

# Two Christian women face death penalty in Pakistan in case over Quran sticker

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FAISALABAD: Police have registered a case against two nurses of the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital on the charge of committing blasphemy.

Scores of hospital employees staged a protest demonstration on Friday against the two nurses while alleging that both committed blasphemy by removing a sticker with sacred inscription from a cupboard.

Some of the unruly agitators attacked the police van parked inside the hospital to get custody of one of the nurses but the police locked her inside the van to keep her safe from the the protesters. A mob at the scene was stirred by Islamist activists calling for the pair to be hanged. It was reported that Maryam Lal, a nurse, was stabbed as she fled. Activists from the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) party, which campaigns for those accused of blasphemy to be put to death, fuelled the protests. Among the protesters were clerics who demanded action against the prime suspect.

“After Friday prayers, a mob gathered and tried to kill them both,” Rana Atta, the police deputy superintendent, said.

Lal told police that she and Newsh Urooj, a medical student, were asked to tidy the locker of the hospital’s head nurse, a Muslim. They scratched off the sticker with a pen. When they returned the next day they were accused of desecrating the holy text.

Deputy Medical Superintendent Dr Mohammad Ali submitted an

application to the Civil Lines police claiming that the allegation of blasphemy had been proved by the hospital committee. He said the head nurse had taken the removed sticker into her custody and she apprised him of the issue on Friday.

Human rights groups have been outraged by the accusations. "This is a false allegation and minorities feel more insecure in Pakistan than ever," Lala Robin, a local activist, said. "This is a campaign by the TLP to serve their politics. The Christian nurses in Faisalabad live in a state of fear."