
Weekly Report of Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme

Religious Conflict

1. Shia mosque in Saudi Arabia hit by gun and bomb attack

The Imam Rida mosque in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia was attacked on 29 January. According to the Interior Ministry, one bomber blew himself up outside, killing four people. Security forces exchanged fire with the second attacker and arrested him. There was no claim of responsibility, but it resembled previous attacks by Sunni militants from Islamic State on Shias.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Shia mosque, Islamic State

Religious Controversies

1. Minorities fear backlash over Sri Lanka's proposed new constitution

Sri Lanka's minority religious groups, namely Christians and Muslims, are concerned after Buddhist hardliners reacted angrily to the President's proposed new constitution. The extremist Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) criticized that some of the provisions regulate the power of the Buddhist clergy. On the other side, minority religious groups appreciate the progress of the reformation under the new elected government, while doubting the effects of the constitutional changes on integrating them into the local society.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, New constitution, Religious Minority, BBS

2. Shani Shingnapur Controversy: Freedom of religion does not mean freedom to discriminate

The storm over the Shani Shingnapur temple in Maharashtra continues. Advocators of the status quo refer to the cloak of faith and religious belief to justify discriminatory customs, while the opponents argue that such restrictions on female worshippers are discriminatory and that they have no foundation in their respective religions. Next week, the argument against the denial of entry to women in the sanctum sanctorum of the Haji Ali Dargah will be listened in the Bombay High Court.

Keywords: India, Bombay High Court, Discrimination, Religious controversy

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. Brian Grim Briefs Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau on Religious Freedom at Davos

Brian Grim, Chair of the Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith, briefed Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Religious Freedom at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. Leaders from several major global NGOs also attended this meeting. The briefing document, drafted by Archbishop Antje, focuses on the role of faith in addressing key global challenges, including economic growth, environment and resource security etc.

Keywords: Davos, Canadian PM, Religious freedom, Global challenges

2. Human Rights Group Says India Needs to Do More to Defend Religious Freedom

The latest report of The Human Rights Watch, published in January 2016, expressed concern over the growing religious intolerance in India. In 2015, a series of violent attacks on religious minorities in the country has sparked a debate over whether the rise of Mr. Modi has emboldened people eager to push a religious agenda. Besides, the report also criticizes the Indian government's restrictions on non-governmental organizations.

Keywords: India, Religious intolerance, Religious freedom, NGO

3. Cuba Attacks Christians As Washington Liberalizes Economic Ties

The new report of Christian Solidarity Worldwide warned of a dramatic rise of violations against religious freedom in Cuba during last year. According to the report, the increase observed mainly due to the government declaring 2000 Assemblies of God (AoG) churches illegal. Through a wide-ranging campaign led by the Office of Religious affairs, a large number of churches have been demolished and closed.

Keywords: Cuba, AoG church, Demolition, Religious freedom

4. Rule Prioritizing Religion Classes in Primary Schools Abolished

Rule 68 of the Education Act, giving a privileged status to religion classes at primary level, was abolished in Ireland. Some regard the abolition as a significant moment for education reform, emphasizing the diversity of families and communities in the country. New curriculum is under way to rebalance the time spent on different subjects in the primary schools. However, the Catholic schools claimed that their teaching of religious education would not be changed.

Keywords: Ireland, Religion classes, Education reform, Catholic schools

Contributors: Akanksha Narain, Ha Yu Xin, Juhi Ahuja, Yang Ni
Editors: Akanksha Narain and Juhi Ahuja

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

1. Muslim Leaders Vow To Protect Rights Of Religious Minorities (Marrakech)

A group of Islamic scholars, Muslim leaders and government ministers from more than 100 countries attended the gathering in Marrakech this week, addressing the plight of religious minorities in Muslim lands. A declaration coming out of the meeting calls on Muslim intellectuals to develop a more inclusive concept of citizenship. However, some still worry that efforts by traditional Muslim scholars may not reach the right people.

Keywords: Marrakech meeting, Muslim-majority state, Minority right