

# **MINORITIES: SECULARISM/GENERAL- 2010**

January to December – 2010

## **Sacred Heart may move minorities panel (7)**

CHANDIGARH: Even as the Chandigarh administration gives final touches to its report on the role of Sacred Heart School in expelling Ruchika, the school is reportedly planning to move the National Minorities Commission, alleging harassment. The UT administration, which had earlier said the report would be ready by Tuesday, was mum on its deadline. Sources said the report is likely to make adverse comments on school's role, which may have allegedly led to this move. Voicing apprehension, Ruchika's friend Anuradha's sister Adhunikha, said "the delay may work in favour of the school, if the panel stepped in." "We would approach the administration to urge them for speedy action in submitting the report," she said. Technically, once the commission steps in, it would then become the supreme authority and any future action on the part of the administration could be put under its purview. However, a senior functionary of the commission in Delhi said the panel was also aware of public and media attention, which would guide its actions as well. "According to sources, the fact finding report has pointed out the anomaly that Ruchika had been a defaulter in 1989 also, but neither her name was scrapped off the rolls nor was she was expelled. It was only after her molestation in 1990 that, within a month, she was asked to leave the school. The report is expected to be submitted on Wednesday to the UT home secretary. (Times of India 6/1/10)

## **Supreme Court seeks government's view on dalit converts (7)**

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought the Centre's response on a PIL that accused it of scuttling the recommendations of Ranganath Misra Commission on the issue of reservation benefits for dalits converted to Christianity and Islam as also Parsis and Jains. The PIL filed by All India Christian Federation sought reservation for converted dalits of all faiths on the same footing as extended to scheduled castes following Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. A bench comprising Chief Justice KG Balakrishnan and Justice BS Chauhan issued a notice to the ministry of social justice and ministry of minority affairs for its response on the implementation of the recommendation of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (NCRLM) headed by former Chief Justice of India Ranganath Misra. The PIL said paragraph three of the Presidential order of 1950 under Article 341 of the Constitution, which empowers the President to specify scheduled castes, was coming in the way of extending the benefits of reservation to dalit converts. It sought striking down of paragraph 3 of the Scheduled Castes Order 1950 on the grounds that it is ultra vires of the Constitution. After a brief hearing, the bench tagged the petition with other PILs on the contentious issue which has been pending since 2004. Senior advocates KK Venugopal and D Vidyanandam submitted the PIL on behalf of the petitioners. (DNA 7/1/10)

## **Criticism of religion OK but not malice (7)**

Mumbai, Jan. 6 (PTI): Every religion is "open to criticism" but malicious writing aimed at promoting communal hatred is not permissible, Bombay High Court ruled today. The judgment came as a full bench of the court upheld a ban on a book, Islam — A concept of Political World Invasion By Muslims, authored by advocate R.V. Bhasin. The book had been banned by the Maharashtra government in 2007 on the ground that it contained derogatory remarks about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad and insulted Muslim sentiments. Bhasin, who in his book argues that Islam encourages terrorism and does not tolerate other faiths, had challenged the ban, saying it violated the right to freedom of speech. "In our constitutional set up, everything is open to criticism and religion is no exception.... Every religion, whether it is Islam, Hinduism, Christianity or any other religion, can be criticised.... Even if the author is wrong, he has the right to be wrong," the judges said. "But what needs to be seen is whether the author has done this exercise bona fide." The court said an author had the "right to put forth a perspective that a particular religion is not secular" but, in Bhasin's case, the criticism was "not academic" as he had "gone on to pass insulting comments" about Muslims, particularly Indian Muslims. "If writing is calculated to promote feelings of enmity or hatred, it is no defence to a charge under Section 153-A of the IPC (promoting enmity between communities) that the writing contains a truthful account..." the court said. "It cannot be denied that misguided Muslim youths have indulged in acts of terrorism. But misguided youths are in every religion." (Telegraph 7/1/10)

### **'Minorities were better represented in colonial army' (7)**

Omar Khalidi, a scholar attached to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, has written extensively on the social and economic profile of Muslims in independent India. Among his works are *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India*. Khalidi spoke to Humra Quraishi: You have researched the ethnic and religious composition of the security forces in India. What patterns has your study revealed? There is a clear, consistent pattern of recruitment in the army. The army's infantry regiments are still recruited in states and areas with "martial races", i.e. in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and western UP. These so-called "martial races" are Hindu, Sikh and Gorkha. There are very few Muslims among the jawans and still fewer among the officers. Officers are fewer partly because Muslims' educational level, and thus the ability to compete in the UPSC examination, is poor. Dalits are also conspicuous by their absence. Christians are well represented in the officer class. The Rapid Action Force of the CRPF has a good representation of Muslims. The composition of police is also somewhat similar. There are far fewer Muslim police officers, and within that a tiny number of IPS officers. It is only in Andhra Pradesh that Muslims are far in excess of their numbers, but only at the constable level. Do these factors ethnic and religious composition of the forces impact their functioning in a democratic republic? The army has so far been exceptionally fair and neutral, and this must be strongly commended. It is a tribute to the rigid discipline and sense of duty in the army. The paramilitary forces' performance is OK. It is the performance of the police that is often poor. The police's poor performance is largely because the police does not have a free hand. It follows the orders of the chief minister or home minister. If the government wants, the police can be very effective. So, the police must be made largely free of political interference and allowed to play its role impartially. As long as the police is under the control of the political party in power, its performance is going to be influenced by the wishes of the ruling party. Your study also focuses on the ethnic composition of security forces prior to independence. Has the situation changed for the better? I talk about the pre-independence era for purposes of comparison. Minorities were better represented in the colonial army and police than today. On the positive side, Scheduled Castes and Tribes which were not well represented in the colonial era are now better represented in the IPS cadres due to the system of reservation. Since Muslims are not well represented in the IPS, there is every justification for reservation for them at least for a decade. A virtual middle class has come about due to the reservation system. Simultaneously, there ought to be widespread coaching for minorities to compete successfully in the UPSC examination. (Times of India 8/1/10)

### **Central panel slams Bengal on minority's plight (7)**

Kolkata: The state government was in for a severe embarrassment as one of the members of the National Commission on Backward Classes Ali Azizi today accused the state government of starving the backward and Muslim communities to death. "While in Gujarat they are dying of bullets, in West Bengal, Muslims and backward community people are dying of hunger," said Azizi who met district magistrates of five districts dominated by Muslims and other senior officials of the Backward Class department. "The state government has done nothing for minorities and backward classes. It is very unfortunate. There is dearth of orphanages, guest houses, old-age homes, hostels for the minorities and OBCs. Ration is not being given to them. In fact, reservation for OBCs should be increased from 7 per cent to 27 per cent and 10 per cent of them should be for minorities. I am quite disappointed with the situation here," Azizi said at the end of the meeting. The West Bengal government was quick to respond in kind to Azizi's statement that was made right in front of the chamber of the chief minister, who is also in-charge of minority affairs. "Azizi came here to do politics and that is exactly what he did. By meeting DMs of just five districts, how could he come to the conclusion that the state government had done nothing for the minorities. And he is not from Minorities Commission. Which state government has spent Rs 1,600 crore for madrasa education only? Which government is actively trying to arrange for reservation for minorities so earnestly? We will take it up with the chairman of the National Minorities Commission and the prime minister," said Abdus Sattar, the minister of state for minorities. (Indian Express 9/1/10)

### **Malaysia minorities fear Islamization (7)**

KUALA LUMPUR: A dispute over the use of the word "Allah" by Christians in Malaysia is the latest sign of growing hard-line Islamic influence in what has been a relatively moderate Muslim-majority country. The dispute has spawned attacks on 10 churches and has hardened a long-standing sense of alienation among the non-Muslim minority, threatening 40 years of ethnic peace and stability that underpins Malaysia's economic success. Tensions rose further Thursday after lawyers representing Christians in their legal fight for the right to use "Allah" discovered their office had been ransacked and a laptop was missing. Also Thursday, a church in the southern state of Johor was found to have been vandalized with red paint. "We are continually treated as second-class citizens," said Benjamin Poh, a 47-year-old

executive who is ethnic Chinese. He added that he is saving money so his son, now 10, can attend university overseas to escape discrimination at home. The church attacks over the past week — most were firebombed — followed a Dec. 31 court decision overturning a government order that forbade a Catholic newspaper from using the word "Allah" as a translation for God in its Malay-language edition. The opposition parties have been quick to blame the government for inflaming tensions with policies that pander to Muslims to win votes. "Although the fire-bombing of churches alarmed Malaysians, it underscored the magnitude of the real problem," said Charles Santiago, an opposition member of Parliament. "It showed that after 52 years of living together, nation building and national unity is in tatters. The church attacks shattered notions of Malaysia as a model secular Muslim nation in the eyes of the international community." Prime Minister Najib Razak, who inherited the friction that grew largely during his predecessor's 2003-2009 tenure, strongly condemned the church attacks and vowed to protect the minorities. "As a multiracial community we must practice respect for one another ... it cannot come under threat from anybody," he said. A separate statement by his office said, "Malaysians of all faiths are angered by these incidents and stand together in solidarity. These are criminal acts committed by individuals and are not representative of Malaysia." A nation of 28 million people in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is a multicultural mix. About 60 percent of the population is Malay, who are required to be Muslim by the Constitution. Another 25 percent are ethnic Chinese, mostly Buddhist, and about 8 percent are Indians, who are mostly Hindu. Most of the Christians are indigenous people living on Borneo, a remote island about 3 hours by flight from Kuala Lumpur. While the "Allah" debate has puzzled and upset them — they have been using the word for decades — they have been largely watching the controversy in mainland Malaysia from afar. The nation's current policies on race stem from violent riots in May 1969 in which Malays attacked the generally more prosperous Chinese. The government responded in part with an affirmative action program for Malays in jobs, housing and other areas. There are exclusive schools and colleges for Malays, while minorities fight for limited university places under the program..... (Express Buzz 16/1/10)

#### **YSR's death kills govt minority welfare too (7)**

HYDERABAD: With YSR gone, the state government appears to have lost its minority welfare touch too. Once the USP of the late CM, today funding has dropped to an all-time low for important institutions and four of them have been functioning sans a head for a while. While AP Wakf Board, State Minorities Finance Corporation and Urdu Academy have been headless for over four-six months, it's been over a year for State Haj Committee. On Monday, several contract workers of the Urdu Academy demonstrated outside Haj House demanding salaries for the past four months. The Academy got its last funding in Sept. — that too for scholarships. Fund crunch has also ensured it could do little to strengthen infrastructure in Urdu schools or even in deeni madrasas where it annually distributes computers. Academy superintendent Mohammed Omer said: "Though the government has apparently allotted funds to the Minorities Welfare Department, it hasn't reached us yet." The story repeated itself at the minorities finance corporation. "Barring funds for scholarships and fee reimbursements, we have not received any funds for other projects such as self-employment schemes for which we used to get Rs 4 crore annually," said a senior official. Sources, however, said even scholarships and reimbursements of fee have not reached students this academic year. A cash-strapped Wakf board, meanwhile, has discontinued its widow pension this financial year. "We are not only short of funds, but there is also little attempt to recover funds from Wakf properties," said Raza Hussein of Wakf board. According to ex-chairman of state Haj committee Hafiz Peer Shabbir Ahmed: "There is an urgent need to appoint chairpersons and committees in all the departments. Without them, there is nobody to put forth the problems to the minister, who is currently handling all charges and over-burdened." Despite government assurance they are yet to see the money. "The minorities welfare minister Ahmedullah Syed in a statement had said that funds have been released and salaries (of Urdu Academy employees) will be paid soon. But it has been 20 days since then and we are struggling to meet our daily needs," said Mohammed Umar, general secretary, Urdu Academy Computer Centres and Libraries Employees Welfare Association. (Times of India 26/1/10)

#### **Centre plans a finishing school for minority women (7)**

New Delhi: The Centre wants women from minority communities to become confident enough to deal with the government, the police, politicians, banks and bureaucracy on their own. To help them out, the ministry of minority affairs (MoMA) has launched a leadership development scheme in villages that will show these women how to access government services, facilities and opportunities on their own. In the first year, the scheme will target about 32,000 women and give them the knowledge, tools and techniques needed for interacting with government, banks and government functionaries. Awareness programmes on government schemes in education, employment, health, hygiene, immunisation, family planning and micro-credit will be part of the grooming package. In the second year, the programme will target 56,590

women and 93,000 in the third. "The objective of the scheme is to instill confidence in women and help them make use of government programmes. For example, they'll be taught how to avail below poverty line (BPL) card and benefits related to it or how to use Right to Information (RTI) Act," Salman Khurshid, minister for minority affairs, said. The Sachar report on the social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India has pointed out that they have been left out of the development trajectory and that women were doubly disadvantaged. "Although the scheme is primarily for women from minority groups — Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Zoroastrians — 25% of women who stand to benefit from it will be from non-minority groups," Khurshid said. An amount of Rs4.80 crore has been sanctioned for the scheme. (DNA 28/1/10)

#### **'UPA will invite trouble if it accepts Ranganath report' (7)**

JAIPUR: Speakers at a symposium on the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission Report here on Thursday called for a "far-sighted analysis" of its recommendation for reservation for minorities before placing the demand for its implementation in view of the sensitivity of the issue. Noted Mumbai-based scholar and chairperson of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, Ashghar Ali Engineer, said providing reservation to Muslims and other minorities at this stage would give an opportunity to communal forces to consolidate the majority community and arouse passions to come back to power at the Centre. "The UPA Government at the Centre would be inviting trouble for itself if it accepts the Ranganath Misra Commission's recommendations in toto. That is why it has avoided tabling the report in Parliament," said Dr. Engineer. The Commission has recommended "at least 15 per cent" reservation for minorities in government jobs at the Central and State levels and in non-minority educational institutions. Of the 15 per cent, it has called for a 10 per cent quota for Muslims, who comprise 73 per cent of the country's minority population. Dr. Engineer said it would instead be "politically wise" to demand action for socio-economic development, release of scholarships, vocational training to artisans, opening of schools, hospitals and banks in minority-dominated areas and economic empowerment of minorities as recommended by both the Ranganath Misra Commission and the Rajinder Sachar Committee. Activists, academicians and researchers addressing the symposium said the Centre should amend without delay the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, to remove the provision for treating Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists alone as Scheduled Castes. This would pave the way for giving the benefit of reservation to Dalits among minorities, they added. G. Khan, former member of the Rajasthan State Minorities Commission, said the caste system was a social phenomenon prevailing in all communities irrespective of religious persuasions. Persons of Scheduled Caste origin who converted to Islam or Christianity in the past continue to face disabilities. People's Union for Civil Liberties vice-president Radhakant Saxena said the discrimination associated with caste and occupation would continue unless equity was promoted in the society and those belonging to the so-called higher castes changed their mindset. Jamat-e-Islami Hind State president Mohammed Salim said while the higher castes insisted that no special benefits should be given to any community or group on the basis of religion, the class of Scheduled Castes had been made religion-based through the constitutional order: "There is an urgent need to remove this discrepancy." (The Hindu 29/1/10)

#### **Law to prevent atrocities based on religion mooted (7)**

MANGALORE: The Justice B.K. Somasekhara Commission of Inquiry, in its interim report, has suggested to the State "to pass legislations through Special Law under the Lists of The Constitution to ensure prevention of atrocities on any person in the name of religion in any form". The Government had constituted the commission to inquire into attacks on Christian prayer halls in 2008. Justice Somasekhara submitted the interim report to the Government here on Monday. In its suggestions and recommendations to the Government, the interim report said: "Legislations through Special Law within the competence of the State under the Lists of the Constitution may be passed to ensure prevention of atrocities on any person in the name of religion in any form." It further said: "The scope of Chapter XV (Sections 295, 295-A to 298) of Indian Penal Code may be enlarged under the said Special Law with stringent sentences of minimum period of punishment, with no bail and no right of appeal in addition to disqualification to contest in any election or to hold any post or office in any status." Section 295 deals with injuring or defiling places of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class. Section 298 refers to uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person. The commission suggested conducting religious harmony awareness programmes, at village and taluk-levels to avoid any expected religious conflicts, with elders of all religions by constituting peace committees. It said that "the State should take all measures to ensure fundamental rights for freedom of conscience and free profession and propagation of religion within the meaning of Article 25 of the Constitution in letter and spirit. For this purpose a 'Commission of Religions' may be constituted representing all religions... and a Registrar of religions to

execute the policies of the commission through the government agencies..." The commission said that "...Registrar of Religions will ensure protection and privileges to genuine members of a religious minority and eliminate fraudulent methods of misusing a religious tag for selfish purposes detrimental to the religious interests of the country..." The report said that the Government should convince the affected Christian institutions and persons that it shares their miseries and sentiments suffered due to unpleasant incidents of attacks in all forms with sympathy, compassion and concern, by taking all the religions and political parties into confidence. It said that "the compensation for all claims for damages to the property or injury to any person during the incidents and thereafter shall be inquired and paid within one month from the date of communication of the recommendation by the appropriate authorities..." (The Hindu 2/1/10)

#### **'Implement Somasekhara panel recommendations' (7)**

Bijapur: Members of the district unit of the Congress staged a dharna in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office here on Wednesday demanding the immediate implementation of the recommendations of the interim report submitted by the Justice B.K. Somasekhara Commission of Inquiry. The members took out a procession from Gandhi Chowk to the Deputy Commissioner's office. Addressing the protesters, general secretary of the district unit Vajinath Karpurmath said that as recommended by the commission the State Government should initiate action against "unscrupulous religious organisations that carried out campaigns against other religions". He demanded that the Sri Rama Sene, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal be banned immediately for disturbing the peace and their alleged involvement in desecrating various religious places. The protesters submitted a memorandum addressed to Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa to the district authorities. The district unit of the Congress has sought a ban on Sangh Parivar organisations, including the Bajrang Dal, VHP and the Sri Rama Sene, for their alleged role in the attacks on churches and Christian prayer halls in the State. In a memorandum submitted to the district administration here on Wednesday, the Congress also demanded the resignation of Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa.(The Hindu 4/2/10)

#### **Maharashtra's Hingoli district to get minority benefits (7)**

New Delhi , Feb 5 : The government has approved Maharashtra's Hingoli district as a minority concentration district bringing to 77 the number of such areas where special attention is being paid to improve the socio-economic parameters and quality of life of people. The ministry of minority affairs has approved Hingoli, which is one of the four minority concentration districts (MCD) in the state, under its special multi-sectoral development programme for the welfare of minorities, an official statement said Friday. An MCD is the one where minority population is 20 percent or more and the quality of life of the people there is below average. "Now the total number of MCDs whose district plans have been approved by the ministry has gone up to 77," the statement said. The thrust of the minority development scheme is to address the "development deficits" and bring people in such areas at par with the national average. Financial assistance is made available to these districts to address backwardness in terms literacy, work participation, status of houses, drinking water and electricity supply. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis have been notified as minority communities in India. As per the 2001 census, the minorities in the country constitute about 18.4 percent of the total population of the country, of which Muslims are 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3, Sikhs 1.9, Buddhists 0.8 and Parsis 0.007 percent. (New Kerala 5/2/10)

#### **Culture and religion are distinct, says Agatha Sangma (7)**

VELANKANNI: "Ethnicity and religion are two different ideas. By mixing it up, cultures can become extinct. The Catholic Church must distinguish between the two," said Union Minister of State for Rural Development Agatha Sangma at the Indian Priests Congress here at Velankanni on Wednesday. Musing aloud from the periphery as a 'tribal, woman, and a Christian' from the North-East, Ms.Sangma looked at a multiplicity of identities apart from religion. In a negation of homogenisation of identities, Ms. Sangma located the dichotomy between culture and religion, and said that the Christian Church should ensure that ethnicity with its adjunct cultural differences is protected. The Minister pointed to pagan practices in her own North-East to drive home the point. The Church can help maintain this distinction. "Rights of indigenous peoples across the world have suffered. There is a danger of over 98 per cent of languages of the world going extinct in 20 years." According to her, the Catholic Church was seized of the duty of protecting the dualism. "I don't claim to be religious, but the message is that of peace. And as priests, your role is important for the cause of peace," said Ms.Sangma lauding those who survived through the alienation and threats on field in Kandhamal. According to her, the role of Christian missionaries in education was commendable. However, today's education system begets capitalists through its competitive structures and materialism. In the process, spiritualism of human beings had eroded. It is the role of the missionaries to usher in good education, Ms.Sangma said. The missionaries had impacted

upon the literacy rates in Jharkhand, she said. Priests can partake in the developmental processes along with the government. A nun and a priest in her constituency have facilitated SHGs and were also members of a Vigilance and Monitoring Committee for rural programmes. According to Ms. Sangma, these were also individual initiatives and there could be partnerships in the government-managed rural development programmes. A community-based social audit for NREGS was possible with space to involve religious bodies in the processes along with civil society, Ms. Sangma said, also stating that hers were the "views of an amateur trying very hard to learn." Mr. John Dayal, journalist and rights activist, called for purging of what according to him were non-egalitarian provisions of the Constitution such as exclusion of Dalit converts from positive discrimination. (The Hindu 11/2/10)

### **Only 5% of Plan funds spent on minorities (7)**

One of the significant steps of the first UPA government was to initiate action on the festering issue of exclusion and backwardness amongst minority communities in India, especially the Muslims. As the Sachar Committee had revealed in November 2006, Muslims had a shocking poverty rate of over 31% (compared to the national average of about 22%) and, at 15%, unemployment among Muslim graduates was double that of the majority community. Representation in civil services, central and state government service, armed forces and judiciary was less than 5% (though Muslims make up over 13% of the population) and ownership of assets or land was proportionally less than others. Clearly, special attention was needed to set this situation right. The UPA government created a new ministry of minority affairs in 2006 to implement a slew of schemes addressing the problems of backwardness and poverty among Muslims primarily, but also among other minorities. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a refurbished 15-point program for educational and vocational deficits among Muslims. In 2007, the government surveyed and identified 90 Muslim concentration districts (MCDs). An ambitious multi-sectoral development plan (MSDP) was launched to provide better housing, sanitation, education, healthcare, credit facilities, employment opportunities etc to minority community members. MSDP has emerged as the chief vehicle of delivering the UPA government's promises to remove the developmental deficit of the Muslim community out of the total allocation of Rs 1,756 crore to the ministry of minority affairs in 2009-10, the MSDP alone drew Rs 889.5 crore, that is, over 56% of the ministry's funds. A performance analysis of this ambitious scheme, done by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), shows that it appears to be floundering. Of the 90 Muslim concentration districts, 16 have yet to formulate a plan under MSDP. As of September 2009, project activities worth Rs 1,562 crore had been sanctioned for the remaining 74 districts, but only Rs 77 crore had actually been spent, according to data collected by CBGA. That's just 5% of the total sanctioned amount. For the 11th Plan (2007-12), a total of Rs 2,750 has been set aside for the MSDP. After half the period has already gone by, the expenditure amounts to just 2.8% of the total. As per a later but incomplete report of the Data Monitoring Unit of the ministry, covering 44 of the 90 MCDs, expenditure till December 2009 had improved slightly, but still stood at a shocking 17% of the total funds available with the districts. In most states, funds for 2009-10 were being released in December 2009. For current year, just 3,201 houses had been built out of a target of 205,260 for Muslim families, under the Indira Awas Yojana, just 1,523 handpumps had been installed out of the targeted 14,020, only 5 health centers had been built from a target of 1,715, and only 20 anganwadi centers had been built out of 18,970 targeted, according to the ministry's report. The main reason behind the pathetic performance is lack of trained and adequate staff, infrastructure and planning at the district and state levels, says CBGA. While involvement of panchayati raj institutions may give the needed impetus to implementation, the UPA government needs to do a reality check on its lofty promises. (Times of India 20/2/10)

### **Three Sikhs beheaded by Pak Taliban (7)**

Three Sikh men were said to have been beheaded by Taliban groups in the FATA area of Pakistan and their heads sent to a gurudwara in Peshawar. According to information available with India late this evening, one of the Sikhs has been identified as Jaspal Singh. He and his two friends were residents of Badi near Peshawar. (Late tonight, a PTI report from Pakistan quoted sources as saying there was confusion on the exact numbers, that two men had been beheaded and others were being held hostage. It said the body of Jaspal Singh was found in Khyber while that of Mahal Singh was found in Orakzai Agency. Gurvinder Singh and Gurjit Singh, the sources said, were among those being held captive.) The men had gone to the FATA area for some work but were held by Taliban groups who apparently asked them to convert to Islam. Sources said the information so far suggests that the men resisted the order and were then beheaded. Later, their heads were sent to Bhai Joga Singh Gurudwara in Peshawar. The incident has shocked the small Sikh community in Peshawar. This attack, sources said, comes in the backdrop of repeated threats to the Sikh community there to convert if they wanted to stay on. India has in the past taken up the issue of security of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. While the Pakistan government

has been committed to providing security to minority groups, this incident has certainly made matters far more dangerous and sensitive. (Indian Express 22/2/10)

### **India will use Sikh attacks to drive home terror point (7)**

Not taking any chances, the Pakistani authorities have cut short the visit of Indian pilgrims to Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal due to the security situation in the area. The visit of the Sikh jatha was shortened from three days to one, media reports said. They were earlier scheduled to stay in Hasanabdal and participate in the 'Saka Nankana Sahib Anniversary', being observed for the second time after the Partition. But tempers are still high in Punjab, where the Cabinet, in a unanimous resolution, called upon the Union government to mobilise international public opinion against the carnage and to focus global attention on the plight of the minorities in general and the Sikhs in particular in Pakistan. The Cabinet also appealed to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to take up the issue with his Pakistan counterpart and to take it up as a priority item in any dialogue. In New Delhi, an NDA delegation called on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to demand that India register its protest with Pakistan and apply diplomatic pressure on it for ensuring safety of the Sikhs. The delegation, comprising BJP Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha S S Ahluwalia, SAD MPs Harsimrat Kaur, Naresh Gujral and Ratan Singh Ajnala and former Minority Commission chairman Tarlochan Singh among others, met the Prime Minister and demanded that India take up the matter with Pakistan. "The Prime Minister assured us that talks were on at various levels with Pakistan on the issue," Ahluwalia said. (Indian Express 24/2/10)

### **'No religion must be ridiculed' (7)**

BANGALORE: The Union Government should evolve a common policy to deal with denigration of religions, gods and leaders to prevent communal disharmony, the former BJP national president M. Venkaiah Naidu said here on Tuesday. "No religion, religious leader or gods should be ridiculed or denigrated. People have the freedom (to express), but it should not hurt the sentiments (of others)," Mr. Naidu said appealing for calm in the communally disturbed parts of Karnataka, which flared up on Monday following the publication of a translated work of Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen. "Let us show restraint and allow the law take its course. We should not play with the emotions of people," the BJP leader told presspersons after a function organised to distribute computers to 32 Bruhat Bangalore Mahangara Palike (BBMP) schools from his MP Local Area Development Fund. "She (Taslima) is a refugee and is here as a guest of India. I haven't read the article, but some people say it is derogatory," Mr. Naidu said. Reacting to criticism by the Congress over the BJP's walk-out during the budget session, Mr. Naidu said that it was a step to highlight the unprecedented rise in prices of commodities. "In fact, Congress boycotted budget session in Gujarat this time as the finance minister, who was unwell, was allowed to read the budget while sitting in his seat. Congress should not show double standards in its criticism," he added. (The Hindu 3/3/10)

### **Minority institutions not happy with new Budget (7)**

Bhopal: The minorities' institutions of the State that had wide expectations from the State Government in the new Budget have been disappointed as they have received very nominal increase in their respective Budgets. Six minorities' institutions of the State have got an increment of mere Rs 20.73 lakh in total. Maximum increment of Rs 8.60 lakh has been given to the Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission that does not have any chairman for the past one-and-half year and of the three members-tenure of one member is scheduled to expire in January. The earlier Budget of this institute was Rs 88 lakh that has been enhanced to Rs 96.60 lakh. The Budget of the Madhya Pradesh Urdu Academy for the year 2009-2010 was Rs 50 lakh and for the fiscal year of 2010-2011 it had demanded Rs 85 lakh, as the academy has been burdened with a new vice chairman and it has to implement the Sixth Pay Commission for its employees. However, the academy got an increment of just Rs 2.50 lakh and its total Budget for the year 2010 — 2011 would now be Rs 52.50 lakh. Madhya Pradesh Waqf Board (MPWB) which had budget of Rs 72 lakh for the year 2009 — 2010 had demanded Rs 1.75 crore for the year 2010-2011, the reason being that it also had to implement Sixth Pay Commission and the major portion of its Budget goes in the salary of staff. The MPWB got an increment of just Rs 4 lakh and its Budget has reached to Rs 76 lakh. The Budget of Masajid Committee increased from Rs 64 lakh to Rs 1.20 crore only, whereas it had demanded to double the budget allocation. At present the committee pays salary of Rs 1,200 to the Imam and Rs 1,000 to the muezzin, whereas the HC has instructed it to increase the salaries of Imams and muezzins to the tune of Rs 3,500 and 2,500. The worst sufferer among these minority organisations is Madhya Pradesh Madarsa Board. The budget of the board remained unchanged since its foundation in 1998. (Pioneer 4/3/10)

### **Norms for minority concentration districts to be scaled down (7)**

New Delhi: In what could have a far reaching impact on minority politics in the country, the Government is planning to relax norms for declaration of districts as 'minority concentration' ones. The move, when approved, will add 40 to 45 districts to the category. Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said his Ministry was mulling the reduction of criterion of 25 per cent population for declaration of a Minority Concentration District, to 15 per cent. Presently, there are 90 Minority Concentration Districts in the country. Khurshid said the time had come to go beyond the provision of reservation and instead move towards more affirmative action for the benefit of the minorities like the Prime Minister's 15-point programme of action for the minorities. Addressing the annual conference of the State Minority Commissions here, Khurshid said programmes like Multi-Sectoral Development Programme for the welfare of Minorities (MsDP) needed further expansion as it is a unique area development programme under which even the majority community is benefited thereby creating a congenial atmosphere for co-existence. "We are committed to giving share to the backward among Muslims in the reservation list for backward castes," Khurshid said on the sidelines of the conference. Chairperson of National Commission for Minorities Mohammed Shafi Qureshi urged the Centre to "explore the possibility of enacting a law to prevent atrocities against minorities" on the lines of an existing Act for the Scheduled Castes. Seeking constitutional status for NCM, Qureshi also dwelt upon the importance of synergy between the National Commission and the State Minorities Commissions. (Pioneer 1/4/10)

### **Minority panel U-turn on 30% (7)**

New Delhi, April 7: Under pressure from Christian groups and the government, India's apex minority education watchdog has backtracked on a controversial decision it took in March that threatened to strip several top educational institutions of their minority status. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions today declared that it would reconsider a move to deny institutions with less than 30 per cent students from a particular minority community the tag of a minority institution. But while backtracking on its 30 per cent demand, the minority panel today laid down fresh potentially controversial conditions that could require schools to conduct a religion-based headcount of students. Panel chairman M.S.A Siddiqui had demanded a minimum percentage of minority community students from institutions seeking the minority tag in a slew of cases in early March. But that move triggered a wave of protest from the Christian community which petitioned the Prime Minister, the human resource development minister and even the Vatican expressed concerns. The Christian groups, including the Catholic Bishops Conference of India — the highest decision making body of Catholics in the country — also demanded that the HRD ministry appoint a Christian member on the commission. The HRD ministry has now appointed a Christian and a Sikh member to the commission in addition to Siddiqui. The posts of Christian and Sikh members were lying vacant since December. Today, Siddiqui declared that the full commission would decide whether to impose a minimum percentage of minority students for institutions seeking the minority tag, and what it should be. "Let the full commission debate and decide how to determine what constitutes a 'substantial' population as required by the Supreme Court in its order," Siddiqui said, in a hearing today. In its 2005 landmark P.A. Inamdar judgment, the apex court had stated that minority educational institutions must "substantially" cater to students from such communities. But the judgment did not define "substantial" and did not lay down any minimum percentage of students from such communities that institutions need to claim for the status. Siddiqui's demands for a minimum percentage had triggered fears among several top Christian educational institutions that they may lose their minority status. Most of these institutions have fewer than 30 per cent Christian students. The minority panel has, however, introduced fresh application conditions that will require institutions seeking minority status to conduct a religion-based count of students. Under the new application procedure, institutions have to submit an affidavit showing the "community-wise break-up of student population admitted in the institution". (Telegraph 8/4/10)

### **Minority panel summons state chief secretary (7)**

MARGAO: Taking serious note of the failure of the state government in responding to letters and reminders sent by it in connection with the kabrastan issue in Margao, the National Commission for Minorities has summoned chief secretary S K Srivastava to appear before it in New Delhi on April 22 to explain the state's position on the matter. Taking suo motu cognizance of a TOI story (June 26, 2009) regarding the demand for a kabrastan at Margao, the NCM had on July 16, 2009 written to the chief secretary asking him to furnish details about the steps taken by the state in allotting land to the Muslim community for the purpose. The NCM in the latest letter addressed to the chief secretary dated April 5 has pointed out that several reminders had also been sent to him at regular intervals, besides writing to the chief minister on two occasions. "Subsequently, the commission has also received a representation from the general secretary of Madrasa Raza-e-Mustafa. But even after a lapse of considerable time, the

commission didn't receive any response in the matter from the state government," the letter signed by under secretary to the government of India, A K Nigam, says. Clause (a) and (c) of section 9(4) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 specifically gives the commission the power of "summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person from any part of India and examining him on oath" and receiving evidence on affidavits, the letter points out. Abdulmatin Daud Carol, general secretary of Masjide-Gaousiya, has also been directed by the NCM to appear before it for the hearing on April 22. It may be noted that the kabrastan issue has been hanging fire for long with the Muslim community crying hoarse over the failure of the government to allot them adequate land for a burial ground. (Times of India 11/4/10)

### **Rs.1,710 crore spent on minority welfare (7)**

New Delhi, April 22 : The government has spent over Rs.1,710 crore towards minority welfare in the last financial year, parliament was told Thursday. Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid informed the Lok Sabha that 98 percent of the Rs.1,740 crore was released to the state governments and implementing agencies for various schemes and programmes for minority welfare. Of India's 1.2 billion population, Muslims are the largest minority at 14 percent, followed by Christians at 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.9 percent, Buddhists 0.8 per cent, Jains at 0.4 percent and others, including Parsis, at 0.6 percent. (New Kerala 22/4/10)

### **India placed on US 'watch list' on religious freedom (7)**

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan US panel on global religious freedom has named Pakistan and 12 other nations as "countries of particular concern" while placing India on its 'watch list' for the second year in succession. In a report to the US Congress on Thursday, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) termed India's progress in protecting the rights of minorities as mixed and placed it on the second category watch list. While not rising to the statutory level under US law requiring designation as a "country of particular concern", watch list countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments, the report said. The Indian government at various levels recognised the problem of communal violence and created some structures to address these issues, it said. "However, justice for victims of communal violence was slow and often ineffective, thereby perpetuating a climate of impunity. "While there was no large-scale communal violence against religious minorities during the reporting period, attacks on Christians and Muslims and their places of worship continued, along with incidences of intolerance against both," the report said. The USCIRF, which was denied visas by India to have a spot assessment of the ground realities for the second consecutive year, urged "the US government to integrate concern for religious freedom and related human rights into all bilateral contacts with India, and for US ambassador to India to speak out against, and seek to visit sites of, communal violence". In November 2009 when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the US on the first state visit of the Obama administration, USCIRF wrote to President Barack Obama, urging him to raise religious freedom concerns in India with his guest. The letter, while noting the stated commitment of the Congress party to religious tolerance, called attention to what it called the Indian government's "inadequate responses" to violence against religious minority communities, including Christians in Orissa in 2008 and Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. In a note of dissent, however, Felice D. Gaer, who was the USCIRF chair last year, said: "The Commission's conclusion that the system's 'capacity and will is severely limited' and that government response to such incidents has been 'largely inadequate' seems to fly in the face of the evidence of serious measures that have been undertaken." Gaer argued the response of the Indian government during the past year have been significant, citing amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, establishing fast track courts to take up cases in Orissa, appropriating of funds for rebuilding and paying compensation to victims or the families, and to permitting a 10-country delegation of the European Union to travel to the region for a first-hand examination. "I respectfully dissent from the decision to recommend that India be placed on the Commission's Watch List of countries with egregious, severe violations of religious freedom that fall short of the statutory requirement for countries of particular concern," Gaer said. (29/4/10)

### **VHP to protest against quota for minorities (7)**

Belgaum: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad will soon launch a nationwide struggle against the Union Government's decision to grant reservation to Muslims and Christians. Announcing this here on Monday, VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia said the reservation of 10 per cent for Muslims and 5 per cent for Christians, as announced by Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram and Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Corporate and Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid, was detrimental to the socio-economic development of the Hindus. As of now, he said, the Government has ensured 50 per

cent reservation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes leaving only 50 per cent to general categories. Now, with 15 per cent reservation for Muslims and Christians, the Hindu-general categories will be left with only 35 per cent, which is not acceptable to VHP. The VHP leader expressed satisfaction over a special court in Mumbai pronouncing its verdict in cases related to 26/11 terror attacks in that city and holding Ajmal Kasab guilty of committing the offence. Addressing presspersons in Hubli on Monday, Mr. Togadia has said that VHP would oppose any move by the Union Government to provide 15 per cent reservation for minorities in jobs and educational institutions. The organisation was against providing any kind of reservation on the basis of religion as it was against the spirit of the Constitution, Mr. Togadia said. (The Hindu 4/5/10)

### **BJP slams Misra panel report (7)**

BANGALORE: The Bharatiya Janata Party has vehemently opposed the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission's recommendation to include convert Dalit Christians and Muslims in the list of Scheduled Castes. It warned the UPA Government on Tuesday of launching a nationwide agitation if the commission's report was not scrapped. Addressing a press conference in Bangalore, BJP national spokesperson Ramnath Kovind said the commission had recommended inclusion of convert Dalit Christians and Muslims in the Schedule Castes list in addition to the 15 per cent reservation to minorities under Backward Classes quota in education, government jobs and social welfare schemes. The converts would also be eligible for political reservation in elections, thus reducing opportunities for Hindu Dalits as they have to share their reservation facilities with convert Dalits, he said. As the educational level of convert Dalit Christians and Muslims was higher than Hindu Dalits, he said the recommendations of the commission, if accepted, would only accentuate the backwardness of Hindu Dalits and encourage conversions leading to the destruction of the social fabric. Already, various Schedule Caste bodies, including the National Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission (NSCTC) had rejected the demand for inclusion of convert Christians and Muslims in the SC list, he said. Even the Supreme Court, through its various judgements, was of the opinion that convert Dalit Christians and Muslims could not be equated with SCs, he said. When his attention was drawn to criticism from the NSCTC that grave injustice had been done to Schedule Castes in the State, Mr. Kovind said: "If the commission says so, let the Government study (suggestions) and make amends." To repeated queries on the H. Halappa quitting as minister following charges of rape, Mr. Kovind said: "Let the CID investigation be completed. Action would be taken against the guilty based on the report." (The Hindu 5/5/10)

### **'Mishra Commission report fabricated'(7)**

Bhopal: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has stated that the fabricated Rangnath Mishra Commission report is the violation of constitution's provisions. BJP said that this fabricated report has raised questions on the Congress's intention. State president of Scheduled Caste Front of BJP Omprakash Khatik and senior leader Lal Singh Arya in the joint statement on Sunday informed that Rangnath Mishra Commission member secretary Asha Das had stated the reservation proposed to Dalits among the Muslims and Christians on the basis of religion as unconstitutional. They informed that Asha Das had opposed the proposal of giving reservation to minority on the basis of religion. They said that the Congress party could not digest the opposition because it is against the strategy of appeasement of the party. They said that this was the reason that Das was not invited in the last meeting of the Commission. Khatik and Arya further said that organising meeting without member secretary is also a conspiracy. They said that any commission has constitutional space and any report become authentic only with the signature of its member secretaries. They further said that keeping Das outside of the meeting has raised question on the reliability of the Central Government. Arya said that not inviting Das in the meeting has raised many suspicion and possibilities of changes in the report of the commission could not be denied completely. Arya further said that it seems all the policies of the Central Government have become minority centric, in view of coming Assembly elections in 14 States in upcoming years. He said that the Congress party has forgotten constitution due to the petty vote bank politics. He added that even the apex court has rejected the concept of giving reservation on religion basis. (Pioneer 10/5/10)

### **Non-Muslim minorities seek rights (7)**

PATNA: Non-Muslim minorities aired their grievances at a meeting convened by the Bihar State Minority Commission. Minority Welfare minister Shahid Ali Khan assured the gathering that the non-Muslim minorities in the state will get an opportunity to meet chief minister Nitish Kumar and place their demands before him. He said that the NDA government was sensitive to the demands of every section of the society and will strive to meet the genuine demands made by them. "For the first time in Bihar, a separate meeting is being held for non-Muslim minorities," pointed out commission vice-chairman Dr Dilip Kumar Sinha. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Sikh, Christian, Buddhists, Jain and Bengalis

(linguistic minority) residing in Bihar. It was chaired by Sinha. The Sikh representatives demanded appointment of teachers to teach Gurumukhi at Gurdwaras. They also demanded compensation for 35 Sikh families which were hit by the 1984 anti-Sikh riot in the state and reservation for Sikh students in technical institutions. They also demanded interest-free loans for Sikh youths to start business and self-employment schemes. The Christian representatives demanded a permanent representation in the commission instead of the present rotational system of selecting members from the Sikh and Christian community. They also demanded a nominated member in both the Houses of the state legislature and removal of hindrance in getting caste certificates. They also demanded construction of boundary walls for Christian graveyards, besides rebate in fees for children belonging to Christian community in missionary schools and access to government schemes like mid-day meal, free uniforms and cycles. The Buddhist representative demanded amendment in Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949, to enable Buddhists to take control of the shrine. They also demanded that Buddha Purnima be declared a state holiday and the benefits earmarked for members of minority community be given to the Buddhists. The Jain representatives demanded notification declaring Jains as a minority as done in 10 states of the country. The Bengalis demanded appointment of teachers of Bangala language in government schools where there are more than 40 Bangala students. They also demanded Raiyati rights over land where East Bengal refugees were settled in the state, besides shifting of Bihar Bangala Academy from the state human resource department to the minority welfare department.  
(Times of India 17/5/10)

#### **‘Govt pulling down religious structures without probe’ (7)**

Bhopal: Minorities in the State have opposed the pulling down of religious structures in the name of encroachments without carrying out any investigation about their status in several districts in Madhya Pradesh. The places displaced or removed by the State Government in various parts of the State are of all the religions. Former chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Minorities Commission and president of the Madhya Pradesh Muslim Education Society (MPMES), Ibrahim Qureshi, led a delegation here on Wednesday to handover a memorandum in this regard to Governor Rameshwar Thakur for his intervention on the issue. Qureshi, in his memorandum to the Governor, said "The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government of the State is either removing or displacing religious places in many districts of the State, including the State capital Bhopal in the name of encroachments without doing any enquiry about their status." Qureshi further said that as per the Special Religious Places Act 1991, which is a union law, clarifies that the status quo of all the religious places should be maintained as per their status on August 15, 1947. Any change in their shape and use leads to punishable criminal act, he added. He stated that all such religious places are registered in revenue records and Waqf boards after being publicised through gazette notification. Hence, these could not be considered as encroachments. Neither their design could be changed nor could they be removed or displaced, he added. He said that the State Government is wrongly interpreting an apex court order that is also the violation of democratic rights of worship. Others included in the delegation were MPMES secretary general Arif Aziz, president of the District Muslim Backward Class and Corporator Rafique Qureshi and Aziz Ahmed Qureshi. The delegation also demanded from the Governor for providing free coaching to minority students in all the universities of the State. (Pioneer 21/5/10)

#### **Priority to welfare of minorities: Minister (7)**

TIRUCHI The State Government is according priority for the welfare of minority communities, said Geetha Jeevan, State Social Welfare Minister, here on Sunday. Delivering the valedictory address of the three-day sixth World Christian Tamil conference organised by the World Christian Tamil Academy and the Church of South India of Tiruchi-Thanjavur Diocese at Bishop Heber College here, the Minister said that the Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi is all praise for the contributions made by the Christian community for the Tamil language. She explained in detail the contributions made by Christian scholars and poets several centuries ago for the development of Tamil language and recalled the works of Veeramamunivar, G.U. Pope and others. She said that a number of research articles by Christian Tamil scholars were received for the souvenir to be released at the World Tamil Classical Conference to be held in Coimbatore next month. The Minister pointed out that she was very happy that the conference had discussed several important issues for the development of Tamil language. The Minister presented awards to four Christian Tamil scholars for rendering yeoman service for the development of Tamil language at the conference. Bhagavathar Clement Vedanayagam Sastriyar of Chennai was presented with the "Arulisai Maamani" award, Ref. Fr. Amudan Adigal with "Christhuva Ilakkiya Kavalar" award, Dr. Gnanavaram of Madurai with "Arulurai Chemmal" award and Dr. Y.R. Chelladurai of Malaysia with "Arul Tamizh Maamani" award. CSI Bishop Paul Vasanthakumar and Bishop Esra Sargunam presented the awardees with a shawl and certificates respectively. Mrs. Geetha Jeevan also released a book on Tamil

literature written by Rev. Paul Vasanthakumar, Bishop of CSI, Tiruchi-Thanjavur Diocese, and the first copy was received by N. Siva, MP. Mr. Siva in his address, spoke about the contributions made by Christian Tamil scholars to the development of Tamil language. The CSI Bishop who presided over the conference said that the conference had passed a resolution to extend full co-operation and support for the ensuing World Classical Tamil Conference to be held in Coimbatore next month and appreciated the Chief for his efforts to conduct the conference. He said that the conference had adopted a resolution to take special efforts for promoting the classical Tamil literature and also to adopt pure Tamil words in the prayers in the churches. The conference has decided to create a separate chair in the Bharathidasan University for research in Tamil Christian literature works and also establish a separate wing by the World Christian Tamil Academy in the Bishop Heber College library to enable the students and scholars to get all Christian Tamil literature works, etc. (The Hindu 24/5/10)

### **J-K Pandits criticise Amnesty International team (7)**

Jammu: Slamming the conduct of an Amnesty International team during its visit to Kashmir, two organisations of displaced Kashmiri Pandits on Monday accused it of ignoring human rights violations by 'jehadi' terrorist groups in J-K. "The way the Amnesty team has conducted itself during its recent visit to Kashmir demonstrates that their visit was guided more by political considerations than any concern for human rights," Chairman of Panun Kashmir Ajay Chrungoo told reporters here. The two-member team comprising B J Batra and Gopala Krishnan concluded its six-day visit to Kashmir yesterday. President of All State Kashmiri Pandit Solidarity Conference (ASKPSC) O N Trisal alleged that the team "conveniently chose to sidetrack the issue of ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindus, as it has over the years chosen to ignore the genocide of Hindus living in Pakistan and Bangladesh and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)". The two leaders criticised the team for meeting Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Yasin Malik and compared the separatist leaders to the fascist war criminals of Germany. Chrungoo said, "we want to clearly state that human rights violations in J&K, which the representatives of Amnesty came to assess, are mainly the violations committed by jehadi terrorist groups against the whole community of Hindus in the state who are subjected to genocide and extermination. "By persisting with its specific agenda, Amnesty has not been able to dispel the doubts about it being essentially and instrument of foreign policy of those who want to subvert the independence of India and destroy its national unity," the leaders alleged. They said the Centre should not have allowed the delegation to visit Kashmir after having denied it permission to do so during the last two decades. (Zee News 25/5/10)

### **Maharashtra seeks Facebook ban (7)**

New Delhi, May 25: The Maharashtra government has asked the Centre about the possibility of blocking social networking site Facebook following such a demand from Muslim and Christian organisations. Muslim and Christian leaders have themselves jointly written to the Prime Minister, Sonia Gandhi and the Union home ministry demanding immediate action against Facebook for displaying "blasphemous" pages. The Pakistan government, following a Lahore High Court order, has blocked Facebook for inviting its members to post caricatures deemed blasphemous. Christian groups such as the Catholic Secular Forum (CSF) are upset over various Facebook pages on Jesus Christ and Christianity. The Maharashtra additional chief secretary (home), Chandra Iyengar, has written to Union home secretary G.K. Pillai requesting a ban on Facebook, if possible. A copy of the letter has been sent to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, a division of the information and technology ministry. "We want the government to block Facebook for its irresponsible action. If the government does not act promptly, we will be left with no option but to take to the streets," said Sohail Rokadia of the Raza Academy. The academy, a prominent Mumbai-based Sunni organisation, has taken the matter up jointly with the CSF. "The CSF believes that blasphemous pages on any religion should be taken off the website. Several pages on Facebook are worse than the pages that are being objected to by Muslims across the world," said John Dias of the CSF. "We call upon Facebook to tender an unconditional apology for hurting the religious sentiments of millions of followers of different faiths. Such blasphemous material on the Internet has dangerous law-and-order consequences, particularly in the East. It disturbs peace and harmony in an already communally sensitive situation." (Telegraph 26/5/10)

### **Hindus urge EU to treat all religion well in Malta (7)**

Kathmandu, Jun 1 : Hindus have written to Commissioner for Human Rights of Council of Europe to 'ensure that Malta country treats all religions and denominations equally in front of the law', a statement issued by Universal Society of Hinduism said here today. Bhavna Shinde of Forum for Hindu Awakening, in a communique to Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg, wrote that Malta Criminal Court reportedly makes one liable to imprisonment up to six months for publicly vilifying "Roman Catholic Apostolic

Religion", while committing such an act against "any cult tolerated by law" makes one liable to imprisonment only up to three months. The forum urged to investigate the matter and ensure that Malta treats all religions and denominations equally in front of the law. In the recent past, Hindu statesman Rajan Zed and prominent Jewish leader in Nevada and California in US Rabbi Jonathan B Freirich said it seemed to imply that except Roman Catholic, other religions and denominations, including Hinduism and Judaism were just one of the cults in the eyes of Malta. Mr Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, along with Mr Freirich, argued that it was perturbing to note that a country of Europe, which prided itself for its human rights initiatives, apparently treated crimes against religious sentiment of "other" religions or denominations as less serious than against majority religion and described religions or denominations other than majority religion as cults. Maltese islands were first settled reportedly in 5,200 BCE. Few European countries have such concentrated architecture, history, and beaches in so small an area as Malta. (New Kerala 1/6/10)

### **Follow the Constitution, governor tells Karnataka (7)**

Bangalore: Governor HR Bhardwaj on Monday warned the state government that he would be forced to use his power if the government failed to discharge its duties. Speaking at a function organised by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission, Bhardwaj said, "Protection of law and order is my duty. If the government does not act as per the Constitution, I will be forced to utilise my powers." Bhardwaj said he was closely observing the developments in the state over the last three decades, and the repeated attacks on backward communities, especially Christians, and stated, "I will not tolerate such attacks. If law and order fails, it is inevitable for me to interfere in the government affairs." He added that the governor was a representative of the president, and said, "If everything is done as per the Constitution, I will not interfere. But if something goes wrong, I will definitely interfere in the administration's activities." Bhardwaj said that in a democratic set up, protection of people's rights and duties was the primary duty of the government. If it followed anti-people policies, the administration had to be checked, or it would become very difficult for people of backward communities to live in the state, he said. (dna 2/6/10)

### **Central govt to introduce Equal Opportunity Bill (7)**

NEW DELHI, Nov 16, DHNS: Union Minister for Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid confirmed on Monday that the Equal Opportunity Commission Bill would be tabled in Parliament during the forthcoming winter session. Salman Khurshid said his party was committed to replicating for the entire country the Karnataka-Kerala-Tamil Nadu model of reservation for the educationally and economically backward minorities. "Our government is committed to reservation for the backward sections among the minority communities following the Karnataka-Kerala-Tamil Nadu model," Khurshid told reporters here. "However, given the fact that the reservation issue in Andhra Pradesh is stuck with the Supreme Court, we have to find out a sustainable model, which would be approved of by the judiciary," he said. Khurshid, also minister of corporate affairs, said the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) would begin prosecution into the Satyam scam this month. "During this month, the SFIO will begin the prosecution on those or those areas of company laws that the SFIO is expected to and have been authorised to proceed with," he said. Dismissing the "Vande Mataram" controversy as a "non-issue," Khurshid said Jamiat-Ulama-e-Hind had wasted their time passing the resolution issuing fatwa against the National Song. Khurshid said a group of Ministers would deliberate on the draft Equal Opportunity Commission Bill before sending it to the Cabinet. The rules and regulations mentioned in the Bill would also be applicable to the private sector. In the beginning, the Bill would focus on the twin issues of education and employment and would intervene when the "aspirational diversity" would not be reflected in any institution. On the policy of affirmative action to be followed by the corporate world, Khurshid said his ministry would consider a proposal of financing the training cost for those from underprivileged groups who might be given employment by the companies. It was precisely for this reason that the "Corporate India Week, 2009," to be celebrated next month, would be given a theme on inclusive growth, he said. Khurshid claimed that the number of scholarships provided to the minority students rose to 29 lakh this year from six lakh last year. The next year's target has been fixed at 50 lakh. The government has decided to give 725 scholarships to PhD scholars among the minorities from this financial year and has allocated a fund of Rs 8 crore for a new scheme to encourage entrepreneurship among minority women. (Deccan Herald 13/6/10)

### **Grave issue: Muslims, Christians fight for burial rights (7)**

New Delhi: India's teeming cities, where even the living jostle for space, are running out of room for the dead. Hindus cremate their loved ones, but the country's Muslim and Christian minorities usually choose burial -- and they fear the practice is under threat. About 185 million Indians belong to the two faiths, with

census figures recording 13 percent of the population as Muslim and two percent as Christian. Finding land for burials in urban areas is the primary problem, religious leaders say, as India's cities become ever more congested and every piece of earth is fiercely fought over. "Go anywhere in India and see the graveyards, they are all full," said Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, chairman of the All India Imam Organisation in New Delhi. "The government has been overlooking this issue for decades." Ilyasi said the lack of burial space is not just a problem in major cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata but has spread to many small towns. Muslims bury the dead as fast as possible, and disapprove of cremation as they believe there will be a physical resurrection on the Day of Judgement. To meet their needs, increasing numbers of Muslims are joining together to buy small pieces of wasteland to convert into "Kabristans" -- Muslim graveyards. Mohammed Arif, a resident of Noida on the outskirts of Delhi, purchased a government-registered plot along with his siblings and cousin in 2008. "When my nephew died in a car crash, we struggled to get space in a graveyard in Delhi to bury him," said Arif. "We want to avoid such a crisis in future." Indian Muslims often face widespread discrimination and live in the most densely packed, poorest parts of inner cities. A 2008 government report on "wakf", an Arabic word for property donated permanently by Muslims for the benefit of their community, showed that 50 percent of all wakf plots across India have been encroached on. "Government offices, hotels and schools have all been constructed and many slums are standing on wakf property," said Rehman Khan, a lawmaker who sits on the parliamentary wakf committee. "Don't award us new land but at least give us back the land we own and we will make our own graveyards," he said. Country's relatively small Christian community -- like many of their faith around the world -- are increasingly choosing cremation over burial for reasons of both space and cost. But Father Rebello, chairman of the Delhi Cemetery Committee, said many Indian Christians were hesitant to abandon the tradition of burial. "Several families are turning one grave into a family grave to accommodate all the members -- at least four more can be buried in the same place," he said. "We are suggesting families should start cremating the bodies and recently a priest in Delhi was cremated to promote it but we cannot force anyone." The concept of family graves, or the "tier" system, where coffins are placed one above the other, originated in India in the southern state of Kerala and has slowly gained more acceptance. Priyanka Thomas, a widow living in New Delhi who last month reluctantly chose to bury her husband in her father-in-law's grave, said the decision was inevitable. "Myself and then my children will be buried in the same grave," she said. "It is more economical for families as they have to spend less and Christians often visit graves, so prefer burying their loved ones close to their church." In the eastern state of Bihar, the Catholic church is asking the faithful to donate up to 60,000 rupees (1,280 US dollars) to reserve plots. "We don't have space for more bodies in existing graveyards," said Vincent Francis, a priest in Patna, the capital of Bihar. "The state government just won't give us more land." Some graves in the city of Chennai have been repeatedly reopened to add more family members, said Francis Fernandes, a local priest. "One family went into a state of shock when seeing a half-decomposed body when they were trying to place the second coffin in their family grave," he said. Sabha Dayal, a New Delhi professor who specialises in town planning, said civil authorities had to take burial needs as seriously as any other infrastructure requirement. "Advertisements promote new residential premises offering swimming pools and golf courses, but have you ever seen them stating that land has been allotted for cremation and burial?" asked Dayal. "The problem is that these do not generate revenue," she said, adding the government often demolished existing graveyards to widen roads or for new commercial ventures. About 80 percent of Indians are cremated in the Hindu fashion -- often beside a river, and with the corpse decorated with flowers and covered in ghee (clarified butter) before the skull is cracked to release the spirit. Another death ritual in India is practised by a small community of Zoroastrian Parsis who leave their deceased on dakhmas, or "Towers of Silence", to be consumed by vultures. But for the country's Muslims and Christians, the government offers little hope of new graveyards as urban development picks up pace. "The shortage of graveyards stirs resentment among the minorities and can be an issue during local elections," a senior official at the Ministry of Urban Development said on condition of anonymity. "In truth, these are small issues and they need to be dealt with locally." (Sify News 14/6/10)

### **'Special consideration for minorities' (7)**

MUMBAI: There is no religion-based quota for jobs in India. However, the 'Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities' in June 2006, the DoPT circulated revised guidelines to all central ministries and departments on January 8, 2007, asking them to give special consideration to the recruitment of minorities in central government offices and central PSUs. "The government does not maintain community-wise data but keeps it under a broad category of minorities," said an official from the ministry of minority affairs. But the term does refer to various religious minorities like Muslims, Jains, Christians, Buddhists etc who live in the country. Therefore, the minority recruitments to central government jobs will also refer to people from these communities. Studies have shown of all the

minorities, Muslims seem to be lagging the most when it comes to access to education and jobs. As far as state governments are concerned, the PM's programme said they should give "special consideration" to minorities while recruiting police personnel. But no data was immediately available to show how matters have fared there. (Times of India 21/6/10)

### **Bal Thackeray criticises Centre's efforts for uplift of minorities (7)**

Mumbai, Jun 23 : Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray today came down heavily on the UPA Government at the Centre for its pro-minorities policies, such as reservation in government jobs, for their upliftment, terming it as "Islamisation" of India. In an editorial in the party mouthpiece 'Saamna' the Sena chief said there has been a large increase in the number of government jobs given to Muslims, as per figures released by the Centre indicate. For instance, in the railways, in 2007, 1,500 Muslims got jobs, last year it shot up to 4,000, in public sector banks, from 762 in 2007 to over 4,000 last year. Ditto was the situation in several other government departments, noted the editorial. It said Prime Minister 'Janaab' Manmohan Singh, in 2007, had written to all government departments to accord priority to minorities in employment. Though this should mean jobs to Dalits, Jains and Sikhs, for the Congress, minority only implies Muslims, its vote bank, the editorial alleged. Now, they are busy implementing the horrifying recommendations of the Justice Sachar Committee report. The agenda seems to be let the Hindus perish, but Muslims must progress at any cost in this country Mr Thackeray said. (New Kerala 23/6/10)

### **Religious intolerance on rise in South Asia: Report (7)**

New Delhi, July 1 : Religious intolerance is on the rise in South Asia, including in India, leading to discrimination and violent attacks against minorities, says a new report by Minority Rights Group International. The report titled "State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010", which was released Thursday, says that while religious nationalism was on the rise, the abuse of counter-terrorism laws too have led to a growing pattern of persecution against religious minorities globally. In its South Asia chapter, the report says that religious minorities are facing increased incidents of targeted attacks and persecution across South Asia "as states are turning a blind eye to the rise of nationalist and radical groups". "Militant and extremist groups from Taliban in Pakistan and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in India have been accused of a series of religiously motivated killings and attacks," the report says. It cites the example of US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) which in 2009 put India on its watch list of countries with violations of freedom of religion. "The large scale violent incidents in 2008 against Christians in Orissa and the climate of impunity towards violations of religious rights contributed towards this decision (by the USCIRF)," the report says. "Christians in India face threats and intimidation and are forcibly made to convert to Hinduism," it says. Citing newspaper articles, the report points out that 18 Indian Catholic families were "forcibly taken to a Hindu temple where they were made to convert and perform Hindu rituals and then sign statements that they had voluntarily converted". In an unspecified account of communal riots in India in 2009, the report claims 23 people were killed and 73 injured in violence against religious minorities by Hindu extremist groups. "There was a rise in incidents in the south of the country. Of the 152 incidents against Christians during 2009, 86 happened in southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh." On the situation of Muslims, the reports says it "remains tense" in some parts of India. Since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, the report says, "the Indian government has used counter-terrorism measures to arrest and detain large number of Muslims arbitrarily". In Pakistan, attacks against religious minorities have escalated in recent years, the report says, citing the examples of Pakistani Sikhs and Christians who have been displaced in the fighting between government troops and Taliban militants. "The Taliban and other extremist groups were also responsible for several attacks against Christians, burning down churches, destroying Bibles and forcibly converting people to Islam". Farah Mihar, who has authored the South Asia chapter, said in South Asia "irrespective of the religious community you belong to, simply being in the minority puts you under increased threat of attack and persecution". Shoba Das, programme director of Minority Rights Group International, said: "There is a clear trend of counter-terrorism laws and rhetoric used to either carry out attacks against particular religious communities or justify restrictions of freedom of particular groups." And South Asian states "provide plenty of examples of this", Das said. (New Kerala 1/7/10)

### **No reservation of flats on religious basis, says HC (7)**

KOLKATA: In an order that may have far-reaching consequences on the West Bengal government's attempts to regain the confidence of minorities, the Calcutta high court on Friday ruled that the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) may not reserve flats for families on the basis of religion. In March this year, KMDA had advertised the sale of LIG and MIG flats in the Baishnabghata-Patuli Township. The advertisement had mentioned that 26% of the flats would be reserved for the minority

community. In its detailed brochure, KMDA explained that Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis etc were eligible for the reservation. Advocate Kaushik Chanda, who appeared for petitioners who moved a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the high court, contended that minorities can't be classified on the basis of religion as per the law of the country. "Such classification is discriminatory and goes against the secular fabric of the country. Under law, a minority community can't consist of people of a certain religion alone. There is no such provision in the Constitution," Chanda submitted before the division bench of Chief Justice J N Patel and Justice Bhaskar Bhattacharya. KMDA was directed to explain the matter. In its submissions, this statutory authority, under the department of urban development, West Bengal, clarified that a corrigendum had been published since, in which this error has been rectified. "The authority can reserve property on the basis of social and economic backgrounds, bereft of religion. There can't be reservation on the basis of religion. The authority should issue fresh advertisements with the necessary changes before making allotments of the flats," the court ruled on Friday. KMDA counsel Soumitra Basu said his client would abide by the court's decision and take necessary steps. According to legal experts, the Constitution does not define the word "minority". It has left it to the courts of law to decide on the issue, should any dispute arise on the definition. In the past, Supreme Court and several high courts have passed judgments on the issue of reservation in educational institutions and government jobs. This may be the first time that a court has been asked to decide whether property can be reserved on the basis of religion. (Times of India 3/7/10)

#### **'Ranganath Mishra report on minority quota unacceptable' (7)**

July 4: Stoutly opposing the Ranganath Mishra Committee report which provides quotas for the minorities, the BJP on Sunday that any move to implement the report would prove detrimental to the interests of other backward classes (OBC) and Dalits. Speaking at the Swabhimani Samavesh — a convention organised by the party's OBC unit here, BJP national president Nitin Gadkari alleged that the Congress was trying to get the report approved in the Lok Sabha with an eye on vote banks. "The report will jeopardise the interests of the OBCs, scheduled castes and tribes. We will not allow this to happen," he said adding that if implemented, the report will reduce the reservation for OBCs in jobs and higher education to just 12 per cent from the existing 27 per cent. "We also oppose any move to provide quotas to people who have converted to other communities," he asserted. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the implementation of the report would divide society. "Although we are not against the welfare of Muslims, we would like them to have better education and access to health facilities without quotas," he explained. (Deccan Chronicle 5/7/10)

#### **More than 1000 honour killings in India every year: Experts (7)**

London, July 04, 2010: More than 1,000 young people in India have been done to death every year owing to 'Honour Killings' linked to forced marriages and the country needs to introduce stringent legislation to deal firmly with the heinous crime, two legal experts have claimed. Participating in International Child Abduction, Relocation and Forced Marriages Conference organised by the London Metropolitan University here, Chandigarh-based legal experts Anil Malhotra and his brother Ranjit Malhotra have said that in traditional societies, honour killings are basically 'justified' as a sanction for 'dishonourable' behaviour. In a joint paper, they said: "Forced marriages and honour killings are often intertwined. Marriage can be forced to save honour, and women can be murdered for rejecting a forced marriage and marrying a partner of their own choice who is not acceptable for the family of the girl. They said in India, honour killings happen with regularity in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. "They happen not only within the Muslim community but also among Sikhs and Hindus." Though there was no nationwide data on the prevalence of honour killings in India, they quoted figures compiled by the India Democratic Women's Association, according to which Haryana, Punjab and U P account for about 900 honour killings and another 100 to 300 in the rest of the country. "The total figure for India would be about the same as estimated for Pakistan, which researchers suggest has the highest per capita incidence of honour killings in the world." They said the ministries of Home Affairs and the Law and Justice are preparing to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to define the act of "honour killing". The demand for such a law was made repeatedly with the objective of stamping out this social evil. "This aim is to provide for deterrent punishment for caste and community panchayats which should be booked for aiding and abetting such killings and as accomplices to the murder," they said. They pointed out that the Supreme Court of India, concerned over the spate of recent 'Honour Killings' has asked the Centre and eight state governments to submit reports on the steps taken to prevent this barbaric practice. (Hindustan Times 5/7/10)

#### **Student percentage not an index of minority status: panel (7)**

The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions has made it clear that the percentage of admission of students from a notified minority community in an educational institution cannot be an index

of the minority status of such an institution. Quoting the Supreme Court judgment in the T.M.A. Pai case, the Commission comprising its Chairman Justice M.S.A. Siddiqui and Members, Dr. Mohinder Singh and Cyriac Thomas, in its order on July 6, said that fixing a percentage would be an unreasonable restriction wholly impermissible under Article 30 (1) of the Constitution or by judicial precedents governing the field. Imposing a uniform ceiling on admission of minority students in all types of educational institutions established by the minorities is virtual negation of the autonomy to minorities in running educational institutions of their choice, it said. The Chairman, who wrote the order, said that so long as the institution retained its essential character by achieving its objectives to conserve its religion and language and to give a thorough, good, general education to children belonging to its community it would remain a minority institution. No rigid formula for identifying a minority educational institution could be imposed, the Commission held. It made it clear that a ceiling of 50 per cent could not be imposed against the minority institutions, requiring them to compulsorily admit minority students up to 50 per cent. It said "there cannot be a common rule or regulation in respect of all types of educational institutions from primary to college level and for the entire State fixing the uniform ceiling in the matter of admission of students in minority educational institutions." The Commission took up the issue when the Orissa government did not act on the application filed by Buckley Primary School seeking grant of Christian minority status. It was stated that of the 297 students admitted in the school, only 95 were Christians forming 31.98 per cent and the rest belonged to other communities. The State did not file its response even before the Commission. Disposing of the application, the Commission said "fixing a formula of percentage governing admission of students in a MEI virtually involved an abject surrender of the right of establishment and management of educational institutions and the same was inconsistent with the constitutional guarantee enshrined in Article 30 (1) of the Constitution." The Commission declared the applicant institution as a minority institution and asked the State government to issue the certificate accordingly. (The Hindu 9/7/10)

#### **"Congress, DMK garner minority votes through welfare schemes" (7)**

The Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) cannot accuse the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of being communal when they try to garner the votes of minorities through welfare schemes that leave out deserving sections in the majority community, State president of the BJP Pon. Radhakrishnan said here on Sunday. Leading a demonstration by his party to demand Centrally-sponsored pre-matriculation scholarship for school students for Hindus also, Mr. Radhakrishnan said there were poor students in all communities. Therefore, any scholarship or other forms of assistance for education should not be limited to students of a few communities. Mr. Radhakrishnan rejected the argument of the Congress and its ally, DMK, that five prominent minority communities (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis) were being covered under the scheme. While the others were limited in number and present in very few areas, Muslims and Christians were spread across the country in substantial numbers. Therefore, this scheme largely benefited them. Though there were many poor students among Hindus, this scheme was not being extended to them. Besides, norms relating to the distribution of scholarship were not being followed. Scholarships were being given to more than the prescribed number of students. A massive demonstration would be staged in Kanyakumari on June 25 to demand the inclusion of poor students among the Hindus. Some parties asked whether the BJP still existed in the State. But, the response from the public to its protests over the rise in prices of essential commodities and fuel only pointed at its strong presence, he claimed. (The Hindu 12/7/10)

#### **"Minority institutions must obtain certification to avail the Constitutional protection"**

Article 30 gives the right to establish minority institution anywhere in India: Chairman of National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions. Minority-run educational institutions must obtain the requisite certification in order to avail the protection guaranteed under the Article 30 of the Constitution, said M.S.A. Siddique, Chairman of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions of India, Government of India. He was addressing the 13th annual Islamic women's welfare conference organised at the Crescent group of institutions here on Sunday in association with SIMAN. He said that minority-run institutions that have difficulty in obtaining the certificate that states as such can take recourse to the Commission after due process. He also elaborated the various procedures for applying to the commission.

#### *TMA Pai case*

The Article 30 is a fundamental right that empowers any individual to establish an educational institution for the minorities and have an administrative system of their choice. As said by the Supreme Court in its judgement on the TMA Pai case, minority-run institutions can have their own administrative systems

without Government interference. They can admit students hundred per cent from their own community but if they were to avail Government aid, they will have an obligation to admit non-minority students to a reasonable extent as determined by the Government, he said. As reported by the Sachar Committee, he said that education backwardness was high in Muslim community with main reason being the gradual dilution of the rights guaranteed to the minorities by the Constitution.

#### *National database*

Speaking earlier, Shabistan Gaffar, Chairperson, National Committee on Girls Education, Government of India, said that a national database has to be formed to provide information on the rights of minorities and the welfare schemes. Non-governmental organisations working with the minorities across the country should unite and form hubs in their localities to access this database and also report their problems to the government. Education and the various schemes for promoting it should be linked to employment, she said. The Committee was going to hold five zonal conferences across India with Andhra Pradesh having been chosen in the south. These conferences would find out the problems at the grass roots level and report to the Government, said Dr. Shabistan Gaffar. S. Sumiya, Principal, Thassim Beevi Abdul Kadar College for Women, Keezhakarai, gave a report on the educational status of minority girls in Tamil Nadu. The minorities continued to remain visibly backward in educational despite economic assistance from the State and Centre. This was due to the low levels of awareness, she said. (The Hindu, 3/8/2010)

#### **PSBs lent Rs 1,12,038 cr to minorities**

New Delhi: The public sector banks have lent Rs 1,12,038 crore at the end of last fiscal the minority communities as part of the priority sector lending, Parliament was informed today. "As per report from public sector banks (PSBs), the total outstanding credit of different PSBs to minority communities, as on March 31, 2010 (provisional) stood at Rs 1,12,038 crore," Minister of State for Finance Namo Narain Meena said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. All domestic scheduled commercial banks are statutorily required to lend 40 per cent of their total loans to priority sector, including agriculture, small scale industries, weaker sections etc. The government, in 2007, had asked the PSBs to step up lending to the minority communities to the extent of 15 per cent of their priority sector lending by the end of March 2010. ([www.financialexpress.com](http://www.financialexpress.com), 4/8/2010)

#### **Bill to ease rules for minority-run educational bodies to get recognition**

NEW DELHI: Parliament on Thursday passed a Bill, seeking to give more powers to the National Commission for Minorities Educational Institutions (NCMEI), and make it easier for minority-run bodies to get recognition. Replying to the debate over the Bill -- the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (Amendment) Bill, 2010 -- in the Rajya Sabha, human resource development minister Kapil Sibal said it was a "procedural Act", which allows an institution to approach the NCMEI directly in case a state government rejects its appeal for seeking the status of a minority institution. Allaying fears of members, including Chandan Mitra and Rama Jois of the BJP, who alleged that the legislation was a political move to appease minorities and could divide the social fabric, Sibal said it does not have a mandate to go beyond the framed guidelines for setting up educational institutions. The Bill, already passed by the Lok Sabha, seeks to overcome the difficulties which the commission faced after it came into being. The panel, to be headed by a chairman, has also been expanded from two members to three. Moreover, the process of getting a No Objection Certificate (NoC) for setting up a minority educational institution from state governments has been simplified. Now, NoC will be automatically given, if there is no law in the state concerned governing these institutions. For deciding on the status of the minority educational institution, the process of consultation with the state government has been done away with in the Bill. The state government would now only be a party in certain cases before the commission. "The coming up of so many universities and institutions only goes on to show that the young population is growing at a fast pace and there is no space to adjust them. We are only creating space for them, especially young Muslim population," Sibal said. He said the government had held national-level consultations with all stakeholders before framing the legislation. (The Times of India, 6/8/2010)

#### **Minorities in BJP do not have lust for posts: Shahnawaz**

"Minorities in BJP do not have lust for power and posts. They love the party and are capable of sailing against the course of current," he said when addressing workers' conference organised by BJP's minorities cell in Bihar. Stating that those who believed that BJP was far away from minorities were living in fool's paradise, Hussain said, "I can loudly tell that if there is any formidable organisation of minorities in Bihar, it is with BJP and not with any other party." "All the Muslims who decided to live in India after division are ready to go for any sacrifice for the sake of the country," he said and ridiculed NCP General

Secretary Tariq Anwar's statement against BJP alleging that the saffron party had sided with MNS chief Raj Thackeray on the issue of migrants. "I never supported MNS leader Raj Thackeray or extended help to him," Hussain said and castigated Anwar for his "Jaichand and Mirzaffar" remarks against him (Shahnawaz). Holding Congress responsible for the riots in Bhagalpur, he said it was the reason that led to that party faced a rout and now it has only ten MLAs in the state assembly. Hussain slammed Union Minorities Welfare Minister Salman Khursheed for his allegations that Nitish Kumar government had miserably failed to reach the benefits of Multi-sectoral schemes to minorities and said the minorities knew it better what NDA led by Nitish Kumar had delivered for them during the past 57 months. "BJP has never been against the interests of minorities and it will continue to work for betterment of their lot," he said. ([www.zeenews.com](http://www.zeenews.com), 7/8/2010)

### **Karat Targets UPA, BJP**

7th Aug, 2010: Karat alleged that Christians and Muslims in BJP-ruled states are being targeted with a view to deprive their rights as citizens of the country. Communist Party of India (Marxist) general-secretary Prakash Karat on Saturday said that communalism is injurious to the unity of the county and of its people. Addressing the inaugural session of the 3-day Central Committee meeting, Karat said that Christians and Muslims in the BJP-ruled states of Gujarat, Karnataka or MP are being targeted with a view to deprive their rights as citizens of the country. Referring to the Sohrabuddin fake encounter case, the Left leader said that the Gujarat Government had used the police force and the administrative arm of the state to attempt a cover-up of the heinous crime. He said, "the police and State machinery in Gujarat have been used to cover-up the pogroms and stage encounter killings." Karat said that this should serve as a reminder of what can be in store if the forces which work on the basis of the Hindutva ideology ever come to power. He called on the Central and state governments to not make any concession on terrorist violence, wherever it comes from. The Left leader also targeted the UPA government for letting food stocks rot in godowns while millions of the country's poor are going hungry due to the spiralling prices of essential commodities. The CPM leader said that while the FCI godowns have 60 million tonnes of food grains, the distribution system is working to exclude the poor from getting their hands on the grains. The veteran leader said that this shows the callous and arrogant attitude of the government which compounds its flaws by refusing to admit its mistakes. ([www.fullhyderabad.com](http://www.fullhyderabad.com), 7/8/2010)

### **Minority schools get HC backing**

NEW DELHI: Relying on Supreme Court's rulings, the Delhi high court on Friday said extra benefits given to employees of recognised unaided minority schools stand protected under the Constitution. It quashed a Delhi government order insisting on regulating retirement age of a principal of one such school. Justice S Muralidhar sided with the Mount Carmel school that had challenged a section of the Delhi School Education Rules, which governs the retirement age of the principal of the institutions in the capital. Delhi government had taken a stand that retirement age of the principal of an unaided minority school should be at par with that of a government school or a private unaided or aided school recognised by it in terms of Delhi School Education Act. HC turned down the government's plea saying the minimum qualification for any post should not be less than that prescribed for other schools. However, the state cannot have any say on what should be the terms and conditions of the service. "If the retirement age of the principal of an unaided minority institution is more advantageous, it will not be held to be discriminatory or unconstitutional," the court said. The court also said rules governing the retirement age of the principal or the vice-principal will not be applicable in the case of an unaided minority school. "While the state has every right to prescribe conditions for granting recognition or disbursing aid, it cannot under the guise of that power prescribe onerous conditions compelling minority institutions to surrender their rights of administration to the government," the court added. It said minority educational institutions enjoy the fundamental right guaranteed under the Constitution and Delhi government cannot insist that the retirement age of the principal of such institutions can be no different from that of a principal of a government school or a private (The TOI, 17/8/2010)

### **On new year, Parsis talk change**

NEW DELHI: There are 734 Parsis in the NCR Delhi, Gurgaon and Noida. And about half of them turned up to celebrate Navroze, the Parsi New Year, at Delhi Parsi Anjuman on Thursday evening. One piece of statistics must be haunting them in the past 18 months, the community had one birth, 21 deaths and one marriage! Acutely conscious of the threat to its existence, the community is now talking of change even as it preserves its culture and heritage. At the gathering on Thursday evening, there was a vibrant display of sarees worn in the typical Parsi style and long white attire of the men. Even the old who turned up were not short on the spirit of the day. After a sumptuous meal which included traditional dishes, a dance party was organised. On this occasion, Chief Justice of India S H Kapadia was felicitated and scholarships

given to many children. "Money has never been a concern for the people of our community. We want to make sure that children are given proper funds," said Dadi Mistry, president, Delhi Parsi Anjuman. "Our biggest strength as a community is the fact that we have blended with the fabric of India. Chief Justice Kapadia is a shining example of the success of our community," he added. "Zoroastrians are imbued with an essential virtue of integrity, which has helped me reach where I am today," said CJ Kapadia, addressing the gathering. "The impact of the Parsis on India is inversely proportional to their numbers." "We have to procreate and there are no two thoughts about it. But we don't force our young ones into anything like we were forced by our elders times have changed and we have to change with it," said Mistry. "On the contrary, I advocate inter-marriage. It is the only way to save our community. Our forefathers have done this mistake and we won't follow them. I have a Christian daughter-in-law and a Muslim brother-in-law, and I hope that the community will follow my leadership." "In the midst of growing diseases and migration of Parsis from the country, my biggest concern is to keep the spirit of the Parsi culture alive. And it is only through events like this that we can accomplish that," said Mistry. The Parsis are said to have first arrived in north India during the reign of Akbar. At the old Parsi cemetery there is an inscription dating back to 1869. The Delhi Parsi Anjuman was formed in 1925 with just 40 Parsis. The Anjuman today runs the Parsi Dharamshala, a community hall that showcases Zoroastrian history and culture and an agiary or fire temple where the celebrations began on Thursday morning. (TOI, 20/8/2010)

### **Minorities to get more jobs share?**

NEW DELHI: Having sought to take a lead in imparting special focus on minorities in development programmes, the Congress-led Centre may nudge states to work towards increasing share of minorities in employment as it has concluded that its efforts are yielding results. While recruitment is a "state subject" in which the Centre does not have any role, DoPT is likely to urge states to sensitise departments on the issue. It is likely to ask them to publicise recruitment plans in minority concentration areas and to have representatives of minority groups in selection boards. The move follows Centre's satisfaction over the results of its three-year-old drive to increase employment of minorities in central ministries and paramilitary forces. The minority share in central jobs for 2009-10, which was reviewed by the Union Cabinet on Monday, is likely to be 9%, a significant jump from 6.9% in 2006-07. The 2009-2010 figures are still being collated. This is seen as a result of a circular issued by DoPT on January 8, 2007. After the Centre revised 'PM's 15 point programme for welfare of minorities', DoPT asked central ministries and departments to make selection committees "inclusive" and to give wide publicity in local language to all appointments. It also asked them to distribute "vacancy circulars" in minority concentration districts to create awareness. While UPA desisted from asking states to follow suit for fear of being charged of "overreach", results in central jobs appear to be forcing a rethink and sources said the minority affairs ministry (MoMA) has urged the government to take up the issue with states. Any interaction with states will be in the form of "advice" as against the "directives" to Union ministries and departments. Even if the advice is not binding on states, it can bring political dividends by creating goodwill for Congress among minorities. The move will test the "secular" rivals of Congress who control states as they may find it difficult to oppose such "advice" for fear of the consequences. Also, MoMA wants HRD ministry to publicise recruitment of Urdu language teachers in states and ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation to push states for more proposals for urban renewal mission from minority areas. When contacted about 2009-10 performance, secretary, minority affairs, Vivek Mehrotra expressed satisfaction. "The targets achieved in 2009-10 show that departments are becoming more aware of minority schemes and are trying to achieve targets," he said. (TOI, 24/8/2010)

### **Bengal tops in minority scholarships**

KOLKATA: West Bengal's progress in giving out scholarships to minority students is showing. In fact, it has been so impressive that the Centre has written to all states and Union territories to send officers here to see how the schemes are being implemented. The only other state Bengal has for company in this tremendous feat is Tamil Nadu. A careful note of data, however, will show that this progress has been inversely proportional to the way votes have dwindled in elections for the Left Front since 2008. Therefore, the less the votes, more the largesse to woo them back. As the Left Front realised it had lost its traditional support from Muslims thanks to the Sachar Committee laying bare the neglect the community faced over the years, more funds and scholarships were doled out to them. The scholarship amount and number of beneficiaries has increased by leaps and bounds since 2009. (IE, 13/9/2010)

### **Minority Forum seeks 2nd phase assistance for the riot-hit**

The Odisha Minority Forum on Tuesday demanded that the State Government should provide second phase financial assistances up to Rs 5 lakh to every Christian businessman whose shop was destroyed in

the Kandhamal riot triggered after the killing of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati on August 23, 2008. Cuttack-Bhubaneswar Archbishop Raphael Cheenath and president of the Forum Swarupananda Patra called on Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik at the State Secretariat and placed some demands before him. After the meeting, Cheenath said to the reporters that they placed some of demands for adequate compensation to Christian businessmen who were affected and for construction of Prayer houses and Churches which were destroyed during the Kandhamal riot. "We have demanded that every affected business man who had lost their shop wholly should be given financial assistance of Rs 2 to 5 lakh. Similarly, we have demanded Rs 2 lakh for every Prayer house, Rs 5 lakh for every big Church and the same amount for each of five NGO establishments which were destroyed during the riot," he informed. He also said that the assistance of Rs 15,000 which was given to each of 164 affected shopkeepers by the State Government was not sufficient. "We said to the Chief Minister that the first phase assistance of Rs 15, 000 was not sufficient and requested him to consider their pleas in line with the assistances given by the Gujarat and Delhi Governments earlier to the riot affected in their respective States," Cheenath said. Patra said he apprised the Chief Minister that Christian head counting campaign has been going on by some organizations in Kandhamal now. (Pioneer, 15/9/2010)

### **CM to review 15-point plan for minorities**

Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit will review the implementation of Prime Minister's new 15 point programme for the welfare of minorities in the Capital. Principal Secretary (Home) GS Patnaik will present a status report in the Cabinet meeting on Monday on the action taken or proposed by the various departments and local bodies pertaining to minorities' welfare programme under the programme. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had held a review meeting in July and directed all the States to submit an action taken report on the minorities' welfare. According to the status report, Delhi Police which comes under Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) have stated that it would not grant quota for the minority community in the force. "No posts are reserved for minority community. However, direct recruitments are made by advertising the vacancies in leading newspapers and employment news and it follows a transparent system such as video-graphing of outdoor and indoor test, rotation of interview board on a daily basis and only 10 marks for interview. One officer belonging to SC/ST category is nominated from minority community in view of the number of vacancies," the report said, adding appropriate publicity will be done in the minority concentration areas. Delhi Police also stated that it has been given ISP 9000-2000 certification for adopting professional and transparent recruitment process.

It may be noted that most of the action taken reports are similar to that presented in the last year before the Chief Minister. According to the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992, five religious communities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zorastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minorities and as per the Census 2001, 18.4 per cent population belongs to minority communities. In Delhi, minority communities have played a major role in bringing back the Sheila Dikshit Government for the third consecutive term. The action taken report further stated that new minority dominated areas such as Methapur Savda Ghevra, Aman Vihar, Bawana and Burari have been identified which are inhabited by the minority communities and are being catered under the ICDS schemes. According to the report, quota under pre-matric scholarship for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists has been fixed at 18,810, 1,540, 6,490 and 330, respectively. Of these, 18,790 applications have been received from Muslims, 131 from Christians, 1268 from Sikhs and six come from the Buddhist community. Similarly, for the post-matric scholarship programme, 626 applications have been received from Muslims of the 5,985 quota, 18 out of 400 quota for Christians and 140 from the Sikh community. The Department for Welfare of SC/ST/OBC and Minorities gives two scholarship schemes for minorities under the new 15 point programme. (Pioneer, 01/11/2010)

### **CM for transport jobs to minorities**

The Delhi Cabinet on Monday reviewed the steps taken by various departments of the Government in the view of the Prime Minister's 15-point programme for the welfare of the minority communities in the State. During the meeting, Dikshit asked the transport department to explore providing jobs to minority communities. The Chief Minister also underlined the need of rapid socioeconomic development of minorities in the national Capital. As per the provisions of the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992, five religious communities - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist and Parsis - have been notified as minorities. The Government has been concentrating on better facilities of transport, health and education in predominantly minorities-inhabited areas. In order to provide for better training and income earning opportunities, integration with Samajik Suvidha Kendras is being attempted. In addition to existing minorities-dominated areas, the department of social welfare has indentified Mithapur, Savada Ghewara, Aman Vihar, Bawana and Burari as new areas where ICDS schemes are being implemented. The

Directorate of Education has added 28 additional classrooms in minorities-dominated localities. Vacant posts of Urdu teachers will soon be filled by the DSSSB. The Directorate of Education has been offering scholarships to meritorious students from minorities communities. The Department of Welfare of SC/ST/OBC/Minorities has also been offering pre-matric and post-matric scholarships schemes for minorities. The city Government is concentrating on ensuring an equitable share for minorities participation in economic activities, employment through various schemes and improving the living condition of minorities communities through different schemes (Pioneer, 02/11/2010)

### **Minority Forum hails Sonia's secular stand**

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Minority Forum has welcomed the secular stand of Congress president Sonia Gandhi at the AICC meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. Responding to Sonia Gandhi's call for a secular India, Forum president Dr Swarupananda Patra said, "India and Indians have upheld the secular traditions of the nation for the past many centuries." The AICC has adopted a statement that the Congress would fight all forces spreading religious hatred, prejudice and bigotry and that seek to polarise people along religious lines, Dr Patra pointed out. The Forum welcomed this strong secular stand and is committed to the cause of nation-building and building communal harmony in the society to keep communal elements at bay, he added. (Pioneer, 03/11/2020)

**Can Sikhs claim minority status in Punjab? issue for Constitution Bench** The Supreme Court on Thursday indicated that it would refer for adjudication by a Constitution Bench the issue whether Sikhs, who form a majority population in Punjab, can claim 'minority' status in that State. A Bench of Justices B. Sudershan Reddy and S.S. Nijjar gave this indication during the course of arguments on a batch of appeals from the State of Punjab and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) against a judgment of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which held that Sikhs were not "minorities" in Punjab and could not claim minority rights. In May 2009, the court stayed the operation of the judgment. The Punjab and Haryana High Court on December 17, 2007 struck down a notification issued by the Punjab government on April 13, 2001 permitting the SGPC to give 50 per cent reservation to Sikh students in colleges run by it on grounds that Sikhs were a minority community. **"Parameters not applied"** The High Court was of the view that the impugned notifications had not applied the relevant parameters for declaring a group of individuals to be minority. "The country could not be taken as a unit, as has been done. There is no material to substantiate that "Sikhs" are a non-dominant group in Punjab apprehending deprivation of their rights at the hands of "dominant" groups, who may come to power in the State in a democratic election. The notifications are clearly ultra vires the jurisdiction of the State government, violating right of equality and public interest." The State and the SGPC argued in the Supreme Court that the High Court erred by striking down the minority status of the Sikhs. They said that going by the definition of Sikhs as explained in the Sikh Gurdwaras (SG) Act, 1925, only about 53 lakh, roughly one-third of the electoral college of the SGPC, were Sikhs as against the 1.66 crore total voters in the State. They disputed the High Court's reasoning to conclude that Sikhs were a majority by virtue of a Census report that pegged their population in the State at 59.2 per cent. The State said this figure, taken from the 2001 census, was based on a counting of all sects belonging to Udasis, Nirmala Sadhus, Sant Nirankari Mandal, Dera Sacha Sauda, Radha Soami Satsang. "They are not Sikhs within the meaning of 'Sikh' under the SG Act, 1925, since they believe in living gurus." (The Hindu, 19/11/2010)

### **Minority welfare dept to look after concerns of gays, transgenders**

HYDERABAD: Things are finally looking up for the gay and transgender community in the state. In its first step forward, the state government has issued a GO bringing the transgender community under the purview of the minorities welfare department. The GO Ms No 565, which was issued last week by the general administration department, states that the minorities welfare department will be the nodal agency to look into issues pertaining to the transgenders hereafter including their protection and welfare. So far, there was no department as such at the state government level looking after the transgender community. Officials from the minorities welfare department said that as they are a small population, the women and child welfare department had recommended to the chief minister K Rosaiah that they be brought under the department of minorities welfare. Lingaraj Panigrahi, principal secretary (minorities welfare) said, "Sensitisation is required among the general public that they (gay & transgenders) have the right to lead a normal life. This is a social issue and they should not be isolated. So far, the department has been dealing with religious minorities but with the government handing over the subject, we have to chalk out our plan of action." However, officials admitted that they were clueless as to the kind of activities that would be undertaken for the welfare of the gay and transgender community. Meanwhile, representatives of the transgender community who were unaware of the recent development expressed their jubilation.

"We have been struggling for our rights for the last 18 years. This is the first time the policy-makers have recognised the community. We need equality in society. Though educated, the community people do not get employment and are forced to get into sex trade," said G Krishna, gay and transgender activist, Suraksha Society, a community based organisation. As per current estimates, there are about 1.2 lakh gay and transgenders in Andhra Pradesh, and a massive 80 per cent of the transgenders are into sex work. Krishna added that this was the first time the community got an identity, but at the same time he said it required livelihood programmes from the government for dignified sustenance and not the ubiquitous schemes like pension. (TOI, 22/11/2010)

### **Govt likely to map minority share in welfare schemes**

NEW DELHI: The government is mulling a proposal to separately map the share of religious minorities in flagship welfare programmes. The objective of the proposal is to gather verifiable data to monitor the success of welfare schemes among minorities similar to the way it is done for underprivileged sections of the society. But, there are signs that the government has developed a cold feet over its political implications as Hindutva groups may make a political capital out of it. The proposal is pending before the Assessment and Monitoring Authority (AMA) of the Planning Commission, which was set up to monitor the extent of development benefits of welfare schemes accruing to religious minorities. It has been suggested that flagship programmes -- like NREGA and Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan -- should have separate "minority" column in the evaluation data. This will give a clear picture of the minorities' participation in these schemes, which give legal entitlement of work and education to the poor. Presently, the collection of community-wise data is limited to SCs and STs, and, in some cases, to women. But the suggestion from Abusaleh Shariff, who is in AMA and was also on Sachar Commission, which gave a status report on socio-economic condition of Muslims in the country, seems to have put the Plan panel in a spot. "We have suggested there should be a separate column for minorities for data about the participation of Muslims in the mainstream flagship and welfare programmes," Shariff said, adding, "Ever since the proposal was mooted, AMA has not met or the meetings have been postponed." Sources linked the delay in meeting of AMA to the Centre's dilemma over the political implications of the proposal. The dilemma revolves around fears that it will give a handle to the saffron brigade to accuse the Congress of "appeasement" as it did about the Sachar panel. When the Commission, headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar, asked about the share of Muslims in armed and paramilitary forces, Union ministries and banks, it triggered strong protest and was dubbed a "communal" move, which would hurt the national interest. Congress, however, went ahead and even presented a follow-up action plan to the Sachar recommendations. The fresh move to fragment beneficiaries of welfare schemes along religion lines could again risk similar criticism from Congress adversaries. Sources claimed when the proposal was mooted at the meeting, the government departments said that data was not collected about caste or religion, not even for OBCs, except for SCs/STs. Given the issues involved, the decision on the proposal could well be "political". (TOI, 5/12/2010)

### **43,000 minority students waiting for scholarships**

Tags:students waiting for scholarship|educational scholarships|bureaucrats in the education department  
YAVATMAL: Over 42,000 students hailing from minority communities in Yavatmal district have been deprived of the educational scholarships offered by the Union government due to the apathy of the bureaucrats in the education department. According to sources, the Central government had announced educational scholarship to students hailing from minority communities like Muslims, Christians, Buddha, Sikh and Parsi. During the current academic session, 43,223 students from these communities applied for the scholarship in Yavatmal district, of which 13,253 students are from secondary schools. The government had set certain norms for shortlisting of candidates. As per the norms, the parents' annual income should be within Rs 1 lakh. The hostellers were to get Rs 500 per month while others would get Rs 1,000 annually. The tehsil-wise break-up of eligible applicants was: Yavatmal (5,167), Kalamb (1,066), Babhulgaon (952), Darwha (5,351), Digras (3,539), Ner (2,348), Pusad (9,119), Umarkhed (6,012), Mahagaon (2,951), Pandharkawda (1,137), Ghatanji (1285), Ralegaon (398), Wani (1269), Maregaon (228), Arni (2,113) and Zari (288) respectively. After scrutiny, all the applications were sent to the directorate of education, Pune, for further action. The finally approved list is awaited from the Pune office, educational department officials said. "As soon as we receive the final list and the funds from the Pune office, we shall start disbursing the scholarship," said a secondary education office source. However, the poor students are anxiously looking forward to their scholarships and whenever they approach their institutions; they are sent back empty-handed, since the order is yet to come. "The official procedures should be expedited so that poor students get their scholarship," said local Muslim community leader Abdul Ansar. (TOI, 10/12/2010)

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