

# The Muslim Vote

*It exists, but not as  
a monolith*

The likes of Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid nurse the hope of turning India's Muslim population into a vote bank, and under one national party. That hope is nothing but an illusion. The Muslim vote is real, as Muslims are. But the Muslim vote is not a homogeneous monolith, since the community itself is not. As with other communities, Muslims too are divided on regional, class, and even caste lines. This difference or diversity gets reflected in the vote as well. There are times when a consolidation of some kind takes place. Such binding is made possible by local, regional, national or international developments that have political or social appeal. Political movements that spot such moments and successfully mobilise people on those issues do benefit from the consolidation of community votes. However, the dynamics of such politics is rarely uniform. The recent state elections indicate its complex and varied character. As we have pointed out in these columns, the consolidation of Muslim votes was an influential factor in this round of assembly elections. But no political party can be singled out as the sole beneficiary of this trend. It has worked differently in Kerala, West Bengal and Assam, states where Muslims constitute more than 20 per cent of the population, and different political formations have gained from it.

In Kerala, Muslim League, a democratic outfit that had a monopoly over Muslim votes, was the loser. The Left Front, with the help of a few radical Islamist outfits, profited from League's loss. The Left was the beneficiary in West Bengal as well. In both states, Iraq occupation and Iran figured during the campaign. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK-led front gained from Jayalalithaa's dalliance with Hindutva and NDA. The trajectory of change in Assam has been towards a new outfit, Assam United Democratic Front, which appears to have weaned away Muslim supporters of Congress. The broad trend apart, this is not to suggest an en masse movement of community votes. That these varied political responses can crystallise into a monolithic vote spread all over the country is a fallacy of the Muslim and Hindu right. This is a ruse for the Muslim right to bargain for political patronage whereas Hindu fundamentalists use it as a bogey to whip up majoritarianism. One feeds the other. It is best to understand the Muslim response in the five states that went to polls as a political vote in favour of parties that also share a common ground on specific issues, especially towards US policies on Iraq and Iran.

13 MAY 2006

# Vadodara erupts over dargah demolition, 4 killed in clashes

**RATHIN Das**  
Ahmedabad, May 1

FOUR PEOPLE were killed in Vadodara after the civic body's move to demolish a 400-year-old dargah sparked violence on Monday.

Demolition of illegal encroachments on Vadodara's main road had been on for about a fortnight as per a Master Plan. The dargah of Sufi saint Rashiduddin Chishti too encroached on government land, but Muslims in Champaner Darwaza area on Yakoutpura Road believed it would be spared, as it was not obstructing traffic.

Some Muslim organisations had appealed to the authorities to spare the dargah saying it was a symbol of amity; both Hindus and Muslims attended the Urs of Rashiduddin Chishti, buried at the dargah. The Bazme Azeez Charitable Trust had even



REUTERS

Vehicles set ablaze by a mob in Vadodara on Monday.

written to the Prime Minister in this regard.

The trouble began around 10.30 am on Monday when talks between the minorities and mayor Sunil Solanki failed and the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) demoli-

tion team arrived with police protection.

Those resisting the demolition tried to stop the VMC staff and pelted stones at the police party. The police initially lathi-charged and lobbed teargas shells at the protest-

ers before opening fire. Two locals succumbed to bullet injuries received in police firing while two others were stabbed to death in clashes. Twenty-two others were injured as the situation went out of control in Champaner Gate area. A policeman was also injured.

Violence and stone pelting was also reported from Machipith and Nyay Mandir areas. Police lobbed tear gas shells to control the crowd in the Nyay Mandir area.

Curfew had to be imposed in the City police station and adjoining areas. Vadodara police commissioner Deepak Swarup said the situation was now "under control". He denied allegations that only minority encroachments had been targeted, but the minorities say half a dozen hand-carts and kiosks belonging to members of their community have been set on fire in Panigate area.

02 MAY 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

# Central troops rushed to volatile Vadodara

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & AGENCIES

**Vadodara:** The Centre on Wednesday dispatched five companies of 500 paramilitary personnel to contain the situation in the city following fresh violence after a man was burnt alive in his car on Tuesday night. The killing took the number of dead in the violence triggered by the Vadodara civic authorities razing a 300-year-old shrine to six.

A chemical trader was burnt alive when mobs attacked housing societies on Ajwa Road. Rafiq Raju Vohra, 30, was trying to leave the area in his Tata Sierra when he was surrounded by a mob which set his vehicle afire. His charred body lay on the side of the road until the police arrived, nearly 45 minutes after the gruesome incident.

Angry residents said they had been trying to call the police for the last three hours but officials refused to respond to their calls for help. "In fact, officials in the stray police vehicle that came by abused us," said a Ajwa Road resident. "We were left to fend for ourselves." According to some, fire brigade officials were seen running away from the site, unable to handle the situation.

Countering the residents' claim, police officials said Vohra was attacked and burnt alive because he tried to run his vehicle over the mob. They were, however, unable to explain why they could not reach the



RAF flagmarch on a Vadodara street on Wednesday

spot on time. In fact, even before Vohra was attacked the situation had worsened with mobs indulging in stone-pelting for over two hours. At one point, worried residents sent out desperate SMSes saying, "Repeat of 2002, two colonies on Ajwa Road—Bahaar and Sabina—in Saraswati society surrounded by mob, assisted by police. Please do something and save lives."

On Wednesday, two factories were set on fire by a mob in the Sardar industrial area of the curfew-bound Panigate.

04 MAY 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Rajasthan Governor urged not to give assent to religion Bill

Sadbhav Manch feels it will give free licence to Sangh outfits to terrorise minorities

Special Correspondent

*Patil*  
*Rev. M. S.*

**JAIPUR:** The Rajasthan Sadbhav Manch has urged the Governor, Pratibha Patil, not to give her assent to the controversial Freedom of Religion Bill passed in the Assembly's Budget session and return it to the State Government for reconsideration.

The Manch alleged that the Bill was aimed at furthering the communal agenda of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

A delegation of the Manch, headed by its convenor Sawai Singh, met the Governor here on Tuesday and pointed out that the Bill had banned all religious conversions, except re-conversion to Hinduism, to create hatred against minority communities and fulfil the fascist designs of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which decides the course of action for the ruling party.

The members of the delegation told Ms. Patil that the developments in Rajasthan, ever since the BJP took over the reigns, had given disturbing indications that the State was following the Gujarat pattern of victimisation of minorities. "The BJP Government is preparing the ground for replication of the Gujarat model of mayhem and violence, which will become inevitable when the Sangh Parivar succeeds in communalising the

*ND 3 19/9*

**'State following the Gujarat pattern'**

• Memorandum submitted to Governor

• Govt. behind recent spate of attacks on Christians'

whole society," said Mr. Singh.

The members of the delegation included Rev. Raymond Coelho of Rajasthan Christian Fellowship, Qari Moinuddin of the Rajasthan Muslim Forum, Than Singh of People's Union for Civil Liberties, T.C. Rahul of All India Buddha Mahasabha, Mohammed Salim of Jamat-e-Islami Hind and Abdul Lateef of All India Mill Council.

A memorandum submitted to the Governor on behalf of Sadbhav Manch -- which is an umbrella organisation of civil rights bodies -- stated that the State Government's actions such as withdrawal of ban on distribution of trishuls, sponsoring communal riots in several towns, withdrawal of 200 criminal cases relating to riots, extending protection to the Sangh outfits in their campaigns against minorities and the recent attacks on Christians on the pretext of opposition to a book would damage the delicate fabric of peace and divide the society.

The Manch accused the BJP-led Government of masterminding the recent spate of attacks on Christians by managing the seizure of the book "Haqeeqat" to justify the introduction of the anti-conversion Bill in the Assembly. "The passage of the Bill on the Budget session's last day without any debate, taking advantage of the BJP's brute majority, reveals the ugly mindset of the Sangh which is misusing the State power to repeat the Gujarat events in Rajasthan," said Mr. Salim.

The memorandum, while requesting the Governor not to sign the Bill in, pointed out that it violated the freedom of faith and worship enshrined in the Constitution. "The Bill will give a free licence to Sangh outfits to terrorise minorities and bring them into the fold of Hinduism. The RSS will also use the Bill as a tool to persecute Dalits," it stated.

The delegation members drew Ms. Patil's attention to the fact that she had a constitutional right to stop the enactment of a law based on the false presumption of minorities converting Hindus by force or allurements. "By exercising this right, you will be preventing the bloodshed in Rajasthan on the Gujarat pattern for which all preparations have been made under the State protection," they said.

PONTIFF SAY ANGERS BJP, RSS, VHP

# Pope earns saffron ire

Religion & Conversion Sr. 6

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, May 20. — Pope Benedict XVI today earned the wrath of the Sangh Parivar for his observation that there were “disturbing signs of religious intolerance” in India and “reprehensible attempt” to enact “discriminatory” laws against “fundamental right of religious freedom”.

The BJP, RSS and VHP today said the Pope’s remarks made while receiving India’s new envoy to the Vatican, Mr Amitava Tripathi, were not relevant to India and they exposed his “ignorance” about traditions and laws in this country. “There is much more freedom here than in many countries,” BJP spokesman Mr Prakash Javadekar told reporters here. Attacking the pontiff, Mr Javadekar said the state Assemblies had the power to enact such legislation. “Such laws are not against conversion by conviction but if people convert en masse, motives have to be there.”

The Pope on Thursday said: “The disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some regions in the nation (India), including the reprehensible attempt to legislate clearly discriminatory restrictions on the fundamental right of religious freedom, must be firmly rejected”. He said their rejection was necessary “as not only unconstitutional, but also as contrary to the highest ideals of India’s

MS founding fathers, who believed in a nation of peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between different religions and ethnic groups.” India yesterday responded to Pope Benedict’s criticism of conversion laws by pointing out that all Indians of different religious faiths have “equal rights”. “It is acknowledged universally that India is a secular and democratic country in which adherents of all religious faiths enjoy equal rights,” the external affairs ministry spokesperson, Mr Navtej Sarna, said yesterday.

VHP international president Mr Ashok Singhal said the “right to uphold ancestral faith” should be a fundamental right for inter-religious harmony “because if everybody accepts the right to uphold ancestral faith nobody will convert people of their faiths”. He said the Pope’s comments against the Bill was tantamount to insulting the Supreme Court of India. He pointed out that as per a Supreme Court judgment, under Article 25 of the Constitution “nobody has the right to convert”. He suggested the Pope fight against *Jihad* instead and undertake that Church would not convert a single Hindu.

RSS national executive member Mr Ram Madhav said: “The Pope is ignorant of Indian traditions and laws. Religious freedom does not include freedom to convert people of other religions using force, fraud or allurements.”

21 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

# Bombs in polythene bag near mosque pond

**HT Correspondent**  
New Delhi, April 14

TERROR STRUCK Delhi again on Friday evening, less than six months after the Diwali blasts. The target this time was the Jama Masjid, arguably India's best-known mosque.

Two bombs went off in quick succession in the main courtyard right next to the *hauz*. Fifteen persons were injured, one of them seriously.

It is not clear who planted the bombs. No one has claimed responsibility and the police commissioner refused to link it to the Varanasi blasts without evidence. Nevertheless, Delhi and other places, including West Bengal, have sounded a red alert. Imams of various mosques, including the Jama Masjid, have appealed for calm.

The first bomb went off at 5.25 pm, the second 10 minutes later. The first did more damage, with dozens present at the spot. By the



Security after the blasts.

time of the second occurred, the place had been vacated. The damage could have been unimaginable, police said, had the bombs gone off during or after *jumma*, the weekly congregation, when the yard is packed to capacity.

The blasts happened during *asr*, the day's third *namaaz*.

Some devotees were performing *wazu* when the first bomb went off with a deafening sound. Police said it was a low-intensity, crude device, possibly ammonium chloride, packed tightly with iron nails, shrapnel and nuts and bolts. The explosives had been kept in a polythene bag.

"We saw a white polythene lying near the pond. We told the police to check it, but they didn't bother. Suddenly there was a big bang," said 22-year-old Fazil Khan, an eyewitness to the blasts.

At 5.20 pm someone shouted that a child had fallen into the pond. It turned out to be a decoy. "I, like many others, ran to the other side of the pond to try and rescue the child. But none of us could find the child. Even as we were checking there was this blast," said Fazil.

Adil Rashid, who was near the *wazukhana*, herded out at least 20 people before the second blast got him. He received chest injuries.

**More reports on Page 2**

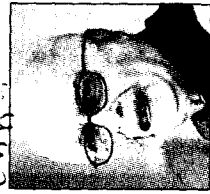
# Advani launches Bharat yatra, appeals to Muslims

**Rajkot:** Sixteen years after his landmark 'Ram Rath' yatra which changed the contours of Indian politics, senior BJP leader L.K. Advani on Thursday embarked on his sixth yatra invoking Lord Ram and appealing to Muslims to abandon their claim over the disputed site in Ayodhya.

The launch of the 6,000-km-long Bharat Suraksha Yatra on Ram Navami day in the presence of Hindutva poster boy and Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, chief ministers of other party-ruled states and senior BJP leaders was replete with ideological symbols including portraits of Lord Ram and a

hooded terrorist in the background, Advani aiming an arrow from a large bow, blowing of conch shells and chanting of vedic hymns.

But the post-Jinnah Advani, who has expressed a keenness to change the party's hardliner anti-minorities image, was far from aggressive. Even the BJP's historic 1989 Palampur resolution endorsing the Ram Janambhoomi movement was not anti-Muslim, he asserted before the gathering which included Muslims donning skull caps both on the dais and the audience.



He also expressed concern over "congressisation" of BJP and factionalism and corruption in the party and counselled the partymen to "tread carefully."

Making a fervent appeal to the Muslims to respect Hindu sentiments and facilitate the construction of a grand Ram temple at the disputed site, Advani said the "minority appeasement" policies of successive Congress governments, which began from the Shah Bano case, has only boosted the party's strength but was "neither in the interests of the Muslims

or the country". If both the communities come together for the construction of the Ram temple, it would bring about an unprecedented harmony and goodwill in the society, the former deputy prime minister said.

Interestingly, undertaking his first major political campaign after his controversial Pakistan visit last year, the veteran BJP leader sought to avoid any criticism of the neighbouring country on the issue of terrorism but focused on eastern neighbour Bangladesh over the arrest of its alleged nationals in the Varanasi bomb blast case. Agencies

► Pictures on Page 11

# Karnataka Cong sees communal tinge in yatras

Our Political Bureau  
BANGALORE

**L**AMBASTING BJP chief Rajnath Singh and former deputy prime minister L K Advani for their "politically motivated" *Bharat Suraksha* Yatras, Karnataka Pradesh Congress committee president Mallikarjuna Kharge has cautioned the saffron leaders against any attempts to disrupt communal harmony.

With Advani's yatra scheduled to enter Karnataka from Bijapur on April 12 and cover most of the northern parts of the state before leaving for Ananthpur in Andhra Pradesh on April 15, the Congress leader asked the government to be vigilant in maintaining peace.

Pointing out that Advani and BJP leadership had made it a habit to embark upon yatras at the flimsiest excuse whenever the party was out of power to gain political mileage, Kharge

ter," he said.

Kharge said BJP's attempts to gain political mileage in the run up to elections in the five states, including Tamil Nadu and Kerala, would not cut much ice with the voters and the party would get a severe drubbing in all the five states.

The yatra will not help Advani's efforts to refurbish his image and regain lost ground after the Jinnah episode following his Pakistan visit last year, he felt adding that the people cannot be misled or fooled by going on yatras at the drop of a hat. The Congress leader pointed out that even the Sangh Parivar had taken strong exception to the yatras with RSS and VHP leaders and even key party leaders like Madan Lal Khurana and Uma Bharti joining the critics.

Criticising Samajwadi Party leaders Amar Singh and S Bangarappa for their disparaging remarks against Congress pres-

## SOUND & FURY



charged Advani of doing precious little in curbing the Gujarat carnage or post-Paliament attack or Jammu and Kashmir terrorist strikes or the Kargil war.

"If Advani is really sincere, he should have undertaken his yatras to protect the country when these incidents occurred during his rule as home minis-

## Rajnath's Rath breaks down

PTI

HAMIRPUR (CHHATTISGARH)

THE 'Bharat Suraksha Yatra Rath' carrying Rajnath Singh on Saturday broke down at a place close to Orissa-Chhattisgarh border. The bullet-proof vehicle developed a snag when its fan-belt developed some problem because of scorching heat and had to be stopped for necessary repairs.

ident Sonia Gandhi for her decision to resign her Lok Sabha seat and UPA regime's National Advisory Committee chairmanship, Mr Kharge said the Congress party was not worried over the office of profit issue. However, partymen would not take kindly to any unwarranted attacks against Ms Gandhi, he warned.



# Rajasthan crackdown on conversions

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

JAIPUR, APRIL 7

THE Rajasthan Assembly today passed an anti-conversion Bill that not only gives the state sweeping powers to put behind bars, even before trial, any person accused of forcing or alluring a person to change his religion, but also applies it specifically to conversions from the "original religion".

This has given rise to speculation that the legislation is meant only to stop conversion from Hinduism.

It was passed on the last day of the Budget session, amid strong protests by the Opposition. Many of them point out that the Rajasthan Dharma Swatantrya Act (2006) will boost the Hindutva brigade, which has long accused Christian preachers of running a conversion campaign in the tribal belt of Rajasthan. Now the Hindutva campaigners might go on a reconversion drive, without attracting action under provisions of the new Act.

Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria, considered a

hardliner, admitted that the Act was necessitated by the rising cases of forcible conversions in the state, though he denied it was directed against minorities.

"This is not against any religion. As the name itself suggests, the Act allows people the freedom to practise their religion by protecting them from conversion by force or allurement," he said.

Under the Act, conversion by force or through allurement is a non-bailable offence that could lead to imprisonment

for at least two years. A DSP-rank officer can arrest any person who has "converted or attempted to convert a person through force, allurement or fraudulent means".

The Opposition blasted the Act as "a draconian attempt to curb the fundamental right to religion" because of the powers it gives the police and government. Congress MLA Hari Mohan Sharma pointed out that the Act was even more stringent than a similar law framed by the Gujarat government.

0 APR 10 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

# ফায়দা তুলতে চায় বিজেপি-এসপি, চিন্তায় কংগ্রেস

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ৮ মার্চ: বারানসী বিক্ষোভের ফের ধর্মের ভিত্তিতে মেরুকরণের সুযোগ এনে দিল ভারতীয় রাজনীতিতে। সে লক্ষ্যে কে কতদূর পৌঁছবেন তা হয়তো সময়েই বলবে, কিন্তু আজ থেকেই তাতে সার-জল দেওয়ার প্রক্রিয়া শুরু করে দিলেন লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী বা মুলায়ম সিংহের মতো জাতীয় রাজনীতির কুশীলাবেরা। আডবানীর বক্তব্য, ইউপিএ সরকারের সংখ্যালঘু ভোয়সেরই ফল বারানসীর বিক্ষোভ। এই তথ্যে ভর করে হিন্দু ভোট ব্যান্ডকে সংগঠিত করার লক্ষ্যে 'জাতীয় সংহতি যাত্রা' বের করার কথা আজ ষোষণাও করে দিয়েছেন প্রাক্তন বিজেপি সভাপতি। তিনি এই যাত্রা শুরু করতে চাইছেন গুজরাতের গাঁধীনগর থেকে। উত্তরপ্রদেশ থেকে যাত্রা শুরু করবেন দলের সভাপতি রাজনাথ সিংহ। পাশাপাশি বারানসীর ঘটনায় প্রেক্ষিতে বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব হোলি পালন না করারও সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। হোলির পরের দিন তাঁরা বারানসীর সঙ্কটমোচন মন্দিরে যাবেন পূজো দিতে। বিজেপি যখন হিন্দু সেন্টিমেন্টকে উদ্দেশ্যে চাইছে, অন্য দিকে মুলায়ম

সিংহও এখন চাইছেন তাঁর সংখ্যালঘু ভোট ব্যান্ডকে আরও জোটবদ্ধ করতে। বুশের সফরের বিরোধিতা দিয়েই সেই প্রক্রিয়া শুরু করেছেন তিনি। সমাজবাদী পার্টি নেতারা মনে করছেন, বিক্ষোভের প্রেক্ষিতে বিজেপি যত হিন্দুত্বের কথা বলবে, ততই তাঁদের মুসলিম ভোটের নতিত শক্ত হবে। পরিবর্তিত রাজনৈতিক বাতাবরণে উত্তরপ্রদেশের ভোট এগিয়ে আসার সম্ভাবনা যখন জরমই ঘনীভূত হচ্ছে, তখন এই ধরনের মেরুকরণ সমস্যায় দিয়েছে কংগ্রেসকে।

এক দিকে বুশের সফর-ইরান গ্রামে মুসলিম অসন্তোষ আর অন্য দিকে বারানসী বিক্ষোভের ঘটনা নিয়ে কংগ্রেসের এখন উত্তমসঙ্কট। তাই মুসলিম আস্থা ফেরাতে দু'দিন আগেই যে সনিয়া গাঁধী গোথরা রিপোর্ট নিয়ে বিজেপির বিরুদ্ধে দলের সাংসদদের নেতৃত্ব দিয়েছিলেন তিনিই এখন গতিমুখ



পাটিল বলেছেন, 'দেশে সাম্প্রদায়িক উত্তেজনা ছড়াতেই যে মাদিরে হামলা চালানো হয়েছে সে ব্যাপারে সন্দেহ নেই। দেশ-বিরোধী এই সব শক্তি যাতে সফল না হয়, সে ব্যাপারে সকলের উদ্যোগী হওয়া উচিত।' কিন্তু এই ভারসাম্যের রাজনীতিতে কংগ্রেস কতটা সফল হতে পারবে, তা নিয়ে দলেই সংশয় রয়েছে।

স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই সনিয়ার বারানসী ছুটে যাওয়ারা একে খাটো করে দেখিয়ে বিজেপি সরকার

তথা কংগ্রেসের মুসলিম ভোয়গের চরিত্রটাই বারবার তুলে ধরতে চেয়েছে। আডবানীর অভিযোগ, সংখ্যালঘু ভোয়গকে সরকার এমন পর্যায়ে নিয়ে গিয়েছে যে, তা এখন জাতীয় স্বার্থ বিরোধী হয়ে উঠেছে। সরকারের ভূট কর্মসূচির উল্লেখ করে তিনি বলেন এ সবই সংখ্যালঘুদের ভোয়মোদ করা। সেগুলি হলে, অঞ্জে মুসলিমদের সংরক্ষণ দেওয়ার উদ্যোগ, আলিগড় মুসলিম

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়কে স্বায়ত্তশাসন, আইএমডিটি আইন বাতিলের জন্য সুপ্রিম কোর্টের পর্যবেক্ষণ উপেক্ষা করা, গোথরা কাণ্ড খতিয়ে দেখতে উদ্দেশ্যচন্দ বন্দোপাধ্যায় কমিটির গঠন ও তাঁর রিপোর্ট, সেনাবাহিনীতে মুসলিম গণনা এবং সংখ্যালঘুদের জন্য পৃথক মন্ত্রক। সংখ্যালঘু ভোয়গ নিয়ে আজ বাসেদেরও তুলোথোনা করেছেন আডবানী। তাঁর অভিযোগ, মুসলিমদের খুশি করার জন্যই বাসেদের বৃশ-বিরোধিতা। সিপিএম সাংসদ নীলোৎপল বসু এবং মহম্মদ সেলিম অবশ্য এই অভিযোগ খারিজ করে পাল্টা বলেন, সাম্প্রদায়িকতাকে উস্কানি দিতেই বিজেপি সংসদ অটল করেছে। এ দিকে, সংহতি যাত্রার সময় নিয়ে বিজেপির মধ্যে নানান প্রশ্ন উঠেছে। দলীয় নেতৃত্বের একাংশের বক্তব্য, সংসদের বাজেট অধিবেশনের পরে যখন এই যাত্রা শুরু হবে তখন পাঁচ রাজ্যে নির্বাচনের তোড়জোড় শুরু হয়ে যাবে। ফলে এই যাত্রাকে ওই পাঁচ রাজ্যে সীমিত রাখা হোক। ১০ মার্চ বিজেপির সংসদীয় বোর্ডের বৈঠকে যাত্রার খুটিনাটি স্থির হবে।

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়কে স্বায়ত্তশাসন, আইএমডিটি আইন বাতিলের জন্য সুপ্রিম কোর্টের পর্যবেক্ষণ উপেক্ষা করা, গোথরা কাণ্ড খতিয়ে দেখতে উদ্দেশ্যচন্দ বন্দোপাধ্যায় কমিটির গঠন ও তাঁর রিপোর্ট, সেনাবাহিনীতে মুসলিম গণনা এবং সংখ্যালঘুদের জন্য পৃথক মন্ত্রক।

# 12 killed as blasts rock Varanasi

**Varanasi:** At least 12 people were killed and several others injured when two separate explosions rocked near Sankatmochan temple and railway station here.

The first explosion took place outside the temple at around 5 pm when a large number of devotees were present at the peak evening 'aarti' time as it was Tuesday, believed to be a special day for Lord Hanuman. Four people died in the explosion and several others were injured.

Minutes later another blast took place outside the room of the station master of the cantonment railway station. Several casualties were feared in the explosion, officials said. The injured have been rushed to various hospitals, the sources said.

The blast at the temple set out panic and

a near-stampede situation as devotees scrambled to rush out to safety and workers ferried bleeding injured persons, including several old women, to the hospital. Rescue workers struggled in narrow lanes and bylanes to bring out the injured from the incident site. The wailing of ambulance and fire brigade sirens drowned the chiming of the temple bells of the evening hour of this temple town.

Condemning the explosions in Varanasi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appealed to the people to maintain calm. The Centre has alerted all the states to be vigilant to ensure that no untoward incidents take place, home minister Shivraj Patil said.

Patil told reporters after a meeting with officials that he has spoken to chief min-

ister Mulayam Singh Yadav on the situation in the state after the blasts and the Union home secretary was in continuous touch with the state chief secretary.

He said the Uttar Pradesh government has been asked to take steps to see that the situation did not go out of control. Similarly, other states have been asked to be vigilant so that no untoward incidents take place, he added. A red alert has been sounded in Uttar Pradesh while chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has announced ex-gratia relief for the victims and appealed to the people to maintain peace and order. In a statement issued in Lucknow, Yadav condemned the incidents and appealed to the people exercise restraint and said the cul-

Agencies

# 'Muslims helped douse Godhra fire'

ONLY IN  
**HT**

VINOD Sharma  
New Delhi, March 6

THE FIRE in coach number S-6 of the Sabarmati Express, on February 27, 2002, in Godhra, was 'accidental' and not caused by the use of any inflammable material. The Justice U.C. Banerjee Committee, which probed into the incident, is understood to have concluded this in its final report.

Sources told *HT* that the probe panel — given the status of a deemed commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952 — categorically ruled out any conspiracy to set the coach on fire from outside.

Quoting from the deposition of Raju Bhargav, the then Panchmahal SP, the report says that Muslims not only permitted the district administration to use their (community) well but also provided a pump set to draw water to douse the flames.

The SP also told the inquiry panel that he had no information about *kar sewaks* returning from Ayodhya in the train. The report said Bhargav's deposition, a confirmation of the statement made by the then Additional DGP of the state intelligence bureau R.B. Srikumar, reinforced the probe panel's conclusion that the incident was a "mere accident" that did not occur as part of any conspiracy.

"How could there be any conspiracy when there was no information about the return of the *kar sewaks*", the panel noted. Moreover, Bhargav observed that since 1990, there was total harmony in Godhra with no incident of communal violence reported.



First instituted as a high-power committee, under a retired judge of the Supreme Court, the probe panel reportedly says that it received no cooperation from the state government till it was vested with powers of a commission of inquiry. Its summons met with no response on as many as 14 occasions.

Sources said the body of the report contains Srikumar's sensational claim that he refused to be intimidated by Gujarat home secretary G.C. Murmu, who wanted him to tell the Nanavati Commission — appointed by the Narendra Modi regime on March 6, 2002 — that the fire was the outcome of a conspiracy.

Apart from damning the state government machinery, the report is also harsh on the then railways minister Nitish

Kumar, who had told Parliament after the change of government at the Centre that the commissioner of railway safety did not probe the incident as the Nanavati Commission was already looking into the matter.

The Banerjee panel says the Nanavati Commission was constituted only on March 6 — a good seven days after the Sabarmati tragedy. As per rules, the commissioner of railway safety is expected to start probing accidents without any loss of time.

Coming down heavily on the rail administration under Nitish, the report notes that while the safety commissioner failed to act, there was no internal communication for almost eight months of the decision against probing the incident.

## Court gag on Banerjee report

HT Correspondent  
Ahmedabad/New Delhi, March 6

IN A significant development, a division bench of the High Court, comprising Justice M.R. Shah on Monday ruled that the railway ministry, Parliament or any other agency should not act upon the U.C. Banerjee panel report till March 8 when it would deliver its interim order. The high court order means that the UPA government cannot table the Banerjee report in Parliament and the railway ministry cannot publish it or release its contents.

In New Delhi, sources told *HT* that the ministry has referred the matter to the attorney general with the query whether tabling the report amounted to action taken.

Meanwhile, the clamour for Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's dismissal resounded in Parliament on Monday with the Lok Sabha being adjourned twice after unruly scenes. The Rajya Sabha was also disrupted as the Congress and the Left mounted an offensive on the BJP in light of the U.C. Banerjee Committee report on the Godhra train inferno. Parliamentary affairs minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, however, assured that the railway minister will make a statement on the issue on Tuesday.

07 MAR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Godhra train fire was accidental: Panel

**HT Correspondent**  
New Delhi, March 3

THE JUSTICE U. C. Banerjee Committee, probing the February 2002 Godhra train fire that claimed 59 lives, said in its final report on Friday that the fire was accidental, and not an act of arson. Coach No 6 of the Sabarmati Express, which caught fire, was carrying *kar sevaks* returning from Ayodhya. The incident sparked widespread riots in several Gujarat towns.

The BJP dismissed the findings as "absurd" and alleged the committee, appointed by railway minister Lalu Prasad, lacked credibility. "This report is absurd and is devoid of any logic," BJP spokesman Prakash Javadekar said.

The report, which takes into account both old and new evidence, confirms the findings in an earlier, interim report sub-



mitted by the same committee to Railway Board chairman J.P. Batra on January 17, 2005. It also deals with fire safety aspects on trains and makes some recommendations. Noting that about 200 passengers were able to escape to safety, it rejects the theory that the coach's doors were locked. Quoting an income tax employee who crawled to safety, it concludes that the passengers died when they trampled over each other.

The interim report too had noted "preponderance of evidence that the fire originated in the coach itself, without external input, and ruled out the possibility of an inflammable liquid having been used. There was first a smell of burning, followed by dense smoke, and flames thereafter. Such a sequence wouldn't have been possible had the fire been caused by inflammable liquid or an inflammable object thrown into the coach from out-

side. The inflammable liquid theory also got negated by the evidence of some passengers who suffered injuries in the upper, not lower, parts of their bodies.

The committee faced some problems in getting evidence from Gujarat officials. Justice Banerjee said until he was conferred powers under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, he couldn't get several senior state police and administrative officials to depose before him.

It took Justice Banerjee one-and-a-half years to get the officials to cooperate. State additional director general of police Sri Kumar, Western Railway's J. K. Bhat, SP Rajiv Bhargava and the IB's Rahul Sharma deposed only after he sought their evidence under the Commissions of Inquiry Act. Asked about Justice Nanavati's comments on his findings, he said he could not say anything about him.

## TIMELINE

**Feb 27, 2002**

Train fire at Godhra kills 59

**Feb 28**

Riots start in Gujarat

**March 4**

Gujarat appoints one-man probe panel. Later, retired Justice Nanavati too appointed to the Commission

**July**

Forensic trial on an empty coach indicates it is impossible to pour liquid from outside

**Feb-Sept 2003**

Survivors testify that no one threw any petrol at the coach

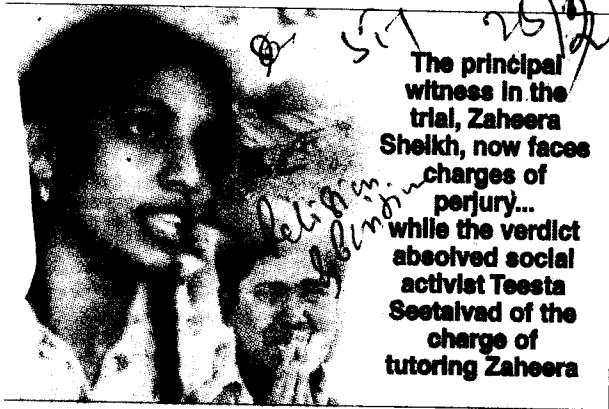
**Sept 2004**

UPA govt appoints U.C. Banerjee committee to probe train fire

**March 3, 2006**

Panel's final report says fire was an accident

## Nine nailed in Best Bakery case



The principal witness in the trial, Zaheera Sheikh, now faces charges of perjury... while the verdict absolved social activist Teesta Seetalvad of the charge of tutoring Zaheera

MUMBAI, Feb. 24. — A sessions court here today handed down life imprisonment to nine of the 17 accused in the Best Bakery case — in which 14 people were burnt to death on 1 March, 2002, in Vadodara — and let off eight others for want of evidence in a retrial ordered by the Supreme Court outside Gujarat to ensure justice. The judge, Mr Abhay Thipsay, said he could not impose capital punishment on any of the convicts since their specific roles in the crime could not be ascertained.

The principal witness in the trial, Ms Zaheera Sheikh, who turned the case upside down in the fast track court in Vadodara in Gujarat by becoming hostile, now faces charges of perjury. The judge has asked her and the other members of her family to answer why perjury charges should not be framed against them for lying on oath. Notices issued to them are returnable by 20 March. The verdict also absolved social activist Ms Teesta Seetalvad of the charges of tutoring Zaheera. Ms Seetalvad said she was satisfied with the outcome of the trial which she described as one conducted with probity and transparency. In contrast to what had happened in Gujarat, the witnesses deposed here without any fear, she said.

See BAKERY: page 5

2006

THE JOURNALIST

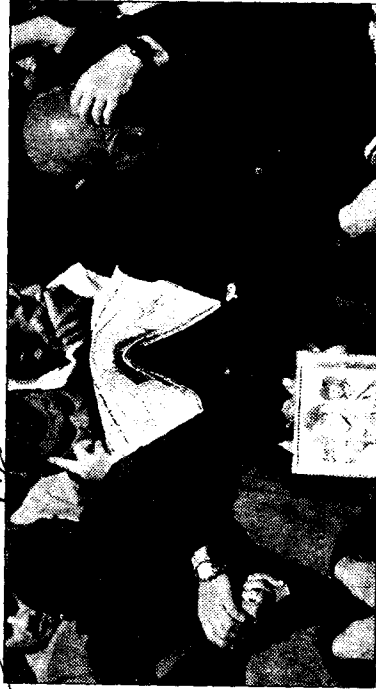
IRAQ | Sunni, Shia leaders sit together during daytime curfew

# Joint prayers to stop violence

BASSEM MROUE  
BAGHDAD, FEBRUARY 24

**R**ELIGIOUS leaders summoned Iraq's Shi'ites and Sunnis to joint prayer services on Friday amid an extraordinary daytime curfew aimed at halting a wave of sectarian violence that has killed nearly 130 people since the bombing of Askariya one of Shi'ite Islam's holiest shrines.

The curfew was aimed at preventing people from attending the week's most important Muslim prayer service, which officials feared could be both a target for attacks and a venue for stirring sectarian feelings.



**Muslims attend joint Friday prayers at Sadr city in Baghdad.** AP

Such sweeping daytime restrictions indicated the depth of fear within the government that the crisis could touch off a Sunni-Shi'ite civil war. Police and soldiers blocked major roads and surrounded Baghdad's two main Sunni mosques as streets throughout this city of nearly seven million emptied of people and traffic.

Residents in Samarra, where the shrine bombing took place on Wednesday, were instructed to stay indoors "until further notice".

In the southern Shi'ite heartland, over 10,000 people converged on Basra's Al Adillah mosque, where a representative of Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, called another joint service with Sunnis.

In Basra, where the curfew was not in effect, gunmen on Friday kidnapped three children of a Shi'ite legislator, police said. But there was little sign of the curfew in Sadr City, where militiamen loyal to radical Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr have been out in force since Wednesday's attack. —AP

## Why a shrine attack particularly upsets Shi'ites

BORZOU DARAGAH  
BAGHDAD, FEBRUARY 24

**T**HE attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra ignited fury among Iraq's Shi'ite majority by targeting one of the sect's most revered shrines.

More so than Sunni Arabs, Shi'ites believe in the sanctity of shrines. Shi'ites make pilgrimages to the shrines where the bodies of the sect's imams are believed to be resting.

The shrines date back to the 9th century, though the gold dome was completed in 1905. Their revered status comes from their con-

nection to the imams, who are "part of the skeleton of the Shi'ite faith," said Yitzhak Nakash, professor at Brandeis University.

Shi'ites revere the line of succession that began with Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law Ali, while Sunnis follow the rule of Arab tribal leaders, called Caliphs.

Shi'ites believe that the Caliphs were trying to wipe out Ali's line of succession by killing off his heirs—the imams—over the first few centuries of the faith and that the 10th and 11th of Ali's heirs, Ali Hadi and Hassan Askari, are buried in the shrine. —LATWP

# 16 killed in Nigeria toon strike

2012  
Religious  
Freedom

*Danish daily sorry, cartoonist not*

## AGENCIES

Maiduguri/Dubai/London, February 19

A SAUDI-OWNED pan-Arab newspaper on Sunday printed a full-page apology from *Jyllands-Posten*, the Danish daily that first published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad. But the wave of fury it has unleashed refused to die down, and the cartoonist who sparked the violence with his depiction of the Prophet said he has no regrets.

Nigerian Muslims attacked Christians and burned churches killing at least 16 on Saturday and in what has become a daily event, tens of thousands of Muslims protested — in Britain, Pakistan and Austria.

The violence in Nigeria was the first major protest to erupt over the issue in Africa's most populous nation. Mobs of Muslim protesters swarmed through the city centre with machetes, sticks and iron rods. One group threw a tire around a man, poured gas on him and set him ablaze. Thousands of rioters burned 15 churches in Maiduguri in a three-hour rampage before troops restored order. With Saturday's deaths, at least 45 people have been killed in protests across the Muslim world.

In Jakarta, hundreds of protesters tried to storm the US embassy on Sunday, smashing the windows of a guard post but failing to push through the gates. Several people were injured.

A church was set on fire in Pakistan by some 400 rioters during a protest over the burning of pages from the Quran, but no casualties were reported.

In Cairo, Bishop Karsten Nissen, of Denmark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, met Grand

## Support for sharia

FOUR OUT of 10 British Muslims want sharia, or Islamic law, introduced in predominantly Muslim parts of the country, a poll showed on Sunday. One in five of those polled for the *Sunday Telegraph* also said they sympathised with the "feelings" of the July 7 suicide bombers. The findings led noted British scholar, Alasdair Palmer, to comment that Islamists had the ability to persuade a weak government to accept sharia in the Muslim-dominated areas.

HTC, London

Imam Mohammed Sayyed Tantaawi of al-Azhar University. Tantaawi said the Danish prime minister must apologise for the drawings and further demanded that the world's religious leaders meet to write a law that "condemns insulting any religion." He said the UN should impose the law on all countries. Nissen said it was impossible for Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to apologise.

The Danish daily's apology was the strongest expression of regret yet from the paper, but stopped short of explicitly saying sorry for printing the cartoons, instead apologising for the turmoil caused in their aftermath.

But Kurt Westergaard, the man behind the cartoons, said he has no regret for his action. In an interview to the *Glasgow Herald*, Westergaard said he was being protected by the Danish secret service. Asked if he had expected the controversy the caricatures would spark, he replied simply: "No, no."

THE  
Glasgow Herald  
19 FEB 2012



# NDA puts cops under Hindu-Muslim scanner

RANCHI, Feb. 17. — If the BJP-led NDA has kicked up a fuss in the Lok Sabha demanding that a survey of the minority communities in India's armed forces be stopped immediately, the government the alliance runs in Jharkhand has ordered the DGP's office in Ranchi to supply it with detailed information about the numbers of Hindu and Muslim personnel in the state's police. Letters from the IG (operations and law and order) to this effect have gone out to

all SPs across Jharkhand with pro formas attached. The letter says that the state's welfare department seeks data about the Muslim community's socio-economic and educational status in Jharkhand so a fact-sheet can be prepared. The pro formas allude to policemen of all levels - DGPs, IGs, commissioners, general cadre officers, superintendents, circle inspectors, sub-inspectors, station house officers, head constables, constables and assistant sub-inspectors - calling for religiously

orientated information. The religious beliefs of all employees and officials in Groups A, B, C and D, not excluding temporary staff members, too, have been inquired about. Though most senior police officers in the DGP's office chose to remain tight-lipped about the letters, which had asked the SPs to submit their responses within 10 days, some of them, insisting on anonymity, revealed that the state government had been put up to it by the Centre. Mr Ramesh Singh Munda,

the state's welfare minister whose department deals with the matter, told The Statesman as much. "The Centre issued a circular to the state governments, asking them to submit details about their employees as well as the people in the uniformed forces based on their religions and we are only compiling the data," said Mr Munda. The former chief minister, Mr Babul Marandi, has condemned the move. — **Dipankar Bose**

It's Pranab vs Advani: page 5

# NDA Cong U-turn on T

## 'Shameless move to woo minorities' Army gave no data: Pranab

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, February 14

AN NDA delegation met President APJ Abdul Kalam to seek his intervention to stop the survey by a government-appointed panel on Muslims in the defence forces.

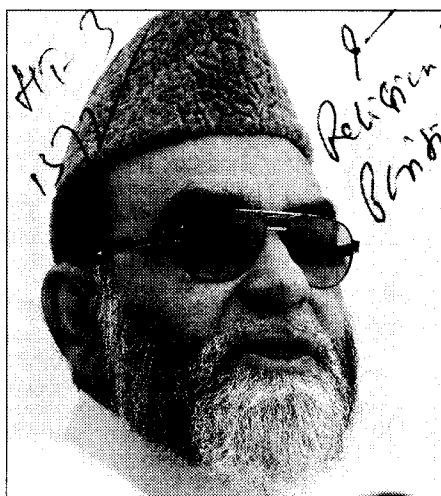
It also requested Kalam to use his moral authority in advising the government and election commissioner Navin Chawla to resign following disclosure that he was running a trust into which Congress MPs had paid money.

Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani and NDA convenor George Fernandes told reporters after meeting the President that they feared the survey could lead to serious consequences. "It's a very serious issue. Nobody has ever thought of holding this kind of an exercise, which this government has done. It's a shameless attempt to woo the communal vote-bank", Advani said.

In support of his charges against the Congress, Advani cited Central moves to award a minority institution designation to the Aligarh Muslim University, to amend the Foreigners Act and religious reservations in Andhra Pradesh institutions.

"All these actions are shameless attempts to woo the communal vote-bank," Advani said. The NDA memorandum said, "For the committee to start inquiring into religious denominations of the personnel of the armed forces and further probing the kind of postings being given to each one of them is fraught with dangerous consequences."

Secondly, the NDA document said, disclosures have now been made about election commissioner Navin Chawla having received funds from various MPs of the Congress from their MPLADS accounts for furthering the activities of his private Trust. "This indicates the cementing bond between Chawla and the Congress. It creates a reasonable apprehension of bias in the minds of the people of India and in our



There's nothing wrong in it. It's the govt's responsibility to recruit Muslims in all Services according to population pattern

SYED AHMED BUKHARI,  
Imam of Jama Masjid

minds about Chawla's ability to conduct himself impartially and independently."

The NDA memorandum said through its MPs, the Opposition alliance, would be submitting a detailed memorandum to Kalam. "Through that memorandum we're going to request you to refer this issue to the chief election commissioner".

HT Political Bureau  
New Delhi, February 14:

IN HIS first comments on the controversy over the work of the Justice Rajindar Sachar Committee, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee has clarified that the Indian army provided no information to the panel as it does not maintain the kind of statistics that were sought from it.

"In reply to letters received from the Sachar Committee, the Indian navy provided some indicative numbers regarding civilian personnel in the navy. Some statistics were also provided by the Indian air force.

Since the Indian army does not maintain any such statistics, no such information has been provided by the army", Mukherjee told *Hindustan Times*.

The Sachar panel has been set up to prepare a report on the "social, economic and educational status of the minority community of India".

Towards that end, he had sought data relating to Muslim personnel in the three wings of the armed forces.

On his part, the defence minister said the government's recruitment policy for the armed forces was based on merit and was open to every citizen of the country, including members of the Muslim community, without any discrimination on the basis of their caste, creed, religion or region.

"The Indian armed forces have an all-India orientation, in which each state contributes its fair share of manpower to the defence forces", the defence minister said in his interview.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Beware: division can be a chain reaction

Communal tensions in Ladakh and Jammu must be quickly addressed, says MUZAMIL JALEEL

AT A time when leading separatists are aligning themselves to the peace process and talking of an inclusive, secular solution, the state of Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing fragmentation on communal lines. And the ruling Congress party is at the centre of this polarisation in Ladakh and Jammu provinces. It is a worrisome signal that cabinet colleagues of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad are believed to be at the forefront in stoking communal passions for electoral gains.

Ladakh is tense and the civilian administration has called in the army to help restore order despite the imposition of curfew in both Buddhist-majority Leh and Muslim-majority Kargil. Recent troubles are traced to the desecration of the Quran by unidentified persons in Kargil's Bodh Kharboo village. This led to violent protests in both Kargil and Leh. This single incident, however, is seen as a planned move aimed at breaking the tenuous calm between the Buddhist and Muslim populations who have been living in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion for some decades now.

And a look at the political landscape of the twin districts of Ladakh breeds suspicion that there is a sinister design to re-enact the Buddhist-Muslim polarisation of the 1980s that brought the Ladakh Buddhist Association to the centre of Buddhist politics in Leh, culminating in the creation of Ladakh Area Hill Development Council — a body that literally enjoys self-rule within J&K state. In fact, in certain instances, the LAHDC chairman enjoys more power than the chief minister. For example, the CM has powers to sanction projects up to Rs 2 crore without cabinet approval; for the LAHDC chair-

man the limit is Rs 5 crore.

But recently LBA and its leader Nawang Rigzin Jora — who is minister for power and industries, the most powerful portfolio in Azad's cabinet — have lost a substantial portion of their support base to the Ladakh Union Territory Front,

party in the state to be stoking trouble could have immense repercussions.

The story of Jammu province might not be as explosive today but polarisation is very visible there as well. Earlier the demands for a separate Jammu state came from the Jam-

mu Mukti Morcha and BJP with their politics focussed exclusively on Hindu and Dogra pride. But for last three years, senior Congress leader and cabinet minister Mangat Ram Sharma has become the symbol of parochial stridency in Jammu, eclipsing both BJP and the Mukti Morcha. In fact, the Congress itself is sharply divided on religious lines within the state, a division highlighted recently when four ministers from Jammu resigned to pressure the J&K government to extend the Amarnath yatra by another month.

mu Mukti Morcha and BJP

while raising the issue of discrimination of Kashmir province or the Muslim-dominated areas in Ladakh and Jammu provinces, even the government's own statistics and surveys are ignored. The reason is clear: the moment any mainstream political party raises the issue of the majority population of the state, it is denigrated as anti-national.

A survey conducted by the General Administration Department shows the Muslim representation in the state government is 2.8 per 100 persons while the Hindu representation is 4.8.

A cursory look at the economic growth as well as political empowerment of Jammu province makes it absolutely clear that Muslims living in Jammu province are hardly included in it. (According to the recent census, the Muslim population in Jammu province is 30.68 per cent, mostly in Doda, Rajouri, Poonch and part of Rajouri.) Official figures reveal that more than Rs 3,000 crore worth of industrial investment took place in Jammu during the past three years alone while investment totalling another Rs 2,000 crore is in the pipeline. However, industrialisation and economic growth in Jammu have also been limited to the Jammu-Kathua belt.

This sort of polarisation is inviting reaction from Doda, Rajouri and Poonch. The demand for a separate Chinab Development Hill Council in Doda and establishment of the Poonch-Rajouri Peoples Front can certainly be viewed as the beginnings of this fragmentation process.

If serious efforts are not made to stop this sort of communal fragmentation in the state, what chance would there be of negotiating a solution to the larger Kashmir problem?



Moharram in Kargil: a case for preserving the state's composite culture

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The issue of the Government Medical College, Srinagar — once an elite institution but now on the verge of de-recognition because more than 100 faculty positions remain unfilled — too has gathered regional/communal overtones. The two GMCs of the state, the other one being at Jammu, have joint seniority. Since 1990 many teachers from Jammu have refused to take assignments in

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# Rice accuses Iran, Syria of stoking cartoon fire

ASSOCIATED Press  
Kabul, February 8

US SECRETARY of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday accused Iran and Syria of stoking Muslim anger against the West over the Prophet cartoons, even as the body count in the deadly clashes climbed to 11.

Afghan police shot dead four protesters on Wednesday, in an effort to stop hundreds from storming a US military base in southern Afghanistan, causing Islamic organisations to call for an end to the deadly rioting.

"Islam says it's all right to demonstrate but not to resort to violence. This must stop," said senior cleric Mohammed Usman, a member of the Ulama Council, Afghanistan's top Islamic organisation. "We condemn the cartoons but this does not justify violence. These rioters are defaming the name of Islam."

Other members of the council went on radio and television on Wednesday to appeal for calm. It followed a statement released by the United Nations, European Union and the world's largest Islamic group on Tuesday also urging an end to violence. "Aggression against life and property can only damage the image of a peaceful Islam," said the statement released by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the EU chief Javier Solana.

Rice, addressing a news conference with Israel's foreign minister Tzipi Livni, said, "Iran and Syria have gone out of their way to inflame sentiments and use this to their own purposes and the world ought to call them on it."

Meanwhile, a US military spo-

## Danish sites hacked

HACKERS HAVE attacked hundreds of Danish websites to protest against the publication of the Prophet cartoons. Home pages have been defaced and websites replaced with messages hailing Islam and condemning the cartoons. Up to 700 Danish websites had been attacked by Wednesday.

AFP, Copenhagen

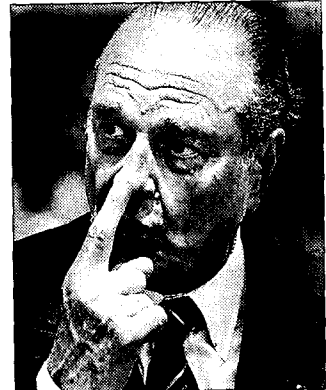
kesman said the US and other countries are examining whether extremists may be inciting protesters to riot.

In the southern Afghan city of Qalat, hundreds rioted outside the US military base on Wednesday, throwing rocks at the police, who initially tried to clear the crowd by firing in the air. But later they were forced to fire into the crowd, killing four and injuring at least 20. The protesters then set fire to three fuel tankers waiting to deliver gas to the base, prompting US troops to fire warning shots into the air.

Eleven people have been killed in the past week as thousands took to the streets around the world against the cartoons, which first appeared in a Danish newspaper in September.

Elsewhere on Wednesday, some 300 Palestinian protesters attacked an international observer mission in West Bank's Hebron and tried to set one of the buildings on fire. Sixty people were inside at the time.

More than 1,000 people also rallied Wednesday in Dhaka, burning Danish and Italian flags. There were no immediate reports of casualties.



## Chirac pulls up newspapers

AS YET another French publication put the contentious cartoons on its pages, French President Jacques Chirac accused newspapers printing the sketches of "provocation". "Anything that can hurt the convictions of another, particularly religious convictions, must be avoided. Freedom of expression must be exercised in a spirit of responsibility," Chirac said. "I condemn all manifest provocation that might dangerously fan passions," he said.

## Holocaust ploy

AN IRANIAN newspaper's call for Holocaust cartoons is an attempt to drag Israel into a conflict between Europe and the Muslim world over caricatures of the Prophet, German Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler said. A state is using this clash of cultures as a tool to further its own dominance," he said.

**ASIA PROTESTS** | Two demonstrators shot dead, six injured in Afghanistan

# EU, Arab world must get together, end cartoon row: Sweden, Annan

AGENCIES

STOCKHOLM/GAZA/UNITED NATIONS, FEBRUARY 6

**E**UROPEAN Union members and the Arab world must act together to head off further violence in the growing row over newspaper cartoons of Prophet Mohammad, Sweden said on Monday.

There is a need for "common action, for example between the EU and the Arab world," Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds told Swedish television.

"(We need) a statement, to stand together to say that this conflict does not promote our common interests and does not reflect the situation we are in, where we are trying to develop a closer cooperation between these lands," she said adding that it was positive that religious leaders in Lebanon had tried to prevent the violence, but religious leaders in the Christian world too must ensure there was no counter-reaction. "There is more to do together, between the West, the EU for example, and representatives of the Arab world," Freivalds added.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appealed for calm in a statement issued on Sunday.

"The Secretary General is alarmed by the threats and violence, including the attacks on Embassies, that have occurred



**Afghan protesters attack a building belonging to the Danish mission in Kabul on Monday. One person was killed and two wounded during shooting, police said. Reuters**

in Syria and Lebanon and other countries over the past few days," the statement said.

"While he shares the distress felt by many Muslims at the publication of caricatures which they see as insulting to their religion, he wishes to emphasise that such resentment cannot justify violence, least of all when directed at people who have no responsibility for, or control over, the publications in question."

He also appeals to all parties, particularly all governments and authorities, whether religious or secular, to do everything they can to reduce tension and to avoid ac-

tions or statements which might increase it," it said adding, "He urges Muslims to accept the apology given by the Danish newspaper, to act in the true spirit of a religion famed for its values of mercy and compassion, and to put this episode behind them."

Meanwhile, Palestinian demonstrators hurled stones at EU offices in the Gaza Strip on Monday and pulled down the EU flag in protest over the caricatures. The crowd chanted: "Down with Denmark. Down with Norway. With our blood we will redeem our Prophet."

Palestinian riot police sur-

rounded the EU building to prevent the crowd of several dozen students from entering. Security forces fired into the air as one protester pulled the EU flag down.

A wave of anger has swept the Muslim world over the publication of the cartoons, one of which shows the Prophet Mohammad wearing a turban shaped like a bomb.

The cartoons were first printed in Denmark. The cartoons have since been reprinted in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary, New Zealand, Norway, Poland and the US.

## On the streets in Asia

■ **KABUL:** Two demonstrators were shot dead and six others, including two police officials, were injured in the Afghan city of Mihtarlam when police fired on demonstrators, said Interior Ministry spokesman Dad Mohammed Rasa. Earlier, the protesters had tried and failed to break down the gate of the Danish government's diplomatic mission. Police there said the protesters beat some of the police guarding it and security guards at a house used by Belgian diplomats.

■ **JAKARTA:** About 300 people protested outside the building housing the Danish Embassy, which was guarded by a cordon of security forces. "The cartoons were meant to insult us," said Hendri Novrizal, one of the demonstrators. "We wouldn't insult Jesus or the Buddha because such an act would cause tension among believers."

■ **BANGKOK:** About 400 members of Thailand's Muslim minority shouted "God is Great" outside Denmark's Embassy, and some demonstrators stomped on a Danish flag.

■ **KUALA LAMPUR:** An editor of a newspaper that ran one of drawings to accompany an article about the lack of impact of the controversy inside the country resigned, according to a statement seen Monday.

—Associated Press

7 FEB 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

February 8, 2006  
Roots of Dispute

## West Beginning to See Wide Islamic Protests as Sign of Deep Gulf

By ALAN COWELL

LONDON, Feb. 7 — As Islamic protests grew against the publication of cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad, a small but vocal Muslim immigrant organization responded with a drawing on its Web site of Hitler in bed with Anne Frank. "Write this one in your diary, Anne," Hitler was shown as saying.

The intent, said the group, the Arab European League, was "to use our right to artistic expression," just as the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten did last September when it published 12 cartoons showing Muhammad, several of them satiric.

"Europe has its sacred cows, even if they're not religious sacred cows," said Dyab Abou Jahjah, the founder of the organization, which advocates for immigrants' rights in Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.

After days of violent protests that have claimed several lives, the conflict has pushed both sides across an unexpected threshold, where they view each other with miscomprehension and suspicion.

As the protests have spread, some Europeans have come to realize that relatively small Muslim minorities — 3 percent in Britain, 4 percent in Denmark and around 5 percent in the European Union — can wield power across the Islamic world.

"No longer is the issue merely that of belittling an immigrant group," wrote Jürgen Gottschlich, a German journalist based in Istanbul. "Just as there are heroes of free speech in Denmark, there are also heroes from the Arabian peninsula to North Africa to Indonesia who are ready to take to the barricades to defend their prophet's dignity."

Ibrahim Magdy, 39, an Egyptian Coptic Christian with a florist business in Rome, said, "The problem now is that when you say something or do something, you are not just talking to the Egyptians or to the Syrians or to the Saudis, but you are talking to the entire Muslim world."

The cartoons have set off a profound debate about freedom of expression and supposed double standards. And the spreading protest signified a hardening of extremes that left little room for moderation. "The moderate Muslim has again been effectively silenced," said Tabish Khair, professor of English at the University of Aarhus, Denmark.

For decades European nations have wrestled with an influx of immigrants who came for economic and political reasons, primarily from lands where Islam is the dominant faith — from Bosnia and Turkey,

from Iraq, Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East, from North Africa and Somalia. But many feel they have never been fully welcome.

The catalog of Islamic terrorism — from the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, to the March 2004 bombings in Madrid and the July 2005 attacks in London — has challenged governments and societies to distinguish between moderates and extremists, like the four British-born Muslims who killed themselves and 52 other people in London.

Ostensibly, said Timothy Garton Ash, an Oxford professor of European history, the clash has pitted two sets of values — freedom of expression and multiculturalism — against each other. Muslim immigrants, initially seen in the 1960's as temporary laborers, have formed permanent and expanding communities.

But beyond that, there is a seething resentment among some Muslims that they are treated as second-class citizens and potential terrorists in lands that deny the importance of their faith, even though the number of Muslims in Europe totals 20 million, and possibly many more.

"If you have black hair, it is really difficult to find a job," said Muhammad Elzjahim, a 22-year-old construction worker of Palestinian descent whose parents moved to Denmark when he was 2 years old. He said he had studied dentistry for three and a half years only to find that "it was for nothing, because I couldn't find a job in my field."

That mistrust is mirrored by a gnawing sense among some Europeans that their generous welfare states have become home to an unwelcome minority that does not share their values and may even represent a fifth column of potential insurgents, who project themselves as the victims of Islamophobia and discrimination in housing and jobs.

"The radicals don't want an agreement, they don't want the round table," said Rainer Mion, a 44-year-old German insurance agent in Berlin. "What they want is to spread their Islamic beliefs all over the world."

Giulio Cordese, a 50-year-old salesman in an Italian specialty deli in Berlin, added: "We have to make a point here. Personally, I would expel all Muslims in the concerned countries, because they simply don't accept democratic rules here."

But that goes to the core of the debate: which rules apply to which people?

In London on Tuesday, Abu Hamza al-Masri, an Egyptian who is wanted in the United States on terrorism charges, was sentenced to seven years for incitement to murder. Five days earlier, Nick Griffin, chairman of the anti-immigrant British National Party, was acquitted on race hate charges relating to assaults on Islam as a "vicious, wicked faith."

The different outcomes provoked fresh accusations that British justice — like British society, by this argument — discriminates against Muslims. "We seem to have different standards when we deal with these issues from different communities," said Massoud Shadjareh, a founder of the Islamic Human Rights Commission in London.

Flemming Rose, the culture editor of Jyllands-Posten, which first published the cartoons, insisted last week that his interest lay solely in asserting the right to free speech over religious taboos. "When Muslims say you are not showing respect, I would say: you are not asking for my respect, you are asking for my submission," he said.

Yet, The Guardian reported Monday that three years ago, Jyllands-Posten rejected several cartoons satirizing the resurrection of Jesus, saying they were not funny and would "provoke an outcry." The editor who rejected those drawings, Jens Kaiser, dismissed comparisons with the Muhammad cartoons, saying the paper had never asked for the cartoons of Jesus.

Many here echoed Mr. Rose's apprehension that European values and freedoms are under threat.

"In America, few people fear that they will have to live according to the norms of Islam," an editorial in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad read. "In European countries, with a large or growing Muslim minority, there is a real fear that behind the demand for respect hides another agenda: the threat that everyone must adjust to the rules of Islam."

In 2005, a Moroccan-Dutch painter, Rachid Ben Ali, went into hiding after receiving death threats related to an exhibit showing "hate imams" spitting bombs. Most infamously, in 2004, the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered for committing what his confessed killer called blasphemy in his film, "Submission," about violence against Islamic women.

In the Netherlands, where the population of 16 million includes a million Muslims, some people wonder whether their secular values can guarantee social peace.

In earlier periods of European history, NRC Handelsblad said, "a small religious dispute could lead to large- or small-scale wars."

"The Muslim immigration has thrown Europe back to the religious conflicts of the past."

In Britain, some analysts argue that the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair has shown itself ready to promote self-censorship when dealing with Islamic militancy in the interest of averting further terrorist attacks. "Islam is protected by an invisible blasphemy law," said Jasper Gerard, a columnist in The Sunday Times. "It is called fear."

In some assessments, the situation rewards those at the extremes. "Islamic fundamentalists and European right-wingers both enjoy a veritable gift that can be used to ignite fire after fire," said Janne Haaland Matlary, professor of international relations and former deputy foreign minister of Norway.

Many Europeans draw distinctions, suggesting different responses across the Continent.

In Germany, where two newspapers published some of the cartoons, arson attacks directed at Turkish and other immigrants in the early 1990's conjured the specter of Nazism, and some people believe that memory has built a degree of caution.

"We must de-escalate the situation," said Ayyub Axel Köhler, a convert to Islam who heads the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. "It might be easier to do that in Germany than in other countries."

A joint statement released Tuesday by Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations, Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Javier Solana, the foreign policy representative of the European Union, sought to re-establish a common ground.

"We fully uphold the right of free speech," the statement read. "But we understand the deep hurt and widespread indignation felt in the Muslim World. We believe freedom of the press entails responsibility and discretion, and should respect the beliefs and tenets of all religions."



"But we also believe the recent violent acts surpass the limits of peaceful protest.

"Aggression against life and property can only damage the image of a peaceful Islam."

Reporting for this article was contributed by Marlise Simons in Paris, Mark Landler and Petra Kappl in Frankfurt, Victor Homola and Sarah Plass in Berlin, Renwick McLean in Madrid, Elisabetta Povoledo in Milan, Peter Kiefer in Rome and Ivar Ekman in Copenhagen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2006 ✓

## Religious reservation

### and AMU *Religious reservation*

**I**t was a flawed move from the start. When Aligarh Muslim University announced that 50 per cent of its seats in some post-graduate courses would be reserved for Muslim students, there was doubt whether this could be legally sustained. The decision, which was formally endorsed in February 2005 by the Human Resources Development Ministry, has predictably run into rough legal weather. With a Division Bench of the Allahabad High Court upholding a judgment by a single judge of the same court and ruling that admissions from 2006 onwards would be "free to all," AMU's ill-advised religious reservation system — which reversed a tradition established since it was founded in 1920 and drew opposition from a progressive section of its faculty — has been nullified. The Division Bench has also upheld the view that AMU, which was established by statute and has the status of a Central university, is not a minority institution. Striking down two sections of the Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act, 1981, that purportedly gave the university a minority status, the High Court echoed the Supreme Court's 1968 judgment in the Azeez Basha case. In that judgment, the apex court held that AMU could not claim minority status as it was set up by an Act of Parliament. In consequence, it was held that the University does not have the protection of Article 30(1), which gives linguistic and religious minorities "the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice," and *ipso facto* the freedom to reserve seats for students belonging to the community they represent.

That there is a serious problem of educational backwardness among vast sections of India's 130 million-plus Muslims and that the Central and State Governments have failed to address it effectively are facts that are not in dispute. The limited issue addressed by the Allahabad High Court judgment is the propriety of extending religious reservation to an institution such as AMU. Politicians with vested interests must be discouraged from giving this issue a communal twist. As the great historian of Mughal India who has long taught at AMU, Irfan Habib, has pointed out, "it is clear from Article 30 of the Constitution that its framers had in mind only educational institutions with private managements when they conceived of minority institutions." Religion-based reservation also militates against the broad-minded, secular tradition of AMU. As Professor Habib has noted, at no time did "the founder [Sir Syed Ahmad Khan] and his successors ... see any conflict in the university keeping its doors open to all, while promoting the spread of modern education among Muslims." The Allahabad High Court has declined permission for a special leave petition to be filed against its judgment in the Supreme Court. The Centre would do well to allow the matter to rest and refrain from promulgating an Ordinance to nullify the judgment — a drastic step it reportedly has in mind.

# Quashing of quota for Muslims in AMU upheld

## Allahabad High Court strikes down AMU Amendment Act conferring minority status on varsity

Legal Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** The Allahabad High Court on Thursday quashed the Central law that gave Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) its minority status and held illegal the reservation of seats for Muslims in its postgraduate medical courses.

A Division Bench thereby confirmed a single judge order holding that the AMU Amendment Act, 1981, was unconstitutional and that AMU was not a minority institution. Holding illegal, the single judge had also quashed the notification issued

by Union Human Resource Development Ministry on February 25, 2005 permitting AMU to reserve seats for Muslims in postgraduate medical courses.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice A. N. Ray and Justice Ashok Bhushan passed this order on appeals filed by the Central Government and the AMU challenging the single judge verdict delivered on October 4, 2005. The Bench was of the view that the 50 per cent reservation being extended to doctors in the AMU's postgraduate courses was illegal and incorrect.

The judges struck down Sec-

tion 1 and Section 5 (2) (c) of the AMU Amendment Act, 1981, by which the status of minority institution was accorded to AMU observing that these provisions were ultra vires the Constitution.

They agreed with the reasoning given by the single judge that the Supreme Court in the Ajeez Basha case in 1968 had already taken the view that AMU was not a minority institution and enactment of a law by Parliament could not overrule the judgment.

The Bench made it clear that admissions for the 2006-2007

session "will be free to all." Granting limited relief, the Bench said those students who were admitted earlier under a quota system and were studying in the university would continue to do so.

The Bench declined to suspend the operation of the judgment or grant leave to the AMU to file a special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the judgment, saying "we do not find any reason for the same."

In October last, Justice Arun Tandon said approval given by the Academic Council of AMU to

reserve 50 per cent seats in postgraduate medical courses was illegal and admissions made on the basis of this notification were also illegal. He cited the apex court ruling that AMU was not an institution established by a minority group and it was established under the Act passed by the Central legislature. He gave the verdict on a writ petition filed by Malay Shukla and others challenging the AMU Amendment Act of 1981, the notification dated February 25, 2005 and the subsequent decision of the Academic Council of AMU endorsing the notification.

# Muslim quota ban order brought into force by SC

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Jan. 4 — The Supreme Court today declined to stay an Andhra Pradesh High Court judgment quashing an Ordinance providing 5 per cent reservations for Muslims in government jobs and ordering status quo while referring the issue to a Constitution Bench.

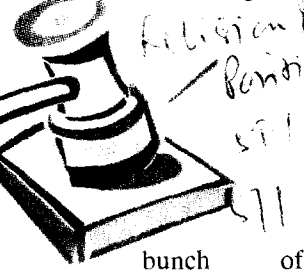
"We are not inclined to stay the operation of the judgment and make it operational as it has invalidated the law," a Bench comprising Chief Justice YK Sabharwal, Justice CK Thakker and Justice RV Raveenderan said in an interim order.

However, the Bench gave some relief to those who had already availed themselves of the benefit of the quota, directing the authorities to maintain sta-

tus quo.

"We are of the view that status quo should continue to the extent that persons who have been granted admission to educational institutions would continue with their courses and be not disturbed and likewise if an appointment to public position is made, the same should not be disturbed, the Bench said.

Admitting a



bunch of appeals, including one from the Andhra Pradesh government, against the High Court judgment, the Supreme Court referred the matter to a Constitution Bench.

"Considering that a question of public impor-

tance has been raised and the High Court granted the state leave to approach the apex court...we grant leave in all matters and direct the same to be placed before the Constitution Bench," the three-judge Bench said.

Senior advocate Mr Fali S Nariman, appearing for the state government, sought a stay of the judgment which was opposed by senior advocate Mr Harish Salve, who argued for the students on whose petition the High Court had quashed the Ordinance. Declining to stay the verdict, the Bench said that if the operation of the judgment was stayed it would mean that the law deemed unconstitutional would continue to operate till the Supreme Court arrived at its own decision. The Andhra Pradesh government had contended that the High Court did not consider Article 16 (4) of the Constitution while invalidating the Act.

THE STATESMAN

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