

Delhi celebrates gay pride with gusto

Some had their faces covered with multi-hued masks, while most others walked smiling at the cameras, unabashed and fearlessly. Brandishing rainbow-coloured flags, holding banners and swinging to the drum beats as they walked along, Delhi's first gay pride parade Sunday evening made for a colourful spectacle.

In a nation where homosexuality is illegal and is punishable with up to 10 years in jail, the overwhelmingly large attendance at the event took many by surprise.

"I wasn't expecting such a large crowd," said Priyanka Mehra, a gay activist taking part in the "Queer Pride".

Lesly Esteves, a journalist supporting the movement and taking part in the rally, said that she was expecting roughly 150 people in the parade. The attendance was not less than 500.

Gays, lesbians, transgenders, activists and supporters walked in the parade with great gusto. Banners with screaming headlines such as "Drop 377" (referring to section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that considers homosexuality a crime), "Heterosexuality is not normal, it's common", "Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, Hetero-Homo Bhai Bhai" and the likes floated above the hundreds of heads on the roads of Connaught Place, the business district and shopping arcade in the heart of the capital.

A baby being carried on the father's shoulders and carrying a placard "Gay Baby" and a Great Dane, a breed of dog famous for its huge size, wearing a rainbow flag in the collar made for a great spectacle.

Besides Delhi, what the organisers termed 'Queer Pride parade' was simultaneously held in three other places in India - Bangalore, [Kolkata](#) and Puducherry.

"Puducherry confirmed it a little late. Nevertheless, with a fourth place in India joining in the movement which simultaneously took place in more than 20 other cities across the world, the magnanimity of the whole event has become bigger," Esteves told IANS.

The history behind the 'Queer Pride' goes back to the morning of June 28, 1969, when armed squads of the New York Police Department (NYPD) raided the Stonewall Inn, an obscure pub in Greenwich village in New York, that was a regular watering hole of gays.

Several people were bundled into waiting vans. The gay groups at the bar protested and the outcry against the arrests led to full-scale riots and arson that lasted five days.

Since then, every year the week leading up to June 29 is remembered by sexual minorities and those with alternative sexual proclivities across the world as the 'Rainbow Pride Week'.

This week is the 30th anniversary of the 'Rainbow Flag', a de-facto symbol of pride of alternative sexual groups worldwide.

Among the more than 20 cities where the gay pride took place were Lisbon, London, Berlin, Seattle and New York.

A large number of foreigners also took part in the pride in Delhi.

Ashley John, for instance, was an American tourist walking along with hundreds of other supporters waving the rainbow flag and singing slogans.

"Considering this is the first time that Delhi is having a gay pride, the turnout is quite impressive. I was informed about this by a friend and I am glad that I came," John told IANS.

Nina and Annie, two tourists from Britain, also marched. "It's such a fantastic spectacle! Such a big turnout is definitely encouraging for those fighting for their rights," said Annie, wearing a rainbow badge.

The march which began at the Barakhamba Road, and not at the Regal cBuilding as scheduled earlier, because of security reasons, ended at Jantar Mantar, the famous observatory and tourist destination.

The marchers lighted candles and sang while waving their flags, which mark celebration of diversity.

A large posse of police personnel, however, were never far from the marchers, keeping an eye on the goings-on.

(© IANS / India eNews)