

Pakistani mob attacks churches, houses of Christians

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ISLAMABAD: Muslim fanatics attacked churches and burnt down scores of houses of the Christian community in Pakistan's Punjab province, a news report said on Saturday.

A mob attacked two churches and gutted 75 houses of Christians over the alleged desecration of papers inscribed with Quran verses at a wedding ceremony in Punjab's Azafi Abadi village at Chak 95-JB on Thursday, Atif Jamil Pagaan and Ashfaq Fateh, leaders of the minority community was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper today.

Fearing attack, the members of the minority community fled the village that allowed the fanatics to attack the church, houses and cattle, the report said.

The station house officer of Gojra Sadar has been suspended by the District Police Officer (DPO) Inkisar Khan, the Pakistani daily said.

DPO Khan said a case has been registered against Mukhtar Maseeh, Talib Maseeh and Imran Maseeh, who were accused of desecrating the papers inscribed with Quran verses. it said.

Christians are the second largest religious minority community in Pakistan after Hindus. The total number of Christians in Pakistan is approximately nearly 3 million or 1.6 of the population.

Christians, like other minorities, have been targetted in Pakistan for flouting blasphemy laws. International rights groups have urged the government to change the law because it was being used to terrorize religious minorities.

Sajid Ishaq, the Interfaith League chairman, has expressed concern over the violence against the Christian

minorities.

Christians in southern Pakistan held demonstration last Sunday against an attack in Sikendarabad in which four persons were injured, leading to forcible occupation of a primary school, The Christian Post reported.

The attack came barely a month after a mob attacked 100 houses of Christian in Punjab province's Kasur district, destroying several houses and injuring many on blasphemy charge, it said.

"That attack was made in presence of police who did not move to save the Christians and rather protected assailants who took control of primary school building and threw children out of it," an eyewitness was quoted as saying in the report.

"More than 1,200 of Christian families have been living in Sikendarabad near Kotri even before the creation of Pakistan," he stressed.

In November 2005, 3,000 militant Islamists attacked Christians in Sangla Hill in Pakistan and destroyed churches. The attack was over allegations of violation of blasphemy laws by a Pakistani Christian named Yousaf Masih.

In February 2006, churches and Christian schools were targeted in protests over the publications of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons in Denmark, leaving two elderly women injured and many homes and properties destroyed.

Pakistan was recommended by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in May 2006 to be designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) by the Department of State.