

HINDU-MUSLIM TENSION IN WESTERN NEPAL: BANKE

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING: THRD ALLIANCE



On 29 September 2017 night, the Muslim Community at Hirminiya village Ward 6 of Duduwa Rural Municipality of Banke district wanted to organize a programme to observe their Moharam (or Muharram) festival. However, they could not do so. The Hindus there told the Muslims that they were observing Durga Puja (Dashain festival) at Mahantapurwa village of Hirminiya and they wanted the Muslims not to organize their programme at the place.

The next day (30 September 2017), the situation remained normal.

On 1 October 2017, while the Hindus were organizing Durga Idol immersion procession, they were using microphones and loudspeakers to chant their religious slogans.

The Muslims of the locality told them not to use the microphones and loudspeakers. The Hindus, however, did not pay heed to the Muslims' request. After that, some members of the Muslim community attempted to obstruct the Hindus' procession at Subbapurva area by pulling the wires of microphone and loudspeakers.

Following the incident, there was a minor clash between the members of both religious communities. However, the tension between them came to normalcy with the initiation of locals.

In the afternoon (around 2pm), the Hindus who returned after immersing Durga idols urged the Muslims not to beat drums in the areas. Upon the request made by the Hindus, the Muslims, who were beating drums during Muharram procession, stopped beating drums while taking their Tazia immersion procession (on the end of Moharam) through Baldipurba village.

However, at Baldipurba village, Sub Inspector (SI) Sushil Rawal, who is also the in-charge of Hirminiya Police Post told the Muslims that their procession will not be obstructed and they were free to beat drums as per their tradition. After getting green signal from the concerned police officer, the Muslims started to beat drums in the procession. This infuriated the Hindus and they started pelting stones at the Muslim processioners.

At around 3 pm, the Hindus and the Muslim clashed with each other. Subsequently, the situation went out of control. Around 30 people in both sides were injured in the clash when police used force to control the mob.

Among the injured, three persons - Tedhe Sheikh (35 years old), a resident of Behnanpurba, Rampal Maurya (30 years old) of Baldipurba where the incident took place and Ram Singh Ahir (34 years old) of Ahirapur village - were critically injured. Seikh suffered injuries in his eye, chest, stomach and left leg when SI Rawal beat him up with a stick. Maurya and Ahir got

injuries in their heads. The injured, after undergoing treatment at local health facilities, have returned to their home.

Muslims, who failed to immerse Taziya of Hirminiya, Munsipurwa and Kala Banjar on 1 October 2017 due to clash between the two communities were however, able to do the same on 2 October 2017 amid tight security arranged by Nepal Police and Armed Police. The police had provided adequate security to the Muslims during Taziya immersion procession. There was a heavy deployment of police personnel under the command DSP Sudhir Sah in the area to prevent an untoward incident.

FINDINGS OF THRD ALLIANCE MONITORING

Following are the findings of THRD Alliance based on the monitoring of situation in Hirminiya by our local human rights defenders.

1. The Muslims and Hindus wanted to observe their festivals without the help of security personnel, according to the local leaders of Hindu and Muslim community that our human rights defenders interviewed.
2. The intervention by security authorities was the main reason behind the clash and tension that took place between both religious communities.
3. The community members concluded that Sub Inspector Rawal was responsible for deterioration of communal harmony in Hirminiya. They have demanded that Sub-Inspector Rawal should be transferred from Hirminiya Police Post.
4. If the efforts are not made to restore communal harmony in the local areas, communal clashes could occur between the two communities anytime.

The new constitution – The Constitution of Nepal 2015 – promulgated in September 2015, declared Nepal as a secular country. Article 26 of the Constitution stipulates “right to freedom of religion”. As the implementation of secularism as provisioned in the Constitution is underway, the government authorities need to understand and sensitise the situation before taking into action (forceful implementation of secularism as mentioned in the situation update)

CALL TO ACTION

THRD Alliance would like to urge the government of Nepal, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and other concerned authorities restore communal harmony in the aforesaid areas of Banke district by holding dialogues with the local community members and transferring Sub-Inspector Rawal as per the locals’ demand. Last year, Sub-Inspector Rawal was transferred from Banke's Matehiya Police Post to Hirminiya Police Post after his policing was questioned by the local people.