

# CREATING THE MUSLIM "OUTSIDER":

Hate speech, migrant vulnerability &  
faltering law & order in Himachal Pradesh

A Fact-Finding Report



Association for  
Protection of  
Civil Rights



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Hate Speech, Migrant Vulnerability and  
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ASSOCIATION FOR PROTECTION  
OF CIVIL RIGHTS

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# SUMMARY

## **Himachal Pradesh Communal Tensions:**

In September, Himachal Pradesh witnessed escalating communal tensions sparked by Hindutva groups protesting the Sanjauli mosque in Shimla. The protests turned violent, with clashes between protesters and police resulting in injuries. The controversy centred around the mosque's construction, deemed unauthorised by Hindutva organisations.

Hindutva organisations demanded the mosque's demolition, citing illegal construction. In response, the Muslim community offered to demolish the unauthorised section voluntarily, in compliance with a court ruling. However, tensions continued to rise and Hindutva groups advocated for the mosque's complete demolition.

The protests took a violent turn on September 11, with protesters clashing with police and attempting to breach barricades in Sanjauli. The Himachal Pradesh government deployed additional security forces to maintain law and order.

From Sanjauli, the violent protests against Muslims spread to the entire Himachal including Shimla's Nerwa and Kasumpti, Mandi, Chamba, Bilaspur, Una, Palampur, and Nagrota Bagwan of Kangra, Hamirpur, Sirmaur and other districts.

The role of Congress leaders in the communal tension in Himachal Pradesh has been criticised as ineffective. According to reports, the Congress government failed to address the growing tensions, leading to increased fear within the Muslim community. The situation escalated to the point where protesters clashed with police and shops were vandalised in Mandi, Palampur, Sanjauli, Kullu, and Solan. The fact-finding team visited all these locations.

Specifically, in the Sanjauli Mosque issue, the Congress government's inaction was seen as enabling the communal tensions to spread. Vikramaditya Singh and Anirudh Singh, both ministers in the Himachal Pradesh Congress government, made some significant Islamophobic statements during this conflict. While Anirudh questioned the citizenship of Muslim workers in Himachal Pradesh, Vikramaditya stated that all vendors will now have to display their IDs outside their shops. The decision was

rolled back after significant criticism. The lack of decisive action from Congress leadership allowed the situation to spiral out of control.

The incident has exacerbated communal tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities, affecting local businesses and residents. The controversy highlights concerns about minority rights and freedom of religion in India. The rise of communal politics has contributed to increased tensions, with Himachal Pradesh becoming a focal point.

The events unfolding in Himachal Pradesh have sparked widespread concern and debate. The need for dialogue, understanding, and peaceful resolution has become increasingly urgent. As the situation continues to unfold, attention will remain focused on the state government's response and the measures taken to address communal tensions.

# BACKGROUND

After the 2024 Lok Sabha election results, a wave of communal violence has engulfed the country from Himachal, Uttarakhand to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand as if the political parties have come to realise that it is the only way to remain in power or win elections.

There has been a sudden spurt in violence targeting Muslims and mosques over the past few months in Himachal. The recent one was triggered by a very localized incident of violence between two individuals in Shimla that was later given a communal color. In Himachal, the campaign against Muslims was triggered by no one other than the ruling dispensation of INC and active participation of many of its top rank leaders, ministers, and MLAs. The communal tension soon escalated and spread across state, involving other right wing groups and actors, using anti-Muslim inflammatory remarks, speeches and rhetorics leading to a number of violent clashes across state leaving Muslims - specially poor and migrant laborers, workers, hawkers and tailors, who have largely migrated from other states, under fear and terror. State and its institutions like the police took discriminatory measures targeting Muslims in the name of law and order.

## Background of the Himachal Incidents

The Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu-led Congress government which came to power in 2022 was on the edge of falling as six of its rebel MLAs and three independent legislators joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Although the party was able to save the government after the interventions from the central leadership, the crisis within the party and the government continues to manifest in different ways. As many Congress leaders were seen flaring up communal tension in the state, various Hindutva organisations, Hindu Jagran Manch and Swaran Samaj and many other 'shadow armies'<sup>1</sup> of RSS became active in the state leading to various incidents of violence, vandalism and looting of Muslims shops. A series of minor incidents have already occurred in the state before the Sanjauli incident.

On 17 June 2024, a Muslim man's shop in Nahan town of Sirmaur District in Himachal

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1 Dhirendra Jha, "Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva", Juggernaut Books, **Published Year: 30-Jan-2019.**

Pradesh was attacked, looted, and vandalised by a Hindutva mob.<sup>2</sup> The violent assault occurred in the presence of the police, raising serious questions about the law enforcement's role and effectiveness in preventing such acts. This incident was triggered by a WhatsApp status message of a Muslim man named Javed Qureshi, the brother of the shopkeeper that was attacked by the Hindu mob, in which Javed was shown slaughtering an animal on Eid, triggering rumours that he had killed a cow.<sup>3</sup> A mob of 400-500 strong Hindu men was seen looting Qureshi's garments shop in the Chotta Chowk market in Nahan in front of the police while chanting "Jai Shri Ram, Jai Shri Ram" and "Shoot the traitors."<sup>4</sup>

This was not an isolated incident. On the same day, Hindu Jagran Manch posted a video in which vigilantes seized two trucks in Mandi in central Himachal Pradesh, alleging cows were smuggled in them.<sup>5</sup>

These groups along with a number of other locals were raising demands of the expulsion of the 'outsiders' Muslims and making Islamophobic comments, almost in resemblance to what is seen in Himachal now.

Himachal has just 2.18 percent of Muslim population according to the 2011 census, which limits the scope of any kind of resistance and hence, also makes it difficult for the Hindutva organisations to engineer large-scale communal violence in the state. In Shimla, the number of Muslims is just 1.45 per cent according to the 2011 Census.

On the other hand, official data puts the number of migrant labourers in the state at 1.14 lakh.<sup>6</sup> Himachal has 8.5 percent migrants in its population which is the second highest share of the external migration population after Delhi (21.3%).<sup>7</sup>

Himachal Pradesh is facing a significant economic crisis as the state debt has increased manifold affecting dispersion of salaries and pension, unemployment increasing and it has slipped to 18th position in terms of quality of education. There is an increasing dissatisfaction against the state government which is being exploited by the right wing organisations to depict Muslims as "outsiders" largely responsible for many of these problems.

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2 <https://muslimmirror.com/nahan-himachal-pradesh-in-presence-of-police-hindutva-mob-attacks-muslim-mans-shop-over-whatsapp-status/>

3 <https://tribe.article-14.com/post/hindu-men-who-provoked-mob-against-muslim-shopkeepers-in-himachal-are-still-out-spewing-hate-66837192d2abo>

4 <https://tribe.article-14.com/post/hindu-men-who-provoked-mob-against-muslim-shopkeepers-in-himachal-are-still-out-spewing-hate-66837192d2abo>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/ZRHhKgoe5C1nsitT/?mibextid=oFDknk>

6 <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/shimla/himachal-drive-register-all-migrant-labourers-8111907/>

7 <https://www.livemint.com/economy/in-charts-how-indians-move-within-the-country-11678642949279.html>



# SHIMLA & SANJAULI

## Current Conflict Points

Sanjauli is a bustling market area located near Shimla. In 1940, land was donated for the construction of a mosque, a practice known as waqf, which refers to a charitable endowment. Once land is donated for charitable uses, it cannot be claimed or sold by individuals. Specifically, in Islam, mosques can only be established on waqf land, not on private property. The management of these waqf lands falls under the jurisdiction of the Waqf Board. A document from 1940, written in Urdu and attached as evidence by activist Himanshu Kumar, confirms the mosque's establishment on legitimate grounds.<sup>8</sup>

At the time the mosque's land was donated, the Waqf Board law had not yet been implemented in India. It wasn't until 1954 that the Indian Parliament enacted the Waqf Board Act. This legislation facilitated the transfer of all community waqf lands belonging to the Muslim community—including mosques, rest houses, cemeteries, and madrasas—to the Waqf Board. This process was entirely lawful and government records from 1954 indicate that the land for the Sanjauli mosque is officially documented as property of the Waqf Board.

The mosque also serves as a place for travellers from various locations within the Muslim community, prompting the mosque committee to construct an upper hall for their accommodation. Congress Minister Anirudh Singh and Vikramaditya Singh alleged the previous BJP government headed by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur in 2019 allocated rupees from taxpayer funds for development of the mosque.<sup>9</sup>

On September 1, tensions escalated when a group of individuals began calling for the mosque's demolition, labelling it as illegal.

Our on ground reporting revealed that an incident preceded the conflict. An altercation between Hindu men and Muslim men in Malyana, which is around 9 kilometres from Sanjauli, led to injury of a few Hindu men. The FIR number 148/2024 was registered on 30th August, on the day of incident, under Section 126(2) for

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/5PHY6ghSH3XpkbfJ/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ptinews.com/story/national/jai-ram-thakur-gave-rs-2l-for-construction-in-sanjauli-mosque-claims-himachal-minister-thakur-terms-it-baseless/1813259>

wrongful restraint, Section 115(2) for voluntarily causing hurt, and Section 3 (5) which pertains to joint criminal liability under the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS). The FIR registered on the complaint of 37-year-old shopkeeper Vikram Singh alleged that the accused Mohammad Kulnavaj and his men injured Singh and his friends Jaipal and Rajeev Sharma.

Kulnavaj and six others were arrested on 3 September and were granted bail by the Shimla district court on 12 September. Since then, they have left Shimla and have gone back to Saharanpur.

A journalist working in Sanjauli told us, on the condition of anonymity, that a rumour was spread that the Muslim men after hurting Hindu men took refuge in the Sanjauli mosque. After that the Sanjauli mosque became the target of Hindu far-right protests.

The Malyana incident was utilised as justification for a march from Malyana to Sanjauli, with demands for the expulsion of Muslim outsiders and the demolition of the mosque, which Hindu far-right claimed as illegal.

The journalist further gave us a background on how the issue of mosques was raised in Sanjauli: "After the fight in Malyana, on 1st September, the first protest rally against the mosque was taken out in Sanjauli. It was initiated by local Congress counsellors, local Hindu rightwing outfits and BJP members."

Himachal Pradesh's Minister of Rural Development Anirudh Singh and his Congress party colleague Harish Janartha also raised the mosque issue in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on 5 September. Janartha moved a motion in the Assembly to discuss the alleged illegal construction.

In his widely viral speech from the assembly Anirudh Singh alleged that persons of Bangladeshi origin were living in the mosque and demanded that their identities be verified.<sup>10</sup> He said, "They started construction without approval. It was an illegal structure. First, one floor was built, then the rest followed," and later added, "They have a habit of engaging in illegal activities. They built a 5-storey mosque. This entire matter should be investigated."<sup>11</sup>

Singh also tweeted his speech on X platform and said, "Govt. should verify people entering Himachal from other states. A law should be passed reserving street

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<sup>10</sup> <https://x.com/anirudhsinghMLA/status/1831572255098437974>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/shimla-sanjauli-mosque-illegal-construction-minister-anirudh-singh-state-assembly-congress-love-jihad-2594142-2024-09-05>

<https://scroll.in/latest/1072902/congress-mlas-clash-in-himachal-pradesh-assembly-over-illegal-mosque-in-shimla>

vending permits exclusively for bona fide residents of Himachal Pradesh. This will help safeguard local livelihoods and promote fairness. (sic)"<sup>12</sup>

Singh further said, "What kind of situation is developing in the state? New people are coming in every day...People from the Jamaat are arriving, and there's no trace of where they are coming from. Are they Rohingyas? I personally know 1-2 people who have come from Bangladesh. They should be verified."<sup>13</sup>

After the first major protest on 1st September, protest rallies against the mosque were also taken out on 5th September and on 11th September. The call for the 11th September protest was given by Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Hindu groups protested the mosque construction, demanding action.

Protesters chanted slogans such as -

*"Mulle Katue nahin chalenge"*

*"Masjid ko girana hoga"*

*"Himachal Ne Thaana Hai, Devbhoomi Ko Bachana Hai"*

*"Bharat Mata Ki Jai"*

*"Jai Sri Ram."*<sup>14</sup>

The protests were part of a bandh called by Hindu organisations to demand the demolition of the mosque and registration of outsiders coming to the state. The district administration issued prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which barred the assembly of more than five people and the carrying of lethal weapons and arms.<sup>15</sup>

On September 11, protesters clashed with police, breaking barricades and pelting stones. Police used water cannons and batons to disperse the crowd, injuring about 10 people including police and women. Police booked 50 people for violence, including leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, panchayat chiefs and their deputies, former councillors, and shopkeepers.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <https://x.com/anirudhsinghMLA/status/1831572255098437974>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> <https://x.com/kaushikrj6/status/1831668275702354007?t=y9xgjQHVk8YVwMM1WRQeXA>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/shimla-mosque-dispute-protesters-break-barricades-clash-with-police-101726042894795.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/protests-by-hindu-groups-in-shimla-continue-despite-mosque-demolition/articleshow/113343486.cms#:~:text=Protests%20continue%20in%20Shimla%20and,mosque%20committee%2C%20tensions%20remain%20high.>

On 13th September, Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukkhu chaired an all party meeting. The all-party meeting, held in Shimla, was chaired by chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukkhu and state Congress president Pratibha Singh, BJP MLA Randhir Sharma, AAP state president Surjit Singh Thakur, and CPM leader Rakesh Singha were among few others present. In a joint statement, the representatives of political parties said, "Himachal is a peaceful state and there has always been harmony among people living here. We appeal to everyone to maintain peace and brotherhood in the state."<sup>17</sup>

Sukkhu said every religion is respected in Himachal Pradesh, and no one has the right to hurt the religious sentiments of any community. "Himachal is a peace-loving state and there is no restriction on anyone from any part of the country working here, but it must be within the framework of law. However, everyone must refrain from making any remarks that could hurt people of any particular community or faith," he said.<sup>18</sup>The CM also assured that the government will take action against any illegal construction, be it of any community, strictly as per record and law.<sup>19</sup>

After that, on 14th September, a Himachal Bandh was announced by the protesters in response to police action against Hindu Far-Right protesters.<sup>20</sup> During the Himachal Bandh, many places across Himachal saw violent Hindu Far-Right rallies.

On 19th September, a delegation of Himachal Muslims met Congress general secretary KC Venugopal in Delhi as protests continued. Congress party's national chairman of the minority department and Rajya Sabha MP Imran Pratapgarhi also accompanied the delegation.

On 26th September, triggering another controversy around the mosque at Shimla's Sanjauli, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Shoaib Jamai released a video saying the buildings surrounding the mosque were of the same height. The leader's comments, made in a video post after a visit to the complex,

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<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/himachal-pradesh/shimla-mosque-dispute-vhp-leaders-ex-councillors-among-those-booked-for-violent-protest/article68645117.ece>

[https://thewire.in/communalism/muslims-fear-escalation-shimla-anti-mosque-spread?mid\\_related\\_new#:~:text=Muslims%20Fear%20Escalation%20as%20Shimla%27s%20Anti%2DMosque%20Agitations,paradise.%20%20Muslims%20worried%2C%20concealing%20their%20identities.](https://thewire.in/communalism/muslims-fear-escalation-shimla-anti-mosque-spread?mid_related_new#:~:text=Muslims%20Fear%20Escalation%20as%20Shimla%27s%20Anti%2DMosque%20Agitations,paradise.%20%20Muslims%20worried%2C%20concealing%20their%20identities.)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/shimla-mosque-row-leaders-call-for-peace-at-all-party-meet-101726251924672.html>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/shimla-mosque-row-leaders-call-for-peace-at-all-party-meet-101726251924672.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.indiatv.in/india/national/hindu-organizations-called-for-himachal-bandh-appealed-to-keep-shops-closed-for-2-hours-2024-09-14-1075376>

drew sharp reactions from various people including the leader of opposition, Jai Ram Thakur. Thakur said the leaders from other states are coming and spoiling the atmosphere in the state, trying to disturb the peace and the government is watching the spectacle in the whole matter. "The government should take strict action against such people so that people cannot try to disturb the peace of the state," he said.<sup>21</sup> The mosque committee also distanced themselves from his comments.

Further on the same day, September 26, Himachal urban development minister Vikramaditya Singh had said every restaurant and fast food stall in the state will have to display the owner's ID, like Uttar Pradesh. His comments went viral on social media and drew sharp criticism from civil society.

After that Congress' central leadership intervened, prompting the state government's clarification. The party's Himachal in-charge Rajiv Shukla told media that he has discussed the issue with Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Vikramaditya Singh.<sup>22</sup> Next day, in a statement, a government spokesperson said the Congress government has not taken any decision on nameplates or other identification by the vendors on their stalls so far. He added, the government was committed to address the concerns of street vendors of the state and would consider all suggestions carefully before taking any decision.<sup>23</sup>

There was also a Sadbhavna March taken out by the concerned citizens and led by the CPI(M) on 27 September in Shimla. The march, which started from outside the Deputy Commissioner's office, ended in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue on The Ridge. The participants took a pledge to protect and promote peace and harmony in the state.<sup>24</sup> Many retired justices such as Rajeev Sharma and VK Sharma, former MLAs from Himachal Adarsh Sood and Rakesh Singha, retired IAS officers such as Deepak Shanan, Ajay Sharma and other bureaucrats, retired professors HS Parmar and Kulvant Rana among many others along with former mayors of Shimla Sanjay Chauhan and Tikender Parmar participated in the march. Parmar told the fact-finding committee that over a thousand people participated in the march.

On the next day, on 28th September, Hindu-far right organisations also took out a

21 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/aimim-leader-s-remarks-on-sanjauli-mosque-triggers-row-101727355935697-amp.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1729424662540734&usg=AOvVaw2JLtf-yD1lmB-WbnzokPQm5>

22 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/no-decision-for-mandating-display-of-name-plates-so-far-himachal-government-101727388425090.html>

23 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/no-decision-for-mandating-display-of-name-plates-so-far-himachal-government-101727388425090.html>

24 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/himachal/citizens-hold-sadbhavana-march-in-shimla/>

counter protest from the DC office to Mall road in Shimla and gave an ultimatum to the government to demolish the mosque.

On 5th October, Shimla municipal commissioner (MC) court ordered the demolition of the top three unauthorised floors of Sanjauli Mosque in Shimla and gave a two-month deadline to the mosque committee to execute its orders. The next date of hearing is on 21 December when the case on the remaining part of the mosque will be heard. The matter has been sub-judice for the last 14 years when extra floors were constructed after 2007.

According to Hindustan Times, the Sanjauli mosque committee headed by Mohammed Latif has now written to the Himachal Pradesh Waqf board seeking "direction" to demolish the floors.

Latif told Hindustan Times, "As the property is under the supervision and management of HP Waqf board so I have written a letter seeking directions in wake of the orders," Latif said, adding, "I have referred to the order of Shimla municipal commissioner's court and have sought permission from Waqf board so that action can be taken in wake of the order."<sup>25</sup>

## TESTIMONIES

Altaf Hussain\*, 25, works in a shop in the main Sanjauli market. He said,

*"I have been working here for four years and have never seen such an environment. Sanjauli was completely peaceful. But now I can see the atmosphere changing. During the protests, the entire Sanjauli market was shut and we were hidden in our houses. We opened the shop in the afternoon the next day after the administration assured us of our safety. Many Muslims, especially from UP who used to work as labourers and vendors have left in fear. We have invested a lot in our shop. We cannot leave like them overnight. The shop is on rent and our landlord has supported us. Even our house is on rent. The locals are supportive but we are very fearful of Hindutva organisations. We have also verified our identities at the local police station"*

Qamar Hussain\*, 18, also works in the same shop and came a few days earlier when the protests started. He said,

*"Our family lives in Meerut and when they see these protests against Muslims in the news, they get scared. But what can we do? We have come here to earn*

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/shimla-mosque-panel-writes-waqf-board-for-demolition-directions-101729104172222.html>

*a living because there is no work in Uttar Pradesh. I have hidden this fact from my family that I am in Sanjauli because they would call me back. I cannot afford to do that because our financial condition is very poor. I need this job."*

55-year-old Sunita\* lives near the mosque in Sanjauli and was a witness to the protest and vandalism by the Hindu far-right groups protesting against the mosque since 1 September 2024. She said,

*"I have lived next to the mosque my entire life and I have never seen Muslims there misbehave with women. This controversy is created for a political game. There was no issue with the mosque before."*

*She said, "When the first Hindutva rally was called in Sanjauli on 1st September, an innocent Muslim vendor was hit on his head by protestors. He used to sell vegetables at the Sanjauli Chowk. Then again on 11th September, after the call of Vishwa Hindu Parishad when the protestors took over Sanjauli mall road, I was very scared. The vandalism was happening in front of my eyes. I couldn't believe that so many violent people were there. I was alone in my house. As a Hindu, I was even scared for my safety."*

*She further said, "Since the protests have started against Muslims, they have been really scared. They do not talk to anyone. I try to build their confidence in local Himachalis and many Muslim families have appreciated our support. But it is very difficult for them."*

Balveen Khanna, 75, has run a jewellery shop opposite Kashmiri mosque in the Lower Bazar, Shimla, for 50 years. He said,

*"We have never seen anything like this in Shimla before. This has also happened in Sanjauli for the first time. We should stay in harmony together. But when we hear that Muslims spit in our food and pelt stones, we feel bad."*

On being asked if he has seen Muslims spitting in food, he said,

*"I have seen this on television."*

Just opposite his shop, 32 year old Surender Mehra has a shop adjacent to the same Kashmiri mosque. Their family has run a shop since 1988. He said,

*"Sometimes some fights are blown out of proportion. Peace should be maintained. The people who provoke leave but the innocent ones become the victims."*

*While we were reporting in Sanjauli, the police briefly questioned us and inquired*



*about our credentials including our identity cards such as aadhar card, passport and press cards probably on the complaint of Kamal Gautam from Hindu Jagran Manch. Kamal Gautam had posted on his Facebook and Twitter that he had complained to the Shimla Police that we are a five member team belonging to a terrorist outfit. He had also posted photos of Kaushik Raj and Nadeem Khan, saying that his team had identified these two.*

During our off the record conversation with the police, a senior police official from Sanjauli said that they didn't know how to handle communalism because there had been no such previous instances in Himachal Pradesh. Every few minutes they were taking directions from the seniors on how to handle the situation. They also called police officials in other states to know how to handle such situations. They said, "Primarily we didn't expect such a big crowd during the protest. It was challenging for us. Our policemen also got injured in the protest. One of the lady police officials was hit in her back and one of the policemen lost his hearing," he said.<sup>26</sup> He added, "We are patrolling the Sanjauli area 24x7 and have created a roster of four hour shifts for every policeman. These kinds of communal incidents are unnecessary and divert the attention of the police from other important issues such as drug menace in Himachal Pradesh."

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26 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/shimla-police-release-cctv-of-anti-mosque-protestors-pelting-stones-6-cops-injured-8-firs-registered/articleshow/113310852.cms?from=mdr>



# MANDI

## Current Conflict Points:

Multiple protests took place in Mandi district on 10th September, 13th September and 28th September against the irregular construction of the mosque in Jail Road area of Mandi district. During the protests, slogans such as "Mulle Kazi nahi challenge," and "Masjid ko Girana hoga" were raised by Hindu far-right protesters.<sup>27</sup>

The Municipal Corporation court in Mandi, on September 13, had declared the mosque structure illegal, stating that the recent construction in the structure was carried out without the necessary approvals under the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act. On the same day, security was beefed up by the police in Mandi with the deployment of heavy force after Hindu outfits gave the call for the protest march. Prohibitory orders under 163 BNS were also issued by Mandi Police.<sup>28</sup> Despite that, raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram," the protesters initially held a march in the Mandi market area and sat on a dharna at Seri Manch. Later, when they made attempts to proceed towards the Jail Road mosque, police stopped them and used water cannons to bring the situation under control.

On 17th September, delegation of a Hindu organisation handed over a memorandum to Mandi deputy commissioner Apoorv Devgan, seeking an archaeological excavation of the mosque site. The delegation members claimed that they had been informed that there used to be a temple at the site. They demanded that the excavation of that part of the mosque, built on encroached public works department land which has now been demolished and vacated, should be done under the supervision of the archaeological department.<sup>29</sup>

On 20th September, the Mandi Municipal Commission cut the electricity supply and water connection of the Jail Road Mosque, deeming it illegal. The mosque committee claims that the masjid stands on Waqf board land, but the boundary wall of the mosque was on PWD land, which they demolished in cooperation with

27 <https://x.com/kaushikrj6/status/1833436907511992424?t=FAAmX5y5xmHj8Q5XNgSPxA>

28 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/shimla/a-day-after-shimla-stir-hindu-groups-protest-against-illegal-construction-at-mandi-mosque/articleshow/113316990.cms>

29 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/himachal-mandi-mc-cuts-power-water-supply-to-mosque-over-illegal-structure-101726824212029.html>

police and the municipal corporation.

On 28th September, Hindu seers were called to Mandi to tour street to street with Hindu-far-right protesters to convince Hindu landlords not to rent their properties to Muslims. Many Hindu seers raised provocative slogans and resorted to hate speech against secular Hindus and dog-whistling against Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

On 29th September, a meeting of representatives of the Muslim community was held also in the Balh area of Mandi. It was decided that a state-level committee of the minority community would be constituted and they would meet the chief minister to apprise him of the prevailing situation.<sup>31</sup>

On October 17, the court of urban development and town and country planning principal secretary, meanwhile, stayed the demolition order for the jail road mosque issued by the local MC court, based on an appeal from the managing committee.<sup>32</sup> The committee requested an interim stay while their appeal is pending. The stay order will remain in effect until the next hearing, scheduled for October 20.

## TESTIMONIES

Iqbal Ali, 40, was born in Mandi and is a member of the committee of the mosque against which Hindutva organisations were protesting. He told the fact-finding committee the history of the mosque dispute. The committee needed to renovate the mosque from sometime. However, when they sent the map of the proposed floors to the town and country planning department of the municipal corporation, there was no reply for six months. They deemed it as a silent consent and constructed a floor. On the day of the construction, the department came and labelled the floor as illegal construction. They have appealed against the decision but it was pending for a very long time in the MC court until the protest started.

Anwar Ali, 45, general secretary of the mosque committee said,

*"They call us outsiders, a specific community, which is code word for discrimination against Muslims. I don't like it. We are not outsiders or a specific community. In fact, I have to go to two weddings next week. Both of them are Hindus. We are a part of society here."*

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30 <https://x.com/HateDetectors/status/1841013143402582159>

31 <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/himachal-hindu-outfits-clash-with-police-in-kul-lu-over-mosque-demolition-demand>

32 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/shimla-mosque-panel-writes-waqf-board-for-demolition-directions-101729104172222.html>

The committee told us that there would be around 1000-1200 Muslims in Mandi, out of which 20-25 rent a shop in markets and 3-4 own a shop. Most of them are tailors and work as labourers. The tailors have stopped taking new bookings. Many of them have already left. At least 20-30 Muslim vendors have already left. Total 200-250 Muslims who were in a capacity to leave, have left.

The committee also informed that in the spirit of brotherhood and harmony, they also struck down a boundary wall of the mosque after DC and SP asked them to as that particular wall was outside their own land.

Talib Hussain\*, 34, has been running a tailor shop in Mandi's Bhagwan Mohalla since 2010. He was 20 years old when he came from Rampur in Uttar Pradesh to Mandi with his uncle. Today he is one of the most famous and busy tailors in Mandi. On three occasions the Hindu far-right stopped outside his shop pointing towards the board 'Hussain Ladies Tailor' and gave threats to him. In those rallies, Hindutva leaders took his name and questioned his character, warning the landlords to vacate Muslim shops.

His landlord is a BJP member. Hussain said,

*"Even though he is a BJP member, he is very supportive. He has not asked me to vacate the shop."*

The videos of threats went viral with the board of 'Hussain Ladies Tailor' which also had his number. His number was subsequently circulated in far-right groups. Since then, he has been getting endless threats through phone calls. He shared some of the recordings. In many of those calls, the callers ask Hussain's address and tell him in abusive language that they would harm him. One of the callers told him that he got his number from Bajrang Dal. The callers said they would kill him.

"When I opened the shop on the 14th after the rally, some Hindu men came and started questioning me in an aggressive way. They asked me where I was and why I didn't open the shop. Afraid, I ran away. I am afraid that they might physically harm me." In his shop, four Hindu ladies work sewing the clothes while four Muslim men design the clothes.

*"I am worried about the situation. We never know when we will have to leave. So we are just finishing the previous orders. We have stopped taking new orders," said Hussain.*

*He further said, "I have two sons. Both of them study in Mandi. I am so afraid for them that out of fear, I have not sent them to school for seven days in the last eight days."*

*A woman named Kumari\* who works at his shop said, "He treats everyone with respect. I don't believe in this discrimination campaign. This is a political stunt."*

The workers working there informed us that at least five tailors from West Uttar Pradesh have left Mandi. Many tailors were worried and jittery but still working to complete the orders.

Hussain said that he reached out to the Mandi SP on the day when he received the threats. But she could not meet him. Next day, SP was not in the office. In that case he went to ASP who took his written complaint at around 3 pm. After that, the police started patrolling his area in the evening. He said, "Before that, two-three men used to come with sticks in the evening forcing Muslims to close their shops. But after the police patrolled, it stopped."



# SOLAN

## Current Conflict Points

After calls of Himachal Bandh on 14th September by protestors in response to police action in Sanjauli and Mandi, things also deteriorated in Solan. In Solan, a violent protest rally was taken out on 16th September by the Solan Vyapar Mandal along with Hindu far-right outfits. The protesters claimed that their protest was against the "Muslims who have come from outside." The market in Solan remained closed until noon in response to a call from local traders. During the protests, the shops owned or rented by Muslims were marked by a red cross while some shops were also vandalised. Slogans such as "Solan main rehna hoga, toh jai shree ram kehna hoga" were raised by protestors. The Hindu outfits also read Hanuman Chalisa outside the Solan mosque in Mall road.<sup>33</sup>

The police on 17th September registered an FIR against Hindu far-right protesters under section 189(2), 190, 191(2), 299, 353(2) of BNS. Police claimed Vyapar Mandal and Hindu far-right organisations raised objectionable slogans against 'specific community' and also beat up a man at Mall road of Solan. The police also claimed that conditions of permission given for the rally were violated by the protesters.<sup>34</sup>

## TESTIMONIES

The fact-finding team went to Solan on 26th September and found that the shops of Muslims were still marked with a red cross.

We met a Muslim shopkeeper whose shop was still marked with a red cross.

Shamim Ahmed Ansari, 48, runs Ayan Garments, and belongs to Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh. He has been running this shop for 8 years. We asked him how the crowd was filled with locals who had already identified the Muslim shops to mark a red cross. He said, "The crowd had already identified the Muslim shops. In their mind, there must be hatred, that's why they did this. Of course I felt discriminated against.

33 <https://www.jagran.com/himachal-pradesh/solan-solan-protests-hindu-organizations-and-traders-protest-against-illegal-mosque-construction-in-shimla-23798246.html>

34 <https://www.amarujala.com/shimla/cases-registered-against-the-vyapar-mandal-president-and-other-hindu-community-leaders-for-protesting-in-solan-2024-09-17?pagelId=1>

In my shop, my worker Sharma ji has been working for five years now. We live in complete harmony together. There is no law in our country which prohibits anyone from any state to work in some other state. Either you make such a law..."

We also met the president of Solan Vyapar mandal to understand why they took out the rally. Kushal Jethi, 60, is the president of Solan Vyapar mandal (traders association) for six years. He said, "For a long time we have been protesting against the outsiders. That is why we expressed our rage. Our demand is that there should be a verification of the outsiders that why are they coming to Himachal in such large numbers. In the last 4-5 years, many outsiders are coming with a criminal background. How can they pay INR 3000 per day as rent? Definitely they are being funded. They make fake aadhar cards. They could be Rohingyas as well. Why would an Indian keep a fake aadhar card? Police should verify all these things. Many keep aadhar cards with Hindu names. What if they are from some other religion? This should be investigated." Regarding the cross marked on Muslim shops, he said, "There were at least 2000 people in the protest. Some of them might have done this. I cannot control everyone."

The fact-finding team also met an 87-year-old shopkeeper who supported Muslims. Nirmal Kumar Gupta, 87, has taken a sweets shop and medicine shop on rent from the Solan mosque near the old bus stand for 100 years. "I support Muslims. There was a lot of pressure on me but I have still given a Muslim vendor space to sell fruits," he said. A vendor named Salim Khan\* (24) sells fruits in front of his shop. During the protest in Solan, the far-right Hindu groups sat in front of his shop and recited Hanuman Chalisa.

*"In the group there were a lot of locals. So they knew which shops belonged to Muslims. The shops owned by Muslims were also marked with a red cross. But this is not right. Everybody has the right to earn anywhere in the country,"*  
*Gupta said.*

Gupta also shared that he has done the verification of all his Muslim staff after the protests.

"I have kept the photocopy of their Aadhaar card and have also submitted them to the police. Everything was okay in Solan. A minor scuffle was converted into a Hindu-Muslim conflict by the Hindutva organisations."

23-year-old Salim Hussain\* works at a shop in Solan old bus stand Market. A cross was marked on his shop as well by the Hindutva protesters. The shop has been rented since 2006 by Shahrukh Ali\*. Mohammad Ali\* (30) from Meerut has been working in this shop since 2014. He said, "There is an atmosphere of terror. Even the

customers misbehave with us after the protests."

He added, "Local people might have passed the information to Hindutva organisations that which shops belong to Muslims. People look at us, Muslims, with a different gaze. My family is worried and asking me to come back."

Vinod Kumar, 52, works in a shop in Solan old bus stand market. There was a poster outside his shop that said a helper was required in his shop. But Kumar said, "I will only employ locals, not outsiders."



# KULLU

## Current Conflict Points

On 14th September, same day as Himachal Bandh, various Hindu outfits in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu raised objections over a Jama Masjid in Kullu's Akhara Bazar. The outfits alleged the mosque had been illegally constructed. Couple of metres away from the structure, the Hindu outfits recited Hanuman Chalisa. The members of these groups demanded the removal of Jama Masjid, which has stood for decades in Kullu, claiming that there were unauthorised additions to the mosque's structure.<sup>35</sup>

Further, at the centre of the dispute is a discrepancy over land ownership. The Hindu far-right outfits claimed that the mosque, despite its long-standing presence, is still registered in the name of the Khadi Board. Further they intensified the issue claiming the mosque had constructed four additional floors without obtaining the necessary permissions. The protestors claimed the construction was carried out illegally under the Town and Country Planning (TCP) regulations.<sup>36</sup>

The Kullu Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Vikas Shukla claimed that the Jama Masjid in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh is not illegal. He presented documents to the media to support his claims that the mosque is owned by the Punjab Waqf Board as well as the mosque is recorded in government documents. Further, the mosque is also mentioned in the state government's gazette notification dated August 15, 1970 as well as in the state revenue records. The mosque was granted a temporary construction permit (TCP) in 1999 and the mosque's construction was approved until 2003. The SDM also said that the mosque is stable and safe. However, there is a small deviation of around 150 square metres in the mosque's construction from the original maps. The Waqf has requested regularisation of this deviation, and the request has been forwarded to the town and country planning director in Shimla.<sup>37</sup>

35 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/himachal-pradesh-hindu-outfits-recite-hanuman-chalisa-outside-illegally-made-masjid-in-kullu-2599948-2024-09-14>

36 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/himachal-pradesh-hindu-outfits-recite-hanuman-chalisa-outside-illegally-made-masjid-in-kullu-2599948-2024-09-14>

37 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/shimla/kullu-mosque-not-illegal-says-government-2-weeks-after-protest/articleshow/113794873.cms>

<https://www.etvbharat.com/hi/!state/kullu-sdm-presented-akhada-bazar-mosque-documents-himachal-pradesh-news-hps24093003458>



Despite his clarifications on 30th September, a huge rally was called by Hindu right-wing protesters. Protesters including women gathered in large numbers, carrying placards and saffron flags bearing the 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan as they called for the demolition of the mosque in Kullu. Musicians playing local instruments and women in traditional costumes dancing to Kullu folk music led the yatra. Hindu outfits which took out a yatra in Kullu demanding the demolition of a mosque were also involved in a scuffle with the police. Amid tight security, members of the Hindu Dharam Jagaran Yatra marched from the Hanuman temple to Akhara mosque chanting the *Hanuman Chalisa*.<sup>38</sup> The Hindu far-right protesters tried to storm the mosque upon reaching the Akhara Bazar but police foiled their attempt without applying force and let them move on to Lower Dhalpur and Dhalpur bazaars after about an hour of demonstrating.<sup>39</sup>

## TESTIMONIES:

Nawab Hashmi, 60, has been the Imam of the mosque in Akhada Bazar, Kullu, since 1993. He said, "Rajan Sood, Rajiv Sood, Rajesh Sood, Kshitij Sood have been associated with Devbhoomi Jagran Manch since 2017. They have been protesting against the mosque since 2017. They also, at their own cost, renamed the street in which the mosque is present as "Shree Ram Gali" in 2017. They also wrote to DC and Town Planning that our mosque is illegal. Now after the Sanjauli protest, this matter was highlighted again. On 14th September, they protested against the mosque and on 15th they gave the ultimatum that on 30th, they would themselves demolish the mosque. On 30th September, they had protested violently against the mosque and raised anti-Muslim slogans. Police stopped them from entering Shree Ram Gali where the mosque is located but registered the FIR against unknown people.

In Kullu district, there are at least 5000 Muslims, mostly from UP, Bihar and Kashmir. This is the only Jama Masjid in nearly 500 km and it is 150 years old.

Reminiscing the old days of harmony, Hashmi said, "In 1999 on 2nd October, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh community came together to put the foundation stone for mosque renovation. Raja Maheshwar Singh, the king of Kullu and BJP politician, and RSS leader Jagdamba Prasad Awasthi were the first donors and both gave a donation of Rs. 5000 from their own pocket to the mosque. Congress leaders such as Rajkishan Gaur were also present. But the harmonious situation has deteriorated

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38 <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/himachal-hindu-outfits-clash-with-police-in-kullu-over-mosque-demolition-demand>

39 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/shimla/protests-erupt-in-kullu-against-mosque-amid-legal-approval/articleshow/113830388.cms>

since the last five-six years due to constant brainwashing. Many ladies tailor have left Kullu or have stopped taking new orders. The administration gave us assurance that we can work here. The common public is also not so communal but they are also not coming out in our support publicly. Who would go against their own community?"

Firasat Khan, 65, from Shahjahanpur has been living in Kullu for 50 years, said, "The administration is supporting us. There are many people over here who support us, especially our neighbours. None of the landlords have asked Muslims to vacate the shops. In a communal harmony meeting with the administration, landlords had said that they support Muslims but they are under a lot of pressure. Situation deteriorated after pamphlets were distributed from the Hindutva side which went viral on social media. At least, 500 Muslim labourers left overnight. They are poor and hence cannot take risks."

*He further said, "In the protest, they were doing a cultural dance of Himachal called Nati so that locals also joined the protest. They were paid dancers and were called from outside. We believe less than 5% local Hindus participated in the protest. Not all Hindus are like that. Many Hindus organise iftar and community events on Eid."*

Describing the day of the protest rally on 30 September, Hashmi said, "A day before, the entire area was sealed by commandos of CRPF and police. There was a full police force along with a fire brigade. In the morning, DSP and SHO met us and told us we must not venture outside and the mosque was locked. At around 11 am, the rally started. They reached Shree Ram Gali at 1 pm. They were raising slogans such as "Mulle Thulle Nahi Challenge", "Mulle Kaate Jaayenge Ram Ram Chillayenge", "Mulle Thulle Thu Thu Thu." Many Muslims were watching this live on Facebook. I was not afraid. I knew there was sufficient police force. But I was sad to see this. We have never seen a situation like this."

Hashmi added, "Kullu had a lot of Muslim population before partition. After partition a lot of them left. When people from Kashmir came here they took refuge in a mosque. Muslims from UP, Bihar came here after liberalisation. As the need for a space increased during Eid, this mosque became an important space for Muslims."

*Riyaz Ahmed, 35, from Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, sells blankets in Kullu, said, "Social media is the biggest culprit here. All of these protests spread in Himachal after Sanjauli because of social media. Anybody can spread fake news on social media. Then, that is picked up by Godi Media to create sensational news. In such times it is valid to feel fear. Who knows what*

*might happen?"*

Riyaz Ahmed has been harassed for the last 2-3 years by Hindu far-right, who often vandalise his cart. In 2021, he complained to the police against them. Then, they stopped for a while.

Azimuddin, 33, from Sitapur in UP, runs a 23 year old family boutique in Kullu. Muslims in Himachal have faced Islamophobia even before the Sanjauli protests. He said, "On 24th August, a drunk man came to our shop and started abusing my workers and father and eventually slapped my father. He asked my father to show his aadhar card and said he is a Pakistani Mullah. When we filed a complaint at Akhada Bazar police station, police didn't register an FIR and made us compromise."

He added, "After the Sanjauli incident, my workers are scared. I had to request them not to leave the town. We have refused to take new orders now. We are completing old orders. Many women come to us for tailoring work, including the women of the family of the Hindutva leaders who are protesting against us."



# PALAMPUR

## Current Conflict Points

A rally was taken out in the Palampur market by Hindutva organisations on 14th September. Several shops of Muslims were vandalised in this rally. Hundreds of workers of Hindutva organisations took to the streets and staged a fierce protest against the construction of a mosque in Palampur. Slogans such as “Mulle Thulle Nahi Challenge,” “Mulle Sulle Nahi Challenge,” “Palampur Hum Aapka, Nahi Kisi Ke Baap Ka” were raised along with “Jai Shree Ram.”<sup>40</sup>

Around 11 in the morning, a large number of workers of Hindutva organisations gathered at Gandhi Maidan and demonstrated in Palampur market. After that, the protest reached the New Bus Stand Palampur in the form of a rally, where the leaders of the Hindutva organisations gave hate speeches. The workers of Hindutva organisations took a pledge not to buy goods etc. from the people of Muslim community. The organisations also appealed to the local people not to buy any goods etc. from the people of Muslim community, calling them a “particular community.” The leaders of the Hinduva organisation told locals not to rent their houses and shops to the people of a “particular community in the greed of a little money.”<sup>41</sup>

A large number of police force was present in the city during the protest, despite that many Muslim shops were vandalised. Hindutva organisations also protested outside the Palampur mosque and raised slogans. They also demanded the administration to “demolish the illegal mosque built in the middle of the city.”<sup>42</sup>

## TESTIMONIES

Zulfikar\*, 66, from Kangan in Kashmir, sold dry fruits for 40 years in the Palampur main market. During the protest rally on 14 September 2024 by Hindutva organisations, his shop was vandalised. Our conversation with the Muslim shopkeepers revealed

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40 <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/Y6GwchYVMjangqtB/>

41 <https://www.divyahimachal.com/2024/09/demonstration-against-the-mosque-in-palampur/>

42 <https://www.divyahimachal.com/2024/09/demonstration-against-the-mosque-in-palampur/>

that a day before the rally police had asked only the Muslim shopkeepers to close their shops, while the rest of the shops were open. Zulfikar's shop was vandalised while it was closed and he suffered a loss of Rs. 5000. His brother who also ran a shop left Palampur after the vandalism. He told us, "It pained me to see that I could even be attacked like this. Don't I have the right to work freely in any part of my country? I will leave Palampur in a year or two. This place is now no more in my heart." He added, "Neighbouring shopkeepers came to me and said that what happened to me was wrong. DC assured me that nothing will happen and then I opened my shop again on 24 September after 10 days."

Salman Ahmed, 24, runs a garment shop in Palampur main market. The shop is 22 years old. He is originally from Baramulla in Kashmir but now he has changed his address on aadhar to Palampur. He also said that the police came a day before the protest rally and asked only Muslim shopkeepers to close their shops. The police also took a copy of their aadhar cards. He said,

*"I was in my room when the protest was happening and I was watching it live on Facebook while they were vandalising our shop. They tore the board of our shop as well as the tubelight. We were very afraid that they would attack us as well in our homes. When we opened the shop the next day, nearby shopkeepers came to us and told us that they were with us and that we should take care. We are also the citizens of India. We can rent a shop anywhere in the country. Our landlord is also supportive. We pay 4-5 thousand rent per month."*

Regarding the people who left Palampur, he said, "The Muslim vendors have left. I knew one Abdullah from Kashmir who left. Usually in Palampur, many Kashmiris come during the winters. The SDM has also told us that if there is any difficulty, we must contact him."

Tazim Rizvi from Kairana, 19, works in a garment shop in Palampur. He got a call from the owner of the shop that the situation is going to worsen and they should enrol themselves in the police station. He got this call after the protest rally was taken out in Solan. He said that Abdullah from Kairana was forcefully made to vacate his shop by his landlord, who was a member of the Bajrang Dal. He went back to Shamli. However, the Bajrang Dal member landlord told him in confidence that he can return once the situation is better. He said, "The police were also not very supportive. They said, "Keep your shops shut or we will not be responsible." Many Hindutva protesters had also tried to enter the mosque. They can do anything anytime. We are very afraid."

He further said that when the Hindutva protesters were trying to enter the mosque, local Hindus stood before the mosque to protect it.

A Hanuman temple was constructed three years ago within 100 metres of the mosque at the entry of the street in which the mosque is located. On 14th September, the police stood right there and stopped the mob from entering the street.

A Hindu boy named Abhishek Singh from the same village in Kairana works in the same shop. He said, "On 20th September, a BJP member came and told me that he will make me join BJP so that there would be no vandalism in the shop. He took my aadhar card and made me join the party in the pretext of protection."

He further said, "The village to which we belong, there is so much love among communities that we don't see who is a Hindu and who is a Muslim. Even in Palampur, there was nothing like this before."

*Regarding the protest he said, "The locals support us, so we are not afraid. When they would take out a rally, we would just stay in our room, close the shop and enjoy our holiday. That doesn't mean that we are not afraid. If the situation doesn't improve, we will leave this shop."*

Abdullah Aleem, 32, runs a garment shop in Palampur for 12 years now. He is from Jalalabad in Uttar Pradesh. He said, "In the name of protest, the Hindutva organisations have conducted a riot. There is an FIR against unknown people. We have demanded protection from the police and also requested that these organisations must not be given permission to protest any further."

*The shutter of Aleem's shop was broken on 14 September by Hindutva protesters. He said, "Administration has informed us that Muslims will close their shops. As instructed we closed our shops on 14 September. But the protest that was taken was violent. They broke my shutter and tore my board. After the protest at least three shops have been vacated - one tailor and two cosmetics shops. There are just 10 Muslim shops of Muslims in Palampur Market. We have been living here for years. Our kids also study here. We have never misbehaved with anyone."*

The landlord, who was also in shock during the interview, demanded a copy of a police verification letter from Aleem and his workers. She said, "I have known Aleem for long. I never had a problem with him. He always pays rent on time. But there is a lot of pressure on me by Hindutva organisations to vacate the shop. People question me why I have given my shop to a Muslim. But I don't see a problem in that. But I am still afraid because Hindutva organisations are targeting landlords

like me as well."

Abdullah added, "Anybody comes to me after the protests and asks if I have verified my details at the police station. What right do they have to demand this?"

Abdullah had submitted a written complaint to the SSP and told us that he is ready to approach the court against the discrimination he and his community is facing.



## HIMACHAL PRADESH COMMUNAL PROTESTS' IMPACT ON HARYANA ELECTIONS

There has been a well identified pattern to the communal violence in India often preceding elections. BJP and its ideological master, RSS has mastered the dreadful art of kicking off controversies and flaring up communal tension. Just before any election, there will emerge a concocted controversy involving Muslims to manufacture hatred and produce small and large scale violence against Muslims. To give a few examples - just before 2014 Lok Sabha elections large scale anti-Muslim violence in Muzaffarnagar (2013) was manufactured on the false allegations of love jihad, Karnataka hijab controversy was kicked off to influence the 2022 UP elections and now Sanjauli mosque controversy that spread across Himachal was largely manufactured to affect the assembly elections in Haryana.

Correlating this, Ramandeep Hisar, a senior journalist from Haryana told the fact-finding team, "This is not just related to the elections in Haryana and Himachal. It has now become a type of model. If there are elections anywhere, violence would occur in another state followed by incessant reporting of the violence on TV channels, social media, and elsewhere."

Hisar elaborated that, "Violence affected the voting but they also set a different narrative by linking Muslims with farmers, jaat, and sikhs. Now they do not ask for boycott of Muslims or try to communalize relations of Hindus and Muslims, rather it is now jaat plus musalmaan. Now their slogan was if you want to be saved from Jaat and Muslims, you should vote for BJP." While this narrative was spread in Haryana during elections, prominent BJP faces from Himachal Pradesh including Jai Ram Thakur came to the state for election campaigns. This was further exacerbated by the close connection between Haryana and Himachal Pradesh: they share a border, facilitating migration and cultural exchange between the residents of two states. Thereby, it is a no brainer that the communal tensions in Himachal would affect the elections of Haryana, held simultaneously.

Congress leader Pawan Khera told the fact-finding team, "There's no immediate empirical data to correlate the protests with the results in Haryana. It is a no brainer though to guess which party whips up a polarising narrative to reap electoral advantages."

While Hisar, who has kept a close eye on the Haryana elections, said that, "In Haryana, BJP was supposed to get cleaned up. But whatever seats - Radaur, Yamuna Nagar, Ambala city, Pataudi, Hodal, Sohna, Tigaon, Palwal - they got here, were a miracle of Himachal violence."

## **POLICE ACTIONS SO FAR**

- During September 11 protest in Sanjauli, around 10 people, including police personnel and women, sustained injuries during crowd control.
- In Shimla, police booked 50 people for violence, including leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, panchayat chiefs and their deputies, former councillors, and shopkeepers.
- FIR was registered against the Hindutva protesters in Sanjauli, Nerwa, Mandi, Kullu, Sirmour, Bilaspur, Una, and Chamba. However, nobody has been arrested yet.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations for Addressing Communal Tensions in Himachal Pradesh:

1. **Effective Governance:** Ensure swift action against communal elements to prevent escalation of tensions, as seen in the Sanjauli mosque issue.
2. **Inclusive Dialogue:** Foster open communication between Hindu and Muslim communities to promote understanding and peaceful resolution.
3. **Strengthening Law and Order:** Deploy adequate security forces to maintain law and order, preventing clashes and vandalism.
4. **Leadership Accountability:** Hold elected representatives accountable for inflammatory statements, promoting responsible leadership.
5. **Community Engagement:** Encourage community-led initiatives promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion.
6. **Policy Reforms:** Review and reform policies to address communal tensions, ensuring equal protection and opportunities for all citizens.
7. **No Permission for Inflammatory Rallies:** Deny permission for rallies that may incite communal conflicts, as identified by intelligence agencies or local authorities.
8. **Government Support for Muslims:** The government should take proactive steps to ensure Muslims feel secure, such as increasing police presence in sensitive areas and engaging in dialogue with community leaders.
9. **Social Media Monitoring:** Track and counter inflammatory content on social media platforms.
10. **Swift Legal Action:** Ensure prompt arrests and prosecution of perpetrators of communal violence.

## **Civil Society Initiatives**

1. Community-Led Initiatives: Support grassroots initiatives promoting communal harmony.
2. Interfaith Coalitions: Form coalitions of community leaders, organisations, and individuals.
3. Advocacy Campaigns: Launch campaigns to promote tolerance, understanding, and peaceful coexistence.
4. Education and Research: Conduct research and educate the public on communal harmony.
5. Conflict Resolution Training: Provide training for community leaders in conflict resolution.

## **Long-Term Measures**

1. Education and Awareness: Integrate communal harmony and cultural sensitivity into school curricula.
2. Interfaith Initiatives: Encourage interfaith dialogues, cultural events, and community programs.
3. Economic Empowerment: Implement initiatives to promote economic equality and opportunities for marginalised communities.
4. Strengthening Institutions: Ensure independence and effectiveness of law enforcement, judiciary, and regulatory bodies.
5. Policy Reforms: Review and reform policies to address communal tensions, ensuring equal protection and opportunities.





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