Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

... It is the will of the people of Pakistan to establish an order ... wherein shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to law and public morality

Constitution of Pakistan

Preamble

Subject to law, public order and morality (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.

Article 20

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

No one shall be subject to discrimination by any state, institution, group
Pakistan’s religious minorities, which constitute 3% of the country’s population, continued to face maltreatment during the year under review. Discriminatory laws, militancy, the state’s failure to protect religious minorities, and deep-rooted intolerance gave rise to many incidents of persecution.

No laws were made by the federal government to safeguard the interests of minorities. Out of the four provincial assemblies only the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly passed two bills related to religious minorities. The acts provided for the protection and management of properties of non-Muslim communities.

A report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom pointed out that Pakistan topped the list of countries that jailed citizens for allegedly attacking religion the most. Though courts gave death sentence to people who were charged with blasphemy, no one had ever been executed by the state. However, the accused often faced mob attacks and vigilante violence. A majority of the people charged with blasphemy were Muslim. More Ahmadis were booked under these laws than Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Many people from religious and sectarian minorities were targeted by militants across Pakistan. The Zikri sect was also attacked twice and many Zikris had to move from Balochistan to other parts of Pakistan. Representatives of Christian and Hindu communities said they were fleeing from Pakistan to other countries for safety.

According to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), 114 Christian, 29 Hindu, 10 Baha’i and four Buddhist families were among those displaced from FATA due to Pakistan army’s operation against militants in the region. Some displaced families talked to the media and said that they were facing discrimination at the IDP camps in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where they had taken refuge. They also said they were being ignored at the food distribution points.

The HRCP Expert Group on Communities Vulnerable because of their Belief—a forum that has since 2010 brought together representatives of religious minority communities with a view to finding answers to the challenges confronting them on account of their faith—met twice during 2014. In the first meeting held in July, the group dwelt at length on attacks on places of worship of religious minorities and the motives for the attacks. In its second meeting in November, the expert group discussed various aspects of access to justice for members of religious minority communities and sects.

HRCP jointly organized a consultation with the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in January at which members of the
Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Increasing impact of the law

Exponential rise in cases pointing to increasing radicalization

2014 was an alarming year with more than 90 cases

Sources: CRSS, HRCP and NCJP

Comparison of Blasphemy Accusations from 1927-1986 and 1987-2014

Before and after the introduction of the stricter blasphemy laws in 1987:

- 7 accusations before
- 1335 accusations after

The stricter blasphemy laws were introduced with death penalty as the only punishment with no room for pardon.

Extra Judicial Killings Before and After the Law was Passed

- There were 2 cases of Extra Judicial killings from 1946-1987 as compared to 57 cases of Extra Judicial Killings after the law was passed from 1987-Present

- Only 2 cases of Extra Judicial Killings before the Blasphemy Laws were introduced
- 57 Killings after the new laws

The narrative behind and surrounding the law has resulted in an alarming increase in extra judicial killings.

Source: Dawn
minority communities from across the country expressed their concerns. The main issues highlighted by them included faith-based discrimination and persecution in all spheres of their lives – from political and legal to education and employment. Forced conversions were a matter of great concern for Hindus and Christians. A Sikh participant talked about having to pay *jazia* to militants in parts of KP (particularly Malakand division) in order to enter or leave a place.

**Religious minority groups**

Some of the main trends, incidents and challenges faced by Pakistan’s religious minorities are as follows:

**Sikhs**

In Pakistan lies the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. However, life for the Sikh community, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has become an ordeal because of the targeted killings and kidnappings they have been facing. A lot of them had to resort to moving to other places like Rawalpindi so that they did not have to live under constant threat to their life and could run their businesses in a relatively secure environment.

On September 3, unidentified assailants gunned down a Sikh in his shop in Shaheedan Bazaar, Mardan. Just three days after this incident, on September 6, unidentified persons opened fire on three shops run by Sikhs in Hashtnagri, Peshawar. One Sikh trader who ran a grocery shop was shot and killed while two other traders were injured. The assailants escaped before police arrived.

Members of the Sikh community took to the streets after these attacks and demanded measures to increase their security.

Kidnappings from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas have also
been reported. According to some media reports, the abductors often set the ransom so high that the families of victims were unable to pay it and the kidnapped Sikhs were killed. Two Sikhs businessmen were kidnapped from Dera Ismail Khan in February. They were released after four million rupees were paid to the abductors.

Though Peshawar too has become a hostile environment for the Sikh community, at least 500 families migrated to this city from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) because of the military operation against militants.

The Sikh community said they were afraid to go to Gurdwaras to worship and many of their religious places were closed due to the poor security situation in the region. A lot of Sikhs also had to close down their shops. Many parents were not sending their children, especially boys, to school because they could be easily identified by their headdress.

On May 8, a copy of Guru Granth Sahib was burned when the hall in which it was kept was put on fire. This incident took place at Jai Ram Das Darbar in Shikarpur. A day earlier, another copy of Guru Granth Sahib was desecrated at Bhagwati Temple in Karachi’s Lea Market. Reports of desecration of the holy book of the Sikh religion had previously come from various parts of Sindh. On November 14, a Hindu man was arrested for tearing off pages of Guru Granth Sahib in a temple. Keeping the holy book of the Sikh religion in Hindu temples had been a tradition but after such incidents the Sikh community was having second thoughts about keeping their holy book in temples. Ramesh Singh, the head of Pakistan Sikh Council said, “If they can’t take care of our
books, then they should just return them.”

In the wake of this incident Sikhs from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stormed the parliament in Islamabad. The protesters demanded better protection for their religious sites. The Pakistan Sikh Council also addressed a press conference and warned the government that the Sikh community would hold protests across the country if the perpetrators were not arrested. On May 15, the National Assembly passed a resolution urging the government to deploy security personnel to guard the holy places of religious minorities.

More than 1,000 Sikhs arrived from India to Pakistan to observe the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) was expecting to receive 3,000 Sikh pilgrims but many did not come to Pakistan, possibly because of the recent blast at Wagah border. The Punjab government deployed rangers and police to protect the pilgrims and keep security high at the Gurdwaras.

**Hindus**

Forced conversion of Hindus was a common complaint in Sindh. In most cases Hindu girls were abducted, forcibly converted to Islam and then married to Muslim men. The Secretary-General of the All Pakistan Hindu Panchayat stated that almost 1000 girls in Sindh were forcibly converted each year. Even Hindu children were being subjected to forced conversion. On February 4, two little girls who sold toys and utensils from door to door did not return to their family. Investigation revealed that they were with a Muslim man who presented them in a court as Muslim girls. The court sent both of them to Darul Amaan, women’s shelter home, on suspicion that they were facing abuse at their house. One of them was later returned to her parents. Children also complained of discrimination at schools. Many parents were said to have started giving Muslim names to their children to protect them from such treatment.

The immediate step that needed to be taken to prevent forced conversions was to draft a Hindu marriage law. The Hindu community had long been irked by the lack of codified Hindu personal laws, particularly Hindu marriage law. A Hindu Marriage Bill was tabled in the parliament in 2011 but it had still not been passed. The Supreme Court of Pakistan also directed the government to take measures to register Hindu marriages. Muslims and Christians can obtain marriage certificates from the government but Hindus have no documentary proof of their marriage. Once passed, the Hindu Marriage Act would offer the Hindu community some protection against forced conversion and harassment by police. It would also enable them to settle other issues such as divorce and inheritance.

The Hindu community in Balochistan has been targeted by kidnappers who mostly pick up Hindu traders and businessmen and ask for ransom. On May 28, five children were picked up by armed men while returning from
Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

their school. They were daughters and sons of a Hindu trader. The police arrested four suspects but the children had yet to be recovered. A lot of Hindus are moving to other parts of Pakistan due to lack of security in the province.

According to Ramesh Kumar Wankwani, a PML-N lawmaker and head of Pakistan Hindu Council, around 5,000 Hindus migrate from Pakistan to India every year due to religious persecution. He said that scores of Hindu girls were being abducted in Sindh and married to their kidnappers after forced conversion. The lawmaker said the government had failed in its duty to protect the Hindus from attacks and to prevent forced conversions effective laws needed to be enforced.

More than a hundred members of the Hindu community had to abandon their homes because of the military operation against the Taliban in FATA. It was reported that 29 Hindu families had to take refuge among IDPs in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Reportedly none of these families was allowed to stay in the government-run camps in the city. An official said the families had not registered themselves and measures were being taken to resolve the issue quickly. According to one of the Hindu families, minorities were not treated in the same way as other IDPs.

Many religious places of Hindus were attacked during the year. On January 26, two unidentified men gunned down a policeman guarding a Hindu temple in Peshawar. Police suspected that it was a militant attack. On March 15, just before midnight in Larkana, Sindh, a mob burned down a Hindu temple after a rumour spread that a member of the Hindu community had desecrated a copy of the Quran. Hundreds of students of local Islamic seminaries stormed and

Arson attack on Hindu temples in Larkana.
damaged the temple and the community centre. The mob ransacked and set the buildings on fire and destroyed all statues. However, the police arrived quickly and allegedly saved the accused by making him put on a police uniform. On March 17, a temple in Badin was attacked. On March 28, a small Hindu temple was torched in Hyderabad. On March 30, the Faqir Par Braham Ashram in Tharparkar was desecrated. On November 21, an idol of Lord Hanuman and some religious books were burned down by unidentified men at a temple in district Tando Mohammad Khan, Sindh.

Pakistan Hindu Council issued a statement that around 1400 Hindu religious places were in dire need of the government attention. The army was reported to be planning to demolish a Hindu temple in Rawalpindi to build a barracks and an educational complex. They also wanted to evict the Hindus living in the vicinity of the temple in Gracy Lines area. The Hindu community got a temporary stay and the army offered resettlement.

In March, an unauthorised development project also threatened the 160-year old Shri Ratneshwar Mahadev Mandir in Clifton, Karachi when Bahria Town started excavating the roads leading to the temple to build flyovers for the convenience of its residents in a nearby project. The vibration from excavators was damaging the roof of the historic underground temple. On the basis of a letter from HRCP, the then chief justice of the Supreme Court took "suo motu" notice and summoned the relevant officials. The case is in the Sindh High Court which has asked the builders to restore the damaged parts and ensure that all construction work takes place further away from the temple.

The SC chief justice, hearing a petition on non-payment of compensation to victims of the Peshawar church massacre, instructed the government to ensure protection of places of worship of the minorities and to set up a minorities’ commission. HRCP also submitted a report on destruction of Hindu temples in Sindh.

The leaders of the Hindu community asked the government to make Diwali a national holiday and also give bonuses to the Hindu employees. The Pakistan Hindu Council urged the government not to hold a Senate session on Diwali day. The government agreed to this request and the Senate observed a holiday on Diwali for the first time in the history of Pakistan. The Chief Minister of Sindh also announced that all Hindu government employees would be given a holiday and bonus on Diwali. The federal government officially patronised the festival and many political parties, including PML-N, PPP, and PTI also celebrated Diwali.

**Christians**

Many Christians had to face persecution after being accused of committing blasphemy during the year. Pakistan’s blasphemy law can prove deadly for the
freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Students chant slogans against burning of Christian couple to ashes.

accused even before they are arrested and tried in court. The prime example of this was the lynching of a Shama and Sajjad in Kot Radha Kishan, Punjab. On November 4, the Christian couple was beaten to death and then burned by an angry mob that had been told that they had desecrated a copy of the Holy Quran. Local clerics used loudspeakers to incite the mob. The victims were working as bonded labourers at a brick kiln. It was reported that the couple knew that they were in danger before the attack and went to the kiln owner to seek permission to leave. But he locked them in a room and told them that they could not leave before they cleared their debt. The mob found them there, beat them to death with bricks and shovels and then burned their bodies in a brick kiln. Shama was expecting her fifth child. The suspects were apprehended after a few days.

Christians living in village Torey Wala, Punjab, were looking for a way to get some land to bury their dead because there was no space left in their cemetery. A Muslim landowner gave them a two-acre plot but on September 2 around 500 Muslims confronted the Christians and said that there were some graves of Muslims on that land. The landowner whose family had been in possession of the plot for many generations insisted that there were no graves on the site. On the following day, some Muslims in the neighborhood charged 53 Christians with blasphemy and the police arrested eight villagers including a two-year-old boy. However, the charges were dropped a week later. After this incident, the Christian community in the village had to resort to cramming bodies in the existing graveyard.

The Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan published a report in
April, which alleged that every year around 700 Christian women were being abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and then married to Muslim men. According to the report, when a victim’s family registers a first information report the abductor registers a counter FIR stating that the girl converted of her free choice. In most cases, these girls remain in the custody of abductors during the judicial proceedings.

A media report stated that activists and members of the Christian community said that thousands of Christians had left the country because of threats, persecution and lack of security. Many of them went to Thailand because it was an easily accessible and affordable option. Some representatives of the Christian community in Thailand said the country had around 10,000 registered Pakistani asylum seekers.

Victims of last year’s mob attack face marginalization

In Michael Town, Korangi, Karachi, the Christian and Muslim communities had been living in harmony with each other till last year when a fight broke out between them. Around 2,000 Christians lived in that area. On September 23, 2013, some members of the Christian community protested against the killing of Christians in a suicide attack on a church in Peshawar. However, Muslims in the neighborhood alleged that some Christians threw stones at a mosque. A scuffle followed and a Muslim man died in the melee. The Christians said he died in a stampede by the Muslims. A mob then ransacked and burned homes of Christians. Around 300 Christian families had to flee from Michael Town and were too afraid to return to their homes. The commissioner of Karachi’s east district called a meeting to broker peace between the two communities but the terms that the Christian families had to accept to return to their homes were seen as punishing the Christians for raising their concerns through public protest. The town’s name was changed from ‘Michael Town’ to ‘Khulfa-e-Rashideen Colony.’ The Christians were asked to remove external loudspeakers from their church. Three Muslims who were injured in this incident received compensation but none was given to the Christians who had been injured. No FIR was registered against the persons who attacked the homes of Christians. The community was warned not to present evidence in the case relating to the Muslim man who died in this incident. Christians, who continue to face taunts, have to avoid confrontation to co-exist in the area and keep their heads down. Even children are subjected to marginalization and are not allowed to enter the playground to play cricket.

Christian laws were made during the colonial times and need to be updated. In August, the federal government proposed amendments in the Christian Marriage Act and Christian Divorce Act after consultations with the leaders of
Christian organizations. In the proposed Christian Marriage Act, the role of Church of England, Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic Church had been omitted. It states that the age of persons getting married should not be less than 18 years and each church would have the right to solemnize a marriage. The proposed Christian Divorce Act included nine grounds on which a marriage could be dissolved. Previously, divorce could only be sought on the ground of adultery. The Christian community also urged the government to draft inheritance laws for Christian women.

Around 114 Christian families had to leave their homes in FATA and seek refuge among IDPs living in Bannu because of the army operation against militants in the region. Some families reported that they faced discrimination at the government camps and food distributors ignored them.

**Ahmadis**

The many problems that Ahmadis in Pakistan have been facing since a 1974 constitutional amendment declared them non-Muslim continued in 2014.

On July 27, a mob went to a police station in Gujranwala to register a blasphemy case against an Ahmadi youth and said that he had posted something blasphemous on Facebook. At the same time, another mob went to an Ahmadi
neighborhood in Gujranwala and burned down eight houses. An Ahmadi woman and two girls died in the attack due to suffocation. The mob also stopped fire brigades and ambulances from reaching the houses under attack. The police did little to stop this violence.

However, this was not the only attack carried out against the Ahmadi community during the year. A total of 11 Ahmadis were killed in targeted
attacks in 2014. On May 16, while Khalil Ahmad was in police custody for allegedly committing blasphemy, a man entered the police station and shot him. He died and the perpetrator was arrested by police. On May 26, Dr Mehdi Ali Qamar, a Canadian-American cardiologist who had come to Pakistan to serve his community, was gunned down by two unidentified motorcyclists while he was walking to a cemetery in Rabwah.

Some Ahmadi places of worship were also attacked. On January 23, some unidentified persons set an Ahmadi place of worship on fire. However, only a door was damaged in this incident. On January 26, some people stormed a place of worship of Ahmadies in Faisalabad and tore up their religious texts. On February 18, the police razed minarets of two Ahmadi places of worship in Rahim Yar Khan. In June, some men accompanied by the police destroyed a place of worship under construction in Dera Ghazi Khan. During the same month, in Narowal, police told Ahmadies to stop building a place of worship. In addition, burial places of Ahmadies were often desecrated.

The Ahmadi community faced discrimination and harassment at various educational institutions and government offices. They were also not given equal employment opportunities.

The Ahmadis continued to face hostile comments in the media. Hate speech against Ahmadis was seen in posters, rallies, pamphlets, and sermons. On December 22, Geo TV telecast Aamir Liaquat Hussain’s programme in which a cleric called Ahmadis enemies of both Muslims and Pakistan. Within a week of this telecast, an Ahmadi was gunned down in Gujranwala.

**Blasphemy law**

A total of 12 cases were registered under section 295-C (blasphemy law) of the Pakistan Penal Code during the year. As soon as someone in Pakistan is accused of committing blasphemy his or her life is endangered. Those arrested by police are often the lucky ones.

However, even police custody is no protection anymore. Mohammad Asghar, 70, who had returned from Britain and was a psychiatric patient, was arrested for claiming to be a prophet. He was shot multiple times by a police officer and had to be taken to a hospital. A Christian pastor, another man booked for blasphemy, who was sharing the cell with Asghar was gunned down during the attack by the same police officer.

On November 4, Shama and Sajjad, a Christian couple accused of desecrating a copy of the Holy Quran, were beaten to death and then burned in a brick kiln by a mob. This incident took place in Kot Radha Kishan, Punjab where they were working as brick kiln bonded laborers. The Supreme Court,
the prime minister and the provincial chief minister took notice of the incident and the suspects were swiftly apprehended.

Be they rich or poor, marginalized or influential, blasphemy accused have little hope of getting a fair hearing. A blasphemy case was registered against Junaid Jamshed, a television personality, for making blasphemous remarks in one of his televised sermons. He released a video in which he apologized for his remarks and asked for forgiveness but in vain. But someone who had committed blasphemy could not be forgiven under Pakistan’s blasphemy law. He fled the country and took refuge in London.

Even lawyers and judges pursuing blasphemy cases are not safe. HRCP Multan office coordinator for South Punjab, Rashid Rehman had been threatened in open court in front of a judge in April for defending a blasphemy accused that no other lawyer in Multan agreed to represent. On May 7, at around 8:45 pm two unidentified assailants entered the HRCP office on the pretext of seeking legal advice and opened fire on him. A bullet that hit him in the head killed him. A fellow lawyer and a client were also injured in the attack. A case was registered in Chehlik police station Multan. No progress was made in apprehending Rashid’s killers or even in arresting the men who had issued the threats to him in open court in the judge’s presence.

Sawan Masih was accused of making blasphemous remarks in a fight with one of his Muslim friends in 2013. After this accusation was made, an angry mob raided Joseph Colony, a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore, and burned down many houses. In March, Masih was sentenced to death. An appeal was filed against this sentence in the Lahore High Court. Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufa Kausar, a Christian couple arrested from Gojra in 2013 for allegedly sending a blasphemous text message, were also sentenced to death. An appeal against the sentencing was filed in the Lahore High Court. Following these sentences, the Christian community held demonstrations in some parts of Lahore.

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, was arrested for making blasphemous remarks four years ago. Her death sentence was upheld in October by the high court. She filed an appeal in the Supreme Court in November.

**Sectarian violence**

Sectarian attacks by militant groups outnumbered sectarian clashes. Militant groups that claimed responsibility or were suspected in these attacks included Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-ul-Islam, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Sipah-e-Sahaba. According to a report by Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), a total of 144 incidents of sectarian violence were reported from across Pakistan, out of which 141 were sectarian-related terrorist attacks and three
were sectarian clashes.

After the targeted killings of many Shia Hazaras, in 2014 militant groups also started targeting the Zikri sect in Balochistan. In July, a bus carrying people belonging to the Zikri sect was attacked with an IED in Khuzdar and seven persons were injured. The Zikri community was targeted again on August 29 when six Zikris were gunned down by three unidentified men at a shrine in Awaran, Balochistan. Many Zikris had to move from Balochistan to other parts of Pakistan after these targeted attacks.

On October 23, eight Shia Hazaras were killed by unidentified gunmen who boarded their bus and opened fire. No one claimed responsibility but Lashkar-e-Jhangvi was the main suspect because they had been targeting Hazara Shias previously. On October 4, a suicide bomber attacked a crowded Eid bazaar in Hazara Town, Quetta. Five people were killed and 20 injured.

In January, buses carrying Shia pilgrims were targeted by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in Mastung, Balochistan. At least 23 persons were killed and 32 injured. The casualties included children and women and led to countrywide protests by the Shia community. On the first day of the new year, militant group Jaish-ul-Islam targeted a Shia pilgrim bus travelling from Iran to Quetta in a suicide bomb attack.
attack. Three Shia pilgrims were killed and 34 injured, including the policemen escorting the vehicle. On January 21, another bus carrying Shia pilgrims from Iran to Quetta was bombed. At least 20 people including women and children were injured.

In March, a gathering of Ismailis celebrating their ritual of Nauroz (religious new year) in Hunza-Nagar, GB, was attacked by members of Shia and Sunni communities and forced to disperse. The attackers, arrested by police, later stated that they attacked the gathering because in their opinion the Ismaili community was spreading obscenity in the area.

On October 2, some Shias who were traveling in a van were targeted with a bomb near Haramosh village on Gilgit-Skardu road. Five women, two men, and three children were injured in this incident. The local police said this was a sectarian attack.

In November, fighting erupted between members of a Shia procession and activists of a Sunni religious group called Ahl-e-Sunnat-wal-Jamaat (ASWJ) over the route of the Muharram procession through Badin, Sindh. Members of both groups threw stones at each other and beat each other with wooden sticks. Ten people were injured. In Orakzai Agency, FATA, on the 9th of Muharram, a roadside bomb exploded in an imambargah at noon, killing two persons and injuring 28 others. Another attack took place a few days later when a procession was passing through a road in Lower Orakzai. Militants targeted the crowd with a bomb and rockets. Two persons were killed and seven injured.

In December, hundreds of members of Imamia Students Organization (ISO), a Shia youth organisation, were inside a hall at Degree College for Boys, Gilgit, a government college, to commemorate a religious day when a mob of over 100 students belonging to a Sunni sect gathered there and chanted slogans against Shias. The two groups pelted each other with stones. Shots were also fired and three students were injured. The local administration and police intervened to stop the clash. Police registered a case on a number of charges including rioting, causing hurt, etc., against 17 students. After this clash, the police cleared the campus and left. An hour later unidentified persons entered the campus and set three classrooms and a portion of the library on fire.

A number of shrines were also attacked by militants in 2014. On January 7, bodies of six men whose throats had been slit were found at the shrine of Ayub Shah Bukhari, a Sufi saint. The shrine is situated on the outskirts of Karachi and three of the victims worked at the shrine, while the other three frequently visited it. The police found a note along with the bodies in which
the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility and warned people against visiting shrines. On February 9, six to eight unidentified gunmen on motorbikes fired indiscriminately at the people present at the shrine of Baba Pir Mehrban Shah, which is located in a Karachi suburb. Eight people were killed and more than a dozen injured. On June 20, a bomb blast took place at the shrine of Chan Pir Badshah in Islamabad and 32 persons were injured. On August 26, a bomb explosion at Sheikh Taqi’s shrine in Mastung, Balochistan, injured a man and a woman. On January 28, the police found and defused a bomb near Ghazi Baba shrine in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On September 6, unidentified men attacked a shrine in Sargodha, Punjab and gunned down a religious leader, his brother who was a brigadier, and another man. Seven other men participating in the religious festival at the shrine were also injured.

Courtesy pervasive impunity for the killers, the perpetrators were arrested in very few cases.

**Recommendations**

1. The government should ensure that the blasphemy law is not misused. Protection should be provided to lawyers, judges and witnesses involved in blasphemy cases. Police should carry out preliminary investigation before registering a case against a person accused of committing blasphemy.

2. The government needs to tackle militant groups that frequently target religious minorities. Security forces need to take a more active role in protecting vulnerable minorities.

3. Hate speech and activities of banned extremist organizations should
be curbed.

4. Steps need to be taken to increase tolerance and harmony between religious groups and promote peaceful co-existence.

5. Outdated laws such as Christian Marriage Act and Christian Divorce Act need to be updated and new legislation like the Hindu Marriage Bill should be enacted swiftly.