



Pakistan's Monthly Extremism Watch

Compiled by National Initiative against Organised Crime (NIOC)

Centre for Governance Research-Pakistan

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After reading nine articles and news items selected this month, one finds that three oft-repeated themes occur again and again:

- The incidents of mob ransacking minorities' worship and historical places on various pretexts remain unabated. The current examples include attack on a Hindu temple in Rahim Yar Khan and vandalizing of Raja Ranjit Singh's statue at Lahore Fort. In the attack on Temple case, there is allegedly a personal rivalry background too, highlighting yet again how people settle their scores using religious sentiments of the masses.
- Arrests of Christians and other minorities for alleged blasphemy is another issue highlighted by one incident in Abbottabad where four people were arrested. In one case Supreme Court has been moved against Christian couple's acquittal in a blasphemy case.
- Honorable Chief Justice of Pakistan has shown a firm resolve to protect rights of the minorities and their worship places. But at the same time, clerics have expressed reservations over the draft of anti-forced conversion bill. The article "A question of faith" discusses in detail anti-forced conversion bill.

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Mob ransacks temple after minor boy gets bail in desecration case



Hundreds of people reportedly vandalised a Hindu temple in Bhong town (60km from Rahim Yar Khan) and blocked the Sukkur-Multan Motorway (M-5) after a nine-year old Hindu boy, who allegedly urinated in a local seminary, was granted bail by a local court.

Responding to the situation, the district administration deployed rangers in the area after Deputy Commissioner Dr Khuram Shehzad and District Police Officer Asad Sarfraz visited the town.

Sources said on the complaint of a cleric, Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim, of Darul Uloom Arabia Taleemul Quran, the Bhong police had registered a case against the boy under section 295-A of the Pakistan Penal Code on July 24.

They said some Hindu elders did tender an apology to the seminary administration saying the accused was a minor and mentally challenged. But, when a lower court granted him bail a few days ago, some people incited the public in the town on Wednesday and got all shops there closed in protest.

A video clip viral on social media showed charged people wielding clubs and rods storming the temple and smashing its glass doors, windows, lights and damaging the ceiling fans.



Later, the protesters also blocked the M-5 motorway for more than three hours.

District police spokesman Ahmed Nawaz Cheema said the rangers had been deployed in the troubled area and the situation was under control.

About the alleged late response by the police authorities, sources said senior officials were busy attending the police martyrs' day ceremonies.

Mr Cheema confirmed the accused was a minor, and added that so far he had no information about his mental health.

There are reports of some old monetary dispute between Hindu and Muslim groups in the area which was stated to be the actual cause of the unrest.

A small town close to the River Indus and Sindh-Punjab border, Bhong houses a number of gold traders who originally hail from Ghotki and Dehrki (Sindh).

A PTI member representing minorities (who did not want to be identified) said he had been in touch with the local Hindu community and influential Rais family of Bhong since the issue surfaced.

He said the boy was sent to the Rahim Yar Khan district jail for security reasons.

The district and sessions court had granted bail to the boy four days ago.

The Rais family, according to him, had settled the issue amicably, but a local from the Sumro tribe ran a campaign against the minority community on social media which ultimately caused the unrest. He said after getting the Bhong market closed, the mob also tried to attack some houses of the people belonging to the Hindu community.

M-5 spokesman Amer Sardar said as the motorway remained closed for almost three hours, traffic was diverted to the National Highway via Iqbalabad and Guddu interchanges.

Source: Dawn, August 5, 2021

Three arrested in Abbottabad for blasphemy



The police have arrested two brothers and a transgender person on charges of desecrating the holy Quran in Abbottabad and Havelian. In the first incident, a transgender person identified as

Qaiser Zada, a resident of Swabi, was arrested after he was allegedly caught by locals near the Jinnah Bagh in Abbottabad city while burning a copy of the holy Quran. He was beaten up by the people and was later handed over to the police.

The police registered FIR against the accused under Section 295-B, and later produced him before the judicial magistrate, who remanded him for three days.

In the other incident, the police arrested two brothers - Asif Fareed and Abdullah Fareed - when locals allegedly caught them burning pieces of Quran and other Islamic material.

The alleged blasphemers had collected the pieces from the tin boxes affixed to poles on the roadside.

The two were also booked under Section 295-B on the complaint of local elders and ulema.

Sources said that people blocked the Abbottabad-Havelian Road after the incident, with some protesters attacking the Havelian police station and trying to enter the lock-up. The police used tear gas to disperse them.

The protesters were chanting slogans and were demanding that the police hand the alleged blasphemers to them.

DSP Havelian Bashir and additional SP Malik Ejaz negotiated with the protesters to calm them down.

The police also arrested at least six protesters for damaging a police mobile, motorcycles and other vehicles parked inside the police station.

Source: Dawn, August 8, 2021

SC moved against Christian couple's acquittal



A petitioner has challenged a Lahore High Court (LHC) order to acquit a Christian couple languishing in jail for years over blasphemy charges and contended that the LHC drew a wrong conclusion which resulted in a "gross miscarriage" of justice.

A trial court in Toba Tek Singh on April 4, 2014, sentenced Shafqat Masih and his wife Shagufta Kausar to death under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) read with Section 34 for sending blasphemous messages through their mobile phones.

However, an LHC division bench – comprising Justice Shahbaz Ali Rizvi and Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh –on June 3 acquitted the couple after the prosecution “failed to establish the case beyond doubt”.

Senior advocate Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhary has now challenged the LHC order by filing an appeal in the Supreme Court Lahore Registry. According to the appeal, the LHC’s bench "failed to appreciate the facts and law of the case in their true perspective and drew a wrong conclusion".

“The observation of the LHC’s division bench to the effect that ‘the appellants can be convicted only if the prosecution establishes that the handset (phone) belonged to them or was in their use

and they authored and sent the text is a far-fetched imagination going much below the ground realities.”

It said the division bench did not mention, discuss or distinguish the precedent laws produced during arguments from the complainant side, adding that the evidence of judicial confession was important and the best evidence in the eye of law.

“[This is so] because Muhammad Nasir Siyal, superintendent of police (PW-11) before whom firstly the accused had confessed his guilt, had taken him to the magistrate immediately, where again confession was recorded ...and it was not proved from any document that the said confession was not voluntarily.”

The appeal said while deciding the criminal appeal against conviction of the culprits after a full-fledged trial, there was no occasion or justification for the division bench to embark upon "theoretical and academic discussion" with reference to Articles 4, 9,10, and 10-A of the Constitution.

“The important thing is that all laws are made and implemented for public good and advancement of justice, therefore, punishment of the criminals is of equal importance.”

“In a case where the facts, circumstances and evidence on record prove guilt of the accused beyond any shadow of doubt, punishment of the culprits becomes quite inevitable for the simple reason that to let the criminal go free, means to punish the whole society,” it added.

The case

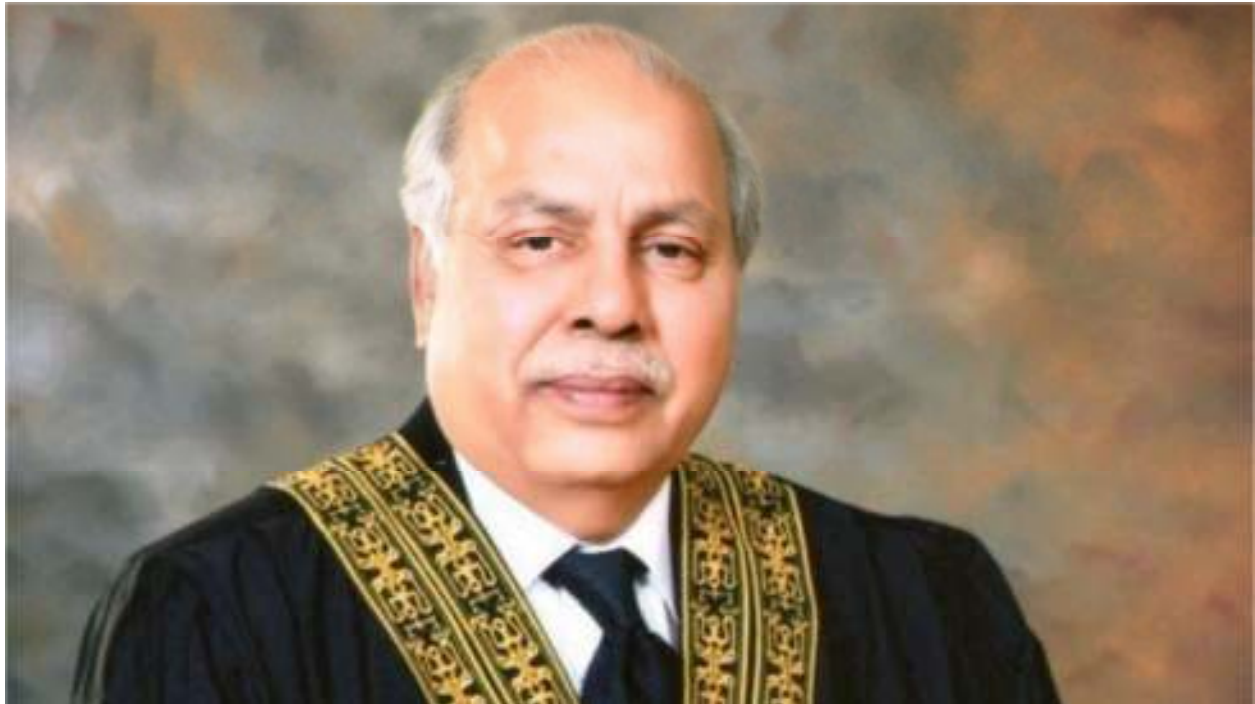
Complainant Muhamad Hussain on July 18, 2013, was offering prayer in a mosque when he received a message on his phone. When he checked the phone, he found that it was a sacrilegious text from an unknown mobile number.

The complainant showed these messages to one Khalid Maqsood and Muhammad Shabbir and others. The complainant obtained prints of these blasphemous SMS and went to the office of Sajjad Asghar Khokhar for initiating legal proceedings against the suspects.

He was still there when he received five more SMS from the aforesaid number with the same derogatory contents. He showed them to Sajjad Ashgar who called the sender from his phone to know who the person was, but nobody picked up the phone. After that, the police registered a case and arrested the accused for alleged blasphemy.

Source: The Express Tribune, August 8, 2021

Minorities' rights, places of worship to be protected: CJP



Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Gulzar Ahmed held out an assurance that as long as he served the top judicial office, he would ensure that the rights of minority communities, as guaranteed under the Constitution, were protected at any cost and that the tragic incidents of desecration and vandalism of their places of worship were not repeated.

Speaking at a seminar organised by the Implementation of the Minority Rights Forum (IMRF) and All Neighbours on the rights of the minorities at a local hotel, the CJP recalled how he felt pain when he learnt about the desecration of temples both at Hindu Samadhi in Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and at Ganesh Mandir in Bhong, Rahim Yar Khan.

“That was the reason why prompt suo motu notices were taken on the desecration of the worship places because such tragic and unfortunate incidents of desecration of the holy places of the minority communities were neither tolerable nor acceptable in the country,” the CJP said.

“Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras and churches are as important and sacred to me as my own religious places,” observed the CJP, adding that such incidents should be discouraged with full force by taking prompt and stern action against the culprits.

“A sense of tolerance and religious harmony should be instilled in our society so that the people are allowed to live and profess their religion freely without any fear,” Justice Gulzar said.

“The Supreme Court of Pakistan always takes the fundamental rights of all people of the country very seriously and sincerely and we have always been at the forefront to ensure no unfairness, atrocities or violation of any fundamental right of the minority communities take place,” he said.

The CJP added that the apex court would continue to take measures relentlessly to ensure necessary action against any disrespect to the harmony, tranquillity or coherence in society.

He stressed the need for rooting out the rampant practice of marrying underage girls from the minority communities with Muslims, especially in Sindh and Punjab, and emphasised that the Christian Marriage Act 1872 should be made applicable to all such cases.

“The law clearly disallows underage marriage of girls and since such wedlock may not be void but definitely wrong and, therefore, this should come to an end. The courts should always pronounce dissolution of such marriages,” the CJP said.

He also asked Attorney General for Pakistan Khalid Jawed Khan, who was present on the occasion, to investigate the matter and bring the issue to the notice of the government for finding some amicable solution to the problem.

Citing examples from Tharparkar (Sindh) where underage girls usually tell the court that they have married Muslim men of their free will, the CJP said the courts should be extra careful in dealing with such cases and being a serious matter, the issue needed to be addressed promptly.

Justice Gulzar also referred to the 2014 landmark judgement of the Supreme Court on the rights of the minority communities and said the court, through the most liberal construction of the minority rights, ordered the government to ensure that the rights of minorities were protected, their places of worship secured, and an atmosphere of tolerance and religious harmony was ensured.

He said that as a result of the judgement, a National Council for Minority Rights was established and a commission headed by Dr Shoaib Suddle was constituted, which was doing an exemplary function by acting a bridge between the minorities and the government.

“Any individual with any grievance on the minority rights can approach Dr Suddle and, in return, the commission will ensure that nothing goes wrong, and the rights of minorities are protected,” the CJP said.

Earlier, Samuel Payara, chairman of the IMRF, highlighted that the law regarding marriages of underage girls was not being implemented and appreciated that courts in the country had always taken stern and prompt action against any violation of the rights of minority communities.

Source: Dawn, August 12, 2021

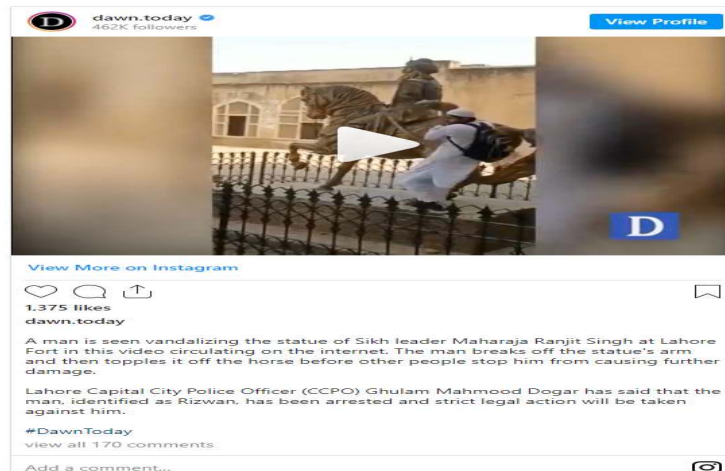
Man arrested for vandalising Raja Ranjit Singh's statue at Lahore Fort



A man was arrested for vandalising the statue of famous Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh located at the Lahore Fort, with the city's Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Ghulam Mahmood Dogar saying "strict legal action" will be taken against him.

This is the third time the statue has been vandalised since its unveiling in June 2019 to commemorate the ruler's 180th death anniversary.

In a video of the latest incident, the vandal, identified by police officials as Rizwan, can be seen breaking off the statue's arm and toppling it off its horse before bystanders stop him from causing further damage.



In a statement issued today, CCPO Dogar said the suspect used a hammer to inflict damage on the statue, as he directed the superintendent of police to immediately visit the site.

The vandalism was condemned by Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry, who termed it a "shameful" act.

"This bunch of illiterates are really dangerous for Pakistan's image in the world," he tweeted.



Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar also took notice of the incident and directed the Lahore CCPO to submit a report in this regard.

He directed that action be taken against the suspect in accordance with the law and ordered for the statue to be restored to its original form.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the ruler of the Sikh empire spread across many parts of Pakistan, with Punjab being the main territory and including parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and even southern parts of the country. His statue was unveiled in the Lahore Fort at the Mai Jindan Haveli, on the emperor's 180th death anniversary by Sikh historian, writer and filmmaker Bobby Singh Bansal.

Bansal's London-based organisation, the S.K. Foundation, had funded the statue. It was sculpted by local artists, under the aegis of the Fakir Khana Museum.

Bansal himself had stated earlier that the statue was a project meant to forge a lasting friendship amongst the people of Punjab, and that the statue had been donated to the people of Pakistan by his foundation to promote Sikh heritage and tourism here.

However, not long after the statue was inaugurated, the first attack of vandalism took place, where two men struck it with wooden rods, resulting in the breakage of one of its arms and damage to other parts. The attackers were chanting slogans against the former ruler of Punjab and were protesting the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status by India.

In the second attack in December 2020, a young man, who was later arrested, broke an arm of the statue made of bronze. Like those before him, the suspect also told the police that Ranjit Singh's statue should not have been built as he had committed atrocities against Muslims during his rule.

Source: Dawn, August 17, 2021

Clerics express reservations over the draft of anti-forced conversion bill



Clerics and religious scholars who attended a meeting called by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to discuss the draft of the anti-forced conversion bill have expressed serious reservations over the bill and warned the ministry that it cannot be implemented in its current shape.

The ministry invited only Muslim stakeholders to hold the in-camera meeting. Members of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) or its chairman, Chela Ram, were not invited to the

meeting. The lone Muslim member of the NCM, Mufti Gulzar Naeemi, was invited in the capacity of a local cleric.

The meeting was chaired by Minister for Religious Affairs Pir Noorul Haq Qadri. Some senior officials of the ministry, including heads of the Interfaith Harmony Wing and Haj Wing, were also in attendance.

Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) chairman Dr Qibla Ayaz, CII's other officials and some local clerics were invited to the meeting.

The agenda of and discussion at the meeting has not been made public. However, one of its participants said that they were informed that the draft of the "Prohibition of Forced Conversion Act, 2021" has been received from the Ministry of Human Rights.

"The copies of the draft were shared, and discussions were held after everyone in the room went through the papers," the participant added.

The clerics and religious scholars in the review meeting expressed serious reservations over it and objected to several clauses, including the minimum age of conversion. It was noted that the minimum age of 18 years for conversion was incorrect, and it was pointed out that this age bracket was contrary to the draft domestic violence bill that was currently with the law ministry.

"When parents cannot even scold their children under the domestic violence bill, so can they stop their children from embracing Islam?" one of the clerics was quoted as saying.

The participant also observed that the procedure allowed under the draft law for conversion was too cumbersome.

Conversion certificate

Meanwhile, the copy of the draft bill, which is available with Dawn, shows that any non-Muslim, who is not a child, and is able and willing to convert to another religion will apply for a conversion certificate from an additional sessions judge of the area where he or she is residing.

The draft law highlights that the application will have to include the name of a non-Muslim who is willing to change the religion, age and gender, CNIC number, details of parents, siblings, children and spouse (if any), current religion and the reason to convert to the new religion.

The draft law states that the additional sessions judge will set a date for interview within seven days of receipt of an application for conversion, and on the date the judge will ensure that the conversion is not under any duress and not due to any deceit or fraudulent misrepresentation.

The proposed law states that the "Judge may award a time period of 90 days to the non-Muslim to undertake a comparative study of the religions and return to the office of the Additional Sessions Judge".

After satisfaction, the judge will the certificate of change of religion.

The proposed law also awards punishment between five to 10 years and a fine from Rs100,000 to Rs200,000 to any person who uses criminal force to convert a person to another religion.

While any person who is an abettor to a forced conversion will be liable to imprisonment from three to five years and a fine of Rs100,000.

It has been highlighted that the age of the person willing to convert his/her religion will be determined by either the child's birth certificate, or school enrolment certificate, or Nadra B-Form.

"Only in the absence of such forms the child's age may be determined on the basis of a medical examination," the draft added.

The proposed law also states that the case of forced conversion will have been disposed of within 90 days by the Court, while appeal against a conviction or acquittal of an offence under this Act can be presented before the respective High Court within ten days from the date on which copy of the order passed by the Court of Session is supplied to the appellant.

Source: Dawn, August 25, 2021

Four arrested on charge of blasphemy

Police arrested four people on charges of blasphemy in two incidents.

Chunian police lodged a criminal case against a man under sections 295-A (outrage the religious feelings of any class of citizens) and 298-A (wounding the religious feelings of any person) of PPC.

According to the first information report, the suspect allegedly uploaded hate material on social media that was reported to police by some men of the village.

In the second case, Changa Manga police booked eight people of Bhagiwal village for allegedly writing derogatory remarks against the caliphs and companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on walls in various streets of the village. A case was registered under sections 295-A, 298-A of PPC and the Punjab Prohibition of Expressing Matters on Walls Act 1995.

Chunian police claimed to have arrested the suspect and Changa Manga police took into custody three of the alleged blasphemers.

Further investigation is under way.

Meanwhile, many people from Chunian took out a peaceful rally from Tibbi Dial Singh Chowk to Mandi Bhadoki. People from all walks of life vowed to maintain peace and respect for all sects. They said elements fanning sectarianism should be unmasked and penalised.

District Police Officer Imran Kishwar said the situation was under control and teams had been established to arrest the suspects. He said elements trying to disrupt peace and inter-sect harmony would be dealt with an iron hand.

Source: Dawn, August 25, 2021

A question of faith

THE troubling issue of forced conversions continues to be viewed largely through a majoritarian lens. Such an approach will further demoralise and alienate non-Muslims in the country and lead Pakistan further adrift from its international obligations. On Monday, the Ministry of Religious Affairs held a meeting with several clerics and religious scholars to discuss the draft of a bill, prepared by the human rights ministry, to prohibit forced conversion. No non-Muslims were invited to participate, not even from the National Commission for Minorities; its sole Muslim member was included in the capacity of a local cleric. Non-Muslims are the primary stakeholders in this issue which has deeply personal ramifications for them: was it not critical to obtain their point of view in discussing it? By this exclusionary approach, members of the majority faith have been enabled to record their objections to the bill unchallenged and set down the parameters of the discourse.

While the discussion at the in-camera meeting has not been made public, the participants reportedly expressed strong reservations to several clauses of the draft, including the minimum age of conversion. The religious lobby's opposition to the latter point has twice derailed the Sindh government's attempts to prohibit forced conversions. Non-Muslims, particularly Hindus in Sindh, have time and again protested minor girls from their communities being abducted, forcibly converted and married to Muslim men. It is thus unsurprising that the religious lobby is so strenuously opposed to a minimum age for conversion, especially since the courts unfortunately often overlook underage marriages when the child brides are new converts. However, changing one's faith is a serious decision with life-changing consequences. It must be taken after much deliberation and with informed consent. Aside from stipulating a minimum age of 18, the draft bill contains sensible clauses that prevent rushed decisions; it also mandates severe punishment for those perpetrating forced conversions. It is time the government and society did right by the beleaguered minority communities that call Pakistan home.

Source: Dawn, August 26, 2021

Clerics reject proposed anti-forced conversion law

Clerics belonging to all the four mainstream schools of thought rejected the draft Anti-Forced Conversion Bill, calling it a conspiracy and suggested that the government should not fall into the trap of the West by taking the draft bill to parliament.

At a meeting, chaired by Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) Chairman Dr Qibla Ayaz, they reviewed the draft bill. Minister for religious affairs Pir Noorul Haq Qadri attended the meeting held to commemorate the completion of three years of the present government.

The meeting was attended by senior officials of the CII, Ministry of Religious Affairs and clerics belonging to the four mainstream schools of thought in the country - Shia, Barelvi, Deobandi and Ahle Hadis.

The participants criticised the Ministry of Human Rights for not sharing with them the report of Senator Anwaarul Haq Kakar when he was the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions.

The officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs told the clerics that the report had been received from the Ministry of Human Rights and would be provided to them on Friday (today).

Incidentally, not only the clerics but even the officials were unanimous in declaring that there was no forced conversion in the country and most of the cases related to “love affairs between individuals”.

The meeting also unanimously rejected the title of the draft bill - Anti Forced Conversion - and one of the clerics later said the bill was a trap and the government should avoid it at all costs.

The cleric on the condition of anonymity added that it had been decided in the meeting that none of the participants would speak about the subject in public.

The meeting formed a committee headed by Dr Inamullah Khan, head of research at the CII, and including officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for suggesting an alternate name for the bill and eradicating controversial clauses in it.

Meanwhile, in another meeting, the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) too decided to formulate proposals for the bill against forced conversion.

The meeting of the NCM was chaired by Cheela Ram Kewalani and was briefed by Secretary Religious Affairs Sardar Ijaz Khan Jaffar and other officials of the Ministry of Law, Human Rights and Nadra.

The meeting noted that suggestions had been received from all stakeholders over the draft law to protect minorities, and after formulating all the proposals the draft would be sent to the Ministry of Law for vetting.

The chairman of the NCM said a law to protect religious minorities from forced conversion was the need of time and the commission was compiling proposals in this regard.

The meeting noted that the commission can play an effective role in promoting religious harmony in society, and lauded the government for arresting the culprits who disgraced the

Ganesh Mandir in Bhong, Rahim Yar Khan, and started the rebuilding of the temple.

“Such incidents not only hurt the religious minorities but also the Muslim brothers,” Mr Cheela Ram added.

“The dignity of the entire Pakistani nation has been tarnished due to the incompetence of some people,” he added. However, the commission noted that before the Bhong temple tragedy, the administration had shown negligence, but such negligence should not be repeated and it could have been averted had recommendations of the “Implementing Commission on Terry Temple, Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, been adopted by the Punjab government.

Source: Dawn, August 27, 2021

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