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Recent incidents of persecution

Open Doors (13.11.2012) - India is No. 37 on the World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. "While most Indian Christians are relatively free, many parts of the country remain key battlegrounds between Hindu extremists and Christians," according to the list. "Violence against pastors and church gatherings continues on a monthly basis, usually in rural areas."

Here is a sample of incidents in late September and October.

Karnataka

Kannur — Hindu extremists beat a pastor unconscious by the side of the road, then attacked him in his hospital bed the next day.

Pastor John Samuel Kim, from the Jerusalem prayer house in Kannur village, a few kilometers away from Kolar District, told Open Doors News he was standing on the road with three friends Oct. 11 after distributing wedding cards of his sister.

"A mob of 20 extremists questioned me on what I was doing in the village," he said. "They pushed me, saying 'Why [do] I always visit the village and tell people about Christ,' accused me of forceful conversion and began to beat me with sticks and stones, kicked and punched me."

The pastor fell unconscious when they kicked him in the groin. The attackers left and Kim's friends summoned police. Kim was hospitalized with a broken rib, and injuries to his head and neck.

Early the next morning, four people entered Kim's hospital ward.

"They told me that I should die, shook my bed and started to beat me again, and strangled me on my neck and brought a sharp weapon to cut my neck," he said. Kim suffered a severe neck injury.

The attackers left when they heard the sound of people coming. Later, Kim provided a description of the attackers to police, who posted guard on the ward for the next seven days as the pastor recovered.

The police have registered a case against the attackers, but no arrests have been made.

Kolar District Police Superintendent Ram Niwas Seeat told Open Doors News that he and his team will continue to protect the pastor whenever necessary, and that they continue to search for the attackers.

The Global Council of Indian Christians, an advocacy group, said the Oct. 11 attack was the second on Kim within the past year. Three months earlier in Bangarapet, he was attacked in a similar way.

"I was crossing the flyover on my motorbike when they stopped me. They accused me of forceful conversion and beat me up," Kim told Open Doors News.

The pastor did not file a police complaint after the first attack. "I have forgiven them and I thought that they will not disturb me again," he said.

Attacks against pastors and Christian institutions have accelerated in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, where violence against Christians has been most frequent during the past nine months.

Anekal Taluk — A Christian-run child-development center accused by Hindus of forcefully converting Hindu children to Christianity has resumed operation after the Hindu parents insisted their children were getting academic, not religious, instruction.

Center director Devanand Samuel told Open Doors News that Karnataka police came to the center Sept. 29 with accusations that it was using food, clothes and education to lure children to Christianity. A local politician, J. Ram, added to the pressure on Oct. 10 when he threatened dire consequences if the center did not close. The center's staff closed the facility while they attended a retreat, "but it will resume soon," Samuel said.

The child-development center, in Anekal Taluk, south of Bangalore, re-opened Oct. 29 after Hindu parents of the children who attend the center met with the accusers, and told them it is not involved in any conversion and is helping the children with their studies only.

Uttar Pradesh

Ambednagar — Police arrested a pastor and 10 other Christians on Sept. 30 after Hindu extremists disrupted their prayer service, beat them up and accused them of stealing. Pastor Pannalal of Philadelphia Church in Ambednagar told Open Doors News that at about 8 p.m. the Hindus and police barged into the prayer meeting, beat them and forced them to the Jalalpur police station. The mob accused Pannalal and the believers of stealing articles from families in the area. The Christians were arrested, and released the next day on bail after the intervention of a lawyer from the Light Foundation.

Orissa

Kanthapada — Hindus burst into a baptism in the Balasore District on Oct. 2 and beat Pastor Jayaram Marandi and the believers, accusing them of forceful conversions of Hindus. Rev. Subhash Chandra Digal told Open Doors News that prior to barging into the baptism service, the police had filed a police complaint against the Christians. As the meeting was starting, the extremists stormed in, and took them to the police station. The police kept Marandi and four believers in custody overnight, ostensibly for their safety as angry demonstrators gathered near the police station. The following morning, the police released the Christians without filing any charges. Pastor Marandi, then conducted the baptism without further incident.

Bhubaneswar — The Orissa state government on Oct. 1 appointed former Orissa High Court judge A. S. Naidu to take over the one-man commission investigating the 2008 killing of Laxamanananda Saraswati, a leader of the local Viśva Hindu Pariṣad, or World Hindu Council, widely known as the VHP. The riots that erupted afterward claimed the lives of several Christians and displaced thousands. The commission's former director, Justice S. C. Mohapatra, died in May. On Oct. 22, Naidu sent summonses to 55 people, including the Cuttack then-Archbishop Raphael Cheenath, and John Dayal, secretary general of the All India Christian Council.

India's Karnataka State needs immediate attention

World Evangelical Alliance (24.10.2012) - Attacks on Christians in the south Indian state of Karnataka are being reported almost every other day. And now, with the state assembly election not too far away, the frequency and the intensity of attacks might further increase. For, the ruling Hindu nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) appears to be consolidating its Hindu votebank in the wake of a new crisis.

Attacks on Christians shot up in the state after the BJP came to power on its own in May 2008, after being part of a ruling alliance with a regional party, the *Janata Dal-Secular*, for about 20 months. While Hindu nationalist groups had been working in Karnataka for decades - due to the presence of some highly influential Hindu shrines in the state, those groups began to freely implement their agenda only after the BJP's rise to power.

In the months of August and September in 2008, at least 28 attacks were reported in the state. According to the New Delhi-based Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), Karnataka saw at least 48 attacks in 2009, and in 2010 the number increased to 56. In 2011, the number slightly decreased to 49 attacks.

However, the incidence of attacks has been much higher in the recent months. And the total number of attacks is expected to be unprecedented by the end of this year, thanks to a crisis within the Hindu nationalist party which could further deepen as the election comes closer.

Some key leaders of the Karnataka unit of the BJP are facing corruption charges, and the party is also divided within. Former chief minister B.S. Yeddyurappa, who was accused of illegally allotting land and illegally granting mining licenses, was forced by the national party leadership to resign in July 2011. Now, he has announced his decision to leave the party and form his own "secular" political group by December.

Yeddyurappa belongs to the Karnataka's largest caste community, Lingayat. Though also Hindu, the Lingayats - who represent more than 20 percent of the state's population - differ from mainstream Hinduism in certain religious matters. And they have a distinct sense of identity as opposed to other Hindu caste groups. The BJP's first-ever election victory in Karnataka in 2008 was attributed to the party's decision to have Yeddyurappa, from the Lingayat community, as its chief ministerial candidate.

Now in the run up to the state election due in 2013, the BJP had little choice but to let Yeddyurappa leave. For, corruption is currently the biggest national issue, and the party could not take a risk by featuring him again as its chief ministerial candidate.

Therefore, the BJP can no longer depend on the Lingayat votebank for re-election in 2013. BJP's second-most influential Lingayat leader in the state, Jagadish Shettar, may or may not be able to bring many votes from the community. Moreover, Yeddyurappa is also expected to take several legislators of the BJP to his new party.

So how will the BJP deal with the crisis? A statement recently made by a former leader of the *Bajrang Dal*, a violent Hindu extremist group that has been closely associated with the BJP, sheds light on this question.

The BJP is trying to bring the state's Hindus together by raising issues against Christians and Muslims, Mahendra Kumar, who was state unit president of the *Bajrang Dal* until 2009, told the *Tehelka* magazine recently. "They [state BJP leaders] are in a process of consolidating the Hindu vote bank as they will have to face polls in 2013," he said, referring to Yeddyurappa's expected departure.

Due to the caste system in Hinduism, and politicization of those caste divisions, no party can easily mobilize Hindus as one votebank. However, this has been done for years by projecting the Christian and Muslim minorities as enemies of all Hindus.

Kumar, who was in jail for 42 days as the main accused in a spate of attacks on Christians in 2008, divulged more to the magazine. He said the days he spent in jail proved to be a turning point of his life, and led him to eventually quit the Hindu nationalist movement.

Kumar confirmed what many in India believe, that Hindu nationalism, or *Hindutva*, "is a political strategy and it has nothing to do with Hinduism or the welfare or benefit of Hindu society." He added that Hindu nationalists play on emotions, "projecting wrong history and some negative points of the minority community, hatred is sown among the Hindu youth," merely to get Hindu votes. Hindu nationalists typically allege that Christians are bribing Hindus to convert them, and denigrating their gods.

Raising the issue of conversion may also be to divert people's attention away from corruption charges on BJP leaders and the visible divide within. For example, on Oct. 24, when television channels questioned BJP national president Nitin Gadkari on source of funds for companies owned by him, Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) that is believed to be the parent organization of the BJP, suddenly called for the construction of a temple of Hindu god Rama where once the Babri Mosque stood in the northern Uttar Pradesh state. The call for the Ram temple at the disputed location has been one of the most divisive communal issues independent India has witnessed in its history.

Christian groups in India have diligently reported incidents of violence against Christians in Karnataka and other states. Since the documentation is available, they could possibly approach the Karnataka High Court through a writ petition, seeking issuance of directives to the state police and government to ensure the security of the minority community.

This is perhaps the only way to compel the state to do its duty as long as the BJP is the ruling party.

More violence against Christians. Government complicit with Hindu nationalists

Two new attacks in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, by the United National Party led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), notes "a growing intolerance, discrimination and persecution" against the minority community

By Nirmala Carvalho

Asia News (13.09.2012) - "The Indian states where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in power, close their eyes to the atrocities against Christians" is the comment of Sajan K George, president of the *Global Council of Indian Christians* (GCIC), two new attacks in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, administered by the ultra-nationalist Hindu party. In both cases, activists of radical groups supported by the BJP attacked and accused the pastors of the Christian communities of forced conversions and proselytism.

The first incident dates back to September 5th, in the village of Sagar (Shimoga, Karnataka). The Rev. Damodara, 42, of the *Parishudda Prarthanalaya Pentecostal Church*, led a prayer service. Suddenly, 15 Hindu radicals led by a certain Omkara entered, attacking the pastor and the faithful who are present there. The activists then called the police to report Taligoppa Christians of forced conversions. Arriving on the scene, before shutting it down the agents beat the Rev. Damodara and those present.

Informed of the attack, the GCIC contacted a Sitaram police inspector, explaining what had happened. The official then ordered the pastor transferred to Sagar police station, for an impartial interrogation. At dawn, the priest was released without charges. Police said the man signed a document, in which he claims not to be involved in forced conversions. Even the attackers had to sign a declaration stating that they would not interfere with the Christian prayer services.

The second incident took place on September 7 in Birmawal villages (Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh). The victim was Rev. John Pargy, 26, of the *India Gospel Church*. The pastor was distributing pamphlets on Christianity at the bus station, when 25 Hindu radicals of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and the *Bajrang Dal* stopped him. Instead of beating him, the activists dragged him to the local police station: the told police that the pastor was publicly criticizing Hinduism and forced them to drink cow's blood (an animal sacred to Hindus, and therefore untouchable , ed.) The police held him in prison for three days, then released him.

"India - said Sajan George - is a secular country. This means that it protects all religions equally, and does not raise any belief to the level of state religion. Yet, over 60 years since independence and the proclamation of our Constitution some minority communities, such as Christians, are experiencing growing intolerance, aggression and severe discrimination. "

Recent incidents of persecution (April)

Compass Direct News (30.04.2012) – About 100 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers led by A. Raja and another identified only as Chidambaram on April 21 beat 15 Christians for proclaiming Christ in Paganeri, Shivagangai. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Hindu extremists beat them, burned their Bibles and tracts, seized their vehicle key and destroyed their megaphone. The Christian group, led by an evangelist identified only as Jessudoss from Kandapur, had gone to the area in a van fitted with a megaphone; they filed a complaint at the Paganeri police station against the attackers, but officers took no action, according to the GCIC. The Christians then went to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, who immediately sent officers to the site; they helped arrange an agreement between the assailants and the victims with the help of the village head, and the Hindu extremists returned the vehicle key to the pastor. Later that same evening, however, the BJP members returned and beat Jessudoss, the GCIC reported. They told Christians they would not hesitate to attack them again.

Andhra Pradesh

Hindu extremists staged a protest in front of Hebron Church in Mahadevapura on April 19, demanding action against a pastor for alleged attempts to forcibly convert schoolchildren, sources said. Intervening to defuse tensions, Mahadevapura police detained pastor Victor Babu for questioning. Rajashekara Reddy filed a complaint against the pastor for “deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings” under Section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code. The complaint accused the pastor of preaching to 32 schoolchildren under the guise of organizing a summer camp for them. Police inspected the church premises and illegally confiscated Vacation Bible School materials, including hymnbooks.

Jammu and Kashmir

A Muslim mob on April 17 beat a Christian couple from New Delhi and a young local woman in North Kashmir’s Bandipora town for distributing Christian pamphlets in the area. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that the Rev. Mafford Maharaj Singh and his wife, Kusum Singh, of Grace Upon Grace Church, along with Sammema Bano, were distributing gospel tracts in Urdu and sharing their faith in a local market when a mob gathered, beat them and dragged them to the head of the local mosque, who handed them over to police. The police filed a complaint against the Christians for allegedly “promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion, race, birth, residence,” which is punishable by imprisonment of up to five years, according to the EFI. The Christians reportedly told police they were not doing anything unconstitutional or illegal. The mob had alleged that the couple offered 100,000 Indian rupees (US\$1,870) to persons willing to convert to Christianity and that the New Testaments they were distributing contained money as inducement to convert. Bano was released after questioning, according to the EFI. The agency reported that the couple was released on bail, despite the local bar association and other groups protesting and preventing attorneys from appearing. An attorney from the Srinagar High Court, however, filed the bail application on behalf of the couple on April 23, and the couple was released late that night, the EFI reported.

Andhra Pradesh

Hindu extremists in Dharmapuri on April 16 accused a pastor of forceful conversion and filed a complaint against him of violating Government Order 746 and 747, which bans propagation of other religions near the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams temple and 19

other Hindu temples across the country. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that a pastor identified only as Ahron and another church member were distributing pocket calendars when the Hindu extremists began verbally abusing him, took items from the pastor and took him to the local police station. On April 17 the extremists staged a strike and demanded the arrest of the pastor. Police investigation was underway at press time, the EFI reported.

Andhra Pradesh

Police on April 16 arrested a pastor identified only as Samuel for trespassing on a cemetery in Yellamma Banda, Hyderabad after Hindu extremists filed a complaint against him. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that the pastor had decided to upgrade the public graveyard and on April 5 had submitted a memorandum to a local official, as well as approached the municipal commissioner through a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), requesting permission. He sought to construct a fence, install lights and construct a small cabin in the Yellamma Banda graveyard. After receiving verbal approval from MLA Bhiksa Yadav, the pastor and his co-workers began leveling the surface of the cemetery. On observing this activity, Hindu extremists filed a complaint against the pastor for illegally encroaching on public land, according to the AICC. At around 1:30 a.m., officers arrested Pastor Samuel for illegal trespassing. At around 7 a.m., about 50 pastors met with MLA Yadav, who promised to intervene with the sub-inspector of police and other authorities. AICC representative Moses Vattippali told Compass that the pastor was released on bail on April 18 after the intervention of the area AICC leaders.

Tamil Nadu

On April 12 in Dalmiya Puram, Trichy, an intruder disrupted a prayer meeting and stabbed a Christian, severely injuring him. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that an intruder entered a prayer service led by Pastor Y.S. John of the Indian Pentecostal Church and told him to stop the meeting immediately. The pastor's nephew, John Britto, tried to calm the intruder, but the enraged extremist drew a sword and struck Britto, nearly cutting off his left hand, GCIC reported. Britto received hospital treatment, and a complaint was filed against the assailant at the Dalmiya Puram police station. No arrests had been made at press time.

Andhra Pradesh

Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Kakinada, East Godavari on April 12 tied and stabbed a pastor's son, as well as beat the pastor and his wife. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists went to the home of the pastor, identified only as Ratnababu, and urgently asked for him. When his son, Madhu, opened the door, the RSS members pounced on him, stuffed his mouth with cloth and tied his hands and legs. One of the Hindu extremists sprinkled chili powder in Madhu's eyes, and they lacerated his ankle and other parts of his body, according to the GCIC. Then they started beating the pastor and his wife. The Hindu extremists had a gas can for setting fire to the house, but a neighbor who heard the cries of the pastor's wife arrived, and the extremists fled, the GCIC reported. Madhu and others identified the assailants and named them in their complaint, registered at the hospital where he received treatment, but police filed a case against "unknown persons." Pastor Ratnababum, who has served the Christu Asinadu Prarthana Mandir church for 15 years, had previously received several death threats and survived three attempts to burn his church building, according to the GCIC. RSS members have manipulated the police into arresting the pastor two times in the last six months, according to the GCIC. An attorney has petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court to stop the violation of religious rights and personal safety of the pastor and his family. The GCIC also reported that callous

indifference of officials against the violence has traumatized the 500-plus church members.

Tamil Nadu

On April 11 in Emapur, Villupuram district, a mob led by a Hindu extremist identified only as Balaji beat a pastor and pressured his landlord to evict him from his home. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that the pastor, identified only as Caleb, was on his way to preach in the village when the extremists began verbally abusing him and then severely beat him. The church had been meeting at the pastor's rented home.

Karnataka

A police inspector in Mangalore beat a pastor on April 8, alleging forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that on Easter morning the inspector, identified only as Janardhan, accused the pastor, identified only as Rajesh, of forceful conversion, beat him and warned him to vacate his rented house or face harm. After the intervention of area Christian leaders, the inspector apologized to the pastor, who remained in his home, according to the GCIC.

Uttar Pradesh

On April 7 in Maharajganj, Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh beat Christians after barging into a large gathering of healing prayer. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that at about 8 a.m., the armed extremists entered into the "Festival of Deliverance" meeting of Maharajganj Baptist Church (MBC), where 4,000 people had gathered, and accused them of forceful conversion, verbally abusing and beating them. Besides striking the Christian leaders, the extremists targeted a convert from Hinduism, Ambika Prasad, who had provided the church with land, an MBC member told EFI. About 10 enraged extremists with iron rods took part in the violence, injuring pastor Ram Chander, Vish Prasad and his wife, Ambika Prasad, and others, according to the EFI. Police soon arrived and restored order. The Christians filed a First Information Report against the attackers, and police arrested four extremists, but they were released the same day without any charges, according to the EFI.

Tamil Nadu

After learning that children at a crisis center had attended church services in Akkarapettai village, near Nagapattinam, intolerant Hindus tore up Bibles and gospel literature at their homes. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that after town Hindus learned that there was a noticeable drop in the number of people attending a Hindu festival, they found out that many villagers were attending church services. On April 2 the enraged Hindus went to a government school and announced a reward for children with Christian literature in their homes. With this ruse, they were able to harass the children who admitted to having Christian books, summoned their parents, verbally abused them and threatened to expel them from the village if they continued to go to church, according to the EFI. The next day, the assailants searched the Christians' houses and searched for Christian literature; they tore Bibles and other literature and threatened the residents, the EFI reported. They also threatened leaders of SUSHASYA, the Scripture Union's center that ministers to children in crisis. The Hindus asked one family to vacate their house after they openly said they were worshipping Jesus, and they also locked 12 Christian houses for three days before police intervened, the EFI reported. One person identified only as Mahalaxmi and three other families filed a police complaint against the attackers, and police protection was provided. Some fearful Christians, however, are staying away from the village, where the assailants are threatening further harm, according to the EFI.

Orissa

Hindu extremists repeatedly attacked a Catholic priest, threatening to murder him in Gudayagiri, Khnadhmal. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that on March 29, extremists led by Manoj Nayak and others dug up a road to a grotto shrine but stopped after a priest identified only as the Rev. Sisir Kant asked them to stop, saying it would destroy the grotto. The next day, however, the same party arrived with a bulldozer and began to dig up the road. The Hindu extremists verbally abused the priest, and one, Deepak Nayak, began strangling him, kicked him and threatened to kill him, according to the GCIC. On April 4, when the priest was on his way to Gudayagiri, another Hindu extremist, Manoj Nayak, caught hold of the priest by the throat and pushed him. Two days later, Hindu extremist Rabindra Nayak threatened to kill the priest, reported the GCIC.

Karnataka

Police on March 28 arrested a pastor and three church members after Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh beat them and filed a complaint against them of forceful conversion in Gadag. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a pastor identified only as Mallikarjun and four church members were distributing tracts to some people when the extremists, led by area leader Ravi Bagle, began to beat them. They dragged the five Christians to a police station. After intervention by area Christian leaders, four church members were released at about 11 p.m. without charges. The pastor, however, was charged with abetment and harboring persons hired for an unlawful assembly (sections 107 and 157 of the Indian Penal Code), according to the GCIC. After further area Christian leaders' intervention, he was released on bail at 1:30 a.m.

Uttar Pradesh

Rampur police and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council) on March 24 disrupted the Yeshu Mahatsava Convention (Celebration of Jesus Christ) in Chadidiha after the VHP filed a complaint of forceful conversion against the organizers. The Catholic Christian Forum reported that despite procuring permission from the associate district magistrate to conduct the convention, police shut it down over VHP allegations that forced conversions was taking place. Fearing a possible backlash from the community, Sub-Inspector R.P. Saroj arrived at the venue and withdrew the permission he himself had granted, ordering all stalls to be removed. VHP District Chairman Omprakash Singh accused Christian workers of converting people by enticing them with money.

Hindu villagers attack mourners

Compass Direct News (27.04.2012)- Hindu extremists trying to stop the burial of a convert to Christianity last week in Chhattisgarh state beat a pastor and other Christians, including children and two 60-year-old women who fell unconscious, sources told Compass. Jaikant Pawar, 31, of Balgal village, Kanker district, died on April 20 en route to a hospital; an asthma sufferer, he had complained of chest pains. When more than 40 Christians at the family's house were taking his body out for burial, Hindu villagers who had surrounded the house stopped them. At least 10 Christians sustained injuries and received medical treatment, sources said, adding that the attack went on for more than six hours. The assailants accused the Christians of having poisoned Pawar. At about 2 a.m. that night, the Hindu extremists told the Christians to remove the body from the village or be killed, sources said. The Christians carried the body to the Bande police

station about 10 kilometers (six miles) away, but police were unwilling to register a First Information Report, they said. After pressure from area Christian leaders and the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the district collector and police investigated, source said. The officials summoned the attackers, who then falsely accused the Christians of beating them. Police warned the villagers not to disturb the Christians again and worked out an agreement in which the body was allowed to be buried in Balgal. On Wednesday (April 25), however, area Christians began to receive threats, according to Christian support organization Open Doors. "Withdraw your complaint or face dire consequences, to the point of losing your lives," they were warned, according to an Open Doors press statement.

Islamic extremists beat, mock Christians in India

Prayer group in West Bengal village is attacked less than one month after woman is driven out

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (12.04.2012) – Islamic extremists in India attacked a Christian prayer meeting in West Bengal state, beating a 65-year-old widow and other women less than a month after they helped drive a young woman out of her home and village for her faith.

Islamists in Nutangram, Murshidabad district forced their way into the home of Gaffar Shaikhe on March 30 at around 2 p.m., as 11 Christians from Believers' Church were gathered for lunch and worship. In the same area of Nutangram on March 9, Islamic extremists drove 22-year-old Rekha Khatoon out of her village because she dared to give thanks for healing in Christ's name in the predominantly Muslim village; her parents helped the Islamists to beat her nearly unconscious.

Initially seven extremists led by Mohammed Aanu Shaikhe stormed into the home of Gaffar Shaikhe and ordered the Christians to stop the meeting, said Pastor Bashir Pal, founder and pastor of the village Believer's Church.

Gaffar Shaikhe said the extremists called them pagans as they kicked, slapped and pushed the Christians, adding that they reprimanded him and his wife for dismissing several warnings from them to stop leading prayer meetings in their house. A year ago, the extremists had burned Shaikhe's crops for his faith in Christ, he said.

"I asked the radicals why they barged into my house and why they were not allowing us to pray in my own home," Shaikhe said, adding that the extremists were so blinded by fury that they only continued beating them, calling them pagans and threatening to continue doing so until they returned to Islam.

"We want freedom to worship Jesus in our home," he said.

As the extremists mocked and otherwise verbally abused the Christians, a mob of about 100 Islamists gathered and charged into the house entryway, which is 72 feet long and eight feet wide, shouting anti-Christian slogans and threatening to murder them as they pushed, kicked and slapped them.

When the Christians tried to flee, the extremists blocked their way. The son of Muslim extremist Ahammed Shaikhe, Mohammed Kuran, beat 65-year-old widow Moyazan Bewa, Christians present said. While Ahammed Shaikhe's wife was called in from the front porch

to beat a Christian woman at the meeting named Selina Bibi, Mohammed Aanu Shaiké beat Gaffar Shaiké' wife, Aimazan Bibi, kicking her head and stomach and leaving a deep cut on her hand, they said.

Other Christians present received minor injuries. Two Christian children present at the meeting were crying in fear, the Christians said.

The Christians somehow made their way out and scattered, but Mohammed Aanu Shaiké, brandishing a sickle, chased many of them, "hurling all kinds of insults and attempting to murder them all, but God saved the Christians at that moment," said Pastor Pal.

By then about 500 Muslims had gathered and were watching in amusement as the extremists chased and harassed the Christians for about 90 minutes, the pastor said.

"The Christians were running in all directions for their lives, including the children who were crying in fear, but the [adult Christians] were stopped at every corner by the radicals who thrashed, bashed and verbally abused them," Pastor Pal said; no children were attacked.

Aimazan Bibi said spectators took up many positions.

"Some were standing on the house roofs, some stood in front of their houses and on the road," she said. "There was a huge number of people who were mocking, pushing and shouting at us while some were also just spectators."

Pastor Pal added that at one point the extremists had trapped many from the Christian group.

"The Christians were cornered at one place, where they all stood petrified in fear, but somehow the almighty God saved them," he said.

"We pleaded with the radicals to let us go, and eventually they freed us while they were still shouting at us to leave Jesus or face more sufferings," said one of the trapped Christians, Moyazan Bibi.

The Christians fled to the outskirts of the village about two kilometers away and took refuge in the home of one of the participants in the prayer meeting, Nasima Bibi, meeting police en route and informing them of the attack.

Area Christian leaders also informed the station officer of Nutangram Thana, who immediately sent police force to the site.

"After realizing that the police had reached the village, I urged Moyazan Bewa to go out and meet the police," Pastor Pal said. "She asked the police why the Islamic radicals were constantly attacking them."

Assuring her that they would take action against the assailants, police took the 65-year-old widow to her home, where a furious mob of Islamic extremists had gathered, said the pastor.

Officers warned the Islamic extremists not to disturb the Christians again, but they continued to taunt and mock them, he said, treating them as criminals.

"The extremists were always passing insulting remarks against them even while they were simply walking on the road," Pastor Pal said.

On April 5, Mohammed Aanu Shaike threatened to kill Aimazan Bibi after he found her talking to a Muslim woman on the street, he said.

"Some extremists soon gathered, and they were calling her pagan and they threatened to murder her if they ever find her talking to any Muslim again," the pastor said.

The Muslims have since ostracized the Christians, prohibiting them to buy and sell in the area and keeping them from using the public bathroom and water well, he said. The extremists have sternly told all shopkeepers not to sell anything to the Christians, and at press time they were all complying with the order.

The Christians filed a police complaint against the assailants, but no arrests have been made.

Some of the victims have been attacked earlier. Last year Selina Bibi was beaten for her faith and, as the Muslims assumed she would have some mark on her body indicating her faith, they stripped her naked to search for one. They beat her in spite of finding no mark (see www.compassdirect.org, "Muslim Extremists in India Attack, Threaten Women," Aug. 5, 2011.)

"Even though the radicals have beaten me many times and want to kill me, I will not leave Jesus," she said. "I will worship Him as long as I live on this earth."

Religion may be taken out of marriage registration

By Mahendra Kumar Singh

The Times of India (11.04.2012) - The Union Cabinet is likely to consider a proposal that seeks to do away with the requirement to disclose one's religious affiliation for registration of marriages as well as the demand of Sikh bodies that their marriages be registered under a separate law.

The move has been prompted by the consideration to help those opting for inter-faith marriages, along with the need to make registration of marriages a simpler affair.

It is recognized that those who marry outside their religion face harassment, including from the conservative sections of the bureaucracy.

Administrative convenience is the other consideration, with the law ministry suggesting that registration of marriages will become easier if a clause on marriage registration is added to the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969.

In its note to the Cabinet, the ministry has argued that since infrastructure to register births and deaths is already in place in civic authorities, it can easily handle registration of marriages once the law has been suitably amended.

As for the demand of Sikh bodies, they have argued that their marriages should be, as is the case with other minority communities - Muslims, Christians, Jews, Parsis - registered under a separate law. Marriages of Sikhs along with those of Buddhists and Jains are currently registered under the Hindu Marriage Act: an arrangement which is being opposed by many Sikhs as part of their pursuit for a distinct identity. These groups argue that their demand can be accepted by amending the Anand Marriage Act, 1909.

The Cabinet will be required to factor in view that meeting the demand will spark similar pitches from Jains and Buddhists: two other communities that have so far been comfortable with the practice, where their marriages are registered under the Hindu Marriage Act.

Recent incidents of persecution (March)

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (29.03.12) – Police arrested five Christians on March 25 in Dhanegaon, Chhinwara, after Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh attacked them and accused them of forceful conversion. A source told Compass the extremists barged into the Sunday worship service of Bharatiya Pratna Bhawan (India Prayer Hall), beat pastor Harichand Varti and church members Santaram Parteti and Mayram Padame, and dragged them to the police station. Pastor Varti's back was seriously injured, and his hands were cut, the source said. Senior Pastor Rajkumar Narad rushed to the police station to file a complaint, but police took him into custody and later also charged Pastor Varti and two church members 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." At press time area Christian leaders were taking steps to get them out on bail.

West Bengal – State police arrested seven Christians on March 15 in Asansol, Branpur after anti-Christian elements attacked them. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that the opponents of Christianity suddenly surrounded five pastors – Weleston Kisku, Animesh Das, Nripen Das, Satyanarayan Soren and Rajesh Das – and two unidentified Christians as they distributed gospel tracts and verbally and physically mistreated them. Police took the seven Christians to the station and later released them without charges. Soon a group of Kora tribal people filed a police complaint against the Christians of forceful conversion and luring people to Christianity by offering food and clothes, according to the EFI. Police summoned the Christians back and charged them with promoting enmity and hurting religious feelings. The next day, a judge rejected their appeal for bail and sent them to the Dulal Mandal jail, where they remained at press time.

Madhya Pradesh – Police in Jabalpur detained eight Korean Christians on March 15 after Hindu extremists filed a complaint against them of luring people to convert to Christianity. A source reported that Hindu extremists from the Dharma Sena (Religious Army) also accused them of distributing pamphlets with objectionable materials in them and took the Christians to Adhartal police station. Hindu extremist leader Arvind Baba complained that the Koreans were offering huge sums of money to people to convert to Christianity. The Koreans denied the accusations. After police investigated, the Christians were released without charges

New Delhi – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal on March 12 attacked a prayer meeting in Kalkaji, New Delhi and made false allegations that Christians were desecrating idols and making insulting remarks about their gods and goddesses, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI). Jagdish Dey of the Apostolic Faith Church (AFC) was leading a prayer meeting at the residence of a church member attended by six women and a few children when the extremists stood at the door of the house and started taking photographs, according to the EFI. After the final prayer, the extremists forcefully entered the house and dragged Dey out to the street, where about 30 armed extremists waited to beat him, but the women kept Dey from them. Police arrived and took Dey into custody, where area AFC pastor Bobby Chellappan and the Rev. Jobby

Prasannan soon arrived, as did 50 Hindu extremists who threatened to hurt the Christians and pressured police into forcing Dey to promise to stop the prayer meetings. "It was a false allegation against us – we do not talk about other people's religion, nor teach people to talk ill against any other faith," Chellappan told the EFI. The Hindu extremists have also kept the Christians from using the public water pump and have pressured landlords to evict them, Prasannan told the EFI. In a similar incident the next day, the extremists disrupted a women's prayer meeting led by another AFC pastor, Blessy Bobby, and ordered the Christians to cease the meeting or face harm, according to the EFI.

Madhya Pradesh – State police on March 11 arrested a pastor and another Christian after Hindu extremists disrupted their Sunday worship in Multai, Betul district. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that extremists from the Bajrang Dal stormed the house church, stopped worship and accused pastor Motilal Gujare of forceful conversion. Pastor Gujare's brother, a zealous Hindu extremist, instigated his co-religionists to break up the worship due to a personal grievance he had against the pastor, according to the EFI. Multai police arrived and arrested Pastor Gujare and Prakash Masih for "uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person." The Christians were sent to jail and were released on bail on March 15.

Karnataka – State police in Ankola, Uttar Kannada on March 4 arrested a pastor after Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh disrupted a worship service, beat him and other church members and accused them of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists barged into the Sunday worship of New Life Church, beat pastor K. Manohar, his wife Lavanya and other church members and took the pastor and his wife to police, accusing them of forceful conversion. The Christians were detained till late evening, and after area leaders' intervention, Pastor Manohar's wife was released without charges, but he was charged with hurting religious feelings and was sent to jail, according to the GCIC. At press time area Christian leaders were working to get the pastor released.

Karnataka – On March 3 in Vijayanagar, Bangalore, Hindu extremists accused Christians of forceful conversion and ordered them to halt a prayer meeting. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists forcefully entered the prayer meeting led by two women identified only as Parimala and Padmavathi of Mahima Prarthana Mandira. Police officers arrived, verbally abused the Christians and then ordered them to report to the police station the next day. Officers detained the Christians the following day, but after area Christian leaders' intervention, they were released without a First Information Report being filed against them. GCIC also reported that the two women had to give a statement in writing that they wouldn't visit houses and distribute tracts, and that they would not lead prayer vigils.

Assam – Hindu extremists in Gophur on March 3 beat a Christian worker for his faith. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that the extremists beat evangelist Santosh K. Jose, put a garland of sandals on him and paraded him through the village. Jose sustained severe injuries and was taken to his native Kannur, Kerala state, for treatment and rest.

Madhya Pradesh – On Feb. 28 Dasrath Mandari expelled his Christian wife, Satwantin Mandari, from their home and village in Tuthuly, Kanker, because of her faith in Christ. A source told Compass that Hindu extremists had warned him that they would ostracize the family if his wife continued to believe in Christ, and he cast her out that same night. The community strictly prohibited her from returning home unless she returned to Hinduism. The homeless Christian was staying with a Christian family in Kanker.

Madhya Pradesh – The parents of a 23-year-old woman, along with community members, chased her from her home and village because she refused to renounce Christ.

A source told Compass that Hindu extremists Patel Singh, Jalam Singh and Raja Ram and one identified only as Iswar pressured Mingaro Bhai's parents, Dasu Ram and Sadhini Ram, to throw her out. The convert from Hinduism took shelter with another Christian in Kanker and filed a complaint against the attackers on Feb. 13 in Dudhada Chowki Thana. Officials summoned her on Feb. 24 to tell her she could proceed with the complaint against her attackers, including her parents, in a higher court, but at press time Bhai had not done so.

Madhya Pradesh – On Jan. 19 in Modi, Thana Antagar, Kanker, Hindu extremists stopped a Christian from beginning her new job because of her faith in Christ. A source reported that the Madhya Pradesh government appointed Shrimati Sambhai of a Gospel for Asia church as a pre-school teacher, but the village head, Dhanuram Behari, and community leader Hiralal Behari persuaded the state to revoke her appointment because of her Christian faith. She filed a police complaint in Sarpanch Amodi on Feb. 18, to no avail. Area Christian leaders were intervening, but at press time the Christian was still not allowed to take her post.

Madhya Pradesh – Hindu extremists in Terra Gowndi, Dhamtari, on Jan. 18 ostracized a Christian convert from Hinduism and pressured him to leave the village. A source told Compass that the extremist threatened to throw Om Prakash Sahu out of the village if he did not renounce Christ, and they also threatened his parents with harm if they did not bring him back to Hinduism.

Parents, Islamic extremists beat young woman in India

Christian in West Bengal cast out of home for her faith

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (20.03.12) – A young woman was thrown out of her home this month for daring to give thanks for healing in Christ's name in a predominantly Muslim village in India's West Bengal state, and then her parents helped Islamic extremists to beat her nearly unconscious.

The attack on Rekha Khatoon, 22, took place on March 9 in Nutangram, Murshidabad.

"I boldly told those who beat me up that I may leave my parents, but that I will not leave Jesus," Khatoon said. "Jesus has healed me, and I cannot forget Him."

In a village where hard-line Muslims have threatened to kill the 25 families who initially showed interest in Christ, leaving only five frightened Christian families, Khatoon was returning from worship with Believers Church at Al Hamdulillah Hall when her parents and Muslim extremists attacked her, she said. They called her a pagan, among other verbal abuse.

The mob also harassed the Christian woman who encouraged Khatoon to trust Christ as Lord, Aimazan Bibi, said Bashir Pal, pastor and founder of the village Believers Church.

"On the same night, Rekha Khatoon's father, Nistar Shaike, and about 20 Muslim radicals surrounded Aimazan's house, shouted anti-Christian slogans, threatened to harm her and her family and falsely accused her of 'luring' Rekha to convert to Christianity," Pastor Pal told Compass.

After finding herself alone on a road after the beating, Khatoon had taken refuge in Aimazan Bibi's home.

Khatoon had met Amaizan Bibi last year and told her about a reproductive ailment that caused her to bleed heavily, and the older woman had shared both the gospel of Christ and His healing power with her, Pastor Pal said.

"After Rekha Khatoon came to know about her ailment, she met one of our church members, Aimazan Bibi, and she shared her physical problem with her and told her that her illness was getting worse as she was not able to purchase medicines anymore," he said.

Aimazan Bibi also invited Khatoon to attend church. On Dec. 23, Khatoon came to the worship center, where Christian women laid hands on her, he said. The pastor and congregation prayed for God's healing touch in Jesus' name.

"She received healing from Christ, and thereafter she attended the worship services whenever she could," Pastor Pal said. "On Jan. 17, Khatoon attended one house church meeting in her village and once again testified that Jesus has healed her, and that she had not taken any medicine since Dec. 23."

He said the Muslim extremists warned Khatoon not to have contact with Christians. West Bengal is 25.2 percent Muslim, with Hindus in the predominantly Hindu country making up 72.5 percent of the population in the state, according to *Operation World*. The state, which borders Muslim-majority Bangladesh, is only 0.6 percent Christian.

Upon learning that she was attending Christian worship meetings, her parents had strictly warned her not to have any relationships with Christians and not to attend their fellowship, Aimazan Bibi said.

"However, she told them that she cannot forget Jesus and His love for her," she said.

Pastor Pal's wife, nurse Anasea Pal, added that at another house church meeting, Khatoon brought her sister and talked about the healing she had received from Christ.

Khatoon has since relocated to another area, where she lives largely confined for her own protection.

Khatoon and her mother had attended worship services at the church previously; they began there in 2009 until area Muslims, furious to hear that several women were attending worship services, warned them to cease all contact with Christians or else they would face harm. The local mosque then offered Khatoon's mother a job carrying food for the local Islamic leader to ensure she stopped all contact with Christians.

She also stopped Khatoon from attending Christian meetings.

Tensions prevail in the area, with enraged Muslim radicals threatening to hurt the five Christian families on the slightest pretext. In addition to harassing Aimazan Bibi, Islamic extremists have ruined her son Sirajul Shaik's business, throwing away all his vegetables and chasing him out of the village market.

"It is very difficult for them now, since selling vegetables was the main source of income for the family," Pastor Pal said.

Christians in the village have endured all manner of physical torture and social boycotts at the hand of Muslim extremists, Pastor Pal said. He added that the extremists are not allowing Christians to enter the village.

Orissa: second Christian killed since the start of the year

AsiaNews (14.03.12) - Six Christians have been killed by Hindu ultra-nationalists or unknown attackers in Orissa in the last 14th months. The latest are Suryakant Nayak, an Anglican from Bakingia village (Kandhamal), and Goresa Mallick, a Catholic from Salimagocha village (Ganjam), who were murdered on 6 and 3 March respectively. "What is scary is the fact that the government is not concerned about the occasional killing of Christians in Orissa, and that the police is conducting its investigation slowly and carelessly," said Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC).

The latest murders were particularly gruesome. Suryakant Nayak went missing on 2 March. After withdrawing some money in Raika, he carried out some errands with his mother and three daughters and then went home. Not far from home, he stopped for a drink whilst his mother and daughter went on their way.

Eyewitnesses say they later saw him lying on the ground, drunk. His body was found in a well four days later not far from Raikia, showing bruises. Both his hands and wrists were broken. The mouth and lips were swollen and some of his teeth were missing. All these are telltale signs of a fight. Nevertheless, the police has not filed a case of murder yet.

On 3 March, Goresa Mallick, 50, met a group of 15 Hindus from a neighboring village. After drinking something, he was attacked by the men, who cut his throat and then proceeded to burn his body in the woods. The next day, the family found his remains.

Police arrested the alleged murderers who justified the killing by accusing the victim of "witchcraft". Goresa Mallick had converted to Catholicism five months earlier.

According to Sajan George, "the high rate of acquittals and the low rate of conviction in connection with the 2008 pogrom have encouraged right-wing Hindu nationalists. They feel they have total immunity from the authorities and can thus threaten and intimidate the Christian minority with impunity."

What is more, "in Kandhamal District, the failure to bring Hindu extremists to justice" is compounded by the fact that "Christians are ostracized."

India expels Chabad rabbi over alleged attempt to hide conversion efforts

IRPP (14.03.12) - A Chabad rabbi who was serving the tiny ancient Jewish community in Cochin, India, and his wife were expelled to Israel on Tuesday for allegedly engaging in illegal activities. Indian authorities accused Rabbi Zalman Bernstein of failing to declare on his visa application that he would be conducting religious activities and of trying to convert foreigners. A local daily accused him and his wife of spying for Israel.

Bernstein, of the Chabad Hasidic movement, dismisses all the charges and says he was always open about the purpose of his stay in India → providing religious services. With his departure, the Jewish community in Cochin is now down to fewer than the ten Jewish men required as a quorum for organized prayer.

Bernstein and his wife, Shendi, say they were invited by the local Jewish community to come to Cochin two and a half years ago after the death of the community's long-time rabbi. He told Haaretz that the couple had noted on official government forms that they were conducting religious activities in Cochin. Their work there included organizing prayer, celebration of Jewish holidays and administration of the large synagogue in a neighborhood of the city known as "Jew Town" and was conducted openly, they say.

Spy allegations

A report by a local correspondent for the Times of India daily reported that the rabbi held numerous suspicious nighttime meetings at his home in Cochin and that the large size of the home engendered suspicion that he was receiving outside financial support. The reporter went on to say that the couple had been accused of spying for Israel, but the basis of his allegation was simply a conclusion drawn from a reference in a police report to strange activities conducted by the rabbi.

Following the press report, Bernstein denied that he had engaged in spying, and Israeli consul Eyal Siso of the embassy in New Delhi said the espionage allegations were "nonsense." He said there was speculation that a Libyan Muslim initiated the effort to have Rabbi Bernstein and his wife expelled but this has not been confirmed.

Chabad, which is based in Brooklyn, New York, is an ultra-Orthodox movement that is well known for its outreach to unaffiliated Jews. Its centers have become a popular destination among Israeli and other Jewish backpackers. The Chabad House in the Indian city of Mumbai was targeted by terrorists in 2008, killing six people including the Chabad rabbi and his wife.

Chabad has 4,000 centers run by husband and wife couples in countries all over the world. Chabad sources said since the Mumbai blast, senior officials of the movement in India have kept a lower profile.

For his part, Bernstein speculated that the expulsion order was issued because the owners of numerous boutique hotels and restaurants in the area wished to rid themselves of competition from Chabad House, where Shabbat dinner is offered at no charge. The Chabad rabbi said he had also been accused of attempting to expand the Jewish community in Cochin by attracting foreigners who would then be converted to Judaism. He denied that he was engaged in such an effort. Over the past month, he and his wife tried to persuade the local Indian court to allow them to remain, but to no avail.

Although the expulsion order issued against Bernstein and his wife did not accuse the couple of espionage, it unleashed a wave of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel comment on the Internet. Hebrew University professor Shalva Weil, an expert on Indian Jewry, said there is no history of the anti-Semitic targeting of Indian Jews. Weil said the Jewish community of Cochin → in the Indian state of Kerala → at one time numbered 2,400 people, but most moved to Israel in 1954.

India Briefs: Recent incidents of persecution (February)

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct New (29.02.12) – State police on Feb. 21 arrested a Christian after Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) accused him of forceful conversion and beat him in Thuvakudi, Trichy district. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the Hindu extremists made the accusation against

Sahayam Chidambaran after arguing with his brother, pastor John Chidambaran. The pastor's neighbor had demanded part of his church land, and after a quarrel had broken a water pipeline. When the pastor filed a police complaint, the neighbor brought about 10 extremists from the RSS to attack the pastor and falsely accuse him of fraudulent and forced conversion. They also beat his daughter, Mercy, who had to be rushed to the hospital for treatment, reported the GCIC. Police assured the pastor that they would amicably settle the matter and also took a statement from him, but the neighbor along with an RSS leader identified only as Mahendra subsequently attacked the pastor's brother and raised the same false accusation to get him arrested and jailed. Sajan K. George, president of the GCIC, told Compass today that the Christian remained in jail at press time and that he and his team was working for his release. "We are expecting that he will be out from the prison in two days time," he said on Tuesday (Feb. 28).

Kerala – Hindu extremists in Kanhagad, Kasargod, on Feb. 21 verbally abused a pastor and his children and damaged his car because of his faith in Christ. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Hindu extremists barged into the house of a convert from Hinduism who had invited pastor Titus Ignatius Kapan and his family for dinner. The invading extremists tackled the pastor and his children, and then began dropping huge boulders and stones on his car, according to the GCIC. The assailant fled after learning Pastor Kapan had called police, who arrived about an hour later. Officers filed a charge-sheet, but no arrests had been made at press time.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) disrupted a prayer service organized by Bershebha church on Feb. 15 in Pandhi village, near Bilaspur. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the church had organized a worship event for Feb. 14-16 and had prior police permission. On the first day of the meeting, 15 to 20 RSS members arrived and issued threats, telling pastors Daulat Ram and Sunam Kumar Besra to halt the event; on their way out, they slapped Pastor Besra. On the second day, about 50 RSS members told the pastor to stop the meeting and then started tearing down the tent, microphone and speakers. The mob then dragged the Christians and started assaulting them, resulting in severe injuries. Pastor Besra suffered head injuries that required stitches. Later that evening, the extremists came back and attacked pastor Immanuel Banchor and other church members, beating them badly with their fists and a leather belt. The pastor sustained an injury to his left eye, and another Christian's ear was severely injured. The extremists also damaged the pastor's motorbike. With great difficulty the Christians managed to take refuge at a Christian's house near the event site. At around 3 a.m. some pastors and church members brought them to their houses in Bilaspur. A case has been registered against the extremists, reported the GCIC.

Andhra Pradesh – Members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) threatened a church in Sutari Gudem village, near Medchal, during a worship service on Feb. 12. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that Timothy Paul, a pastor in Sutari Gudem for more than two years, received a warning six months ago from BJP members to stop leading services in his rented home. Another Christian provided a place for services where about 50 people meet on Sundays, and it was there that the Hindu extremists from the BJP stormed into the church service and had a heated argument with the pastor that nearly led to a physical attack. Pastor Suvarho Rao and a few of the church elders planned to meet with village elders to resolve the issue of church services in the village, according to AICC.

Karnataka – Police along with Hindu extremists on Feb. 2 searched the home of a pastor, took tracts and Bibles and filed a complaint against him of forceful conversion in Siddapura, Utara Kannada. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that officers in civil attire and area Hindu extremist leaders searched pastor Kiran Thippanna Das's house without cause and questioned him. They took his vehicle, some books and Bibles and ordered him to meet with the inspector. Three days later he received a phone

call from police ordering him to meet an official identified only as Almurthy, who told him he had received complaints from villagers that he was forcefully converting people to Christianity and that he had 24 hours to leave the village or go to jail. The pastor contacted pastor L.N. Gowda, state coordinator of the GCIC, who in turn informed the official about human and legal rights and said legal trouble could arise from his action on behalf of the Hindu extremists. The official summoned the pastor the next day and told him that he could ask for protection if necessary.

Chhattisgarh – Police arrested a pastor and another Christian on Feb. 1 after Hindu extremists accused them of forceful conversion in Jorapara, Raipur. A source told Compass that pastor Harish Sahu of New Life Fellowship led prayer meetings at the house of a Christian identified only as Baghel. The extremists confronted Baghel's relatives, Upendra Pande and Purnima Pande, at about 1 p.m., accusing them of forceful conversion, and beat them. As the Christians reported the matter at Modhapara, Raipur police station, the extremists filed a police complaint against Pastor Sahu and Baghel of forceful conversion and allurements, the source said. Police summoned Pastor Sahu and charged him and Baghel, who were later sent to Central Jail, Raipur. Both of them denied the charges, and they were released on bail on Feb. 2, the source said. Purnima Pande, Baghel's niece, filed a complaint against Hindu extremists Suneel Gaikwad, Raju Shendre, Ajay Sahu, one identified only as Goldi and others. The extremists were arrested but later released on bail.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal disrupted a gospel film screening, destroyed equipment and beat a pastor on Jan. 31 in Indira Nagar, Dongargarh. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that pastor Rajendra Masih of a Believer's Church congregation was screening the movie in front of the residence of one of the members of his church when the extremists charged in. They caught hold of Pastor Masih and began thrashing him, leaving lacerations on his face and wounding his left eye. The extremists phoned police at about 11:30 p.m. complaining that the Christians were forcibly and fraudulently converting Hindus to Christianity. The police inspector visited the place along with a few constables and took the pastor to the station for further questioning. Finding no basis for the accusation, he closed the case after the two groups worked out an agreement.

Chhattisgarh – Hindu nationalists surrounded Nirmala Convent School on Jan. 31 in Korba to try to force those present to make a ritual offering to a Hindu goddess. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that the extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh entered the school chanting slogans and accused staff members of forceful conversion. A student carried an idol of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, with the intention of performing "puja," or ritual offering, in class, and the Hindu extremists were on hand to support the act, according to the EFI. Soon police arrived and ordered the principal, Sister Mary, to lead the Hindu ritual. When she refused, a Hindu teacher was told to conduct the offering. A local cable TV channel, Abhi Tak, subsequently broadcast false reports that the idol had been desecrated by Christians at the convent school. Police ignored an attempt to file a complaint against the channel, which repeated the fabricated news for 48 hours. Despite several attempts by school authorities to file a case against the radicals, none was taken.

Jharkhand – Christians in Chaibasa district were forced to leave their village after a series of attacks against them by local villagers. The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that in the latest attack, on Jan. 29, a mob closed down all the exit points of the village and attacked the Christians with iron rods, axes, arrows and other sharp weapons. The Rev. Rajendra Babu received a blow with iron rods while trying to leave the village, breaking the helmet he was wearing, the EFI reported. The mob also beat three other Christians – Madan Muduiya and two identified only as Sunil and Vinod – and broke doors, windows, furniture and other belongings in the house of a Christian. They also dragged some Christians, including children, to a room, locked it from the outside and

attempted to set it ablaze. The arrival of police halted the violence. The Christians have taken refuge on church premises outside the village, without adequate food and clothing. Their animals have been slaughtered and their harvest stock destroyed, EFI reported. A First Information Report was registered against the attackers, but no arrests were made. On Jan. 29 the village head called for a reconciliation meeting and identified the assailants, but the Hindu extremists boycotted.

Gujarat – Unidentified people on Jan. 26 used a bulldozer to destroy tombs in a Christian cemetery in Sabarmati, Dharamnagar. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a local councilor along with ultranationalist Bharatiya Janata Party members had incited the assailants. “When we reached the cemetery, cars were parked in the area where tombs used to be,” said Martin Hector Harris of the Methodist Church in Dharamnagar, according to the GCIC. “We also saw the desecrators pile mud from the tombstones on a nearby sidewalk. Police have not arrested anyone yet, or even started an investigation.”

Karnataka – Four Dalit Christian families have been receiving threats since nine Hindu extremists charged into the house of a Christian identified only as Puttamma as she was celebrating her son’s 25th birthday on Jan. 9 and injured 10 people. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the attackers, alleged to have come from Sarjapur six kilometers (less than four miles) away, fled when the commotion attracted other villagers. Puttamma reportedly said some villagers had threatened to cut off the water supply to the Christians’ homes and remove their names from a rationing list. She was hit on the leg when she tried to stop the Hindu extremist assailants from assaulting the pastor. The GCIC reported that the Hindu extremists have also told people not to employ the Christians.

Accused pastor in Kashmir, India given reprieve

Police fail to find evidence of fraudulent conversion; converts urged to return to Islam

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (16.02.12) – A court has ordered the Jammu and Kashmir state government to temporarily halt criminal proceedings against a pastor accused of bribing Muslim youths to convert to Christianity.

The state’s High Court on Saturday (Feb. 11) halted proceedings in the police complaint of “promotion of religious enmity by conversions” against the Rev. Chander Mani Khanna of the Church of North India denomination. Responding to a petition by the pastor to quash the complaint, the court issued notices to top officials of the state’s police department and interior ministry because investigators have not been able to formulate charges even though the case was registered last Oct. 29, Pastor Khanna told Compass by phone.

Pastor Khanna, who retired on Jan. 16 from All Saints Church in Kashmir Valley’s Srinagar city, seemed relieved.

“After I was released on bail, the court had asked me not to leave the state, but with this stay order I can at least travel out,” he said.

The pastor, who remained in jail for more than 40 days until he was released on bail last Dec. 1, added that the court asked the government to file its response by March 14, and

then it will set the date for the next hearing. Police have not been able to gather evidence of "conversion by allurement" against Pastor Khanna.

The pastor added that real victory will be achieved when he is allowed to return to Kashmir, in the Muslim-majority region of the state.

"We do not want to retaliate," he said. "We want to promote the spirit of acceptance, accommodation and tolerance and be salt to the community in Kashmir for the betterment of the whole country."

Kashmir's *sharia* (Islamic law) court, which has no legal authority in India, in December found Pastor Khanna, the Rev. Jim Borst, a Dutch Catholic missionary and Gayoor Messah, a Christian worker, guilty of "luring the valley Muslims to Christianity" and ordered them to leave the state. The court, headed by Kashmir Grand Mufti Bashir-ud-din Ahmad, also "directed" the state government to take over the management of all Christian schools in the region.

Muslim leaders had been rallying against Christians after a video posted on YouTube last October showed the baptism of formerly Muslim youths at All Saints Church. The sharia court summoned Pastor Khanna and held a hearing before announcing its verdict against the three pastors.

Reconversions

Life has been extremely difficult for Kashmir's Christians since the sharia court's verdict, said a Christian worker who fled the region last month along with 15 others.

Muslim clergy, he told Compass, claim to have converted 155 Christians back to Islam.

"But I don't believe that," added the source, who said he fled fearing police would force him to speak against Pastor Khanna. "I have spoken to some of them, and they said they neither denounced their faith, and nor did they embrace Islam. Out of fear, they listened to the 'advice' while remaining non-committal."

Local online news portal Kashmirwatch.com late last month reported that an Islamic seminary in north Kashmir was working with 115 converts to bring them back to Islam.

"We are collecting details," it quoted a seminary official as saying. "We would try to catch them all and persuade them to revert to Islam."

Local Christians say the sharia court has formed area committees to prevent conversions and reconvert Christians. Committee members are visiting Christians' homes and allegedly pressuring them and their families to return to Islam.

Kashmirwatch.com reported that over 20,000 Kashmiri Muslims had converted to Christianity since separatist militancy erupted in Kashmir in the 1990s. According to a September 2002 report in Christian media in the United States, it reported, the number of "neo-Christians" was 15,000.

"The conversions are likely to have surged past 20,000, with over a dozen Christian missions and churches based in the U.S., Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland operating in the state," the news portal stated.

Local Christians said the report in the U.S. media was not accurate.

Support from Separatists

While most Muslim leaders have turned against Christians and the state government is apparently unconcerned about their safety, a highly influential separatist group has spoken out for Christians.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, head of a faction of the Hurriyat Conference separatist political front, has reportedly said his group does not support the sharia court's fatwa calling for the expulsion of a few Christian workers from the state.

"Banishing someone is no solution," the *Kashmir Times* quoted him as saying. "As Muslims, it is our responsibility to ensure that we reach out to our youth and create awareness about Islam."

The 82-year-old leader also acknowledged the contribution Christians have made to Kashmir.

"They are part and parcel of the society," he reportedly said. "It is our duty to protect them. Kashmiris cannot ignore the contributions of Christian missionary schools towards the educational system in the Valley. Unfortunately, Kashmiri Muslims have not been able to build an educational institution like those by the Christian missionary schools despite all available resources."

A fact-finding team, which included a senior official of the National Commission for Minorities, visited Kashmir from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2 last year. It learned that some extremist groups and other vested interests had been trying 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," the fact-finding team reported.

The state government apparently sided with the extremists to preempt any unrest, local residents told the fact-finding team.

Recent incidents of persecution (January)

By Mahruaii Sailo

Compass Direct News (31.01.2012) –

Orissa – A Hindu extremist in Adigar, Phulbani, Kandhamal district on Jan. 25 attacked a pastor's hut and harassed his family, according to the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). Jaleswar Pradhan threw stones at the home of Pastor Patiba Mohan Kota while he was away, verbally abused his wife and pushed his daughters, shouting, "You Christians must not live here – it is not your land; the last time your houses were only damaged, this time all of you will be buried here," the GCIC reported. Though damage to the house was minimal, the pastor and his family were anguishing in fear as Hindu extremists have previously tortured him physically, causing partial loss of eyesight and hearing, reported the GCIC. The pastor was among those whose houses were destroyed during anti-Christian violence in 2008. Pradhan was booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, reported the GCIC.

Karnataka – Hindu extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh on Jan. 23 barged into a prayer meeting led by Pastor Chandrakanth Chavan of New Life Fellowship in Haliyal, Kanara, beat him and stripped him naked. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists shouted at the Christians in coarse language as they started beating and kicking Pastor Chavan and Kishore Kavalekar

before parading the naked pastor in a procession throughout the village. At about midnight they tied the pastor to a tree near a temple and sent for police. Haliyal Police Sub-Inspector Umesh Shet and a dozen officers took Pastor Chavan and Kavalekar into custody for questioning, according to the GCIC. Both were charged and locked up but were released the same night.

Orissa – Raikia police on Jan. 9 arrested Pastor Sukadeb Digal from his home in Sipainju (or Sipainjari) village, Tiangia, G-Udayagiri Block, in Kandhamal district on false charges of forced or fraudulent conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians reported that police incarcerated him. Digal, pastor of Danekbadi Baptist Church at Daringbadi, remained in jail at press time.

Karnataka – Armed Hindu extremists on Jan. 9 beat Christians at a prayer service in Anekal, Bangalore, seriously injuring a pastor and others and accusing them of forceful conversion. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that a pastor identified only as Shanthakumar had organized the service at the home of another Christian where about 20 people had gathered in the Coogur area. At about 10:30 p.m. some 20 Hindu extremists attacked with huge clubs and iron rods, ranting in foul language and accusing them of fraudulent and forcible conversion, according to the GCIC. In the beatings, Pastor Shanthakumar lost one finger, and a church member identified only as Yashodamma received treatment for head and nerve injuries at Anekal Government Hospital. Another church member identified only as Vijay suffered a serious leg injury. The Christians reported the matter to the police; officials have held an inquiry and registered a First Information Report against the extremists, but no arrests have been made.

Andhra Pradesh – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal on Jan. 17 beat a pastor and another church member in Yadagirigutta, accusing them of forceful conversion. The All India Christian Council (AICC) reported that the pastor, identified only as Kiran, and another Christian were on their way to visit a church member who works with the tourism department in Yadagirigutta, Bhogri, a Hindu pilgrimage town, when the extremists took notice and gathered a mob to attack them. As is customary in India, police arrived and arrested the victims. After area Christian leaders' intervention, the accusations against the two Christians were found to be baseless, and they were released without charges, according to the AICC.

Karnataka – Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal on Jan. 1 attacked a New Year's prayer service and accused a pastor of forceful conversion in Humnoor, Bagalkot. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that the extremists stormed into the prayer meeting led by Pastor Siddu Seemanth Gunike of Blessing Youth Mission Church, ordered it to stop and beat the pastor, alleging that he was involved in fraudulent and forced conversions. After manhandling the pastor and other Christians, the extremists sent for Jamkhandi police, according to the GCIC. The sub-inspector and a few other officers arrived and began questioning those present. Area Christian leaders intervened, and police took a written statement from the extremists that they would not disturb the Christians again; officers advised the Christians to continue their prayer services.

Karnataka – About a dozen Hindu extremists in North Kanara forced their way into a New Year's Eve prayer service, ordered Christians to stop praying and beat them. The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that extremists led by Biju Nair and a friend identified only as Venkatesh accused the Christians of fraudulent and forcible conversions. The extremists informed police, and two police constables arrived and joined in harassing the Christians, threatening to harm them. The officers ordered the pastor to go to the police station the next morning, and on that day Christians filed a police complaint against the extremists and the two constables for trespassing on church property and for their heavy-handed tactics, according to the GCIC. Later, the Christians met with Ramnagar Police Sub-Inspector Babu Madar and briefed him about the incident.

The sub-inspector reprimanded the two constables and advised the pastor to continue the prayer services without fear.

Tensions rise in Kashmir, India after 'guilty verdict,' fatwa

Sharia court launches campaign threatening to ostracize those who decline to convert to Islam

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (20.01.2012) - Christian workers are fleeing India's Kashmir Valley after a sharia (Islamic law) court issued a "guilty verdict" against three Christian leaders, issued a fatwa against Christian schools and allegedly launched a door-to-door campaign to bring converts back to Islam.

The court, which has no legal authority, found the Rev. Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church in Srinagar, Dutch Catholic missionary Jim Borst and Christian worker Gayoor Messah guilty of "luring the valley Muslims to Christianity," The Times of India daily reported on Dec. 19.

The three had already left the region apparently due to rising tensions.

Headed by Kashmir Grand Mufti Bashir-ud-din Ahmad, the sharia court also "directed" the state government to take over the management of all Christian schools in the region, the daily added.

"I fled with my wife and children, as I was not feeling safe in Srinagar," a Christian worker from Kashmir told Compass on condition of anonymity. "A group of Muslims visited my house twice, threatening my parents with a social boycott if they failed to produce me."

The source said he and some of his friends left Srinagar, the summer capital of northern India's Jammu and Kashmir state, a few days before the sharia court ordered three Christian workers to leave Kashmir Valley, in the Muslim-majority region of the state.

Another source told Compass that some men had visited his family and those of his friends in Srinagar asking for their whereabouts.

"They had the names of all my local Christian friends when they came to my parents' house, and they asked for the names of more Christians in the area," he said. "Muslim men are going to every believer's home and asking their families to ensure that their children return to Islam. They are using Islamic scriptures to persuade the families, warning that if their members do not reconvert their households will face ostracism."

The source added that those who have fled may not be able to return to their homes for at least a year.

"We have our family with children - where should we send our kids to school?" he said. "Where should we stay? We don't have any answers."

He said the men who are visiting Christians' homes are sent from the many committees the sharia court has formed to prevent conversions. The mufti could not be contacted for comment.

Separately, well-known Muslim clergyman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq recently launched a website, www.tahafuzeiman.org, entitled "Council for Protection of Faith," for a committee formed in November 2011, "after numerous cases of apostasy came into light" and "to thwart nefarious designs of pervasive forces and the deep-rooted conspiracy of making youth apostate and defectors by giving them concessions and benefits secretly."

Besides the "guilty verdict" against Pastor Khanna, Borst and Messa, mufti deputy Nasir-ul-Islam reportedly said an investigation against Parvez Samuel Kaul, principal of a local Christian missionary school, was underway.

The court also ordered all Christian schools to teach Islam and other faiths.

"Given the Muslim majority character of the valley, the Muslim students should be taught Islam, and daily prayer written by Syed Mohammad Iqbal should also be sung in the morning prayers," Nasir-ul-Islam told The Times of India.

Muslim leaders began to rally against Christians after a video posted on YouTube last October showed Muslim youth being baptized at the All Saints Church. Soon thereafter, the sharia court "summoned" Pastor Khanna to explain why Muslim youth were converted and whether they were offered money.

State police arrested Pastor Khanna on Nov. 19 on charges of hurting religious sentiments of Muslims by "converting" their youth. He was released on bail on Dec. 1. The court later summoned Borst, but he asked the mufti to meet him at his church site. The mufti declined. The court found Christian worker Messah "guilty" because he was also seen with Pastor Khanna in the video.

The All India Christian Council warned that the sharia court's verdict could encourage extremist elements to indulge in violence.

"The church does not accept as genuine any conversion brought about by fraud or force," Dr. John Dayal, the group's secretary general, said in a statement.

He pointed out that a fact-finding team that went to Srinagar late last year found no evidence of force or fraud in baptisms. "Each baptism has been proven to be voluntary."

There are only about 400 Christians in the Kashmir region, with 300 of them living in Srinagar, according to the fact-finding team.

The council also said the Christian community did not accept the jurisdiction of the sharia courts anywhere in India.

The sharia court was careful in its "verdict," one of the area sources observed, noting that the three who were ordered to leave are not permanent residents of Kashmir. He questioned the fatwa against Christian schools.

"The court issued a fatwa against Christian schools because some business-minded Muslims want greater control over these schools, which are known for providing quality education," he said.

Local residents saw an element of politics behind the tensions. The fact-finding team, which visited Kashmir from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2, learned from local people that some extremist groups and other vested interests had 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,” one resident said. The state government apparently sided with the extremists to preempt any unrest, local residents told the fact-finding team.

While most Muslims in Kashmir are peaceful adherents of Sufi Islam, some are influenced by Wahhabism and are extremists.
