

Sachar panel report on Muslims out, contents a hot potato

The Justice Rajinder Sachar panel on the social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India has found that the community lags drastically behind the rest in most development indicators.

The panel, which submitted its controversial report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Friday, is reported to have been astonished over the findings, which have shown a sharp decline in the status of Muslims.

Sources in the panel told IANS the report has essentially detailed data proving that the status of Dalit Muslims as of date is below that of low caste Hindus or Dalits.

Labouring for over a year collecting data, carrying out interviews and meeting respondents in different states, the panel, short of making a strong case for reservation of Muslims, has recommended representation for Muslims in sectors like healthcare and teaching, and sensitisation of all government employees towards the requirements of the community.

It also makes a case for setting up of more English and Urdu-medium government schools in Muslim-dominated areas.

Different ministries in the union government, the report argues, should be in favour of allocating 15 percent of funds for the welfare of the community.

'The community is relatively poor, more illiterate, has lower access to education, lower representation in public and private sector jobs, and lower availability of bank credit for self-employment,' an official release quoted the panel as saying to the prime minister.

'In urban areas, the community mostly lives in slums characterised by poor municipal infrastructure,' it said.

The committee, however, noted that the condition of the minority community varied in states and regions.

The Sachar committee was constituted in March last year for a term of 15 months, which expired in June and was given an extension till November.

It is unclear when the union government will make the report public since it will require a serious response considering the nature of the panel's elaborate findings.

On its part the panel has urged the prime minister to form 'appropriate programmes to address the educational and economic backwardness of the community'.

Manmohan Singh emphasised that the data given in the report was necessary for planning, formulating and implementing specific programmes to address issues relating to the socio-economic backwardness of any disadvantaged group.

'One cannot wish away differences merely by refusing to measure them,' he was quoted as saying.

Singh also said the report would be tabled in parliament to enable a national consensus on how to improve the social, educational and economic status of the Muslims.

Considering that the crucial Uttar Pradesh elections are round the corner the government's task will be all the more difficult with the states ruled by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) protesting against the collected data and other parties demanding remedial action.

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