands will earn for the entire household," Engineer said. He said studies show that 65% of literate Muslims in Kerala have done effective family planning compared to 38% poor Hindus in Uttar Pradesh. "This shows literacy and poverty are linked to population control," he said. The city's Christians are a case in point. For every 100 Christians who died, only about 100 were born last year. This shows the community has not been increasing as compared to others. Christian community leaders put this

down to effective pre-nuptial counselling and natural birth control methods. Anthony Charanghat, spokesperson for the Catholic archdiocese of Bombay, said the Catholic church does not encourage artificial methods of birth control and volunteers conduct camps to educate young people about the rhythm method, which relies on awareness of a woman's ovulation cycle. "These are aspects many youngsters are still not aware of, and we tell them to be extra careful for at least seven days in a month," he said. Charanghat said factors like migration also contribute to the dwindling birth figures. "Youngsters migrate to other countries after they have finished their studies, which results in the dwindling number of infant births." He added that the statistics also reflected the fact that people were marrying at a later age.

It would be risky, however, to read too much into these figures. Here's why: The all-India birth rate is about three-and-a-half times the death rate. The ratio in Mumbai's case is less than two according to the data Kothari got in response to his query. Migration has a large part to play in explaining this. People born elsewhere who move to the metropolis and settle down and die here skew the ratio significantly. It's also possible that a section of migrants moves back to ancestral villages in the last years of their life. This section could be bigger or smaller in different communities, thus making a difference to the death rates. The figures are even more alarming for Parsis. For every 100 Parsis who died, only around 14 were born in 2008. Here, too, delayed marriages and the ensuing fertility problems are held responsible. "Many couples marry in their mid-thirties, and some never get married," said Berjis Desai, social activist and columnist on Parsi affairs. For every Jain who died, about 15 were born last year. Community leaders like Dipchand Gardi say Jains live long because of their way of life. A vegetarian lifestyle and fasting combine to remove toxins from the body, Gardi said. (Times of India 27/2/09)

Constitutional validity of Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act challenged in HC (7)

Ahmedabad: A petition challenging the constitutional validity of the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act 2003 and Rules of 2008 that came into force last April, has been placed before the Gujarat High Court. A division bench of justices M S Shah and Akil Kureshi heard the matter on Wednesday and admitted the petition. They also issued a notice to the Advocate General of Gujarat to submit the state government's reply in the matter. The petition was jointly filed by the Gujarat United Christian Forum for Human Rights; retired IAS officer P K Velera; Hanif Lakdawala, the representative of NGO Sanchetna; and civil rights activists Valjibhai Patel and Dwarikanath. Advocates Girish Patel and Shalin Mehta contended that the most offensive part of the Act was the advance permission of the district magistrate to conduct conversion, or prior intimation to the district magistrate about individuals attending such programmes. They said it was in violation of the Fundamental Right of Freedom of Conscience and Freedom to Profess, Practice and Propagate Religion under Article 25 of the Constitution of India. They said the Indian state, by its very secular nature, could not intervene in any case of free and voluntary conversion from one religion to another. They further said the state could not regulate or control the free exercise of the freedom of conscience and religion by citing that public order may be disturbed by forcible or fraudulent conversion. They argued that any such Act would be beyond the legislative competence of the state. They also pointed out the difference between the Gujarat Act, the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 and the Madhya Pradesh Dharm Swatantrata Adhinyam of 1968. They said the Orissa and MP acts merely provided for intimation of conversion to the district magistrate but nowhere insisted on taking prior permission of the district magistrate for the same. The Gujarat Act made it compulsory to seek prior permission for wilful and voluntary conversions not only by those willing to convert, but for all those desirous of attending the conversion ceremony. They also pointed out the Supreme Court's judgment in 1977 that upheld the validity of the Orissa and MP acts. "The Act, by insisting upon intimation of one's own free conversion, attacks the right to privacy, as question of faith is purely a personal and private matter. By making one's conversion a matter of public notice and knowledge, the Act aims at facilitating and encouraging the religious fanatics to take law into their hands to prevent even free and voluntary conversion," said a counsel, adding that in the name of maintaining law and order, the Act would invite people to disturb it. (Indian Express 28/2/09)

Funds for minorities not to be used for religious acts: HC (7)

Ahmedabad: The Gujarat High Court has dismissed a Public Interest Litigation against the Central government's 15-point-programme for minorities, and has ordered that funds should not be used for the promotion of any religious activities or the advancement of religious teaching of a particular minority community. The PIL was filed by former BJP parliamentarian Vijay Patel, who had challenged the steps

taken by the Union Government to earmark Rs 1,900 crore in favour of the Muslim community by way of the 15-point programme of the Central government on the recommendations of the Sachar committee. The petitioner had also questioned the wisdom of utilisation of national resources in favour of a particular minority community, which according to the petitioner, was contrary to the constitutional mandate. High Court Chief Justice K S Radhakrishnan and Justice Akil Kureshi on Friday ordered the Centre to ensure that the money should be utilised only for social welfare activities of the minorities. On its part, the state should ensure that the funds are not utilised for inculcating any religion or advancement of any particular religion affecting the constitutional requirement of neutrality, they said. The Court dismissed the petition, observing that funds used to minimise inequalities among minority communities by adopting various social and welfare activities did not violate constitutional principles. (Indian Express 22/3/09)

Minority panel seeks action against Togadia (7)

MUMBAI: The State Minorities Commission has trained its guns on VHP leader Pravin Togadia. The panel has protested against an alleged hate speech Togadia made at Pandharkawada in Yavatmal district on March 24. In a letter to additional director-general of police (law and order) P P Srivastava, commission vice-chairman Abraham Mathai demanded an inquiry into the alleged speech and a ban on Togadia entering the state, especially at a time when Lok Sabha elections were round the corner. "I have learnt that Togadia made statements such as 'madrasas should be shut down' and 'Hindus will decide how many wives and children Muslims should have'. This is outrageous," Mathai said. Mathai also asked the police that if the BJP's Varun Gandhi could be arrested for making an alleged hate speech (in Pilibhit) and then detained under the NSA, then why could the Maharashtra police not invoke the same act against leaders such as Togadia. (Times of India 1/4/09)

Secularism can't be overstretched, says Katju (7)

New Delhi: Rejecting the plea of a Muslim student that he should be permitted to sport a beard in his convent school, the Supreme Court on Monday observed that secularism could not be overstretched and "Talibanisation" of the country could not be permitted. "We don't want to have Talibans in the country. Tomorrow a girl student may come and say that she wants to wear a burqa. Can we allow it," asked Justice Markandey Katju, speaking for a Bench headed by Justice Raveendran. Asserting that he was a secularist to the core, Justice Katju, however, said religious beliefs could not be overstretched. "I am secularist. We should strike a balance between rights and personal beliefs. We cannot overstretch secularism." Justice Katju made these observations while dismissing the petition by Mohammad Salim of the Nirmala Convent Higher Secondary School, a government-recognised minority institution in Madhya Pradesh, for quashing its regulation requiring students to be clean shaven. Challenging a Madhya Pradesh High Court verdict that earlier dismissed his plea, Salim said every citizen was entitled to follow his religious principles and no one should restrain him from doing so in a secular country. Salim's counsel Justice (retired) B.A. Khan argued that sporting a beard was an indispensable part of Islam. "But you [Justice Khan] don't sport a beard," Justice Katju told counsel. The court then said a minority institution had its own set of rules and rights provided by Article 30 of the Constitution and the same could not be breached by any person. "If there are rules, you have to obey. You can't say that I will not wear a uniform I will [wear] only a burqa," the Bench observed. The court said if the student was not interested in following the rules he would have the option of joining some other institution. "But you can't ask the school to change the rules for you." Justice Khan said Article 25 guaranteed protection to Salim to pursue his religious practice of keeping a beard and the regulation providing for shaving it off was violative of this provision. He said the principal forcing the student to leave the school for keeping a beard was against "his religious conscience, belief and custom of his family." Pointing out that Sikhs were allowed to keep a beard and sport a turban, Salim alleged discrimination on the part of the school in forcing him to be clean shaven. — PTI (The Hindu 1/4/09)

Communal agenda cannot succeed in India: Nitish (7)

Patna (PTI): Secularism is deeply ingrained in the soul of India where no communal agenda can succeed, feels Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whose party is a key partner in the BJP-led NDA which is often accused of inflaming religious sentiments at the time of elections. "Communal agenda cannot succeed in the country in whose soul the principle of secularism is deeply ingrained. Be it Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians, a vast majority of Indians are genuinely secular," Mr. Kumar told PTI. "The JD(U) and the BJP are constituents of the NDA, but hold divergent views on a variety of issues. The BJP as a political party

is free to hold its views on the Ram Temple and several other issues, but when we form a coalition government, no communal or contentious issue is on our agenda," he said. Mr. Kumar, in a free-wheeling interview in which he spoke about his relations with the saffron party, his projections about the impending Lok Sabha elections and his archrival Lalu Prasad, felt that the RJD chief has become irrelevant in Bihar politics and accused him of being 'ungrateful' to the Congress, which stood by him through thick and thin. Asked what he had to say about BJP which once again raked up the issues of Ram Temple, uniform civil code and Article 370 in its election manifesto, Mr. Kumar said, "BJP is at liberty to implement these only if it is able to get a majority on its own. These issues were not part of the common agenda for governance when we were in the government earlier." Asked about the BJP trying to cash in on the issue of Varun Gandhi being booked under the National Security Act, he said, "Varun Gandhi or the temple-mosque issues are irrelevant in Bihar. "What is important is that JD(U) and BJP are successfully running a government in Bihar that has reopened several cases of Bhagalpur riots closed by the erstwhile RJD regime, secured compensation for the victims' families on the lines of those of the anti-Sikh riots in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination and ordered pension for them. "These are the collective decisions of our government of which BJP is a constituent," he said. About his bete noire Mr. Prasad, Mr. Kumar said, "his electoral future along with that of Ramvilas Paswan is quite bleak. Lalu benefited from a broader alliance he had effected with the LJP, the Congress, the NCP and the CPI(M) in the 2004 LS polls. "Much water has flown down the Ganga since then. Lalu's alliance has contracted from five to just two. The UPA has split in Bihar and the NDA will definitely reap the benefit. Mr. Prasad, Mr. Kumar said, depended heavily on his 'social engineering' factor while being "unmindful" of the ground reality. "We cannot completely ignore the caste factor, but it is not as important as it used to be a few years ago. Even Lalu is now talking about development." Asked what would be the fallout of the Congress' split with the RJD and the LJP, he said, "as is his habit, Lalu has been ungrateful to the Congress, which stood by him through thick and thin. Their break up will definitely have a psychological impact on the electoral fortunes of the UPA." Whether there was a possibility of the JD(U) forging a post-poll alliance with the Congress, as indicated by senior Congress leader Veerappa Moily, he said: "I think such comments are intended more to irritate Lalu and Paswan. When our government is running successfully in Bihar, where is the need for JD(U) switching over to the UPA?" On the Prime Ministerial ambitions of Mr Prasad and the LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan, the JD(U) leader said, "their utterances are aimed at energising their diffident supporters and party workers. There is nothing more to it." On media reports attributed to Mr. Paswan that he would have been a taller leader had he not been a dalit, the Chief Minister said "the reverse is true. Paswan would not have scaled the heights he did if he was not a dalit leader." On accusations by three-time Bihar Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra, who quit the party accusing him of being anti-Brahmin, Mr. Kumar said he was inducted in the JD(U) on the advice of party president Sharad Yadav and L.K. Advani despite reservations expressed by the State units of the two parties. "Mishra has been criticising my government ever since the deluge caused by the Kosi in several north Bihar districts. The Kosi tragedy was a huge one and, when the whole world came to Bihar's rescue. Mishra only did hair-splitting over relief. He had already made up his mind to part ways with us," Mr. Kumar said. Stating that the NDA's appeal among the masses has improved since the 2004 LS elections, he said "I am confident that the electorate will wholeheartedly vote for the NDA in Bihar keeping in mind our development initiatives." (The Hindu 5/4/09)

AIADMK let down minorities, Dalits" (7)

MADURAI: Muslims, Dalits and Christians in the State would teach a fitting lesson to Jayalalithaa and her allies for betraying the interests of the deprived sections and minorities and also for practicing "political untouchability," said M. Basheer Ahmed, State president, National League, on Thursday. Addressing a press conference here, he said that the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam did not offer a single seat to a Muslim in its first list of candidates. Later, it replaced its Chennai Central candidate with a Muslim. Even in the election manifesto of the AIADMK, there was not a single mention about improving the socio-economic conditions of Muslims. The alliance had also betrayed Dalits and it had not accommodated any Dalit party in the alliance. Dalits and Muslims, who formed a huge vote bank, would jointly work for the victory of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led alliance. National League, along with a consortium of eight Muslim organisations, would campaign in all the 39 constituencies for the alliance, he said. Hailing the efforts of Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, he said that even at the age of 85 he observed a fast to save the Sri Lankan Tamils and it was after his intervention and pressure from the Centre that the Sri Lankan government stopped using heavy artillery. Mr. Ahmed also opined that Ms. Jayalalithaa had

not ruled out any alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party and maintained that any clever politician would have his/her options open. Pattali Makkal Katchi, which enjoyed power all these days with the Congress and DMK, had no moral right to speak for the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. Its leader S. Ramadoss never asked his MPs to resign over the issue, (The Hindu 1/5/09)

Delhi allows scrutiny of religious freedom (7)

Washington, May 2: In its last days in office, the UPA government has broken with a long-standing policy of disallowing intrusive fact-finding visits from America and permitted a religious vigilante state body from the US to sit in judgement on the extent of India's religious freedom. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a statutory body created by the US Congress and funded by the US government, announced yesterday that its members will "travel to India for the first time in June 2009". Pending this scrutiny of the extent of religious freedom in the country, the Commission has put off its annual report on conditions in India and promised that it will only "release its report on India during this summer" after its members assess the conditions first hand. Ever since the US Congress passed an International Religious Freedom Act 1998 and created the USCIRF, it has been trying to visit India, but New Delhi has consistently told the Commission's members that they will not be given visas for an official visit if they applied for one. That policy, hitherto followed by the NDA and UPA governments alike, has been in line with the stand taken by governments led by P.V. Narasimha Rao, H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral that intrusive inspections by similarly placed US institutions and individuals to sit in judgement on India on issues like human rights would not be permitted. Government officials, who objected to an USCIRF visit at this time and were overruled, suspect that politics, not diplomacy, is behind the unprecedented permission to allow the Commission into India. Its members are certain to target Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi on the continuing fallout from Godhra and its aftermath as well as the BJP and other saffron organisations for communal violence in Orissa. For whatever it is worth, it will add a dimension of international pressure to the actions resulting from a resurgent judicial activism against Modi and hold back, at least to a limited extent, Orissa chief minister Naveen Patnaik from realigning with the BJP in the crucial month of June, when the USCIRF team is expected to be in Orissa. Even if the change in New Delhi's policy is overlooked and the USCIRF is given the benefit of the doubt, indications are that its judgement will neither be illuminating or factual. In its annual report and announcement of the India visit yesterday, the USCIRF referred to Modi as "governor" of Gujarat and not its chief minister. The Commission also got Modi's first name wrong as "Nahendra", instead of Narendra. This is despite the Commission having a 17-member professional staff, including a full-time researcher, specifically for South Asia. There is also a possibility, although unlikely given the character of the USCIRF, that the decision to play politics with the Commission's visit could boomerang. In March last year, the UPA government similarly allowed into India, without any prior announcement, a Pakistani, Asma Jahangir, the special rapporteur of freedom of religion or belief of the UN Human Rights Council. Jahangir went to Gujarat, where, contrary to expectations, Modi laid out a red carpet for her. As a result, she was criticised by some human rights advocates in India and Pakistan, who would have preferred that she wrote her report without meeting Modi. Although some US allies like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have been targeted for recommended sanctions as "countries of particular concern" by the USCIRF, it is significant that states that are considered unfriendly to Washington figure prominently among those routinely vilified by the Commission. These include North Korea, Iran, Myanmar, Cuba, Russia and China. In the last eight years, because of the Bush administration's friendship with New Delhi, the Commission's punitive recommendations on India have largely been ignored by the US administration. (Telegraph 4/5/09)

Minorities, government staff and teachers script Congress win (7)

TIRUNELVELI: People belonging to minority communities, government employees and teachers of Palayamkottai Assembly segment in Tirunelveli Parliamentary constituency, who stood by the candidates of DMK and its allies in the past, had once again joined hands to ensure the victory of the candidate who fought the electoral battle against the AIADMK contender. This time the beneficiary is S. Ramasubbu, Congress candidate for the once AIADMK bastion, Tirunelveli Parliamentary constituency. As all the six Assembly segments under this constituency are being represented by DMK and Congress MLAs, Mr. Ramasubbu was in an upbeat mood from the beginning of his election campaign. The presence of huge number of teachers, government employees and minorities further boosted his morale. Since the sitting

MLA of Palayamkottai and Minister for Environment, Youth Welfare and Sports T.P.M. Maideen Khan comfortably won the 2006 Assembly polls by a resounding margin of nearly 45,000 votes owing to a vociferous support of the minorities, government employees and teachers, it was presumed that Mr. Ramasubbu also would get a lead of over at least 30,000 votes in Palayamkottai Assembly seat alone. Sensing the situation, AIADMK candidate K. Annamalai concentrated more on Alangulam, Ambasamudram and Nanguneri segments. He firmly believed that the sizable lead that he could get in Alangulam, Ambasamudram and Nanguneri segments would neutralise the 'Palayamkottai factor' and get an edge over the rival candidate, Mr. Ramasubbu. Though the Congress candidate could get a lead of just over 15,000 votes in Palayamkottai Assembly segment, he successfully made inroads into the rival's bastion of Alangulam, Ambasamudram and Nanguneri segments where Mr. Annamalai had to unexpectedly concede a lead of over 13,000 votes which ultimately dashed the AIADMK candidate's hopes. The only solace for the loser is that he could get a lead of over 5,000 votes in Tirunelveli and Radhapuram constituencies, which was not enough to win the battle. Moreover, the cold war between Mr. Annamalai and the local AIADMK leaders also contributed to his defeat, it is said. Though it was widely speculated that most of the Roman Catholic Christians (RC) would support the DMDK candidate S. Michael Royappan en masse, he has bagged only 12,155 votes in the Palayamkottai segment, where RC Christians reside in large numbers, even as he has polled more votes in all other Assembly segments. It also proves that the RC votes have gone in favour of Mr. Ramasubbu. However, Mr. Royappan's 94,562 votes are also one of the reasons for the AIADMK candidate's defeat. (The Hindu 18/5/09)

Pak vows to protect Sikhs from Taliban; Canada announces aid (7)

Toronto (IANS): A visiting Pakistan minister vowed to protect Sikhs from the Taliban even as Canada announced \$5 million for Pakistan's Sikh families who have fled the Swat Valley after the imposition of 'jaziya' (tax on non-Muslims) by the Taliban. Announcing the \$5-million package at a round-table here, Canada's newest Sikh MP Tim Uppal said: "I am pleased to announce on behalf of the prime minister that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has committed 5 million dollars to the humanitarian effort to help those people displaced by the conflict." Mr. Uppal, who is the ruling party MP from Edmonton, said: "We call upon the government of Pakistan to ensure the security and safety of all its citizens, including religious minorities." Pakistan's Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, who was a special invitee to the round-table, said: "I want the minorities to know that they have a brother and a friend in the government of Pakistan who will do all in his power to stop atrocities on Sikhs in Pakistan." When asked whether the Pakistan government will compensate the Sikhs for the money taken away by the Taliban, the minister only said: "I strongly condemn the jaziya collected from Sikhs by the Taliban." The Pakistani government has announced a token compensation of \$120 each to the displaced Sikh families, many of whom have sought refuge in the historic Sikh shrine at Hasan Abdal. Asked by round-table convener and filmmaker Roger Nair how Pakistan could justify such a small amount, the minister said Sikh refugees are "still in a better shape than many of over a million or so refugees since they have a better organised structure in the form of gurdwaras". The Toronto-based South Asians for Human Rights Association (SAHRA), which organised the round-table discussion with the visiting Pakistani minister, offered to sponsor 50 displaced Sikh and Hindu families as refugees to Canada. "We have written to the Canadian government to sponsor these families from Pakistan. We will work with both the governments and local bodies to identify displaced families due to the Jaziya tax and sponsor them," said SAHRA chairman Nair. He also demanded the abolition of the blasphemy law in Pakistan under which the murderers of a 27-year-old Hindu worker Jagdish Kumar last year went unpunished. (The Hindu 19/5/09)

Govt to go all out for a law to deter communal violence (7)

New Delhi: The UPA Government will make all efforts to get a law to deter communal violence passed in Parliament and give protection to minorities. The government will also seek the active participation of the majority community in implementation of the recommendations of the Sachar Committee for welfare of the Muslims. "My ministry will make all efforts to ensure that the Communal Violence Bill, which has been pending since the last government, is passed," Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khursheed said. The Bill, aimed at giving protection to the minorities, provides punitive measures for perpetrators of the riots, and has been pending with the UPA government after the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) drafted it. "The Bill has been under inter-ministerial consultation and dialogue. We will definitely make efforts to see that it is passed by this government as it is something that needs to be done. We are going to have

detailed discussions with all the ministries concerned on the issue as it requires a combined effort," Khursheed said. The Minister, however, declined to give any time frame on the issue since detailed consultations had to be carried out with the Home and other ministries. Khursheed said that a cautious approach has to be adopted while dealing with communal problems as "hyperbole is not the best way to handle social conflicts". After all people have to live together, he said. He said that "active participation" of the majority community will be needed in the implementation of the recommendations of Sachar Committee, which examined the social and economical status of the Muslims and suggested remedial measures. "Minority welfare has to be the part of the national effort. It cannot be an exclusive minority thing. The majority must be stakeholders in what is being done for the minorities," the Minister said, hoping that there should not be any road block in implementing the Committee's report. Asked about his ministry's stand on the vexed issue of reservation for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims on the lines of the Scheduled Caste, a demand which has also been raised by NDA's ally JD-U recently, Khursheed said that his Ministry will "certainly examine the issue." He, however, termed it a "sensitive issue" and said there was a need to take all sections of the society along on it. Khursheed said there could be some constitutional constraints on the reservation issue but noted that some recent Supreme Court judgements could help the government. "Reservation is not the only answer to social welfare although it is definitely time-tested and popular answer for welfare and empowerment," he said. The ministry, he said, is looking at "empowerment in totality" and felt a genuine effort made by the software sector through technical education for the underprivileged could have much more success in that direction. Underlining that the UPA government and the Congress party were "committed to giving attention to the minorities," he said that the Sachar Committee was a "major step" as far as the Muslims were concerned and it's implementation would be on the highest priority this time. At the same time, he had a word of caution saying, "We will have to see that procedural delays do not negate the noble dream that we have for implementing the Sachar Committee report". Khursheed said the issue of Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), which was also pending with the Centre, was "an extremely promising step" and an "answer for the future". "It's an answer for the lot of the piecemeal efforts that we are making for empowerment. It's an extremely promising step that we can take during the course of this government. "We are in process of active consultation with other ministries, other empowerment-related agencies," Khursheed said, adding that his ministry would like the efforts to move fast. "The potential of EOC is fantastic. We have an excellent opportunity in it. It takes forward my argument that minority welfare is part of the total national effort," he said. (DNA 2/6/09)

Government mulling constitutional status to minorities panel (7)

Minister of State for Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid Thursday said the government was considering giving constitutional status to the National Minorities Commission and would decide on reservation for Muslims after studying the Andhra Pradesh and Kerala models. 'We want to give the minorities commission a constitutional status and will try our best for that,' Khurshid told reporters after a meeting with the commission members. Asked about reservation for Muslims, Khurshid said: 'We keep on getting such demands. We will see it within the constitutional framework. We are studying the models of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. And we might adopt it,' he added. In Andhra Pradesh there is four percent reservation for Muslims who are recognised among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, while in Kerala, the quota is 12 percent across the board. On providing scholarships to Muslim students, the minister said the Sachar Committee appointed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005 to study the socio-economic condition of Muslims in India had spoken about affirmative action and the government was working on it. He refused to comment on granting minority status to the Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia University. He only said: 'The matter is sub judice.' (India E-News 11/6/09)

Minority affairs ministry keen to push equal opportunity panel (7)

NEW DELHI: Equal Opportunity Commission, a watchdog to ensure level playing field for minorities and other disadvantaged social groups in jobs, is a priority item for the minority affairs ministry as it moves on its policy agenda in the first 100 days of UPA government. The ministry has drawn up a 100-day plan with Cabinet nod for EOC dominating its agenda. The blueprint for EOC is awaiting Cabinet approval after it was resented by other ministries which said it would lead to duplication. EOC is meant to be a monitoring mechanism to ensure adequate representation for disadvantaged groups in job sector. It would range from ensuring level playing field to fair selection processes and treatment of employees. The idea emanates from Sachar panel report. A major amendment to the Wakf Act is in the offing with Cabinet

approval listed as a priority in 100 days. It is to ensure better management and development of massive Wakf properties, which the Sachar report has said could be used to fund Muslim education and welfare schemes. If the twin moves get rolling in 100 days, it would give the minority affairs ministry a headstart in policy business — the first laws from its stable even though it has successfully launched scholarship and skill development schemes in the first UPA regime. A thrust on policy decisions would add weightage to a "bold" announcement from minister Salman Khurshid against special reservation for Muslims. The spelling out of the stand is unlikely to go down well with quota proponents who have been pushing for Kerala, Karnataka and AP model at the Centre. The announcement also goes against Congress manifesto promise in elections. The ministry sees itself as getting the two bills introduced in Parliament this year. Strengthening of the dargah at Ajmer Sharif after the recent blasts is a serious agenda. A plan is being implemented to erect a security regime in the shrine and the ministry plans to complete it in three months. The ministry is set to engage a consultancy firm to draw up restructuring of national minorities development and finance corporation. In an ambitious move, it plans to draw up a fellowship scheme for minority students. It is aimed at funding research studies — MPhil and PhD — on the lines of Rajiv Gandhi national fellowship scheme. (Times of India 13/6/09)

Gujarat govt refuses to contribute for minority students (7)

The Gujarat government has refused to contribute its share to the scholarships awarded to the minority community students, according to Union minister for minority affairs Salman Khurshid. Talking to newsmen, he disclosed that all other states had agreed to the proposal. He said the scheme was being launched in 90 districts of the country, registering the presence of 20 per cent and more minorities or more than five lakh of them. Most of these districts, he added, were in UP, Assam, Bihar and West Bengal. He said a meeting of MPs of different parties held in that connection emphasised that greater attention should be paid on literacy of minority community. Khurshid also said a sum of Rs 990 crore had been allotted for different other schemes to better the economic lot of the community. (Rashtriya Sahara 8/8). Polygamy: Polygamy, says the Law Commission, is against the spirit of Islam and the general impression that the Muslim personal law in India allows it, is wrong. The Commission, headed by Justice AR Lakshmanan, and having Dr. Tahir Mahmood and BA Agarwal as members, has in unanimous report submitted to the Union government, said while polygamy is banned in Turkey, in Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Bangladesh, the practice is under the control of administration or judiciary. Besides, says the commission, polygamy is not common among Indian Muslims and those practising it are looked down upon outside their families. However, the commission has not recommended any change in the law because of the sensitivity of the issue. (Qaumi Khabren 8/8). Chinese Muslims: A middle in Aag (7/8) has demanded the Indian government to take steps to prevent atrocities on Chinese Muslims. Columnist K Vikram Rao claims that Pakistan is not taking any step in this regard due to its close ties with China, but wants India to do that. Rao said Vajpayee was a great critic of Chinese while in Opposition, but the situation changed after he became the PM. The Chinese Muslims, he says, want permission to offer Juma prayers in mosques and right to undertake Haj pilgrimage even to those below 50. Navodaya Vidyalayas: The Union government has restored the teaching of Urdu in Navodaya schools of UP and asked the commissioner of these schools to explain as to under whose orders this change had been introduced. Meanwhile, the order to commission teachers to teach Tamil, Telugu, Oriya and Punjabi has been cancelled and the principals of the schools concerned have been told to arrange their return to their homes. (Sahafat 8/8). Urdu's Fragrance: BJP leader LK Advani has said the fragrance of Urdu is unparalleled and it is a complete language. Speaking on the occasion of the release of Urdu translation of his autobiography, Mera Watan, Meri Zindagi, Advani added Hindi and Urdu were the most widely spoken languages of the country. The chief guest of the function, columnist MJ Akbar regretted that the language was orphaned after the country's independence and hoped that the situation would change. Speaking on the occasion, BJP president Rajnath Singh said his party was opposed to dividing the country on the basis of caste and creed, but did not favour reservation on the basis of religion. (Times of India 10/8/09)

Pakistan committed to safeguarding minorities' rights: PM (7)

Islamabad, August 11, 2009: Holding that attacks on minorities posed a "great challenge", Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Tuesday reiterated the government's resolve to safeguard their rights as envisaged in the constitution. "The sporadic events of terrorism against minorities are a great challenge for us. But every one of us is sure that such events are part of a conspiracy to destabilise the growth and development of Pakistan," he said in a message on Minorities Day that is being observed in

the country for the first time. "On this day, I reiterate that the rights and privileges of all the minorities living in Pakistan shall be fully safeguarded by the people's government as enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan in accordance with the guiding principles laid down by the father of nation in his historic speech of August 11, 1947," Gilani added. Seven Christians were killed in the communal riots that erupted in the Punjab province's Gojra town earlier this month over the alleged desecration of the Quran. Masked gunmen also torched the houses of some 100 Christians. The incident had figured in the National Assembly, the lower house of Pakistan's parliament, Aug 4 with the house unanimously adopting a resolution condemning the attack and calling for stern action against the perpetrators of the violence. "This proves that Pakistanis can act as one nation without any distinction of religion, caste, culture, creed or language as envisioned by our great leader Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah," Gilani noted. This apart, the declaration of Aug 11 as Minorities Day was clear proof of the government's commitment to ensure equal rights for all communities in Pakistan, he added. "It is a moral and social obligation of our society to strengthen the bond of love and to promote the culture of tolerance in the country. Indeed this is the very need of the time as right now the main fabric of our society is threatened due to virulent intolerance and lengthening shadows of terrorism," the prime minister maintained. He also called for "conscious efforts" for the socio-economic uplift of the under privileged and marginalized section of society so as to integrate them and bring them in the mainstream. "This day provides us a chance to reassure that despite belonging to different faiths, we are one nation and we are to struggle together for a prosperous Pakistan by developing interfaith harmony," Gilani said. "I wish the minorities of Pakistan all the best in their future endeavours", he added. (Hindustan Times 11/8/09)

India on watch list for religious freedom (7)

WASHINGTON: The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has placed India on its "Watch List" for New Delhi's largely inadequate response in protecting its religious minorities. In a statement, USCIRF said India earned the "Watch List" designation due to the "disturbing increase" in communal violence against religious minorities — specifically Christians in Orissa in 2008 and Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 — and the largely inadequate response from the Indian government to protect the rights of religious minorities. "It is extremely disappointing that India, which has a multitude of religious communities, has done so little to protect and bring justice to its religious minorities under siege," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. USCIRF's India chapter was released this week to mark the first anniversary of the start of the anti-Christian violence in Orissa. Any country that is designated on the USCIRF "Watch List" requires "close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the government". Other countries currently on the commission's Watch List are Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Laos, the Russian Federation, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Venezuela. USCIRF, which released its annual report early this year had delayed the publication of its India chapter due to the general elections. USCIRF members wanted to visit India for their first hand assessment of the situation but they did not get the visa. The organisation observed that last year in Orissa, the murder of Swami Saraswati by Maoist rebels in Kandhamal sparked a prolonged and destructive campaign targeting Christians, resulting in attacks against churches and individuals. These attacks largely were carried out by individuals associated with Hindu nationalist groups, and resulted in at least 40 deaths and the destruction of hundreds of homes and dozens of churches. Tens of thousands were displaced and today many still remain in refugee camps, afraid to return home, it said. "India's democratic institutions charged with upholding the rule of law, most notably state and central judiciaries and police, have emerged as unwilling or unable to seek redress for victims of the violence. More must be done to ensure future violence does not occur and that perpetrators are held accountable," Leo said. Similarly, during the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, India's National Human Rights Commission found that the government not only failed to prevent the attacks against religious minorities, but that state and local officials aided and participated in the violence. In both Orissa and Gujarat, court convictions have been infrequent, perpetrators rarely brought to justice and thousands of people remain displaced, USCIRF alleged. The India chapter of the annual USCIRF notes that the deficiencies in investigating and prosecuting cases have resulted in a culture of impunity that gives members of vulnerable minority communities few assurances of their safety, particularly in areas with a history of communal violence, and little hope of perpetrator accountability. The report recommends that the the US President, Mr Barack Obama, administration must urge Indian government to take new measures to promote communal harmony, protect religious minorities, and prevent communal violence by calling on all political parties and religious or social organisations to denounce violence against and harassment of religious minorities,

women, and low-caste members, and to acknowledge that such violence constitutes a crime under Indian law. USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan federal government commission. Its commissioners are appointed by the US president and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. Its principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the president, the secretary of state and Congress. (Express Buzz 13/8/09)

Government committed to well-being of minorities: PM (7)

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Saturday said the government was fully committed to the well-being of the minorities and had started many schemes for their welfare. "We do not subscribe to the view that to take special care of the deprived sections of the society amounts to appeasement. In fact, we believe that it is our solemn duty to do so. Our government will give its full attention to the well-being of our brothers and sisters belonging to the minority communities," he said while addressing the nation on Independence Day. "We have started many schemes for the welfare of the minorities. These programmes will be taken forward," he added. Manmohan Singh said funds for special schemes to develop districts that had a concentration of minorities have been enhanced quite substantially this year. "Similarly, we have allocated increased funds for scholarship schemes for minorities that the first United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had started. A bill to prevent communal violence has been introduced in parliament and efforts will be made to convert it into a law as soon as possible," he added. (Times of India 15/8/09)

Sex ratio relief for Capital (7)

New Delhi, August 26, 2009: Here's something that bursts the myth for those who talk of "unbridled birth rates among minorities". The Delhi government's Annual Report on Registration of Births and Deaths for 2008 reveals that of the total 3,33,908 births in Delhi, 2,86,597 births took place in Hindu families. Not surprising since Hindus comprise the majority. Muslim families recorded 42,352 births, while only 3,113 births were recorded in Sikh families. Christian families recorded 1,024 births, while 822 births were recorded in families of other faiths. The city also recorded a decrease in infant deaths in 2008. After the serious spurt in infant mortality rates in 2007, the city recorded a decrease in infant deaths in 2008. The city also managed to improve its sex ratio — for the first time in years, more girls were born than boys. The sex ratio was 1,004 girls per 1000 boys in 2008 compared to 848 girls per 1,000 boys in 2007. "There is a remarkable increase in Delhi's sex ratio ... because of number of registrations of female birth which increased due to implementation of the Laadli scheme," Delhi finance minister AK Walia said. (Hindustan Times 27/8/09)

Minorities panel slams attacks on prayer meets in Vasai (7)

MUMBAI: The state minorities commission has protested against the attacks on Christian prayer meetings at Ashirwad Prayer Centre in Vasai. In a letter to P P Srivastav, additional DGP (law and order), the commission's vice-chairman Abraham Mathai said despite police complaints, some miscreants disrupted the services. "For the last one month, the meetings have been regularly disrupted by miscreants who come with lathis and chase away the devotees," said Mathai. One such incident occurred on Friday morning. Locals claim that they fear the spread of swine flu as many of those who attend the meetings are ill. "Religious gatherings during Ganpati and Ramzan are allowed, but a group of people are selectively targeted for fear of spreading swine flu. This is travesty of social justice," alleged Mathai. On Saturday, the tehsildar held a meeting with the two groups to sort out the issue. "We will reinforce the bandobast if needed," said Madhukar Pandey, Thane's SP (rural). (Times of India 31/8/09)

Madhya Pradesh's prayer order to be challenged (7)

A group of socio-cultural organisations in Madhya Pradesh Saturday said they would file a petition in the high court demanding that the compulsory recitation of 'bhojan mantra' prayers before the mid-day meal in schools be immediately stopped. The decision came after the groups failed to get an appointment from state Education Minister Archana Chitnis to discuss the issue. Two years after introducing the surya namaskar or prayer to the Sun god in schools, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government last month directed that students in state-run schools have to recite a 'bhojan mantra' before their mid-day meals. 'The schoolchildren in the state will have to recite the 'bhojan mantra' before their mid-day meals. This will come into force from Sep 5 - Teachers Day this year,' a notice from Chitnis said. However, this sparked

off controversy as many Muslim and Christian organizations had described it as being against the religious freedom of the minorities. 'Since the state education minister seems to be avoiding a meeting, we would file a petition in the high court very soon,' the representative of one of the organisation told IANS, but declined to divulge all the issues to be included in the petition or when it would be filed. On Friday, representatives from various socio-cultural organisations submitted a memorandum to Governor Rameshwar Thakur demanding cancellation of the education department's order. Calling on the governor to intervene, the memorandum said that these decisions seek to divide students and teachers on the basis of religion. 'No such decision should be imposed in educational institutions, which may be emanating from the practices of one religion. Ours is a secular constitution, which prohibits state power to patronise one particular religion. Recitation of 'bhojan mantra' is a ritual prevailing in Hindu society,' the memorandum said, noting the high court had already rejected the government's decision regarding compulsory 'surya namaskar' in schools. The delegation comprised of L.S. Hardenia, convenor of the National Secular Forum, Kamala Prasad, the national secretary of the Progressive Writers Association, Father Anand Muttungal, the spokesperson of Catholic Church, Ram Prakash of Janvadi Lekhak Sangh, Govind Singh, a government employees leader and several others. (India E-News 5/9/09)

CIC, govt at odds over sensitive minority report (7)

NEW DELHI: The Central Information Commission and the minority affairs ministry are at loggerheads over the Ranganath Mishra Commission report which has recommended that SC status be extended to Muslims and Christians. The minority affairs ministry (MoMA), which has kept the report "secret" for two years, is peeved over a CIC order that it be given to an interested person, threatening a confrontation. Sources said an unwilling MoMA may move the Delhi High Court against the full-bench directive of CIC. While UPA's sensitivity over the report by Justice Mishra, who headed the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, appears strange, there is a growing belief that it is aimed to keep the controversial demand of 'reservation for minorities' out of public debate. This when minority affairs minister Salman Khursheed has said that quota on religious ground was not admissible under the Constitution. The government also seems against SC status for dalit converts. Given the nature of NCRLM's recommendations, it is feared that making the report public could bring pressure on the government. A decision is not easy given its repercussions on the dalit population as well as the implications it will have on 50% ceiling on reservations. The NCRLM had suggested that dalit status, presently limited to Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, be extended to Muslims and Christians. It recommended that the clause in Constitution (SCs) Order of 1950 which links SC status to religion be dropped. Besides giving SC status to converts, NCRLM also recommended that minorities be given reservation in jobs, education and government schemes. The NCRLM report is seen as politically combustible. UPA has chosen to steer clear of it ever since it was submitted. Its stock response to demands that the report be made public has been that it was being examined. Though the plea for not giving the report under RTI has been that it is still to be tabled in Parliament, it is seen as an excuse. In fact, sources said, the ministry has not even taken a decision if the report was to be tabled in Parliament. The drama over the report reached a climax when MoMA refused to give its copy to National Commission for SCs. The Centre had sought the Buta Singh-headed panel's opinion on whether SC status could be given to Muslims and Christians and the latter wanted to study NCRLM's recommendations to firm up its view. If there is an explanation, sources said it is the Centre's keenness to avoid a sensitive quota issue after UPA's experience with myriad quota demands in its last regime. (Times of India 5/9/09)

Govt plans three universities for minorities (7)

NEW DELHI: After allocating Rs. 25 crore (Rs.250 million) for two more campuses of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), the government is planning to set up three more universities for the country's minorities, according to officials. "Three universities primarily for the students of minority communities will be set up with a view to providing them better higher education," a senior official of the minority affairs ministry told IANS, requesting anonymity since he is not authorised to speak to the media. These universities will be set up in Mysore (Karnataka), Kishanganj (Bihar) and Ajmer (Rajasthan). According to the official, "Fifty percent of the seats in these universities will be reserved for minority students to make them more competitive in the job market." To be set up on land owned by Waqf boards, these universities will provide education in all modern subjects along with theological teaching. However, officials said the biggest problem in establishing such universities will be to overcome the legal hurdles for providing 50 percent reservation for students from minority communities. "Our effort is to find a solution according to

constitutional provisions so that the proposal doesn't get stuck in legalities as it happened in the case of AMU." In a 1968 lawsuit, the Supreme Court of India scrapped the minority status of the AMU. Then prime minister Indira Gandhi restored the AMU's minority status through legislation in 1981. But in 2006, a division bench of the Allahabad High Court struck down the provision of the AMU Amendment Act, 1981. It rejected the central government's plea for restoring the minority status of the AMU and scrapped 50 percent reservation for Muslim students. This was challenged by the centre in the apex court, which is yet to take a decision on the matter. Minority affairs ministry officials said the government was trying to work out a new model to overcome such legal hurdles. According to this model, the "land for these universities will be given by the Waqf board and the government will set up a university on it. Since these universities will be for the minorities, reservation for 50 percent minority students will be justified".The draft has been prepared and will be sent to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD). (Times of India 14/9/09)

Minorities Commission members meet L-G (7)

Members of the Delhi Minorities Commission Pushpinder Singh and Arnold James met Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi Tejendra Khanna on Monday to apprise him of the steps taken by the Delhi Minorities Commission to inform and educate minority students about various government schemes. The schemes include tuition fee reimbursement, free supply of stationary, books and scholarships by Department for the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes and Minorities. Arnold told Khanna that there has been a 10-fold increase in the number of applications for welfare schemes implemented by the Delhi government as compared to last year. Singh, meanwhile, appraised Khanna about the 24 awareness workshops organised in city's minority areas. (Indian Express 15/9/09)

Bill seeks to give more jobs to minorities (7)

NEW DELHI: Better employment among minorities and disadvantaged sections will be the focus as the proposed Equal Opportunities Commission will aggressively push public and private sectors for a diverse social profile of workers. The EOC, for which a legislation will be tabled during the winter session of Parliament, will call upon companies to have a diverse profile and goad them to employ workers from different weaker sections. Minority affairs minister Salman Khursheed on Thursday said the EOC bill would be tabled in Parliament in the winter session. Khursheed said EOC would seek to promote diversity with incentives and disincentives for employers. Better performers could be recommended for government aid like tax waivers while poor ones could be penalised by taking away government help. Companies will have to give information on the diversity of workforce to the proposed commission. "EOC is the next major step that we will take to bring the majority and the minority together in concern for equality," Khursheed told an agency. The 'diversity index,' which will be devised by the EOC once it comes up, will show how far a company has gone about in providing affirmative action to underprivileged sections. The Sachar committee had recommended setting up of EOC to promote jobs for minorities. Khursheed, however, steered clear of whether EOC recommendations would also be applicable to defence forces, saying the commission had no restrictions on it. "Law ministry is working on the legislation. If any exception has to be made, it will be in the legislation," he said. Companies will have to maintain data on profile of workers. Khursheed said, "Data will not come from somewhere else. It has to be collected from workplaces... You (workplaces) will have to supply the data." If the EOC finds that the diversity profile of employees in an organisation, both public and private, needs correction, it will ask for the same. "It will tell you that in three years' time, your diversity profile must improve," Khursheed said. (Times of India 2.10/09)

Illiteracy, backwardness attributed to communal violence in State (7)

MANGALORE: Chairman of the State Minorities Commission Khushroo Qureshi has criticised the previous governments for not doing enough for the uplift of minorities, particularly the Muslims, in the State. Speaking to presspersons during a visit to the district here on Saturday, Mr. Qureshi termed "unfounded" the allegation that the Bharatiya Janata Party was anti-Muslim and anti-Christian. Stating that Muslims were themselves responsible for communal violence, he said that a majority of the Muslims, who were involved in communal violence, did so because they were illiterate or backward. The BJP had allocated more funds for the uplift of minorities than any other Government had done. "The State Government has allocated Rs. 167 crore in the first budget, and Rs. 172 crore in the second, for the uplift of minorities. The previous Government had allocated only Rs. 23 crore for this purpose," he said.

Responding to questions about the spate of communal violence in the State, particularly in Dakshina Kannada, ever since the BJP came to power, he said, communal tensions had erupted even when other parties were in power. Muslims should make use of the various educational facilities being provided by the Government, he added. (The Hindu 4/10/09)

Beyond Minority Reports (7)

The Sachar committee report, when it came out in 2006, created a stir among advocates of social justice and minority rights. The report and the surveys conducted in its wake revealed continuing disparities between the Muslims and the rest of Indian society, particularly upper caste Hindus. In a country where social prejudice is widespread, not to say endemic, advocates of minority rights have found it natural to attribute the plight of Muslims to the practice of discrimination against them. It is, of course, difficult to demonstrate that those Muslims who have fallen behind in the competition for education and employment have been individually the victims of discrimination, or that prejudice was the sole reason why they fell behind. Presumption of prejudice and injustice against Muslims has created a demand for special provisions in recognition of their separate status as a minority. They did enjoy such a status under colonial rule. That underwent a major change with India's partition and attainment of independence. The Constituent Assembly sought to create a new consensus on the basis of equal citizenship for all without consideration of race, caste, creed or gender, and protection of minority interests in cultural and educational matters. The constitutional consensus was against provisions for the representation of minorities in politics and administration of the kind adopted for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There would be quotas for the latter, but not for the former. On quotas, Nehru and Ambedkar thought alike. Ambedkar gave pointed expression to the view then shared by most: "It is wrong for the majority to deny the existence of minorities. It is equally wrong for minorities to perpetuate themselves." He did not want the special interests of the minorities to be ignored, but he also did not want a return to the status quo ante. The new Constitution was designed to establish a new political order based on the rights of the individual as citizen. Some concessions could be made to groups that had suffered the consequences of centuries of geographical isolation and social segregation, but religious minorities did not fall within their scope. India had been since time immemorial a society of castes and communities. What counted in its traditional social order were village community, caste and joint family rather than the individual. The new Constitution sought to make a break from the old order by enlarging the role of the individual citizen and restricting the role of castes and communities. Ambedkar and his associates in the Constituent Assembly were not unaware of the challenges in making a break with the past. Ambedkar's anxiety about the minorities seeking to perpetuate themselves must be seen in the light of the primacy he assigned to citizenship in the new constitutional order. Communities were important, but it would be wrong to allow their claims to supersede the claims of the individual. Some wished to give the village community primacy. He opposed them, saying, "I am glad that the draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit." The positive response to the Sachar committee report was an endorsement of Ambedkar's view that it would be wrong to ignore the existence of minorities. But what about his view that it would also be wrong for the minorities to perpetuate themselves? It is doubtful such a view will be received kindly by those who were enthused by the report and the committee's recommendations. India's political climate has changed substantially in the last 60 years. In December 1946, when the Constituent Assembly first met, only the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha espoused identity politics. Today, it has become the staple of all political parties. (Times of India 13/10/09)

National Commission for Minorities team to visit Punjab (7)

Chandigarh, Oct 19 : A team of National Commission for Minorities comprising of members H S Hanspal and Splazes Angmo would visit Punjab and Chandigarh from October 20 to 22 to review implementation of schemes for the welfare of minorities. According to an official spokesperson, the team would meet Chief Secretary and senior state government officials to discuss pending cases of the state with the Commission and would also monitor educational scholarship schemes of the students belonging to minority communities. The team would also review the implementation of 15 point programme for welfare of minorities. The spokesman added that the team would also meet representatives of Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Parsi communities of the state. The team would also call on the state Governor and the Chief Minister. (New Kerala 20/10/09)

'Minorities must integrate for overall development' (7)

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh chapter president of Minority Forum of India Syed Sajid Ali said that every person belonging to minority is the citizen of India and is devoted towards the nation and its integration. He further said that every minority citizen is proud to be an Indian. He was expressing these views in a meeting organised by the Minority Forum of India at the Mulla Ramoozi Bhawan here on Sunday. Various representatives of the minority organisations of the State participated in the meeting. Syed said that minority family includes Muslim, Sikhs, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and other linguistic minorities that have different problems according to their community and therefore integration is not possible. The problems are almost common but the solutions are different. He further said all the minorities would come forward for making a strategy for the overall development of minorities of Madhya Pradesh. He said if one community has developed in one field then this community should try to club other minorities for their development in that field. Giving various examples he said that Christian community is advanced in the education sector and they should come forward for the education of Muslim community. Similarly the Jain community is economically strong and it should come forward for the economic development of the Buddhist. Every minority community should come forward to help each other for the mutual development and should discuss the various problems and solution for the overall development of the minorities. Syed Sajid Ali also appealed the Union and State Government to assure that the funds and policies sanctioned for the minorities should be utilised and allocated properly. (Pioneer 19/10/09)

Indian govt respects religious freedom: US (7)

Washington, Oct 27: A US government report gave top rating to the Indian government for doing its best to protect religious freedom, but criticised some state and local governments for imposing limits on this freedom. 'The National Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, some state and local governments imposed limits on this freedom,' the State Department said Monday in its Congressionally mandated annual report on International Religions Freedom. 'Although the vast majority of citizens of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence, some organized societal attacks against minority religious groups occurred,' the report said alleging 'the state police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly to effectively counter such attacks.' Releasing the report covering 198 countries, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hoped it 'will encourage existing religious freedom movements around the world and promote dialogue among governments and within societies.' The report said the phrase 'generally respected' signifies that the government attempted to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense and was 'thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned' by it. Religious extremists, it noted, committed numerous terrorist attacks throughout India, including the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai that targeted luxury hotels, a crowded railway station, a Jewish centre, a hospital, and restaurants. The report noted 40 persons died and 134 were injured as 'violence erupted in August 2008 in Orissa after individuals affiliated with left-wing Maoist extremists killed a Hindu religious leader in Kandhamal, one of the country's poorest districts.' 'Although most victims were Christians, the underlying causes that led to the violence have complex ethnic, economic, religious, and political roots related to land ownership and government-reserved employment and educational benefits,' it said. Numerous cases were in the courts, including cases in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and more recent attacks against Christians, the State Department report noted. But 'some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity.'(Central Chronicle 27/10/09)

Chidambaram welcomes fatwa against terror (7)

DEOBAND (U.P.): Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram on Tuesday deplored violence in the name of religion and made a fervent appeal that more voices be raised against terrorism and all forms of violence, mainly communal strife. He said the Babri Masjid demolition at Ayodhya in 1992 was a manifestation of religious fanaticism. Communalism negated pluralism and opposed political freedom to people. Civil society was based on a contract whose core was tolerance. The sharper the differences, the greater should be the tolerance level. "Spread the message of tolerance and strengthen the thread that binds the society," Mr. Chidambaram said addressing the 30th general session of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) at Shaikhul Hind Nagar here. While welcoming the fatwa (decree) against terrorism issued by the Darululoom, Deoband, in February 2008, he called upon all right-minded people to condemn terror acts. The nation could not ignore its minorities and it was a self-evident rule that it was the duty of the majority to protect the minorities. It was this rule that led the Government of India to lodge a protest against the

discrimination and denial of rights to the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and the attacks on Indian students in Australia. However, the roles were reversed in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, where the minorities constituted the majority. In Jammu and Kashmir, Muslims were bound by this rule and by the tenets of Islam to protect the minority community. Islam was not an alien faith and Muslims were the honoured citizens of the country, he said. On behalf of UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Chidambaram conveyed a special message of greetings at the session. Union Minister of State for Communications Sachin Pilot assailed divisive forces and condemned terrorism. (The Hindu 4/11/09)

CM opens Anjuman Marriage Hall in Balaghat (7)

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, while inaugurating the Anjuman Marriage Hall in Balaghat stated that the State Government would take all possible steps for the welfare of minorities. He further said that State Government has initiated policies and programme for every section of the society and no discrimination would be made. Chouhan said that State Government is doing everything for the fraternity among the citizen, which will lead to the growth of State. State Minister of Public Health Engineering, Cooperatives Gauri Shankar Bisen and district in-charge Dev Singh Saiyyam, Member of Parliament KD Deshmukh and others were present in the inauguration of the Anjuman Marriage Hall. Bisen has sanctioned 2.47 lakh for the marriage hall from local development fund. The Muslim community was in need of a marriage hall since there was no space for this purpose. For the welfare of the Muslim community, State Minister of Public Health Engineering has sanctioned the money and a marriage hall has been constructed for the welfare of the Muslim community. The Muslim community thanked Chief Minister and State Minister of Public Health Engineering for the constructing the marriage hall and expected for further coordination of State Government with the community. (Pioneer 9/11/09)

Rs.60 lakh for minority welfare (7)

PUDUKOTTAI: The Tamil Nadu State Minorities Commission has earmarked Rs.60 lakh to be given as assistance to those belonging to the minority communities in the district, its Chairman Fr. Vincent Chinnadurai said. Speaking to the media at the end of the commission's sitting here on Thursday, he said that Rs.25 lakh had been allotted for individual loans and an equal sum to encourage them to start tiny, small and medium industrial units. The balance Rs.10 lakh would be released as educational assistance to students in the community. He pointed out that Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi attached priority for proper and immediate utilisation of funds being sanctioned to the cause of the minority community. Although funds were sanctioned to few other States, due to under-utilisation, they were surrendered. Tamil Nadu ranked first in releasing the assistance. During the current year, the commission would release Rs. 40 crore for various projects, with focus on self-employment activities and individual loans. On the achievement of minority-oriented schemes in the district during the last financial year, Mr. Chinnadurai said that as many as 1.22 lakh Christians and Muslims got assistance to the tune of Rs.1.04 crore. (The Hindu 9/11/09)

Minority commission pulls up Punjab government (7)

Chandigarh, Nov 16 : A special team of the National Commission for Minorities, which visited Punjab and this union territory Monday, pulled up the state government for its failure to work for the upliftment of the minority communities. "They are giving us lame excuses for the lapses that we found in their functioning. We have taken very serious note of this and directed them to immediately bring in the reforms that are meant for minorities into force," Splazes Angmo, a team member, told reporters here late Monday evening. She added: "We have warned the Punjab government that no further funds, under minority welfare, will be released in future till they make appropriate use of the present funds." The team earlier in the day met the chief secretary and other senior officials of Punjab. The team also interacted with the representatives of Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Parsi communities, and listened to their grievances. "During our interaction, we received 12 to 14 complaints," said H.S. Hanspal, another member of the team. (New Kerala 17/11/09)

Minority Commission concerned over ...(7)

Shimla: While the Himachal Pradesh government has for long been trying to promote old cemeteries from the pre-independence time as tourist places, the National Minority Commission on Thursday warned the government to prevent encroachments on these cemeteries. To protect rights of the minorities, the Commission also asked the government to set up a state commission for effective implementation of the

15-point national program for minorities. Commission members Spalzes Angma and HS Hanspal, after holding a meeting with the state government, said Christian community from the state had approached them about encroachments on cemeteries. The members also expressed concerns about management of WAKF Board and teaching of Punjabi, Urdu and Bhoti languages in the state. While the WAKF Board is without a chairman, they said, there were not enough teachers for these languages. They seeking implementation of the three language formula in school curriculum. (Himvani 19/11/09)

2,250 complaints with NCM in 2008-08 against 1,508 in 2007-08 (7)

New Delhi, Dec 3 : Nearly 1,500 complaints of 'atrocities' against Muslims and nearly 200 against Christians have been received by the National Commission for Minorities in 2008-09, the Lok Sabha was informed today. Minister of State for Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid said in a reply while complaints received during 2007-08 were 1,045 against Muslims, it shot up to 1,474 in 2008-09. "Over all, there were 2,250 complaints received by the NCM in 2008-09 against 1,508 in 2007-08," he informed. On the other hand, it was 166 against Christians in 2007-08 which rose to 183 in 2008-09, he said, adding that the highest percentage recorded was that against Sikhs which rose from 151 in 2007-08 to 413 in 2008-09. For other communities the representations received by the NCM was 42 against 39 (for Buddhists) in 2008-09/2007-08, 37 against 33 for Parsis and 101 against 74 for other minorities, he added to a question whether such complaints had increased substantially in recent times. "The Commission has taken appropriate action on these complaints as per procedure," he added. (New Kerala 3/12/09)

Ludhiana remains tense; one killed, 2 injured in police firing (7)

Ludhiana, December 05, 2009 After a day full of violent clashes and rioting scripted by migrant labourers on Friday, Ludhiana witnessed a fresh round of violence and arsoning claimed one life on Saturday morning after radical Sikhs spilled over the city streets to protest a religious congregation being organized by a Hindu organization Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan (DJJS) whom the Sikhs accuse of indulging in acts of blasphemy. The city youth, who is yet to be identified lost his life after he sustained bullet injuries during the police firing in Samrala chowk. The police opened fire when a group of Sikh activists broke off the cordon and sought to march towards the venue. Another youth, who too sustained injuries in his upper part of leg was rushed to Christian medical college and hospital in critical condition. Venting their anger on public transport, the Sikh activists broke off police cordons, pelted stone on vehicles hence provoking the cops to resort to firing that left two protestors injured. Determined to disrupt the DJJS function, the hardliners gathered at Pheruman Shaheeda gurudwara near Dholewal chowk early morning. Following speeches by the Sikh leaders as the tempers ran high and activists were about to march towards the venue of Sansthan's religious gathering, the cops took one of the leader Baba Jarnail Singh into "preventive custody". Provoked by the detention of their leader, the activities challenged cops with swords and other weapons in their hands. Fearing that any retaliation could further aggravate the situation, the cops brought back Jarnail Singh and appealed the protesting mob to maintain clam. Later, having learnt that DJJS function had a "smooth start" and was on at the venue on Chandigarh road, the visibly charged activities suddenly got into action and broke off the cordons erected by police. With high pitch sloganeering and swords in their hands as the protestors started running towards the road leading to venue, the cops used tear gas to block their ways but in vain. Unperturbed with the stiff resistance posed by guarding cops as a group of agitated hard liners reached Samrala chowk, one of the closest entry point to function venue, the police initially sought to stop them by firing in air but later had to resort to lathicharge and open firing..... (Hindustan Times 5/12/09)

Need to provide protection to minorities stressed (7)

Madikeri: Speakers at a function to mark Human Rights Day, organised by the Codava National Council (CNC) at the Capitol Village near here on Thursday, expressed support to the cause of the CNC which is demanding an autonomous Kodava homeland status to the Kodavas in Kodagu district. M.C. Nambiyar, journalist, who was a guest, said one of the aims of the human rights charter of the United Nations was to protect all kinds of minority people living in the world. India had the largest diversity of minority population in the world, including the Kodavas, which ought to be given protection by the majority people, Mr. Nambiyar said, according to information reaching here. The culture and tradition of Kodava people were unique, Mr. Nambiyar said, and added that securing tribal status for Kodavas and also inclusion of Kodava language in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution were not difficult tasks. He, however, cautioned the Kodavas against alienation of land by them. When Bodoland and Gorkhaland, could exist why not

Kodavaland, he said. Gunasekaran, anthropologist from Kerala, justified the CNC struggle and said Kodavas deserved the autonomous homeland status since they were distinctly different among other communities. Chendrimada G. Muthappa, a senior member of the Kodava community, said all Kodavas should accept the CNC leadership and continue the struggle for the autonomous homeland status. N.U. Nachappa, secretary general of the CNC, referring to the development with regard to the creation of Telangana, said the CNC would achieve its goal through peaceful struggle. Organising programmes at the Kodava "ain mane" (ancestral homes) to spread awareness among Kodavas on the CNC struggle had been a big success. (The Hindu 11/12/09)

Minority report talk hard to walk (7)

New Delhi, December 11, 2009 The government's decision to table the Ranganath Misra Commission report in Parliament has largely been hailed, but Muslims leaders are sceptical about the implementation of its prickly proposals. The UPA government set up the commission in 2005, during its first tenure, to assess the status of religious and linguistic minorities. The four-member panel submitted its report on May 21, 2007. The Misra-led National Commission on Backward Religious and Linguistic Minorities has recommended 15 per cent reservation for minorities — 10 per cent for Muslims — in education and jobs. In case it's difficult to achieve, the panel proposes breaking up of the 27 per cent quota for Other Backward Classes (OBC) to give minorities an 8.4 per cent share. Six per cent of it will be for Muslims. Most pro-quota parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Lok Janashakti Party and Janata Dal (United) have welcomed the move. The BJP is not in favour of it. The Congress had proposed something similar in its poll manifesto. "Reservation to backward Muslims within 27 per cent OBC quota is under active consideration," Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said. The panel also recommends Scheduled Caste (SC) status for Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians along with deprived sections, if any, among Jains and Parsis. Only Hindu Sikhs and Buddhist Dalits have the SC status, under the Presidential Order 1950 (Para 3). "No member professing a religion different from Hinduism (Sikh and Buddh) shall be deemed to be a member of SC," it says. "The PM has conceded a long-standing demand to open the doors for a national consensus on reservation for Muslims," former diplomat Syed Shahabuddin, who leads a coalition of Muslim outfits seeking reservation, said. The proposals are a political hot potato. They'll further strain country's full-up quota system for disadvantaged groups, who will resist any move to reduce their share. Widening quota, on the other hand, could breach the Supreme Court's 50 per cent cap on reservations. "In the end, talk of reservation for Muslim will polarise votes and minorities will get nothing," JD (U) MP Ejaz Ali, who has been spearheading the demand for SC status for Dalit Muslims, told HT. To implement 15 per cent reservation, the government will have to pull off a Bill requiring approval of two-thirds of members in both the Houses. Extending the SC status to Dalit Muslims and Christians will require a Bill to be cleared by simple majority, a relatively easy task. Experts say fresh reservation may lead to rivalry between current and new beneficiaries. "The Mahars may look upon Muslims as rivals, leading to social conflicts," said Renuka Dikshit of the Pune-based Institute for Study of Social Policies. (Hindustan Times 11/12/09)

7,000 people to embrace Buddhism in Gujarat (7)

Ahmedabad, Dec 18 : Nearly 7,000 people, including a few Christians, will embrace Buddhism at a massive congregation of Buddhists from across Gujarat at the Kankaria football ground here on January 24 next year. Several prominent Buddhist monks, including All India Bhikku Sangh president Jyaneshwar, and Buddhist representatives from Japan and Nepal, will participate in the 'Deeksha ceremony, Gujarat Bauddh Dhamma Deeksha Angikar Abhiyan Convener Balkrishna Anand told UNI here today. Mr Anand said few Dalit and Scheduled Tribe families, who were disillusioned after being converted to Christianity earlier, will also take Buddhist Deeksha. Few serving and retired government officials will also take Deeksha, he added. More than 10,000 people are expected to attend the function as a massive publicity campaign through 350 meetings is in progress in the state, he said. He argued that a large number of people belonging to Kshatriya and Koli communities will embrace Buddhism as Bhagwan Buddha's parents belonged to these communities. (New Kerala 18/12/09)

Minority panel praises Hooda (7)

Chandigarh: A two-member panel of National Commission for Minorities (NCM)-HS Hanspal and Spalzes Angmo-on Monday praised the efforts of Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda led Haryana Congress Government in improving the overall lot of the minorities in the State. They expressed satisfaction over

the performance of Haryana in implementation of various schemes for the members belonging to minority communities, especially those concerning 15-Point Programme of Prime Minister and scholarship scheme for minority students. In a meeting with Hooda, the members of the Commission informed Chief Minister that they have met representatives of various minority communities in the State and observed that overall performance of Haryana was better than many other States. When Hanspal drew the attention of Chief Minister towards the demand to set up a separate Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for Haryana, Hooda reiterated that the Government would act as per the aspirations of the members of the Sikh community in the State. Spalzes Angmo, the Buddhist member of the Commission, urged Hooda that a Buddhist chair be set up in a university in Haryana and the Buddhist sites of archeological importance should be preserved. Hooda said that such sites were already being protected by the Archeological Survey of India in the State. Chief Secretary Urvashi Gulati, who was also present in the meeting, said that some years ago an off shoot of the Bodh tree was brought from Bodh Gaya and planted on the banks of the sacred Brahamsarovars at Kurukshetra in Haryana. Haryana Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Geeta Bhukkal and Financial Commissioner and Principal Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, Dhanpat Singh were also present in the meeting. Earlier addressing a Press conference, Hanspal and Angmo said that minority communities were safe in Haryana as there had been no communal riots in the State after 1992. Hanspal said that they mainly discussed with the officers of the State Government the issues concerning the implementation of Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme. In reply to a question concerning separate Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for Haryana, Hanspal said that he would convey the sentiments of the people. When asked that would he recommend to the the setting up of a separate SGPC for Haryana, Hanspal replied that the Commission would convey the sentiments of the people. (Pioneer 22/12/09)

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