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Four of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for sharing their faith

JW Official Website (29.12.2011) / HRWF (19.01.12) - A 60-year-old widow, two other women, and one man were assaulted by a mob on November 29, 2011, in the city of Bangalore. Although the local police were notified of the incident, they chose to defend the actions of the mob and arrest the four Witnesses.

The incident began when two of the women, who were sharing a peaceful message with one of their neighbors, were detained by an aggressive man. The man also detained another female Witness who was passing by and began accusing all three of the women of conversion. A mob gathered and seized all the religious magazines in the women's bags. A male Witness, who was engaged in personal business nearby, was also threatened with being beaten if he did not join the three women being detained. The mob then called the police and forced the Witnesses to go to the police station.

At the station, the police deferred to the mob and filed a First Information Report against the Witnesses and even joined the attackers in insulting the Witnesses and their religion. When the male Witness insisted on filing a counter complaint, he was threatened with being stripped to his underwear and being put in a prison cell with the women. Later, one of the officers reluctantly accepted the complaint of the Witness, but refused to provide a written acknowledgment, violating standard procedure. All four Witnesses were arrested on charges of blasphemy and were released the same evening after securing bail.

Karnataka most dangerous state in India for Christians

Southern state remains most volatile place for third straight year

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (13.01.12) / HRWF (18.01.12) – Attacks on Christians accelerated over the Christmas and New Year's holidays in the south Indian state of Karnataka, which was identified as the most unsafe place for the religious minority for the third consecutive year in 2011.

With 49 cases of violence and hostility against Christians in 2011, Karnataka remained the state with the highest incidence of persecution, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India's annual report, "Battered and Bruised..."

The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), which is based in Karnataka's capital of Bengaluru and initially reported most of the incidents, also documented at least six anti-Christian attacks between Christmas Eve 2011 and New Year's Day.

On the evening of Jan. 1, about 20 men disrupted the New Year's Day worship service of the Blessing Youth Mission Church at the house of a believer in Hunnur village, in Jamkhandi division of Bagalkot district. Suspected Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal, the men manhandled pastor Siddu Seemanth Gunike, accusing him of forcibly and fraudulently converting Hindus. Local police intervened and rescued the pastor and other Christians.

On New Year's Eve, more than 10 men trespassed onto the premises of the Karnataka Calvary Fellowship Church, in the Ganeshgudi area in Joida division of North Canara

district, and disrupted a service of thanksgiving. Believed to be Hindu nationalists, the men forced the church to stop the service. Police arrived but only to summon the pastor, identified as P.R. Jose, to the police station the following morning. After GCIC's intervention, however, a senior police official assured the Christians of security.

On the evening of Dec. 28, 2011, a group of men from the nationalist Hindu Sriram Sene disrupted the prayer meeting of the Divyadarsana Ministry Church at the home of a Christian, Bima Naik, in SS Layout in Davanagere city, the headquarters of the central Davanagere district. Alleging the meeting was to convert Hindus, the men tried to manhandle the Christians. Police arrived, but instead of detaining the intruders took pastor Raju Doddamani, Naik and three other Christians to the police station for interrogation. They were released late at night.

The same day, unidentified persons burned a Christmas tree and a crib that were part of Christmas celebrations by local Catholics in Maripalla area in Bantwal division of the Dakshina Kannada district. Police arrested two men, but their identities were not disclosed.

Police reportedly said the decorations were burned over suspicion of "conversions." Evangelizing and conversion are legal in India.

Also on Dec. 28, suspected Hindu nationalists ransacked and broke windows of the Hebron Assembly Church in the Haleangadi area of Mangalore division in Dakshina Kannada district. The attackers also destroyed household items in the house of the pastor, identified only as Prasanna. Police registered a case against the attackers, but at press time no one was reported to have been arrested.

On the evening of Dec. 25, about 20 people beat Christians with stones and wooden clubs as they celebrated Christmas at a house in the Maindguri area, near Surathkal, a few miles from the city of Mangalore, in Dakshina Kannada district. The attackers, allegedly from a local extremist *Hindu Jagran Vedike* (Hindu Revival Forum), attacked the Christians, including women and children, indiscriminately.

A 27-year-old man identified only as Joyson fractured his leg; a pastor's wife identified as Lata, sustained chest injuries; a 29-year-old woman identified as Roshini and another woman identified as Annamma received head injuries; and a 23-year-old man identified only as Deepak broke his nasal bridge in the attack. A local Christian told Compass by phone that police arrested five of the attackers, but that they had been released on bail.

The attacks on Christians in Karnataka are "shameful" and "a blot on the secular and democratic India," GCIC President Sajan K. George said. The local government and authorities were "complicit in the persecution against Christians," he added.

Anti-Christian attacks increased in the state after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to sole power in May 2008. At least 28 attacks were reported in less than two months in August and September of that year. In 2009, Karnataka witnessed at least 48 attacks, and the number grew to 56 in 2010, according to the EFI.

In its 2010 report of Christian persecution in India, the EFI had warned about increasing attacks on Christians in Karnataka, remarking that "although in 2007 and 2008 two major incidents of violence occurred in eastern Orissa state's Kandhamal district and hit headlines in the national as well as international media, little efforts have been taken by authorities in India to tackle the root causes of communal tensions, namely divisive propaganda and activities by powerful right-wing Hindu groups, who do not represent the tolerant Hindu community."

The violence in Kandhamal district during Christmas week of 2007 killed at least four Christians and burned 730 houses and 95 churches, according to the All India Christian Council (AICC). These attacks were preceded by around 200 incidents of anti-Christian attacks in other parts of the country.

Violence re-erupted in Kandhamal district in August 2008, killing more than 100 people and resulting in the incineration of 4,640 houses, 252 churches and 13 educational institutions, according to the AICC.

Christians account for about 2.3 percent of India's population, which is more than 1 billion.

India Briefs: Recent Incidents of Persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (30.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) – Police arrested a Christian after Hindu extremists on Dec. 22 accused him of forceful conversion in Nagarcoil. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that Hindu extremists accused Sagaya Dass of forceful conversion after he and students from SP Hindu College organized a Christmas program. The extremists filed a police complaint at the Kottar police station. Dass was released on bail the same day after the intervention of area Christian leaders.

Tamil Nadu – Hindu extremists on the evening of Dec. 22 burned down a church building in Kurinjipadi, Vallalar Nagar, Kadaloor district. The Global Council of Indian Christian reported Hindu extremists had threatened Pastor K .Solomon and other church members, and that they destroyed the building to stop Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

Madhya Pradesh – On Dec. 21 police filed forcible conversion charges against Christians after their Hindu extremist accusers from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh beat them in Nehru Nagar, Indore. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that pastor Dilip Wadia of Light Giving Church went to the house of Kailash Gormeys for a prayer meeting and to watch the "Jesus Film." One of the 24 other people present belonged to the RSS and soon informed other extremists, who surrounded the house, according to the GCIC. After the extremists attacked them, the Christians went to the police station to file a complaint, only to find out that officers had filed a First Information Report against them under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including Section 323 for "voluntarily causing hurt." Police also took down a complaint against the extremists for injuring or defiling a place of worship with intent to insult religion. At press time police were attempting to broker an agreement between the two parties.

Karnataka – Police arrested a pastor after Hindu extremists beat him and stopped his church's Sunday worship service on Dec. 18 in Pillanna Garden, near Lingarajpuram, Bangalore. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that about 200 Hindu extremists barged into the Agape Bible Church service and attacked pastors Reuben Sathyaraj and Perumal Fernandes. At the time church members "were only being given baptism to confirm their membership to the church, as part of a regular year-end program," according to the statement of one of the church leaders, reported GCIC. Nearly 200 Hindus outside the church premises chanted slogans accusing the Christians of forced and fraudulent conversions before beating the pastors and other Christians. Police took 20 people alleged to have been forcibly/fraudulently converted to the police station, but after several hours of questioning they found there was no truth to the accusations and released them. The 60-year-old Pastor Sathyaraj, however, was detained late into the night; when he became ill, he was allowed to go a hospital on the

condition that he report back the next morning. The following day police charged him with "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs." With the intervention of the area Christian leaders, the pastor was released on bail the next day.

Andhra Pradesh – Hindu extremists at Mahabubnagar railway station attacked a pastor as he was distributing Christian literature on Dec 17. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that Pastor R. Prasad had gone to the railway station and was distributing tracts to commuters when a group of young men approached him at about 8:30 a.m. and started beating him. The young men then forcibly led the pastor to a car that took them to a Hindu temple, where they burned the Christian literature and again beat him, according to the AICC. The pastor has filed a complaint at the Mahabubnagar police station.

Karnataka – Police arrested a pastor and other Christians after Hindu extremists on Dec. 16 trespassed into the house of one of them, identified only as Venketesh of Badhravathy Baptist Church, and beat assistant pastor Sagar Guntur and church elders in Kagekodana-Jayanagar Shimoga. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the perpetrators attacked six women, four elders and the assistant pastor. The extremists falsely accused the Christians of forcible conversions, dragging them out and summoning police from Badravathy rural police station, according to the GCIC. Police have filed a First Information Report against the Christians under Sections 34 and 295-A of the Indian Penal Code for "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs." The Christians were released on bail after two days.

Maharashtra – Hindu extremists demolished a church building and beat a pastor in Ghatkoper, Mumbai on Dec. 14 after he complained that the church's worship site was omitted on an area development plan map. Visiting the office of Kunal Vardhan of Neelam Finance Bombay, Ltd., pastor Prabhakaran Kaviraj of the Apostolic Christian Assembly learned of the omission and inquired about it. A few men beat him as he was leaving Kaviraj's office, and on Dec. 14 a bulldozer demolished the church building. Kunal identified one of the key perpetrators of the demolition along with 12 others who were later arrested. An FIR has been filed against Vardhan and others involved in the demolition at Cheda Nagar police station.

Andhra Pradesh – Masked men on Dec. 11 seriously injured a pastor in Nalgonda, according to the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). The suspected Hindu extremists stormed into the Sunday service of New Fellowship Gospel Church and started throwing stones at a pastor identified only as Bangariah, who was leading worship. The pastor bled heavily, according to the GCIC, and as church members cried out, neighbors gathered at the site and the masked men ran away. The pastor was taken to Government Hospital in Nalgonda and received 14 stitches on his head and face. Police registered a case, but no arrests have been made.

Madhya Pradesh – Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and World Hindu Council (VHP) attacked Christians on Dec. 9 in Jhabua, Indore, beating a pastor unconscious, destroying Bibles and taking gold and silver jewelry. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that about 100 RSS and VHP activists surrounded pastor Ramesh V. Asnia's house from all sides and began pelting the Christians with large stones before forcibly entering the pastor's house as his wife, Indira Vasunia, was leading prayer. After breaking a wooden cross and a television set and taking silver and gold chains worth about 30,000 rupees (US\$550), they beat the pastor's 50-year-old mother and broke one of her legs. Vasunia and other women escaped and told the pastor what was happening. When Pastor Ramesh reached his village by motorcycle along with another Christian, Babu Vasunia, about 20 RSS and VHP

members severely beat them, alleging that they were forcibly and fraudulently converting Hindus. Even as the two Christians were bleeding heavily and the pastor was unconscious, the extremists continued to strike them with stones and with their fists, also kicking them in the stomach, according to the GCIC. They dragged the pastor, tearing his clothes. Witnesses later told Pastor Ramesh that the extremists threatened to further harm them if he continued preaching and teaching, and that they were carrying pistols, bows and arrows, and a sword-like weapon. Pastor Ramesh and Babu Vasunia went to the Antarwailya police station and told a head constable identified only as Kushwaha about the incident, asking him to file a First Information Report against the attackers, but Kushwaha said no police officers were on duty that day, according to GCIC.

Tamil Nadu – Police in Nagarcovil on Dec. 9 arrested the Rev. Arul Saiju and the Rev. Stanley Baburaj, along with 10 Christians from the Makankara Catholic Church, after local officials supervised the demolition of their church building, which was under renovation. Saiju and Baburaj produced the original title deeds to the officials to establish ownership, but Hindu extremists attacked them and took them to the local police station alleging that they had obstructed civil servants from discharging their responsibility. Saij, Baburaj and the 10 other Christians were put in a sub-jail and were later released on bail, reported a GCIC representative.

Orissa – A group of tribal Hindu extremists on Dec. 8 attacked three tribal Christian families in Chandikhole, Jajpur district. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that the extremists beat the Christians, accused them of forceful conversion and filed a police complaint against them. When the tribal Christians approached the police to complain, they were reprimanded and detained due to the First Information Report filed against them. The AICC leaders in Orissa contacted the deputy inspector and superintendent of police in efforts to free the innocent victims of the hate crime, reported AICC.

Tamil Nadu – Hindu extremists on Dec. 3 razed a church after issuing several threats to a pastor in Hosur. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists destroyed the Christu Sabha church building in the dead of night. The Hindu extremists had mounted two previous attacks against pastor Paul Chinnaswamy, according to the GCIC, robbing his small savings and destroying a small shed in which he regularly held worship services in April 2007 and beating and stabbing him in the leg with a screw driver in May of that year. They have also threatened to abduct his four daughters and harm his son if he continues spreading Christianity in the village. Police refused to register a case.

Madhya Pradesh – Police arrested a pastor after Hindu extremists filed a complaint of forceful conversion against a pastor in Sendwa, Badhwani district on Dec. 2. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported that the pastor of the Indian Pentecostal Church, identified only as Titus, and other Christians were arrested after being charged under Sections 3 and 4 of the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act after a complaint was registered against them. While in the police station, about 20 men from a radical Hindu organization stormed in demanding the arrest of the pastor. Pastor Titus and the other Christians were released after bail was posted by local Christians. Police seized the vehicle they were using along with some CDs and Bibles.

Christians in Kashmir, India increasingly fearful, report says

Muslim leaders setting hostile tone as Christmas nears

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (14.12.11) / HRWF (15.12.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> -- A fact-finding mission to India's Kashmir Valley found that Muslim leaders' increasingly shrill opposition to conversions has instilled fear among the Christian minority, which has been threatened as Christmas nears.

Christians in Srinagar, the summer capital of India's northern-most state of Jammu and Kashmir, are "really scared," said Dr. John Dayal, a member of the National Integration Council and part of the fact-finding team. "Christian men, women and children are in a state of panic, fearful of their security, uncertain of the future, uncertain of their jobs."

The Rev. Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church in Srinagar, was arrested on Nov. 19 on charges of hurting religious sentiments of Muslims after several youths were baptized; he was released on bail on Dec. 1. But the pastor of the Church of North India denomination, who is due to retire early next year, may never be able to go back to his church due to security concerns, Dayal said.

"There may be no proper celebration of Christmas in the church if the bishop does not send a new priest immediately," he added. "The church [in Srinagar] needs to get its act together in how it faces such religio-political persecution."

At the same time, a sharia (Islamic law) court has reportedly summoned the Rev. Jim Borst, a Dutch Catholic missionary, to appear on charges of proselytizing and "forced conversions." Borst runs two schools in Baramulla and Srinagar that are said to have aroused jealousy in area Muslims.

Sentiment against Christians was evident when a member of the Kashmir Bar Association disrupted court proceedings as a lawyer was seeking bail for Pastor Khanna.

"Their behavior tested the patience of the judge, who remarked, 'Do you want me to hang him?'" states the fact-finding report, entitled "Dealing with Islamic Groups in Kashmir on Christian Persecution."

The investigative team was headed by Dr. H.T. Sangliana, vice-chair of the National Commission for Minorities, and included the Rev. Dr. Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. The team noted hostilities toward Christian workers, churches and Christian educational institutions in Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir state is 67 percent Muslim, 29.6 percent Hindu and 0.2 percent Christian, but the Kashmir Valley region is 97 percent Muslim, according to Operation World. Christian organizations run schools where many state leaders have studied.

Veiled Threat

Muslim leaders in the Kashmir Valley began to rally against Christians after a video recording of Muslim youth being baptized at the All Saints Church was posted on YouTube in late October. Kashmir Grand Mufti Bashir-ud-din Ahmad told the fact-finding

team he would prove that "we are men, not impotent persons." The highest authority in Islamic law in Kashmir added that the sharia court he heads will soon come out with its "judgment."

The sharia court has no legal authority for non-Muslims in India, but the mufti hinted that the "judgment" could include demands such as a halt to further baptisms and morning prayers in schools run by Christians. He accused Christian schools of encouraging drug abuse among children, though the only evidence he offered was the statement that "it is well known."

Though generally polite, the mufti issued a warning, saying, "We will do what we have to do, and others will have to do what they have to do." He also said he was keeping an eye on the schools, their principals and staff, and that they would hear from him soon.

The report said it was clear that the mufti was "contemplating a denunciation of the church, if not actually calling for mass action," though he had asserted there would be no violence.

Sharia courts deal only in local civil matters applicable only to Muslims. But the mufti summoned the pastor to appear for a hearing held on Nov. 17 concerning allegations of fraudulent conversion. Bishop Pradeep Kumar Samantaroy of the Church of North India has said the mufti's allegation that Pastor Khanna had converted Muslims by offering money is "totally baseless and untrue."

The pastor earlier told Compass that the Muslim youths had been coming to the church on their own initiative and wanted to take part in Holy Communion. Pastor Khanna told them they had to follow a procedure if they wanted to join in the sacrament, and they expressed desire to be baptized in due course.

The fact-finding team, which visited Kashmir from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2, criticized the role of local media in helping vested interests to create tensions.

"The reporting and editorializing have been one-sided and without any reference to the truth as seen by the religious minority," the report states.

The team also concluded that the state administration was making concessions to the Muslim majority for political reasons, and that police had "acted on behalf of the political leadership."

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution grants considerable autonomy to states, where many Indian institutions and laws have no jurisdiction.

With India and Pakistan frequently fighting over Kashmir, local complexities have given rise to extremism and a rigid politico-religious Islamic clergy that seeks to carve out space to challenge the state government, political groups and the Indian army, according to the report.

"The vast majority of Kashmiris are peaceful and adhere to a soft and melodious Sufi Islam, far removed from the stridency of Wahhabism espoused by the extremist groups," the report notes.

Local residents told the team that some extremist groups and other vested interests have been seeking to use the issue of conversion in their confrontation with the state government, political parties and moderate Islamic groups. They were "looking to score political points against each other, and any excuse was good enough to foment trouble," according to the report.

This dynamic was why the state government was quick to arrest Pastor Khanna, and it will go to any extreme to ward off trouble from Islamic groups, the report said.

As Christmas approaches, the government has moved to its winter capital in Jammu, and there is no senior officer in Srinagar to give any assurance of security to the Christian community, the team pointed out. There is also a "total absence" of human rights organizations in the region, the team reported.

Barring a few sporadic incidents of communal violence, Christians and Muslims had had good relations in Kashmir, as elsewhere in India. Tensions in Kashmir began in March 2003, however, after local newspapers alleged that Christian missionaries were converting Muslim youth; the allegations were based on an article on a U.S. evangelical news website that local Christians say was fictitious.

The fact-finding team said Kashmir's Muslim groups were not concerned that, in the rest of India, Christians and Muslims are both minorities that need each other and civil society at large in order to face the challenge of Hindu nationalists, who see the two communities as "outsiders."

The report called for the formation of a state minorities commission and assurances of security for Christians from state and federal governments.

There is also a need for introspection within the church, the team reported, regarding the spoken word, the language of evangelization and the translations of various Biblical verses.

"We have seen many verses whose local translation entirely mutilates the real meaning and lends itself to misinterpretation," the report states. This exercise must be carried out "as early as possible, not just for the sake of the Kashmir Valley, but for the country as a whole."

India briefs: Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (30.11.11) / HRWF (05.12.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - **Karnataka** - Police on Nov. 26 arrested a Christian woman after Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal accused her of forceful conversion at Kushalnagar, Kodagu. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists barged into a prayer meeting led by a woman from Bethel Ministry, identified only as Janakiyamma, at a Christian's home on the outskirts of Kushalnagar. The extremists called Kushalnagar police, and a sub-inspector identified only as Chickaswamy and other officers took Janakiyamma into custody and questioned her for three hours, according to the GCIC. They charged her with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs" and "acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention," and she was sent to Madikere Jail, according to the GCIC. Area Christian leaders were taking steps to free her at press time.

Chhattisgarh - Police arrested three pastors belonging to the Grace Church of God Welfare Society, along with two other Christian workers, and falsely accused them of forcible conversion on Nov. 22 in Pandariya town, Kawardha. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that a mob of about 25 Hindu extremists led by Raghu Pathak, along with Block officer Uttam Singh, disrupted the worship service and made the allegations against pastors Jivan Tigga, 57, Leku Sahu and one identified only as Madhav, along with Christian workers Itwari Lal and another identified only as Santosh, according

to the EFI. Police later arrived and arrested the pastors under Section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code for acts intended to outrage religious feelings. The Christians were later released on bail.

Chhattisgarh – A mob of about 200 Hindu extremists disrupted house church worship and attacked pastor Naresh Sahu on Nov. 6 in Parsada village, Raipur. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that at about 11 a.m., as the Sunday worship service was underway, a large group of Hindu extremists gathered in front of the house of Pastor Sahu and brought the service to a halt. The extremists verbally abused the pastor, dragged him out of his house and beat him brutally, according to the EFI. The mob then tore Bibles and other church materials. Police sent the pastor to Abhanpur Hospital for treatment, and both parties have filed complaints, reported the EFI. Pastor Sahu later met with former Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Shri Ajit Jogi and submitted a letter about the incident. After intervention by Jogi, police went to the village and issued a notice to both the parties to resolve the dispute.

India briefs: Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (21.11.11) / HRWF (23.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - **Karnataka** - State police on Nov. 13 arrested pastor H.S. Nagaraj of Immanuel Prarthanalaya in Arkalgud, Hassan district, after Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal disrupted his congregation's Sunday worship service. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that at about 10 a.m. the extremists forcibly stopped the service, verbally abused the Christians for their faith, tore Bibles and called Arkalgud police. Officers arrived and arrested Pastor Nagaraj and Christians identified only as Shivanna, Ravi and Chandrashekar, presumably based on the common Hindu extremist charge of forced conversions. Police took the Christians to the Arkalgud police station for questioning, and after area Christian leaders' intervention they were released on bail that evening at 11:30 p.m., according to the GCIC.

Karnataka - State police on Nov. 12 detained five Christians, along with a 4-year-old child, in Belur Krishnarajnagar after Hindu extremists from the Hindu extremist Bajrang Dal accused the Christians of forceful conversion and beat two of them. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported the 10 extremists stopped the Christians as they were returning from a prayer meeting. They beat two Christians, Varun Chakravarthy and another identified only as Raju, and then alerted Harehally police station. A sub-inspector of police identified only as Venkatesh and other officers arrived and took all parties to the police station for questioning. Police charged the Christians with deliberate acts intended to insult religious feelings under section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code. After holding them overnight, authorities brought them before a judge the next day. GCIC was able to secure bail for the women, including one identified only as Padmavathy, who was with her 4-year-old child. The two male Christians were sent to Hassan Jail, however, and were released on bail on Nov. 16, reported a GCIC representative.

Andhra Pradesh - A Christian in New Paloncha, Khamman district, was sentenced to three years of prison on Oct. 28 for accidentally pasting a poster over another religious announcement. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that Burgula Prasad had organized an evangelistic event for Oct. 3-5 and invited Dr. John Manga Charyulu to speak. While placing posters about the event, they accidentally posted one over another in Indranagar Colony in New Paloncha, AICC reported. Angry area residents started a protest, creating a road block. New Paloncha police summoned Prasad, and he apologized to officers and demonstrators. He was then released, but on Oct. 28 police again

summoned him and informed him of a First Information Report filed against him. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Uttar Pradesh - A mob of about 150 Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal stormed into a medical camp organized on Oct. 25 on the outskirts of Agra. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that the extremists shouted anti-Christian slogans and accused the medical team of forcefully converting people under the guise of medical treatment. A camp coordinator identified only as the Rev. Kashyap showed the local leaders of the Bajrang Dal a copy of the permission letter for the camp, but one of them, Digvijay Tiwari, demanded a copy for himself, according to EFI. Kashyap refused, and the angry Tiwari left only to return an hour later with a mob that broke the clinic tent, overturned chairs and tables and started manhandling people. Kashyap and others retreated to the roof of an adjacent building, but the extremists captured him and brought him downstairs and made him a hostage of the mob, according to EFI. The extremists accused him of forceful conversion, striking and humiliating him in front of the crowd. Hearing that the extremists were planning to lock the medical team downstairs and burn the room, the volunteers fled, and one called police. EFI reported that the mob took Kashyap to the Shahganj police station, where extremists pressured police to put him in jail. As camp organizers had sought prior permission from the chief medical officer of Agra, however, Kashyap filed a complaint against members of the mob. Copies of the permission had also been duly provided to the district magistrate and the senior superintendent of police. After police registered Kashyap's complaint, Bajrang Dal leader Tiwari was arrested and incarcerated. He was later released on bail, according to EFI.

Pastor's arrest Stir's anti-Christian sentiment in Kashmir, India

Bishop says area Christians in danger from angry Muslims after accusation of 'allurement'

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (23.11.2011) / HRWF (24.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Charges that a pastor in Jammu and Kashmir state "lured" Muslims to Christianity by offering money are false and have put the lives of the clergyman and other Christians in danger, according to Bishop Pradeep Kumar Samantaroy of the Church of North India denomination.

Following the arrest on Saturday (Nov. 17) of the Rev. Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church in Srinagar, Bishop Samantaroy told Compass by phone that the time has come for the church to speak up against the "discriminatory action" by authorities in India's Kashmir Valley.

The bishop of the Amritsar Diocese said the pastor told him his life was in danger, as the charges have angered area Muslims. The government must provide protection to the pastor, churches and Christian institutions "immediately," he said.

The allegations of allurement appear to have turned Muslim clergy and separatist leaders against the Christians. Kashmir lies at the heart of a bitter territorial dispute between India, Pakistan and China, even as many Kashmiris call for separation from India. Two prominent leaders of the separatist movement, Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, have met religious leaders to prevent "conversions."

A court in Srinagar on Sunday (Nov. 18) remanded Pastor Khanna to judicial custody for 15 days, a representative of the Evangelical Fellowship of India's advocacy wing told

Compass. Pastor Khanna was arrested for creating "enmity" between religious communities and hurting religious sentiments.

Bishop Samantaroy said the allegation made by Kashmir Grand Mufti Bashir-ud-din Ahmad, the state's highest official of Islamic law, that Pastor Khanna had converted Muslims by offering money was "totally baseless and untrue."

Ahmad has a video of Muslims being baptized in Pastor Khanna's church, which he said was evidence on which to file a police complaint of fraudulent conversion, although the video only shows a baptism ceremony. The Constitution of India grants religious freedom to all, allowing them to propagate and change their religion or have no religion at all.

Superintendent of Police of East Srinagar Sheikh Zulfkar Azad, however, told Compass there was "certain evidence" of allurement by Pastor Khanna, though he did not specify it.

"I am in hospital for treatment, and that's all I can say at the moment," he said.

Seven youths who were baptized, as shown in the video, have denied to police that they were offered money to convert, a local Christian told Compass. But some local newspapers have quoted anonymous police sources as claiming the converts were given money.

A source who requested anonymity previously told Compass that police beat the converts from Islam when asking them if Christians had given them money for their conversion (see www.compassdirect.org, "Police Detain, Beat Converts from Islam in India," Nov. 10).

Police arrested Pastor Khanna two days after the mufti held a hearing on conversions in the sharia (Islamic law) court he heads. Although sharia courts in India deal only in civil matters with community people's cooperation and do not have any legal authority, the mufti had summoned the pastor to appear for the hearing. The pastor agreed in an effort to maintain peace.

On the pretext of meeting with a senior police official, police picked up Pastor Khanna at his residence on Saturday evening (Nov. 17). After arresting him, officers did not inform his family, nor was the pastor given any written communication concerning the charges, the bishop said.

Police later brought Pastor Khanna to his home as they searched for evidence. They took CDs and literature for examination and kept him in custody.

Bishop Samantaroy said Kashmir's Bar Association had asked its members not to defend the pastor. The church has asked a lawyer from Jammu, a Hindu-majority region in the state, to apply for his bail.

He also said he was worried about Pastor Khanna's health. The pastor is diabetic and needs daily medical attention, and the bishop said he has learned that the doctor looking after him has a poor attitude toward him.

The pastor earlier told Compass that the Muslim youths had been coming to the church on their own initiative and wanted to take part in Holy Communion. Pastor Khanna told them they had to follow a procedure if they wanted to join in the sacrament, and they expressed desire to be baptized in due course.

Barring a few sporadic incidents of communal violence, Christians and Muslims had had good relations in Kashmir. Tensions began in March 2003 after local newspapers alleged that Christian missionaries were converting Muslim youth. Reports of conversions followed an article in an evangelical Christian website in the United States that claimed thousands of Muslim youths were converting to Christianity, which local Christians say was not true.

In November 2006, a convert from Islam, Bashir Ahmed Tantray, was shot dead by Islamist extremists in Barmullah district. Tantray's name had appeared in newspaper reports.

In September 2010, Muslim mobs burned a school and a church in Tangmarg district after a television channel showed U.S. pastor Terry Jones burning the Quran.

Police detain, beat converts from Islam in India

Video showing baptisms in Kashmir creates tensions.

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (10.11.11) / HRWF (14.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Police in India's Kashmir Valley detained and beat converts from Islam and were expected to arrest Christian workers after Muslim leaders alleged that Muslim youth were being "lured" to Christianity.

Police in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley picked up seven converts who were recently baptized in All Saints Church in Srinagar, a local Christian who spoke to the converts after their release on Nov. 2 told Compass. Srinagar is the summer capital of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir and the main city of the Kashmir Valley.

The source, who requested anonymity, said police beat the converts and asked if Christians had given them money for their conversion. Most of the converts were from Budgam district, about 18 miles from Srinagar, and pastors there fearful of being arrested were in hiding, he added.

Senior Superintendent of Police of Srinagar Ashiq Bukhari was not available for comment.

Police got the names of the converts and pastors from a video recording of the baptism provided by Kashmir's grand mufti (the highest official of religious law), Bashir-ud-din Ahmad. The video was later posted on YouTube.

The Rev. Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church, told Compass that he had been summoned by the mufti, who is also the head of the sharia (Islamic law) court. He said he would meet Ahmad on Nov. 17.

The court had issued the summons for Saturday (Nov. 12), but Pastor Khanna had a prior engagement.

India, home to the world's third-largest Muslim population, has a few sharia courts pertaining only to civil matters.

Ahmad alleged that Pastor Khanna, whose church is affiliated with the Church of North India (CNI) denomination, was converting young Muslim men and women by offering money, and that therefore he must be arrested. The mufti told media that the video was

definitive evidence that Muslims were being "lured" to Christianity, although it only shows the baptism ceremony.

Pastor Khanna said the young men converted of their own will and without his persuasion.

The Indian constitution provides for religious freedom, including the right to propagate and the right to change one's religion.

The pastor told Compass that the former Muslims, who were baptized at his church facility in August, were willing to sign affidavits saying there was no duress or allurement.

"That's what they told the police also," he said.

Pastor Khanna said his church is located in the heart of Srinagar, and that many Muslims come to attend worship service on Sundays.

"I have never gone to anyone's house to share about Jesus," he said. 'But in the church, it is my responsibility to preach God's Word. I can't refuse anyone. The house of God is open for all."

The pastor said the Muslim youths had been coming to the church on their own initiative and wanted to take part in Holy Communion. Pastor Khanna told them they had to follow a procedure if they really wanted to join in the sacrament, and they expressed desire to be baptized in due course.

"I can't convert anyone; it is the work of the Holy Spirit," he added. "And what do I teach in the church? God's love and how to be good citizens and good human beings ... I have never shown disrespect for the Quran."

Pastor Khanna said there were many people, some with cameras, at the baptism ceremony.

"If it was meant to be a secret or illegal activity, we wouldn't have allowed cameras," he said.

Kashmir's civil society had shown support, he added, as the church had helped build about 600 homes for the poor, apart from providing other services in the region.

Kashmir police reportedly acted on the mufti's complaint because conversion is a sensitive issue.

"The decision to book the seven was taken at the highest level to avoid possible unrest in the Valley," The Times of India reported.

Kashmir has only a few hundred Christians. The whole state, which has a population of more than 10 million, has little more than 20,000 Christians – mostly from the Hindu-majority Jammu region.

Christians have generally had good relations with the Muslims, but there have been some sporadic incidents of violence.

Local Muslims resorted to violence last year after a television channel showed U.S. pastor Terry Jones of Florida burning the Quran. In September 2010, Muslim mobs burned a school and a church belonging to the CNI in Tangmarg district. A month earlier, Muslims

had attempted to burn a hospital in Anantnag district, but security forces managed to prevent it. A mob had also vandalized a Catholic-run school in Pulwama district.

In November 2006, a known voluntary Christian worker, Bashir Ahmed Tantray, was shot dead by Islamist extremists in Barmullah district. An engineer by profession, the 50-year-old Tantray was a convert from Islam.

Tensions have been simmering in Kashmir since March 2003, when national and local newspapers alleged that Christian missionaries were converting Muslim youths en masse in Kashmir. Tantray's name also appeared in the reports.

Allegations of conversions by allurement hit the headlines after an evangelical Christian website in the United States claimed that thousands of Muslim young men and women were converting to Christianity – which, local Christians say, is not true.

Kashmir lies at the heart of a bitter territorial dispute between India, Pakistan and China, and there are also local movements in Kashmir that resist India's rule.

India briefs: recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (31/10/2011) / HRWF (03.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – The government on Oct. 20 deported U.S. evangelist William Lee, blacklisted him and prohibited him from visiting India again after police arrested him on Oct. 14 for participation in a musical concert in Kaloor Stadium, Cochin and jailed him for allegedly violating terms of his visa by preaching, according to the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). Lee participated in an in-door musical program organized by Faith Leaders Church of Lord, Tiruvalla. After three days in jail, the evangelist complained of chest pain and was admitted to a hospital. The Ernakulam magistrate's court fined him 10,000 rupees (US\$202). The GCIC condemned Lee' arrest as selective, releasing a statement that, "The moral policing, sectarian violence and the selective arrest of Christian evangelists demonstrate very clearly a failure of secular institutions in India."

Karnataka – On Oct. 17 in Sullia, South Kanara, Hindu extremists along with village head exhumed the body of a Christian woman, alleging that Christians were guilty of an illegal burial. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a pastor identified only as Moses V. conducted the funeral service of Asha Latha of Bethsaida Assembly of God Church on land he had bought as a burial ground. Just as the Christians had completed the ceremony and interned the body, the village head and about 100 extremists forced them to exhume the body and bury it elsewhere and complained to Sullia police. Officers arrived and took the pastor to the police station. As Christians buried Latha's body on her land at Ivara Nadu, police questioned the pastor till about midnight, GCIC reported. He was released only after area leaders' intervention, but on Oct. 18 police took him back to the station for further questioning.

Andhra Pradesh – Police on Oct. 16 detained Christians after Hindu extremists beat them and damaged a pastor's car in Ramagudam. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that about 100 Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) barged into the evening youth meeting, beat the young Christians and took them to the police station. A pastor identified only as Suresh rushed to the station, but the RSS stopped him and damaged his car. After beating the pastor, the RSS members filed a false charge of forcible conversion, according to the GCIC. Pastor Suresh also filed a police complaint against the attackers, after which the youth leaders were released without charges.

Karnataka – Police on Oct. 15 seized the passport of a pastor who runs an orphanage after he reported a missing orphan in Kadugodi, near Bangalore. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Joseph Victor notified authorities that a 15-year-old girl at his Navajeevan Orphanage left the facility to attend a tailoring class. Police told him he could file a written complaint the next morning, and Pastor Victor sent his associate pastor and a clerk to the police station the next day to do so. While police made the Christians wait, the station inspector and sub-inspector went to the orphanage and demanded to know whether Pastor Victor had permission to operate the facility. After questioning, they took him to the police station. Detaining the Christians till evening, police and forced them to sign a statement that they themselves should search for the missing girl, demanded that they produce all documents for operating the orphanage and a house church and confiscated the pastor's passport, reported the GCIC.

Andhra Pradesh – Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh on Oct. 15 accused Christians of forceful conversion and attacked them in Ramagundam. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported the extremists accused the Glorious Ministries youth group as they were preparing for three days of meetings at Calvary Temple on Oct 18-20. The extremists took the youth group to the police station. When a pastor identified only as Suresh along with three other Christians went to the station, about 100 extremists led by Thota Kumara Swamy attacked them, seriously injuring their heads and eyes and badly damaging their car with boulders, according to the GCIC. The Christian youths were charged and taken to the Karim Nagar Magistrate Court. At press time area Christian leaders were taking steps to resolve the matter.

Karnataka – Police in Arasikere arrested Pastor Sunder Raj on Oct. 13 after Hindu extremists filed a complaint alleging that he tried to demolish a temple and had attacked and abused them with foul language. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that police, bowing to the extremists' pressure, filed an anti-religion atrocity case against the pastor, whom a judge sent to Hassan Jail; he was released on bail the next day. In 2004 the Arasikere Municipality, pressured by Sangh Parivar extremists, had demolished a church building alleging that it was constructed without permission and then built a temple on the same spot. Police had refused to accept the pastor's complaints. Pastor Raj fought the case for more than two years but lost it in 2006. He then appealed to the District Sessions Court at Hassan, which ordered a fresh survey of the land. Knowing this, some Sangh Parivar extremists damaged a small part of the temple wall to make it appear the pastor was guilty of an anti-religious atrocity, according to the GCIC.

Karnataka – Police arrested six tribal Christians on Oct. 12 in Kulshalnagar, Coorg after Hindu extremists barged into their prayer meeting, verbally abused them and filed a complaint against them of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the incident took place on the previous day at about 7 p.m., when the extremists forcefully entered into the prayer meeting at a Christian's house. Accusing them of forceful conversion, the angry extremists destroyed vehicles parked outside the house, according to the GCIC. The police who arrived soon after arrested the Christians and took them to the Siddapura police station. They were sent to Virajpet jail and were released on bail the next day.

Maharashtra – Hindu extremists led by Gupsingh Raya Paurana threatened to murder a convert Christian from Hinduism, Ram Balli, and other Christians after launching repeated attacks on them in Virla Town, Sirja, Dhule. "Gupsingh Raya Purana claimed that he was imprisoned several times on charges of murder and other criminal acts and he threatened to murder me because I am a Christian," Balli told Compass. "He told me that he would murder me and go back to jail and that it does not matter to him." On Sept. 7, the village head summoned all the Christians and detained them for about eight hours after a Sept. 2 attack by Hindu extremists on a home prayer meeting that severely

wounded the head of Raju Narayan. The village head along with Hindu extremists mocked them, and, in coarse language, told them they must not follow Christ. "They forced us to kneel down and worship the idols and also forced us to drink alcohol, and threatened to kill us if we didn't oblige," Balli said. On Oct. 8, while the Christians were getting ready to sleep, the extremists started throwing stones at their houses, sending Meena Raju to the hospital with a severe head injury. The Christians filed a police complaint against the attackers. The next day, the enraged extremists went to Balli's house and other Christian homes and verbally abused them, threatening to kill them. Balli ran for his life to the police station, and other Christian family members hid in a field. The extremists destroyed the houses of the Christians. Police summoned the two parties. "The police told the Christians to worship the idols like all the other villagers and live in harmony with each other," reported a pastor identified only as Sarichar, coordinator of the Indian Evangelical Team of Chodada division. After the intervention of the National Commission for Minorities, Shirpur Police in-charge P.R. Gulate and his team on Oct. 19 went to the site and investigated, and then registered a case against Dev Das, Gup Singh Paurane and Sai Singh. The attackers were charged with voluntarily causing hurt and intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace. Tensions still prevailed in the area, and at press time police were trying to arrange another meeting between the two parties.

Andhra Pradesh – On Oct. 2, Hindu extremist Goli Suman and a drunken mob broke into Jesus Prayer Hall at Govindupally Jagitiyal town and threatened pastor Badugu Lazarus and other members of the church during a praying meeting. The Catholic Christian Forum reported that the extremists drank on the church premises. That night at 2 a.m., pastor A. Paul Chand rushed to the church and called police. An assistant sub-inspector of the town police station immediately visited the church, and after daybreak the Deva Reddy inspector of police also arrived and gave moral support, suggesting the pastor file a complaint. The Christians filed a complaint, and police arrested three extremists. Six months before, Hindu extremist Malla Reddy and the same group had objected to church construction and threatened to harm Pastor Lazarus if he built a church.

Kerala – On Sept.27 in Ambalavaval, Wayanad, Hindu extremists beat a pastor for his faith in Christ, seriously injuring him. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a pastor identified only as Jaison E.T. and his wife were distributing gospel tracts and praying for the sick in various homes until one resident ordered them to get out of his family's house. The Christians left, but later the same man and two Hindu extremists caught up with him in a house where the Christians had been welcomed and severely beat him. The owner of the house tried to stop them and called her husband to help, according to GCIC, and within five minutes he reached their house and gave protection to the pastor. Meantime, more than 20 people turned up to keep the intolerant Hindus from attacking the pastor's wife.

Karnataka – In Nagnure, Belgaum district, a pastor and another Christian en route to evangelistic work on Sept. 27 were stopped by Hindu extremists who then tied them to a tree and beat them for their faith in Christ. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that upon learning of the assault on the pastor, identified only as Kashinath, and the worker from the Indian Missionary Society, Christian youths from the area gathered and retaliated, requiring police intervention. Both parties filed cases against each other the following day. No arrests had been made at press time.

Karnataka – In Sakleshpur, about 50 Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal, youth wing of the World Hindu Council, on Sept. 25 forced their way into the End Times Full Harvest Church, manhandled pastor Balzy D'Souza and some Christian women. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists took Bibles and called police, who quickly arrived and joined the extremists in bullying the Christians. The area sub-inspector ordered them to stop their worship service and close down the

church. Three weeks prior, an area inspector of police identified only as Ganesh visited the church and asked the pastor whether he had a license and the necessary permission from authorities to run a church in his house. The officer told him that there had been complaint against him that he had been involved in forcible and fraudulent conversions and that he must stop such illegal activities immediately. Area Christian leaders intervened, meeting with Hassan district official Ajit Singh and arranging a meeting between the Christians and the assailants. The extremists, however, gathered and fabricated a story with a couple of false witnesses that pastor John D'Souza and his colleagues had tried to bribe two people, supposedly paying them 10,000 rupees (US\$202) each to become Christians. Hindu leaders then issued an order that the pastor must stop his activities immediately, as they accused him of causing communal disharmony.

Karnataka – Police in Hulimavy, Bangalore Rural District on Sept. 25 threatened to jail pastor Arunachala Paramashivam of the Church of God Full Gospel India and shuttered his church. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Hulimavu police station's sub-inspector, identified only as Chandru, visited the pastor and asked him whether he had permission for a church, and that he had received complaints against him of forcible and fraudulent conversions. The pastor was arrested and subjected to lengthy questioning by Inspector Balram Gowda, who warned him that if he persisted in continuing with his prayer services, he would be arrested and sent to jail, reported the GCIC. He then ordered him to stop worship services and closed down the church. With area Christian leaders' intervention, the pastor was able to continue Sunday worship meetings, reported GCIC.

Students at orphanage in India forced to pay idol worship fee

Hindu extremists force closure, then limited re-opening of Christian social programs

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (06.10.2011) / HRWF (13.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Hindu extremists in West Bengal, India who earlier this year refused to admit Christian orphans to a high school have forced them to contribute funds for idol worship in order to gain admission, sources said.

The conflict in Kharagpur, Paschim Medinipur, last month led the hard-line Hindus to throw stones at a Christian orphanage, shut it and other social programs down and threaten to arrest the head of the organization that operates them. The Rev. Dr. Subimal Dutta, director general of Ambassadors Service Society, which operates the Gilgal Children's Home, told Compass he faced the threats and program shut-down after opposing the collection of money for idol worship at government schools or government-aided schools.

Dutta said that since 2007 he has tried to stop school officials from collecting money from the Gilgal Children's Home and from non-Hindu students at public schools for the "Puja subscription," or idol worship fee.

Hindu extremists led by Achinty Hatui, headmaster of the Dudhebudhe Gram Sava Tribal Institute, forced the Christian students to pay the fee for idols and warned him that they would ransack the properties of the Society, which also runs child development, children and mother survival, pregnant women and infant care, health care and primary school programs.

"I went to various administrative officials to stop this unfair practice, but I got no positive responses," Dutta said, adding that when he reported the matter to area Additional District Inspector Jasodananda Misra, he refused to take action.

No area schools would admit the five orphans from the Gilgal Children's Home, so they attended Dudhebudhe Gram Sava Tribal Institute, a high school that is a three-minute walk from their home, hoping that they would eventually be granted admission. After attending classes for 21 days, however, Hatui expelled them on March 25 in a fit of coarse language and insults, said Chetan Larence Orasad, manager of Ambassadors Service Society.

"Achinty Hatui and his team have been collecting money for idol worship through unfair means and pressured orphans from the Gilgal Home to submit the money or they would be expelled," Orasad told Compass.

The orphans also faced discrimination and harassment from the headmaster and staff for not contributing to the idol fund, he said. The orphans filed a police complaint against Hatui, which the local police initially refused to register.

Dutta said he pressured the additional district inspector, Misra, to take action, and he arranged a meeting for him with Hatui and his team on April 19, which was fruitless.

"In response to the public litigation case I submitted in Kolkata High Court at the beginning of the year, the honorable court on April 8 issued an order to Dudhebudhe Gram Sava Tribal Institute and other government-aided schools in the area to give admission to the children from Gilgal Children's Home," Dutta told Compass.

Even after the court order, however, Hatui initially refused to admit the students in his school, Dutta said.

"The orphans were given admission only after I went to the police station and reported the matter," he said.

But the orphans faced constant discrimination and harassment from Hatui and his staff, and they continued to pressure them to submit the money for idol worship, he said.

After receiving a letter from the West Bengal Minorities Commission to appear on Sept. 7 for a hearing following a complaint filed by Dutta, Hatui and his staff tried to force the orphans to sign an agreement stating that the orphans had willingly paid the idol worship fee. The orphans refused to sign, and they have stopped going to the school because of the constant harassment they faced from the faculty, he said.

Hatui and his staff also insisted that the orphans change their legal guardian from Dutta to relatives in order to attain status as regular students, he said.

On Sept. 7, Hindu extremists led by Hatui gathered at the Society compound, stoned Gilgal Children's Home, blocked the road and demanded that all Christian activities stop. As a result, Dutta was unable to appear at a hearing of the West Bengal Minorities Commission.

"A big mob of Hindu extremists blocked the passage and the compound of the mission, and the police also asked me not to venture out from my home as it could be harmful for my life," he said. "I sent my representative along with my letter to the chairman of the commission stating the reason for my absence."

Later that day, police summoned Dutta, Hatui and his secretary for talks, but Hatui insisted that they meet at his high school compound, where Hindu extremist groups could gather. Dutta declined to meet at Hatui's school that day.

On Sept. 8, Hatui and other Hindu extremists forced their way into the Gilgal Children's Home and demanded the arrest of Dutta within 24 hours – on charges of forcibly converting orphans and trying to bring Christianity to the area – or else they would demolish the orphanage.

"I have also come to know through well-wishers that Hatui bribed some people to attack us," Dutta reported.

On Sept. 9, the extremists again stormed into the Society compound and warned Dutta to stop all Christian activities within seven days or that they would forcibly shut down the mission. They also sternly warned Dutta that his life would be in danger if he involved police or any administrative officials.

"We dare not bring forward the matter to the police or to any officials for fear of the extremists, and we have closed down all our activities since Sept. 9," he said.

At a meeting with the village head, the local political party and the Ambassadors Service Society on Sept. 23, an agreement was reached for re-opening the Society, but it required all students at the government high school to pay the idol worship fee without complaint. As a result, the five students from the orphanage have paid the fee but have not attended due to harassment from Hatui and his staff, sources said.

The agreement allows the Society to resume limited Christian social programs and also calls for teaching about Christ to be restricted to the Society compound. In addition, the Society must provide jobs to six local Hindus, and committee members of the Society's primary school must be nominated by the local political party. Because the Society primary school has more students than the public school, it can operate only when the government school is not in session, according to the agreement. The Society's primary school has some 300 students, including Muslim and Christians.

Dutta said he felt he had to consent to these demands in order to continue providing shelter to 72 orphans.

"The extremists will go to any extent to close down the orphanage and all the other mission works of Ambassadors Service Society," he said.

India briefs: Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (30.09.2011) / HRWF (05.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - **Andhra Pradesh** - Police charged eight Christians with "promoting enmity" under Section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code after Hindu extremist Adepu Venugopal filed a complaint against them of forceful conversion on Sept. 23 in Karimnagar district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Christians of Brethren Church in Kerala came to proclaim Christ in some villages after obtaining permission from the Karimnagar superintendent of police. While they were preaching in Donoor and Dharmapuri villages, the Hindu extremist mob suddenly surrounded them and then filed the complaint of forceful conversion, GCIC reported. The extremists took the Christians to the police station, and the Christians were charged with "promoting enmity between

different groups on grounds of religion,” according to GCIC. The Christians were sent to jail; area Christian leaders were taking steps to obtain bail for them.

Andhra Pradesh – On Sept. 21 in Girmapura, Hindu extremists accused a Christian identified only as Pastor Steven of forceful conversion and verbally abused him for his faith. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that the extremists, led by one identified only as Mallareddy, forcefully entered the prayer meeting at the house of a woman identified only as Padma and verbally abused the pastor for his faith. The woman defended the pastor, saying that it was her right to choose to worship God. Several of the Christians who met for prayer then went to the village head, Raghupati Reddy, to file a complaint. He refused to help the Christians, however, as his term was to end four days later. AICC reported that he preferred to stay clear of any controversies and hence did not want to get involved, though he did blame the Christians for disrupting peace in the village.

Chhattisgarh – In Khandari Kona, Shankargarh, Surguya, Hindu extremists led by Ambuj Yadav on Sept. 18 attacked pastor Vishwanath Tirkey and another church member as they were returning home from a prayer meeting. Pastor Mukti Lakra told Compass that at about 6 p.m. the Hindu extremists stopped and suddenly attacked the two Christians, asking them why they dared come back after the extremists had beaten them and ordered them not to visit the area again. The extremists called police, but officers released the Christians without charges after questioning. Police summoned Pastor Tirkey and 20 church members, however, for questioning the next day. “The police in charge told us not to conduct worship meetings during daytime, and he also falsely accused us of going around converting people,” Pastor Tirkey told Compass. No police report, however, was filed by either party.

Tamil Nadu – Police warned pastor S. Arputharaj of Jesus Comfort Assembly not to conduct further worship meetings after a doctor with the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh filed a complaint against him in Erode, Appakudal on Sept. 18. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that a doctor identified only as Varatharajan, who runs a clinic near the pastor’s church, and a local official identified only as Thasildar, convinced police to take action against the pastor. The sub-inspector of police asked the pastor to sign a letter stating that he would no longer conduct worship services in the church building. After the intervention of representatives of the AICC and the area pastors’ association, the pastor was allowed to lead the usual Sunday worship services under police protection, Moses Vattipalli of AICC told Compass.

Karnataka – On Sept.18 in Mallikoppa, Chickmagalur, suspected Hindu extremists set fire to a pastor’s motorbike and broke the windows and doors of his church building. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Hindu extremists attacked Immanuel Church while pastor C.S. Varghese was away from his home with his family. A small orphanage is located near the church, and children and those minding them came out after hearing the noise; they saw the fire and woke up villagers, who put out the blaze, according to GCIC. The assailants escaped. The villagers also informed the N.R. Pura police station about the incident, and an investigation was continuing at press time.

Karnataka – In Athani, Belgaum, Hindu extremists on Sept. 16 stopped a baptism service led by pastor Santosh V. Naganoor, manhandled him and accused him of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Pastor Naganoor, of House of Praise Church, was just about to begin the baptism of two women identified only as Muthavva and Rani in a canal when the Hindu extremists intruded. The extremists pushed the pastor and hurled verbal abuse at him as they accused him of forceful conversion, and then called police, according to the GCIC. Officers took Pastor Naganoor, guest speaker P.C. Joseph and six church members to the Khagaveri police station. After area Christian leaders’ intervention, the Christians were released without charges.

Karnataka – Police on Sept. 16 arrested Pastor Daniel Raghu after Hindu extremists accused him of forceful conversion in Arakalgud, Hassan district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Pastor Raghu, of New India Church, was conducting a prayer meeting in a Christian home when the extremists surrounded the house shouting anti-Christian slogans. The police arrived, questioned the pastor and later charged him with promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, according to the GCIC. The pastor appeared before a judge and was sent to Sakleshpur Sub-jail. After area Christian leaders' intervention, he was released on bail on Sept 19.

Madhya Pradesh – Police along with Hindu extremists in Mainashree Colony, Dewas Railway Station on Sept. 12 disrupted a baptism service led by pastor Ramesh Manduwey and slapped a Christian. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the policemen and extremists stormed into the house of Manish Tiwari, where about 20 Christians had gathered for the baptism, and questioned them. After the Christians told them they were carrying out a baptism service, the police and extremists became enraged and started verbally abusing them, with one extremist slapping Tiwari. Police arrested 15 Christians, including three pastors. On interrogation, the candidates for baptism said there was no case of forceful conversion as they had decided to be baptized of their own will. The officer and extremists tried to pressure the Christians to file a complaint of forceful conversion against Gospel for Asia's Pastor Maduwey, but they refused, GCIC reported. The 15 Christians were later released without charges, but the three pastors were summoned to the police station the next day, where they were arrested under the state "Freedom of Religious Act" and sent to jail. They were released on bail on Sept.19.

Karnataka – In Honnavar, Kanara, Hindu extremists on Sept. 7 beat two converts to Christianity, Bhasker Naik and Hemant Naik, warning them to convert back to Hinduism or face violence, sources said. The extremists dragged the two Christians to the Honnavar police station and accused them of forceful conversion when they refused to give up their faith in Christ. A police inspector identified only as Venkatappa and a sub-inspector identified only as Revathi charged them under Section 295 (A) of the Indian Penal Code with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs," and a Honnavar judge sent them to the Honnavar Sub-jail. The Christians were released on bail on Sept. 9.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists led by Ganga Ram on Sept. 5 barged into the Sunday worship meeting in Kanker of a house church led by Bhagat Lal, accused him of witchcraft, violence and disrupting the peace in the area and beat him and his wife. Pastor S.S. Jhali reported to Compass that the extremists entered the worship meeting and started accusing the Christians of being pagans as they beat them. Lal and his wife received treatment at Government Komaldev Hospital for their injuries. The Christians filed a police complaint, but no arrests had been made at press time.

Orissa – In Banapur, Khurda, Hindu extremists on Sept. 2 attacked a Christian couple after having beaten them in July for converting to Christ. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Bangu Dei, mother of convert to Christianity Satyaban Nayak, instigated her nephew and villagers to attack her son and his family for their conversion from Hinduism. The incident took place when Dei found Nayak's wife drawing water from the village well, and Dei and others began verbally abusing her. Later that day, Dei instigated Babula Nayak, Satyaban Nayak's cousin, and other villagers to attack her son and his family. The extremists dragged the Christians to the village square and ordered them to give up Christianity. When the Christians refused to deny Christ, they manhandled them in the public square, pushing, kicking, beating them and demanding that they leave the area. During the hour-long attack, according to GCIC, the Christian couple continued to pray loudly, calling upon Christ to forgive their tormentors. Thereafter, the angry mob became quiet and started to disperse one by one, reported

the GCIC. Babula Nayak asked the Christians for forgiveness, according to the GCIC, but Dei was still bent on harming them. Police organized a meeting in which the two parties agreed not to file any complaints. The GCIC provided first-aid and arranged for medical treatment, and the badly bruised Satyaban Nayak received hospital treatment.

Madhya Pradesh – In Khargone, the village head on Aug. 31 barged into a prayer meeting led by a pastor identified only as Wilson and accused him and others of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the village head later filed a police complaint against the Christians at Bhagwanpura police station, and officers summoned the pastor and the owner of the house where the prayer meeting took place; under police questioning, the owner said that no one had forced or otherwise fraudulently “lured” him to convert to Christianity, and that he had invited Pastor Wilson to lead the meeting at his home, the GCIC reported. The police released the pastor and the homeowner.

Madhya Pradesh – In Khamkheda, Khargone, Hindu extremists led by Gayatri Samaj on Aug. 31 stormed into a prayer meeting and ordered pastor Veersingh Kalesh of the Philadelphia Church to end it, according to the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). One of the extremists called police, who later arrested the pastor. Villagers, however, blocked police and informed them that they should not arrest him, saying he was a good man who preached good news and displayed the power of God in a way that left people blessed, reported GCIC. Officers then took the pastor along with Samaj to Khamkheda police station. Pastor Veersingh informed the police that he was not converting anyone, but that people were blessed by the message of Jesus Christ. Police warned the pastor to not visit the village anymore and sent him away.

Karnataka – Karnataka police on Aug. 30 arrested four Pentecostal Christians in Puttur, Dakshina Kannada district, accusing them of trying to forcibly convert people from a Dalit colony in Nidle Boodujalu. The Christians were beaten before being arrested, reported the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). Hindu extremist Praveen Boodujalu accused the Christians of door-to-door evangelizing, although such activity is legal in India. Some area Hindu extremists also said that the group, identified as 60-year-old Mary, her 30-year-old son Kunjimonu, his wife Lenny, 23, and B.T. Sainu, 34, went to some homes every Sunday for a month, bringing books to aid people in converting to Christianity, according to the GCIC.

Tamil Nadu – In Thurivarur district, Hindu extremists on Aug. 13 beat pastor Ramados Williams and his wife. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported the extremists opposed the government’s declaration that the church land belonged to Pastor Williams, of Bethel Prayer House. Later that day, the enraged extremists demolished the church, destroyed the Christians’ two motorcycles, stole six bicycles, one camera and a cell phone and dragged Pastor Williams and some church members to the police station. The Christians were arrested under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and were sent to jail, the GCIC reported. They were released on bail on Aug. 19.

Another Catholic church attacked in Kerala

by Nirmala Carvalho

Asia News (06.09.2011) / HRWF (08.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Police has not yet identified the extremists who on Sunday sacked the Catholic church in Kottenkulangara, near Kollam, in Kerala.

Twenty masked vandals, probably Hindu extremists, forced the door and broke the windows, destroying the altar, the confessional, lights, and sacred ornaments, thus desecrating the sacred building.

Their suspicions aroused by the noise, Catholics rushed to the church where the attackers threatened them. One of the attackers also stole a gold chain from Susi Antony, whose family lives nearby.

"We are deeply saddened by such an attack against a Catholic Church," Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), told AsiaNews.

"The GCIC condemns the attack in the strongest possible terms. It is a matter of grave concern. An attack on a place of worship is extremely serious and this is the third attack on a Catholic Church in two months. The previous one were in Pune and Secundrabad."

"This attack on the Church," the GCIC president explained, "is aimed at grievously wounding the religious sentiments of the vulnerable Christian community."

The local church, Our Lady of Vailankanni, was built in 1986. The Marian shrine is visited by thousands of people who attend Mass as well as Wednesday novenas.

Karnataka, 4 Christians arrested over "door to door" forced conversions

According to the police they were proselytizing among the Dalits and poor Hindus. Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians: "The situation is alarming. The Dalits are empowered by Christian prayer and Hindus are afraid of this"

AsiaNews (29.08.2011) / HRWF (31.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - "The number of Christians targeted by Hindu extremists are on the rise: the situation is alarming", warns Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), speaking to AsiaNews of the umpteenth case of anti-Christian violence, the fourth in the month of August in Karnataka. Yesterday the police arrested four Uppinangady Pentecostal Christians in Puttur Taluk (Dakshina Kannada district), accused of trying to convert by force a Dalit colony in Nidle Boodujalu. The Christians were beaten before being arrested.

Praveen Boodujalu, a Hindu, denounced the four, accusing them of door to door proselytizing. Some local residents, including the Dalits, said that the group - Mary (60), her son Kunjimonu (30), his wife Lenny (23) and BT Sainu (34) - went to their homes every Sunday for a month, bringing books to help in the conversion to Christianity. According to the police report, the houses chosen by the Christian were only those of Hindu and Dalits with financial difficulties. "When we refused - explain some locals - the Christians attacked and insulted on the basis of our caste."

But for Sajan George, "this arrest reflects the lack of religious freedom in Karnataka. Moreover, the evangelization of the Dalits is still viewed with suspicion. In India, for Hinduism India's over 250 million Dalits are Hinduism's "untouchables," relegated by the high-caste to an almost permanent underclass status. The caste system, though illegal in India, remains in force socially. Dalits are not allowed to enter upper-caste houses, fields, or temples. They cannot draw water from village wells or wear shoes while passing upper-caste areas".

"Many of them - continues the president of the GCIC - are empowered by the liberative message of the Gospels and this is staunchly opposed by the Hindus, hence they will use

even fabricated charges to arrest anyone who announces to them the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ". (NC)

Hindu radicals ransack churches, beat up clergyman in Karnataka

Asia News (22.08.2011) / HRWF (23.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – In Karnataka, Rev Sangappa Hosamani Shadrak, 28, a resident of Mudhol, was attacked by 20 radical Hindu activists from the Bajrang Dal. The incident occurred yesterday when the clergyman was celebrating Sunday Mass in the home of a parishioner, Yellappa Hosamani, in the village of Rohi, some 10 kilometres from the clergyman's own home. In recent years, he had held had regular Sunday service in the village.

When extremists attacked the small Christian community, they desecrated the bread and wine used during the celebration and badly beat up Rev Shadrak, who lost a tooth and was seriously hurt to the face. After the initial attack, he was taken to another village, Latte, where he was tied to a tree. His attackers then left him and called police in Lokapura.

Accompanied by a few agents, Inspector Choudhary freed the clergyman and took him, and some of his parishioners, to a police station. Rev Shadrak was eventually sent to Jamkotai prison for detention on unspecified charges, this despite attempts by the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) to have him released.

GCIC president Sajan K George slammed the arrest. "Attacks against Christians continue despite promises made by the new chief minister, Sadananda Gowda, who has always had good and cordial relations with the Christian community. The latter backed him but it continues to be vulnerable and suffer persecution by Hindutva extremists." Sajan K George said that for two Sundays in a row, Mass was disrupted. Pentecostal clergymen have been insulted and roughed up. The church has been ransacked and false charges of conversion laid against innocent people.

"The aggressors walk free. Sixty-four years since independence, religious freedom does not exist in states like Karnataka, Orissa and Gujarat. This is a serious blot on secular India."

The GCIC is also worried about a new campaign launched by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The Hindu extremist Hindu group has come out against a draft law on 'Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence'.

VHP leader Pravin Togadia said the law would make police "subservient to minority communities". He accuses the National Advisory Council chaired by Sonia Gandhi of being anti-Hindu.

In reality, the law is designed to give the central government the power to declare a state of "internal disturbance" whenever sectarian violence breaks out.

India briefs: Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (17.08.2011) / HRWF (22.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – **Chhattisgarh** – After receiving a letter from Hindu extremists demanding the closure of

Grace Church in Dhamtari, district government officials on Aug. 6 stopped the church's worship service, warning those present that they could be attacked if they continued to hold services in the area. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that the officials warned that if there is anymore Christian worship at Grace Church, the Christians would be responsible for any subsequent rioting. The church, led by Pastor Rohit Sahu, discontinued meeting, but area Christian leaders are taking steps to solve the matter.

Andhra Pradesh – In Ramagundam, Karimnagar, police on Aug. 3 arrested a pastor, five of his evangelistic team members and a local bystander after Hindu extremists filed a complaint against them of forceful conversion. All India Christian Council representative Moses Vattipalli told Compass that the Christian team was on an evangelistic outreach that included scrawling Bible verses on the rocks of a hill near a Hindu temple when the extremists appeared and began verbally abusing them, took their cell phones and beat them. The assailants forced the Christians to erase the Scripture verses and manhandled an onlooker who had been reading them, according to Vattipalli. Six Christians and the bystander were charged with promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and were sent to the district sub-jail of Karimnagar, he said, adding that they were released on bail after two days.

Uttarakhand – A mob of about 300 Hindu extremists in Makhdoompur on July 31 beat Christians at a church service and accused Pastor Bachan Singh of forceful conversion. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that as the church was about to take the Lord's Supper, a large mob of Hindu extremists gathered, accusing the congregation of forceful conversion. Those the extremists beat included women and children as the extremists demanded that the Christians stop all church activities, according to the AICC. Local police arrived after about 25 minutes and stopped the commotion, and no one was seriously hurt.

Chhattisgarh – Police in Bilaspur, Kawardha district on July 29 arrested Pastor Diwarkar Kumar after an attorney along with Hindu extremists filed a complaint against him of forceful conversion. A source told Compass that on July 28 Rani Matle visited a lawyer for help in submitting a legal request to the church stating her wish to attend a seminary. Another lawyer, Naval Kishore Pandey, learned that Believers' Church Pastor Diwaker Kumar had advised her to do so and contacted a local Hindu extremist group, which filed a complaint against Kumar of forceful conversion. Subsequently police took Kumar and Matle into custody for questioning, the source said. Matle told police that there was no forceful conversion and stated that she willingly chose to follow Christ, and police released the pastor without charges. The next day, however, police summoned Kumar, Matle and her father to the station and forced Bharat Matle to sign a First Information Report (FIR) against Kumar "for deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs," the source said. The FIR also cited sections 3 and 4 of the Chhattisgarh law outlawing forcible and fraudulent conversion. The pastor was sent to Pandariya Jail and was released on bail on Aug. 5.

Madhya Pradesh – Hindu extremists in Dewihar, Bajna, Ratlam on July 15 barged into a prayer meeting conducted by a Christian convert from Hinduism, damaging a roof and ransacking the house, stealing 20,000 rupees (US\$440), some silver and five kilograms of corn. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that they entered Suresh Maida's house and verbally abused those at the gathering for their faith in Christ. The Christians filed a police complaint, according to GCIC, but at press time police had made no arrests.

Uttar Pradesh – Police in Katra Divan Kheda, Dhagpur, Unnoa on July 14 arrested pastors Om Prakash, Ganga Prasad, Premshankar, Desh Kumar and one identified only as Vinod of the New India Church of God for leading a prayer meeting in Prakash's home. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Hindu radicals ordered

Prakash and his family to give up their faith in Christ and stop the services in their home. Police along with the Hindu extremists had earlier threatened Prakash's wife, Uma, and her three grown daughters if they continued in their faith, according to the GCIC. The church subsequently stopped Christian activities in the area.

Orissa – Hindu extremists in Banapur, Khurda, on July 8 harassed a Christian family for their conversion from Hinduism to Christ, ending in a Hindu woman beating her Christian daughter-in-law. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that after Satyaban Nayak and his family began to trust Christ as Lord and Savior and were healed from physical ills, Nayak's mother strongly opposed her son's worship of Christ and warned him to either forsake Christianity or be deprived of his birthright; she also told him she might commit suicide if he and his family did not deny Christ. When this failed, according to the GCIC, she planned a village meeting or "panchayat" with area hard-line Hindus so that the community would pressure him into forsaking his faith, but the village head questioned him and his wife about their faith in Christ and found them guilty of no wrongdoing. Nayak's mother took a firewood log from a burning furnace and began beating her daughter-in-law in front of the crowd, cursing and verbally abusing her, knocking her to the ground as the extremists demanded the family's expulsion from the village, the GCIC reported, adding that Nayak's wife, Sarojini, continued to pray and praise the Lord amid the beatings. As her mother-in-law continued to deal her painful blows, Sarojini prayed louder, praising God with calls of "Halleluiah" and asking forgiveness for her, according to the GCIC. The village head and some villagers rescued the Christians.

Muslim extremists in India attack, threaten Christian women

Convert from Islam, others threatened with burning

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (05.08.2011) / HRWF (17.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - – Four months after a recent convert to Christianity from Islam in eastern India's West Bengal state was stripped and beaten, about 50 Muslim extremists yesterday disrupted a prayer meeting held in her home, threatening to burn it down if she did not return to Islam, area Christians said.

The extremists warned Selina Bibi of Motijil village in Murshidabad district that if she did not return to Islam, then she must either leave the area or see her house burned down. At her baptism at Believers Church four kilometers from her home on March 29, a large crowd of Muslim extremists disrupted the service, said a pastor identified only as Bashir.

"I pleaded with them to let me at least finish the worship service before they attack us," he told Compass.

When word of her conversion to Christianity reached her village, another extremist group from Motijil led by Jamal Shaikhe disrupted the service. Shaikhe and the others verbally abused the Christians, and he ordered his son who was present at the service to leave immediately, Bashir said.

The pastor said that on April 5, two Muslim women along with members of the extremist group summoned Selina Bibi to one of their homes and forcefully stripped her naked.

"The radicals believe that when any person from the Muslim community becomes Christian, they get Christian marks on their body," Bashir said. "When the radicals could not find such marks, they started beating her up."

The Muslim extremists later gathered at the local mosque and resolved to ostracize her until she returned to Islam. She lives only with her two teenage sons.

Selina Bibi told Bashir that her body bore the marks of suffering for the sake of Christ, and that she was being treated like a criminal.

"She was not allowed to buy goods from the store, nor was she allowed to sell any vegetables," he said. "They have also restricted her from procuring water from the village well. In spite of the persecutions she constantly faces from the radicals, she has started conducting a Bible study for ladies every Thursday at her home."

After the extremist threats yesterday, study member Naseema Bibi said she and some of the other women attending the meeting went to the Murshidabad police station to file a complaint. Police called both parties, and they agreed in writing to allow each other to practice their respective faiths, and that police would prosecute any further attacks or disturbances, she said.

Burn Threat

In Natungram, Murshidabad district, Muslim extremists held three Christian women for an hour on July 21, threatening to beat and burn them alive if they continued worshipping Christ, area Christians said.

Moyazan Bibi and Aimazan Bibi of Believers Church told Compass that at 5:30 p.m. they had set out to visit a widow, Suryja Bibi, to share the message of Christ at her invitation. As they reached her house, a large mob of Muslim extremists led by Fakir Shaikhe, Sajahan Shaikhe, Manuwar Shaikhe, Samsul Shaikhe, Ahamed Shaikhe and Jalal Shaikhe blocked their way, pushed them around and verbally abused them for their faith in Christ as they threatened them.

"The extremists called us infidels and held us captive, threatening that they will call a public meeting to socially boycott us," Aimazan Bibi said. "The extremists angrily shouted that we should not return to our homes, while they continued to mock and push us around."

The extremists rushed Suryja Bibi, asking her why she invited "infidels" into her home as they were pushing her. One of the assailants twisted her hand, the Christian women said.

"She was injured, but by God's grace it was not broken," said Bashir, founder and pastor of the Believers Church. "They warned Suryja Bibi never to call the Christians to her home again or leave the area and they also threatened all the villagers with the dire consequences they will face if they attend Christian meetings or talk to any one of them."

Suryja Bibi tried to file a police complaint the next day, July 22, but the local Muslim head and other extremists stopped her, threatening to harm her, area Christians said.

Bashir said Suryja Bibi showed interest in hearing more about Christ, and that he met her and her daughters Mamoota and Darju at his house church fellowship on July 19.

"Since then, the radicals have warned them not to attend any Christian service or talk to any Christians or else they will be burned alive," he said.

Naseema Bibi informed Bashir of the incident by phone, and he called police, he said.

"I also tried to call Aimazan," he said. "At that time she could not take my call, as some radicals were trying to snatch her mobile phone from her."

Moyazan Bibi said she pleaded with the assailants.

"I asked the attackers what crime have we done for them to torture us in this manner?" she said. "But the enraged extremists brutally pushed us around, furiously shouting at us to convert back to Islam or face dire consequences."

After holding and harassing the Christian women for about an hour, the extremists fled in fear after they learned that Bashir had contacted the police, the women said.

The area was still tense at press time, with Suryja Bibi and her family unable to attend any Christian meetings as the extremists are closely monitoring them and are prepared to pounce on them at the slightest opportunity, Bashir said.

"We are trying to contact Suryja Bibi, but the radicals are not allowing any Christian to contact or meet her," he said. "But we are praying for her safety."

Aizama Bibi and Moyazan Bibi, who two years ago began trusting Christ as their Savior, told Compass that last December the extremists tried to chase them away from the village, threatening to burn them and their houses. They were not allowed to sell and buy in the area and were kept from using the public bathroom and the water well.

The extremists also burned the crops field of Aimazan's husband, Gaffar. The Christians reported the matter to police, and officers warned the Muslim extremists not to disturb the Christians again.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India last year reported that Muslim extremists in Natungram on Nov. 28, 2010, ostracized another member of Believers Church, keeping Chanda Bibi and her family from selling and buying. They also warned the family to stop attending church services and threatened to impose a fine on her if her family continued to follow Christ.

India briefs: Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (25.07.2011) / HRWF (29.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - **Orissa**- Hindu extremists on July 14 summoned three Christian families of Missionary Grace Fellowship and demanded that they abandon Christ or face a social boycott in Lathikata, Banapur. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a Christian woman identified only as the wife of Sarat Naik declared before the intolerant Hindus and others that she and other Christians were prepared to undergo persecution, but that under no circumstances would they abandon Christ. She said relationship with Christ had transformed their lives, according to the GCIC. Area Christian leaders were reportedly taking steps to help the Christians.

Uttar Pradesh - In what appeared to be a premeditated attack, state police arrested five pastors and a Christian woman after Hindu extremists stormed into their prayer meeting on July 13 in Bighapur, Unnoa, and accused them of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that at about 11 a.m., 70 Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal attacked the meeting organized by Pastor A.B. Singh, Pastor Ganga Prasad and another identified only as Pastor Robert. Officers and extremists threatened

the pastors, later arresting Pastor Prasad and Christians Om Prakash, Desh Kumar, Vinod Kumar, Prem Shankar and a woman identified only as Uma. They were released on bail at about 7 p.m. the same evening.

West Bengal – In Midnapur, Hindu extremists on July 10 seized St. Priscilla School, beating the Rev. Nathan Hazre, owner of the school, and his wife, Sabitha Hazre, while accusing them of forceful conversion. A source told Compass that the extremists removed all Christian devotional items. Led by Dr. Sushil Mahanty, the intolerant Hindus told the Christian family that they would burn them to death in the same manner that Australian Christian worker Graham Staines and his two sons, ages 10 and 6, were killed in Orissa state in 1999. In January the extremists had threatened school Principal Daniel Barik. Fearful Christians filed a police complaint, but officers had taken no action at press time.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists on July 3 disrupted the Sunday worship of a Believers Church in Pali, Korba, tearing up Bibles and gospel literature and beating Pastor Sunil Masih as they accused him of forceful conversion. The Rev. Ravi Paksh, secretary of the Korba Christian Forum, reported that the extremists from the Bharatiya Janata Party forcefully entered the worship meeting at about 11:30 a.m. The extremists took the pastor and other Christians to a police station, where the Christians told police that they had not been converted by force or fraud and attended church services willingly. Officers detained the pastor for about six hours, and after area leaders' intervention, he was released without charges.

Uttar Pradesh – An enraged mob on July 3 beat Pastor John C.V. Samuel and his wife, accusing the pastor of forceful conversion, in Manpuri. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported the incident took place when Pastor Samuel of Assembly of God's Church, his wife and other Christians were about to attend a burial service for Anil Saxena, who had attended the church for two years and had committed suicide after an argument with his father. The mob rushed the pastor and his wife and accused them of being the cause of Saxena's death. Saxena's wife intervened, telling the assailants that she and her late husband went to the church of their own free will and nobody had forced them, and she called police. Officers arrived and rescued Pastor Samuel and his wife, taking them to Pushpanjali Hospital, Agra. Area Christian leaders filed a police complaint, but no actions had been taken at press time.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists in Dhantulsi on July 2 attacked a Christian's wedding reception and subsequent worship service, beating those at the gatherings and leaving their food in ruins. The Rev. Abel Varghese, area pastor and coordinator of Althea Indian Mission, told Compass that about 60 extremists beat women and children among those they attacked after barging into the wedding reception of tribal Christian Dhurau Kachalam. They also burned Christians' vehicles. The Christians submitted a complaint to Kanker police, but the extremists continued threatening them, telling them to either stop Christian activities or leave the area. Sources said police pressured the Christians to withdraw their complaint and refused to take any action on their behalf.

Orissa – In Bendoguda, Malkangiri, Hindu radicals at midnight, June 28, destroyed a church building under construction. About 25 Christian families belonging to the Koya tribe were trying to build a worship center from their meager savings on a small piece of land donated by a Christian named Aitu Podiami. Hindu extremists had also attacked the same group of Koya tribal Christians in November 2010; at that time, with intervention from the Global Council of Indian Christians and the area sub-collector, a peace agreement between the communities had been reached. The Hindu extremists last month violated the agreement, and the village head has been pressuring tribal Christians to refrain from complaining to police about the incident.

Pastor's father beaten unconscious in attack in Rajasthan, India

Hindu extremists threaten to kill church leader in spite of pact to stop assaults

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (05.07.2011) / HRWF (12.07.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Hindu extremists in Pratapgarh, Rajasthan have threatened to kill a pastor after beating his family and violating an agreement to stop attacking them, the pastor said.

Pastor Shantilal Ninama of Believers Church told Compass that the Hindu extremists beat his 65-year-old father until he fell unconscious in one of the attacks last month.

On the evening of June 8, after agreeing to do no further harm to Pastor Ninama and his family in exchange for him dropping police charges he'd filed over a previous attack, the enraged Hindu extremists stormed into his home and began beating and stoning his father, sister, wife and three children, he said. As he sought police help, his father fell unconscious and his wife and two of his children ran out into the darkness. Another daughter hid beneath a bed, and his sister escaped and hid in a valley.

"The next day, I asked one Hindu extremist, Bhim Shankar Sharma, to give me a copy of the agreement," Pastor Ninama said. "But he got angry with me, and verbally abused me and my faith, saying that I am an unclean person because Christianity is an unclean and foreign religion, and that Christians are not worthy to stay in India. He caught me by my collar and slapped me on my face."

The Rev. Prabhatkar Malladi, secretary of the Udaipur Diocese in Rajasthan, told Compass that the extremists were threatening to kill the pastor.

"The villagers are not allowing any Christian leaders to enter into the village to meet Pastor Ninama, but we are taking necessary steps to help the pastor, and one advocate is now taking up the case," he said.

Pastor Ninama also told Compass that the extremists were plotting to kill him.

"Well-wishers are telling me to be careful and not to venture out alone, as the extremists are looking for a chance to find me alone, kill me, cut me to pieces and throw my body away," he said.

He said local extremists initially attacked him and his family for his faith in Christ on June 4; Khatiya Pitakaniya assaulted him as he was repairing his motorcycle.

"I was repairing the tire of my motorcycle when one villager, Khatiya Pitakaniya, came and told me that he did not want to see my face in the early morning as it will bring bad luck to him because I am a Christian," the pastor said. "Khatiya Pitakaniya grasped my neck when I told him to stop pestering me, but he would not stop and called his wife to bring a knife to kill me. His wife and elder brother ran to get it."

Bopal Ninama, the pastor's younger brother, came to rescue him. Pitakaniya later returned with his wife Devali, Pastor Ninama's older brother Naryayan Nimana and his cousin Jeevan Ninama, and began stoning and cursing him, the pastor said. He fled and locked himself inside his house.

Later the same day, Pastor Ninama filed a complaint at Ghantali police station, and the assailants were furious when they learned about it.

June 6, the village head and elders called for a public meeting regarding the incident.

“Such public meetings took place several times in the past to discuss on how they could eliminate me from the village because of my faith in Christ,” Pastor Ninama said.

The village head who summoned Pastor Ninama to the meeting told him to gather 10 people from five neighboring villages and offer the meat of five goats and five pots of alcohol as a Hindu ritual to reconvert him back to Hinduism, he said. They also told the pastor to burn his Bible and all gospel literature in front of them, he added. The extremists told him that if he agreed to their demands, they would give him all manner of support.

“I can leave everything – my family, my property – but I cannot forsake Jesus at any cost,” the pastor told the extremists.

The next day, he said, they kept his father from obtaining an electricity connection for installing a water pump.

“They told my father to leave Christianity and not to stay with me, or else leave the area,” Pastor Ninama said. “After prayerful consideration, my father decided to stay with me and be faithful to Christ till death.”

The extremists then told the pastor they would do no further harm to him if he withdrew the police complaint. The pastor agreed, and on June 8 the parties gathered to put the agreement in writing. They agreed that anyone who disturbed the pastor and his family would be fined 5,000 rupees (US\$111) in exchange for Pastor Ninama dropping the charges, and both parties signed it, he said.

“We went home happily thinking that we will not face any trouble from the extremists in the future,” Pastor Ninama said.

That same evening saw the enraged villagers launching their assault on his family. When Pastor Ninama ran to the police station for help, initially officers said the area was not within their jurisdiction, but after he pleaded with them they went back to the village with him, he said. Sitting near the pastor’s house when he returned with police, the extremists dispersed when they saw the officers.

On June 9, Pastor Ninama went to the Piplekhut police station to report the incident, but officers refused to file a First Information Report (FIR), saying there were no eyewitnesses to the assault, he said. They later filed an FIR after seeing medical reports describing the injuries to his family, he said, but no arrests have been made.

Rajasthan state has been a hotbed of anti-Christian activity since the late 1990s. Pastor Hari Shankar Ninama, 65, was praying for an 8-year-old boy’s recovery from illness at a house in Ambarunda, Peepal Khoont, Pratapgarh district on Feb. 1 when at least 10 Hindu extremists arrived on motorbikes and attacked him.

The assailants beat him and, putting him on one of their motorbikes, took him outside the village, where they stripped off his clothes and struck him. Threatening to kill him if he continued to spread Christianity, they left him naked on the road and fled, he said.

Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (08.07.2011) / HRWF (12.07.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Pastor Johnny Lazarus, 50, was beaten by Hindu extremists on June 28 at Bollepally village in Bhongir Mandal. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that one extremist, Malla Reddy, accused Pastor Lazarus of performing witchcraft on him. Reddy and his family members verbally abused the pastor and his faith, saying, “You brought a low-caste god among us,” slapped him and threatened to harm him further if he did not leave the area immediately. The pastor reported the attack to police and to the AICC. Police officers summoned both parties on July 1, and the attackers apologized to the pastor, putting into writing that they would not disturb him again. The pastor forgave his assailants.

Karnataka – Police on June 28 arrested two Christians after Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal attacked Pastor M. Sandeep and a man identified only as Isaac as they were returning home from a prayer meeting in Heggere, Hubli. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that at about 11 a.m. the extremists rushed the Christians and began questioning them, accusing them of forceful conversion. They searched their bags for Christian literature, slapped them and verbally abused them. The extremists then took the Christians to the Old Hubli police station, where they were detained for about six hours. Thereafter police filed charges for hurting religious sentiments, violation of private property and unlawful coercion. The Christians appeared before a judge and were later sent to Dharwad Jail.

Karnataka – On June 28 in Shimoga, state officials verbally ordered the cancelling of permission for a Christian school to operate after Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh urged authorities to do so. The extremists accused Good Shepherd Community School officials of forceful conversion. The All India Christian Council reported that the school, belonging to Operation Mercy India Foundation, educates people of all faiths. Area Christian leaders were taking steps to resolve the conflict, with villagers supporting S. Prakash, community development officer of the school. Tensions prevailed in Shimoga as people awaited written notice cancelling the school’s permission to operate.

Karnataka – Police arrested four tribal Christians after Hindu extremists accused them of forceful conversion on June 21 in Badragola village, Virajpet. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Christians – three of whom were identified by their single names of Mani, Agela and Ravi – were detained at the police station for about five hours without food and water. They later appeared before a Virajpet judge, and the Christians were released on bail the same day with the intervention of area Christian leaders. The GCIC reported that the area Hindu extremists were jealous of improvements in the tribal Christians’ lives after they received Christ.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal on June 19 disrupted worship and threatened to harm Christians if they continued meeting in Gurur, Durg. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that the extremists led by Narayana Teke stormed into the Sunday worship meeting, took pictures of the congregation and ordered the Christians to leave the building. Pastors Mohan C. Thomas and Anish C.K. went out to meet the furious mob, and the extremists then warned them to leave the area altogether.

Tamil Nadu – On June 12 in Karaikal, Puducherry, Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh threatened a Christian identified only as Pastor Robinson and members of the Church of Jesus. The extremists warned the Christians that they would be harmed if they continued to hold worship services. Pastor Robinson works as a manager in a Christian school and also leads a church of 100, reported the All India Christian Council. About 50 extremists stormed into the Sunday worship meeting and threatened the pastor and others with knives, warning them to cease all Christian

activities. Pastor Robinson and local Christians submitted a memorandum to the district collector asking authorities for protection.

Christian, visiting lepers beaten, jailed in India

Suspected Hindu extremists attack him and Hindu visitors as police watch

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (20.06.2011) / HRWF (22.06.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - NEW DELHI – A Catholic and two Hindu visitors with leprosy in Karnataka state were freed on bail on Tuesday (June 14), two days after they were beaten by suspected Hindu extremists and arrested on charges of forcible conversion.

Police arrested the Catholic, retired Indian Army Cpl. Henry Baptist Robey, and two guests from Tamil Nadu state, Ram Moorthy and another identified only as Mani, from Robey's house on Hennur-Bellary Road in the state capital of Bangalore while they and others were celebrating Pentecost on Sunday (June 12).

"I was arrested under Section 295(A) of the Indian Penal Code after a few men lodged a complaint that I was converting leprosy patients," Robey told Compass by phone.

Violation of Section 295(A), "deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings" of others, is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and/or a fine.

Robey said about 80 leprosy patients from neighboring Tamil Nadu state came to his house after he invited them to a special Pentecost prayer service.

"All the leprosy patients who had come for the prayer function told the police that they were Hindu, and that they were not being converted, but the police still registered a complaint against us," Robey said. "Police should have arrested the complainants, who forcibly came into my house and searched every room and beat some of the leprosy patients as the police looked on."

Circle Inspector Hanumantharayappa acknowledged to Compass that two of the accused were Hindus.

"They brought others from Tamil Nadu state to Bangalore not just for food [but to be converted]," the inspector said. "They [the two Hindus] were paid for that, that's what the complainants said."

He denied that the two arrested visitors were leprosy patients.

Asked why the leprosy patients said they were not being converted and that they had come voluntarily – and asked who were the real victims in the case – the official said he would share "each and every detail" after a preliminary investigation.

Dr. Sajan K. George of the Karnataka-based Global Council of Indian Christians, who reported the incident, said he had petitioned the National Human Rights Commission against the filing of charges against Robey.

"The tragedy of the whole thing is that, though the very leprosy patients repeatedly told the police that they visit and receive their gifts every year and that there are no conversions as had been alleged, the police did not pay any heed," George said. "Perhaps in the days to come, giving alms from the window of your house will be construed as an

attempt to convert if you are a Christian and the receiver a Hindu leprosy patient.”

Some of the visitors from Tamil Nadu were sitting on the veranda as they ate lunch, Robey said.

I was told by some of them that cameramen had come from the media to take pictures,” Robey said. “I didn’t pay much attention. But then I heard some noise and found out that a crowd of men had gathered around my house. They alleged I had brought the leprosy patients for conversion. I explained I am just interested in taking care of them as fellow human beings and not interested in their conversion. But they were not willing to listen.”

The crowd soon swelled to over 100. While Robey could not say with certainty who the men were, some local residents later told him that they belonged to the Hindu extremist Jai Karnataka group, said to have close ties with the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Police soon arrived and took Robey and all his guests to the police post. All were released two hours later except Robey and the two Hindu lepers. That night they were taken to the Hennur police station and officially arrested.

On the morning of June 13, police took them to court, and they were sent in judicial custody to Bangalore Central Jail. Their plea for bail was initially rejected, but the next day they were granted bail.

Leprosy patients, believed to be religiously impure and physically contagious – though the disease is hardly infectious after treatment – live in isolated hamlets in India. Robey has been going to a village in Tamil Nadu state twice a year to provide them clothing, medicines, and ration.

“Some of them said they really wanted to come for the prayer, and I invited them,” he said. “What’s wrong with that?”

He said he was charged with a victimless crime.

Karnataka recorded the highest number of anti-Christian attacks among all Indian states in 2009 and 2010. Of the at least 149 anti-Christian incidents recorded nationally in 2010, 56 were from Karnataka, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. In 2009, Karnataka witnessed at least 48 attacks. The year 2008 was even worse, with at least 28 attacks reported in less than two months in August and September.

Attacks on Christians increased in the state after the BJP came to sole power in May 2008. Prior to that, it ruled in alliance with a local party for 20 months.

Christians complain that the state government is not only doing little to protect them but also supporting the attackers, mostly extremist Hindu nationalists. A government panel in February blamed anti-Christian violence on conversions, rubbing salt into their wound (see www.compassdirect.org, “Report in India Blames Attacks on Conversions to Christianity,” Feb. 8).

Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo and Binaifer Wadia

Compass Direct News (07.06.2011) / HRWF (09.06.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - **Karnataka** - State police on June 5 arrested Christians based on a false complaint by

Hindu nationalists of forcible conversion in Doddamma Layout, Hulimavu village, Bangalore. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that at around 10 a.m. police disrupted the worship of an Indian Pentecostal Church home fellowship and arrested Pastor Manjunath Venketappa Naik. Later that morning, officers returned to the house and took Naik's wife to the Hulimavu police station, along with their minor children and six Christian women, for questioning. With GCIC intervention, the Christians were released the same day at around 2:30 p.m. without being charged. – *BW*

Jharkhand – Hindu extremists in Karivadhi village, Garwah district of Jharkhand threatened three Christian families who had converted from Hinduism in the village, warning them to stop following Christ or be severely beaten. Pastor Arjun Karmagi, field coordinator of Gospel Echoing Missionary Society, told Compass that the extremists threatened to force the families of the Christians, Raghuvir Chowdhary, Purnima Devi and Mahendra Chowdhary, to the Ganges River in Banaras city to reconvert them back to Hinduism. The Christians fled the area and are now in hiding. – *MS*

Jharkhand – Hindu extremists beat five Christian families for their faith in Christ on May 28 in Laherbanjari, Palamu district. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported that a week earlier about 20 Hindu extremists had threatened Pastor Sanjay Choudary of the Gospel Echoing Missionary Society, warning him to stop leading worship meetings or be beaten. Christians filed a complaint, and police on May 28 visited the area. Immediately after the police left, the enraged extremists appeared and started beating the five Christian families, including the women. One woman, Mala Devi, suffered internal injuries and was hospitalized at Sadar Hospital. Another Christian woman, Kalavati Devi, was reportedly still missing. The Christians fled their houses and at press time were still in hiding. – *MS*

Uttar Pradesh – Hindu extremists in Bhopura, Sahidabad on May 19 threatened Pastor Sanju Mahananda of the Believers Church, telling him to stop construction of his church building. A Believers Church representative told Compass that Pastor Mahananda was constructing a pastor's residence/prayer hall when the extremists appeared and threatened to demolish it if he continued building. Christians stopped the construction work but filed a police complaint. – *MS*

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists in Jangir, Champa district on May 20 attacked a Christian because of his faith. A source told Compass that the extremists had threatened a Christian convert from Hinduism who goes by a single name, Tarzan, on Feb. 20 for following Christ and singing gospel songs. They warned him to stop his Christian activity or face harm. Led by Jharu Ram Manohar, the extremists on May 20 attacked him for continuing to follow Christ, beating him, destroying his house and keeping him from using the village pond. The next day the extremists filed a police complaint against him for "misbehavior." The Christian filed a counter-complaint against the extremists, but no action has been taken by the police at press time. – *MS*

Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo and Binaifer Wadia

HRWF (18.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – **Karnataka** – Police on April 10 arrested a pastor and other Christians of the New India Church in Mysore after some 25 Hindu extremists from the Sreeram Sena attacked their Sunday service, accusing them of forcible conversions, reported the *Mathrubhumi* daily. Pastor Vinod Chacko was leading the service when the Hindu nationalists barged into the church, stopped the prayer service and complained to police of alleged forcible conversions. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that the extremists along with police detained the worshippers

inside the church building, including 20 women and 10 children, taking down personal details about them and asking them whether they were paid money or otherwise lured to attend. Police also seized vehicles belonging to the church and those attending the service. Police charged Pastor Chacko, his wife Asha and others identified only as Sabu, Simon and Sayazu under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings." – *BW*

New Delhi – A mob of about 150 Hindu extremists on April 9 attacked a Christian worship meeting in Bhajanpura, East Delhi, beating Christians with clubs and stones, including women and children. Pastor Solomon King told Compass that the Assembly of God church organized an open-air "Festival of Deliverance" meeting at which he was speaking; there were about 150 people in the arena when he arrived with 40 choir members. After the meeting began at about 6 p.m., some present suddenly shouted "Jai Shri Ram [Praise Lord Ram]" and started beating the Christians. Two Christians identified only as Prabhu and Abhisek sustained head injuries and received hospital treatment. Pastor King, his wife and other Christians also suffered bruises. The intolerant Hindus also destroyed furniture, a sound system, a generator and some Christians' vehicle. The Christians had received permission from government officials to conduct the worship meeting, and five police officers were on duty to protect it; the Hindu extremists also severely beat them. The attack lasted for about an hour before police reinforcements arrived, and the extremists fled. Police were able to arrest two of the assailants. – *MS*

Madhya Pradesh – An enraged mob of Hindu extremists on April 7 stormed into the prayer meeting of a Christian Assembly house church shouting anti-Christian slogans and filed a police complaint of forceful conversion against those present in Sagar. The Hindu extremists accused Pastor Joy Thomas Philip of forceful conversion, Pastor C.P. Mathew of Bhopal told Compass. Police arrived and took Pastor Philip and three other Christians into custody for questioning but claimed it was a protective measure. After area Christian leaders' intervention, the Christians were released on bail on April 9. – *MS*

Karnataka – Mulki Circle police officials on April 4 forcibly took church documents from Hebron Assembly Church in Mulki and told the pastor not to allow any Hindus to enter. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that officials identified only as Inspector Shivaprakash and Sub-Inspector Neelakanta, along with five police officers, verbally abused Pastor I.D. Prasanna and harshly denigrated church activities. Police officials questioned Pastor Prasanna for three hours, telling him what church activities he can and cannot undertake, and threatening to close the church if he disobeyed. They also ordered the pastor to give detailed information about the families that attended the church service. – *MS*

Karnataka – Police in Shimoga on April 3 detained Pastor Abraham K.G. and a Christian identified only as Eerappa for their faith in Christ. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Hindu extremists led by area Bajrang Dal member Subbraya Shetty interrupted the worship meeting of the Jehovah Nizzi church and warned them to stop meeting. The extremists had been harassing the pastor since March 27, reported the GCIC. As the April 3 service started at about 10:30 a.m., a sub-inspector from the Hosanagara police station arrived in a Jeep with three other police officers to make the arrests. When the Christians asked about the reasons, the officials said without basis that the Christians were using abusive language. Later that evening, police released the Christians without charges after taking a statement from them pledging that they would conduct no future worship meetings – and that they should leave the area. – *MS*

Deportation order for only Mill Hill missionary in Kashmir

By Nirmala Carvalho

AsiaNews (30.03.2011) / HRWF (04.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Srinagar, India - Fr Jim Borst, the only Mill Hill missionary in the Kashmir valley for 48 years, must leave the country within seven days, on pain of expulsion. The order came today from the Government of Jammu & Kashmir for the second time. The Dutch missionary, 79, had already received a warning last July, just months after the government had renewed his permission to stay until 2014. The deportation order is motivated by accusations of proselytism and conversions.

The Bishop of Jammu-Srinagar, Mgr. Peter Celestine brands the allegations as "fabricated and baseless." He confides to AsiaNews his "deep sadness" at news of the priest's deportation. "Fr. Borst - he says - is a famous educator and his service has benefited the majority of the population of the state. For over 40 years he devoted himself selflessly to serving the community, without discrimination. His expulsion will be a loss for the entire civil society. "

Since 1997, Fr Borst has run two schools in Kashmir. Both are called "School of the Good Shepherd", one in Pulwama, the other in Shivpora, in Srinagar, where the staff is 99% Muslim. In the past, Fr. Borst led the St. Joseph School in Baramulla and the Burn Hall School in Srinagar.

The bishop slams the accusations of proselytism and conversions. "They are false and baseless. Government statistics show that the Christian population of the state has decreased and according to the last census there is a microscopic presence of Christians equal to 0.014% of the population. Where then is the proof of conversion? It's just slander, sowing distrust and suspicion without any evidence. "

Predhuman K. Joseph Dhar, a Kashmiri Pandit Brahmin who converted to Catholicism, is a collaborator of Fr Borst: together they translated the Bible into the Kashmiri language. Furious at the deportation order, he says: "This order is the result of jealousy and vested interests ... We all know that some Muslim intellectuals run schools in the vicinity of those of Fr. Borst. They are the ones who are vilified by the schools of the Good Shepherd, and are angered that their schools are unable to compete with Mill Hill Missionaries schools. "

According to Joseph K. Dhar Predhuman since 2003 there has been a systematic campaign, made up of lies and terror against Fr. Borst, going so far as to attack the schools of the Good Shepherd. The Catholic intellectual also points the finger against the ruling party, Congress, which together with a coalition claims to be champion of democracy and secularism ... A secular state should work to defend the interests of minorities. "

Mill Hill Missionaries are present in Jammu & Kashmir since 1891-92 and are now engaged in education and health. "There is no evidence - says Dhar - of proselytizing. In contrast, the number of Christians in the Kashmir valley has decreased and now they are composed mainly of people who came here from other states for work in Kashmir. "

"The accusation of proselytism is above all an insult to all Muslim families in the valley, who are proud to have known Fr Borst, who was their principal at St. Joseph's School in Baramulla or Burn Hall School in Srinagar.

In Catholic schools - and Protestant - several Muslim figures received their education such as Omar Abdullah, the current head of government in Jammu-Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, a former head of the government, Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, one of the founders dell'Apnc (All Parties Hurriyat Conference).

Jammu-Kashmir is situated in the north, near the border with Pakistan, which has claimed it as its territory for decades. There are 14 thousand Christians (about 0.0014%), 93% of the population consists of Muslims.

"The Christian community - concludes Dhar - is saddened by the way Fr. Jim Borst is treated. It is an anti-Christian gesture and a gross violation of human rights by the government. We are all determined to defend our rights and to denounce all those who try to sully the priest's reputation to satisfy their egos and whims."

Orissa: Another Christian killed in Kandhamal

By Santosh Digal

AsiaNews (23.03.2011) / HRWF (28.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - In Orissa, Christians continue to suffer from persecution. On 10 March, Angad Digal, a Catholic man from Mondasoro (Kandhamal), went missing. Local sources say he was killed in Tilakapanga, where he travelled in the company of a couple of Hindu acquaintances. For days, family, volunteers, and human rights activists in Cuttack diocese have been searching for his body, without success.

One of the men suspected in Digal's murder has been arrested, Fr Laxmikant Pradhan, a local priest, said. "The authorities' inertia is making matters worse for the family and Christians in Kandhamal," he added.

People are in shock and afraid. "We must find Digal's body and stop this culture of impunity," the priest noted.

Since the 2008 anti-Christian pogroms, Hindu extremists continue to threaten and kill Catholics and Tribals. The authorities have not intervened to stop the violence.

Among the population, fear is strong and few dare file complaints. Many murders go unsolved, ignored by law enforcement.

Br Markose, a Monfort missionary and lawyer for pogrom victim families, told AsiaNews that police on Sunday announced the death of Mathew Sunamajhi and his son, both murdered on 25 August 2008.

The two were captured by Hindu radicals who tortured and then killed them. The incident was but one among many that took part during the wave of violence that swept across Kandhamal in 2008.

Fearing retaliations, no one reported the double murder until now.

According to Br Markose, it is impossible to count all the cases of murder, disappearance and violence that have taken place in the last few years.

"Many are coming to light just now and the Church will not tire from following such cases and demand justice for the victims."

Indian Catholics protest the demolition of 729 crosses in Mumbai

AsiaNews (28.02.2011) / HRWF (02.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Mumbai, India - 729 crosses are being destroyed in Bandra, a western suburb of Mumbai, for urban renewal. Local Catholic groups have organized a sit-in protest this morning in front of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the local authority which issued the demolition order. The announcement of the dismantling of religious symbols was delivered through notices on the crosses. At present, the BMC has suspended the demolition order. Subodh Kumar, Municipal Commissioner, said: "No cross will be demolished if the relevant documents prove that these [crosses] are prior to 1964."

The demolition is part of a program to improve facilities and infrastructure, which provides for the elimination of places of worship built after 1964 and considered "illegal" because in the way of road widening, road improvements, or constructed on land destined for public services.

However Kumar's statement has failed to allay fears. Some older people who attended the sit-in said they were "saddened" by the way in which they received the news, and say that the crosses were placed near their homes in 1948, one even 1912. "Since 2003 we have been presenting documents proving the date of construction of these crosses to the BMC - explain the residents - despite this, the committee has, however, issued the demolition order." The office claims it never received these documents.

Anil Joseph, president of the Bombay Catholic Sabha, explains: "These crosses are part of the history and cultural and religious heritage of Bandra. Previously, they were within the boundaries of Catholic property. When BMC was founded, many areas were reclaimed by the civic body for the construction of roads or other infrastructure, and so the crosses were saved by placing them along the streets". The Jesuit Errol Fernandez SJ, pastor of the church of St. Peter present at the sit-in, said: "We are Christians and honest law-abiding citizens, and therefore we will present the necessary documents again, even if we already did so in 2003. I myself remember delivering documents into the hands of Sudhir Naik relating to two crosses out of my parish. "

Sudhir Naik, deputy municipal commissioner, has apologized to the community for the way in which it was notified of the demolition: "It was not our intention to hurt the religious sentiments of anyone, we are only doing our duty. The order of the Supreme Court established February 28 as the deadline for demolition". (N.C.)

Christians in India fear backlash at massive 'reconversion' event

Tribal locals oppose Hindu nationalist rally in Madhya Pradesh; 2 million pilgrims expected

By Shireen Bhatia

Compass Direct News (09.02.2011) / HRWF (21.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – New Delhi – Responding to a petition by the state Catholic Bishops Conference, the High Court of Madhya Pradesh yesterday directed the state government to ensure the safety of Christians during a massive Hindu nationalist rally scheduled tomorrow through Saturday (Feb. 10-12) in Mandla.

Organizers of the Maa Narmada Samajik Kumbh (Mother Narmada Social Kumbh, with "kumbh" literally meaning, "pot") on the banks of the Narmada River hope to draw 2 million pilgrims to the event. Christian leaders said that the Kumbh is the latest in a series of anti-Christian propaganda events that Hindu nationalist organizations have held in recent years.

"We are worried about our safety and security, as our attempt to get adequate protection from the state government received a very cool response," said Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur.

A similar event in Dangs district, Gujarat state in 2006 was filled with hate speech against Christians and attempted mass "reconversions," and area media in Mandla district have already begun carrying false stories of "forced conversion" and other malicious accusations against Christians.

A local tribal party known as the Gond Mahasabha (Great Assembly of the Gonds) has vehemently opposed the Kumbh. The Gonds, whose origins predate Hindu presence in the area, have stated that they are not Hindus and are against the proposed ghar wapasi or "homecoming" ceremony – a "reconversion" drive by the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS umbrella group of hard-line Hindu extremist groups asserts that all people born in India are Hindus, and that therefore anyone who believes otherwise must be "reconverted" back to Hinduism.

The Gonds have delivered an ultimatum to the RSS threatening violence should even one case of "reconversion" occur at the Kumbh. They have called for a protest tomorrow (Feb. 10), and clashes are expected.

The former chief minister and general secretary of the Congress Party, Digvijay Singh, has also protested the event, accusing the RSS of "brainwashing the people."

Dr. John Dayal, secretary general of the All India Christian Council (AICC), told Compass that the Sangh Parivar (the RSS and its affiliates) "has left no one in any doubt" that the main reason for the Kumbh "is to purge the region of 'Christian missionaries' they accuse of carrying on large-scale conversions of tribals, mostly Gonds, in this part of the country."

Dayal and Vijayesh Lal, secretary of the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, made a recent fact-finding trip to Mandla and compiled a report. In a press statement, Dayal said that they supported the freedom to hold large-scale religious events.

"But, we fear that, even if there is no violence or a forcible conversion of Christians to Hinduism during the Kumbh, the Hindutva [Hindu nationalist] campaign has poisoned the atmosphere in Madhya Pradesh," Dayal stated. "This will negatively impact relationships between Christian and other tribals in the hamlets, villages, and townships of the region."

The activity of hard-line Hindu nationalists in Madhya Pradesh could damage freedom of religion in the region, he added. "It may also negatively impact the continuing social work of Christians, including schools and medical centers in under-developed districts."

Sources in the region have indicated to Compass that a hate campaign against Christians is already underway, fanned by local-language media reports hostile to Christian workers.

"The propaganda against Christians is getting serious by the day," Pastor Rakesh Dass of Mandla told Compass. "Just a few days back, there was a report in a local newspaper that a Christian priest was coercing three tribal children to convert to Christianity. Remarks from the district collector were taken, and a case was made of forcible conversion, whereas the reality was completely different."

Hindu nationalists publicized the accusations, Pastor Dass said.

"We refuted the news and submitted a memorandum to the district collector, but the very next day the local papers carried news against Christian missionaries and alleged that Christians are opposing the organizing of the Kumbh in the area."

While some clippings of local-language newspapers targeting Christian churches are highly malicious, organizers are also forcing Christians to help finance the event, Christian leaders said.

"Christian pastors have been forced to give donations to the cause of the Kumbh," said Anoop George, an independent pastor in Mandla. "Christian families are being forced to give rice and pulses as their contribution to the Kumbh, and they are being threatened with dire consequences if they continue to preach the message of Jesus Christ in and around Mandla."

Pastor George told Compass that a lot of anti-minority – especially anti-Christian – materials were appearing in the area.

"Posters denouncing the church and missionaries are being put up around Mandla, and pamphlets are being distributed against the so-called anti-national activities of the Christians," he said.

Another pastor on condition of anonymity told Compass, "The Superintendent of Police had sent us a letter on his official letterhead asking the Christian institutions to remain closed from Jan. 23 till mid February to accommodate the pilgrims. Later, when we took the matter up with him, he denied any such letter being sent from him."

Tribal students in government hostels have been mobilized to go to villages to educate people about the "nefarious designs of the missionaries," the pastor sadly added.

Dayal and Lal reported how Hindu nationalists were using the administration to target Christian institutions.

"The police issued a notice to Sister Olga Lucas of the Deenbandhudham Convent in Mandla that they were investigating complaints and wanted the convent to give a list of the nuns serving in the convent with details, further details of their bank accounts, the details of other inmates, numbers of landline and mobile telephones in the convent and the names of those who owned these instruments," their report noted. "Going to ridiculous lengths, the police also asked for full details of patients undergoing treatment in the hospital and clinics and the details of the administrative structure of the congregation of the nuns, together with names, addresses and phone numbers of the office bearers and superiors. Similar notices were also issued to other Catholic priests and Protestant pastors."

The report also noted that that the government of Madhya Pradesh was "going all out" to ensure the success of the Kumbh, reportedly allotting 1.4 billion rupees (US\$30.7 million) for infrastructure and other arrangements.

"Police from the division but also other parts of the state are being deployed, as prominent Hindu religious leaders as well as activists of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu organizations, besides prominent Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] leaders, are expected to attend," the report notes. "We were given to understand that chief ministers of BJP-ruled states, including Mr. Narendra Modi of Gujarat, Mr. Shivraj Singh Chauhan of Madhya Pradesh and Mr. Raman Singh of Chhattisgarh, were also expected to attend."

When plans for the Kumbh in Mandla district were announced in May 2010, an area house church was attacked.

The Kumbh venue is spread over a 14 square-kilometer (nearly nine square-mile) area

Previous Kumbh

The Ma Narmada Samajik Kumbh is a follow-up of the Shabri Kumbh held Feb. 11-13, 2006 in tribal-dominated Dangs district of Gujarat state.

Besides hate speeches before, during and after the event, the Kumbh also led to the beating of Christians, with many abandoning the area, and much loss of Christian property, including graveyards. Christian graves were reportedly dug up and crosses desecrated.

The Supreme Court of India subsequently banned a CD produced by the event organizing committee entitled "Shri Shabri Kumbh 2006: Spirituality along with the Wave of Patriotism," ruling that it incited "Hindus against the Christian community and suggests that Christians be attacked and beheaded."

Swami Aseemanand of Dangs was the main force behind the Shabri Kumbh in 2006. He is now in police custody, under investigation for his part in terrorist targeting of religious minorities, including alleged involvement in the bombing of Muslim shrines and mosques, as well as the bombing of the India-Pakistan "peace train" in 2007.

Church leaders also believe that Aseemanand was also the mastermind of the attacks on churches in Dangs district in 1998.

Traditionally a Kumbh is a mass Hindu pilgrimage celebrated every three years. The Ardh Kumbh is a bigger event celebrated every six years, while the full Kumbh – known as the Purna Kumbh – is celebrated every 12 years. A Maha (great) Kumbh is held every 144 years at Allahabad. The last Mahakumbh was held at Allahabad in 2001 and was attended by 60 million people, making it the largest gathering of people anywhere in the world in recorded history.

"What distinguishes the Narmada Samajik Kumbh from the others is that it is part of a very recent series of religious festivals invented by the Sangh Parivar as part of an ideological campaign to animate tribal populations in western and central India," the report by Dayal and Lal states.

According to RSS leader Mukund Rao, the "social Kumbh" began in 2006 with the Shabri Kumbh in Dangs, Gujarat – described as an attempt to counter the influence of foreign Christian workers in the area. It resulted in propaganda against Christians and heightened tensions.

Orissa: Church gets local government to compensate pogrom victims

By Santosh Digal

AsiaNews (15.02.2011) / HRWF (16.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Bhubaneswar, India – Authorities in Kandhamal District (Orissa) have said they would allocate US\$ 370,000 to rebuild houses destroyed by Hindu extremists during anti-Christian pogroms in August 2008. The decision was made possible by the mediation of local Church leaders who organised a meeting between 31 representatives of local victims and District Collector K. Krishnen.

Reconstruction will be especially important for the village of Pirigad, where the Church complained about faulty government survey, undercounting of housing units involved and homes left half-built.

Br K J Markose, a Monfort missionary involved in helping pogrom victims, said it took 12 visits by a local leader and 4 visits by himself to get the authorities to meet the families. "Thanks to the mediation, people will be able to finish their homes."

Also through the mediation of the Church, which has pledged financial aid, the local government will help reconstruction in the villages of Pipudidei and Badabanda, which are in the Tikabali block, one of the remotest areas of the district.

Report in India blames attacks on conversions to Christianity

Panel absolves Hindu nationalists in Karnataka state

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct (08.02.2011) / HRWF (09.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Christians in India's southern state of Karnataka are preparing to file a court petition against a panel that blamed a series of anti-Christian attacks in 2008 on conversions from Hinduism.

In Mangalore, which bore the brunt of Hindu extremist attacks on churches in August-September 2008, Bishop Aloysius Paul D'Souza of the Catholic Diocese said he intended to file a writ in the Karnataka High Court against the Justice B.K. Somashekhara Commission. In its Jan. 28 report on the violence, the commission absolved the state government, ruled by a Hindu nationalist party, of any responsibility in the violence.

Defending the state government and recommending the enactment of an "anti-conversion law," the commission stated that an allegation of misuse of foreign funds for "mass conversions of innocent and helpless members of the society belonging to weaker sections ... is true."

Dr. Sajan K. George of the Karnataka-based Global Council of Indian Christians called the report "a bundle of lies intended to mislead and confuse the people," and Dr. John Dayal, a member of the government's National Integration Council, said it "parroted" Hindu nationalists.

The more than 28 attacks in Karnataka in August-September 2008 were believed to be led by Hindu extremist groups, mainly the Bajrang Dal, close to the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. The violence was seen as fallout of a deadly spate of anti-Christian attacks in eastern Orissa state's Kandhamal district, which killed about 100 people and burned thousands of houses and churches beginning in August 2008.

George told Compass the final report submitted to Karnataka's Chief Minister was "completely contrary" to the commission's interim report submitted last year, which pointed to the culpability of police officials, ruling party leaders and Hindu nationalist groups, including the Sriram Sene and Bajrang Dal.

George said the panel tried to "rewrite the whole story as if dictated by [its political] mentors as per their requirements and convenience."

Likewise, the Catholic Secular Forum (CSF) released a statement critical of the commission.

"Attacks of such a magnitude are not possible without funds and official support," according to the CSF.

The panel runs the risk of being labeled as the mouthpiece of Hindu nationalist groups, added the CSF in its statement, signed by CSF General Secretary Joseph Dias, Vice-Chairman of the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission Dr. Abraham Mathai, retired High Court Judge Michael Saldanha, social activist Nafisa Ali and Dayal.

They criticized the report for calling anti-Christian assaults a spontaneous reaction of Hindus "victimized" by conversion attempts, and for denying collusion of the administration. Such accusations, along with baseless allegations of "forced" and "fraudulent" conversions and the demand for anti-conversion legislation, are all typical claims of hard-line Hindu nationalist groups, they said.

Speaking to The Times of India, Walter J. Maben, chairman of the Karnataka Missions Network, recalled that the pretext of the 2008 attacks in Karnataka was a 1987 book translated into the local Kannada language in the late 1990s that allegedly offended Hindus. Attention to alleged distribution of the book by the New Life Church did not come until "several years after its publication, during which period there was no unrest," Maben told the newspaper. The accusation that the book led to the attacks "was never proven by the commission," he added.

On Saturday (Jan. 29), Law Minister Veerappa Moily echoed Christians' demand for a federal probe into the 2008 attacks in Karnataka.

"Just because a commission gave a report, the truth cannot be suppressed," he told The Times of India.

The CSF statement also pointed out that by "limited exoneration of the Catholic Church" and "blaming other Christian denominations for conversions," the commission sought to divide the Christian community. "If the attackers were not targeting the Catholic Church, how come it had to bear most of the brunt of the violence?" it asked.

Karnataka, which recorded the highest number of anti-Christian attacks among all Indian states in 2009 and 2010, is now seen as the hotbed of Christian persecution in the

country. Of 149 anti-Christian incidents recorded nationally last year, 56 were from Karnataka, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. In 2009, Karnataka witnessed at least 48 attacks.

Supreme court gaffe

Calling the Karnataka report “the final blow” to the minority community,” Dayal said Christians had the right in recent times to feel “hemmed in from all sides – from the political rulers in Karnataka, Orissa and elsewhere who have made it quite clear that minorities do not matter.”

Dayal, secretary general of the All India Christian Council, also criticized a recent Supreme Court judgment in a case concerning the burning alive of Australian Christian worker Graham Staines and his two sons by radical Hindu nationalist Dara Singh in Orissa in January 1999.

Upholding Singh’s life imprisonment and rejecting prosecutors’ petition for a death sentence, the Jan. 21 judgment raised objections with its statement – apparently referring to non-Hindus – that “It is undisputed that there is no justification for interfering in someone’s belief by way of ‘use of force,’ provocation, conversion and incitement or upon a flawed premise that one religion is better than the other.”

The judgment came under further criticism by Christians and others as it continued, “...Though Graham Staines and his two minor sons were burnt to death while sleeping inside a station wagon at Manoharpur [in Orissa], the intention was to teach a lesson to Graham Staines about his religious activities, namely, converting poor tribals to Christianity.”

Following protests, the court revised the text of the judgment. It changed the first section to, “It is undisputed that there is no justification for interfering in someone’s belief by any means,” and in the second part it deleted the word “conversion” and the reference to “teaching the victim a lesson.”

But the revisions did not wholly assuage Christians.

“The modified version may be less offensive, but it is in no way less dangerous,” said Dayal. “On the face of it, it is satisfactory. But senior Supreme Court advocates have told me there is enough cause to go back to the Supreme Court to seek clarifications on what it means by the term ‘interference’ in someone else’s religion. Is talking about your own religion ‘interference,’ or is evangelization interference?”

Two days after the commission presented its report, the Dalai Lama, Tibetan spiritual leader in exile in India, also criticized religious conversions while condemning the attacks on churches, reported The Deccan Herald. Addressing a gathering in Karnataka’s capital of Bangalore, the Dalai Lama also cited the example of Mongolia, where he said some Buddhists, lured by money, have embraced Christianity.

Christians account for around 2.3 percent of India’s more than 1.2 billion population, which is more than 80 percent Hindu. While the vast majority of Hindus are tolerant of other faiths, a small but powerful minority of extreme Hindu nationalists are believed to be responsible for attacks on minorities.

Recent incidents of persecution

By Mahruaii Sailo and Binaifer Wadia

Compass Direct (07.02.2011) / HRWF (08.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Hindu extremists on Jan. 31 attacked a pastor, vandalized his church building and beat members of his congregation in Lall Barra village, Lalgarh Balaghat district, reported the Global Council of Indian Christians. At around 2 p.m. Pastor Mahandra Nath Deve of Alpha Bible Church was conducting worship when nearly 25 Hindu extremists barged into the church building, grabbed a Bible from him, tore its pages and began thrashing congregants. They smashed the public address system and musical instruments and accused the Christians of "conversion activities," though evangelizing and conversion is legal in India. Deve told Compass that even as they were slapping him, he told his congregation not to retaliate, but rather to disperse. After Deve filed a complaint against the attackers, police arrested four Hindu extremists. "The estimated loss incurred due to vandalization is around 30,000 rupees [US\$645]," Deve said. - BW

Karnataka - Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Bajrang Dal on Jan. 28 locked up five Christians and beat them in Kanakagiri, Koppal district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Christians - identified only as J. Ravi, Lawrence, Williams, Manjula and James - were beaten mercilessly for being Christians. The assailants told the Christians that they either had to convert to Hinduism or move to another place, according to the GCIC. The Christians later received police protection. - MS

Andhra Pradesh - Hindu extremists kidnapped a pastor identified only as Jonathan D. and tried to force him to worship at a Hindu temple on Jan. 26 in Secunderabad. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that extremists with their faces covered grabbed the pastor from behind and forced him into a vehicle, and then drove him around for about six hours. The next day they forced him to enter a temple in a forested area, where they told him to bow down before their idols and shout "Jai Shri Ram [Hail Lord Ram]," and then beat him when he refused, verbally abusing and threatening him, according to the AICC. The pastor was able to escape on the night of Jan. 28 while the assailants were asleep. He walked about 15 kilometers (nine miles), found a main road leading to Gulbarga and, though he had no money, managed to reach Patancheru and call his family. His family had not informed police due to uncertainty and fear, according to the AICC. His relatives and church members picked him up by auto-rickshaw and returned him home. - BW

Karnataka - Acting on false complaints by Hindu nationalists, police on Jan. 25 arrested Christians in Kanakagiri village, Koppal district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that at around 6:30 p.m., more than a dozen Christians had met for worship led by pastors John Harris and Ravi Kumar of the Evangelical Church of India when a mob of nearly 20 extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh stormed into the service. Led by an area extremist identified only as Purushotham, they shouted profanities as they falsely accused the Christians of forced conversion, threw chairs and broke musical instruments, according to the GCIC. After chasing the Christians out, they hit Pastor Harris and Pastor Kumar with their fists. The extremists telephoned the police, who took the two pastors into custody. Kanakagiri police officials told Compass that the pastors have been charged with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting religion or religious beliefs." At press time, the pastors were still in custody at Ganagavati sub-jail. - BW

Karnataka - Police in Hirekerur, Haveri district, on Jan. 23 detained a pastor after Hindu extremists disrupted the prayer service at the home of Rajanna Handijogar, where nearly 45 believers had assembled. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that Pastor Suresh Yakob of the Christ's Discipleship Prayer Fellowship was leading the weekly worship when nearly 50 extremists from the Bajrang Dal, led by extremists identified only as Shivakumar, Raghu and Veera, forcibly entered the house, took their Bibles, spoke in foul language and accused them of forced conversion. Pastor Yakob told

Compass that Hirekerur police arrived and took him and at least 10 other Christians into custody, including a man identified only as Handijogar, his wife Girijima and their two daughters. The pastor said police also interrogated the Hindu extremists at the station. After nearly three hours of questioning, police reprimanded the extremists, saying the Christians had not violated any laws. "Police told me to give a written application requesting that they provide security," Pastor Yakob said. – BW

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal beat Christians during their prayer meeting on Jan. 16 in Odisha, Konta, seriously injuring them. Pastor Wycliff Sayar told Compass that about 15 Christians from Konta Independent Church were praying when a group of extremists stormed in and began verbally abusing them for following Christ. Pastor Sagar said most of those gathered were converts from Hinduism from a tribal background. The Christians received hospital treatment for injuries on their heads, hands, legs and backs. – MS

Andhra Pradesh – Suspected Hindu extremists on Jan. 14 beat a pastor identified only as Swamidas and several other Christians, including his wife, as they were going to a meeting near Kamareddy, Nizamabad district. The victims went to Tadwai police station and tried to file a complaint, but officers refused because a member of the state assembly from the area, Ravinder Reddy, allegedly called a police sub-inspector, Vijaya Kumar, and urged him to have the parties sign an agreement rather than register a case, according to the All India Christian Council. – MS

Chhattisgarh – In Sirisguda, Jagdalpur, Hindu extremists on Jan. 12 beat a Christian for leaving Hinduism, seriously injuring him. Pastor S.S. Jhali told Compass that Itu Veko of Obedient Life Church decided to trust in Christ for his salvation a year ago, and since then area extremists have been threatening him. Hindu extremists led by Jintu Gond verbally abused Veko for his faith, ordered him to return to Hinduism and repeatedly beat him, Pastor Jhali said, describing an injury to Veko's head as life-threatening. The Christian was receiving treatment at a government hospital. Area Christian leaders submitted a complaint to police in Badanji Thana, but no arrests had been made at press time. – MS

Maharashtra – Hindu nationalists on Jan. 6 beat three Christians who were distributing Christian literature in Kolaphur district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Akhil Prasanna, Shiju Mathew and Thomas George of the Satveda Mission were distributing gospel tracts when they were surrounded by nearly 35 Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal. The nationalist extremists grabbed the tracts, tore them up, shouted profanity at the Christians and falsely accused them of forced conversion before taking them to the Rajawada police station. Officers forced them to pledge that they will cease any future Christian work, according to the GCIC. Pastor Johnson George, director of the Satveda Mission, told Compass that while the Christians were later running errands at a market, the extremists pounced on them and beat them, as well as kicked them, pushed them to the ground and stomped on them. The Christians rushed back to their campus in Nagadev and later went to Kerala for medical treatment. Prasanna and Mathew were discharged after treatment for minor injuries, but George underwent further treatment for backbone injuries at Sree Sankara Hospital, Changanacherry, Kerala, according to the GCIC. – BW

Maharashtra – Hindu extremists on Dec. 24 attacked tribal Christians in Vikramgarh, Thane district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that two unidentified tribal Christians from the Catholic Church were verbally abused for their faith in Christ and beaten mercilessly on Christmas Eve. The two Christians were treated at a hospital for their injuries, according to the GCIC. – MS

Not BJP but missionaries blamed for attacks on Christians

Hindustan Times (28.01.2011) / HRWF (31.01.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – A judicial commission probing attacks on the church in Karnataka has laid the blame for the violence at the door of the leaders of the victim community and their missionary activities. The Justice BK Someshekara commission, which submitted its report to Karnataka chief minister BS Yeddyurappa on Friday, gave a clean chit to the BJP and its affiliate organisations, and said the violence was a cause of the distribution of some "material" derogatory to the Hindus and their conversion to Christianity.

This observation is significant in view of the fact that when Christian nuns were raped in MP in 1998-99, the NDA government, led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said there should be a debate on "conversions". Recently, while upholding the life term for the killers of Graham Staines, a Supreme Court bench had said the murderers wanted to teach the deceased "a lesson" for his proselytising activities. However, the remark was expunged.

The commission said: "There is no basis to the apprehension of Christian petitioners that the politicians, BJP, mainstream Sangh Parivar and state government, directly or indirectly, are involved in the attacks." It also denied any collusion between the administration and the attackers, as alleged by various Christian groups.

"The attacks (were) indulged in by misguided fundamentalist miscreants of defined or undefined groups or organisations against Christians and Christianity who have mistakenly presumed that they (miscreants) would be protected by the party in power with their policies at the relevant time," it added.

The panel received 1,500 petitions and examined more than 800 people.

The commission was set up following an uproar over the attacks in Mangalore, Udupi, Chikamangalur, Kolar, Chikaballapur, Bellary and Davangere districts in September 2008. However, the panel was critical of the authorities for not treating the Christians protesting the attacks sympathetically. It said a police station for dealing with religious issues should be constituted in every district.

Justice BK Someshekara is a retired judge of the Karnataka high court.

India confirms life term for murder of missionary

AP (21.01.2011) / HRWF (24.01.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – India's top court Friday confirmed the life sentence given to a Hindu who burned to death an Australian missionary and his two young sons outside a church in eastern India.

A trial court had sentenced Dara Singh to death but it was reduced to life in prison on appeal. Justices P. Sathasivam and B.S. Chauhan on the Supreme Court rejected a plea by state prosecutors to raise Dara Singh's punishment back to the death penalty, Singh's attorney, S.S. Mishra, said.

The judges said Singh's offense was highly condemnable, but it did not fall in the category of rarest of rare to warrant the death sentence, Mishra said.

Babu Joseph, a spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, said "We accept the judicial verdict."

However, he said it was a grim reminder of the 1999 killings of Graham Staines and his sons, Philip, 10, and Timothy, 8.

Staines had been looking after leprosy patients in Orissa state. A mob led by Singh set fire to a jeep in which the family had been sleeping outside a church in the tribal village of Manoharpur.

A series of attacks against missionaries and Christian institutions at the time were blamed on right-wing Hindus, who claimed missionaries tricked impoverished Hindus by force, money and superstition into converting faiths, a charge the Christian missionaries denied.

Hindus comprise more than 80 percent of India's 1 billion-plus population. Christians make up about 2 percent.

Christians suspect cover-up in pastor's death in Orissa

Police refuse to follow leads pointing to murder

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct (21.01.2011) / HRWF (24.01.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – Relatives of a pastor who was found dead in a secluded area in eastern Orissa state's Kandhamal district last week have accused local police of a cover-up.

The body of Saul Pradhan, a 45-year-old independent pastor whose house was burned by Hindu extremists two years ago, was found near a pond in Pakala village in Kandhamal's Raikia Block on Jan. 11 and bore marks of assault, Catholic activist Ajay Singh told Compass.

"I spoke to the widow of the pastor, and she told me that the hands and legs of the deceased looked twisted, and there was blood in his mouth. His pants were also torn," Singh said by phone from Orissa's capital, Bhubaneswar. "Why should it not arouse suspicion when Pastor Pradhan was last seen with two Hindu men, Marda Pradhan and Baiju Mallick, who were among the rioters who burned houses of Christians in 2008?"

A local activist with the Evangelical Fellowship of India said he visited the site after the body had been removed and saw blood stains on a stone.

Kandhamal witnessed two of India's deadliest waves of anti-Christian violence in December 2007 and August-September 2008; the latter killed over 100 people, destroyed thousands of homes and displaced more than 60,000 others after a Hindu nationalist leader was killed by Maoists; Hindu nationalist groups blamed it on local Christians.

Christian residents of Kandhamal say the antagonism toward them by those who engaged in the attacks under the influence of extremist Hindu nationalists remains strong.

Singh said that the two Hindu men who burned houses of Christians in 2008, Marda Pradhan and Mallick, came to Pastor Pradhan's house the evening of Jan. 10 and asked him to come out.

"The pastor's wife was about to serve dinner and so asked him to wait," he said. "But he said he wouldn't take long."

When the pastor did not return the next day, his wife went to the house of Marda Pradhan with a few villagers. Marda Pradhan's wife told them her husband had been in the jungle for three days because of a leg injury, Singh said.

That afternoon, the pastor's wife and the villagers again went to the house of Marda Pradhan, whose wife claimed he was not there. They could see him inside the house, however, and asked him to take them to the spot in the jungle where he had taken Pastor Pradhan the previous night. After walking for around half an hour, Marda Pradhan ran away, Singh said.

"The villagers got suspicious and began to look around," he said. "That's when they found the body lying near a pond."

Some area residents told the villagers that they had heard loud quarreling the previous night.

Police, however, say they have found little reason to suspect foul play.

"There were no injury marks on the body of the man," Inspector Ravi Narayan Barik told Compass, refuting the claims of the dead man's family. "The doctor who performed the autopsy said it was just an unnatural death."

According to police, Pastor Pradhan and two other men got drunk on the night of Jan. 10. The two others were able to return to their homes, Barik said, while the pastor could not and died in the cold.

"Drinking country-made liquor is normal behavior here," said Barik, of the Raikia police station. "We called one of the two men who was with the deceased for interrogation but did not find anything suspicious."

An official autopsy report was still awaited at press time.

Asked what sections of the Indian Penal Code or the Criminal Procedure Code were mentioned in the First Information Report or the formal police complaint, the official said, "None."

"The family is spreading rumors about murder in hope of receiving compensation from the government, as many victims of the 2008 violence got compensated," the inspector said.

Activist Singh said when the family went to police to report the suspected murder, officers were unwilling to listen.

"The police scolded them," Singh said. "They said he must have died from the cold. When the family asked for an autopsy, the police asked them to collect the body, take it to the village and bring it to the police station the following day."

But after the family insisted, the police asked them to bring the body the same day, he said.

"So the family and friends carried the body on a bicycle and brought it to the police station," Singh said. Asked why police did not go to collect the body, Singh said, "This is how it happens here."

Singh also said he heard that some local politicians from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) visited the Raikia police station after the death was reported, though he added that he "could not confirm if that actually happened."

Until March 2009, the BJP was a ruling party in Orissa in coalition with a regional party, the Biju Janata Dal, for 11 years.

Dr. Sajan George of the Global Council of Indian Christians called for an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported on Monday (Jan. 17).

"The killing of Saul [Pradhan] seemed to be an organized crime by a section of people who had threatened him a few months ago, his family members alleged, adding that his house was also torched during the Kandhamal riots in 2008," George told PTI.
