

QUARTERLY

Vol: 03 Issue: 01

Jan-Mar 2015

MINO-VIEW LAHORE

Voice of minorities and oppressed people in South Asian societies



Minority Communities Want **Modi's** Word on Religious Freedom to be Converted into Action

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Students Act as
Human Shield For
Hindus Celebrating
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Produced by: Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation, Lahore

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EDITORIAL

Religious conversion has been a passionate topic debate in India for many years. After Modi's BJP party coming into power there were fears over the future of religious minorities in the country. Modi is accused of deadly anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002 when he was CM. Last year on December in Agra it is alleged that local Hindus employed fraud by not telling people about conversion and offered inducement by promising ration cards and other basic amenities of life if they attend the event. During rituals they were made to do according to Hindu priest. After rituals they were declared Hindus which they call 'GHAR WAPSI'. One such movement is *Ghar Wapsi* or Home coming, a scheme of the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha, in which those who were converted to Christianity or Islam are welcomed back into the Hindu community after some ceremonies of purification. This is often done under pressure by the RSS and related organizations though it is claimed that the reconversion is voluntary. In this movement, Muslim but mostly Christians are targeted. RSS claims that the conversion of Hindus, especially lower castes, was enforced, that they were bribed to become Christians. When *Ghar Wapsi* is opposed, the RSS demands a debate on conversion. By that they mean conversions by the Christians, and the implication is that those are forced and should be banned. The controversial issues related with religion and Modi government's silence over it is also seen as one of the reasons of debacle in Delhi elections, where BJP had to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of AAP party. Modi who was criticized for his silence on this issue of *ghar wapsi* or

reconversion of non-Hindus. Modi recently made it clear that his government promotes the idea of religious freedom in the country. After the issue *ghar wapsi* many cases of alleged vandalism of churches took place. Minority communities want PM Modi's words on religious freedom to be converted into action. Hundreds of Dalit women gathered at conference in Nepal, organized by sensitive government political parties, civil society and related stakeholders on Dalit women rights issue. The major themes discussed were the status violence against Dalit women, inclusion of Dalit women issues in the new constitution and challenges women face from local to national level. The current issue of *Mino-View* also includes Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International raise serious concern over caste discrimination, Taliban attack on Lahore church, a resolution against Anti Dalit Atrocities introduced in US House, New president of Sri Lanka brought a new wave of hope for minorities; Pak Students act as human shield for Hindus celebrating Holi. The present issue of *Mino-View* is a little attempt to promote justice and equality for the peace and stability of the region. It will act as a mirror reflector reflecting the issues related to the identified minorities and other oppressed classes in the region. It will throw light on the darkest issues of our social system by voicing the concerns of minorities, Dalits and other oppressed sections of the SA societies. We will welcome feedback from our respected readers and concerned quarter. We invite social forces from all over the region to join hands for adopting a way towards egalitarianism.

EDITOR

PAKISTAN

15 killed in Taliban Attack on Lahore Churches

At least 15 people were killed and more than 70 injured when two Taliban suicide bombers attacked churches in Lahore on Sunday, sparking mob violence in which two other suspected militants died.

The bombings occurred during prayers at two churches located around half a kilometer apart in the city's Youhanabad neighborhood that is home to more than 100,000 Christians, officials said.

Broken window panes, blood and shoes were scattered across the blast sites. Police spokeswoman Nabila Ghazanfar said two policemen guarding the churches were among those killed in the attacks, while two people were beaten to death by protesters who took to the streets after the blasts.

"Policemen on duty at both the entrances tried to stop them but the bombers blew themselves up," she told AFP.



The angry mob protesting after the blast beat to death two people whom they suspected of being associates of the attackers. An AFP photographer saw the bodies of the two suspected militants on fire after the beatings. It was not clear whether they were still alive at the time.

Up to 4,000 Christians later spread across the city's streets; many were armed with clubs as they smashed vehicles and attacked a Metro bus station in a rare show of anger by the beleaguered minority.

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction claimed responsibility for the attack.

Rising anger

The thousands of Christian protesters who clashed with police on Sunday attacked their cars with stones and sticks, as women wept and beat their heads and chests.

The protesters, some wearing crosses round their necks, later turned on the city's bus rapid transit system -- a signature

project of the ruling PML-N party of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Christians make up around two percent of Pakistan's mainly Muslim population of 180 million. They have been targeted in attacks and riots in recent years, often over allegations of blasphemy.

Attacks were the worst on the community since a devastating 2013 double suicide-bombing in Peshawar that killed 82 people. That attack came months after more than 3,000 protesters torched some 100 houses as they rampaged through Joseph Colony, another Christian neighborhood of Lahore, following blasphemy allegations against a Christian man.



Sharif in a statement condemned the church bombings and "directed provincial governments to ensure the

security of (the) public and their properties”.

Zaeem Qadri, a spokesman for the provincial government, said efforts were being made to talk to the protesters to stop the rioting but “emotions are very high because their churches have been attacked”.

Christians also took to the streets in other cities, including Karachi, where around 200

protesters blocked a main road and burnt tyres. There were also demonstrations in Peshawar in the northwest, in the central city of Multan and in Quetta in the southwest.

Sunday's attack was the first by the Taliban since three of their major factions said on Thursday they had reunited.

The military has stepped up its fight against militants since

Taliban gunmen massacred more than 150 people, most of them children, at a school in Peshawar in December. A moratorium on executions in terror cases was lifted and the constitution amended to set up military courts for the speedy trial of terrorism cases. Later, the death penalty was reinstated for all capital cases.

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Source: Dawn News

INDIA

Minority Communities Want PM Modi's Words on Religious Freedom to be Converted into Action

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in clear-cut words has warned majority as well as minority communities living the country that in no way his government would tolerate any religious intolerance.

Modi who had been continuously criticised for his silence on the issues such as Ghar Wapasi or the re-conversion of non-Hindus, recently made it clear that his government promotes the idea of religious freedom in the country and nobody would be allowed to disturb the atmosphere of peace.

After the issue of Ghar Wapasi, certain cases of alleged vandalism of churches in Delhi under the nose of BJP government, PM Modi came under attack with opposition accusing the government of failing to provide a safe and secure environment to the Christian and Muslim community.



The controversial issues related with religion and Modi government's silence over it is also seen as one of the reasons of debacle in Delhi elections, where BJP had to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of Arvind Kejriwal's AAP.

It seems Modi was waiting for an opportune time to respond to his critics. And that opportune time came when he participated in a function to celebrate the elevation to sainthood of two great saints of Kerala - Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Saint Euphresia, in New Delhi.

In this function Modi made it clear that his government would ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence.

Christian community that has started feeling a bit panicky post some incidents of alleged vandalism of

churches feels that whatever Modi said in his speech, it's time now to convert them into action as until and unless they don't see things happening on the ground, the assurances would be only theory.

Reacting to the assurance of Narendra Modi, **Sister Cleopatra, Director, St. Euphrasia Center**, said, "Probably he (PM Modi) understood that it is the time (function to celebrate the elevation

to sainthood in New Delhi) and he should have used it, or else it will be waste. So he took that occasion. It's only his speech, now we have to wait for his action, since he did not do any active work or did not take any action when the churches were destroyed."

Narendra Modi said that his government would not allow any religious group, belonging either to the majority or the minority to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly. He had said, "Mine will be a government that gives equal respect to all religions."

Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali, a well-known Sunni cleric and a member of All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), while responding to Modi's words that nobody will be allowed to incite hatred on religious grounds, echoed

Muslim community would wait for the words to be converted into action. Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali

similar sentiments as of Sister Cleopatra. He said that the Muslim community would wait for the words to be converted into action.

"The statement of Prime Minister regarding communal harmony, I think it's just his statement.



Authorities should first take action against those people who had attacked various churches especially in the national capital and the concerned people should also take action against those political leaders who are continuously giving such statements which hurt the religious sentiments of the Muslim community. Then I think that this statement can be taken in a positive manner," said Mahali.

Modi had said that India was the land of Lord Buddha and Gandhi. Equal respect for all religions must be in the DNA of every Indian. He had said that his government cannot accept violence against any religion on any pretext and a strong action will be taken against accused.

Are the assurances given by PM Modi enough to make minorities in India feel safe and secure?

Gomati Bodra, Assistant Professor at Department of

Social Science at Jamia Millia Islamia said mere a statement is not enough. Indicating towards some past provocative statements by BJP MPs, party members, she said that first of all these leaders need to be changed to make minorities feel safe and secure.

Gomati Bodra said, "Actually the type of image which the Prime Minister and the overall party (BJP) has projected, it shows that they strongly support RSS ideology, which is reflected by the type of ministers which are there in the cabinet.

So, the statement cannot be taken as an assurance until and unless work has been done, the structural aspect has to be taken into account.

When we talk about inclusivity in the society, and looking at the actual evidence of Churches being attacked and communal tensions and the type of statement which is coming from the cabinet ministry. And how they want to follow the Hindutva politics ideology and making it a Hindu nation.

It is a proactive thing which is perpetual. It is like a process going on and on, until and unless changes have been brought up at structural level. One political statement doesn't make the minority in this country to feel very safe.

One has to see that there is a link between the theory and the actual action."

PM Modi had appealed to all religious groups to act with restraint, mutual respect, and tolerance in the true spirit of ancient nation India which is manifest in the country's

Constitution and is in line with the Hague Declaration.

He had said that he had a vision of a Modern India. "I have embarked on a huge mission to convert that vision into reality. My mantra is Development - Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwa," said PM Modi. Has the Delhi debacle forced the PM to make such statement and what will be the political gain for BJP, post these assurances by Narendra Modi?

Dr. Pradip K Dutta, a Political Science professor

at Delhi University agrees with this perception. He said that a huge loss in Delhi elections has forced PM to break his silence and address the people of the country on the subject of religious freedom.

Dr. Dutta said, "It's certainly the Delhi debacle that is behind it reinforced by President Obama's caution.

It will certainly weaken his popularity amongst the Hindus, within the radical and within the RSS. But it may neutralize a bit of the anger, building up against

Modi for not doing anything to help the minority. The general anti-minority drive that is going on in the whole country, to that extent it will help to neutralize for some extent. But, there has to be more than just statements you know. And it has to be for all minorities not just Christians. Focus seems to be on Christians for some reason, but it should be for all minorities, and it is the Muslim minority which gets the most affected."

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Source:

INTERNATIONAL

Resolution Against Anti-Dalit Atrocities Introduced In U.S. House

The first Global Conference on Defending Dalit Rights kicks off with a spirited discussion steps away from Capitol Hill and a plan to march to the White House over the weekend.

Even as the Dalit community continues to face oppression in parts of India, a major conference aimed at defending Dalit rights worldwide kicked off in the U.S. capital which included a spirited discussion steps away from Capitol Hill and a plan to march to the White House over the weekend and set up a human chain of solidarity and dignity there.

The same week that the first Global Conference on Defending Dalit Rights took place, a key resolution was introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives “Condemning Dalit

untouchability, the practice of birth-descent discrimination against Dalit people, which is widely practiced in India, Nepal, the Asian diaspora, and other South Asian nations, and calling on these countries to recognise the human rights of the Dalit people and end all forms of untouchability within their borders.”

The resolution, H.Res.158, noted that discrimination against the Dalits existed for more than 2,000 years in India and included educational discrimination, economic disenfranchisement, discrimination in medical care, and increased vulnerability to poverty, hunger, violence, rape, and humiliation.

Lawmakers including resolution sponsor Democratic Congresswoman Eleanor Norton cited reports of rights group Human Rights Watch and other

surveys which argued that Dalits were among the poorest of the poor, living on less than \$1.25 per day, that most of India’s bonded labourers were Dalits, and a large proportion of India’s Dalit children were undernourished, severely underweight, and faced relatively higher rates of child mortality.

The harsh realities of the Dalit community in India were also the focus of attendees and speakers and the global conference, who came from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Malaysia, Japan, France, and almost all 50 states of the U.S.



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One of them, Dalit rights activist and Robert Rauschenberg Fellow Thenmozhi Soundararajan that

“The movement is poised for a tremendous growth. In no other time in History have Dalits been so unified to ending this violence in our lifetime.

With our leadership and the support of civic and intergovernmental allies we feel now that our only obstacle is the obstruction of the Indian government itself in implementing the constitutional protections and laws that were



written to ensure human rights for all. Until this happens, we will in Dr. Ambedkar's words, Educate, Agitate, and Organize until caste and caste discrimination is annihilated.”

The global conference being held in Washington is organised around five themes: international mechanisms and the obligation to end discrimination, violence, and inequality; best practices and challenges; empowering Dalit civil society; legislative approaches to ending caste, work, and descent-based discrimination; universal measurement and advocacy framework including the caste freedom index; and gender equality and the power of Dalit women.

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Source: The Hindu

NEPAL

Kidnapped at 13: Nepal's Dalit child Brides



On a freezing night three years ago, 13-year-old Susmita Kami sneaked out of her husband's house and didn't stop running until she reached her parent's doorstep in Nepal's remote northwest.

Her escape from a forced marriage — a tradition many teenage girls from the Himalayan nation's Dalit community are expected to uphold — was soon under threat.

But Susmita's parents resisted demands from her in-laws to send her back, deciding to stand by their pleading daughter who desperately wanted a better life.

"I told them I never wanted to get married and I wasn't going back. I ran away because I want

I wanted to stay in school," Susmita, now 16, told AFP. Although Nepal banned child marriage in 1963, four out of ten girls are married before they turn 18, according to UNICEF.

The figures are even higher among the country's impoverished Dalits or "untouchables" who live in remote communities shunned by the mainstream, meaning their customs go largely unchallenged.

Three out of four Dalits marry during their teens or earlier, according to a 2012 survey by Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision. Girls are often abducted by prospective grooms in a cultural practice few families object to.

Susmita was kidnapped while collecting firewood, and forcibly married four days later — an ordeal also endured by her mother, Jadane Kami, when she was a teenager.

"This is our culture. People worry that otherwise our girls will elope or marry into other communities," said Kami, who initially did not oppose her daughter's forced marriage.

The tradition has survived a ten-year civil war, the end of royal rule and Nepal's transition to democratic politics.

In Simikot, headquarters of remote Humla district that borders the Tibetan plateau, Dalits live in segregated settlements.

Their hay-topped homes stand in stark contrast to

the shiny tin roofs of houses belonging to higher-caste Hindus and Buddhists.

"Dalits have struggled due to their low caste status. For centuries, they were not allowed to mix with others at all," Humla's deputy district



Three out of four Dalits marry during their teens or earlier, according to a 2012 survey by Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision

chief, Bam Bahadur KC, told AFP.

"Naturally, this has left them very isolated, they are still following old customs and change has been slow to come," he said.



Dalit families also labour under huge financial strain, officials say, with

children pushed to leave school and start work while their parents eke out a living as subsistence farmers.

The oldest of seven children, Dana Sunar, now 18, had been the last Dalit girl in her class. While the others had dropped out, Sunar dreamed of graduating and becoming a schoolteacher.

But she was taken at 14 and forced to marry an 18-year-old farmer earning \$50 a month.

"I cried and cried. It was like a door had closed before me, any dreams I had were gone," Sunar said.

Her in-laws pressured her to drop out of school and focus on farming and housework. Now a mother to six-month-old twins, Sunar described her new life as "a daily struggle".

"We never have enough money – sometimes we eat only once a day. I don't know how I am going to bring up these children," she said. Experts say the consequences of marrying so young are devastating.

"Adolescents have children early, they are unable to focus on education...and both mothers and babies end up with health problems," said Kunga Sanduk Lama, a government official who works on child rights.

Laws are ineffective, he said, citing a lack of evidence — documents, photos or witness testimonies — needed to prove a marriage occurred so punitive action can be pursued.

Instead, campaigners focus on raising awareness through radio shows, street plays and after-school clubs for children.



Those who have fallen victim to the tradition need no convincing. Susmita, now in ninth grade, said she wanted to see an end to "this terrible custom".

Her father, a cobbler who earns \$80 a month, said sending her to school was a struggle. The cost of her uniform alone is a staggering \$45. But for now, her family will do whatever they can to keep her in class.

"I want my daughter to have a chance to stand on her own feet," her mother said.

"I think she did the right thing by running away. She is braver than me — I never felt like I had a choice in the matter."

Source: *The Tribune*

INDIA

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International's 2015 Reports Raise Serious Concern over Caste Discrimination

The newly released Human Rights Watch World Report 2015 and the Amnesty International 2014-15 report find that caste discrimination persists with adverse effects to human rights on multiple levels. Serious obstacles to access to justice, discrimination in education and access to services and caste-based violence, including rape of Dalit women, are among the key themes addressed in the reports. These concerns are also noted in the latest India and Nepal reports of the US State Department.



Approximately 250,000 children and women are forced into armed service.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Failure of state authorities to protect the rights of Dalits

In the India chapter of the Amnesty International 2014-15 report it is noted that “corruption, caste-based discrimination and caste

violence remained pervasive,” and that,

State authorities often failed to prevent and at times committed crimes against Indian citizens, including children, women, Dalits and Adivasi (Indigenous) people.” Amnesty International

The report also finds that

“torture and other ill-treatment continued to be used in state detention, particularly against women, Dalits and Adivasis.” Amnesty International

This concern is also raised in the Nepal chapter where it is noted that caste and other discrimination remained rife in Nepal and that, “victims were subject to exclusion and ill-treatment, and torture including rape and other sexual violence.”

It was furthermore found that, “the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Act of 2011, was applied in only a

handful of criminal cases due to a lack of awareness about the Act and victims’ fears of reporting attacks. Rape laws continued to be inadequate and to reflect discriminatory attitudes towards women.”

Human Rights Watch in their India chapter similarly note that several court cases in 2014 had served to highlight,

“The difficulties the Dalit community has in obtaining justice and “the failure of prosecutorial authorities.” The report also underscores this argument with the persistence of the practice of manual scavenging – the cleaning by hand of human waste by Dalits – despite laws banning it and a Supreme Court verdict in 2014 that India’s constitution requires state intervention to end the practice.

This reports also echo the latest country human rights report



from the US State Department (their 2014 reports has not yet been released). In its India report the State Department writes,

“Although the law protects Dalits, they faced violence and significant discrimination in access to services, such as health care, education, temple attendance, and marriage.

Many Dalits were malnourished. Most bonded labourers were Dalits. Dalits who asserted their rights often were attacked, especially in rural areas. As agricultural laborers for higher-caste landowners, Dalits often worked without remuneration. Reports from the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination described systematic abuse of Dalits, including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence against Dalit women. Crimes committed by upper-caste Hindus against Dalits often went unpunished, either because authorities failed to prosecute perpetrators or because victims did not report crimes due to fear of retaliation.” *US State Department*

The State Department report also gives several case examples and in the Nepal country report similarly writes, “despite passage of the Caste Discrimination and Untouchability Act in 2011, a rigid caste system continued to operate throughout the country in many areas of religious, professional, and daily life.

Societal discrimination against lower castes, women, and persons with disabilities remained common, especially in rural areas...”

Rape and violence against Dalit women

All three reports highlight rape and violence against Dalit women. The Amnesty International report states that,

“[in Nepal] Women from marginalized groups, including Dalits and impoverished women, continued to face particular hardship because of multiple forms of discrimination. In India, Dalit



women and girls continued to face multiple levels of caste-based discrimination and violence.” *Amnesty International*

The US State Department report notes that,

National crime statistics indicated that, compared with other caste affiliations, rape was most highly reported among Dalit women,” and that “Lack of law enforcement safeguards and pervasive corruption limited the effectiveness of the law.” *US State Department*

“Concern is also raised over bonded-labour practices directly affecting Dalit women.

Bonded labour, child labour and obstacles to education for Dalit children

The Human Rights Watch report highlights the practice of manual scavenging and US State Department highlights the Sumangali scheme in the South Indian textile industry,

“During their years of bonded labour, the women were subjected to serious workplace abuses, severe restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and death. The majority of sumangali-bonded laborers came from the SCs [scheduled castes – Dalits] ... most sumangali workers did not report abuses due to fear of retribution.” *Human Rights Watch*

Bonded labour of Dalit children and discrimination against them was also found to severely impede their possibilities for staying in school.

Echoing findings from their 2014 report “They say we’re dirty”, on education in India, the report also states that,

“millions of children, particularly from vulnerable Dalit, tribal, and Muslim communities, facing

discrimination, inadequate support in government schools, and pressures to earn money,

National crime statistics indicated that, compared with other caste affiliations, rape was most highly reported among Dalit women,” and that “Lack of law enforcement safeguards and pervasive corruption limited the effectiveness of the law.” *US State Department*

soon drop out and start working.” *Human Rights Watch*

The Amnesty International Report also states that schemes to ensure education for disadvantaged families in India were “poorly implemented” and that “Dalit and Adivasi children continued to face discrimination in school.” In relation to access to education the US State Department

referred to NGO reports stating that, “During the year there were reports that school officials barred Dalit children from morning prayers, asked Dalit children to sit at the back of the class, or forced Dalit children to clean school toilets while denying them access to the same facilities. There were also reports that teachers refused to correct the homework of Dalit children, refused to provide

mid day meals to Dalit children, and asked Dalit children to sit separately from children of upper-caste families.” *US State Department*

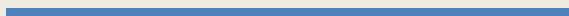
Source: Amnesty International 2014-15 report – caste extracts

Human Rights Watch 2015 World Report – caste extracts

US State Department 2013 Human Rights Report on India – caste extracts

US State Department 2013 Human Rights Report on Nepal – caste extracts

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SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka: Hope for Minorities?

By *Neha Sinha*



A new president, Maithripala Sirisena, has brought a new wave of hope to Sri Lanka, yet it is still a moment of somewhat tempered optimism for the minorities who constitute almost 30 percent of the population of this post-conflict country. Sirisena, with his election motto of “compassionate governance,” is walking a tightrope of balancing different political parties whilst aiming to fulfill several ambitious objectives, which include addressing war-crimes allegations through an independent domestic mechanism, establishing independent commissions to secure the impartiality of the judiciary, and cracking down on corruption.

However, the key question remains: Does Sirisena have the political will and capability to actually resolve the fundamental problems that drove the country to almost three decades of civil war?

A History of Violence

The civil war in Sri Lanka has often been read as an inevitable outcome of historically warring “races” or portrayed as a

terrorist problem between an extremist secessionist group and the Sri Lankan state. Both these interpretations are simplistic and misleading. For an understanding of the political history of the conflict, it is useful to start with 1956, when Tamil grievances, related to legislative measures regarding language, admission into institutions of higher education, distribution of agricultural lands, and state employment, led to protests and an escalation in violence.

The Tamils initially tried to address its grievances through political means. However, the introduction of “proportional representation” and the reintroduction of Tamil as an official language by the then United National Party (UNP) government failed to pacify the minority, and instead a feeling of disillusionment and lack of trust in the political leadership grew. Instead of accommodating the legitimate grievances of the Tamils, the government responded by implementing the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979. This was followed by anti-Tamil pogroms in July 1983, which fuelled the civil war. Previous governments

have also been accused of state sponsored “colonization” schemes that effectively changed the demographic balance in the Eastern Province, an area Tamil nationalists considered to be their traditional homeland, in favor of the majority Sinhalese community. Despite several attempts at a peaceful resolution, no political settlement was found and, under the helm of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the civil war came to a violent end in 2009. Since then, the island nation has clung to its political setup of a centralized Sinhala-majoritarian state, one that fails to incorporate the interests and aspirations of minority groups. Moreover, there has been no peace dividend for the minority communities, with high levels of unemployment prevalent in the northern province, especially among youth and women. Approximately 300,000 people were displaced in the war’s final phase and many still remain mired in poverty, without proper housing and under constant military surveillance.

With the new president at helm and parliamentary elections approaching, the Tamils have

demanding greater autonomy in the north and the east. But Sirisena's election manifesto is completely silent on this matter. In fact, Sirisena has clearly stated that he is against giving more autonomy to the Tamils. It is also highly unlikely that he will change his hardline stance, given his unstable coalition with anti-Tamil extremist party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), which has been busy downplaying the role of the Tamil and Muslim communities in the recent elections that helped bring Sirisena to power.

Religious Tensions and Sectarian Violence

Extremist political parties are not the only concern. Religious tensions and sectarian violence have cropped up since the end of the war, with several incidents of violence against the minority communities and destruction of Muslim and Christian places of worship by Buddhist fundamentalists who are allegedly members of Buddhist extremist groups, namely the BBS (Bodu Bala Sena) and Sinhala Ravaya. In the Tamil-dominated north, and in the east, where most of the country's Muslims live, national monuments have been erected to honor Buddhist kings while mosques have been attacked and ransacked.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is given special recognition in the Constitution, which requires Sri Lanka to "protect and foster the Buddha Sasana," where "sasana" implies "rule" or "administration." Despite the constitutional support, insecurities have arisen in the Sinhala community and BBS have played into these insecurities by inciting nationalist sentiment. This

coupled with the silent support from the former government, have created a culture of impunity where minority groups have been attacked without any judicial action taken against the culprits. On the other hand, BBS leaders have repeatedly claimed that minority groups are threatening the nation's Buddhist identity. This kind of xenophobic rhetoric mirrors the "prejudice held by majority of Buddhist population," said Jehan Perera, executive director of the National Peace Council NGO.

This onslaught of violence against Muslims and Christians is not new. Throughout the Tamil movement for self-determination, the Muslim community has been concerned about being politically marginalized in a federal political and administrative framework. Historically, they have been supportive of the Sinhala-Buddhist political system and have been targets of violence by the LTTE throughout the 1990s. On many occasions the LTTE forcibly expelled them from the Northern Province and that expulsion still carries bitter memories amongst the Sri Lanka's Muslims, who are now facing further indignities and attacks.

Peace without Accountability

The violent end to the conflict and defeat of LTTE came on the back of one of the most internationalized peace processes, led by Norway as mediator. However, despite the peace talks, human rights violations continued, including use of the civilian population as human shields, bombing of civilian areas, deliberate assassination of surrendering

soldiers, torture and summary executions. The 2011 Report of the UN Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka states that as many as 40,000 civilians may have died amid government shelling in the final five months of the conflict in 2009.

Under international pressure to address demands of justice and reconciliation, the Rajapaksa government set up several commissions and inquiries, such as the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and the Presidential Commission to Investigate into Complaints Regarding Missing Persons (COI). However, most government led commissions have been plagued with allegations of misrepresentation of facts, limited mandate, alleged lack of independence and failure to meet minimum international standards or offer protection to witnesses. Moreover, no concrete action or punitive measure has been taken against leaders or others responsible for human rights violations.

The Sri Lankan government has repeatedly denied allegations of human rights violations and has rejected calls for international investigations of alleged war crimes carried out by both parties, a stance that remains unchanged with Sirisena heading the new government. Whilst his predecessor had asked the Tamil minority to "forget the past," Sirisena has categorically stated in his manifesto that he will not allow any political leader to be prosecuted for alleged war crimes. Instead he promises to appoint a (yet another) domestic mechanism for accountability. This is hardly surprising, given that he and the former president

Rajapaksha were part of the government during the end of civil war, and if implicated, could face charges for war crimes.

But international cooperation is necessary for Sirisena if he wants to raise the credibility of the Sri Lankan government in the international stage. He could probably begin with allowing visas for the investigating team of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which intends to present a report in March this year about the abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the civil war. Unfortunately, Human Rights Council has no stringent implementing power, since it reports directly to the General Assembly, rather than the Security Council. It lacks the enforcement powers to ensure compliance with its resolutions and is unable to effectively protect human rights where a state is not willing to cooperate. Moreover, in case of Sri Lanka, both China and Russia have so far been reluctant regarding implementing sanctions against Sri Lanka or to refer its case to the International Criminal Court.

Right Moves?

Sri Lanka's recent presidential polls were definitely a negative vote for Mahinda Rajapaksa's repressive regime, but his downfall was more to do with allegations of nepotism, corruption, and the Rajapaksha's family's dominance, and less to do with minority issues.

Nevertheless, to date the new man at the helm seems to be making all the right moves. Almost one month into his presidency, as promised Sirisena has called for parliamentary elections in April, two years

ahead of schedule. He has appointed Ranil

Wickremesinghe as the new prime minister, who in the past has held this position twice and has been more amenable to a peaceful political solution to issues concerning the minorities. A new chief justice has been appointed, Kanagasabapathy Sripavan, who is the first member of the minority Tamil community to hold the post in more than two decades. A new civilian governor has been appointed to the Tamil-majority Northern Province, replacing former army commander Maj. Gen. G. A. Chandrasiri with long-time diplomat H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, whilst Tamil leaders have agreed to join a new council to monitor developments in the north. The new government has also announced the lifting of a ban on foreign nationals visiting the island's former war zones and the scrapping of an economic embargo on minority Tamil regions. In his latest official visit to India, the new foreign minister, Mangala Samaraweera, stated that the Sri Lankan government was identifying people whose land had been in military use, so as to reverse their relocation and return them to their original home. Finally, he also reiterated that the government was committed towards implementing the contentious "13th amendment" of the Constitution on devolution of powers to Tamil-majority areas, but would start discussions with all parties only after the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In spite of these positive steps and promises, skepticism still lingers. Militarization of the northern provinces continues, which has been confirmed by the spokesperson for Sri Lanka's

army who stated that no decision has been taken to reduce the number of troops in the military, noting instead that more than 20,000 people had been recruited into the armed forces for "development projects." Moreover, Sirisena's "humanitarian" approach to human rights questions only goes to the extent of "engaging" with the UN Human Rights Council without being open to any criminal or civil jurisdiction at the international level.

The following months are going to be critical for Sirisena, who needs a majority in the upcoming parliamentary elections to push ahead with his planned reforms. Whilst balancing the different demands of his allies, he has to simultaneously keep an eye on Rajapaksha, who might attempt to return to the parliament with a majority. This is an opportune moment for Sirisena and his allies to prove that a new political era has begun, by following through with their promises and addressing the fundamental issues plaguing the minority communities, otherwise Sirisena could very well end up being another Rajapaksha.

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The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of any other individual or organization.

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Source: The Diplomat

SOUTH ASIA

Dalit Watch

Denied School Over Poverty, Man Wants to Return Barack Obama's Gift

Madhya Pradesh
Jan 26, 2015



Ujjain: A Dalit labourer, feted by Barack Obama when he came to India in 2010, now wants to return the souvenir he had received from the US President to draw his attention to the plight of poor parents who cannot even afford primary education for their children. "Take back the souvenirs, we don't want them. We will live on the footpaths and somehow support out families," said 48-year-old Ramdas Ahirwar. Ramdas was working as a stone-cutter at Tughlakabad Fort when in 2010, his elder son Narendra started a school for the poor where 12 children including his younger brother Vishal studied. The initiative was appreciated by President Obama who met them along with his wife

Michelle and gifted a pen and a medal to the two brothers. The US President also recommended to the central government to help the family run the school. But a few months later the Ahirwar family was asked to leave and the school shut down. "After the school was shut our lives changed my elder son who was a teacher had to take up a menial job. My younger son had to give up studies, we are now daily wagers living on the foot path," said Ahirwar. Ramdas earns Rs. 400 a day and supports his family of four; he does not dream of a better life but wants to donate the land he has in his village so that schools and colleges can come up and the children from families like his own have access to education.

Source: NDTV

Dalits demand 'or' provision on citizenship

Nepal
4th Feb 2015



Kathmandu: Dalit rights activists presented a letter to Constituent Assembly (CA) Chairperson

Subas Nemwang demanding that the provisions on citizenship be loosened to allow stateless Dalits receive the nationality documents. In the letter, the Federation of Dalit Non-government Organisations has demanded that the provision, which allows a person to be Nepali only if both their parents are one, be altered to say either of the parents. The Federation has also asked that the Dalits be allowed to receive citizenships on basis of the surnames listed by National Dalit Commission, without the need of a reference letter from the Commission. According to a study by the Commission, 35 percent of Dalits are without citizenship papers, which the Federation alleges has led to 70 pc of Dalits being landless. Source: The Himalayan Times

Probe into Dalit murders far from satisfactory: study

Tamil Nadu
8th, Feb 2015

Madurai: Heinous crimes against Dalits, particularly women, are on the rise in Tirunelveli, Madurai, Ramanathapuram districts among others in the State.



A survey conducted on Dalit murders in 28 districts in the State has revealed that the investigations of such crimes were far from satisfactory. What is shocking is that in a majority of complaints, the police, instead of booking the suspects, were trying to strike a compromise between the victim's families and the accused. There were undue delays at every stage after the crimes were reported. For instance, the police do not register an FIR on receipt of the complaint. The post-mortem copy was not furnished to the victim's families. The charge-sheet was not filed on time in almost 99 per cent of the cases. Lastly, the police have not only arrested the key suspects after a long time, but did not raise objections when the suspects sought anticipatory bail. Yet another finding was that the weapons used by the murderers were not seized. Evidence, a Madurai-based NGO studied 102 cases reported across Tamil Nadu to come up with these startling revelations. Speaking to *The Hindu* on Saturday, its executive director A. Kadir said the data showed that 73 victims were casual workers; 12 employed in private firms and two government employees. Eleven cases were reported in Tirunelveli district, followed by 10 each in Madurai and Ramanathapuram districts, nine in Tuticorin and five each in Cuddalore, Vellore, Thanjavur, Sivaganga and Virudhunagar. In 76 incidents, Dalits were attacked by caste Hindus in a gang or groups. In 26 cases, the victims were attacked by individuals. The motive revolved around untouchability (91 cases), while in 14 cases it was due to dispute over immovable properties, love affair, clashes at temple festivals

and so on. In 27 cases, women were murdered — in seven cases they had been raped before the murder. Human rights activists said the pattern of crimes against Dalits suggested that there was vengeance, especially against those who owned immovable properties in villages or if they had a good track record of educational qualification than the caste Hindus and others. In some cases, it showed that a marriage between caste Hindu boy and Dalit girl had ended in violent deaths. The government's action should instill confidence and the custodians of law should book the culprits then and there. Above all, speedy disposal of cases by judiciary was essential as conviction rate was far from satisfactory, said Mr. Kadir.

Source: The Hindu

16-Year-Old Girl Allegedly Raped in Uttar Pradesh, Body Found Hanging From Tree

Assam

19, Feb 2015

Lucknow:

A 16-year-old teenage Dalit girl was allegedly raped and her body

was later found hanging from a tree in Motipurwa village in Nighasan district of Uttar Pradesh, 200 kilometers from the state capital. The incident, triggered an angry outburst from leaders of various political parties, who slammed the Samajwadi Party (SP)



government, saying that the law and order machinery is "hanging from trees". After the body was discovered on Tuesday morning, the girl's father lodged a complaint with Nighasan police, naming two youths of the same village behind the alleged rape and murder. "A case of alleged rape and murder has been lodged against the two youths - Manoj and Dharmesh - on the basis of her father's complaint. Investigation is in progress," Station In charge Ram Kumar Yadav said. The post mortem report is awaited to ascertain rape and cause of death. In a shocking incident in May last year, two cousins were found hanging from a tree in Badaun district and it was alleged that they were hanged after being raped. However, CBI later filed a closer report in the case saying that the girls had committed suicide. Reacting to the latest incident, opposition parties attacked the Uttar Pradesh government for the "deteriorating" law and order situation. "The entire state has turned into a jungle raj. People are feeling insecure...crime graph has shot up. We wanted to raise the issue in the state Assembly, but the government is avoiding a debate on it," senior BSP leader Swami Prasad Maurya said. BJP spokesman Vijay Bahadur Pathak said that the government made tall promises of security to women, but has failed to fulfil it. All its schemes like 1090 women helpline have failed. "The law and order machinery is hanging from trees," he remarked, adding women were not safe in UP. Mr Pathak also demanded action against police personnel who did not take cognisance of the

incident. Incidentally, the latest case came to light just a day after the Uttar Pradesh government put up a bold face through the Governor's address to the state legislature on the law and order front, claiming the situation has remained under control and communalism has been dealt with full force. The government, the address noted, has taken "prompt action for controlling crimes and maintaining law and order. There is rule of law in the state...(government) remained successful in maintaining social harmony." **Source: ABP Live**

Cong member wants quota for Dalit Muslims, Dalit Christians

New Delhi

2 March 2015



New Delhi: A Congress member today demanded reservation for Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians, taking

umbrage to the Supreme Court's reported decision that a person can be accorded SC status on his re-conversion to Hinduism if he is accepted by his fellow castemen. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha, Hussain Dalwai demanded amendments to the Constitution to provide reservation to Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians." On February 26, the Supreme Court held that a person can be accorded Scheduled Caste status on his reconversion to Hinduism if he

is accepted by fellow caste men and proves that either he or his forefathers previously belonged to that caste before embracing another religion," he said. Noting that while the Supreme Court cannot be faulted for upholding the word of law, he said it is time to recognize that the caste system is no longer a religious problem, but a social one. "Even if one has converted to another religion, the stigma associated with being a Dalit has hardly been eradicated. Thus a new section called Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians has emerged which shows that the caste system transcends religious boundaries. "It is well documented fact that these sections of society are worse off than Dalits that belong to Hindu religion," he said. P L Puniya from the same party said that benefits of funds being granted for SC/ST are not reaching them adequately and urged the Centre to enact a law to ensure the same.

Source: Deccan Herald

Owaisi urges Dalits, backward classes and minorities to unite

Telangana

2nd March 2015



Hyderabad: All India Majlis e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi today

stressed the need for Dalits, backward classes and minorities to unite and emerge as a strong force. "We need to be together because problems faced by us are the same. Our youths are unemployed and there is no development in our areas. Hence, it is very important to get united, become a power and move forward," the Hyderabad MP said. He was addressing a gathering which assembled as part of a convention on the welfare of SCs, STs, BCs and minorities to highlight the demands. "It is your party (AIMIM). I request you to join us and we will move forward together. Majlis wants that justice is meted out to everyone and it will be done only when we will get political empowerment. We need to work together and it will ensure benefit to all of us. Until there is political empowerment of SCs, STs, backward classes and minorities, justice will not be meted out," he said. "I feel, if MIM has to move ahead, it has to take not only Muslims, but Dalits and backward class along as well. It will also ensure there is no misunderstanding," the AIMIM President said. Stating that the convention was only a

beginning in that direction, Owaisi said, "We will put all efforts and move forward with this work. Our effort will be not only restricted to a single convention or to Hyderabad, but such conventions will be held across Telangana state and message will be spread on the need for members of SC, ST, OBC and minorities to be unite." **Source: NITI Central**

Dalit Embrace Islam on being denied access to temple

Uttar Pradesh

15th March 2015



Meerut: A Dalit of Meerut was recognized as Shyam Singh a month ago. But now he declares himself

“Azad” (liberated).

Shyam, a member of the Dalit Valmiki community in Moga village, converted to Islam two weeks ago. Shyam alleged that he didn’t embrace Islam only because his community was denied access to the temple to perform the traditional puja but also because of the “continuous

threats of harassment” from the local law and order officials after he persisted with his demand to have the right to perform puja, The Hindu reported. When their efforts to get equal rights not succeed, they declared that they would embrace Islam. “What is the point in being a Hindu and having this sacred thread around my wrist if I can’t even enter a temple and perform puja,” he argued. Shyam, a landless laborer has petitioned the District Magistrates of Baghpat and Meerut, and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes against this kind of injustice. He also petitioned the Prime Minister’s Office. While Shyam has converted to Islam, his fellow Valmikis, numbering over 100, are scared and are thinking of migrating to some

other part of the State to escape official harassment. Shyam himself plans to migrate to Nepal. Interestingly, the announcement of the conversion plan by Shyam and his fellow Dalits needed abrupt attention from Hindutva outfits, which requested them not to convert. “All of them wanted us not to convert to Islam, but none of them want us to get equal status among Hindus. This is how we have historically and traditionally been cheated,” said Shyam. Shyam and his family were booked by the Meerut administration the last week for “disturbing peace and communal harmony” by persisting with their demand to perform puja at the temple and the announcement about converting to Islam. Source: **Source: The Sisat Daily**

INDIA

Leading Dalit Activists Arrested for Protesting Massive Cuts in Budgets Meant for Dalits



Dalit leader Paul Divakar and 29 other activists were arrested following a peaceful gathering of over 500 students gathered in front of the Indian parliament to protests severe cuts to budgets allocated to Dalit and Adivasi (Tribals) welfare and upholding of their rights. The arrests underscore a deeply concerning trend for Government stifling of voices of dissent in India.

Massive cuts to provisions for education of Dalits and Adivasis were central to the protest and public meeting, organized by the Campaign of Adivasis and Dalits for Rights on Education (CADRE 2201).

“The budgeted expenditure by the Modi government for the most marginalized sections – Dalits and Adivasis – of our country has seen a colossal decline this year. We strongly protest this unilateral reduction in budgets for Dalits and Adivasis,” said Paul Divakar, general secretary of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR).

According to Ramesh Nathan, General Secretary, National

Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ), the activists were about to submit a ‘Memorandum of Demands’ to the Union Minister of Human Resource Development, over unfair budgetary allocations within the education sector for Dalit and Adivasi students, when they were arrested by the police.

Speaking at the protest Abhay Xaxa, coordinator, CADRE 2201, spoke of the ramifications of the budget cuts for education prospects for Dalits and Adivasis saying that,

“The general thrust of the budget is to strengthen the corporate forces and intensify the exploitation of the Adivasis and Dalits. So it is not surprising that the allocation of funds for education has declined.”

The budget cuts made to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes sub-plans (SCSP & TSP), amount to a 60% cut in allocations for Dalits and a 53% cut in allocations for Adivasis, according to Paul Divakar. The cuts were made despite several meetings held between

NACSTL, a coalition working to further the rights of Dalits and

Adivasis and secure the budget components set out for them, and the Ministry of Finance. The sub-plans are meant to ensure that Dalits and Adivasi who suffer discrimination limiting their access to general budget resources are secured allocations.

Campaigners are saying that the Modi administration has chosen to steal from the disadvantaged to give gifts to the corporate sector in the form of tax cuts.

According to Paul Divakar, “A closer examination of the drastic cuts in social sector expenditures such as the SCSP and TSP shows a blatant Modi Government disregard for poor Dalits and Adivasis and their concerns, and a downright dismissive attitude to the rights-based paradigm.”

After detaining the activists at the police station they were released. However, the cuts to welfare for the countries most disadvantaged groups and attempts to stifle their voices of dissent in reaction to this decision are deeply concerning

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**Source:** International Dalit Solidarity Network

## PAKISTAN

## Pak. Students Act as human Shield for Hindus Celebrating Holi

Pakistani students formed a human shield for Hindus celebrating Holi at a temple in Karachi to protect and show solidarity with the minority community.

The National Students Federation (NSF) formed the shield at Swami Narayan Temple as part of an attempt to promote interfaith coexistence

and cooperation among different religious and ethnic groups.

A member of the NSF describes the union as a “progressive leftist organisation” dating back to the NSF of the Ayub Khan era. “When we showed solidarity with Shias at the Imambargah... it’s only fair that as a group, we extend the same courtesy to all Hindus in Pakistan who face a lot of persecution of different kinds,” General Secretary NSF Fawwad Hasan was quoted as saying by the Dawn.



Hasan cited the desecration of Hindu temples, forcible religious conversion of girls and suppression of culture and religious practices as reasons for showing solidarity with and protecting Hindus.

“We are not religious fundamentalists who take religion into our own hands, that is not what we do,” Hasan said.

“Society as a whole has to show change and be a part of that change. If you don’t stand up for someone else’s rights today, tomorrow you will also be targeted and there will be no one to stand up for your rights,” he added.

President Mamnoon Hussain felicitating the Hindu community for celebrating this year’s Holy festival has said that this cultural activity generates harmony and brotherhood in society.



The President acknowledged and appreciated the valuable contribution made by the Hindu community in Pakistan in all fields. The nation is proud of their great contributions for the development of the country and deeply admire their loyalty to the state, he added. “I have no doubt that they will continue to play their positive role for peace, progress and prosperity of Pakistan,” he said. The President said the equality of all citizens of the state has been enshrined in our constitution and the Quaid-e-Azam made this abundantly clear in his address to the constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947.



Source: The Dawn



## NEPAL

## Hundreds of Dalit Women Gather at Conference in Nepal



**Hundreds of Dalit women from across Nepal gathered in Kathmandu for the “Dalit Women’s National Conference for Democracy, Justice, Sustainable Peace and Inclusive Constitution” from 2-4 December 2014. The conference was organized by the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) and international speakers included UN Women and IDSN.**

The conference was organized to sensitize Government, political parties, civil society and related stakeholders on Dalit women’s human rights issues and agenda, to push for the inclusion of Dalit women’s issues in the new constitution and to discuss the major challenges Dalit women face from the local to the national level.

Around 300 Dalit women from across the country, Dalit non-governmental organizations,

Dalit intellectuals, feminist Dalit organization, human rights organizations, Government, political parties, international non-governmental organizations, Donor Agencies, United Nations, and journalists participated in the conference.

Major themes discussed were the status of violence against Dalit women; media monitoring of violence against Dalit women, political participation and Constitution making as well as the socio-economic status on Dalit women.

Speaking at the conference, the UN Women Representative and acting UN Resident Coordinator on Dalit rights, Ziad Sheikh said, “When, for example, you are a Dalit woman, you face double discrimination leading to social, political and economic exclusion and often worse. As we know, this is a reality in Nepal,” he also commended Dalit women for their leadership saying that, “the remarkable work and ongoing efforts for women’s participation in Nepal

continues, led by many of you here today.”

**A conference declaration was drafted with recommendations including:**

Constitutional provisions should be made to ensure proportional representation of Dalit women in all bodies of the state from the local to central levels.

Proportional representation of Dalit women should be ensured in the quota reserved for women to make it Dalit women-responsive, results-oriented and socially justifiable. Twenty percent of the existing 33 percent reservation quota reserved for women should be allocated to Dalit women

The state is called upon to ensure an equitable society including by safeguarding the rights of the Dalit community and Dalit women through the constitution and the institutionalization and strengthening of federal and



provincial structures. The state should ensure that the constitution, legislation, policies and administration are in line with the spirit of positive discrimination for radical changes to happen in the almost zero-level participation of Dalit women in policy-making and implementation.

Caste-based and cultural discrimination against Dalit women and the negative impacts caused by these existing customs and tradition in the

society should be brought to an end. Relevant acts should be implemented and amendments made to address shortcomings

Special efforts must be made to by the government and other relevant bodies for provision of free health care services, free quality education at all levels and in terms of increasing Dalit women's access to employment; and educational loans.

Inter-caste marriage should be encouraged and the couple

should be provided with both social and economic protection. Persons interfering negatively with such marriage should face economic and social repercussions and imprisonment.

The Minister for Information and Communication, Dr. Minendra Rijal and Mr. Anup Raj Sharma, Chair Person of National Human Right Commission were also special guests at the conference.

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*Source: International Dalit Solidarity Network*

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## BANGLADESH

### Bangladesh 'Untouchables' Demand Equal Rights



Some of Bangladesh's most underprivileged communities have demanded equal rights in every aspect of social life on Saturday.

To mark the "International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination" the Dalit and Harijan communities -- who some consider "untouchable" --

memorandum to the government which includes passing an act to eliminate racial discrimination, to have quotas for their representation in all elected bodies including the National Parliament and to have quota in the higher education institutions."

The general secretary of the community group Harijan Oikya Parishad, Nirmal Chandra Das said: "Education is the foremost necessity to ensure higher education in public universities."

He also demanded land property rights to end the housing problems the community faces, adding that previous pledges had not been kept.

Dalit and Harijan communities tend to be concentrated in separate districts in different areas of the capital Dhaka and elsewhere in the country.

An organization in the country's southern town Satkhira, Paritran's director Milan Das said "there are at least 35 colonies in Dhaka but the

biggest community lives in the southern part of the country."

The National Human Rights Commission's chairman Mizanur Rahman said during a roundtable discussion in the capital on Wednesday: "We have to end their identity crisis and to ensure their comfortable movement into society."



*National Human Rights Commission's chairman Mizanur Rahman*

Dalits are discriminated against by the caste system, a social structure which treats some people as "untouchable."

Despite attempts to abolish the system it still persists in practice in many South Asian countries and especially in India.

**Source: Anadolu Agency**

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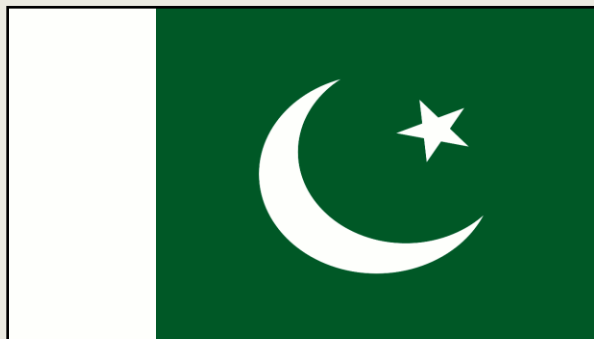
specifically demanded unfettered access to education and employment.

Ashok Das, the secretary of Bangladesh Dalit Parishad, which represents Dalits in

Bangladesh, said: "We are submitting a 10-point

*We are submitting a 10-point memorandum to the government which includes passing an act to eliminate racial discrimination, to have quotas for their representation in all elected bodies including the National Parliament."*

*Ashok Das, the secretary of Bangladesh Dalit Parishad*



## ***We Remind the Nation***

The importance Pakistani nation gives to its minorities can be measured by public announcement of the founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which he made just three days before the declaration of the partition of India. He said in his historical speech delivered in parliament on September 11, 1947 that: There would be complete freedom to the minorities in Pakistan for spending their lives according to their faith and life style. They will be absolutely free to go to their temple, churches, and other worship places for performing their religious practices.

It was not just the word of ordinary assurance after the formation of Pakistan when a three Member committee had been constituted under convener ship of Syed Ameer Hussain Qudwai, for designing the national flag of newly born nations, the committee followed Quaid's approach towards the minorities in the region by considering minorities as essential part of the nation, our First national assembly approved the proposed national flag, where, color white was suggested as the symbols of minorities. By adopting this two colored flag we gave message to the whole international community that minorities are essential section of Pakistani nation. Although minorities at large in Pakistan are satisfied, as they themselves and the people outside the country recognized this fact. Now when election campaign is going to stand, Sir Ganga Ram Heritage foundation remind the nation Particularly all political parties that chalking their election program they should keep in mind Quaid's and people's commitment with our friendly and patriotic minorities as Pakistani Muslim majority is religiously and morally bound to protect the interests and right of the minorities of the country.

**SIR GANGA RAM  
HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
LAHORE**