

ভারতে ধর্মান্তর নিয়ে মন্তব্য, বিতর্কে পোপ

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, রোম ও নয়াদিল্লি, ১৯ মে: গোটা খ্রিস্টান দুনিয়ায় তাঁর কর্তৃত্ব আকসংবাদিত। সেই তিনিই এমন একটি মন্তব্য করলেন, যা একেবারেই অপ্রত্যাশিত। তা-ও যেমন ভয়ময় বিষয় নিয়ে নয়, গোটা বিশ্বে 'ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা'র প্রতীক হিসাবে চিহ্নিত ভারত সম্পর্কেই কড়া মন্তব্য করেছেন পোপ যোহান বোলেনডিউ। ধর্মান্তরকরণ প্রসঙ্গে ভারতের বিরুদ্ধে কড়া মন্তব্য করে তুমুল বিতর্ক তৈরি করে ফেললেন তিনি।

ভ্যাটিকানে নবনিযুক্ত ভারতীয় রাষ্ট্রদূত অমিতাভ ত্রিপাঠী তাঁর সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করতে গলে পোপ বেশ কড়া ভাষাতেই তাঁকে বলেন, "সামাজিক অবস্থান বা ধর্মীয় প্রেক্ষাপটের ভিত্তিতে ভারতের কোনও নাগরিক, বিশেষত দুর্বল এবং অনগ্রসর শ্রেণির লোকেরা যেন কখনও বৈষম্যের শিকার না হন।" পোপের মূল বক্তব্য, ভারতে খ্রিস্ট ধর্মে ধর্মান্তরকরণ রুখতে আইন করার চেষ্টা চলছে,

এগুলো বন্ধ করতে হবে। কারণ তা একেবারেই 'অসাংবিধানিক'।

ধর্মান্তরকরণ প্রসঙ্গে খ্রিস্টানদের সর্বোচ্চ ধর্মগুরু যে ভাষায় প্রতিজ্ঞা জানিয়েছেন, তা একেবারেই অপ্রত্যাশিত।

ভ্যাটিকানে থেকে অমিতাভ ত্রিপাঠী জানিয়েছেন, এই মন্তব্য পোপের নিজস্ব দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি। নিজেদের জাতীয় স্বার্থ মাথায় রেখেই ভারত সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে বলেও জানিয়েছেন তিনি। কিন্তু ভারতীয় রাষ্ট্রদূত যা-ই বলেন না কেন, পোপের মন্তব্য নিয়ে পৌরগোল উঠেছে ভারতের রাজনীতিতে। বিশেষ মন্ত্রকের তরফে সন্ধ্যায় এক বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, সারা দুনিয়া জানে, ভারত ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ ও গণতান্ত্রিক দেশ,



যেখানে সব ধর্মের লোকেরা সমান অধিকার ভোগ করেন। ভারতের সংবিধানে সব নাগরিকের ধর্মবিশ্বাসের স্বাধীনতা এবং তা পালনের অধিকার আছে।" এ নিয়ে সরাসরি মুখ না খুললেও কংগ্রেস শিবির বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের বক্তব্যকেই পুরোপুরি সমর্থন জানিয়েছে। বিজেপি প্রত্যাশা মতোই পোপের মন্তব্যের কড়া সমালোচনা করেছে। বিজেপি নেতা মুখতার আব্বাস নকভি পোপের বক্তব্যের বিরোধিতা করে বলেছেন, পোপ যা বলেছেন, তা বন্ধার অধিকার তাঁর নেই। অন্য দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ বিষয় নিয়ে মন্তব্য করার পোপের তীব্র নিন্দা করে বিজেপি নেতা রবিশঙ্কর প্রসাদ বলেছেন, ভারত নিজেদের সংবিধান মেনে

চলে, ভ্যাটিকানের নির্দেশ মেনে নয়। গত কয়েক দশকে ভারতের কয়েকটি রাজ্যে, বিশেষত আদিবাসী অধ্যুষিত কিছু রাজ্যে ধর্মান্তরকরণ নিয়ে একাধিক বার সরব হয়েছে বিজেপি ও সজয় পরিবার। ধর্মান্তরকরণ রুখতে সম্ভ্রান্তি রাজস্থানের বিজেপি সরকার একটি বিল বিধানসভায় পাশ করিয়ে নেয়। আরও কয়েকটি রাজ্যে এই ধরনের আইন তৈরির প্রস্তুতি নেওয়া শুরু হয়ে যায়। কিন্তু রাজস্থানের রাজ্যপাল বিলটিতে সেই না করায় জটিলতা বেড়েছে। কংগ্রেস ধর্মান্তরকরণ বিলের উদ্দেশ্য নিয়েই প্রশ্ন তুলেছে। ভারতই মতো পোপের মন্তব্য যে পুরো পরিস্থিতি ঘোরানো করবে তাতে সন্দেহ নেই। রাজস্থানের ধর্মান্তরকরণ বিলটি নিয়ে মুখ খুলেছে বিজেপি, কংগ্রেস দু'পক্ষই। ধর্মান্তরকরণ বিরোধী বিলটিকে সমর্থন করে নকভির বক্তব্য, দারিদ্রের সুযোগ নিয়ে ধর্মান্তরিত করা উচিত নয়। এমন ধরনের ঘটনা ঘটলে রাষ্ট্রের হস্তক্ষেপ দরকার হয়ে পড়ে।

UK Asians fear for safety

Press Trust of India

LONDON, May 1: Asian shopkeepers in UK have expressed fears for their safety after three fire bomb attacks targeted local businesses, including those of Hindus and Muslims, in south London in the past two weeks.

Police said they believed the attacks that killed one shopkeeper and critically injured another were motivated by race rather than religion, as victims included Muslims and Hindus from several countries. The attacker, described by witnesses as a black person in his thirties, was seen throwing a petrol bomb through a window of the Price cutter store in Kennington last Thursday.

The explosion set off a fierce blaze and trapped Khizar Hayat, in his forties from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and an Afghan colleague inside the building. Hayat later died from severe burns while his colleague is in critical condition in hospital.

Scotland Yard detectives told reporters that the attacker had been linked to firebombings at a Tulse Hill news agent and a South Norwood corner shop last month.

Detective Superintendent Dick Heselden warned of another strike by the man and released an artist's impression of the arsonist described by witnesses as broad shouldered, stocky black man, about 5 ft 8 in with a shaven head and barrel chest.

"In the absence of any other possible motive, I'm working on the basis that these are racially motivated attacks. "It's my opinion that we're dealing with a serial fire bomber who is targeting small Asian businesses," he said.

02 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

ASEAN to discuss relative functions of members

China, India and Japan might soon play greater roles

P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: India and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) "are of the view that a forward-looking approach is required" if the "East Asia Summit process" is to steer clear of controversies.

This has been indicated to *The Hindu* by diplomatic sources, after a meeting which ended in Laos on Friday between the ASEAN and Indian officials. The ASEAN was represented by its Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong and officials from each of the 10 member-states, while the Indian team was led by Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East).

The next stage will be discussed at an ad hoc meeting in Malaysia in a few weeks time. They are the ASEAN, its "Plus Three" partners — China, Japan, and South Korea — and the other three partners — India, Australia, and New Zealand. The emerging issues centre

on the relative roles of the Plus Three, on one side, and the other three.

Shared vision

Mr. Ong noted, after the first EAS in Kuala Lumpur last December, that all the participants shared the vision of a pan-regional community. The move is aimed at harmonising the relative roles of the members to realising the vision.

While the ASEAN officials insist that the association will remain in the driving seat to promote the cause of a pan-regional community, a senior ASEAN political leader told *The Hindu* that the partners of the 10-member organisation, especially the bigger players such as China, India and Japan might soon play greater roles. The subjects discussed in Laos included counter-terrorism, a field in which New Delhi offered to share its expertise with the association.

02 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Iran snubs EU before nuke offer

Tehran, May 14 (Reuters): Iran today said it would reject any demand to stop what it calls peaceful nuclear work, a day before European foreign ministers discuss incentives and penalties designed to rein in Tehran's atomic ambitions.

European Union foreign ministers will meet tomorrow to work out technical, trade and political sweeteners that would be offered to Iran in exchange for allaying western fears it is seeking to produce an atom bomb, notably by halting uranium enrichment.

Iran, the world's fourth largest oil exporter, insists its nuclear plans are purely to make electricity and says it will not give up enrichment, a process which can be used to make fuel for power stations but also material for weapons.

"Any proposal that obliges us to stop peaceful (nuclear) activities would not have value and would not be valid," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said. He accused the Europeans of living in a "colonialist world" and said Tehran would not accept decisions reached in Brussels.

"If they want to decide things that concern us in a place where we are not present, then that body does not have any legal validity or credibility in decision-making," Ahmadinejad said.

Washington and its Euro-

pean allies have been seeking to pass a UN Security Council resolution that would oblige Iran to halt all uranium enrichment work or face possible sanctions.

But Russia and China, which have energy interests in Iran, have resisted the move. Washington agreed to let Britain, France and Germany devise a package of benefits for Iran in return for cooperating, putting back a decision on a possible resolution.

"The aim is to come up with a very attractive package to make it difficult for the Iranian government to refuse," said a senior envoy from one of the so-called "EU3" countries.

A draft statement for tomorrow's EU meeting stated the bloc was ready to help Tehran develop "a safe, sustainable and proliferation-proof civilian nuclear programme" while insisting it halt all enrichment on its soil.

EU officials said it was undecided if help could include letting western firms build nuclear power stations in Iran, an offer sources said was in an earlier package rejected by Iran last August and which also stipulated an end to enrichment.

The EU wants the package ready by a meeting on Friday in London of the five permanent Security Council members plus Germany.

15 MAY 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

European Union to ban LTTE

Alienation will compel LTTE to tread a hardline path: Balasingham

Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI: After months of discussion, the 25-nation European Union has set the stage for a formal ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a senior European diplomat familiar with the case told *The Hindu* here on Thursday.

"The ground has been prepared for a ban on the Tigers." A formal decision to recommend the proscription was taken at two separate meetings of legal experts and counter-terrorism specialists in Brussels on Wednesday. According to the diplomat, the E.U. processes would now take hold leading to a formal announcement of the ban. Some key members previously objected to a ban, arguing that a high level of proof was needed and no engagement was

possible with a banned organisation.

Clearly, the recent acts of violence have convinced those who had doubts about the real face of the LTTE, a group that remains determined to try and achieve its objectives through violence. A ban by as many as 25 European states will come as a body blow to the LTTE's fund-raising and political activities conducted by its myriad front organisations. It will also end decades of legal toleration of the Tigers by European nations. On May 12, the E.U. said in a statement: "The LTTE

have committed gross violations of the Ceasefire Agreement at sea in recent days ... the reckless behaviour of the LTTE in the last days can only contribute to a dangerous escalation that results in growing hostilities and jeopardises any possibility for future peace talks." In September 2005, the E.U. said it was "actively considering the formal listing of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. In the meantime, the European Union has agreed that with immediate effect, delegations from the LTTE will no longer be received in any of the

1915
• LTTE has committed gross violation of ceasefire agreement

• Ban will be a body blow to LTTE's fund raising activity

R. Abhian
En. 101
E.U. member-states until further notice."

The LTTE, it appears, has an inkling of what transpired within the E.U. in Brussels on Wednesday. In a statement, its tactician Anton Balasingham lashed out at any move to impose a ban. "The more the international community alienates the LTTE, the more the LTTE will be compelled to tread a hardline individualist path," Mr. Balasingham told the pro-Tiger Tamilnet website. "As such [a E.U ban] is not going to help bring about peace, [but] will only serve to exacerbate the conditions of war and endanger the lives of Tamil civilians ..." he said, warning that the LTTE could step up its attacks on the Sri Lankan security forces if the E.U. clamped a ban.

19 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

European Union bans LTTE

This will result in the freezing of the outfit's assets in 25 countries

Amit Baruah

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NEW DELHI: The European Union Foreign Ministers on Monday ordered the listing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a banned organisation.

Western diplomats said on Tuesday that the decision was taken at a meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels.

The decision confirmed a recommendation by European officials to proscribe the terrorist outfit on May 17, a development first reported by *The Hindu* on May 19.

The diplomats told this correspondent that the E.U. decision would result in the freezing of LTTE assets in 25 countries across Europe and put an end to its efforts to raise funds for funding its terror campaign in Sri

• LTTE does not represent all Tamils: European Parliament

• Strong message to the Tigers: New Delhi

• Move will hurt the outfit's fund-raising efforts

Lanka.

Asked to comment on the E.U. decision, an Indian official said: "It's a strong, symbolic message to the Tigers." The Tigers would have to shut down their huge office in Paris, used by Lawrence Thilagar for propaganda activities. Fund-raising capacities of the LTTE would also be affected, the official said.

European nations have become increasingly intolerant of

the LTTE after its latest round of killings. On May 17, the European Parliament sharply criticised the militant group for attacking a vessel carrying 710 unarmed security force personnel, besides members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

Also, the vessel was flying the SLMM flag, and was escorted by Navy gun boats. In the attack, one gun boat was sunk, and 18 crew members were killed.

Saying that the LTTE did not represent all the Tamils, the European Parliament called on it to "allow for political pluralism and alternate democratic voices in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, which would secure the interests of all peoples and communities."

The wheel has turned full circle for the LTTE, an organisation that has shown unusual strengths in extorting money

from Tamil expatriates in the name of waging an armed struggle to create an independent state of "Tamil Eelam."

After obtaining a degree of international legitimacy following the involvement of Norway as facilitator and other key entities such as the E.U., the United States and Japan, the LTTE has returned to its old ways. Its threats to return to war in case the E.U. slapped a ban on it have failed to prevent Brussels from taking the extreme step.

The assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and the attempt on the life of Army Chief Sarath Fonseka convinced the European nations that the Tigers had not changed their stripes.

Pressure mounts on LTTE: Page 14

Demolition squad gets court's nod

One more killed in Vadodara violence

HTC & Agencies
Ahmedabad, May 2

VADODARA, WHICH has seen large-scale mob violence since Monday over the demolition of a centuries-old *dargah*, remained tense through Tuesday with sporadic incidents of stone-throwing and one more person — injured in police firing — dying in hospital. A late night agency report said another man had been burnt alive when a mob torched a car in a fresh bout of violence.

Earlier, police tear-gassed a crowd, which threw stones at a procession taking the bodies of two victims of police firing for burial.



Uneasy aftermath

- Crowds clash in wide areas of city
- Curfew relaxed in select areas
- HC upholds demolition of illegal structures
- Centre says administration was ham-handed in tackling situation

Meanwhile, the civic authorities, received a shot in the arm with the Gujarat High Court ruling that all illegal structures — including religious ones — which encroach upon public space need to be demolished. Taking suo motu cognisance of a newspaper report that Ahmedabad city alone had more than 1,400 illegal religious structures encroaching public land, a division bench of Justice B.J.Sethna and Justice R.P. Dholakia said the authorities had the right to remove such structures. The court also suggested that the police make preventive arrests of anti-socials, who were likely to obstruct demolition work.

The two-judge bench ruled that municipal authorities should seek adequate police protection while going for such demolitions. A survey by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation had found that the city had 1,200 Hindu religious structures and 260 Islamic shrines on public land.

However, the Centre said the Vadodara district administration had not taken enough precaution in handling the situation. The matter had religious sentiments involved and should have been dealt with more sensitivity.

03 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Govt Takes SLP Route To Render Gujarat HC Move On Vadodara Null & Void

SC stalls demolition of religious edifice

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

THE Centre on Thursday filed an SLP at the Supreme Court and got it to stay the Gujarat High Court order to demolish religious structures encroaching upon public space in Vadodara.

The high court had directed the state administration last month to demolish 1,200 temples and 260 Islamic shrines.

Following the court instructions, the Vadodara civic administration has already demolished 18 religious structures belonging to the Hindus and two to the Muslims. But the minority community reacted to the administration's decision to demolish a dargah in the city. Riots broke out in the city

After two Hindus were killed as an aftermath. Sections within the Centre, which want the government to use the issue to take on Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday sought the Prime Minister's intervention for stalling the demolition. AR An-



tulay and Arijun Singh, who raised the issue at the Cabinet meeting were unhappy with the Centre's handling of the issue.

Union home secretary VK Duggal said: "The Centre has no reason to believe that the district administration did not act as was expected of them."

munal disturbances."

The SLP route was taken as the Centre has not been able to pass the blame on to Narendra Modi. The chief minister, who visited the trouble spot, made a request to the army to quell violence. The Centre's activism suits Mr Modi. A decision by the state government to stall demolition would have given the impression the state government is capitulating under pressure from a hostile Centre.

The BJP can be expected to use the Centre's SLP to drive home its political point that the UPA government goes into a overdrive when faced with protests from the minority community. The court's direction to demolish 1,200 Hindu structures have not faced similar resistance.

According to Union home ministry officials, the district administration had conducted the entire drill that must precede firing. This prompted the Centre to direct the legal department to approach the Supreme Court. In the SLP, the government counsel claimed that the high court acted on a report in *The Times of India*. The Centre said: "The high court's directed demolition of all alleged structures en masse, without even conducting a prima facie explanation into the veracity of the contents of the newspaper report and without any pleadings on the record."

According to the Centre, the order passed by the HC "lacked judicial discretion in the matter of circumspection, particularly in a state which witnessed com-

05 MAY 2006

The Economic Times

06 MAY 2005

Centre seeks list of illegal religious structures

RAJNISH Sharma
New Delhi, May 5

THE UNION home ministry has sought a detailed list of the religious structures encroaching upon public land from the Gujarat government. Sources said the information was sought under Article 355 of the Constitution and the Special Provisions Act, 1991.

In a communication to the state government on Monday, the day violence erupted in Vadodara, the Centre had asked for a comprehensive list and details of religious structures that encroached upon government property. The Gujarat government, however, is yet to send the list. The Centre also advised the Gujarat government to verify all land records before demolishing a religious structure as it might lead to communal tension, both in and outside Gujarat.

The Centre's opinion was based on the Places of Worship Act that prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of its religious character, as it existed on August

15, 1947. The home ministry indicated to the Gujarat government that the information available with it revealed that the demolished Vadodara *dargah*, when constructed, was on the outskirts of the city and the "road came up much later".

"The basic idea of seeking the details from the state was to identify the religious structures that were in existence as on August 15, 1947, since the Places of Worship Act calls for the maintenance of the religious character of such structures," an official said.

Ministry officials felt the district authorities should demolish only those religious structures that encroach upon public land after building plans and by-laws came into existence.

Interestingly, the Centre has also used Article 355 and the Places of Worship Act as the basis for filing a special leave petition (SLP) in Supreme Court on Thursday, that stayed a Gujarat High Court order directing civic authorities in Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat to clear all encroachments by religious structures on public lands.



AFP
Activists of the All-India Minorities Front at a protest demonstration in Delhi on Friday.

Normality returns to Vadodara

RATHIN Das
Ahmedabad, May 5

THE TROUBLE-TORN CITY OF Vadodara limped back to normality on Friday as no untoward incident was reported from anywhere for the past 24 hours. Friday prayers in the city's mosques also went on peacefully as the army and police maintained vigil.

With the situation remaining peaceful, curfew was relaxed for three hours for the women and children on Friday in all the six police station areas.

However, a place of worship on a pavement in Akota area was found burnt early in the morning. The two-foot-by-three-foot structure by the roadside -- revered by auto-rickshaw drivers -- had a deity's photo-

GUJARAT

ON THE BOIL

- No untoward incident reported from anywhere in 24 hours
- Curfew relaxed in the city on Friday for three hours
- Army and paramilitary forces to remain deployed in city

graph and some coconuts which were found burnt, police commissioner Deepak Swarup told Hindustan Times. But, the incident didn't have much repercussion in the city. Curfew has been relaxed in Navapura, Vadi and city police station ar-

reas from 900 am to 12 noon. In the other three areas of Karelbaug, Raopura and Panigate curfew will be relaxed from 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm. Police said there was no untoward incident reported during the curfew relaxation hours. A decision on complete relaxation of curfew would be taken after reviewing the situation late in the night.

The army and paramilitary forces remained deployed in the city as a precautionary measure. The army also staged flag marches twice in the city during the day.

A 75-year-old man was stabbed in the Navapura area on Thursday night. Confirming the incident, the police said the stabbing was due to personal rivalry. He received minor injuries and has been admitted to hospital, the police added.

SHOT IN THE ARM FOR LOCAL MISSIONARIES AS RAJASTHAN GOVERNOR REFERS BILL TO PRESIDENT

Pope opposes conversion ban law

Delhi 20/5

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

THE Christian missionaries engaged in conversions received a major boost on Friday when Pope Benedict came out in the open to oppose the law banning conversion.

Agency reports from Paris said Pope Benedict, in an unusually strong language, told India's new ambassador to the Vatican that efforts in some states to outlaw conversions were unconstitutional and should be rejected.

The papal assertions comes as a backdrop to the Rajasthan government's efforts to enact an anti-conversion law. The Bill, passed by the state Assembly, was forwarded to the governor last month.

Reports from Jaipur said state governor Pratibha Patil has not given her assent. She has referred the Bill to the President for his advice. It will be interesting to watch the presidential response in the context of the strong statement from the Pope.

The Pope on Friday also appeared to be endorsing a section's claim that religious intolerance was rampant in India.

cally correct," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley said.

Pope Benedict's assertions are not surprising as he is known to hold ultraconservative views. Before becoming the Pontiff, for 25 long years, he was the head of the Vatican office that oversees doctrine.

The Pope has been a subject of controversy for his hardline views. While he never shows any flexibility on the Church's views on priestly celibacy and contraception, he had invited controversy when he described rock music as the "vehicle of anti-religion"; dismissed the feminist interpretation of the Bible; and asked bishops to deny Communion to those who support abortion.

This hardline position earned him nicknames such as Panzer-cardinal, God's Rottweiler and the Grand Inquisitor.

His interventions outside the Church doctrine were equally controversial. Sometime ago, he had termed Buddhism a religion for the self-indulgent. He also brought the Vatican into conflict with the Muslim world when he opposed Turkey's efforts to join the European Union.



The disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some regions of the nation, including the reprehensible attempt to legislate clearly discriminatory restrictions on the fundamental right of religious freedom must be firmly rejected," the Pope told India's ambassador Amitava Tripathi.

New Delhi swiftly rejected the Papal assertions. "It is acknowledged that India is a secular and democratic country in which adherents of all religious faiths enjoy equal rights. The Constitution of India states that all per-

Apex court rules out conversion as fundamental right

THE Vatican's stand that the fundamental right to practice and propagate religion includes the right to convert was an issue considered and rejected by the Supreme Court. In a 1977 judgment in the Rev Stanislaus versus the State of Madhya Pradesh, the court had upheld the constitutional validity of conversion-prohibiting laws enacted by Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The two states, which were then controlled by the Congress, had passed anti-conversion laws in 1967 and 1968, respectively.

"What the Constitution grants is not the right to convert another person to one's own religion, but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets," the court had ruled. According to the country's top court, organised conversion, whether by force or fraud or by providing help or allurement to persons, taking undue advantage of their poverty and ignorance, is anti-secular.

Allow conversions: Pope to India

SR 1 9/15 Rashmee Roshan Lall | TNN *Rashmee*

London: An increasingly assertive Vatican has reiterated the seven-year-old message first put out by the late Pope John Paul II on a visit to India—religious conversion is a human right and it will be unconstitutional for India to ban it.

Thirteen months into his papacy, Benedict XVI upbraided India's new ambassador to the Holy See, Amitava Tripathi, as he presented his letters of accreditation, with the grim warning that there were "disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some regions of the nation, including the reprehensible attempt to legislate clearly discriminatory restrictions on the fundamental right of religious freedom". In the full text of the Pope's comments to Tripathi, seen by TOI, Benedict XVI, once dubbed the "Panzerkardinal" and "God's Rottweiler", said the attempt to restrict religious freedom "must be firmly rejected as not only unconstitutional, but also as contrary to the highest ideals of India's founding fathers who believed in a nation of peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between different religions and ethnic groups".

The Pope's admonition to Tripathi came at a routine Vatican ceremony to receive letters of accreditation from the ambassadors of Moldova, Australia and Cape Verde.

Experts on the reigning Pope's body language, key advisors and the tone and tenor of his pronouncements—



often likened to Kremlinologists of old—said Benedict XVI's warning merely renewed and hardened his predecessor's 1999 message to an India under the BJP regime. Benedict XVI's language is being read as unusually strong.

It is the second time this week that the Pope has demanded the right to religious freedom in countries with non-Christian majorities. On Monday, he urged Muslim countries to give Christian minorities the same rights that Muslims enjoyed in the Christian West.

20 MAY 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Pope told of India's displeasure

HT Political Bureau
New Delhi, May 23

INDIA HAS conveyed to the Vatican its strong disapproval of the Pope's recent statements on religious intolerance in the country.

On Tuesday, minister of state for external affairs Anand Sharma told the Rajya Sabha during Zero Hour that the Vatican representative had been summoned on Monday and told in "no uncertain terms" that the government disapproved of the Pope's statement.

The matter was raised in the House by BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad, who said the Pope's comments were inappropriate and asked why the government had remained silent. In his reply, the minister said the government's response had been "firm, appropriate and timely".

The government had conveyed its displeasure over the remarks to the Vati-



can's charge d'affaires. He had also been told that it appeared that the Pope had not been appropriately briefed about India's secular credentials or the religious tolerance that is appreciated the world over.

On May 18, Pope Benedict XVI had made a statement to the new Indian ambassador to Vatican when the latter presented his credentials. "There are disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some regions of the nation (India)," the Pope had said. Benedict XVI had also said that laws to ban religious conversions were discriminatory and impinged on the right to religious freedom.

Referring to the Pope's comments, Prasad said while Article 25 guaranteed the freedom of speech and freedom of religion, it did not include the right to conduct forced religious conversions.

Prasad was joined by his party colleagues who asserted that the Pope's comments were not only "unwarranted interference" but also amounted to a slur on the secular character of India's democracy. They demanded to know why the government had not acted in the matter.

24 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Yet again we cave in to religious bigots ✓

Rival groups are egging each other on in a politics of grievance. Now, militant Hindus in Britain turn on M.F. Husain.

Nick Cohen

THE SATANIC Verses, *Behzti*, Theo van Gogh's *Submission*, *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, the Danish cartoons of Muhammed... now we can add the London exhibition of the work of Maqbool Fida Husain to the rapidly expanding list of works of art and satire targeted by militant religion.

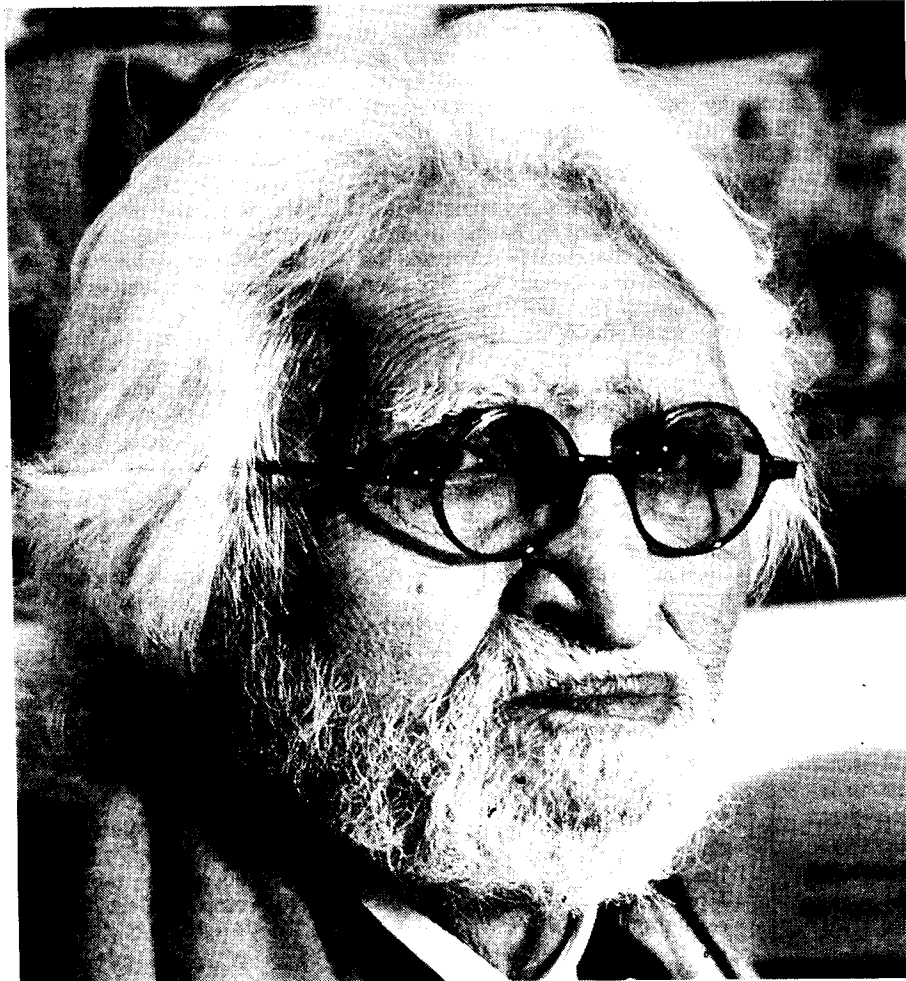
For readers interested in Indian culture, the show at the Asia House gallery in the West End's fine art district should have been essential viewing. Husain is the grand old man of Indian art. He began as a boy painting cinema hoardings for six annas per square foot before getting his first break at the Bombay Art Society in 1947. His international appeal lies in his mixing of classical traditions with modern styles. Art from all over the world inspires him — Emil Nolde and Oskar Kokoschka were early influences — but you only have to glance at his pictures to know an Indian must have painted them.

The Indian High Commissioner, Kamallesh Sharma, claimed at the opening that Husain was India's greatest modern artist. The exhibition was to run until August, to allow visitors to decide for themselves if he was right.

They won't be able to now. Asia House closed the show on Monday after threats of violence from anonymous Hindu fundamentalists. Arjun Malik of the Hindu Human Rights campaign assured me they had nothing to do with him, but said his group had been willing to do everything short of violence to stop the public seeing two of Husain's works.

His supporters had already deluged the gallery with letters, phone calls and emails complaining that Husain's "so-called art" offended the "sentiments of the Hindu community of the U.K." (Whether it did is debatable, as no one has elected the Hindu Human Rights campaign to represent the Hindu or any other community.) The protesters also went for Hitachi, which had given Asia House plasma TV screens, and demanded public apologies from everyone involved, including the Indian High Commissioner.

They called off a planned demonstration in London on Sunday because, like the man-



CONVENIENT TARGET: M.F. Husain — Photo: V. Ganesan.

agers of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre who closed *Behzti* after the demonstrations by conservative Sikhs and the national newspaper editors who refused to publish the Danish cartoons, Asia House buckled under the pressure to censor.

The apparently separate protests from different faiths are connected. What we are seeing is rival fundamentalists egging each other on in a politics of competitive grievance. Every time one secures a victory, the

others realise they can't be left behind. If satirists are frightened of having a go at Islam because they believe they may be killed — and they are — why shouldn't Christian fundamentalists decide to become more menacing?

A comedian who takes a pop at the Pope sends the subliminal message: "We can deride your religion as despicable because we know you are not so despicable you will resort to violence." There is a limit to how

long the ultras for any religion will put up with that before they change the ground rules.

After abusive Sikh men closed *Behzti*, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's play about the abuse of Sikh women by Sikh men, Christian Voice upped the ante against *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. It had previously run at the National Theatre for months without attracting protest. But when BBC2 came to broadcast it, London Christians imitated Birmingham Sikhs and BBC executives suddenly needed the protection of private security guards.

You can see the same pattern in the hounding of M.F. Husain. The paintings the demonstrators targeted were nudes of Draupadi and Durga. Arjun Malik went into all kinds of verbal convolutions when I asked what he had against them, before coming out with the explanation that "according to tradition, they should not be disrobed." The reason for the tongue-twisting is that nude gods and goddesses have been a part of the Indian tradition for 5,000 years. As Husain said: "Here, the nudity is not nakedness; it is a form of innocence and maturity."

It is no longer innocent because, after the state-sponsored violence of the Danish cartoon protests, Hindus from the religious Indian right looked around for a grievance of their own. They picked on Husain — the fact that he was born a Muslim made him a natural target — and began a confessional arms race. In February, a Muslim politician in the Uttar Pradesh offered a large reward to anyone who beheaded the Danish cartoonists. A Hindu politician responded by saying he would pay the same to anyone who would kill Husain.

What is depressing is that, apart from a letter to *The Guardian*, from Lord Meghnad Desai, the closure of a major exhibition by fanatics has passed without comment. British troops are fighting against forces motivated by the religious fervour of the ultra right. British police officers arrest suspects they claim are inspired to kill because they, too, have a psychotic religious mission. Yet every week, comedians, art gallery owners, TV producers, newspaper editors and Home Office Ministers give in to religious extremists. This is no way to win a war. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

30 Jan 2006

THE HINDU

Delhi knives out for Husain

MANAN KUMAR

New Delhi, April 7: If the nationally important issue of wardrobe malfunction on the ramp is keeping the Maharashtra government preoccupied, nudes on M.F. Husain's canvas are causing a flutter of activity at the centre of the country's power.

Husain, who today moved the Supreme Court seeking transfer to Delhi of criminal complaints filed against him in Indore and Rajkot "for outraging religious sentiments" with his works, does not know he might be jumping from the frying pan to the fire as the home ministry had put the Intelligence Bureau on him.

After receiving the IB report that said paintings such as Bharat Mata and other nude images of Hindu deities can cause communal trouble, the ministry, under Shivraj Patil, is considering prosecuting the 91-year-old painter under a section of the Indian Penal Code.

The IB report suggested that the government should take damage control steps.

Sources said the law ministry, whose opinion had been sought, has said Husain can be prosecuted under Section 295A, which deals with outraging religious feelings of a community.

The home ministry section dealing with human rights had sent photographs of seven-eight paintings by Husain to the law ministry.

These paintings are Hanuman opposite Sita sitting on the thigh of a naked Ravana, nude Sita on the long tail of Hanuman, bull copulating with Parvati and Shankar watching on Shivratri, Durga in sexual union with a tiger, nude



Husain: Transfer plea

Laxmi on the head of Ganesh, nude Saraswati playing the Veena and Bharat Mata in the nude.

On the Bharat Mata painting, the law ministry has said it does not violate either the State Emblems Act or the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act and Husain cannot be prosecuted for this work.

Before it makes a decision, the big question for the government is if it should risk being clubbed with radical Hindu outfits by starting prosecution or simply put Husain on a leash by serving him a warning or a notice.

The sources said though the home ministry was divided, the majority opinion was in favour of filing a case against the painter. It is a decision the ministry will, obviously, not take without consulting the Prime Minister's Office.

Faced with threats to his life in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, where rewards have been announced for killing or mutilating him, Husain has requested the Supreme Court to club the cases in Indore and Rajkot with a similar complaint filed in the Patiala House courts in Delhi so that the hearings are held in the capital.

Afghan Christian convert released from prison

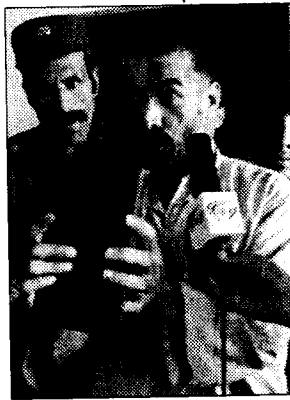
ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL, MARCH 28

AN AFGHAN man who had faced the death penalty for converting from Islam to Christianity has been released from prison after the case was dropped amid intense international pressure, the Justice Minister said on Tuesday.

The UN said it is working to find a country willing to grant asylum to Abdul Rahman, who has appealed to leave Afghanistan. Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini will ask his government to accept Rahman, the Italian government said in a statement.

Afghan Justice Minister Mohammed Sarwar Danish said that Rahman, 41, was released from the high-security Policharki prison on the outskirts of Kabul late Monday.

"We released him because



Abdul Rahman

the prosecutors told us to," he said. "His family was there when he was freed, but I don't know where he was taken."

Deputy Attorney-General Mohammed Eshak Aloko said prosecutors had issued a letter calling for Rahman's release because "he was mentally unfit to stand trial." He also said he did not know where Rahman was staying.

29 MAR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

MP court issues warrant against M F Husain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
INDORE, MARCH 22

A LOCAL court today issued a bailable arrest warrant against noted painter M F Husain for allegedly painting nude picture of Bharat Mata.

The bailable arrest warrant was issued by Judicial Magistrate First Class, Narendra Jain on the petition filed by a social worker Ajay Singh Naruka. The court also rejected the request application filed by Husain's counsel for transferring the case to Delhi on the grounds that the painter was facing a threat to his life in Madhya Pradesh,

Naruka's advocate Chandrashekar said. Husain's counsel telegraphed the request to the court, which rejected it following objections by the petitioner, he said. Earlier, the court had issued summons to Husain in the case and directed him to appear before it today, but he failed to do so.

Naruka has said in his petition that Husain's alleged painting of a nude image of Bharat Mata had hurt the sentiments of Hindus. The court has fixed April 13 as the next date of hearing in the case.

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 MAR 2006

British schoolgirl loses Islamic dress case

AMIT ROY

London. March 22: The law lords, the highest court in Britain, today settled a long running legal dispute by backing a comprehensive school which sent home Shabina Begum, a Muslim girl who had insisted on wearing the head to toe Islamic dress called the jilbab.

Denbeigh High School in Luton, Bedfordshire, where 75 per cent of the pupils were

Muslims, had worked out a policy of allowing girls to wear the salwar kameez with a head scarf after consulting parents and community leaders.

But this was not enough for Shabina, now 17, who took her head teachers and school governors to court in 2002. She argued that her human rights were violated if she was not allowed to practice her religion by wearing the jilbab.

In a legal case with many

twists and turns, she lost her case in the high court, won in the appeal court and lost again today in the Lords. She and her advisers have the option of taking the dispute to the European Court of Human Rights.

The case has caused much agonising in Britain where, in sharp contrast to the ban on hijabs in government schools in France, pupils are given a considerable degree of latitude if they want to wear Islamic dresses to classes.

In Shabina's case, however, it was felt she had taken religious observance too far by wearing clothes which were not safe for laboratory work, for example.

What has given the case added interest is that Shabina has been represented by the Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Booth, queen's counsel, who is a determined human rights lawyer, especially where women's issues are involved.

However, others have

claimed that it was not Shabina who wished to make a stand but hardline Muslim groups, who wanted to use her to see how far the boundaries could be pushed.

Despite the political background to the case, their lordships made their judgment today on purely legal grounds. One of the three law lords, Lord Bingham, said the school was fully justified in acting as it did.

His judgment was: "It had

taken immense pains to devise a uniform policy which respected Muslim beliefs but did so in an inclusive, unthreatening and uncompetitive way. The school had enjoyed a period of harmony and success to which the uniform policy was thought to contribute."

Agreeing, Lord Hoffmann said there had been nothing to stop Shabina going to a single-sex school where her religion did not require a jilbab or a school where she was allowed

to wear one. The girl's counsel, Cherie Blair, had explained that Shabina felt her previous uniform did not sufficiently protect her modesty because she had reached sexual maturity.

Shabina said today: "Obviously I am saddened and disappointed about this, but I am quite glad it is all over and I can move on now. I had to make a stand against this and I am just happy it is all over now."



Shabina Begum in London. (Reuters)

Christians hit back in Nigeria



'FATWA WRONG': Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, has slammed calls to kill the cartoonists who lampooned the Prophet, saying violence would hurt the cause of the Muslims.

STRIKE IN PAK: Five major markets in Rawalpindi were closed on Tuesday (above) as traders called a strike to protest against the cartoonists who lampooned the Prophet, and some 2,000 people chanted anti-Denmark slogans in the town of Barwand.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Lagos, February 21

CHRISTIAN MOBS rampaged through a southern Nigerian city on Tuesday, burning mosques and killing several people in a wave of anti-Muslim violence after deadly protests against cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad over the weekend.

Muslims residents in the southern, predominantly Christian city of Onitsha were beaten to death by mobs which also burned two mosques there. "The mosque at the main market has been burnt and I've seen six bodies on the streets," Izzy Uzor, an Onitsha resident and businessman, said. "The whole town is in a frenzy and people are running in all directions."

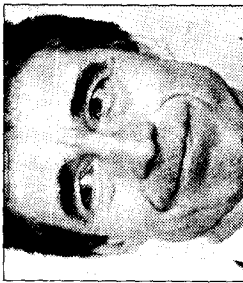
The violence appeared to be in reprisal for anti-Christian violence Saturday in the mostly Muslim northern city of Maiduguri in which thousands of Muslims protesting caricatures of the Prophet Mo-

hammad attacked Christians and burned churches, killing at least 18 people.

Another Onitsha resident, Isotonu Achor, said one badly beaten Muslim man ran into his office from the streets to escape the violence. "There is blood all over him and I'm scared they'll come for him here. If he doesn't get urgent treatment he will die," Achor said. Police and government officials were not immediately available for comment.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country of more than 130 million people, is roughly divided between a predominantly Muslim north and a mainly Christian south. Thousands of people have died in religious violence in Nigeria since 2000.

Saturday's protest over the cartoons of the Prophet in Maiduguri marked the first violent demonstrations over the issue in Nigeria. Police say at least 18 people, most of them Christians, died, and 30 churches were burned down.



'Cartoonists safe'
DANISH PRIME MINISTER Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Tuesday said his government had taken "necessary steps" to protect the cartoonists. He defended the government's handling of the crisis. "Freedom of the Press is not up for negotiation," Fogh Rasmussen said.
AP, Copenhagen

CARTOON PROTEST

Cartoon protesters fire in the air

Press Trust of India

LUCKNOW, Feb. 19. — Demonstrators, protesting the publication of cartoons of Prophet Mohammad in European newspapers, fired some shots in the air and partially damaged a hotel and a coffee shop as they marched towards the Uttar Pradesh Assembly here today.

Thousands of Muslims assembled at the historic Tilewali Masjid before staging a noisy demonstration in front of the Vidhan

Sabha. Addressing the gathering, Islamic scholars and religious leaders demanded cancellation of US President Mr George W Bush's upcoming visit to India and recall of India's ambassador to Denmark.

Some protesters fired shots in the air and burst crackers to register their protest. They carried placards and shouted slogans against Denmark, Britain and the USA. They also torched an effigy of Mr Bush.

Protesters damaged glass

panes of a hotel and set on fire flags of several countries fluttering inside its premises. Demonstrators also damaged a Barista coffee shop, Islamic scholars Maulana Kalbe Jawwad and Maulana Fazlur Rehman and United Muslim Morcha president Mr Salahuddin Shibu accused the Centre of "surrendering before the imperialist Bush".

They also wanted an apology from the government for voting against Iran at the IAEA and asked it to

restore the minority status of the Aligarh Muslim University. A memorandum has been sent to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh through the district magistrate, they said. Shia scholar Maulana Kalbe Jawwad, while addressing the gathering, said that there was a "conspiracy" against Islam. "Unfortunately, India too has joined this conspiracy and has surrendered meekly before the USA," Mr Jawwad said adding that inviting Mr Bush amounted

to "insulting and hurting the sentiments of 20 crore Muslims in the country."

Mr Jawwad said Muslims would protest against his visit if their demands were not met. A letter from the rector of Nadwa-tul-Ulema (Islamic University) Maulana Rabe Hasan Nadwi was also read before the gathering. Stressing the need to unite to "fight the Western forces", All India United Muslim Morcha vice-president Mr MA Siddique said it was essential to boycott their goods.

2006

THE STATESMAN

Three dead, dozens injured in cartoon protests in Pakistan

Religion
08-7
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
PESHAWAR/JAKARTA/KUALA LUMPUR.
FEBRUARY 15

THREE people were killed and dozens injured in Pakistan today, officials said, bringing the country's death toll from protests against cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed to five.

An eight-year-old boy and a 28-year-old man died as thousands of people demonstrated in the northwestern city of Peshawar, while a youth was killed by gunfire during a second day of protests in eastern Lahore.

"We have received the bodies of two people, an eight-year-old boy and a 28-year-old man," said Yousuf Pervez, Deputy Medical Superintendent at Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar.

"The man, named Feroz, fell on an electric wire that is said to have snapped in police firing," he said. "The boy, who was identified as Mohammed, died when a bullet hit his head during aerial firing."

He did not say whether police or protesters had fired the bullet that killed the boy. "There are 30 people wounded. The injured include people hit by teargas



A US fast food restaurant after it was set on fire by protesters in Peshawar on Wednesday. Reuters

shells," added Pervez. "Four or five are in a serious condition. Their wounds are deep and we are worried about them."

A youth died in crossfire between po-

lice and protesters in the new campus area of Lahore's Punjab University, police said, a day after two demonstrators were shot dead during mass riots in the same city.

The exchange of fire took place when mostly student protesters started hurling stones at security forces and passing vehicles the official said.

Meanwhile in Jakarta, Indonesia's Importers Association began a boycott of Danish products today, its chairman Amiruddin Saud said.

"Starting today, we will halt imports of Danish goods as our way of protesting the publication of the cartoons," said Saud.

Elsewhere Malaysia has ordered a Chinese-language daily to halt publication for two weeks as punishment for printing a photograph showing Danish cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in their February 3 edition.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in a statement late on Tuesday that he ordered the *Guang Ming Daily*, Malaysia's third-largest Chinese-language daily, to stop publication of its evening edition for two weeks starting tomorrow.

European Hindus protest 'offending' whiskey ad

By Rashmee Roshan Lall/TNN

London: European Hindus have joined with their American counterparts to fight the so-called 'whiskey wars' against an American manufacturer's controversial attempt to advertise its tippie through images of Durga Devi astride a tiger, cradling numerous bottles of booze in her many hands.

The advertisement for Southern Comfort whiskey, denounced as "blasphemous and sacrilegious" by British Hindus, was first glimpsed at a discotheque in the Greek capital, Athens.

Bimal Krishna Das of the UK's National Council of Hindu Temples (NCHT) told TOI on Monday that the whiskey manufacturer appeared to be "offending, insulting and denigrating Hindu culture, they are mocking Hinduism."

The NCHT, which claims support from the umbrella Hindu American Foundation, has warned that it will launch large-scale protests if Southern Comfort does not respond to its appeal to withdraw the Durga adverts.

The NCHT, which represents 90 of the UK's 140 Hindu temples and by extension at least 75 per cent of Britain's estimated 600,000 Hindus, said it was time for Hindus around the world and the Indian government to stand up and be counted. "Many Hindus in north India revere Durga mata," said Das, adding that Western manufacturers still appeared to ride roughshod over Hindu-sentiment.

The NCHT complained that New Delhi had never supported Hindu campaigns against the succession of "sacrilegious" marketing impulses of big companies around the world. "Now," said Das, "it was time for a change of stance."

The Hindu 'whiskey wars' come just a year after the successful "bikini battle" waged by the NCHT and other western European Hindu groups against designer Roberto Cavalli's religiously-enriched images on his swimwear and lingerie range.

Conversion won't be tolerated: Modi

By Hitarth Pandya/TNN

Subir (Dangs): "Aa laut ke aaja mere meet, tujhe mere geet bulate hai.." the rendition by Ram kathakar Moraribapu of this soulful Mukesh number completed the setting as two lakh people thronged the Pampa sarovar at Shabri Kumbh here on Saturday. The motive behind the mela was clear on the first day.

Chief minister Narendra Modi joined the religious leaders to say the time had come for "converted tribals" to adopt their own religion. Without mincing words, Modi and religious leaders Moraribapu and Asarambapu were categorical that conversion won't be tolerated any more. "Conversion of tribals by offering them medicines and food will not be tolerated and it's time for them to return home," they said.

The dais was cramped



with sadhus and Bhil leaders in the backdrop of a poster loaded with symbolism, showing Ram killing Ravana. Taking digs at the Congress and NGOs for their opposition to Shabri Kumbh, Modi said sarcastically, "I would like to thank Congress leader Arjun Singh, who discussed the Shabri Kumbh with Sonia Gandhi and abused its organisers for almost half-an-hour. I also

would like to thank those jhola chhap people (NGOs) for raking up the issue and bringing it to the notice of the rest of the world. And finally, I would like to thank the media which for a change has given positive reports on the event."

Defending the decision to organise the Kumbh, he said, "Whatever we have said and done is as per the constitution, which mentions that conversion by means of force or temptation is wrong. Whatever is happening in Dangs is not good for the tribals and efforts to take them away from Ram will fail."

Moraribapu, who mooted the idea of the Shabri Kumbh, began by quoting the Bible. He said, "The Bible says that conversion by means of allurements is a sin and a person doing it and the person who gets converted will go to hell. I wish Christians follow it."

2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Cartoon protests grow louder

Demonstrators raise slogans for al-Qaida

RASHID Ahmad
Srinagar, February 10

MASSIVE PROTEST rallies were held in Srinagar, Baramullah and Anantnag and Sopihan on Friday against the US, Denmark and other Western countries for the disregard shown against the Prophet of Islam.

Mirwaiz Ummer Farooq, chairman of a faction of the Hurriyat Conference, led a large procession in the interior Srinagar. The procession from the Jamia masjid ended at Rajouri Kadal.

Most of the young participants raised slogans in favour of the al-Qaida, responsible for the September 11, 2002, attack on America. A section also raised slogans in favour of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and other militant groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir.

Shaikh Shoukat, Imam of Ahl-e-hadees, led the protest march at Gawkadal. Dakhtaran-e-Millat activists held a rally at Lal Chowk. There were demonstrations at the main chowk in the southern district headquarters of Anantnag. Baramullah, Shopian and Kulgam, too, witnessed protest rallies.

The Imams and khateeb (preachers) set the mood for the protests. They lashed out at anti-Islamic forces for their "sustained campaign against Islam and the Muslims".

"America first attacked Afghanistan, then Iraq and now are preparing for Iran. They want to subjugate the whole Islamic world. The rulers of the



Protesters march past an Israeli flag set on fire in Srinagar.

AFF

Muslim countries have no guts to stand up to the American onslaught. It's time for the common Muslims across the world to rise and protect the faith and values," said a khateeb in a mosque at Maisumma.

"The onslaught is not restricted just to the geographical identities of the Muslims. Our faith and sentiments are also targeted. The

blasphemous caricature of our Prophet in the Western newspapers is a part of this campaign," the Imam said. The ire against America and the West dominated the sermons of the khateeb of other mosques as well.

Earlier, the Shia mourners shouted slogans against the US during Moharrum processions on Thursday.

Bush looking forward to India visit

S. Rajagopalan
Washington, February 10

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. Bush is looking forward to his India visit in order to build upon the close ties between the two countries, the White House said on Thursday.

While the itinerary of Bush's visit to India and Pakistan is still to be formally announced, spokesman Scott McLellan said: "The President is looking forward to going to India. He has a good relationship with Prime Minister Singh. We want to continue to build upon what has been an improving relationship over the course of the last few years."

"Historically, there've been some contentious issues in the relationship between the US and India, but we've worked to change that and have close relations with India," he said.

On India's vote on the Iran nuclear issue alongside the US, the spokesman confined himself to the remark that the international community needed to continue to work together to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons capacity. Asked if Bush was considering cancelling the Pakistan leg of the visit in view of the massive protests over caricatures of Prophet Mohammed in western media, McLellan said: "The President looks forward to going to India. He looks forward to going to Pakistan. We're making arrangements for that trip, and that'll be in a few weeks."

Meanwhile, reflecting the growing importance of India and China in the US foreign policy formulation, the two Asian giants will have a surfeit of new diplomatic positions under a revamp ordered by secretary of state Condoleezza Rice. India will get 12 new diplomatic positions and China 15 in the first round of restructuring, according to lists obtained by the Washington Post. The two countries will be gaining at the expense of Russia and Germany. Seven of the new positions in India will be based in New Delhi.

হজরতের ব্যঙ্গচিত্র : ক্ষোভ দেশে দেশে ডেনমার্ক থেকে রাষ্ট্রদূত ফেরাল ইরান

দামাস্কাস, তেহরান, মিউনিখ (এ পি), ৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি— সংবাদপত্রে হজরত মহম্মদের ব্যঙ্গচিত্র প্রকাশ মুসলিম দুনিয়ায় গভীর অসন্তোষের ঝড় তুলেছে। আন্তর্জাতিক রাজনীতিতে ডেকে আনছে অস্থিরতা। সিরিয়ার রাজধানী দামাস্কাসে বিক্ষোভকারীরা পুড়িয়ে দিয়েছে ডেনমার্ক দূতাবাস। বের্লিনে ডেনমার্ক দূতাবাসেও আগুন ধরানো হয়েছে। গাজা থেকে লাহোরের পথে পথে প্রতিবাদ মিছিল বেরিয়েছে। ডেনমার্কের সঙ্গে কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করতে চলেছে ইরান। রাষ্ট্রদূতদের ডেনমার্ক থেকে ফিরতে বলেছে ইরানের বিদেশ মন্ত্রক। প্রসঙ্গত, গত সেপ্টেম্বরে ডেনমার্কের বৃহত্তম সংবাদপত্র 'জিলান্ডস-পোস্টেন' হজরত মহম্মদের ১২টি ব্যঙ্গচিত্র ছাপা হয়। পরে ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন সংবাদপত্রে ব্যঙ্গচিত্রগুলি পুনর্মুদ্রণ করা হয়। এই ঘটনায় মুসলিমরা আহত বোধ করে। ইসলামে হজরত মহম্মদের ছবি ছাপা নিষিদ্ধ। কারণ তাতে একদিকে যেমন পৌত্তলিকতার সম্ভাবনা থাকে, অন্যদিকে আশঙ্কা থাকে হজরতের অবমাননার। ইউরোপের সংবাদপত্রগুলি হজরতের ব্যঙ্গচিত্র ছেপে তাঁকে অপমান করেছে বলে মুসলিমদের অভিযোগ। রুশ মুসলিম জনতা তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়া জানিয়েছে নানা দেশে। তুরস্কের রাজধানী আঙ্কারায় ডেনমার্কের দূতাবাসের সামনে কালো কাপড় উড়িয়েছে জনতা। লন্ডনের ডেনমার্ক দূতাবাসের সামনে বিক্ষোভ দেখান ১৫০০ মানুষ। প্রতিবাদ মিছিল বেরায় ইন্দোনেশিয়া ও

মালয়েশিয়ায়। পাকিস্তানের লাহোরে মিছিল করে ছাত্ররা। গাজায় ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের দপ্তরে ঢোকার চেষ্টা করে প্যালেস্টাইন যুবকরা। ব্যঙ্গচিত্র যেহেতু প্রথম প্রকাশিত হয় ডেনমার্কের সংবাদপত্রে, কোপটা তাই বেশি পড়ছে ডেনমার্কের দূতাবাসগুলির ওপর। তবে বলগেরিয়া, ফ্রান্স, জার্মানি, ইতালি, স্পেন, সুইজারল্যান্ড, পোল্যান্ড ও হাঙ্গেরি সম্পর্কেও অসন্তোষ গভীর। এইসব দেশের কাগজেও ছাপা হয়েছে ব্যঙ্গচিত্র। নিউজিল্যান্ডের দুটি সংবাদপত্রে আজ কয়েকটি ব্যঙ্গচিত্র ছাপা হয়। জার্মানের সাপ্তাহিক পত্রিকা 'শিহান'-এর সম্পাদককে গ্রেপ্তার করেছে পুলিশ, ব্যঙ্গচিত্র ছাপার দায়ে। সংবাদপত্রগুলির তরফে বলা হচ্ছে, আন্তর্জাতিকভাবে স্বীকৃত বাক স্বাধীনতা অনুসারেই তারা ব্যঙ্গচিত্র ছেপেছে। কিন্তু ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন দেশের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধান এই ঘটনায় উদ্বেগ প্রকাশ করে বলেন, বাক স্বাধীনতার ব্যবহারে সংযম থাকা উচিত। কারও ধর্মীয় আবেগ আহত হতে পারে এমন কিছু করা উচিত নয় সংবাদমাধ্যমের। মার্কিন বিদেশ দপ্তর বলেছে, কোনও সন্দেহ নেই ব্যঙ্গচিত্রগুলি আক্রমণাত্মক। আমরা সংবাদমাধ্যমের স্বাধীনতাকে সম্মান করি। সংবাদমাধ্যমের উচিত দায়িত্ববোধের পরিচয় দেওয়া। বিভিন্ন দেশের তরফে মুসলিমদের শাস্তি থাকার আবেদন জানানো হয়েছে। রুশ প্রেসিডেন্ট ভ্লাদিমির পুটিন ডেনমার্কের নিন্দা করেছেন। ডেনমার্কের সঙ্গে বাণিজ্য সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করার কথা ভাবছে সিরিয়া।

AAJKAL

- 6 FEB 2006 ..

Cartoon row sparks angry protests

VOICES

■ Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen said he could not apologise for the publication of controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in his country where newspapers are free of state control. "A Danish government can never apologise on behalf of a free and independent newspaper," Rasmussen told reporters after meeting 76 foreign diplomats to discuss the issue.

■ British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw called the decision to reproduce the cartoons "insulting", "insensitive", "disrespectful" and "wrong". "There is freedom of speech, we all respect that," Straw said. "But there is not any obligation to insult or to be gratuitously inflammatory," the foreign secretary told reporters on Friday.

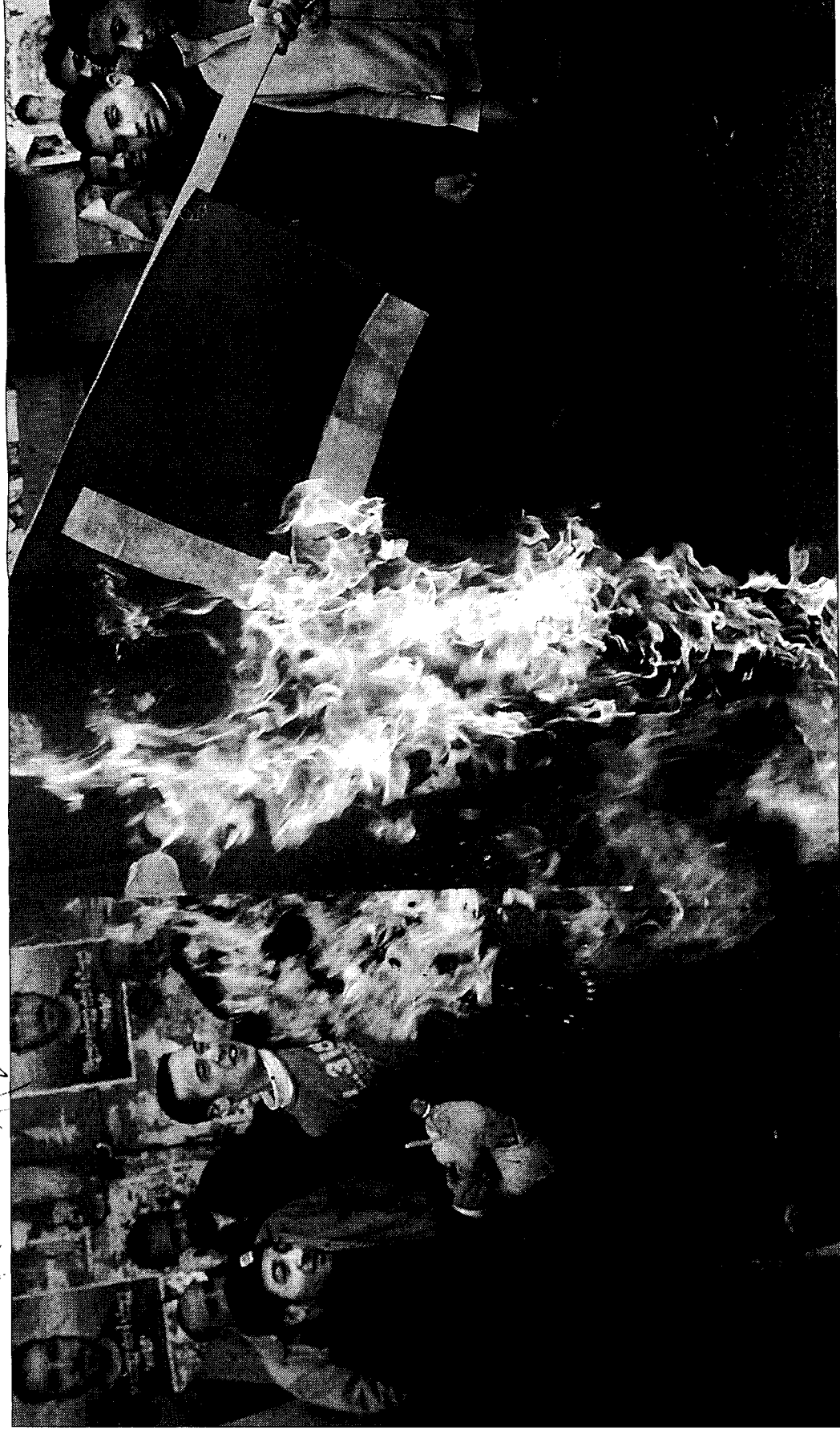
■ Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has strongly condemned the cartoons. "It is regrettable that newspapers did not honour the sentiments of Muslims throughout the world. I am surprised that such cartoons were published at the current critical situation," he said.

■ Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called the caricatures an attack on "our spiritual values" which have damaged efforts to establish an alliance between the Muslim world and Europe.

■ French President Jacques Chirac called on Friday for freedom of speech to be used in a spirit of responsibility and respect. He appealed to all to "show the greatest spirit of responsibility, of respect and of good measure to avoid anything that could hurt other people's beliefs."

■ The United States blasted the publication of the cartoons as incitement to religious hatred. "These cartoons are indeed offensive to the beliefs of Muslims," State Department spokesman Justin Higgins said. "We recognise and respect freedom of the Press and expression, but it must be coupled with press responsibility. Inciting religious or ethnic hatreds in this manner is not acceptable."

■ Former US President Bill Clinton has also condemned the cartoons as "appalling" and "outrageous" and warned of rising anti-Islamic prejudice that could be compared with anti-Semitism.



AP
 Hamas supporters burn a Danish flag in the West Bank town of Nablus on Friday. (Below) An Indonesian youth protests in front of the Danish embassy in Jakarta on Friday.

VIJAY Dutt and Agencies

London/Jakarta, February 3

THE ROW over Prophet Mohammed's cartoons brimmed over on Friday with tens of thousands of angry Muslims marching through Palestinian cities, youths attacking the Danish embassy in Jakarta, Turkish groups burning the Danish flag and Pakistani protesters calling for vengeance against European countries where the cartoons were published.

In Iraq, thousands demonstrated after Friday mosque services, and the country's leading Shiite cleric denounced the drawings. About 4,500 people rallied in Basra and hundreds at a Baghdad mosque. Danish flags were burned at both demonstrations. The caricatures, including one depicting the Prophet wearing a turban fashioned into a bomb, were reprinted in Norwegian, French, German and even Jordanian papers after first appearing in a Danish paper in September. Dutch-language newspapers in Belgium and two Italian right-wing papers reprinted the drawings on Friday.

In Britain, hundreds of protesters, yelling threats against Britain and Eu-

rope, gathered outside the Danish embassy in London to rally against the images. "JFK you will pay with your blood... We support (Osama) bin Laden," they chanted. Police surrounded the marchers while helicopters circled overhead.

Danish Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen, in a meeting with the Egyptian ambassador, reiterated his stance that the government cannot interfere with issues concerning the press.

On Friday, Palestinian militants threw a bomb at a French cultural centre in Gaza City, and many Palestinians began boycotting European goods. "Whoever defames our prophet should be executed," said Ismail Hassan, 37, a tailor who marched through the pouring rain along with hundreds of others in the West Bank city of Ramallah. "Bin Laden our beloved, Denmark must be blown up," protesters in Ramallah chanted.

The demonstrators in Indonesia wore white robes and pelted the Danish embassy with eggs before pushing past security guards into the plush lobby. Shouting "God is Great," they tried to reach the mission on the building's 25th floor, but were told to stop by their leaders. Some furniture was damaged in the melee.



Italy party hires Prophet editor

ITALY'S RIGHT-WING Northern League wants to hire as its Paris correspondent a French editor who was sacked for printing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, party member and Reforms Minister Roberto Calderoli said on Friday. Jacques Lefranc, editor at newspaper France Soir, published cartoons that first appeared in a Danish daily and triggered protests by Muslims around the world. "He is certainly a person with the courage to tell things the way they are, rather than write what his boss tells him," Calderoli told reporters at a Northern League support rally in front of the Danish consulate.

La Padania, the Northern League's newspaper, also printed some of the offending cartoons on Friday under the headline: "... no one will fire me!" One of the caricatures showed the Prophet wearing a turban in the shape of a bomb. France Soir's owner sacked Lefranc this week for publishing the cartoons.

On Friday, the publisher of a Jordanian tabloid weekly also fired its chief editor who had decided to reprint the caricatures. "This is only the tip of the iceberg of the religious war that Islamist extremists have declared on us," Calderoli said, surrounded by a handful of party members waving flags.

Reuters, Milan

Kama Sutra virus proves a damp squib

AGENCIES
 Amsterdam, February 3

A COMPUTER virus that was designed to start its malicious work on Friday did not cause the mayhem that was anticipated, computer security firms said. The worm, known as "Blackmal" and "Kama Sutra," hides inside email attachments and contains a time-activated payload due to execute on the third day of each month, first occurring on Friday.

It has been spreading through cyberspace since January 16, in emails with subject headings like "give me a kiss" and "crazy illegal sex." When users click on an attachment sent with the e-mails, their computers become infected with malicious software designed to replicate itself.

It will attempt to stop anti-worm software from running and try to delete all Word, Excel, PowerPoint and PDF file types from an infected PC.

Rather than disabling up to 500,000 PCs that were expected to be infected, the virus had hit only a few thousand computers by midday in continental Europe, mostly from individual consumers, according to several computer security firms.

Advance warnings by virus security firms and enterprises to their customers and employees appeared to have worked.

"This is certainly not a disaster," said technical consultant Graham Chuley at British virus fighter firm Sophos.

Rival security software firm Symantec confirmed "the worm is not spreading wildly and infections are relatively low." The virus is also known as "Nyxem," "MyWife," and "Tearec."

In India, the virus and its variants ravaged more than 80,000 computers through its mailing worm Nymex that cut a swathe through the Microsoft Windows operating system.

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) of the government's Department of Information Technology had sent out an advisory to 800 organisations on January 23 to protect their computer systems against the worm.

However, in Milan, technicians did not want to take chances and switched off more than 10,000 computers after discovering the infection on Thurs- day and deciding they didn't have enough time to clean the machines.

Haj stampede toll 362, Indians 28

Three Victims From State, Haj Panel Announces Rs 3 Lakh As Damages

Dubai: At least 28 Indians, 16 of them women, were among 362 Haj pilgrims killed in Thursday's stampede during the symbolic stoning ritual in Mina near Mecca.

Eight of the 15 Indians injured in the tragedy have been discharged from various hospitals, Indian consul general Ausaf Sayeed said.

Among the dead, 12 were from Uttar Pradesh, three each from Maharashtra, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, two each from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and one from West Bengal. Two Indians based in Saudi Arabia were also among those killed.

The Indian Haj Committee (IHC) chairman Tanveer Ahmed said the panel would give a compensation of Rs 3 lakh each to the families of the 26 deceased who had gone there through it.

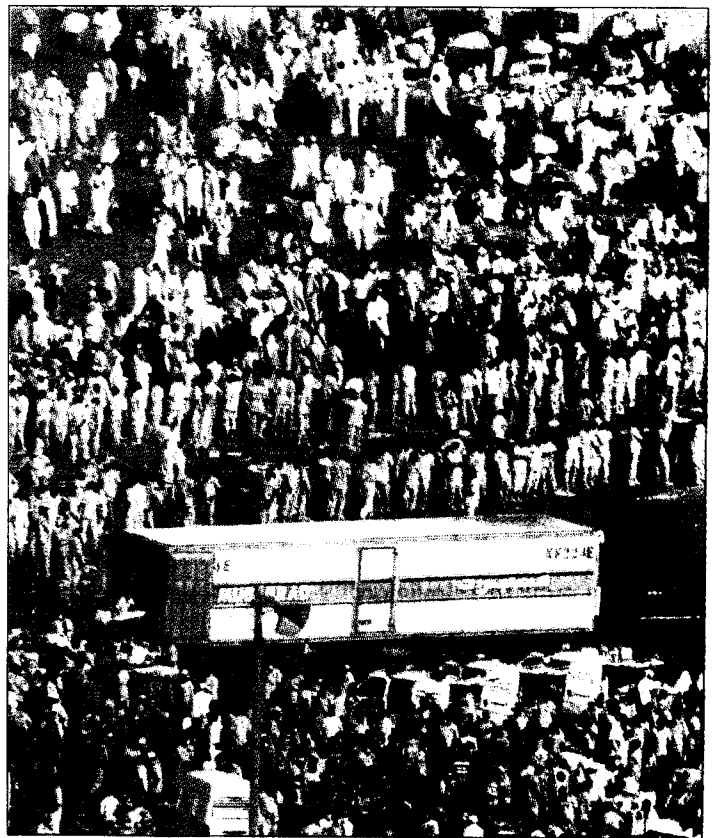
Sayeed said efforts were on to seek the consent of the kin of

those killed for early burial of the deceased in Mecca. He said teams of Indian Hajis and officials had been formed to visit the relatives of those killed to offer assistance to them besides condolences.

A control room has been set up in the Mina camp for the convenience of the pilgrims. Ten branch dispensaries and the main hospital in Mecca have been put on alert.

Egypt accounted for the largest number of casualties—100. At least 30 Pakistanis, four Chinese nationals and two Indonesians were also among those killed. "We now have 362 dead," official sources in Mina said.

Sayeed said efforts were on to ascertain whether any Indian pilgrim was missing. "The picture will become clear when all the devotees return to Mecca after completing the stoning ritual, which still continues," he said. Agencies



Bodies of the pilgrims are shifted to hospital from the site of the tragedy