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## PAKISTAN | Blasphemy Accusation Triggers Violence

One person was killed and another critically injured by a mob attack targeting the Hindu community in Mirpur Mathelo of Sindh district, Pakistan on July 27. The incident was triggered by a false blasphemy accusation on July 26 against a Muslim man, who was formerly a Hindu.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) received reports that Amar Lal was arrested in Daharki in Ghotki district, Sindh on July 27 for desecrating pages of the Qur'an. Lal, who converted to Islam from Hinduism three years ago, was living in an unused mosque in the area and is thought to suffer from mental illness. He was allegedly seen near the mosque burning pages of the Qur'an.

Once news of the blasphemy accusation spread, a mob assembled at the National Highway in Daharki in protest, demanding that Lal be handed over to them. After Lal's arrest, communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the Ghotki district of Sindh began to worsen, leading to rioting which caused damage to shops and in which rioters clashed with police. Over 80 people have since been arrested. Despite local rangers being deployed to maintain calm in Mirpur Mathelo and the surrounding villages, all shops and business have remained closed for the past three days due to communal tensions. Many local people are afraid to leave their homes.

Following the riots, two young Hindu boys were attacked July 27 while fueling their motorbike at a gas station in Mirpur Mathelo. Unknown assailants shot at them, killing Sateesh Kumar and injuring his friend, who remains in a critical condition.

Krishan Sharma, Chairperson of Right of Expression, Assembly, Association and Thought (REAT) Pakistan, a network of civil society organizations, visited Mirpur Mathelo and told CSW that civil society condemns the incident and considers it a conspiracy against Sindhi Hindus by religious extremists, who want to make them migrate to India. He added that the state failed to provide protection for the Hindu community and appealed to the government to implement the National Action Plan "with true spirit and protect the non-Muslim citizens of Pakistan." The government's National Action Plan was established after the 2014 Peshawar school massacre with several objectives, including ending religious extremism and ensuring the protection of minorities.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with Sateesh Kumar's family and all those who have been injured in the recent communal violence in Sindh Province. The authorities must take immediate action to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of the violence and to ensure that communal tensions do not escalate further. Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often misused as a tool to settle personal scores and even the rumor of an allegation can incite violence against the accused. While the majority of those accused are Muslims, religious minorities are disproportionately affected as it is more likely that their whole community will be attacked. In the absence of having the laws repealed, CSW is calling on the government of Pakistan to urgently review the blasphemy laws so they are not open to abuse. We urge the government to fully implement progressive judgments by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to protect the rights of religious minorities."