

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Dalit Solidarity Network demands justice for Kasthuri Kolhi

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By Urooj Zia
Karachi

The Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), Joint Action Committee (JAC) and other social and political groups protested on Friday outside the Karachi Press Club (KPC) against the alleged kidnapping and gang-rape of a 17-year-old Dalit girl, Kasthuri Kolhi.

The crime against the girl, who is a resident of village Mokryo, Taluka Nagarparker, district Tharparker, was allegedly perpetrated on January 24 by a local Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader, Ramzan Khoso, and his associates, Habibullah Khoso, Ghulam Nabi Khoso, and Veero Maharaj.

After several efforts by the girl's father, as well as the Kolhi Association, an FIR was finally lodged on February 17 under Section 365-B. "Regardless of the fact that Section 365-B is a non-bailable offence, the Sessions Court (Mithi) issued bails to the accused," Mehrgarh Hyderabad Coordinator and Kolhi Association head Veerji Kolhi, who has been pursuing the case since the start, told The News. "Only the high court is authorised to accept bail for such offences."

In the meantime, Kasthuri and her family have been forced to leave their home in the face of alleged threats and harassment from the police and the rapists. "The SPO (investigation) asked me why the girl left her house after 7pm," Veerji Kolhi said. "What right does he have to ask such questions? She can step out of her house at 2am if she wants to; it is the job of the law-enforcement agencies to protect her."

"The medical report has been released," said Krishna Lal, another activist who has been struggling to get justice for the girl. "The report says that rape could not be confirmed because a month has passed since the incident. The Nagarparker SHO has been suspended by the DPO Mithi for allegedly helping the suspects, but a charge-sheet has not been filed in court as yet. Despite this, the Sessions Court Mithi has accepted the eight-day bail for the accused. The next hearing has been fixed for March 8, which is International Women's Day. We will commemorate it as 'Kasthuri Day'."

The protesters in Friday's demonstration also demanded that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Sindh Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah take notice of the case. "It is the responsibility of the State to protect the citizens," they said. "Special measures should be taken to protect minority communities, especially those from the scheduled castes, because they are already down-trodden and face discrimination due to their low status in the caste system."

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Rape victim threatens to commit

Monday, March 01, 2010

By By Jan Khaskheli

Karachi

A 17-year-old rape victim 'K' has said that if she was not provided justice and her rapists not punished, she would commit suicide.

She was gang-raped on January 24 in Village Mokrio, seven kilometer from Nagarparkar Town, Tharparkar district. She had gone to collect fodder for their animals when she was kidnapped by armed men and raped.

Parents of the 17-year-old victim told The News that she was worried as after the unfortunate incident her fiance shown reluctance to marry her. She warned her parents that if the culprits were not punished, she would kill herself. After the defiance by her fiancé she is upset and her parents fear she might commit suicide.

The victim belongs to mountainous Nagarparkar area, a far fledged town of the province at the end of Rann of Kuchh. She looked depressed while her father Nawo Kalhi narrated the unfortunate episode. He told The News that it was a routine that his young daughter would walk to the place to collect fodder. He added that on the day of the incident she left home at around 7 pm and did not return after one-an-half hour after which they went out looking for her but she was missing from the site where she should have been. The villagers and relatives then assembled on the spot and found foot prints and marks of a vehicle's tires. They followed the marks which led them to a place of a local landlord where the armed men standing in front the gate denied any news of 'K' and threatened them villagers to leave, Kolhi added.

However, the fully charged youths, belonging to scheduled caste Kolhi community, resisted and went inside where they found Kastoori fastened and lying on the floor of a room.

Kolhi said that they went to police station in order to lodge a report, but the local influentials assured them that they would resolve the matter traditionally and there was no need for the police to be involved. He added that he was assured that they would punish the rapists.

According to Kolhi they recognised four culprits as Ramzan Khoso, Habib Khoso and Ghulam Nabi Khoso, all of whom are close relatives of an influential person Bachal Khoso, adding that another was one of their supporters Weerio Guriro son of Shankar Guriro.

Kolhi said that the culprits also pressurised them to hand over 'K' to them so that they could convert her to become a Muslim and get her married with one of the culprit. The accused also went to a local court, claiming that the girl came to them willingly, accusing her parents of subjecting to torture her and wanted to change religion. They took her to the town on her own request for help and not for abusing her.

However, after this civil society groups and human rights activists raised voice and pressurised the police to register an FIR against the accused people. However, the irony is that the police, so far, have not been successful to arrest the culprits.

In the meantime, the police, perhaps, on the directives of the victim's rapists, lodged a counter FIR against her relatives accusing them of using chemicals to collect gum from Guggal. The police raided their village and arrested 13 people.

Veerje Kolhi, a human rights activist and main complainant of the rape victim's case told The News that the village which these people belonged to was not a Guggal growing area. Guggal gum was collected from Karoonjhar Hills, 30 kilometer away from the area. He termed this a tactic to pressurize Kastoori's poor parents to withdraw their case. He said that the culprits had the backing of local PPP leaders that was why police officials were hesitant to take any action against them. Veerji added that they had sent documents to a Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) of the area regarding the incident and sought his help, but he did not respond positively.

Meanwhile, local activists from the minority communities told The News that the cases of abusing the girls belonging to minorities were increasing.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's (HRCP) Sindh Task Force Coordinator Dr Ashothama Lohano told The News that it was not just an incident of abusing an innocent girl, but it was also a conspiracy against the indigenous people, and the scheduled caste communities, especially Kolhis. He added that the landlords and

influential people wanted them to migrate to other areas.

“There are reserves of natural resources in the area, which certain elements want to use. The Kolhi community being in majority in the mineral rich areas is among the main stakeholders, whom the influential do not like to give share of any kind,” Lohano said.