



Parsis gathered at the memorial column in Sanjan

Conversion issue mars Sanjan Day celebrations

Manoj R Nair

The issue of religious conversions raging in the Parsi-Zoroastrian community almost stalled the annual Sanjan Day celebrations that commemorate their arrival from Persia about 1,300 years ago.

Over a thousand Parsis had gathered on Thursday in Sanjan village on the Gujarat-Maharashtra border. The function was held around the memorial column built to mark the spot. Many had travelled from Mumbai.

Apart from members of the local Parsi community, the guests included high priests, Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) trustees and DB Vaghela, the Valsad superintendent of police.

According to those present, one of the guest speakers, a prominent businessman from Ahmedabad, criticised community priests for ignoring conversions to Zoroastrianism. He is reported to have said that new converts were entering the community's fire temples, including their most important shrine at Udwarda, 30 km from Sanjan.

Dastur Khurshid Dastur, the high priest of Udwarda where the holy fire brought by the Persian immigrants is enshrined, protested the statement. "He said that the high priests and their forefathers had never allowed conversions," said Parvez Wadia, a member of Sanjan's small Parsi community.

Dastur is reported to have

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▶ The function was held in Sanjan village around the memorial column built to mark the spot where the Parsis had landed from Persia about 1,300 years ago

▶ It began around 11.30am with a Jashan or prayers and an entertainment programme by children. It ended around 1pm with the traditional Bhonu or feast

walked down followed by a few other guests. The fracas ended when somebody took the mike away from the businessman. The high priest and other guests were called back before the function ended with a traditional Bhonu or feast.

Conversions to Zoroastrianism is a sensitive topic for Parsis. While some eminent Parsis from Mumbai and Pune have approached the Bombay high court to support two priests who have been banned for conducting the initiation ceremonies of children from mixed parentage, a Russian had recently filed a petition in the high court after he was stopped from becoming a Zoroastrian priest.

BPP chairman Dinshaw Mehta said, "It was an old man in his seventies who made the statement. The issue has been resolved." But local members of the community said they were embarrassed by the incident.

HC breather

Lawyers representing the show argued that t

Mayura Janwalkar, Shabana Ansari & Nitin Kumar

A day after the information and broadcasting (I&B) ministry asked two reality shows, *Bigg Boss* and *Rakhi Ka Insaaf*, to be moved to late-night slots, Viacom18 Media Private Limited that airs the former programme on Colors moved the Bombay high court against the order and obtained a stay on the operation of the order till November 22.

The reality show that recently featured Hollywood actress Pamela Anderson will continue to be on air at 9 pm till the court's further orders.

Viacom18's counsels Aspi Chinoy and Ameet Naik told the court that there is nothing obscene in the show and it is in accordance with the ministry's guidelines. In its order, the ministry had said that the show can be aired between 11 pm and 5 am and that even promotional clips should not be aired beyond these hours. The ministry felt that the show was not suitable for viewing by children.

Chinoy argued that the ministry had not pointed out a single incident which they found objectionable. "They ask us to modify content without saying

what needs to be modified," he said. He added that the show, running in its fourth season, has been on air since October 3 in the prime-time slot.

He further argued that the order was passed by the ministry without giving the channel any time to respond. "There should at least be a 24-hour or 48-hour notice before issuing such an order. My (Viacom18) advertising commitments will fail and lead to civil consequences," Chinoy said.

Justices DK Deshmukh and ND Deshpande said they found prima facie substance in the submissions made on behalf of Viacom18. Issuing notice to the ministry, the court said it would dispose of the matter finally on November 22. "Will you assure it (*Bigg Boss*) is of good taste and decency?" Justice Deshpande asked. "We will not change the time then."

The channel on Wednesday defied the ministry by broadcasting the show. "We did not receive the ministry's notice on Wednesday, perhaps because it was a holiday. That's why we went ahead with the telecast of the show at its usual time," a Colors spokesperson said on condition of anonymity. Sources reveal that the channel has been pulled by the ministry and string

Police building v

Divyesh Singh & Menaka Rao

The case against dismissed senior police inspector Arun Borude, who is accused of raping a 15-year-old girl, will now be made watertight.

The Andheri magistrate has granted permission to the police to record the judicial statement of the victim and the key accused, Shantabai Gaikwad.

Unlike a police statement which is not admissible in court unless the witness recounts the statement before court, a judicial statement under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code is admissible

before the court unless pro involuntary.

"The 164 statement of witness is taken before magistrate on oath. It is considered authentic. A 164 statement of the accused on the other hand is as good as a confession. This confession, however, needs corroboration," senior public prosecutor Hini Salian.

The police in its return application filed before Mazgaon magistrate dated November 15 said they had sought permission to record the two statements from the Andheri Ra Mobile court and was added to them.