

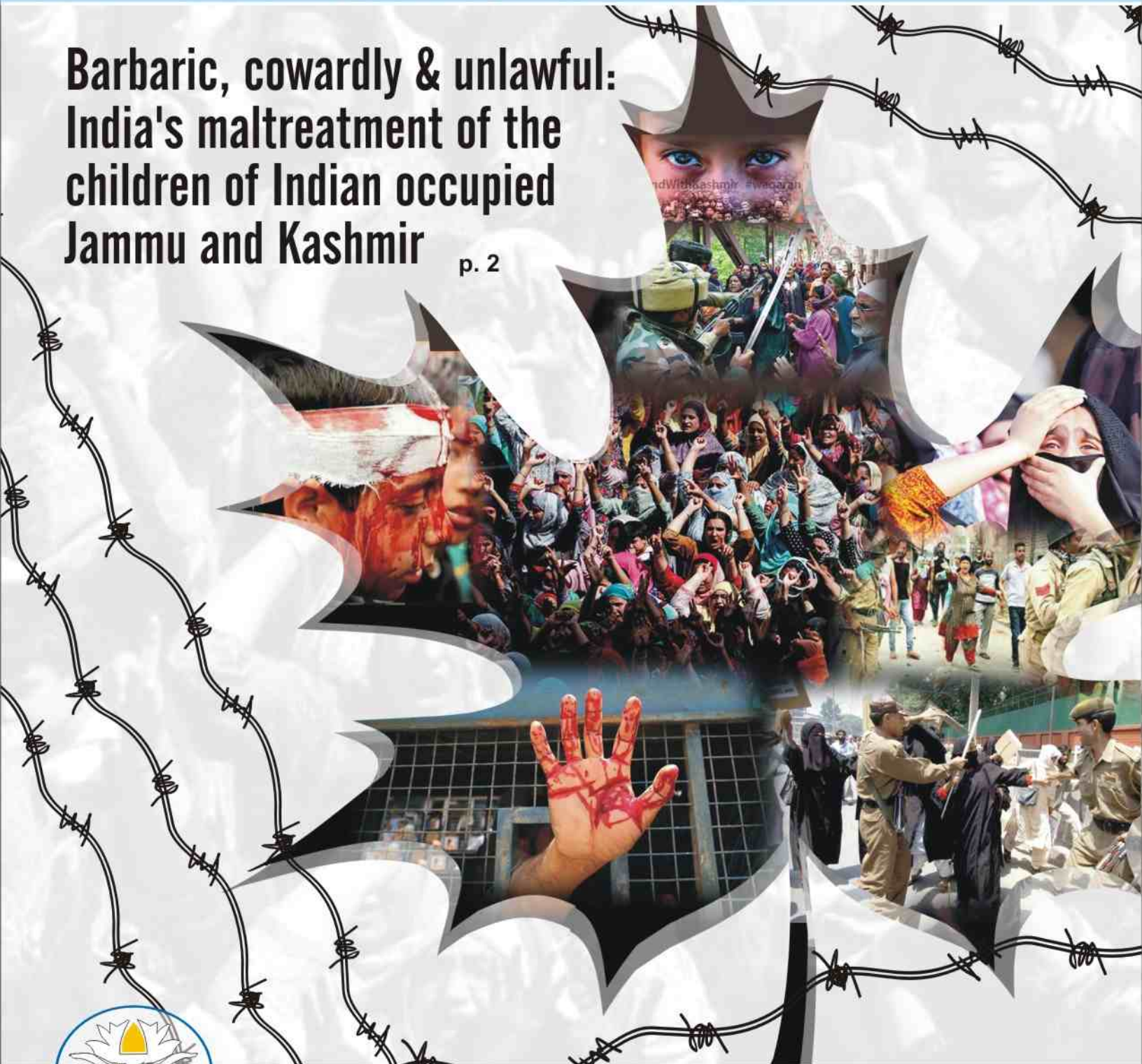
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Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies

Barbaric, cowardly & unlawful: India's maltreatment of the children of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir

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Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation www.sgrhf.org.pk

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Editorial

The recent outbreak of COVID-19, has caused massive disruptions in the lives of people all over the globe. It is observed that in such emergencies, marginalized people which include minorities, socially suppressed people, women, low-income daily wagers, the elderly, children, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants become even more vulnerable because of their lack of access to healthcare facilities and social safety. Currently, the entire world is facing an extraordinary challenge to protect not only the lives of billions of people but also to put human rights at the heart of their responses. It needs efforts to protect marginalized and vulnerable groups at higher risk including daily wage earners, people displaced due to lockdowns, health workers and prisoners. Talking about South Asia, many of the marginalized communities here are living in conditions where they are unable to follow COVID-19 public health and safety recommendations during this pandemic as most of them have shared bathrooms, with multiple doors to touch between one's own room and the bathroom, while many homes or shelters do not have sinks for hand washing. The informal sector of the region consists of 80 percent of total employments, many of whom is internal migrant workers and live far away from their families. The coronavirus pandemic is directly a public health crisis, a depression and a humanitarian crisis in South Asia. Countries in this region have extraordinarily large informal economies; almost 90% of the workforce is made up of the self-employed, casual labor on daily wages and informal workers without any social protection. The lockdowns have meant that hundreds of millions of people who have lost their jobs, hence incomes, have been deprived of their livelihoods, imposing a disproportionate burden on the poor and people who survive just above the poverty level.

According to World Bank's recent report, the growth rate of the region this year will reach down to 1.8-2.8 per cent from its pre-pandemic projection of 6.3 percent, and at least half the countries will be falling into "deep recession". The report also warned that "the pandemic will reinforce inequality in the region". For instance in India, the world's biggest lockdown has affected hundreds of thousands of informal workers and marginalized communities, but in this crucial time, country tried to hold its Muslim community responsible for spreading COVID-19 in the region. Thus, the coronavirus pandemic has only added to the miseries and troubles of this marginalized community. Similarly, when social isolation in the time of the coronavirus signifies the physical distance between any two individuals, many Hindus have celebrated it as international validation of 'untouchability'. This results in more visible and clear bifurcation of two sections of Indian society. COVID-19 is currently posing a significant threat to quite one and a half billion people living within the South Asian region. All regional countries must focus on improving their capacity to protect their people without any discrimination against the deadly pandemic.

Editor

Pakistan, India and the minorities



Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim country where 96.2% people adhere to Islam while the rest include Hindus (1.6%), Christians (1.59%), Ahmadis (0.22%) and other minorities viz, Sikhs, Parsis and Kalashs (0.07%), according to the 2017 Census. Treatment of minorities - whether religious, sectarian or ethno-linguistic - is a barometer of the state of human rights in a society, and thus, a subject of continuing debate the world over, including Pakistan. History testifies the fact that Pakistan has continued to ensure a level-playing field to its various minorities and protected their rights and liberties well.

Here are a few evidences. Pakistan's first foreign minister, Zafarullah Khan, was an Ahmadi. Our first and only Nobel laureate in science, Dr Abdus Salam, also belonged to Ahmadiyya community. Justice AR Cornelius, a Christian, was the country's first non-Muslim Chief Justice of Supreme Court. Justice Rana Bhagwandas, who hailed from a Hindu family, served the country as Supreme Court judge as well as the acting Chief Justice of the apex court. Anil Dalpat and Danish Kaneria, two Hindu cricketers, donned the Pakistan cap in both Tests and ODIs. Benjamin Sisters, a singing group of three Christian sisters, were a well-known name in the country's showbiz circles in the 80's. Besides, a large number of non-Muslim personalities have contributed to Pakistan's progress as educationists, legislators, soldiers, doctors, lawyers, sportsmen, artists and businessmen. Of late though, there has been a bit of concern over religious freedom in Pakistan, but our leaders mean to set things right. And with Imran Khan now in the saddle, one is sure that minorities need not worry about the protection of their rights and freedoms. On assuming the Office of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, in August 2018, Imran Khan stated very clearly that "the rights of minorities shall be protected in Pakistan and there will be no discrimination whatsoever". On February 26, 2020, Khan declared, "I want to warn our people that anyone in Pakistan targeting our non-Muslim citizens or their places of worship will be dealt with strictly. Our minorities are equal citizens of this country."

The PTI government has vowed to protect the civil, social and religious rights of minorities, their places of worship, property and institutions as laid down in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan whose section 27 states, "No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste,

sex, residence or place of birth."

And in a major step towards a religiously-inclusive Pakistan, the Imran Khan-led PTI government has set up a National Commission on Minorities, represented by members of the various minority communities. The commission is tasked with formulating proposals for development of a national policy to promote interfaith harmony in the country. Pakistan is leaving no stone unturned in ensuring the rights of minorities and providing them equal opportunities in all spheres of life, but one country seems to have lost its way. Yes, I'm talking about India. Despite being the largest religious minority in India, Muslims continue to be treated as second grade citizens there. While Muslims have, since Partition, been the victims of violence unleashed by right-wing Hindus, the rise of Hindu nationalism in the wake of the martyrdom of Babri Masjid in 1992 made it more systematic. And now, under Narendra Modi, violence against Muslims has turned into state-sanctioned pogroms orchestrated by Hindutva-adhering BJP-RSS goons. The saffron Hindutva ideology paints Muslims in black - as traitors and enemies of the state. It only preaches hate towards any religion other than Hinduism, especially Islam. Muslims have been living in India under perpetual fear. No wonder, 84% of the victims of cow vigilante violence in India from 2010 to 2017 were Muslims and almost 97% of these attacks were reported after May 2014, according to IndiaSpend, a data-driven Indian website. Where Pakistan is constantly on the move to secure its minorities, protect their rights and put an end to religious discrimination, India has subtly declared a war against the minority Muslims. Now, India is for Hindus only: this is the blow that the saffronised Modi regime has dealt to the soul of India.

Source: Tribune Pakistan

Barbaric, cowardly and unlawful: India's maltreatment of the children of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir



India has been gravely violating human rights in Jammu and Kashmir for decades. When it comes to children, any violation of their rights is absolutely intolerable and cannot be justified on any grounds whatsoever. The facts and figures recently revealed in the United Nation's report titled, "Children and Armed Conflict," published on the 15th of June 2020 are deeply upsetting. A country whose government purposely chooses to harm children is a country that should be looked down upon by the entire world.

The report states that eight children were killed and seven were maimed between the ages of one and 17. Such barbaric actions against the children were committed by or during joint operations of the Central Reserve Police Force, the Indian Army (Rashtriya Rifles) and the Special Operations Group of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, among others. The report notes that the casualties that occurred were mainly caused by torture in detention, shootings, including from pellet guns and cross-border shelling. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its update on the situation of human rights

in Indian administered Kashmir in 2019 stated that "the 12- gauge pump-action shotgun firing metal pellets is one of the most dangerous weapons used in Kashmir." Further noting that the weapon is not deployed elsewhere in India.

It is depressing to note that 68 children have been detained in Jammu and Kashmir by the Indian security services on national security-related charges, according to the report. Under no grounds can such detention of children be justified. The Indian security services have disgraced themselves by such cowardly acts. India vigilantly protects its children. Under Article 39 of India's Constitution, the State is responsible to direct its policy towards securing that the tender age of children is not abused and that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment. This ensures that the legislature of India, armed forces and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are aware that children need to be protected, then why is India inflicting such brutality against the children of Jammu and Kashmir? Every child, no matter the nationality is precious and deserves safety and security. Each child, no matter where they are born, are born with the right to live and not be unlawfully killed, maimed and/or detained.

The United Nations in the report verified attacks on nine schools in Jammu and Kashmir. This speaks volumes about India's failure to protect the children. The Indian Constitution under Article 21A makes it the responsibility of the State to provide free and



compulsory education to all children of the age of six to 14 years. While the children of India enjoy their fundamental right to education, there remain attacks on the schools of children in Jammu and Kashmir. Every child, be it from India, Kashmir or the rest of the world deserves the right to an education.

Many human rights organisations and NGOs have spoken about the maltreatment of children in Kashmir. United Nations chief Antonio Guterres stated in the same report that he remains concerned by child casualties in Jammu and Kashmir and called upon the Indian Government to take preventive measures to protect children, including by ending the use of pellets against children. Furthermore, he stated that he is concerned by the detention of children, including their arrest during night raids, internment at army camps, torture in detention and detention without charge or due process and urged the Indian government to immediately put an end to the same. He added that the access of children to education and health services continues to be of concern.

When it comes to international conventions, India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). India was also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The UNCRC states the fundamental rights that children everywhere are entitled to. These rights include the right to life, education, survival and development and protection from abuse, violence or neglect, etc. It is written in Article 2 of the Convention specifically that, "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or another status." It is clear that the Indian government is in breach of this convention. As a signatory to the UNCRC, India is bound to comply with it by international law.

India is a state party to the ICCPR and obliged to ensure that no person is "subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." The preamble to the UDHR states, "... recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Furthermore, Article 1 states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with



reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

The Declaration shall be kept constantly in mind by the Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction. It seems that India has ignored the UDHR.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, children all around the world are suffering from mental health issues. In Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir, the plight of children seems never-ending due to not only the pandemic, but the draconian treatment inflicted upon them by the Indian government and armed forces as well. In the backdrop of this, it has been reported that on the 16th of June, an earthquake of magnitude 5.8 hit Jammu and Kashmir, the third to hit the territory in three days. When it comes to Azad Jammu and Kashmir, in the same report, no responsibility was attributed to the Pakistani armed forces or government for any casualties or attacks inflicted upon the children of Pakistan administered Kashmir. The UN chief appreciated Pakistan, he stated, "I welcome the Government's continued efforts to protect the workers who are conducting the polio campaign."

India should learn from Pakistan. On the pages of history, India will forever be remembered as a nation that inflicted cruelty on the innocent children of Jammu and Kashmir. If this is the treatment that India has inflicted upon the children, it is clear that India does not deserve Jammu and Kashmir.

Children are innocent, delicate and vulnerable. Each child irrespective of race, sex, colour, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth or other status deserve to live their life peacefully and happily with access to their fundamental rights.

Source: Daily Times

Call to action to respond to the suspension of fundamental labour rights in India



IDSN fully endorses the Call to action on Labour Law changes in India, issued by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). The statement calls on businesses sourcing in India to respond to the news that several Indian states will suspend key fundamental labour rights for a period of up to three years, under the cover of the Covid-19 crisis.

The laws to be suspended relate to basic consultation with workers, contract workers, industrial disputes, occupational health and safety, working conditions and an extension of working hours from 48 hours a week to 72 hours a week. "It is incredibly important that companies ensure that they are living up to core ILO conventions and human rights obligations in India, despite the suspensions of fundamental labour laws at the local level," said IDSN Executive Director, Meena Varma. "Dalits and other vulnerable workers will depend on companies being vigilant with their suppliers in India to ensure that their rights are not being violated, with no recourse to justice."

Upholding minimum rights and labour standards for workers in India is already a challenge and vulnerable groups, such as Dalits, suffer from widespread abuses as it is, as documented by IDSN and ETI in the Base Code Guidance **Caste in Global Supply Chains**. A further weakening of legislation that support these workers in asserting their rights is a devastating blow to ensuring decent working conditions in India generally and in supply chains. To our knowledge, the states suspending or relaxing labour laws include Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. IDSN strongly urges employers in these states and companies sourcing from these states to live up to international labour and human rights obligations and to push for these new measures to be challenged.

Call to action on Labour Law changes in India

Position

We are deeply disturbed by the recent moves by some

Indian State Governments to suspend many existing labour laws and worker protection provisions for periods of up to three years. These changes have the potential to seriously undermine workers' rights with a direct impact on vulnerable workers and are likely to bring employers and workers into conflict. In such circumstances no one will benefit, and India's risks its reputation. These changes must be challenged. India has endorsed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights reaffirming the Government's responsibility to protect workers and ensure a clear expectation of business to respect the rights of workers and not seek to take advantage of circumstances however unprecedented.

While we recognize that the global pandemic has had a significant impact on many businesses and national economies, as well as individuals and families, removing the state's support for workers is not the right solution for workers or for businesses. Therefore there is a heightened role for leading responsible business sourcing from India to individually and collectively register their concern and ensure that standards in their supply chains are not lowered in the circumstances. This will require enhanced Human Rights due diligence, supplier engagement and joint action to register concerns at state and national level.

Our Understanding

Two state governments (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) have passed ordinances to suspend most of the labour laws in all new production units for a period of three years. These include laws relating to basic consultation with workers through representative bodies such as trade unions, contract workers, industrial disputes, occupational safety and health and working conditions.

Six Indian states have also announced an extension of working hours from 48 hours a week to 72 hours a week. This violates ILO convention C001 on Hours of Work, which was the first ILO convention adopted almost 100 years ago (and ratified by India in 1921). Of the six states, some will now not pay workers the original double

overtime wage they would have received for working over 8 hours per day.

These suspensions and changes will harm workers by removing their ability to exercise key rights and protections that link to conditions for Decent Work. This includes the fundamental human right to form or join a trade union as well as additional rights including:

- the right to consultation via bipartite committees like the works committees,
- the right to tripartite consultation under the Minimum Wages Act,
- the right to raise industrial disputes and take them for eventual resolution,
- the right to strike,
- the right to be informed of changes in the conditions of employment,
- the right to natural justice in case of termination and
- the right to call for the abolition of contract labour.

In basic terms this would mean that any changes made to workers lives during the COVID-19 pandemic are not consulted on in any shape or form. Suspension of these laws violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, core ILO conventions and India's commitment to ensure decent work. If an employer takes advantage of such provision they would likely be in violation of the ETI's Base Code and member codes of conduct.

Call to Action

India is an important and influential country in both the value and dynamism of its own economy and as a key partner in global trade. It is a sourcing destination as well as a market for many global brands, who are accountable to customers and investors globally. Specifically we are aware that a large number of ETI members source goods from these states, including garments, leather products, metal and glassware, cosmetic jewellery, rugs and artisanal products. While it is the responsibility of business to conduct appropriate human rights due diligence within their supply chains, so as to identify, prevent and mitigate risks, governments must provide the enabling environment for this to happen. In this situation the state itself is lowering the standards and/or reducing the level of protection for workers.

ETI Proposes the following actions for discussion and joint agreement:

1. Ensure that there is a clear understanding of the risk to workers in the changes being proposed by senior management at commercial level.
2. Contact relevant suppliers who are operating in or may be sourcing from the relevant regions in India and convey the following:
 - i. That the changes are in contravention with national and international standards

- ii. That companies code of conduct and/or the ETI Base Code sets a higher standard for suppliers and must be respected whatever local policy or law indicates.
 - iii. That the supplier must engage with the buyer to confirm that "normal" standards will be respected
 - iv. That the buyer will engage with the supplier to fully understand what adjustments may need to be made in sourcing due to the impact of COVID-19 to maintain supply while avoiding heightened risk for workers
3. Jointly with ETI to communicate to the state governments and the Indian government to indicate the conflict between these provision and international standards that are demanded by international standards and global supply chains
 4. To work collaboratively to consider other actions to influence respect for the rights of workers in the relevant Indian states.

ETI's Approach

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a leading alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers' rights around the globe. Our vision is a world where all workers are free from exploitation and discrimination and enjoy conditions of freedom, security and equity. The ETI's approach to responsible business in complex global supply chains, is closely based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which set out the Protect, Respect and Remedy framework. In this States should protect human rights; businesses should respect those rights; and both should work to provide remedy when rights are violated.

In line with the ETI Base Code and the responsibilities of Business identified in the UNGPs we remind members of their responsibilities to:

1. Respect and in this instance, defend fundamental human and labour rights in their own operations and throughout their supply chains;
2. Strive to support and ensure that their suppliers respect those rights even where national or state law does not require them to do so;
3. Enhance their own human rights due diligence to ensure that they are not associated with (and do not become associated with) any business enterprise that seeks to reduce the rights of workers in line with these provisions;
4. In this particularly egregious case, engage with export business associations, trade unions and civil society organisations as well as ETI to play an active part in collaboratively advocating for the reversal of these changes to the law.

Source: IDSN

Nepal: Bachelet condemns Dalit killings, calls for independent investigation



GENEVA: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed shock at the killing of five men by opponents of an inter-caste relationship in Nepal last weekend, as well as several other incidents of caste-based discrimination and violence that have taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It is distressing that caste-based prejudices remain deeply entrenched in our world in the 21st century and I am filled with sadness for these two young people who held high hopes of building a life together despite the obstacles presented by their accident of birth,” Bachelet said. “Caste-based discrimination remains widespread, not only in Nepal but other countries and often leads to serious harm and, as in this case, even loss of life. Ending caste-based discrimination is fundamental to the sustainable development vision of leaving no one behind.”

On 23 May, 21-year-old Dalit man Nawaraj BK and a group of his friends from Jajarkot district travelled to Western Rukum district in Karnali province, the home of Nawaraj’s girlfriend who belonged to a so-called “dominant” caste group. They intended to escort the young woman back to their home district, allegedly at her request, but were attacked and chased into a river. Five men, four of whom including Nawaraj were Dalits, were later found dead while another person is still missing.

Extremely disturbing reports are also emerging about a 12-year-old Dalit girl who was killed in a separate attack in Devdaha village of Rupandehi district. She is said to have been forcibly married to her alleged rapist from a dominant caste. The girl’s body was reportedly discovered hanging from a tree on 23 May. Bachelet called for an independent investigation into the attacks. She stressed that the victims and their families have the right to justice, truth and reparations.

Dalits are seen to be on the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy in Nepali society, traditionally discriminated against as “untouchables”. The killings have sparked outrage in Nepal, prompting the federal Ministry of Home Affairs to establish a five-member “high-level investigation committee” to look into the incident. On

26 May, police filed a complaint against 20 alleged perpetrators.

“Despite constitutional guarantees, impunity for caste-based discrimination and violence remains high in Nepal,” the UN human rights chief said. “Nepal has taken big strides to address this scourge, but so much more can and must be done to eradicate this blight on society. This is especially the case when the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their vulnerability.” Since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, Dalit activists and journalists have reported several cases of caste-based discrimination, incidents of rape, assault, denial of funeral rites and discrimination at quarantine sites.

On 25 May, the Nepali Parliament’s Law, Justice and Human Rights Committee directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to investigate all incidents of caste-based discrimination and violence during the COVID-19 lockdown. The parliamentary committee asked authorities to immediately investigate two cases of gang-rape of Dalit women, as well as other caste-based cases involving murder, enforced disappearances and forced abortion.

Nepal is a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, one of the core international human rights treaties. After its last review in May 2018, the Committee tasked with monitoring the treaty observed that despite the abolition of “untouchability” in Nepal, Dalits continue to face deep-rooted discrimination. It also raised several concerns about issues around inter-caste marriages.

Dalits in Nepal and other countries experience discrimination at every level of their daily lives, limiting their employment and educational opportunities, the places where they can collect water or worship and their choice of who to marry. Structural barriers and discrimination force Dalits to continue low-income and dehumanising employment, such as manual scavenging, disposing of dead animals, digging graves or making leather products.

Source: IDSN



George Floyd - Online Live Homage from Tamil Nadu

A memorial for George Floyd on Tamil soil is organized on (10.06.2020) involving various political parties, socio-political movements, human rights organizations and democratic forces across the State. This online public event is designed to take a pledge against discrimination based on caste, religion and race, in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US, condemning the brutal murder of the Afro American, George Floyd at the racist white American Police in Minneapolis, Minnesota on 25th May. We stand united with the black and other coloured people of the US who have been suffering racial discrimination for more than four centuries. We from India have special interest in the Black Lives Matter Movement, as we are ourselves up against caste discrimination, which is another form of racial discrimination.

There will be an expression of physical solidarity to Black Lives Matter in two cities in Tamil Nadu, Madurai and Coimbatore, wherein leaders of political parties and people's movements will take part in, which will be shown on live during the memorial.

An online signature campaign has been designed and tens of thousands of signatures from people across the state, jointly addressed to Mr. Donald Trump, the US President and Mr. Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, condemn the racist attacks against the Afro Americans and institutional racism in the US and deep rooted caste discrimination that is widespread across Indian sub continent.

Voices of the people's Movements against institutional racism, police atrocities and caste discrimination will be raised during the live public meeting. Mr. Gerald Staberock, Secretary General, World Organization

against Torture (OMCT), Geneva, Prof. Gay McDougall, Civil- Rights Activist and International Lawyer, UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Georgia, Mr. Prashant Bushan, senior advocate, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi, Arch Bishop Antony Poppusamy, President, Tamil Nadu Catholic Bishop's Council and Mr. Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director, People's Watch joined the online memorial event.



The leaders of the political parties and people's organizations include Dr. Thol Thirumavalavan, MP and President, Viduthalai Siruthaigal Katchi, Mr. Vai Ko, MP and General Secretary, MDMK, Mr. T. K. S. Ilangovan, MP, DMK, Mr. Balakrishnan, State Secretary, CPM, Mr. Mutharasan, State Secretary, CPI, Prof. Jawahirullah, President, Manitha Neya Makkal Katchi, Mr. Nellai Mubarak, State Secretary, SDPI, Mr. Velmurugan, Founder and President, Thamilaga Vaazhuvurimai Katchi, Mr. K. Veeramani, President, Dravidar Kazhagam, Mr. Thiagu, President, Tamil National Liberation Movement, Mr. Kolathur Mani, Dravidar Viduthalai Kazhagam, Mr. Thirumurugan Gandhi, May 17 Movement, Mr. P. Maniarasan, Tamil Thesiya Periyakkam and Mr. Mi. Tha. Pandian, Tamil Thesa Munnani and others.

Source: People Watch

SRI LANKA: Religious minorities must have their final rites respected

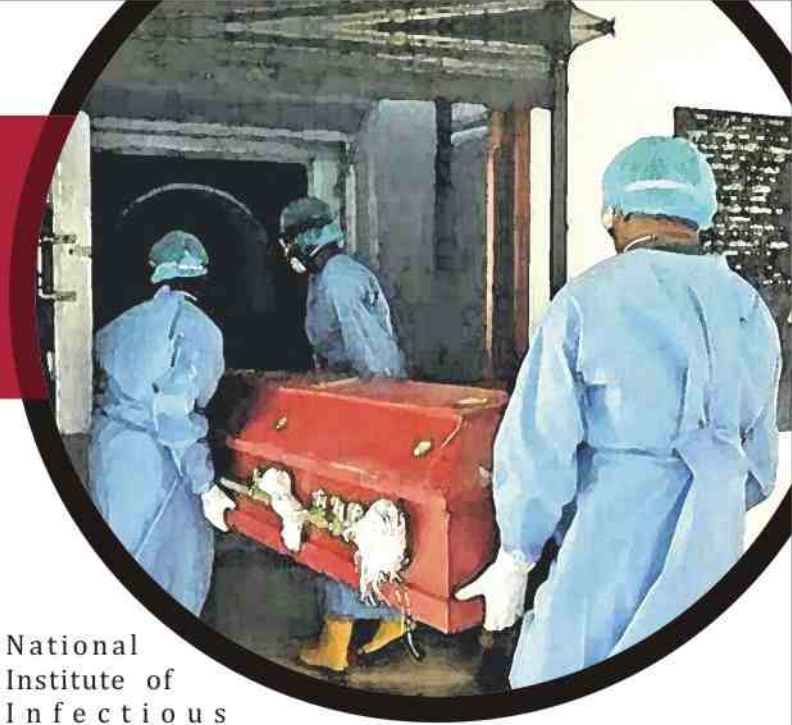
Sri Lanka's authorities must respect the right of religious minorities to carry out the final rites of their relatives in accordance with their own traditions unless they can show that restrictions are needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Amnesty International said today.

Two of the early COVID-19-related deaths in Sri Lanka have been those of Muslims who were forcibly cremated on the instructions of the authorities and against the wishes of the deceased's families.

"At this difficult time, the authorities should be bringing communities together and not deepening divisions between them. Grieving relatives of people who have died because of COVID-19 should be able to bid farewell to their loved ones in the way that they wish, especially where this is permissible under international guidelines," said Biraj Patnaik, South Asia Director at Amnesty International.

The World Health Organization's guidelines for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19 allows for either burials or cremations and this position was mirrored in the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health guidelines issued on 27 March 2020. On 31 March, the Sri Lankan guidelines were revised to exclusively order cremations for people who die or are suspected to have died as a result of contracting the COVID-19 virus. The government has not provided adequate or reasonable justification for departing from the WHO guidelines, which underlines concerns that the change was not necessary to protect public health. For Sri Lanka's Muslim community, which makes up nine per cent of the population, burials are considered to be a required part of the final rites in accordance with Islamic traditions.

The first Muslim death took place on 31 March, in Negombo, a town on Sri Lanka's western coast, before the guidelines were revised to exclude burials. Despite protests by the relatives of the deceased, community leaders and Muslim politicians, a burial was blocked by the authorities, and a cremation took place instead. The second Muslim death happened on 1 April at the



National Institute of Infectious Diseases and the person was cremated a day later despite efforts by the victim's family and the Muslim community to carry out a burial.

The forced cremations have resurfaced fears that Sri Lanka's Muslim minority community is being targeted by the authorities. Last year, the authorities did not intervene to stop attacks on Muslim-owned shops and homes by violent mobs and emergency regulations were abused to ban women wearing the face veil, in the aftermath of the 21 April bombings by an Islamist armed group that killed more than 250 people in attacks on three churches and three hotels in Sri Lanka.

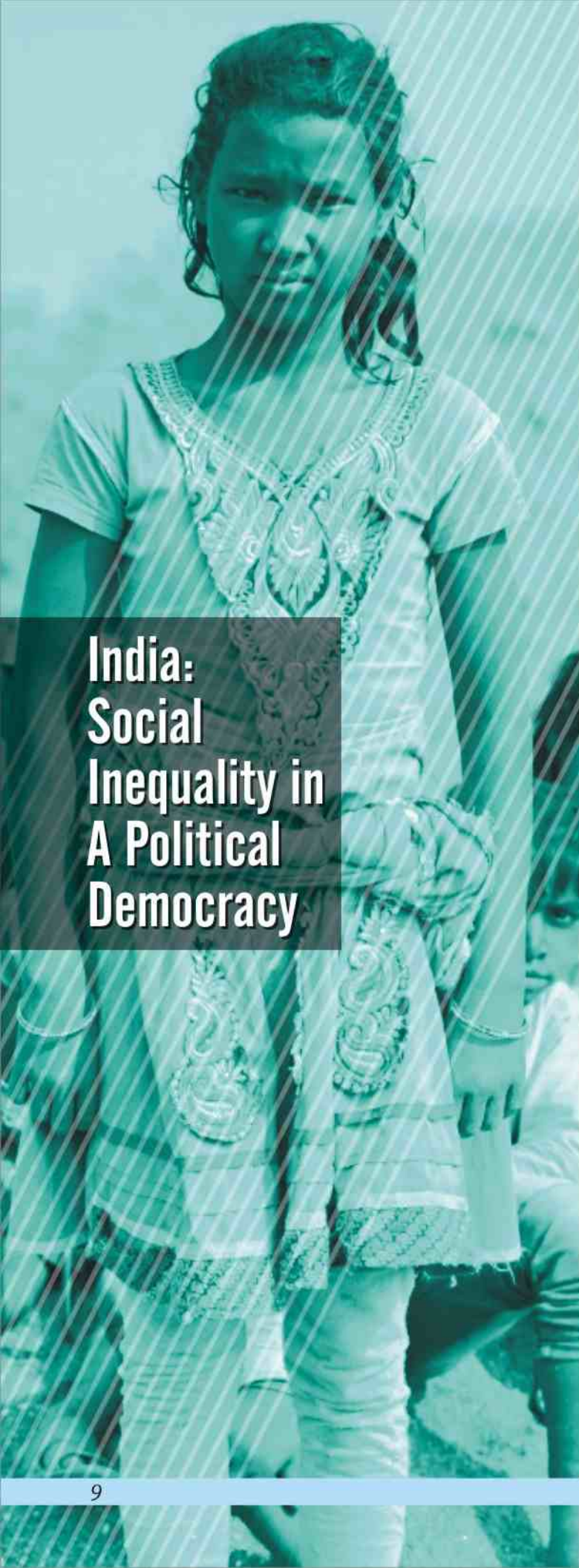
Given the underlying religious and cultural sensitivities, Amnesty International urges the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that religious rites and practices are respected as far as possible and in line with international guidelines; and any changes to guidelines involve prior consultation with the affected community.



"COVID-19 does not discriminate between groups. Its victims include people of all faiths and none. As it strikes almost every country in the world, the virus is showing that we are united by our common humanity. The only way to deal with this crisis is as one, united in our support for the

health workers on the frontlines and people from all backgrounds who are at risk during the pandemic," said Biraj Patnaik.

Source: Amnesty International



India: Social Inequality in A Political Democracy

"The discrimination they face at schools at young age in an unwelcome atmosphere will have a long term hurt throughout their life. There are 33 million child labourers in India as per Census 2011 and 80 per cent of them are Dalits and 20 per cent from Backward Classes. The 2014 report titled "Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children", by UNICEF..."

In spite of India's perceptible economic and social development, the caste system still obstructs and isolates the section of its population, the Scheduled Caste (SC) also called as Dalits and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The Dalits, who form around 16.6 percent of Indian population, undergo systemic discrimination and excluded from the development process even after 72 years of independence is a shameful reality of India. Majoritarian democracy has failed to address the substantial issues of its section of population and electoral promises of eliminating caste based deprivation have been a mirage for Dalits all these years. The day to day living experience of Dalits in India in every sphere justifies their anger and distrust over all the political parties.

The Right to Education for all children, now being a fundamental right under Indian Constitution, hasn't been effective in addressing the issues of Dalits and Scheduled Tribes of India. The National Campaign for Dalit Human Right (NCDHR) study in 2017, on exclusion and discrimination of Dalits in school reveals that the humiliation and segregation on caste lines has been institutionalised in the school system. Made to sit separate, forced to clean toilets, restricted to drink water from common pot, mid-day meals given at last and everyday caste abuses are daily living experience for these Dalit children in schools. The NDTV 2017 report on how the ST students of Rajgarh in Jharkhand were to eat mice, rabbits and birds as teacher comes rarely to school and no mid-day meal is provided. The Navsarjan Trust survey report - Voices of Children of Manual Scavengers in 2010 reveals the extreme form of discrimination faced by the children of manual scavengers in Gujarat. The 2014 Human Rights Watch Report titled "They say we are dirty" concludes how Dalits, ST's and Muslims are at high risk of dropping out of school in India. The dropout rate for Dalit children is 51 per cent compared to national average of 37 percent. Prof. Thorat's study in 2006 revealed that in mid-day meals scheme Dalits were made to sit separately, given separate meal, inferior or insufficient food served to them and Dalit cook prepared food not taken by upper caste children. According to a study by Harsh Mander, Anganwadi (Child Care) Centres are deliberately kept away from Dalit and Scheduled Tribes locality to deprive the facility to them.

The discrimination they face at schools at young age in an unwelcome atmosphere will have a long term hurt throughout their life. There are 33 million child labourers in India as per Census 2011 and 80 per cent of them are Dalits and 20 per cent from Backward Classes. The 2014 report titled "Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children", by UNICEF revealed that Dalits girls have the highest rate of primary school exclusion of 6.1 per cent in India. Further ILO in a survey has identified that among the bonded labourers in India, those who belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were the majority with 61.5 per cent and 25.1 per cent. With such daily experience of discrimination and exclusion, completion of school education itself a humongous task, but such institutionalised discrimination continues in higher education also, as we witness numerous suicides by Dalit students at university level.

The National Health Protection Scheme may be the largest Government funded programme in the world, but still a Dalit women in India dies 14.6 years earlier than upper caste women on an average. According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-06, SC and ST children suffer more from undernourishment (weight for age, height for age and weight for height) compared to upper caste children. The Dalit women suffering from anaemia is 4 per cent more than the national average, while the neonatal mortality (within one month) is 46 per 1000 for Dalits as national average is 39 per thousand according to NFHS 2005-06. Similarly, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is 66 for Dalits, while national average is 57 and under-five mortality is 88 for Dalits compared to a national average of 74. Research study point out that Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) don't even enter Dalits house, while pharmacist doesn't explain the doses properly for Dalits. Explicit discrimination by doctors and nurses, as they are reluctant to touch them and give proper treatment, is widespread in rural areas that access to health facility for Dalits has become a difficult task.

The Census 2011 data shows that around 71 per cent of



Dalits are agricultural labourers, while only 29 per cent are cultivators. But it is 41 per cent and 59 per cent for non-SC/ST, showing the landlessness/small land holding status of Dalits in India. Amnesty International in its Halt the Hate website has recorded around 902 incidents of hate crime between September 2015 and June 2019, out of which 619 were against Dalits showing the growing hate culture against Dalits in India. Since 2015 almost 70 per cent of hate crimes were against Dalits in India. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the crime against Dalits has increased from 16.3 crimes per 100, 000 Dalits in 2006 to 20.3 crimes in 2016. However the conviction rate during same period is below 30 per cent.

Dignity of labourers being protected by the Constitution of India, the Dalits are still forced to involve in menial occupations, risking their lives. In spite of legal protections in the form of The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, the manual scavenging and its deaths are prevalent in India. Dalits being predominant in this caste based occupation; the sluggish implementation of its provision takes the lives of them regularly. Around 180657 households are forced to be manual scavengers for their livelihood according to Socio Economic Caste Census 2011. There are around 794000 cases of manual scavenging according to 2011 Census data. According to National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), a statutory body, since January 2017, one person lost his life in every five days cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

Honour killing, cow vigilantism, underrepresentation in Government employment, discrimination in religious worship and other numerous types of discrimination and exclusion is being practiced against Dalits throughout India, humiliating and harassing them every day. The present Corona lockdown and unemployment will have a disastrous effect on Dalits compared to others due to already existing discriminatory social structure. In such a socially undemocratic milieu, political democracy seems to be a mere ritualistic exercise without any substantial change in the lives of this vulnerable group. There is a urgent need to work towards realising the constitutional dream of social equality as Dr Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution, said that the political democracy cannot be realised in its true form, when we lack the social democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Source: Kashmir Times

Lord Elton Hails Usman Buzdar For Fixing Quota For Minorities

Members British House of Lords Lord Elton has hailed Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar for fixing two percent quota in higher education for the minorities.

In a letter addressed to CM Punjab Usman Buzdar, Lord Elton of Liverpool extended compliments and acknowledgment for his step for the minorities in Punjab and hoped that the initiative would go a long way in opening new avenues for the members of the Pakistani minorities in the higher education.

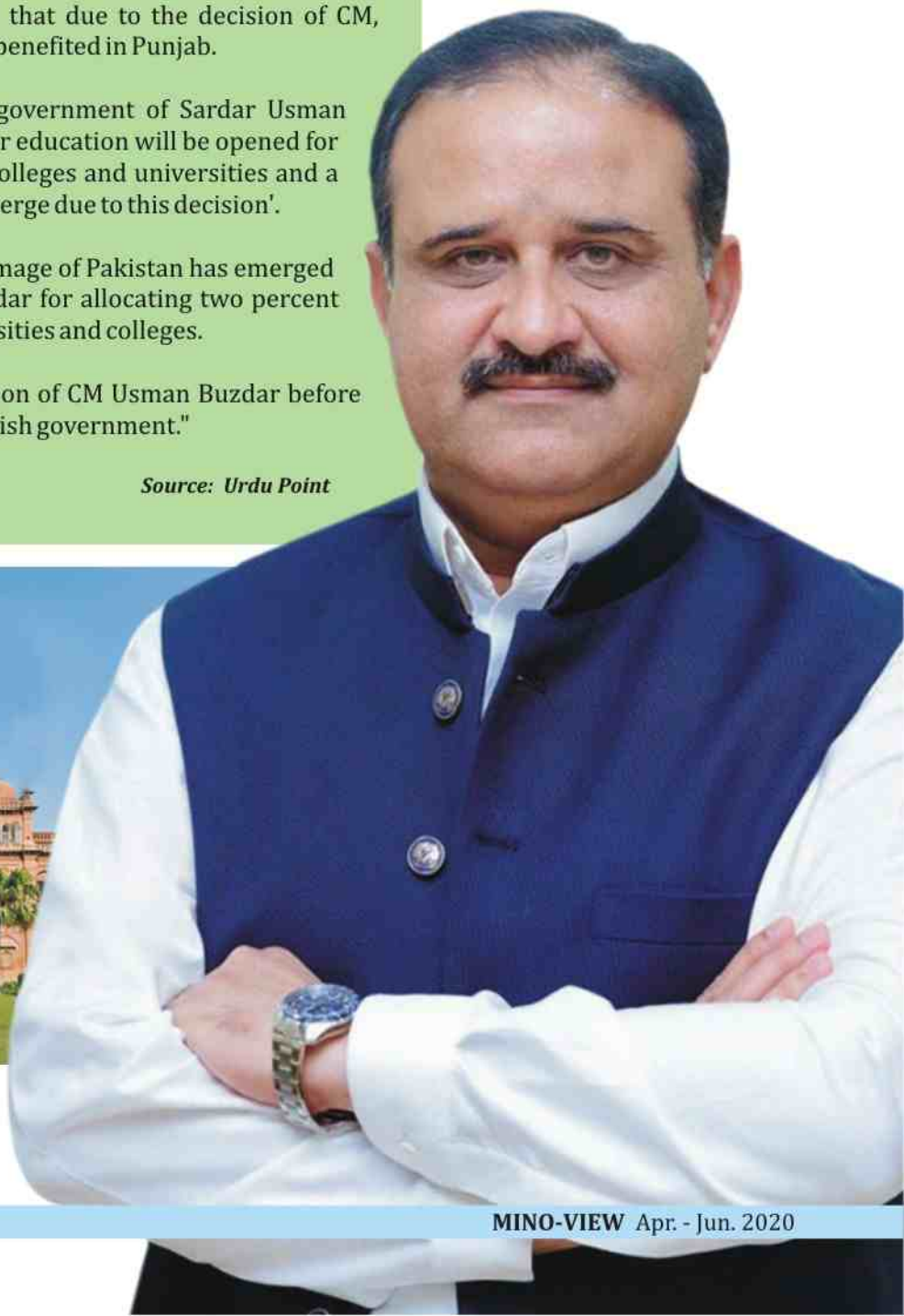
Lord Elton, who is also Chairman of Pakistani Minorities' All Party Parliamentary Group, further hoped that due to the decision of CM, thousands of youth minorities will be benefited in Punjab.

Hailing the decision of the Punjab government of Sardar Usman Buzdar, the letter read 'doors of higher education will be opened for the minority students in renowned colleges and universities and a new middle class of minorities will emerge due to this decision'.

Lord Elton, further wrote that a soft image of Pakistan has emerged with this decision of CM Usman Buzdar for allocating two percent quota of minorities students in universities and colleges.

He said "I will portray positive decision of CM Usman Buzdar before the British House of Lords and the British government."

Source: Urdu Point



'Women's employment hit harder by lockdown'



MUMBAI: While the lockdown has led to a spike in job losses across the country, women's employment has been hit harder than that of men's, according to a paper by Ashoka University economics professor Ashwini Deshpande. Analysing CMIE data, the paper found that women who were employed before the lockdown were 23.5 percentage points less likely to be employed after the lockdown compared to men.

Male heads of households were 11.3 percentage points more likely to be employed post-lockdown compared to female heads, the paper said. It also found that the lockdown impacted the employment of disadvantaged caste groups more than upper castes.

The paper titled, *The Covid-19 Lockdown in India: Gender and Caste dimensions of the first job losses*, analysed the employment status of 37,000 people before and after the lockdown from the CMIE's consumer pyramids household survey database.

"The lockdown was gender-blind, but its impact was not gender-neutral," said Deshpande. "Pre-existing inequalities along gender and caste lines are likely to get reinforced, unless the specific contours of disadvantage are recognised and addressed."

The paper found that on an average, people were 12.8 percentage points less likely to be employed after the lockdown. On a pre-lockdown base of 38.9 percentage points, this translated into a 33% reduction in the likelihood of being employed. Comparing March and April, the data showed an overall employment loss of 30% during the first month of the lockdown. In absolute terms, more men than women lost jobs in the first month of the lockdown. This is contrary to global trends. But this is because in India, more men than women held jobs in the first place.

For a gendered analysis of job losses, the paper compared the ratio of absolute employment in April 2020 with the average employment between April-December 2019. It found that female employment in April 2020 was at 61% of the pre-lockdown yearly average. But for men, it was higher at 71%.

Rural women's employment suffered the largest fall, as it stood at 57% of the previous year's average. It was 73% for rural men, 69% for urban women and 67% for urban men, the paper said. "The decline in female labour force participation rates since 2004-05 has been driven by a decline in rate for rural women. The pandemic-induced suspension of economic activity reveals a similar pattern," it said.

It also noted that the lockdown affected the employment status of OBCs, SCs and STs more adversely than upper castes-it declined by 6, 12.3 and 9.4 percentage points respectively. "While women and Dalits have suffered... more job losses, risky and stigmatized jobs are exclusively their preserve. All frontline health workers (ASHA) are women; manual scavengers are exclusively Dalit. Thus, for several women and Dalits, the choice seems to be between unemployment and jobs that put them at risk of disease and infection and make them targets of vicious stigma."

Source: Times of India

In 1946, BR Ambedkar, educationally the most accomplished Indian of his time (he received his education at Columbia and the London School of Economics), wrote to WEB Du Bois, the Harvard-educated African American intellectual, telling the latter that, 'I was very much interested to read that the Negroes of America have filed a petition to the UNO'. He asked for 'two or three' copies of the Negro petition to the newly formed world body because, as Ambedkar informs Du Bois, the 'Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit'. Ambedkar, at the end of his decades-long differences with Gandhi about caste matters and such groundbreaking books as the *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), would become the draftsman of the Indian constitution. But, even then, he would lose hope of getting rid of the caste system in Hinduism and convert to Buddhism.

Du Bois, on the other hand, was also at the end of his long struggle against American racism with such groundbreaking books behind him as *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901) and the first book of researched urban sociology on blacks, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). As caste was the target of Ambedkar's

polemics, racism remained on Du Bois's crosshair. And Du Bois, too, would eventually take the citizenship of the African country Ghana, become a communist and live and die there in 1963. However, the problems both raised, caste in Hindu South Asia for Ambedkar and racism for Du Bois, have persisted. 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line', Du Bois famously said in the opening of his magnum opus, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Ambedkar in effect said the same thing that the problem of Hindu India in the 20th century was the caste system.

But, alas, the killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and of Dalit youths in the mid-Western hills of Nepal unequivocally show that the problems of race and caste have barged into the 21st century with a diabolical snarl. Floyd died at the hands of four policemen (one of whom pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes) and the Dalit youth Navaraj BK and his friends were murdered by upper-caste villagers in Western Nepali mid-hills for going to the village to elope with his upper-caste sweetheart. The would-be bride had urged Navaraj to come get her; otherwise, her parents were going to marry her off against her wishes to somebody from their own caste.

Steeped in blood

As American soil is drenched in the blood of black men, so is Hindu Asia's land soaked in the blood of the Dalits its sky reverberates with their silent and not-so-silent screams. Just a few days before George Floyd's death, a white woman who worked as the vice president of an investment firm called the cops on a Harvard-educated birder in New York City's Central Park, telling him in no uncertain terms that she was going to call the cops and tell them that an 'African American man' was threatening her life and her dog.





She was angry because he asked her to put the dog on a leash in the area of the park where leashing was mandatory.

No matter how educated a black man becomes, no matter how educated a Dalit becomes, in the eyes of the racial or caste majority, their worth is not more than what the deep prejudicial ideology has valued them as.

As an academic, I teach and research both African American literature and the non-Western world and its literature and culture. America and South Asia have been my abiding intellectual interests and I have spent long periods of my life in both places. When I teach African American literature, I begin with Gospels, Spirituals, slave narratives and end with Barack Obama's Philadelphia race speech about America's striving to be a more perfect union. When I teach South Asia, I'm obsessively drawn to texts that deal with caste problems, such as Tagore's *Gora*, Arundhati's *Roy's The God of Small Things*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and other such narratives and poems. I have always asked why has race and caste remain so stubbornly ingrained in society.

In America, the model minority Asians, despite facing barriers, have been assimilated in the corporate as well as the marital worlds with white Americans. But the brunt of the racial othering always falls on the African Americans. In the same way, I have found Hindu Nepal to be more tolerant in terms of inter-caste marriages as long as they are between upper-caste Hindus or upper-caste Hindus and indigenous communities or caste Madhesi. The acceptance stops at the door of the Dalits. Why? Hill Dalits are educated, Nepali-speaking, many even pale-skinned.

What is the problem? In the southern plains and most parts of India, the situation is worse.

The hope of a better future

In America, the blacks have over the centuries of oppression created their own aesthetics. Jazz, Blues, Hip hop, Rap are the glories of America. Besides, African Americans can draw from the whole continent of Africa as the source of their pride, civilisation and culture. Besides, Christianity has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration and hope for them throughout their history in the New World. There is no such separate spatial region as a source of inspiration for the Dalits but in the past century and a quarter with Ambedkar and Phule, Dalits have begun to form their own traditions of pride and source of inspiration.

Marx, Buddhism, Ambedkar and, recently, evangelical Christianity have provided alternatives to the South Asian Dalits. Intermarriage obviously could be a source but it has risks as well. In my view, the recent trends of inter-caste solidarity to oppose caste oppression and interracial solidarity to oppose racial oppression as seen in the post-Floyd and post-Navaraj protests is one of the signs of hope for a better future. But Dalits and those who find solidarity with Dalits have to fight on three levels: ideology, structure and practices. This is because caste is deeply ingrained in each of these three forms. Only Dalits cannot eradicate or annihilate caste oppression; only the blacks cannot end racial oppression, even though they have to lead in front with ideas and action. People of conscience of all castes and races have to come together to find ways to end caste and racial oppression and realise each other's humanity.

Source: Kathmandu Post

Report: Over 50% of child labourers in cottonseed farms in India are Dalits or Adivasis

A new report published by the human rights NGO Arisa has found that children under 14 years account for over 18% of the workforce in the cottonseed farms surveyed, with over 50% of the child labourers in the sector being Dalits or Adivasis. The majority of the child labourers were not attending school. The report *Sowing Hope*, which examines child labour and wages in cotton and vegetable seed production in India, says that while still too high, the total amount of child labourers has in fact declined since 2015, due to initiatives by companies and NGOs.

The report however does find that wages across the sector are still far from the minimum wage, a figure which has not improved significantly. The prevailing wage rates were found to be 24-41% below minimum wage in some Indian states. The researchers also found differential treatment of Dalits in the workplace with reports of Dalit workers being treated differently to dominant castes and not being given the same privileges in relation to taking breaks during work hours or being treated with respect and dignity.

613 sample farms were surveyed showing a direct correlation between the decline of child labour in companies who have implemented special programmes to address this issue in relation to those who have not yet tackled the problem. IDSN welcomes 'Sowing Hope' and urges companies looking to address child labour and the working conditions in the seed sector to address caste discrimination directly, as it is a key root cause of child labour, also evidenced by the large percentage of Dalits engaged in this work as documented. This caste dimension is also witnessed in many other sectors including Leather, Stone and Minerals, Construction, Carpet Weaving as well as across the Garment and Agriculture sectors.

Source: IDSN

