

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

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RESPONSE

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Sources indicate that Maharashtra, and Mumbai in particular, is an important financial centre in India, and, as a result, has been the target of a number of terrorist related attacks. The latest *Economic Intelligence Unit* security risk briefing notes that attacks by Islamic militants “on political and financial targets – such as those in Mumbai – are likely to continue”. Muslim organisations allege that the Muslim community is viewed with suspicion and has faced harassment in such an environment. Recent reports also indicate that Hindu nationalist sentiment is increasing, aided by the BJP inflaming religious divisions in the lead-up to the general elections to be held in 2009. The opposition party, Shiv Sena (in alliance with the BJP), are still a force in the State. It is also alleged that local politicians continue to use divisive tactics to maintain their power base. Previous research also indicates that corruption is a significant problem within Maharashtra’s police force, and that Shiv Sena maintains influence over the police and judiciary in Mumbai. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the recent appointee to the position of police commissioner in Mumbai is Muslim (‘India risk: Security risk’ 2008, *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 3 April – Attachment 1; Rajput, R. 2008, ‘SIMI arrests: Maharashtra connection’, *NDTV*, 1 April – Attachment 2; for allegations of harassment, see: ‘Anger at minorities commission hearing’ 2007, *The Hindu*, 6 September

<http://www.thehindu.com/2007/09/06/stories/2007090660271000.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 3; ‘India Muslim body criticizes “unsubstantiated” police statements on terror’ 2008, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, source: The Asian Age website, 9 March – Attachment 4; for police corruption and Shiv Sena influence, see: ‘And the loser is... Mumbai’ 2004, *Times of India*, 11 November
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/919618.cms> – Accessed 26 March 2007 – Attachment 5; Noorani, A. ‘Has Shiv Sena a future?’ 2003, *Frontline*, 1 March,
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2005/stories/20030314000307600.htm> – Accessed 15 May 2007 – Attachment 6; for information on the appointment of new commissioner, see: ‘Mumbai gets new top cops’ 2008, *The Times of India*, 1 March – Attachment 7).

Previous research, collated in *Research Response IND31476* (dated 27 March 2007) provides information on the general security situation for Muslims living in Mumbai; any examples of corruption of the Mumbai police, and; security in regard to entry and exit procedures for India and Mumbai in particular (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IND31476*, 27 March – Attachment 8).

Research Response IND31794, dated 18 May 2007, provides information on the nationalist Shiv Sena party in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India; violence against Muslims and level of police protection depending on which state the violence occurs; and which states in India have large Muslim populations (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IND31794*, 18 May – Attachment 9).

The latest US Department of State report on human rights in India, released in March 2008, states that:

The law provides for secular government and the protection of religious freedom, and the central government generally respected these provisions in practice; however, occasionally the government did not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from legal constraints inherent in the country’s federal structure and in part from shortcomings in the law enforcement and judicial systems. There is no state religion, although the fact that the majority of citizens are Hindus adversely affected on occasion the religious freedom of others. Some Hindu hardliners interpreted ineffective investigation and prosecution of their attacks on religious minorities as evidence that they could commit such violence with impunity.

...The government did not take action on the investigation of the September 2006 attacks against Muslim worshipers in Maharashtra (US Department of State 2008, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 – India*, March, Section 2. c – Attachment 10).

A September 2007 article reports that Maharashtra Muslims are frustrated that there is an ongoing lack of political will to implement recommendations from the report on the Mumbai riots (1992-1993). The article notes that Muslims in Maharashtra allege that discrimination and police harassment continue, that there is fear of the police and that Shiv Sena politicians continue to incite the people against Muslims:

Farooq Mapkar, who was injured in the Hari Masjid firing, said that he was a victim but the police had charged him with murder. Till today, no case had been filed against the policemen but he was facing trial.

Nirbhay Bano Andolan and several other groups demanded the dismissal of policemen involved in the Mumbai riots. Hasina Sheikh from Awaz-e-Niswan, said that people did not come forward and register complaints as they feared the police. The government must open the over 1300 cases which had been closed, she said.

Dr. Zeenat Shaikat Ali, Professor of Islamic studies, said that, “as an Indian, it is a big shame that I have to come here and ask for justice when the Indian Constitution does not discriminate.”

Women also complained about the way the police harassed their sons and husbands. Khatoon Sheikh from the group Hukook-e-Niswan, said that there was a lot of fear and the government must ensure their security.

NGOs also made the point that ensuring justice was not the responsibility of Muslims alone. The entire society must participate in demanding it. Saumya Uma from Women’s Research and Action Group said that when the State government decided to implement the Srikrishna Commission’s report, the Shiv Sena said it would cause problems. Why did the State not act against the Sena’s threats and punish politicians inciting the people, she asked (‘Anger at minorities commission hearing’ 2007, *The Hindu*, 6 September <http://www.thehindu.com/2007/09/06/stories/2007090660271000.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 3).

A September 2007 newsletter reports on the visit to Mumbai by the National Minorities Commission (NCM). It may be relevant that allegations of the “indifference and laxity” of the police when dealing with attacks on Christians are noted in the report. Regarding Muslims specifically, the information states:

Muslims unanimously demanded the prevention of harassment to Muslim youths by implicating them in false cases on the pretext of their involvement in terrorist activities. There was a strong demand for the abolition of MCOCA (Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act) which was termed as a draconian law under which confessions are extracted from Muslim youths by the police through intimidation and physical torture (Indian National Commission for Minorities 2007, ‘Minorities India’, Newsletter of the 5th National Commission for Minorities, September <http://ncm.nic.in/News%20Letter%20Sep,%2007.pdf> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 11).

There has been continued media interest in the topic of terrorism and Islam. Recent media articles have continued to report on allegations that terrorists (Muslim groups, Lashkar e-Toiba, SIMI) were setting up “sleeper cells” of locals in Mumbai and other parts of the country. Some sources have claimed that much of the reporting is sensationalist and tends to link Islam and extremism. For example, an article in *The Telegraph*, dated 3 April 2008, notes the hyperbole and assumption of guilt inherent in the widespread reporting on the recent arrests of members of SIMI a student Islamic organisation (Nanjappa, V. 2008, ‘Slain Mumbai terrorists had Karnataka links’, *Rediff.com*, 13 March <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/13terror.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 12; Punj, B. 2008, ‘Open SIMIism! Now fight radical Islam’, *The Pioneer*, 4 April http://www.dailypioneer.com/columnist1.asp?main_variable=Columnist&file_name=punj%20Fpunj130.txt&writer=punj – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 13; Kesavan, M. 2008, ‘Presuming Innocence’, *The Telegraph*, 3 April http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080403/jsp/opinion/story_9087647.jsp – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 14).

The latest briefing from *The Economist Intelligence Unit* gives the following relevant security risk information:

Terrorist incidents affect the commercial climate in India (Moderate risk)

More than 200 people were killed in a series of bomb blasts in Mumbai in July 2006, the worst terrorist incident in India since 1993. The attacks were suspected to be the work of Kashmiri militants and element of Pakistan's intelligence community who seek to derail the peace process between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir. The bombing followed several other bombings in Delhi, Varanasi and other cities that were also believed to have been carried out by **Muslim** militants. The latter are driven as much by religious sentiment as by a desire to aid Kashmiri independence. India has held **Islamist** groups responsible for many of the most serious terrorist attacks in India, including the hijacking of an Indian aeroplane from Kathmandu in 1999 and an attack on India's parliament in December 2001. Although **Islamic** militants are unlikely to strike at foreign companies directly, attacks on political and financial targets--such as those in Mumbai--are likely to continue. India has long suffered from occasional bomb attacks on trains and buses, although responsibility for these incidents is rarely claimed. Threats from militants in the north-east of India and in Kashmir itself are much more direct. Businesses should tighten security, particularly in the major commercial centres.

The BJP inflames religious divisions in the run-up to a general election (High risk)

Some members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which lost the last general election in May 2004, attribute the party's poor performance to its unwillingness to embrace a Hindu nationalist agenda consistent with core BJP beliefs. As a result, hard-liners may feel compelled to adopt more strident policies in support of Hindu nationalist issues. There is already some evidence of this sort of activism: in September 2007 the BJP accused the government of blasphemy for having said that some of Hinduism's most important texts are not proof of the existence of Hindu gods. The issue arose because of a dispute over the dredging of a shipping lane between India and Sri Lanka, which Hindu devotees believe was built by a Hindu god. The issue led to demonstrations and riots in several major cities. In elections in the state of Gujarat in December 2007, Narendra Modi, who has been accused of complicity in the killing of thousands of **Muslims** in 2002, was re-elected as the state's chief minister. Businesses should closely monitor statements from Hindu nationalist leaders, especially at the state level, with an eye towards inflammatory comments that could stoke new tensions ('India risk: Security risk' 2008, *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 3 April – Attachment 1).

An April 2008 article on the recent arrests of members of the Student's Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) notes concerns that intelligence agencies in Maharashtra are perhaps at risk of stereotyping the Muslim community by constantly linking it with terror. The article states:

These men point to a larger army of young cadre. The police have repeatedly stumbled upon them in areas of Mumbai with big **Muslim** populations time and again, raising concerns that our intelligence agencies are perhaps at the risk of stereotyping a community by constantly linking it with terror.

Ansari, a Unani doctor, one of the accused in the train blasts used to work out of SIMI office situated in central Mumbai.

Ehtesham Siddiqui used to assemble all the train bombs and hold meetings with his men in a building in Mira road, just outside the city. And in SIMI's Malegaon office Shabbir

Batterywalla became a convert. He used to run a shop till two years ago in Malegaon. He neither looked like a bomber nor had any record in crime. Though he was a member of SIMI before it was banned.

“In my view SIMI activist are good human being. They don’t look like terrorist to me,” said Jamil Sheikh, Shabbir Batterwala’s brother.

In 2002 when Gujarat riots happened, the **Muslim** community was hurt and angry and seething for justice. Thus, it became easy for the SIMI to find new supporters.

So despite the ban they continued to grow. And in one terror case after the other, **Muslim** young men from Malegaon were being arrested.

“The youth are provoked in the name of religion and they fall prey to SIMI ideology. If we look at the history of these SIMI activists, they are from decent backgrounds,” said Sanjay Patil, Additional DSP, Malegaon.

The police say it is in the small townships and mohallas the hydra-headed scheme of the SIMI plays out. There are 50,000 members in SIMI and 5,000 of them are leaders like Siddiqui and Batterwala, who are easily replaced (Rajput, R. 2008, ‘SIMI arrests: Maharashtra connection’, *NDTV*, 1 April – Attachment 2).

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has recently accused the Central government of not confronting “Hindutva forces”. The unwillingness to punish those guilty of complicity in communal violence is observed in a 1 April 2008 article. The article also states:

The resolution conveyed displeasure over the Maharashtra government not punishing those held guilty by the Sri Krishna Commission in the 1992 and 1993 riots. Many of those held guilty were police officers and leaders of the Shiv Sena and the BJP (Prasad, K. 2008, ‘Centre unable to confront Hindutva forces; *The Hindu*, 1 April
<http://www.hindu.com/2008/04/01/stories/2008040155561000.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 15).

A January 2007 letter in the Indian Muslim newspaper, *Milli Gazette*, draws attention to the fact that Maharashtra police and media tend to associate arrested Muslims with terrorism, whilst not viewing arrested Hindus in the same light even if they have been engaged in the same activities. A number of reports also allege that the MCOCA is only applied to Muslims (‘Indifferent attitude of Mumbai police towards Muslims’ 2007, *Milli Gazette*, 26 January
<http://www.milligazette.com/IndMusStat/2007a/011-mumbai-muslims-police.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 16).

A March 2008 article reports on an appeal from an India Muslim body to national leaders to “restrain the police from going public with unsubstantiated claims about the involvement of Muslims in each and every act of terror in the country”. The article states:

The All-India Milli Council has appealed to the UPA [United Progressive Alliance, ruling coalition] leader, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Union [Federal] Home Minister Shivraj Patil to restrain the police from going public with unsubstantiated claims about the involvement of **Muslims** in each and every act of terror in the country.

The council secretary-general, Mohammed Manzoor Alam, said that each time a bomb explosion occurs somewhere the police and intelligence agencies suspect the involvement of a

Muslim organization or somebody from the **Muslim** community. This is done even before an enquiry begins, he added.

Moreover, according to Mr Alam, this is something that has been going on for years even though such claims have turned out to be false in several cases.

To back its statement, the council has cited some instances of such false claims made by the police.

In the Chhittisingpora massacre [Indian-administered Kashmir], the involvement of **Muslims** was suspected, said Mr Alam. Later, however, it turned out that **Muslims** were not involved in the Chhittisingpora killings.

Again, in the Mecca Masjid blast in Hyderabad [Andhra Pradesh state, southern India] last year, the police arrested **Muslim** youth and alleged the involvement of **Muslim** organizations, said Mr Alam.

The same pattern has been repeated by it in the Ajmer dargah [shrine, Rajasthan state, northwest India] blast or the one at the Jama Masjid in Malegaon [**Maharashtra** state, western India], the council has said.

It is difficult to understand why a **Muslim** organization would bomb a mosque, remarked Mr Alam ('India Muslim body criticizes "unsubstantiated" police statements on terror' 2008, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, source: The Asian Age website, 9 March – Attachment 4).

The communal riots in early 2008 against "northern Indians" or "non-Maharashtras" in Mumbai also indicates, according to media reports, that local state politicians, especially Shiv Sena, continue to engage in divisive politicking and that communal violence is easily stirred. Shiv Sena is well-known for inciting Hindu-Muslim violence and leaders have also recently been again focused on Muslims, after a number of arrests of Islamic student organisation members were made in relation to the 2006 Mumbai train bombing. A February 2008 article cites a Shiv Sena editorial calling for Hindus to unite to save the nation from Islamic aggression and "threats" (Aklekar, R. 2008, 'Thackeray focus on Hindu unity', *Hindustan Times*, 8 February – Attachment 17).

An October 2007 article reports that a large police presence was deployed near Thane to ensure security as Hindus and Muslims celebrated respective festivals at the same time. According to this information, the events passed peacefully ('Navaratri, Eid celebrated "side by side" in Kalyan town' 2007, *Newindpress.com*, 15 October <http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEP20071014093715&Page=P&Headline=Navaratri%2C+Eid+celebrated+'side+by+side'+in+Kalyan+town&Title=Nation&Topic=0> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 18).

A March 2008 article reports on lack of action by Maharashtra police in a case involving a Muslim girl. The judge is reported as saying that he hears of at least 10-15 cases a day where police have not taken the necessary action. The article states:

Irked over the police's failure to register an offence of harassment over dowry on a three-month old complaint, Justice S B Mhase and Justice V K Tahilramani came down heavily on the police.

Unhappy with the state of affairs, Justice Mhase said that “There are innumerable petitions before the court owing to police inaction”.

“Everyday, we hear at least 10-15 cases where police have not taken the necessary action,” Justice Mhase added (‘Court raps police for inaction on dowry complaint’ 2008, *The Indian Express*, 26 March <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Court-raps-police-for-inaction-on-dowry-complaint/288493/> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 19).

Other

In February 2008 Khwaja Hasan Gafoor became the first Muslim police commissioner of Mumbai since the 1960s. A March 2008 article includes an interview with the new police chief regarding the “growing threat of terrorism in Mumbai” in which he emphasises that terrorists come from all communities and not just the Muslim community. He also discusses improving the police force in Mumbai. It may be significant that Gafoor is an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, appointed by the Central Government (‘Mumbai gets new top cops’ 2008, *The Times of India*, 1 March – Attachment 7; Kolhatkar, N. 2008, ‘I will not let pressures come in the way of good policing’, *DNA Sunday*, 2 March – Attachment 20).

For background information on the IPS and Muslim police nationally, see *Research Response IND32431*, dated 8 October 2007 (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32431*, 8 October – Attachment 21).

Previous research response *IND31476* also notes the regular press reports of Maharashtra police involvement in extortion practices. A quick search of the available media sources currently indicates that this has not changed, with a number of recent media articles reporting examples of Maharashtra police corruption and/or incompetence (for example, see: Janwalker, M. 2008, ‘HC hauls up “insensitive” Thane police’, *DNA*, 19 March <http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1156819> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 22; ‘Maharashtra to probe “encounter fame” cop for graft’ 2008, *Thainidian News*, 10 April http://www.thainidian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/maharashtra-to-probe-encounter-fame-cop-for-graft_10036267.html – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 23).

A February 2008 article reports on the lack of law and order in Mumbai, citing criticisms that a Shiv Sena splinter group was triggering violence against northern Indians in Mumbai whilst the government took no action against the perpetrators (‘There is no law and order in Mumbai: Amar Singh’ 2008, *Rediff.com*, 5 February <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/feb/05mumbai2.htm> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 24).

In February 2008 it was reported that a local (Congress) politician had been beaten to death in Maharashtra, allegedly by a mob of Shiv Sena supporters. Arrests had been made but no charges had been laid (‘Mob beats political leader to death in western India’ 2008, *Associated Press*, 9 February – Attachment 25).

There have been recent reports of attacks on Christians in Maharashtra by Hindu extremists. *Compass Direct News* reports that 13 people were arrested and later released on bail following a March 2008 attack on two Catholic nuns (Carvalho, N. & Bhatia, S. 2008, ‘India Briefs: Recent Incidents of Persecution’, *Compass Direct News*, March – Attachment 26).

On the 12 January 2008, the All India Muslim Majlis-e Mushawarat (AIMMM) central council included the following in its resolutions:

MMM notes with satisfaction that the Maharashtra state government has decided to establish a cabinet portfolio for Muslim welfare in the state government. This is in the framework of implementing Sachar Committee recommendations in the state. The MMM also welcomes Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh's announcement that the state government would also consider if Muslims could be given reservation in housing societies and residential premises built by the state housing corporation, that the state government would consider to provide jobs to Muslims. MMM believes that such cabinet portfolios should be created in each state government and should be sufficiently empowered to discharge their duties in the implementation of various government schemes for the minorities ('Resolutions of Markazi Majlis, 12 Jan. 2008' 2008, All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat website, 12 January <http://www.mushawarat.com/news.asp?id=503> – Accessed 10 April 2008 – Attachment 27).

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RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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