

US report slams human rights record of Pakistan, India

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WASHINGTON - Extrajudicial and targeted killings, disappearances, torture, lack of rule of law and sectarian violence were cited as Pakistan's "most serious" human rights problems in a US government report, which also noted that the "orderly transitions" in the military (chief of staff) and the judiciary (Supreme Court chief justice) solidified the democratic transition.

The State Department's annual Congressional-mandated on human rights, which covers the year 2014, said lack of the rule of law in Pakistan included absence of due process, poor implementation and enforcement of laws, and frequent mob violence and vigilante justice.

"The military and intelligence services nominally reported to civilian authorities," the report said. "Police generally reported to civilian authority."

The most serious human rights problems were extrajudicial and targeted killings, disappearances, torture, lack of rule of law (including lack of due process, poor implementation and enforcement of laws, and frequent mob violence and vigilante justice), and sectarian violence.

"Other human rights problems included poor prison conditions, arbitrary detention, lengthy pre-trial detention, a weak criminal justice system, lack of judicial independence in the lower courts, and infringement on citizens' privacy rights," the report said. "Harassment of journalists continued, with high-profile attacks against journalists and media organisations. There were government restrictions on freedom of assembly and limits on freedom of movement.

Government practices and certain laws limited the freedom of religion, particularly for the minorities."

The State Department report said, "Sectarian violence and discrimination against religious minorities continued. Corruption within the government and police, as well as rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, honour crimes, other harmful traditional practices, and discrimination against women and girls remained serious problems. Child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children persisted. Child labour remained pervasive. Widespread human trafficking, including forced and bonded labour, continued. Societal discrimination against national, ethnic, and racial minorities persisted, as did discrimination based on caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status. Respect for worker rights was minimal."

"Lack of government accountability remained a problem, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity.

Authorities seldom punished government officials for human rights violations. Violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organisations and other nongovernmental actors contributed to a culture of lawlessness in some parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata)."

Similarly, India's human rights record also comes under sharp criticism. The report said abuses by police and security forces were among the most significant human rights problems in India.

The report said that the 2014 general elections were considered free and fair, despite isolated instances of violence.

Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

"The most significant human rights problems were police and security force abuses, including extra-judicial killings, torture, and rape, widespread corruption that contributed to ineffective responses to crime, including those against women and members of scheduled castes or tribes; and societal violence based on gender, religious affiliation, and caste or tribe," the report said. According to the State Department report, other human rights problems included disappearances, hazardous prison conditions, arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pre-trial detention.

"The judiciary remained backlogged, leading to lengthy delays and the denial of due process," it said. Noting that there were instances of infringement of privacy rights, the report said the law in some states restricts religious conversion, and there were reports of arrests but no reports of convictions under those laws. Some limits on the freedom of movement continued.

Rape, domestic violence, dowry-related deaths, honour killings, sexual harassment, and discrimination against women remained serious societal problems, it said. Child abuse and forced and early marriage were problems, the State Department said.

Human trafficking, including widespread bonded and forced labour of children and adults, and sex trafficking of children and adults for prostitution were serious problems, it said.