

# Prez Pranab hails Parsi community

AT THE WORLD ZOROASTRIAN CONGRESS Praises contribution to country, says falling population needs to be checked

sidelights



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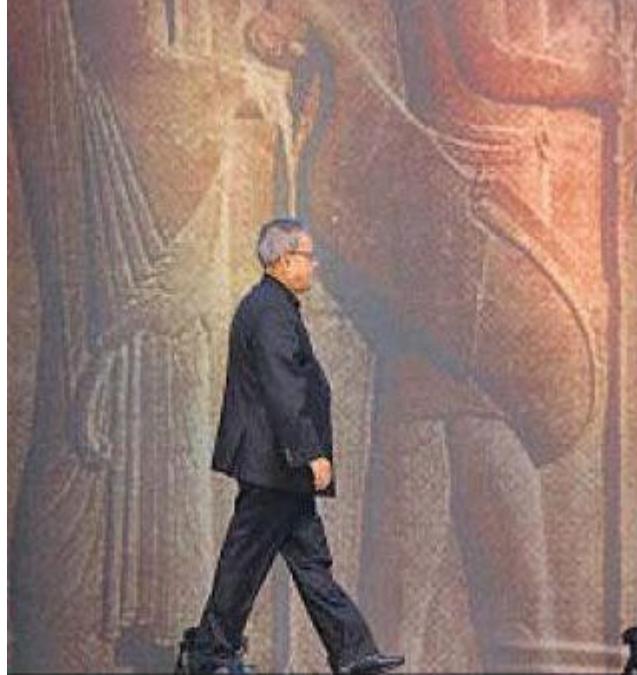
MUMBAI: President Pranab Mukherjee called on the Parsi Zoroastrian community to address its demographic crisis 'pragmatically and sensitively' while inaugurating the 10th World Zoroastrian Congress the global meet of the community on Friday. It was the first time that the head of the state attended the Parsi conference, which is being held in India after 23 years.

Praising the community for its contributions to the country and to Mumbai, Mukherjee said, "In Mumbai, it was the Parsi community that laid the

foundations of industry and the commercial and financial structure that characterise this vibrant city."

He also lauded the community for its philanthropy.

"With a noble philosophy that wealth should be used for advancing society, Parsi business houses have been at the forefront of building institutions of science, medicine and culture and have also led our corporate sector in philanthropy".



President Pranab Mukherjee at the World Zoroastrian Congress being held at the National Sports Club of India, Worli.

ANSHUMAN HORSHAM/ HT

On the most pressing problem the community is battling - its dwindling numbers - Mukherjee said. "There are less than 1.4 lakh followers of Zoroastrianism and one-third are aged above 60.

The government of India, in its 12th five-year plan envisages several measures to protect and promote the interests of the minorities. The Jiyo Parsi programme is bound to achieve results."

Mukherjee expressed hope for the community's future. "I am certain the Congress will back in good initiatives that will ensure the community grows in numbers."

Also present at the four-day event, being held at the National Sports Club of India, Worli, were governor K Sankaranarayanan and state rural development minister Jayant Patil.



President of India, Hon. Pranab Mukherjee is seen greeting Dr. Cyrus Poonawalla, Chairman, 10th World Congress in Mumbai on Friday, 27th December 2013.

## Community fighting to preserve its identity

MUMBAI: The global Parsi Zoroastrian identity was the hot topic of discussion on the first day of the World Zoroastrian Congress. At a panel discussion titled 'Affirming the Global Parsi Iranian Zoroastrian identity', community representatives from across the world agreed that Zoroastrians are facing an identity crisis, and presented solutions.

Rohinton Rivetna, who heads

The North American Zoroastrian Association, said the community was "halfway to dismantling the identity established by our forefathers." "Our linguistic bonds have to be reinforced, we are indistinguishable when it comes to sartorial identity, and even personal names aren't reliable identifiers."

Ketayun Kapadia, from the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America

(FEZANA) said, "Our religion is the only uniting factor in our diversity, but due to different cultures and environments across the world, even the rituals and practices differ." She recommended religious education within the community as a means to reinforce the Zoroastrian identity.

Dinshaw Mehta, chairman of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet,

said the most vital tool for bringing the community together was community housing. "The Bombay Parsi Panchayet has 4,500 flats across the city and more than 25,000 Parsis are part of this," said Mehta.

Ma I c o l m D e b o o, from the Zoroastrian Trust Fund of Europe, urged that the Zoroastrian identity be affirmed through exhibitions about the community's history and culture.

Moving away from restrictive community norms was the need of the hour, said Sarosh Bharucha, who heads the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario in Canada. "We do not

excommunicate our women marrying outside the community. We perform navjote ceremonies even for adopted children," he said.

Esfandiar Ekhtiyari, representative from the Iranian Majlis, urged the community to go back to their Iranian roots. "We should be proud of Iran, as that is where our identity comes from," he said.

