

MINORITIES: MUSLIMS - 2007

(January to December 2007)

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Report on Sachar committee on Jan. 31 (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The high power committee set up by Union HRD minister Arjun Singh on the Sachar Committee's recommendations will submit its report on January 31. Led by minister of state for HRD, M.A.A Fatmi, the Committee had earlier indicated that it was submitting the report on January 10. Senior ministry officials said although the committee has identified the major problem areas affecting education of Muslims in the country and the possible solutions to them, it was yet to gain consensus on the financial allocation needed for the implementation of the recommendation. The committee has already informed the Planning Commission about its recommendations so that it can be included in the plan allocations for the XI Plan. The last consultative meeting of the committee will be held now on January 25, following which the final recommendations will be presented to Mr Arjun Singh on January 31. The issue of reservation for Muslims has been kept aside by the committee which has reportedly recommended that the matter of whether dalit Muslims should be given reservation under the SC/ST category be looked into by the ministry of social welfare. "It has been proved in states like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh which top the list of states with the highest number of Muslims in government jobs that if the approach is positive there is no need for reservations," a senior ministry official said. A more proactive role by the states is also believed to have been recommended by the committee in its report which has apparently recommended that they should take further steps and provide resources in addition to the assistance provided by the Centre to improve the status of Muslims. Secondary education has been recognised as a key area of concern in the report prepared by the committee which has also recommended ways to improve other areas like primary and vocational education for Muslims. Senior ministry officials said new areas of concern have emerged and these will be discussed by the committee before giving final touches to the report. (Asian Age 11/1/07)

Govt sends Sachar report to Ministries, calls for comments (7)

New Delhi, January 11: The Sachar Committee report highlighting the abysmal state of Muslims in education, society and employment is now moving beyond the debating stage. At the instance of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, several key Ministries have been sent relevant extracts from the report, including its recommendations, and asked to get back with their comments by mid-January. These will be discussed at a meeting chaired by the Principal Secretary to the PM, according to a December 29 directive to all Ministries from the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Those asked to comment include: HRD, Health, Power, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Development, Panchayati Raj and the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion. The key issues on which responses have been asked include incentives in education, government, private employment, and housing where fiscal benefits would accrue to those who provide more opportunities to disadvantaged Muslims. Also included are suggestions of transfer of funds from Jawaharlal National Urban Renewal Mission to provide Muslim children access to parks and libraries. For villages, the plan is to ensure electricity, road and drinking water as well as minority representation in local self-government and panchayats. The Minority Affairs Ministry's directive says that the "proposed procedure and the time limit" for examining the report and suggesting follow-up action has been approved by the PM. The Sachar panel, constituted by Singh in March this year, had its tenure extended until November 30. Its report tabled in Parliament was not discussed during the winter session but Parliamentary Affairs Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmuni had said that the government would take note of it in the Budget Session where there could either be some legislative measure or targeted budgetary allocation for the minority community. (Indian Express 12/1/07)

Bengal Muslims turn hostile to Left (7)

Kolkata, Jan. 11: West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee held a meeting with representatives of some Muslim organisations here on Thursday after partymen reported that the rural Muslim population in south Bengal, a strong support base of the CPI(M), was fast getting disenchanted with the party due to his government's "overzealous" land acquisition plans. Mr Bhattacharjee, deeply perturbed over this feedback from the party cadre, tried to "clear some misgivings" at Thursday's meeting. This was attended, among others, by the editor of the Urdu daily Azad Hind, Ahmed Syed Malihabadi, Jamaat-e-Islami chief Rahmat Ali, Jamaat media cell in-charge Syed Ali, the state head of the All-India Milli Council, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, and Muslim Institute general secretary Sulaiman Khurshid. In an effort to bring the explosive situation under control in Nandigram, which had witnessed a violent outbreak on Sunday over land acquisition for the Indonesian Salim Group's proposed SEZ, Mr Bhattacharjee on Tuesday had virtually apologised for "the blunders we committed." Taken aback by the intensity of the local residents' opposition to the government's move and their violent retaliation against the local CPI(M) workers, the chief minister asked the administration to lay off. "I told them that they should not do anything. I have begun a political process and I will not take any step without taking everyone into confidence," Mr Bhattacharjee had announced on Tuesday. As part of this "political process", he had invited the Muslims for talks at Writers' Buildings, the state secretariat. "He assured us that there would be no coercion in acquisition of land. He categorically said there was no question of acquiring any land which houses a mosque or a temple or a cemetery, as some vested interests (Asian Age 12/1/07)

Muslim Board wants MP Govt to cancel Surya Namaskar order (7)

BHOPAL, JANUARY 13: The Madhya Pradesh government's proposed en mass Surya Namaskar (sun salutation) programme on January 25 caused quite a flutter in the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board's Chennai meeting when some members suggested that Muslims should send their children to schools and colleges but ask them to abstain from any activity. But a large majority of the 250-odd members who attended the three-day session of the board felt that such a gesture would create animosity between Muslim students and teachers as also other students, Maulana Mehmood Madni, general secretary of Jamiat-e-Ulma Hind, told The Indian Express over phone on Saturday. The board, instead, passed a resolution requesting the BJP government to cancel the programme. If that doesn't happen, Muslims should not send their children to schools and colleges on January 25, read the resolution passed on Friday. Minorities enjoy freedom of religion, and by extension, they can't be forced to take part in activities not permitted by their religion. Islam does not permit its followers to bow before anyone but Allah, the resolution said. Madni said the board would write to the state government to convey the resolution passed at the end of the 19th session. The state government had recently announced that it would come out with its Yoga Policy on January 25 when Surya Namaskar sessions would be organised in educational institutions and all district headquarters. When Muslim organisations opposed it the government clarified that participation was not compulsory for students. In Bhopal, MP Congress Committee's minority department said by making participation voluntary, the government was asking Muslim students not to come to schools and colleges on that day and in a way creating a rift between them and other students. A few Muslim organisations have already called on the Governor and sought his intervention in the matter. "Why should any state government organise programmes suited to a particular religion," department chairman Haji Mohd Haroon said and requested the government to cancel the programme. He said the minority community was not against Yoga but Surya Namaskar because it amounts to worshipping the sun. "It seems the government does not want Muslims to join the mainstream and benefit from Yoga," he said. Why does the government want to organise it only in the morning and not at other time of the day, he asked. (Indian Express. 14/1/07)

Army 'gunmen' in mosque attacks? (7)

Shangus (Kashmir), Jan. 14: The police in Jammu and Kashmir is probing the alleged role of three gunmen working as counter-insurgents with the Army in the recent desecration of three Muslim places of worship in and around Shangus township in southern Anantnag. Spontaneous

strikes in protest brought life in the Valley to a standstill for several days, during which huge crowds of Muslims came out on the streets to denounce the incidents. Shangus falls in southern Anantnag district and is about 80 km from Srinagar. In view of heightening tensions, the Ghulam Nabi Azad government ordered a probe. A special team headed by a police officer of DSP rank was quickly constituted to unravel the mystery behind the sacrilege and unmask those involved in it, said the officials. Although the police will not disclose the names of the suspects, it has written to the local Army commander seeking their antecedents and other details. The senior superintendent of police (Anantnag), Mr Abdul Gani Mir, said that the investigations are still not complete, and it would be premature to name the alleged offenders. Army officials said the trio would not be spared or shielded if they were found guilty. There is apprehension among the local population as well as some political parties here that the truth might never come to light. Responding to this, an Army official said: "We'll not wait even for a minute in handing them over to the police if evidence about their involvement is shown to us." The official, on condition of anonymity, said that the Army too is investigating the incidents and had already questioned some people. On January 2, the residents of Shangus found a few pages of the Quran torn in the local mosque. During the night of January 2-3 a fire broke out at a mosque at Chandarwattan (Utrasoo) village, damaging its coir matting. Again, on January 6, some unidentified persons set the coir matting at a mosque in the neighbouring village of Wakhil Balan on fire. This was, however, brought under control swiftly and the mosque suffered no major damage. The residents have constituted special vigilance committees, whose members keep watch on places of worship all through the night by rotation. The local police forces have also stepped up night patrolling. State consumer affairs and public distribution minister Taj Mohiuddin told the Assembly, now in session, that the night patrolling had been intensified and was being monitored by two senior officers..... (Asian Age 15/1/07)

Antulay: Cong to blame for plight of Muslims (7)

Aligarh, January 20: Squarely blaming the Congress for the plight of Muslims, Union Minority Affairs Minister A.R. Antulay today warned the community would hold up the country's progress if steps are not taken for their economic uplift. Muslims, who constitute nearly 15 per cent of India's population, will become a "drag" on the path to progress if they "continue to languish in social and economic backwardness", he told a minorities conference here. "We are all to be equally blamed for this sad state of neglect, and I have no hesitation in owning up the responsibility of my own party and I apologise to the Muslims for the present state of affairs," he said. According to Antulay, the primary concern of minorities is the threat to their lives and security during communal violence. It was imperative that Muslims are adequately represented in police and other security forces, he said. Antulay said the Central Government "shortly intends to implement in toto all recommendations of the Sachar Committee", which studied the socio-economic state of the community. Referring to Congress' pre-poll pledges to protect minority rights, he said, "I want to make it amply clear that both Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi are determined to implement all policies aimed at the uplift of the minorities in the country." (Indian Express 21/1/07)

Muslims against yoga in schools (7)

Bhopal, Jan. 22: Challenging the Madhya Pradesh government's move to hold "suryanamaskar" or yogic exercise in schools, Muslim representatives on Monday approached the high court and also sought Governor Balram Jakhar's intervention. "Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind has filed a PIL in the high court seeking a stay on suryanamaskar scheduled to be held on January 25. It is expected to be heard tomorrow," Mohd Haroon, executive committee member of the organisation told PTI from Jabalpur. The court was approached after pleas before chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and other authorities failed to yield results, he said, adding the move to "force students of all religions to perform suryanamaskar is unconstitutional and against Islam". Meanwhile, a group of Muslim representatives, led by state convenor of All India Muslim Personal Law Board Shamsuddin Afridi, submitted a memorandum to the governor and sought his intervention in preventing the event. The government had planned to organise the programme across the state, wherein children will carry out suryanamaskar and five pranayam exercises. (Asian Age 21/1/07)

Admn plays matchmaker, brings weddings back to Dhar (7)

BHOPAL, JANUARY 23: IT SEEMED unrealistic and risky till a few hours before, but this Basant Panchami the communally sensitive town of Dhar, home to the disputed Bhojshala shrine, saw a mass marriage featuring 100 couples, some of them Muslim. Since 2003, communal tension in the town had prompted many people to delay marriages on Basant Panchami, an auspicious day for the Bhojshala. This was exactly why the district administration thought a mass marriage would be the best confidence building exercise for the town. Hindus insist the Bhojshala is a Saraswati temple, while Muslims call it the Kamal Maula Masjid. The Archaeological Survey of India, which takes care of the shrine, allows Hindus to worship here every Tuesday from sunrise to sunset and Muslims for two hours on Fridays. In addition, the shrine is thrown open for Hindus every Basant Panchami, when goddess Saraswati is worshiped across India. Last year, Basant Panchami fell on Friday throwing the ASI arrangement into disarray and leading to violence. A clueless administration was kept on its toes by a swarm of Hindu Jagaran Manch activists who refused to vacate the shrine in time for Friday prayers. With Basant Panchami falling on a Tuesday this year, the administration decided to organise marriages across the town. Using funds from the Chief Minister's Kanyadaan scheme, which ensures girls from economically weaker sections get Rs 5,000 at the time of marriage, the administration convinced villagers to tie the knot in a mass ceremony in Dhar. "There was a bit of risk involved and the couples were apprehensive," admitted District Collector Ram Kinkar Gupta. "We brought them here ahead of the festival and kept the families at one place to ensure that they didn't go away," Gupta told The Indian Express on Tuesday. The proposal was discussed in the peace committee meeting held ahead of the festival. Indian Express 24/1/07)

M.P. Government to go ahead with yoga programme (7)

Bhopal: The BJP Government in Madhya Pradesh seems to be going ahead with the mass yoga programme on "surya namaskar," expected to be attended by over three lakh school children. Elaborate preparations have been made for the "surya namaskar" and "pranayam" programme, planned at school, district and State levels on January 25, as announced by Health Minister Ajay Vishnoi and School Education Minister Narottam Mishra last month, official sources said on Tuesday. The event would be monitored by committees formed by District Collectors, they said, adding that Ministers had been asked to attend the programme in the districts. The main programme here would be led by yoga guru Baba Ramdev and telecast and aired across the State, sources said. Citizens, private organisations and educational institutes had been invited to attend it. Two teachers were trained in every block to conduct the programme. Describing the move as "unconstitutional," a 11-member committee, constituted at a meeting of important Muslim bodies called by the State unit of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), had sought Governor Balram Jakhra's intervention in preventing the programme. Jamiat Ulma Hind had also approached the Madhya Pradesh High Court seeking a stay on the event. "Though we don't have objections to any kind of yogic exercise it is unconstitutional to force students of all religions to recite religious verses during "surya namaskar" — which we believe is worship of sun and against Islam," Jamiat executive member Haji Mohd Haroon told PTI. "Booklets carrying 'slokas' (religious verses) have also been circulated among the schools for recitation," the Muslim representatives said, claiming to have garnered support of their Christian counterparts against it. The BJP Government was attempting to "incite religious passion under the garb of yoga" among school children, Catholic Church of Madhya Pradesh spokesman Anand Muttungal said. (The Hindu 24/1/07)

Madhya Pradesh High Court on yoga programme (7)

Jabalpur: Amid a raging controversy over Madhya Pradesh Government's decision to organise "surya namaskar" and "pranayam" programme in schools on Thursday, the High Court on Wednesday ordered that the participation in it should be voluntary. No individual or institution should be forced to take part in the programme, a Division Bench of Chief Justice A.K. Patnayak and Justice R.S. Jha said in an interim order on petitions filed by some Muslim organisations against the Government's decision. It said the programme should be attended only by those who want to participate in it voluntarily. The Bench issued notice to the State Government to reply within four weeks. Counsel for petitioners (Jamiat Ulma Hind and Bharatiya Muslim Sangh)

contended that recital of certain 'mantras' during the programme would hurt religious feelings of minority communities. (The Hindu 25/1/07)

Muslims can skip yoga in school: Court (7)

Bhopal, Jan. 24: The Jabalpur high court has exempt Muslim students from performing the Surya Namaskar (sun salutation), the timeless set of six yogic asanas, at the mass public performance billed for Thursday morning. The drill is part of the Madhya Pradesh government's statewide campaign to introduce regular teaching of yoga in schools. A formal yoga policy is also expected to be announced at this function. In its order dated January 2, the state government had directed all government schools to ensure that the entire set of six yogic asanas comprising Surya Namaskar and Pranayam be performed at 9 pm, with each posture accompanied with the chanting of a separate mantra. The high court order came on Wednesday in response to a petition by a few unknown Muslim bodies like Tehreek-e-Islam Committee and Jamiat Ulema Hind. The bodies had argued that performing the Surya Namaskar and Pranayam (breathing exercises) to the chanting of mantras was contrary to the tenets of Islam. They charged that the BJP government was promoting Hindu rituals in the guise of yoga inside educational institutions. The petition, in fact, went one step ahead, and demanded that the teaching of yoga be disallowed in schools. The same bodies had also handed over a petition to governor Balram Jakhra, who was requested to get the yoga programme cancelled. State government sources said the court order was on expected lines. However, they were happy that the court had turned down the absurd demand of the petitioners that the public performance of Surya Namaskar be cancelled. State school education secretary I.S. Dani had clarified to this newspaper last week that though performing the sun salutation was not mandatory, schools would be encouraged to make it part of their PT curriculum. The performance was originally supposed to have been taken place in the presence of Patanjali Yoga Peeth founder Baba Ramdev. Under the revised schedule it is his followers who will be conducting the show. Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan, however, has asked the baba to open a branch of his peeth in Madhya Pradesh. He has stressed that quite apart from being a physical fitness regimen acknowledged the world over, honest and sustained practice of Surya Namaskar and other yogic postures could help bring about a "mass awakening" in a materialist world. The baba's disciples have been conducting a yoga workshop here for the last few days. (Asian Age 25/1/07)

'Islamic terrorism rubbish' (7)

New Delhi, Jan. 24: "No country has any right to dictate to another country in terms of culture traditions, customs and force upon their own culture on others. Each country is unique and represent a civilisation which should be respected," Russian railway minister Yakhunin said. Speaking at the World Public Forum (WPF), "Dialogue of Civilisations", organised at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mr Yakhunin also rubbished the new concept of Islamic terrorism. Without naming any country he said, "The very idea of Islamic terrorism has no roots, for, Quran does not profess anything evil. We are not here to nail any one country but whichever country tries to impose themselves upon other nations, commits a condemnable act," he said. Talking about the multicultural aspect of Indian civilisation, he said that India is a bouquet of many cultures. Mr Yakhunin said, "India is an ancient civilisation and there are a lot of books available on India and Indian civilisation. But none on Russian civilisation. Only today we will be releasing a book on Russian civilisation and that would be the first book on the theme." Underlining the need of technology in the present day world, general secretary, World Public Forum, Prof. Atkov Olguyevich said that the technology has brought a paradigm shift in the global choices. However, Ms Olguyevich maintained that India and Russia are faring well in the field. Talking about the Indo-Russian relations, member of Federation Council, Russia, Lopatnikov Victoralekserich said that Russia is trying to extend economic relations with India that would be in the interest of both the countries in the global arena. Union minister Oscar Fernandez, during his brief presence at the function, talked about the cordial ties between India and Russia since Independence. He said that Russia has always supported India in nation-building, establishing industry, defence and whatever that one can think of. "Russia has always been a friend in need," he said. Other speakers included, Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Prof. Emeritus C.P. Bhabri, director, Institute of Political Research, Gromiko Yari Vyacheslavovich and others.

(Asian Age 25/1/07)

"Surya namaskar" programme held in Madhya Pradesh (7)

Bhopal: Declaring its yoga policy at a mass "Surya namaskar" programme, made voluntary by a High Court order amid protests from different quarters, the BJP Government in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday decided to teach the ancient form of exercise in schools and constitute a council to promote it. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan also announced a Rs. 1 lakh award for excellence in promoting yoga, at the main function at the T.T. Nagar stadium here, telecast and aired across the State. The Government will support dedicated organisations to set up yoga centres, he said. These centres, jointly with the proposed Yoga Council, will help in creating awareness about yoga. "Yoga will be made a part of the physical education course in school curriculum," Mr. Chauhan announced, asking students to perform the exercise for a "healthy body and mind." The mass "Suryanamaskar" and "Pranayam" programme began with the recitation of 'Vande Mataram', official sources said. Around three lakh school children attended the programme at school, district and state levels, they said, adding Ministers attended it in different districts, where citizens, private organisations and educational institutions, were also invited. Barring a stray incident of a sixth-standard student fainting at a school at Shahdol, the event remained smooth elsewhere, the sources said. The "Suryanamaskar" programme came under attack from minority communities and opposition parties who had dubbed it as "an effort to saffronise education." Terming the move as "unconstitutional", a committee formed at a meeting called by the State unit of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), had sought Governor Balram Jakhar's intervention in preventing the programme. The ruling BJP was trying to "incite religious passion under the garb of yoga" among school children, a spokesman of the Catholic Church of Madhya Pradesh said. On petitions by the Jamiat Ulma Hind and Bharatiya Muslim Sangh, the High Court on Wednesday ordered that the programme should be voluntary, while State Advocate General Ravinandan Singh maintained that attendance was never intended to be mandatory. (The Hindu 26/1/07)

BJP opposes UPA plan for Muslim areas (7)

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party here on Monday took strong objection to an indication by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that areas where Muslims constitute around 25 per cent of the population would be separately identified and special efforts made for the development of these areas. Party spokesperson Prakash Javadekar said this was part of the pattern that had emerged in the United Progressive Alliance. The Congress-run State Governments made efforts, so far futile, to give reservations to Muslims in educational institutions; it (the party) indicated that it wanted banks to lend to minorities on a priority basis; it talked about special package of financial resources being spent on Muslims; and now there is talk of identifying Muslim-dominated areas. Mr. Javadekar reiterated the BJP line that the Congress was practising divisive politics. (The Hindu 30/1/07)

AIDWA seeks special sub-plan for Muslims (7)

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has demanded a special sub-plan for the development and advancement of Muslims. The central executive committee of AIDWA, which concluded its three-day meeting here on Monday, has also sought allocation of 15 per cent of the national budget for the purpose. The funds should be used in a targeted manner in Muslim-dominated districts, blocks, villages and wards. These demands would find a prominent place in the charter of demands that AIDWA plans to submit to the Manmohan Singh Government in the next couple of weeks, the association president, Subhashini Ali, told a news conference here on Tuesday. Ms. Ali said the decision to lay special emphasis on Muslims, particularly women, was taken after a long deliberation of the AIDWA central executive committee on the Justice Sachar Committee Report. The AIDWA was of the view that Muslim women should be recognised as beneficiaries with special needs such as proper sanitation, health facilities, educational institutions, including residential schools, and credit facilities. It had launched a signature campaign at the national level around demands such as an end to the practice of unilateral divorce in one sitting, polygamy and granting of equal rights for women in the matter of custody and guardianship of children. The response to the signature campaign was

encouraging, she said. The organisation is also conducting a survey of Urdu medium schools so as to frame demands relating to their improvement. The need to teach the State languages concerned in these schools was also discussed, she said. The committee also noted that the UPA Government had failed to recognise the growing discontent and anger among the masses, especially women, over the steep increase in the prices of essential commodities and the virtual dismantling of the Public Distribution System. (The Hindu 31/1/07)

'SEZ, globalisation anti-Muslim' (7)

New Delhi: While the UPA Government is trying to project the Sachar Committee recommendations on the Muslims as the only solution to the problems faced by the community, the minority outfits representing dalit and backward Muslims have risen against economic policies of the Government, branding them as anti-Muslim. This is the first time that organisations representing Dalit and backward Muslims that account for 85 per cent of the community are raising their voice against economic policies of the Government. Almost 30 of these Muslim organisations plan to protest before Parliament next week against the setting up of Special Economic Zones and the policy of liberalising the retail sector and import of readymade goods. "These Muslims are the most affected by the liberal economic policies of the Government, as most of them are artisans, small traders and retailers," Ali Anwar, Coordinator of the Pasmada Mahapanchayat, an umbrella organisation of the Dalit and Muslim organisations, told media persons on Wednesday. "SEZ and multinational companies are hurting us in a big way. The weavers of Benaras who were pioneer in making clothes, are languishing. They are forced to sell their children," he said. He wondered what would the tailors do if the Government opens the doors of readymade clothes from outside. The Muslims have already played a leading role in struggles against acquisition of farmland in Singur and Nandigram by the Left Front-ruled West Bengal. Anwar claimed that 80-85 per cent of the Muslims in the country are Pasmada (OBC or dalit) and asserted that characterisation of all Muslims as backwards was unjustified. "The multinationals in retail and the corporate in car servicing and the import of finished goods will affect the weavers, tailors and mechanics, most of whom are Muslims," said Hazi Anwar Quereshi, national president of Rashtriya Jamiatul Quresh Hind. A protest demonstration by these Muslim organisations, who represent Muslim castes like halkhors, washermen, potters, weavers, tailors, barbers, meat sellers, is slated for February 10. It is a comparatively new phenomenon in the Muslim politics as these organisations are not raising emotive issues that are being traditionally raised by big names in the mainstream Muslim politics. "There are 1,050 Muslim elected members in Assemblies and 50 in Parliament, but they are engaged in raising trivial issues. None of them raise any economic issue facing the community," Anwar added. "They are the elites of the community and it is a wrong perception that Muslims are a monolithic and homogeneous community," Anwar, a Rajya Sabha member associated with Janata Dal (U) said. The leaders addressing the media also demanded that reservation should be given to Pasmada Muslims in minority institutions and there should be a quota within quota for dalit Muslims. (Pioneer 8/2/07)

Malerkotla Muslims want empowerment, not freebies (7)

MALERKOTLA (PUNJAB): Sikhs are a majority in Punjab, but a minority at the national level where Hindus are a majority. Muslims, who are a minority both at the national level and here in Punjab, are a 'majority' in this town. That such communal arithmetic must become starker in the run-up to any elections is quite obvious to a visitor here. This constituency located on the border of Sangrur district with Ludhiana has 1.67 lakh voters, of whom about 72,000 are Muslims, 45,000 Sikhs, 25,000 Dalits and 22,000 Hindus. Since 1954, when Chand Ram won the election to the State Assembly, the town has not returned a non-Muslim. Not ever a sitting MLA. As electioneering for the upcoming polls later this month reaches a crescendo, it's time for political leaders and voters to look ahead as well as undertake a major exercise to introspect. For the dominant Muslim community, the major achievement so far has been its emergence out of the fear psychosis borne out of violence related to Partition of the country in 1947 and the subsequent persecution syndrome. The youths now seek different shores, breaking away from their traditional trades and roots. Demands for empowerment at the grassroots and resolution of issues related to assertion of identity have begun to gain currency in the political discourse here.

Leaders of the Muslim community have struggled hard against the trend that prevailed since 1947, when many of them in their attempt to remain in the mainstream took to adopting Sikh or Hindu names. However, when some Muslims reverted to their 'own' names, fundamentalists of other communities raised the bogey of conversions to Islam, leading to some localised tensions. While the mainline political parties shout themselves hoarse making counter-claims about bringing development to the State, ordinary citizens here are quite critical that for over half-a-century attempts have been made to appease the populace by just doling out a paltry sum of Rs. 5 lakhs annually for the Idgah. They rue that successive MLAs from the constituency have been mere ceremonial figures who were hardly involved in the decision-making process. However, in the present electoral run-up, the 41-year-old sitting Congress legislator, Razia Sultana, cast in the midst of a formidable patriarchal set-up, promises to continue her quest for breaking new ground in case she is retained for a second term. She also realises that though technically she is elected from Malerkotla, being the only legislator from the community in the 117-member Punjab Assembly she also represents the interests of nearly 1.2 million Muslims in the State who are settled in clusters in Ludhiana, Qadian, periphery of Amritsar, Kharar, Ropar and Hoshiarpur.(The Hindu 9/2/07)

Muslim body targets Pataudi, he turns to Bhopal clergy (7)

BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 8: From property disputes to the alleged hunting of a black buck, Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi has always had his share of troubles. Now the former India captain has been forced to approach the clergy and get a fatwa issued against a little-known Muslim organisation, All-India Muslim Tyohar Committee, which has alleged that he is no longer a Muslim because he consumes liquor and has acted in films. The Shahar Qazi has ruled that the committee has no religious standing and no authority to 'excommunicate' any Muslim. And yet the organisation has succeeded in getting the governor and the state government to intervene in a matter that deals with religious properties worth hundreds of crores in and around Bhopal. A couple of properties are also located in Saudi Arabia. The properties are controlled by Auqaf-e-Shahi Wakf, a body created when the Bhopal State merged with the Indian Union. The merger agreement made it clear that only a member of the erstwhile royal family will head the body. Committee chairman Ausaf Shahmiri Khurram had written to the governor demanding that the body be merged with the Wakf Board because Pataudi was no longer a Muslim. In his complaint, Khurram had enclosed a copy of the decision of Majlis-e-Shoora, which in its June 19, 2005 order, expelled him from the community for his alleged non-Islamic activities. The governor forwarded the complaint to the chief minister, who discussed it at a meeting he had with the chief secretary. The state government in turn asked the Wakf Board to look into the complaint and ask the body's explanation. Before replying to the state government notice, Pataudi approached the Shahar Qazi and got a fatwa issued in his favour. Pataudi is expected to arrive here on February 19 to make a personal appearance before the Wakf Board. "The government has nothing to do with his religious status, it's only looking into the points and complaints on which the demand for merging the body with the Wakf Board has been made," (Indian Express 9/2/07)

"Muslims' backwardness rooted in regional context" (7)

NEW DELHI: Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jairam Ramesh on Saturday said the Government alone could not address the backwardness of the Muslim community. It must be backed by political will and community initiative, he said, adding that the status of Muslims was rooted in the regional context as their condition in South India was better than in the North. Addressing a national consultation on 'Social, Economic and Educational Implications of the Sachar Report on Muslim Women,' the Minister said while the Sachar Committee made a detailed analysis, it failed to reflect on the connection between the general backwardness of North India and the status of Muslims in the region. Mr. Ramesh cited the Sachar Committee's observation that only about a lakh SHGs were located in minority-dominated areas. "But, the fact is that 80 per cent of the SHGs is in South India." He said Muslim women were particularly backward. This was borne out by the lower fertility rate among the Muslim women of South India. "So, the focus should be on the larger issue of backwardness of North India" as the benefits of development percolated to all communities as was proved in the South. Using the incidence of polio to support his argument for a community initiative in addressing backwardness among

Muslims, he said 540 of the 667 polio cases reported from across the country in 2006 were from Uttar Pradesh. "When Muslims of South India administer the oral polio vaccine to their children, why is it that their counterparts in the North say the OPV will make their kids impotent?" He said State Governments must take the lead in providing reservation on social and economic grounds — as was done in Kerala and Karnataka — to broadbase education among Muslim women. On SHGs, Mr. Ramesh said the movement was very rural-based whereas Muslims were urban-centric. (The Hindu 11/12/07)

Meeting on Sachar report (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 10: National Commission for Minorities chairman Hamid Ansari on Saturday said, the effective implementation of the Sachar Committee's recommendations will not be possible without first solving the problems faced by the Muslim women. Speaking at the National Consultation on Social, Economic and Educational Implications of the Sachar Report On Muslim Women, Dr Ansari said, "Implementation of the Sachar report must take women's issues into notice. If it is not done, only 50 per cent of the Muslim population would be benefited and the whole process would be absolutely defective." Focusing on key development areas such as education, health as well as economic empowerment, the day-long consultation organised by the Guild of Services, All India Democratic Women's Association, Muslim Women's Forum and the Justice Sunanda Bhandare Foundation laid stress on the need to create awareness and educate Muslim women for the benefit of the community. Calling for a national solution to Muslim community problems, the consultation saw speakers stress on the need to find a common and not separate solution. "There cannot be Muslim solutions to Muslim problems. It has to be a common solution," academician Imtiaz Ahmed said. Seconding his view was Prof. Akhtrul Wasi of Jamia Millia Islamia University, who noted that the Sachar recommendations should be made into a development issue and not a political one. Muslim women, it was felt, were suffering due to the incorrect interpretation of the Shariat. While CPI(M) leader Subhashini Ali pointed out that, "Shariat laws are being interpreted against women by some people with vested interests. Public opinion must be created for reforms in the interpretation of the Shariat laws." (Asian Age 12/2/07)

Muslims killed in fake encounters: Bukhari (7)

Lucknow, Feb. 11: The United Democratic Front (UDF), led by the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Maulana Syed Ahmad Bukhari, has alleged that a large number of innocent Muslim men have been shot dead by the UP police in fake encounters during the Mulayam Singh regime. The UDF has demanded an independent inquiry into the fake encounters by the National Human Rights Commission to "expose" the truth. "Even the five young men killed in an encounter with the police during the militant attack on Ayo-dhya were innocent. If they had been terrorists, the police should have made efforts to catch them alive and unravel the entire conspiracy behind the attack. Muslim youth are being termed as terrorists and are then shot dead. How come in all such encounters, not a single policeman was killed?" Mr Bukhari said at a press conference here on Sunday. Replying to a question, he said that the main accused in the Varanasi blast case, Maulana Vali-ullah, was also innocent and had been wrongly framed by the UP police. The UDF president said that the law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh was at its worst and the Muslim community had been at the receiving end all along. "Whether it is the riots in Gorakh-pur or the Allahabad madrasa rape incident, the police, along with the Hindu Vahini, have been unleashing terror on Muslims and this government had forfeited its right to remain in power," he stated. Mr Bukhari said UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav was hand-in-glove with communal forces and his recent meetings with RSS and Hindu leaders proved it. "Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav claims to be pro-Muslims but he has merely used Muslim sentiments to capture power. If he genuinely respects the sentiments of the Muslim community, why has he not issued a fresh notification in the Ayodhya case so that senior BJP and VHP leaders can face trial?" he asked. He said that parties like the Samajwadi Party and the Congress has taken advantage of Muslims for almost six decades in Uttar Pradesh but the UDF would not provide leadership to the community on its own. (Asian Age 12/2/07)

CPI (M) to discuss steps for betterment of Muslims (7)

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) plans to deliberate on the steps it thinks are needed to address the issues concerning the Muslim community in the wake of the recommendations of the Justice Rajinder Sachar panel report. "The Polit Bureau would finalise its approach on the needs of the Muslim community based on the Sachar Committee report including education and employment," party general secretary Prakash Karat told The Hindu . The Polit Bureau meets here this weekend. He said the party would finalise a document that could then be put up for discussion among people especially those belonging to the community before coming up with specific suggestions. The party's Minority Affairs Committee that went into the entire issue has prepared a draft document suggesting steps like the possibility of inclusion of some categories of Muslims under Article 341 of the Constitution. Article 341 provides that the President may with respect to any State or Union Territory, and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be. The party was of the view that in many cases Muslims belonging to Other Backward Classes have not been included for the purposes of benefit. The opinion was that the matter varies from State to State. To cite an example, the party members said for instance, Muslim OBCs in U.P. constitute more than Yadavs who were around 9 per cent. Yet over 50 per cent of the jobs go to Yadavs while the Muslims get between 2 per cent and 3 per cent. Earlier, the party had mooted the idea of a separate sub-plan earmarking 15 per cent of the funds for Muslims on the lines of special allocation for tribal people. In addition the document to be discussed talks of education and employment. (The Hindu 16/2/07)

Quota plan for Dalit Muslims hits hurdle (7)

New Delhi: The government's bid to get Dalit Muslims categorised as 'Most Backward Castes' — as suggested by the Sachar panel to get them targeted-quota in employment and education— seems to be floundering, with the social justice ministry giving its thumbs-down to the possibility. In its response, the ministry has pointed out that there is no such category as MBC at the Centre where the backwards are treated as a monolith, as opposed to states where they have been differentiated into "forwards among backwards", or "OBC", and "backward among backwards", called "MBC". With the nodal ministry putting a spanner, government, under increasing pressure to back up its professed concern for minorities with tangible action, has been left hoping for a go-ahead from the National Commission on Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The body has been asked to examine whether non-Hindu Dalits are entitled to quota benefits on par with Scheduled Castes. In its report, which created much debate in political circles, the Sachar panel differentiated between two groups of Muslims — converts from OBCs and from "untouchables" — who are clubbed together in an "all encompassing OBC category". The report said the Dalit converts were "the worst off and need to be handled separately" It said they be either absorbed in the SC list or in a separate category (MBCs) carved out of OBCs. While the backward Muslims are entitled to OBC quota, it is argued that an overwhelming majority of those are not equipped to compete against other Hindu OBCs for quota benefits. Thus, the demand for sub-categorisation of Muslim OBCs into MBCs with a separate quota. It is argued that Dalit Muslims would be better placed to compete for quota benefits against SCs, who would be equal competitors given their similar socio-educational status. Government is unlikely to draw much hope in the given situation as the less contentious suggestion to sub-categorise OBCs to earmark exclusive quota for Muslims has met with a negative response from the nodal ministry. Arguing against a split of OBCs at the Centre, MSJ told a recent meeting in the PM's Office — called on working out an implementation plan on Sachar panel's recommendations — that the Centre's reservation policy skims out 'creamy layer' for the purpose of quota benefits. (Times of India 17/2/07)

Muslim fertility fall sharper than rest (7)

New Delhi, Feb. 18: The Sach Committee report on the Muslim community has nailed the lie on the issue of Muslim reproduction and the "prevailing Muslim conspiracy" to reduce Hindus to minority status. The report, quoting extensively from Census reports and the National Health Survey, highlights how the last decade has witnessed a sharp decline in Muslim fertility rates as against the rest of the population. Estimates show that the total fertility rate (TFR) among Muslims

declined from about 4.3 to 3.6 in the 1990s, a reduction of about 0.9 points. During the same period fertility rates for the population as a whole declined from about 3.4 to 2.9, a reduction of nearly 0.5 points. The decline in fertility among Muslims was, therefore, sharper than average. Dr Rakesh Basak, an economist with IIM Ahmedabad and a member of the committee, points out that at present "there is (only) a 0.7-point difference between the Muslim and the average fertility rates. While the average fertility rate is 2.9, for Muslims it is 3.6." Dr Basak emphasises that 37 per cent of Muslims use contraceptives against a national average of 48 per cent. Therefore, contraceptive usage is about 10 percentage points lower among Muslims than the average. However, there are significant regional variations. The use of contraceptives amongst Muslims is more widespread in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh than amongst Hindus in these states. In Gujarat, there is hardly any difference in the use of contraceptives across religious communities. In general, the report observes, contraceptive usage goes up with education and development and all communities benefit from such changes. Of course, the availability of various contraceptive options also plays a major role in enhancing contraceptive use. Dr Basak says, "Data shows that on an average Muslims prefer using reversible methods of family planning as compared to *nasbandi* (sterilisation). This is true of several Hindu communities as well." He adds, "If there are severe supply-side constraints in the availability of the preferred contraceptive options, adoption may suffer. There is evidence to suggest that the unmet needs of the Muslim population for reversible methods of family planning are high." (Asian Age 19/2/07)

Implement Sachar panel report, says Milli Council (7)

JAIPUR: The Rajasthan unit of All India Milli Council on Sunday demanded implementation of the recommendations of Justice Rajindar Sachar Committee in right earnest and called upon the Muslim community to take full advantage of welfare programmes and credit schemes of the Central and State Governments. Milli Council members pointed out at a State-level meeting in Muslim Musafirkhana here that the dismal picture of social, educational and economic conditions of Muslims and the underlying causes revealed by the Sachar Committee necessitated urgent steps to address the development needs of the largest minority community in the country. The participants in the meeting noted with concern that Muslims were denied jobs and banks often discriminated against them in giving loans. "The nation cannot progress if a section of population remains underdeveloped, poor, malnourished and uneducated," said Milli Council general secretary Abdul Qayoom Akhtar, while citing the findings of Sachar Committee. The Milli Council flayed the objection raised by Bharatiya Janata Party to the move to implement the committee's report and pointed out that any positive action by the Government would damage the political interests of Sangh Parivar, the survival of which depended on mutual suspicion, hatred and animosity between different sections of people divided across religious identities. National Integration Council's Member Navaid Hamid said a significant reason for backwardness of Muslims, besides sheer discrimination, was the lack of awareness and education within the community. He said the Muslim organisations in Rajasthan should form block-level committees to monitor implementation of schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Swarna Jayanti Rozgar Yojana. Mr. Hamid said the Muslims should establish more non-Government organisations to work in education, employment, women's empowerment and health care sectors and float cooperative societies to help out artisans, craftspersons and small traders. Besides, budget allocations should be seriously studied to find out the scope for the community's development. Milli Council's State secretary Abdul Lateef said the State unit had established three industrial training institutes in Jaipur and one each in Jodhpur and Sikar to impart job-oriented technical training to youngsters. He said the Milli Council was expecting a positive response from the State Social Welfare Department to its demand for scholarships to Muslim students from the next financial year. The Milli Council expressed satisfaction over the Planning Commission's reported proposal to allocate Rs. 17,224 crores for minorities' welfare during the 11th Five Year Plan. The Union Rural Development Ministry has already announced quota for minorities in its schemes during the current financial year. (The Hindu 26/2/07)

'Security works' at Ayodhya make Muslims see red (7)

AYODHYA, February 25: Even as the application of the Union Government to start construction for security purpose at the disputed site of Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi in Ayodhya is pending

with the Supreme Court, Muslim organisations have alleged that functionaries of the acquired land have undertaken construction work near the makeshift temple. Reportedly, work on a parallel barricade to the outer boundary, concrete passage for motorcycle patrolling, construction of Kharanja for security, Sita Rasoi and Vishwamitra Ashram barricade and two walls near Ved Mandir and Singh Dwar has been carried out. "Along with this, the status quo at the makeshift structure has also been disturbed in violation of the SC direction," said Zafaryab Jilani, counsel for the Sunni Central Waqf Board, pleading the Babri Masjid case before the High Court. According to him, during last Sunday's visit to the site, it was noticed that the so-called old structure of the makeshift Ram temple had been replaced by a new one. "We are going to bring it to the notice of the High Court as well as the SC," said Jilani. Hashim Ansari, main plaintiff in the case, said, "We are now preparing to move the SC for contempt." However, DM of Faizabad Amod Kumar said all construction works in the acquired area were in accordance with the security committee's recommendations. (Indian Express 26/2/07)

'Union budget disappointing for Muslims' (7)

JAIPUR: The Rajasthan unit of Jamat-e-Islami Hind has termed the Union Budget for 2007-08 "disappointing" for Muslims, saying the Central Government does not seem serious about improving the socio-economic lot of the community despite the recommendations of the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee. The Jamat-e-Islami held a debate on the Budget at its headquarters here over the weekend, in which the participants said the Muslim community was expecting a better deal from the UPA Government in the Centre in view of its commitment to work for welfare of marginalised sections. Besides, the Budget would increase the debt burden on the common man, while there was no hope for a reduction in the prices of essential commodities in the near future, said the participants. They felt that some sections of society, such as the educated unemployed youth in the urban areas, are directly affected by price rise. Jamat-e-Islami State president Mohammed Salim said the Budget had made no allocation to facilitate implementation of any of the Sachar Committee recommendations. "The Government's proposals to take steps for betterment of Muslims should be matched by adequate financial allocations. The Budget is unsatisfactory on this front," he said. The meagre increase of Rs. 63 crore in the budget of the Minorities' Development and Finance Corporation was described as insufficient. Mr. Salim said it would turn out to be a hike of Rs. 4 per person of the minority communities, which was "laughable". Educationist Abdul Razaq said the provision of Rs. 381 crore for giving scholarships to Muslim students and for development of districts with a significant population of minorities was highly inadequate. The Muslim organisations had urged Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram to allocate Rs. 10,500 crore under this head. The community had demanded an additional Rs. 1,000 crore for the institution. (The Hindu 4/3/07)

CPI (M) seeks programme for minorities (7)

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Monday asked the Centre to frame a concrete programme to address the discrimination being faced by minorities especially Muslims. The recommendations of the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee should be taken into account, it said. The programme has to be backed with adequate funds. It also suggested reservation for Dalit Muslims. "The proposals are not purely propagandist. We like it to be realistic as to what can be done by the Central Government. We are sending the report to various organisations and individuals for their feedback and will take a final view at a convention," party general secretary Prakash Karat, said at a press conference. He was releasing a "Charter for Advancement of Muslim Community." Mohammed Salim, MP and convener of the party committee that studied the Sachar Committee recommendations, was present. Mr. Karat said the Sachar report highlighted the "deplorable socio-economic plight" of the mass of the Muslim community and served to highlight the urgent need to adopt measures for the uplift in social and economic conditions of 13.8 crore Muslims, who constitute 13.4 per cent of the population. The UPA Government, he said, should not allow itself to be browbeaten or succumb to the propaganda about "minority appeasement." It should take steps in a time-bound framework for development of the Muslims with special focus on employment, income generation, education and security. The party asked the Government to formulate a sub-plan for the Muslims with specific budgetary allocation in all development schemes in proportion to their population at the all-India level; monitor

implementation of existing schemes and increase allocation to institutions such as the Maulana Azad Foundation, the National Minorities Development Corporation, the Wakf Council etc; steps to protect the Wakf properties; ensure Integrated Child Development Schemes and primary health centres in Muslim populated villages; and have special schemes to ensure housing for poorer sections. On employment and income generation, the party said that besides providing reservation for Dalit Muslims, the Government should give adequate representation for Muslims in the State and Central security forces; empanel adequate numbers in recruitment boards of selection committees; give easy credit especially for women engaged in traditional work as artisans; pay attention to women's self-help groups with bank linkages; devise skill development programme to upgrade traditional skills; and ensure allocation of plots, shops, stalls, petrol/gas dealership. It emphasised the need for OBC Muslims to get an adequate share of reserved quota. The suggestions on the education front include schools imparting modern education in all districts and blocks with sizeable Muslim population; incentives for women and girls' education with an increase in the number of hostels; increase in stipends and scholarships on means-cum-merit basis; recruitment of Urdu-speaking teachers; and introduction of scientific and job-oriented education in madrasas. (The Hindu 6/3/07)

CPM faults its own policy on education in Bengal (7)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5 : The CPI(M) today blamed its own policy for neglecting private institutions, referring to West Bengal where it said Muslims were lagging behind in education. The party today released a charter for advancement of Muslims in the wake of the Sachar committee report. "I have a personal view on that (status of Muslim education in West Bengal). The party as a policy did not encourage private schools, like the Muslim-sponsored schools, or the private higher secondary schools," CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat said. "It's only lately that private educational institutions have started coming up in Bengal. And the gap remains." He said the party would also take steps to address the issue of poor representation of Muslims in government jobs, which is currently 4.2 per cent. He, however, described as "tokenism" the allocation for minorities in the Budget. The CPI(M) charter for the advancement of Muslims came after a sub-committee headed by MP Mohammad Salim studied the Sachar Report. Though it did not recommend reservation for Muslims, it said "Dalit Muslims" should be given quotas. "We are not calling for reservation. But, there should be special intervention for affirmative action," Karat said. He called for an exercise to calculate number of Muslims in Other Backward Classes (OBC) lists in states where no such exercise has taken place so far. The Muslims must also get adequate representation in recruitment in state and Central security forces. The party said schools, including residential schools imparting modern education for both boys and girls, must be built in all districts and blocks with a sizeable Muslim population. Muslim girls' hostels must be constructed. The CPI(M) will now send the charter to various stakeholders following which there will be a national-level convention to finalise it. Besides, it also called for the implementation of the recommendations of the Sri Krishna Commission report on Mumbai violence. The report had "indicted top politicians, police and government officers", besides reiterating its demand for a CBI inquiry into the Gujarat riot cases in a time-bound manner. (Indian Express 6/3/07)

Muslims will march to Parliament today (7)

New Delhi, March 6: Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh on Wednesday will flag-off a march to Parliament of several Muslim organisations from across the country, seeking removal of barriers for providing exclusive reservation for Muslims in education and employment. This assumes significance in the backdrop of the Andhra Pradesh Muslim Reservation Bill being thrown out by the courts. The leaders also plan to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with their charter of demands. The rally is also demanding the implementation of the Sachar Committee report. Significantly, the Tamil Muslim Munnatra Kazhgham (TMMK) from Tamil Nadu has served as a catalyst for ensuring pan-Indian participation of several Muslim organisations on the issue of seeking implementation of the report. Union ministers G.K. Vasan, Dayanidhi Maran, T.R. Baalu, S. Reghupati, A.R. Antulay, Arjun Singh, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Ram Vilas Paswan are expected to attend the meeting. Syed Qasim Rasool Ilyasi of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, Asaduddin Owaisi of the MIM, Mahmood Madani of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-

Hind, CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat and CPI national secretary D. Raja and Syed Shahabuddin will also be there. TMMK leader P.M.R. Shamsuddin said, "The 27 per cent OBC reservation should be compartmentalised into Hindu OBC and MBC and Muslim OBC and MBC. There should implementation of the Sachar report recommendations on political representation from panchayat to the Parliament level, by instituting suitable mechanism, whereby, the Muslim representation in these bodies will match their population." Equal Opportunity Commission should be established and institutions faring well in Diversity Index should be rewarded, he added. (Asian Age 7/3/07)

Discussion on Sachar panel report soon: Das Munshi (7)

Kolkata, March 25: Union parliamentary affairs minister Priya Ranjan Das Munshi said on Sunday that Sachar Committee report, which exposed the appalling state of affairs of the minorities in West Bengal, would be tabled for debate in Parliament. Mr Das Munshi explained that a committee set up by the Union Cabinet had been working on the report. "The report would be placed in Parliament for discussion and its recommendations would be implemented objectively," he added. He claimed that the Congress-led UPA government had no obligation to place the report before Parliament as it was not a commission of inquiry report. "But Congress president Sonia Gandhi wants it to be tabled before Parliament," the Union minister added. Mr Das Munshi was speaking at a convention on Sachar Committee report, organised at the Muslim Institute by the minority development cell of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee. Trying to use the Sachar Committee report to criticise the ruling Left Front government, Mr Das Munshi said: "West Bengal is among those states where the condition of the Muslims is the worst. But obviously chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee does not accept this." The Union minister also recalled that Mr Bhattacharjee had once branded all the madrasas as breeding grounds for terrorism. "I am the only MP from the state who has given MPLAD funds to the highest number (42) of madrasas in my Raiganj constituency," he claimed. Stating that the UPA government was committed to improve the condition of the minorities in the country, Mr Das Munshi pointed out that unless the Muslims received economic freedom, "the soul of Mahatma Gandhi would not rest in peace." Mr Das Munshi, who is also the information and broadcasting minister, strongly attacked Mr Bhattacharjee for ordering a police action at Nandigram. "The Nandigram carnage is a blot on this government. And the chief minister does not even find it necessary to apologise for his irresponsible action," he added. (Asian Age 27/3/07)

Survey shows sharp fall in number of Muslim men with regular jobs (7)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 30: Adding another dimension to the Sachar panel report on the condition of Muslims in the country, the latest National Sample Survey shows that between 1999-00 and 2004-05, there was a nearly 45 per cent drop in the number of urban Muslim males in the category of "regular employees". During the same period, the number of urban Muslims increased in the self-employed category. Data from the 61st round of the NSSO on employment and unemployment among religious groups — it was released today — shows that during 2004-05, more than half of the workers in rural areas were self-employed, the proportion being the highest among Muslims, both males and females in both rural and urban areas. Figures for regular male employees in urban India show that the fall was more pronounced among urban Muslims — from 300 per 1,000 in 1999-00 to 165 per 1000 in 2004-05. Among Hindus, the drop is marginal — from 437 in 1999-00 to 431 per 1000 in 2004-05. The trend is altogether different among the urban female population. There has been a more than 200 per cent increase among female Muslim regular employees. According to the NSSO data, it increased from 175 per 1000 in 1999-00 to 587 per 1000 in 2004-05. During the same period and category, increase in female Hindu regular employees was around 75 per cent — from 338 to 590. Another interesting trend seen between urban male and females is that while there is an across the board increase in the number of self-employed among Hindu, Muslim and Christian males (around 9 per cent, 49 per cent and 52 per cent respectively), there is a reverse trend among self-employed Hindu, Muslim and Christian females where the fall is around 56 per cent, 51 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The NSSO also has data on the unemployment rate (number of unemployed per 1000 persons) as well as proportion of those employed per 1000. Data shows that unemployment rate (among male and female) in rural India increased among all religions between 1999-00 and

2004-05 , the increase being the highest among Christians (from 39 to 44 per 1000). In urban India, there has been a fall in the unemployment rate of Muslims (50 to 41 per 1000) but there has been an increase in the unemployment rate of Christians (73 to 86 per 1000). The proportion of persons employed in urban India (male and female, per 1000) was highest among Christians (375) followed by Hindus at 373 and Sikhs at 365. For Muslims, the figure was 331. (Indian Express 31/3/07)

Implement Sachar report: CPM to Govt (7)

New Delhi, March 30: The CPI(M) today asked the Government to implement the Sachar Committee report unmindful of the BJP allegation of Muslim appeasement. Speaking at the party's national convention on Sachar Committee recommendations, CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat urged the UPA Government to consult all political parties to overcome the Supreme Court stay on OBC quota in higher educational institutions. "We are disturbed by the trend arising in the judiciary (on the reservation issue)... Access to higher education has become the prerogative of the privileged few," Karat said. "Whatever safeguards remain for the others, especially those educationally backward, these doors are also being barred by the higher judiciary. The Centre should take the counsel of all political parties to overcome this difficulty," he said. He asked the ruling UPA coalition not to succumb to BJP campaign on "minority appeasement" and demanded that the Government go ahead full-steam to implement the recommendations for the uplift of the Muslim community. Observing that the West Bengal government was the first to seek a sub-plan for the Muslims in the 11th Plan, Karat said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has told the Left leaders that a decision would be taken on the matter. "We want the Union Cabinet to take a decision soon on having a sub-plan for the minorities," he said. Referring to two earlier Supreme Court judgements, Karat said while one had made higher education "a commercial and business activity", the other ruled that the state had no role in fixing quota for private institutions. These verdicts have placed higher education outside the reach of the common people, whether majority or minority, the CPI(M) leader said. He said in the 1990s, a nine-member Constitution Bench of the apex court had upheld job reservation for OBCs, barring those in the creamy layer. "Now why is it going backward?" Karat asked. Maintaining that the socio-economic status of Muslims was far behind other communities, Karat said while BJP has already begun a campaign on UPA's "minority appeasement", the Government should "not give in to any such pressure and justice must be done to the Muslims". Karat said the convention would adopt a demand charter on the basis of Sachar Committee recommendations and present it to the government for action. CPI(M) MP Mohd Salim explained the proposed demand charter to the gathering of mostly Muslim party leaders from different parts of the country. Observing that the Sachar Committee had highlighted the deplorable socio-economic plight of the Muslims, he said issues of development, employment, equity, education and security were part of the CPI(M) demand charter for the advancement of Muslim community. (Indian Express 31/3/07)

Muslims no more a minority in Uttar Pradesh: High Court (7)

ALLAHABAD: The Allahabad High Court on Thursday ruled that Muslims in Uttar Pradesh could no longer be treated as a religious minority. The landmark verdict was given by Justice S.N. Srivastava after applying the twin criteria — population and strength — of a religious minority and relying on the Census reports of 1951 and 2001. Muslims comprise about 18.5 per cent of the population in the State. Shortly after the verdict, Advocate-General S.M.A. Kazmi said the State Government would challenge the judgment. The order comes two days ahead of the first phase of the Assembly elections in the State. "The court finds that Muslims have ceased to be a religious minority community in the State of Uttar Pradesh on the consideration of the material on record, which include various Census reports including those of 1951 and 2001," Mr. Justice S.N. Srivastava said. The court directed the State Government to treat members of the Muslim community on a par with the non-minority communities without discrimination in accordance with law. The judgment was given on a writ petition filed by a madarasa in Ghazipur district, challenging the out of turn grant-in-aid to certain other minority institutions. On the timing of the judgment, Mr. Justice Srivastava said he considered it appropriate to pronounce the operative part of the verdict on Thursday since he was scheduled to sit in the Lucknow Bench from April 9. The judge said he applied "the twin criteria, i.e., population and strength of a religious community

as laid down by the founding fathers of the Constitution of India, as is clear from the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, to determine any religious community as a religious minority." He further said: "The U.P. Government should treat any member of Muslim community equal to other non-minority religious communities without discriminating in any respect in accordance with law being an integral part of citizenry of India." The court also asked the State Government to treat all Muslim institutions applying for grant-in-aid on a par with non-minority institutions without any discrimination. The judge issued notice to the Centre and the State Government to take appropriate steps to modify an October 23, 1993 notification issued by the Central Government on grant of minority status. Allowing the writ petition challenging out-of-turn grant-in-aid to certain institutions, Mr. Justice Srivastava took note of the petitioners' allegations of corruption. (THE HINDU 6/4/07)

Muslim clerics to move apex court (7)

NEW DELHI: Muslim religious leaders on Thursday reacted sharply to the Allahabad High Court decision taking away the minority status of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh and said they would challenge it in the Supreme Court. "We will approach the apex court challenging the Allahabad High Court decision that denies minority status to Muslims in Uttar Pradesh," Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid Syed Ahmad Shah Bukhari said. Asserting that the court's decision would send a negative message among the Muslim community, he said: "The cleric heads of all major Muslim organisations will sit together to take an unanimous decision in the matter." Describing it as an "unfortunate" verdict, the Imam of Fatehpuri mosque Mufti Mohammed Mukaram said, "Muslims are in a minority in the country and they should get all the benefits of their minority status." He questioned the criteria for the data relied upon by the Allahabad High Court. "The census of 2001 was incomplete and at that time itself we had raised objections about its credibility. We want the Government to order a fresh census to decide about the minority status of Muslims," he added. (THE HINDU 6/4/07)

Court order on status of Muslims in U.P. stayed (7)

Allahabad: A Division Bench of the Allahabad High Court on Friday stayed a single judge's judgment denying minority status to Muslims in Uttar Pradesh. Justice S.R. Alam and Justice Krishna Murari gave the stay order after a preliminary hearing of the review petition filed by the State Government challenging the verdict given by Justice S.N. Srivastava. The Government argued that it was not necessary for the single judge to adjudicate on the minority status of Muslims since this matter was neither before him, nor was any relief sought. The stay came on the eve of the first phase of the crucial elections to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly after Thursday's order triggered an outcry among all political parties, excluding the Bharatiya Janata Party, and several Muslim organisations. Highlighting the urgency of the matter, Advocate-General S.M.A. Kazmi submitted that "hundreds of welfare schemes run by the Government would be affected by the judgment and all the benefits accruing to the Muslims under those schemes will come to an end." Mr. Kazmi said, "the order was passed without reason. Besides, the question of minority status for the Muslims was neither before the single judge nor was any relief sought on the basis. It was, therefore, not necessary to adjudicate on this issue." — PTI (THE HINDU 7/4/07)

Muslims have poorest school record in UP (7)

NEW DELHI: Samajwadi Party boss Mulayam Singh Yadav may take pride in his "pro-minority" credentials, but with six phases of UP polls still to go, a study sponsored by the Centre has revealed that the state scores lowest in attendance for Muslim, SC and OBC students in government schools. Attendance of Muslim children in UP's primary and upper primary classes makes grim reading. It is clear that more needs to be done to keep Muslim kids at school as attendance figures for children from the community in primary and upper primary classes were 56.11% and 65.9% respectively. If UP does make the grade, the situation is somewhat better in West Bengal, which has sought to fast track facilities for Muslims. But while its performance is better than that of UP, a lot still needs to be done. In West Bengal, attendance of Muslim children for primary classes was 68.8% and 66.4% in upper primary. (TIMES OF INDIA 11/4/07)

Social activists cut 'secular' disk to take on BJP's CD (7)

LUCKNOW, APRIL 11: In an attempt to nullify the impact of the BJP's controversial CD, castigated for its inflammatory references to Muslims, a social group has come out with its own VCD. The message? Not just to tone down the hatred but actually "stop hate", as the campaign theme puts it. Titled Secular Voices, the CD has been made by Anhad, a social group headed by activist Shabnam Hashmi. It will be launched on Thursday. The social group has brought together 27 celebrities from various walks of life (see box) to spread the message through the CD, Hashmi said. She said two young Anhad volunteers, Mohammad Zabeeh Afaque and Mir Basit Hussain, made the VCD, one-and-a-half hours in length, with "stop hate" messages from these celebrities. "We are meeting youngsters from across various schools and colleges in the country as part of the campaign," she said. Hashmi said the idea is to get the youth involved in the anti-communalism crusade, and "this VCD is a part of that campaign". Hashmi agreed that the CD may not create as much noise as the BJP's controversial disc did, but it's a beginning nonetheless. "We know a small groups like ours will not be able to clear hatred in a single day, but this is a small attempt to reach out to the youngsters." Hashmi said the group plans to release the CD across the country, especially in areas where communalism has taken root. Uttar Pradesh, she said was chosen as the first destination not just because of BJP's controversial CD but also in view of the ongoing Assembly elections in the state. (THE INDIAN EXPRESS 12/4/07)

Surat love story: VHP looks for 'hidden' Muslims (7)

SURAT, APRIL 17 : The VHP is tracking down Muslim workers living in the city under assumed Hindu names. This latest "initiative" comes on the heels of the recent elopement of a Muslim boy, Qadir, with a Hindu girl, Khushi Agarwal. The VHP and Bajrang Dal have always maintained that such love affairs are part of a "conspiracy" and have sought ways to "tackle the situation". A week before Qadir eloped with Khushi, the VHP's south Gujarat wing approached the Surat police commissioner, requesting him to look into cases involving Hindu girls who had eloped with Muslim boys. It was alleged that the police did not register such cases. Now VHP workers are collecting data about Bengali goldsmiths and other traders who have settled in Surat after "assuming" Hindu names. Bajrang Dal and Durga Bahini workers, along with local sympathisers, were said to be contributing to this information gathering initiative. "This is a major threat. We have seen many cases where girls have been duped by Muslim youths residing in the neighborhood using Hindu names. We had to initiate action in this regard as police would not help us," VHP South Gujarat president, Utkarsh Patel, said. At present, VHP workers are said to be conducting a door-to-door surveys in the Varachha, Katargam and Mahidharpura localities of the city where most of the workers live. "We would like to share the information with the police and alert them wherever anything untoward is happening. We want to tell the police to do their job, or else we will take up the responsibility of social policing," said Patel. In a meeting with the members of the Agarwal, Maheshwari, Sindhi and Jain communities, the VHP initiated moves to ensure that they approached the city police stating that inter-religion love affairs were a serious problem and a conspiracy by the minorities. "We will meet again on Wednesday to decide what kind of action should be taken to prevent our daughters from getting lured into similar traps. Also we will see what action can be taken against Muslim youths camping outside educational institutions to lure girls," said Agrasen Vikas Trust president, Vikas Jindal. When contacted, Surat police commissioner RMS Brar reacted strongly, stating that no such surveys will be tolerated. "What authority does the VHP have to conduct such surveys? We will question everyone connected with this. If there is substantial evidence, we will take action against such people," said Brar. (Indian Express 18/4/07)

Condition of Muslims worse than Dalits': Heptullah (7)

LUCKNOW: Bharatiya Janata Party MP and the former Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha, Najma Heptullah, said the Sachar Committee report on the status of Muslims had exposed the real face of secularism. She said it had also brought to the fore the role played by the parties which harped on secularism. Addressing a press conference, Ms. Heptullah said the condition of Muslims after over 50 years of Independence was worse than that of the Dalits. She said the Muslims should have progressed accordingly but unfortunately, that had not been the case. Recalling her days in the Congress, Ms. Heptullah held herself also responsible for the plight of Muslims as she could do nothing much for them. Had she held a more responsible position she

would have contributed towards the uplift of the Muslims, she said. The BJP MP said though the Sachar panel report could not be disputed but there was no need to constitute the commission as the socio-economic and educational condition of the Muslims was known to every one. She added that their condition had deteriorated. Ms. Heptullah said the larger issue was development and progress of the country. On Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's statement on the division of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, Ms. Heptullah remarked that she came from a family which was opposed to the partition of India. (The Hindu 19/4/07)

"Committed to implementing Sachar report" (7)

New Delhi: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday reiterated his government's commitment to implement the Sachar Committee report as a strategy towards "removing backwardness of minorities." Dr. Singh lamented that "the use of religion for dividing people and getting electoral benefit is a bane of our age," and said this needed "to be curbed." He was speaking at a function after releasing a collection of parliamentary speeches by Maulana Syed Asad Madani of the Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind here. Praising Syed Asad Madani as "a modern mind, a patriotic and nationalist mind," Dr. Singh noted that the Maulana had relentlessly struggled "in defence of our composite nationalism." And, "it is this composite vision which defined the identity of our nationhood and which remains central to our approach to nation-building." Describing the Maulana as "a staunch advocate of pluralism and secularism," the Prime Minister noted with approval his view that "true secularism in the country could prevail only if every section of society is provided with an equal opportunity for progress." This view was very relevant "in our combined quest for a life of dignity, peace and prosperity for all sections of societies, including religious minorities." (THE HINDU 24/4/07)

Govt to set up four panels on minorities (7)

New Delhi : Acting on recommendations of the Sachar Committee report on socio-economic conditions of Muslims, the Centre on Thursday decided to set up four committees, which will examine the structure and functions of Equal Opportunity Commission, a National Data Bank, education and skilled development and to identify minority-concentrated districts. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, Information and Broadcasting Minister PR Dasmunshi told mediapersons. The Sachar Committee report, which was tabled in the Parliament in November 2006 has shown the backwardness of the Muslim community. The report noted that Muslim community in the country is socially, economically and educationally backward. It was decided to set up expert groups to examine and determine the structure and functions of an Equal Opportunity Commission, recommend an appropriate diversity index to promote diversity in living, setting up a National Data Bank and focus on improving access to education to Muslim girls reduce the educational backwardness among them. Dasmunshi said that an Inter-Ministerial Group would be set up to plan and monitor implementation of a comprehensive programme for skilled development of Muslims. (Pioneer 18/5/07)

Parivar 'support' keeps exhibition going (7)

BHOPAL, MAY 17: Controversial paintings depicting Muslims as terrorists remained on display for the third consecutive day at Bharat Bhavan here today, with policemen outnumbering visitors at the venue of the show titled 'The Face of Terror.' Late last evening the Bharat Bhavan administration seemed to be succumbing to protests by the Rashtriya Secular Manch and Congress activists when a couple of paintings were removed. Artist Kailash Tiwari, convener of the Rashtriya Swabhiman Andolan, a Right-wing body, himself did not turn up at the venue after a Congress delegation met the Governor demanding his arrest and removal of the paintings. A police complaint was also lodged against Tiwari. "I think the exhibition continued because of backing from the VHP and Bajrang Dal," Tiwari said. He openly flaunted his saffron leanings and said he saw nothing wrong in the paintings because all "terrorists happened to be Muslims". He said his next project would focus on Naxalites and other forms of terrorism. After his visit to Raj Bhavan, Congress spokesman Manak Agrawal claimed that the Governor had directed the police to arrest Tiwari because the paintings could whip up communal passions. He accused the state government of dancing to the tunes of Hindu organisations and claimed that his party would

continue to oppose the exhibition. Tiwari said a few paintings had indeed been removed yesterday but all were on display today. Only the order of display of the 20 paintings had been changed. The Bharat Bhavan Trust had asked him not to put up six more paintings that were "more explosive in nature". After the Congress protests, a group of Bajrang Dal and VHP activists staged a demonstration in support of the exhibition. President of BJP Yuva Morcha Vishwas Sarang accused the opponents of the exhibition of double standards. "When paintings of M F Hussain hurt Hindus, these elements rush in support of freedom of expression," he said. (Indian Express 18/5/07)

Cabinet approves Sachar report (7)

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the recommendations of the Rajinder Sachar Committee on Muslims as also those of a subsequent special panel, headed by Minister of State for Human Resource Development A.A. Fatmi, on the empowerment and education of the community. It directed the various Ministries to initiate comprehensive programmes to implement the recommendations effectively. Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson Priyaranjan Dasmunsi said the government would present an action taken report in Parliament on the Sachar Committee's recommendations, considering that it had brought out the stark reality of the socio-economic conditions of Muslims. The report would be presented in the monsoon session. An expert group would be set up to examine and determine the structure and functions of an equal opportunity commission. Another expert group would recommend an appropriate diversity index to promote diversity in living, educational and workspaces. A national data bank would be established and relevant particulars of socio-religious communities maintained. An autonomous assessment and monitoring authority would be set up in the Planning Commission to evaluate the data. Further, an inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Small-Scale Industries and Agro and Rural-based Industries, Textiles, Heavy Industries, Health and Family Welfare, Minority Affairs, Food Processing Industries, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Finance and Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion would be set up to monitor the implementation of a comprehensive programme for skill and entrepreneurship development of Muslims. The Cabinet directed the Planning Commission to provide adequate financial backup for implementation of the various new measures in the 11th Plan. As Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Mr. Dasmunsi assured the Cabinet that his Ministry would promote Urdu in a big way, including introduction of a 24-hour channel. Chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Cabinet meeting gave its approval of identification of 90 districts where minorities were concentrated for implementing special development plans in consultation with the Planning Commission. (The Hindu 18/5/07)

Immediate action on Sachar report: Sonia (7)

NEW DELHI: United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Friday promised immediate implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations on Muslims. "Appropriate action is in hand," she said addressing a conference on "Empowerment of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities through Elementary Education" organised by the All-India Forum of Legislators and the Ministry of Human Resource Development here. Ms. Gandhi's remarks come a day after the Union Cabinet decided to set up four committees on proposals for an equal opportunity commission, a national databank, education and skill development and identification of minority-dominated districts. Reiterating that the UPA Government was committed to uplifting both religious and linguistic minorities, she said some issues of minorities were addressed by the 15-point programme already being implemented. Expressing concern over staff absenteeism in government schools, Ms. Gandhi said Panchayati Raj institutions and women's self-help groups should be empowered to make teachers in rural areas accountable. Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh said reservation for backward classes was an attempt to make the entire higher education inclusive. When the issue came up, "it was pointed out that it conflicted with the advantages for the unreserved candidates. If general category seats were to be curtailed and given to the backward classes in higher education institutions, then their grievance would have been genuine, but the government adopted a unique, level-headed approach in which the general category seats were increased so that quota to backward classes

did not affect them." Mr. Singh said his Ministry was making all-out efforts to ensure that the SCs, STs, and minorities had full access to education. Education was a means for the advancement of all people and ensuring political rights for them. "But what exactly is holding back the matter is the lack of a sense of fair play, justice and commitment. There is a mindset that has been set by society, who just cannot think beyond their own rights." In a democracy, an individual's rights were safe only as long as other people's rights were also safeguarded. "The challenge today is to bring about a change in the mindset and an awakening that everyone has an equal right." Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat said it was necessary to eliminate poverty and provide the SCs, STs and minorities access to education. Empowerment was also important to instil confidence in these deprived classes. (The Hindu 19/5/07)

Govt nod to Sachar ideas on Muslims (7)

NEW DELHI, MAY 18: The Government today accepted nearly all the recommendations of the Sachar Committee and decided upon targeted intervention to help the Muslim minority in the country. As part of its plan, the government instructed all public sector banks to open more branches in areas with high concentration of Muslims. The government has already identified 90 such Muslim-dominated areas. Now, public sector banks will have to monitor disposal of loan applications by members of the minority community. In addition, to avoid false records, the banks will also have to maintain records of rejection of loan applications. The records of disposal of loan applications will be maintained by the RBI in a district wise and bank wise manner on its website. The flow of credit to minorities, including Muslims, will be monitored by the RBI and the data available with it will be made accessible through RTI. In another major decision to address the concerns expressed by the Sachar Committee over the anomalies in representation of Muslims, the government has decided to constitute a high-level committee to review the Delimitation Act, which will look into the concerns expressed by the panel. In addition, the government also decided in principle to set up an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) to look into grievances about discrimination against minorities, including Muslims. The structure and functions of the EOC will be notified on the basis of recommendations of an expert group to be set up by the government. Further, the government has decided to constitute an expert group to come out with an appropriate "diversity index", which will measure the extent of social inclusion in educational institutions, work places and living spaces. The government plans to use the suggested "diversity index" as a performance indicator to measure the extent of inclusive representation. Thus, an institute with better diversity index may receive better incentives from the government than an institute or organisation with poor diversity index. The government will also set up a National Data Bank (NDB) and an autonomous Assessment and Monitoring Authority (AMA) for minority communities, which will analyse the diversity data and suggest appropriate policies to the Government on a regular basis. The decisions follow demands raised by several groups after the recommendations of the Sachar Committee was submitted to the government in November last year. It laid bare the stark reality of the economic, social and educational backwardness of the Muslim community and suggested the above measures to rectify them. (Indian Express 19/5/07)

Minorities' front demands Andhra CM's resignation (7)

New Delhi : The All-India Minorities' Front (AIMF) on Sunday demanded resignation of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Rajshekhar Reddy over the police firing following the May 18 blast at historic Mecca mosque in Hyderabad. Addressing the protesters at Andhra Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi, AIMF president SM Asif said that the Chief Minister failed to protect the lives of innocent member of minority community, an official release said. The AIMF also submitted a memorandum, addressed to the Chief Minister, to the State's Resident Commissioner in Delhi and sought YS Rajshekhar Reddy's resignation over the issue. A powerful bomb had ripped through a gathering of thousands during Friday prayers at the mosque, leaving 14 people dead, including three in police firing. "We the members of the AIMF have come to seek your resignation from the office of Chief Minister, as you have miserably failed in fulfilling your Constitutional obligations of keeping the members of the minority communities safe," AIMF said. Meanwhile, Ilyas Azmi, an MP from Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday sought dismissal of the Andhra Pradesh Government over the issue. In a release, Azmi said that the police firing on persons, who were rushing to hospitals with the blast victims, was "intolerable". (Pioneer 21/5/07)

Court to examine legality of taking oath in Allah's name (7)

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court will examine in July the legality and constitutional validity of oaths taken by 11 Muslim MLAs of the Kerala Assembly in 2006 in the name of 'Allah.' Article 188 provides for taking oath and Third Schedule of the Constitution prescribes the manner. A member can take oath by saying, "I swear in the name of God" or "I solemnly affirm". But whether he/she can take oath in the name of 'Allah' is the question to be examined by the apex court. The State Vice President of Bharatheeya Janatha Yuvamorcha moved the Kerala High Court with a writ petition challenging the action of 11 MLAs taking oath in the name of 'Allah' instead of in the name of God. The High Court dismissed the petition holding that the MLAs concerned had not violated the statutory form under Third Schedule of the Constitution. The High Court had said: "When a person belonging to Muslim community takes oath in the name of Allah, he/she is not violating any constitutional provisions. Constitution permits to take oath in the name of God." (The Hindu 22/5/07)

Minorities panel to hold RTI camps for Muslims (7)

Bhopal : With objective of making Muslims aware about the Right to Information Act (RTI), the State Minorities Commission would organise several camps in Muslim-dominated localities and acquaint the people of importance of the Act. The camps would be organised with the assistance of United Reformers Organisation. Apart from the State capital, the camps would also be organised in other districts and developmental blocks of the State. According to sources the commission would organise its first camp at SBI Square in the first week of June. Later, the camps will be organised at Aishbagh, Budhwara and Jehangirabad, the localities densely populated with the Muslims. Madhya Pradesh Minorities Commission secretary Umar Farookh Khatani while speaking to The Pioneer said that the commission along with United Reformers Organisation is going to organise several camps in Muslim-dominated areas to inform the locals about the importance of the RTI Act. The camp termed as "RTI Promotion Joint Action Plan" to be held at SBI Square, Aishbagh, Budhwara and Jehangirabad, he added. Later, the camps would be organised across the State covering every district and block, Khatani added. The commission will not only provide information on RTI Act in the camp but also organise interactive session to involve the participants. Minister for Minorities Welfare Rustam Singh and Chief Information Commissioner PP Tiwari have also approved to attend the inaugural camp. (Pioneer 23/5/07)

Justice eludes Gujarat victims: Amnesty (7)

New Delhi: Amnesty International has expressed concern that the victims of 2002 post-Godhra riots are yet to get justice. In its report for 2007 on 'World human rights' released here on Wednesday, Amnesty said: "Justice continued to evade most victims and survivors of the 2002 violence in Gujarat, in which thousands of Muslims were attacked and more than 2,000 were killed. Rehabilitation continued to be slow. Members of the Muslim minority in Gujarat reportedly faced difficulties in accessing housing to rent and public resources." It said, "An official panel concluded that over 5,000 displaced families lived in 'sub-human' conditions. There continued to be a few successful prosecutions relating to the violence. However, 1,594 cases closed by the State police were reopened on the orders of the Supreme Court and 41 police officials were being prosecuted for their alleged role." The report said, "New evidence on the riots emerged, in the form of details of mobile phone calls made between those leading the attacks and politicians belonging to the then ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, a Hindu nationalist party." On J&K, Amnesty said, "Politically motivated violence slightly decreased, but torture, deaths in custody, enforced disappearances and extra-judicial executions continued to be reported. (The Hindu 24/5/07)

Violence erupts after anti-Muslim posters show up on MSU campus (7)

VADODARA, MAY 25 : Trouble erupted in the walled city areas of Vadodara after Friday prayers in the Jumma Masjid over the appearance two days ago of objectionable posters at the M S University campus. Police used lathis and fired teargas shells to disperse stone-pelting mobs protesting against the posters. Late in the night, mobs gathered again in the Mandvi area, near the Jumma Masjid, and police lobbed four teargas shells to disperse them. It started a few days ago with M S University Senate member Deepak Shah offering a Rs 1 lakh award daring anybody

to "offend Islam the way Fine Arts Faculty student Chandramohan's works had offended the religious sensibilities of Christians and Hindus." Shah, formerly with the BJP students' wing, withdrew his statement, saying he meant no ill will towards any community. However, on Wednesday night an anonymous caller tipped off police and media about posters objectionable to Islam found near the M S University campus. Police seized the posters, bearing words in Hindi and falsely attributing it to Chandramohan. One Farid Lakhajiwala filed a complaint against those responsible for making and distribution of the controversial posters as well as against Shah for his controversial offer. The case was made out under Sections 153 (a), 153 (b), 295 (a), and 114 of the Indian Penal Code — the same as those pressed against Chandramohan for his art works. Senior Muslim leaders and PUCL activist Prof J S Bandukwala were in discussion with police on how to handle the situation. And on Thursday, M S University deans and department heads adopted a resolution that displaying obscene pieces of art to hurt sentiments, beliefs, and faith was deplorable and should be avoided. On Friday, however, anonymous leaflets calling for a bandh and widespread condemnation of the provocation were found stuck on walls in Muslim areas of the city. There was tension in the air and crowds gathered, with some men bearing images of Osama bin Laden. Stone-pelting followed. Some 15 youths were arrested for rioting and combing operations were on in full swing in walled city areas. Police Commissioner P C Thakur said, "Miscreants who wanted to breach the peace have been identified and more arrests will take place tonight." He compared the situation to the teleserial Tamas, which depicted communal violence during the Partition and said the disturbances were all well-planned conspiracies. He said an alert had been sounded and two reserve police companies had been deployed. But Thakur did not comment on why no action was taken against Shah for his provocative statements and offer of a reward. (Indian Express 26/5/07)

UPA not sincere about Sachar: CPM (7)

New Delhi, May 27: Accusing the UPA Government of not being "sincere" in implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations, the CPI(M) today said it has failed to take practical steps for the uplift of Muslims in the country. "Seven months have passed since the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee submitted its report. But the Government has not taken any action and practical steps on it so far. The Government is not sincere. There is a need for will-power," CPI(M) General Secretary Prakash Karat said, addressing a convention on the Sachar Committee report here. He said the Prime Minister had assured a CPI(M) delegation that the report would be discussed in the Budget session of Parliament. "But unfortunately no discussion took place in the session." Karat claimed that due to the BJP and the NDA's opposition and frequent disruption of Parliament, the report has not been discussed in the House. "But that is not the only reason. If the ruling party had wanted, it would have been discussed in Parliament. There is no priority to the report," he said. Karat said with the decision by the Union Cabinet to constitute four committees to go into the details of the Sachar report, the whole issue has been postponed indefinitely. He added that the CPI(M) had requested the Government to allocate more funds for the welfare of Muslims in the 11th Plan, but that was not accepted. Karat also asked the UPA Government to debunk the BJP "campaign" on Muslims being appeased and tell people the "true picture" about the condition of Muslims. On post-Godhra riots, Karat said the CPI(M) had asked the Centre to tell the Supreme Court that except the Best Bakery case, all other cases would be handed over to the CBI for detailed investigation. "So far the Home Ministry has not taken any step," he said. (Indian Express 28/5/07)

State makes it harder for Muslims (7)

Jaipur, June 13: The Rajasthan government has asked Muslim divorcees applying for jobs as teachers to submit talaq decrees approved by a court. Legal experts and Muslim organisations said the order is discriminatory. "The government advertised teachers' posts for divorcees and deserted women. But when we applied for the post, the authorities refused to entertain our applications and asked us to submit a court decree," said Naseem Bano, a divorcee. "It is against the rule of equality," she said. But minister of state for education Vasudev Devnani said it is a government order and a few of the applicants had filed a case in court. "Hence we should wait for a court verdict," Mr Devnani said. Naseem's husband had uttered talaq thrice, dissolving their marriage. "The government asked us to submit a talaq decree. We are not fond of talaq. Talaq is

a stigma gifted by the husband, society treats us as degraded persons," she said. (Asian Age 14/6/07)

Terror link disturbs Muslims (7)

New Delhi, July 5: Muslims in India reacted on Thursday with dismay, anger and disbelief over the arrest of three Indian doctors in the car bomb attack in Britain that has for the first time linked the community in this country to Al Qaeda. Many of the young and the old in the country's largest minority said it was difficult for them to even accept that Indian Muslims could anyway be linked to any international terror plot. "Indian doctors plotting mass murder? I find that extremely difficult to comprehend," Kashmiri businessman Tamiiz Ahmad Dar said, echoing a widely held view in the community that has until now scrupulously kept away from Al Qaeda and its terror network. With over 140 million, India is home to the world's second largest Muslim population after Indonesia. Unlike other huge or predominantly Muslim societies, Indian Muslims have remained far away from Al Qaeda, a point that was noted globally. The arrests of eight doctors — seven in Britain and one in Australia and including Indians — came quickly after a burning jeep loaded with gas cylinders into the doors of Glasgow airport June 30. Mr Dar added, "Right now, the Indians have just been detained by the authorities. But to taint them as terror suspects and say that they were part of a diabolical plot to blow up London or Scotland is something, I refuse to believe." Seven of the suspects arrested in Britain are doctors or medical students, which includes two Indians. The eighth person, also a doctor and Indian, has been held in Brisbane. Another Indian was released after questioning in Australia. Sabeed Ahmed and Mohammed Haneef have been arrested in Britain and Australia respectively. Both are from Bangalore. The man who drove the jeep and is badly burned has also been identified as an Indian doctor. The families of Ahmed and Haneef insist that the two are innocent. Haris Beeran, a lawyer, said that if the Indians were guilty, "it is most unfortunate thing to happen. I cannot accept it or justify it". "I can still excuse a Pakistani or an Afghani indulging in radicalism because they are not getting any chance to mix with others or to imbibe good things from other religions of culture," Mr Beeran said. "I think when Indians go abroad, they get mixed up with radical groups. They go to mosques or clerics who fill them with fundamental ideas. Naturally, they tend to get a different mindset." Qasim Rasool Ilyas, convenor of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, admitted that it was the first time Indians were coming under suspicion. But he argued it would be wrong to tar the entire Indian Muslim community. Politician and former diplomat Syed Shabuddin was blunt. "Of the 150 million Indian Muslims, if you find one or two odd ones, what is the big deal?" he asked with indignation. (IANS) (Asian Age 6/7/07)

Coming: a sweeping new law to revamp, regulate madrasas (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 13: Aiming to modernise the estimated 2,500 madrasas across the country to encourage the growth of a "Muslim vox populi unmediated by clerics," the UPA Government is considering a new law that will usher in sweeping changes in the madrasa system: from teaching to funding, regulation to curriculum. The Central Madrasa Board Act 2007, a draft of which the recently appointed National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions has submitted to the HRD Ministry, comes with a set of recommendations pushing for a Central Madrasa Board (on the lines of CBSE) to which all madrasas are affiliated and a Madrasa Fund. "Muslims in India must realise that they are actually scraping the bottom of the education barrel in an era of internationalism," says the commission, adding that it is imperative to bridge the divide between "the educated elite in the Muslim community who belong to the stream of modern and secular education " and those who are "products of madrasa education." Tying improvement of madrasas to empowering the voice of the aam Muslim, the committee is unsparing in its criticism of the existing system: "There is no uniform or scientific curriculum...(not) even basic infrastructure...outdated examination and evaluation." The move to bring madrasas under a central board has been opposed by powerful Muslim organisations like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, the Deoband and the Jamaat-e-Islami, as interference by the government in religious affairs. However, the commission cites those who have backed its proposal: "Eminent scholars of the Barelvi school, Ahle Hadis, Dawoodi Bohras, Imam Shefai's Sect, Nadvatul Ulama, Lucknow, a section of Deoband represented by Sheikhu Hadis and president of the Tanzeem Ulama-e-Hind, Hazrat Maulana Anzar Shah Kashmiri." According to the 40-page draft Act, a copy of which is

with The Indian Express: • Rs 500-crore seed money for the Madrasa Board, half of it earmarked as "Reserve Fund" or fund invested in "agricultural and industrial activity" with profits to be ploughed back into a central Madrasa Fund. • Financial experts will advise the Board on how this money should be invested to ensure optimal and safe returns. Even donations, both domestic and foreign, will be rolled into this Madrasa Fund. • While the Board won't audit individual madrasa accounts, madrasas will have to meet specified quality standards if they wish to continue their association with the Board. • Salaries of madrasa teachers and staff (typically, meagre sums) will be brought on par with those of government school teachers and staff. • Initially, affiliation to Board will not be mandatory but will guarantee equivalence to the CBSE board and enable students to get to universities and colleges not otherwise possible for madrasa graduates. • Curriculum for deeniyat (religious studies) won't be touched but controls will kick in for affiliated madrasas when it comes to the non-religious end of the curriculum. • Science, technology and computers will be part of the curriculum with the Board encouraging the use of "modern technology" and "methodology" for "preparation of textbooks, educational material", and for "teacher training". • Board will advise madrasas every five years on updating the syllabus, as well as "advise the National Council for Educational Research and Training on textbook writing in respect of Urdu textbooks as well as relevant aspects of curriculum." According to the 2001 Census, only 55% of Muslim men are literate (the national average is 64.5%) and only 41% of Muslim women are literate (the national average is 45.6%). According to the Sachar Committee Report made public last year, only 4 per cent of Muslims go to madrasas for their educational needs. But reforming the madrasas would go a long way in attracting more Muslim students, it is felt. (Indian Express 14/7/07)

Muslim law board seeks Waqf Act amendment (7)

New Delhi, July 17: Unhappy with some Supreme Court judgments, which it feels impinge upon the Muslim personal law (Shariat), the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) now wants amendments to the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. The board plans to refer this matter to its legal committee so that it can formulate the amendments required in the act. The board then plans to take this forward by actively lobbying among political parties to seek changes in the act, a move that is sure to stir the political cauldron. This was decided during the working committee meeting of the AIMPLB held last week. The board also decided to seek amendments to the Waqf Act, 1995, beginning the process by suggesting the changes to the joint parliamentary committee (JPC) on Wakf. Among the changes it wants is one that will make state Waqf boards internally autonomous and also have elected rather than nominated members. Ironic as it seems, the Divorce Act was passed by the Rajiv Gandhi government in the wake of the controversial Shah Bano judgment of the Supreme Court in 1985, which had drawn vociferous protests from many in the Muslim community. In fact, the act, which diluted the Supreme Court order, was viewed as a move to appease the Muslim community by the Rajiv Gandhi government. Now, the board says it would like to see this act amended. Mr Abdur Raheem Qureshi, one of the two board secretaries, told this newspaper: "We will try and convince the political parties, including the Left, on the need for amendments." Mr Qureshi said that the act, even otherwise, had been "loosely drafted" and the board had sought 23 amendments to the draft legislation before it was passed by Parliament. He says Rajiv Gandhi assured the board that it would the proposed amendments would be incorporated later and to allow the passage of the bill. This did not come about but now the board would like the changes in the light of certain Supreme Court orders. (ASIAN AGE 18/7/07)

State govts wary of hurting Muslim sentiments (7)

NEW DELHI: State governments have been chary of compliance with the court's directive on registration of marriages for the fear of offending representatives of Muslims who have resisted the extension of law to their personal matters — that is, matters pertaining to marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance etc. The court, moved by the plight of women fighting for their rights under marriage — like maintenance and custody of children, had last year asked the governments to amend the law or frame rules for compulsory registration of marriages and notify them within three months. It had felt that this ruling was the need of the time as certain unscrupulous husbands altogether deny marriage, leaving their spouses in the lurch, be it for seeking

maintenance, custody of children or inheritance of property. Accordingly, the court directed the governments to provide for "consequences of non-registration of marriages" in the rules, which should be formalised after inviting public response and considering them. The rules so framed would continue to operate till respective governments framed proper legislations for compulsory registration of marriages, the apex court had clarified. The Special Marriage Act, Parsi Marriage Act, Christian Marriage Act and the Foreign Marriage Act all provide for registration of marriages. Section 8 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, enables the state government to make rules with regard to mandatory registration of marriages and provides that any person found violating this would be asked to pay a fine of Rs 25! The court had also accepted the submissions of the National Commission for Women, which said non-registration of marriages affected women the most. Listing out the benefits of registration of marriage, NCW said it would help "prevention of child marriages, check bigamy/polygamy, help women exercise their matrimonial rights, enable widows to claim inheritance and deter men from deserting their wives". (Times of India 24/7/07)

Most Muslims secular, but religious leaders should fight extremism: PM (7)

NEW DELHI, JULY 27: Underlining once again that he can "feel the pain of attempts to taint the entire (Muslim) community as terrorists because of the mistakes of a few," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called on religious leaders to unitedly fight against the spread of extremism. The PM was responding to a letter addressed to him by fellow Congressman C K Jaffer Sharief, expressing concerns over "an act of violence in a western country where it was suspected that people of only one faith were involved. As a result, innocents are being harassed only because of their faith." In his letter, Sharief also referred to the case of Haneef who was held by the Australian police in the Glasgow bomb case. A majority of Indian Muslims, Singh said, are "moderate and secular, and don't subscribe to fundamentalist views that preach violence and terror." However, he added that "in recent times, India has also been a victim of extremist views and thinking" that destroy religious views and try to negate the message of peace-loving religions. This view, he said, wants to destroy the spirit of mutual coexistence in society and "encourage violence". Significantly, the PM has called upon religious leaders to fulfil their duty: "It is their duty to unite and fight, prevent such (extremist) views from spreading. Muslims for centuries have got together and provided innumerable services for the development of the country." He added that as there are very few countries where so many castes, religions and communities live together, it is "our duty to preserve" this ethos of co-existence, as "this is necessary for a strong, democratic and secular system." Adding that "if we are not loyal to this system, our country will cease to exist." (Indian Express 28/7/07)

Refused house for 'being Muslim', TV actor files PIL (7)

Mumbai, August 2: A television actor, Aamir Ali, has filed a PIL aggrieved at being refused a house in the hub of television industry —Lokhandwala — "just because he was a Muslim". In his petition, he prays no other citizen should be discriminated on grounds of caste, creed or religion. A Division Bench of the Bombay High Court comprising Chief Justice Swatanter Kumar and Justice Dhananjay Chandrachud has ordered the state to respond to the petition in four weeks. Alleging discrimination, Ali's petition urges the court to direct the state Government and the registrar of co-operative housing societies to ensure membership was not denied to an individual because he belonged to a particular community. In November 2006, when Ali was looking for a flat in Lokhandwala complex, Andheri, he was impressed with a flat shown to him by his broker in Springfield Co-operative Housing Society. However, he says, broker M Kukreja told him that the society would not allow him to become a member because he was a Muslim. Ali claims he discovered later that such treatment was meted out to other people as well. His solicitor Mustafa Motiwala said, "Ali filed a PIL because he was refused a flat only on the ground that he was a Muslim." Arguing on behalf of Ali, senior counsel Arif Bookwalla told the court that an apex court judgment relating to a matter in Gujarat covered only Zoroastrians, where land was allotted to the community and they had the power to deny membership to a non-Zoroastrian. "That apex court judgment applies only in cases where people from a community come together and decide to construct a building, which allows only their people. However, in a regular co-operative society where a cosmopolitan crowd resides, you cannot disallow anyone membership on the basis of religion," added Motiwala.(Indian Express 3/8/07)

Eviction: Madrasa students threaten AASU leader (7)

Guwahati, August 3: The expulsion of suspected Bangladeshi migrants by Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland into Assam in the past two weeks and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) accusing the state Government of protecting them has taken a new turn with the All Assam Madrasa Students' Union threatening AASU adviser Samujjal Bhattacharyya and banning his entry into the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley. A statement issued by Saleh Ahmed Mazumdar, president of the Hailakandi district unit of the AASU, accused the AASU adviser (who is also the chairman of the Northeast Students' Organisation) of spreading hatred against the religious minority and vowed to ban entry of Bhattacharyya into the Barak Valley. The AASU, however, dismissed the threat as "nonsense" with AASU General Secretary Tapan Kumar Gogoi saying its adviser would visit Hailakandi on August 9 to attend a conference of the district students' union. Earlier, the All Assam Minority Students' union had criticised the AASU for its stand against Bangladeshi migrants. (Indian Express 4/8/07)

Antulay tables virtual ATR on Sachar panel (7)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 20: Taking note of the Sachar Committee's recommendations, the Centre has decided to set up an equal opportunities commission, create a diversity index for rewarding educational institutes, monitor credit flow to Muslims, and review laws to ensure that the process of delimiting constituencies does not end up barring Muslims from contesting elections in areas where they have significant strength. These were among 15 measures announced by Union Minister for Minority Affairs A R Antulay in the Rajya Sabha last week in reply to a question on the steps for the implementation of the Sachar report. Antulay's statement, tabled in the House on August 13, is a virtual "action taken report" on Sachar's recommendations. He said the Government has constituted a high-level committee to address concerns about inadequate representation of Muslims in legislatures because of anomalies in the delimitation process. The panel will review delimitation laws and recommend necessary changes. The Sachar Committee had pointed out that many constituencies in which Muslims had significant population had through the process of delimitation been reserved for SC/ST candidates, thereby barring Muslims from contesting. Antulay also said that public sector banks would be encouraged to open more branches in Muslim concentration areas, and that the Reserve Bank would ensure maintenance of credit flow to Muslims. Data on public-sector banks' lending in such areas would be made accessible under the RTI. He said that in principle, it has been decided to set up an equal opportunities commission to look into grievances regarding discrimination at the workplace. Also, civil rights centres would be opened at universities. The other steps listed are: • Targeted intervention for improvement of basic amenities and employment opportunities in 90 districts with concentration of Muslims that have been identified as backward. • A multi-pronged strategy for addressing educational backwardness by starting more schools • A modernisation programme for madrasa education • A merit-cum-means scholarship for 20,000 students from minority communities who are taking professional and other technical courses • Guidelines issued for improving representation of minorities in government, PSUs, public sector banks etc • A National Data Bank and an autonomous assessment & monitoring authority for giving government feedback and proposing changes. (Indian Express 21/8/07)

Government statement likely on Sachar Committee, says Dasmunsi (7)

NEW DELHI: The Government could make a suo motu statement in Parliament on the recommendations of the Union Cabinet on the Sachar Committee report, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Priyaranjan Dasmunsi said here on Wednesday. While he did not indicate when it will be made, Mr. Dasmunsi said the Cabinet had discussed the report in detail and the government, through a statement, would share with Parliament what it intended to do. If some MPs wanted a debate, it would be up to the presiding officer to take up the matter. With the adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday having taken up most of the day, the Minister (The Hindu 30/8/07)

More schools for Muslim girls: Sachar panel (7)

NEW DELHI: In the ATR on the Sachar Committee that was tabled in Parliament on Friday, government said that deficiencies in civic amenities and economic opportunities in 338 identified towns and cities with substantial population of minorities will be addressed. RBI will maintain a district-wise and bank-wise data regarding the disposal of applications for minorities. More Kasturba Gandhi vidyalayas will be opened for Muslim girls, and mid-day meals will be extended in blocks with Muslim concentration. A revised coaching and remedial tuition scheme has been approved to improve employability of minorities. While government presses ahead with Sachar-driven schemes, it does, however, run the risk of generating a reaction to the pro-minority overdrive. It needs to balance being seen to be attentive to Muslim interests even as it attracts the expected criticism from BJP that it was playing sectarian politics. If this gains traction, Congress would have to do a balancing act. While Left leaders never agree that the Muslim factor is part of their calculations, they believe that vigorous opposition to an "alliance" with Bush will do the trick for them. The Left parties had not hesitated in being part of anti-Bush protests when the US president visited India last year. The protests had a strong component of Muslim mobilisation. Minister for minority affairs A R Antulay in Lok Sabha said that "targeted intervention" was proposed to improve basic amenities in Muslim dominated areas. He said that an expert group would recommend the structure and functioning of a commission while another panel has been set up to review the delimitation of constituencies with respect to "anomalies in representation of Muslims". A group of experts is working on an ideal "diversity index" to promote social diversity and inclusiveness as far as the Muslim representation in educational institutions was concerned. "Such an index can be the basis for providing incentives for better representation" in all such areas. (Times of India 1/9/07)

Implement Sachar report now: LJP (7)

NEW DELHI: The Lok Janshakti Party, (LJP), headed by Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, has demanded the immediate implementation of the Sachar Committee report and separate reservation for Muslims in employment and educational institutions. If needed an amendment to the Constitution should be made, according to a resolution passed at the party's 'Muslim Conference' which ended here on Tuesday. The meet also demanded punishment for those found guilty in 1992-93 Mumbai communal riots like those in the Mumbai bomb blasts and compensation for victims of all communal riots, including Bhagalpur riots, on the pattern of compensation for the Sikh victims of 1984 riots. The LJP demanded that the law regarding anti-communal riots be framed as soon as possible and fast track courts established for early disposal of the cases of communal riots. (The Hindu 5/9/07)

Hyderabad simmers over 'illegal detentions' (7)

Hyderabad: The old city of Hyderabad is simmering over the undeclared detention of about 40 youth over the last one week in connection with the twin bomb blasts. Some of the affected families on Tuesday threatened to come out on the streets if their wards were not released immediately. The delegation led by the Hyderabad Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi told the Commissioner that the detention of the youth without bringing them before a court was creating a lot of tension and restlessness in the Muslim community. The mothers and sisters of the youngsters, who included daily wage earners, salesmen and auto rickshaw drivers, told a Press conference in Hyderabad that they were picked up by plainclothes policemen from different places several days ago but they were yet to get to know their fate. "My younger son Wasey was taken away by the police from my house on Thursday last. As a precaution I had sent my elder brother Rafey with him. But none of them have returned. I don't know where they are. I have lost my sleep. Have mercy on us and please return my sons," said an elderly widow Mujeebunnisa. Arifunnisa, another elderly lady narrating her tales of woe said that her son and a medical student Ibrahim Ali Junaid had returned from Delhi on Friday after attending a conference at the Jamia Millia and went to his hostel. "He called home from there to say that he was coming home but never reached. On inquiry we were told that some persons dragged him away soon after he made the phone call". Ghousia Begu, mother of an auto driver Abdul Raheem, said her son was dragged away from home by the police last night. "He is the sole bread earner of the family. I am a heart patient and I do not have the money even for my medicine. I am not able to understand why we are being harassed and tortured like this. Where should we go for justice".Zaheda

Begum, mother of Rayees Ahmad, said that he was taken away by two plainclothes policemen when he was returning home from work in Secunderabad area. "He has already faced a lot of harassment at the hands of the police since the Mecca Masjid blasts. He lost his earlier job and his engagement was broken because of this," she said with tears in her eyes. Nusrat said her brother Zulfiqar was running the home by working as a sweet meat maker and there was nobody to take care of the elderly and ailing parents at home after he was taken away five days ago. "Despite being a girl I am running from police station to police station to find the whereabouts of my brother. I want to ask the Chief Minister whether this was his Government or the police Goonda Raj," she asked. Many such tragic and heart rending stories came one after the other at the Press conference organised by Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee secretary Lateef Mohammed Khan. He alleged that these illegally detained youth were kept in different safe houses of the police and were being tortured. Alleging that 40 to 50 Muslim youth were picked up by the police since the blasts, he said the entire community was being targeted in a systematic manner. "This is being done to tarnish the image of the community and portray all the Muslims as culprits. Innocent youth of poor families have been picked up and they do not know where their wards are," he added. (Pioneer 5/9/07)

"BJP running away from debate on Sachar report" (7)

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Wednesday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of disrupting Parliament to prevent a debate on the Sachar Committee report on the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. The report was tabled on November 30 last and a discussion in the Lok Sabha was listed for Wednesday. Describing the BJP demand for setting up a Joint Parliamentary Committee on the India-U.S. nuclear agreement — on which the House was adjourned — as "old and hackneyed," Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said the Opposition was frequently disrupting the proceedings on "one pretext or the other." "Never before has a JPC been constituted on international agreements." He said there was no question of an all-Parliament or all-party committee on the nuclear deal. The Pranab Mukherjee committee was set up to go into the issues raised by "our" supporting party. "This is an internal group of the UPA, by the UPA, for the UPA to clarify the concerns raised by our supporting party. If the National Democratic Alliance or its allies are so interested in joining it, then they should either join the UPA or give outside support. Then we will consider their offer." Just because there were Ministers on the Mukherjee panel, it did not make it a government committee. "The Ministers are representing their parties." Seeking to know why the BJP was "running away" from a debate on the Sachar panel's recommendations, Mr. Singhvi said: "What are their reservations about the Sachar panel? Why are they running away from a debate on an issue of the utmost importance?" He dismissed the charge that the (recently tabled) follow-up action on the Sachar recommendations was an election-eve package for Muslims and said the setting up of such a committee was proposed under the Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance. Charging the BJP with "playing politics," trying to mislead the nation and creating confusion, Mr. Singhvi said there was no talk of elections when the Sachar Committee was set up or when it submitted its recommendations last year. "It is they who are politicising the issue, not us." (The Hindu 6/9/07)

Anger at minorities commission hearing (7)

MUMBAI: Anger and frustration boiled over during the public hearing of the National Commission for Minorities on Wednesday, as the Muslim community voiced its anguish at the "betrayal" by the Congress government and the lack of political will to implement the Srikrishna Commission's report on the Mumbai riots of 1992-93. People expressed their feelings of aggrievement and insecurity 14 years after the communal carnage in Mumbai. The hearing in the afternoon at the State government guest house took a noisy turn when people's representatives tried to speak and articulate issues concerning the community. Arif Naseem Khan, Congress MLA, bore the brunt of the anger and his speech was shouted down with cries of "down with the Maharashtra government." Various individuals and NGOs said there was no need for an MLA to speak here and they had no faith in the elected representatives or the government. The proceedings were disrupted for a while as everyone protested against the Congress-NCP government which they said had done little to implement the Srikrishna Commission's report or punish the guilty. Next in the line of fire was Maharashtra Minister of State for Labour Baba Siddiqui, who tried to calm

down the angry gathering. He too had to stop speaking. Finally, the Commission said that only NGOs or individuals were required to speak. Some calm was restored after Dr. Zoya Hasan, member of the Commission, suggested that women speak for a while. The National Commission for Minorities headed by former Union Minister Mohammed Shafi Qureshi was hearing public representatives and NGOs on various issues concerning the minorities. It will meet the Maharashtra Chief Minister on Thursday. Though important issues such as education, lack of jobs and overall discrimination were raised, the most vital point was the complete lack of justice after the riots. Speaker after speaker said the government, despite an election promise way back in 1999, failed to keep its word. Farid Batatawala, who has been campaigning for riot victims for 14 years, said that in the two major incidents during the riots — Suleiman Usman Bakery and Hari Masjid incidents — the government must punish the guilty policemen. Habib Fakir, educationist, said the government lacked the political will to implement the Srikrishna Commission's report. (The Hindu 6/9/07)

Sachar: Govt to set up two expert groups (7)

New Delhi, September 6: Putting the process of implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations for the upliftment of Muslims on the fast track, the Government on Thursday announced the setting up of two expert groups. The two new committees—determining the structure and functioning of the Equal Opportunity Commission and a panel for deciding the “diversity index” for the minorities—have been directed to submit their reports within three months. The specific projects include augmenting the entrepreneurial skills of the minorities, development of Wakf properties and putting in place a data bank on the minorities, enabling the Government to form particular schemes for them. The terms of reference of this expert group will be to recommend the structure, scope and functions of the proposed Equal Opportunity Commission, to advise on an appropriate legislative framework for such a Commission and to make any other recommendations relevant to the above. The group, headed by N R Madhava Menon, will include Javeed Alam, Satish Deshpande, Yogendra Yadav and Gopal Guru as its members. The Commission is expected to be political in nature and will address the issues of discrimination against the Muslims in the Government as well as private sector. The expert group on “diversity index” will “develop and devise an acceptable index to measure diversity in the areas of education, Government and private employment and housing,” as suggested by the Sachar Committee. It will be headed by Amitabh Kundu and would include Sugata Marjit, Abdul Kalam and Hasb Dabru as its members. The plans in the pipeline include the development of Wakf Properties, tapping its commercial potential. The Union Minority Affairs Ministry has already written to the state Governments about the same. The Government is also exploring ways to amend the Wakf Act so that the management of the properties is done in a better way with the Centre having a greater say. The skill and entrepreneurship development among the Muslim community will focus on making credit easy to the Muslims, besides devising particular schemes in areas where the Muslims are employed in traditional occupations like the lock industry in Aligarh. Meanwhile, the Centre has written to state Governments and Union Territories, urging them to post more Muslim health workers, teachers and police personnel in areas dominated by the community. The letter, sent by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) on August 30, has focused on these spheres of Government since these are the ones which have “maximum public-administration interface” and the maximum potential to generate confidence within the community, official sources said. The department, however, admitted that the letter was more in the nature of an “advisory” since posting of personnel came under the domain of the state Governments. “Our letter has nothing to do with recruitment, only posting of existing personnel in the states,” a senior DoPT official said. The Union Ministries of Home, Health and HRD have been directed to come up with guidelines for such postings. The Home Ministry is the cadre controlling authority for the Indian Police Service but officials concede that the right to post a particular officer to a particular area is the prerogative of the state Government. (The Indian Express 7/9/07)

'Sachar panel revives two-nation theory' (7)

New Delhi : The BJP on Friday said that the UPA's "Sachar ammunition" brazenly revives the two-nation theory dividing people along the communal lines. "The Congress under Sonia is doing

for the Muslim appeasement what even Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi did not allow," BJP Parliamentary Party spokesperson Vijay Kumar Malhotra said. Malhotra said that the Congress-led Government was making overt and brazen attempts to introduce religion-based job reservations through moves to set up an Equal Opportunity Commission. "The implementation of Sachar Committee recommendations aims at reviving the two-nation theory," he said. "Is it a crime to be a Hindu in this country? Why are there no welfare schemes for 23 crore Hindus living below the poverty line? The Government wants to bring in job reservations for Muslims," Malhotra said. "The move to set up an Equal Opportunity Commission is a step towards introducing religion-based quotas. There is an atrocious attempt to divide this country again on Hindu and Muslim lines," he said, and blamed the Congress for the economic backwardness of the Muslim community in the country. The BJP on Thursday also had thrashed the Government on the move to post Muslim police personnel in the Muslim-dominated areas of the country. "It's a matter of very deep concern that the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has issued such directive to all the State Governments and Union Territories," BJP spokesperson Ravi Shanker Prasad said in a statement. (Pioneer 8/9/07)

Nomadic tribes ignored by Sachar panel: Tribal body (7)

SRINAGAR, SEPTEMBER 9 : In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, the Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation, an organisation working for the tribal and nomadic communities of India, has sought amendments in the Sachar Committee report. The foundation, in its letter, has stated that the problems faced by the nomadic tribes be included in the report. "The Committee, constituted by the Prime Minister to assess the social, educational and economical status of Muslims in India, has not addressed the concerns of nomadic Muslim tribes," spokesman of the foundation said. "The report mainly focuses on the issues of settled Muslims and ignores the Muslim nomadic tribes, the Gurjjars of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, who fall under Scheduled Tribes," the letter states. National Secretary of the foundation Javaid Rahi said it is surprising that the 404-page report does not incorporate even the word "nomadic Muslims" or "Muslim tribes" in it. "The report has not addressed the concerns of tribal community. Issues like right to vote, recognition of traditional judiciary system popular among Muslim tribes, political empowerment of Muslim STs, safeguarding their socio-economic rights and issue related to their ethnic, cultural and lingual identity have not been addressed," Rahi said. (Indian Express 10/9/07)

Implement Sachar report or face stir: Jamiat to Centre (7)

New Delhi, September 10: The Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind on Monday raised the pitch in the run-up to the 2009 general elections and threatened to launch a countrywide agitation if the UPA Government did not take concrete action on the recommendations of the Sachar Committee report within a month. "The time for assurances is over. It has been a long time since the Sachar Committee submitted its report. The Government has to act now," Jamiat's General Secretary Maulana Mahmood Madani told reporters here. Jamiat is demanding reservation for Muslims in Government jobs in proportion to their share in the population, a stringent law to prevent communal violence with provisions to punish the administrative officers if found lacking in their duty, and implementation of the Sachar Committee, Ranganath Mishra Commission and Srikrishna Committee reports. In a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Madani said if Jamiat did not get a satisfactory response from the Government till October 10, it would be constrained to launch a nationwide 'satyagraha'. "We will meet after this deadline is over and decide on our future course of action. We will raise our voice through peaceful means and offer court arrest throughout the country," Madani said. Accusing the Congress of using diversionary tactics, Madani said before it came to power in 2004, the party had expressly assured the Muslim community that it would provide reservation for them. "The Government had sufficient time in the past three-and-half years to fulfill its promises. The plight of the Muslim community is worse than that of the Dalits and this has been established beyond doubt by the findings of the Sachar Committee," he said. Madani said the 50 per cent cap on reservations put by the Supreme Court should not be held sacrosanct and the Government should find means to increase the quota limit to accommodate reservations for Muslims. On the proposed law to deal with communal violence, Madani said the draft Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, which is under consideration of Parliament, had major drawbacks and asked the Government to

replace it with a Bill having more stringent punishments for those abetting hate crimes. The Jamiat also opposed the civil nuclear cooperation with the US saying the country had enough resources for power generation and there was no need to get into any such arrangement with a foreign power. "When we are not even utilising all the resources that are available to us, why should we enter into such a degrading agreement with a country like the US," Madani said. (Indian Express 11/9/07)

Sachar: Don't delay law to check Executive (7)

New Delhi, Sept. 13: Political parties must not postpone enacting of suitable amendments and legislation to uphold the primacy of legislature and to ensure that the executive should not have untrammelled powers to enter into any treaty without legislative approval, according to Justice Rajindar Sachar. Justice Sachar, who is a retired Chief Justice of the Delhi high court, on Thursday told a conference on "Indo-US Nuclear Deal — Implications for Democracy and Sovereignty" that it is "not a political issue" but one that concerned itself with the nation and, therefore, ratification of international treaties by the Legislature is needed. He wondered why Parliament is avoiding passing the necessary amendments and legislation. "Why postpone ...? (It is) not a political issue," he asked the Left parties, which have sought postponement of the next steps to operationalise the nuclear deal. He felt that the Left, and other political parties, must reject the government's view that the Executive is under no obligation to have Parliament's approval. CPI general-secretary A.B. Bardhan sought to suggest that the UPA-Left political committee, which has been set up for evaluating the implications of the Hyde Act on India's self-reliance in the energy sector and strategic autonomy, was by no means an exercise to "postpone" the pressing issues. The Left, Mr Bardhan said, has no illusions and the Left parties have adopted a step-by-step approach. The Indian middle class, he explained, does harbour certain illusions and the Left will try to convince them. According to a 1996 recommendation by the People's Commission on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, presided over by Justice Krishna Iyer and other judges, it is a constitutional necessity that legislation be enacted so that all treaties go through ratification of the agreement by the legislature. (Asian Age 14/9/07)

State announces seven per cent quota for Muslims, Christians (7)

CHENNAI: The State Government on Thursday announced seven per cent quota for Muslims and Christians in education and employment. It will come into effect from September 15 as a gift to the minorities on the occasion of former Chief Minister C.N. Annadurai's birth anniversary, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi said. Those Muslims and Christians included in the list of Backward Classes would get 3.5 per cent reservation each from the share of the Backward Classes of 30 per cent. At present, the Government was following the policy of 69 per cent reservation for the Backward Classes, the Most Backward Classes/De-notified Communities and the Scheduled Castes/Tribes. The move follows the recommendation made by the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission, headed by Justice M.S. Janarthanam. The Commission's advice was based on the report of the Second Backward Classes Commission, which had J.A. Ambasankar as the chief. Immediately after the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Government took over in May 2006, the Governor's address to the Assembly mentioned that legislation for providing reservation for Christians and Muslims in education and employment would be introduced. The Budget for 2006-2007 stated the Government would urge the Centre to provide reservation for the Muslims and Christians. A senior official said the scheme of seven per cent quota had been worked out in such a way that the overall quantum of reservation did not exceed the present level of 69 per cent. The Government's action relied on the recommendations of the State Backward Classes Commission, unlike in the case of the Andhra Pradesh, where the Government Order of July 2004 sought to provide five per cent quota for Muslims. But it was quashed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court. One of the reasons was that there was no consultation with the State Commission for Backward Classes. The Pattali Makkal Katchi and the Indian Union Muslim League were among those which welcomed the Government move. L. Ganesan, president of the State unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party, criticised the decision and said the quota for the minorities had been provided from the share meant for the Backward Classes belonging to Hindus. (The Hindu 14/9/07)

Mumbai riot victims to get same relief as Sikh riot cases (7)

NEW DELHI:: National Minorities Commission Chairman Mohammed Shafi Qureshi told Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Thursday that the Maharashtra Government will implement the Srikrishna panel recommendations and dole out a compensation package, which will be at par with that given to the 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims, to those affected by the 1992-93 Mumbai riots. "The compensation will be at par with what was given to the victims of the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh has assured us," Qureshi said, adding, the state Government has also assured action against 38 police personnel. He said that PM and Sonia Gandhi have also been informed that the Government will set up special courts to speed up the riot cases. (Indian Express 14/9/07)

Muslims killed in custody: 20 yrs later, postcards of pain go to Maya (7)

MEERUT, SEPTEMBER 20 : As many as 48 people, all Muslims, were dragged out of their houses by UP's Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and loaded into a truck for "questioning" on May 22, 1987. Only five of them returned to tell the tale of a carnage. Numerous court hearings, petitions and 615 RTI applications later, the residents are now ready with 270 postcards, each signed by a family member of a victim, addressed to Chief Minister Mayawati. "These postcards are an attempt to make the government see our plight and assist us," says Zulfikar Nasir, one of the five survivors. During the communal violence that followed the reopening of Babri Masjid's gates in 1987, over 400 people were picked up from this Muslim-dominated locality. All but 43 returned. For two months, the families did not know what happened to those taken away. They ran from police station to police station. Most of the community believed they would return. "It was only when I saw the article in Chouthi Duniya in June that I started making the lists of the missing people and asking all those coming out of the jail if they had seen or heard of any of them' Eventually, we realised our children had been murdered in cold blood," says Jamaluddin, father of one of the victims. Some bodies were discovered floating in the upper Ganga canal near Moradabad but the police said those were of riot victims. The story came out when Zulfikar Nasir, who escaped by feigning death, returned. "Even 20 years later, our families have not got justice and that's why today we are requesting the government to change the Special Public Prosecutor employed by them in our case," says the postcard. Says Mohammad Usman, who was shot twice but survived by pretending to be dead, "The present lawyer does not even care enough to talk to any of us before or after the court proceedings and that is why we want him to be changed... The case needs an honest and committed lawyer if we are ever to see justice done." While Special Public Prosecutor Surendra Adlakha did not comment, Director General of the Crime Branch CID, Harmol Singh, said, "We are very serious about seeing a conclusion to this case and are trying present the case as best as possible." "Grief, hope and despair have taken turns to play with us and now we only wait for the guilty to be punished for killing our innocent children," says Hajira who lost her 18-year-old son. "In most cases, the earning member of the family was taken away, leaving helpless children and mothers or wives behind to fend for themselves," says Zarina Begum. Zarina lost both her husband and eldest son. She has supported her remaining family by stitching clothes and working as a maid. Sitting in the verandah of Nasir's house with tears in her eyes, she says: "The deaths seem to have left a whole generation missing in our locality." (Indian Express 21/9/07)

Muslims battle cop 'harassment' (7)

Hyderabad : The Muslim community in Hyderabad, reeling under the indiscriminate arrests of its members by the police since the twin bomb blasts on August 25, has decided to constitute a panel of 15 prominent lawyers to wage a legal battle against the harassment. The decision to constitute the panel was taken at a meeting attended by renowned activist Teesta Seetlavad and organised by a local Urdu daily Siasat. Teesta met the families of the persons who were taken into police custody. She stressed the need for legal action to put an end to the systematic harassment of the Muslim community in the name of fighting terror. "The support of the members of all the communities should be enlisted to fight on the issue", she said. "This is a fight for Human Rights and it should be fought democratically," she said. Teesta lauded the State Minorities Commission chairman Yusuf Qureshi for taking up the cause of detained persons. (Pioneer 23/9/07)

Muslims worse in women's literacy (7)

New Delhi, Sept. 23: A comparison of adult literacy rates among India's religious communities based on the 2001 census shows that Muslims fare the worst. With an overall adult literacy level of 59.1 per cent, it is far less than the literacy level among the Jains who have an overall level of 94.1 per cent, the highest among all religious groups in the country. The Jain community not only has the highest overall literacy levels among all religious communities but also has the best female literacy level with 90.6 per cent. A level way ahead of the overall female literacy level of 53.7 per cent. All this and more is contained in a report on the "Status of Adult Literacy" in India, which has made use of the 2001 census data to do a religion-wise analysis too. Brought out by the National Literacy Mission, adult literacy in India basically means targeting those aged between 15 and 35. The report says that the Muslim community's adult literacy level is 5.7 per cent less than the national average of 5.57 per cent. As for female literacy among the Muslim population, the report says that it is the lowest among the female literacy rates of all other religious communities. Only 50.1 per cent of Muslim women are educated. But going by the average literacy rate among women of all religious communities, 53.7 per cent, the difference of 3.6 per cent isn't that substantial. The report listed 16 states with low Muslim literacy rates — among them are Bihar, Haryana, J&K, UP, Assam, Uttaranchal, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal — as compared to the overall literacy rate of 59.1 per cent in the community. But the picture isn't all bleak as it also notes that in at least 17 states/union territories, adult literacy levels among the Muslims are higher than the national average of 64.8 per cent. Among these states/UTs are Kerala, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu, Chhatisgarh, Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Orissa, MP, Karnataka, AP and Delhi. Yet, as the Sachar committee, which also examined the educational status of the Muslim community in India, pertinently observes Muslims have not been able to respond to the challenge of improving their educational status. As a result, "Their gap vis-a-vis those labelled 'all others' (with initially high literacy levels) has increased further, particularly since the 1980s. The Jain community not only has the highest overall adult literacy levels among all religious communities but also has the best female literacy levels with a percentage of 90.6. A level way ahead of the overall female literacy level of 53.7 per cent. As for Hindus, their overall adult literacy levels at 65.1 per cent are better than those professing the Muslim faith but worse than all other religions. While the male literacy level is 76.2 per cent, among females it is merely 52.2 per cent. The report notes that the literacy rate of Hindus in the states of Bihar (47.9 per cent), Jharkhand (54.6 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (58 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (59.4 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (62.8 per cent), Orissa (63.3 per cent) and Chhatisgarh (63.9 per cent) is lower than the national average. As for the Christian community, the report notes that it is an overall 80.3 per cent. But in states, like Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Orissa, the literacy rate is lower than the national average. Regarding the Sikh community, the report says that it is higher than the national average in all states except Rajasthan where it is just a wee bit lower at 64.7 per cent. Buddhists have an overall literacy level of 72.7 per cent and is by and large higher than the state average except in six states — Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. (Asian Age 24/9/07)

CPM attacks Sachar 'tokenism' (7)

New Delhi, Sept. 24: The CPI(M) has attacked the UPA government for its failure to ensure justice for victims of communal violence and to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee report. The government's approach was rejected as "hesitant and tokenist" by the Left leaders on Monday. Senior MPs Brinda Karat and Mohammad Salim pointed to "serious omissions" in the action taken report submitted to Parliament, which has failed to even mention the steps being taken to ensure justice to victims of communal violence. The CPI(M) leaders noted that the record of the UPA government was "very disappointing" on this front and listed the omissions in what amounted to a virtual chargesheet against the government. They pointed out that the Centre had not accepted the demand for a CBI inquiry into the killings during the 2002 Gujarat riots; the culprits responsible for the Babri Masjid demolition had not been punished; the Congress-led government in Maharashtra continued to ignore demands for action on the Srikrishna report on the Mumbai riots which had named the political leaders and police officials "who had led and connived in the killing of over 800 Muslims." Drawing attention to the Sachar

Committee's observation that the "lackadaisical attitude of the government and the political mileage sought whenever communal riots occur has been very painful for the community," the CPI(M) leaders said the "UPA government has so far not been able to bring any improvement in the situation." They went on to say that "this approach belies the UPA government's commitment to ensure justice for the minorities. Between the BJP's vicious anti-minority campaign and the UPA government's tokenism, the Sachar Committee recommendations are getting jettisoned." They pointed out that a closer look at the crucial areas of education and access to credit further "exposes the lack of political will" by the government in implementing the report. The CPI(M) has asked why the action plan prepared by the high-level committee headed by HRD minister of state M.A.A. Fatimi on education has been completely ignored by the government. This committee suggested the allocation of specific financial requirements during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan but the government has followed this up with only "meagre" allocations with proposed scholarships for deserving Muslim students, funds for modernisation of madrasa education, schemes for adult literacy and education all being major casualties. Mr Salim equated government promises of funds for the minorities with a "post-dated cheque, the cheque neither has an amount nor a date. Neither is the bank (read RBI) willing to part with the amount, nor is the cashier (finance ministry) willing to part with the money." The action plan had recommended literacy campaigns in minority concentration districts (MCDs), building adult education and vocational training institutes in all MCDs, building one Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in each minority-concentration block and expanding the modernisation scheme for madrasas. The necessary budget was not made available for these schemes, the Left leaders said. Reference is made to a RBI report that identifies 121 districts as minority-concentration districts, and then goes on to state that eight have been identified in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Haryana for "100 per cent financial inclusion." The CPI(M) has asked the government to explain the basis of identifying eight districts of the 121 declared as MCDs. The government did not implement the finance minister's promise to support 20,000 merit-cum-means scholarships to encourage minority students to pursue higher studies. The CPI(M) has pointed out that in response to a Rajya Sabha question on May 14, 2007, the minority affairs minister said that the Budget announcement had not been implemented. Ms Karat and Mr Salim said that a dedicated sub-plan for minorities along with allocation of adequate resources were necessary for a holistic implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations. They pointed out that such a sub-plan had been approved by the West Bengal government, but the proposal submitted by the CPI(M) to the UPA government had not been accepted so far. (Asian Age 25/9/07)

Ministry's skewed calculations leave Muslims out of welfare scheme (7)

When the Ministry of Minority Affairs recently prepared a list of 90 backward minority concentration districts in the country with the aim of launching programmes to alleviate poverty and provide education, health and civic amenities, Gujarat did not figure in it. The reasons are not hard to find. The 2001 Census puts the economic status of Muslims above that of the majority community in the state. This lopsided calculation forced the MMA authorities to drop areas with minority concentration in Gujarat from the list even though they deserved to be included. As far as Gujarat is concerned, there are three Muslim communities—Bohras, Khojas and Memons—whose standard of living can be compared to that of well-to-do Hindus. Educational standards among Bohras and Khojas is so high that it is difficult to find a single non-graduate among them. And being in business, they are also among the richest Muslims in the country. As far as Memons are concerned, they may be educationally behind the Bohras and Khojas, but economically they are at par with them. However, these three Muslim 'jamaats' account for a fraction of the Muslim population in the state and there is a vast gap between them and the rest of community. But when the figures of these 'jamaats' are clubbed with that of the rest of the Muslims, who are extremely backward in terms of education and economic status, the average figure goes up, making the per capita income and literacy rate appear above that of Hindus. Similarly, the per capita income and literacy level of Hindus are clubbed with tribals, the most backward educationally and financially, bringing down their average figure. It was on the basis of these figures that the MMA selected backward minority concentration districts in the country, thereby denying any special economic package for Gujarati Muslims. Now, the criterion of selection has been opposed strongly by Prof J S Bandukwala, a member of the Maulana Azad Educational

Foundation, who was invited to participate in the meeting when the minority concentration districts were selected. However, officials in the minority affairs ministry, including Minority Affairs Minister A R Antulay did not agree with him. While Muslims in Gujarat comprise just 2.58 per cent of the total Muslim population in the country, the school drop out rate among Muslims in Gujarat is 7.70 per cent. Against this, the drop out rate among Muslim children in Uttar Pradesh, from where 21 districts have been included in the list, is 14.4 per cent. Bandukwala is not far off the mark when he disputes the Census figures. The Muslim concentration areas in Gujarat present a sorry picture. Most Muslim areas have no recourse to banking, health and education facilities. They also lack civic infrastructure like proper roads, drinking water supply and electricity. For example, Juhapura in Ahmedabad, a Muslim dominated area with a population of over three lakh, does not even have a bank branch though the Prime Minister's 15-point programme wants bank loans to be made accessible to Muslims to reduce poverty and generate self employment. Efforts by local residents, who even approached Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram, bore no fruit. All the roads and lanes in Juhapura flood easily during rains due to the absence of proper roads and drainage facilities. There is no drinking water supply. Similar is the condition in Tandalja, a Muslim pocket in Vadodara city. The condition of western Godhra is perhaps the worst. It's not that the condition of Muslims has deteriorated after the BJP came to power, it was the same story even when the Congress was at the helm of affairs. More than 5,000 Muslim families displaced from their native places after the 2002 riots are still living in temporary settlements with no civic amenities on the outskirts of various cities. Will officials of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, particularly Antulay, visit the Muslim areas of Gujarat to experience reality for himself? (Indian Express 25/9/07)

Quota for Muslims not based on religion: Andhra (7)

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 5: The state of andhra pradesh on friday informed the supreme court that its Act enabling 4 per cent reservations for socially and backward classes of Muslims within the existing list of Backward Classes is "perfectly valid and legal" and not merely communal reservation. "The sub-categorisation of SEBC (Socially and Educationally and Backward Classes) Muslims is not based on religion alone. But it is on account of their delayed and recent inclusion on their relative backwardness vis-à-vis existing SEBC and therefore, the same is lawful," the state said in its response to petitions challenging the said Act. The Government in fact has blamed lack of understanding of Muslim community in Andhra for their delayed inclusion. "The factual position is that for reasons like lack of proper understanding of the AP Muslim society and its structure, a large part of the Muslim population, which should have been ab initio identified as Socially and Educationally Backward Classes had missed being identified as such over the last so many decades," stated the affidavit filed by Amitabha Bhattacharya, Principal Secretary, Backward Classes Welfare Department. "Thus unintentionally, religion had been allowed to become a handicap in their case," it submitted, defending the separate class of SEBC Muslims in the existing list of BCs. "It is in fact social justice without allowing religion to be a handicap or barrier for any backward class to be identified as such," the state claimed. It also sought to justify its provision contending Muslim reservation as a separate category already exists in state list of BCs of Kerala and Karnataka. Highlighting that refusing reservations to SEBC Muslims would be "a denial of equal opportunity based on religion alone," the Government concluded that the Act is based on careful identification of beneficiaries. It also attempted to prove that the provision is in consonance with principles laid down by the High Court and also the Supreme Court. Last year, the state Government had come out with the provision of 4 per cent Muslim reservation accepting the P S Krishnan Commission report which contended that a bulk of SEBC Muslims had fallen behind over several decades. Asserting its decision of sub-categorisation within the BC lists, it explained, "Strategy of sub categorisation within SEBCs is intended to ensure that benefits of reservations are more equitably spread among different classes and groups of classes. It recognises the fact that even among the Backward Classes, some are more backward than others and as such to ensure inter se representation among SEBC." The bench headed by Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan, while extending the earlier order of not allowing the State from going ahead with any admissions till further orders, posted the matter for October 12. (Indian Express 6/10/07)

Left: Do more to implement Sachar report (7)

New Delhi, Oct. 21: The Left is now tightening the screws on the government on fronts other than the nuclear deal with the United States. Clearly not satisfied with the plans outlined by the government so far to improve the lot of the country's Muslims, it has upped the ante on implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations. The latest salvo on this has come from the Communist Party of India. CPI secretary Shameem Faizee, in an article in the party weekly New Age, wrote: "After hard labour for nine months, Union minister for minority affairs Abdur Rahman Antulay has dug out the proverbial rat from the mountain of the Sachar Committee report." Mr Faizee's article was in response to a statement made by Mr Antulay in Parliament on August 31 detailing the government's followup action on the recommendations of the Sachar report. Mr Antulay had listed a series of measures the government plans to take: targeted intervention in 90 minority-concentration districts, improving civic amenities and economic opportunities in 338 towns and cities with a substantial minority population, and a multi-pronged strategy to deal with educational backwardness in the community. But Mr Faizee said in his article that the minister's statement "contains nothing substantial." He said: "It seems the August 31 announcements are also more 'political' than 'real'. "It seems the Congress has bought the idea that its proximity to the USA may cost it Muslim votes. It wants to retrieve the loss by making some 'gesture'. One can only pity Antulay. The measures are just peanuts," he wrote. According to Mr Faizee, the Sachar report has taken note of the fact that the basic problem is the "discrimination practised by the administration" against the community. He adds: "Muslims do not get their due share just because of the mindset of the bureaucracy and political class that is against Muslims." He said: "If the UPA government is really serious about ending this discrimination, it should accept the suggestion to create a mechanism at all recruiting levels to ensure that Muslims are recruited in proportion to their number among the eligible applicants." He has also suggested that dalit Muslims be recognised as such by the government, a demand that has been increasingly voiced by many Muslim organisations, among them the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, in recent months. "The minister has skipped the concrete suggestions of the Sachar committee even about the most backward among Muslims. It has been demanded umpteen times that the presidential order of 1950 allowing discrimination on the basis of religion in recognising SCs be withdrawn," he said. The article also demanded that in order to give Muslim professional communities facilities and concessions available to their counterparts in the majority community, the list of OBCs should be updated. "A sub-quota within 27 per cent reservation for OBCs could be considered," it said. As for providing education an impetus among Muslims, the article has called for the allocation of 20 per cent of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan funds for providing basic infrastructure in areas where the community is concentrated for a period of at least three years. Another demand is for the opening of at least one Kendriya Vidyalaya and Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya each in the 338 towns and cities that have been identified as having a substantial Muslim population. (Asian Age 22/10/07)

Jethmalani for release of jailed Muslim youth (7)

Hyderabad : Senior Supreme Court lawyer and former Union Law Minister Ram Jethmalani came down heavily on the Hyderabad police for the detention and arrest of innocent Muslim youth and subjecting them to torture in the name of investigations of the bomb blasts. He declared that if need be he will take up the legal battle to get them released as the cases against them were false. Jethmalani was speaking at a public hearing organised by the Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee in Hyderabad, where the family members of more than two dozen youth in jail narrated their tales of woe. "They said that their wards were kept in illegal detention for weeks and were subjected to inhuman torture," he said. "I have gone through the case papers of some of these youth including Ibrahim Ali Junaid. I don't have any doubt that these youth are innocent and there was no case against them. If the Hyderabad police has any respect for me, it should release them immediately", Jethmalani said. The high profile Supreme Court lawyer, who heard the heart rending tales of several families along with another senior criminal and civil liberties lawyer KG Kannabiran looked visibly moved and upset by the sufferings of the families. "I have put up a board outside my residence in New Delhi saying not to disturb me as I have stopped taking up new case. But if need be I will ignore the board and will take up the cases of these boys as they are innocent," he said. Jethmalani said that he would advise the team of local lawyers to

properly fight the case in Hyderabad and point out the lacunas in the FIRs. For instance, he said Section 125 and 126 was invoked to charge these youth with waging war against the State. "The fact is that this section can be used only in case of somebody waging a war against another Asian country friendly to India", he said. He said that this is how police lodges false cases, FIRs and fabricate cases against the people they want to target. Jethmalani's criticism of the police came at a time when a report of the Andhra Pradesh Minorities commission is already subject of raging debate in the State. The report said that the police had subjected 8 youth to inhuman torture in private torture cells and some of them were given electric shock on their genitals. Dr. Ibrahim Ali Junaid's father told the public hearing panel that for more than a week his son was kept in illegal custody and subjected to torture. He was given electric shock on the joints of the bone and even inside the ears to force him to admit his involvement in the bomb blasts. (Pioneer 22/10/07)

One more survey for Muslims under ICSSR supervision (7)

New Delhi : The Centre has initiated one more survey to ascertain social, economic and educational backwardness in 90 Muslim-dominated districts across the country. This time four institutes have been given the task, with specific emphasis on the post-2001 census socio-economic and educational status of Muslims. Unlike earlier surveys and assessments, the Centre has this time engaged the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR) to co-ordinate the whole exercise likely to be over by early next year. "The four institutes would look into different sectoral issues related to the minorities, and we are co-ordinating the whole efforts," Prof TC Anant, member-secretary, ICSSR, told The Pioneer on Monday. Though ICSSR is not directly involved in conducting the survey, the move assumes significance, as the research body directly under the direct control of Ministry of Human Resource Development is known for expertise in conducting researches, and also advises the Centre with regard to social issues. "After having identified 90 Muslim-dominated districts countrywide, the next step involves preparing comprehensive action plan for carrying out development works. This would be possible only if there is a sound and dependable research report, suggesting what kind of affirmative measures are required to bring an overall turnaround in their life," an official of Ministry of Minority Affairs (MMA) said. According to Prof Anant, the four institutes conducting fresh survey under the supervision of ICSSR are Fore School of Management, New Delhi, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Giri Institute of Development, Lucknow, and the fourth one is in Guwahati. Since majority of 90 districts are located in northeastern parts of the country, the Ministry has not picked up any social institute from southern or western part of the country. After the much-hyped committee of Justice Rajinder Sachar, the Centre has been constituting one after another committees and conducting more and more surveys to establish the level of backwardness among Muslims. In September this year, Minority Affairs Minister AR Antulay announced to set up an expert groups as a follow-up to the Sachar Committee. One expert group headed by Prof Amitabh Kundu of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been tasked to develop and devise an acceptable index to measure among minorities diversity in the areas of education, Government and private employment and housing, while the other expert group led by Prof NR Madhava Menon would examine and determine the structure and functions of an equal opportunity commission (EOC). "There is no conflict of purposes among the Sachar Committee, expert groups and the current round of survey. There is a specific purpose behind each such move and intends to achieve certain goals. In the wake of findings of Sachar Committee, several measures have been planned and thought out. They cannot be uniformly applied in all 90 districts, as the dynamics of problems varies from place to place," the Ministry official said. "As a result, the current survey under the direct supervision of ICSSR would take stock of the ground realities vis-à-vis Muslim-dominated 90 districts. The survey would come out with a roadmap for the long-term action plan for all the districts," the official added. (Pioneer 24/10/07)

Muslims being singled out: Basha (7)

Coimbatore, October 24: There was high drama after Judge K Uthirapathy read out the sentences with Al-Umma activists shouting that Muslims were being targeted and singled out for punishment. Soon after hearing his sentence, S A Basha, who founded Al-Umma and the accused number one, made a brief, emotional speech, demanding to know why only Muslims

were being sentenced. "Only Muslims are being punished. Why is it that the members of the Sangh Parivar are not punished. It is shame on India," he said. Al Umma general secretary Mohammed Ansari, who reportedly deposed Basha, to take control of the outfit while in prison, termed the sentences as "unfair". He said time and again it was only the Muslims who were being "oppressed". Co-accused Basith lashed out at the judge, saying that it was only the "Advanis, Modis and Togadias who were not punished and remained in power". "They have not spent even one day in jail, while we are languishing for nine years. They are enjoying Z category security. Just withdraw their security for an hour and see what happens," he said. Basith, the explosives expert, is said to have designed several IEDs that were set off at several places across Coimbatore town. Basith recalled the fate of former Gujarat Home Minister Haren Pandya, reportedly killed in retaliation for the 2002 Gujarat riots. Some accused requested the judge to include in his order the place of their incarceration. "Keep us in Coimbatore prison. If we are not kept here, it will amount to punishing our families," Ansari told the judge. (Indian Express 25/10/07)

Sting traps footsoldiers of Gujarat riots boasting about killings with state support (7)

NEW DELHI, Ahmedabad, OCT 25: As Gujarat gears for Assembly elections and Chief Minister Narendra Modi makes it known that he doesn't want to talk about the 2002 riots, a sting operation by Tehelka magazine has claimed to have captured several footsoldiers of the violence who are recorded talking, in graphic detail, of how they executed the killings and how the state machinery stood by them. The sting, broadcast on Aaj Tak, has 14 main characters: one of them is sitting BJP MLA from Godhra Hareesh Bhatt who was national vice-president of Bajrang Dal when the riots happened, one is a public prosecutor and the rest are all VHP or Bajrang Dal leaders or activists. Of these, seven are accused in key riot cases: Babu Bajrangi, Suresh Richard, (Naroda Patiya, 89 killed); Mangilal Jain, Prahlad Raju, Madan Chawal (Gulbarga Society massacre, 39), Rajendra Vyas (Ahmedabad city) and Anil Patel (Sabarkantha). Bajrangi and Richard are only two of the 64 accused in the Naroda Patiya case who were arrested while Jain, Raju and Chawal are three of the 38 arrested in the Gulbarga massacre. Bhatt is purportedly caught on tape saying he was present in a meeting in which Modi allegedly gave him three days time "to do whatever they wanted". "After three days, he (Modi) asked to stop and everything came to a halt," Bhatt said, claiming that the Chief Minister thanked them after the Naroda Patiya massacre. The BJP promptly dismissed it as "dirty tricks" by the "CIA, Congress Investigative Agency." Congress leaders, wary of raising Hindutva as an issue — in a state that gave Modi a landslide win after the riots — played it down, saying the tapes revealed what they had known all along, how the killings had the blessings of the Modi government and how the police and administration were subverted to that end. Writing in the magazine, Tehelka reporter Ashish Khetan said he had approached a range of characters linked to the riots posing as an author working on a book to "propagate the VHP brand of Hindutva." VHP leaders Anil Patel and Dhawal Jayanti Patel are also caught on tape describing details of the riots and its aftermath. In the sting, Dhawal Jayanti Patel claims that VHP activists made bombs in his factory while Bhatt has been shown saying they even made rocket launchers which were used in the riots. Bajrangi, the self-styled rescuer of Patel girls marrying intercaste, fell out with the VHP and BJP and was expelled from the party last year after complaints that he and his moral police beat up college youths chatting with woman students. A disgruntled Bajrangi went and joined the Shiv Sena.

Consider what these characters said soon after the riots: • Bhatt claimed immediately after the Sabarmati Express carnage that "killing kar sevaks is a sin and this act will be avenged. Kar sevaks should get justice and I will try my best to see that they do." In July 2002, when asked why the Bajrang Dal was distributing swords and tridents, Bhatt retorted: "Don't you know every action has a reaction? Are we just supposed to sit back and watch?" When contacted today, he said: "You know how these sting operations work. I was talking of something else and it has been construed and shown as something else. It is a political gimmick of those who are opposing us."

• Bajrangi was arrested in June 2002 and was sent to judicial custody. He is presently out on bail. The trials in Naroda Patiya case and Naroda Gam case have been stayed by Supreme Court. He said: "I dont know who is taking my name and why. I did not lead any mob in Naroda Patiya. The

sting operation shows me saying that I took a sword and cut open a woman's womb. But I was trying to explain that the FIR filed against me accuses me of that act and that I deny it." In the sting, two M S University staffers have been shown detailing how the riots happened: Deepak Shah, an MSU Senate member and Dhimant Bhatt, state government-appointed Senate member as well as the internal auditor of the university. During the fine arts faculty controversy over Chandramohan's paintings, it was Shah who had offered Rs 1 lakh to anyone who would paint a blasphemous portrait of Prophet Mohammed. "Narendra bhai saw our enthusiasm" •Bajrang Dal leader during riots, now with Sena • It has been written in my FIR. There was this pregnant woman, I slit her open, • Narendrabhai came to Patiya. He could not make it to the place of the incident because there were commandos-phamandos with him. But he saw our enthusiasm and went away • Narendrabhai got me out of jail. He kept on changing judges Haresh Bhatt Then with Bajrang Dal, now Godhra MLA • Diesel bombs, pipe bombs, we made them. We ordered two truckloads of swords from Punjab. In Dhariya, we readied everything Madan Chawal Accused in Gulbarga Society massacre, on the killing of former Congress MP Ehsan Jaffri • Five or six people held him, then someone struck him with a sword. Chopped off his hand, then his legs, chopped off all his organs. After cutting him to pieces, they put him on the wood they'd piled and set it on fire . Dhimant Bhatt . Chief auditor of MS University .• The same day as Godhra there were two meetings, one at Ahmedabad and one at Baroda. Everybody was present, the BJP, RSS, Parishad. It was decided we would not take this any longer. If we have the guts, we should react Rajendra Vyas VHP Ahmedabad president • As CM, Narendrabhai couldn't say kill all the Muslims. I could say it publicly because I was from the VHP (Indian Express 26/10/07)

Muslim outfits seek execution of riot report, threaten stir (7)

Mumbai : Several Muslim outfits flexed their muscles on Thursday threatening to launch a Jail Bharo Andolan on December 6 to press for total implementation of the Srikrishna Commission report on the 1992-93 Mumbai riots. Crusading under the banner Nyay Andolan for the implementation of the Srikrishna Commission report, the Muslim outfits adopted an eight-point resolution at a massive rally organised at Azad Maidan here, demanding, among other things, the "instigators, perpetrators and absconders" of the 1992-93 riots be booked under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA). Though the resolution did not name Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, there was an underlying emphasis that he should not be spared, when it called for a complete implementation of the Srikrishna Commission report. It may be recalled that the BN Srikrishna Commission had, among others, indicted Thackeray for "instigating" organised attacks against the Muslims, through his provocative editorials in Shiv Sena's official mouthpiece Saamna. The Nyay Andolan activists, belonging to 30 Muslim organisations, were however very specific in their clamour when it came to initiating action against Sena leaders Madhukar Sarpotdar, Gajanan Kirtikar, former Mumbai police commissioner RD Tyagi and 31 other indicted in the Srikrishna Commission report. On his part, State Samajwadi Party leader and Rajya Sabha member Abu Asim Azmi set a deadline of December 5 for the Congress-led DF Government in the State to arrest Tyagi and 31 other police officials indicated in the Srikrishna report. In its resolution, the Nyay Andolan also demanded that Tyagi's discharge in the 1992-93 riots case be challenged in a higher court. The resolution also demanded that Sarpotdar be tried for the same offence and under similar laws as Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt, who has been found guilty under Arms Act and sentenced to six years rigorous imprisonment by a special TADA court. It urged the State to expedite the case against Sena leader Gajanan Kiritikar, a former Minister of State for Home. Azmi demanded that the victims of the riots should be compensated without any further delay on the lines of 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims. The Nyay Andolan also demanded compensation for victims of September 8, 2006 Malegaon blasts on the same footing as victims in other States. Maulana Abdul Hamid Azhari, addressing the rally, equated Deshmukh with his Gujarat counterpart Narendra Modi. "There is no difference between Modi and Vilasrao," he said and expressed surprise how Muslims were arrested for blasts in religious places in Malegaon, Hyderabad and Ajmer Sharif. (Pioneer 26/10/07)

Don't club us with migrants, say Assamese Muslims (7)

Guwahati, October 30: The Assamese Muslims are caught in a dilemma. Till a few decades ago, they were identified as any other ethnic Assamese. With migration from Bangladesh taking

enormous proportions, the Assamese Muslims are feeling threatened about their identity. "People refer to us as minority because the migrants have become politically important," says Nekibur Zaman, a Guwahati-based lawyer, who wants to float a forum to safeguard the rights and identity of Assamese Muslims. Zaman and some others are demanding special ethnic group status for the Assamese on lines of other ethnic groups of the state. "The migrant Muslims have pushed us to the brink. We are an inseparable part of the Assamese society, but people now tend to look at us as migrants," Zaman said. They are accusing political parties of caring too much about the Muslims of migrant origin and in the process neglecting the Assamese Muslims. "Our ancestors have played significant roles in several crucial moments in the history of Assam. Bagh Hazarika alias Ismail Siddique was a trusted lieutenant of Ahom general Lachit Barphukan who inflicted the most severe defeat on the Mughals ever and saved Assam from becoming a part of the Mughal India," said Sariful Islam, a social activist. Zaman also points at Bahadur Gaonburha and Formud Ali, who were packed off to the Andamans for playing a leading role in extending the revolt of 1857 to Assam. "Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed went on to become India's President. Syed Abdul Malik, Moydul Islam Bora, Mafizuddin Ahmed Hazarika were leading lights of Assamese literature. But today we are a neglected lot because we are politically insignificant," Islam said. Zaman feels the migrant Muslims have become important for political parties and governments because they constitute a huge votebank. "Our people are scattered all over the state. We don't constitute a vote-bank," he said. Muslims constitute a little over 30 per cent of Assam's 2.66 crore population. Bulk of these Muslims are of migrant origin and are today the deciding factor in at least 30 of the state's 126 Assembly segments. They are the majority in six districts. Another group dismisses such fears as "unfounded" and "in bad taste". "The Sachar Committee has aptly said that Muslims have been historically backward in almost every aspect all over India. Thus it is incorrect and unfortunate that some people are trying to find fault with one section of Muslims," says a joint statement issued by three leading educationists in the state — Ashraf Ali, Abdul Mannan and Abul Lais. Ali is a former principal of Cotton College in Guwahati, and the other two are professors of Gauhati University. Their statement has annoyed another group, the All Assam Garia-Moria-Deshi Jatiya Parishad, that claims to represent a major section of Assamese Muslims. "There is no denying the fact that the Assamese Muslims have been neglected. But it is also a fact that all government facilities and schemes are only aimed at benefiting the migrant Muslims," said Azizur Rahman Saikia of the Parishad. (Indian Express 31/10/06)

Torture report: Panel member denied access to jail (7)

NEW DELHI, October 30: A representative of the Andhra Pradesh State Minorities Commission was denied access to a prison last week after a fact-finding committee associated with the commission reported details of illegal detention and alleged torture of at least 20 Muslims picked up over the twin blasts which killed 43 people in Hyderabad. While a forensics expert, sent by the minority panel, confirmed instances of torture and third-degree methods, lead representative of the AP State Minorities Commission, Advocate Commissioner Ravi Chander, was refused permission on Saturday to meet the detainees at Charlapally Prison to complete his report. Minority commission is a statutory body, and questions are now being raised about the refusal by the state authorities. Says Ravichander: "The state minorities commission has the powers of a civil court and I had the necessary permissions to enter. I even took fresh permissions the second time I went, but I was told to go talk to a minister this time around." The three-member committee, which met the detainees over the last month under the aegis of the minority panel, has demanded a judicial probe into how suspects were picked up and in many cases were interrogated at "unknown locations" and subjected to "severe beatings and even electric shocks". In its report, accessed by The Indian Express, the committee says it "sees communal bias in the pattern of detentions/arrests made after the twin bomb blasts. There is sufficient evidence to believe that Muslim young men were picked up at random because they belonged to a particular religion." The report adds: "Boys were picked up and not permitted to inform at least one family member of their arrest (the police did not notify the families of the detainees either). They weren't even produced in a court within 24 hours. On an average, the delay was for five days and there were signs of physical torture evident to the naked eye for days after." Endorsing the committee's findings, Chander said: "We were able to substantiate and verify most of what the boys and their families told us." Chander added that an official forensics expert, who confirmed instances of

torture, accompanied the committee —civil society activists Nirmala Gopalakrishnan, K Anuradha and Mohammed Afzal — in its fact-finding mission. “The expert, Dr Mahender Reddy, confirmed after examining signs of torture on the boys that they were subjected to third-degree methods, despite no evidence or due process of law,” said Chander. When contacted, Hyderabad Police Commissioner Balwinder Singh said he is yet to see a copy of this report. “We have tried our best to ensure that the case is investigated within the framework of the law and we have not indiscriminately arrested anybody. Everyone found not involved — even if our suspicions remain though we had no evidence admissible in a court of law — we have let them off,” said Singh. State Minorities Commission Chairman Yousuf Qureshi said: “The report is extremely disturbing. I have proposed a 24 hour help-line for relatives in cases of people being whisked away, so they can get a hearing immediately.”

What the report says There were allegations of beating on soles of feet by leather or rubber objects • There are noticeable small scars of 1-cm diameter noted on external ears • There are noticeable 1-mm to 2-mm scars noted around nipples indicative of electricity or needle entry • Hafez Mohammed Bilal Muftahee, 26, was picked up as police wanted to question him about one Rizwan Ghazi whom he had taught the Koran, a year ago. He was interrogated at an unknown location, “severely kicked, beaten, hit with sticks on the sole of his feet.” He was later hospitalised, and medical records confirm that he was beaten up. • Abdul Kareem, 24, told the committee that he had been arrested on August 30 and produced before a magistrate eight days later. “He said that during interrogations he was beaten severely...He was given electric shocks even in his private parts and that a small electric shaving machine like device was used, which they kept charging. His hands were tied behind his back and he was hung from his hands upside down. Kicked by boots on his face also. Four or five days of torture and ten days in custody. When he would drift into sleep, he would be awakened by water being thrown on his face. The police threatened to make his mother and sister naked, which they said would make him tell the truth. They said things against his religion; asked him why they have so many children and wives, told him that they were all fundamentalists”. • Ibrahim Ali Junaid, 25, final-year medical student, BUMS (Unani Medicine), said he was picked up on September 3 and produced before a magistrate five days later. He was taken to an undisclosed location, where he was interrogated. “At night they took off all his clothes, tied his feet together and with a belt beat him on the sole of his feet and other parts of his body. During interrogation they asked him about the Mecca Masjid and Gokul Chat bomb blasts. Legs were stretched sideways and then beaten. Electric shocks were administered on his penis, ears, waist and ankles,” says the report. (Indian Express 31/10/06)

Workshops on giving more teeth to Equal Opportunities Commission (7)

New Delhi : A group of Civil Society activists have come together to explore possibilities of giving more teeth to the Equal Opportunities Commission set up by the Government following the recommendations of the Sachar Committee. Led by the Muslims for Secular Democracy, the group of Muslim intellectuals is holding workshops and discussions in five major cities of the country, including Mumbai, Bangalore and Delhi. “The Sachar Committee while recommending the setting up of the panel, had suggested Britain’s Equality and Human Rights Commission as a model to be followed,” Javed Anand of the organisation said. Taking up this advice, we have invited the Commissioner of the UK Rights Commission, Kay Hamilton, to attend a series of workshops on the difference between Rights Commissions in India and foreign countries and find ways to make them more effective, he said. The workshops have already been held in Mumbai and Delhi, and would be held in Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad. (Pioneer 3/11/07)

Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamaath activists stage demonstration (7)

PUDUCHERRY: Activists of the Puducherry unit of the Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamaath (TNTJ) on Monday staged a demonstration here seeking justice in the Godhra train burning case and the subsequent violence in Gujarat. They also demanded action against Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the case. Several activists of the TNTJ, including a large number of women, gathered outside the Head Post Office and raised slogans calling for the dismissal of the Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP) Government in Gujarat in the wake of recent expose in the media

about "Mr. Modi's role in the communal violence." They also demanded prosecution of Mr. Modi and sought action against BJP leader L. K Advani, who was the then Union Home Minister. They urged the United Progressive Alliance Government to initiate steps for the proper rehabilitation of the victims of Gujarat violence. (The Hindu 6/11/07)

Muslim women's board: Bar Modi (7)

Lucknow, Nov. 6: The All-India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board has asked the Election Commission to ensure that Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi is barred from contesting the elections in his state. A letter to this effect is being sent to the Chief Election Commissioner by the board. "In view of the exposé by TV channels and his role in the Gujarat riots, Mr Modi should actually be arrested and put in jail. By no accounts should he be allowed to participate in the election process," Ms Shaista Amber, chairperson of the women's board, told reporters here on Tuesday. She said that it was now clear that women and children had suffered the maximum during the post-Godhra violence in Gujarat and women will be able to vote fearlessly in the state Assembly elections only if Mr Modi was out of the scene. (Asian Age 7/11/07)

Muslim groups allege harassment of Imams by police (7)

JAI PUR: Incensed at the continued harassment of clergymen and madrasa teachers in the wake of the Ajmer dargah blast, Muslim groups in Rajasthan on Wednesday demanded an immediate release of all "terror suspects" detained by the police without any evidence of their complicity in the crime. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has reportedly taken a dozen Imams, Maulvis and madrasa teachers into custody and is interrogating them to ascertain their alleged links with Islamist outfits. None of them has been produced in court so far, while the Muslim groups accused the police of torturing the detainees to extract "fake confessions" from them. The police set free a madrasa teacher, Khushibur Rehman, detained in Godda district of Jharkhand, on Tuesday night. An Imam of a mosque in Khandela village of Sikar district, Abdul Hafiz Shameem, was earlier released on Saturday. Mr. Rehman, teaching at Madrasa Jamia Latifia at Sardarshahar in Churu district, was picked up in October-end in Godda, his native place. The SIT suspected him of having contacts with the Lashkar-e-Taiba. A Crime Branch team brought Mr. Rehman to Ajmer without obtaining transit remand from the local court, but the SIT could not get anything substantial from him. On a lead purportedly provided by him, the police detained Maulvi Imran Ali in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra last week. Muslim groups told newsmen that after Mr. Rehman being found innocent and set free, the case against Maulvi Imran Ali had automatically collapsed. "Imran Ali and other clergymen incarcerated by SIT without following the due process of law should be released forthwith," said Qari Moinuddin, convenor of the Rajasthan Muslim Forum. (The Hindu 8/11/07)

Govt plans artisan clusters in Muslim areas (7)

New Delhi, November 8: The Government has made an action plan for the development of artisan clusters in Muslim-dominated areas as a follow-up measure for the Sachar committee recommendations. This was part of the decisions taken at a meeting presided over by PM Manmohan Singh on October 26. The meeting was held to review the status of implementation of the affirmative action programme for minorities and the progress in the implementation of other flagship programmes of the UPA Government. PM had directed his Principal Secretary T K A Nair to hold monthly reviews of the progress made in the implementation of the PM's new 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities and the follow-up action, approved by the Government, taken in response to the recommendations of the Sachar Committee. At the meeting, it was highlighted that the pace of implementation, especially, of decisions taken in education and extension of credit facilities needed to be stepped up. Nair gave suggestions for the speeding up of the implementation and the need for producing tangible results quickly, a release issued by the PMO on Thursday said. The secretaries to the Ministries/Departments of Home Affairs, Department of Personnel & Training, Rural Development, Human Resource Development, Financial Services, Planning Commission, Statistics & Programme Implementation, Labour & Employment, Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, Women & Child Development and Minority Affairs attended the review meeting (Indian Express 9/11/07)

Muslims outraged at destruction of Buddha statue in Swat Valley (7)

New Delhi: The destruction of the historic Buddha statue in Swat Valley of Pakistan by Taliban rebels has evoked sharp reactions from Indian Muslims who said what was happening in Pakistan was anti-Islamic and should be stopped immediately. The act reminded Indian Muslim leaders of what the Taliban did in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, in 2001. "Demolition of such centuries old symbols is against the tenets of Islam. The statue of Buddha in Swat is a heritage site, part of the country's rich cultural legacy, and should be preserved at any cost. Since such sites do not ask anyone to worship them, there can be no justification of destroying or damaging them on any pretext," Mohammad Manzoor Alam, general secretary, All India Milli Council, said. As per the media reports from across the border, Pakistani Taliban rebels have carried out a second assault on the historic 40-metre tall Buddha statue in Swat Valley. The rebels have reportedly threatened to reduce the statue to rubble. "The destruction of Buddha statue in Swat Valley is the worst form of retaliation, which Islam does not approve of. It is un-Islamic to the hilt. Hence, the perpetrators of these acts deserve nothing but condemnation. One can only hope that good sense prevails upon them and they desist from such dastardly acts," Kamal Faruqui, a senior functionary of All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), said. Swat, a picturesque valley in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, has a number of Buddhist heritage sites in terms of statues and stupas, now falling prey to the radicals, who rule the roost in the entire province. "If there is a law and order problem, such acts would certainly get fillip. We hope the Government of Pakistan would do the needful to prevent such vandalism," Niaz Faruqui, secretary, Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind, said. "What was done in Swat is condemnable, a very sad moment and anti-Islamic. Since long, the statues of Buddha have been existed in Swat Valley. The incident reminds us of what happened in Bamiyan in 2001, which shuddered the whole world. Let's hope and pray that such vandalism is checked immediately and effectively," Faruqui said. At the same time, they feel the need to go deep into these acts of cultural vandalism to know the truths. "What is being reported could not be the whole truth. The entire act might have been carried out at the behest of some other forces. It is one of the dimensions of the unfortunate happenings in Swat Valley," Alam said. How to prevent such acts? "It is a very difficult suggestion to make at a time when Pakistan is passing through such a bad time. Still the destruction of heritage sites could not be allowed to continue. It has to be stopped sooner the better. The onus certainly shifts to the society's key and responsible people. They should come forward to thwart such un-Islamic acts," Alam added. (Pioneer 12/11/07)

Muslims, worst hit, raise voice against CPM terror (7)

New Delhi: As Nandigram turns out to be a death cauldron for the minority community, Muslim bodies launched a scathing attack on the Left Front Government in West Bengal for taking Muslims on a ride and subjecting them to the worst kind of hardships and cruelties. "What is happening in Nandigram is a reflection of the real character and outlook of Leftists and their insensitivity towards the poor in general and Muslims in particular," said Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) spokesman Abdul Hamid Nomani. Expressing indignation over the atrocities on Muslims by CPI(M) cadre, he said, "Duplicity and contradictions have always been the hallmark of the Left leaders' approach vis-à-vis the welfare of Muslims in West Bengal. Even after 30 years of Left rule, Muslims are socially, economically, politically and educationally backward. Their condition is worse than their counterparts in other States." Since a large number of victims of the Nandigram carnage belong to the minority community, Muslim leaders also questioned the kind of security measures the Government had taken to check the CPI(M) cadre's onslaught. "It is high time the State's Muslims should raise their voice against the Left hypocrisy and atrocities. None of us is in doubt about the fact that West Bengal Government's love for Muslims is hollow," claimed Mohammad Manzoor Alam, general secretary of All-India Milli Council. "We have been raising the issue of Muslims' pathetic condition from time to time with the State Government, but in vain. The whole community was shocked when the findings of Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee exposed the overall plight of Muslims in the State. One fails to understand how a Government could take its core constituency so lightly," Alam added. Former Member of Parliament and National Wakf Board member Syed Shahabuddin said that the State Government should have promptly asked for Central assistance when the situation was spiralling out of control. "It is extremely unfortunate that the Left leaders let loose their cadre in an attempt to policing the area," he said. All-India

Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) executive committee Kamal Farooqui said the Left used the Muslims as their vote-bank. "Nandigram incidents bring forth the fact that Left leaders only believe in shedding crocodile tears over Muslims," Farooqui said. "It was highly reprehensible on their part to allow the CPI(M) cadre to take law unto their hands. Whether Narendra Modi or the Left leaders in West Bengal, we do not approve of subverting the Constitution to heap tragedies on their own people," Farooqui added.(Pioneer 16/11/07)

Godhra riots: Bandukwala's call for forgiveness finds no takers (7)

Indira Gandhi National Integration Award winner J S Bandukwala's recent comment that Muslims must forgive the perpetrators of 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat has sparked off a debate among the rights activists. Human rights activists who have been fighting for justice to the victims feel that Bandukwala's comment is not only "defeatist" in approach, but also demoralising those involved in seeking justice. The issue, according to Rohit Prajapati of Vadodara, is the "politics of hate" being used to communalise the civil society and create a divide between people belonging to different communities for political purposes. "But even if one talks of forgiveness, it will not be meaningful unless there is remorse on the part of those involved, including those at the helm of affairs in the state Government," says Prajapati. Reacting on the plea for forgiveness, Shakeel Ahmed of the Islamic Relief Committee of Gujarat says: "There can be no peace if there is no justice." Ahmed adds if that Bandukwala's proposal was accepted, it would invite more violence in future for Muslims and other minorities. "Bandukwala's thinking is intended at weakening the fight for justice," he says, adding that there was "no provision for forgiveness in the Indian Penal Code". Ahmedabad-based activist Raees Khan says: "Bandukwala's comments are quite disappointing for victims and those trying to get them justice. What right has Bandukwala got to pardon the rape and murder accused?" He adds: "Should former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri's 75-year-old widow Zakia Jafri give up her fight for justice for her husband's murder?" Zakia recently filed a petition in Gujarat High Court seeking registration of criminal cases against Chief Minister Narendra Modi and 62 others who were allegedly involved in the brutal murder of her husband in Gulbarg Society during the 2002 violence. The petition was however, dismissed. "Bandukwala is only adding insult to injuries of Gujarati Muslims," Khan says. The situation in Gujarat, he says, is totally different and there is no feeling of remorse or appeal for pardon from the side of the aggressors. Jesuit human rights activist Father Cedric Prakash too says there is no point talking about forgiveness when there has been no such plea for it and nor is there any sense of remorse. Mumbai-based human rights activist Teesta Setalvad, fighting for the riot victims, says though every individual has a right to hold his/her opinion in a democracy, the "guilty must be punished when a communal violence with top level state complicity takes place".(Indian Express 16/11/07)

4 women convert to Islam, seek Court protection from parents (7)

Chennai, November 16: Fearing harassment from relatives and villagers for converting to Islam, four young women, including three sisters and their friend, hailing from Pasupathi Koil and Chakrapalli villages, about 15 kms from the famous temple town of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, have moved the Madras High Court seeking protection. Stating that their parents and the Ayyampettai police were trying to prevent them from embracing Islam, the four women moved the High Court on Thursday. The women claimed they had gone through the conversion ceremony organised by a socio-religious organisation, the Tamil Nadu Tawheed Jamaat, on November 7. "The villagers, particularly the local BJP unit, have turned the issue into a political one and are trying to get us back home and prevent our conversion," Lokeshwari (22), now Sumaiya (after conversion), told The Indian Express. Her sisters, 20-year-old Ambika (now Afreedha), 19-year-old Sharmila (Shamila) and friend 20-year-old Kaliaselvi (Shakira) also went through the conversion, she said. The women said as they lived in a Muslim-populated area, there was a strong Islamic influence on them. Lokeshwari worked in the Razia clinic along with Kalaiselvi and claimed to have had access to the copy of the Quran, "reading it thoroughly" for the past two years. "I was fascinated by the religion and was keen to convert. My relatives accepted it initially. But then they started wedding preparations for me to a Hindu boy. So, in the early hours of November 7, we fled to (nearby) Kumbakonam and took a car from there to Chennai and reached the Tamil Nadu Tawheed Jamat," said Lokeshwari. The women then moved the Court on Thursday, seeking protection. They claimed they had approached the State Human Rights

Commission with their case but they were turned away. Meanwhile, back in their villages, the local BJP unit reportedly observed a bandh on November 12 demanding that the women be brought back home. The women said as they were majors, they had every right to choose the religion of their choice and sought a Court direction to the Chennai Police Commissioner to provide them security and protect them from their parents and the Ayampettai police. Saying they wanted to be in Chennai until they decided what to do with their lives, the women urged the court to restrain their parents and the police from forcibly taking them back home. "The conduct of their parents and the political parties created an apprehension that they were not safe," the women said, adding that they converted because they wanted to and no one had forced them. "But people in my village are threatening to kill us," they added. The Court directed the women to appear before it on November 22 and file individual affidavits on their situation. (Indian Express 17/11/07)

'60 yrs of democracy only for Indian Muslims' (7)

Dubai, Nov. 19: Muslims in India are the only Muslims in the world who have enjoyed 60 years of uninterrupted democracy, according to eminent journalist and author M.J. Akbar. "Indian Muslims are the only Muslims in the world who have enjoyed six decades of uninterrupted democracy," Mr Akbar said, who is also the editor of The Asian Age and the Deccan Chronicle, delivering a speech on "India and the Strength of its Diversity" at the Indian Consulate General here on Sunday. The speech was part of a series of programmes being organised by the Indian mission here to mark 60 years of India's independence. Delving into the issue of Muslims being a minority in India, Mr Akbar said, "In demographic terms, Indian Muslims have always been a minority whether historically they were in power or not. When the Mughals were in power or when the Nizams ruled Hyderabad, did the Muslims of India think of themselves as a minority?" According to him, the issue of minority and majority in India is not about numbers but about empowerment. "That is why, the Indian Muslims' struggle for empowerment is very justified," he said, before an audience of around 200 Indian Diaspora in this Gulf metropolis. He said that the real minorities in India were the dalits and the untouchables. "And this is why the rise of Mayawati (to power in Uttar Pradesh) is a triumph of Indian democracy. What has happened to dalit activism in the last 50 years eventually must happen to the Muslim political consciousness," he said, adding that Indian Muslims are getting a new assertion today, which was a healthy sign. According to Mr Akbar, the answer to the problem of minority and majority is equality. Describing the strength of Indian democracy in this context, he said, "The brahmin has always been less than one per cent (in demographic terms) since the time of Brahma. But have they (the brahmins) ever thought of themselves as a minority? What our Constitution has done is to put the dalits and the Muslims on equal footing with the brahmins." On the flip side of this equality and multi-culturalism, Mr Akbar said, India is the only country in the world where every religion, except Buddhism, has produced a terrorist. "However, the good consequence of that is that despite all the deaths, despite all the violence, we do not use terms like 'Islamic fascism' or blame a faith for the killings." According to Mr Akbar, India changed when it managed to overcome the Sikh violence in Punjab. (IANS) (Asian Age 20/11/07)

An inconvenient truth for secular CPM: Nandigram victims' mainly Muslim face (7)

KOLKATA, NOVEMBER 19: •The first fallout of what has happened at Nandigram is that it weakens our case in Gujarat. The CPM, which always speaks of high ideals, is indulging in such shameful acts of violence. This is not an issue that concerns Muslims only. It's a national issue: Kamal Faruqui, permanent member, All India Muslim Personal Law Board •The only good thing with regard to Muslims is that in the last 30 years of Left rule in West Bengal, they were safe. What happened in Nandigram now puts question mark on that, too: Manzoor Alam, general secretary, All India Milli Council This is, perhaps, the worst-kept secret of the Nandigram violence that's now being talked about openly. And is reason for embarrassment to the CPM which swears by its secular credentials: a majority of those targeted by its party cadres as they reclaim their turf are Muslim. Certainly, the violence is political, not communal — the protests were over proposed land acquisition and a turf war, not any religious issue — but the demographics of Nandigram and the nature of opposition to the CPM have ensured that wherever you go, in relief camp after relief camp, most of the refugees are Muslim. Local administration officials admit that at least 65% of

those huddled in the largest relief camp at the Brojomohan Tiari Institute are Muslim. So is the victim of the first gangrape case officially registered and eight of those who have been killed so far. Then there is the reference the National Human Rights Commission has made to Gujarat in its indictment of the state government. And, ironically, the CPM, at pains to draw a distinction between Gujarat and Nandigram to argue against a debate in Parliament, has ended up reinforcing this aspect. Ask CPM MP Mohammed Salim and he says this is a mere coincidence. "Those who are trying to draw the Gujarat-Nandigram parallel are trying to undermine the seriousness of the Gujarat riots. If a particular area has 46% Muslim population it is natural that they will also be affected." When contacted, Abdus Sattar, Minister of State for Minorities Welfare and Development and Madrassa Education, says: "A large number of Muslims might have been affected but what happened in Nandigram was not on the basis of religion. The Chief Minister is the minister for minorities, I have no other comment to make." What both the MP and the Minister do not admit is that sections in the party are concerned over a possible backlash given how a majority of the victims in Nandigram are Muslim. (Indian Express 20/11/07)

NCM to visit Nandigram (7)

New Delhi, Nov. 20: The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) plans to send a two-member team to the trouble-torn Nandigram for on-the-spot assessment of the situation there. NCM chairman Mohammed Shafi Qureshi said that in light of the reports coming in that members of the minority community have faced the brunt of the violence there, "we cannot remain idle spectators." Mr Qureshi said that reports from there saying that many members of minority community had been forced to flee homes and are now too scared to return to them, the NCM "would like to see the facts on the ground." As has been reported, many among the minority community are now packing the relief camps. While parallels are already being drawn between the communal violence witnessed by Gujarat in March 2002 post the Godhra massacre, in Nandigram's case, the CPI-M has said that the violence is not communal in nature. But some leaders from Muslim community have already indicated that the violence does have communal overtones. The CPM, though, has maintained that the violence perpetrated in Nandigram is not communal in nature. Also, it has pointed out that a substantial portion of the population in Nandigram is Muslim and in any violence, they were bound to be affected. In fact, a well-known Muslim academic who did not wish to be named told this paper that the Nandigram violence seemed more a case of human rights violation than one of a particular community being targeted. A National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) team, in fact, visited the Nandigram on Monday to assess the situation there. The team collected documents other than information during its visit. Moreover, the NHRC chairman even said that Nandigram and Godhra "were the worst scars on the face of the nation." (Asian Age 21/11/07)

Dargah blast probe seen as a ploy to target Muslims (7)

JAIPUR: Speakers at a convention organised by Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind (JUH) here on Tuesday lambasted the Bharatiya Janata Party regime in Rajasthan for "targeting the Muslim community" in the wake of last month's bomb blast at the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and demanded immediate release of clerics taken into police custody. The day-long convention was organised to register protest against the investigating agencies allegedly "harassing" innocent Muslims while trying to pinpoint the blame for the October 11 blast, which claimed three lives, on Islamist outfits with an assumption that they were opposed to syncretic traditions of the Sufi shrines. Ulema, clerics, academicians and activists addressing the convention affirmed that Sufism and Tasawwuf formed part of mainstream Islam and there could be no question of "Islamist neo-conservatives" launching terror attacks on dargahs to show their hostility to Sufi orders. They said this propaganda was the ruling BJP's ploy to drive a wedge between Muslim sects. JUH general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Syed Mahmood Madani said the police were raiding madrasas subscribing to the Deobandi school with the conjecture that their teachers and students would have connections with the Islamist outfits. "The State Government is using its police force to persecute innocent Muslims without any evidence to establish their involvement in the crime," he charged. Congress MLAs Mohammed Mahir Azad and Chandrashekhar Baid, Rajasthan Jat Mahasabha president Rajaram Meel, Pradesh Congress Committee minorities cell president Khanu Khan, and All India Milli Council's State general secretary Abdul Qayoom Akhtar

were among those who attended the convention at B. M. Birla Auditorium here.(The Hindu 21/11/07)

Govt ready to debate Sachar findings 'as per norms' (7)

New Delhi: Members belonging to the Janta Dal(United) and the BJP on Friday demanded a discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the report of Sachar Committee report on the status of Muslims in India and the Government said it was ready for a debate as per rules and norms. Making the demand during Zero Hour, JD(U) members Ali Anwar JD said though the report was tabled in Parliament a year ago, there was no debate on it. He sought a debate on the issue during the ongoing Winter Session. He also said similar was the case with the report of the Ranganath Misra panel on the condition of religious and linguistic minorities and added Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians were in a pitiable condition. BJP members including SS Ahluwalia backed Ali's demand and urged the Government to give the copies of the Misra panel recommendations. Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Suresh Pachauri said the Government was prepared to discuss the Sachar report and it was for the Chair to decide the timing and the rules. (Pioneer 1/12/07)

Muslims hide scars (7)

In Ghodasar village of Mehmedabad seat, memories of 2002 do not sit easy. It was on March 3, 2002, that 14 Muslims were hacked in their farms. A year later, a local court in the state sentenced 12 villagers to life imprisonment. "There is no major issue now, the Muslims live in their settlements. In fact, we got some of them back from Jinger village," said Parbat Dabhi, the Ghodsar sarpanch. But for the Muslims here, it isn't as simple as that. They prefer not to say much and like in most other riot-affected constituencies, believe that it's more important to exercise their right to vote. "It is not about who is going to win—the Congress or the BJP. But the fact that we are part of the decision process makes us feel like citizens," said a Muslim farmer in the area. Like the rest of Kheda, Mehmedabad went the BJP way in 2002 when Sundarsinh Chauhan won from here. The seat has a mix of Kshatriyas, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and a fair sprinkling of Muslims. The Ghodsar case resulted in the first conviction in the post-Godhra riots. The BJP's Sundersinh Chauhan is believed to have good contacts in the constituency that is barely 40-odd kilometers from Ahmedabad. But Congress leaders believe that they could regain the Kshatriya votebank if they stay united. (Indian Express 7/12/07)

Babri demolition: Muslim leaders say punish accused (7)

Ayodhya, December 6 : On the 15th anniversary of the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Muslim leaders who assembled in the town, urged the Central and state governments to take effective steps to get the accused in the demolition case punished. "We will be forced to march to the disputed structure, if no action is taken within a month," they warned. Meanwhile, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad celebrated the day as Shaurya Diwas. In the presence of about 50 workers at Karsewakpuram, the VHP's local headquarters in Ayodhya, its leader Ram Vilas Vedanti said the VHP would build the Ram temple at any cost. "For the rise of Hindutva, it is necessary to form a Hindu-supported governments like that of Modi in Gujarat," Vedanti said. He also asked Muslims to keep away from the Ram temple issue if they want to "live in this country peacefully". The president of Ram Janmaboomi Nyas, Mahant Nritya Gopal Das, said the temple of Lord Ram already exists, the only thing left is to give it a great concrete shape, which will be done sooner or later. Meanwhile, Zafaryab Jilani, the convenor of All India Babri Masjid Action Committee, said: "We have demanded the governments to issue a fresh notification in the Babri Mosque demolition case having crime number 197 and 198 of 1992 registered at Ram Janmabhoomi police station in Ayodhya". Jilani said the accused in the demolition case including senior BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, VHP leaders Ashok Singhal, Sadhvi Ritambhara, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray and Uma Bharati are still away from the hands of law. The main plaintiff in Babri case, Hashim Ansari, said leaders in governments should take the initiative and get the accused punished within a month or otherwise "Muslims will be bound to cross their limits and will take out a march in protest, towards the acquired area". Two dozen youths of Hindu Mahasabha tried to break into the meeting and were arrested by the police. They were booked for trying to create communal tension. (Indian Express 7/12/07)

Muslim caste divide leaves Bihar village tense (7)

Patna, December 6: Tension gripped Allepur hamlet of Rampur Bairia village in East Champaran district of north Bihar on Thursday when around half-a-dozen huts of backward Muslims were set ablaze, allegedly by landed sections of the same community. A named FIR against eight persons has been lodged and additional police reinforcement deployed in the village to maintain peace. District Magistrate Jeevan Kumar Gupta said efforts were on to nab the culprits. "The situation is under control. Policemen have been deployed in the village." According to reports, Muslims of the village are divided on caste lines and have been fighting for a long time over a separate mosque and burial ground. Dispute over the land on which the backward caste Muslims had set up their mosque had led to the incident. The landed sections were claiming that the land belonged to them. The district administration, however, had ruled in favour of the backward Muslims. "Well past midnight, a group of around 20 people raided our hamlet, poured kerosene oil on half-a-dozen huts and set them on fire. Though people managed to save their lives, the huts and other belongings were gutted," said Akbar Ali of the village over phone. Expressing outrage, JD(U) MP and national president of All-India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj, Ali Anwar, said the attack was perpetrated by upper caste Muslims. "The administration should take strong action against the culprits. Affluent upper caste Muslims of the village have been treating the poor lower caste members like untouchables," he said. Anwar has been championing the cause of backward caste among the minority community for a long time. Anwar claimed that last year, members of the backward caste were beaten up when a bridegroom rode a car along the road dominated by upper caste Muslims. (Indian Express 7/12/07)

Muslims split on caste lines in this Bihar village (7)

Kesaria (East Champaran), December 8: On Thursday, six huts belonging to Muslim families were set ablaze in Allehpur village of East Champaran district in Bihar. The accused are fellow Muslims from the same village. For over a year now, the Muslim population in the village is locked in a bitter caste war between the forward caste Saiyyads and backward caste Ansaris. And it was the Ansaris' huts that were set ablaze, allegedly by some Saiyyads. The differences have spilled over to the mosque too. The Ansaris have stopped offering prayers at the village mosque and built their own temporary mosque. "They treat us like upper caste Hindus treat Dalits. Though they allowed us inside the village mosque, they would push us and tell us to go to the back to pray. So we decided to have our own mosque," says 75-year-old Yaseen Ansari. But the Saiyyads claim that the land on which the Ansaris have built the mosque belongs to them. Both the sides have sought official intervention on the matter. "Humlog jaat ke Saiyyad hain, Muslim ke Brahman hain (We are Saiyyads by caste, the Brahmins among Muslims)," says Saiyyad Mohammad Idris, a villager, addressing the Ansaris as lowly "Jolhas". According to locals, the differences began in April last year when a car carrying an Ansari bridegroom reportedly trampled over the graveyard of some Saiyyads' ancestors. The situation has worsened now with the burning of the six huts belonging to Ansaris. In an FIR, Saiyadda Khatun (60), one of those whose huts was burnt, has identified eight Saiyyad members. But the police have refrained from arresting them. "In her statement, she said she had not seen anyone. But in the FIR lodged later, she has identified eight persons. So we are investigating the matter," said Ajay Kumar, Inspector, Kesaria police station. District officials accuse local politicians of fanning the flames. The Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj headed by Ali Anwar, whose campaign for Muslim backward castes earned him a Rajya Sabha berth, commands a strong support base among the Ansaris of Allehpur. (Indian Express 9/12/07)

Supreme Court moved inquiry against Modi (7)

New Delhi, Dec. 11: A day before the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear bail pleas of Godhra carnage accused, a petitioner on Tuesday moved court seeking an inquiry by a high court judge into the alleged role of Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi in the incident and the riots in 2002. The petition filed by an Ahmedabad-based NGO, Namrata Khadi Gramdhyog Trust, said there was need for constituting a commission of inquiry headed by a sitting judge of the high court as neither the Centre nor the state government has taken appropriate action. The trust said proper inquiry was necessary as no follow up action was taken by the Centre to bring the culprits to book

on the basis of the findings of the Justice U.C. Banerjee commission report which was accepted by Parliament. The NGO, also sought probe into the alleged role of other leaders, bureaucrats and organisations like VHP, RSS, VHP and others in the riots. Meanwhile, the top court is scheduled to hear on Wednesday the bail plea of some of the accused of the Godhra carnage. The matter, which was to be heard by the bench headed by Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, will be listed before the bench of Justice B.N. Agrawal. The chief justice accepted to refer the matter to another bench after the counsel appearing for the accused said there was a technical difficulty for it to hear the matter. (PTI) (Asian Age 12/12/07)

Godhra's Muslims feel polls will change little (7)

Godhra, Dec. 11: The people of Signal Falia here — all of them Muslims — have been living with the stigma attached to a place that was the epicentre of the infamous 2002 communal riots in Gujarat and feel the coming Assembly polls would do little to change that. As Godhra goes to the polls in the second phase on December 15, cynicism has pervaded so deep among the families here that they have little to look forward to from the political class and the election process for deliverance. Signal Falia, the colony beside which the S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express burnt on the morning of February 28, 2002, today is a place whose many men are either in jail or out of the place or the country. "We have no enmity with our Hindu brothers but it gives us shivers when we think of any more riots. The chief minister (Narendra Modi) spoke of Hindu pride in his election rally last week here and it made us revisit those days of riots," Mahmood Thantya, a shopkeeper whose younger brother is in jail accused of master minding the train carnage, said. "It is because some one had to be booked and we were the most soft target. Please believe us, we are innocent," he said before breaking into tears. Many of the 2,000 families of this Muslim locality are left with only female members and Sarifa is one among them. Sarifa's husband Abdul Rehman is behind the bar accused of being the key planner of the train carnage while she claims the story is otherwise. "He was working in the field when the incident happened. My husband in fact tried to douse the fire from the irrigation water pipeline at his disposal. I don't know why he was arrested. I don't know where to appeal," said a helpless Sarifa. Many members of the families here have opted to live migrate to other places and have little hope from any political party or the government. Binyameen, whose three sons were taken away by the police on charges of the carnage, now live aloof in a nearby locality of Rahmat Nagar and earn his living by selling milk. "I don't want to talk to you. Go and ask the politicians if they value life," an angry Binyameen said. (PTI) (Asian Age 12/12/07)

Forgotten after riots, Naroda Patiya families are indifferent to elections (7)

AHMEDABAD, DECEMBER 12: They lost their homes in 2002 at Naroda Patiya. On July 2004, they were given keys to their new houses, but have been forgotten since then. Even before the election, no candidate visited them for campaigning barring an Independent candidate, whose name they can't even remember. The area is a part of Sarkhej constituency; the same place from where one of the most powerful ministers of the state government, Amit Shah, Minister for State for Home Affairs, won the previous elections. For the past three years, life for the riot victims at Citizen Nagar, behind the AMC Sewage Firm at Danilimda, has been nothing short of a struggle for the very basic civic amenities. And today, they simply don't bother about elections or for political parties. "We are about 400 adults here," says Sayeed Nadeemuddin, a stocky man in his fifties. "Haan, voting cards mil gaye hain lekin kya farak padta hain?" (Yes, we got the voting cards, but what difference does it make?), he says. "We lost everything in the Naroda Patiya massacre. After that in 2004, Muslim NGOs provided us with houses here and that's it," says Moin Sheikh. Nestled behind the city's garbage dump, the settlers have a lot to negotiate. The firm regularly releases waste water towards the colony, which, according to the settlers, enter their homes. Also, the waste water released from the factories around adds to the plight of the colony dwellers. "We had to raise a few thousand rupees just to get a gutter here. When it rains, the plight worsens. And in summer, with the scorching sun, the stench gets unbearable," says Farida, a resident. The filthy environment takes its toll on these settlers periodically. Only about a month back, Reshma Bano lost her 13-year-old son Riaz Beg. "Doctor ne bola, uske lival mein kachra bhar gaya tha," (Doctor said filth got into his liver), she tells this reporter. "No, we are disillusioned and don't really care for any one who comes to power," says Nadeemuddin. "Jisne

train jalaya, hum sina thok ke kehte hain usko saza do. Lekin humne kisika kya bigada tha? Hamein yeh saza kyu ?" (Punish those, who burnt that train, we say that too, but why this punishment for us?) he says. With the fear of imminent arrest, following the denial of bail petition by the court, the Congress candidate for the constituency, Shashikant Patel, is running for cover and remained incommunicado. The sitting MLA and minister Amit Shah when reached for comments said, "I learnt about them today itself. We'll send someone there to convince them, so that they come out and vote." For development issues, he, however, appeared non-committal. "The settlement probably doesn't have the required approval. But, let's see, we'll do as much as we can under the legal provisions," he added. (Indian Express 13/12/07)

Godhra Muslims cower under POTA shadow (7)

GODHRA: Shamshir Khan Sultan Khan, Saddique Khan Sultan Khan and Nasser Khan Sultan Khan may be just names on the state records, but for their mother they are men, who, for the past five years, have been languishing in jail charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) with no hope in sight. Ask Syed Umar on what charges his father Maulana Umar has been in jail, and he has a chilling tale to tell. The maulana has been charged under POTA with supporting the conspirators behind the riots and stopping the accused from surrendering. Umar says, "For a Muslim to get bail in Gujarat, especially when it involves Godhra, is virtually impossible. When it comes to Godhra, everyone looks at our religion and not the substance behind the charge." Then there is the misery of being displaced during the riots. An emotionally scarred Nissar Abdul Rahim Sheikh is unable to forget the day in 2002 when 11 people were hacked in his village in front of him. He was himself lucky to escape. Nissar says, "My sister-in-law was killed with a sword... I have seen everything..., now I can't go back..., I am afraid of going back home. My brother stopped eating after the incident, and he too died later. I have a farm there but I can't go back." Displaced, jailed and forgotten – no one is ready to care, or even less, to listen about the riot-hit Godhra victims. Pollan Bazaar resident Siddique Md Ummaeji, son of Maulvi Hussain, says, "My father has been jailed for so many years... Frankly, the political party has only taken advantage of us." For the three Khan brothers, Shamshir, Saddique and Nasser, the trauma of being sent to jail has only compounded with the death of their father two years ago. In the absence of a man in the household, their mother has been forced to beg to make ends meet. Bibi Khatim says, "What is this POTA? I don't even know what it is....My sons wouldn't kill a bird, how can they kill people?" With tears flowing uncontrollably, Bibi Khatim says, "Is POTA meant only for Muslims? Hindus killed so many Muslims, what about them? Muslims are not terrorists." Saddique's wife Nurjahan Khan, 23, still cannot fathom what went wrong after police forcibly took away her husband five years ago. She was married for just eight months when Godhra riots erupted in 2002. Ever since then her life has turned upside down. Her five year old daughter does not recognise her father. The rage and frustration of the victims has been conveniently buried in the din of Jitega Gujarat and Chak De Gujarat . A VHP insider, who was a witness to the 2002 carnage, says, "Muslims are safest in Gujarat. There are more Hindus than there are Muslims in jails right now". Clearly, no one in Gujarat is either ready to listen or own up for the 2002 massacre, least of all Narendra Modi, who has consistently avoided any questions on the subject. (Times of India 22/12/07)

Workshop to improve the lot of Muslims in Rajasthan (7)

JAIPUR: Low productivity and falling demand of traditional occupations, lack of information about government schemes, indifferent attitude of banks in providing loans and communal mindset of authorities have been identified as major obstacles confronting the livelihood sector of Muslims in Rajasthan at a workshop held here. Artisans, crafts persons, entrepreneurs, social activists and researchers attending the two-day workshop titled "Livelihood issues and strategies for Muslim communities of Rajasthan" this week pointed out that the livelihood and employability of Muslims in different spheres could be improved by concerted community action together with a sympathetic approach by government authorities. The workshop – the first of its kind in the State – was organised jointly by the Rajasthan Livelihood Mission and a newly launched non-government organisation, Progressive Muslim Social Circle (PMSC). The participants from different parts of the State tried to identify the nature of livelihoods, occupational patterns, problems faced and future scenario in view of the facts that the Muslim artisan communities were

socio-economically poor, their health and education status was low and their self-employment ventures were frequently destroyed in communal riots. PMSC president and former civil servant A.R. Khan said Muslims were often victims of the prejudiced mindset of government officials responsible for implementing welfare programmes. "Communalism rampant in the government machinery denies the benefits of employment, social security, health care and educational schemes to the Muslim community," he charged. Muslim artisans face a great difficulty in getting loans from banks, financial institutions and the Minorities Finance and Development Corporation. Mr. Khan, citing the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee's findings, said the livelihood scenario for Muslims could not improve unless adequate attention was paid to availability of finance, skill development, innovations and a change in the attitude of official machinery. The Deputy Chairman of the Livelihood Mission and former State Chief Secretary, M. L. Mehta, said the Mission would compile information on the State Government's schemes on loans, employment, entrepreneurship and training for improvement of skills. (The Hindu 23/12/07)

One killed in police firing in Rajasthan (7)

JAIPUR: One person was killed and another seriously injured when police opened fire on a crowd protesting against the alleged slaughter of a cow at Kapasan village in Chittaurgarh district of Rajasthan on Sunday. The crowd of 800 people attacked police on being prevented from storming into a Muslim-dominated locality. Tension was building up in the area since Friday with the villagers accusing Muslims of sacrificing a missing cow on Id-ul-Zuha. Some of the cow's remains were reportedly found at a field belonging to a Muslim man, while the carcass was spotted in a well of Sarpanch of Usnar village, Maghulal Jat.irate villagers set on fire a shop, a cabin and a motorcycle belonging to Muslims after blocking the Kapasan-Bhadsoda road and also burnt a private bus plying on the route on Saturday. Police dispersed villagers trying to attack Muslim-dominated Raghunathpura by lobbing teargas shells. Six policemen were injured in the confrontation with the violent crowd. On a call for bandh issued by Vishwa Hindu Parisahd and Bajrang Dal on Sunday to protest against the alleged cow slaughter, villagers assembled on the main road again and proceeded towards Raghunathpura. They hurled stones on police personnel trying to disperse them. Police first used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the agitated mob raising provocative slogans and demanding that Muslims be driven out of the village. Police sources said a policeman surrounded by the crowd fired "in self-defence" that left two persons injured. While one of the injured succumbed on way to the hospital, the other was stated to be in a serious condition and was being treated in a hospital at Sanwaliaji. Extra police force from Udaipur was deployed in Kapasan to bring the situation under control. Prohibitory orders have been enforced in the region with the situation still described as tense. On the demand of villagers, police searched some houses in Raghunathpura and claimed to have seized a few weapons. While six persons were arrested on charges of arson, some "suspects" were also detained in Raghunathpura. (The Hindu 24/12/07)

"Implement Justice Sachar findings to improve the lot of Muslims" (7)

JAIPUR: The findings of the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee on the socio-economic lot of Muslims were highlighted in the context of educational backwardness of the community at a conference on Muslims' education here on Saturday. The participants called for immediate implementation of the Sachar Committee's recommendations. Governors of three States -- S. K. Singh of Rajasthan, Nawal Kishore Sharma of Gujarat and A. R. Kidwai of Haryana -- and Union Steel, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Ram Vilas Paswan were among those who attended the two-day conference. The event to discuss issues and challenges in the field of education and distribute awards for excellence was organised by the American Federation of Muslims of Indian Origin (AFMI) as its 16th international conference at Jamia Hidayat on the outskirts of Jaipur. Speakers felt that the Sachar Committee's report, which was an "authentic document" elaborating the pitiable and appalling condition of Indian Muslims in terms of education, should be treated with seriousness and measures taken for advancement of the community's primary, higher, technical and madrasa education. Mr. S. K. Singh said the Sachar Committee had "struck the right chord" by revealing the pathetic condition of Muslims and added that urgent steps were needed to ameliorate the community's educational status, which was the key to its progress in all other fields. He said cash prizes and recognition to meritorious students would encourage them to

set high aims in their lives. Mr. Nawal Kishore Sharma said the low educational status of Muslims in North India warranted a rethink on the government's policies, while the non-government organisations should take up educational activities in a big way. He suggested that a significant portion of Zakat (charity) contributed by Muslims every year be spent on education. Dr. A. R. Kidwai said the steps for inclusive growth would benefit Muslims at large, while the community should make sincere attempts to make collective contributions in the sectors such as health care, social reforms and education. "All citizens should have a share in India's journey to cross the development mark by 2020." Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan called upon Muslims and Dalits to launch a "combined struggle" to ensure social justice, while affirming that development without equity would be of no use for the country. He said the feeling of insecurity among minorities should be removed as the first step towards ensuring inclusive growth. AFMI gave away the Sir Syed Ahmed Award for excellence in education to chairman of the Hyderabad-based Foundation for Economic and Educational Development and Hyderabad Zakat and Charitable Trust Ghayasuddin Babu Khan. Gold medals were also given to meritorious students selected from various States. AFMI president Shakir Mukhi and trustee A. S. Nakadar said the Foundation was devoted to promotion of education among Muslims in India and had been organising international conferences every year. Maulana Fazlur Rahim Mujaddidi, Rector of Jamia Hidayat, pointed out that the Muslim community's development would ultimately contribute to the progress of the nation. (The Hindu 30/12/07)

'Progress of Muslims linked to education' (7)

JAIPUR: The destiny of India's Muslim community is decisively linked with its ability to excel in education and produce professionals willing to work for marginalised sections. Muslims' empowerment will help settle all complaints of prejudice, discrimination and persecution. This was the consensus among participants in a conference on Muslims' education organised by the American Federation of Muslims of Indian Origin (AFMI), which ended here on Sunday. The two-day conference identified difficulties on the education front and suggested strategies to confront them. Haryana Governor A.R. Kidwai, addressing a technical session in the conference, said there were enormous opportunities for Muslims in the national life and the only way to benefit from them was through education. "In the present age of cut-throat competition, only those who equip themselves with modern education can progress." The Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities' Educational Institutions, Justice M.S.A. Siddiqui, said a workable balance should be evolved between religious and temporal education to enable Muslim children to compete successfully with others. He said a new orientation to madrasa curriculum would serve the educational needs of children from poor families. Commission's Member Vasanthi Stanley pointed out that the extensive rights given by Islam to women could be affirmed by launching a special drive to promote their educational status. Former Vice-Chancellor of Agra University Manzoor Ahmed said imparting basic education in Urdu medium would enable Muslim children to join the mainstream. Syed Zafar Mahmood of Zakat Foundation of India said Muslim students should be encouraged to appear in competitive examinations. Academician and educationists addressing the sessions on "Bridging gap between Muslims' education and economy" and "Priorities in social investments and educational development" underlined the need for efficient management and proper orientation of Muslim institutions. Two students from Kolkata -- Mohammed Arif Sheikh and Mohammed Nasir who secured 99.38 per cent marks in senior secondary examination this year -- were given gold medals and gala awards on the occasion. (The Hindu 31/12/07)