

MINORITIES: MUSLIMS - 2006

Compiled By
K. Samu,
Human Rights Documentation,
Indian Social Institute, Lodi Road, New Delhi

Muslim forum slams lacunae in AMU Act (7)

LUCKNOW: The All India Muslim Forum (AIMF) on Sunday castigated the anomalies in the Aligarh Muslim University Amendment Act, 1981, which resulted in the Allahabad High Court denying the institution its "minority status." Addressing a convention here, AIMF president Nehaluddin lamented that at a time when the Muslim community in the country was grappling with numerous problems, including economic backwardness and lack of education, the High Court decision has come as a dampener. "The judgement was not a prejudicial view of the judges, but it is the lacunae in the AMU Amendment Act, 1981 which prompted them to arrive at the verdict," he said. The AIMF president called upon the UPA Government at the Centre to immediately enact AMU (removal of anomalies and Doubts) Act, 2006, declaring its minority character under Article 30 of the Constitution. He warned that if the Centre failed to act positively, the forum, in co-ordination with other secular political parties and outfits, will launch a "massive movement." Speaking on the occasion, CPI (ML) State general secretary Akhilendra Pratap Singh flayed the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government for failing to control the growing atmosphere of communal tension in the State, created especially by the BJP in Eastern U.P. He also appealed to the secular outfits to provide an alternative to SP, BJP and BSP. President of U.P. Muslim Majlise Mushawarat (MMM) Mehmood Ahmed exhorted all Muslim political parties to a forge an alliance and prove their united electoral strength in the next Assembly elections. (The Hindu 16/1/06)

Scrap uniform code clause: Muslim board (7)

Lucknow, Jan. 31: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) subcommittee on Muslim reforms has demanded abolition of Article 44 of the Constitution, which recommends a uniform civil code for the country but falls under the non-enforceable Directive Principles of State Policy category. The subcommittee has said that either this clause should be abolished or Muslims should be exempted from it. The subcommittee, which met here on Tuesday, felt that the existence of this Article was like a sword hanging over the heads of Muslims in the country. The members felt that the danger of abolishing the personal religious freedom of Muslims would continue to lurk as long as Article 44 remained in existence. "The personal law is an integral part of Islamic Shariat and there is no change possible in it from either outside the community or even inside it. Hence the uniform civil code is unacceptable to believers in Islam. The government has no right to tamper with religious freedom. Even in the Mughal era and the British regime, everyone was allowed personal religious freedom," said Maulana Syed Nizamuddin, general secretary of the board. The maulana said that the AIMPLB had come into existence in 1972 with the specific intention of protecting the personal religious freedom of Muslims. "Shariat means family laws, and this has no bearing on people of other religions. So why should we be not allowed to practice our religious laws that do not interfere with the religious freedom of others," he said. The subcommittee further expressed its concern over the growing instance of dowry among Muslims. "Accepting or demanding dowry is against Shariat and it is the responsibility of the groom to bear the expenses and responsibility of his wife and family. The AIMPLB is concerned over the growing tendency of Muslim boys to demand dowry and we will create awareness among the youth that this is un-Islamic," the maulana said. (Asian Age 1/2/06)

Insulting cartoons: 'violent acts' condemned (7)

NEW DELHI: United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and some others have condemned the "recent violent acts" that have surpassed "the limits of peaceful protest" on the issue of insulting caricatures of Prophet Muhammed published by a Danish newspapers. In a joint statement, they, however, shared their anguish with the Muslim World at the publication of the offensive cartoons. The statement was adopted by the Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, and the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union,

Javier Solana, besides Mr. Annan. The statement was released here on Thursday by Austria's Ambassador Jutta Stefan-Basti since Austria is currently holding the rotating European Union presidency. The statement upheld the right to freedom of speech. At the same time, it said that "freedom of the press entails responsibility and discretion, and should respect the beliefs and tenets of all religions." There was an urgent need for a renewed dialogue among and between communities of different faiths and authorities of different countries. They should all appeal for calm and restraint in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect. (The Hindu 10/2/06)

Global protests fan cartoon fury (7)

THOUSANDS OF Muslims vented their anger on Friday in seething protests around the world over satirical caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, torching flags and effigies and clashing with police. From Nairobi to Kuala Lumpur, Istanbul to Islamabad, protesters took to the streets after traditional Friday prayers while political leaders scrambled for answers to a crisis that has exposed cultural and religious divisions. However, there was no repeat of the violence that has so far left 13 people dead worldwide in demonstrations against cartoons first published by a Danish newspaper and reprinted by some other media in Europe. In Nairobi, Kenyan security forces fired teargas at angry stone-throwing Muslim demonstrators attempting to march on the Danish embassy. Baton-wielding riot police launched teargas canisters to disperse about 300 protesters who tried to storm a cordon by hurling rocks and other projectiles, witnesses said. Thousands of people also demonstrated across Turkey, burning European flags and effigies of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The largest demonstration was in the country's biggest city Istanbul where some 2,500 people gathered in front of the historic Beyazit mosque under heavy police presence. "The army of Muhammad is the fear of infidels! We will kill the bastards of the crusaders," the crowd chanted. Danish and US flags were also torched in demonstrations in Islamabad, while one protester was injured by a teargas canister at a rally in the northwestern city of Peshawar and smaller protests were held in Karachi, Lahore, Quetta and Multan. "Crush Denmark, crush America", some 4,000 protesters chanted in Islamabad as they burned an effigy of US President George W. Bush. (Hindustan Times 11/2/06)

How many Muslims do you have, Govt asks armed forces (7)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11: For the first time ever, all three wings of the armed forces have been asked by the Government to provide data on how many Muslims are there in their ranks, which positions they hold, even their role in some key operations. This controversial Muslim-specific survey, ordered last March by the Prime Minister's Office, is on despite objections raised by the Army that such an exercise could send the wrong signal to what is, by tradition, a secular, apolitical organisation. But this objection was overruled. For the record, this survey forms part of what the Government calls its efforts to promote "minority welfare" by studying the social, economic and education status of the Muslim community in India. Behind it is a seven-member committee headed by Justice (retired) Rajender Sachar. June is the deadline for its report. Justice Sachar told The Sunday Express that the military is not different from any other Central government organisation. "We are still to get the figures," he said. Apparently not satisfied with merely Muslim figures in the military, the Sachar Committee is also asking questions relating to operations, like the one in Hyderabad in 1948 to the Kargil War in 1999. Quoting extracts from a book Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India by Omar Khalidi, the Sachar Committee late last month asked the Army to confirm whether 700 Muslims deserted during "Operation Polo (Hyderabad operations)" in 1948. And whether then Leh-based III Division Commander V S Budhwar wanted Muslim villagers evicted from Turtok along the Line of Control (LoC) in Ladakh during Operation Vijay in 1999. The Army is yet to reply to this. But on January 9, 2006, it told the Sachar Committee that the seniormost Muslim officer in the Indian Army is Lt General ZU Shah, brother of celebrated actor Naseeruddin Shah, who is the Commander of the Dimapur-based III Corps. (Indian Express 12/2/06)

Muslims demand scholarships (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 12: Muslims in Gujarat want the government to make provision for scholarships, interest-free loans and government-sponsored career-guidance for Muslim students belonging to low-income background. This assumes significance in the backdrop of the stiff resistance to reservations for Muslims in government jobs and educational institutions. Focus of the Muslims remains firmly on seeking greater educational and job avenues. The quota route was only one of the options. If there is resistance to it, the community leaders are open to other options to improve the educational facilities for

the Muslim students. This proposal emerged from a presentation made to the Prime Minister's high-level committee on the condition of Muslims in Gujarat, which was made by M.S. University Senate member Cassim Unia in Ahmedabad recently. The thrust of the presentation is that Muslims need educational facilities and greater facilitates for career-guidance, to enable them to shape up and take part in competition. The presentation also points out that areas with Muslim concentration are marked by the chronic absence of civic amenities like better schools, colleges, medical centres and hospitals. The situation is compounded by the absence of nationalised banks, post offices, community halls, parks and sports complexes, drinking water or even basic sanitation. The presentation pleads that a multi-pronged approach that simultaneously lays emphasis on primary, secondary and professional education is the crying need of the hour. There is a dearth of schools and colleges available to Muslims that are either self-financed institutions run by Muslims or grants-in-aid institutions located in Muslim areas. "Although private initiative in establishing such schools and colleges is not entirely lacking, there seems a deliberate policy of denying them permission. The Central government needs to look into this area closely and enunciate policy measures to ensure speedy government clearance to self-financed institutions and equipping them with adequate financial assistance at the earliest," the presentation emphasises. "The area where a shift in policy is relaxing of the rigidity of rules and criteria for stabilising educational and health-related institutions. For Muslim-run schools and colleges, there has to be easing of the traditional norms, it says. (Asian Age 13/2/06)

NDA seeks Kalam's help to halt survey on Muslims (7)

NEW DELHI: The National Democratic Alliance on Tuesday sought President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's intervention to "stop" a survey on Muslims in the defence forces by a government-appointed panel. The move was fraught with "dangerous consequences," it said. The Opposition also urged Mr. Kalam to use his "good offices" to prevail upon the government for the resignation of Election Commissioner Navin Chawla and prevent a "constitutional embarrassment." Speaking to newsmen after submitting a memorandum to the President, NDA convener George Fernandes and BJP leader L.K. Advani said: "Both are serious issues. The President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. We told him that everybody is keen that poverty ends. It is an issue that needs to be handled with a non-discriminatory attitude. But to undertake an exercise to ascertain only from the Muslims their economic situation, their backwardness and what could be done for them, is to communalise the issue for vote-bank politics." Mr. Advani said: "The Army has no religion. Selections in the Army are based on the ability to defend the country. Even the Army Chief has raised objections to this exercise. We met the Supreme Commander and objected to it." (The Hindu 15/2/06)

Army gives data but does not want it passed on to panel (7)

NEW DELHI: The Army has submitted data on the number of Muslims in its ranks to the Defence Ministry but requested that the information be not given to the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee. The committee had sought information for preparing a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim population in the country. The panel said its efforts to seek information according to its terms of reference had been misconstrued and misrepresented. "We had only asked for the number of Muslims in the military as part of questionnaires sent to over 500 institutions all over the country. It has been blown out of proportion. After all, that is our mandate," committee's Officer on Special Duty Syed Zafar Mahmood said. The Army told the Government that it had less than eight per cent Muslim personnel and this number varied slightly since Independence. It had striven to recruit eight per cent Muslims out of its overall strength of 11 lakh, but the transfer of the Baluch and Frontier Force regiments to Pakistan led to shortfalls. The Army maintains two registers on the religious composition of its men. The register for officers has a breakdown according to ranks, and the one for those below officer ranks is a composite one, sources in the Army said. The Navy and the Air Force had submitted information on Muslim personnel immediately after a request by the committee. The Army attempted to stall furnishing the data but was left with no option after the Ministry sought one. "It was almost an order," Army officials said. Explaining the Army's stance, a senior official said: "It is not as if Muslim personnel in the Air Force and the Navy do not handle sensitive information or deal with expensive equipment. It is better to avoid this in the case of the Army, especially the infantry regiments, because we are on the ground dealing with counter-insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and had [fought] wars with Pakistan. Men regardless of caste or creed conduct these operations. We do not think on these lines." (The Hindu 15/2/06)

Provision of data: Army may have over-reacted (7)

NEW DELHI: The Army may have over-reacted by refusing to provide data on the number of Muslims and their gender in its ranks to the Prime Minister's High Level Committee which is preparing a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India, according to the correspondence exchanged between the Army and the committee. In its first refusal to the committee in August last year, the Army's chief of personnel K. P. D. Samanta had said that the data relating to various castes or religion is not maintained in the Army and "it will also not be proper to collate such data as this may convey the wrong message to the troops, adversely affecting the well established cohesion, regimental spirit and morale." But the Army's recruitment forms tell a different story. For example, the application form for women officers has a column asking for the candidate's religion. Thus the Army seeks information on applicants' religious identity at the first stage of recruitment. Further on, replying on behalf of Army chief J. J. Singh, Major Gen. Samanta admits that a "few traditional regiments continue to be based on fixed composition," but their recruiting proportion is also subsumed within the recruitable male population criteria. In other words, soldiers are recruited, mainly in infantry regiments, according to their caste, religious and ethnic identities but the Army tries to balance it in the overall criteria. In similar letters to the three services, the committee pointed out that the information sought was not limited to a particular institution. "The mandate [given by the Prime Minister] requires the committee to collect, collate and analyse information from various sources, including Central and State Governments, ministries and departments, public sector undertakings, universities, corporate sector and even the Government's beneficiary oriented programmes," it explained. (The Hindu 16/2/06)

Rs 51-crore reward for Danish cartoonist's head, says UP Minister (7)

LUCKNOW, MEERUT, FEBRUARY 17: The Minister for Minority Welfare and Haj in the Mulayam Singh Yadav government, Haji Yaqoob Qureishi, has announced a cash reward of Rs 51 crore for anyone who beheads the Danish cartoonist who caricatured Prophet Mohammad. While the state government has defended the Minister's remark as the "voice of someone whose religious sentiments have been hurt," a senior member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board has slammed it calling the reward "anti-Islamic and anti-humanity." Speaking to The Indian Express, Qureishi defended his announcement saying it was a "concerted decision" and the killing of a person who blasphemed Islam was "justified." Addressing a gathering at the Faiz-e-Azam College in Meerut after Friday prayers today, Qureishi announced the reward and urged Muslims to show "proof" of being himayat-e-Islami by joining in the protest. Taking the cue, several shopkeepers downed shutters with speakers demanding an apology from the Danish government. They also demanded that New Delhi snap diplomatic ties with Denmark. When contacted, UP Principal Secretary, Home, Alok Sinha told The Indian Express: "The minister's reaction was the voice of someone whose religious sentiments have been hurt. Moreover, since the reference was to a person who is far off, there is no question of an FIR being lodged against the minister." However, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board member and Naib Imam of Aishbagh Idgah, Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali, criticised the Minister's call for the killing of the cartoonist. "The Minister's statement is anti-Shariat, anti-Islam and anti-humanity," Mahali said. "The western media is already up against Islam, the minister's statement will only add fuel to the fire." The Prophet believed in pardoning others for "sins committed by them," the Maulana said, "Who are we to issue such irresponsible statements?" (Indian Express 18/2/06)

Oppn stalls House: Stop count of Muslims in forces (7)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 17: Saying there was a "sense of outrage in the Army, Navy and Air Force" over the headcount of Muslims in the three Services—it was first reported by The Sunday Express—the Opposition today stalled proceedings in both Houses and demanded an immediate end to the exercise as it was "fraught with dangerous consequences". In Lok Sabha, the issue led to an exchange between Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Leader of Opposition L K Advani, each accusing the other of "vote bank politics". "Our armed forces are basically professional, apolitical, secular and a most disciplined force. There is no question of compromising the character of the Indian armed forces," Mukherjee said. Advani led a walkout of the BJP and its allies, demanding that armed forces not be subjected to the survey being conducted by the Rajindar Sachar Committee constituted to go into the socio-economic condition of Muslims. Raising the issue, Advani said the Government was sending "wrong signals" to the troops by the move which had been objected to by the Services chiefs. He said the move was "fraught with dangerous implications" and had come for criticism from many a soldier. "No government in the past thought of such

a measure," he said, asking why such a database was needed after 58 years of Independence. He demanded the scrapping of the committee itself. (Indian Express 18/2/06)

Police counts Muslim, Hindu strength (7)

Patna, Feb. 18: The BJP-led government in Jharkhand is carrying out a headcount of Muslim and Hindu police personnel despite the NDA's loud protests about the Centre's direction to count the number of Muslim armed forces personnel. A document in this newspaper's possession reveals that police headquarters in Jharkhand has asked superintendents of police of all districts and other senior IPS officer to submit a report on the number of Muslim police personnel working under them. The officers have also been asked to inform police headquarters about the number of Hindus in the police force. "Yes, we have ordered that they find out their numbers in the police force. But nothing wrong should be read in that. It is a regular exercise, which had been done in the past. There is some purpose behind the survey," said Jharkhand police inspector-general (operations) B.C. Verma, who wrote the letter to the SPs and other officers. The "letter" says the welfare department of the state wants a report on the socio-economic and educational condition of Muslims across the state. In order to prepare a complete and detailed report on the condition of Muslims, the number of community personnel in the state police force is required, it says. Well placed sources at police headquarters disclosed that the welfare department had asked the office of director-general of police Vishnu Dayal Ram to provide the details. It had also asked Mr Ram to provide the number of Hindu police personnel in the force. The DGP, in return, asked Mr B.C. Verma to get the details for the welfare department as soon as possible. (Asian Age 19/2/06)

Shots fired, lakhs out on Lucknow streets (7)

Lucknow, Feb. 19: Lakhs of Muslims — from eight-year-olds to 80-year-olds — turned out on the streets of Lucknow on Sunday to protest against offensive cartoons of Prophet Mohammed. Shouting slogans against those who had offended religious sentiments, the protesters burnt nearly 1,000 effigies and fired several rounds in the air to register their protest. Carrying placards denouncing US President George W. Bush and the Western world, the protesters, belonging to 690 different Muslim organisations, marched from the famous Tile Wali Masjid to the Vidhan Bhavan where leading religious leaders addressed the gathering. The Shia and Sunni sects joined hands to stage the protest. Women and children participated in the protest march in large numbers and some youth turned violent when they broke the show-window panes of a Cafe Coffee Day outlet and a Domino Pizza outlet in the posh Hazratganj locality. Though the offensive cartoon has emanated from Denmark, the anger of the protesters was directed towards America and they took out a mock funeral of the US President. (Asian Age 20/2/06)

'Muslims are last to be hired' (7)

March 9, 2006: "Muslims are the last to be hired and first to be fired as far as recruitment in the defence forces is concerned. With this background, a headcount of Muslims in the Army, Navy and Air Force is absolutely necessary," said Rahim Qarashi, assistant general secretary of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), when asked his views on the controversy about Muslim recruitment in the armed forces. He briefed the media on the deliberations of the AIMPLB executive meeting here on Wednesday. "This is not on the agenda of the AIMPLB. We did not discuss the matter in the meeting but nothing prevents me from expressing my views. I am very clear on this issue. We will be vocal and categorical in some other forum," he said in response to a question. In his view, Muslims were denied the benefit of reservation by the Kaka Kalelkar Commission. (Asianage 9.3.06)

RSS to Muslims: Treat Krishna as one of prophets (7)

New Delhi, April 11: The RSS chief, Mr K.S. Sudarshan, has asked Muslims to regard the Hindu god, Lord Krishna, "as one of the prophets." The RSS chief argued that "since Allah delivered the verses of the Quran, Lord Krishna delivered the message of the Gita, therefore Krishna may be regarded as one of the prophets, if not as God by the Muslims, as Prophet Mohammed had said that prophets were sent to every place." The RSS mouthpiece Organiser has in its latest issue published a speech of Mr Sudarshan, delivered at a meeting of the Sarvapanth Samadar Manch, an affiliate of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, in Ajmer. Toeing the RSS line, Maulana Jamir Ahmed Ilyasi, president of the All-India Imams' Organisation, praised the outfit and stressed on the need to "teach Sanskrit in madrasas" and felt that "non-Muslims should try to learn about Islam." It can be mentioned that in the ongoing centenary celebrations of RSS ideologue Guru Golwalkar, the outfit is trying to "bring both communities together to make a strong India."

Rajasthan education minister Vasudev Devnani, who was present on the occasion, announced that the state was all set to bring forward a Religious Freedom Bill in the forthcoming Assembly session. In his so-called attempt to breach the gap between the majority and the minority communities, the RSS chief claimed that "when God decides birth, he also decides ancestors." He then asked that all those living in a particular country should "die" for that country. "We should die for the land where we live," he was quoted as saying in Organiser. The RSS chief pointed out that "all the 73 sub-communities of Muslims live peacefully in India," and said that India's Muslims "should ask their 'brethren' why the Muslims in Iraq, Iran and Kuwait were fighting." (Asian Age 12/4/06)

Panel accuses UP of criminal negligence (7)

New Delhi, April 13: The National Commission for Minorities has accused the Uttar Pradesh administration of "criminal negligence", which resulted in the killing of seven Muslims and 21 injured in the police firing on April 6 in Oligarch. All the killed and injured, who belonged to the minority community, were shot above the waist. It was also found that the personnel of the Provincial Armed Constabulary, who opened fire were escorting a procession led by one Shakuntala Bharati, a local "Sangh" leader towards the Muslim dominated pocket, Farsh. An FIR has been lodged against Ms Bharati. "Altercation started when the projectionists, who had gathered at the disputed piao (water outlet), reached the Muslim pocket raising provocative slogans. Following the altercation, the PAC men escorting the projectionists opened fire at the minority community," Mr Harcharan Singh Josh, member of the NCM, who went as an one-member fact finding mission said. Mr Josh, who had interviewed over 250 local people from various walks of life and communities over the incident, was told that there was "no attempt made by the police to stop the projectionists at the piao. Instead, they were allowed to march towards the Muslim pocket". The police did not resort to usual practice to disperse the mob, which were by using rubber bullets, water cannons, teargas and resorting to lathicharge. Instead, SP (city) S.K. Verma ordered the PAC to open fire. The copy of the order in possession of this newspaper stated: "I, SP city, order to open fire to protect lives and properties. The PAC should immediately open fire." (Asian Age 14/4/06)

'Victims of bias, Muslims at bottom of social barrel' (7)

Jayanth Jacob Posted online: Tuesday, April 18, 2006 at 0000 hrs Sachar panel initial findings Most BPL Muslims can't access welfare schemes, 60% landless, equal number skip school NEW DELHI, April 17: Discriminated against and pushed to the sidelines, the Muslim community in India is at the bottom of the heap when it comes to benefits from Government-run welfare schemes, access to education, employment, even the system of credit, including bank loans. This is the disturbing conclusion emerging from the initial findings of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee, headed by Justice (retd) Rajinder Sachar, looking into the "social, economic and education status of the Muslim community in the country." The final report of the committee is expected to be submitted in June this year. Since August last year, the committee has collected data after visiting several states, holding talks with government departments in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, NGOs and Muslim organisations. The data, accessed by The Indian Express, shows: • 94.9 per cent of Muslims in Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in rural areas do not receive free foodgrains. • While only 3.2 per cent of Muslims get subsidised loans, just 1.9 per cent of the community benefit from the Antyodaya Anna Yojana Scheme, a programme meant to prevent starvation among the poorest of poor by providing food grains at a subsidised rate. • 60.2 per cent of Muslims do not have any land in rural areas. National average: 43% • Just 2.1 per cent of Muslim farmers have tractors. With 15,25,000 tractors, India ranks No.4 after US, Japan and Italy • A mere 1 per cent own handpumps. • On the educational front, the picture is equally dismal: 54.6 per cent Muslims in villages and 60 per cent in urban areas have never attended schools. National average: 40.8 per cent in rural areas and 19.9 per cent in urban areas. • Only 0.8 per cent of Muslims in rural areas are graduates. • Although in urban areas, nearly 40 per cent of the Muslims now receive modern education, only 3.1 per cent of the community in urban areas are graduates. Just 1.2 per cent are post-graduates. (Indian Express 18/4/06)

'Muslims insecure, feel inferior in UP; Rajasthan poor in minority affairs' (7)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18: The initial findings of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee, headed by Justice (retd) Rajinder Sachar, looking into the "social, economic and education status of the Muslim community in the country" show how poorly the state governments have fared in implementing measures for the uplift of the community. The committee has made some scathing observations about the BJP-ruled

government. It found that the state government was not doing enough for the welfare, education and health care needs of the community. • The much publicised 15-point programme for the minorities are non-existent and no financial and physical targets are fixed in implementing these programmes. • The state government has few programmes for the minorities and the outlays of these programmes have been abysmally low. • Even the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Shiksha Abhiyan do not appear to have entered the Muslim-dominated areas. • Sanitation and sewerage facilities are next to nothing in poorer Muslim areas. • There was only one primary school with "improper building" and a few teachers in an exclusive Muslim locality of over 1.2 lakh population on the outskirts of Jaipur. When contacted, Madan Dilawar, social welfare minister, said: "Muslims are our brothers and we all are children of Mother India. So why is there this demand for everything separate for Muslims? They can study in the same schools where the children of other communities study. Every community has to follow certain procedures like furnishing guarantees in getting bank loans and there cannot be any exception to a particular community." (Indian Exp 19/4/06)

Panel advises Centre to remove PAC from Aligarh (7)

New Delhi, April 19: The Minorities Commission in its report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has recommended immediate replacement of the Provincial Armed Constabulary with Rapid Action Force and Central Reserve Police Force at the "communally sensitive pockets" in Aligarh. On April 6, in a communal clash between the communities at Aligarh, the PAC personnel shot dead seven Muslim youths, while 21 belonging to the same community suffered bullet injuries. The report was sent to the Prime Minister by NCM member Harcharan Singh Josh on April 15. Mr Josh had visited the riot area to conduct "one-man probe" for the commission. Stating that "people have lost faith in PAC," the report observed, "The Uttar Pradesh government may be advised to have a balanced police force with proportionate representation of all communities, which include Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and Parsis." Recalling former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's 15-point programme, the report stated that the "promotions of the district magistrates and senior superintendents of police, should be based on their performance in preventing communal disturbances." Demanding a judicial probe by a sitting high court judge, the report also suggested that "severe action should be taken against those involved in the communal clashes, irrespective of their communities." It also wanted the Prime Minister to consider setting up of special courts for the speedy trials of the cases relating to communal clashes. The report moreover indicated that it was the leaders of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP, who had allegedly triggered off the communal disturbance in the area. Former BJP MLA Kishan Kumar Navman, local Sangh leader Shakuntala Bharati, have already been arrested by the police for "inciting communal disturbance," sources said. (Asian Age 20/4/06)

Top court verdict's on talaq irks clerics (7)

Bhubaneswar, April 23: The Orissa unit of Jamait-ul-Ulama has taken strong objection to the recent judgment of the Supreme Court asking the state government to provide security to a Muslim couple who wished to stay together after a controversial talaq. Maulana S.S. Sajideen Quasim, president of the state unit of Jamait-ul-Ulama, told this newspaper over telephone from Cuttack that the verdict was a direct interference in the religious rights of the Muslims granted by the Constitution. He even threatened that the Bhadrak-based couple — Sher Mohammed, alias Sheikh Sheru, and Nazma Bibi — would be ostracised if they abide by the judgment. "The Supreme Court has no power to intervene in religious matter. It should have consulted Muslim religious institutions and clerics before taking such a decision," Mr Quasmi said. "We will certainly drive the couple out of Muslim society if they stay together defying clerics' decisions and abide by the Supreme Court verdict," he threatened. The Maula stated that if the couple were serious to stay together, they should accept halala which means Nazma will marry another person and if the latter divorces her, she can reunite with Sheru. It may be mentioned here that the Sheikh Sheru — in an inebriated condition in 2004 — had uttered triple talaq. Later, realising his mistake he wanted to stay with her wife and children. However, the Muslim clerics in Bhadrak opposed him and forced the couple to live separately. With no alternative, the couple left their home and took asylum in Ashiyana, a local non-governmental organisation in Bhadrak. (Asian Age 24/4/06)

Kerala sits on riot report indicting Cong govt, Muslim League (7)

KOCHI, APRIL 25: The judicial commission probing Kerala's worst communal massacre in Marad in 2003 has severely indicted almost every arm of the Congress-led United Democratic Front Government: politicians, police officers and top bureaucrats. It has also found that the massacre was a planned conspiracy involving extremist organizations, including those funded from abroad, organisations, it said,

successive state governments have used to cultivate “vote banks.” And that at least one senior politician belonging to the Muslim League, part of the ruling Congress-led front, had advance knowledge of the conspiracy. The report of the commission, set up in 2004 and headed by District Judge Thomas P Joseph, has been kept under wraps by the state government which received it two months ago. It has been accessed by The Indian Express. The report asks the state government—which declined to allow a CBI probe—to hand over the investigation to a special investigation team. Its reason: the state police not only botched up investigation, it planted false leads and avoided looking at the wider conspiracy. Marad, a sleepy fishing village off Kozhikode, hit headlines on January 3, 2002 when Hindu and Muslim extremist elements were quick to hijack what began as a trivial altercation over drinking water at the public tap. A couple of Hindus and three Muslims lay dead the morning after. This was the first communal eruption in this village of 275 Hindu and 191 Muslim families. The police did round up a few men, almost all were found to belong to mainstream political groups, Congress, CPI(M), BJP and the Muslim League. Police later found several had a dual identity as members of a rash of extremist outfits. (Indian Express 26/4/06)

Muslim personal laws: SC declines to interfere (7)

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed at the admission stage a public interest petition challenging the legality of the customs of polygamy, talaq and divorce practised by Muslims under personal laws. A Bench consisting of Justices Ruma Pal and Markandey Katju rejected the plea by Lily Thomas, an advocate, for a direction to the Centre to make uniform marriage laws for all communities. It asked her to approach the Government as it was for Parliament to make laws. "Go to Parliament. A Muslim may have four wives — it is for Parliament to change or amend the law and judges must exercise judicial restraint." The petitioner said polygamy, talaq and divorce were irrational anachronisms, which offended and denied the fundamental rights of Muslim women and ought to have been wiped out long ago as indecent practices, not to say illegal, unconstitutional and anti-national. The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act 1957 gave the customs the force of law. She said personal laws for different communities on the basis of religion militated against secularism and national integration. There was no mention at all in the Shariat Act that Muslim marriage was polygamous or that talaq divorce was a whimsical exercise of husband domination. (The Hindu 11/5/06)

New UP Muslim front is formed (7)

Lucknow, May 15: Inspired by the success of the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), seven Muslim political organisations have joined hands in Uttar Pradesh to form a new political front called the People's Democratic Front (PDF). The parties which have pooled in their resources to float the new front are the Muslim Majlis, Parcham Party of India, Momin Conference, Loktantrik Party, Indian National League, All India Muslim Forum and Jamaat-e-Islami. The People's Democratic Front is backed by the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Maulana Ahmad Bukhari, who is the patron of the new organisation, and well-known Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Jawwad, who has been named chairman of the front. Interestingly, the PDF will be controlled and "blessed" by Muslim religious leaders and ulemas. "Unless religion enters politics, politics will be dominated by anti-social elements. We believe that religion can be a perfect guiding force for politics," said Maulana Kalbe Jawwad. Talking to reporters here on Monday, Maulana Kalbe Jawwad said that Muslims constituted 20-25 per cent of the electorate in more than 125 of the 403 Assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, while in 60 constituencies the Muslim population was between 35 to 40 per cent. "We are a deciding factor in about 147 Assembly segments and if we all come together, we can make a bid for power-sharing. The population of Yadavs in UP is only seven per cent but they are a ruling force while dalits, with a population of 12 per cent, have also enjoyed power in the state. The Muslim population is around 23 per cent, but we are nowhere near the centre of power," the maulana said. Criticising the Mulayam Singh government, the maulana said: "Recently there were 1,800 posts to be filled up in the police department. Muslims got merely 30 posts while Yadavs got 1,000 posts. If this government was so concerned about Muslims, it should have given at least 20 per cent reservation in these posts to Muslims." (Asian Age 16/5/06)

No guarantee for Muslims here in national rural job guarantee (7)

AHMEDABAD, MAY 27: Once again, the courts may have to step in for justice in Gujarat. Four years after the riots, it's been officially acknowledged—and is being examined by a state government panel—that Muslim residents in many villages face social and economic ostracism. Now add one more: many of them are being denied work under the Centre's showpiece National Rural Employment Guarantee Act Scheme

(NREGA), which ensures—by law—100 days employment per year to anyone in need of work. This also raises questions about the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism in the scheme. For, several Muslim villagers who fled to the nearest taluka after the violence to find safety in numbers also find themselves knocked off the rolls. The job scheme is on in six districts of Gujarat—Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Dahod, Narmada, the Dangs, and the Panchmahals. Over three weeks, The Sunday Express toured three districts which were the worst-hit: Panchmahals (166 killed), Sabarkantha (134 killed) and Banaskantha (17 killed). And visited at least 24 villages with mixed population. The Sunday Express collected copies of the job-card registers from these villages and found that where there was political will to monitor progress, Muslims were included in the scheme. For example, in Oran village in Sabarkantha and Boru in the Panchmahals, there are Muslims on the panchayat who ensured their community was not left out. But where the communal divide has hardened, where violence led to murder and widespread arson, like Eral, Delol, and Vejalpur, Muslims are nowhere on the EGS rolls. Spot reports: (Indian Express 28/5/06)

Muslims who fled villages after riots fall off job scheme (7)

AHMEDABAD, MAY 29: After the 2002 post-Godhra riots, Muslim families from many villages of Sabarkantha and Panchmahals fled to the nearest talukas to find safety in numbers. Even today, many go back to their villages during the day to do odd jobs and return before nightfall. As reported by The Sunday Express, in villages worst hit by the communal violence of 2002 in Panchmahals, Banaskantha and Sabarkantha, Muslims have been kept out of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) scheme through a strategy mixing disinformation with no information and prejudice. The state now has to ensure that these Muslims too are involved in the scheme because in some of these villages, the attitude of many is one of extreme hostility towards Muslims. Talukas or towns where Muslims have shifted do not come under the NREGA, so there is no question of them getting work under the scheme there. There are only six Muslim families here and they had to flee to Vadali after their homes were burnt during the 2002 riots. The families lodged an FIR and some of them eventually returned to their village after the culprits were arrested. All are out on bail now. When the families returned, they were told by villagers to withdraw the complaint but they refused. In April this year, when the case was to come up for hearing in a local court, the villagers put tremendous pressure on the families for a compromise. They again refused. On April 14, two houses of Muslims were torched at 11.30 pm. Police Inspector V J Rathod says the incident appeared to be a fallout of the compromise not working out between the Muslims and others in the village. "We have registered a fresh FIR regarding the April 2006 incident. After the riots, Muslim families shifted to Vadali and they keep coming back to work in the village. I think the villagers are asking for a compromise but the Muslims are refusing." Says social activist Abdul Qadir Memon who works in Sabarkantha: "In villages like Therasan, we don't know if Muslim families, who have shifted to Vadali, want to work under NREGA or not. There's no way to find out. Even if they wish to, conditions in the villages may not make them confident." (Indian Exp 30/5/06)

'Muslims denied scheme aid' (7)

New Delhi, May 31: The National Commission for Minorities has asked for a full report from the government of Gujarat about reports that Muslims in Gujarat from some districts have been denied the benefits of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. NCM took suo moto cognisance of reports published in a newspaper that Muslims from the Panchmahals, Banaskantha and Sabarkantha districts are being kept out of the scheme through a strategy of mixing disinformation with no information and prejudice. Meanwhile, the newly formed ministry of minority affairs has written a letter to the ministry of rural development expressing their concern about the reported developments in Gujarat on the same issue and has also asked them to investigate the same. Muslims in the region has alleged that state government officials are keeping them outside the purview of the act on the pretext that they do not reside in the village. But Muslims said that after the riots in 2002 where they were burnt in their homes, many of them work in the villages where they have farms but they do not stay there at night due to fear of attacks. (Asian Age 1/6/06)

Explain why Muslims falling off job scheme: Centre to Gujarat (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 31: After a series of reports in The Indian Express on how Muslims are being kept out of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) scheme in Gujarat villages worst affected by the 2002 riots, the Union Ministry of Rural Development has written to the Gujarat chief secretary, demanding "corrective action" and an explanation. "I am concerned about this lapse and am awaiting the

state government's response," said Minister for Rural Development Raghuvansh Prasad Singh. According to him, the initial response has been encouraging, with local politicians promising to take corrective steps. The Union Ministry for Minority Affairs, too, took note of the reports, and expressed its concern in a letter to the rural development ministry, asking for an investigation into the complaints of Muslims being discriminated against in the UPA government's flagship scheme. Officials at the minority affairs ministry said they had decided it would be better for the rural development ministry to seek explanation from Gujarat. They said the state government may simply deny the charges levelled in the reports. Therefore, the rural development ministry, as the nodal agency for the job guarantee scheme, will be in a better position to assess the ground situation. "The Ministry of Minority Affairs has written to the Rural Development Ministry for investigation of the reports of Muslims being excluded from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Gujarat," said secretary M N Prasad. In fact, the state government's director of information had written to The Indian Express saying that Muslims had moved out of the villages in search of "greener pastures" or were not interested in taking up jobs involving heavy labour. (Indian Express 1/6/06)

Attackers cut off noses, ears of J&K Muslims (7)

Srinagar, June 16: Unidentified assailants cut off the noses and ears of 13 Muslim residents of a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, a delayed report received here said. One of the victims, 65-year-old Abdul Ahad, whose tongue and nose had been cut off by the assailants, died hours later as he could not receive proper treatment at the area sub-district hospital. Reports said a group of seven to eight gunmen descended on Donga hamlet, in the Mahore area of Udhampur, and ordered the residents to come out of their homes and assemble in an open space. The gunmen then caught hold of the villagers one after the other and cut off their noses, tongues and ears without giving any reason for the brutality. Abdul Ahad was admitted to the sub-district hospital at Mahore, 40 km from Donga where, however, he could not be treated properly in the absence of proper medical facilities. He died soon thereafter, reports said. Later, the other seriously injured villagers were shifted to Jammu's Government Medical College Hospital. The victims include three brothers and a woman, Fatha Begum. A report said the assailants also torched the shacks of the villagers while leaving the hamlet. Though no one has claimed responsibility for the gruesome attack, police officials see a connection between these and the killing of a top militant by security forces in the same village on April 25 following a tip-off. Meanwhile, militants tossed a grenade at a senior police officer as he was returning to duty after offering Friday prayers at a mosque in Bandipore town in north Kashmir. The sub-district police officer, Fareed Khan, four policemen accompanying him, and a couple of civilian bystanders were injured in the attack. One of the civilians, Mohammed Subhan Dar, died in hospital later. Officials said the SDPO and special police officer Javed Ahmed have been critically injured and are battling for life in hospital. (Asian Age 17/6/06)

Muslims seek right to pray in historic mosques (7)

New Delhi, June 18: Indian Muslims are demanding the right to pray in nearly 600 historical mosques across the country which are under the control of the central government for archaeological reasons. Muslim leaders say it is high time the Archaeological Survey of India permitted their community to pray five times a day in all these mosques if it does believe in religious equality. "There are nearly 600 mosques all over the country, 53 in Delhi alone, where Muslims cannot pray because they are seen as historical monuments," said Mr Intezar Naeem of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, a body founded in 1941. "Imagine how you would feel if reasons of history were given to prevent you from praying in equally ancient (Hindu) temples?" he asked. The 53 mosques in the capital include those located inside the 17th century Red Fort, one across the road near Jama Masjid, in the Safdarjung Tomb, in Lodi Garden and at the imposing Qutub Minar complex (Quwwat-ul-Islam). The Khairul Manazil mosque opposite the Old Fort is also out of bounds for prayers. So are the ones inside the Delhi Golf Club grounds and near Wazirabad bridge, near the Yamuna river. Similar restrictions are in place at the mosque near the Ferozeshah Kotla ground here. Nevertheless, on major Islamic holidays, Muslims pray there in large numbers. But once the prayers get over, the police slap cases against the prayer leaders accusing them of intruding into protected monuments. (Asian Age 19/6/06)

Sachar report on Muslims by Oct.

New Delhi, June 19: The Rajinder Sachar Committee is expected to submit its report on the status of Muslims by the end of October. The committee's request to the Army on the number of minority community members in the forces had touched off a fierce controversy in the beginning of 2006. Talking to mediapersons here, Justice Sachar said the committee is in the process of collecting information and the report would be submitted by October 31. The recent extension of term of the committee was necessitated because the panel has to collect data from the Central government, state governments and public sector undertakings (PSUs), which would take time, he said. "We have sent them a format. Information on the basis of religion is not available with them. They have to collect information and send it to us. This takes time," he said. He said he would not like to seek another extension. Justice Sachar, however, refused to talk about the committee's findings or the controversy over its request to the armed forces on the number of Muslims in the Army. "The controversy is over. We asked for information. But the government did not give it. The rest is public," he said. The seven-member committee was set up by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in March 2005 to prepare a comprehensive report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in the country. (Asian Age 20/6/06)

Minority panel notice to Jamia, Centre (7)

New Delhi, June 20: The National Commission For Minority Education Institutions has issued notices to the Jamia Milia Islamia University and the Centre on a petition alleging that Muslim minority students were not being given due weightage in the matter of admission in the university. A three-judge bench headed by Justice M.S.A. Siddiqui asked the vice-chancellor and registrar of the university to file their replies by August 8, the next date of hearing. The bench also issued notices to the ministry of human resources and development and the ministry of minority affairs on the petition moved by the Jamia Students Union and others. Advocate M. Tarique Siddiqui, appearing for the petitioners, sought direction to the concerned authorities to take appropriate steps to admit students from the underprivileged Muslim minority community to the extent of at least 50 per cent. Raising the plea of minority rights guaranteed under the Constitution, advocate Siddiqui said that the concerned authorities should be directed to reframe the admission policy in consonance with the character of the university. The authorities shall also be directed to take appropriate steps on the basis of government census or any other statistical information to determine the need of the Muslim minority community to enable them to compete with the general category students, said the petition. On April 3, the HRD ministry had directed the institution to take appropriate steps to admit students from the Muslim minority community to the extent of at least 50 per cent but it is not being implemented, stated the petition. The petitioner students' union stated that from the inception of the university, no political party encroached upon the character of the university. Even the Special Act of Parliament passed in 1988 cannot take away the cherished dream of its founding fathers, the union said. The act, which catapulted it to the position of a central university, has to be construed according to the minority rights guaranteed under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution. (Asian Age 21/6/06)

Muslim groups criticise MHA's security proposal for Ayodhya (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 4: Several Muslim groups have criticised the Home Ministry's application to the Supreme Court which asks for allowing additional structures at the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid site in Ayodhya. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) says that it is a way of "trying to give legitimacy to the site and an attempt to appease a certain segment of the population keeping the UP elections in mind". AIMPLB says that it made its stand clear to the central government as early as February this year, when they found out that the UP state government had made the proposal. It says an attempt was made during the Shiladaan in 2002 and the court's opinion was sought. The court had, however, reiterated that no change at the site was possible till the original title dispute was resolved. Citing examples of the status quo judgement of 1994 and the 2002 order, the Board says it is confident that the judiciary would not allow this. In case the site requires more security, the Board says, "The government can increase the forces, the vigilance around the site, and make sure no further lapses occur." Congress MP Rashid Alvi, part of the Congress core team working in UP, is also uneasy at the proposal. He holds the state government responsible for making the proposal and is asking the PM to make sure that the status quo is maintained. Zafaryab Jilani, Lucknow-based senior advocate and a key member of the Babri Masjid Action Committee (in the years before the demolition) says that the Congress-led UPA at the Centre as well as the Samajwadi Party in the state are "conspiring to legalise an illegal structure". He says the SC ruling is very clear and any tampering with the status quo would amount to violation of court orders. The SC orders

issued on December 6, 1992, say that the status quo as just after the demolition should be maintained till the original title suit to the site has been settled. (Indian Express 5/7/06)

Ayodhya shield angers Muslims (7)

New Delhi, July 7: Muslims have strongly attacked the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre over its plan to build a bulletproof enclosure made of steel around the Ram Lalla idol at the disputed site in Ayodhya. They have claimed that this would be a violation of the Supreme Court order mandating that the status quo be maintained at the disputed site in Ayodhya. Muslim Personal Law Board spokesman S.Q.R. Illyasi said: "After the December 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid, Muslims for the first time reposed trust in the Congress in 2004. By such actions, the Congress stands to forfeit their confidence." Mr Illyasi went on to point out: "The Supreme Court in 1994 had ordered the status quo in Ayodhya. Again, in 2003, the Supreme Court further clarified on the status quo order and maintained that it covers the entire 67-acre land acquired by the Centre, in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992." The disputed site has a three-tier security cover. The outer ring is manned by the Uttar Pradesh police. The second ring is manned by the UP Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), and the inner ring around the idols is manned by the CRPF. "There is no justification for providing further bulletproofing at the disputed site. It is unwarranted and uncalled for," Mr Illyasi said. Erection of a steel wall would legitimise the makeshift temple at the disputed site, and the Muslim leaders had serious objections to this, he added. Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind acting general secretary Abdul Hameed Noamani said: "The Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind seriously objects to the Union home ministry (seeking) the permission of the Supreme Court for providing bulletproof security to the temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. This act of providing bulletproof security to the Ram Temple would send a wrong message to members of the minority community, and it can cause further alienation with the Congress. He said the Centre's action was uncalled for and constituted a flagrant violation of the status quo order passed by the Supreme Court." (Asian Age 8/7/06)

PM panel seeks details on Muslim judicial officers (7)

New Delhi, July 19: The Prime Minister's high-level committee, set up to probe the social status of Muslims, has sought details of judicial officers from across the country. Judicial officers include civil judges, district and mofussil-level magistrates. The details sought include the number of judges and those in lower judiciary from the community in a district. The committee, headed by former chief justice of the Delhi High Court Rajinder Sachar, has written to all chief justices of the high courts to provide the details. Sources said the high courts had administrative jurisdiction over the lower judiciary and hence the query had been sent to them. They also clarified that the query did not relate to any appointment in the high courts and the SC as these two are separate constitutional entities. In the lower judiciary there was an examination akin to that of the service commissions and hence the query had been sought for the lower judiciary, said the sources. "When a country-wide census has to be taken on the socio-economic-educational status of a particular community, queries of similar nature have to be sent to various walks of life and judiciary is not different", they said, adding that the query had nothing to do with the judiciary per se. Justice Sachar Committee has been given an extension and by October it is expected to submit its report to the Centre on the "social and educational status" of Muslims in India. This rather sensitive committee is in fact a forerunner to the reservation of about 27 per cent of seats for the OBCs in educational institutions in the country. The committee is also expected to collect data from the army, judiciary and other departments but has not gone into the "unorganised sector" where too various communities and castes, including linguistic groups, have sizeable presence. (Indian Express 20/7/06)

BJP tells PM to wind up Sachar Committee (7)

New Delhi: Muslim headcount will communalise judiciary, says Arun Jaitley ---- Taking strong exception to the headcount of members of the Muslim community in the judiciary, the BJP on Thursday asked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to wind up the Justice Rajindar Sachar Committee. "The Sachar Committee is on a path of national destruction. The Prime Minister, who constituted the committee, must accept this reality and wind up the Sachar Committee, a product of the perverse mindset," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley said on Thursday. The Sachar Committee had started a Muslim headcount in the armed forces but was forced to abandon the exercise midway in face of fierce media criticism. Asserting that the Sachar Committee was a product of a perverse mindset, Jaitley said, "The committee tried to destroy the professionalism of the Indian Armed Forces by seeking to communalise them. The public opinion and

political opposition prevented the Government and the Sachar Committee from proceeding on a suicidal path." "Having failed to communalise the Army, the Committee is now making attempts to communalise the judiciary. At this rate, a situation would arise when the litigants might ask for the judges of his caste or religion to hear the cases," Jaitley added. With the UPA Government already under attack from the BJP for indulging in minority appeasement, the Muslim headcount in the judiciary has given fresh ammunition to the Opposition to target its gun at the Centre. Jaitley said that a judge owes his commitment to law and law alone. "His religion is a matter of his personal belief. His religious belief does not dictate his interpretation of law. If religious representation was introduced as a criterion for judicial appointment, it would embolden religious identities in the discharge of judicial functions," he said..... (Pioneer 21/7/06)

Kerala HC: Taking oath in name of Allah is constitutional (7)

Kochi: Holding that the taking of oath of office in the name of Allah is constitutional, the Kerala High Court on Friday said any move to prevent this would defeat the secular character of the nation. Dismissing a public interest litigation seeking a declaration that 11 MLAs, who had taken oath in the name of Allah, be disqualified, a Division Bench of Justices J B Koshy and V Ramkumar held that Allah is the synonym of "God" and taking oath in the name of Allah is constitutional. Taking oath in the name of Allah is taking oath in the name of God, they said. The bench observed that the MLAs had taken the oath in their personal capacity and not on behalf of voters of their constituencies. If taking oath in the name of Allah is prevented, it will defeat the secular character of the nation, the judges said. The PIL was filed by Madhu Parumala, vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. (Indian Exp 24/7/06)

In TN, radical Islamic outfit's latest recruits are fresh converts (7)

THENI, JULY 26: A radical Islamic outfit on the state intelligence's watch list has made this sleepy pastoral village in Tamil Nadu a crucible for India's biggest conversion exercise in recent times. Hundreds of men and women from all over the state, mostly the jobless and Dalits, have been converted to Islam in the last five years. Intelligence agencies say they have reason to believe that the mass conversions could be used as a potential bridge to terror. Every four months, more than 50 Hindus from all over Tamil Nadu, converge at Arivagam (House of Knowledge), an Islamic learning institute, after going through the conversion ceremonies at local Jamats, to learn about the new religion they have embraced. Of the five MNP activists arrested on July 22 for plotting a terror attack on Coimbatore, two—Athikur Rehman and Tipu Sultan—had converted to Islam only a year ago, and had their indoctrination at the Arivagam. Firoze Khan, deputy in-charge at the Arivagam, explained: "Yes, I initiated Athikur Rehman and Tipu Sultan into Islam over four months, from September 2005. But I had also taught more than 2,000 other converts. We don't teach them to be militants and we don't talk about other religions." He insists that police allegations that they were weaning converts on hate literature and training them in arms and explosive, are "rubbish." Funded by the Manitha Neethi Pasarai (MNP), which has now officially entered the state intelligence records as "a possible militant outfit, which needs to be closely watched," the Arivagam has churned out more than 2,500 converts, mostly in their 20s, in the five years of its active existence. Of these, at least 350 are women, trained at the Darul Hikma (Centre of knowledge) in mountainous Eruvadi, close to Tirunelveli, 250 km from Muthuthavanpatty. Indian Express 27/7/06)

"Islam gives many rights to women" (7)

MUMBAI: The Quran does not give permission to kill innocent people, said Aalima Nowhera Shaikh, president of the newly launched Muslim women's organisation, At-Tawheed International Dawah Centre for Women. Speaking to The Hindu before addressing over 400 Muslim women who had travelled from distant suburbs to listen to her, this religious teacher from Tirupati said, "If there are a few bad people, you can't call all people of that community terrorists." Aalima Nowhera is convinced that Muslim women will realise how much their religion offers them by way of rights if they can first understand what is written in the Quran. She says that most women barely know the Quran and what they are taught is in Arabic. As a result, they are not aware of their rights and cannot question the interpretation of the Quran by male clerics. "I want a day to come when women can speak up for their rights", she says. To this end, the Aalima, who received her training in religion in Chennai but now runs the Jamia Niswa al Alifiya Women's Arabic College in Tirupati, says educating women is essential. Originally from Kallur in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, she says, "In our district, they don't send girls to school. So we set up a madrassa with a regular school curriculum. We want to give women the courage to fight." The Dawah Centre is the first

all-women Muslim organisation that is not affiliated to any other existing organisation. Men cannot be members. Even at the meeting in Mumbai, men were not permitted to attend although they were allowed to listen in from an adjoining room. "Women think they are suffering because they are women. They don't realise that Islam gives us so many rights." The organisation has chapters in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and in Ahmedabad. It aims to teach women not just the Quran but also skills so that they can stand on their own feet when they are either abandoned by their husbands or in distress. It also helps them to use the legal system. "Women cannot go and tell men what is their problem," she says. The organisation has given women a chance to come forward and talk about their problems, particularly marital problems. (The Hindu 28/7/06)

An opportunity for Muslims: Bitta (7)

JAIPUR: All India Anti-Terrorist Front chairman and former Youth Congress president Maninderjit Singh Bitta on Wednesday called upon Muslim organisations to register protest against terrorists perpetrating violence in the name of their religion and defaming the community. "The recent bomb explosions in Mumbai have provided an opportunity to Muslims to join the nation in challenging the nefarious designs of terrorists and tell them that there is no justification for their acts," Mr. Bitta said at a press conference here. Mr. Bitta, who was here to visit the Amar Jawan Jyoti monument, said Muslims coming out on streets and protesting against Islamist extremism would be a "commendable gesture" that would strengthen the spirit of secularism in the country. He said this would help in isolating terrorists in society. Mr. Bitta had survived a major bomb attack on the Youth Congress headquarters in New Delhi in September 1993. He said he and other like-minded Sikh leaders had stoutly opposed terrorism in Punjab and built up a vigorous public opinion against terrorists using religious places for their activities. The Congress leader demanded that the Centre enact a new legislation -- on the lines of the Prevention of Terrorism Act which stands repealed -- to deal with terrorist activities with no provision for appeal against conviction and establish anti-terrorist military courts for speedy trial of these cases. He alleged that his own party had a "soft approach" towards terrorism. The AIATF will observe October 28 as Anti-Terrorist Day and organise a function at Vigyan Bhawan in Delhi marking the day to provide assistance to those injured in Mumbai and Delhi bomb blasts and adopt children orphaned in the terrorist attacks. (The Hindu 3/8/06)

Intelligence chokes over clean chit to madarsas (7)

New Delhi: For Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil, madarsas are seats of learning and scholarly pursuit. In a speech at the Ahle-Hadeeth complex in Jamia Nagar on July 24, he merrily gave a clean chit to madarsas saying, "We believe that Islamic madarsas are seats of social service. They are not the centres of terrorism." But the Minister's words delivered in the aftermath of the serial bomb blasts on Mumbai trains were in sharp contrast to the information of his own security agencies. Intelligence agencies have irrefutable evidence to suggest that a majority of these madarsas are not only breeding grounds of terror but are also in league with anti-India forces to bleed it through a 100 cuts. There are over 350 madarsas within 10 km of the Indo-Nepal border in the Indian side. In central and eastern Uttar Pradesh more madarsas have come up than in the western part. Agencies mention border districts of Siddharth Nagar, Maharajganj, Bahraich, Shrawasti, Balrampur and Lakhimpur Kheeri in this connection. In the 10km belt of the bordering districts of Bihar such as West Champaran, East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Saupal, Araria and Kishanganj over 180 madarsas have come up after 1993. What has rung alarm bells in security set ups is the setting up of madarsas on the Nepal border. Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and terrorist outfits have been funnelling funds and recruiting jihadis from these schools of subversion, intelligence sources said. Getting back to the Home Minister. In the same speech he had said, madarsas, where knowledge of humanism is being imparted and where human values are taught, could only be termed as "servants of humanity." Intelligence agencies are not too sure about the syllabi, but they say that the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), accused of masterminding the 11/7 serial blasts, has a sizeable following in these madarsas. Many are financed by petro-dollars and share a close association with ISI agents while their premises are used as hideouts for Kashmiri militants, ISI agents, gunrunners and criminals. They also serve as transit camps for terrorists. (Pioneer 3/8/06)

Cops target Muslims in Bollywood (7)

New Delhi, Aug. 8: The Mumbai police, acting under a directive from the Maharashtra government, continued harassing prominent Muslims in the city who have been clearly registered with them as frequent

travellers abroad. Well-known dance choreographer Hameed Khan, who has been working with filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, received a knock on his door in Mumbai on Tuesday afternoon with the police demanding to see him. Mr Khan, when contacted, said he was not at home at the time and his ageing father, extremely upset, telephoned him to speak to the policemen. He was asked whether he had visited Dubai recently, to which he replied in the affirmative, saying he had gone there for a film shoot with director Mahesh Bhatt's company. He was told to present himself before sub-inspector Jameel Sheikh at the Oshiwara police station at 7 pm. Mr Khan panicked and called Mr Bhatt, who had already been in touch with this newspaper over Tuesday morning's report that a directive to investigate Muslims travelling abroad had been issued by the state government. A furious and very upset Mahesh Bhatt said it was absolutely clear that Muslims were being targeted. He said his entire unit, which had gone to Dubai for the shooting of the movie *Woh Lamhe*, had not been questioned as "they are Hindus, the only Muslim member was Hameed Khan, who is now being questioned." Maharashtra chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and deputy chief minister R.R. Patil, despite being contacted by prominent citizens, did not agree to issue a statement denying the directive. In fact, Mr R.R. Patil told reporters in Mumbai, according to news agency reports, that he had received instructions from national security adviser M.K. Narayanan to further beef up security in the city in view of Independence Day. However, late on Tuesday night, Mumbai police commissioner A.N. Roy issued a letter to this newspaper insisting that Muslims were not being targeted, and that no such instruction had been issued. He also said that only eight arrests have been made and there was no large-scale detention of Muslims in Mumbai..... (Asian Age 9/8/06)

"Terrorism wrongly linked to Muslims" (7)

NEW DELHI: A conference on "Terrorism" on Sunday took objection to the print and electronic media painting Muslims with a single brush, leading to misgivings and giving rise to a perception that the entire community was tilting towards "Islamic terrorism" and "Jihad." "Do not treat Muslims as terrorists" was the fervent plea made by Muslim clerics at the conference organised at Parliament House library by Ulemas from different parts of the country. Maulana Abdul Hafeez, Rector, Jamia Ashrafia; Maulana Asrarul Haq Qasmi; Maulana Sayed Aqil Ahmad Qasmi; Maulana Fuzailur Rehman Hilal Usmani and Maulana Matinul Haque Osama argued that "jihad" and "terrorism" had been wrongly linked to Muslim community. "A terrorist is a terrorist who has no religion and each and every act of terrorism needs to be condemned in strongest possible terms," they said. Referring to the misinformation campaign that mosques and 'madrassas' were becoming centres of terrorist activity, they said that mediapersons should visit mosques and seminaries and see for themselves the activities being carried out there. The clerics said that in the wake of the July 11 Mumbai train blasts, whenever a Muslim was arrested by police it was made out as if a terror plot had been busted. They objected to the insensitive manner in which the community was being portrayed by the media, and said that this offended its dignity. The conference was also an attempt to initiate a dialogue with the media which, they claimed, only picked up "negative trends and news" of Muslims. They also complained that the national press ignored their interests. Voicing his opposition to exercising government "control" over the media, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Priyaranjan Dasmunsi said the media in India was very powerful and responsible. He favoured using "persuasion" with the media rather than trying to exercise control over it. "We cannot behave like a dictator. We have to take people along in a democratic set-up and win their confidence," he said. (The Hindu 21/8/06)

Row builds over Vande Mataram (7)

Lucknow, Aug. 20: The year-long centenary celebrations of Vande Mataram may end on a discordant note, with a section of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh objecting to the Union government's directive to ensure recitation of the song in all schools on September 7. Muslim leaders and clerics term Vande Mataram as un-Islamic because the song equates the motherland to God. "This is unacceptable in Islam and we cannot revere anyone except Allah. We consider recitation of Vande Mataram by Muslim students as un-Islamic and I have no hesitation in advising members of our community to shun it," said Maulana Khalid Rasheed, a prominent Islamic cleric, who heads one of India's leading Islamic institutions, popularly known as Firangi Mahal. [Union human resources development minister Arjun Singh, seeking to quell the controversy over his ministry's directive to schools, said in Varanasi on Sunday that the measure was not mandatory, reports PTI. The recitation of the song on September 7 to pay tribute to martyrs and freedom fighters was entirely "voluntary in nature", Mr Singh said at a gathering at a minority academic institution. "The song should not be viewed otherwise," the minister added, saying that he did not think that Muslims should have any objection to reciting the song.] Explaining his objection to recitation of Vande Mataram,

Maulana Khalid Rasheed, who is also a member of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, said: "The song tends to equate the nation with God, which Islam does not permit. Even the Prophet Mohammed cannot be placed on an equal pedestal with Allah, the Almighty. Our opposition to Vande Mataram must not be construed as any kind of disrespect to another religion. It is simply because our religion does not allow any Muslim to bow his head before anyone other than God, the Almighty." Another senior member of the Muslim Personal Law Board, Mr Zafaryab Jilani, echoed similar sentiments when he said: "Reciting the Vande Mataram is against the tenets of the Shariat (Islamic law) and we cannot permit our children to sing the song, though we have no objection to the national anthem."..... (Asian Age 21/8/06)

Manmohan's assurance to Muslims (7)

NEW DELHI: Asserting that terrorism should not be linked to any religion in particular, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday announced that he would soon convene a meeting of the Chief Ministers to address the concerns of "being targeted and wrongly implicated" by law enforcement agencies while probing terror-related crimes. Addressing the concluding session of a conference on 'Terrorism: Causes and Remedies', organised by Muslim clerics and religious leaders at Parliament House Annexe here, the Prime Minister assured the gathering of taking "concrete steps" to dispel their doubts and fears of being at the receiving end of security and law enforcement agencies. His promise came on a query relating to the ongoing investigation of the July 11, 2006 Mumbai serial blasts in which, ulemas claimed, only Muslims were being picked up by the police. "I have spoken to the Maharashtra Chief Minister. The incident at Nanded is also under investigation. It is wrong to cast doubts only on the Muslim community during investigations. Terrorists have no religion. About 15 years ago when terrorism flared up in Punjab, Sikhs were meted out the same treatment. If the LTTE is involved in a terrorist-related crime, it does not mean that Tamils are involved. This kind of blame on the basis of religious affiliations is totally wrong. Police and security agencies have to take care not to cast doubts on the patriotism of Muslims or any other community," Dr. Singh said. Striking an emotional chord with the ulemas and addressing the gathering in chaste Urdu, Dr. Singh said that he identified with the concerns and agonising experiences of the community and assured that the Government steps to address these concerns would come sooner than expected. At the same time, the Prime Minister used the opportunity to request the ulemas to fulfil their role of religious teachers by providing exemplary leadership and telling the Muslim youth to choose the right path. "Tell the youth that they should neither be lured by anyone nor pay heed to any kind of provocation. They should set their eyes on getting good education and participate in the nation's progress," he said. (The Hindu 22/8/06)

Nanavati Commission gives Gujarat a week's time (7)

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat Government has been given a week's time by the G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah judicial inquiry commission to submit a list containing names of officials of the State Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) who can analyse compact discs (CDs). The panel is probing the Godhra train carnage and the riots that followed. The time was given after the State Government, which was asked by the commission to submit a list of organisations and experts in CD analysis, on Monday told the commission that it could identify only one institution in this field, the cyber crime branch in the State FSL. The demand for the analysis of two CDs submitted to the commission by the former State police intelligence department official, Rahul Sharma, containing the list of mobile phone numbers called to and from between February 27 and March 3, 2002, was made by the advocate for the Jansangharsha Manch, Mukul Sinha. He is fighting the cases for the riot victims. Dr. Sinha submitted a list containing the names of Chief Minister Narendra Modi, then Chief Secretary and the Director-General of Police and some senior leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Sangh Parivar outfits and senior officials, whose numbers he wanted to be analysed. He contended that an analysis of the CDs could reveal valuable information about the location of these leaders during the riots, some of whom were accused of having participated in the carnage. (The Hindu 22/8/06)

Deoband issues fatwa against life insurance for Sunnis, Shia clerics disagree (7)

LUCKNOW, AUGUST 29: The Darul Uloom of Deoband, the supreme body of the majority Sunnis, has declared life insurance as illegal but prominent Shia leaders have opposed the decree. The Darul Ifta of Deoband, the body authorised to issue fatwas, issued a fatwa saying that interest earned on bank deposits as well as insurance of life is illegal as per the Shariat, the supreme law for Muslims. And that Muslims should not go in for insurance or assurance of life which has been given to them by Allah. The

fatwa, issued by Mohammad Zafeeruddin on August 7, in consultation with the two muftis of Darul Uloom, Deoband says: "Life insurance is not permissible because there is interest income in it as well as gambling, which are illegal under Shariat." The fatwa was issued in response to a question from one Saleem Chisti from Lucknow who was approached by an insurance company to buy a policy and become an agent. "It is najayaz as per the Shariat," said vice-president of All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) Maulana Khaleed Rashid. It amounts to not believing in the supreme status of Allah, he said. But his colleague and noted Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Sadiq disagreed: "There is nothing wrong in taking an insurance policy. I can say it in the light of the laws followed by the Shia sect. But if another sect has views against it, one should respect that too." The chairman of the All India Shia Personal Law Board, Maulana Mirza Mohammad Athar, too, said such fatwas are not binding on Shias. Support for the fatwa among Sunnis, however, was strong. Said Rukhsana Lari, a member of AIMPLB: "Insurance is illegal as per the Shariat. Those who are covered under group insurance in their jobs should donate the interest and the maturity benefits. Mufti of Nadwa College too has said that if under certain circumstances one has to take life insurance policy, the interest should not be accepted." (Indian Express 30/8/06)

Muslims protest over directive on 'Vande Mataram' (7)

JAIPUR: Muslim organisations in Rajasthan on Thursday registered a strong protest against the State Government's recent directive to all educational institutions to render "Vande Mataram" compulsorily on September 7, saying the song could not be imposed on the community which believes that it is against the tenets of its religion and expresses Hindu nationalism. A controversy has arisen in the State with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government reportedly threatening to withdraw recognition and stopping aid to schools and colleges where the orders for singing of Vande Mataram are not complied with. The State Government is yet to issue a clarification on these reports. Representatives of the Rajasthan Muslim Forum -- an umbrella body of Muslim groups of the State -- said at a press conference here that imposition of the song, going beyond the Centre's directive making the rendition optional, formed part of the Sangh Parivar's agenda to target Muslims and label them as "traitors and anti-nationals". "Muslims do not need a certificate from the Sangh outfits to prove their loyalty to the nation. It is outrageous to say that only those who recite the national song are patriots," said Mohammed Salim, president of State unit of Jamat-e-Islami Hind, while pointing out that the Congress Working Committee had in 1937 recognised the validity of objections raised to the song and made the singing of its first two stanzas optional. A delegation of the Muslim Forum met the State Principal Secretary, Education, C.K. Mathew, here on Wednesday seeking a clarification on the applicability of the State Government's order. Mr. Salim said Mr. Mathew did not spell out whether the singing was mandatory but denied that there would be any coercion in the execution of the directive. J.M. Khan, State president of Muslim Majlis Mushawrat and former Chairman of the State Public Service Commission, said the contents of Vande Mataram went against the Islamic doctrine of monotheism, which required Muslims to worship none other than God. (The Hindu 1/9/06)

Panel mum on SC query if Gujarat riot cases should be reinvestigated (7)

New Delhi, August 31: Told by the Supreme Court to recommend whether re-investigation by an independent agency was required in a slew of the most serious Gujarat riot cases, the committee of Additional District and Sessions Judge M L Mehta has neither given any recommendation nor conclusions. SC to hear 14 cases on Gujarat riots today Gujarat HC rejects Rail Ministry plea Another U-turn, Zaheera wants Gujarat jail Lie is a lie is a lie Godhra was an accident: Banerjee panel In his 106-page report, the ADJ of Delhi has only recorded amicus curiae Harish Salve's recommendation that "as far as the investigation of these (riot) cases is concerned, there may be needed to set up a special investigation team of officers identified by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) or any other agency (or the Hon'ble Supreme Court itself) who could go over the investigation so far conducted and conduct any further investigation that may be necessary or take such steps as they consider proper". Beyond this, Mehta's report is a "compilation" of all major riot cases with Gujarat government's blanket denial of all allegations including connivance of the local police with the accused and slipshod investigation. The NHRC's petition before the Supreme Court was converted into a PIL on which the SC had earlier transferred trial in the Best Bakery case outside Gujarat and also ordered CBI investigation into a few cases. The July 11 order of the Supreme Court directed the appointment of Mehta to scrutinise all the cases and recommend whether re-investigation is needed. Mehta categorised the eight major incidents of worst communal riots: Godhra, Gulbarg Society, Naroda Patiya, Sardarpura, Ode, Naroda Gaon, the case

involving a British national, and the Dipda Darwaja Case. His report merely lists the "allegations" of the petitioners and the denial of the state government. (Indian Express 1/9/06)

BJP rejects fatwa against recitation of Vande Mataram (7)

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday rejected the fatwa issued by the Dar-ul-Uloom of Deoband asking Muslim parents to withdraw their children from schools forcing them to sing the national song "Vande Mataram." Talking to reporters here, BJP vice-president Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said such diktat using the shield of Islam was not just against the culture of this country but would also find no support from common Muslims. Clerics who regard Vande Mataram as anti-Muslim were people with an 'anti-national' mindset, and the fatwa an expression of a 'separatist' mindset, he said. Reacting to Dar-ul-Uloom criticising him for extending support to the singing of the national song, Mr. Naqvi said the fatwa by a handful of "fanatics" was against the basic tenets of Islam. They would not find support from the Muslim people, who were all patriots and whose loyalties could not be swayed by such forces. "Fatwas cannot weaken the patriotism of crores of Muslims like me. It is a way of diverting the attention of the Indian Muslims from the basic social, economic and educational problems," he said. Mr. Naqvi is in charge of organising the recital of Vande Mataram throughout the country on September 7, the day chosen by the Government to observe the centenary of the national song. The party had directed its units across the country to sing the song with respect and honour in all public places and educational institutions. "This kind of intolerant behaviour displayed by ill-informed groups was nothing but a replica of the reprehensible behaviour of people like Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden at the global level," Mr. Naqvi said. (The Hindu 3/9/06)

Vande Mataram' is anti-Muslim: IUML (7)

MUMBAI: The Indian Union Muslim League on Saturday said 'Vande Mataram' was "anti-Muslim." "Any attempt to force the singing of Vande Mataram will be uncivilised and an affront to the secular character of our polity and will also not be tolerated by Muslims," IUML president G.M. Banatwala said in a press release here. "'Vande Mataram' has been consistently and conscientiously held as idolatrous by Muslims. It also has an anti-Muslim and objectionable background. Muslims cannot sing it." Mr. Banatwala called on Muslim students not to attend classes on September 7 in case there was "any fear of insistence on singing Vande Mataram." The Centre has issued a directive, asking schools to get their students to recite 'Vande Mataram' on September 7 to mark the centenary of the national song. "It is most unfortunate that instead of appreciating the Muslim position, the Sangh Parivar is out to vitiate the communal atmosphere," he said. "Muslims should not, as usual, accept any provocations and maintain calm and patience. They may stand up silently as a mark of respect to the right of the gathering singing Vande Mataram." A day after the Assam Government issued a notification for singing of 'Vande Mataram' on September 7 in all educational institutions, Education Minister Ripun Bora on Saturday clarified that the rendering of the national song was not mandatory. In a press release, he said the Government had asked the heads of institutions to arrange for singing the first two stanzas at 11 a.m. as a sequel to orders received from Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh. However, the notification had not made the singing "compulsory" as had been reported in a section of the media..... (The Hindu 3/9/06)

Court quashes complaint against Muslim youth (7)

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat High Court on Wednesday quashed a police complaint against a Muslim youth who married a Hindu girl against the wishes of her parents. The court issued the order on a petition filed by the couple against a police complaint purportedly made by the girl, which claimed that the boy and his family demanded dowry and subjected her to physical abuse. The complaint was quashed after the girl told the court that she had not filed any such complaint, she was forced to sign on a blank paper and had no idea about the contents of the alleged complaint. Both the boy and the girl told the court that they loved each other and there was no question of any dowry or physical harassment. Both residents of Kosamba, near Surat, Amir Raza (21) and Swati Khare (19) had eloped and registered their marriage at Chitradurga, near Bangalore, on June 21. But ever since they returned to Kosamba on September 19 to meet their parents, they had to confront the "moral police" of the Sangh Parivar. However, Swati's father himself contacted the Bajrang Dal and the Durga Vahini for "help" after she met them. Some Parivar activists forced Swati to accompany them to the Kosamba police station to file a complaint. The local police also allegedly colluded with them and forced her to sign on a blank paper. They allegedly threatened to kill her and Amir in a fake encounter if she refused to sign. Later, a complaint of dowry and assault was

registered against Amir. Two months pregnant, Swati was later taken to a hospital in Broach by the Parivar activists and was forced to abort the child. Brought back to Kosamba, she was asked to sign on a divorce paper. On her refusal, she was reportedly kept "in confinement" in her brother's house in Vadodara. The Kosamba police kept harassing Amir on the basis of the complaint, following which he went into hiding in Surat. Swati, however, managed to flee from her brother's house on October 3 and with the help of some friends managed to contact Amir. The duo met at the Surat railway station, after which they filed a complaint with the Surat Police Commissioner against the Parivar activists, her parents and the doctor in the Broach hospital and later filed a petition in the High Court. Swati's father, Amir claimed, was still trying to exert pressure on him to divorce her, but both have so far resisted the move. (The Hindu 12/10/06)

Bannerjee Committee illegal: High Court (7)

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat High Court on Friday held the constitution of the U. C. Bannerjee Committee by the Railway Ministry to probe the Godhra train carnage illegal and unconstitutional. It restrained the Centre from tabling the committee report in Parliament or taking any further action on it. Allowing a petition filed on March 28, 2005 by Neelkanth Tulsidas Bhatia, one of those injured in the February 27, 2002 carnage on the outskirts of the Godhra railway station, Justice D. N. Patel held that the Ministry and the Centre had no jurisdiction to issue the September 2, 2004 notification appointing the committee. Its constitution was "unconstitutional, illegal and null and void." Taking note of the existence of the G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah judicial inquiry commission appointed by the Gujarat Government earlier to go into the carnage and the post-Godhra communal riots, the court said that neither under the Commission of Inquiry Act nor under the Indian Railways Act, the Railway Ministry was authorised to appoint a committee to probe the same matter. On the plea by railway advocate Nirupam Nanavati that the Centre had jurisdiction in any inter-State matter as the Sabarmati Express had passed through more than one State before the incident occurred at Godhra, the court said such powers were vested in the Centre in appointing an inquiry commission and not a high-level committee. The court viewed with apprehension the Ministry's attempt to upgrade the committee vesting it with powers of a judicial commission. This was a "colourable exercise of power with mala fide intentions." Justice Patel also took exception to the appointment of the committee two years and seven months after the incident had occurred, the way its interim report was submitted just two days before the Bihar elections and the publicity given to it for apparent political advantages.(The Hindu 14/10/06)

'Police did not probe VHP, Bajrang' (7)

Mumbai, Oct. 14: Most speakers at a seminar on "Malegaon Bomb Blasts: Who is to Blame?" felt the police would never get at the truth because of its one-sided attitude: it did not investigate organisations like the Bajrang Dal, VHP or RSS. Justice Kolse Patil referred to the haul of 195-kg of RDX in Ahmednagar town on September 2 and the strange facts surrounding this affair. "The man whose godown had stocked this was found dead on Sept-ember 10 and an employee of his was absconding," he said, adding, "The one-sided attitude of the police and administration itself was proof that the truth would not be arrived at." Lyricist Javed Akhtar said the police officers investigating the Malegaon blasts were quick to rule out the possibility that the bombs might have been the handiwork of the Bajrang Dal, which has been active in the Marathwada region. "Does RDX have a special stamp establishing its link to Muslims," Mr Akhtar asked. Referring to the SMS circulating since 7/11 that said "Every Muslim is not a terrorist, but every terrorist is a Muslim," he asked whether Naxalites, Maoists, ULFA and LTTE militants were all Muslims. "Are those responsible for the Gujarat riots just firemen then," he asked. The meeting had been jointly organised by the Maulana Azad Research Centre, Malegaon; National Awakening for Development of Youth, Malegaon; Communalism Combat; Citizens for Justice and Peace; and Muslims for Secular Democracy. Maulana Azhari said he was in favour of keeping a close watch on SIMI. However, he demanded that the police also keep an equally close watch on the activities of the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS. Ms Teesta Setalvad, co-editor of Communalism Combat, said, "Many questions need to be answered, and one issue is that even the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS were making bombs and were responsible for bomb blasts in mosques in 2004 and 2005. We are not trying to say Muslims are not involved in bomb blasts, but an investigating agency cannot close its eyes and ears to Hindu organisations creating another kind of terror. We have a right to ask them." (Asian Age 15/10/06)

BJP accuses NCM of bias (7)

New Delhi, Oct. 25: The BJP accused the National Commission for Minorities of being biased against states ruled by the party after the NCM report observed that the Modi government failed to rehabilitate riot-affected families in Gujarat. Senior BJP leader Venkaiah Naidu wondered why only the BJP-ruled states were being targeted by the NCM but the Congress-ruled states were not facing any censor. He said it was vote bank politics that was behind NCM report. He alleged that the NCM was targeting BJP-ruled states at the behest of the ruling Congress. In its report after the visit of its team to rehabilitation camps in Gujarat, the NCM said the Modi government has not been able to provide basic facilities, such as potable water, healthcare, schools and roads to the families hit by the 2002 riots in the state, a charge Mr Naidu denied. Also, it has noted that the state government has not been able to create a conducive atmosphere for the affected families to leave camps and return to their homes. After the meeting which discussed the issue of special economic zones, Mr Naidu said the party was in principle supportive of SEZs. (Asian Age 26/10/06)

PM fears report on Muslims will be explosive (7)

New Delhi, Oct. 26: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has not given time to Justice Rajinder Sachar (Retired), who had reportedly asked for an appointment to discuss the findings of the committee appointed last March to look into the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. Sources said that the government is worried about the overall impact of the report that has essentially detailed data proving that the status of Muslims today is below that of dalits. The Sachar committee's term has also been extended to November. It had been constituted in March last year for a term of 15 months, which expired in June. It was given an extension till October. Justice Sachar, when contacted, said that the term had now been extended till November, and that the October date that had incidentally been printed in all newspapers at the time was a "mistake." He did not respond to a question about the appointment with the Prime Minister. Significantly, Justice Sachar himself had stated earlier this year in a recorded interview that he would be ready with the report before June as most of his work had been completed. Informed sources said the Prime Minister is now not keen for an early release of the report, which has now been delayed till next month. The Justice Sachar Committee, which had worked hard through the months collecting data, carrying out interviews and meeting respondents in different states, is reported to have been astonished over the findings which have shown a sharp decline in the social, educational and economic status of Muslims. The sources said that the data itself will require serious responses from the government and a strong demand from concerned citizens and political parties for direct action. (Asian Age 27/10/06)

Prison is the only place where Muslims are over-represented (7)

New Delhi, October 28: In sharp contrast to education and employment, where their share is way, way below their share of the population, Muslims have a disproportionately high representation when it comes to being in prison. In judiciary's most crowded space, Muslims are invisible. Even if govt is employer, Muslims fall off job map 'Muslims insecure, feel inferior in UP; Rajasthan poor in minority affairs' 'Victims of bias, Muslims at bottom of social barrel' In fact, in many states, Muslims even make up a higher percentage of the population in jail than they do outside. This statistic, a key finding of the Prime Minister-appointed Justice Rajinder Sachar committee — which is looking into the status of Muslims nationwide — has major social and political implications. Such a high figure of incarceration, experts say, means further marginalisation of the community, deepening prejudice and distrust. While there is no break-up of the nature of the crime for which these inmates have been imprisoned, sources said the total number of inmates surveyed is 102,652 and a majority of them are not in for terrorism. A dozen states with significant Muslim population shares were asked to furnish statistics on the number of Muslims in prison, convicted and under-trials. West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have not reported back to the committee on this so the data available is only for eight states that did. Incidentally, West Bengal, UP and Bihar, as was first reported in The Indian Express this week, rank at the bottom when it comes to representation of Muslims in Government employment, including state public sector undertakings and the lower judiciary. (The Indian Express 29/10/06)

Muslims worse off than OBCs (7)

New Delhi, October 30: If Muslims are worse off than Scheduled Castes when it comes to education, they significantly trail behind Other Backward Classes (OBCs) virtually across the board: education, employment, poverty levels and landholdings. OBCs also include Muslim OBCs. (For example, Noniya, Dhuniya, Chirimar and Bhishtis etc, considered to constitute close to a half of the Muslim population

although this share is a heavily disputed one). Muslim OBCs not only trail the non-OBC Muslim (the "General Muslim"), they are worse off than Hindu OBCs in all categories. These are among the findings from the data based on the 61st round of the NSSO survey and inputs from states. Member Secretary of the Sachar Committee economist Abusaleh Sharif told The Indian Express: "(These) NSSO statistics demonstrate general Muslims are well below the status of Hindu OBCs." This acquires significance given the current debate over quotas for OBCs in higher education and the political resistance to the idea of excluding quotas for a "creamy layer." Clarifying that his opinion was personal, Sharif, who has shared some this data in a paper with the National Knowledge Commission last month, said: "There is no time like the present, when the world wants Indians. Why don't we want our own people? A deadly mix of prejudice and poor economic conditions have held back Muslims, poor OBCs (both Hindu and others) and SC/STs constituting large sections of the population. Unshackling the energies and talents of these groups is ultimately what the Indian miracle will need to be premised on." The data tabulated indices for levels of education (matriculation, graduates and above), employment (workers and formal sector), economic (poverty and land holdings) between Hindu OBCs, General Muslims and Muslim OBCs, and compared them with the standard all-India average (See red line in chart). (Indian Express 31/10/06)

Brinda Karat seeks special economic package for Muslims (7)

VISAKHAPATNAM: CPI(M) leader and Rajya Sabha MP Brinda Karat has urged the United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre to announce a special plan for the development of Muslims. A majority of them faced discrimination and their social and economic conditions were bad. By announcing a series of schemes in the next budget, their status should be improved. The Government should also expose the canard of "Muslim appeasement" spread by the BJP-RSS combine, she told The Hindu on Sunday. Ms. Karat described as disturbing media reports on the findings of the Rajinder Sachar Committee, which went into the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. According to the committee, set up on March 9, 2005, while the Muslim population in the country was 17 per cent, it had less than two per cent representation in government jobs. Muslims were not only socially and educationally backward, but artisans in the community too had least access to government credits. Likewise, Muslim women self-help groups were not encouraged with adequate funds. She urged the Government to table the committee report in the winter session of Parliament, beginning this month. The CPI (M) wanted a full discussion on the report. Besides formulating a special economic package for Muslims and scholarship schemes for Muslim children, the Centre should include welfare schemes for them in the 11th Plan. Earlier, at the meet-the-press of the Vizag Journalists' Forum, Ms. Karat said all State Governments must immediately appoint protection officers and counsellors under the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which came into force last month. A lot of misconception and disinformation campaign was being carried out by vested interests about the Act, and this must be stopped. (The Hindu 6/11/06)

Change attitude towards Muslims: Shia Board (7)

LUCKNOW: The All India Shia Personal Law Board on Sunday alleged that the Government was discriminating against Muslims and urged it to change its attitude. The president of the board, Maulana Mirza Mohammad Athar, told newsmen that a 'false impression' was being created that Muslims were anti-nationals and terrorists. He demanded representation for Muslims in government service in accordance with their population and regretted that there was no effort in this direction. The minority community was restless and measures should be taken to end their dissatisfaction. The Maulana said the board took strong exception to the 'discrimination' against the community. He said the issue would be discussed in the second annual session of the board at Mumbai on November 26. He said the model nikah-nama prepared by the Board gave women now the right to divorce their husband. The law had been approved by Hakim-i-Shara, Ayatollah Sistani of Iraq and legal experts. It would be presented before delegates at the Mumbai session. The Maulana said the board would formulate a national policy for Shias laying stress on their commitment to their religion and loyalty to the country. (The Hindu 6/11/06)

Apologise to Muslims" (7)

LUCKNOW: Former Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party president, Ms Mayawati's controversial remarks on Muslims' 'preference' for fundamentalist leaders continued to evoke strong reaction with the controversial U.P. Minister of State for Haj and Minority Welfare, Haji Yaqub Qureshi, demanding a public apology from her. "Ms Mayawati should apologise to the Muslims or else the minority community will not sit silent on this issue," the Haji told The Hindu on Saturday. Even as the Lohia Vahini of the Samajwadi

Party burnt Ms. Mayawati's effigies at the district headquarters in protest against her statement, several Muslims vent their ire in Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Moradabad, Agra, Bijnor and Saharanpur by taking out protest demonstrations and torching her effigies. The United Democratic Front had decided to appeal to the conscience of Muslim MLAs, MPs and supporters of the Bahujan Samaj Party to redefine their priorities in the light of her statement, and leave the BSP. Haji Qureshi slammed the former Chief Minister for dubbing Muslims as fundamentalists and fanatics. The Minister said the statement was part of a strategy and even hinted at Ms Mayawati having a secret pact with the BJP. He warned Ms Mayawati that if she failed to render an unconditional apology, she will have to incur the wrath of the minority community in the next year's elections. "The Muslims will ensure that the BSP candidates lost their security deposits." (The Hindu 12/11/06)

HRD to PMO: We will start counting all Muslim school kids from this year (7)

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 13: The Human Resource Development ministry, headed by Arjun Singh, has told the Prime Minister's Office that Muslim students will be counted in the annual survey of children studying in schools across the country with special attention on Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Assam which constitute half of the total out-of-school Muslim children in the country. The PMO had reportedly sought for a report on minority education after the PM emphasised the need to tackle the high level of illiteracy in minorities at a minority commission gathering on November 2. "From 2006 onwards, the category minority (Muslim) is being included in the reporting of enrolment from each school in the country under the Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan's database," the HRD ministry has said. Similarly, each state will collect habitation-wise information on out-of-school children for which Muslims will be included as a separate category. This survey — under the acronym of DISE or District Information System for Education — is an annual exercise since the late '90s. According to a 2005 survey, about 12 lakh Muslim boys and 10 lakh Muslim girls — nearly 9.97% of 2.25 cr Muslim children — were estimated to be out of school. (Indian Express 14/11/06)

Fair share for Muslims is our goal, says Cong (7)

New Delhi, November 13: Giving a clear-cut official indication of what to expect on the Rajinder Sachar Committee report on the social and educational status of Muslims, the Congress party today said it favoured affirmative action for minorities. The Sachar Committee is expected to submit its report later this week. Responding to views expressed by party leaders AR Antulay and N Veerappa Moily on the sensitive issue, party spokesperson Satyavrat Chaturvedi read out the 2004 election manifesto of the party. "The Congress believes in affirmative action for all religious and linguistic minorities. The Congress has provided for reservations for Muslims in Kerala and Karnataka in government employment and education on the grounds that they are a socially and educationally backward class. The Congress is committed to adopting this policy for socially and educationally backward sections among Muslims and other religious minorities on a national scale. The Congress also pledges to extend reservations for the economically deprived persons belonging to communities that are at present not entitled to such reservations." Antulay had called for Dalit Muslims getting the same benefits of reservation as Dalit Hindus and Sikhs. Moily favoured the inclusion of Muslims in the category of socially and educationally backward classes. "It has always been the classical stand of Congress. What Mr Veerappa Moily and Mr Antulay have said is not new. The party has been advocating reservation to all socially and educationally backward irrespective of any religion." (Indian Express 14/11/06)

Muslim school rate abysmal (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 13: A Planning Commission report says that 12 per cent of Muslim children in the age group of six to 13 years do not attend school at all and only a marginal percentage of the community makes it to university. The report, prepared by the sub-group on education for minorities, has been submitted to the convenor of the working group on empowerment of minorities for the 11th Five-Year Plan, Zoya Hassan. The working committee on empowerment of minorities was constituted by the Planning Commission following the announcement of a 15-point development programme for minorities by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. About 50 per cent of Muslim children in rural areas and one third of the community's children in urban areas remain illiterate. The enrolment ratios for secondary and higher secondary education stand at 15 per cent and five per cent respectively, both significantly lower than the national average, according to the report of the sub-group on education of minorities. The report of the working group on empowerment of minorities for the 11th Five Year Plan will have far-reaching

consequences because the committee was set up by the Planning Commission, which is a constitutional body, as against the Sachar Committee, which has statutory status and was constituted by the Prime Minister. The Planning Commission deputy chairperson, Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who enjoys the rank of a Cabinet minister, has direct access to the Prime Minister, who heads the Central planning body. The report says that 1.3 percent of the males and 0.3 per cent of the females from the community in the rural areas make it to the level of graduation. Only 5.1 per cent of Muslim males and just 2.5 per cent of females from the community in urban areas make it to higher education, The national average for higher education stands at eight per cent of the total population. "The level of Muslims in various stages of school and college education is the lowest among all religious groups in India. Net enrolment rates of Muslim children in the age group of 6-10 years is around 65 per cent, but the same is reduced to one third in the 11-14 age bracket," said the chairperson of the sub-group on education for minorities, Dr Vimal Thorat, citing the report, and added that the level of education among Muslims is "chintajanak (worrisome)"..... (Asian Age 14/11/06)

'Muslims face bureaucratic neglect' (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 14: A report with the Planning Commission has revealed that "bureaucratic neglect" has led to poor enrolment, increasing dropout rates and significant level of illiteracy among the Muslims in the country. The condition of Muslim-dominated districts is worse than districts with majority Scheduled Caste populations in terms of educational infrastructure due to "bureaucratic neglect", according to a report submitted to the Planning Commission. The report of the sub-group on education of minorities said, "Muslim-dominated areas tend to suffer from bureaucratic neglect or apathy, even in provision of basic social infrastructure for which norms have been so well laid down." In spite of significant progress made in the growth of schools and colleges in the country during the last six decades, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims tend to significantly lag behind in such areas, the report prepared for the Planning Commission's working group on empowerment of minorities for the 11th Five-Year Plan said. The districts that had more than 25 per cent Muslim population suffered from a variety of supply constraints with respect to primary and upper primary schooling, according to a case study of the sub-group on education of minorities. "The desegregated data for social and religious groups by gross enrolment rates (GER) in higher education shows that Muslims had the lowest enrolment. The GER for backward Muslims was just 3.86 while for 'others' among the Muslims, the comparable figure was a little below six. This was significantly lower than that of the all-India average (10.1) on the one hand and 'other' Hindus and 'other' Christians that stood at 20 per cent and 30 per cent respectively," the report revealed. (Asian Age 15/11/06)

UP Muslims call for Maya boycott (7)

Lucknow, Nov. 14: Muslim religious leaders, apparently irked by BSP leader Mayawati's "damaging" statement against the community, have now given a call for her social and political boycott. Ms Mayawati, at a press conference last week, had termed Muslims as fundamentalists and though she retracted her statement within a few hours, tempers have been on the boil ever since. Sunni leader and member of Parliament Maulana Masood Madni has asked all Muslim MPs and MLAs in the BSP to resign with immediate effect and express their protest against Ms Mayawati's statement. "If Muslim MPs and MLAs in the Bahujan Samaj Party do not resign, we shall be forced to call for their social and political boycott. The BSP has shown its true colours by terming Muslims as fundamentalists and anyone who supports her is apparently anti-Islamic," he said. Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Jawwad, on the other hand, said that Ms Mayawati had categorically spoken against Muslims and he would now appeal to the community not to vote for the BSP in any election. "Ms Mayawati has already betrayed the faith of Muslims on three occasions, when she formed government with the BJP, but this time, she has revealed her true feelings for Muslims. No Muslim with self-respect should vote for her and I will formally issue an appeal against the BSP when elections take place," he said. The All-India Shia Personal Law Board and the All-India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board have also condemned Ms Mayawati's statement and have termed the BSP as "an opportunist party that only knows how to take advantage of Muslim votes and functions in its own fundamentalist way." Political parties in Uttar Pradesh have not lagged behind in deriving political mileage on the issue either. Samajwadi Party general secretary Beni Prasad Varma has called for a social boycott of the BSP president and has asked people to beware of such parties. (Asian Age 15/11/06)

Gujarat govt gives Sachar good news on Muslims (7)

New Delhi, November 15: The data provided by the Gujarat government to the Rajinder Sachar Committee show Muslims are better off in the state on social indices than most other states — and, in fact, more literate than Hindus in the state. On education, employment and benefits from government schemes, the Narendra Modi government in the state claims a healthy record for the minority community. Consider these: • 73.6 per cent is the literacy rate among the Muslims as against 68.3 per cent among Hindus. • 7.3 per cent employees in Government service are Muslims while they form 9.01 per cent of the population. • 4.5 per cent of the teachers are Muslims in the state. • 40 Muslim sub-castes are being provided with reservation. In its response to the committee's queries, the Gujarat state government has also highlighted a Rs 500-crore project for the kite-making sector. With 90 per cent of the Below Poverty Line Muslims working in this sector, the state claims the project has been well-received. Besides this, Gujarat has drawn attention to schemes such as the Kanva Kelavani Scheme for educating the girl child — it claims the principal beneficiaries have been Muslim girls. However, it does not have religion-based data to back this claim. Countering allegations of ghettoisation of Muslims, the Modi government says that even in parts of Ahmedabad dominated by Hindus, there are several Muslims who own shops. Having looked at the data, a section of the Sachar panel feels that a "deeper analysis is needed to ascertain the veracity of such claims, considering the number of complaints the panel received from the community members, NGOs and other organisations". The panel has also got data that show that there were only eight Muslim students among the 750 enrolled in medical colleges last year. On the healthy literacy figure, a key member of the panel said: "There is no data on the drop-out rate of the students. Considering drop-out is high among the Muslims, there should have been such data." (IndianExpress 16/11/06)

Muslims lagging behind in most development indicators: panel (7)

NEW DELHI: The Rajinder Sachar committee has said that Muslim community was "lagging behind" other religious groups in development indicators and has asked the Government to frame appropriate programmes to address its educational and economic backwardness. The committee that presented its report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here on Friday, however, maintains silence over reservation for Muslims. The seven-member committee headed by Mr. Sachar, a former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court was set up to go into the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. The report will be tabled in Parliament for discussion. Replying to queries from reporters on whether the committee had recommended reservation for Muslims, Justice Sachar said this was for the Government to decide. The committee in its report said that the community was "relatively poor, more illiterate, has lower access to education, lower representation in public and private sector jobs and lower availability of bank credit for self-employment". In urban areas, the community mostly lives in slums characterised by poor municipal infrastructure, it said adding that there was, however, considerable variation in the condition of the community across States and regions. The committee has stressed the need for formulation of appropriate programmes to address the educational and economic backwardness of the community. Justice Sachar informed the Prime Minister that the Committee visited a number of States and met a wide spectrum of people, commissioned detailed surveys and research papers by experts, reviewed published research on the subject, collated available data and interacted with various departments and agencies of Central and State Governments to obtain relevant information to prepare its report. He said all members of the committee were unanimous on the findings and there were no dissenting voices. (The Hindu 18/11/06)

Equity, education are Sachar's two pills (7)

New Delhi, November 17 : The Prime Minister's High-Level Committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar that looked into the social, economic and education status of the Muslim community is learnt to have recommended "equitable" distribution of available jobs in the "formal sector" for Muslims. The other important recommendations of the committee include making "disbursal of bank credit more transparent", ensuring "quality education" to Muslim children up to the age of 14 while continuing with the "modernisation of madrasas" as an interim measure, greater role for civil society in ending ghettoisation of the community in certain parts of the country and special focus on traditional employment areas of the community. The Sachar report says that in small towns (populations between 50,000 and 2 lakh) the monthly per capita expenditure of Muslims is less than that of SC/STs. Also, across the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the expenditure per month by Muslims is less than that of SC/STs. Perhaps, the most interesting aspect with regard to the education of

the Muslims in the committee's report is that a mere "4 per cent" of Muslim children go to "madrasas". The Sachar committee, however, did not recommend reservation and seemed to have toed the line of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that a "fair share" of employment should be given to the community in both private and public sectors. Though the committee admits that the "formal sector" (organised sector) is shrinking, it is essential to ensure an "equitable share" of "available jobs" in the formal sector to Muslims. The report suggests that when recruiting panels are set up, a representative is kept on the board to ensure fair treatment to candidates. The Indian Express had first accessed the Sachar panel data and reported that Muslims fare worse even if the employer is the Government. For example, the share of the community in government jobs in West Bengal is 4.2 per cent against a population of 25.2 per cent. In Kerala, their share is 10.4 per cent against a population of 24.7 per cent and the corresponding figure for Assam is 11.02 per cent and 30.9 per cent. (Indian Express 18/11/06)

Muslims to Mulayam: Clarify stand (7)

Lucknow, Nov. 19: The All-India Muslim Personal Board (AIMPLB) has asked UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav to clarify his stand on the issues of a fresh notification in the Babri demolition case, bullet-proofing of the makeshift Ram temple in Ayodhya and amending the UP Zamindari Abolition Act. Three senior members of the AIMPLB — Mr S.Q.R. Ilyas, Mr Zafaryab Jilani and Begum Naseem Iqtedar Ali — said at a press conference here on Sunday that the chief minister had kept the notification issue hanging for more than three years now and he should finally clarify his stand on the issue. Mr Ilyas said that despite several resolutions and reminders by AIMPLB, the chief minister had not made any effort to issue a fresh notification in the Babri case and ensure trial of the accused persons. "The notification was quashed during the Rajnath Singh regime due to a technical fault and the court had said that if the state government wanted, it could issue a fresh notification and bring the accused within the purview of the trial. Whenever the AIMPLB president met the chief minister, he always reminded him about this and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav assured that his government would take necessary steps in the matter. However, the elections are now round the corner and the state government has not done anything in the matter. Therefore, we seek an explanation on the issue," Mr Ilyas said. He added that if the state government did not clarify its position, the board would create awareness among Muslims on the issue. "We will use all democratic means to register our protest. The working committee of the board is meeting in Delhi on November 26 and the general body will meet in January in Chennai and the issue will be discussed at both the meetings," he stated. Mr Jilani, meanwhile, asked the UP government to "clarify whether or not it favours a bullet proof structure for the make-shift Ram temple in Ayodhya". "The board is opposed to a bullet-proof structure because that would change the status quo position at the site that has to be maintained as per the Supreme Court orders. Putting up any structure at the place would amount to legitimising an illegal structure. The Centre has given an affidavit in the Supreme Court, based on a report sent by the UP government. The state government has been trying to shift the blame for this on the Centre but we want the UP government to categorically withdraw its report and say that it is opposed to any change at the site," Mr Jilani said. (Asian Age 20/11/06)

Missing factor in growth labs:Schar says ... (7)

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 23: Tracking the poor representation of Muslims in virtually every sector, the Sachar Committee, in its report to the Prime Minister, has uncovered a more worrying trend: in the IIMs and IITs, laboratories of India's growth story, Muslim students make only 1.3 per cent and 1.7 per cent (about 4 per cent in the higher stages) respectively. Data collected by the Committee from five IIMs for 2004-05 and 2005-06 puts the Muslim count at 1.3 per cent or 63 in a total of 4743 students. The Committee did not have the socio-religious break-up of the number of students who take the Common Admission Test (CAT) since no such data is collected. But on the basis of data available for all levels of the examination — the written test, the interview that follows and the group discussion — the Committee has concluded that while the success rate for Muslim candidates is better than those for other communities (a strike rate of "one out of three") yet, in the final list, only 1.3 per cent of those who make it are Muslims. As far as the IITs go, of the existing 27,161 IITians, "only 894 are Muslims." At the under-graduate level, only 1.7 per cent are Muslim. Though the percentage gets better at the higher stages — about 4 per cent — it's still lower than their population share. The share of Muslims in PhD courses is somewhat better than that for other courses. In its report, the Committee concludes that "apparently, Muslims are able to compete better when they complete their graduation." Educationist Anil

Sadgopal says he is “not surprised at the low figures for Muslims”. “I am sure the figures for Dalits and tribals are in the same range. With a high drop-out rate for Dalits, tribals and Muslims, how will they ever reach the level of being able to compete for seats in elite institutions like these? When only 5-6 per cent of school-going Dalits and tribals reach Class XII, with Muslims being in the same range, how will a decent percentage of these make it to elite lists? The problem is the lack of a good and equitable school system. If that’s not rectified, then most Muslims, Dalits or tribals will get filtered out at the school level itself,” says Sadgopal. Experts also say that lack of diversity in classrooms generally makes the quality of learning poorer for even those who make the list. Dr Madan Jha, Secretary, HRD in Bihar with a doctorate from Oxford on the subject of diversity in classrooms, says “research proves that diverse classrooms, reflecting diversity of all kinds — socio-economic groups, abilities, religions, castes and communities — make for better learning environments, everyone learns better if the class is more diverse. So, if even elite schools are the preserve of students with just one kind of profile, it doesn’t help them either.” As already reported by The Indian Express, as far as school enrolment goes, data with this committee showed that Muslims were falling behind levels attained by SC/STs. But this data on elite educational institutions confirms the trend of Muslims not having been able to catch up or get onto opportunities in the new India. (Indian Express 24/11/06)

Too many Muslims in prison, Sachar edits this out (7)

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 24: One set of numbers that the Justice Rajinder Sachar committee obtained from states told what is, perhaps, the most distressing story of the state of Muslims in India: in sharp contrast to schools and jobs, where their share is way below their share in the population, Muslims have a disproportionately high representation when it comes to being in prison — in many states, twice or thrice as much as their share of the population. And yet this crucial data, first reported by The Indian Express on October 29, finds no mention in Sachar’s final report that is expected to be tabled in Parliament next week. What makes this deletion surprising is that this data, showing such a high rate of incarceration, has significant social and political implications, including the further marginalisation of the community, reinforcing stereotypes and deepening prejudice. When asked about this omission, Sachar said: “It would be improper on my part to comment on any aspect of this report now as it has been submitted to the Prime Minister. It is yet to be tabled in the House.” The deleted data showed that when it came to Muslims in the prison population, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Kerala are the most disproportionate. • In Maharashtra, the percentage of Muslim jail inmates in all categories is way above their share in the population Muslim share in population is 10.6%, share in the total prison inmates is 32.4%.

• When it comes to those in prison for less than a year, Muslims contribute 40.6% of all prisoners in Maharashtra. • In Gujarat, the percentage of Muslims in the state is just 9.06% but they make up over a quarter of all jail inmates. • Assam, the second highest Muslim populated state in the country, after J&K, has 30.9% Muslims, and here, the percentage of Muslim jail inmates is 28.1. • Even Karnataka, which did relatively better than other states in providing jobs to Muslims, shows the same trend: 17.5% of its jail inmates are Muslim as compared with 12.23% of its population. • In Delhi, where Muslims make up 11.7% of the population, they constitute 29.1% of those in jail for less than a year. (Indian Express 25/11/06)

More relief for Gujarat riot victims (7)

New Delhi: With the Manmohan Singh Government reviewing existing policies governing the payment of compensation to victims of communal violence, the families of the over 2,000 individuals killed in Gujarat during the communal violence in the State in 2002 are likely to be the first to benefit from enhanced ex-gratia monies. According to PTI, the Centre has decided to pay Rs. 7 lakh as compensation to each victim of the Gujarat violence, which lasted several months that year. Most of those killed were Muslims. Though the existing State Government compensation package provides for only the payment of Rs. one lakh for each person killed, the new package, if finalised, will place the Gujarat victims on par with the victims of the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and other cities following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. "Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has decided that based on the compensation given to anti-Sikh riot victims, Rs. 7 lakh ex-gratia would be paid to victims if communal riots take place anywhere in the country," PTI quoted Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Sriparkash Jaiswal as saying. The BJP government of Narendra Modi had initially promised the victims of the Godhra train fire a total of Rs. two lakh but this figure was reduced to one lakh. The Centre's decision to review the level of compensation follows a recent report of the National Commission for Minorities pointing to the failure of

existing rehabilitation policies in Gujarat. Sources said the NCM also highlighted the wide disparity in compensation packages from incident to incident. (The Hindu 27/11/06)

Examine panel report: CPI (7)

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Sunday urged the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government to examine the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee report on the status of minorities in the context of affirmative actions envisaged in the Constitution that provide for recognition of socially and educationally backward classes. "The CPI has been repeatedly demanding that affirmative actions are required to ameliorate the educational and economic condition of the minorities," party general secretary A.B. Bardhan said at the end of the two-day national executive meeting. Party national secretary D. Raja said the CPI always maintained that irrespective of religion, dalits should be provided reservation. "Even the Mandal Commission had identified several Muslims as Other Backward Classes. As a matter of principle, we do not support the idea of giving reservation on the basis of religion." The national executive demanded that all professional Muslim communities be accorded benefits that are available to their counterparts in the majority community. There should be no discrimination in recognising Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes on the basis of religion. As a majority of Muslims belonged to various artisan communities such as weavers, the Government should announce a special package for them, and they should be given soft bank loans. Adequate funds should be allotted to the existing institutions, special efforts taken for their educational uplift, and there should be no discrimination on the basis of religion for Government jobs and other benefits. (The Hindu 27/11/06)

Ensure fair representation of Muslims in security forces, NCM tells Centre (7)

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 26: In the midst of the debate over the state of Muslims in the country, the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has asked the Home Ministry to ensure a fair representation of religious minorities in the police and paramilitary forces. It wants the ministry to make the necessary provisions to meet this objective in the new Police Act. Going a step further, the minorities panel has suggested that a way must be found to ensure that people with "bias against religious minorities" should not be part of the recruitment process. Such screening, the NCM feels, should also be factored into the promotions system. More significantly, the NCM has suggested that the punishment for "dereliction" of duty during "communal disturbance" must be immediate dismissal from service. These recommendations seek to address the inadequate representation of religious minorities, particularly Muslims, in the police and the paramilitary forces. NCM sources point out that police forces of states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal have hardly any Muslim representation. Muslim organisations grappling with this issue have on earlier occasions urged the Centre to at least adopt the the BC Roy model. As CM of West Bengal, he had posted a Muslim inspector with a non-Muslim additional inspector or vice-versa in police stations covering areas of Muslim concentration. It is not the first time that the NCM has raised this issue. Poor representation of religious minorities in the police force have been mentioned in earlier NCM reports, but this is the first time concrete suggestions have been made to address the problem. "The force should be broadly representative of the people they police and to ensure that the forces should have more members from the minorities communities in its rolls," National Commission for Minorities chairman Hamid Ansari said, adding that the forces should be "professionally managed and run" and lambasted the Gujarat administration in dealing with the post-Godhra riots. (Indian Express 27/11/06)

Muslim deprivation widespread: Sachar Committee (7)

NEW DELHI: The Rajinder Sachar Committee, appointed by the Prime Minister to evaluate the social, economic and educational status of Muslims, has called for path-breaking efforts to include and mainstream them — efforts that will at once address the inequities experienced at all levels and in all spheres by the community and eliminate its perception of discrimination. Suggesting the adoption of suitable mechanisms to ensure equity and equality of opportunity to Muslims in residential, work and educational spaces, the first of its kind report, tabled in Parliament on Thursday, makes a strong pitch for making diversity a key feature of public policy. The report emphasises that these objectives can be achieved only "when the importance of Muslims as an intrinsic part of the diverse Indian social mosaic is squarely recognised." It recommends the creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission, modelled on the U.K. Race Relations Act, 1976, to look into the grievances of religious minorities. "It is imperative that if the minorities have certain perceptions of being aggrieved, all efforts should be made by the state to find a mechanism by which these complaints could be attended to expeditiously." Other institutional mechanisms

suggested include a national bank to collect and store data, and an autonomous authority to assess, monitor and suggest timely policy options. The report does not recommend reservation in education and jobs for the community as a whole. However, it makes a forceful case for "multifarious measures, including reservation" for Muslims with similar traditional occupations as that of the Scheduled Castes "as they are cumulatively oppressed." The report notes that the community exhibits "deficits and deprivation" in practically all dimensions of development. "In fact, by and large, Muslims rank somewhat above the SCs/STs but below Hindu OBCs, Other Minorities and Hindu General (mostly upper castes) in almost all indicators considered." In States with large Muslims populations, "the situation is particularly grave in ... West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam." What adds to the "development deficit," is the perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against and excluded. (The Hindu 1/12/06)

Data from armed forces not used, says Sachar (7)

NEW DELHI: Acting on a Defence Ministry request, the Prime Minister's High Level Committee under Justice Rajinder Sachar has not included the data received from the Air Force and the Navy on the number of Muslims in these services in its report on the community. As part of its mandate, the seven-member committee sought information from the three services on the number of Muslims in their employ. While the Army refused to furnish the data, the Navy and the Air Force obliged the committee amid a controversy. "The Ministry of Defence informed the committee that it was not possible for it to supply the data for the Army. It also requested the committee not to use the data which had already been sent by the Air Force and the Navy," Justice Sachar noted in the foreword to the report. "Thus, in the report, the committee has not used the data received from the armed forces." At the same time, Justice Sachar has sought to clarify that the "innocuous purpose" of seeking such information was "to know if Muslims were under-represented in some departments or any other sphere." Further, "such an approach is not divisive but is positive, an essential requirement for impartial and caring administration in its commitment for instilling confidence in the fairness of the government's functioning. Without considering such information, the Government may not be in a position to take any corrective action, even with the best of intentions." The Sachar Committee was set up on March 9, 2005 to plug the information gap on the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. It was to have submitted its report by June 8, 2006, but could complete the task only mid-November due to delay in receipt of information from various organisations including the National Sample Survey Organisation on its 61st Round and the Reserve Bank of India. "Important part of the data was not forthcoming in time from many States," Justice Sachar pointed out in his letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. (The Hindu 1/12/06)

Sachar nails madrasa myth: Only 4% Muslim kids go there (7)

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 30: This Sunday, the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, which comes under the Human Resource Development Ministry, prepares to host several Muslim clerics and scholars in Delhi to discuss the way forward on constituting a Central madrasa board to oversee 'modernization' of madrasas across the country. Grants, schemes and aid will possibly be on the cards. At present, only some states like West Bengal have a madrasa board which tries to ensure a certain degree of uniformity and introduction of modern elements in madrasa curriculum. But data collected by the Sachar Committee — tasked by the Prime Minister to find out the status of Muslims, the panel's report was tabled in the Lok Sabha today — rejects the theory that madrasas need to be reformed and aided by the state if the educational status of Muslims has to improve. Because the Sachar Committee data shows that only 3 to 4 per cent of school-going Muslim children go to madrasas. Dispelling the impression that Muslims flock to madrasas in large numbers, the Committee report concludes that "Muslim parents are not averse to mainstream education or to send their children to affordable government schools." The report also differentiates between the madrasa and the maktab. The madrasa is an established religious school, sometimes residential, and the maktab is the neighbouring school, attached to a masjid which supplements 'mainstream' school children with some religious instruction. Citing the example of Kerala (which has a sizeable Muslim population) "where 60,000 children are enrolled in madrasas and maktab", the report notes that maktab are seen as necessary by those Muslim families who see 'mainstream' schools as providing inadequate knowledge of Urdu, or the Persian script, necessary to read the Koran. Hence, the need to supplement with a stint at the local maktab. The report explicitly asks policy makers to be careful and distinguish between maktab and madrasas. The Sachar report, however, says that the government should provide "equivalence" to certain madrasa

courses with Class XII and then graduation so that madrasa-educated children and young adults can compete for jobs with children from 'mainstream schools'. (Indian Express 1/12/06)

Muslim areas lack basic amenities: report (7)

NEW DELHI: Muslim dominated villages, whether in West Bengal, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, are less likely to be served by infrastructure facilities like an educational institution, healthcare facilities, 'pucca' roads, bus-stops or even electricity or tap water, but the housing of Muslims was more or less at par with other communities. However, surveys showed that in the southern States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu differences between infrastructure in low or high Muslim populated villages was only marginal. The Sachar Committee report found a "clear and significant inverse correlation" between the proportion of the Muslim population and the availability of various facilities, which in turn leads to further social and economic disadvantage for the minority community. The report has suggested urgent policy initiatives to improve matters. The suggestion, though not clearly articulated, is that there has been a State bias, conscious or otherwise, against Muslims, for nothing else could explain consistent findings of lower levels of infrastructure of all kinds in villages with high Muslim populations. Chapter seven of the report demonstrates with the help of diagrams that villages with higher concentrations of Muslims have less access to even services like posts and telegraph, and the situation deteriorates further if the high Muslim concentration village is larger, with a population over 2000. As Muslims are less landed and more likely to be artisans, lack of 'pucca' roads and bus stops means that the economic opportunities that may have opened up for them elusive. Using the National Sample Survey Organisation (61st round) data, the Sachar panel found that use of electricity for lighting is less among Muslims when compared to the all-Indian average and the disadvantage is "quite large" in Muslim concentrated villages, with "the share of villages with no electricity increasing substantially" as the size of the village falls and Muslim population rises. A number of diagrams and charts are used by the Sachar report to establish this point. (The Hindu 1/12/06)

Include specific Muslim groups among SCs: report (7)

NEW DELHI: The Sachar Committee report has suggested that it will be "most appropriate" to absorb the lowest category 'arzal' Muslims, suffering maximum social deprivations, among the Scheduled Castes by amending the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order of 1950 that has kept Muslim and Christian converts from among the Hindu Dalits out of its purview, denying them any benefits of reservations. "It would be most appropriate if they [the lowest Muslims groups known as 'arzals' mostly working as butchers, washermen, barbers and scavengers] are absorbed in the Scheduled Caste list, or at least in a separate category, Most Backward Classes, carved out of the Other Backward Classes," the report has argued. It points out that the Constitution (SC) order of 1950 has its origin in the Imperial (SC) order of 1936 that has rejected the SC status to Christians and Muslims. The report asserts that some Muslim communities known as 'arzals' are converts from "untouchables" among the Hindus and "change in religion did not bring about any change in their social or economic status." Instead of getting the benefits given to the SCs, the 'arzals' were clubbed with Muslim 'ajlafs' (meaning degraded or unholy social groups classified as backward), signifying converts to Islam from low social ranking Hindus. The report notes that sociological studies have affirmed the presence of "descent based social stratification" among Muslims. The Sachar Committee says that Muslim 'ajlafs' are equivalent to OBCs in terms of their deprivation levels, the 'arzals' to SCs, and only the Muslim 'ashrafs' suffered no social deprivation as they were converts from the Hindu upper castes or had "foreign blood". The 1950 Constitution (SC) Order was amended twice, once in 1956 to include SCs among Sikhs, and the second time in 1990 to include SC converts to Buddhism, thus practically only Christians and Muslims Dalit converts were denied the benefit of reservations for SCs. (The Hindu 1/12/06)

Madrasas not breeding terrorists: Arjun Singh (7)

NEW DELHI : Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh on Sunday said the allegation that madrasas were a breeding ground for terrorist was "untrue." The Government was open to suggestions on setting up a Central Madrasa Board. He was speaking at a conference convened by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions. The meeting was the culmination of a series of consultations held across the country. Referring to the Sachar Committee report on the status of minorities, he said the Government would try its best to implement its suggestions. Statistics showed that hardly 4 per cent of Muslim children went to madrasas. Minister of State for HRD, M.A.A. Fatmi, said secondary and primary education would be strengthened to ensure greater representation for Muslims in

institutions of higher learning such as the IITs and IIMs ensured. He suggested imparting technical training to people in their mother tongue to create more job opportunities. "The Sachar Committee report is a mirror for politicians to see where Muslim education stands today." NCMEI Chairman M.S.A. Siddiqui said affiliation to the proposed central madrasa board should be voluntary. It should be set up under legislation and free from Government interference. All India Muslim Personal Law Board member Kamal Faruqi also spoke. "We want the Government to leave the madarsas alone." (The Hindu 4/12/06)

Sachar report: Arjun Singh forms panel (7)

NEW DELHI: Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh has set up a 13-member high-level committee, under the chairmanship of Minister of State for HRD M. A. A. Fatmi, to examine the education-related recommendations made by the Sachar Committee. The Sachar Committee had made the recommendations in its report on the 'Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India.' The Ministry's committee has been asked to prepare a plan of action based on the recommendations by January 31, 2007. Besides the senior-most bureaucrats of the Ministry, the committee includes vice-chancellors of two universities, University Grants Commission Vice-Chairman, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Monitoring Committee for Minorities Education, and the Directors of the National Council of Educational Research and Training and the Central Board of Secondary Education. (The Hindu 3/12/06)

Godhra train fire conspiracy theory bogus, says counsel (7)

AHMEDABAD: Jansangharsha Manch advocate Mukul Sinha, fighting the 2002 Gujarat riot cases on behalf of the victims, on Tuesday sought to demolish the "theory of conspiracy" in the Godhra train carnage advanced by the State Government and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Summing up his arguments before the G.T. Nanavati-K.G. Shah Judicial Inquiry Commission, Dr. Sinha, quoting from affidavits filed by senior police and railway officials and "independent witnesses," said circumstantial evidence did not support the conspiracy theory. There was "absolutely no information" about the journey by kar sevaks aboard the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002; there was no possibility of chain pulling by the alleged conspirators from outside the train; and there was no second chain pulling on the outskirts of the Godhra station platform, where coach S-6 was allegedly set on fire, Dr. Sinha said. All affidavits filed by the security personnel, including Director-General of Police K. Charavarthy and the Railway Protection Force, mentioned that there was no prior information of kar sevaks travelling by the train. Then how could the Godhra Muslims "conspire" to set the train afire? In his affidavit, Central Reserve Police Force constable Mohan Yadav said he saw neither any unusual movement at the signal nor any large crowd gathering there before the arrival of the train. Assistant station master Harimohan Meena, who was present in the A cabin, mentioned that people in groups of 10 to 15, including women and children, were running towards the train as it left the platform and before it halted at the signal. He estimated that the crowd consisted of 250-500 people. (The Hindu 6/12/06)

Muslims still await justice in Babri case (7)

Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh): On the eve of the anniversary of the Babri Mosque demolition, Muslims said they were still waiting for justice, though the incident has gathered dust. "We see it as an atrocity on us. We observe it as a day of mourning. We want that what is ours should be given to us. The court should pronounce its verdict as soon as possible," said Haji Abdul Ahat, a Muslim, who witnessed the demolition of the mosque. Hindu leaders, however, said Muslims had no reason to feel wronged. "In the history of India, Hindus have never destroyed a mosque. There was no mosque here. It was just a makeshift structure. There were pillars of the golden temple of Lord Ram built by King Vikramaditya. There were remains of that temple. There was not even a single mark of a mosque. There were no minarets, no place where Muslims perform cleaning rites before prayer and no Islamic religious symbol. Hence, calling it a mosque is a big mistake. If a mosque was destroyed, then the Muslims should mourn. But one should keep in mind that there was no mosque, only a makeshift structure," said Nriya Gopal Das, President of Ramjanmabhoomi Movement. Ayodhya's residents have condemned the political overtones attached to the issue, saying Hindus and Muslims should be left alone to arrive at an amicable resolution to the dispute. "We believe that this can only be solved if there is an amicable attempt to reach a solution. The Government should show interest in this. If they sit together and discuss the issue, then hopefully a solution can be reached. The outsiders play political games," said Sadiq Ali, a resident. The anniversary still raises tensions between the two communities across the country, and often results in rioting. (ANI)

The Supreme Court, which is seized of the issue, has restrained any construction on the site till a lower court finally disposes off the dispute. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, sparked off the worst Hindu-Muslim riots, claiming the lives of about 3,000 people. (The Hindu 6/12/06)

"Godhra conspiracy theory bogus" (7)

AHMEDABAD: Jansangharsha Manch advocate Mukul Sinha, fighting the 2002 Gujarat riot cases on behalf of the victims, on Tuesday sought to demolish the "theory of conspiracy" in the Godhra train carnage advanced by the State Government and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Summing up his arguments before the G.T. Nanavati-K.G. Shah Judicial Inquiry Commission, Dr. Sinha, quoting from affidavits filed by senior police and railway officials and "independent witnesses," said circumstantial evidence did not support the conspiracy theory. There was "absolutely no information" about the journey by kar sevaks aboard the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002; there was no possibility of chain pulling by the alleged conspirators from outside the train; and there was no second chain pulling on the outskirts of the Godhra station platform, where coach S-6 was allegedly set on fire, Dr. Sinha said. All affidavits filed by the security personnel, including Director-General of Police K. Charavarthy and the Railway Protection Force, mentioned that there was no prior information of kar sevaks travelling by the train, the counsel added. (The Hindu 7/12/06)

BJP, back to basics, stops House on Muslim jobs (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 11: The main Opposition BJP on Monday attacked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on his remarks at the National Development Council that the minorities, particularly Muslims, must have first claim to the country's resources, leading to pandemonium in both Houses of Parliament. The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were adjourned repeatedly without transacting any business. The BJP and Shiv Sena wanted the Prime Minister to apologise for his remarks, but the government turned it down. The uproar in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha began right from the word go as a determined Opposition demanded an apology from the Prime Minister. Both Houses were adjourned for the day without transacting any business after three adjournments in the pre-lunch session. Trouble began in the Rajya Sabha soon after proceedings commenced while in the Lok Sabha it started after Telangana Rashtra Samithi supremo K. Chandrasekhar Rao took the oath and Speaker Somnath Chatterjee greeted a parliamentary delegation from Namibia. BJP and Shiv Sena members stormed the Well of the House chanting slogans like "Pradhan Mantri maafi maango (Prime Minister, apologise)" and "Desh ko mat baanto (Don't divide the nation)". Mr P.R. Das Munshi was heard alleging that the BJP was attempting to divide the country. In the din, the presiding officers of both Houses ordered the laying of papers listed for the day before adjourning them till Tuesday. Earlier, in the Lok Sabha, BJP deputy leader V.K. Malhotra demanded the suspension of Question Hour to discuss the issue and was unrelenting when the Speaker asked him to raise during Zero Hour. "I have the right to seek the suspension of Question Hour," Mr Malhotra said as other BJP members demanded an apology from the Prime Minister and waved copies of his speech. Mr Malhotra was unrelenting when the Speaker said he could raise the matter after Question Hour..... (Asian Age 12/12/06)

Muslims must not be vote bank for parties' (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 13: Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh at a meet on "Sachchar Committee and Muslims" said that the time has come for Muslims to become bank managers and not to be the vote bank of the so-called secular political parties. The former PM was speaking at the meet organised by National Economic Forum for Muslims at Islamic Centre, here, on Tuesday. He declared that if his party comes to power or holds the key to power in Uttar Pradesh, the first decision of the Cabinet within one hour of the government formation will be to bifurcate the 27 per cent OBC quota among advanced OBCs, others and Muslims in proportion to their population. He called upon the Central government to revoke the Article 341, the only communal clause in the Constitution, imposed by a presidential order in 1950, which bars Muslims and Christians from SC/ST reservation, due to their religion. Elaborating on vote bank politics, he further said that Muslims vote for secular parties out of fear. The time has come for Muslims to choose who will deliver for them, and not, who can necessarily defeat BJP, he claimed. By following the policy of "Defeat BJP", Muslims have suffered a lot, he added. Addressing the meet, deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha Rahman Khan, said that there is no need to wait for the government to implement the Sachchar report, some programmes can be taken up right away for the economic and educational development of the Muslims. (Asian Age 14/12/06)

Muslims still marginalised in Gujarat (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 14: Four years after the Gujarat carnage, Muslims continue to be marginalised and discriminated through means other than violence in the state. From pushing Muslims to the borders of the cities and segregating them from the mainstream society, new ways are being adopted to ensure the ghettoisation of Muslims in Gujarat, it was revealed during a discussion held here on writer Dionne Bunsha's book *Scarred: Experiments with Violence in Gujarat*. Revolving around the existence of a much larger agenda behind the Gujarat carnage that left hundreds of people killed, Bunsha's book tells the story of those people whose lives were changed overnight by the violence that followed the Godhra incident. "I always hoped while writing this book that it would become obsolete by the time I finished it. But here we are, four years after the incident still discussing it. The situation that provoked that kind of violence still has not changed in the state. The terror among the minority community of Gujarat, specially the Muslims continues to be there. It is tragic to see that the land of Gandhi has transformed into a land of goonda raj," Bunsha said. For Sheikh Naushad Rasool and Hafizabanu Naushad, who were forced to move away from their house in Pavagad village following the carnage in 2002, life has never been the same. "The police had told us to move from our village as they said our lives were not safe there. They told us that they would safely take us away and we could return after things were normal again. But when we tried to come back, the villagers were not ready to accept Muslims back. There were fights and we were beaten up," Mr Rasool said. "We have been now given a house in the relief camp but there are no facilities here like water, roads or even schools for our children. Work has also suffered as we are unable to make enough money," he added. (Asian Age 15/12/06)

Muslims see harassment under pressure (7)

JAIPUR: Muslim groups of Rajasthan on Friday accused the State police and administration of acting under the pressure of the Sangh Parivar to harass the Muslim minority by implicating them in false cases, displaying bias against them and discriminating against them in all walks of life. Representatives of the Rajasthan Muslim Forum -- an umbrella organisation of Muslim bodies -- alleged at a press conference here that an "open licence" given to the police to target Muslims formed part of a ploy by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government to communalise the State's atmosphere during the next two years before the 2008 Assembly elections. "The BJP wants to create conditions on the Gujarat pattern favourable for generating hatred against Muslims that would give political mileage to it. This dangerous strategy can replicate in Rajasthan the mayhem and violence witnessed on an unprecedented scale in Gujarat," said Mohammed Salim, State president of Jamat-e-Islami Hind. The Forum leaders cited a number of instances in the State since the BJP came to power in 2003, in which Muslims were "targeted by the administration in connivance with Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists", while pointing out that Muslims could not expect justice under BJP rule. The cases included anti-Muslim violence in Sarada (Udaipur), Mandal and Jahazpur (Bhilwara) and Karauli, implicating Muslims in "false cases" during an anti-encroachment drive at Hasanpura (Jaipur), lathi-charge on Muslim crowds in the Walled City of Jaipur last month, and the arrest of 'innocent' Muslims after a rally organised by Bajrang Dal on December 6 in Suket (Kota). A delegation of the Forum met the Director-General of Police, A.S. Gill, here on Wednesday to register its protest against criminal cases lodged against 63 persons and lack of action against the guilty police officers. The delegation was left aghast by the stance of Mr. Gill, who according to them blatantly justified the police action. (The Hindu 16/12/06)

Godhra: Manch wants fresh probe (7)

AHMEDABAD: The Jansangharsha Manch, representing the victims of the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002, has urged the G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah judicial inquiry commission to recommend a fresh inquiry into the Sabarmati Express train fire. Justifying the demand, the Manch advocate, Mukul Sinha, told the commission probing into the Godhra train carnage and the post-Godhra communal riots that it was necessary to "establish the truth." He alleged that the investigation done by the Gujarat police was "not intended to bring out the truth" but was only an exercise to "establish Chief Minister Narendra Modi's conspiracy theory as true." Dr. Sinha recalled the press statement issued by Mr. Modi within hours of the train carnage on February 27, 2002; that it was a "pre-planned, one-sided collective terrorist attack" on the kar sevaks travelling by the train. He said Mr. Modi did not wait for the investigating authorities to inquire into the matter but drew his own conclusions. The investigation that followed was conducted not only "without the slightest application of mind," but was also directed at justifying the pre-conceived conclusion

of the chief executive of the State," he claimed. Dr. Sinha said he would not hazard a guess on how the fire broke out in S-6 coach; it could be a case of flash fire, but there certainly was "not an iota of evidence" to justify the Government's conspiracy theory nor was there any proof of use of petrol or any other hydrocarbons for setting the coach afire. Government Pleader Arvind Pandya claimed before the mediapersons that the prosecution would prove that Dr. Sinha's arguments were merely "based on hypothesis." (The Hindu 18/12/06)

VHP funded my battle against Banerjee panel: Bhatia (7)

AHMEDABAD, DECEMBER 17: The man on whose petition the Gujarat High Court termed Justice UC Banerjee Commission as illegal, is not sure on which grounds he had challenged the constitution of the commission. Nor does he remember when he had moved the High Court. But one thing that Neelkanth Bhatia is candid about is that the VHP supported him and bore all expense of the legal battle. Bhatia, a survivor of the Godhra incident, had been evading mediapersons ever since his petition had been moved in the HC in September 2005. The Indian Express, which had been trying to speak to Bhatia for the last one month, finally managed to track him down on Friday night. Bhatia had been refusing to speak on pleas that he was busy with his night shifts and increased workload at the factory. But when this correspondent met him and his family members at his Harinagar Society residence near CTM cross roads on city outskirts, he admitted his links with the VHP. He, however, refused to be photographed. Bhatia had survived the February 27, 2002 torching of S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express in Godhra, with burns on both legs. While that incident claimed 59 lives, at least 1,000 more were killed in the communal riots that broke out in the aftermath of that. Bhatia, 52, works as a tool fitter at a private factory in Vatva GIDC. His family of six — wife Mandakini, three sons and a daughter-in-law survives on his modest monthly salary of Rs 5,000. The couple, however, hold important positions in the VHP set-up. And they have also been given police protection at their residence since the Godhra incident. When asked on which grounds he had challenged the Banerjee Commission, Bhatia said it had given varying reports at different points of time. "It once said that the coach caught fire while someone was cooking food. Later it said that it was an accident. How can they give different reports?" he reasoned, adding that the High Court had rightly held it illegal. He went on: "When the Nanavati-Shah Commission is already probing the case, why should another commission be there?" Asked when he moved the court, Bhatia said: "I don't remember exactly when, but it was after Lalu Prasad Yadav became the Railway Minister." Asked if the VHP supported him in the legal battle, Bhatia was more than being honest: "VHP ka to pura support hai na humko (we have full support of the VHP)." And about the expenses, especially the fat fees the prominent advocates took, Bhatia just shot back: "Woh ho jata hai. Lekin kharch kaun karta hai yeh likhne ki jarurat nahi hai." (that is taken care of, but you don't have to write all this). On being asked to name his sponsors, an angry Bhatia started cursing all mediapersons and refused to talk more. (Indian Express 18/12/06)

Govt promises to implement Sachar recommendations (7)

New Delhi : The Government on Monday told the Rajya Sabha that it was committed to implement the recommendations of the Sachar committee report on the status of Muslims but did not give any assurance on reservation for Dalit Muslims. Stating this, Union Minister for Minority Affairs AR Antulay said amidst interruptions by Samajwadi Party MPs that "reservation can be an instrument but is certainly not a goal" while providing reservations for Dalit Muslims. Fielding a volley of questions, primarily raised by the Samajwadi Party members, about the plight of minority community and implementation of the Sachar Committee report, Antulay said the Government would implement the recommendations. When the agitated Samajwadi Party members sought to know the Government's stand on providing reservations for the Dalit Muslims, the Minister refrained from committing himself and said he did not want to make a promise without studying all the aspects. Samajwadi Party members, however, were not satisfied with Antulay's replies to questions raised by one of its MPs Abu Asim Azmi and raised slogans demanding the immediate implementation of the Sachar Committee report. They also charged that the plight of Muslims worsened in the past 60 years and the Congress was responsible for this phenomenon. The Minister, however, did not yield despite repeated interruptions by the Samajwadi Party members and said it would be wrong to blame any single party. He also urged the Elders to appreciate the measures taken by the present regime and said the 15-point programme announced by the Prime Minister covered financial assistance to the poor Muslims among other measures. The UPA wanted to bring all sections of the society on par and would do whatever possible and the Prime Minister's programme for the welfare of minorities was a major step in this direction. Refuting another claim that the Government did not allow a

debate on the Sachar Committee report despite promising to do so, Antulay said he had never committed to hold a discussion during the current session of Parliament. (Pioneer 19/12/06)

Muslim MPs seek separate IITs, IIMs, 5,000 schools, scholarships (11)

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 19 : In a significant development after the tabling of the Sachar report, Muslim MPs, cutting across party lines, today handed over a wishlist of sorts to Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh: IITs and IIMs exclusively for Muslims, 5,000 schools, 2 lakh scholarships and more campuses of the Aligarh Muslim University across the country. The wishlist came from some 10 Muslim MPs who were called for an interaction at the Indian Islamic Cultural Centre in the Capital. The meeting was also attended by HRD Minister of State Mohd Ali Ashraf Fatmi and senior officials. Sources pointed out that despite the low turnout of Muslim MPs — only 10 out of 50-plus showed up — there was active participation. Fatmi, who heads the HRD Ministry's high-level committee on Muslim education, told The Indian Express: "There was frank discussion with the MPs, ranging from primary to higher education. They came up with interesting ideas." Sources said the MPs asked for setting up 2,000 Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Schools) exclusively for Muslim children, of which 1,000 should be for boys and another 1,000 for girls. Since Muslim girls have a poor track record in primary education, the MPs demanded 3,000 residential schools for Muslim girls on the lines of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. They asked for setting up of four campuses each of Aligarh Muslim University and Maulana Azad National Urdu University across the country and scholarships for 2 lakh Muslim students, especially in higher education, so that needy students can study. A senior HRD official, present at the meeting, said, "The MPs said since IITs and IIMs have less than 2 per cent of Muslim students, the HRD Ministry should create IITs and IIMs exclusively for Muslim children." Urdu schools, they also demanded, should be given adequate infrastructure support. "Minority-run societies and NGOs, if they wish to open schools, should be given CBSE affiliation without any delay," an MP demanded. The MPs said that these suggestions should get reflected in the forthcoming budget as well as the Eleventh Plan. The HRD Ministry panel on Muslim education is expected to submit a report by January 31. (Indian Express 20/12/06)

Govt hints at funds for Muslims in Budget (7)

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 19: Instead of opening up the Sachar Committee report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslims for a debate, the government plans to take note of the findings of the report either by legislative measure or by considerations in the coming Budget. That the government is geared up to adopt policies and work out a financial package for the minority population was clear today when the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, fending queries on why the report was not discussed in the Winter session of Parliament, said the government would duly take note of the report. "In the Budget session, there would either be some legislative measure or targeted budgetary allocation (for the Muslims)," Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi said and added, "It is being duly considered, There is already a committee going into it." With Assembly elections scheduled in four states, including Punjab and UP, sources said the government could ill-afford to let the Opposition hijack a debate on the report and communally divide the polity. But budgetary allocation or legislation would come as a fait accompli. On the Women's Reservation Bill, Dasmunsi hinted that the legislation could be introduced at a time and in a manner that would make it implementable in the next round of Lok Sabha elections slated to take place in 2009. Citing time constraint, he said the inter-session period would be utilised to work out a consensus on the Bill. It may then come up for the Budget session. (Indian Express 20/12/06)

Muslims prefer access to education (7)

NEW DELHI : Instead of reservation, Muslims would rather the Government open schools, anganwadis and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in areas dominated by the community to improve access to education. At the same time, some Muslim MPs and NGOs working within the community were of the view that Scheduled Castes among Muslims should get reservation, as they suffer double discrimination. This, according to Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development M.A.A. Fatmi, was the sum and substance of his meetings with Muslim MPs and NGOs over the past two days. Briefing mediapersons, he said there was a view that Article 341 of the Constitution should be used to extend reservation to Scheduled Castes within the community. However, the Minister said the reservation issue was not discussed in great detail at the meeting, which he had convened as head of the 13-member high-level committee set up by HRD Minister Arjun Singh to draw up a roadmap on the Sachar Committee Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India. Some MPs said access

of Muslim children to Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas was limited because they had more or less become the exclusive domain of the children of government employees. With only a small percentage of government employees being Muslims, access of the community to these schools was limited. On setting up a Central Madrasa Board, he said there was no consensus, as the Muslims feared that a unified structure would lead to interference in the functioning of the madrasas. The report on the demands made by the Muslim MPs and NGOs will be presented on January 10, he said. (The Hindu 21/12/06)

Malegaon: 'SIMI hit mosque to start riots' (7)

Mumbai, December 21: Hours before the September 8 Malegaon serial blasts case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Anti-Terrorist Squad of the Maharashtra Police today filed the chargesheet in the case, claiming that its investigations were complete. The ATS contends that the nine accused, who are allegedly active members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), had hatched and executed the conspiracy with the help of two Pakistanis in the textile town to "infuriate the entire Muslim community and trigger communal riots". Thirty-one people died and 312 were injured in four blasts, of which three were inside the Hamidiya Masjid and Bara Kabrastan. The fourth was at Mushawart Chowk. The Malegaon blasts chargesheet is clear about the motive but, unlike the July 11 Mumbai serial blasts chargesheet, it fails to establish the identities of the two Pakistanis. All that it says is that one of the Pakistanis is "learnt to be Muzammil", while the other is unidentified. Investigations have also failed to establish the identities of the two men who had bought the bicycles that were used to plant the bombs, though the ATS claims in the chargesheet that the prime conspirators and the planters have been arrested. The chargesheet does not say how the 20 kg of RDX and other explosives used in the blasts reached Malegaon from Mumbai. It says the explosives were brought to Mumbai in the third week of July, after 7/11, by SIMI activists Mohammed Ali Sheikh and Asif Khan alias Junaid. And that they handed it over to prime accused Shabbir Ahmed Masiullah. The chargesheet does not explain where Mohammed Ali Sheikh and Junaid got the explosives. Neither does it say why the police did not know about the involvement of Masiullah — who had been arrested by the Mumbai Police Crime Branch on August 11 — till three months after his arrest, which was almost a month before the Malegaon blasts. (Indian Express 22/12/06)

Riots rehab gets poor report card from MPs (7)

AHMEDABAD, DECEMBER 22 : The delegation of MPs belonging to the UPA, which visited the rehabilitation sites of the riot-hit in Gujarat last month, has presented its report to the Prime Minister. Citing the conditions at the sites to be appalling, the report says they were devoid of basic civic infrastructure like drinking water, sanitation and approach roads. It has sought a financial package on the lines declared for victims of 1984 riots in Delhi. The nine-member delegation had on November 30 visited areas like Naroda Patiya, Citizen Nagar, Kifayat Nagar, Mahajir Nagar and Himant Nagar in Sabarkantha district, where 2002 riot victims have been rehabilitated. In their report presented to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on December 19, the delegation suggested that since the Gujarat Government had failed to discharge its constitutional duties, it should be dismissed. The delegation ruefully observed that despite the Centre providing Rs 150 crore, the Modi Government returned Rs 19.10 crore as unspent money to the Centre while not taking proper care to rehabilitate the riot-affected people. The delegation members sought to know why the state Government did not make use of the money to create infrastructure like drinking water, drainage, schools and roads. It also observed that at no site where the victims have been resettled did the state Government provide land. "Almost in all localities, the state Government did not provide any land for rehabilitation. The NGOs purchased land and constructed houses on them," the report said. Regarding compensation, members mentioned that they received large number of complaints regarding inadequate compensation for loss of life as well as loss of property. The report also observed that no survey was carried out to assess the loss victims suffered. The report also observed that all houses built by the NGOs were small, of size 10X15 sq ft and 12X20 sq ft. "Such houses are very small for large families but still they are staying because of no option available to them," mentioned the report. Recommending several measures, the report stressed that more financial assistance should be given to the affected people on the lines of the package declared for victims of 1984 riots in Delhi. It has also recommended that the package to be declared by the Central government be given to a Central agency like HUDCO, which can build the infrastructure in the localities. It has also emphasised that Gujarat Government be kept out of any such exercise. It also recommends that a special survey be carried out by

an agency like National Minorities Commission to rehabilitate these families economically, and finding out source of employment for them. (Indian Express 23/12/06)

"Muslims in Suket being harassed by police" (7)

JAIPUR: A fact-finding team of Rajasthan Muslim Forum, which visited Suket town in Kota district to probe into the trouble created by Bajrang Dal activists on December 6, has accused the administration and police of targeting the Muslim minority and harassing Muslim youths in the town under pressure from Sangh Parivar. The team found during its visit to Suket over the week-end that police had slapped serious cases on innocent Muslim youngsters and were torturing them in custody, while the Bajrang Dal activists, who brandished swords and tried to attack Muslim localities, were let off with minor charges. Police used force against a crowd of 1,500 Bajrang Dal members in Suket on December 6 when they raised provocative slogans against Muslims and tried to storm into their houses while taking out a rally to "celebrate" the demolition of Babri Masjid. When the crowd was dispersed, a youth fell into a nearby mine filled with water and died. The fact-finding team, lead by Jamat-e-Islami Hind State president Mohammed Salim, said here on Sunday that while the police action preventing a direct confrontation between Hindus and Muslims was creditable, there was no justification for implicating Muslims in the non-bailable offence of attempt to murder. "The arrest of Muslim youths in concocted cases and their torture in the police custody proves that the administration is acting under an intense pressure of Sangh Parivar. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is out to implement the Sangh's divisive agenda in the State," said the members of the fact-finding team. The members of the team, constituted by the Muslim Forum were Syed Azam Ali, Gulsher Ahmed Khan, Mujeeb Azad, Zafar Mohammed, Saifullah Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Abdul Samad and Abdul Aziz. (The Hindu 26/12/06)

'Not enough Muslim participation in government'(7)

New Delhi, Dec. 26: A status paper on Muslims to be submitted at the two-day-long international conference of minorities and dalits in New Delhi on December 27 and 28, finds that high school dropout rates, few going for higher education like in the IIMs, IITs and MBAs, lower margins in professional courses and social backwardness to be alarming among these sections of society. The report, prepared by Qurban Ali and Arshi Khan, which shows that Muslims in India are turning their back on communal issues and looking towards development, governance and capacity-building, says the lack of adequate participation of Muslims in governmental institutions have resulted in either non-implementation of laws and schemes or misuse of such privileges. The report claims that more than 1,000 Muslim-concentrated villages in West Bengal and Bihar do not have any educational institutions. In Uttar Pradesh, this figure is 1,943. Also, the mean years of schooling of Muslims is the lowest at about three-years-four-months. The report also claims that as many as 25 per cent of Muslim children in the 6-14 age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. This is higher than that of any other socio-religious communities considered by the Sachar Committee. So far as attainment of education is concerned, Muslims are in very bad shape, the status reports states. While 26 per cent of those above 17 years and above have completed matriculation, this percentage is only 17 per cent among Muslims. Even the Sachar Committee reported only 26 per cent of the Muslims students who complete secondary education, transit for higher education. This figure stands at 34 per cent among other groups. Muslim's share in graduation is six per cent while their share in those aged 20 years and above, is around 11 per cent. Also, the graduate attainment rate among the Muslim is lower than the SCs and STs since 1970. Muslims constitutes only 1.3 per cent of students studying in the IIMs across India. In case of the IITs, out of 27,161 students enrolled in the different programmes, there were only 894 Muslims. The share of Muslims in post-graduate course is just about four per cent but it is even lower in under-graduate course at 1.7 per cent. Against 376.7 lakh graduates in India, only 23.9 lakh are Muslims. In case of diploma and certificate holders, out of total 40.5 lakh persons, 2.7 lakhs are Muslims. The representation of Muslims in the top medical colleges is about four per cent. In the data made available by 129 universities (out of around 300 universities) and 84 colleges (out of over 83,000 colleges), the committee found that Muslims students in under-graduate courses are about nine per cent, significantly below those of both the SCs/STs and the OBCs in the country. The status of Muslims in post-graduate course is one out of twenty students, below the share of OBCs, SCs and STs. (Asian Age 27/12/06)

We will remove social inequities (7)

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said here on Wednesday the Government was committed

to removing imbalances and inequities in society so that everyone got an equal share in the country's growth. Inaugurating a Dalit-Minority International Conference, organised by the Lok Jan Shakti Party, Dr. Singh, however, said steps in this regard should be taken without hurting the growth process and reducing the incentives for individual enterprise and creativity. Referring to the Sachar Committee findings, he said some minorities, especially from among Muslims, had an unequal share of the fruits of development and it was incumbent upon any democratically elected government to eradicate such inequities. The United Progressive Alliance Government was committed to doing this. Dr. Singh said that some minorities, such as Jains and Sikhs, did better than other minorities, especially Muslims. Data in the report of a high-level committee on the "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community of India" had pointed this out. "It is incumbent upon any democratically elected government to redress such imbalances and eradicate such inequities. I assure you, our Government is indeed committed to doing this." Dr. Singh said: "It is true that the Muslim minorities in our country have not got an equitable share of the fruits of development. Therefore, practical ways and means have to be explored to redress this basic inequity in the functioning of our democracy. There are problems facing the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes too. "Such problems arise when it comes to acquiring land for certain purposes, the problems of the displaced persons and their livelihood and those who are forced to migrate in search of a livelihood to cities, the growing homelessness in urban conglomerates, these are all genuine issues and they, I can assure you, will receive the attention they deserve." (The Hindu 28/12/06)

'Sachar report to be implemented in full' (7)

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 28: AN INTERNATIONAL conference of Dalits and minorities organised by Union Minister Ramvilas Paswan turned out to be a platform for the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to flaunt its concerns for these sections, ahead of the crucial Assembly elections in 2007. While Union Minority Affairs Minister AR Antulay assured full implementation of the Sachar Committee Report, Home Minister Shivraj Patil promised stringent action against communal violence through a new Bill that is awaiting Parliament approval. Recommendations of the Sachar Committee to address social, educational and economic concerns of Muslims will be implemented in toto, said Union Minister for Minority Affairs AR Antulay. Among other things, the Sachar panel had recommended reservation for the most backward among the community and creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC). A month after the report was tabled in Parliament, Antulay said on the sidelines of the conference: "We will not only implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee, but also its observations." On the opening day of the conference, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that his Government was committed to the upliftment of the minorities. Addressing the delegates today, Home Minister Shivraj Patil said "victims of communal riots will get immediate compensation." The legislation on communal harmony, now under consideration by Parliamentary Standing Committee, provides for payment of immediate compensation to the victims. The minister said a dead or injured person, or a victim whose property has been burnt or damaged in communal riots could be ascertained instantly. In the Bill, the Government has proposed that those indulging in communal disturbances should face double the punishment stipulated in the existing legal provisions. Central and state officials who were found wanting in the discharge of their duties in such situations would also suffer the consequences, Patil. said. The Bill also proposed special courts for expediting hearing of such cases. (Indian Express 29/12/06)

'If madarsa produce tenor, then Kashmir should be peaceful' (7)

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER'28: "IF madarsas produce terrorists, then shouldn't Kashmir be the most peaceful state?" says Mufti Abdul Rashid, principal of Darul Uloom Bilaliya, the biggest madarsa in the heart of Srinagar. The madarsa saw just 175 students pass out of it since its inception 16 years ago. Not surprising as only 1,729 boys and 962 girls are studying in the madarsas of the state, according to the figures quoted by Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee, one of the lowest in the country. The numbers run to lakhs in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, several thousands in most other states. Only Punjab, Delhi, Haryana and Tamil Nadu have less than 2,000 students in madarsas. Is it surprising to have such low figure in a Muslim-majority state?

Mufti Abdul Rashid has an answer. "You are more concerned about your religious identity if you are in a minority but Kashmiri Muslims are a majority population, so the insecurities are less," he says. The other factor is economics. Most of the students are from the rural areas and poor families. The new admissions are mostly orphans of violence. "They have no place to stay so they join these schools where they get a place to study and stay," said a resident of Lal Bazar where the Bilaliya Darul Uloom is located. The

madarsa in Srinagar has 415 boys and 50 girls as resident students learning the fundamentals of the religion. The number is almost similar in Darul Uloom Rahimiya in Bandipora, the oldest madarsa in Kashmir. (Indian Express 29/12/06)

'Muslims more literate than Hindus in 7 states' (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 28: Contrary to common perception, literacy level of Muslims is better than that of Hindus in seven Indian states, says a new book authored by noted demographer Mahendra K. Premi. At an all-India level, while the literacy level of the male population for all religious groups is 75.3 per cent and of Hindus 76.2 per cent, it is 67.6 per cent for Muslims, says the book Population of India in New Millennium: Census 2001. However, in Andhra Pradesh, while Muslim males enjoy a literacy rate of 76.5 per cent, that for Hindu males is 69.5 per cent. Similarly, in Gujarat, while Muslims have a literacy level of 82.9 per cent, it is 79.1 per cent for Hindus. In AP, female literacy level among Muslims is 59.1 per cent as against 49.2 per cent for Hindus. Again in Gujarat, 63.5 per cent of Muslim females are literate compared to 56.7 per cent Hindus. Mr Premi's book reveals that both male and female Muslims enjoy better literacy levels in seven states — Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. "Muslims are not lagging behind in India in literacy levels as believed by many. This is a clear indication that the community is catching up in many states." Mr Premi, also a former demography professor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, said. "As this book reveals, the picture (for the Muslim community) is not all that bad," noted demographer Ashish K. Bose said. "The government should take into consideration all aspects of social indicators based on primary data before framing national policies for minorities," Mr Bose added. In the Indian census, a person is recorded as literate if he or she is able to read and write a simple message with understanding in any language. The 2001 Census, for the first time, tabulated data on literacy for religious groups. In Kerala, India's most literate state with an overall level of 94.2 per cent, the literacy level for male Muslims is 93.7 per cent, compared with 93.8 per cent for male Hindus. For females, the state reports an overall literacy level of 87.7 per cent — 86.7 per cent for Hindus and 85.5 per cent for Muslims. For other religious groups, the national average for males is 84.4 per cent for Christians, 75.2 per cent for Sikhs, 83.1 per cent for Buddhists and 97.4 per cent — the highest — for Jains. (IANS) (Asian Age 29/12/06)