

Weekly Report

Religious Conflict

1. NE India - Manipur violence sparks fears of religious conflict

Militants from the minority tribal groups (mainly Christians) in Manipur denounced three bills passed by the State Legislature in Manipur and initiated violent reaction in the town of Churachandpur. In retaliation, suspected paramilitary insurgents from the majority Meitei (mainly Hindus) opened fire at the mob, causing at least nine dead and 20 injured.

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/09/4010307/>

2. India's Christians are under attack

18 violent attacks were conducted against Christians and churches from July to the first week of September 2015. Of these, 16 were conducted in states with "anti-conversion" laws namely, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/3626084/4007879>

3. Sixth Indian state seeks to adopt "anti-conversion law"

The state of Maharashtra in India is debating the introduction of "anti-conversion law", which prevents anyone from forceful or fraudulent conversion to another religion. The ambiguity of the terms in the law led Christians to fear that they were a soft target of the law.

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/09/4008146/>

Religious Controversies

1. Where religious freedom ends: Why a Kentucky clerk has no right to deny gay marriage licenses

Kentucky county clerk named Kim Davis was put behind bars for 5 days as she continued to deny marriage licenses to same-sex couples on the grounds that doing so violates her deeply held religious beliefs despite a federal court order.

<http://theweek.com/articles/574847/where-religious-freedom-ends-why-kentucky-clerk-no-right-deny-gay-marriage-licenses>

2. Muslim flight attendant suspended for not serving alcohol

A Muslim flight attendant said the Atlanta-based airline ExpressJet suspended her for refusing to serve alcohol, a practice that is against her religious beliefs. Charee Stanley began working for ExpressJet nearly three years ago. She later converted to Islam and only learned earlier this year that her faith prohibits her both from serving alcohol and consuming it.

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/09/08/muslim-flight-attendant-suspended-not-serving-alcohol/>

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3. Calls to prioritise Christian refugees are discriminatory – Australia's grand mufti

Australia's Grand Mufti remarked that by prioritizing refugees on the basis of religion will reinforce a sense that Muslims 'are always going to be vilified in the Australian community'. He also said that choosing refugees based on religion or ethnicity was the very kind of sectarian thinking "that got Iraq and Syria into the problems they're facing now". His comments were in response to Australian MPs' demand for Christians to be given priority among Syrian refugees.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/sep/09/calls-to-prioritise-christian-refugees-are-discriminatory-australias-grand-mufti>

4. 'Banistan': Four-day meat ban in India's Mumbai sparks outrage

A ban on the slaughter and sale of meat for four days had been imposed in Mumbai following a demand from the Jain community. The Jains, a small but extremely powerful community in India, will be observing an 8 day fast beginning later this week. The community is strictly vegetarian and demanded a meat ban given their belief in ahimsa (non-violence). However, following a huge hue and cry over the imposition of dietary restrictions over the entire city the Mumbai High Court ordered a stay over the order.

This is not the first time that a meat ban has been imposed in an Indian state. Only recently the slaughter of beef, a major source of cheap protein for Muslims, Christians and lower caste Hindus, was imposed in Maharashtra.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/08/us-india-meat-idUSKCN0R81ER20150908>

<http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/ganesh-chaturthi-bjp-imposed-meat-ban-karnataka-congress-never-revoked-it-34325>

5. Renewed clashes at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque

"Israeli forces and Palestinians clashed at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound for a second straight day on Monday as Jews celebrated their new year and protesters vowed to protect Islam's third-holiest site."

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/14/renewed-clashes-at-jerusalems-al-aqsa-mosque-compound.html>

6. Nepal rejects calls to make nation Hindu, sparking violence

Nepal, an erstwhile Hindu kingdom, has decided to maintain its secular character despite violent protests. Two-thirds of the country's constituent assembly voted against making Nepal a Hindu state.

<http://news.yahoo.com/nepal-rejects-hindu-nation-calls-protesters-police-clash-091456185.html>

7. Bangladesh High Court rejects petition challenging Islam as state religion

The Bangladesh High Court rejects Advocate Samendra Nath Goswami petition questioning how Islam could still be acknowledged as the state religion despite revival of "secularism" as the state policy.

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Bangladesh's original Constitution (1972) declared "secularism" as one of the state principles however under the rule of military ruler-turned politician president Ziaur Rahman secularism was scrapped as a state policy. His successor ex-army chief HM Ershad made Islam as the state religion in 1988.

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/48854665.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=txt&utm_campaign=cppst

8. Detroit suburb rejects proposed mosque

Detroit's Planning Commission rejected a much-debated plan to build a mosque in a residential neighborhood. The committee found the proposed mosque to be in violation of the city's planning rules. However, many believe that the Planning Commission succumbed to pressure levied by the public urging the rejection of the proposal.

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/11/detroit-suburb-rejects-proposed-mosque.html>

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. Catholic village tells Protestant man to convert or go to prison

A Mexican Protestant man was imprisoned three times since July for not converting to Catholicism. His family was forbidden from attending non-Catholic Church services in a neighbouring village and his children denied education.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/catholic.village.tells.protestant.man.to.convert.or.go.to.prison/64737.htm>

2. Myanmar's religion laws a 'death knell' for peace

Myanmar's Race and Religion Laws have raised concerns about them becoming a tool used to persecute religious minorities in the Buddhist-majority country.

<http://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmars-religion-laws-a-death-knell-for-peace/74244>

3. Bangladesh urged to tackle religious intolerance

Heiner Bielefeldt, the United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, highlighted the marginalisation of the minority religions in Bangladesh. Even though the government is committed to secularism, religious extremism is threatening the space for secularism and minority religions.

<http://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-urged-to-tackle-religious-intolerance/74243>

4. Orthodox and secular Jews fight over shaping Jerusalem's character

Eight convenience stores owners in West Jerusalem have been ordered to close their stores during the Jewish Sabbath period or be fined. This is part of a deal struck by the city's mayor with the ultra-orthodox Jews, who form the majority in West Jerusalem and wield strong political power. Ultra-orthodox Jews believe that remaining open during the period destroys the sanctity of the day of rest.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/09/11/jerusalem-israel-sabbath-closings/72012942/>

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5. Muslim-Jewish council formed to fight for religious freedom in Europe

Muslim and Jewish leaders in Europe have formed the Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council (MJLC) to fight over minority religious rights and promote interfaith dialogue.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4699993,00.html>

6. Religious Freedom vs Rule of Law

Observers debated on the case of Kim Davies, who was imprisoned on six days for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples because it was conflicting with her religious beliefs. The focus of the debate was whether imprisonment was necessary or if more moderate options to allow her to perform her duty and practise her beliefs at the same time could have been more applicable.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2015/09/11/september-11-2015-religious-freedom-versus-federal-law/27121/>

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

1. Russian Church in Germany is ready to shelter refugees from Syria

The Berlin Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church are in talks with relevant authorities and migrant organisations to explore how they can assist Christian refugees from Syria. One possible way is to settle some of them near the Gotschendorf Monastery, so that they may also receive “spiritual help”.

<http://interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12290>

2. Cambodia orders repatriation of Christian Montagnards

The Cambodian Interior Ministry has given the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees a three-month deadline to facilitate the repatriation of Christian Montagnards to Vietnam, after refusing to grant them refugee status. The Christian Montagnards were thought to have faced oppression in Vietnam causing them to flee to Cambodia.

<http://www.ucanews.com/news/cambodia-orders-repatriation-of-christian-montagnards/74254>