

HINDU-MUSLIM TENSION IN WESTERN NEPAL: BARDIYA

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING: THRD ALLIANCE



1 October 2017

The Hindus and the Muslims clashed in Ward 11 and 12 of Gulariya Municipality of Bardiya district when the Taziya immersion procession blocked the procession of Hindus who were taking out Durga idol immersion procession.

The Muslim processioners had told the Hindus at Mainapokhar that they (Hindus) could lead their idol (Durga) immersion procession once their Taziya immersion procession would be over soon. However, the Hindu processioners wanted to lead their procession at any cost. This resulted in clashes between the two communities. Some injuries were reported in both sides and some police personnel were also injured in the incident. The police personnel were, however, able to control the situation.

2 October 2017

The next day, the Hindu youths entered Lalpur village and attacked Mosques and Madarsa in the village. They also tried to beat Muslims up. Then a clash erupted between the two communities. A total of 17 Muslims were injured in Lalpur village. Among them, Naim Kureshi, Abdul Hasize Khan and his eight-year-old son Arman Khan are undergoing treatment at the Nepalgunj Teaching Hospital.

District Administration Office (DAO) of Bardiya imposed a curfew since 9 am in the area of one kilometer at Lalpur for an indefinite period. The curfew was clamped to prevent communal clash between the two communities in the area, according to Bardiya Chief District Officer Narayan Prasad Bhattarai. He told THRD Alliance that the DAO clamped the curfew after security personnel failed to control the situation even after firing 14 rounds of tear gas canisters and eight rounds of bullets into the air.

An all-party meeting held in the afternoon decided to provide free treatment to all the injured and form a committee to probe the incidents of the communal clashes. The all-party meeting discussed to lift curfew when the situation comes under control, and take their goodwill rallies in the area.

Hindu youths Mahabir Rana, Bachha Yadav, Nanku Rana, Jagadish Yadav, Balaram Verma, and Kishori Tamoli had reportedly threatened to set the houses of Muslims on fire. Thereafter, the local Muslims from Lalpur fled to their relatives in Mohammadpur village. The Administration, however, had assured that there will not be any untoward incident.

3 October 2017

The DAO lifted the curfew at around 11:30 am after 26 hours. The situation. Those Muslims who fled to Mohammadpur came back to their home in Lalpur.

In meantime, Superintendent of Police (SP) Janak Bhattarai, who is also the chief of District Police Office (DPO) Bardiya told THRD Alliance that the office has arrested three persons in connection with the communal clash. However, he did not unveil the names of the arrested arguing that it might affect their investigation.

The situation, following the arrest of the three persons, has become normal. The victims of Muslims community demanded to provide free treatment to those admitted in the hospital, and take strict action against those who were involved in provoking the communal clash between the Hindus and Muslims.

FINDINGS OF THRD ALLIANCE MONITORING

Our local human rights defenders in Bardiya monitored the situation in Lalpur. We found that lack of preparedness among security authorities led to the incident of October 2. The Hindus and the Muslims had already clashed a day before October 2. The clash that erupted the next day could have been prevented if the security arrangement were made to prevent any untoward incident. If the efforts are not made to restore communal harmony in the local areas, communal clashes could occur between the two communities again.

The new constitution – The Constitution of Nepal 2015 – promulgated two years ago declared Nepal as a secular country. Article 26 of the Constitution stipulates “right to freedom of religion” to all the religious communities. While a religious community is observing their festival, they should not hamper or obstruct the festival marked by another religious community. The observation of festivals or events by religious communities should not deteriorate public peace and communal harmony. The government authorities must be vigilant on the occasions where two of the religious communities are observing their festivals.

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 Bardiya district by holding peace dialogues with the local community members. As demanded by the victims, an action against the arrested could help to prevent any untoward incident. Hence, the roles of local administration office and local communities are very important to restore communal harmony and build peace.