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Kandhamal violence triggered by Hindu fanatics: Report

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The 3-day National Peoples Tribunal (NPT) on the Kandhamal communal violence at New Delhi concluded on Tuesday exposed the abject failure of police, judiciary and the Orissa Government to protect its weakest and poorest citizens during Kandhamal violence in 2007-08.

Varied depositions by the violence victims 15 jury panel having expertise in the field of housing, law, media, culture and administration made it clear that anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal was an orchestrated attempt by Hindu fanatics.

A report of the Jury Panel released by the NPT said, religion was used as an excuse to execute their plans. The hearing marked the second anniversary of the start of the riots.

Sectarian "forces used religious conversions to incite horrific forms of violence and discrimination against Christians of low caste origin and their supporters in Kandhamal," the report said.

The objective of the violence was "to dominate" the poor "to ensure that they never rose in social status so they would remain subservient to higher castes," it said.

The 12-member jury heard evidence from 43 victims and testimonies of bishops, officials and social activists from Orissa's Kandhamal district, the center of the 2008 violence.

The tribunal was established by the National Solidarity Forum, a coalition of some 50 volunteer organizations and rights groups.

"What happened in Kandhamal was a national shame, a complete defacement of humanity," said jury chief A. P. Shah, a former New Delhi chief justice. Survivors continue to be intimidated, denied protection and access to justice, Shah added.

"Coercive tactics have been used for the conversion or re-conversion of people into the Hindu fold, including threats, and intimidation, as well as institutionalized humiliation rituals," the report said.

State and district authorities "on no occasion, intervened to protect freedom of religion and freedom of expression," it added.

The report also recommended the establishment of a special team to investigate existing and fresh allegations of crimes committed during the violence. Trials have been compromised by ineffective prosecutions and the willful downgrading of crimes by police, it said.

The state government must "greatly increase" compensation packages and take steps to strengthen the justice system, the tribunal said.

Some 400 people including 95 survivors from Kandhamal attended the meeting The NPT was organised by the National Solidarity Forum, a coalition of over 65 organisations and peoples' movements that have come together to highlight the plight of victims and survivors; and attempt to bring justice.

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Kandhamal victims still face intimidation: People's tribunal

Updated on Tuesday, August 24, 2010, 20:31

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New Delhi: A 'people's tribunal' today said the victims of 2008 Kandhamal communal violence in Orissa continue to be intimidated, "systematically" denied protection and access to justice, recommending that state government must protect those affected and the witnesses of the cases.

A 12-member jury of the public tribunal on Kandhamal violence, headed by former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court A P Shah, recommended setting up of a special investigation team to re-examine the registered FIRs and examine the registration of fresh FIRs, noting that cases of sexual assault remained "grossly" unreported due to "fear and intimidation".

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"What happened in Kandhamal was a national shame, a complete defacement of humanity. Most of victims are dalits and tribals. Survivors continue to be intimidated and systematically denied protection and access to justice. They can not return to their villages unless they re-convert," Justice Shah said at a press conference here.

The tribunal recorded testimony of 43 victims, survivors and their representatives and heard fact-finding reports prepared by various voluntary organisations and experts.

"From the testimonies heard and the detailed reports received, the jury is convinced that the carnage in Kandhamal was an act of communalism mainly directed against the Christian community," Justice Shah said.

"It is clear to us that there was deliberate strategy of targeting of the community, fed by groups of Hindutva ideology such as RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and active members of BJP."

The jury is convinced that communal violence in Kandhamal was the consequence of a "subversion of constitutional governance in which state agents were complicit," he said.

The jury observed that delay in obtaining forensic evidence, failure in obtaining corroborative evidence and the "rampant" intimidation to victim, survivors and witnesses have led to many acquittals in the cases of Kandhamal violence.

Claiming "grave dereliction" on the part of police and administrative officials, the tribunal recommended a probe into such matters. It favoured appointment of a special public prosecutor "who enjoy confidence of affected community." "State must provide protection to victims and witnesses, during and after the trial process, according to guidelines provided in recent judgement of Delhi High Court," it said.

The tribunal said state government should recognise the rights of those displaced in the violence and create all "possible enabling conditions" to facilitate their return.

"Designate the affected areas as communally sensitive, appoint officers with professional integrity...develop appropriate response mechanism to halt the brewing of hate mobilisation and

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religious and caste-based discriminative activities," it added.

The tribunal felt that the compensation given to victims were "extremely arbitrary and inadequate," and recommended that both Centre and state adopt "at the very minimum" the Gujarat compensation package to enhance the amount.

PTI

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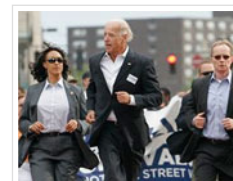


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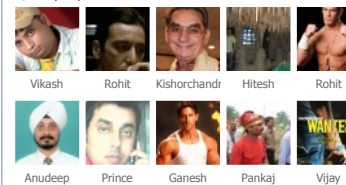
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