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Hate to Hope: After scars of 2024, will 2025 heal the wounds and bring a new dawn?

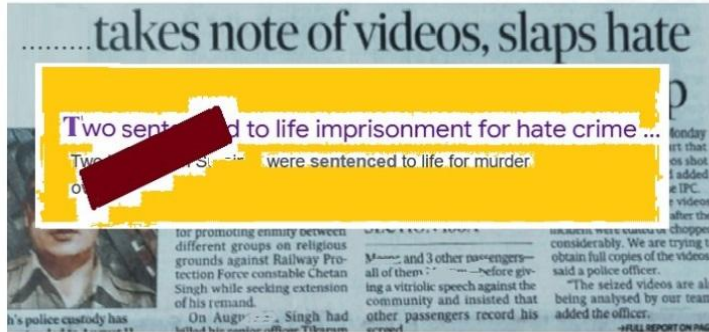
Asad Mirza

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An impartial review of the year 2024 makes it clear that hate has become an essential component in society. Goons hell-bent on dividing society, who make attacks, attempts to vilify the minorities, had a free run. Worse, leaders were not much concerned or apologetic about the false and hateful narrative created for selfish gains. In fact, like previous years, 2024 was no different as bigotry rose. In India, it was election year & many thought that minorities might get a respite from hate crimes and speeches. But this didn't happen.

In the months leading to general elections, a vicious and one sided campaign was orchestrated by the right-wing elements with the apparent silent support of certain sections of bureaucracy. In 2024, five states --Assam, HP, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand & UP were virtually turned into labs to harass the religious minorities. It seemed as if the script to unsettle & target religious minorities was written and task to deliver was given over to lesser-known right-wing outfits on the ground. Controversy was raised in Himachal Pradesh's capital Shimla, against a mosque, terming it an encroachment, even though the mosque committee had all the relevant documents to prove the ownership and sanctions by the concerned authorities to add additional floors to the mosque. But when state power is usurped by elements then who cares to listen to the evidence and advice? This concerted action led to their ostracism further, when Muslims were asked to leave different localities in several towns and cities of the state.

On the same lines, a doctor was asked to cancel the sale of their house to a Muslim couple, in Moradabad-UP, as the locals claimed that this sale will vitiate the atmosphere of the colony.



The same script was played again in New Delhi, when several old mosques and graveyards were served notices alleging that these were illegal encroachment, and in spite of clear judicial orders, the 'bulldozer justice' was exercised by local authorities. People were not ready to stop the local administration's activities, when such activities were taking place in the national capital. As if the replay of the old scripts was not enough, the central government brought in a constitutional amendment bill to manage the Waqf properties of the Muslim community. All this went on, though such properties were donated by Muslims themselves for the welfare of the community. A false narrative was created, utilising WhatsApp and other social media platforms to spread canards against the Muslim community and Waqf properties. Another face of the right-wing politics taking firm roots in the political landscape of the country was evident when different political parties announced their candidates for the Lok Sabha elections. Though, the BJP' avoids

fielding Muslim candidates, even the supposedly secular parties were not ready to give tickets to Muslim candidates. The result was glaring when the eighteenth Lok Sabha got constituted with such a low share of Muslim MPs in the last six decades. Less than 5% of members are Muslims despite people from the community forming nearly 15% of the country's population. There are currently 24 Muslim MPs (4.4%) in the Lok Sabha. The party with the most elected members in 2024, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has no representatives from the Muslim community currently. In fact, the decline in the share of the Muslim MPs in the Lok Sabha, in the 1990s, coincided with the rise of the BJP, whose total MP tally crossed the 100-mark for the first time in the 10th Lok Sabha (1991-96). Moreover, during the election campaign, top leaders seldom talked about development programmes, reflected in his *jumlas*, but chose to spoke on completely fabricated charges against the country's Muslim

=community and the opposition, viz, a weird claim that if the Congress party came to power, it would distribute the country's wealth among Muslims. People were told that other party would take away their possessions – such as the bridal necklaces, or *mangalsutra* – of Hindu women and give it to its "vote bank" i.e. the Muslims. There was also claim that the opposition Congress party was planning to take away job reservations from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and give them to Muslims; additionally he said that the opposition alliance is asking Muslims to do 'vote jihad'. A linked report that is a continuation with this year roundup can be read on the Opinion page of The Asian Tribune.

[Asad Mirza is a New Delhi-based senior commentator on national, international, defence and strategic affairs, environmental issues]

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INSPIRING: How a woman's commitment towards society & children, transforms lives

Finding a meaning in service to others, Shoa Khan finds joy in giving back to society

By Soha Moitra

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NEW DELHI: For Shoa Khan, 28, who works with a multinational corporation in Gurugram, life is a balancing act between her professional role and a heartfelt commitment to a big cause. Every Thursday, Shoa embarks on a challenging journey from her home in Greater Noida to Gurugram—a hectic schedule as she stays overnight at her cousin's place in South Delhi until Saturday evening, taking out time to fulfill her responsibilities as a dedicated volunteer for the cause of children's education.

Instead of spending the hard-earned weekly off after hectic work schedules at office, Shoa chooses this long travel every weekend, as spending time with the children—teaching them, encouraging their creativity through art and craft, and simply being a pillar of emotional support. brings her a sense of satisfaction & fulfilment that nothing else can match. She commutes to RK Puram in Delhi, and her weekend work involves metro rides, cabs, autos, and occasionally driving her car. After hours of volunteering, she makes the exhausting trip back to Greater Noida, covering nearly 110 km.

Her journey began in 2019, and since then, she has become a constant presence in the lives of the children she works with. "No matter how exhausted I am, the energy and love these children give me make every sacrifice worth it," says Shoa, who fulfils her responsibilities as a volunteer with Child Rights and You. Actually, her connect with these children became stronger during the COVID-19 pandemic period.



Lockdown disrupted children's lives, forcing many families to consider migrating back to their home states. She talks about a heart-wrenching moment when a 12-year-old girl confided in her, tears welling in her eyes, that her family might leave Delhi. "She told me she would miss me the most," Shoa says, her voice trembling with emotion. "I didn't realize until that moment how much my presence meant to her. It broke my heart."

Fortunately, the family decided to stay, and that little girl remains part of Shoa's sessions today. "That experience changed me. It made me realize the emotional impact we volunteers can have. Since then, I've promised myself never to leave these kids—they deserve stability and care, no matter what."

Her compassion towards other kids, is not new. Her mother recalls an incident from Shoa's childhood that perfectly captures her nature. When Shoa was barely 10 yrs old, she noticed her specially-able cousin being left out during family games. Unable to bear the thought of him feeling excluded, she told cousins to play

such games which her cousin can also take part in. "She has always been like this," her mother says, voice filled with pride.

"Even as a little girl, she couldn't stand to see someone left behind." Shoa's eyes glisten with tears as she reflects on that day. "That moment shaped me in ways I didn't understand at the time. It taught me the importance of inclusivity and how small gestures can make a big difference."

Shoa's formal journey as a volunteer began at the age of 16, while she was living in Oman. During a summer break, she and her best friend began working with children at a local rehabilitation center for the specially-able. "That summer changed me," she says. "I realized how fulfilling it is to give your time and energy to someone else's happiness."

In 2019, after returning to India, Shoa joined Child Rights and You (CRY) as a volunteer. Although she had to stop for a while to pursue her master's degree in UK, the pandemic brought her back. Picking up from where she had left, Shoa continued her work with the children, even finding ways to connect with them virtually

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during the lockdown. Today, Shoa's journey has given her life a renewed sense of purpose. Her time with the children has inspired her to dream bigger. She now envisions starting her own NGO to support women who suffer from domestic violence. "I want to create a space where women can heal, rebuild their lives and find the strength to move forward," Shoa shares. "CRY has shown me how powerful community support can be. I want to carry that forward and make a bigger impact." Shoa's story tells the transformative power of compassion and dedication. It highlights how volunteerism is not merely about extending help—it's about building connections, fostering empathy, and creating a ripple effect of positive change in society. Her work as a volunteer, enriches lives on both sides. For those in need, it provides support, stability, and hope. Those who give their time and energy, find a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of shared humanity. It reminds us that the greatest impacts often come from the simplest acts of care—sharing knowledge, offering a listening ear, or standing beside someone during challenging times.

Clearly, social activism is cornerstone of a compassionate and inclusive society. It inspires us to look beyond our individual lives and find ways to contribute to the greater good. By dedicating our time & effort to others, we can bridge gaps in communities & pave the way for a brighter, more empathetic future for all.

[The author is Regional Director, Child Rights and You]

Hate crimes and inflammatory speeches need to be checked

In continuation with the lead story, ASAD MIZA explains how the year 2024 went for the minorities

People were probably naïve when they rather erroneously expected that after election, the hate speeches and hate campaign against the religious minorities would come down, but again the hopes were belied. In just two months i.e. August and September 2024, there were 135 violent attacks on the religious minorities and close to 68 hate speeches were delivered against them. Then, the right-wing elements found another ploy & alleged that hundreds

of mosques across the country including the ones at Varanasi, Mathura have been built on demolished temples and urged the courts to order excavation of these mosques. The worst result of this canard was evident in Sambhal - UP, where the police action against the local Muslims demonstrating against the excavation of the local Jama Masjid, resulted in death of several Muslim youth. An end to this insane campaign was laid when Supreme

Court in its order on December 12, directed courts across the country not to entertain or pass orders in any new suits or pleas seeking surveys of mosques to determine whether temples exist beneath them. In its order, the court further restrained lower courts from passing any orders in existing suits concerning such disputes, effectively putting a freeze on surveys pending further directions. But it remains to be seen how long the restrain may continue, as

SC had earlier asked to file FIRs against the culprits. Yet, despite these orders, hate speeches continued during the election campaigns and at a conservative estimate, around 200 hate speeches were delivered by the right-wing leaders in 2024. United Christian Forum said that 745 cases of hate and violence were committed against the country's Christian community by right-wing Hindu activists, across India.