

# PROVOCATION, PROPAGANDA & PUNISHMENT

A Fact Finding report on

## Bihar Ram Navami violence



ASSOCIATION FOR PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS



# PROVOCATION, PROPAGANDA & PUNISHMENT:

**A Fact Finding report on**

## Bihar Ram Navami violence



**ASSOCIATION FOR PROTECTION  
OF CIVIL RIGHTS**



# Acknowledgement

The *Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR)* would like to most sincerely acknowledge the contribution of all those who led to the successful completion of this Fact-Finding visit to ascertain the recent violence in two district of Bihar during thge celebration of Ram Navami. We acknowledge the communities living in different states of Bihar that is Bihar Sharif and Sasaram who shared their experiences of violence and participated in the informant interviews that provided the required content for this report. The efforts by the various Community leaders, local Journalists, Lawyers and Civil Rights activists that have put their lives on the line in the promotion and protection of human rights and useful information provided to the fact finding team cannot be gainsaid. The Association for Protection of Civil Rights further acknowledges the local people for their immense and invaluable support towards the success of this mission leading to final publication of this fact-finding report. We also sincerely thank the reviewers for their invaluable comments and the technical editing of this report.



# Table of content

<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Pattern of violence .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Trail of Events : Bihar Sharif .....</b>	<b>14</b>
• Testimonies of the victims of violence .....	16
<b>Trail of Events: Sasaram .....</b>	<b>23</b>
• Testimonies of the victims of violence .....	24
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>





# Methodology

The report is a result of quantitative data collected through fact finding by a team comprising Mohammad Moboshshir Aneeq Advocate, Prashant Tandon Sr. Journalist, Saiful Islam Advocate, Gulrez Anjum Social Activist, Nasiquz Zaman Advocate, Mohammad Zahid Social Activist and Akbar. They visited two districts of Bihar including Bihar Sharif and Sasaram and recorded statements of families affected by Ram Navami procession and the aftermath of violence. The testimonies of the victims who have lost their properties and sustained severe injuries reflect the total failure of administrative duties and lack of preparedness by the state. On a wider perspective it has ruined the social fabric of India while depicting hindutva supremacy. The team of APCR visited the affected area of Bihar Sharif and Sasaram to understand and document the violence in Bihar.

The Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR), is a non-governmental civil rights organization working for the marginalized sections of society established in 2006 to provide pro-bono legal assistance has conducted the Fact-Finding visit in Assam to ascertain the present condition of human rights violations after the Assam crackdown on child marriage.



# Introduction

The communal violence in Bihar took place during the Ram Navami processions on 30.03.2023 & 31.03.2023 in the districts of Nalanda and Sasaram. A boy of 16 years was killed in cross firing and Madrasa, properties, businesses, homes worth crores of rupees were destroyed.

In the aftermath of the violence, the police registered 20 First Information Reports (FIR) and arrested around 200 People. Out of 20 FIRs 15 had been registered in Bihar Sharif. One FIR bearing No. 07/23 had been registered by the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) under sections 153, 153 A(a), 153A (1)(b), 153A(1)(c), 297, 505(1)(c), 120B, 66/66(F) of IT Act. Several people had been arrested including the convenor of Bajrang Dal Mr. Kundan Kumar who is the mastermind of the communal riots. The others who had been arrested include Rajnish Kumar, Dharmendra Kumar, Tushar Kumar, and Manish Kumar. They were part of the WhatsApp group that had delivered hate speech during the Ram Navami Processions. According to the police, 457 people were part of the WhatsApp group who penetrated the communal violence in Bihar Sharif.

A team from the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR) visited the affected areas of Bihar Sharif and Sasaram on 12.04.2023 and 13.04.2023 respectively.

## The Team:-

1. Mohammad Mobashshir Aneeq- Advocate
2. Saiful Islam- Advocate
3. Prashant Tandon- Sr. Journalist
5. Gulrez Anjum – Social Activist
6. Nasiquz Zaman- Advocate
7. Mohammad Zahid- Social Activist
8. Akbar





# The Background

Bihar has a history of a communal conundrum. It has witnessed several religious tensions in the past. The Bihar Sharif communal violence of 1981 which started on May 2 and lasted for five days led to the killing of 45 persons and the injury of 70 persons. Thereafter the communal violence of 1989 Bhagalpur started on October 24 and lasted for two months. According to official figures, 1,070 people were killed and 524 injured. As many as 11,500 houses in 195 villages were destroyed, displacing 48,000 people. A total of 600 power looms and 1,700 handlooms were burnt to ashes and 68 mosques and 20 Mazars (shrines) were destroyed. Following the Bhagalpur riots, the state was more or less peaceful, barring a few incidents of low-intensity conflicts. There was something new this year – a procession to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Rama (Rama Navami) and violent aggression in the crowd taking part in the processions. Earlier in 1989 and 1990s, Hazaribagh and Ramgarh districts – which are now in Jharkhand – had a tradition of a procession on the occasion of Rama Navami that sometimes used to result in violence.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had begun spreading its influence in undivided Bihar from Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana and focussed on Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, and Ranchi. Few communal tensions were fomented for the very first time in the state during the Rama Navami processions during that period.

## The Pattern of Violence:

The politicization of religious festivals, highly provocative and Islamophobic songs, and forced entry eventually resulted in communal conflagrations in the two districts of Bihar. Religious festivals nowadays have been completely taken over by RSS-BJP activists and fringe elements like Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) for communal polarization. The districts we visited had the same pattern. The organizations approach the district's administration, asking for permissions for the Rama Navami processions, which are granted in many cases with terms and conditions. People – especially youth – riding on hundreds of motorbikes take out rallies, brandish brand-new swords and other weapons, and play highly objectionable/communal songs. Violating the terms and conditions, they try to enter Muslim-majority areas or deviate from the route that is objected to by the local Muslim population. As a result, stone pelting starts, and then shops and other properties belonging to a particular community are set on fire. One allegation that was common in the versions was that the mob was carrying a large number of swords. Further, CDs and pen drives containing Islamophobic songs are distributed to play on loudspeakers during the Ram Navami Procession.

## Trail of Events: Bihar Sharif

On 30.03.2023 as per the Hindu calendar was Ram Navami. To celebrate Ram Navami permission was sought by the District Magistrate's office to have the Shobha Yatra or processions from Shram Kalyan Maidan to Baba Mani Ram Akhada Temple by the Bajrang Dal for Friday i.e. 31.03.2023 the next day of Ram Navami for the participation of 5000 persons. But before that, the District Administration called for the peace meeting on 26.03.2023 where it was decided the route of the Ram Navami procession and the terms and conditions. The said peace meeting was attended by the following people Mohd. Jameel Akhtar Ex Councillor Ward Member 33, Jahangir, Javed Khan, Kafeel Master, etc. In the peace meeting, it was decided that the procession will start from Shram Kalyan Maidan and end at Baba Mani Ram Akhada Temple, and in between it will pass through Hospital Mod, Bharao Par, Kanta Par, Gagan Diwan, Soghra College Mod – a stretch of around 4.5 km along the Main Road (also called Ranchi Road). Further, it was also decided there will be no playing of DJs music and brandishing of swords. There will be a presence of two to three police personnel on the rooftop of the properties who are in a way of the route of the procession. But unfortunately, nothing was put on the ground.

On 31.03.2023, After the Friday prayers, the procession led by Bajrang Dal took off from Shram Kalyan Maidan but when it reached Shahi Masjid at Murarpur it turned violent. It is estimated around 60,000 persons participated in the Shobha Yatra or procession as per figures given by the District Magistrate office despite permission only for 5000. According to eyewitnesses the unruly mob turned violent and went on a rampage thus setting looting and ablaze the shops, business centers, and Madrasa Azizya Library and Masjid while brandishing swords, holding saffron flags, and playing provocative/communal songs on the large sound boxes. It is said that the looting and arson were targeted specifically at the shops/business owned by the Muslim communities.

A few songs which were played by DJs are as follows-

*Topi wala bhi sar jhuka ke Jai Shri Ram bolega,  
Ramlala hum aayhenge Mandir wahin manayenge,  
Gaand mai lungi Muh mai paan bhaago baita Pakistan,  
Baharat mai hi kabr banegi baber kai santano ki,  
Pakistan samarthik musalmano tumhara ant samay nishchit hai and  
Dharam Dhvaj lahraingay har ghar Ayodhya banaigay.*

Further, we were told by the eyewitness that a few days back CCTV cameras installed at the Gagan Diwan Petrol Pump were removed by the unknown. This was in the main route from where the procession was to be passed. Another important thing to note is that these clashes share the same script, pointing to the conspiracy behind them. The Bajrang Dal Leader Kundan Kumar is considered the mastermind of the violence by the police. The silence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who hails from the District Nalanda over the incident also created discontent among the locals who think that it was the Government conspiracy to create a ruckus. Many people on the ground talked about the role of local BJP leaders and Bajrang Dal members in leading the Ram Navami processions.

## Testimonies of the victims of violence:

The communal violence seething in Bihar has created discontent among the locals. However, in most cases, the people chose to answer non-violently. The team of APCR extensively talked to the locals and heard their stories. Here are a few of the testimonies.

### 1. Mohd. Jameel Akhtar H/o Asthma Khatoon Ward No.39

**Gagandiwaan:** According to Mohd. Jameel Akhtar the violence was pre-planned by the Bajrang Dal leaders. There was a total administrative failure. He said that the violence took place on 31.03.2023 after the Friday prayers. He said that the police failed to barricade the route of Shobha Yatra or procession march intentionally thus leading to deviating in route of the procession and in return causing arson and looting of the properties only of Muslims by the rioters. He further said there was no adequate police force during the procession. He further said that it was known to the District Administration that areas such as Gagan Diwan, and Sohra College are sensitive areas despite that there was no adequate police force. He further said what was decided in the peace meeting dated 26.03.2023 called by the District Administration was not put on the ground. Further, The CCTV cameras installed at the Gagan Diwan Petrol Pump were removed by unknown persons a few days back from the Ram Navami procession.





**2. City Palace, Kantapar:** According to Mohd Aslam who is the manager at the City Palace said that it was Friday afternoon i.e. 31.03.2023 and the City Palace was closed due to Rama Navami Procession when suddenly a mob of thousand started hurling stones causing damage to the windows. Thereafter the mob forcefully entered the hotel and looted the necessary goods that they could and then poured the petrol bomb and set the three-story City Palace building on fire. When the above was informed by the neighbors to the manager he immediately called for help to the Police Station Lahedi which was 200 meters away from the City Palace but unfortunately no help ever came. The mob looted all the necessary goods and took away the CCTV cameras recording (Dashboard) so that it became impossible to identify the unruly mob. Further, after two hours the Fire Brigade came and doused the fire but at that time everything was damaged. According to him, there was a total loss of Rs. 50 lakhs. When the fact-finding team visited the marriage hall, it was being repaired and painted. All the furniture and electrical fittings were turned into ashes. The fire was so strong that it had brought down plasters and caused cracks in the walls. When asked why are they getting the repair works done even before the examination of the site by a forensic team, he said, “We have prior bookings from April 26 onward; therefore, we were left with no option but to begin the repair works from the very next day of the incident.” When asked about any compensation that has been assured by the District Administration, he said that nothing much had been proposed by the Administration to date. It is important to note that opposite City Palace, there are two other marriage halls – Sai Palace and Krishna Palace. But no losses were caused to these properties. From this, it was evident the mob only targeted Muslim-owned properties.



**3. Shahi Masjid, Murarpur:** According to Imam Mohammad Shahabuddin after the Asr Namaz around 5:30 PM the unruly mob who were part of the Ram Navami procession intentionally stopped in front of the Masjid and played a communal/objectionable DJs song. Thereafter, they announced “ab ho gaya, chadh jao, bhago mat’ (it has begun; climb up; don’t run away), a crowd of around 500-1,000 people broke into the mosque’s main gate and entered its campus. The locals were muffled and the outsiders had their faces open. After that, the mob broke the two Minar installed outside the Masjid along with six Mihrab. Thereafter, they broke inside the main gate and came inside the Masjid compound, and hurled stones thus damaging the mirrors of the Masjid. It didn’t stop there the unruly mob poured the petrol bomb on the vehicles parked inside the compound and put them on fire. In total four bikes and two tempos were burned. In total, there was a loss of around 10 Lakhs. This continued for 40-45 minutes but the police didn’t arrive till then. In fact, rather than the police acting tough against the perpetrators and investing energy in nabbing them, the cops are forcing the Masjid managing committee to do the repair work even without a forensic examination and work order. They (the police) have already forcefully got the two minarets constructed with an aim to remove the evidence,” he alleged. The police have not registered the FIR to date despite filing the written complaint.



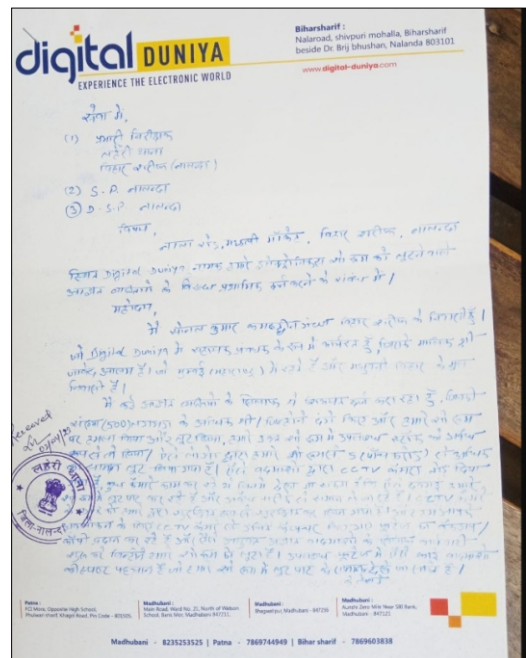
**4. Hotel Asia, Murarpur Road:** According to Manager Rupesh Kumar on 31.03.2023 (Friday) there was the Ram Navami Procession, and the mob who were part of the procession without any reason or provocation on our side pelted stones thus damaging the window panes of the hotel. Thereafter they broke the main gate and entered the hotel and burned down the Generator and looted all the necessary items such as crockeries and cushions etc. Further, he said everything had been recorded in the CCTV camera and the same has been shared with the police with the written complaint but till the drafting of this report, no action has been taken. We were informed by the Manager that we identified most of the persons who were part of the mob as they were locals. Many of them involved are those who used to sell vegetables outside hotels and were seen pelting stones and breaking the main gate.



**5. Madrasa Azizia:** Established in 1896 and later shifted in 1910 to a sprawling three-acre campus in Bihar Sharif, a historic city in the Nalanda district of Bihar, Madrasa Azizia was built by the philanthropist Bibi Soghra in memory of her husband, Abdul Aziz. Soghra inherited property worth lakhs after her husband's death and decided to donate it to the waqf. A large chunk of this donation was envisaged to be spent on the health and education of marginalized Muslims in Bihar. The madrasa is one of the very first educational establishments built by Bibi Soghra's donations. Others include Soghra High School and Soghra College. They are still managed by Soghra Waqf Estate. Since its inception, Madrasa Azizia has been a well-known hub of Islamic education having hostel facilities for students, as well as teachers and a mosque within its precinct. As per the latest reports, 300 students study at the madrasa, ranging from those in class one to those pursuing postgraduate courses. This is not the first time the madrasa has been targeted, there have been attempted attacks on it during the 1981 riots and later in 2017. It was Friday i.e. 31.03.2023 when a Shobha Yatra or Ram Navami Procession was passing through the decided route when a mob deviated (Ranchi Road) and went approximately 1 km in a different direction (Murarpur neighborhood) with the intention to attack the Madrasa. According to the Madrasa's guard Mohan Bahadur first he tried to lock the main gates of the Madrasa but the mob threatened and started pelting stones. Seeing the mob of 1000 he fled the spot. Thereafter the unruly mob sets the library on fire. According to the Principal Mohammad Shakir Qasmi the library was deliberately targeted by the hoodlums. As many as 4,500 books on Islamic literature and divinity had been stored in this 110-year-old library which was gutted by fire. Thereafter, the Principal informed the police but the police arrived after two hours and so the fire extinguisher but by that time the fire was out of control, and only by the next morning the fire personnel was able to extinguish the fire.



**6. Digital Duniya, Nala Road:** After burning down the Madrasa Azizia the unruly mob went towards the Nala Road to attack the Digital Duniya. Digital Duniya is an electronic and furniture showroom owned by Haider Azam. It sells electronic items such as smartphones, TVs, Fridges, Washing Machines, Geysers, Fans Etc. According to his son Javed Azam, it was Friday i.e 31.03.2023 when around 4:00 PM he received a phone call from one of his staff that there is a Ram Navami Procession today and due to it the situation is very tense. So looking at it the showroom was closed and except for the guard, every staff member left for home. At around 6:00 PM he received a phone call that an unruly mob who were part of the Ram Navami procession had deviated from the stated route of the procession and gone on the rampage and destroyed the properties. Further, they have assembled outside the showroom and are trying to break the lock. He immediately called the Chief Minister's office, the Director General of Police, Superintendent Office of Nalanda, Magal Pandey, State BJP Chief for help, but nobody received his phone call. Ultimately, an unruly crowd entered the showroom by breaking the main lock and looted everything which they could such as Smartphones, Coolers, TVs, Fans, Geysers, etc. All this loot can be seen live through CCTV footage installed in the showroom from their head office in Madhubani. It is said around 4cr worth of products had been looted by the unruly mob. When asked whether any compensation had been assured by the District Administration the reply was simply no. Further, he said that I have submitted the list of items looted, and CCTV footage and filed a written complaint against some known and unknown persons including Local BJP MLA Dr. Sunil Kumar to the Superintendent's office in Nalanda.



## **District Magistrate Nalanda Mr. Shri Shashank Shubhankar:**

The fact finding team met the District magistrate and asked about all such allegations, the DM accepted the deployment was not enough to control such a heavy crowd. "Whatever the police force the district had, we made best use of it. And therefore, we could save lives. Magistrates along with policemen were stationed at regular intervals throughout the stretch. We consider the areas from Soghra School Mod till Baba Maniram Akhada communally sensitive; and therefore, the stretch was secured with heavy deployment. As the major chunk of the rally was moving ahead on the permitted route even after the violence erupted, we ensure that it peacefully terminates at the designated point. Had they not been accompanied by us, there would have been huge loss of lives as the crowd was insisting to deviate in the densely populated Muslim localities," he said. When asked about arrests, he said the police are making arrests based on video recordings. "We are not balancing communities," he added. He said three parallel investigations are going on by a special investigation team (SIT) led by the superintendent of police, a team of forensic experts and the local police. Asked why it was such a sensitive permit of the route and why the organizers were allowed to take out the rally a day after Rama Navami, the District Magistrate said it is the traditional route of the procession that the district administration has been permitting for the past several years.

## Trail of Events: Sasaram

On 30th March, a procession started from Hanuman Gali and took several routes, including Nav Rattan Bazar, Jani Bazar, Bijli Ghar, Shahjuma, Sherganj, Old Adda, Dharamshala, Chaukhandi, Chauak Bazar, and returned to Mazar Darwaza. Although the procession played vulgar songs and had loud DJ music passing through the Muslim-dominated route, nothing serious happened. In retaliation, Muslims also started sloganeering, and the police were present, but there were no violent incidents. However, on 31st March, Bajrang Dal called for a bandh, but Muslim shops refused to comply and remained open. Around 200-300 people gathered in Shahjuma and other Muslim areas during namaz time. A mob came from the Navratan area (non-Muslim area) to Jani Bazar, and stone pelting and sloganeering started until the powerhouse area. Stone pelting continued for 1-2 hours at Mazar Darwaza, and ironically, the police came after 5-6 hours of violence. Stone pelters moved to Khaki Ghat and Shajahana Ganj.

Around 250-300 people allegedly gathered near Jama Masjid at Shah Jalal Peer locality of Sasaram – the administrative headquarter of Rohtas district – and began chanting slogans, praising lord Rama. After the prayer was over, Muslim devotees retaliated by shouting “Allahu Akbar” (God is the greatest). The heated sloganeering from both sides triggered stone pelting, said locals, adding that the Muslim-concentrated neighborhood of Shah Jalal Peer in no time began witnessing large-scale arson and loot. The newly settled colony on the other side of the mosque was allegedly outnumbered by “armed men” from surrounding areas such as Qadirganj, Saifullahganj, etc. Since almost all the male folk were in the mosque to perform the prayer, eyewitnesses said, two virtual fronts got formed – one group on the side of the mosque while the other that had taken over the colony. The two sides were separated by a 10-12 feet concrete road.

According to the police five First Information Report (FIRs) had been registered and seventy five people had been arrested. The arrest had been made as per the video footage available.

## Testimonies of the victims of violence:

The communal violence seething in Bihar has created discontent among the locals. However, in most cases, the people chose to answer non-violently. The team of APCR extensively talked to the locals and heard their stories. Here are a few of the testimonies.

**1. Yasmeen Khatoon:** She narrated the story to the fact finding team that on Friday, i.e., 31st March when her husband was performing wudu for Friday prayers when suddenly he observed stone pelting and directed them to close the doors. Hindus who were part of the Ram Navami Processions from all four directions started stone pelting at her house. Her husband tried to retaliate, but the opposite side was huge, and they eventually left the house by putting a lock on the main door with the help of the police administration. Thereafter rioters broke the lock and entered the house and burned everything, including school uniforms, and books, looted valuables like jewelry and the dowry, and took away 50k cash. A peep into the first room of her was enough to understand the level of devastation. Burned steel almirah – which broke open, utensils, clothes and electrical fittings was narrating the reign of terror the rioters had caused. In total, there has been a loss of Rs. 10 Lakhs. It is important to note that all this happened in the presence of the police force.





**2. Shabban:** A mother of five, in her unfinished one room newly-constructed house. She told the fact-finding team that despite protests and slogan chantings from both sides during Rama Navami processions on Thursday (March 30), there was no tension at all. "They attacked us the next day i.e. Friday in a well-organized and coordinated manner," narrating the sequence of events that unfolded the fateful day. "While I was preparing lunch for children, my house was suddenly attacked by a group of people who were shouting Jai Shri Ram while hurling abuses on us. I realized after some time that it's not only my house but the entire area was surrounded by rioters who were attacking Muslim houses one by one. I saw two of my neighbors' houses turning into ashes. Now, it was our turn. I somehow managed to escape along with the children,". When the family returned the next day, the steel door on the main entrance was open. It had big holes. All the valuables were missing. What was left were the broken pieces of furniture, shattered books, etc. "They attempted to burn our house as well but failed as it could not catch fire," she added. Her husband Muslim Qureshi earns a living by trading goats.



**3. Syeda Khatoon:** The mother of three, had a similar story to narrate. She told that there was heavy stone pelting and commotion all around. As she noticed that the rioters would soon target her house, she preferred to save the lives and modesty of her children. She has an 18-year-old daughter. I locked all the rooms and the main gate and escaped to safety. The attackers broke open all the locks and looted everything we had. They took away all the jewellery, sewing machine and other items we had bought for the marriage of our daughter. They also robbed a cash amount of Rs 45,000. They set a blaze whatever was left, which they found unworthy of taking away, she said.

# Recommendations

The Accountability of the Public officials and elected representatives, who participated, instigated and encouraged the riots be fixed and should be given exemplary punishment as per the rule of law. The government should conduct a thorough investigation into the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice. It is essential to hold the guilty accountable to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future.

Further, the compensation should be granted to all the victims of the riots as per their damage/loss suffered. For that the State Government shall appoint the Commission headed by retired Judge for evaluating the every individual damage/loss and thereafter grant the compensation. A Judicial enquiry be set to look into the plan and programme of the organized violence must be done. It is crucial that the government provides support to the victims and their families and takes measures to rebuild the affected areas. It is only through such collective efforts that we can prevent the recurrence of such incidents and promote a society that is inclusive, just, and peaceful for all.

# Conclusion

The Ram Navmi violence in Bihar Sharif and Sasaram will go down in history as a dark chapter in the city's past. The incident has left a scar on the hearts of the people, and it will take a long time for the wounds to heal. It is a reminder that communal harmony is fragile and must be nurtured with care. It is the responsibility of every citizen to uphold the values of peace and harmony and work towards a better tomorrow. The fact-finding report on the Bihar Ram Navami violence calls for swift action by the authorities and emphasizes the importance of promoting interfaith harmony, providing rehabilitation and support to victims, strengthening the education system, and building community resilience. By implementing these recommendations, we can prevent the recurrence of such incidents and promote a society that is inclusive, just, and peaceful for all.





## ASSOCIATION FOR PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

📍 E-57/1, Fourth Floor, Scholar School Lane, Abul Fazal Enclave-1,  
Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025

☎ 011 - 41052797 ✉ /apcrindia@gmail.com

🌐 /apcrindia.in 📱 /apcrofindia