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## **Archbishop, priests and nuns arrested during peaceful demonstration**

AsiaNews (11.12.2013) - Police in New Delhi arrested Archbishop Anil JT Couto, as well as priests and nuns from his diocese, during a peaceful march for the rights of Dalit Christians and Muslims. Mgr Anil JT Couto, along with other members of the local clergy, was taking part in a protest for the rights of Dalit Christians and Muslims. Police apparently beat the religious leaders present, charging the crowd with water cannons. Several people have been injured. For Card Gracias, "violence on priests, religious and nuns" is a disgrace for India. The country "cannot move forward as long as one part of society is discriminated and deprived of something on religious grounds."

According to eyewitnesses, police agents beat vested priests and nuns who are presently being held at a police station near the parliament building.

Several people have also been reportedly injured. Some sources note that agents charged the crowd using water cannons.

Card Oswald Gracias, president of the Bishops' Conference (CBCI) and archbishop of Mumbai, told *AsiaNews* that "the excessive violence on our bishops, priests and nuns" was a disgrace. They were "arrested and detained because they fought for the rightful demands of the country's poor and marginalised."

The Archbishop of Delhi and other religious leaders were silently marching from Jantar Mantar, headed to the parliament building when the police intervened using water cannons.

In addition to Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto, those arrested include Church of North India (Anglican Church) General Secretary Alwan Masih, Dr Roger Gaikwad from the National Council of Churches in India, National Council of Dalit Christians President Mary John, Delhi Minorities Commission member A C Michael, All India Christian Council Secretary General John Dayal and Member of Parliament Anwar Ali.

"The Catholic Church of India is deeply saddened by the detention of our clergy, religious and other people, who were merely asking for justice and equality for Dalit Christians and Muslims," Archbishop Couto said.

The struggle to achieve equal rights for Dalit Christians and Muslims has been going on since 1950, when the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 was adopted, granting economic, educational and social advantages to Dalit Hindus. In 1956 and 1990, the status was extended to Buddhists and Sikhs.

"Such discrimination violates the constitution, which instead treats all citizens as equals," said the president of the Bishops' Conference. "Our concern touches the whole of India, which cannot move forward as long as one part of society is discriminated and deprived of something on religious grounds. This is detrimental to the development and moral authority of the nation."

This is the first time since 27 November 1997 that bishops and religious leaders are arrested for embracing the Dalit cause.

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## **Indian Christians sentenced to life terms will appeal**

### ***Lawyer says murder convictions are based on 'circumstantial' evidence***

World Watch Monitor (18.10.2013) - India's churches are urging an appeal of the lifetime sentences handed down Oct. 3 to seven men convicted for the 2008 murder of a prominent Hindu leader.

"The seven Christians are innocent," said Rev. Charles Irudayam, executive secretary of the Office for Justice, Peace and Development within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. "The ruling is manifestly wrong and unjust. We call for the release of the seven innocent, sentenced without evidence," he said via [a statement](#) issued to the Catholic news service Agenzia Fides.

An eighth defendant, Pulari Rama Rao, a leader in India's communist Naxalite movement, also was sentenced to life in prison.

The eight were among 14 the government suspected of carrying out the August 2008 murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four others at his hermitage in the rural heart of Orissa state. Saraswati was a Hindu monk and an activist for the welfare of India's many indigenous, and impoverished, tribes. A mob of about 50 people surrounded his hermitage, and several opened fire.

The killings touched off a wave of violence, much of it directed at Christians, whom many angered Hindus considered responsible. Orissa is among the states along India's eastern flank, the heartland of the communist Naxalite movement, which has attracted many Christians in India's lower castes. Police focused their investigation on Maoists, even as leaders in the movement said Christians were among those pressing for Saraswati's death. Saraswati was prominent in the Viśva Hindu Pariṣad, or VHP, a Hindu nationalist political party, and took a hard line against Christians attempting to convert Hindus.

The violence following Saraswati's murder left nearly 40 people dead, some of them dragged from their homes and burned. Thousands of Christians fled their villages. Christian homes, churches and an orphanage were burned.

The eight defendants, tried in a district court in the rural town of Phulbani, were convicted Sept. 30 of murder, criminal conspiracy, unlawful assembly and rioting. Two also were found guilty of violating weapons laws.

Aside from Rao, the seven others who were convicted are Christian and killed Saraswati because he was converting Christians to Hinduism, prosecution lawyer Bhagaban Mohanty told the Indo-Asian News Service after the verdict.

"The judge convicted them purely on the basis of circumstantial evidence and the deposition of witnesses," the news service quoted Mohanty as saying.

Prosecutors sought the death penalty. Instead, the additional district and sessions judge of Kandhamal, Rajendra Kumar Tosh, ruling from a court in the Orissa capital of Bhubaneswar, handed down life sentences.

A lawyer for the seven told the Times of India "we will certainly appeal" the convictions and sentences to the Orissa high court.

"There was no evidence against my clients and I would advise them to move Orissa high court," the Times quoted attorney Bijay Mishra as saying.

Christian advocates said the convictions are consistent with a larger pattern of pressure upon Christians.

"It is really a heart-breaking story for modern India," Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, told Fides. "Seven people have already lost five precious years of their lives in prison without a fair trial. And thousands of other Christians who survived the most brutal wave of attacks, are still living in fear. Prosecutors and judges have intentionally delayed the trial". He said "the judiciary is influenced by Hindu nationalist groups and extremists."

Six days after the sentences were handed down, the same Phulbani court, citing a lack of evidence, acquitted five defendants accused of burning down a house during the 2008 violence that followed Saraswati's murder. George [told the Catholic news site asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it) that the decision, coming so soon after the conviction of the seven Christian men, serves to illustrate what he said is a tilt of justice against India's Christian minority.

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## **Bajrang Dal pressure villagers to leave Christianity**

### ***Nationalist Hindu group destroys church, threatens believers***

World Watch Monitor (17.10.2013) - For much of the year, Christians in the central India village of Taragaon have been enduring pressure to abandon their religion.

In April, elements of Bajrang Dal demolished the church in Taragaon, a small town in the farming- and forestry-dominated region of southern Chhattisgarh state.

Bajrang Dal is the militant youth wing of the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or VHP. Bajrang Dal goals include preventing "[fraudulent or forceful conversion](#)" of Hindus to any other religion.

Their church destroyed, the Christians of Taragaon moved their worship meetings into the homes of believers. The Bajrang Dal followed them.

On Sept. 22, Mitko Kashyap, 60, was confronted by her nephew for attending a house worship service. He hit her multiple times, she said, as she refused to deny her faith. Ultimately, he struck her on the head with a rock, causing injuries that required hospitalization.

"Kashyap's daughter-in-law was also attacked by the same man, but she managed to escape," said a staff member for Open Doors International, a ministry that provides support to Christians who are pressured because of their faith.

Police initially declined to register a complaint against the attacker, calling the incident a family matter, according to Open Doors. They registered the complaint after hospital management summoned police to the hospital to see Kashyap's condition. No arrests have been made.

Early this month, members of Bajrang Dal have been parading Hindu idols by the houses of Christian believers. Using loudspeakers, they ordered the Christians to come out of their homes to worship the idol, according to Open Doors.

"They are threatening us that they will drag each one out of our homes, beat us and kill us if we did not come out of our homes ourselves," the ministry quoted a village resident as saying.

"In this atmosphere of fear and pressure, we do not know whom to turn to for help," the resident said. "The police are biased and do nothing to protect the Christians."

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## **Christian beaten unconscious in vicious assault in India**

Barnabas Fund (16.10.2013) - A Christian man was beaten unconscious in a brutal attack by suspected Hindu extremists in [India](#) when he stood up for the right of Christians to gather peacefully.

The incident on 9 October started when five suspected Hindu extremists, who appeared to be drunk, forced their way into a prayer meeting that was taking place in a house in Neelam Patra, Surbuya, Chhattisgarh.

They asked the pastor to come outside, but Shyam Sunder intervened, telling the intruders to leave and not to disturb them again.

The Hindus then dragged Shyam to a field and hit him with thorny branches before taking him to a house where they knocked him unconscious with part of a plough. They revived him only to continue the assault by forcibly pouring alcohol into his mouth, tearing his clothes, dousing his body in alcohol and beating him up. The attackers repeated the onslaught three times.

Later that day, Shyam was found by church members on a road in a semi-conscious state with a deep wound on his head and cuts and bruises all over his body.

In a separate incident, which also took place in Chhattisgarh, two Christian siblings were beaten up after they refused to deny their faith. Hindu extremists summoned Mankuram and Mankumar Singh to a temple in Kongud, Kondagoan, on 22 September and asked them to renounce Christ.

When the brothers refused, a Hindu mob attacked them, accusing the Singhs of forcibly converting people. The assailants then vandalised Mankuram and Mankumar's home, locked up the property and chased them out of the village.

Although the Christians reported the matter to the police, the latter failed to register a case against the attackers. The extremists threatened further violence if the brothers did not withdraw their complaint.

Elsewhere, in the village of Hadothi in Rajasthan, police sided with Hindu extremists against a pastor whom they falsely accused of forcibly converting people.

Pastor Senthil Kumar was locked up for seven hours on 8 October after the Hindus lodged a complaint against him. They then pressurised the police to order the church leader to leave the village; an inspector threatened Pastor Kumar with physical harm if he did not go.

He was later released without charge and is now looking for somewhere to live in a neighbouring area. The church leader denied the allegation of forcibly converting people, saying that there were five Christian families in Hadothi and they had all freely decided to follow Christ.

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## **Karnataka: no end to violence against Christians**

***The president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) appeals to the state's chief minister, asking protection for minorities. Over the past four months, Hindu extremists have carried out 21 anti-Christian attacks. In the latest case, a Protestant clergyman suffered a heart attack after he was beaten by fundamentalists and arrested by police.***

AsiaNews (11.10.2013) - Hindu ultra-nationalists continue their "brutal and relentless" violence against Christians and churches in the Indian State of Karnataka, this according

to Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians ( GCIC ), who in a letter called on the state's Chief Minister Siddaramiah to intervene.

The seriousness of the situation is such that the central government acknowledged the situation, defining the Karnataka one of the six states in which extremist forces are targeting minorities for their own political end.

Last May, when the [state went to vote](#), nine years of government under Hindu ultra-nationalist the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to an end after the Indian National Congress won the elections with an absolute majority. A secular and democratic party, Congress is in power at the Union level.

Yet, attacks by militants from the Sangh Parivar (a Hindu extremist umbrella organisation) intensified, Sajan George said. Just in the last four months, the GCIC recorded 27 acts of violence against Christians, compared to four between January and June.

The latest episode occurred on 5 October. Rev Anil Kumar, a Protestant clergyman in Hubli, was the victim. On that day, the religious leader visited a widow whose Christian husband, NB Holemarore, had died of cancer a few years ago, to hold a prayer vigil in his memory.

The next morning, some Hindu militants armed with machetes surrounded the woman's house, preventing the reverend from leaving. Then they stormed the building, dragged Rev Kumar out, accusing him of conducting forced conversions, and beat him. The beating took place under the eyes of Siddapura police agents who had arrived on the scene.

Instead of stopping the attack, they took the clergyman to the police station where they slapped him around and charged him with violating Section 109 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (concerning "suspected persons").

After he was released on bail, Rev Kumar suffered heart attack and was hospitalised in intensive care.

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## **Church under construction set on fire at Tiptur, Karnataka**

ICAN (01.10.2013) - Pastor Aneef, 34, is in charge of the Believers Church of India at Tiptur in Tumkur District of Karnataka. He has been looking after the spiritual needs of his congregation of believers who number about 40 during the last 4 years. All along he has been using his own house as a house church for purposes of Sunday Worship and other prayer meeting. He lives with his wife, Hema, 28, and two little children. Since the space was insufficient for Sunday Worship Services etc, he decided to build a small church and purchased a small piece of land and began to put up the church building.

This construction of a little place of worship attracted the attention of anti-Christian forces in the locality, and on Saturday night, 28-09-2013, sometime at midnight, the Hindu fundamentalists set the entire building on fire and destroyed it.

The stunned pastor along with a few believers went to the Tiptur Rural Police Station and tried to lodge a complaint about the incident, which we understand, was not accepted by

the police. However, the police are supposed to have assured the pastor that they would look into the matter.

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## **Churches targeted, pastors beaten up, Christians arrested**

ICAN (01.10.2013) - Attacks against Christians in the Indian state of Karnataka have "accelerated" over the past two months: church gatherings have been targeted, pastors beaten up and Christians arrested.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India has collated incidents from the state during August and September.

One church in Bangalore North was attacked on two consecutive Sundays. On 1 September, Hindu extremists entered Living Hope Church, stopped the service and accused the pastor and church members of forcibly converting people.

They returned the following week, shouting, "No prayer, no church!" On both occasions, members of the congregation were beaten up.

In August, two pastors were beaten up in separate incidents. On the 24th, Hindu extremists barged into a prayer meeting in Bagalakote, pinned Pastor Samson to the ground and kicked and punched him all over his body.

He was left bleeding from his ears and eyes and was hospitalised for a week. The police refused to take any action against the assailants.

Two days earlier, Pastor Kotresh was beaten up at a prayer meeting in a house in Davanagere. Around 40 Hindu extremists stormed the property and kicked and punched the pastor, whom they accused of conducting forcible conversions. They warned him not to set foot in the village again.

The attackers tore up Bibles and threw stones at some of the Christians in attendance.

"Forcible conversion" is an accusation commonly levelled at Indian Christians by Hindu extremists, who use it as a pretext to attack them.

In eight states, "anti-conversion" laws have been introduced as a result of pressure from militant Hindus, who want the country to be religiously "pure".

No such legislation exists in Karnataka, but this does not stop the authorities from bowing to the pressure of aggressive Hindu allegations against Christians.

On 25 August, police arrested three Christians after Hindu extremists beat them up, accusing them of forcibly converting children at St Thomas's School in Uttara Kannada.

The Hindus had forced their way onto the campus and questioned the pupils, videoing and photographing them. The intruders then beat up Sunil Varghese, Alexander and Sabu in front of the police.

Rather than detaining the attackers, the police took the Christians into custody and charged them with forcibly converting children.

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## **Hindu fundamentalists attack and ransack a Church at Mandya in Karnataka**

ICAN (30.09.2013) - Pastor Solomon Ramesh, 32, is the pastor in charge of St. Thomas Church at Bellur, Varasandra Village at Mandya District in Karnataka. It is an Independent church, and he has a congregation of about 150 believers. He lives with his wife, Salome, 28, and a year and a half old baby boy, his little son. In the course of his evangelization work during the last 8 years, he has been able to visit and establish contacts in about 60 villages in Mandya district and convey the good news of Christ to people in those villages.

On Saturday morning at about 10.30 AM, 28-09-2013, they were having a special prayer meeting in the church. Exactly at 11 AM about 20 Hindu radicals suddenly drove in 3 vans and mounted an attack upon the church. They forced themselves inside the church and shouted at the Christians to stop their prayer meeting. Then they began to destroy everything that they could lay their hands upon. They tore the bibles, broke the crosses and destroyed the church instruments. They also hurled terrible abuses at the pastor and the believers using very filthy language allegedly for forcible conversion of Hinduism to Christianity. After completing what they had come for, they abruptly left the place in their vans and other vehicles.

Pastor Solomon Ramesh and some believers went to the Bellur Police Station and lodged a complaint against the Hindu fundamentalists about the havoc caused in the church. It is learnt that the radical Hindus too have lodged a complaint against the pastor of forcible and fraudulent conversion of Hindus to Christianity.

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## **Tarikere Christians face repeated attacks**

ICAN (30.09.2013) - Pastor Hemachandra Hebal, 39, is in charge of a Gypsy Church at Thudipet A.K.Colony at Tarikere in Chikmagalur District of Karnataka. He lives with his wife Elizabeth, 35, and three young children, in a rented building which he also uses as his house church, during the last 5 months. He caters to the spiritual needs of his small congregation of 15 believers.

On 22-09-2013 Sunday morning, while Pastor Hemachandra was having his Sunday Prayer Service, some Hindu fundamentalists came to the church and disturbed the service and drove the believers out of the church. They abused the pastor and said that he was forcibly converting Hindus to Christianity. The next day, accompanied by some other pastors, Pastor Hemachandra went to the Tarikere Rural police Station and lodged a complaint as to what had happened on the previous day in his church. The police asked him to provide all the necessary details about his believers which he gave them on 25-09-2013.

On 29-09-2013, Sunday morning at about 10.30 AM, when the pastor was conducting his Sunday Worship Service, a group of about 25 radical Hindus attacked the church and stopped the prayer service and beat up both Pastor Hemachandra and his wife Elizabeth and then locked them up in the church along with all the members of their congregation, and then they informed the police alleging them of fraudulent and forcible conversion of Hindus to Christianity. The police came to the spot and shouted at the pastor and then

they took both the pastor and his wife to the police station where they were made to sign on blank sheets that they would not continue with their preaching of Christianity and conversion work etc. and that they should vacate the place within 24 hours and if anything untoward were to happen to them, they could not be held responsible for not providing them any protection.

The pastor then visited the Tarikere Government Hospital and got himself treated for the wounds and the bruises which he received when the radicals attacked him earlier in his church. The incident is under investigation by local police.

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## **Indian PM vows tough action over deadly religious riots**

AFP (16.09.2013) - Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh vowed Monday severely to punish those to blame for recent Hindu-Muslim clashes that left 49 people dead, as he met people displaced by the violence.

Singh said his government would work with local authorities to help victims of the unrest, which erupted earlier this month in the village of Muzaffarnagar in India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh. "This is a very tragic incident and whoever is responsible for this must be severely punished," Singh said, as he visited camps for those who fled the clashes, along with ruling Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi and heir-apparent Rahul Gandhi. The unrest, during which mobs burned houses and a mosque, erupted in Muzaffarnagar, 105 kilometres (65 miles) northeast of New Delhi, and spread to other villages.

The death toll from the violence has climbed to 49, state police spokesman Nityanand Rai told AFP on Monday. During the violence, Singh's federal government deployed 5,000 paramilitary personnel and the army to the affected area of the state, which has a history of religion and caste-based violence in its 200-million population. The latest unrest triggered speculation that parties are seeking to polarise the politically pivotal state along religious lines before general elections next year.

"It is the duty of the (state) government to protect lives and property so that people can once again return to their homes," Singh said. "The Indian government will give full support to Uttar Pradesh administration to rehabilitate the victims, and simultaneously we must make efforts to hand down the sternest of punishment to the perpetrators of this incident," he said. Uttar Pradesh witnessed riots in 1992 following the razing of a mosque by a Hindu mob. More than 2,000 people -- mostly Muslims -- were killed after the 16th-century structure in Ayodhya was demolished. The latest clashes erupted on September 7 after thousands of Hindu farmers held a meeting to demand justice over the killing of three Hindu men who had protested when a woman was allegedly harassed. Inflammatory speeches calling for action against Muslims were made during the meeting and the farmers were attacked as they were returning home, triggering a backlash.

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## **New anti-Christian violence in Karnataka, but religious freedom non-negotiable for Sajan George**

Asia News (03.09.2013) - The Christian leader slams three new attacks in August. Despite changes in the state government, the influence of the Hindu ultra-nationalists Bharatiya Janata Party continues to cause acts of anti-Christian violence and boycotts.

"I am outraged by these new anti-Christian incidents in Karnataka," said Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC). "Religious freedom is non-negotiable," he told *AsiaNews* as he criticised fresh acts of violence against minority Christians. Three new attacks occurred in the Indian state in August alone, all by Hindu extremists.

The latest occurred on 18 August in Chikkamalaguru District when Hindu radicals stormed the home of Ms Doddamma, a member of the Rehebothe Prarthana Mandir Pentecostal Church.

The group of men asked her why she visited Hindu families and who gave her permission to preach Christianity.

Faced with her silence, the men dragged her and her daughter to a nearby Hindu temple, where they ordered some holy men to reconvert them to Hinduism. Faced with their refusal, the Hindus brutally beat the two women, as others destroyed their home.

On 11 August, in Chitadurga District, Rev Paramajyothi, the pastor at an independent Pentecostal Church, was attacked by Hindu ultra-nationalists. Dragged out of his church, he was stripped and beaten mercilessly under the eyes of his congregation and family. The religious leader suffered several injuries, including three broken teeth.

Once discharged from the hospital, he turned to the police in Bejikere for protection since the fundamentalists had issued threats against him, ordering him to leave the village. Police instead filed a complaint against the attackers, as well as the clergyman.

On 3 August, 50 Hindu extremists violently attacked Somashekarwas, an Evangelical Christian in Bijapur District. Pulling his hair and ripping his clothes, they ordered him to reconvert to Hinduism. They also swore at his wife Kusumabhai and ordered the couple to leave the village if they were not willing to renounce Christianity. Because of their refusal, the attackers reported them to the police in Nedugundhi, accusing them of practicing forced conversions.

"Although Congress rules in Karnataka," Sajan George noted, "many years of government by the (ultra-nationalist Hindu) Bharatiya Janata Party have contaminated police with Hindu radicalism. The social and economic boycott of Christians is common, as well as physical and verbal abuse. The minority is vulnerable and this climate encourages fundamentalists to break the law."

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## **A familiar pattern of pressure on Christians**

### ***News briefs: Incidents for May and June***

World Watch Monitor (30.07.2013) - In vast and diverse India, Christians often live freely. Yet India ranks among the 50 countries where life as a Christian is most difficult, according to Open Doors International, a global ministry that serves Christians who are pressured because of their faith. The country is No. 31 on Open Doors' 2013 World Watch List, largely because of a streak of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, that envisions India as a purely Hindu state.

Each month, numerous reports surface of provincial Hindutva militants breaking up prayer meetings, intimidating pastors, assaulting worshippers, and chasing Christian

families from their homes and villages. The dates, locations and names change, but many of the elements remain: Christians are accused of forcing Hindus to convert; Church buildings are damaged; area church leaders intervene; police often provide little protection. The incidents reported here, for May and June, contain more of the same.

Hindutva has a political base in India's right-wing, nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party, or BJP. It is the No. 2 party in the national assembly and holds or shares power in seven of India's 28 states, comprising about 15 percent of India's population. "This ideology . . . has firm root and strong support in many government structures as in the police," the World Watch List says.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an advisory body to the U.S. Congress, notes the Indian government has created programs intended to prevent religious intimidation. But it also says the country's overburdened courts, rife with "political corruption, and religious bias, particularly at the state and local levels," rarely punish Hindutva aggression.

The result, the commission says, is a "climate of impunity," especially in states with anti-conversion laws. Five Indian states, three of them BJP-controlled, have passed laws placing restrictions on religious conversions.

"While intended to reduce forced conversions and decrease communal violence, states with these laws have higher incidents of intimidation, harassment, and violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians, than states that do not," the commission's 2013 annual report claims.

Incidents in May and June, listed by state:

### **Karnataka**

**May 15:** Hindu nationalists rally in Pakshirajapura, accusing Pastor Steven Suresh of forcefully converting members of the nomadic Hikki Pikki Adivasi tribe to Christianity and insulting Hindu gods. Police arrest Suresh and 11 other Christians. Pastor Shiibu of Indian Evangelical Church tells World Watch Monitor the new converts were forbidden to draw water from the town well, and denied government-subsidized staples such as rice and sugar.

**June 26:** In Narasipura, a crowd burns Zion Church, beats the pastor and five church members, following repeated calls to stop holding worship services, according to the pastor, named Annaiah. Three days later, the temporary shed built to replace the church also is burned. Police tell Hindus to stop disturbing the church, and tell Christians to stop holding meetings and to pray at home.

### **Odisha**

**May 21:** Hindutva extremists attack Kati Singh in Bhalukasai village after he refuses to contribute to the local Hindu festivals. Singh is injured and admitted to Nilgiri Government Hospital. According to the All India Christian Council, Singh files a complaint with police, who turn aside his petition and ask Singh to make a festival donation.

**June 12:** The third day of a three-day meeting of pastors and church leaders conducted by Independent Pentecostal Church in Canalpada is disrupted when a crowd barges in, accusing organizers of forceful conversion, according to one of the guest speakers, Rev. Suratmahat Samal. Some of the intruders use motorcycles to chase several meeting participants as they leave the session in an auto-rickshaw. The rickshaw overturns, injuring eight.

## ***Uttar Pradesh***

**June 10:** Returning home from a visit to a church member in Sonari, Pastor Ram Prakash from the Prakash Healing Society's Church is stopped by a group, which threatens to kill him if he doesn't stop holding worship meetings in the area, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Prakash tells World Watch Monitor that the church member, named Raghu, "has been visiting our church for the past two years and I went to his house as he invited me to pray for him and his family." The militants threaten to burn Raghu's house. Prakash files a complaint with police, with no response.

## ***Manipur***

**June 10:** Some residents of Kongpal assault Pastor A. Shyam and damage the newly built Victory Church of India, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. They complain the church, completed in May, is an insult because it is built adjacent to a historic site.

## ***Tamil Nadu***

**June 9:** Pastor Ram Chandra is beaten by Hindu attackers after he prays for a sick man, according to Pastor C.V Chacko of the Indian Pentecostal Church. Chacko tells World Watch Monitor that the man's wife and children asked Chandra to pray with them, and that protesters massed at the family's home, setting upon Chandra as he left the house.

## ***Maharashtra***

**May 5:** A mob of about 20 enters Maranatha Worship Centre in Pimpri village during services, menaces the 50 assembled parishioners assembled for evening prayer, and orders the priest to leave town and close the church, according to the Catholic Christian Secular Forum. The priest, Fr. Wilson Patole, suffers a swollen eye and other bruises.

**May 23:** Intruders barge into the Sarfabad house of Gyaneshwar Kurwade as they are gathered for an evening family prayer. The intruders assault Kurwade and his son, Shrikrishana, saying they don't want Christian activity in the area. The victims report the assault to police, but no action is taken.

**June 6:** State police in Pandherwani file a First Information Report against local Christians after Hindus accuse them of forceful conversion. Sudharkar Mavli, field coordinator for Indian Evangelical Mission, tells World Watch Monitor that some of Hindus in the town have assaulted Christians, destroyed a house, seized farmland, and have ordered Christians to leave the village.

## ***Andhra Pradesh***

**June 4:** In Thukkuguda, Hindu extremists attack a Telegu pastors meeting, hurl verbal abuse at their faith and caste, and beat them with sticks, according to Pastor Bhagati Timothy. Four pastors suffer significant injuries and are taken to the hospital. Police register a First Information Report against the attackers. No arrests have yet been made.

**June 10:** A Hindu mob, assisted by Dhanjiy Reddy, a local government official, demolishes Christ Church in Gutta Begumpet, making good on a year of insistence that Pastor Paul Viswas stop church services. At the intervention of area church elders, Reddy is transferred to a different area.

## ***Tripura***

**April 28:** Angry Hindus in Twirisa interrupt worship meetings April 14, 21 and 28, threatening "dire consequence" if the meetings don't stop, Nabin Zamatia tells World Watch Monitor. On April 28, the meetings stop. "There are about 40 church members and

some are very fearful of the extremists' threats now," Zamatia says. "My family and few families went to another village to worship Christ."

**May 23:** Tapas Bin, 35, is murdered in Twirisa village. Area church leader T. Honathan tells World Watch Monitor that after Bin had married a local woman, his Hindu father had been pressuring him to abandon Christianity. Church officials claim the killing was religiously motivated. Police disagree, though at times have provided conflicting assessments.

### **Kerala**

**June 5:** Eight Hindutva extremists attack Church of God Full Gospel India Pastor Vijayan M. and his wife in Edathar, as they return home from a visit to a believer who had fallen sick, according to the All India Christian Council. The couple is knocked off their scooter, and in the ensuing assault suffer injuries that require care at Palakkad District Hospital. Local Christian leaders file a police complaint.

### **Gujarat**

**May 14:** Rajubhai R. Bhuriyaand and his family, assembled in their Bilwani village home for the evening family devotion, are assaulted by a group of about 20 drunken villagers who accuse the family of forceful conversion. Five injured members of the family are admitted in Dahod Government Hospital.

### **Chhattisgarh**

**May 3:** Police arrest four pastors in Bhelwa Baddhara after they are accused of forceful conversion. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reports that pastors Mani Munda, Vishnu Kerketta, Ashok Idaigo, and Rajgopal Munda, from the Power of Saviour Ministry in Sundargarh, Odisha, were visiting the house of a believer when police arrived and took them to the police station for questioning. Ten local Christians tell police they became believers of their own free will. Police charge the pastors with continuing an assembly that has been ordered to disperse, and release the men on bail.

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## **World churches body denounces bomb blasts at India Buddhist site**

Ecumenical News (19.07.2013) - The World Council of Churches general secretary, Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, has deplored recent bomb blasts at the Buddhist Mahabodhi temple complex in Bodh Gaya, in the north Indian state of Bihar.

"What has been subjected to attack is not only an important religious site but also the moral fabric of respect for difference and diversity, which encourages and ensures the equality of people of all faiths," said Tveit in a July 16 statement.

"This makes the incident even more deplorable," he said.

On July 7, a series of 10 bombs exploded in and around the Mahabodhi Temple complex, a UNESCO World heritage site in Bodh Gaya, India.

The Times of India reported that five people, including two monks, were injured by the blasts. Three other devices were defused by bomb disposal squads at various locations in Gaya.

"We recognize the damage that such unprovoked acts inflict on the religious sentiments of Buddhists across the world and want to let you know that you are not alone in your sense of fear and loss," said Tveit in a letter of sympathy to the Buddhist community in India.

Tveit said he was relieved that neither the interiors of the Mahabodhi temple nor the Bodhi tree (tree of awakening) widely believed to be a descendant of the Peepal tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment were damaged in the blasts.

"We acknowledge the very act of targeting a religious shrine as being hugely detrimental to peaceful relations between religious communities, and we condemn the motives behind it."

Tveit said that the bombings had stirred an awareness of "the fragility of inter-religious relations across the world."

The world churches body leader said the blasts were a reminder "yet again, of the urgent need for people of all religions to commit ourselves more proactively to live in mutual trust and respect."

"A time such as this challenges us to demonstrate in concrete terms that the power of hospitality can overcome the power of hostility.

"Today this calls us to both a sensitive and perceptive recognition of the globally connected nature of religious violence, and a firm reaffirmation of our commitment to grow in our understanding of our neighbouring faiths so that we may work together in a spirit of inter-religious collaboration and cooperation to further the flourishing of all life," said Tveit.

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## **Indian Buddhist sites hit by blasts**

The Huffington Post (07.07.2013) - A series of blasts hit three Buddhist sites in eastern India early Sunday, injuring at least two people and drawing condemnation from the prime minister.

Senior police officer S.K. Bhardwaj said a gate at one of the two temples that was hit was badly damaged in Bodhgaya, a town 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of Patna, the capital of Bihar state. No other damage was reported to the Buddhist sites.

Junior Home Minister R.P.N. Singh said that no one claimed responsibility for the explosions and that an investigation would be carried out to determine who was involved.

Four blasts took place on the grounds of the Mahabodhi Temple, or the Great Awakening Temple, Bhardwaj said. Another four explosions were reported at the nearby Karma temple and at a site with a 55-meter-tall (180-foot-tall) Buddhist tower.

Abhyanand, the director-general of state police, said the blasts ranged from low to high intensity. He also said police recovered two unexploded bombs, which were defused in the area. Abhyanand uses only one name.

A Tibetan and a pilgrim from Myanmar received minor injuries in the blast at the Mahabodhi Temple and were taken to a hospital, Bhardwaj said, adding that a temple gate was badly damaged.

Another explosion damaged an empty tourist bus parked near the Mahabodhi Temple, he said. The temple is a UNESCO world heritage site where Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment.

There were few people at the popular pilgrimage centers, which were targeted for the first time, Bhardwaj said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh strongly condemned the blasts, saying "such attacks on religious places will never be tolerated."

The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, also condemned the explosions.

"It's very sad. It's a few individuals," he told reporters during a visit to the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

The Buddhist sites attract a large number of pilgrims, especially from Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, but the main pilgrimage starts in September.

Bhardwaj said there have been intelligence reports about the possibility of attacks on the sites, but he did not give any details.

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## **Two Afghan evangelists assaulted while sharing Gospel with Muslims;**

Barnabas Fund (08.07.2013) - Pastor and his family beaten; a prayer meeting broken up; Christians forced from their village by a mob; children threatened and abused; a church building attacked and a cemetery desecrated – just a few examples of the repeated incidents of harassment and intimidation suffered by Christians in India in 2012. In many parts of the country the small minority of Christians live at peace with the Hindu majority. But in some states they are acutely vulnerable to a militant Hindu nationalist movement called Hindutva, which is striving to make India a religiously "pure" nation. Recent years have seen numerous incidents of small-scale aggression such as those listed above, and also major outbreaks of anti-Christian communal violence in Orissa and Karnataka.

It is difficult for Christians to obtain justice for offences committed against them. Local police can be slow to respond to attacks, and often no-one is prosecuted. Corruption is also rife in the courts, and Christians' unwillingness to play the system dishonestly works against them. Five years on from the Orissa violence, few people have been convicted. Christian leaders and human rights activists continue to campaign for justice, however, and in December 2012 twelve people were handed prison sentences for their part in the 2008 attacks.

The political wing of the Hindutva movement now holds or shares power in ten states, and in several of these it has secured the introduction of laws that forbid conversions by "force", "fraud" or "allurement". In some places these laws are interpreted more rigorously to prohibit legitimate Christian evangelism. In 2012 it was reported that the

names of some 20,000 Christians had been removed from the electoral roll in Madhya Pradesh; Hindu extremists were suspected of attempting to disenfranchise them.

According to tradition, the apostle Thomas brought the Gospel to India, and there has been an established Christian community since at least the 2nd century. Later there were a number of mass conversions, especially among the lowest levels of the Hindu caste system. Much of the Hindu extremist activist activity has been prompted by the remarkable growth of the Church in India in recent generations, especially amongst Dalits. Two-thirds of India's 27 million Christians are Dalits, who are at the very bottom of Indian society. They suffer even worse discrimination than Hindu Dalits because they are denied the legal status needed to relieve their intense poverty.

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## **Hindu nationalists harass villages for weeks**

### ***Christians boycotted, forbidden to draw water***

World Watch Monitor (28.06.2013) - Three months of intimidation and assaults in two villages in eastern India has left four Christians hospitalised and others injured, two houses damaged, and the entire Christian community unable to do business or draw water from the town well, church leaders say.

The boycott of the Christians of Dangarguda village, led by some Hindu nationalist residents, began in April, said Rev. K. Raju of the Malkangiri Life Development Society.

"The Christians were prohibited from buying and selling and from fetching drinking water from the public well because of their faith in Christ," Raju told World Watch Monitor.

Christians in the village started drinking from the river, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Heavy rains, however, muddied the river, making it unfit to drink.

In many parts of huge and diverse India, Christians and Hindus live together peacefully. In some regions, however, nationalist Hindus enjoy popular and bureaucratic support in their campaign to make India a purely Hindu society.

In Odisha state, where the village of Dangarguda is located, India's foremost nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, shares power with the more secular Biju Janata Dal party.

Antagonism in the village boiled over into violence on June 8 when a woman, Mongli Madhi, was attacked as she tried to fetch drinking water from the public well.

"The extremists did not allow Mongli to take water from the public well, beat her up and broke her water buckets and pots," Raju said.

They returned the following day, going to Mongli's house and beating and even biting her, said Bethel Church Rev. Bijay Purusu. He said she sustained injuries on her back, right hand and neck.

The next day, June 10, area Christian leaders reported the matter to the village head, who took no action. Later the same day, a group shouting anti-Christian slogans attacked village Christians with swords, axes, chains and other weapons.

The victims were beaten nearly unconscious, and the attackers poured water on them to revive them when they were about to pass out. One victim, Mudha Madhi, was unconscious for about three hours.

The mob damaged two houses belonging to Christian families.

Four Christians — Irma Madhi, Mangli Madhi, Mudha Madhi and Sambru Khurami — suffered cuts and bruises and were bleeding profusely when they were rushed to the hospital. Three of the victims have been released, but Irma Madhi remains hospitalised.

The remaining Christians fled the village, taking shelter in Christian homes in a neighbouring village.

"This is the month of an agricultural time and we do not know how long they can stay in the homes of other people as they are all struggling for their livelihood," Purusu said. Most have since returned to their own homes.

The latest assault came on June 22 in nearby Goudaguda village, when a group beat up a Christian couple, Bina Madhi and his wife, Ermi Madhi, and church member Jagarnath Maekani as they unsuccessfully tried to drive the Christians off their farmland.

"The extremists, led by Laxmi Markani, swelled up and told the Christians to leave the village, claiming that there is no place for them and there is no need for Christians to have cultivation land," Purusu said.

The attackers used bamboo sticks, but the victims were not seriously hurt. They filed a complaint at Malkangiri Police Station. No arrests have yet been reported.

Police have registered a First Information Report against the attackers.

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## **Orissa, two Hindu extremists linked to the murder of missionary Graham Staines arrested**

***Arrest comes almost 14 years after the massacre of missionary and his two children. Ramjan Mahanta and Ghanshyam Mahanta were part of the group of dozens of Hindu extremists responsible for the massacre. They will be tried by a special tribunal. To date, only two of the authors of the massacre have been sentenced to life imprisonment.***

AsiaNews (18.05.2013) - The Indian *Central Bureau of Investigation* (CBI) yesterday arrested two other people connected to the brutal murder of Australian Pastor [Graham Staines](#) and his children, burned alive January 23, 1999 in the village of Manoharpur in Orissa. The two, Ghanshyam Mahanta and Ramjan Mahanta, were arrested last night in the area of Anandpur in Keonjhar district and conducted to police stations in Bhubaneswar, where they were interrogated by investigators. Bk Pradhan of the special CBI of Calcutta said that soon the two accused will be tried by a special court.

On the night between 22 and 23 January 1999 a mob of Hindu extremists burned alive Pastor Staines and his sons Philip and Timothy (aged 9 and 7), while they were sleeping in their station wagon in Manoharpur village (Keonjhar district, Orissa) . At first the police arrested Hindu extremist party Bajrang Dal member Dara Singh, the master mind behind the massacre, and 12 other accomplices.

But almost 14 years after the massacre the authorities have not punished the perpetrators. On 22 September 2003, a special court sentenced Dara Singh to death and the other 12 to life imprisonment. However in May 2005, the Orissa High Court overturned the death penalty for Singh to life imprisonment and acquitted 11 others. Only one of the accomplices of Singh, Mahendra Hembram is serving a life sentence. For both the sentence was confirmed in 2011.

In 2006, the missionary's wife and daughter Esther returned to Orissa. The brutal murder of Staines was a prelude of the anti-Christian pogrom in 2008 in the district of Kandhamal.

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## **VHP leads mob to destroy Indian church**

World Watch Monitor (14.05.2013) - On March 12 in a southeast India village, the local newspaper published allegations that Divya Jyoti Church had been built on government land.

The next day, a crowd equipped with a backhoe demolished the small church building, encountering no resistance from the leaders of Guriya Village, in Chhattisgarh state.

Divya Jyoti Pastor Budhram Baghel said the church building had stood on land belonging to him.

"A temporary shed had been constructed in 2006 on this land after permission from the authorities and the same was later replaced by a permanent building," said Rev. Rakesh Dass, a friend of Bahel's.

Three residents of Gadia village, Yogeshwar Kashyap and two people identified as Lakhmuram and Shyamlal, filed a complaint that the building encroached on government land. Their allegations were published in the local newspaper, Dass said.

The crowd arrived the next day, led by Kailash Rathi and Yogendra Kaushik, officers of the local Visva Hindu Parishad, or VHP, a Hindu nationalist organization.

Budhram tried to summon help, but it did not arrive quickly enough to prevent the demolition.

Those who protested were assaulted by members of the crowd, Christian witnesses said. They said several local officials, including the revenue officer, land officer, village head, police chief and a group of police officers, watched the demolition without objection.

"They didn't even measure the land," Dass said.

The church filed a complaint at the Lohandiguda Police Station on March 13 and held a silent protest rally on March 16. A memorandum regarding the demolition also has been submitted to the Collector & District Magistrate of Jagdalpur, a nearby major city.

### ***In other incidents around India in March and April:***

#### ***Chhattisgarh***

**March 24** — Hindu extremists shouting anti-Christian slogans surrounded the house of two brothers, Kayaram and Musuram Kashyat and threatened to expel them from the

village if they did not renounce Christ, said Rev. Rakesh Dass. Early the next day, the head of Gunia village, Lohandiguda, Jagdalpur, summoned the brothers to his home, where the two were attacked when they arrived. The brothers were hospitalized and then filed a police report.

**March 25** — State police stopped an "Open Special Gospel Meeting" in Nagra, Balrampur Ramanujanj following complaints of forceful conversions against the Christians. Pastor Mukti Prakash Lakra said Believers Church was organizing a three day meeting from 25-27 March when the angry extremists barged into the three-day meeting. Police arrived and urged the organizers to close down the meeting, which they did.

**March 28** — The head of Mokhagoan village, backed by local Hindu residents, urged the government to halt the opening of a day-care center built by Indian Evangelical Mission. "The local area Christians have been facing social discrimination from the extremists because of their faith in Christ for a long time," Rev. Raja Singh of Indian Evangelical Mission told World Watch Monitor. After a government inquiry into the center's operations, authorities dismissed the petition to halt operation.

**April 2** — A group of Hindus in Chhotesalna, Raipur, burned the small Believers' Church to the ground after accusing the Christian congregation of forcefully converting members of the community. There were no injuries. Pastor Padam Pande said the Christian community received further threats the next day after they had filed a complaint with police. On April 4 the Christians were summoned to the Village Council meeting, where they were urged to take back the complaint. The Christians refused. To date, police have not taken any action.

### **Maharashtra**

**April 23** — Police in the Gondia district arrested a Christian couple after Hindus accused them of forceful conversion and bribery. A representative of the evangelical organization Mission India who goes by the single name Geeta told World Watch Monitor that a group of people asked Mission India Pastor Vijay Meshram and his wife to visit a home to pray for the sick. After the prayer was over they asked the pastor and his wife to wait outside. As the couple waited, the host slipped from the back door, where a group of 100 people was waiting for his signal. The mob rushed the pastor and his wife, and accused them of bribery and forced conversions. Later, the Hindus filed a complaint against them, and police arrested the couple under several sections of the criminal code, keeping them in custody while the crowd swelled outside, shouting anti-Christian slogans. They were released on bail the next day. "There was no case of forceful conversion and it was a false allegation against us, as we were merely praying for the sick people as they requested us" Meshram said.

### **Karnataka**

**March 8** — The Global Council of Indian Christians reported a group of Hindus barged into an all-night prayer meeting of The Word of Victory Ministry in Moodubelle village, Udupi and assaulted the participants, accusing them of forceful conversions. The pastor, Robert Lobo, and six believers suffered serious injuries and were treated in Ajarakadu Government hospital. Police arrested 10 attackers.

**April 11** — A pastor and his family were hospitalized after an assault in their home in Vijapura, Chitradurga. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported that a man named Rangappa, his wife and son beat the pastor, Kantharaj Hanumanthappa, and his family, after making several threats and complaining to the village head that the pastor had been forcefully converting residents. With the intervention of the Karnataka Legal Aid

Cell, the Bharamsagara police filed a report against the attackers. Kashmir

**April 10** — A pastor in Shivpura, Srinagar, in Jammu & Kashmir state, told World Watch Monitor that he and his family were assaulted by a group of Muslims who had accused him of converting children living in the Agape Home for youth. Pastor Neethi Rajan said the attackers forced themselves into his family's home, and also damaged a car parked nearby that belonged to a friend. Police took Rajan and his family into protective custody, but the family later relocated to another area out of fear of a repeat attack.

### **Andhra Pradesh**

**March 24** — Hindu extremists stopped a church construction in Charlapalli, Ghatkesar Mandal, alleging that the church will cause the disturbance in the neighbourhood. The All India Christian Council said a pastor identified as Bhaskar had purchased land for building a church, registered it in the name of "Life in Christ Ministries", and obtain all required permits. However, as the Christians were digging the ground for the foundation of the church, a group of protesters stopped the construction, and filed a police complaint. Police instructed Bhaskar to obtain permission directly from the most senior local administrator. Other Christian authorities in the areas are intervening to resolve the impasse.

**March 25** — Police in Vasnathvihar, Moulali, Hyderabad detained members of God Grace Ministries Church, including a pastor identified as Timothy, after local Hindus filed a complaint against the church alleging forceful conversions. The All India Christian Council said the congregation is building a church on their own land, which is drawing the opposition of some Hindus in the area.

**March 26** — The All India Christian Council reported that a group of Hindus barged into a prayer meeting of Lay Men Evangelical Fellowship in in Langar House, Hyderabad, in the home of K. Kamamma and started to verbally abuse the Christians, tore Bibles and beat up one participant, Ravi Babu. The Christians filed a police complaint and an investigation is going on.

### **Orissa**

**March 1** — A Christian family was beaten and chased from their village after they refused to pay tributes to idols and spirits of Hindu festivals. Rev. Christopher Takri told World Watch Monitor that Hindu extremists led by Sahadeva Tudu summoned Rabinarayana Marandi to a village public meeting at 6 a.m on March 1 in Bhalutangara village, Kankadahada block, Dhenkanal. There Marandi was threatened with assault and banishment from the village if he did not give contributions towards the Hindu festivals. "The extremists asked Marandi to give a chick as an offering for a new baby boy to the idols, and the extremists beat him up when he refused," Takri said. "The attack last for half an hour." Unwilling to comply, Marandi and his family were chased out and are now taking shelter in their in-laws house in another area. , Monoranjan Mohanti, area Superintendent of police, told World Watch Monitor "Legal actions will be taken against the wrongdoers," but declined further comment.

**March 10** — A Christian convert fled his home in Dengabahalli, Dhenkanal, after hearing threats he and his family would be killed. "The Hindu extremists were planning to kill him that night" said a church leader, Rev. Christopher Takri. But the convert, Mohan Soren, and his family fled the village and took refuge in the house of a Christian leader in another area, Takri said.

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## Persecution briefs for January and February

World Watch Monitor (19.03.2013) –

### *Madhya Pradesh*

Feb. 9 — Jordarsingh Changod, 34, a pastor associated with Philadelphia ministry in Nanpur, Alirajpur district, was attacked after a church service.

At about noon, when the church service had finished and most of the people had returned home, about 36 people arrived on 12 motorcycles. Changod, along with Pastor Ilamsingh Kanesh and two women, were in the church. The intruders barged in and asked, "If we bring a lame man here, can you heal him?"

Changod replied, "If you have faith, certainly God will heal him." On hearing the answer, the intruders punched and kicked Changod and Kanesh and knocked Changod unconscious. Kanesh suffered minor injuries.

About 30 minutes later between 30 and 40 members of the church arrived, and the attackers fled.

"Extremists mostly hit me on my face. It was bleeding near my eyebrow and there was blood behind my right ear," Changod told World Watch Monitor. The church members took him to the hospital, and the next day filed a complaint with police.

Feb. 15 — Pastor Sharda Prasad and his wife visited a house church in Dola, Annupur district, where about 250 people had gathered. The meeting was disrupted by 15-16 Hindu fundamentalists, who shoved in and started manhandling the people.

"They questioned me as to from where I had come?" Prasad told World Watch Monitor. "When I answered them, they blamed me of forceful conversion and beat me with thin sticks." He suffered bruises on his back and waist. The attackers also beat members of the congregation.

Police arrived about an hour later and broke up the assault. They took pastor and his wife to their home in Jhagraha village, Shahdol district. Prasad filed a complaint with police on Feb. 18.

Feb. 16 — Three evangelists meeting with potential converts in Sawalikeda village, Khalwa block, Khandwa district were arrested after a village mob dragged them to the police.

Pastor Ashok Nahar, 50, who runs the Maranatha Prayer Hall in Punjab, and Delhi residents Arjun Singh, 45, and Anand Kumar, 19, were guests in the home of a Christian woman, identified as Shakuntala. They were holding private prayer meetings in the home with Christian seekers on Feb. 15.

The next morning, about 100 villagers came to the home and accused the visitors of trying to convert others in the village. "Punching and kicking us, they dragged us to Khalwa police station," about 1 kilometer away, Nahar said. The three men were released from jail on March 6.

Feb. 16 — Pastor Isaac Rajamani of Friends Missionary Prayer Band, along with an evangelist identified as Raju, was attacked while conducting a prayer meeting in Gulai village, Khandwa district. Members of the Bajrang Dal, a hardline Hindu group, caught hold of Isaac and Raju and severely assaulted them. They were later taken to Khalwa in

the night, where members of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh also beat them.

Later they were handed over to the Police station at Khalwa, where they were charged under section 295A and held in Harsud Jail. They have not yet secured bail.

Feb. 18 — Pastor Iliyas Buck, 42; Hira Lal, 32; Vishram Korku, 22; and Sundar Rachiya, 18; were gathered for a prayer meeting at the residence of Hira Lal in Roshni, Khandwa district. At noon, about 70 members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh disrupted the meeting and started to punch and kick the four Christians, Buck said. The four were dragged to the local police station, where they were interrogated under suspicion of "luring people to Christianity." The police released the four at 9 p.m., and did not file charges against them.

Feb. 20 — Chants of "stop this conversion" greeted a seminar conducted by Pastor Jiyalal Maravi, 35, in Dumartola, Bajag village, in Dindori district. Maravi and four other pastors — Mannulal Rajdiwar, 68; Ebenezer, 41; Tirath Patta, 35; and Vimlendra Jhariya, 25 — had been invited with their teams from Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. As people finished lunch, Rajdiwar noticed that about 15 men standing outside the house with sticks in their hands.

"They had blocked the way to the road from the house from both the sides and were shouting slogans 'stop this conversion,'" Rajdiwar told World Watch Monitor. When police were summoned, they took the pastors in for questioning. They were released in the evening, and no charges were filed.

### **Andra Pradesh**

Feb. 8 — Pastor B. Rakshanandam cancelled two consecutive Sunday worship meetings after angry Muslims threatened to harm him if he did not stop conducting meetings in Balanagar Industrial Slums, in Secunderabad. The All India Christian Council reported that the protesters became angry after he pastor baptized 10 Muslims. After the pastor's landlord stepped in and said the pastor was not forcing anyone to convert, the Muslims withdrew their police complaint.

Feb. 12 — Police arrested a Christian identified as P. Anand after he prayed with friends attending a local college.

Anand visited his friends at IIIT College in Basara, Adilabad district on Feb. 10. "I just went to meet them, but since they were having an informal prayer session I just joined in," he told World Watch Monitor.

After about 15 minutes, five or six people arrived and started questioning the purpose of Anand's visit. They then called for the police.

The police arrested Anand and, based on the complaint filed by the intruders and a local politician, charged him under sections 295A and 193A. With the help of his friends, Anand was freed on bail Feb. 12.

Feb. 25 — About 10 women returning from a visit to a sick friend were assaulted by a group that accused them of "luring people to Christianity." The women, members of Nissi church, had visited the Secunderabad home of their friend and were returning when they were confronted by a group of about 15 people, who punched and slapped the women.

Two of the women, Laxmi Amma, 70, and Rahel Amma, 60, suffered minor bruises on their faces. Their pastor, identified as Mr. Purshottam, took them to the police station to file a complaint, but the attackers, along with some Hindu fundamentalist political

leaders, already were there. The police asked the women to reach a compromise and not press charges, but on Feb. 26 Puroshottam registered a formal complaint.

### **Orissa**

Jan. 18 — Police arrested two Christians, Bahadur Murmu and Rama Soreng from New Creation Church in Dubia village, Baripada, Mayurbhanj district, where they were holding a prayer meeting in the house of one Christian. Rajesh Digal, pastor of New Creation Church and in charge of the Baripada area, told World Watch Monitor the arrests came after Hindu extremists accused the Christians of forceful conversion and threatened to harm them if they continued to conduct prayer meetings. The Christians were arrested under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act and were sent to Baripada jail. They were released on bail two days later.

Feb. 15 — A 4-year-old boy suffered a fractured hand in the tumult stirred up by a police raid in Patachanda village, Balarampur panchayat of Dharakot block.

Adhunik Dalabehera suffered the injury after the Central Reserve Police Force arrived after midnight in search of five tribal Christians: Jatho Mandal; Junas Mandal; Daud Gomango; Simanto Dalabehera, 42; and Kornail Raita, 50. They said they were carried to the nearby jungle on the pretext of having being associated with the Maoist chief, Sabyasachi Panda. The five men denied any involvement, and were beaten with guns and sticks.

The following morning, about 400 tribal villagers blocked roads with trees, and brandished axes and iron rods in protest to the arrests. Jatho Mandal, Junas Mandal and Gomango were released at 11 a.m.

As the protest continued, the police initiated a peace committee meeting with the villagers, and released the other two men in the evening.

### **Chhattisgarh**

Jan. 8 —Government officials helped tear down a wall inside a graveyard in Jagdalpur district after Hindus complained Christians had extended the wall too far, according to the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum. The protesters arrived later and further demolished the wall, desecrated the old graves, shouted anti-Christian slogans and hurled verbal abuse at the pastors and church leaders at the scene. Police filed a first Information Report was filed against three of the protesters. Area Christians staged a counter-protest on Jan. 10.

Jan. 10 —Protesters disrupted the dedication ceremony of the newly built Inlightening Prayer Tower in Dantewada district, and accused the Christians inside of forceful conversion. The meeting was stopped immediately and the matter was reported to Kirandul police, who refused to intervene, according to a local pastor, Ritesh Basra. He said a man he identified by the name Nanda had donated the land for the building and was attacked by the protesters. Basra said the man fled, leaving his wife and children behind.

Jan. 13 — A mob of about 70 people barged into the Sunday worship meeting of an independent church in Ghaspara, in the Raipur district, accused Pastor Sanjay Nag and the church members of forceful conversion, and assaulted them. Nag suffered an injury to his nose. The attackers, part of an extremist Hindu sect, filed a forceful-conversion complaint with police. The pastor filed a counter-complaint. "The police investigation is going on," Nag told World Watch Monitor.

Jan. 18 — Members of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party barged into a prayer meeting conducted in the house of a believer in Saranggarh, in the Raigarh district. They accused pastors Rajesh Yadav and Raju Dewangan and the participants of forceful conversion, and assaulted the two pastors, according to another pastor in the area, Dashrath Prasad. Police arrested Saranggarh and Raigarh, who were released on bail after two days.

Jan. 18 — Protesters surrounded the house of Pastor Ankush Bariyekar in Chandi Nagar, Raipur district, during a prayer meeting. They threatened to harm Bariyekar and accused him of forceful conversion. After the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum intervened and the police arrived, and protesters left. However, the pastor relocated for safety reasons.

Jan. 18. — When word got out that a Jan. 18 healing prayer service was being held in Kartik Devangan's house, a group of angry Hindus arrived, and police arrested two Christian converts conducting the meeting.

Rajesh Yadav, 45, and Raju Devangan, 24, from Navjyoti Church in the Chhattisgarh village of Shakti, came to the village of Sarangarh, to attend the prayer meeting in Devangan's home. The meeting attracted many sick people, and Devangan and Yadav prayed over them.

"Some extremists heard the news about healing taking place and attacked us," Yadav said. "The Police locked us up in the jail and prevented anyone from beating us." The attackers registered a complaint of forced conversion against the men, who were released on bail the next day.

"The advocate (attorney) is asking us for more money and is very uncooperative" said Yadav, who works as a driver and has two children. Devangan, a tailor, and his wife and infant child have since left their home and have moved into a rented house because of pressure from extremists.

Feb. 20 — Church leaders cut short a three-day meeting in Deori, Surguja district when Hindu protesters stormed the proceedings and accused the organizers and the guest speakers, pastors Sukhchain Masih and Lalsa Tirkey, of forceful conversion. Lalsai Khakha, a pastor of Believers Church, host of the three-day conference, told World Watch Monitor the church had police permission to conduct the meeting, which attracted about 1,000 Christians. "But we decided to stop the meeting to avoid further trouble," Khakha said.

Feb. 21 — Three Pastors were arrested in Aara, Surguja district, during a three-day revival meeting. During dinner of the second day, about 12 Hindus arrived with some police officers. The intruders started arguing with the Christians, and police arrested three men: Akshya Kumar Vishyakarma, 32, of Uttar Pradesh state; Angad Singh, 35, and a man identified only as Harendra, both of whom are from Bihar state. The organizer of the event, pastor Albis Bara, 35, was arrested the next day.

The four are free on bail, facing charges of disruption of public peace.

### ***Maharashtra***

Jan. 11 —Hindu protesters disrupted the prayer meeting of New Life Grace Ministry in Sawantwadi taluka, Sindhudurg district, and beat up participants, including women, children and the elderly. Christians sought help from the police, who took no action, said Joseph Dias of the Catholic Christian Secular Forum. The forum says any prayer meeting in the district needs police protection. The areas around Sawantwadi and Malvan have become highly sensitive.

### ***Tamil Nadu***

Jan. 28 — A traveling Pentecostal minister was robbed of his Gospel tracts and money in Kottur, Coimbatore district, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. A group of Hindus robbed the pastor, identified as M. Emmanuel of the Indian Pentecostal Church, and "told the pastor not to come back in the area again to distribute tracts," said Sam Abraham, a church leader in the area. The victim filed a complaint with police, but later withdrew it. The Hindu group pledged not to disturb Emmanuel again.

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## **Pogrom in Orissa: life imprisonment for seven innocent Christians**

AsiaNews (10.03.2013) - Condemned to life imprisonment: this is the ruling issued today by a court in Orissa against seven innocent Christians, accused without evidence of the murder of Hindu leader Laxamananda Saraswati, whose death triggered the violent anti-Christian pogroms of 2008. The immediate reaction of Mons. Raphael Cheenath, retired archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar: "We will appeal to the High Court against the unfair and unacceptable verdict". "The Maoists", he said to *AsiaNews*, "have twice claimed responsibility for the murder of the Swami Laxamananda and his four followers".

After dozens of postponements and sham trials, on October 1 the judges of the regular Session Court of Phulbani condemned the seven Christians for the murder of the Hindu leader, deferring the reading of the sentence to today.

To *AsiaNews* Sajan George, President of the *Global Council of Indian Christians* (GCIC), defines the sentence "a mockery, the sad demonstration of how the Indian judicial system works". The judges, he adds, "were undeniably abetting with the saffron forces and purposely have delayed hearings and trials on a regular basis. We all agree that the basic principle of a democracy is to give equal protection and justice under the law: in our case, these seven men were not judged according to this principle."

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## **Attack on Indian revival meeting sends Christians underground**

### ***Hindutva elements beat women and children; pastor's location unknown***

World Watch Monitor (20.02.2013) — As police looked on, militants attacked a Christian church in central India earlier this month, causing severe injuries to some and sending the pastor into hiding, according to witnesses.

The assault took place during the second day of a Feb. 7-9 revival meeting at India Christian Assembly of God Church in the city of Rajnandgaon, about 72 kilometers west of Raipur, the capital of the mostly rural, and overwhelmingly Hindu, state of Chhattisgarh.

The revival meeting included a graduation ceremony of 14 students who attended a short bible-training program. Around 300 Christians had gathered to witness the ceremony and attend the revival meeting, coming from the neighboring states of Maharashtra, West Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh.

"Everything went well on the first day of the meeting until the afternoon of the second day," a witness told World Watch Monitor. The witness asked not to be named in order to avoid retribution from the attackers.

At about 3 p.m., a group of more than 30 young men disrupted the meeting and started to interrogate the pastor, Thomas Abraham, and other church leaders, who protested the interruption.

The witness said the intruders were from several Hindu nationalist groups, including Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, and Dharma Sena.

"They started to manhandle and beat people, tear Bibles, abused the God of Christians and strode over children," the witness said. More attackers joined in, their faces covered, and armed with sticks and iron rods. Men, women and children were beaten. Church property and vehicles were damaged.

"There was chaos and Christians started to flee for their lives in whichever direction they could," the witness said.

Police were summoned, but they did not intervene and "played the role of mere spectators," the witness told World Watch Monitor.

Attacks continued until 6 p.m., the witness said. Some Christians, from Maharashtra and Orissa, suffered injuries behind the ear and to the eye from being struck with iron rods. They were admitted to a nearby hospital for treatment, though later they left the hospital without informing the authorities.

Christian leaders from Rajnandgaon told World Watch Monitor they approached the superintendent of police, who came to the scene of the attack and began an investigation. He was stymied, however, because Abraham, the pastor, had disappeared. Police are watching the church building and are searching for Abraham.

India is No. 31 on the [2013 World Watch List](#), a ranking of the 50 countries where being a Christian is most difficult. Though Christians live openly without challenge in many parts of huge and diverse India, nationalistic Hindutva movements in some regions have attacked Christian communities with regularity, according to Open Doors International, which publishes the list. Open Doors is a worldwide ministry to persecuted Christians.

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## **Violence against Christians spreading in India**

The Christian Post (11.02.2013) - Hindu extremist attacks on Christians in Maharashtra state could expand even as violence elsewhere in India grows in areas where extremist groups had not been so active, Christian leaders said.

Ram Puniyani of the All India Secular Forum said at press conference in Mumbai this month that Maharashtra is vulnerable to increased attacks on Christians after "a decade of heightened Hindutva [Hindu nationalism], especially targeting tribal and Adivasi [indigenous] communities, as they are easy targets, with little fear of retaliation."

The Catholic Secular Forum (CSF) released preliminary results of a study on Feb. 1, with Christian leaders saying that persecution is not increasing in comparison with previous years but is appearing in new areas. While the perennially troublesome Karnataka state last year saw the most attacks on Christians with 67, followed by Madhya Pradesh with

28, four new states entered the top 20: More attacks from Hindu extremists took place in Tamil Nadu, Assam, Mizoram and Goa than in previous years.

Moreover, CSF noted persecution against Christians from Islamic extremists in Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and West Bengal.

Joseph Dias, general secretary of CSF, said the study chronicled 250 of the worst cases of persecution, but that the actual number of incidents nationwide was much higher. While there were no pogroms such as occurred in Orissa state in 2008, persecution has become more widespread, with an increase in Hindu nationalist attacks even where the "Hindu brigade" is not traditionally strong, he said.

Parliamentary and state assembly elections in the next year portend an increase in attacks as Hindu extremists try to divide voters along religious lines, he said.

Michael Saldanha, former justice of the Bombay High Court, told Morning Star News that he has urged federal Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde to ban Hindutva groups such as the Sanathan Sanstha and Abhinav Bharat, which come under the "Saffron umbrella" with an agenda of a Hindu religious state.

Overall, the states with the highest number of incidents after Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh were Tamil Nadu with 25; Orissa – where the most serious crimes took place, including rapes of minors – with 20; and Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, both also with 20. Maharashtra, with nine incidents, was seventh on the list.

The Maharashtra-based Christian leaders emphasized violations in their state, including not just abuses by Hindu nationalists but by family members of converts to Christianity. Two young women in Padmavati Nagar, Pune, 20-year-old Lakshmi Rathod and Vimla Rathod, 19, fled their home on Aug. 12, 2012, after their parents had forced them to drink cow urine daily. They were assaulted, threatened with "honor killing," labelled unholy and locked in a room for several days after they were found reading the Bible.

The report included an account of an attack last month in Maharashtra by Hindu nationalists suspected to belong to Sanathan Sanstha. On Jan. 11 a Hindu extremist mob stormed into New Life Grace Ministry Church in the Sawantwadi area, Sindhudurg District, and severely beat members of the 600-strong congregation, including many women, children and elderly Christians. They threatened to stop any Christian services in the district, according to CFS.

In Malwan, Hindu extremists under the banner of the Hindu Dharma Jagaran Samiti attacked a prayer meeting on Oct. 26, and 11 Christians were then arrested on false charges of forced conversion, according to CFS. The assailants were also detained, and upon their release on bail villagers congratulated them and encouraged them to continue attacking Christians. Meantime, villagers organized a boycott – refusing to buy fish from Christians, or even sell it to them.

Abraham Mathai, ex vice-chairman of the State Minorities Commission, told Morning Star News that police often look the other way.

"Such police apathy encourages the perpetrators of the crimes to continue their unprovoked violence against Christians with impunity," he said. "If the police do not reign in the perpetrators, violence against the minority Christian community would increase in the run-up to the forthcoming general elections scheduled for 2014."

India's population is 74.3 percent Hindu, 14.2 percent Muslim, 1.9 percent Sikh, 0.82 percent Buddhist, and 5.8 percent Christian, according to Operation World.

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## **Indian Church body records 131 attacks against Christians in 2012**

Barnabas Fund (28.01.2013) - In its annual persecution report, the Evangelical Fellowship of [India](#) (EFI) has expressed its deep concern at the "uninterrupted and increasing hostility against the Christian minority".

The body, which represents over 35,000 churches across [India](#), recorded 131 violent incidents against Christians in 2012, stressing that many more go unreported.

The report said:

*The incidents ... ranged from accusations of "forcible conversion" to desecration of churches to violent attacks against individual Christians. In most of the instances, Hindutva activists led mobs to disrupt Christian worship services and manhandled, physically and verbally abused the congregation, including women and children.*

Despite Christians being the victims, police often detained them at the behest of the mobs.

With 37 incidents, the southern state of Karnataka saw the highest number of violent anti-Christian attacks. In one episode, on 18 September, a mob of about 50 Hindu extremists attacked a prayer meeting in Kelaginahatti for the sick and blind and accused the pastor of forcibly converting people.

In another case, Hindu extremists attacked Christians with wooden sticks and clubs in Chikkamatti on 29 October, injuring nine of them. Police subsequently arrested two Christians.

Chhattisgarh state had the second highest tally of incidents at 21. Among them were a number of violent attacks on Christian burials and funerals. In one such case, offenders stormed the funeral of the 19-year-old daughter of a pastor in Bacheli on 6 June. They beat the Christian mourners, nine of whom required hospital treatment.

And despite accusing Christians of forcible conversion, Hindu extremists made various attempts to impose Hinduism on congregations. On 1 January, they disrupted a church service in Dudhawa village, pushed worshippers outside and placed pictures of Hindu deities inside before locking up the building.

Elsewhere, in Orissa state, the scene of widespread anti-Christian violence in 2007-08, Hindu extremists attacked an evangelist in Mitrapur on his way home from a prayer meeting on 15 June. He was seriously wounded and taken to hospital by local Christians. When the offenders heard that the evangelist had been rescued, they launched an assault on 12 Christian families, seriously injuring about 20 individuals.

Anti-Christian violence was also carried out by Islamic extremists. In one case in Nutangram, West Bengal state, they drove a 22-year-old woman out of the village because she gave thanks for healing in Christ's name. Her parents helped the Islamists to beat her nearly unconscious.

Although the report highlights the serious challenges faced by many Christians in [India](#), there was a significant victory for the Church in 2012. The draconian “anti-conversion” law in Himachal Pradesh state was [partially struck down](#) in a legal challenge brought by EFI. The state’s high court ruled on 30 August that some provisions of the law, which required a person to give prior notice of their religious conversion to the district magistrate and be subjected to a state inquiry, were unconstitutional.

In its recommendations, EFI called upon a number of state governments to repeal legislation that restricts religious freedom and to ensure the protection of religious minorities. It also urged that false and malicious cases against Christians be withdrawn.

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