

Congressman highlights plight of Bangladeshi Hindus in House

India Post News Service

NEW YORK: Hindu groups in the US have applauded an Illinois lawmaker for highlighting the plight of Bangladeshi Hindus on the House floor.

Congressman Robert Dold (R-IL) condemned the daily persecution against Bangladesh's Hindu minority last week on the floor of the House of Representatives.

"Since 1947, 49 million Hindus in Bangladesh have gone missing according to Sachi [Dastidar]," read Congressman Dold. "And a recent Hindu American Foundation report concluded that the Hindus of Bangladesh continue to be victims of daily acts of murder, rape, kidnapping, temple destruction, and physical intimidation.

Dr. Richard Benkin, an authority on human rights abuses in Bangladesh, has described to me on several occasions the atrocities and human rights abuses suffered by Bangladesh's Hindus that he personally has verified."

Commending Rep. Dold's remarks, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) pointed out its human rights report, Hindus in South Asia and the Diaspora, A Survey of Human Rights 2010.

According to the report Hindus in Bangladesh comprised 30% of the population in 1947, while today they comprise less than 10%. Just this month, Bangladesh's parliament passed a constitutional amendment retaining Islam as the official state reli-



Congressman Robert Dold (R-IL)

Secular groups and religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, have expressed serious concerns over the Bangla amendment and its implications on religious freedom

gion, despite 2008 election promises made by the current Awami League government to restore the secular 1972 constitution.

The move has been seen by many as a compromise by the ruling Awami League, which has been branded as anti-Islamic by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and several Islamist organizations. Secular groups and religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, have expressed seri-

ous concerns over the amendment and its implications on religious freedom.

"Voices calling out the Bangladesh government for its history of human rights abuses against Bangladeshi Hindus are once again a part of the Congressional record," said Prof. Ramesh Rao, the editor of the HAF report that Congressman Dold cited. "HAF will continue to work with other advocates to ensure that the issue of Bangladeshi Hindus remains an urgent concern and, that the U.S. Congress soon considers legislation that predicated financial aid on addressing those concerns."

Congressman Dold's remarks were made in reference to his support of H.R. 440, which calls for a State Department Special Envoy who would be authorized to represent the United States in cases relevant to religious freedom in the "priority countries of Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan." The bill passed the House of Representatives yesterday and is now pending review by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under bill number S.1245.

"Promotion of religious freedom in countries with abysmal human rights records, such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, is vital to our national security interests, and we hope such legislation will have the teeth to curb the funding of rogue regimes," added Samir Kalra, HAF Director and co-author of its human rights report.

Hindus welcome House Resolution on Kashmiri Hindus

India Post News Service

NEW YORK: The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) applauded Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) for introducing House Resolution (H.Res. 387), "[r]ecognizing that the religious freedom and human rights violations of Kashmiri Pandits, has been ongoing since 1989." A similar resolution taking up the cause of the Pandits, or Kashmiri Hindus, that were attacked and forced to flee the Kashmir valley since 1989, was introduced by Congressman Pallone, and co-sponsored by Congressmen Mike Honda (D-CA) and Pete Stark (D-CA), in 2010.

"While too many policy makers in Washington D.C. do little to highlight the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, Congressman Pallone has taken the lead in raising awareness about this critical matter," said HAF's Director, Samir Kalra. "HAF is pleased that an issue it has pursued with Congressman Pallone's help for several years has been introduced in the House again."

H.Res. 387, which has been referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, condemns extremist violence in India's state of Jammu and Kashmir and demands that the terrorist infrastructure in the region be dismantled. It also

notes that the Hindu population in the Kashmir Valley has declined from 400,000 in 1989 to less than 4,000 today, and many of them still live in refugee camps in other parts of India.

"The introduction of H.Res. 387 is not only significant for Kashmiri Hindus and the Hindu American community, but also furthers America's commitment to promoting religious freedom around the world," continued

'While too many policy makers in Washington D.C. do little to highlight the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, Congressman Pallone has taken the lead in raising awareness about this critical matter,' said HAF's Director, Samir Kalra

Kalra. "We are grateful to the Indo-American Kashmir Forum (IAKF) for working collaboratively with HAF in keeping attention focused on the plight of Kashmiri Hindus."

According to several security analysts and intelligence reports, the campaign of violence and intimidation conducted by foreign terrorist organizations in Jammu and Kashmir has been supported and funded by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Agency.

"Any discussion on the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir cannot ignore the human rights of 400,000 Kashmiri Hindus, who were ethnically cleansed from the Kashmir Valley by Islamic extremist groups based in Pakistan," said Jay Kansara, HAF's Washington based Associate Director. "The recent arrest of Ghulam Nabi Fai of the Kashmiri American Council (KAC) for allegedly lobbying on behalf of the ISI once again highlights the destructive and mendacious role Pakistan has played in Kashmir."

HAF said that its leaders and supporters would ask several members of Congress to support this measure during HAF's annual Advocacy Days events in Washington later this year, and the Foundation is urging all Americans committed to human rights concerns and religious freedom to contact their Congressional representatives in support of H.Res. 387.



IMAGES OF INDIA EXHIBITION AT UN

Humanitas The Images of India, a photo exhibition by photographer Fredric Roberts (right) was inaugurated by Permanent Representative of India to UN Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri on the occasion of India assuming the Presidency of UN Security Council on August 8. Mrs Puri can be seen in picture.

Pic Mohammed Jaffer-SnapsIndia

