

MINORITIES: MUSLIMS - 2004

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Muslims must join BJP, urges Venkaiah (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 5: BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu on Monday described the meeting between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf as a "positive step in the right direction." Addressing a function to mark the merger of Soshit Kranti Dal, a breakaway RJD faction led by minister of state for social justice and empowerment Nagmani, with the BJP, Mr Naidu also exhorted the Muslims to join the BJP and not be misled by the "mischievous propaganda by the pseudo-secular outfits." Before the merger of Mr Nagmani's outfit, another breakaway RJD faction led by Mr Sukhdeo Paswan had also joined the BJP. (Asian Age 6.1.04)

CBI registers 1st Gujarat riots case (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 7: The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case against three persons for the alleged gangrape of the sisters of a pregnant woman and the murder of her relatives during the communal violence in Gujarat in February, 2002. The Gujarat police had filed a closure report in the case on technical grounds despite clear information about the accused. The case, which is the first registered by the CBI pertaining to the incidents during the communal violence in Gujarat after the Godhra incident, has also been registered against other unknown persons who were part of the group committing murders, rapes and rioting. A CBI spokesman said. "As per the directions of the Supreme Court, the investigating agency has registered a case against Jaswant Nai, Govind Nai, Narcsn Moriya and others for alleged murders, rape and rioting on the complaint of one Bilkis Yakub Rasul. The case has been registered under Sections 143, 147, 148, 149, 376 & 302 of the Indian Penal Code." In the FIR lodged by Ms Bilkis Rasul at the Limkheda police station in Gujarat on March 4, 2002, she had alleged that when she and her relatives were moving around village Panivela after the riots in the last week of February 2002, they were chased by a mob which beat and raped her sisters. The mob also murdered a few of her relatives, she alleged in her complaint. (Asian Age 8.1.04)

Zaheera can play (into) dirty hands of anti-nationals and anti-socials: HC (7)

AHMEDABAD, JANUARY 12: JUSTIFYING its decision to dismiss the state government's appeal and prayer for a retrial in the Best Bakery case—prodded by the Supreme Court—the Gujarat High Court has observed that "there seems to be a definite design and conspiracy to malign people by misusing...witness Zaheera (Sheikh), who is hardly 19." And that Zaheera "can easily fall prey to anyone and play in the dirty hands of anti-socials and anti-national elements." A division bench of Justice B J Shethna and Justice J R Vora, delivering a 90-page judgment dismissing the appeal against the acquittal of all accused by the fast-track court, observed, "We are fully convinced that there is no substance in the appeal." On December 26 last year, the bench had given an oral judgement and deferred passing a detailed order. It took the bench six days to dismiss the appeal and two applications that sought to produce additional evidence. On Advocate General S ; N Shelat's submission that ; when witnesses were turning hostile, that should have raised a reasonable suspicion in the court's mind that they were doing so under coercion or threat, the court observed, "This submission cannot be accepted for the reason that there may be more than one reason for the witnesses for resiling from their statements." (Indian Express 13.1.04)

In Gujarat, Vajpayee seeks forgiveness (7)

Ahmedabad, Jan. 13: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee left scores of Muslims with tears in their eyes on Tuesday evening when he expressed disgust at the Gujarat riots and sought forgiveness from those who had been wronged. "One who forgives is a greater person than one who seeks forgiveness, the Prime Minister said at the inauguration of the Vishwa Parivar Mahotsav, an event organised by the Gujarat government to coincide with the kite festival. An old Muslim kite-maker, Rasul Chacha, welcomed

the Prime Minister. Over 8,000 non-resident Gujaratis and 500 foreigners are participating in the festival. (Asian Age 14.1.04)

12 held in Gujarat for riots gangrape (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 22: The Central Bureau of Investigation on Thursday arrested 12 persons, including a local BJP worker, from Dahod district of Gujarat in connection with the alleged gangrape of three women and massacre of seven villagers during the communal riots in the state in March 2002. The agency had on January 1 registered a case on the basis of the complaints of one of the rape victims. Bilkeesben Yakub Rasool Patel, a resident of Limkheda taluka, under the directions of the Supreme Court. The case is the first registered by the CBI pertaining to the incidents during the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002. Incidentally, the Gujarat police had filed a closure report in the case on technical grounds despite clear information about the accused. The Gujarat government had also earlier turned down a National Human Rights Commission recommendation to hand over the case to the CBI. (Asian Age 23.1.04).

Muslims urge parties not to misuse religion (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 28: Muslim intellectuals, including academicians, social activists and retired government servants, on Wednesday appealed leaders of all political parties to refrain from using any-religious remarks during campaigning for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Commending the role of political leaders for not using such remarks during the recently held Assembly elections in five states, Mr Tarlochan Singh, chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, said, "Muslim intellectuals expect similar behaviour from political leaders during the forthcoming parliamentary elections as far as any religious remark is concerned so that the religion cannot be misused by anybody for political end." Mr Singh referred to the intellectuals who met at the NCM to "find out ways and means to improve the communal harmony in the country and to create a congenial atmosphere for peaceful living. Addressing the media persons after the meeting, Mr Singh said that the intellectuals were also of the opinion that all kinds of problems could be resolved through "dialogue" and therefore roads towards dialogue should be open to all and that too for every contentious issue. (Asian Age 29.1.04)

Politicians must keep off temple: Kanchi seer (7)

Chennai, Jan. 28: The Kanchi Shankaracharya, Swami Jayendra Saraswati, on Wednesday called upon the politicians to keep off the Ayodhya issue, as it was a religious issue to be settled by talks between the Hindu and Muslim leaders free of politics. "Politicians should not come into this (Ayodhya) issue. Only the Hindus and Muslims must sit and find a solution," said the seer, who has been involved in negotiations between the Muslim leaders and the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas on the issue. The Swami was speaking to reporters here after inaugurating the tourism package of Nepal Tourism Board to facilitate Indian tourists visiting the famous Pashupathi temple in Kathmandu. "Let us see when that happens," the Shankaracharya quipped when asked if he would approve political parties including Ayodhya in their manifestos for the coming Lok Sabha elections. Regretting that the Ayodhya dispute still evaded a solution even as optimism soared on resolving more complex conflicts between India and Pakistan, the Swami said: "They are talking and talking (on Ayodhya) and there seems to be no end to that. If there is an open mind on the issue and a true resolve to find a settlement, a breakthrough is surely possible. I am still trying." (Asian Age 29.1.04)

SC admits Zahira plea against Best acquittals (7)

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday admitted a petition by key witness Zahira Sheikh, challenging the Gujarat High Court verdict upholding the acquittal of all the accused in the Best Bakery carnage case. The HC verdict, which has not yet been challenged by the Gujarat government, also contained strictures against Zahira. A Bench of Justices Doraiswamy Raju and Arijit Pasayat also issued notice to the Gujarat government on social activist Teesta Setalvad's petition challenging the HC order and seeking to expunge certain remarks against Zahira. Gujarat government's counsel Mukul Rohatagi told a Bench headed by Chief Justice V N Khare that the state would file a special leave petition against the HC judgment within a week. It was after the intervention of the apex court that the state government moved the HC against a Vadodara fast track court order, acquitting all the 21 accused who had allegedly killed 14 people in the Bakery during the post-Godhra violence in 2002. The court also issued notice to the Gujarat government on an appeal challenging the bail given in September 2003 to some accused in the Kodinar riots case. (Times of India 31.1.04)

Missing, said Gujarat cops, but 2 years later CBI starts digging up human remains (7)

CHAPPADVAD/ NEW DELHI, FEB 1: IN the first significant step towards getting to the truth in the rape and massacre of family members of Bilqis Yaqoob Rasool — they had been declared missing by the Gujarat police — a team of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), under orders from the Supreme Court to reinvestigate the case, has dug up human remains. Highly placed sources said there was strong reason to believe these were remains of the members of Bilqis' family, butchered while fleeing rioters in the wake of the Godhra incident, but a confirmation would have to await DNA tests. The plight of Bilqis was first highlighted by The Indian Express and this is the first post-Godhra case being investigated by the agency. While a skeleton was recovered on Saturday, remains of three others were dug on Sunday from the bed of a rivulet in thick jungle. Sources said the remains, which appeared to be those of three women and a child, will now be sent for forensic tests. (Indian Express 2.2.04)

Tension in MP over bullock slaughter (7)

Bhopal: Tension prevailed in the sensitive Ganjbasoda area in Vidisha district on Tuesday after an unruly mob protested the slaughter of a bullock in Nataren police station limits and torched some houses of the minority community. The carcass of the bullock was discovered early on Tuesday, a day after Eid-ul-Zuha, according to the police. Vidisha district had witnessed communal disturbance in January last year following an incident of cow slaughter. IGP (law and order) M R Krishna said trouble started after villagers from Sev, 40 km from Vidisha town, found the carcass. "The bullock's ears seemed chopped off and it died as a result of blood loss," Krishna said. The villagers then blocked the roads demanding that the culprits be brought to book. The roadblock continued for an hour. A case was then registered against unknown persons under the MP Krishi Sangrakshan Adhinyam and the Cow Protection Act. ' Despite registration of the case, the mob went on a rampage, ransacking some houses of the minority community. According to sources, the mob torched at least ten houses. Two companies of armed police have been rushed in to control the situation. (Times of India 4.2.04)

Mass rape & murder: Exhumed in Gujarat, remains come to Delhi (7)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 5: EXHIBITS lined up in a laboratory in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) since yesterday may hold evidence of the mass rape and murder of 14 people in the Gujarat riots. Bones, bone fragments and items of clothing and footwear exhumed from the mass grave in Dahod— the Gujarat police claimed the victims were missing— are believed to be remains of family members of Bilqis Yaaqoob Rasool. Bilkis, five months pregnant in March 2002, was raped and saw eight of her relatives, among 14, raped and killed. Her plight was highlighted by The Indian Express and her case reopened and handed to the CBI at the instance of the Supreme Court. AIIMS experts today conducted an inventory of the material brought back from the riverine pit in Dahod, which they describe as a "mass grave." From tomorrow, X-ray and other experiments will begin to determine the age, sex and finally the identity of the skeletons. (Indian Express 6.2.04)

Salt in mass grave may explain Gujaraat's missing in Bilkis case (7)

NEW DELHI/VADODARA, FEBRUARY 8: THE CBI, probing the mass rape and murder of 14 people during the Gu-jarat riots, claims they have found several packets of salt while exhuming human remains from a mass grave in Dahod — the Gujarat police claimed the victims were missing — suspected to be the site where bodies of family members of Bilkis Yaqoob Rasool were dumped. CBI sources said witnesses have told them that a Gujarat Police head constable Nalpat Singh — he's one of the 12 arrested by the CBI after the Supreme Court reopened the case of Bilkis whose plight was highlighted by The Indian Express — ordered them to fetch 60 kg of salt to get rid of the bodies in March 2002. The salt was used for early disintegration of the bodies but that, CBI sources said, did not really happen because the moisture-content in the soil — the grave's near a rivulet — was very high. (Indian Express 9.2.04)

Clothes from mass grave match those in cop photos: CBI (7)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 10: WHEN the CBI submits its 15-page status report on the mass murder and rape of 14 of Bilqis Yakoob Rasool's relatives to the Supreme Court tomorrow, it will present pieces of a grotesque jigsaw puzzle that piece together a disturbing picture of the Gujarat police. Senior CBI officials and forensic scientists have confirmed to The Indian Express that pieces of clothing exhumed from the site in Dahod match those featured in photographs taken of the bodies when the Gujarat police hurriedly

conducted the post mortem. This new evidence, lying in the forensic lab at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences – on its way for chemical analysis at the Central Forensic Science Laboratory—is heaps of soiled synthetic garments and under-clothes, mostly belonging to women and children, exhumed along with remains of five bodies from the mass grave. (Indian Express 11.2.04)

IB declines to produce Marad reports (7)

KOZHICODE, FEB. 12. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) under the Union Home Ministry has declined to produce its intelligence reports in connection with the May 2 massacre at Marad, near here, before the judicial inquiry commission probing the case. In an affidavit filed before the Marad Judicial Inquiry Commission here today, Mulloth Mukundan, Joint Deputy Director, Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau, Thiruvananthapuram, said the IB was not in a position to produce the reports received or collected by the department in connection with the Marad incident. "The report contains material pertaining to the affairs of the State and communications of the headquarters as well as other offices which are of secret nature." The IB decision comes close on the heels of the Intelligence Wing of the State Police Department getting a favourable injunction from the High Court of Kerala, restraining the Commission, from publishing any information contained in its intelligence reports on the Marad incident. The State and Central Intelligence departments had been asked by the Commission to produce all reports received or collected between December 2001 and May 2003 in connection with the incident. The IB's affidavit, made available to The Hindu, states that the documents also relate to the question of public policy and these could not be revealed. (The Hindu 13.2.04)

Godhra: That's all Moti could say for months (7)

CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 14 : HE HAD gone missing from his Gujarat home the day a mob torched coaches of the Sabarmati Express in 2002. Seven months later, the mentally-challenged youth was found at a Chennai bus stop with burn injuries on chest and a broken leg. Moti (22) left for home this week. The authorities of Anbagam, a home for mental patients where Moti stayed for the past 18 months, contacted the Godhra railway police after the youth told his story in bits. Moti claims a mob broke his leg when he tried to save those trapped in a fire. The Anbagam authorities had sent Moti's photo to the Godhra Station Superintendent, who passed it on to the police. Then, Moti's brother Jeethu Bhai and an uncle came to Chennai and Moti recognised them. "We thought he had perished in the Godhra fires," Jeethu Bhai said. That day, Moti had wandered off from Jeethu's eatery near the station. "He would often hang around at the station...when he did not come back that day, we filed a complaint," says his uncle. (Indian Express 15.2.04)

Sabarmati suspect: Cops crowd face off in Godhra (7)

GODHRA, FEBRUARY 18: DAYS ahead of two years of the attack on the Sabarmati Express which led to riots across Gujarat, tension has returned to Godhra. Six persons, including a police sub-inspector and two constables, were injured today in clashes with a mob which stopped police from spiriting away a Godhra train attack accused from a mosque. It all began when police was alerted that Salim Panwala, one of the main accused in the train attack, was at Umar Masjid in Saat Pul area. Two men in plainclothes went to the mosque, even offered prayers with Panwala and then pounced on him. As they tried to take him away, Panwala began screaming for help. Policemen standing a little distance away rushed to the mosque but came under heavy stoning from residents of the area. In the confusion, Panwala managed to escape. Police lobbed teargas shells and then fired seven rounds to scatter the mob. Residents later alleged that the police misbehaved with them. (Indian Express 19.2.04)

Jamat disputes VHP claim on conversions (7)

JAIPUR, FEB. 18. The Jamat-e-Islami Hind today disputed the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's claim of having converted 586 Muslim families to Hinduism in the Beawar region of Rajasthan this past Sunday and accused it of indulging in fraud and deception to mislead the gullible people in rural areas. "The people whom the VHP claims to have reconverted to Hinduism were already Hindus and were brought to the VHP's Dharma Sabha on some other pretext," Mohammed Salim, president of the Jamat-e-Islami's State unit, told reporters here. He said the VHP was taking advantage of the complex social behaviour of various castes in the region to hoodwink the public opinion. The Beawar region in Ajmer district is dominated by Cheetah, Mehrat, Kathat and Ghodhat tribes, most of whom had converted to Islam in the 14th century. However, many of them continue to practise the social customs of their Hindu counterparts and

are said to be a "bridge" between the two religions. The members of the Rawat caste are orthodox Hindus. Mr. Salim, accompanied by half-a-dozen functionaries of the Rajasthan Cheetah Mehrat Kathat Mahasabha, affirmed that those who attended the VHP's function were the practising Hindus belonging to Rawat and Ghodhat castes. "The VHP's claim that Muslims had embraced Hinduism is a misrepresentation of facts aimed at deceiving the people who do not know about social complexities of the region," said the Mahasabha's president, Zafar Cheetah. (The Hindu 19.2.04)

CBI indicts Gujarat police (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 25: The CBI status report on the Bilkis gangrape-cum-massacre case in Gujarat, submitted to the Supreme Court on Wednesday, indicted the Gujarat police for closing the case and highlighted the lapses of the police in investigating the matter in the preliminary stage. The Supreme Court later granted the CBI three more months to complete the probe. The CBI, complimented by the court for doing a good job and making "substantial progress" in the case, said in its report that even the security of the rape victim and the witnesses in the case were under threat. Appearing for the victim, senior advocate Harish Salve later said the CBI raised serious doubts about the security of Bilkis as well as the witnesses. He said he would move an application seeking protection for the victim and witnesses by a Central force, like the CRPF. (Asian Age 26.2.04)

Vadodara clash kills 3 (7)

Ahmedabad, Feb. 27: As the Vishwa Hindu Parishad held prayer meetings in the city on the second anniversary of the Godhra train burning, communal clashes erupted in Vadodara leading to the deaths of three persons. In an indication that Gujarat's communally volatile pockets still continue to smoulder, one person today died in police firing and two others of stab wounds. Two years ago, 59 people were burnt alive after a mob torched a coach of the Sabar-mati Express, sparking riots that killed over 1,000 people. The special investigating team (SIT) probing the riots is yet to unravel the "conspiracy" in the case. But seven chargesheets have been filed, 87 people arrested and some freed, and numerous raids carried out in the narrow lanes and by lanes of Polan Bazaar and sensitive areas of Godhra town. Godhra MLA Hareesh Bhatt claimed there was no mystery about the "cowspiracy". It was clear the plot had been hatched in Dubai and Pakistan, but the SIT had not been able to extract much information from suspects on who masterminded the carnage and why. The day the train burned, chief minister Narendra Modi saw the ISFs hand in it. Police then floated a second theory on the involvement of the Students' Islamic Movement of India. Then a "narco-terrorism" link emerged, and finally an underworld connection. None of the theories have yet been proved. (Telegraph 28.2.04)

Poor Muslims still deprived of work (7)

Ahmedabad, February 27: TWO YEARS after the city's worst riots, life is gradually limping back to normal for the relatively well-off Muslims. Their business establishments have been repaired, renovated and restarted. Many Muslim hoteliers have even taken in Hindu partners as a sort of security against Sangh Parivar activists, who had vandalised and burnt their restaurants in the post-Godhra riots. But for the poorer sections of the community who live in the outskirts of the city, life is still a struggle. These Muslims are mostly broom-makers, raakhi-makers and kite-makers. They continue to be deprived of work as traders, some of them Muslims, refuse to give them raw material for fear of losses in case there is another round of riots. Shahin Bano Rangrez, a broom-maker of Aabaad Nagar, faced this problem when she was denied dry-grass, iron wire, wood pieces and plastic covers by a Muslim trader. The trader wanted a security deposit for his goods as he felt the raw material could be destroyed in case there was another riot in the shanties. Similarly, Meherunnis-sa Sheikh of Chandpla lake area too was denied coloured threads, paper and beads for making raakhi. The trader in her case too was a Muslim, who was worried about the safety of his materials in the shanty colonies where Muslims and Dalits live and work. (Hindustan Times 28.2.04)

No end to riot victims' struggle (7)

Ahmedabad, Feb. 26: Two years ago this day the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express was set on fire at Godhra, killing 59 people. And nearly 2,000 were butchered in the communal carnage that raged through Gujarat over the next two months. As thousands were rendered homeless and communal distrust soared, no one could even hope to quantify the psychological toll. Pota was slammed against 135 people

for burning the train coach. But as for the riot deaths, the number of arrests was nowhere near comparable. In any case, trials in a dozen riot-related cases have been stayed by the Supreme & Court following a public-interest petition seeking their transfer outside Gujarat. Today, the physical rehabilitation of the riot-battered minorities is almost complete. But the psychological barrier remains — aggravating the 'ghettoisation' along communal lines in the city. (Hindustan Times 27.2.004)

2nd March

US organizations condemn Gujarat genocide (7)

New Delhi, March 1: Several US-based women organisations have expressed support for the women of Gujarat who suffered and continue to suffer due to the communal genocide that took place in February and March 2002. The women organisations hold the government of Gujarat accountable for the crimes committed and denounce it for its inaction to end violence. In an open letter to the women of Gujarat they said, "We strongly condemn Gujarat chief minister Mr Narendra Modi and the government of Gujarat for justifying the violence and the Sangh Parivar for its role in the pre-meditated attacks against the Muslim community." The women activists have demanded that those who perpetrated the heinous crimes in Gujarat and those responsible for organising the genocide, be brought to justice. The statement issued in the letter was produced as a consensus document of Aarohan, the second annual conference of South Asian Women's organisations in the United States held last year. The statement has also been endorsed by US-based women organisations like AASRA, Chaya, Daya, Manavi, Narika, Saheli for Asian Families and Sakhi for South Asian Women. (Asian Age 2.3.04)

Another riot mother stands up to ask for justice, HC listens (7)

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 1: AFTER Zaheera Sheikh, Bilkis Yaqoob Rasool, it's Madinabibi Shaikh—slowly, Gujarat riot victims are standing up to ask for justice. And the courts are stepping in. Madinabibi, who hid in a field with her son the whole night of March 2, 2002, and says she saw her daughter and niece being raped and later murdered along with five more relatives in Eral village of Panchamahals, moved the Gujarat High Court today accusing the public prosecutor of bias and requesting that the witnesses be examined again. She told the court that the prosecutor should have declared the witnesses as having turned hostile when they suppressed information or deposed in a manner that helped the accused. Allowing Madinabibi to produce xerox copies of the depositions of seven witnesses along with xerox copies of their statements, Justice C K Buch, while fixing the hearing for March 8, stayed ongoing proceedings before the sessions court. The judge also asked the prosecutor to be present before the court on March 8 "so that this court can put certain questions as to his role...(in the) conduct of the trial." (Indian Express 2.3.04)

3rd March

Gujarat riot widow Naseem vows to battle on for justice (7)

New Delhi, March 2: On March 1, 2002, Naseem lost 26 members of her family in the Gujarat riots. Her house in Kaalol, Panchmahal district, was razed to the ground. Two years have gone by since the incident, but no one has been convicted for the murder of her family. But Naseem, who was in New Delhi on Monday along with other Gujarat riot eyewitnesses, is not wasting her life shedding tears. She has instead made it her life's endeavour to carry on the fight for justice. To forget her grief, this 31-year-old widow has taken to the path of peace. She works as an "Anian pulhik" with Aman Samudaya, which was founded by a group of persons at the time of the riots to assist victims. Currently in New Delhi along with other Gujarat riot eyewitnesses, Sheikh Naseem has been participating in functions and protests over the last few days against the inaction of the Gujarat government during the riots and the slow judicial process. Naseem's son, 12-year-old Sohail, is the lone ray of hope in her life. Her husband Mohammed Bhai and 13-year-old daughter were killed by ruthless rioters. Her relatives were killed by the rioters outside the hospital where she was admitted for treatment. From my hospital bed I suddenly saw my brother Yakooob run inside. The rioters had set his clothes on fire. He was burning and screaming for help. Soon he collapsed and I also fainted. It was 15 days later that I regained consciousness," Naseem told The Asian Age. (Asian Age 3.3.04)

A riot victim determined to fight for justice (7)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2. Two years have passed by but the pain hasn't reduced. Losing 24 family members is not easy to forget either. Tears overwhelm 31-year-old Naseem Bano as she recounts the

horrors of the communal carnage that raged through Gujarat and took away all that she had, save her 13-year-old son. And now this brave woman, despite receiving threats to withdraw her case, is standing firm in her fight for justice. "An apology from the Government means nothing to us. An apology is acceptable only when justice has been done. But where is the justice? All those people who victimised us are running free. And the Government has no business to ask for an apology," declared Naseem during a press conference at the Anhad office here today. "Today, all I have is my son and I am being threatened that unless I withdraw my case he will be kidnapped. But I will not step back till these people have been punished," asserted this victim who turned her personal tragedy into a source of strength to help others. Looking back, Naseem's eyes turn misty as she recalls how her family was brutally murdered. "They raped and killed my 13-year-old daughter. She was burnt alive. My husband tried to save her but they killed him too. They killed everyone, including my parents-in-law, and threw their bodies into the river," she said with tears in her eyes. Naseem escaped the same fate because she was hospitalised at that time. For 20 days after her family was killed, Naseem had no information about the tragedy. "Later I was told by friends," she said. (The Hindu 3.3.04)

6th March

Cop who poured salt on bodies is arrested (7)

Ahmedabad, March 5: The probe into the Bilkis gangrape case today saw a second Gujarat policeman land in the CBI net. Inspector Idris A Saiyed was held by the CBI special team to help it determine if he deliberately concealed facts or did not follow the procedure while burying the bodies of relatives of Bilkis who were raped and killed by mobs during the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat. The CBI has been ordered by the Supreme Court to probe the Bilkis case which was first highlighted by The Indian Express. Raped when she was five months pregnant in March 2002, she watched 14 of her family members being killed in a Dahod village. According to CBI sources, it was Saiyed who supervised the inquest and other legal proceedings when several bodies – Gujarat police claimed there were only seven the CBI has so far dug up remains of four – were found in the fields near Paniwela during the riots. (Indian Express 6.3.04)

9th March

Gujarat riots a blot on NDA rule: Advani (7)

GHAZIABAD, MARCH 8. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said today that the riots in Gujarat in 2002 were "unfortunate" and a blot on the six-year rule of the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre, which had performed satisfactorily on the internal security front by initiating peace processes with Pakistan as also with the militant outfits in the North-East. Addressing jawans and officials at the Central Industrial Security Force's Annual Raising Day Parade here, Mr. Advani said the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA Government, which had come to power on the "positive mandate" of providing su ra] or good governance, had tried to fulfil its promise by achieving both security and growth. Averting that people were now discussing the country's progress in the past six years, the presence of a "feel good" factor and the issue of "India Shining," Mr. Advani said the fact that the overall security situation had improved needed to be appreciated. (The Hindu 9.3.04)

12th March

Gujarat Muslims plan Vijay Yatra (7)

Ahmedabad, March 11: Muslim leaders in Ahmedabad plan to take out a "Vijay Yatra" on Friday to show their solidarity with the Indian cricket team because they see the tour of Pakistan as a step towards improving relations between the two countries. The Muslim leaders will begin the "Vijay Yatra" by praying for the success of the cricket team. The yatra will commence after Friday's namaz from Haji Bawa's well in Juhapura and conclude at Narol. The imam of the Jama

Masjid at Kalupur, Shabbi Ahmad Siddiqui, is among the front-runners organising the yatra. "The intention behind taking out the yatra is to ease communal tension between the two communities (Asian Age 12.3.04)

16th March

Protect key witnesses in Gujarat riots (7)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15: THE Supreme Court today asked the Centre to identify key witnesses in the nine Gujarat riot cases where trial has been stayed on its orders, for the purpose of providing them

security by central police forces like the CRPF. Just a fortnight back, the court had observed that the Centre should protect witnesses in cases related to federal offences and fundamental rights violations. It had sought the Centre's response to the demand of Gujarat riots' witnesses for protection by central forces instead of the State police. Responding to this order, Solicitor General Kriti Raval submitted today that there were 1499 witnesses in the nine riot cases and it would be impossible for central forces to provide security to all. As the Gujarat Government counsel, Additional Solicitor General Mukul Rohtagi, pointed out that security had been provided to most of the witnesses, Raval said it was a sensitive issue as law and order is a State subject. Reiterating that the Centre was not averse to providing security through central forces to key witnesses in the riot cases, he sought three weeks time for their identification. However, the Bench comprising Chief Justice V N Khare, Justice S B Sinha and Justice S H Kapadia asked him to report to the court on the issue by April 2. (Indian Express 16.3.04)

18th March

Bilkis: 2 officers told to explain (7)

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 17 : FOUR days after escorting Bilkis Yakub Rasool to the forest where she was gangraped and 14 of her relatives killed by a mob during the post-Godhra riots, the CBI today summoned two Gujarat police officers for questioning. An Ahmedabad court had earlier rejected the officers' petitions for anticipatory bail. The two officers, Deputy Superintendent of Police R S Bhagora and ACP R M Bhabhor, posted in Limkheda taluka at the time of the massacre and currently serving in the state CID and Ahmedabad traffic department respectively, have been summoned by the CBI to its Devgad Baria camp. An ASI and a head constable have already been arrested for "tampering with evidence" and the CBI has informed the Supreme Court of the "poor" probe conducted by the Gujarat police in the case. (Indian Express 18.3.04)

24th March

Zahira asks SC to review decision in Best case (7)

New Delhi, March 23: Zahira Shaikh, a key witness in the Best Bakery case, and Gujarat government on Tuesday requested the Supreme court to consider additional evidence given by witnesses and decide whether the trial court and the high court were justified in acquitting all the 21 accused. While senior advocate Kapil Sibal made the submission on behalf of Zahira, in case of Gujarat government it was made by additional solicitor general Mukul Rohtagi. The submissions were made before a bench comprising Justice Doraiswamy Raju and Justice Arijit Pasayat. The bench heard the appeals filed by them challenging the high court order upholding acquittal of all the accused in the case. However, the bench said that it would first go into the issue whether the additional evidence were to be taken into account while deciding the appeals against the trial court order. Mr Sibal said the state in its appeal had categorically stated that the witnesses could not state during the trial the truth and hence they should be given another chance to depose before it. (Asian Age 24.3.04)

25th March

SC reserves order in Best Bakery case (7)

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its order on a limited question whether the Gujarat High Court could be asked to consider fresh evidence in the Best Bakery case, even as counsel for the acquitted accused criticised the media for its bias against them. The high court had upheld the acquittal of all the 21 accused, who had allegedly burned alive 21 persons in the Vadodara bakery during the violence in Gujarat over two years ago. Key witness in the case Zahira Sheikh and the state government had on Tuesday pleaded before the SC to give a direction to the high court to consider fresh evidence. But counsel for acquitted accused K T S Tulsi said their legal rights had been severely violated in an unabated trial by the media. He urged the apex court not to allow any fresh bid by the witnesses and the prosecution for injection of fresh evidence leading to a retrial of the case. A Bench of Justices Doraiswamy Raju and Arijit Pasayat reserved its verdict on the limited question whether the high court could be directed to consider the fresh evidence claimed through affidavits by some witnesses. (Times of India 25.3.04)

4th March

Curfew imposed in Ahmednagar after communal clashes (7)

AHMEDNAGAR, MARCH 3 : CURFEW was clamped on Ahmednagar city today to quell the violence that erupted after Muharrum procession late last night. It will be in place till 6 am on Thursday. Trouble began at 7.30 pm on Tuesday when the procession reached Kotla area and a group of youngsters there started pelting stones at the bystanders. Soon, tension gripped other areas and reports of stone-pelting poured in from various parts of the city, including Chowpaty Karanja, Telikhunt, Siddhibag, Aurangabad road, Kondyamama chowk and Mangalgate. Then, a mob attacked a house and a bakery, and set three vehicles, including an auto-rickshaw, on fire.

The arson continued till noon today, and even a lathicharge failed to stop the mob. All shops, commercial establishments, theatres downed shutters. With the situation threatening to get out of control, IG of Nashik Range Ankush' Dhanvijay, who arrived in the city in the morning, decided to clamp curfew. Six police personnel, including two sub-inspectors and four civilians, were injured in the stone-pelting. Rajendra Radhakisan Geete, one of the injured, is in a serious condition. Over 100 people, including an NCP corporator Samad Khan Wahab, have been booked under various sections of the IPC, pertaining to rioting. (Indian Express 4.3.04)

BJP equating Muslims with Pak. (7)

New Delhi, March 4: CALLING UPON the political class to respond to the real needs of all sections of the society including Muslims, prominent Mumbai-based intellectuals and social activists have charged the BJP with equating the principal minority community with Pakistan. "It is a shame that both the Prime Minister and his deputy think that Indo-Pakistan friendship is a bribe that can be offered to Indian Muslims in return for their votes," they said in a statement on Thursday. The statement termed Advani's comments on a TV channel—wherein he reportedly said the "most effective way we have figured to reduce Hindu-Muslim tension is by improving India-Pakistan relations" — as curious and shocking. The statement was issued on behalf of Javed Akhtar, Shabana Azmi, Javed Anand, Teesta Setalvad, Nikhil Wagle, Hasan Kamal, Alyque Padamsee and Sajjid Rashid. (The Hindustan Times 5.3.04)

11th March

Vande Mataram row: 12 seek pardon (7)

Agra, March 10: A DOZEN pro-BJP Muslims on Wednesday sought the pardon of a Mufti here who had excommunicated them for praising the national song 'Vande Mataram'. Around 54 Muslims, mainly from the minority cell of the BJP, had held the view that there was nothing wrong if a Muslim says 'Vande Mataram'. Mufti Ab-dul Kadoos Rumi disapproved of the opinion and issued a 'fatwa' against them. The BJP condemned the 'fatwa' as "fundamentalist and foolish". (Hindustan Times 11.3.04)

12th March

Sunni leader: Fatwa is irrelevant (7)

Lucknow, March 11: A fatwa issued by an Agra mufti ex-communicating 54 Muslims and nullifying their marriages for having praised the song Vande Mataram has started snowballing into a major election issue with the UP BJP questioning the rationale behind such a diktat. On Friday last, Agra's local mufti, Abdul Quddus Rumi, issued a fatwa expelling 54 Muslims from the community and nullifying their marriages on the grounds that they had violated the principles of Islam by praising an un-Islamic song like Vande Mataram. The mufti said that if the expelled Muslims wished to revert to Islam, they would have to first cleanse their souls and then remarry according to Islam since their earlier marriages stood null and void. The 54 Muslims include the Mut-wallis of Loha Mandi and Shaheed Nagar mosques. These people had reportedly said Vande Mataram praised the motherland and did not mask any religious sentiments and, therefore, should be sung by Muslims as well. (Asian Age 12.3.04)

Bengal protests against UP fatwa (7)

Kolkata, March 11: Member of the Central Haj Committee and West Bengal BJP leader Muzaffar Khan on Thursday sang Vande Mataram to protest against the fatwa by Mufti Abdul Quddus Rumi, who "excommunicated 54 members of the Muslim community in Agra and annulled their marriages" for singing Vande Mataram at a BJP meet last week. Mr Khan said, "The national song Vande Mataram, does not belong to any community. Freedom fighters fought against the British rule and died with the song on their lips." The West Bengal BJP leader smelt a "political conspiracy" in the fatwa and said the timing, before the Lok Sabha elections, betrays that some forces are out to divide the Muslim community. (Asian Age 12.3.04)

22nd March

U.P. Muslims face a difficult choice (7)

LUCKNOW, MARCH 21. The divergent views being aired by leaders of the minority community since the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections have left observers confused regarding the possible electoral preferences of the Muslims in Uttar Pradesh. The Samajwadi Party had received a preferential treatment from Muslim voters during the past several elections while the largest number of minority candidates contesting these elections belonged to the Bahujan Samaj Party. While the SP has once again made determined efforts to maintain its status as the most favoured party of the Muslims, others have raised doubts about its genuineness to serve the cause of Muslims. The nature of contest during the elections witnessing a fight among political forces making a claim over Muslim votes makes it further difficult for > the minorities to make a choice. The UP Government headed by the Samajwadi Party had taken several legislative measures on the eve of the elections to please the minorities and the Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, has made it a point to refer to these measures at his election meetings. "Even a Chief Minister belonging to the Muslim League would not have taken such bold decisions in favour of the minorities", Mr Yadav has been quoting some Muslim leader as having remarked while praising his Government. (The Hindu 22.3.040)

23rd March

VHP criticizes Government policy towards Muslims (7)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 22. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad said today that the ongoing "maha yagya" in Ayodhya, which started on Sunday, was aimed at three things — creating awareness of Hindutva, support for a Ram temple, and "hriday parivartan" (change of heart), but was in no way connected with the coming elections. Giriraj Kishore, senior VHP leader, said that VHP cadre would be free to canvass for "any candidate" who agreed with the Parishad's 11-point agenda. "The VHP will not support or do propaganda for any political party," he said. But he admitted that senior VHP leaders had supported the recent RSS resolution adopted in Jaipur saying that the organisation and its cadre would support the BJP and work for its victory. "We supported that resolution as RSS swayamsevaks, but as VHP we have our own agenda," Mr. Kishore said.

Mr. Kishore came down heavily on what he called "government policy" towards Muslims. "They [the BJP] are saying that Muslims are coming closer to the BJP as they have had a change of heart. The results of this policy will not be good. Let it be remembered that even a man like Mahatma Gandhi was not able to 'change hearts'," Mr. Kishore said. Asked whether the VHP was against the Prime Minister's peace initiative in relation to Pakistan, Mr. Kishore said he had talked about "government policy" and had not said anything about the Prime Minister or his initiative. (Hindu 23.3.04)

3rd April

SC seeks Gujarat's opinion on transfer of riot cases (7)

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday asked the Gujarat government to respond to various suggestions made by former solicitor-general Harish Salve relating to riot cases. It also issued notice on noted danseuse Mallika Sarabhai's plea for quashing of human trafficking case against her. Salve sought transfer of the violence-related cases outside Gujarat, setting up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to look into other riot cases and setting up of a committee to look into compensation awarded to the victims. A Bench of Chief Justice V N Khare, Justices S B Sinha and S H Kapadia fixed April 21 for hearing the matter. The Bench also issued notice on Sarabhai's petition challenging a Gujarat High Court order rejecting her plea for quashing the case against her. She said the state government was victimising her by filing the false case as she had been raising her voice against the riots that took place following the burning of the Sabarmati Express coach in Godhra. (Times of India 3.4.04)

5th April

DNA of Bilkis kin isolated, shot in arm for CBI probe (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 4 : THE CBI probe into the case of Bilkis Yakub Rasool, who was gang raped while 14 of her relatives were being killed during the Gujarat riots, received a shot in the arm when forensic experts, after weeks of painstaking work in the laboratory, succeeded in isolating DNA samples from the remains of five bodies of Bilkis' relatives exhumed from a mass grave in Dahod. With the DNA isolated, scientists will be able to establish the identity, age and sex of the dead. Officials said the forensic team

would submit its final findings to the CBI in a month's time. The Bilkis case — she was five months pregnant when she was gang raped in March 2002 — was highlighted by The Indian Express and the Supreme Court ordered the CBI to probe the case after Gujarat Police closed the file. Top forensic experts spent a week in Dahod and carried to Delhi the DNA samples of Bilkis and members of her surviving family. These samples are now being matched with the DNA samples isolated by the team. (Indian Express 5.4.04)

6TH April

Gujarat riots case: bail order set aside (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5. The Supreme Court today set aside a Gujarat High Court's order granting bail to the seven main accused facing trial before a Mehsana fast track court for burning alive 11 persons at Visnagar during the 2002 communal riots in the State. A Bench of Justice Doraiswamy Raju and Justice Arijit Pasayat allowed appeals filed by complainant Mohd Iqbal Khan Boloch and the State Government against the impugned High Court order. The present case is one of the seven sensitive Gujarat riot cases in which the apex court had stayed trial on petitions seeking their transfer outside the State. Senior counsel for the complainant, Anoop G. Chaudhary, assisted by counsel Shakil Ahmed Syed earlier contended that the High Court was not justified in granting bail to the seven accused who were threatening the witnesses. It was also contended that the apex court had stayed trial of the case and was seized of the matter and so the High Court should not have passed the impugned order. (Hindu 6.4.04)

Notice on Gujarat police officer's posting in CBI (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5. The Supreme Court today issued a notice to the Centre, Gujarat Government and CBI on a petition challenging the appointment of the former Ahmedabad Police Commissioner, P.C. Pandey, as Additional Director of CBI. The notice was issued by a Bench of Justice Ruma Pal and Justice P. Venkatarama Reddi on a petition filed by the secretary of the Citizens for Justice and Peace, Teesta Setalvad. The petitioner alleged that Mr. Pandey, who was the Commissioner, was morally responsible for the carnage that took place in 2002 during the post-Godhra riots. The apex court was now seized of a number of incidents, which took place during the period of Mr. Pandey in which CBI investigation had been demanded. It would be a great injustice to the riot victims as Mr. Pandey had let the incidents happen due to his negligence, if not conspiracy and connivance. The petitioner prayed for quashing his appointment as Additional Director of CBI. (Hindu 6.4.04)

11th April

Rare confession: Riots a burden I have to carry all my life, says Modi (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10: TWO years after riots claimed nearly 1000 lives, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has said that he will have to carry that "burden for the rest of my life." This rare admission came during an interview with The Indian Express Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta for Walk the "Talk on NDTV 24X7 broadcast tonight. "Ek ghatna ghat gayee, mere karyakaal mein ghat gayee. Aur mujhejeevan bhar usko dhona hoga, main jaanta hoon...mujhe dhona hai main jaanta hoon, main bhitar se ek insaan hoon, (It was an incident that occurred and it happened during my tenure. And I will have to carry this burden for the rest of my life, I know it...I have to carry it, I know it, I am also human inside." When Gupta pointed out to him that "dhona" was a "loaded expression (no pun intended)," he said: "It's for the pundits to analyse all that but it took place when I was in power. So, I can't distance myself from it." Claiming that he didn't take action against any official for the riots because he didn't want to use his position to "hang someone," Modi evaded the question whether as a ruler he ever lost sleep thinking of the victims. (Indian Express 11.4.04)

13th April

Supreme Court orders re-trial in Best Bakery case (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 12. In a severe indictment of the Bharatiya Janata Party Government headed by Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat, the Supreme Court today ordered a fresh investigation and re-trial in the Best Bakery case in which all the 21 accused were acquitted by the High Court. Criticising the State Government for its tardy investigation resulting in miscarriage of justice to the victims, the Court also ordered the shifting of the case — pertaining to one of the post-Godhra incidents in which 14 persons were burnt alive, nine of them belonging to the family of the key witness, Zaheera Sheikh — for trial in Maharashtra. A Bench, consisting of Justice Doraiswamy Raju and Justice Arijit Pasayat, described the

acquittal of the 21 accused as nothing but a travesty of truth and a fraud on the legal process and said the resultant decisions of the lower courts called for interference. "It is no acquittal in the eye of the law and no sanctity or credibility can be attached and given to the so-called findings," it said. The Bench issued the directions while allowing appeals by the Gujarat Government and Ms. Zaheera, challenging the acquittal of the accused by a fast track court in Vadodara on June 27, 2003 and upheld by the High Court by its judgment dated December 16, 2003. (The Hindu 13.4.04)

14th April

Now, a rath yatra by Dalit Muslims to protest against injustice (7)

New Delhi: WITH THE elections round the corner, the Dalit Muslim community in the Capital has decided to organize a countrywide rath yatra to highlight their concerns. The main protest of the community is the "injustice" meted out to them over the past 55 years. The "Mission 341 Rath Yatra", as the yatra has been named, will be flagged off by Shahi Imam of Fatehpuri Masjid, Mul'ti Mohainmad Mukarram on April 19 from Rajghat, stated the All India United Muslim Morcha (AIUMM) in a Press release issued on Tuesday. The rath will be taken to all parts of the country with a view to make people of the Dalit Muslim community aware of their basic rights, the release added. The yatra will be led by AIUMM vice president Hafiz Alimad Hawari. (Pioneer 14.4.04)

Large number of summary investigations in Gujarat riot cases (7)

The Supreme Court's direction on Monday ordering a fresh investigation and trial outside Gujarat in the Best Bakery case might open a can of worms for the Gujarat Government. Already under severe pressure from the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission, the State Government had submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court on January 28, 2004, admitting that the total number of riot cases registered were 4,256 as against 3,912 mentioned in the intervention application filed on December 12, 2003 by Harsh Mandar in the NHRC vs. the State of Gujarat case (Writ Petition No. (CRI.) 109 of 2003). In the affidavit, the Gujarat Government denied that there was "any attempt, planned, systematic or otherwise... to deny justice to the victims of the widespread communal riots that had engulfed the State in the aftermath of the Godhra incident." The document argues that it would not be judicious to shift the cases outside Gujarat because of the quantum of cases, as well as the poor financial condition of the people accused. It points to the "social implications" of doing so and the "prejudice likely to be caused to the accused in their defence." The matter that would be of special concern to the apex court as well as human rights organisations is the large number of summary investigations against the cases registered. The affidavit admits that the correct number of such cases was 2,108 out of a total of 4,256. In certain cities, the number of summary investigations is almost half the number of cases registered. For example, out of the 961 cases registered in Ahmedabad city, summary reports were filed for 427 cases. In Vadodara city, 206 out of 617 cases were instances of summary investigations, while in Vadodara rural, 152 summary reports were submitted for the 242 cases registered. The statistics in Bhavnagar weigh in favour of summary reports that number 267 against the 310 cases registered. (The Hindu 14.4.04)

19th April

Evil gets a new 'name: 'Modern-day Neros' Modern-day (7)

New Delhi: In an unprecedented judgment dealing with communal violence in Gujarat and its aftermath, the Supreme Court has warned people about "modern-day Neros". A Bench of Justices Doraiswamy Raju and Arijit Pasayat has ordered a fresh trial by a Maharashtra court, giving liberty to Gujarat DGP to reinvestigate the charges, so that victims don't feel that justice was denied to them. In a connecting judgment on human rights activist Teesta Setalvad's appeal, seeking expunging of certain unwarranted remarks made by the Gujarat High Court against her, key witness in the Best Bakery case Zahira Sheikh, and the National Human Rights Commission headed by former Chief Justice of India A S Anand, the Bench had the occasion to remind the judges, particularly those who passed the strictures, of judicial restraint and the rule of law. But, why did the judges think of Nero? The judgment does not offer an answer to that. Nero was a Roman emperor and was condemned to death by the Roman senate in 68 AD. Historians say he was considered an "evil man", who was responsible for the death of many Christians. An "inept tyrant", Nero was believed to be leading a "self-seeking life". (Times of India 19.4.04)

CBI moves to file Bilkis chargesheet (7)

CALL IT a coincidence but around the time Gujarat goes to Lok Sabha polls, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will file its chargesheet in the Bilkis Yakub Rasool case before the 90 day deadline ends on Tuesday. The first of the post- Godhra riot cases being probed by the CBI – the plight of Bilkis, gangraped when she was five months pregnant while 14 of her relatives were killed, was highlighted by The Indian Express – the case chargesheet is expected to be a severe indictment of the Gujarat police and the state administration. The Gujarat police shut the Bilkis case file and the Supreme Court ordered the CBI to probe afresh. The CBI chargesheet will be filed in a Dahod court. The agency has time only till Tuesday. Once the deadline runs out, jailed suspects will be eligible for bail. (Indian Express 19.4.04)

BJP conspiring to divide Muslim vote (7)

JAIPUR, APRIL 18. The All India Milli Council today accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of conspiring to divide the votes of Muslims with the intention of weakening their political power. "The BJP is making an all-out attempt to implement its communal and fascist agenda in the Lok Sabha elections," Manzoor Alam, Milli Council's secretary general, said here. Dr. Alam, who was here to interact with the Milli Council's representatives from various districts of Rajasthan, said the BJP had given no signals of any change in its stand on the Ayodhya issue, uniform civil code and Article 370 of the Constitution and had failed to implement its national agenda for governance during the past five years. "Against this backdrop, the BJP has adopted a new strategy of enticing Muslims to its fold so as to divide the Muslim community in view of its significant strength in a large number of constituencies," Dr. Alam told reporters while alleging that it was a "conspiracy" to dilute Muslims' opposition to the BJP. Dr. Alam, who is also national president of the Milli Council's Political Affairs Committee, said the BJP had a track record of "minority- bashing, hate campaign and organised violence", the worst form of which was witnessed in Gujarat in 2002, and its sectarian agenda could not be hidden behind its "new-found love" for Muslims. (The Hindu 19.4.04)

20th April

CBI charges 20 in Bilkis rape inquiry (7)

New Delhi/Ahmedabad, April 19: The Central Bureau of Investigation on Monday filed a chargesheet against 20 people, including six Gujarat police personnel, two government doctors and a local BJP leader in the sensational Bilkis Bano gangrape-cum-murder case. The chargesheet, which was filed in the court of chief judicial magistrate (rural) Ahmedabad, clearly mentioned the murder of Bilkis' three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, allegedly by one Sailesh Bhatt, a Dahod district BJP leader, besides highlighting the involvement of police officials in the criminal conspiracy which included their attempts to hush up the case. Chargesheets were filed against Shailesh Bhatt, Mitesh Bhatt, Vijay Maurya, Pradeep Maurya, Lala Vakil, Lala Doctor, Naresh* Maurya, Jashwant Nai, Rajesh Soni, Ramesh Chandana, Keshav Vahunia, Govind Nai and Bhikha Patel who were arrested by CBI, after the Supreme Court order when the Gujarat police had closed the case. Head constable Narpatsinh Patel was arrested. Those yet to be arrested are senior policemen PSI Idris Abdul Sayeed, circle PI of Limkhe-da Ramsinh Bhabhor, ASI Somabhai Gorabhai and DySP of Dahod district Raman Bhagora. (Asian Age 20.4.04)

They have been brushed aside by Gujarat sweep (7)

Mohammed Shaikh, 116, Modasa, Sabarkantha. THAT'S what passes off for an address in this north Gujarat town where hundreds of riot-affected Muslims are living in relief camps. Today, Shaikh and others will vote—the second time from their camps, Campaigns come and go but Campaigns come and go but life does not change in Modasa — because riot refugees don't matter. No political party has approached them for the divide is clear here: Hindus vote for the BJP, Muslims for the Congress. BJP's Modasa office in-charge Rajabhai Patel says "There is no BJP or Congress here, it's only Hindus and Muslims. We are not going to get a single Muslim vote." What's worrying the BJP is the fact that the influx of the riot-hit has increased the number of Muslims in this town. The town now has 20,300 Hindus to 19,600 Muslims. Before the riots, the Hindus totalled 18,000 and the Muslims 16,500. (Indian Express 20.4.04)

21st April

Tale of two voters portrays Gujarat polarisation (7)

Godhra, April 20: TWO WOMEN defied their families to vote on Tuesday in Gujarat. But their reasons couldn't have been more different. Farida Bano Shaikh, her face veiled, said the vote was a way to

express her anger over the killings of Muslims. To Sejal Mehta, though, the balloting was part of a campaign to ensure Muslims don't gain political power. "We should prove through democratic means that Hindus will govern the country, not Muslims," said Mehta. The families of Mehta and Shaikh stayed away, fearing renewed violence. With some 1,65,000 police and paramilitary soldiers on guard, polling was largely peaceful. But there were exceptions. Clashes broke out in Borsad, 85 kms from Ahmedabad, when groups of Hindus and Muslims accused each other of trying to take over the polling station. After the dispute escalated to stone throwing, police dispersed the crowds. The violence is only one sign that religious divisions are as deep as ever in Gujarat. Shaikh of Vadodara lives a few kilometers from Best Bakery, where 22 Muslims were burned to death during the riots. "I came to vote to protest the massacre, though I was told by my family members not to vote. They feared there would be violence," Shaikh said as she stood in a line with her two young children. The Supreme Court decision (to order retrial of the case), Shaikh said, "has given me the courage to come out." (Hindustan Times 21.4.04)

Forget Ids, 250 Muslims declared 'missing' (7)

KAPADVANJ, APRIL 20: WHEN 45-year-old Mohammed Pathan walked in to vote for the Lok Sabha elections at the Kumarshala polling booth on Tuesday, he was told by poll officials he couldn't vote for a strange reason. He was "dead" as far as they were concerned. His name had been struck off the list as he was missing, and, presumed dead. "I'm alive and kicking and I have my voter identity card too," he said. "How can they tell me I'm dead?" Pathan wasn't alone, though the others got less ludicrous reasons from the poll officials. At booth 311,800-odd voters were turned away though they had voter identity cards. It was afternoon when voters at this "sensitive" booth in the middle of the town realised so many had been told to go back home. Some said a community seemed to have been targeted, for more than 250 of those turned away were Muslims. In vain they ran to the authorities, even to the local Congress office. "Their names must be missing because they failed to get themselves registered during revision of the rolls," said S.L. Kanat, a mamlatdar posted as assistant election officer. "But their names were not struck off the rolls before sending them notices, to which they didn't respond." Pathan and others, however, said they had not received any such notice. (Indian Express 21.4.04)

22nd April

SC notice to govt on riot witnesses (7)

New Delhi, April 21: THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Centre and the Gujarat government, seeking their stand on the deployment of CISF personnel to protect 400 key witnesses of the Gujarat riots. A bench headed by chief justice V.N. Khare sought to know from the Centre about the deployment of central forces to provide security to the witnesses who had lost faith in the local police. Amicus curiae (friend of the court) Harish Salve told the court that CISF personnel could guard the cluster of villages in which these witnesses live. Salve said the investigating agencies have been probing 4,000 riot cases and the testimony of these witnesses is of utmost importance. Solicitor-general Kirit Raval requested the amicus curiae to give him the list of witnesses and assured the bench that he would examine the matter. The bench asked Raval to inform the court about the Centre's stand on May 5. Meanwhile, the court issued notices to all state governments and Union territories, asking them to file affidavits with suggestions for the framing of a scheme to protect witnesses in all criminal cases. The Centre has already filed an affidavit focussing on the witness protection programme and improvement in the criminal justice system. However, senior lawyer Ram Jethmalani, representing the riot victims, underlined the need to transfer at least four riot cases out of Gujarat. (Hindustan Times 22.4.04)

Best Bakery case: Gujarat seeks modification (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. The Gujarat Government today moved the Supreme Court seeking modification of the April 12 judgment shifting the Best Bakery case for retrial to Maharashtra.

In the light of this development, the Additional Solicitor-General, Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the Gujarat Government, pleaded before a three-Judge comprising the Chief Justice V.N. Khare, Justice S.B. Sinha and Justice S.H. Kapadia for deferring the hearing of the petitions seeking transfer of other post-Godhra riot cases for hearing outside Gujarat. The Bench acceded to the request and posted the petitions filed by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and some others seeking transfer of 12 most sensitive cases for hearing on August 3. The Bench issued fresh notice to the accused in these cases and asked the office of the Director-General of Police, Gujarat, to ensure that the notice was served on all the accused. Notice was also directed to be served on those who had not been served so far in pursuance to an

earlier notice issued by the court. The Bench gave four weeks to the accused to respond. Mr. Rohatgi submitted that unless the modification application of the State Government was heard and disposed of, the plea of transfer in respect of 12 sensitive cases had to be deferred. He submitted that in the appeals before a Bench of Justice Doraiswamy Raju and Justice Arijit Pasayat, the issue of transfer of trial outside the State was never prayed for nor argued. He said the Bench went beyond the scope of the prayer in both the appeals while shifting the trial to Maharashtra. (The Hindu 22.4.04)

25th April

Transfer Godhra case out of Gujarat (7)

MUMBAI, APRIL 24. Human rights activist and journalist Teesta Setalvad today demanded that the Godhra case, along with some others, be transferred outside Gujarat, so that investigations can be conducted in neutral conditions. She told a public meeting organised by Insaaniyat, a group against communalism, that the Supreme Court's order in the Best Bakery case taught a judicial lesson. "You have to conduct a trial in an atmosphere of neutrality. The public prosecutors in Gujarat were members of the RSS and in Za-heera's case, he did not even meet her. Today, the minority in Gujarat is faced with a remorseless administration," said Ms. Setalvad who is part of Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP). CJP was formed by concerned citizens from Mumbai and Ahmedabad to ensure justice for victims in Gujarat. It has held a Citizen's Tribunal into the events in Gujarat and published a report. While CJP and others had been demanding that the cases in Gujarat be transferred to the CBI, on February 18, P.C. Pandey, who was Commissioner of Ahmedabad during the riots and who had been criticised for his role, was appointed Additional Director of CBI, Ms. Setalvad said, adding that the appointment had been challenged. Gujarat was one instance where the rest of the country had chipped in to keep the issue alive, she remarked. Several celebrities, including film star Aa-mir Khan, Govind Nihalani, Medha Patkar, Admiral Ramdas, Justice Suresh, director Tanuja Chandra and actor Rahul Bose supported today's meeting and endorsed a petition welcoming the Supreme Court's order. (The Hindu 25.4.04)

28th April

Accused threatened me: Bilkis case officer (7)

VADODARA, APRIL 27: A DAHOD sessions court today deferred until May 1 the hearing on the bail plea of the 14 accused in the Bilkis rape case even as the investigating officer in the case told the court that he had been threatened by some of the accused lodged in Ahmedabad's Sabarmati jail. The plight of Bilkis Yakub Rasool, gangraped when she was five months pregnant while 14 of her relatives were killed in March 2002, was highlighte Indian Express. It's Gujarat riot case probed by the CBI on the orders of the Supreme Court. Five different bail applications were moved by the accused through their counsel Arvind Pandya before sessions judge VB Mayani. However, the CBI counsel submitted before the court that the original case papers of the Limkheda police station were still with the CBI's Mumbai office. The CBI counsel sought time so that investigators could submit the original papers. (Indian Express 28.4.04)

29th April

Security cover for Gujarat riot witnesses (7)

Ahmedabad, April 28: THE GOVERNMENT will provide Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) security cover to some of the key-witnesses in Gujarat riot cases, including in the Bilkis Yakub Rasool gang rape-cum-massacre case. A three-member Central team led by Inspector General Yashovardhan Azad spoke to some of the key witnesses here and ascertained the threat perception before deciding the level of security. The team, which also includes top rank officials from CRPF and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) arrived here on Tuesday night. On Wednesday the team visited the three "worst affected" areas during the violence, including Naroda Patiya and the Gulbarg housing society in the city, official sources said. The sources said that the security of some key witnesses will be handed over to the CRPF while in certain cases, the job would be given to the state police. The Supreme Court on March 15 had asked the Centre to identify key witnesses in the nine Gujarat riot cases for making arrangements of their security by central forces like the CRPF. "The three officers from Delhi are accompanied by Gandhinagar Range DIG and they are going around to ascertain the level of security being provided to witnesses in the riot-affected areas and the general situation there," Gujarat Director General of Police (DGP) A. K. Bhargav said. (Hindustan Times 29.4.04)

Doctors Surrender (7)

THE TWO absconding doctors in the Bilkis gan-grape case, who were chargesheeted by the CBI, have surrendered before an Ahmedabad court, CBI sources said in New Delhi on Wednesday. The duo, Arun Kumar and his wife Sangeeta Prasad, surrendered before the chief judicial magistrate in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. They were remanded in judicial custody till April 30. CBI had filed a chargesheet against 20 people, including the two doctors on April 19. The chargesheet said that the medics had "not performed properly" the postmortem of the victims of mob fury in village Panivela. (Hindustan Times 29.4.04)

Witnesses to get CRPF cover (7)

SATNAGAR (SABARKANTHA), APRIL 28: THE Government would provide CRPF security cover to some key witnesses in the Gujarat riots cases, including the Bilkis Yakub Rasool gan-grape case, sources said today. A three-member central team, led by IB Inspector General Yashowardhan Azad, today visited witnesses in riot cases living in Mehsana and Sabarkantha to ascertain whether adequate police protection was being provided to them or not and if there was any need to deploy central forces. Sources said the security of some key witnesses would be handed over to the CRPF while, in other cases, it would be handled by the state police.

The team visited riot victims of Sardarpura, Visnagar and Vijapur in Mehsana district and Satnagar in Sabarkantha district. The team, comprising IG (CRPF) Vikram Shrivastav and IG (CISF) K. Shekhawat besides Yashowardhan Azad, is assessing the situation following a Supreme Court order. The team today visited Visnagar and Vijapur and spoke to 18 people —witnesses to the killings there on February 28 and March 12 2002. Iqbal Baloch, one of the witnesses, said he regularly received threats from the accused in Dipda Darwaja case. He said he received the last threat on April 17. "I told them it would be better if we had central police for our protection. We do not trust the local police. The accused continuously send messages that we should make a compromise or there would be more trouble. The threats have increased since the SC stayed the bail orders of seven accused," Baloch said. (Indian Express 29.4.04)

30th April

MHA report on riot victims today (7)

New Delhi, April 29: A Central team, which interacted with riot victims in Gujarat over security issues for two days, will submit its report to the Union home ministry on Friday, recommending security to key witnesses to the riot cases. The team, led by inspector-general of police (VIP security in home ministry) Yashowardhan Azad, also examined the existing security provided to some of the witnesses by the Gujarat police. Sources said that while in certain cases, the team was satisfied with the security cover provided by the police, in some others, especially those relating to key witnesses in the riot cases, the team will recommend handing over the security to Central forces, like the CRPF or the CISF. They said that the ministry would subsequently issue instructions to the paramilitary forces next week to provide security to all those witnesses identified by the Centre's team. Besides Mr Azad, the other members of the team were CRPF inspector-general Vikram Srivastav and the CISF inspector-general K. Shekhawat. The team visited several areas in and around Ahmedabad city and other suburban areas which included Sardarpura, Visnagar and Vijapur in Mehsana district and Satnagar in Sabarkantha district. During their two-day stay in the city, the team held extensive discussions with Gujarat police officials, including the inspector-general (human rights). (Asian Age 30.4.04)

1ST May

Bilkis case: Non-bailable warrants against constable (7)

New Delhi, April 30: A local court in Ahmedabad on Friday issued non-bailable warrants against a Gujarat policeman who is one of the accused in the Bilkis Bano case. The court also directed three other policemen, including two deputy superintendents of police, to present themselves in court during proceedings on May 4. All the four policemen were chargesheeted by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the Bilkis gangrape case. The policemen are alleged to have conducted "shoddy" investigation in the case and dumped nearly 60 kg salt for fast decomposition of the bodies of the victims, including Bilkis Bano's three-and-a-half-year-old daughter. Chief judicial magistrate (Ahmedabad-rural) S.M. Pandhya issued non-bailable warrants against the then head constable of the Limkhe-da police station Somabhai Ghori. Two deputy superintendents of police and a retired sub-inspector B.R. Patel, who have been named in the

chargesheet filed by the CB1, have been asked to remain present in the court on May 4. (Asian Age 1.5.04)

2nd May

Complete collusion between accused & prosecution in Gujarat riots, (7)

NEW DELHI : MAY 1: IN the severest indictment of the justice system in the Gujarat riot cases so far, Chief Justice of India V N Khare said today that the Supreme Court stepped in to protect the victims and witnesses as there was "complete collusion" between the accused and those whose job it was to get them justice. "There was no prosecution in the riot cases at all. Therefore, the Supreme Court stepped in to break the collusion between the prosecution and the accused," said Justice Khare, who retires tomorrow. "What will happen to the victims and witnesses if the prosecution and the accused collude throwing the rule of law to the wind?" Khare asked, adding that he was anguished by the riot trials but determined to salvage the justice delivery system.

"I gave a new dimension to criminal jurisprudence as on the one hand, one bench of the Supreme Court monitored the progress of prosecution in riot cases while another bench decided on the judicial side the correctness of the High Court order (ac- I quitting all the accused in f the Best Bakery case)," Justice Khare said. The justice done to s some victims of the Gujarat riots by a bench of the Supreme Court that he headed was one of the high points in his eventful career, he said. (Indian Express 2.5.04)

4th May

18 Bakery absconders lie in wait (7)

Baroda, May 3: It is wait and watch for the 18 absconders in the Best Bakery case.

With the bail applications of Dinesh Tadvī and Phoolchand Rajbar, two accused arrested on April 22, pending in the high court it is believed that the absconders want to see if bail is granted before they make their next move. If the high court grants bail to the duo, it would prompt the 18 absconders to surrender, believe sources. When the Supreme Court passed order of re-trial of the Best Bakery case in Maharashtra on April 12, the delay of about ten days in issuing arrest orders by the Apex Court allow substantial time to the accused to disappear and chalkout their moves carefully, sources claimed. Though the police has not made any breakthrough in the case for the last ten days, it claims that apprehending the absconders is just a matter of time. The Baroda police is putting forward a theory that the accused cannot be provided refuge for long, as with the i passing of time pressure on the people sheltering them also rises leading to moral dilemma and the fear of being labelled as accomplices. The Baroda commissioner of police, Sudhir Sinha informed The Asian Age, "The court can proclaim that those providing shelter to the accused would be treated as offenders. Thus, catching the accused might turn easier in the near future." (Asian Age 4.5.04)

5th May

State colluded with Best accused: Khare (7)

New Delhi, May 4: FORMER CHIEF Justice of India VN. Khare — who monitored the Best Bakery and 10 other sensitive riot cases — said the state colluded with the accused to weaken the post-Godhra riot cases in Gujarat. The state government went so far as to protect the suspects, Khare told the Hindustan Times on Tuesday. Khare said the collusion between the prosecution and the accused was evident from Best Bakery case records. He said the prosecution never attempted to cross-examine or pressure witnesses in the Best Bakery case to ascertain as to why they retracted their statements to the police. "It is the duty of the prosecution to elicit the truth from frightened witnesses, to demonstrate before the court that they are under tremendous pressure from some quarters," he said. Referring to the case records, Khare said the prosecution helped the accused instead of securing their punishment. When asked why he chose to turn the National Human Rights Commission's petition into a PIL, which was unprecedented and unknown to law, he said: "I tried to give a new dimension to criminal jurisprudence considering the fact that there was total miscarriage of justice in the case." Khare said the object of law wasn't to split the minority groups, but to find out political, social and legal means of preventing them from falling apart. (Hindustan Times 5.5.04)

Centre to submit report on key witnesses protection (7)

New Delhi, May 4: THE HOME Ministry is likely to recommend deployment of central paramilitary forces in Gujarat to provide protection to certain key witnesses in the post-Godhra riot cases. A report with this

recommendation is likely to be submitted in the Supreme Court on Wednesday

The report was prepared on the basis of an assessment by a three-member Central team that visited Gujarat to assess security for witnesses. The forces cannot be deployed directly for protection of the witnesses and, therefore, the home ministry will suggest keeping these forces at the state government's disposal, which would then depute them. The apex court had on March 15 directed the Centre to identify key witnesses in the nine Gujarat riots cases and to make security arrangements for them with the help of paramilitary forces. (Hindustan Times 5.5.04)

6th May

Godhra: Centre to decide on protection of witnesses tomorrow (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 5. The Centre today informed the Supreme Court that it would indicate on Friday the areas and cluster of colonies in Gujarat affected by the post-Godhra riots that could be given protection by the Central forces. The Solicitor-General, Kirit N. Raval, submitted before a three-Judge Bench, consisting of Justice Ruma Pal, Justice S.B. Sinha and Justice S.H. Kapadia, that a Central team had visited the riot-affected areas, assessed the situation and submitted its report to the Home Ministry. The Ministry was examining the report and the Government would inform the court on Friday as to which areas and witnesses needed protection by Central forces, such as the CRPF. Mr. Raval made the submission during the hearing of a petition by the National Human Rights Commission on providing security by Central forces to over 400 key witnesses in 10 sensitive cases related to the post-Godhra riots. (The Hindu 6.5.04)

Gujarat riots: Listen to voice within (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 5: IT WAS a moment of embarrassment for CBI's Additional Director, EC. Pandey, when former Chief Justice of India and former chairman of NHRC J.S. Verma asked him to go by his conscience while dealing with the Gujarat riot cases. Pandey was Ahmedabad police commissioner when post-Godhra riots rocked the city and other parts of the state. "When I visited Gujarat during my tenure as NHRC chairman, I talked to Pandey privately. He shared some information with me," Verma said today, at the Fifth D.P Kohli Memorial Lecture on the "Role of Enforcement Agencies under the Rule of Law". Verma also spoke of the need for greater autonomy for the CBI and other law enforcement agencies and hinted at the possibility of fresh probe into the Jain Hawala case, saying "discharge of the accused at the threshold" had disappointed many. At the function, DSP EC. Sharma of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (Silchar) and Constable Naresh Kumar Sharma of ACB-Jammu received the award for the CBI's best investigating officer and best detective constable respectively. (Indian Express 6.5.04)

7th May

Best case, SC slams Gujarat (7)

New Delhi: The Gujarat government has invited Supreme Court's wrath again over the Best Bakery case. On Thursday, a Bench of Justices Doraiswamy Raju and Arijit Pasayat said: "We never tried to identify the persons. It is after the judgement that they are trying to identify themselves with the act. This is a case of arrogance on the part of the state." When state's counsel apologised for "hurting the sentiments" of the court, the Bench said: "If at all you have hurt something, it is this institution and the profession." Warning the state government that it cannot "browbeat the SC like this", the Bench said, "If this happens to the SC, we shudder to think what will happen to the high court or subordinate courts." (Times of India 7.5.04)

Summons to Modi as kin of Britishers killed in riots seek relief (7)

AHMEDABAD, MAY 6: THE Sabarkantha District Civil and Sessions Court today issued summons to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in civil suits seeking compensation for families of two Britons killed in the post-Godhra riots. Apart from Modi, former home minister Gord-han Zadaphia, former home secretary Ashok Narayan and former DGP K Chakravarti, who held charge at the time of the riots, have also received summons. They have been asked to make their representations before the court on June 24. The three suits were filed last week by London-based dependents of Saeed Dawood and Shakeel Dawood, who were killed on March 1, 2002, in Prantij village of Sabarkantha district. (Indian Express 7.5.04)

9th May

SC dismisses Gujarat plea on Bakery (7)

NEW DELHI, May 7. — Criticising the Gujarat government for approaching it for modification of an order "not" to its "liking", the Supreme Court (coram, Raju, Pasayat, 33) today dismissed its plea for transfer of the Best Bakery retrial back to the state. The Centre, meanwhile, assured the Supreme Court, which contemplated deployment of central forces to protect post-Godhra riots case witnesses in Gujarat, that it would definitely "take action" by 20 May on the basis of a report of a Central team that visited the violence-hit areas of the state. The SC had in its 12 April order directed a retrial in the case — in which all 21 accused of burning alive 14 people during the post-Godhra riots had been acquitted both by the trial court and the High Court — in a Maharashtra court. The court today cast doubts on the "bona fides" of the state government and observed that the stand adopted by it seemed to be that of the "defence... As if in the eyes of the state, Zahira is the accused who should be in the dock and not the persons who are made accused in the case." (Statesman 9.5.04)

12th May

Judge appointed for Best Bakery retrial (7)

MUMBAI, MAY 11. The Bombay High Court has appointed Abhay Thipsay, Additional Sessions Judge, Sewri court, to conduct a re-trial in the Best Bakery case, after a Supreme Court order of April 12. The retrial will be held in Mumbai though the date of commencement of the proceedings is not yet clear. According to the Supreme Court order, the retrial should be taken up on a day-to-day basis, by December 31. All records and proceedings of the case in Gujarat will have to be received by the judge before the retrial begins. The Supreme Court order says that Gujarat has to ensure that witnesses are produced in the Court so that they can depose freely and without any apprehension of threat or coercion. In case a witness asks for protection, Maharashtra shall provide it in addition to that given by Gujarat. Teesta Setalvad, secretary of the Citizens Justice and Peace, which filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court, resulting in the order, said she was very happy with the decision. A fair process would be followed now, with the kind of faith placed by the Supreme Court in Maharashtra, she added. (The Hindu 12.5.04)

25th May

After Sena, Trinamool's blaming Modi (7)

KOLKATA, MAY 24: AFTER Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray openly admitted to The Indian Express—breaking the NDA's post-poll silence—that the Gujarat factor was one reason behind the party's rout, now another BJP ally, the Trinamool Congress, has echoed this line. Its argument: the Gujarat riots and the Trinamool's ambivalent stand led to a "total rejection" by Muslim

voters across the state. First to raise his voice is Sultan Ahmed, one of Trinamool's front-ranking minority leaders trounced in Katwa. Speaking to The Indian Express, he said: "Muslims turned their backs on the Trinamool Congress this election. The party's alliance with the NDA even after what happened in Gujarat could be one of the reasons." He said the swing away from Trinamool by Muslim voters was more pronounced in the urban areas but in rural constituencies, too, the phenomenon was also "visible and pervasive." His senior colleague Sougata Roy is more strong in his attack after his stunning defeat in Diamond Harbour. "Muslims were massacred in Gujarat and I had to face the aftermath in Diamond Harbour," said Roy. Several Assembly segments in the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha seat have a high concentration of Muslim voters. (Indian Express 25.5.04)

BJP 'move' to replace Modi (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 24. The Bharatiya Janata Party has begun consultations to find a replacement for the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. A senior party leader indicated that "this could happen within a month or two." However, the party spokespersons continue to maintain that there is "no question of a change of Chief Minister in Gujarat." But, that was the party position even days before the former Chief Minister, Keshubhai Patel, was asked to put in his resignation to make way for Mr. Modi. Yesterday, the former Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, held a meeting here with the Gujarat State unit chief, Rajendrasinh Rana, and three State general secretaries, Jayanthibhai Barot, Bhupendersinh Chudasma and Suresh Gandhi.

At the meeting, Mr. Advani was briefed in detail on the reasons why the BJP won far fewer seats than expected — 14 of a total of 26, when the expectation was that it would bag as many as 22 seats. The factors that led to the erosion of the party's support base were: Mr. Modi's style of functioning which alienated the party legislators as well as ordinary workers; the raising of power tariffs that angered farmers, especially the powerful Patels; the fact that the BJP lost seats in central Gujarat constituencies

such as Kheda and Anand where Mr. Modi had campaigned extensively; and, finally, the unhappiness of even the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh whose Bharatiya Kisan Sangh had agitated against the steps taken by the Modi Government. Reportedly, a detailed analysis of the election results was done, seat-by-seat. "Even the RSS leader, Laljibhai Patel, wants Mr. Modi out," said a BJP leader later. (Hindu 25.5.04)

25th May

Riot victims welcome new govt at Centre (7)

GANDHINAGAR, The change of guard at the Centre has raised hopes of the riot-affected in their renewed bid for justice. Mr Tanvir Jafri, the son of the former Congress MP who was brutally murdered at the Gulbarg Society in the aftermath of the Godhra incident, has written to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh seeking an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the incident. Ehsan. Jafri and 38 others were killed in a riot in Ahmedabad. Tanvir has also sought the trial out-Side Gujarat. He has also asked for a probe into the police inaction while the killings were going on. Meanwhile, a strong contingent of 100 strong CISF jawans has been deployed for the protection of riot victims. Five teams of 20 members each have been sent to Dahod, Himmatnagar, Vadodara, Godhra and Ahmedabad. This deployment follows a Supreme Court directive. (Statesman 25.5.04)

28th May

In the name of Muslims' safety, UPA plays into Sangh's hands (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 27: CONGRESS President Sonia Gandhi may have robbed the BJP-RSS-VHP of the foreign origin issue but her United Progressive Alliance has just handed them another one on a platter: the "secular alliance" is soft on terror, hard on communal violence; in short, it's back to "minority appeasement." In its CMP today, the UPA has committed to scrapping POTA and bringing in a "model comprehensive law" to deal with communal violence to "generate faith and confidence in the minority communities." Its intentions may be Playing politics with the riot victims honest: avoid a repeat of the Gujarat riot injustice and ensure that minorities aren't POTA's exclusive targets. But if the Manmohan Singh Government is sincere about these twin objectives—without giving the Sangh Parivar a handle—it just has to go back to the Rao Government and look at what law it drafted to replace TADA with. (Indian Express 28.5.04)

1ST June

Communal unrest leaves 5 hurt (7)

Ahmedabad, May 31: At least five persons were injured in a communal violence that erupted in Choksi ni Chali at GomtipuR area on Sunday morning. Police arrested 45 people in connection with the violence. The injured were rushed to Shardaben Hospital for treatment. According to Gomtipur police, a minor altercation between a cyclist and a youth, both belonging to different communities, snowballed into communal violence around 11.30 am. A 12-year-old cyclist belonging to the minority community and residing in Choksini Chali accidentally hit a Hindu youth living in the same locality near Narsinhji Mata temple. Enraged, the youth abused the boy and manhandled him. The cyclist went back to his locality and returned with a mob of about 50 men who pelted stones at the Hindu neighbourhood. In retaliation, the Hindu residents of the chali also pelted stones at the people belonging to the minority community. The violence continued for about 30 minutes until Gomtipur police intervened and laathi charged the mob. Later during combing operation, police rounded off 26 youth belonging to the minority community and 19 from the majority community. Police force was deployed in the area to check any untoward incident. (Asian Age 1.6.04)

2nd June

'Gujarat has to appoint public prosecutor for Best Bakery case retrial' (7)

MUMBAI, JUNE 1. It is up to the Gujarat Government to appoint a public prosecutor for the Best Bakery retrial which has been transferred to Mumbai by the Supreme Court, according to the Maharashtra Law Minister, Govindrao Adik. Mr. Adik told The Hindu that the Gujarat police were still investigating the case and therefore the Gujarat Government has to appoint the public prosecutor. "We are only providing the facilities for the case to be retried — the Gujarat Government is still the whole and soul of the case and it has to take this decision," he added. However, Mihir Desai, the advocate who is representing Zaheera

Sheikh in the case in the Supreme Court, said that ideally, Maharashtra should appoint the public prosecutor but the apex court's order was vague on the issue of who should do so. "The Supreme Court order directs the State Government to appoint another public prosecutor and it shall be open to the affected persons to suggest any name which may also be taken into account in the decision to so appoint" said Mr Desai. The Court, however, did not specify which State Government, Mr. Desai noted. The order also says: "Though the witnesses or the victims do not have any choice in the normal course to have a say in the matter of appointment of a public prosecutor, in view of the unusual factors noticed in this case, to accord such liberties to the complainant's party would be appropriate." (The Hindu 2.6.04)

3rd June

Lahoti justifies Supreme Court's intervention in Gujarat riot cases (7)

NEW DELHI, JUNE 2. The new Chief Justice of India, R.C. Lahoti, today justified the Supreme Court's intervention in the Gujarat riot cases, particularly the Best Bakery case [the trial has been shifted to Maharashtra], and said the cases were extraordinary in nature, which called for extraordinary measures. In an interview to The Hindu on assumption of office, Mr. Justice Lahoti said the Supreme Court had risen to the occasion in dealing with the cases in the discharge of its constitutional obligations and duties. The intervention had raised the image of the court across the world "going by the letters and response we have received." Asked about the criticism of judicial activism, he said: "Judicial activism is a misnomer. The judiciary is supposed to be active under the Constitution. The day it is not active, it ceases to be judiciary." Public interest litigations were like alarm clock. "We only make the legislature or the executive wake up and make them to do what they are supposed to do. The PIL jurisprudence is useful and effective and serves its purpose." But by way of caution, he said: "Courts should not take over the job of the legislature or the executive." Asked about the recent incident of 25 judges of the Punjab and Haryana High Court going on mass leave, and a reported move to transfer some of them, he denied there was any such move. "No such decision has been taken and not even any thought process ever initiated," he said. (The Hindu 3.6.04)

4TH June

Buses still skirt Muslim areas in Ahmedabad (7)

Ahmedabad: It's been two years since Godhra riots, but the fear still remains. State transport bus services which were discontinued during the riots in 2002, still continue to skirt minority-dominated areas. Routes of over 300 Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation (GSRTC) buses that used to pass through Juhapura, the largest Muslim ghetto in the state, have been diverted. Though the routes were altered temporarily during the riots, the authorities have not yet resumed buses on these routes which the residents believe to be a conspiracy to malign the area. "This decision is all politically motivated. It is just a part of the larger design to wrongly portray Juhapura as a danger zone," Ibrahim Sheikh, a member of the Gujarat Lok Meet Seva Trust said. (Times of India 4.6.04)

9th June

Muslims step up demand for Urdu as 2nd language (7)

Ranchi: THE STATE Minority Commission's recommendation to accord second language status to Bangla has generated much heat among other minority communities, particularly among the Muslims. The Minority Commission of Jharkhand last week recommended second language status for Bangla if the Bengali community accounts for more than 10 per cent of the population. The Commission's recommendation has invited sharp reaction from the Muslim community. Muslim organisations have called for a bandh on June 21 if the State Government fails to accord Urdu second language status by June 20. "The State Government has overlooked our previous memorandums demanding second language status to Urdu. The State Government is trying to end the Urdu language in the State to marginalise the Muslim community. But we will not allow the conspiracy to marginalise our language in Jharkhand," said president of Muslim Adhikar Manch Afsar Imam. He charged that the State Government is all set to weaken the Muslim community economically and socially and that overlooking Urdu as a second language is part of the larger conspiracy. Muslim organisations have accused the chairman of the Minority Commission of being a tool in the hands of the State Government. "Minority Commission chairman Kamal Khan will be boycotted by the Muslim community and he will not be invited in any function of the Muslim community," says the Press release of Muslim Adhikar Manch. (Pioneer 9.6.04)

10th June

Best Bakery: petitioners 'not consulted' (7)

MUMBAI, JUNE 9. The Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), the petitioners in the Best Bakery case in the Supreme Court, were not consulted in the appointment of the public prosecutor for the retrial in Mumbai, as suggested in the apex court's order. Ms. Teesta Setalvad, secretary of the CJP, told The Hindu today that "we had suggested several names to the Gujarat Government, but finally the person appointed as the public prosecutor was not anyone we had named."

The re-trial began on June 7, and the Gujarat Government had appointed Atul Mehta as the public prosecutor. (Hindu 10.6.04)

11th June

Land prices rising in Muslim areas (7)

Ahmedabad/Vadodara: The demand for quality housing from educated and affluent Muslim families in areas like Navranpu-ra, Paldi and Khanpur in Ahmedabad is so high that the supply can't keep pace, mainly due to the lack of scope for horizontal expansion in ghettoised Gujarat. Not only is there an acute shortage, but houses also cost more. "The price of a flat in a Muslim society in a good area would be at least Rs 2,500-3,000 more per sq yard than one in a Hindu residential society. Prices of the existing properties in areas like Navrangpura and Paldi have

shot up," says president (marketing), Agrawal Organisers, Arvind Shah. In Navrangpura, for instance, the prevailing rates in Muslim residential societies are between Rs 9,000 to Rs 11,000 per square yard while in the same area for a flat in a Hindu society is Rs 6,500 -Rs 7,500. The rates in Khanpur, also perceived to be safe by the minority community, are anywhere between Rs 7,000 -Rs 9,000 per sq yard. "There is no scope of expansion and so the rates are bound to be high....," says Kishore Dedhia, MD of estate broking firm, Space Mgmt. (Times of India 11.6.04)

14th June

Not removing Modi was a mistake, says Vajpayee (7)

SHIMLA, JUNE 13. The former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who is on a weeklong sojourn in Manali, admitted that not removing Narendra Modi as Chief Minister after the Gujarat episode was a big mistake. In an interview to a news channel, Mr. Vajpayee said that the Gujarat riots had a nationwide impact and the Opposition had politically manoeuvred the issue. Asked about a possible change in leadership in Gujarat, he said the issue of Mr. Modi's removal was still open and a decision would be taken at the Bharatiya Janata Party's national executive meeting in Mumbai later this month. He said many new decisions would be taken and fresh permutations and combinations would come up during the meeting. When asked about the Leader of the Opposition, Lal Krishan Advani, being projected to lead the BJP, Mr. Vajpayee said: "So far I had shared the responsibilities and they had supported me; now it would be vice-versa." The party would finally decide everything and it would be good "if Mr. Advani takes over the leadership."

"The party has lost under my leadership and I don't mind stepping down," he said. (Hindu 14.6.04)

'Vajpayee, Advani to blame for defeat' (7)

NEW DELHI, JUNE 13. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today blamed the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the former Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, for the party's debacle in the recent Lok Sabha polls and asked them to repent "by taking political sanyas" instead of holding Gujarat responsible. Reacting sharply to Mr. Vajpayee's comment that the Gujarat riots were responsible for the poor show, the VHP's international general secretary, Praveen Togadia, told PTI over telephone from Ahmedabad that "it was Muslims' appeasement which led to the BJP's defeat." Instead of blaming Gujarat, they should accept their 'failure' and repent for 'betraying' Hindus and take "political sanyas," he said. Insisting that the Gujarat riots did not affect the party's prospects, Mr. Togadia said had it been so, the BJP would not have got a two-third majority in the State and won in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. "The BJP outscored the Congress in appeasing the minority community. It got a 'fatwa' issued from the Shahi Imam of Delhi and used the Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's photograph during the rath yatra. This alienated the party's core vote bank and they did not vote for the party," he said. The VHP vice-president, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, also criticised Mr. Vajpayee's view that not removing Mr. Modi after the riots in the State was "a big mistake". He said the fate of the BJP would have been much worse if Mr. Modi had

been removed at that stage. (Hindu 14.6.04)

16th June

Death sparks communal violence in Ahmedabad (7)

Ahmedabad, June 15: Two communities clashed in Savarkundla in Amreli district on Monday after the death of a person who was stabbed a few days ago. Groups of Koli and minority community resorted to heavy stone pelting and also torched a truck as the news spread of the death of Sukhamundhan Bambhania, 55, who was undergoing treatment at the hospital.

The police had to lathicharge to control the rampaging mobs. Senior police officials are camping in Savarkundla and patrolling has been intensified even as shopkeepers downed their shutters following the incident. Bambhania was injured during a similar clash between the two communities on June 9, triggered by a scuffle over playing cricket. This is not the first time that cricket has resulted in clashes in the state. Such incidents have occurred repeatedly. A complaint has been registered against eight persons regarding the incident including a police constable. (Asian Age 16.6.04)

18th June

College stops juma, women take out rally in protest (7)

MALAPPURAM, JUNE 17 : BOWING to pressure from hardline Sunni factions, the management of Unity Women's College at Manjeri has decided to stop the Friday prayers (juma) by women students in the mosque on campus, even as scores of women took to the streets this evening condemning the decision. Both the orthodox EK and AP Sunni factions had last week asked the college management to stop allowing women students to offer Friday prayers at the masjid, terming it as against Shariat. The pro-IUML college management committee after its meeting decided to suspend the juma temporarily and said a decision on the issue would be taken after holding discussions with the Sunni and Mujahid religious leaders. Meanwhile, the Muslim Vanitha Prathikarana Vedi today organised a protest rally at Manjeri against the decision. Terming the management decision as a blatant denial of the right to worship, they said legal course will be taken to win back the rights of women students to perform juma at the mosque on the campus. "The same people who had issued fatwas against women's education, against women consulting doctors and even against learning English language are now trying to curb the freedom of worship granted to women by Islam," Mujahid Girls and Women's Movement state general secretary Khadeeja Nargis said. She said they would fight the attempts to rob the freedom of worship at any cost. (Indian Express 18.6.04)

22nd June

Settle issue by July 5: Judge (7)

MUMBAI, JUNE 21. The Additional Sessions Judge, Abhay Thipsay, today held that since Gujarat was the prosecuting agency in the Best Bakery case, it alone had the responsibility to appoint a public prosecutor. The Best Bakery re-trial, which was transferred to Mumbai by the Supreme Court in its landmark order on April 12, has been stalemated over who should appoint the public prosecutor, with first Gujarat, and then Maharashtra, appointing a team of public prosecutors. Mr. Thipsay directed both States to settle the matter by July 5, failing which a clarification would have to be sought from the Supreme Court. Atul Mehta told the Court he had been appointed by the Gujarat Government as special public prosecutor, and that T. S. Nanavati would assist him. Manjula Rao, lawyer, said last week that Maharashtra had appointed Senior Counsel, P. R. Vakil, to lead a team consisting of herself and two other lawyers, S. M. Vora and Zahiruddin Sheikh from Gujarat, to handle the case. Mr. Thipsay, after hearing both sides, reiterated that there could be only one prosecutor. These names were submitted to the Gujarat Government but it did not appoint any of them. However, Ms. Rao said the Gujarat Law Secretary had asked her if she would represent Gujarat but in the meantime, she was appointed the public prosecutor by Maharashtra. (Hindu 22.6.04)

23rd June

Railways probing Godhra fire: Lalu (7)

New Delhi, June 22: Union railways minister Lalu Prasad Yadav on Tuesday said his ministry is looking into the cause of the fire in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra in which 58 people lost their lives, triggering widespread riots in Gujarat in which hundreds more were killed. "We are looking into whatever is related

to our department. I am getting it examined what the railways did and what they did not," Mr Yadav told a Muslim delegation from Godhra, led by noted Bollywood producer-director Mahesh Bhatt. Mr Bhatt told Mr Yadav that Muslims in Godhra are still frightened and an atmosphere of suspicion prevails. The delegation complained that Muslims in Gujarat were, being harassed by those investigating the incident and asked Mr Yadav to get a probe conducted by the railways instead of the state government. Mr Yadav assured the delegation that he would probe the cause of fire but for harassment they should approach the home ministry. Rail Bhavan sources said that Mr Yadav had called for all the relevant files and has gone through them. "After reading the reports of various agencies, the new minister is appalled why the railways had not investigated the cause of fire. He has decided that he will order an inquiry to find out how the fire started," a senior ministry official said. (Asian Age 23.6.04)

26th June

Already walled in, these Muslims told to shut doors, raise fences (7)

AHMEDABAD, JUNE 25: AHMEDABAD's Muslims were never so isolated. Rattled and embarrassed by policemen sniffing around their homes, hunting for terror links, Maulanas in the city have issued a desperate call to the community: be careful whom you speak to, they could bring the police to your door. Following the June 15 encounter, in which four suspected Lashkar terrorists were shot dead by police, Muslims are unwilling to take chances. While people shy away from strangers, hotels in Muslim-dominated areas are tightening their guest registration procedures. "These are testing times," says Maulana Habib of Saraspur. "We don't want to give anyone a chance to point fingers at us. I have asked all members of the community not to give outsiders too much space to settle down, even for a few hours," he adds. "Until now, police have pointed fingers at us five times. After the latest encounter, they insist that the girl Ishrat and the terrorists had a local contact. Even after the Akshardham attack, we were accused of providing local support to militants," says Farooq Dilliwalla, a community leader who coordinated with the Maulanas to issue the alert. (Indian Express 26.6.04)

28th June

Muslim organisations deplore misuse of holy word 'Jihad' (7)

New Delhi: FOR AGES; jihad has been used by the terrorists of all hues and shades to justify killings and mayhem in the name of religion. The silence of the muslim religious preachers and maulanas to condemn the use of the holy word to perpetrate bloodshed, has also been a issue of prolonged debate. On Sunday, perhaps for the first time, several Muslim organisations, including All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), collectively decried terrorists for "misusing" the term jihad and stressed the need for clearing air on "misinterpretation" of the "holy" word which has nothing to do with terror. "It is very unfortunate that we have reached a point where we need to clarify that jihad has nothing to do with terrorism. Jihad is a holy word in Quran meaning action which is done to further the cause of God," AIMPLB vice president Maulana Kalbe Sadiq said. He was speaking at a conference on 'Terrorism and jihad: An Islamic perspective' here. Maulana Sadiq said that religious leaders of different religions should be involved to discuss the issue and make people understand the difference between the two words, he said, adding "wide-spread misuse of the word jihad for terrorism might confuse the people." (Pioneer 28.6.04)

Probe demanded into Ishrat's death (7)

MUMBAI, Jun. 27— Various Muslim organisations today .. demanded a judicial inquiry into the death of 19-year old Ishrat Jahan Shaekh, who was gunned down along with three other alleged Lashkar-e-Taiyaba militants in Ahmedabad on June 15. The demand was made at a four-hour long condolence meeting, held by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and attended by Rajya Sabha member and Samajwadi party Mumbai unit chief Mr Abu Asim Azmi as the chief guest while AIMPLB secretary Mr AY Sheikh, presided over. About 5000 people, including representatives from other organisations like Bombay Aman Committee and Jamat-e-Islami, took part in the meeting. The speakers condemned the killing of Ishrat and demanded that such encounters should be stopped forthwith. The meeting passed a resolution demanding a judicial inquiry into the encounter and wanted that Ishrat be declared shaheed. In another resolution, they expressed serious concern over police 'picking up' youths for inquiry and detaining them and wanted such measures be stopped. The resolution also expressed sympathy with the bereaved family members of Ishrat and extended support to them. It was also decided that a writ petition would be filed in the Supreme Court in connection with the incident and also a

memorandum will be submitted to the President Dr Abdul Kalam. (Statesman 28.6.04)

30th June

Doubts raised over conspiracy angle to Godhra train carnage (7)

AHMEDABAD, JUNE 29. The version of the railway police official who initially investigated the Godhra train carnage in February, 2002, raise doubts about the Gujarat Government's claim that the burning of 59 "kar sevaks" alive was a "pre-planned conspiracy." The then Deputy Superintendent of Police, Western Railway, Ahmedabad division, K.C. Bawa, who retired from service in March 2003, told the G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah Commission of Inquiry probing the Godhra train carnage and the post-Godhra communal riots in Gujarat, that the railway police had no information that the "kar sevaks" were returning from Ayodhya by the Sabarmati Express on that day. He claimed that the railway police had no system of passing on such information among themselves. Mr Bawa's was the first major cross-examination of officials before the commission, taken up at the request of the advocate for the Jan Sangharsha Manch, Mukul Sinha. While Mr. Bawa's cross-examination was inconclusive and would be resumed tomorrow, Mr. Sinha, when asked, said the initial replies of Mr. Bawa created doubts about the Government's conspiracy theory. He pointed out that if even the railway police were unaware about the return of the "kar sevaks," how could the local Muslims who were alleged to have "conspired" to set fire to the coach have their travel details. Mr. Bawa said he had reached Godhra a day after the incident on February 27 and had found the S6 coach of the Sabarmati Express already in the railway yard. Till he arrived, no "panchanama," (police statement before witnesses) was signed. The coach was open and many people, including the Chief Minister and a large number of other VIPs and others had entered the coach, which could have caused destruction of valuable evidences. There was no explanation why the "panchanama" which under the rules should be filed within 24 hours, was delayed. (The Hindu 30.6.04)

3RD July

PA whom Gujarat Minister gave clean chit in riots is caught (7)

VADODARA JULY 2: SURESH Patel, former personal assistant to Gujarat Minister Prabatsinh Chauhan, who was given an alibi and a clean chit by the Minister himself, was arrested by state police on Friday in connection with the massacre of 17 Muslims of Delol village in March 2002, following the Godhra carnage. With Patel's arrest, all the 22 accused in the case are now in police custody. According to police officials, Patel will be presented in court tomorrow. Initially, local police had closed the Delol case citing lack of evidence. But after a special investigation team took over the riot cases following a Supreme Court observation, two FIRs were filed on the Delol massacre. In one of them—filed by Firdaus Yaqub and Yaqoob Adam — the complainant had alleged that on March 1, 2002, when a group of about 30 Delol residents was fleeing from the village to a safer place, they were intercepted by a mob carrying swords and sharp-edged weapons. (Indian Express 3.7.04)

Muslim Law Board's right questioned (7)

MUMBAI, JULY 2. On the eve of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) meeting in Kanpur, prominent Muslims under the banner of the Muslims for Secular Democracy (MSD), has challenged the Board's legitimacy and its right to speak on behalf of all Muslims. Well-known lyricist, Javed Akhtar, said today, with regard to the controversy over whether the Board will consider abolishing the provision of 'triple ta-laaq' (instant divorce), that either the Board "should do the right thing or we have to see how they can be marginalised." MSD, which Mr. Akhtar described as "a progressive movement against all the narrow-minded and archaic attitudes", has been campaigning for reform of the Muslim Personal Law. Its demands include the acceptance of a model 'nikaahna-ma' (the marriage contract) drafted by Muslim women's groups over 10 years ago and changes in the laws relating to Muslim women's rights to inherit agricultural property. S.M.A. Kazmi, organising secretary of the MSD and senior advocate from the Allahabad High Court, said that it was ironic that the Muslim clergy had fought for an exception to the common law on maintenance in the Shah Bano case but had not raised its voice against the law on inheritance following the abolition of the Zamindari Act. (The Hindu 3.7.04)

7th July

New Gujarat riots panel likely (7)

New Delhi: The government on Tuesday said it was considering setting up a new commission to probe the post-Godhra violence and the role of the state government, setting the stage for escalation in its

confrontation with B JP. The government made its intentions known in the form of an innocuous question in the Lok Sabha with minister of state for home Sri Prakash Jaiswal stating that the demand for a judicial commission to probe the role of the Narendra Modi government in the post-Godhra riots was "under examination". The reply follows clear indications that a commission to probe the riots afresh and with its ambit extending to cover the role of the Modi government was under consideration. The demand for a fresh probe is based on the Gujarat government's role being repeatedly questioned by SC, the NHRC, the National Commission for Women and other official and unofficial organisations. (Times of India 7.7.04)

12th July

Best Bakery: Two more re-arrested (7)

VADODARA: The Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) re-arrested two more absconders in the Best Bakery case on Saturday from Pavagadh town, even as a relative of one of those arrested alleged she was sexually harassed by policemen. The DCB said they re-arrested Mahendra Jadhav and Jagdish Rajput after a tip-off. The two were remanded to judicial custody. Jadhav had earlier filed a petition with the Supreme Court questioning the NHRC's locus standi in the case.

Meanwhile, Jagdish Rajput's sister-in-law Kapila Rajput alleged in a city court that she was sexually harassed by three policemen while searching for Jagdish. She said three policemen —Rajendrasinh, Mahendrasinh and Yuvrajsinh—had sexually harassed her on July 6 when they barged into her house under the pretext of searching for the accused. (Indian Express 12.7.04)

13th July

Gujarat village boycotts Muslims after Hindu's murder (7)

Baroda, July 12: A deep rift has divided Mankani village on communal lines after the murder of a Hindu man allegedly by a Muslim. The tension between the two communities has been increasing in this village of Sankheda taluka, about 70 km from Baroda, following the murder in June.

The Hindus have reportedly boycotted the Muslims and at least 11 Muslim families have left the village, which has a population of about 1,500 comprising a majority of Hindu Patels. There are about 40 Muslim families in the village, which managed to remain calm following the Godhra carnage about two years ago when anti-Muslim violence spread to other villages of Baroda.

However, murder of Sanjay Patel allegedly by his friend, Abdul Mansoori, has brought latent tensions between the two communities to the fore. Sanjay was missing for three days before his body was recovered on June 3 from a farm in the village. Primary police findings suggested the involvement of his friend Abdul with whom he was involved in anti-social activities, including running a betting den. The row over business issues reportedly led to Sanjay's murder, allegedly by Abdul. (Asian Age 13.7.04)

15th July

Lalu attacks NDA with Godhra probe (7)

New Delhi: Railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav fired yet another salvo at the NDA, when on Wednesday he announced a probe into the Godhra carnage. Reading out from the Forensic Science Laboratory's report on the Godhra incident, he said the report concluded that no inflammable liquid was thrown into the carriage. Even after this report, the terms of reference had not been changed. Lalu received vociferous support from his colleague Kapil Sibal who said the way the inquiry was handled could not have happened without the connivance of the Gujarat government, Centre and PM. RPI member Ramdas Athavale demanded Modi government's dismissal. However, none of Prasad's opponents were present to hear him read out the full report, having walked out when the railway minister got up to reply to the budget discussion, because they would not hear a tainted minister. Prasad said it was meant to demoralise him and thwart his efforts to reach the truth about Godhra. (Times of India 15.7.04)

Andhra Muslim quota breaches statutory limit (7)

New Delhi: In announcing the 5% Muslim quota in government jobs and schools and colleges, Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y S Rajeshkhar Reddy may have fulfilled a poll pledge. But the sop flies in the face of constitutional stipulation as well as Supreme Court rulings on religion-based discrimination. While enshrining "secularism" among the basic features of the Constitution, the apex court has repeatedly ruled against providing quotas solely on the basis of caste and community. By a sudden order late Monday night the Reddy administration gave Muslims the reservation, pushing up the total reservation quota in Andhra state jobs and education to 30%. The government justified the move, citing a study which showed about

two-thirds of the state's 64 lakh Muslims crushed in abject poverty with a literacy rate of just 18%. Constitution law expert P P Rao, however, predicts a lively court battle over the new quotas for Muslims. He says what needs to be watched is the phraseology that the Reddy government is going to use to justify the move. (Times of India 15.7.04)

16th July

Godhra probe issue rocks Parliament (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 15. The Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad's announcement that a departmental probe has been ordered into the Godhra carnage stalled the proceedings in Parliament today, leading to successive adjournments before the presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha called it a day in the afternoon. Practically no business — which included a discussion on the budget — could be transacted in either House, with the Bharatiya Janata Party members raising the issue as soon as Parliament met for the day. Questioning the rationale behind a fresh probe, the members objected to the manner in which Mr. Prasad made the announcement on Wednesday during his reply to the discussion on the Railway Budget. With the ruling coalition MPs — particularly from Bihar — countering the Opposition charge with slogans, the Lok Sabha was adjourned thrice for an hour each before the Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee, decided to adjourn the House for the day. The Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day immediately it met for the post-lunch session after two adjournments in the pre-lunch sitting. The issue was raised in the Lok Sabha by Vijay Kumar Malhotra (BJP) and it evoked an immediate retort from the ruling benches. As both sides traded charges, the BJP and Shiv Sena members trooped into the well of the House while Rashtriya Janata Dal members stood along its edges and raised slogans. (The Hindu 16.7.04)

99.9% Pota accused in Gujarat were Muslims (7)

Mumbai, July 15: Pota was wrongly applied on a number of persons, including teenagers, across the country. This has been found out by a non-governmental organisation, the People's Tribunal, which earned out a survey in 10 states. The tribunal comprises activists such as Teesta Setalvad, retired justice of high court Husbit Suresh, writer Arundhati Roy, columnist Praful Bidwai, lawyers Mihir Desai and Majeed Memon, retired Chief Justice of the West Bengal high court D.K.Basu and former Union law minister Ram Jethmalani. The panel interviewed over 100 people, including the accused who were released on bail, acquitted or the relatives who had almost been ostracised during police interrogation. In Gujarat, 99.9 per cent of those booked under Pota are Muslims, said Ms Setalvad. Of 247 people booked under Pota in Gujarat, 246 accused are Muslims and one from the Sikh community. "If an innocent person is branded as a terrorist, shot dead, then what should be the compensation? The person cannot live in our society with dignity," she said. The findings of the tribunal were made available to the media at a press conference on Thursday. The report will be submitted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Union home minister Shivraj Patil on August 6. (Asian Age 16.7.04)

23rd July

Quota for Muslims in Andhra Pradesh stayed (7)

HYDERABAD, JULY 22. The Andhra Pradesh High Court today suspended the State Government Order that provided for five per cent reservation for Muslims in educational institutions and for government jobs in the State. A Division Bench, comprising the Chief Justice, Devinder Gupta, and Justice C.V. Ramulu, passed the interim order on a batch of writ petitions filed by a student, Srikanth, and others. They pleaded that such reservation based upon religious denomination alone was violative of the Constitution. The Government Order (Ms. No. 33) was issued by the State Government on July 12 on the ground that the Commissionerate of Minority Welfare had submitted a report on the "pathetic state" of the Muslim community. Therefore, Muslims were declared as BC(E) category and given five per cent reservation in educational institutions and government jobs. This was apart from the reservation already given to other categories of backward classes. Counsel for the petitioners said that the total reservation exceeded fifty per cent in violation of the Supreme Court judgment. They further contended that the Supreme Court had directed the setting up of a commission to recommend additions and deletions of groups into category of backward classes and the commission had been set up as per the enactments. (The Hindu 23.7.04)

24th July

Ordinance to replace GO on Muslim quota (7)

HYDERABAD, JULY 23. Floor leaders of all parties met here on Friday to discuss the legal hurdles in the implementation of 5 per cent reservation quota for minorities and seek a way out.

It was agreed upon to effect the GO through an ordinance if the final judgement went against it. The Chief Minister, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, called the meeting in the light of the stay order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday. Later talking to the media, Dr. Reddy ridiculed the criticism that the GO was drafted in haste. Giving a clean chit to the officials concerned, he said that there was no dereliction of duty on the part of the bureaucracy and no one had acted in haste. No irregularities were committed, he said. He said the Government was committed to the welfare of minorities and would not hesitate to implement its promises. (The Hindu 24.7.04)

Gujarat cry for quota (7)

Ahmedabad, July 23: The Andhra Pradesh government's decision to hand minorities five per cent reservation in education and jobs has sparked demands for a similar quota in Gujarat. The state's Muslims, especially victims of the 2002 post-Godhra riots, have welcomed the Andhra decision and want a similar quota in proportion to their population. They make up 11 per cent of the state's population. The BJP and VHP are determined to oppose the Congress-led Andhra regime's "unconstitutional decision" which has put the Gujarat Congress in a spot for it can neither support the government's decision nor oppose it. Never before have Gujarat Congress leaders been so uncomfortable airing their views on issues like reservation for Muslims. All state unit chief B.K. Gadhi would say is: "I have no comment to make." Muktar Mohammed, who has been working with riot victims, said: "More than any other state, Gujarati Muslims need reservation. At least in the police, revenue department and courts. Reservation for Muslims is must." (Telegraph 24.7.04)

25th July

Family of 10 massacred in Siwan (7)

Patna, July 24: Ten members of a family belonging to the minority community, including three children and a woman, were massacred at Bishunpura-Jagdishpur Tola village, in Bihar's Siwan district, early on Saturday morning, the police said. Siwan superintendent of police Jaglal Chaudhury told PTI over the phone from the spot that all the victims were killed in their sleep at around 1 am. Earlier, IG (headquarters) Neelmani had said that nine persons, including seven women and two children, had been killed. (Asian Age 25.7.04)

26th July

Lalu offers sops for Muslims killed by Yadavs (7)

Jagdishpur Kothi (Bihar), July 25: Railway minister and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav announced Rs 1 lakh exgratia payment from the Bihar government for the next of kin of each of the 10 Muslims killed in a massacre early on Saturday morning. The RJD too will give Rs 1 lakh each to the kin of the victims, Mr Yadav announced here during his visit to the site of the massacre.

Mr Lalu Yadav also promised free ration for six months and added that the Bihar government would rehabilitate the community by building proper houses for them and also give them agricultural land. The victims, including an elderly woman and three young boys, belonged to Sain Tola, on the outskirts of Jagdishpur Kothi village — which falls on the border of Siwan and Gopalganj districts and also on the border between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. (Asian Age 26.7.04)

27th July

Minority report: Lalu visits Siwan (7)

Patna: Railway minister Lalu Prasad's visit to Jagdishpur-Bishunpura village in Siwan district, where 10 Muslims were killed on Saturday, is being viewed here as a bid to keep RJD's Muslim support base intact. Ten people, including three children, were shot dead by Lalu Prasad Yadav criminals. The deceased belonged to minority Sai community. Siwan is represented in the Lok Sabha by RJD strongman Mohd Shahabuddin, who, of late, had a love-hate relationship with Lalu. Lalu has made it known in the past that he did not want to antagonise Shahabuddin, his criminal background notwithstanding. So much so that when former DGP D P Ojha saw to it that Shahabuddin was put behind bars despite his political connections last year, Lalu made it a point to visit him in jail. (Times of India 27.7.04)

In Gujarat village, NCW gets Hindus, Muslims together (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 26: A MONTH ago, the murder of a Hindu by his Muslim business partner shattered peace in Mankni, a village of some 2,000 Hindus and Muslim, 70 km from Vadodara. As reprisal, Hindus in the village stopped talking to Muslims and didn't buy milk and merchandise from them. Overnight Mankani was a torn society 40-odd Muslim families felt humiliated as some 110 Hindu families imposed an economic and social boycott on them. The scenario was reported by The Indian Express, which made the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) embark on peacemaking efforts here. NCM member W Augustine reached the village on July 19 and met Samir Bhai, the imam, and four other Muslims. "Muslims feared that Hindus would bum their own houses to put the blame on them (Muslims)," Augustine said. Next, the sarpanch, Naren-drabhai, led Hindus to Augustine. "Surprisingly, the Hindus, who are in majority, were also living with similar fears," Augustine told The Indian Express on his return. Many Hindus were afraid to move out after 5 pm fearing attacks and arson. Augustine also noticed that nobody was working in the fields. The five Muslims farmers in Mankni told him that "Hindus had incited farm hands," mostly tribals from neighbouring states, to boycott the Muslims. Finally, the NCM member got the Hindus and Muslims together. "I made them sit on alternate chairs and it worked wonders." Soon, the villagers were speaking out their fear and anguish. After villagers promised to live in peace, the NCM member formed a watchdog group to check rumours. (Indian Express 27.7.04)

28th July

Muslims plan stir against Jaya (7)

Chennai, July 27: The Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam on Tuesday announced that it would picket the residence of chief minister Jayalalitha if she did not withdraw her statement against providing reservation for Muslims in government jobs and colleges. The TMMK will also hold statewide demonstrations from next Tuesday to protest against the chief minister.

The TMMK general council would meet at Pudukottai on August 8 to decide on the date of picketing, TMMK president M.H. Jawahirullah told a press conference here. He condemned the statement made by Ms Jayalalitha recently that if Muslims were granted reservations, Christians too would make a similar demand. The TMMK chief said equally horrendous was the statement by former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that reservations for Muslims would inspire religious conversions. "There were no such conversion rush in Karnataka and Kerala though both had accorded reservations to Muslims many years ago," he argued. "Some other Sangh Parivar leaders had predicted that the country would go through another division if Muslims were given special reservations in jobs and education. Have Karnataka and Kerala ceded from India?" the TMMK leader asked. He complimented the Andhra Pradesh government for deciding to provide five per cent reservation for Muslims in government jobs and educational institutions. Contesting the oft-repeated statement that Muslims were pampered in India, Prof. Jawahirullah recalled that the new educational policy released by the Centre in 1986 had declared that Muslims along with the neo-Buddhists were educationally most backward across the country. "In fact, with respect to some variables, Indian Muslims fared much worse than the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, considered the poorest of the poor and most vulnerable in society," he said. (Asian Age 28.7.04)

Eve-teasing snowballs into violence (7)

Ahmedabad, July 27: Two persons were killed while over a dozen injured when mobs clashed in Veraval town of Junagadh district over an incident of eve-teasing on Monday afternoon.

Mobs set fire to dozens of shops and vehicles destroyed as stone pelting continued for hours even as police fired several rounds and imposed curfew to bring the situation under control.

Riots erupted when a girl of Kharva community was allegedly teased by a Muslim youth in Baharkot area near the Circuit House. The incident soon went out of control leading to riots spreading to Gandhi chowk, Charchowk and Bhalak areas in Veraval town. A youth identified as Hassan Zakir Hussain was killed in Taj Society when police allegedly opened fire to disperse rampaging mobs that resorted to heavy stone pelting and setting ablaze shops and vehicles.

Another person was stabbed to death in Jai Aramnagar area and was reportedly brought dead to the Civil Hospital. However, he was not identified. Police imposed curfew in the area at 2.30 pm on Monday to be in force till 8 am on Tuesday. But things did not quieten down till late in the evening. Range IG T S Bisht and DSP Junagadh B D Vaghela both rushed to the spot and patrolled the streets to assess the situation. Director general of police A K Bhargav said 200 paramilitary forces and 150 police personnel from nearby police stations have been rushed to Veraval. He did not rule out the possibility of the violence being politically motivated. (Asian Age 28.7.04)

29th July

Gujarat police story: Weren't ready (7)

Ahmedabad: Additional DGP M K Tandon, who was joint commissioner of police, Ahmedabad, during the post-Godhra riots, on Wednesday told the Nanavati-Shah Commission that the police was not prepared to handle the situation despite indications of "possible repercussions" of the Godhra carnage. Tandon's deposition is important in exposing the role of the police as he was in charge of the sector, which saw nearly 126 people killed in the infamous Naroda Patia and Gulbarg Society massacres on February 28, 2002. Tandon said, "There was no high-level meeting with the commissioner of police to plan the course of action for the anticipated communal violence on February 28, 2002 in the event of the Godhra carnage." A fumbling Tandon failed to explain why there were no deliberations, or why more Muslims were killed in the police firings when the mobs largely comprised Hindus, or why there were no investigations into the "private firings" which claimed more Muslim lives than of Hindus. During his cross-examination by Jan Sangharsh Manch lawyer Mukul Sinha, Tandon, at one point, pleaded, "The honourable commission visit the Gulbarg Society site," in an effort to understand his position. About the massacres continuing even after the curfew was imposed, he said, "Curfew was no magic word."

Tandon claimed he got to know about the Naroda Patia massacre only around 9.30 pm and about Gulbarg at 2 pm on February 28, 2002, when he was told that ex-MP Ehsaan Jafri had to be evacuated, adding that when he reached the sites, everything was over. (Times of India 29.7.04)

After Veraval violence hits Rajkot (7)

Rajkot/Veraval: The communal tension which claimed two lives in Veraval over the past two days spread to the main Saurashtra town of Rajkot on Wednesday, which witnessed clashes in two areas, in which three persons were injured. Veraval too saw fresh bouts of violence on Wednesday, even as a BJP delegation, including ex-MP Bhavna Chikhaliya and Junagadh's newly-elected mayor, Mahendra Mashru, were visiting the town. The incidents occurred during curfew relaxation at Vakharia Bazaar, where two shrines were desecrated in the morning. Some sea-food godowns were set ablaze in the Bedia industrial area late in on Wednesday evening. (Times of India 29.7.04)

30th July

Coach set on fire from the inside, say experts (7)

The forensic science report that investigated the torching of the Sabarmati Express coach in Godhra on February 27, 2002 says the fire was a result of the throwing of an inflammable substance from within the coach, and not from outside, as was widely propagated soon after the incident. The report states, "By taking into consideration this fact and also the burning pattern of the outer side of the coach, a conclusion can be drawn that no inflammable fluid had been thrown inside from outside of the coach." The following is the verbatim text of the report of the Forensic Science Laboratory, Ahmedabad, of May 17, 2002, Spot Investigation Report No. 2 regarding CR No. 9/2002, Godhra Railway Police Station: A team of forensic experts had visited the place of offence on 3/5/2002 in which, along with the undersigned, Shri A.N. Joshi, Scientific Officer, Ahmedabad, was included. In order to recreate the real picture of how the offence was committed on the day of incident, one coach of the train was kept on the same spot. With the help of different types of containers, experimental demonstrations were also carried out by using liquids inside the said coach, on the basis of which the following conclusions were made. 1. It was found that the height of the window of the coach was around 7 feet from the ground at the place. Under this circumstance, it was not possible to throw any inflammable fluid inside from outside the coach from any bucket or carboy, because, by doing this, most of the fluid was getting thrown outside. (Asian Age 30.7.04)

Post-riots, Muslims facing economic boycott (7)

New Delhi, July 29: A SEMINAR on the rehabilitation of victims of the post-Godhra riots was organised by the NGO ANHAD, at the India International Centre today. Fr Cedric Prakash, a social activist from Ahmedabad, said that one of the most important issues is the ongoing economic boycott of most of the state's Muslims. "The condition in Gujarat is much worse today than it was in March 2000," he said. "Today, if you are a Muslim in Gujarat, your life is confined to clearly defined ghettos, without any economic activity of import...where you will not find even a single branch of a nationalised bank." There is no better example of a fascist state than today's Gujarat anywhere in the world," he added. "There are

people who live in the so-called border areas of these ghettos...with their bags perpetually packed, ready to leave at the smallest sign of trouble, whether in the form of police checks before a VIP passes through, or a procession to the nearest temple," said Zakia, an aid-worker. She also mentioned the increasing drop-out rates among Muslim children. Speakers drew attention to "inadequate compensation" provided to riot victims. "The state spent anything between Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 4 lakh per family when the earthquake happened. (Indian Express 30.7.04)

3RD Aug

Gujarat riots: Cop defends boss' role (7)

AHMEDABAD CITY Police Commissioner P.C. Pande did send across a message for rushing additional forces to the Gulbarg Society where former MP Ehsan Jaffrey and 38 others were killed by a mob on February 28, 2002. This was disclosed on Monday to the Nanavati-Shah Commission by former joint commissioner of police M.K. Tandon during the second day of his cross-examination. But Tandon admitted that he did not check whether the additional forces had reached the society Police control room records showed Pande had issued instructions to rush more forces. Riot victims and NGOs had alleged that the then city police commissioner did not respond to frantic calls from the former MP who was cut to pieces and burnt by the VHP-inspired mobs. (Hindustan Times 3.8.04)

4th Aug

Lalu sends Cabinet a note on Godhra probe (7)

New Delhi, Aug. 3: Railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav has moved swiftly to set up a new inquiry commission to probe the cause of fire in the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002, causing the death of 58 persons which triggered largescale violence in Gujarat that led to a loss of a few hundred more lives. Sources in Rail Bhavan here told The Asian Age that the rail ministry has sent a note to the Cabinet to set up the inquiry commission. The Union Cabinet is likely to clear the proposal in its next meeting likely next week. According to sources, the new commission will be given three months to complete its probe. It will be a multi-member panel comprising members from the administrative service, the police service, the fire service and the legal service. Soon after taking over as the railway minister, Mr Yadav had called for all the files on Godhra fire and had gone through them. "After reading the reports of various agencies, the new minister was appalled why the railways had not investigated the cause of fire. lie, therefore,, decided that he will order an inquiry to find put how the fire was started," a senior rail ministry official said. (Asian Age 4.8.04)

5th Aug

Censors ban film on Gujarat (7)

New Delhi: AN INTERNATIONALLY acclaimed documentary film on Gujarat riots has been banned in India. Rakesh Sharma, the maker of the film Final Solution, had applied to the censor board in February for a certificate. But the board held up the clearance and asked Sharma to explain why he had in the meantime screened the film at festivals abroad. Sharma wrote to censor board chief Anupam Kher on Wednesday protesting against the "partisan" manner in which the whole thing was dealt with. Sharma has alleged that the censor board officials were casual and inattentive at the screening. In his letter, he wrote: "I urge you to take action against erring officials ... By refusing me even a single opportunity to be heard, they have violated the very principle of natural justice."(Hindustan Times 5.8.04)

6th Aug

'Policeman provided diesel for slums fire' (7)

Ahmedabad, Aug. 5: The then senior PI N.R. Jadhav who was posted in the communally sensitive area of Gomtipur during 2002 riots told the Justice G.T. Nanavati (Retd) and Justice K.G. Shah (Retd) Inquiry Commission probing the Godhra carnage that the name of N.A. Modi, another PI of the police station, figured in the FIR concerning burning of slums dominated by minorities near the Ambika Mills on March 1, 2002. Mr. Jadhav admitted on cross examination that Modi's name figured in the FIR as he was alleged to have supplied diesel from his official vehicles to the rioting mob to set ablaze the slums. He also admitted that the FIR pertaining to setting the slums on fire was registered only after the Gujarat high court directed the police to do so in response to a writ petition filed by convenor of Jan Sangharsh Manch Mohan Bundela in April 2002. (Asian Age 6.8.04)

7th Aug

SC stays trial in Naroda riot cases (7)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6 : THE Supreme Court today stayed the trial in cases pertaining to the massacre of 110 people in Naroda Gam and Naroda Patiya during the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat as a petition sought the transfer of these outside the state. A bench comprising Justice Ruma Pal, Justice S.B. Sinha and Justice S.H. Kapadia issued notice to the Gujarat government on a petition filed by an NGO — Citizens for Justice and Peace. Appearing for the petitioner, senior advocate Ram Jethmalani alleged that the Gujarat police was hand-in-glove with the accused and it was apparent the manner in which the FIRs had been registered. The attitude of the police was to harass the people from the minority community and there was an air of distrust among the people from this community about the state police, the petitioner alleged. (Indian Express 7.8.04)

9th Aug

Ready to fight to the finish: Bilkis (7)

AHMEDABAD, AUG. 8. Bilkis Yakub Rasool, the only eye-witness in the Panivel village gang rape and mass murder incident believes that she will have no problem in returning to her native village, Randhikpur in the Panchmahals district of central Gujarat, once the accused are punished. The case has been transferred to the Bombay High Court by the Supreme Court.

Ms. Bilkis Banoo is under constant threat. She and her family members had to change houses 20 times in the last two-and-a-half years because of security reasons. Even the media conference she addressed here this evening was under very heavy police escort because of the "threat perception." But Bilkis denied that any body had threatened her against coming to Gujarat after the Supreme Court's order on Friday transferring the case to Maharashtra for trial, or even persuaded her not to appear before the media. Ms. Bilkis Banoo and the Delhi-based social activists, Farah Naqvi and Huma Khan, refused to comment on the judicial system in the State. However, Ms. Bilkis Banoo said now that the case had been transferred to the Bombay High Court she was confident of getting justice. "It is not my fight alone, but numerous other Muslim women, who also had to suffer the same fate during the communal riots of 2002, will get the courage to speak up after my case is transferred outside the State." (The Hindu 9.8.04)

Godhra: Police lapses revealed (7)

Ahmedabad, Aug. 8: Senior officials of the Gujarat police who were in charge in the immediate aftermath of the 2002 Godhra train carnage and during the riots that followed have acknowledged several glaring lapses before the Nanavati-Shah commission. These lapses have come to light during the cross-examination of these officials following their testimony. These officials admitted to the commission headed by Justices G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah that the police had failed to respond to the situation arising out of the Godhra train carnage and had not even called a meeting of senior officials to assess the unfolding events and take preventive action. (Asian Age 9.8.04)

As Kalol witnesses face threats (7)

KALOL (PANCHMAHALS), AUGUST 8: AFTER the Supreme Court has transferred two post-Godhra riot cases to Maha-rashtra, witnesses in yet another post-Godhra massacre case are saying that, with the accused out on bail, they feel unsafe. On March 1, 2004, mobs killed and burnt 13 Muslims in the vicinity of Ambika Society in Kalol town of Panchmahals district, some 25 km from Godhra. The killings were investigated by a police officer of sub-inspector rank. But the NHRC, intervening in October 2003 on complaints by witnesses, found the investigation poor and tardy, and ordered a reinvestigation by an IPS officer. Senior IPS officer Neerja Gotru Rao then took charge of the investigations. But though police claim they have been providing adequate security, witnesses allege that some of the accused, who are at large or out on bail, are threatening them. Haroon Rashid Abdul Sattar Mansoori, a key witness, alleges that on July 15, he was cornered near a petrol pump and threatened by Ajay Soni, Kiran Contractor and Mukhesh Parshottam. Soni was arrested a month and a half ago and is out on bail, while Contractor and Parshot-tam, have not yet been arrested. (Indian Express 9.8.04)

10th Aug

SC hints at sacking Gujarat prosecutor (7)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 9 : IN ANOTHER setback to the Narendra Modi Government, the Supreme Court

today pulled up the Gujarat Government's prosecutor in the Best Bakery case and hinted that he may be replaced by one suggested by the Best Bakery victims. The provocation for the tongue lashing was the failure of the Gujarat Police to arrest 10 out of 21 accused in the case even four months after the Apex Court set aside the acquittals and ordered a re-trial in Mumbai. A bench headed by Justice Arijit Pasayat ordered the Director General of the Gujarat Police to inform the court within a week of the steps taken to apprehend the remaining accused and produce them before the trial court in Mumbai. Justice Pasayat also made observations that would have a bearing on the ongoing tussle between the Gujarat and Maharashtra Governments regarding the right to appoint the prosecutor for the retrial. (Indian Express 10.8.04)

11th Aug

[UK Muslim sues, says Branson too has beard \(7\)](#)

London, Aug. 10: A British Muslim, who claims he was sacked for refusing to shave off his 8-inch beard, has become the first person to sue under laws on religious discrimination. Mohsin Mohmed, 22, said he had been humiliated by bosses at Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Trains, who demanded he shave or lose his job as an assistant at Euston station in London. He said his religion required that his beard be at least 4 inches long. But just one month after Mr Mohmed started his job, manager David Adams told him to trim his beard. He then allegedly harassed him regularly. Mr Mohmed, who could win £20,000, said: "Nobody tells Richard Branson to shave his beard off. Why should I have to get rid of mine?" (Asian Age 11.8.04)

[Muslim forum sees Gujarat pattern \(7\)](#)

JAIPUR, AUG. 10. The Rajas-than Muslim Forum today accused the State Government of showing communal bias in handling the situation in the violence-hit Sarada village in Udaipur district, from where most of the Muslim families have migrated following an attack by tribals. It alleged that the violence was planned and executed on the "Gujarat pattern". A six-member delegation of the Forum, which visited the tribal belt from August 6 to 9, found that Muslims had been terrorised by both police and tribals and police had launched a crackdown on the Muslim residents of Sarada after a visit of the Home Minister, Gulab Chand Kataria, in the last week of July. The members of the Forum — an apex body of Muslim organisations and institutions -- said at a Press conference here that the majority of the 200 Muslim families had shifted to Udaipur, Salumbar, Khairwada and Dungarpur fearing for their safety, as the tribals in the region were "still being provoked" to launch a fresh offensive against the Muslim minority. "Police got an explicit message from the Government on the line of action to be taken after the Udaipur Superintendent of Police, Ravi Prakash Meher-da, was removed," Mohammed Salim, a member of the Forum and president of the State unit of Jamat-e-Islami Hind, said. He alleged that Muslims were harassed by raids on their houses. (The Hindu 11.8.04)

17th Aug

[Force didn't listen: Gujarat ex-DGP \(7\)](#)

Ahmedabad: A state of lawlessness among law-enforcers? Former DGP K Chakravarthi has hinted at serious lapses in investigation and prosecution of Gujarat riot cases. On Monday, he suggested that his orders were hardly executed by his subordinates. In his cross-examination before the Nanavati-Shah commission, Chakravarthi admitted that he was kept out of all major decisions, even during imposition of Pota in the Godhra case, change in its investigating officer and transfer of "effective" district police chiefs in the middle of the riots. He said he had sent repeated instructions on fair investigations to all officers in early March '02, and even emphasised that efforts be made to investigate the "conspiracy" angle of the riots. When Jan Sangharsh Manch (JSM) lawyer Mukul Sinha referred to an intelligence report suggesting that the biased attitude of the police was one of the reasons behind the communal tension, Chakravarthi termed it "a perception of the Addl DG (Intelligence)". Asked why he did not initiate an inquiry when lower rung officers did not follow his orders, he said, "Till March 6, 2002 I was busy in maintenance of law and order. On this day, the commission was appointed, so naturally I could not order an inquiry into whether action was taken against lower rung officers." He stated that on several occasions he had also informed the home department about public prosecutors not opposing bails granted to the post-Godhra riot accused, but could not say whether the government acted on it or not. (Times of India 17.8.04)

[Gujarat cops get pat on back from SC \(7\)](#)

New Delhi The Gujarat police came in for some praise from the Supreme Court during hearing of the Best

Bakery case on Monday. The state police had earlier had been repeatedly castigated for the inept handling of the violence and of being partisan. On Monday, the court appreciated the police's efforts to prosecute even those who had allegedly harboured the absconding accused.

The Gujarat DGP had filed an affidavit detailing the "relentless" efforts of the police to catch the accused. A Bench of Justices Arijit Pasayat and H K Sema asked the Gujarat government to notify these appointments before the next date of hearing in the trial court. The government would also publish in two local dailies its order pertaining to the issuance of notice against the accused persons. (Times of India 17.8.04)

Bakery case: Victims get prosecutors of their choice (7)

New Delhi, Aug. 16: The Supreme Court on Monday severed all the links of the Gujarat government to the Best Bakery trial and named two counsels suggested by , victims of the incident as the new public prosecutors. It removed the public prosecutor appointed by Gujarat.

A bench comprising Justice Arijit Pasayat and Justice H.K. Sema, acting on an application filed by one of the survivors of the Best Bakery incident, Zahira Shaikh, appointed Mr P.R. Vakil as special public prosecutor and Ms Manjula Rao as associate PP to conduct the trial before the designated court in .. Maharashtra. The Supreme Court also directed the Gujarat government to notify these appointments before the next date of hearing in the trial court. The two will replace Mr Atul Mehta, who was appointed by the , state. The court asked the counsel for the ? Gujarat government, Hemantika Wahi, whether the controversy over the appointment of PPs had been sorted out. (Asian Agwe 17.8.04)

18th Aug

Set up panel to review closed riot cases (7)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 17. The Supreme Court today directed the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat to set up a high-level police team headed by the Director-General of Police to examine which of the 2,000 or so post-Godhra riot cases, closed earlier on the ground that the accused could not be traced, required fresh investigation. A three-Judge Bench, comprising Justice Ruma Pal, Justice S. B. Sinha and Justice S. H. Ka-padia, gave the direction after the amicus curiae, Harish Salve, submitted that of the 4,252 riot cases registered, over 2000 were closed by the police summarily, expressing their inability to trace the accused. The Bench directed that the committee, which would include two Additional DGPs and seven Inspectors-General of Police of different ranges, would go into each of the cases to find out whether they were "defective, deficient or faulty" and order fresh investigation wherever necessary. When counsel for the accused, K.T.S. Tulsi, opposed such an order, the Bench told him that "what had happened in the State was an unprecedented and abnormal situation because of the State's response to the riot cases." (The Hindu 18.8.04)

Order not a jolt: Gujarat (7)

Ahmedabad, August 17: IN A guarded reaction to the Supreme Court's order to review 2,000 riot cases that had been closed, the Gujarat government said on Wednesday the verdict was not a "jolt" to it. A high-level committee headed by the DGP would be formed as soon as the order is received, the government said. "The petitioners had demanded that a committee headed by a retired police officer and selected by NHRC be constituted to look into these cases. But the Supreme Court has not considered this demand," Minister of State for Home Amit Shah said.

"The Supreme Court has only directed review of closed cases and there cannot be any problem in this. The Apex court does not give its ruling after going into merits of each and every case," Shah said. "The high-level committee headed by DGP, as directed by the supreme court, will be formed within no time of receiving the order," he added. The Minister, however, added that the ruling cannot be construed as an "indictment" of the state government. (Hindustan Times 18.8.04)

19th Aug

Best: Cops blame lack of access (7)

WHEN the Supreme Court ordered the Gujarat government on Monday to clarify in four weeks what steps it had taken against those allegedly intimidating witnesses in the Best Bakery case, it was only jolting the police into action. Though 11 months have passed since the Supreme Court ordered an inquiry into allegations of threats received by main witness Zaheera Sheikh and her mother Sehrunissa, the investigations have not progressed at all. The matter was first reported in The Indian Express, with

Sehrunissa telling the newspaper that she retracted her statement in court due to the threats. Zaheera and her mother, in a common affidavit, had alleged that they retracted their statements against the accused in the fast-track court because of threats from BJP legislator Madhu Srivastava, his cousin Chandrakant Srivastava, their neighbour Lal Mohammed and some others. Police Commissioner Sudhir Sinha, when contacted, said investigations had been delayed because of non-cooperation from Teesta Setalvad, a Mumbai-based activist who is sheltering Zaheera and her family. "She has been postponing our meeting with Zaheera and her mother on one pretext or the other," said Sinha. (Indian Express 19.8.04)

20th Aug

Mend ways or quit country, Thackeray warns Muslims (7)

Mumbai: In what appears to be an attempt to compel BJP adopt a staunch pro-Hindutva line, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray on Saturday launched a frontal attack on Muslim activists for allegedly carrying on a campaign against Hindus. In a front page article in the party's Marathi mouthpiece Saamna on Saturday, the Sena chief asked the "green chhupa rustams" (Muslim moles) to mend their ways or quit the country. The Sena is an ally of BJP, whose national executive meets here early next week. All the bigwigs of BJP will be present and Thackeray is apparently preparing the ground in the run up to the crucial meeting. Thackeray alleged that on the eve of the LS polls, certain Muslim activists distributed a booklet in Urdu giving a highly exaggerated and vicious version of the Gujarat riots in which Hindus were projected in poor light. He said the booklet indulged in inflammatory communal propaganda with a view to mobilising Muslim votes. He also charged that the killing of Hindus in a train at Godhra was vastly downplayed. Maharashtra's minister of state for housing and NCP leader Nawab Malik told TNN that a 32-page booklet in Urdu was indeed published by his supporter Sayed Khan on poll eve. He said 5,000 copies were distributed, but several Muslims activists on their own reprinted the booklet in lakhs and circulated it all over the country. He said the purpose of the booklet was only to "present the facts about the Gujarat violence." "We did not appeal to Muslims to vote for a specific party. But asked them not to sit at home on polling day, but come out and vote for secularism. This was the best way to counter people like Narendra Modi and leaders of his ilk," Malik explained. (Times of India 20.6.04)

21st Aug

The lone Muslim on riot chargesheet (7)

VADODARA, JUNE 20: AMONG the 21 accused in the Best Bakery case who were acquitted by a fast-track court but were arrested again for retrial is a Muslim — Yasin Khokhar, a resident of HanumanTekri, like the rest of the accused. However, he doesn't face murder charges. The only charges he faces are of looting maida, ghee and sugar and carting them away in a truck. This week, Khokhar was arrested again, but there is no clue as to why a mob attacking Muslims in the Godhra aftermath left him alone when everyone in the area knew that he was a Muslim. There was also some talk that he provoked the mob into attacking the bakery, but it's difficult to believe that in the mood prevailing in Gujarat in the days after Godhra that could have happened. In her FIR lodged with the Detection of Crime" Branch police station, prime witness Zaheera Sheikh had named Khokhar, alleging that he had looted material from the bakery. Zaheera said he, a truck driver, had loaded the material in a truck and taken it away even as the mob was killing those in the bakery and setting the building afire. Vadodara Police Commissioner Sudhir Sinha said: "The single FIR lodged by Zaheera accuses Yasin only of looting material." And DCB officers said the chargesheet filed against Khokhar invokes sections 392 and 395 of the Indian Penal Code, relating to dacoity. (Indian Express 21.6.04)

CBI is biased, say kin of accused (7)

Baroda, Aug. 20: In an application to President Dr Abdul Kalam, family members of the accused in the Bilkis Bano case have demanded a judicial inquiry into the case accusing the Central Bureau of Investigation of carrying on a biased investigation. Wives of the 12 accused in Bilkis Bano case had staged a rally in Randhikpur village in 'Dahod in.'the Independence Day. They had submitted the memorandum to the district collector R.R. Solanki, which was later forwarded to the President. On February 28, 2002, a day after the Godhra incident, a group of Muslims from Randhikpur village was attacked by a mob, killing 12 Muslims including family members of the star eyewitness and the complainant Bilkis Yakub Rasool. The case was later handed over to the CBI on directions of the Supreme Court. The CBI had filed charge sheets against 20 persons including 12 locals of Randhikpur, two doctors who had allegedly manipulated the post-mortem reports, and six police officials. (Asian Age 21.8.04)

22nd Aug

Decision to bring bodies was taken by Modi (7)

Ahmedabad, Aug. 21: In a revelation which can put chief minister Narendra Modi in the dock, former additional chief secretary (home) Ashok Narayan said that the decision to bring the bodies of slain karsevaks to Ahmedabad instead of sending them to their native places was taken by Mr Modi himself. Mr Narayan revealed this during cross-examination before the Justice (Retired) G.T. Nanavati and Justice (Retired) K.G. Shah Inquiry Commission probing the Godhra train carnage and its aftermath. Mr Narayan said that the decision was taken by Mr Modi despite the perception among top officials and the chief minister that this move could charge up communal passions. Incidentally, Mr Narayan is the only IAS officer who has filed an affidavit and was being cross-examined before the commission on Saturday. Pointing to a startling official lapse, Mr Narayan's affidavit stated, "The perpetrators of the Godhra train carnage were Muslims." On being questioned by advocate Mukul Sinha of the Jan Sangharsh Manch as to how did he reach to the conclusion that Muslims had committed the Godhra train carnage without any investigations into the case, he said, "This was his perception based on the information passed on to him on that day by the Godhra district magistrate. Even the chief minister and the then director general of police shared this view." (Asian Age 22.8.04)

24th Aug

Court orders review of acquittal in riot cases (7)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 23. The Supreme Court today asked the Advocate General of Gujarat to review the State Law Department's decision not to file appeals in about 200 riot cases in which the accused had been acquitted by the trial courts and to recommend whether or not to prefer appeals. A three-Judge Bench comprising Justice Ruma Pal, Justice S.B. Sinha and Justice S.H. Kapadia passed the order after hearing the AG who submitted that in criminal cases normally the public prosecutor would give a report to the Law Department about the acquittal in a case, suggesting whether or not to file appeals before the higher court. Giving figures, he said that out of 217 cases, it had been decided to prefer appeals in 45 cases and 16 were under process and the remaining 156 cases were pending consideration. In the light of his submission, the Bench, departing from the normal procedure, asked the AG to scrutinise in conjunction with the State Law Secretary all the orders of acquittals given by the trial courts and suggest whether or not appeal should be filed in these cases. Further, the Bench said that in future, in all cases pertaining to acquittal in riots cases, the AG's view would be taken into consideration by the Law Department before deciding whether or not to prefer an appeal. (The Hindu 24.8.04)

25th Aug

Godhra couldn't kill Gujarat spirit (7)

New Delhi: Despite the Narendra Modi government's "open support to the communal pogrom" in Gujarat in 2002, not everything is lost. The state's composite culture is alive and working at the ground level. This has come out in a study — 'The Other Gujarat: Hindu-Muslim Syncretism and Humanistic Forays' — conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Society for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and Samerth, Ahmedabad. The study to be released on August 28 maps, what J J Roy Bur-man of TISS calls "the geography of peace during the pogrom" and probes whether the social fabric of the state is really beyond redemption. Biplove Choudhry of SOFCAR says the study "is the first step towards the journey of exploring the other Gujarat and projecting it". The study conducted in cities and villages which witnessed communal violence in 2002 goes beyond and delves into the state's glorious syncretic past. Its verdict is clear: "The other side of the Gujarat is what will triumph." Though the study admits that "the communal violence spread to rural areas and dalits and trib-als got involved in a large scale", it was limited to places like Anand, Kheda, Baroda, Panchmahals, Dahod, Ahmedabad, Sabarkantha and Mehsana while the rest of the state presented a "geography of peace". (Times of India 25.8.04)

Gujarat SI arrested for tampering with proof (7)

Baroda Aug. 24: A police sub-inspector in Gujarat has been arrested for tampering with evidence during the post-Godhra riots. R.J. Patil was serving as the PS1 at Kalol town police station when 27 persons were killed in different incidents, including in the Ambika Nagar massacre in which 12 persons were stabbed and burnt to death by a mob of about 2,000 people. Instead of treating it as an individual case, he clubbed the gruesome case with other murder cases, thereby undermining the severity of the case. Patil was

initially suspended for dereliction of duty, but after a year he was recalled and was serving as reader to the assistant commissioner of police in Rajkot. (Asian Age 25.8.04)

Communal Violence: Rights activists release draft model law (7)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 24. The Common Minimum Programme of the Manmohan Singh Government promises the enactment of a "comprehensive law on communal violence" but a group of eminent jurists, retired police officials and human rights activists is leaving nothing to chance. Concerned about the legal vacuum which allows mass killings like Gujarat to take place, the group on Tuesday released a draft model law — The Prevention of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity Act 2004 — which, if enacted in its current form, will fix criminal responsibility on Ministers and officials for incidents of mass violence against a group of citizens in which they fail to exercise control. Command responsibility One of the pathbreaking aspects of the draft is that it tries to enshrine for the first time in domestic law the principles of vicarious criminal and administrative liability as well as the doctrine of command responsibility — both settled concepts in international humanitarian law. If India had enacted such legislation — as it was supposed to do soon after it became party to the Genocide Convention in 1959 — it is possible that the Gujarat Chief Minister would have thought twice about allowing the "Newton's Law" to operate freely in his State following the Godhra incident. (Hindu 25.8.04)

26th Aug

ts he got bodies of 13 Muslim victims burnt (7)

KALOL (GUJARAT), AUGUST 25: YET another shocking chapter has been opened in the search for justice for Gujarat riot victims. If the police buried the victims' bodies by a rivulet in the Bilkis Rasool rape and massacre case until the apex court got the CBI to dig, in this case, called the 'Ambika Society' massacre, they simply burnt the bodies of 13 victims, all Muslims. Investigators have now arrested Sub-Inspector R J Patil for "destroying" evidence. When contacted by The Indian Express, Patil admitted that he got the "last rites" of the bodies done because no one came to claim them for three days—a version strongly denied by a survivor who says he saw his brother killed. "I approached the Sub-Inspector the day after the massacre, seeking my brother Imran's body. But he kept dilly-dallying," Idris Godawala told The Indian Express. "I approached him (Patil) again and again over the next two days but the body was not handed over. Later I was told the bodies were cremated, he said. (Indian Express 26.8.04)

29th Aug

join stir for reservation (7)

KOCHI, AUG. 28. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) will take part in the agitations to be launched by the Community Reservations Action Committee comprising representatives of various communities. This was decided at a meeting of the IUML State Working Committee here today. The newly-constituted committee, which met under the chairmanship of the State president of the party, Panakkad Syed Mohammadali Shihab Thangal, decided to organise the State-level meeting at Kozhikode. Talking to presspersons after the day-long meeting, Mr. Thangal said the party would decide its stand on the constituency delimitation issue before September 5. A sub-committee, consisting of party's district presidents and secretaries, has been formed to study the issue. Mr. Thangal said that after the setback suffered by the party in Manjeri in the last Lok Sabha elections, there was a propaganda that the party was not protecting the interests of Muslims. The party was moving ahead with full enthusiasm and its State meet would prove its strength. The State general secretary of the party and Industries Minister, P. K. Kunhalikutty, who addressed the media along with Mr. Thangal, said the party was ready to face any challenge.

It would organise panchayat-level and district-level meetings. The party has already conveyed its stand on the Narendran Commission report. (The Hindu, 29-8-2004)

28th Aug

Court opens one more riot can in Gujarat (7)

AHMEDABAD | AUGUST 28, YET another one of Gujarat's worst massacres has got a second shot at justice. The Gujarat High Court admitted an appeal by the State Government for its "reinvestigation/retrial" and issued bailable warrants against BJP MLA Kalubhai Hirabhai Malivad and eight other accused in the Kidiyad massacre case in which 11 persons were killed and 61 are still "missing." This is the latest in a se-

ries of Gujarat riot cases that have been re-opened or re-investigated. Just last week, investigators arrested Sub-Inspector R J Patil for burning bodies of 13 Muslim victims of the Ambika Society' massacre. (Indian Express, 28-8-2004)

30th Aug

19 hurt in communal clashes at Mehsana (7)

AHMEDABAD, AUGUST 29: AT LEAST 19 people were injured, two of them seriously, in a group clash between two different communities today at the remote Bhankar village of Unjha taluka, in Mehsana district, police said. "The situation is now well under control as police rushed to the spot in time and took necessary steps to maintain law and order," Mehsana district Superintendent of Police H.G. Patel said. The official said the rioting mobs were brought under control by lathi charge and there have been no reports of any damage to public property, he said. Patel said "as per preliminary investigation the son of a retired police official, who has a house in the village had gone for some pooja. He allegedly threatened some persons of minority community after a scuffle and this triggered the clash." Security has been tightened in the sensitive town following the incident, the official said. A case of attempt to murder and rioting has been registered against five persons and the mob that attacked. Several of the accused persons are reportedly absconding after the clash and officials were probing further, Patel added. (Indian Express, 30-8-2004)

15th Aug

PM likely to review cut in Haj subsidy (7)

New Delhi, Aug. 14: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is likely to review the cut in the Haj subsidy ordered by the previous Vajpayee government. There are 20 crore Muslims and about Rs 170 crore is spent annually on the subsidy for the Haj pilgrimage. According to party sources, after the cut in the Haj subsidy, the government at best saves Rs 15 crores. The Congress 'has been holding meetings within the party following representations seeking a review of the decision made by the previous Vajpayee government to cut the subsidy for Haj pilgrims. According to the new guidelines issued during the NDA regime, the Haj subsidy .. not cover those availing rabaat facilities, or those who are income-tax payees. (Asian Age 15.8.04)

16th Aug

Tada hungerstrike over snatched quran (7)

Mumbai, Aug. 15: Over 29 accused persons booked under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act for their alleged involvement in the serial bomb blasts case of 1993 have been on a hungerstrike since Friday at the Arthur Road prison here after a havaladar snatched a copy of the holy Quran from one of the accused and threw it. The jail superintendent, Ms Swati Sathe, who witnessed this incident, allegedly abused the accused. Samajwadi Party Maharashtra unit president Abu Asim Azmi has taken up the issue with Maharashtra home minister Kripashankar Singh. "The jail superintendent, Swati Sathe, was doing her daily rounds of the barracks. The incident occurred in barracks three and six, where the blasts accused have been lodged. The superintendent, along with her entourage of 50 to 60 havaladars, saw a Rs 100 note lying at the entrance to the barracks. She asked the inmates who the money belonged to. When she didn't get a reply, she asked the accused what they were reading, and then she saw the Quran Sharif with one of them. She demanded to see the book. When the accused said that she couldn't touch it without taking a bath, she started abusing them. A havaladar snatched and threw the Quran aside," Mr Abu Asim Azmi alleged. He claimed that she also used abusive language against the accused (Asian Age 16.8.04)

17th Aug

[Belgaum rocked by fresh riots \(7\)](#)

BELGAUM, AUGUST 16: BELGAUM City was rocked by fresh violence on Monday after yesterday's communal riots. Clashes were reported in new areas but no untoward incidents were reported from areas where riots had broken out on Sunday. Though prohibitory orders clamped on the city have been extended for another 24 hours, members of the two communities pelted stones at each other as well as shops and passing vehicles. Today's violence engulfed the railway station area, Mujawar Galli, Tilak Chowk, Bandur Galli, Patil Galli and Tahasildar Galli. The situation in the areas under the Market police station limits that were hit by riots on Sunday has been described as "tense but under control". All shops

here remained shut for the day. As a precaution, police stopped people from entering these localities after late evening. Police also rounded up 45 people for setting ablaze shops and vehicles on Monday evening. (Indian Express 17.8.04)

1ST Sept.

Retired SC judge to head Godhra probe panel (8-5)

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet is likely to soon approve railway minister Lalu Prasad's proposal for a probe into the Godhra carnage but it will not be in the form of high powered departmental inquiry as had been sought by the RJD leader. The inquiry by a commission will be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge. The scope of the commission of inquiry will be to probe into all aspects pertaining to burning of coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express which resulted in the death of 59 people on February 27, 2002. The inquiry will be assisted by railway officials including commissioner railways safety. The inquiry will also address the question of "who were the people behind the burning of the train and why and how they did it," a senior railway official said. Lalu had been advised by some legal experts that a departmental inquiry as he had sought would not really serve the purpose of probing the incident and so he wrote to law minister H R Bhardwaj requesting him to nominate a retired Supreme Court judge to head a commission. There is some speculation that the advice actually originated in the law ministry. (Times of India, 1-9-2004)

2ND September

Nepal's Iraq anger sparks off violence, wary India watches (1)

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 1 : NEPALESE police shot dead two men today after crowds attacked a mosque in Kathmandu and charged through the streets "Down with Islam" to protest against the killing of 12 Nepalese hostages in Iraq. Protesters stormed inside the city's main mosque, set furniture and carpets on fire and tore up a copy of the Koran, before police drove them out. Authorities clamped an indefinite curfew on the capital and later fired on a group who gathered in downtown Kathmandu despite the ban, killing one man, an official said. Another man was killed and three wounded when police fired to break a mob trying to storm the Egyptian embassy in Kathmandu before curfew was imposed, the Interior Ministry said. Calm gradually returned after the curfew took effect at 2 pm and most of the capital's streets emptied. King Gyanendra urged people of different faiths to stay calm. (Indian Express, 2-9-2004)

3RD September

Communal tension grips Dahod; provocative slogans on mosque (7)

Baroda, Sept. 2: Communal tension gripped Dahod early on Wednesday morning when some provocative slogans written across the wall of a local mosque were discovered. The incident is believed to have occurred between 2am to 4am during which slogans like, Allah ne chhodo Ram ne bhajo, Hanuman ne bhajo (leave Allah, preach Rama, preach Hanuman) and 'Jay shree Ram' were painted on the walls of the Saifi Usami mosque here. The mosque belongs to the Vohra community. Soon after the incident, the leaders of the community appealed to the people to maintain peace. The police had also swung in action and cleaned up the walls washing off slogans. The incident is first of its kind in Dahod. The Jamat's secretary Najmuddin Gangardi told The Asian Age, "We want peace. If some miscreant attempts to provoke disharmony in the town we will not let it happen. We have appealed to the community not to react to this incident and have lodged a complaint with the police." Mr Gangardi also indicated that this incident could be a politically motivated one as the municipality elections in Dahod are just three months away.

Similar incidents were reported in Sanjeli and Garbada villages of Dahod during the post-Godhra communal riots. However, this is first such incident in the town after riots. (Asian Age, 3-9-2004)

New panel on Godhra fire - (7)

New Delhi, September 2 : OVER TWO-AND-A-HALF years after the gruesome Godhra incident, the UFA government on Thursday announced the setting up of a high-level inquiry to probe the fire on the Sabarmati Express that claimed the lives of 59 people. To be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, Justice U.C. Banerjee, the probe panel is to be empowered through a separate notification under Section 11 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1952, with all its interrelated provisions. A decision to this effect was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Mandated to submit its findings within a period of three months, the committee is to examine various aspects of the incident apart from ascertaining the precise cause of the fire in the ill-fated coach S-6 of Sabarmati Express. It will also fix

responsibility for neglect or default on the part of the officials and workmen of the railway administration and its security staff for the large-scale loss of life and property. Apparently, the Centre decided to set up a committee as against a commission of inquiry to ward off accusations of constituting a parallel commission. The Narendra Modi-led BJP government in Gujarat has already appointed the Nanavati Commission "to go into the facts, circumstances and course of events of the incidents that led to the setting on fire some of the coaches of the Sabarmati Express train". According to legal experts, the Nanavati Commission's terms of reference more or less preclude an inquiry into whether the fire was an accident or whether enhanced railway safety measures might have prevented the fire from breaking out and spreading. Significantly, a May 2002 report of Gujarat's Forensic Science Laboratory found that no inflammable fluid had been thrown into the coach from outside. The Centre's latest move comes at a time when the Modi government has come in for a lot of flak from the Supreme Court for its lackadaisical investigations into the riot cases that followed the Godhra killings. (Hindustan Times, 3-9-2004)

Lalu's Godhra panel okayed - (7)

Ex-Judge Will Also Probe Kar Sevaks' Behaviour

New Delhi: Opening a political Pandora's box in the context of Gujarat, the UFA government on Thursday approved railway minister Lalu Prasad's proposal of a committee to inquire into the burning of a coach of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra which had sparked communal violence across the state in 2002. The terms of reference of the high-powered one-member committee of retired Supreme Court judge U C Banerjee widen the ambit of the probe to include "behaviour" of the kar senate in coach number S-6 (that was subsequently set on fire) and whether that "contributed to the fire". It will also probe "events and developments" that took place since the train left Muzaffarpur in Bihar on February 25, 2002, passed through UP and Rajasthan before entering Gujarat and whether these contributed "individually or conjointly" to the fire that led to the death of 59 people two days later. The role and the negligence, if any, of railway officials connected with rail safety and with the inquiry into the fire, will also be studied. Judge Banerjee will be assisted by three railway experts. "Ever since I became railway minister, I have been trying to collect information about the Godhra incident. I found that the railways had done no inquiry in the matter. Now at last the people will get an opportunity to know the truth," said an elated Lalu Prasad. (Times of India, 3-9-2004)

9TH September

Bakery case: Court to frame charges afresh (7)

Mumbai: Clearing the decks for re-trial of the Best Bakery case in Maharashtra, a special court on Wednesday declared that it would frame charges afresh on September 15 against 21 accused facing charges of killing 14 people in a carnage in Vadodara during the post-Godhra riots on March 1, 2002. Special judge Abhay Thipse directed prosecutor P R Vakil to submit draft of charges against all 21 accused by September 13. The court also declared that charges would have to be framed against those who were absconding, after they are held and produced before the court. The judge indicated that his court was likely to shift from Sewri to the new premises at Mazgaon on the next hearing. Meanwhile, 15 accused, lodged in central prison here, were produced before the judge to mark their presence. Of them, Raju and Shana baria, who were ar-rested on August 20, were placed in judicial custody. Another accused on bail also appeared before the court. (Times of India 9.9.04)

BJP takes exception to Godhra probe (7)

BANGALORE, SEPT. 8. The Bharatiya Janata Party has taken exception to the ordering of a "malevolent inquiry" into the torching of Kar Sevaks in a train in Godhra, with a perverse motive to prove that the victims themselves set the train on fire in a conspiracy to later incite riots elsewhere in Gujarat." The BJP's national-level office-bearers discussed the issue with other issues here today. "Never in the history of independent India has there been a Government at the Centre like this one, which, even though its responsibility is to promote national ideals, seems bent on doing quite the opposite," the meeting said. Later at a news conference, the BJP spokesperson, Arun Jaitley, in reply to a question, said the Supreme Court transferring the Godhra riot case outside Gujarat was not a reflection on the administration of justice in Gujarat. The courts had also ordered the transfer of cases pertaining to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, outside Tamil Nadu and that was not a reflection on the courts there. "If the courts feel that the cases have to be transferred to some other State, it is final and that verdict is accepted by all," he said. (The Hindu 9.9.04)

Govt to relook analysis of Muslim data (7)

New Delhi: It's now official. The government is taking a "relook" at the analytical comments made in the Census report on religion, which had suggested that the growth rate of the Muslim population during 1991-2001 had grown by 1.5 percentage points, whereas it has actually declined. Confirming this, Deputy Registrar General R G Mitra said, "There is some problem raised on analytical remarks vis-a-vis Muslim growth rate. So the commission has decided to have a re-look at the analysis part." The clarification comes in the wake of a report in The Times of India on Wednesday which pointed out that 36% growth estimated for the Muslim population over 1991-2001 was based on the faulty procedure of comparing all-India 2001 figures with the 1991 figures which excluded J&K. It also comes after the data released on Monday kicked up a political storm with statements from BJP leaders expressing "concern" over demographic changes and urging "uniform" growth for all communities. (Times of India 9.9.04)

13TH September

Cop probing three Gujarat riot cases told to pack up (7)

NEERJA Gotra, Ahmedabad's SP (Prohibition) who on the Supreme Court's direction was assigned investigation of three post-Godhra riot cases in the Panchmahals, has been asked to wind up her probe. Confirming that she had been told to submit her report, she said: "It is a sensitive matter. The investigations are nearly over. I have been asked to submit the probe report." In the Ambika Society massacre case, she ordered the arrest of sub-inspector R J Patil for tampering with evidence by burning bodies of 13 victims without informing their relatives. She also got another massacre case re-opened after it had been closed for lack of evidence.

Reached for his comment, DGP A K Bhargav said: "Investigations are nearly over and she has already filed draft chargesheets. She has completed the task she was given." (Indian Express 13.9.04)

Summon two journalists, Lalu urges Liberhan panel (7)

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 12. The RJD president and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, today urged the Liberhan Commission, probing the Babri Masjid demolition, to summon two journalists who had "exposed" the role of the former Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, and others in the case. He told reporters that the two journalists — Anita Pratap and Jefferson K who were associated with the New York-based Time magazine — had, disguised as kar sevaks, witnessed the role of Mr. Advani, Ms. Bharti and others in the demolition and got it published in the issue of the magazine dated December 21, 1992. It was the responsibility of the Commission to ask them to depose before it. Displaying a copy of the magazine, Mr. Lalu Prasad said that since the Commission's tenure had been extended by another three months, Mr. Advani, Ms. Bharti, and others should be summoned afresh so that the truth would come out. He reiterated the allegation he had made a week ago in Patna that Mr. Advani was an "absconder" in the case relating to a plot to kill Mohammed Ali Jinnah and said the former Home Minister should "come clean" on that case also. There were six accused, including Mr. Advani, in the case, the trial for which was held in Lahore, he charged.

All of them became absconders. Mr. Advani should clarify the position. (The Hindu 13.9.04)

14TH September

Riot-hit demand fresh probe; notices issue (7)

AHMEDABAD, SEPTEMBER 13: ON A petition seeking fresh investigation by an I-G rank officer in a case of post-Godhra rioting where the police allegedly did not arrest a BJP leader named as accused, the Gujarat High Court today issued notices to the state government, Director General of Police, SP and Collector of Sabarkantha, and three others, asking them to file their replies by October 1. The single-judge bench of C.K. Buch issued notices on a petition filed by Abdulkadar Akhuji and Rahim Manasia, residents of Jamla village, alleging that Jethabhai Patel, secretary of the BJP's Sabarkantha district unit, was involved in loot and arson of houses, shops and buildings belonging to Muslims in their village on February 28, 2002. The petitioners, whose houses were also burnt, alleged that the investigation in the case had been perfunctory and suffered from extraneous considerations. "The entire tenor and direction of the investigation" was aimed at seeing that Patel — a locally influential man — was somehow saved, they further alleged. (Indian Express 14.9.04)

Muslim board to promote family planning, literacy (7)

New Delhi: Putting together a response to the political storm over Census findings on the growth rate of Muslims, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board said on Monday that it would discuss steps to promote family planning and literacy in the community when its executive meets next in December. Appealing to politicians to desist from scoring points on the issue, the board said it was wrong to assume that Islam was averse to family planning. In fact, its vice-president Maulana Syed Kalbe Sadiq said the board won't shy away from the need for family planning and education. The Muslim growth rate issue hit the headlines with a misleading Census interpretation of the data, which was subsequently corrected to bring out the fact that the community's growth rate had not climbed over the previous census's growth rate, but not before BJP, including its chief Venkaiah Naidu, and sundry saffron outfits sought to make political capital out of the issue by calling for family planning measures for Muslims. (Times of India 14.9.04)

15TH September

[Muslim board chief contradicts deputy: no room for birth control \(7\)](#)

LUCKNOW, SEPTEMBER 14: A DAY after vice-chairman Maulana Syed Kalbe Sadiq said the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) would discuss steps to promote family planning, chairman Maulana Rabey Hasni Nadwi categorically stated today that "there is no place for family planning in Islam". Yesterday, while dispelling the notion that family planning was not encouraged by Islam, Sadiq had pointed out that Muslim countries like Iran had achieved almost zero per cent population growth. "I have written to Shia and Sunni religious leaders that we must sit together and discuss a model of family planning based on the example of these countries," he had said.

But contradicting Sadiq's stand, Nadwi today said: "If any member of the community has some physical problems, he can approach the mufti. But there is no place for family planning in Islam."

As for his vice-chairman's statement, the AIMPLB chairman claimed "it was said in his (Sadiq's) personal capacity and did not reflect the opinion of the Board." (Indian Express 15.9.04)

[Survey of Muslim places of worship soon \(7\)](#)

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, SEPT. 14.: The Census Directorate will take up a survey of Muslim places of worship in the State from October, the Census Director, Sheela Thomas, announced here today. Simultaneously, the directorate will also take up a survey of Christian churches.

The report is expected to be completed in a year, she told representatives of Muslim organisations at a meeting convened here today. Ms. Thomas said an expert committee comprising religious scholars and academicians had been constituted for the survey of Muslim institutions. The survey will be based on a questionnaire seeking details about the location, sect, the year of establishment, architectural features and important festivals. Village officers will visit each shrine on prior appointment to fill up the questionnaire. Ms. Thomas said the survey was part of the census. She said a similar study on Hindu temples had been completed by the directorate. The report was published as a book titled 'Temples of Kerala'. Representatives of various Muslim organisations highlighted the need for an awareness campaign on the survey. They proposed a meeting of Jamaath office-bearers in the district. (The Hindu 15.9.04)

[Best Bakery, Bilkis cases adjourned once again \(7\)](#)

Mumbai, Sept. 15: The Supreme Court shifted the venue of the trial of two Gujarat riot cases, the Best Bakery case and the Bilkis Bano case, to Mumbai but justice seems to be a long way off. The Best Bakery case came up for hearing in the special court for the first time on June 7, but it was adjourned six times after the governments of Maharashtra and Gujarat staked claim to appointing the public prosecutor.

On Wednesday, the case was adjourned for the seventh

time as the court wanted to start the trial only after the arrest of five absconding accused. Special Judge A.M. Thipsay said that the case papers revealed that these five accused had played a prominent role in the case. Special public prosecutor P.R. Vakil suggested to Mr Thipsay that the court should try the accused who are already in custody. He suggested that there should be a separate trial for the five absconding accused. They have been accused of killing 14 people in the post-Godhra riots in Baroda on March 1, 2002. The Gujarat high court acquitted all the accused following which key witness Zahira Shaikh moved the Supreme Court urging that a retrial be held in another state. (Asian Age 15.9.04)

17TH September

[Property row drives Muslim family to Hinduism \(7\)](#)

Lucknow, Sept. 16: A property dispute has made a Muslim family of 11 members to embrace Hinduism at

Gauhaniya village, in the Ghurpur police station area of Allahabad district. Mohammed Hasan (now Ram Chandra), his wife Akhtari Begum (Sita Devi), four sons, two daughters-in-law and three grandchildren were being tormented by a neighbouring Muslim family in the village over a property dispute. Mohammed Hasan sought help from his community members but no one seemed ready to help. "I was disgusted by the apathetic attitude of my own community members. Everyone said that I was right but no one was ready to extend support. My Hindu friends, on the other hand, were supportive of me and would even take care of my family when I went out of the village. It was then that I decided to embrace Hinduism because it was the Hindus who were helping me in crisis," Hasan told reporters in Allahabad on Wednesday. The family, according to Hasan, discussed the issue threadbare and finally agreed to convert to Hinduism. "We did not pressure anyone and allowed each member to have his way. Finally, when everyone was ready, we submitted an affidavit to the district magistrate on September 10 in this regard," said Mohammed Hasan. (Asian Age 17.9.04)

18th September

Discrepancies favour Shrivastava (7)

VADODARA, SEPTEMBER 17: BJP MLA Madhu Shrivastava, who alleged "intimidated witnesses in the Best Bakery case, is unlikely to be arrested in the near future, police said. This is because there are discrepancies in witnesses' statements and key witness Zaheera Sheikh is yet to give her statement on the MLA's interference in the case. "I will decide only at the end of the investigations. But at present there is not enough evidence (to arrest Shrivastava and the other accused)," said Vadodara police commissioner Sudhir Sinha on Friday. The post-Godhra Best Bakery massacre case had first been tried by a fast-track court, which acquitted all 21 accused. After The Indian Express highlighted witnesses' pleas that they lied in court under intimidation by Shrivastava and others, the Supreme Court had ordered a retrial in Maharashtra. (Indian Express 18.9.04)

20th September

Communal clash in Vadodara, six injured (7)

Vadodara: At least six persons were injured in a communal clash during Ganesh Chaturthi procession leading to tension at Panigate. Members of two communities indulged in stone pelting after an altercation between two youths when the Ganesh idol procession passed through Dudhwalla mohalla where Koran was being recited following the death of a person on Saturday night, the police said. "There was some altercation as those present at the house of the deceased reportedly objected to the bha-jans," the police said. However, the situation was brought under control and security has been beefed up. With the 10-day festival beginning, seven companies of State Reserve Police Force and Rapid Action Force have been deployed, he said. (Times of India 20.9.04)

23rd September

Charges against 16 accused framed (7)

Mumbai, Sept. 22: The special court on Wednesday framed charges against 16 accused in the Best Bakery case. Five accused are still at large. Special judge A.M. Thipsay charged them with murder and dacoity and under other sections of the Indian Penal Code. On the last hearing, special public prosecutor P.R. Vakil had indicated that the trial against those in custody should begin. The court said it will frame charges against the remaining accused when they are apprehended. On March 1, 2002, a mob had attacked and killed 14 people at the Best Bakery on the outskirts of Baroda.

The matter will be taken up on October 4, when the first witness in the case will appear before the court. The identity of the witness has not been disclosed. The court has said it will frame charges against the remaining five accused as and when they are arrested. Meanwhile, the defence counsels have filed an application in the court urging the court to visit the site of the crime before recording the evidence. The court will hear this matter on September 28. (Asian Age 23.9.04)

26th September

Muslim Board not to talk family planning (7)

KOZHIKODE, Sept. 25. — The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today categorically said that it would not take up for discussion "family planning" and "triple talaq" issues, as "Islam does not permit them".

"Islam does not permit family planning or any method of birth control and there should be no compulsion on the matter. Also, separation should be made in a manner only as per the Shariat," AIMPLB assistant general secretary, Mohammed Abdul Rahim Quraishi told reporters. Asked about the reported statement made by a Board spokesman recently, that the issues might come up during the Board's General Body meeting, to be held in Kerala in December, Quraishi clarified that only the AIMPLB President, or General Secretary were authorised to comment on the issues. "Neither of them have made any comments on the issue. Let me make it clear that we have neither discussed these issues nor propose to do so in the future", Quraishi said. (Statesman 26.9.04)

Godhra: Cop contradicts Sangh version (7)

Ahmedabad, September 27: IN HIS deposition before the Nanavati-Shah Commission on Monday, a police officer has contradicted the version of the Sangh Parivar leaders that the Gulbarg Society massacre on February 28, 2002 was provoked when a crowd was fired at. Sangh leaders had earlier said former MP Ehsan Jaffrey, who was among the 39 people burnt to death, had opened fire at the mob. The incident took place during the VHP-sponsored bandh in protest against the burning of the S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express at Godhra. Inspector K.G. Erda of Meghaninagar told the two-judge panel that he did not know whether Jaffrey had fired on the mob, which had laid siege to the Gulbarg Society. He added though that one person was injured in private firing on the mob between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. The injured person later died in hospital on April 4, 2002. Erda said a .12 bore gun was recovered from the roof of a hutment in Gandhi ni chali, about 70 feet behind Jaffrey's house, on March 4, 2002. It was, however, left unexplained how the gun had landed in the hut's roof as Jaffrey was hacked to death and burnt by the 20,000-strong mob in front of his house. (Hindustan Times 28.9.04)

5th October

Bakery case retrial starts, 1st witness deposes (7)

Mumbai, Oct. 4: The retrial in the Best Bakery began on Monday in the special court with the first prosecution witness deposing before the court. Public prosecutor Manjula Rao called upon the person who had drawn the plan of the Best Bakery and the surrounding area in 2002 as the first witness. During the deposition, the witness accepted that he had made the map on an approximate measurement and not as per the scales of measurement. The witness, an official of the collector's office said that he did so at the instructions of another officer, C.K. Patel, whose rank was the same as his. He denied the allegations levelled by the defence that he did not actually draw the map and just signed it. Senior counsel for the defence, Adhik Shirodkar said, "I put it to you that you have not made the plans. You are sent as a 'bakra' by the state." Mr Shirodkar cross-examined him on details of the map and the Best bakery building. The map showed that the plan was prepared on June 29, 2002. The witness said that he had visited the entire area where the Best Bakery was situated and the neighbouring areas and made the plans on the same day itself. However, he was not able to give exact measurements of the buildings, roads and locations during cross-examination. (Asian Age 5.10.04)

No more hostile, witness recalls Best Bakery night (7)

HEARING in the Best Bakery retrial today saw one of two independent witnesses who had turned hostile in the trial court, revert to his earlier testimony. Kallu Mian Sheikh, who was present during the police panchnama on the day after the Best Bakery carnage, had told the trial court in Vadodara that he could not "remember" the details. But today, taking the stand for the retrial in the special court in Mumbai, Kallu Mian recalled what he saw on March 2, 2002 when officers from the Panigate police station took him to Best Bakery to witness a panchnama being drawn. Facing judge Abhay Thipsay Kallu Mian said Zaheera Sheikh, the prime eyewitness in the case, was present when he reached the spot. The group, comprising the police and two independent witnesses, moved through the destroyed bakery, with Zaheera pointing out the damage caused to the structure, he said. According to Kallu Mian, "the entire bakery was gutted." Walls on the ground floor were black and there were cracks. "On the first floor, rooms were littered with damaged utensils and clothes. (Indian Express 6.10.04)

7th October

Muslim board to open new chapter (7)

Oct. 6: The All India Muslim Personal Law Board will meet in Lucknow on Sunday to chalk out the agenda for its December conclave in Kochi that aims to usher in a "new chapter" for the community. The agenda

is expected to revolve around the central role of knowledge in Islam, honesty, hard work and personal integrity, and the "inclusive" and tolerant outward-looking character of the religion. Under Maulana Rabey Nadvi's chairmanship, the board hopes to provide centrality to the "Islah-e-Maishra (reforms in Islamic society)", a report by Munger-based scholar Maulana Wali Rahmani, also the board secretary. The draft report focuses on improvement in personal conduct, reforms in marriage/divorce and a complete ban on dowry and extravagance. Board insiders said if liberals and reformists had their way, the Kochi conclave would see the beginning of a "new chapter" that emphasises "wisdom, practicality and harmony" of Islam. "Islam encourages moderation or a balanced approach to life. Yet, it does not mean straying from the fundamentals of the holy Quran and the example and sayings of the Prophet," a board office-bearer told The Telegraph. (Telegraph 7.10.04)

8th October

An old lady on the terrace kept crying for help (7)

MUMBAI, OCTOBER 7: WHEN firefighter Dayaram Pal reached the Best Bakery site at 10.50 am on March 2, 2002, the last embers of the fire that had destroyed the Bakery were still glowing. "*Ek maaji upar thi aur upar se awaz aa rahi thii, bachao, bachao* (An old woman was standing on the terrace, crying for help)," Dayaram deposed before the special court today. Since the retrial started on October 4 before judge Abhay Thipsay, eight witnesses have already deposed. Most have been police witnesses who were present when *panchnamas* were being drawn up — they have verified various details of the incident as recorded by the police the day after. Dayaram was the first to provide the eyewitness account of the carnage in which 14 persons were killed. (Indian Express 8.10.04)

9th October

Modi back to minority maths (7)

Ahmedabad, October 8: GUJARAT CHIEF minister Narendra Modi has done it again. Addressing the maiden meeting of the state population commission, he once again referred to his favourite '5-25-125-625' population explosion formula, which supposedly negates all the benefits of development. For starters, Modi's controversial formula is a sarcastic comment on the perceived notion that minority men with four wives each (1+4) multiply the population in geometric progression. His infamous remark on the population explosion of minorities — uttered first at Becharji in north Gujarat on the second day of his Gaurav Yatra in September 2002 — had attracted widespread criticism, leading to the National Commission on Minorities taking exception to it. At Thursday's meeting of the state population commission, Modi didn't refer directly to the minorities' growth rate but said "plus or minus in growth rate is okay but the problem is multiplication, like 5-25-125-625". He juxtaposed his formula with the information that even predominantly Muslim countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have taken measures to check population explosion. (Hindustan Times 9.10.04)

Gujarat downplayed riots: Ex-DGP (7)

Ahmedabad, Oct. 8: Former director-general of police (intelligence) R.B. Sreekumar, who filed a second affidavit before the Nanavati-Shah panel on Wednesday, has highlighted the role played by the state government in downplaying the role of the intelligence department during the 2002 sectarian riots. Mr Sreekumar's first affidavit before Justice G.T. Nanavati (Retd) and Justice K.G. Shah (Retd) inquiry commission probing the Godhra train carnage and its aftermath, had stirred up the administration and the second affidavit is no less potent than the earlier one. The former intelligence chief in his recent affidavit has stated that the home department had directed him to prepare a report on law and order on August 20, 2002, keeping in mind the upcoming Assembly elections. According to Mr Sreekumar's assessment, thousands of voters were affected due to the riots and communal tension was still prevailing for which reason elections could have created further trouble throughout the state. The then additional chief secretary for home, Mr Ashok Narayan, in response to the intelligence assessment had on September 9, 2002, described Mr Sreekumar's assessment as "a distorted picture of the situation" and the home department had even questioned the "method of assessment. (Asian Age 9.10.04)

11th October

2 years on, fear stalks Seshan riot witnesses (7)

AHMEDABAD, OCTOBER 10: TWO years after Godhra, the Muslims of Seshan village in Banaskantha are stuck in a circle of fear. After the massacre of 14 of their community members in . 2002, they now say

that some of the accused who are out on bail are threatening the witnesses, asking them to either retract their statements or face the consequences. One of witnesses, Haji Khan Baloch, has written letters to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) chairman, Gujarat Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and Superintendent of Police, Banaskantha, seeking help. In the letter, Baloch has also requested police authorities to tighten security around the village, following the threats on October 1. Says Banaskantha SP, Raju Bhargava: "I have received a few applications from Seshan village and have asked authorities concerned to probe the matter. As far as security cordon around the village is concerned, it has not been diluted" On March 2, 2002, Muslims in Seshan, which has a mixed population, were attacked by a mob—reportedly from neighbouring Morjujuna, a predominantly Hindu village. The mob killed 14, injured 38 and ransacked houses. (Indian Express 11.10.04)

18th October

Naroda victims ask DGP to act (7)

Ahmedabad, Oct. 17: The survivors of the massacres at Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaam have, following the Supreme Court's intervention in the post-Godhra riot cases, written to the director-general of the Gujarat police demanding legal action against the investigating officials for their negligence. In many of these cases, they said, the police had failed to follow up leads and had given the benefit of the doubt in several instances to those allegedly guilty of the massacres. A number of these cases were clubbed in FIR 100/2002 and wrapped up with a "C Summary" despite a number of deaths reported. Copies of the letter to the DGP have been sent to the Supreme Court, the National Human Rights Commission, the CBI director and the police commissioner of Ahmedabad. In the letter, the victims have pointed out contradictions in the police investigation that gave (the accused) benefit of the doubt. They have also questioned the grounds on which the state police filed "C summary" report in three of the FIRs — 177/2002, 187/2002 and 238/2002 — clubbed in FIR 100/2002, even though these mentioned serious offences such as culpable homicide. (Asian Age 18.10.04)

19th October

Best Bakery case: 'DNA tests could not be done' (7)

MUMBAI, OCT, 18. The Special public prosecutor, Ms. Manjula Rao, today told the sessions court that DNA tests could not be conducted on some bones found at the site of the Best Bakery carnage in Baroda, as they were badly burnt. According to the prosecution, the bones may have belonged to two people who were working at the Bakery and who are missing. However, the DNA tests could not be done on the bones and compared with the blood samples of the relatives of the two missing persons, to establish their identity. The badly charred bones are evidence of the extent to which the Bakery was burnt by the mob, according to Ms. Rao. Tomorrow, forensic laboratory officials and doctors who did the tests will depose in the retrial which was transferred to Mumbai by the Supreme Court. So far 18 witnesses have been examined. (The Hindu 19.10.04)

Again, Muslims see justice, hope strangled (7)

Kalol, Oct. 18: So indecent was his younger brother's death that Idris Yusuf Ghodawala never imagined the indignity that was to follow. On March 1, 2002, as Hindu-Muslim riots convulsed the state of Gujarat, a Hindu mob armed with shiny new swords set upon Imran Ghodawala, an 18-year-old Muslim, dragged him into the Rabbani mosque and burned him to death. Idris, hiding on a balcony next door, saw the attack and then the smoke billowing from the mosque. When Idris Ghodawala went to the police to claim Imran's remains, he said the top local police officer, a Hindu named R.J. Patil, told him there were no remains to claim. Mr Patil had burned them, knowing full well that Muslims, unlike Hindus, bury their dead. The sacrilege still makes Mr Ghodawala, 31, weep. "We are Muslims, and they burned our body," he said. Mr Patil's action appears to have been part of a broader effort to conceal evidence and thwart prosecutions after the riots in Gujarat state, which left at least 1,100 Muslims dead and up to 600 missing. Mr Ghodawala could name four members of the mob that killed his brother, two of whom he had played cricket with as a child. But he said Mr Patil refused to let him name names, or even file a complaint. (Asian Age 19.10.04)

28th October

Best retrial: Eyewitness identifies seven accused (7)

Mumbai: Two-and-a-half years after a mob burnt alive 14 people in Vadodara's Best Bakery, one of the survivors identified seven accused from a line-up of 17 in a special court in Mumbai on Wednesday. Earlier, all the 21 accused had been acquitted by a fast track court in Gujarat. Tofel Ahmed Habibulla Shaikh (22), a prime eyewitness in the Best Bakery carnage case, was hesitant to go up to the dock to identify the accused. "I will point them out from the witness box itself," he said. But when additional sessions judge Abhay Thipsay arranged a police escort and directed that all the 17 accused be lined up outside the dock, Tofel went close and pointed out the accused one by one. The seven people identified by the witness are Sanjay Thakkar, Ravi Chauhan, Dinesh Rajbhar, Jitu Chauhan, Sanbhai Bariya, Kamlesh Tadvi and Suresh Vasava. He told the court how they tied their hands and feet before torching them on the night of March 1, 2002. "We were on the terrace when some of the rioters climbed up to the terrace in the wee hours by joining two ladders. They swore not to harm us and asked us to climb down the ladder. First, Zaheera, her mother and grandmother went down followed by me, Sailum, Shehjad, Baliram, Prakash, Nafitulla and his brother Raju," Tofel said. Once they were down, the rioters tied their hands and feet before slashing them with swords and hurling burning wooden logs toward them. Unbuttoning his shirt before the court, Tofel revealed bruises and burn marks on his head, shoulders, chest, hand and legs. (Times of India 28.10.04)

Law to tackle communal violence soon: Patil (7)

NEW DELHI, NOV. 3. The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, said today that a model law to tackle all aspects of communal violence in the country would soon be put in place. The comprehensive law would be drafted based on past experiences. The proposed Bill would be put up for discussion among various groups, committees and MPs and inputs from State police and intelligence agencies would also be taken, he said. "The UFA Government is determined to bring in a model, comprehensive law to tackle the menace of communal violence," he said while inaugurating the 39th annual conference of Directors-General of Police organised by the Intelligence Bureau here. Though the communal situation in the country had been peaceful for the past one year, a law was needed to act as a deterrent. Mr. Patil's message to the top police officials was: "Let us act and not react. If you act, results will be better. Anticipate an event and be prepared to face it. You have to manage the contradiction of acting with determination but with compassion only then long term results will be better." Ahead of his proposed visit to Jammu and Kashmir from November 6, the Minister said the Government continued to hold out the offer for unconditional dialogue with the separatists in the State. "As the situation improves, secessionist leaders would find it easier to participate in the dialogue, thereby making it more broad-based," he said. (The Hindu 4.11.04)

7th Nov.

France school expels Sikhs for turbans (7)

London, Nov. 6: Three Sikh students in France were expelled from a school on Friday for refusing to remove their turbans. The move is expected to trigger off a massive outcry in France. It is the first time that Sikhs have been forced out of school under a new French law banning conspicuous religious signs and apparel in the classroom, their lawyer said. Officials of the Louise Michel high school in Bobigny, northeast of Paris, decided to expel the three teenagers at disciplinary hearings ordered by a court, said lawyer Felix de Belloy. The ruling was the latest twist in France's effort to apply a new law banning religious symbols at public schools. The ban, which includes Islamic headscarves, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses, took effect at the start of the school year. According to reports in the British media, at least eight Muslim girls have been expelled under the law. Islamic headscarves were the law's main target because of concerns that growing Muslim fundamentalism in France was weakening the nation's secular roots. (Asian Age 7.11.04)

Five injured in communal clash (7)

Ludhiana, November 13: FIVE PERSONS were injured, one of them seriously, when Sikhs and Muslims clashed over possession of a religious place in the outskirts of Ludhiana on Saturday. Muslims have been demanding possession of the land in Bhaura village claiming it used to be a mosque, however, the Sikhs opposed to it saying that they have been performing the path of the Guru Granth Sahib for the last 50 years. The dispute reached a flash point on Saturday with members of both the communities resorting to stone throwing, injuring five. The condition of one of the injured is stated to be critical. Police force has been rushed to the village to prevent further escalation of violence. (Hindustan Times 13.11.04)

20th Nov.

New law coming to fight riots (7)

New Delhi, November 19: THE GOVERNMENT is planning a new law to curb communal violence which will put justice on fast track and not treat riots as a mere law and order problem. The home ministry has already sent a draft note to the law ministry to formulate the Bill. To be named the Law on Communal Harmony, it was a key component of the government's common minimum programme. Home ministry sources said the note contains specific suggestions to help the law ministry draft the Bill. However, it may not be tabled in Parliament's winter session, beginning December 1. The new law will specifically define communal violence. Currently, the law book doesn't draw a line between communal violence and a law and order problem. And state administrations would now be able to "identify and isolate acts of communal violence". A key home ministry suggestion is to have different sections under the new law along the lines of CrPC and IPC to deal with specific aspects of communal violence. It also suggests stringent punishment under different sections. (Hindustan Times 20.11.04)

24th Nov.

Minorities panel to present views (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 23: The National Commission for Minorities will present its views to the Union home ministry regarding a proposed comprehensive legislation to tackle all aspects of communal violence in the country. The NCM on Tuesday called a meeting of legal luminaries and representatives of minority communities to chalk out recommendations on the proposed legislation. "In order to formulate the views of the commission, a meeting of legal luminaries and representatives of minority communities was held today," NCM chairman Tarlochan Singh said, stating that it has asked the representatives of the minority communities to bring "proper proposals" so that a consensus view can be arrived at for communicating to the Union home ministry. Former Chief Justice of India A.M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of the Delhi high court, Rajinder Sachar, academician T.H. Khan, legal expert K.T.S. Tulsi, joint secretary in the home affairs ministry A.K. Jain and additional secretary in the law ministry J.S. Negi were among those who attended the meeting. (Asian Age 24.11.04)

25th Nov.

Minority panel to get legal status (7)

New Delhi, November 24: IN A bid to infuse greater confidence among the minorities, the National Commission for Minorities is to be granted a constitutional status. The present commission had been set up on the basis of the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992, sans a constitutional status that lacked any legal sanctity to enforce its recommendations. Drafts of two Bills on this count were okayed on Wednesday by the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. To be introduced in the winter session of Parliament, one Bill will amend the Constitution to pave the way for the constitutional status of the Minority Commission. The other Bill will repeal the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992. In another significant decision, the Cabinet approved a three-month extension to the committee inquiring into the Sabarmati Express fire at Godhra. Authorised to invoke the provisions of Section 11 of the Commission of Inquiry Act-1952, the committee is now expected to complete its findings by March 4, 2005. In the legislative arena, the Cabinet approved a draft amendment to Section-6 (2) of Sree Chitra Tribunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology-Trivandrum Act-1980, Merchant Shipping Act-1958 and Indian Ports Act-1908. (Hindustan Times 25.11.04)

26th Nov.

Compensation in bill on communal violence (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 25: The proposed law to tackle communal violence is likely to have specific provisions on providing compensation to victims. Union home minister Shivraj Patil indicated this here on Thursday. He said victims of communal violence could be awarded compensation by the government or by the judge hearing the case. The quantum of compensation, too, was a point to be considered, he said. Mr Patil confirmed that the Union home ministry had prepared a concept paper, and the Union law ministry has been asked to come up with a draft bill. Both the concept paper and the draft bill will be open for debate. They will be put on the Internet and discussions would be organised to seek opinions of all sections of society. The law had been promised in the United Progressive Alliance's common minimum programme.

Earlier, the government has hinted that the bill could even include the concept of collective punishment: for example, an entire village being fined for creating a communal disturbance. This obviously would be apart from the punishment for grievous crimes committed during a riot. (Asian Age 26.11.04)

29th Nov.

Bill on communal violence being readied: Patil (7)

NEW DELHI, NOV. 28. The Centre is drafting a Bill to "effectively" deal with communal violence and will put its contents on Internet to seek the people's views before finalising the proposed law, according to the Home Minister, Shivraj Patil. The Bill would define communal disturbance, provide for stringent punishment and extend compensation to victims. "We want to make a law which is really effective and which will remain in the statute books for many, many years to come. And it will be in accordance with the wishes of the people and their demands and opinions.

"The new Bill is being drafted by the Law Ministry on the basis of a detailed paper prepared by the Home Ministry to control communal disturbances. The draft and the paper will be put on Internet and we will hold seminars and encourage a countrywide debate to elicit people's opinion on it before finalising it," Mr. Patil told PTI today. The proposed law is expected to lay down the parameters of investigation into communal incidents and may also rule whether the Centre or State will probe any disturbance and the time-frame. (The Hindu 29.11.04)

2ND Nov.

Best Bakery trial: second eyewitness identifies five accused (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 1. The second eyewitness in the Best Bakery retrial today identified five accused in court, and said they were part of the mob which attacked the bakery and its workers on March 1, 2002. Fourteen people were killed in the incident. Teenaged Raees Pathan, who worked in the bakery for a year and half, survived that night with three cuts on the back of his head and burns on both his hands and chest. Pathan pointed to five accused — Sanabhai Baria, Dinesh Rajbhar, Suresh Vasave (who were also identified by the first eyewitness, Toufel Siddiqui last week), apart from Pankaj Gosai and Shailesh Tadvi. He recognised them by face as being part of the mob, but could not name them. When the case was tried in Ba-roda at the Fast Track Court, Pathan was not even summoned as a witness. Pathan, who hails from Shiv-gadh in Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, told the court during his examination in chief, that he and some workers from the bakery were sitting outside on charpoys between 8.30 p.m. and 9 p.m., on March 1, 2002, when a group of 15 to 20 people came there and threw stones at them. However, the police appeared on the scene and the rioters fled. Pathan said that after the first attack, he went to the terrace of his owner's house where he and other workers had to wait till the next morning. Through the night they were assailed by glass bottles filled with kerosene. The rioters told them to come down, saying -"Thoda hi maarenghe,"(we will beat you only a little), Pathan said. (The Hindu 2.11.04)

3rd Nov.

Best Bakery case: witness admits giving false testimony (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 2. Raees Pathan, the second eyewitness who testified to the Best Bakery carnage, today admitted giving a false statement in court, after he was questioned by defence counsel D.S. Jambaulikar. During the cross-examination at the re-trial of the Best Bakery case, Pathan told the court he had gone back to his native village in Rae Bareilly after the incident on March 1, 2002 and he had never left the place. However, Mr. Jambaulikar asked him if he was working in Ulhasnagar (near Mumbai), in a country liquor bar for some months in the recent past. Pathan admitted to this and said he had, in fact, been working in the bar for several months, before quitting and going back to his village a month ago. When the Additional Sessions Judge, Abhay Thipsay, pointed out that earlier he had denied leaving his village, and asked him why he lied, Pathan said he was not thinking clearly and he had in fact, not told the truth. He also said that no relative of his was staying with him at Ulhasnagar but later on, after the defence asked him questions, he said his brother was staying there for a few months. He also admitted that his earlier statement was false. (The Hindu 3.11.04)

4th Nov.

Zaheera retracts again, this time it's Advantage Accused (7)

VADODARA, NOVEMBER 3: THE Best Bakery retrial in Mumbai was to be her second shot at justice. But Zaheera Sheikh, key witness in the massacre case, did an about-turn today by saying that the fast-track

court that acquitted all 21 accused for lack of evidence on June 27, 2003 had given her the justice she wanted. Days after that acquittal, Zaheera's mother Sehrunissa Sheikh had told The Indian Express that she had "lied in court, trembling with fear". Both mother and daughter then had said that BJP MLA Madhu Shrivastava and his goons had threatened them. Legal processes were set in motion and social activist Teesta Setalvad took Zaheera under her wings. Now, Zaheera claims it was Teesta and her associate Rais Khan who had been "using" her. Surfacing before the media here this afternoon, Zaheera, reading from a paper, alleged that whatever she and her family had said after leaving Vadodara in July last year had been on Teesta's instructions. (Indian Express 4.11.04)

5th Nov.

Bakery case accused says activist threatened him (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 4A day after the prime eyewitness in the Best Bakery case, Zahira Sheikh levelled charges against journalist and activist Teesta Setalvad, an accused in the case, Dinesh Rajbhar, said that Ms. Setalvad had threatened him yesterday evening. Rajbhar, identified by witnesses as being part of the noting mob that attacked the Best Bakery, today filed an application in the court and told the additional sessions judge, Abhay Thipsay, that Ms. Setalvad said, "Hum tumko dekh lenge [we will take care of you]," yesterday evening while leaving the court. The application was taken on record by the court and the judge asked Rajbhar's lawyers whether they wanted any action taken. Ms. Setalvad said, "I was in the court at that time, and I deny the allegation which is baseless." (Hindu 5.11.04)

Another witness testifies in Best Bakery re-trial (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 4. Shehzad Khan, who worked in the Best Bakery during the 2002 Gujarat riots, today told a Mumbai court holding the re-trial of the case that on the day of the killing he saw a mob of people coming towards the bakery shouting "kill the Muslims." Shehzad took four days to regain consciousness after the attack and he identified the weapons used to attack him. He said that before giving evidence here he was called to the court at Baroda to testify. However, he was declared to be of unsound mind. "I was frightened in the court and they threw me out saying I was pagal (insane)." Counsel for defence, Adik Shi-rodkar, took issue with this and asked how this was relevant to the re-trial. The special public prosecutor, Manjula Rao, said she was entitled to show that the witness was called for examination and then declared to be of unsound mind in the previous trial. There were repeated allegations that somebody was tutoring the witnesses, when nobody except the Maharashtra police was with them and that too for their protection, Ms. Rao said. During the cross examination, Shehzad said he did not know if he had told the police that his recorded statement was indeed consisting of all the facts relating to the case as he was not fully conscious at that time. Mr. Shirodkar said that since the prosecution had raised the issue of Godhra, he would like to ask some questions on it. "Fifty eight people died there and nobody is bothered but here 14 people died and everyone is concerned," he said. Mr. Thipsay then said these were not matters to be raised in court. The cross-examination will continue tomorrow. Zahira's sister-in-law and her brother Nafitullah's first wife, Yasmin Sheikh, is expected to testify after Shehzad. (The Hindu 5.11.04)

Gujarat cops move Zaheera, family out (7)

VADODARA, NOVEMBER 4: A DAY after she retracted her statement for the second time in the Best Bakery case, prime witness Zaheera Sheikh and her family were taken to an undisclosed destination by Gujarat intelligence personnel. The buzz was that the police van, carrying Zaheera, her family and lawyer, was headed for Ahmedabad. Throughout the day, Zaheera was kept at the Airport Hotel under tight security with police keeping reporters at bay. She had apparently been brought there immediately after yesterday's press conference where she did a U-turn, claiming activist Teesta Setalvad had kept her hostage in Mumbai and had been forcing her to speak out against the accused at the retrial. At 5.20 pm today, intelligence bureau staff from Ahmedabad landed at the hotel and, within minutes, Zaheera and her family were escorted out. Zaheera and her relatives did not respond when reporters, being shoed away by the police, called out to ask whether she would lodge a complaint against Setalvad. The staff at the hotel said the Sheikhs had checked in at 7 am on Wednesday. The booking was made in the name of N H Sheikh, probably Zaheera's brother Nafitullah. (Indian Express 5.11.04)

6th Nov

Dehlool Story: 36 killed but only 1 FIR lodged (7)

New Delhi: This is the little known story of Dehlool Village, 1 km off National Highway 8 and 28 km from

Godhra, where 36 Muslims were killed on a single day, March 1, 2002, at the height of Gujarat violence. Yet only a single FIR was lodged. Brought out by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative* the 'Dehlool Story' is the first of the multi-volume profile of sites of Gujarat violence. 1 The report prepared through eyewitness accounts, gives a blow by blow account of specific places and the manner in which Muslims of the Dehlool area were killed. Beginning with Sabhay's field where two young Muslim boys were hacked to death by a mob, to Ambica Society where 13 fleeing residents of Dehlool were hacked in a similar manner, the report also chronicles the tragedy that the survivors had to face after the violence. However, despite so many incidents and 36 killings, only one FIR was filed. Even this FIR was filed 657 days after the incident. What is worse is that more than two years after the killings, "none of the Dehlool Muslims have returned to live back in their familiar kasba". They are scattered among relations while the rest live in rented accommodation where they feel safe. Some waited for their community or civil society groups to rally around until new land was purchased and new housing societies built. (Times of India 6.11.04)

Zahira gets safe haven in a club resort (7)

Ahmedabad: Life has come a full circle for Zahira Sheikh, key witness in the Best Bakery massacre case, who was lodged at a club resort on the Gandhinagar highway on Friday at the behest of government and the police, spent the whole day trying to deny her presence there. Last year, when Zahira had turned hostile before a fast-track court in Vadodara, she was whisked away from the courtroom in similar fashion by BJP MLA Madhu Shrivastav. And yet again, she is on the run, after the explosive press conference on Wednesday. After the high drama that followed her moving out of Vadodara on Thursday, with the media hot on her trail, Zahira was lodged in Silver Oak, a plush country club on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. The club, which is close to Gujarat High Court, was out of bounds for the media even though a battery of television cameras lurked in the vicinity. Under security cover of the State Commando Force (SCF) and other policemen, no one was allowed to meet Zahira. The gates of the resort were locked with heavy iron chains as media-persons waited outside. (Times of India 6.11.04)

7th Nov.

Teesta Setalvad moves Supreme Court (7)

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. Teesta Setalvad of the Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) today moved the Supreme Court for a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the circumstances that led to the sudden turnabout by Zahira Sheikh, the key witness in the Best Bakery case. On November 3, Zahira Sheikh alleged that Ms. Setalvad kept her in confinement for seven months and that she had compelled her to give false statement in the Bakery case from the one she made before the trial court in Vadodara in Gujarat. She accused the CJP of pressuring her into making statement! and naming innocent persons during the ongoing retrial of the case at a special court in Mumbai. She also sought protection from the Gujarat police. Refuting these allegations, Ms. Setalvad in an application filed in the Supreme Court

Registry said the court had transferred the trial of the case from Gujarat to Mumbai on the basis of the averments made by Zahira in her affidavit, narrating the woeful lack of investigation and cooperation from the investigating and prosecuting agencies. She said many persons questioned by her had alleged collusion between the Gujarat police and the rioters during the post-Godhra riots. (The Hindu 7.11.04)

9TH Nov.

Zahira at Silver Oak outside Ahmedabad (7)

Ahmedabad, Nov. 8: Key witness in the Best Bakery case Zahira Sheikh is now lodged at a farmhouse on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. After feigning departure from city, apparently to shake off journalists and camera crews, she's now back in the city. Though no one wanted to confirm this officially, she is most likely back at Silver Oak resort where she stayed for two days under watchful eyes of state commandos. This time it is plain-clothed policemen who guard her to avoid drawing attention, it is learnt. Director-general of police A.K. Bhargav confirmed that Ms Sheikh was lodged on the outskirts of Ahmedabad but refused to divulge the exact location. Meanwhile, Baroda police commissioner Sudhir Sinha said the Baroda police left for Ahmedabad to serve summons to Ms Sheikh, her mother Sehrunnisa and brother Nafitullah as they have been asked to remain present in the special court in Mumbai on November 17. Ms Sheikh's lawyers Atul Mistry from Baroda and Jaal Unawala, who practise at the high court, are in her constant touch. They refused to talk to the press. (Asian Age 9.11.04)

Sheikh complains to panel about Teesta (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 8: Key witness in the Best Bakery case Zahira Sheikh on Monday moved the National Commission for Minorities, alleging that she was being forced by activist Teesta Setalvad and non-governmental organisation, Citizens for Justice and Peace, and pleaded helplessness on account of belonging to a minority community. "Zahira approached the NCM through a lawyer who submitted her signed letter to the commission," said NCM chairman Tar-lochan Singh. He said, "We received a letter from Zahira today in which she has complained of being coerced to name innocent persons in the case by Ms Setalvad and her NGO. She has written that she is feeling helpless as she belongs to a minority community." In her letter, Zahira also repeated her allegations that she was forcibly taken to Mumbai by some locals at the behest of Ms Setalvad and that she was also threatened with dire consequences and kept in confinement by the activist there. Mr Singh told The Asian Age that the matter would be studied by the law officer of the commission before making any observation. Zahira, who made a shocking turnaround last week, along with her relatives was currently staying at an undisclosed location under police protection. (Asian Age 9.11.04)

10th Nov.

Setalvad files for anticipatory bail (7)

Mumbai: Social activist Teesta Setalvad on Tuesday filed a petition in the Bombay High Court seeking anticipatory bail fearing arrest as Zahira Sheikh, the prime witness in the Best Bakery retrial, levelled allegations against her. Last week, Zahira had claimed that Setalvad had "kidnapped, wrongfully confined and forced her to make false statements in the trial court". She made the allegations before the Vadodara collector and, subsequently, before mediapersons. While Setalvad declined to comment on the anticipatory bail application, a source close to her told TOI, "Teesta apprehends her arrest by the Gujarat police as there is a likelihood of an FIR being registered against her under non-bailable sections, such as wrongful confinement and kidnapping." Sources said the Gujarat police are expected to record Zahira's statements and dispatch a team to Mumbai. A person close to Setalvad said, "The NGO, Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), of which Teesta is secretary, has spearheaded the legal battle on behalf of the Gujarat riot victims. The affidavits of witnesses were written in English and translated into Hindi for Zahira to sign. Nobody used any force on her, nor did anyone confine her illegally." (Times of India 10.11.04)

11th Nov.

Zahira meets NCW head in Gandhinagar (7)

Ahmedabad, Nov. 10: Key eyewitness in the Best Bakery case Zahira Sheikh met National Commission for Women chairperson Poornima Advani in Gandhinagar on Wednesday evening at a government bungalow, putting to rest speculation about her whereabouts. The meeting between Ms Advani and Ms Sheikh was "suggested" by chief secretary P.K. Laheri when he met the NCW chairperson. With Ms Sheikh surfacing in Gandhinagar and it being clear that the state government facilitated a meeting between her and Ms Advani, questions are bound to rise about state's involvement. The meeting between Ms Advani and Ms Sheikh was shrouded in mystery and journalists were not allowed to go near the bungalow in Sector 19 where the meeting was held. The meeting lasted about 35 minutes. Calling Ms Sheikh a "suffering woman", Ms Advani said that she needed protection. She further said Ms Sheikh had submitted an affidavit to the NCW where she had reiterated her allegations against social activist Teesta Setalvad. They discussed many points, which could not be divulged, the matter being subjudice, Ms Advani added. She stressed that the NCW will not investigate the matter in any way. (Asian Age 11.11.04)

Bilkis Bano case: Witnesses may be produced in Dec. (7)

Mumbai: With Zahira Sheikh, the key witness in the Best Bakery case, doing a volte-face, social activists have shifted another Gujarat riot victim, Bilkis Bano, and her family to an undisclosed destination. In a bid to avoid any untoward incident or the possibility of eyewitnesses turning hostile, the prosecution is likely to produce them before the court in the first week of December. CBI's special public prosecutor R K Shah told TOI on Wednesday that the entire Bilkis Bano gangrape-cum-massacre case was based on strong circumstantial evidence. "The trial has already been delayed. So after the court frames charges against the accused, we will produce the main eyewitnesses in the first week of December," said Shah. Special Judge UD Salvi will frame charges against the 20 accused in the case on November 19. When asked who would be the first eyewitness to be produced, Shah said there are two main witnesses in the case: "The victim (Bilkis) herself and an 11-year-old child." However, he declined to disclose the date

when Bilkis will be produced. (Times of India 11.11.04)

14th Nov.

Setalvad questions NCW-Zahira meeting (7)

New Delhi: Social activist Teesta Setalvad caught in a controversy in the Best Bakery case on Saturday raised doubts over the meeting between National Commission for Women (NCW) chairperson Poornima Advani and prime witness Zahira Sheikh, saying it was part of an attempt to "manipulate" the story "The NCW chairperson's meeting with Zahira Sheikh raises doubts that the Commission is being used to manipulate the story" she said at a symposium on "Justice in Gujarat" held in the capital. The activist noted that "the NCW had to face severe protest from women's groups in 2002 when in its report on the Gujarat riots, it stated that there was no widespread sexual violence in the state during the riots." Setalvad, who has already moved the SC asking for a CBI inquiry into the circumstances under which Zahira was taken from Mumbai to Vadodara, where she made the dramatic turnaround, said the probe was essential as it was a case of the state government "tampering" with the witness. (Times of India 14.11.04)

17th Nov.

Zahira's sister-in-law identifies 11 accused (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 16. The fourth eyewitness in the Best Bakery case, Yasmin Sheikh, today identified 11 accused present in court as being part of the mob that attacked the bakery on March 1, 2002. She named all except one of them, at the re-trial of the case, which resumed here after the Diwali break. Yasmin is the sister-in-law of Zahira Sheikh, the main eyewitness in the case. Yasmin confidently pointed out to the accused among the 17 who were lined up. Earlier, she explained the role each one had played during the riots. She also named four persons not present in court — Jayanti Chaiwala, Mafat, Munna and Rinku — who are yet to be arrested. Yasmin was married to Zaheera's brother, Nafitullah, in November 2000 and was living at the bakery since then. She has a daughter. Her husband has since left her and remarried. At the end of the day, Yasmin told the Additional Sessions Judge, Abhay Thipsay, that her sister Shehnaz, who lives in Kavant in Chota Udepur, was threatened over the phone. The callers asked for Yasmin's whereabouts and threatened to kidnap Shehnaz if she did not cooperate. Yasmin submitted that her sister was alone and very scared. (The Hindu 17.11.04)

18th Nov.

Only 8 riot cases listed on website started by state police (7)

Ahmedabad, Nov. 17: The Gujarat police set up a website providing information on various cases relating to the post-Godhra riots, which they reviewed and reopened as stipulated by the Supreme Court, and it became operational just prior to Diwali. However, after a week, on Tuesday, the site showed only eight riot-related cases listed in it. Director general of police A.K. Bhargav said they are still feeding relevant data to the site. Over 800 cases, of which 286 were reopened, have been reviewed 48 persons have been arrested, and a departmental inquiry has been instituted against a police officer for omission of duty, he informed. The Supreme Court had directed the Gujarat government to set up a cell for extensive and in-depth investigations into the 2,000 post-Godhra riot-related cases in which "a summary" reports had been filed resulting in closure of these cases. (Asian Age 18.11.04)

Zahira was bribed to change statement: Yasmin (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 17. Yasmin Sheikh, the fourth eyewitness to depose in the Best Bakery case, today admitted that she had told a private television channel in Vadodara last year that her sister-in-law, Zahira Sheikh, had been bribed to change her statement regarding the accused in the riots. She told the court that Zahira had initially told the police and the court the truth, but had changed her mind later. Meanwhile, Zahira's new lawyer, Harshad Ponda, told the court that Zahira, who was to testify today, was ready to depose on any day the prosecution wished to call her. Her brothers, Nafitullah and Nasibullah, were already here and ready to depose, he added. In the cross-examination, the defence counsel, Adik Shirodkar, referred to an interview Yasmin had given to TNN, a private channel in Vadodara, which was aired on September 20, 2003. Mr. Shirodkar asked her if it was true that she said, in this interview, that the entire Best Bakery episode took place due to her husband, Nafitullah's relationship with another woman, Kailash Vasave. Yasmin denied this. He then asked if she had said, in the same interview, that the accused named in the case were falsely implicated and the attackers were from outside. (The Hindu

18.11.04)

19th Nov.

Zaheera's brother now turns hostile (7)

MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 18: NASIBULLAH Shaikh, brother of prime witness in Best Bakery case Zaheera Shaikh, today retracted his police statement by telling the trial court here that he did not remember the faces of those persons who had set fire to the bakery in post-Godhra communal riots two yearsback. Nasibullah is the fifth eyewitness to depose before the court. Other witnesses, including Zaheera's sister-in-law Yasmin Shaikh, have identified some accused. In his earlier police statement, Nasibullah had named some accused and specified their role in attacking the bakery. During examination in chief, the witness said there was smoke all around the bakery on March 1,2002, and hence he could not see the faces of persons who had gathered there. Nasibullah told judge Abhay Thipsay that someone hit him from behind on the head and he fell unconscious and had been taken to the hospital in that state. On regaining consciousness, the witness said he learnt that he was injured. (Indian Express 19.11.04)

Zahira kin turns hostile (7)

Mumbai, Nov. 18: Nasibullah, alias Raju, brother of key witness Zahira Sheikh, turned hostile in the Best Bakery retrial while deposing before the fast track court in Mazagaon on Thursday. He refused to identify any accused in the court. Nasibullah also told the court that Zahira's sister-in-law Yasmin Sheikh, who identified 11 accused when she was cross-examined two days ago, was not present at the Best Bakery when a mob set it on fire on March 1, 2002. He told the court that Yasmin was at her mother's place when the incident occurred. Public prosecutor Manjula Rao sought the court's permission to cross-examine Nasibullah after he refused to identify any of the accused. Nasibullah told the court that there was smoke billowing from the bakery and hence he could not see the faces of the persons who had gathered there. "There was a huge mob and they pelted stones and hurled bottles filled with petrol at the bakery," he said. (Asian Age 19.11.04)

22nd Nov.

Saffron NGO to help rioters (7)

Ahmedabad, November 21: JUDICIAL ACTIVISM, secular NGOs and the English language media were criticised at the inaugural function of a new NGO floated here on Sunday to protect the interest of the rioters. Though, officially, the state BJP or the VHP will have nothing to do with the NGO, named 'Justice on Trial', it has been started following apprehensions that the Supreme Court order to reopen 2000 riots cases might lead to prosecution of many rioters who were never booked by the Gujarat Police after these cases were closed. The apex court order has threatened to expose many grass-root level Parivar activists, who had actively participated in the riots.

Of the 374 cases reviewed so far under the apex court's order of Aug 17 this year, 286 have been found fit for re-opening. Though none of the top leadership of the state's BJP, VHP and other Sangh Parivar constituents were present at the NGO's meeting on Sunday, the audience comprised lawyers, doctors and chartered accountants owing allegiance to the saffron brigade. The prominent accused in the riot cases of the city were not present, but parents of some rioters reportedly attended the meeting. The first meeting of the 'Justice on Trial' observed that the re-opening of the nearly 2,000 cases would have a deep impact on the social fabric in Gujarat. (Hindustan Times 22.11.04)

Judge seeks Bilkis case location as sessions court (7)

Mumbai, Nov. 21: Special sessions judge U.D. Salvi, who is conducting the retrial in the Bilkis Bano gangrape-cum-massacre case, has written to the registrar-general of the Bombay high court saying the trial be held at the sessions court premises itself at south Mumbai. The high court had earlier directed that the trial be held at the Mazgaon court. Justice Salvi, in his letter, said that there is no adequate infrastructure at the Mazgaon court. The primary reason for transferring the case to Mazgaon was the high security requirement considering the sensitive nature of the case. The fifth floor at Mazgaon court has been separated with iron grills and police constables are on duty throughout the The trial was to start on September 29 at the Mazgaon court. Justice Salvi, who went to the Mazgaon court on that day, decided to hold the hearing at the sessions court as there was no furniture. The two subsequent hearings were also held at the sessions court. The judge has said in his letter, "The courtroom on the fifth floor at the Mazgaon court was virtually empty with scanty furniture. Also, there is no arrangement for the lawyers, the

accused and the public to sit in the court hall." The judge further stated in the letter, "It could take a long time for providing the necessary infrastructure at the Mazgaon court." (Asian Age 22.11.04)

24th Nov.

Lawyers fighting for Gujarat riot victims arrested (7)

Ahmedabad, November 23: LAWYERS IN the high court and lower courts here abstained from work on Tuesday in protest against the arrest of two advocates. The arrest is being seen as a strong message that even lawyers espousing the cause of riot victims and minorities accused under POTA would not be spared. Senior criminal lawyers H.N. Jhala and Mustaq Syed were arrested early on Tuesday following Monday night's raids on their residences. The police claimed to have recovered incriminating documents linking them to a 'jehadi' plot. Two pistols and 20 cartridges have allegedly been recovered from Syed's house. Addl. Police Commissioner (Crime) D.G. Vanjara said that the duo has been arrested for aiding and abetting anti-national activities and for being in touch with Karachi-based sharp-shooter Shariff Khan. They were also involved in land deals on behalf of Khan, he added. The two lawyers were later produced before the designated POTA court for remand proceedings. "It's a sad day for democracy that a lawyer of Jhala's stature is held on charges of anti-national activities," said high court advocate Mukul Sinha. (Hindustan Times 24.11.04)

25th Nov.

Riot? Suspend SHO, punish media (7)

New Delhi: If a riot breaks out in a locality, suspend the SHO. If it continues for 48 hours, suspend the SP. Give justice to the riot victims within six months. Punish any person or media for inciting communal passions. These are some of the legal provisions experts would want incorporated in the proposed communal violence legislation. Planning to bring a law against communal riots, the Centre on Tuesday invited legal experts and representatives of the minority communities to give suggestions on the content of such a law. The National Minorities Commission, which organised the meeting, told the government to take all such views into account and finalise the draft legislation only after seeking its approval. The experts asked for equal compensation for all riot victims across the country and an automatic insurance scheme. "There were some important points raised by experts from the field. We want the government to send us the draft Bill so we can seek the views of the minority leaders and all such experts before it (the draft) is sent to Parliament," said Tarlochan Singh, chairman of the National Minorities Commission. (Times of India 25.11.04)

30th Nov.

Eyewitness identifies 15 accused in Best Bakery case (7)

MUMBAI, NOV. 29. Eighteen-year-old Shailun, an eye-witness in the Best Bakery case, today identified in court 15 of the 17 accused — the most any witness has identified — and even named four. Mr. Shailun, who had his ear slashed and also suffered head injuries during the attack on Best Bakery on March 1, 2002, pointed at the accused lined up in court. He named Dinesh Rajbhar, Sanjay Thakker and Lala and a fourth, Jitu, whom he could not identify. Earlier, there was much excitement as Zaheera Sheikh was brought to the court premises. Her lawyer, Harshad Ponda, told the court that Ms. Zaheera was available if the prosecution wanted to examine her and he could produce her in court. However, the Special Public Prosecutor, Manjula Rao, said she would like to examine Ms. Zaheera last. Ms. Zaheera's mother, Sehrunissa, who was expected to testify today, is unwell. Mr. Shailun, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, has been living in his native village since the incident. He was severely affected by the riots and was under treatment for trauma for more than a year. In his case, the Supreme Court, in its order dated April 12, had noted: "This witness was also surprisingly treated to be of deficient mind without any material and even without any taking any efforts to ascertain the truth or otherwise of such serious claims." Mr. Shailun seemed to be still suffering from the effects of trauma. He was also shivering when identifying the accused, according to the police officer who escorted him. (Hindu 30.11.04)

4TH Dec.

Masjid demolition was an act of God (7)

New Delhi: FORMER UTTAR Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh on Friday retracted his earlier statement that a conspiracy had been hatched by BJP president LK Advani and other senior party leaders

to demolish the disputed Babri Masjid structure. Deposing before the Liberhan Commission probing the sequence of events leading to the demolition of the structure at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, Mr Singh in his amended affidavit stated: "The demolition was an act of God and for what happened I have no regret, no repentance, no sorrow and no grief." "Since Lord Ram symbolised the ethos of Indian nationalism, historians will write that devotees of the nation had demolished the symbol of slavery and disgrace though this demolition was purely sudden and unplanned," he added. Singh, who supplied a detailed affidavit to the Commission, stated that on June 20, 2003, he had come across a newspaper report in which it was alleged that the Uttar Pradesh Government had failed to make arrangements for the protection of the disputed structure and deploy stationed Central forces. (Pioneer 4.12.04)

6th Dec.

Lull before the storm in ayodhya? (7)

Lucknow: AS DIFFERENT Hindu and Muslim organisations are gearing up for 'December 6 ritual', uneasy calm prevails in temple town of Faizabad-Ayodhya which witnessed demolition of Babri Mosque exactly 12 years ago on this day. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas are organising 'Hindu sammelan' at-Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya on Monday in which over 1000 saints, drawn from all over the country, are expected to take part. "The saints are likely to demand construction of Ram temple at the dispute site. They will further their demand of liberation of Kashi and Mathura," Sharad Sharma, the VHP spokesman

told The Pioneer from Karsevakpuram on telephone. The chief of Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas, Mahant Nritya Gopal Das, is likely to reveal the road map for construction of Ram Temple at the disputed site. (Pioneer 6.12.04)

To RSS, Muslims a 'terror group' (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 5: Taking an aggressive Hindutva line, the RSS has launched a vicious attack on the minority community in the country, with its mouthpiece Organiser describing Muslims as a "terror community." Organiser, while commenting on the "poverty" among Muslims in India, put the poser: "Is there something wrong with a community that generates poverty?" The journal then went on to add: "Either way, the community is being laughed at and taken for a ride by politicians who speak for them." In an article, "Communalise polity, divide on religion: The UFA mantra," editor R. Balashankar wrote: "The Manmohan Singh government has programmes only for the minorities, not for the common man..." In another article, "A case for deadly inertia," the editor lashed out at the Prime Minister and his "healing touch for the terror community." Referring to the Prime Minister's recently-announced special package for Jammu and Kashmir, he wrote: "Dr Singh's healing touch was reserved for the terror community." Attacking Congress-led governments for their "Muslim-centric policies," the RSS mouthpiece stated: "The Narasimha Rao government had even announced a separate minority financial institution for Muslims. (Asian Age 6.12.04)

7th Dec.

SC notice to Zahira, Gujarat govt (7)

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to Best Bakery case key witness Zahira Sheikh and the Gujarat government to explain whether her latest statement favouring the accused amounted to filing false affidavit and should it be viewed as contempt. The SC had ordered the retrial of the case in Mumbai believing Zahira's testimony that she had deposed before a fast track court in Vadodara under duress. A Bench of Justices Arijit Pasayat and H K Sema also issued notice to NHRC, which had recorded Zahira's statement before seeking a fresh trial in the case, on a plea by Citizens for Justice and Peace activist Teesta Setalvad. Setalvad has sought a CBI probe into the frequent change of statement by Zahira, who, nearly a month ago, accused Setalvad's NGO of pressurising her to change her statement from what she had deposed during the trial before a Gujarat court. The Bench asked Zahira and the Gujarat government to file their response before January 3 and posted Setalvad's application for further hearing on January 10. (Times of India 7.12.04)

14th Dec.

Bakery judge gets threat emails, security is beefed up (7)

Mumbai, Dec. 13: The security at the Mazagaon court has been beefed up following threat emails received by special judge A.M. Thipsay, who is conducting the retrial of the Best Bakery case. Mr Thipsay

has received over 100 emails, most of which threatened him with "dire consequences if the judgment goes against the accused", highly placed sources claimed on Monday. According to sources, security has also been strengthened at the residence of the judge. While more police personnel have been deployed at both the court premises and Mr Thipsay 's residence, state intelligence officers are also keeping an eye on the security arrangements. It has been reported that the emails sent to the judge also threaten his family members with similar consequences "if the judgment is misplaced". Sources said that the judge had received similar emails even before the trial started. Although the last email was received in November, Mr Thipsay had declined to comment on the exact content of the email. The judge had been receiving threat emails even before the retrial began in Mumbai and has so far received over 100 emails. (Asian Age 14.12.04)

15th Dec.

Please don't release cellphone CDS: Gujarat govt tells riots panel (7)

AHMEDABAD, DECEMBER 14: THE Gujarat government has requested the Justice G T Nanavati-Justice K G Shah riots commission not to hand over to anyone the CDs containing cellphone records of the worst days of post-Godhra riots. Its argument: it is checking their authenticity, they contain information that could be misused, abused, copied. And could violate the right to privacy of those who have nothing to do with the riot cases. Drawing on these cellphone records, The Indian Express had published a series of investigative reports that showed how senior government functionaries and the top police brass, including the Commissioner, were in touch with several of the riot-accused and senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders while the city was on fire. Calling the publication of these reports as "most shocking," the state government has said that the reports "gave the ordinary reader a reason to believe that the CDs of which The Indian Express made revelation were those as if having been obtained from the office of the honourable commission which in fact is not so in as much as the CDs are lying in sealed condition." (Indian Express 15.12.04)

16th Dec.

Zahira's mother turns hostile (7)

MUMBAI. DEC. 15. Sehrunissa Sheikh, Zahira's mother, today turned hostile in court and said she did not see any of the rioters who had set fire to the Best Bakery on March 1, 2002. At the re-trial of the Best Bakery case here, she told the court that when the fire broke out that night, there was a lot of commotion and rioters were shouting "jalao, maro, kato". She said she did not see anything. There was complete darkness all around and she could not look down from the terrace, where she and her family were hiding, as there was a fire raging. She said that she did not know anyone in the mob. She also said that the rioters could not be from her locality as the people there were friendly. She said she did not know the names of the workers at the bakery, but remembered two names later. Her husband Habibullah died a month before the riots after he read a notice sent by her daughter-in-law Yasmin, which shocked him. She said she did not know the names of her neighbours. She admitted her daughter Sabira had died in the first floor of their house, during the riots, due to heat and smoke as the place was on fire. She said that she was not sad that her daughter had died in the fire, though she was really sorry about her husband's death. She said that her daughter anyway was "paraya dhan" (someone else's property). (The Hindu 16.12.04)

17th Dec.

Zahira's mother charged with contempt of court (7)

Mumbai: Irked by her defiant attitude and insulting remarks, additional sessions judge Abhay Thipsay slapped charges of 'contempt of court' on Zahira Sheikh's mother, Sehrunissa, (50), on Thursday Sehrunissa invited the court's wrath soon after the lunch break when she looked at Rai Khan, a social activist sitting in the courtroom and suddenly said Rais Khan is making gestures at me (Woh Rais mere ko ishara kar raha hai)." Judge Thispay asked her to concentrate on the court proceedings and not get distracted by looking around. "You are in a court, nothing will happen to you. Please answer the questions put by the learned prosecutor," he told her. But a defiant Sehrunissa, kept looking at Rais and insisted that he was making gestures with his eyes. A visibly upset Thispay warned her that she could be held for 'contempt of court' to which Sehrunissa promptly replied, "Punish me. Go ahead, punish me (Thik hai, karo muje saza)," she said. In his order, judge Thispay said that despite warning, the witness (Sehrunissa) deliberately tried to obstruct the judicial proceedings of the court. "The attitude of the witness is most defiant and most improper. The statements given by her

amounts to challenge and insult to the court in the presence of the learned prosecutors, accused, defence and general public," the judge said. (Times of India 17.12.04)

22nd Dec.

Zahira shifts line in court, turns hostile (7)

Mumbai, Dec. 21: The prosecution on Tuesday declared Zahira Sheikh, prime witness in the Best Bakery case, hostile after she refuted her own statements made before the Baroda police. In the court Zahira identified her signature on her statement to the police that was recorded two days after the Best Bakery incident while she was recovering at the hospital. She, however, told the court that she was not sure about its contents. Zahira said that on the instructions of the police, she had signed the document. She said this was the second time that she was seeing the document. Before answering public prosecutor Manjula Rao's question as to whether her police statement was shown to her in the Baroda court, she paused for a long time before replying in the negative. Later, Ms Rao pointed out that in her (Zahira's) evidence recorded at the Baroda court, this police statement had been produced in court and she had identified her signature. Zahira maintained: "Maine aaisa nahi bola (I didn't say that)." When asked by the court whether the Baroda court had recorded it wrongly, Zahira said she was not aware of this. (Asian Age 22.12.04)

23rd Dec.

Zahira was paid money, claims Tehelka (7)

NEW DELHI, DEC. 22. In yet another twist to the Best Bakery case, a sting operation carried out by the Tehelka newspaper captured controversial BJP MLA Madhu Srivastava purportedly saying that the key witness, Zahira Sheikh, was paid Rs. 18 lakhs to turn hostile in the case — in which all the 21 accused were acquitted by a fast-track court in Vadodara, Gujarat, in July last year.

A 10-minute video tape recording this and various other aspects of the spycam operation was played at a press conference here by Tarun Tejpal, its Editor-in-Chief. In the tape, claimed to have been shot over the last one month, Mr. Srivastava's cousin and Congress councillor, Chan-drakant Batthoo Srivastava, was shown as saying that the Gujarat Government had "100 per cent" given Zahira money to turn hostile for the second time — during the ongoing retrial in

Mumbai. Asked by the Vadodara corporator, Nisar Babu, -whose conversations with other politicians were caught on camera by the Tehelka reporter, how much money had been paid to Zahira, Madhu replied: "Rs. 18 lakh." Mr. Tejpal said that Mr. Babu did not know that the discussion was being recorded by a spy-cam. (The Hindu 23.12.04)

24th Dec.

Zahira's flip-flop continues (7)

MUMBAI, DEC. 23. Zahira Sheikh today denied she told the court yesterday that she could read and write Gujarati properly. The statement assumes significance in the light of a document, a letter supposedly written by her, which the prosecution asked her to read. Zahira said the document was not in her handwriting and she could not read or write Gujarati. Yesterday, she had said that she could read and write Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Parsi and Sanskrit. Manjula Rao, special public prosecutor, then asked her if the court had incorrectly recorded her statement. Zahira, in reply, first said that whatever the court had recorded was correct. Finally, she said the portion where she had said she could read and write Gujarati was not correctly recorded. Abhay Thipsay, Additional Sessions Judge, asked her if she was saying this because she could not read and write Gujarati properly, to which she evaded a reply. Mr. Thipsay said that she was purposely not answering the question and that she should be detained till she gave an answer. But the question was explained to her again in Hindi and she said that the court had recorded her statement yesterday correctly but she actually could not read and write Gujarati properly. (The Hindu 24.12.04)

25th Dec.

No need to cross-examine Zahira, Gujarat Government tells panel (7)

AHMEDABAD, DEC. 24. The advocate for the victims of the Gujarat communal riots, Mukul Sinha, has taken strong exception to the State Government opposing his plea for the cross-examination of the Best Bakery case prime witness, Zahira Sheikh, before the Nanavati-Shah judicial inquiry commission. The Government through its advocate, J. M. Panchal, has told the commission that there was no need to

cross-examine Zahira at this stage, since a case on similar lines was pending before the Supreme Court. Cross-examining Zahira at this stage was "neither relevant nor necessary" and Dr. Sinha's application for cross-examination was "misconceived both on facts and in law," Mr. Panchal said. Dr. Sinha, the advocate for the Jan Sangharsha Manch, which is fighting the cases for the victims of the riots before the G. T. Nanavati and K. G. Shah commission, had requested permission for cross-examining Zahira in an application on December 14 in view of the "contradictions" in her affidavit filed before the probe panel and her subsequent statements in courts and before the media. In her affidavit filed before the Nanavati, Shah commissions in May 2002, Zahira had given graphic details of the burning of the Best Bakery on March 1 and had even named some of the accused involved in the attack. (The Hindu 25.12.04)

Clerics declare Zahira a pariah (7)

Bhopal, December 24: AN APEX Muslim body on Friday declared Zahira Sheikh, prime eyewitness in the Best Bakery case, a 'munafiq' (hypocrite) and ex-communicated her. The All-India Muslim Tehwar Committee (AIMTC), comprising the Ulema (a body of scholars and clerics) and representatives of over 100 Muslim organisations, took the decision after its emergency meeting in Bhopal on Friday. The Majlis-e-Shoora (advisory council) of AIMTC unanimously decided that in view of the Tehelka expose, it was confirmed that Zahira had been lying again and again. The clerics said they held Zahira guilty of lying, which is considered a sin in Islam. The Ulema said they have expelled Zahira from the community. Clarifying that no coreligionist can be divested of religion, the Ulema said that she has been ex-communicated from the 'qaum'. AIMTC chairman Ausaf Shahmiri Khur-ram said the Muslims of the country should not keep any community relation with Zahira and her relatives. As many 250 religious scholars representing over a hundred Muslim organisations and the leaders of 'biradiris' participated in the meeting.

Prominent among those who attended the meet included Maulana Abdul Sattar Qasmi of Ulema Council, Maulana Anis Ahmad Nomani of Jamiat Farogh-e-Islam, Maulana Nuruddin Qadri of Ahle-Sunnat Jamaat, Maulana Manzar Arifi Al Husaini of Jamate-e-Asna Ashri and other scholars belonging to various Islamic sects. (Hindustan Times 25.12.04)

26th Dec.

Muslims urged to avoid triple talaq (7)

LUCKNOW, DEC. 25. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board today urged Muslims to avoid the practice of triple 'talaq,' while its executive committee approved the draft model 'Nikah-nama' which contains guidelines for married couples. "Muslim couples should hesitate in giving 'talaq,' particularly the triple 'talaq,' which is considered to be a sin," the AIMPLB assistant general secretary, Abdul Rehman Quereshi, told presspersons after the Board's executive committee meeting here at which the draft of the model 'Nikahnama' was approved. If there is any dispute in their married life, they should not take a unilateral decision. "The model 'Nikahanama' emphasises that marriage is not merely a ritual, but a contract," he said. "However, it is not binding." The 'Nikahnama' furnishes guidelines for prospective Muslim couples, details about their relationship, obligation and duties, besides advising how to settle matrimonial disputes. Mr. Qureshi said the 'Nikahnama' asks the couples to carry out their obligations in accordance with the 'Shariat' and "try to satisfy each other." In case of a dispute, efforts should be made to settle it by the elders of the families concerned, but if it persists, it should then be referred to the Islamic court for redress. The matter should be referred to the 'Shariat' panchayat or the local ulema whose decision should be accepted by the parties concerned. (The Hindu 26.12.04)