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US xenophobia targets South Asian minorities: report

Narayan Lakshman

South Asian Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and some Arab communities have increasingly been at the receiving end of growing xenophobic undertones in the U.S.' political rhetoric, which has in recent years become "has become more frequent, more insidious, and more likely to be featured on a national platform," according to a report published here this week.

In its report on 'Under Suspicion, Under Attack,' the minority rights group South Asian Americans Leading Together said that 78 instances of xenophobic political speech and 76 examples of hate violence that it documented between January 2011 and April 2014 suggested that these communities lived a climate of growing hostility in American society today.

Among the key findings of the report is the revelation that there has been a marked increase in profiling and surveillance by law enforcement agencies, and the growth of an Islamophobia "industry" that demonises Muslims via the Internet and media.

The study noted that there has been a surge in "hate violence" over the past 13 years with the Department of Justice reporting that incidents of such violence against South Asian minority communities surged after 9/11 and have remained high with little variation.

Over 80 per cent of the instances of hate violence documented for this report were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment, SAALT noted, though attacks on other faith communities often also involved "severe violence."

The report cited an example of non-Muslim minorities facing discriminatory rhetoric, the case of Kentucky State Senator David Williams, who criticised the Kentucky Governor's participation in a Hindu ground-breaking prayer for a new manufacturing plant.

Mr. Williams stated the Governor was worshipping "false gods," the report said, and he suggested that all Hindus should open their eyes and find Jesus Christ.

Among its recommendations to the Obama administration the study called for the creation of a National Task Force to Prevent Hate Violence focused on addressing incidents directed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities.

The study also urged the government to more rigorously enforce hate crimes legislation and ensure that law enforcement receive cultural and religious competency trainings to understand the challenges that the affected communities faced when reporting hate violence.

The SAALT report also targeted the DOJ's 2003 Guidance on the Use of Race by Federal Law Enforcement, arguing that it was critical to prohibit profiling based on categories of national origin and religion, and to end "suspicion-less and discriminatory surveillance" of the minority communities by law enforcement agencies and investigate law enforcement for discriminatory practices.

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