**EU voiced plight of religious minorities**

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The EU Parliament’s joint motion to review GSP+ status over Pakistan’s failure to uphold the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and human rights is a mirror reflection of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s speech at the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, where he emphasised the importance of religious freedom and the rights of minorities.

He said, “You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state.” Most importantly, he declared that the life, property, and religious beliefs of every citizen should be protected by the state. Mr Jinnah believed in oneness and equality for all, that is how he wanted Pakistan to progress, as a plural society.

I have long feared for the country of my birth. What kind of country has this become now? Crucially, the present state of religious minorities and freedom of expression with the apparent triviality of our system is a moment of truth to compare the present situation in the light of a promise made by founding Father Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The EU Parliament notes the situation in Pakistan continues to decline as the governments have been unsuccessful to end the misuses of blasphemy laws and failed to protect religious minorities from abuse by non-state actors. In addition, mob violence, extremism and religious violence remain an imminent threat for religious minority groups and human rights defenders.

To grasp the failures that have led Pakistan to the threshold of collapse — the US State Commission, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reports on religious persecution and freedom prove vital readings

Consequently, the sharp rise in targeted killings and hate speech against religious minorities, democratic voices and journalists has lodged Pakistan in hot waters. Recently, a Watchdog Pakistan Freedom Network (PFN) declared Federal Capital Islamabad the most dangerous city for journalists and described that there was a 40% increase in attacks on journalists in Pakistan. The scale of crisis also hints at the calamitous handling of the governments to reinforce much-needed legislation and policy reforms to quench the flames of religious intolerance and threats to FoRB.

There is enough truth in the story to dig out how the governments’ wilful blindness and institutional inadequacies have engendered the ethical decline to cause moral panic in the EU Parliament. Amid widespread corruption and political instability, yet the ecosystem of media, human rights and freedom of religion is not free from the tentacles of the government in Pakistan.

The EU motion also reminds us, how violence in the name of religion has become a trendsetting brand that has shredded egalitarian voices of Salmaan Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti. The courageous campaign of both leaders to oppose extremism and misuse of blasphemy law cost them their lives. It is not hard to draw lessons from the bloodshed of their democratic voices, both FoRB and freedom of expression have no space in Pakistan.

Similarly, every year in Pakistan, hundreds of girls belonging to the minorities are forcibly converted, which have exposed an unequal vicious world heading swiftly down to the depths of crimes against humanity, restricting freedom of religion. In addition, Pakistani authorities have performed poorly in respect of legal and practical protection for the citizens’ fundamental rights.

Perhaps, in this trauma, there is a genuine desire to admit our failures to reduce the pain of the vulnerable communities before it is too late. Painfully, lessons have not been learned, repeating patterns of errors has blighted national trust and International relations.

Our callously dismissive narrative has nurtured the bitter tulips in Jinnah’s Pakistan to send minorities and human rights defenders into a tailspin. As a result, religious identity has become a brand factor that determines which citizens are more equal than others in terms of status, opportunities, and rights.

To grasp both the policy and societal failures that have led Pakistan to the threshold ofcollapse, US State Commission, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reports on religious persecution and freedom are vital readings.

Moreover, incompatible mindsets of major power players and religious actors have very often disintegrated us to reboot both foreign and national policy, making it more ethically driven and focused on the questions of the justice system, human rights, and the rule of law.

Instead of upholding the values of freedom for all, most governments seem to believe that the best way to deal with threats to freedom of the press, and belief is to forget all about them and pigeonhole the key issues.

Although these blatant imbalances of negligence are man-made, those operating at the political centre have become too detached from the reality overlooking if any minority group exists in Pakistan.

The rule is quite simple, if a state desires to bring positive change into the society, then it has to change itself by sowing the seeds of responsibility, character, and grace. It may sound too idealistic, but this rule represents the general outline for the process to build a democratic society. Nevertheless, boasts from the mouthpieces of our political elites who are so-called custodians of democracy have eternally betrayed the promise our founding father made with minorities on 11th August 1947. These are worrying truths of Pakistan with enough evidence to testify we are our own worst enemy.

The ability to listen is a life skill and extremely rare in Pakistan, listening may inflate the impulse to shake sense into people. In this story of loss and shame, the EU motion is a soul-destroying factor for Pakistan which has unmasked draconian restrictions and attitudes with an appeal to “listen”.