

President takes note of reports of discrimination in relief against scheduled caste Hindus

KARACHI, Sept 23 (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday took note of media reports that the scheduled caste Hindus (Dalits) were denied humanitarian assistance and entry into relief camps allegedly for being "untouchable" and has called for a report from the provincial government. The President also directed that immediate relief be provided to all marooned and stranded people and flood victims including the scheduled caste Hindus. Spokesperson to President Farhatullah Babar said that the President this morning took notice of the reports in a section of the media and has asked the Chief Minister to look into the complaints and correct the situation.

The President described as "unacceptable" any discrimination in extending rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations to minorities or anyone on the basis of caste, creed or religion.

He said the havoc caused by floods was a humanitarian disaster that called for a humanitarian response beyond partisan or religious considerations.

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PAKISTAN

Flood Relief by Caste, Creed

By Zofeen Ebrahim



print



BADIN, Sindh , Sep 19, 2011 (IPS) - With just the clothes on their backs, Moora Sanafdhano, 68, and his family of nine waded through waist-deep flood waters swirling through their village of Allah Ditto Leghari, saving themselves in the nick of time.

"We heard that the water rose up to nine feet," says Sanafdhano, as the others nod in agreement. But, the lives of these mostly low-caste Hindus, considered the most marginalised group in Pakistan, are far from being out of danger.

They are being turned out of makeshift camps set up in schools, and relief material sent to them hijacked by people who know that low-caste Hindus are so abject that they would not dare retaliate.

Sanafdhano's village is about 80 to 90 km from Badin town in Sindh province, and about 200 km from the provincial capital and port city of Karachi.

It is populated predominantly by low-caste Hindus – officially known as scheduled castes - such as Kohlis, Meghwars, Jogis and the Bheels, most of whom are sharecroppers for wealthy Muslim landlords.

The system of land tenure is so heavily weighted in favour of the landlords that these poor farmers and their families are as good as bonded labour. Sanafdhano says he owes his landlord about Pakistani rupees 50,000 (570 dollars) and is helpless in the face of a catastrophe such as the present floods.

"I'd grown rice on five acres of land and the standing paddy is all but gone," says Sanafdhano. Estimates by the Sindh-Balochistan Rice Mills Association say the floods have damaged 20 - 25 percent of paddy crops in Sindh.

According to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority a severe drought followed by abnormally heavy monsoon rains in August and September have severely affected seven of Sindh province's 23 districts and disrupted life in 11 more.

The death toll now stands at 342 with some 1.2 million homes and 1.7 million acres of arable land destroyed.

The worst affected district of Badin has a population of 1.8 million people of whom 1.6 million have directly been affected by the floods. About 20 percent of the affected are low-caste Hindus.

Pakistan has three million Hindus and 2.5 million of them are from the scheduled castes, the upper castes having fled to India after the 1947 partition when British India was carved up along religious lines.

Some 6,000 villages in Badin have been wiped out by the floods and according to National Assembly speaker, Fehmida Mirza, who belongs to the area, there is no high ground left to set up rescue camps.

Officials deny that the Hindus are being discriminated against in the matter of relief. "Catastrophes see no caste, creed or religion," says Dadlo Zuhrani, deputy district officer in Badin. "Relief activities are area specific, not community specific, and I protest against charges that we are discriminating against certain communities."

But on the ground, for people like Sanafdhano, relief from the government and from aid agencies have passed them by. Unwritten caste rules prevent relief from reaching those who need it most.

"Those from the Hindu faith will never drink from the same well or vessel. They will also never eat from the same plate," says Jewat Ram, a local schoolteacher. "Hindu masons may build a mosque, but never enter it, and Muslims who attend a Hindu wedding will not partake of food there. This is accepted, though the practice is slowly changing."



Their homes and rice paddies submerged by flood waters these Hindu Bheels await government relief in shelters set up on the main road.

Credit:Zofeen Ebrahim/IPS

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But, Ram saw something in the camps which left him disturbed. "The school I teach in has been turned into a camp for the flood-affected people, but when three Hindu families from the Kohli caste sought refuge there, they were denied it.

"When the Kohli families insisted on staying, one of the men from the displaced Muslim community began contemptuously urinating in full view of the Kohli women and they had little choice but to leave," said Ram.

"They treat dogs better than they treat us human beings," said Ram in anger and helplessness.

Moolchand Sakromal, a Hindu government official who tried to give refuge to the Kohlis, says low-caste Hindus are probably the "most neglected" of Pakistan's minorities.

"It's a double whammy for them – they are poor and then they belong to the scheduled caste," says Vikio Rajwani, a Hindu and head master at the government primary school.

The district administration in Badin has set up 278 camps in public schools and other government buildings, providing relief to 81,000 displaced people, but nothing has been assigned for the Hindus. Most of the displaced people from the scheduled castes are camping wherever they can on the roadside in makeshift tents, fending for themselves.

Even charities have shown a preference for giving handouts to displaced Muslims, rather than Hindus.

Donations of material made to Hindus do not reach them. A week ago the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), a non-governmental organisation, sent two truckloads of relief goods for 200 Hindu families in a camp set up in Golarchi (another town in Badin district), but it was hijacked by Muslims.

"When the truck reached our compound, some 20 armed men surrounded the trucks and began looting. Soon the police came and the PFF men were told by the police superintendent to leave," said Shanker Das, a Hindu lawyer, who was present.

"Protests were made to the district coordination officer but even he couldn't do much. All he did was to call up his deputy and order him to send rations, but in the end they were told point blank that there was nothing for them."

Jabbar Habibiani, a politician associated with the newly formed Awami Jamhoori Party, says there is massive corruption in the distribution of relief with political affiliation given priority over actual need.

Officials deny widespread charges of inefficiency. "It is impossible to satisfy a man with a week's rations for his family when he has lost his life's savings; we are doing our best but our resources are limited," said administrator Zuhrani.

In the midst of such chaos, the low-caste Hindu communities remain invisible. They have no representation in the local government. Even their votes are cast on their behalf by their landlords.

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▶ [Their homes and rice paddies submerged by flood waters these Hindu Bheels await government relief in shelters set up on the main road.](#) Credit: Zofeen Ebrahim/IPS



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Minorities complain of relief discrimination in Pakistan

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Friday, 16 September 2011 00:03

Islamabad: Members of Pakistan's minority communities affected by the devastating floods across Sindh province have complained that they are being denied aid by religious and charitable organisations engaged in relief operations.

Members of the under-privileged scheduled castes are among those who say that organisations conducting relief efforts have been discriminating against them.

Mohan Kolhi, a community chief living near Khoski town in Badin district, said a religious organisation set up a relief camp in the area but did not distribute even a single bag of rations to members of the scheduled caste community.

"When we visited the relief camp, the prayer leader of the mosque told us that the ration is only for Muslims," Kolhi told The Express Tribune.

They were not even allowed to drink water from fountains set up outside the camps, he said.

"Sindh is our motherland and we have been living here for centuries. So what if we are scheduled castes? We are also humans," he said.

The scheduled castes of southern Sindh province, including Kolhis, Meghwars, Bheels and Oads, are predominantly employed as farmers in Badin district. The province has a sizeable Hindu population.

These Hindu farmers usually take loans from landlords and tend to land with their families all year round to pay them back.

They are most vulnerable to natural disasters like the recent devastating rains and subsequent flash floods.

"My landlord loaned Rs 50,000 and I used it to plant cotton on 20 acres... All my crops have been damaged. I don't know how I will pay back my landlord," said Kolhi.

Kirtar Lal Meghwar, an agricultural expert who works at Laar Humanitarian and Development Program, corroborated Kolhi's account.

Organisations that have set up relief camps are following in the footsteps of banned religious groups and discriminating against minorities, he said.

"They ignore the scheduled castes every time disaster strikes, whether it is cyclones, floods or heavy rains," said Meghwar.

The 50,000 scheduled caste members living in villages across Badin district are facing similar problems, he said.

However, Sattar Zangejo, affiliated with Britain-based aid group Oxfam, said his organisation had been directed to focus on vulnerable segments of society, including non-Muslims and scheduled castes.

The floods in Sindh have killed over 200 people and affected more than five million.

[Courtesy: [IBN Live](#), September 14, 2011]

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Minorities 'pay extra': Rains for all, relief for some

By Hafeez Tunio

Published: September 14, 2011

BADIN: The floods have wreaked havoc across Sindh but the most vulnerable of its people, the scheduled castes, have to pay an extra price.

Organisations conducting relief efforts, and not just the religious ones, have been discriminating against the scheduled castes, Mohan Kolhi, a community chief living near Khoski town, told *The Express Tribune*.

A religious organisation set up a relief camp in Khoski town but not a single bag was distributed to members from the scheduled caste community, he said. "When we visited the relief camp, the prayer leader of the mosque told us that the ration is only for Muslims," said Kolhi, adding that they were not even allowed to drink water from fountains set up outside the camps.

"Sindh is our motherland and we have been living here for centuries," he said. "So what if we are scheduled castes? We are also humans."

Indebted, ruined

Sindh's scheduled castes, including the Kolhis, Menghwar, Bheels and Oads, are predominantly employed as farmers in Badin district.

These Hindu farmers usually take loans from landlords and tend to the land with their families all year round to pay back. As such, they are most vulnerable to the devastating rains and ensuing floods.

"My landlord loaned Rs50,000 and I used it to plant cotton on 20 acres," said Kolhi. "All my crops have been damaged. I don't know how I will pay back my landlord," he added.

Kirtar Lal Menghwar, an agricultural expert who works at the Laar Humanitarian and Development Program (LHDP) corroborated Kolhi's account.

Organisations that have set up relief camps in towns are following in the footsteps of banned religious organisations and discriminating against minorities, he said. "They ignore the scheduled castes every time disaster strikes, whether it is cyclones, floods or heavy rains," said Menghwar.

The 50,000 scheduled caste members living in different villages across Badin are facing similar problems, he added.

(Read: A view from Badin)

All's not bleak, however. Sattar Zangejo, who is affiliated with a UK-based donor organisation Oxfam, said they have received directives to focus on vulnerable segments of society. These segments include non-Muslims and scheduled castes that have been ignored in the past.

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PAKISTAN: Floods in Sindh-the 'untouchables' waiting to get a touch of relief efforts

An article by Fizza Hassan published by the Asian Human Rights Commission

As Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) predicts more monsoon rains in the coming days, the worst victims of rains and breaches in a monsoon-swollen Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) in Badin district -- the Pakistani low caste Hindus (Dalits) of the districts were denied to get in to relief camps for being 'untouchables.'

In the last five weeks when monsoon-swollen drains and LBOD burst its banks and caused recent history's worst ever catastrophic disaster, the so-called traditional bigotry continued to run deeper than the floodwaters.

Despite torrential rains majority of these Hindu Dalits in Badin district continue to live in open sky as they were not allowed accommodation in the private/self-built relief camps of Muslims.

What added to the tragedy was the federal government's ban on NGOs and international donors to work in these areas for 'security reasons.' As the government itself initiated relief operation much later, the religious extremist organizations that started relief operation in Badin have completely ignored these Dalits or Harijan, which means 'Children of God'.

Cahnesar Bheel, a Dalit farmer and resident of Goth Gomando Bheel, Taluka Golarchi [Shaheed Fazil Rahu] is one of around 700 Dalits of his village who have no choice but to live in their submerged village with his nine children.

'Our village is between the two drains and during rains both burst and inundated our village from either side, so we rushed to a nearby relief camps set inside a government school but the tenants did not allow us to live inside the camp, so we came here and started living under open sky,' Bheel told media.

Bheel said the people living inside the camps had said them that they are Shudra, so they are not allowed to live with Muslims. His village comprises on 80 households with 700 population and all are Dalits.

A civil society activist, Ameer Mandhro sharing his views said, "This is not the only village of Dalits in the district that have no roof on their heads but there are countless other Dalit villages including villages on Khoski road, Seerani, Lonwari Shrief and other areas where Dalits are living this way because they are not allowed a place in the relief camps.'

Same happened with Pibhu Kolhi and 50 other residents of his village, who rushed to a relief camp set inside a government school in Tando Bagho, were not allowed to live in the camp after heavy rains.

However, humanity in still prevails within some hearts as a man inside a camp allotted one isolated class room to a few Dalit flood victims. As Kolhi said, "The isolated class room is away from the main building where only two families are living while the rest of the village is living in open despite continued heavy rains." He said some philanthropists came to provide food in the relief camp, but they were not given, so despite rain they are cooking food in open sky.

In the emergency situation the role of the minister for minorities affairs Mohan Lal Kohistani seeks attention. Kohistani, despite such a large number of the Hindu population being a part of flood victims, has not done anything so far for their relief.

Sindh has faced floods in 2010 this year again worst monsoon rains have hit the region but Kohistani's

ministry has not set a single camp in the province to help any Hindu, Christian or any other religious minority.

As rains continue to wash away the agricultural and residential lands in Sindh, religious bias has yet to be estranged. The situation remains tough for the PPP-led government, which not only hails from Sindh but always claim to work indiscriminately as well.

The views shared in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the AHRC, and the AHRC takes no responsibility for them.

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'Children of God' refused relief



-Pakistan's 'untouchable' Dalits await help following devastating monsoon in Sindh

By Amar Guriro

KARACHI – As the Pakistan Meteorological Department predicts more rains in the days to come, the worst victims of rain and breaches in the monsoon-swollen Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) in Badin district – which brought rainwater from upper Sindh districts into Badin – the Pakistani Dalits or “untouchables” have been denied accommodation in relief camps due to their social positioning.

In the past month since monsoon-swollen drains and the LBOD burst its banks and caused one of the recent history's worst catastrophic disasters, the so-called traditional bigotry has run just as deep as the floodwater. Despite torrential rain, a majority of these Hindu Dalits in Badin have been living under open sky as they are not allowed in the relief camps by Muslims.

More tragic has been the federal government's ban on non-governmental organisations and international donors to work in these areas for “security reasons”, whereas the government itself is yet to start relief operations. The religious extremist organisations that have been providing relief in Badin have completely ignored the Dalits – or Harijans, which means “Children of God”.

Chanesar Bheel – a Dalit by social norms and a farmer by profession, resident of Goth Gomando Bheel in Ghado Union Council, Golarchi (Shaheed Fazil Rahu) Taluka – is one of around 700 Dalits of his village that have been living under open sky along the banks of Soorahdi Sakh Canal.

“Our village is between the two drains, and during the rain, both burst and inundated our village from each side. We rushed to a nearby relief camp set up inside a government school, but the people did not allow us to live inside the camp, so we came here and started living under open sky,” Bheel told Pakistan Today. Bheel said the people living inside the camps told them that they were “untouchables” and were not allowed to live with Muslims. His village comprises 80 households with 700 people, all of whom are Dalits.

“This is not the only village of Dalits in the district that is living under the open sky. There are many more Dalits living in similar conditions on the Khoski Road, and in Seerani, Lonwari Sharif and other areas,” said writer/civil society activist Ameer Mandhro.

A similar case occurred with the Dalits of Pibhu Kolhi village in Tando Bagho. “There is no place to go, so we are simply living outside the school under open sky. A kind-hearted man inside the camp allotted us an isolated classroom, which is away from the main building, where two families are living and the remaining villagers are living under open sky despite continued rain,” said a villager.

He said some philanthropists came to provide food to the residents of the relief camp, but they (the Dalits) were not given any ration and were cooking their own food.

Dalits are social outcasts at the bottom of the Hindu caste ladder and are common in India, but this system has deep roots

in Pakistan as well. Even the government of Pakistan has encouraged this prejudice by officially declaring these Dalits as “scheduled caste”.

Despite its tall claims, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) government has not nominated even a single Dalit for the Sindh Assembly seat.

All four PPP Hindu assembly members are from the so-called upper caste. Minority Affairs Minister Mohan Lal Kohistani has so far done nothing to provide relief to the affected Hindu population.

When contacted, Kohistani said he was busy in a meeting at the Chief Minister’s House and would comment on the issue later. However, sources said the minister was trying to get a licence for a liquor shop from the competent authority, namely Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah. In the wake of last year’s floods and this year’s monsoon, Kohistani’s ministry has not set up even a single camp in the province to help Hindus, Christians or any other religious minority. “These Dalits can’t even claim a seat in public transport. How do we expect them to get space in relief camps? It’s the same mentality,” said human rights activist Sameer Mandhro. He said not only the government, but the civil society organisations, who claim to work indiscriminately, are also ignoring the Dalits.

[Pakistan Today](#)

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Pakistan: Christians and 'untouchables' are denied flood aid

by Speroforum

Friday, September 16, 2011

Among the flood victims of Sindh (South of Pakistan), Christian and Hindu "Dalits" families, considered the "untouchables", are thrown out of refugee camps set up by the government and do not receive humanitarian aid. This is the complaint which comes from the Catholic diocese of Hyderabad, confirmed by non-governmental organizations. Torrential rains hit the region of Sindh, and will continue over the next few days, causing widespread flooding. Out of the 23 districts of the province, 22 are strongly affected and the flood victims are over 5 million. Some villages are now found beneath as much as 6 metres of flood water.

Aid has started to move, with the Pakistani civil protection, as well as NGOs that are at the forefront. Fr. Samson Shukardin, OFM, General Vicar of the Diocese of Hyderabad in Sindh, and diocesan Director of the Commission "Justice and Peace", tells Fides: "We have an emergency, the entire diocese has been hit. We have 16 parishes, all 16 parish priests have asked for help. The displaced people are mostly Hindus, but there are also thousands of Muslim and Christian families. Caritas and NGOs are distributing food aid, medicines, tents. I visited some affected areas: the population has been put to the test and is discouraged. " This is why Mgr. Max John Rodrigues, Catholic bishop of Hyderabad, has issued a message "encouraging and exhorting the faithful to trust in the help of God and the neighbor's help".

The local church also reports cases of discrimination in the distribution of humanitarian aid, a terrible thing that was already registered unfortunately during the floods in 2010. Fr. Shukardin explains: "This happens for religious and caste reasons. The victims are mostly tribal, living in 8 out of 16 parishes. In the district of Badin, on the border with India, inhabited by Parkari tribes, a pastor told me that in the two refugee camps set up by the Government, Christians have been rejected because, what is said is, 'Western missionaries think about you'. In addition to religious discrimination, these people are considered 'Dalits', 'untouchable' (for legacy of the Indian system, before the partition, ndr), therefore thrown out".

Other operators of Pakistani NGOs, working on-site, confirm to Fides that in the district of Badin the Hindus of lower castes were not accepted in public refugee camps, because "the Dalits cannot be next to Muslims". Thousands of Dalit flood victims live thus still "open", without any shelter, although the heavy rains continue. NGOs call for a decisive intervention on behalf of Mohan Lal Kohistan, Provincial Minister for religious minorities in the province of Sindh, to end such discrimination.

Source: FIDES



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