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## **India Hindu leaders turn up 'reconversion' rhetoric**

WWM (23.12.2014) - Ignoring paralyzing opposition in Parliament and private expressions of exasperation from their own political leader, the top leaders of India's fundamentalist Hindu movement have mounted a vigorous defense of a campaign to bring Christian converts back to Hinduism.

"This is our own country, our Hindu rashtra," or nation, said Mohan Bhagwat, head of the Rashtriya Swayasevak Sangh, a national organization that has been the ideological wellspring of India's various groups devoted to a nationalistic expression of Hinduism. Bhagwat [made the statement](#) Dec. 20 in Kolkata, India's third-largest city, during the golden jubilee celebration of the World Hindu Council, which claims to have "reconverted" several hundred thousand Christians and Muslims to Hinduism.

"Those who strayed were lured away. They were looted from us," Bhagwat was variously quoted as saying by Indian news organizations. "When the thief is being caught and my property has been recovered, when I am taking back my own property, what is new in it?"

The next day, Amit Shah, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political home to Hindu nationalism, responded to press questions about Bhagwat's comments by issuing a challenge to the BJP's opposition: Get behind BJP legislation that would outlaw forced conversions nationwide.

Seven of India's 29 states have laws forbidding forced religious conversions. Ostensibly meant to protect individuals from unwelcome proselytizing, the laws instead are "frequently used as a pretext to disturb and disrupt church services as well as to harass, beat up and accuse Christian believers and leaders," according to Open Doors International, a charity that supports Christians who are pressured because of their faith.

"What is happening across the nation is a planned conspiracy. They (Hindu nationalists) want to create an atmosphere where more parties will support a national anti-conversion bill," A J Philip, a columnist who has written for leading national daily newspapers, told World Watch Monitor.

On Saturday, Dec. 20, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council, claimed to have reconverted 500 members of 100 tribal Christian families in a *ghar vapasi*, or homecoming, programme at Arnai village near Valsad, in Gujarat state in western India.

The next day, competing Malayalam news channels were broadcasting images of 30 Christians embracing Hinduism at a reconversion ceremony at a Hindu temple in southern Kerala state – India's Christian heartland where believers account for one fifth of the state's 35 million people.

Earlier this month, 57 migrant Muslim families of ragpickers were reconverted under the watchful eyes of a Hindu fundamentalist outfit in front of news cameras.

The Dec. 20 and 21 reconversion events kept tensions running high in India's Parliament, where three weeks of uproar from minority parties over conversions and violence toward Christians and other minorities has brought the government largely to a standstill.

"We cannot let the Parliament function when the people are terrorised," Sitaram Yechury, a leader of India's Communist Party, [told the media](#) Dec. 22. Yechury and other opposition party representatives have demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi address the Parliament on the conversion controversy.

Modi, head of the BJP ticket that swept to a big election victory earlier this year, has been largely silent. [News reports](#) on Dec. 16 indicated Modi had scolded BJP members of Parliament, telling them their anti-minority rhetoric was hurting India's image and undermining BJP efforts to shore up the economy.

"Prime Minister Modi is media savvy," Philip, the newspaper columnist, told World Watch Monitor. "But his silence and refusal to address the issue in Parliament speaks volume about it."

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## **Are poor Indian Muslims being forced to convert to Hinduism?**

Washington Post (12.12.2014) - In this secular but predominantly Hindu nation of more than 1.2 billion people, religious conversions have always been a touchy subject.

Earlier this week, more than 50 impoverished Muslim families in a slum in the northern Indian city of Agra attended a simple but [controversial ceremony](#) at which they were asked by a Hindu priest to chant and throw offerings into the holy fire in front of some Hindu idols.

The priest then welcomed the Muslims into the Hindu fold.

Some Muslims in the neighborhood of trash collectors told local reporters that it was all a fraud. They said that a Hindu activist had assured them that by attending the ceremony, they will get the government's coveted "below-poverty-line" identity card and access to state welfare assistance in health and education.

Bajrang Dal, the organizers of the ceremony and a radical Hindu group associated with Prime Minister's Narendra Modi's party, said that the ceremony was held in the open and the religious conversion was voluntary.

But the incident created an uproar in parliament and on social media all week about how the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is steering the nation toward a Hindu identity.

The debate also raised the contentious issue of conversion activities by some evangelical Christians and Muslim groups.

"Muslim and Christian evangelists have always been opposed to laws that ban or restrain conversions in the name of freedom of religion," [said an essay in the news portal called Firstpost](#).

The Indian constitution grants religious freedom to its citizens. But [five Indian states have enacted stringent laws](#) against conversions that are carried out by force or allurements. Implementation of these laws has been arbitrary.

Members of the BJP seized the opportunity and [called for a ban](#) on forced religious conversions.

"We are more than willing to discuss the religious conversion issue, we want a law against it," said parliamentary affairs minister [Venkaiah Naidu](#), echoing a longstanding BJP demand aimed at curbing the missionary activities of Christian groups.

Opposition Congress party lawmaker Anand Sharma called it "a [diabolic agenda](#)" of Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP.

Earlier this week, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said that the Hindu scripture Bhagavad-Gita should be declared a "[national scripture](#)." Another BJP state leader, Manohar Lal Khattar, went one step further. He said the Bhagavad-Gita was above the nation's constitution.

An affiliate of the BJP has asked for donations this week to fund an event in the northern city of Aligarh to convert Christians and Muslims to Hinduism [this Christmas](#).

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## **Saffron outfits to 'reconvert' Christians in 3 Meerut villages**

Times of India (12.12.2014) <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/Saffron-outfits-to-reconvert-Christians-in-3-Meerut-villages/articleshow/45498824.cms> - In the midst of a raging row over conversions in Agra, the radical Hindu outfits, including Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrangdal, are set to 'reconvert' Christians in three Meerut villages— CheenaNagar village, Maliana village and Shivpuram—as they claim that the Christian population in these areas has increased at an alarming number.

"The people in these villages, who used to worship Hindu gods have started going to churches for Sunday prayers. These people converted to Christianity because they were offered jobs and other advantages. So, we are set to reconvert them," claimed Sudarshan Chakra, department organizational secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

The outfits are yet to finalize a day to conduct the 'reconversion' ceremony under what they call it as the 'Ghar Wapsi' (returning home) programme. However, Chakra informed TOI that the VHP members have already reached the villages to apprise the residents about their 'reconversion.'

Chakra further claimed that Dharm Prasar—an offshoot of VHP—would also be involved in the re-conversion programme.

When Balraj Dungar, the state convenor of Bajrang Dal, was asked about the 'ghar vapsi' event, he said, "Puri duniya ke andar Hindu tha, Hindu hai aur Hindu rahega. Islam kabhi nahi tha. (In the entire world, there were, there are and there will be Hindus. Islam never existed.) The government might put pressure on us to stall the initiative. We might

even be jailed for the same. We are ready to go to jail but 'Ghar Wapsi' is a continuous affair in the state and will go on uninterrupted."

The conversion row triggered controversy in Uttar Pradesh soon after 57 Bengali Muslim families were "reconverted" in a similar 'Ghar Wapsi' event at Agra. The event also made its way to neighboring Aligarh on Thursday, when Dharam Jagran Samiti allegedly distributed letters in the city to seek donations for their cause of conversion ceremony.

"It is not conversion. It is reconversion. Flip through the pages of history and you will realize that during the time of Akbar, many Hindus were converted to Islam just to save their lives," insisted Dungar.

Referring to the incident in Agra, he said, "How can the media say that the people who got reconverted in the ceremony at Agra were forced to do so? They can see it on TV that they willingly became a part of the 'havan' and applied vermilion on their foreheads."

Though BJP had distanced itself from the reconversion row so far, Vineet Agarwal Sharda, state president of BJP's wing of traders' association broke silence on Friday.

"When Muslim boys tie kalava on their wrists, apply vermilion on their forehead and influence Hindu girls to marry them and convert to their religion; why cannot we host a 'reconversion' event?" asked Sharda.

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## **We strongly condemn the blasphemous and hateful burning of our church**

Asia News (03.12.2014) - An act to be condemned "not only because it blasphemous and accomplished in hatred of the Christian community, but also because it took place in the capital of the country, already battered by other incidents of inter-religious nature", says Msgr. Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, reacting to [the arson attack on the church of St. Sebastian](#), on the eastern outskirts of the metropolis, on December 1.

So far, police have made no arrests in connection with arson attack, an act confirmed by the discovery of two empty cans of kerosene.

Yesterday morning, thousands of demonstrators blocked Vikas Marg, one of the main streets of Delhi, demanding an effective investigation. Contacted by *AsiaNews*, Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), describes the burning of the church of Saint Sebastian "a blot on the secular fabric of India. The holy season of Advent is always targeted by anti-social elements, they want to breed suspicion, discord and disharmony between religious communities. "

According to the Christian leader, "the protection and security of the places of worship are the urgent duties of authorities. The arson of the church of Saint Sebastian is a violation of the right [of Catholics] to religious freedom. The central government and the local administration have failed to ensure that law and cannot abdicate their responsibility. The culprits should be brought to justice and the constitutional guarantees ensured to India's peaceful Christian community".

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## **Karnataka, Hindu radicals attack a Pentecostal church: eight injured, two serious**

Asia News (24.11.2014) - "The violations of public law and order by Hindu radicals endanger religious freedom and threaten the lives and property of Christians in Karnataka" denounces Sajan George, president of the *Global Council of Indian Christians* (GCIC), to AsiaNews after yet another aggression against a Pentecostal community.

Yesterday a group of fundamentalists vandalized the Calvary Apostolic Church in Gangammalaya and attacked worshippers, wounding eight.

The Hindu radicals barged in the middle of the prayer service, attacking those present. Two Christians, Krupakar and Wilson, are hospitalized with broken legs. The group has warned Christians not to rebuild the church.

Although there is a police station near the place of worship, the officers who intervened "did not stop the aggressors." On the contrary, says Sajan George, " they dragged Rev. D'Souza, pastor of the community, in for questioning. It's shameful!".

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## **India's Hindu Radical go on the offensive, calling for a stop to conversions to Christianity and Islam**

AsiaNews (14.11.2014) - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/India's-Hindu-Radical-go-on-the-offensive,-calling-for-a-stop-to-conversions-to-Christianity-and-Islam-32701.html> - On the 50th anniversary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an extremist leader calls for Christians and Muslims to return to Hinduism. For the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), such statements are "absolutely illegal" and "feed suspicion and mistrust" towards minorities. By contrast, the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

Hindus should not convert to Christianity and Islam, and minorities should embrace Hinduism, said officials with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a radical Hindu paramilitary group on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), another extremist organisation.

Such statements are "absolutely illegal" because freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution in India, said Sajan George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) who spoke to *AsiaNews*.

VHP leaders, activists and supporters met on Tuesday and Wednesday in Tumkur, Karnataka, to mark the anniversary of the founding of the extremist association.

"We need to bring back to Hinduism converts to other religions, like Christianity and Islam," RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said. "Foreign forces are trying to destroy India's unity through conversions and other activities," he added.

Radical Hindu groups like RSS and VHP, which are part of the broader Sangh Parivar, persecute religious minorities, even violently.

Christianity is often accused of being a "foreign" religion that "buying" converts with cash or charitable activities.

"I appeal to the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to protect the vulnerable Christian community in Karnataka on the basis of existing constitutional guarantees," Sajan George told *AsiaNews*.

Not only what Hindu radicals do is illegal, "but their statements reflect a clear and deep-seated prejudice against minorities, which can only feed suspicion and mistrust within communities."

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## **Politics fuels religious riots in secular India**

Big Story (07.11.2014) - First, the rumors start. Maybe a Muslim man threw garbage outside a temple, or a Hindu boy teased a Muslim girl. No one has any names or specifics, but that doesn't stop people from taking the rumors as fact. Crowds gather on both sides. Slogans are shouted, stones are thrown. A car goes up in flames.

And just like that, or so it seems, a religious riot rips through an Indian neighborhood.

Thirty years after the notorious anti-Sikh riots in 1984 — the worst communal violence since the bloodshed that followed the partition of the subcontinent at the time of India's independence in 1947 — religious conflagrations are still surprisingly common in a secular country where tolerance is enshrined in the constitution.

But while religion may spark violence in this diverse country filled with religious and cultural tensions, it is often politics that allow it to spiral out of control.

Political parties across the spectrum have used religious differences to manipulate both the country's majority Hindus and its Muslims and other minority groups, exploiting the idea that a polarized electorate is often more pliable.

The most recent riots erupted late last month in Trilokpuri, a largely poor neighborhood on the eastern edge of New Delhi. The fighting started on the evening of Diwali — the Hindu festival of lights — after a drunken brawl broke out near a makeshift Hindu shrine set up across from a mosque.

For hours, large groups of men fought pitched street battles, hurling rocks and stones at each other and injuring dozens of people. A Muslim-owned shop was set on fire, Hindus pelted the mosque with stones, and dozens of angry Muslim men attacked Hindu homes.

Beyond that, the stories vary depending on which religious group you ask. Local Hindus say some drunk Muslim men smashed liquor bottles near the shrine. Muslims say the brawl was between Hindus and Muslims who had been drinking together, and that such fights are common in the neighborhood and usually settled quickly by police.

This time, however, the brawl inflamed religious tempers on both sides. Hindus and Muslims blame each other for starting the violence, but they agree that police arrived only after the worst was over. Police defend their response, though they concede it took them hours to intervene.

Even now, two weeks after the fighting broke out, there is an air of unease in Trilokpuri. Many of the small brick homes are locked up and empty; the residents have sought safety with friends or relatives in other parts of the city. Small knots of police are everywhere.

It's not clear how a local brawl erupted into a full-blown riot within hours, although politics is certainly on everyone's mind. In a few months, Trilokpuri and the rest of the Indian capital will go to the polls to elect a new state legislature.

This wasn't Trilokpuri's first riot, or its worst.

In 1984, Nazar Singh, then 20, watched his father's mutilated and charred corpse lie beneath a street light for three days, too afraid of marauding rioters to retrieve his body.

His father was among hundreds of Sikhs butchered in Trilokpuri, the scene of some of the worst rioting that swept the country after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her on Oct. 31, 1984. Mobs of Hindus went from house to house across northern India, pulling Sikhs from their homes, hacking many to death and burning others alive.

"They came with iron rods and knives and swords. They pulled him out of the house, cracked his skull and sliced open his stomach. Then they took kerosene from inside our house and poured it over him and set him on fire. My mother saw it all happen in front of her eyes," he says.

"The police stood and watched."

Largely-Hindu India's constitution promises equality and religious freedom to all its citizens, but politics and religion have a complex and troubled relationship in this diverse nation of 1.2 billion.

"Controlled violence creates an obliging polarized electorate," says Mukul Kesavan, a historian at the Jamia Millia Islamia university in New Delhi.

In elections about two months after the 1984 riots, Gandhi's Congress party won its largest victory ever. Victims identified Congress party members as leaders of many of the bloodthirsty mobs. News reports from that time said that the police did little or nothing to end the violence. Yet three decades later, only a few people have been prosecuted.

Rights groups say the seeds of India's religious riots were likely sown in the violence of 1984 and the lack of accountability and justice in their wake.

"The Indian government's failure to take even rudimentary steps to bring to justice the authors of the 1984 violence has perpetuated a climate of lawlessness," Meenakshi Ganguly, the South Asia director of New York-based Human Rights Watch, said in a recent statement.

"Thirty years since the horrific massacre," Ganguly said, "communal violence still breaks out in India, raising the same concerns about accountability."

Politics have cast a shadow over many of the large-scale riots in the ensuing years.

In 1992, tens of thousands of Hindu extremists razed a 16th-century mosque in northern India, claiming that it stood on the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. Nearly 2,000 people were killed across the country in the riots that followed.

The religious polarization that followed saw the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party emerge as the single largest party in India's Parliament. The Congress and other regional parties courted Muslim votes by painting themselves as defenders of minority rights.

In 2002, the western Indian state of Gujarat erupted in violence when a train filled with Hindu pilgrims was attacked by a Muslim mob in a small town. A fire erupted — it remains unclear whether it was arson — and 60 Hindus burned to death. In retaliation, more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in the state.

Narendra Modi, now India's prime minister, was Gujarat's chief minister at the time. In elections that followed the riots, he played up his image as a defender of the state's Hindus and won a resounding victory.

In each case, victims accused the government and police of doing little to stem the violence.

"India may be a secular nation but the instruments of the Indian state are fairly majoritarian," Kesavan said.

The aggressiveness of mob behavior is "always based upon how much patronage the state will give you," he said. "There is a very clear signal from the state."

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## **Madhya Pradesh: Hindu radicals beat eight Christians, have them arrested**

AsiaNews (07.11.2014) - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Madhya-Pradesh:-Hindu-radicals-beat-eight-Christians,-have-them-arrested-32636.html> - Bajrang Dal activists take advantage of the state's anti-conversion law to attack a small Pentecostal community. For the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), "it is essential that Hindu and Christian leaders engage in an active dialogue and genuine collaboration."

Hindu radicals from the Bajrang Dal attacked eight Pentecostals from the village of Kotla, in Madhya Pradesh. During the attack, the victims were stripped naked, punched, whipped with belts and then arrested.

On Tuesday, Rev Rana met with seven members of his congregation to prepare a prayer service. When local Bajrang Dal activists learnt about the meeting, they stormed it and beat up the all the participants. Afterwards, police came to the scene of the attack and arrested the Pentecostals.

Adopted in 1968, the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act "is a tool to harass and intimidate the vulnerable Christian minority," said Sajan George. "Hindu radicals use it to make false accusations of forced conversions".

In August 2013, the Madhya Pradesh government amended the law, making it even tougher, by requiring priests to provide local authorities with all the details concerning would-be converts at least 30 days before the ceremony. Failure to respect the law's provisions is punished by heavy fines.

"It is essential that Christian and Hindu leaders engage in an active dialogue and genuine cooperation, to clear the clouds of suspicion and fear that agitate Madhya Pradesh and create instead a climate of mutual tolerance," added the GCIC president.

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## **Tension simmers following attack on Christians in troubled Bastar**

WWM (03.11.2014) - Scores of policemen are camping in a remote Indian village following an Oct. 25 attack on Christians by Hindu fundamentalists.

Government officials characterize the violence in Madhota village, in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state in central India, as a "clash between two communities." Arun Pannalal, president of Chhattisgarh Christian Forum, calls it a "cleverly planned attack."

That's not the only point on which Pannalal and local officials disagree.

"Eleven of our people have been hospitalised. Eight of them have serious injuries," Pannalal told World Watch Monitor on Oct. 29.

"Ten people were injured," countered Ankit Anand, the district collector — the head of Bastar's government administration. The 10 include five Christians and five of the attackers, he said.

In the wake of the violence, more than 100 police officers are camped in Madhota.

"Yes, policemen are there in the village," Anand said. "We have to maintain law and order."

The roots of the trouble go back a week, in the village of Bhanpuri. That's where Dinesh Kashyap, a member of India's Parliament from Bastar, washed the feet of some Christians and declared they had undergone "ghar wapsi," or homecoming, to Hinduism.

Kashyap is a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political home of Hindu nationalism and which won a majority in the national Parliament in elections earlier this year.

The Bhanpuri event raised tension between Christians and fundamentalist Hindus in the region. In Madhota, traditional drumbeats summoned residents to assemble with government officials and police on the morning of Oct. 25 to discuss the resulting "simmering tension." Christians gathered awaiting the officials, Pannalal said.

"But the officials never came," he said. "Fundamentalists came in a truck and attacked the Christians."

Anand said six people — four Hindus and two Christians — were arrested after the "clash."

Several hundred Hindu fundamentalists had been camping around the police station, in Bhanpuri, demanding that the case against them be withdrawn, said Rev. John Daniel, president of the Bastar chapter of Chhattisgarh Christian Forum and a Pentecostal minister.

"I have been here for 40 years. Whenever Christians are attacked, this is the pattern. Before the Christian victims would reach the police station, the attackers would have filed a case against them with the police. That's why innocent Christians have been arrested," Daniel told World Watch Monitor.

Anand, however, said the two Christians who were arrested had been released Oct. 29, while the four Hindus, charged with more serious offenses, are still in detention.

"We have been getting complaints these days that Christians are not even allowed to draw water from the (common) tube wells," Daniel said after attending an Oct. 29 "peace meeting" convened by the district collector.

Elsewhere, police are preventing Christians from entering the hospital at Jagdalpur, 30 kilometres from Madhota, to which injured Christians had been rushed in a truck, Pannalal said.

Asked on Oct. 29 whether police have filed any case against Dinesh Kashyap, the Member of Parliament who conducted the "reconversion" ritual in Bhanpuri village, Anand said "I am not aware of such a report and no Christian has mentioned it in their meeting with me today or given it in writing."

A day earlier, on Oct. 28, the Indian Express, a national newspaper, reported that "the present controversy is rooted in an attempt by the right-wing groups to take these

converted tribals to the Hindu fold." It referenced the MP Dinesh Kashyap, saying he "had visited the [Bhanpuri] area and initiated" the reconversion of Christians in the village.

When World Watch Monitor directed Anand's attention to the national headlines of a day earlier, he said: "We will look into it."

He also said he will look into whether the present situation is linked to tension in other Bastar villages where village councils have passed resolutions that outlaw the open practice of Christianity.

"Christians had complained to us about these resolutions. I had told them that these have no legal validity," Anand said.

Christian-rights advocates have sued the Bastar government over the restrictions. "The government has been asked by the (state) high court to respond to our petition about these resolutions," Pannalal said. "But they have not responded to this yet."

He said the subsequent attacks on Christians are a "ploy to intimidate us."

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## **Christians attacked in Chhattisgarh**

Persecuted church (28.10.2014) <http://persecutedchurch.info/2014/10/28/christians-attacked-in-chhattisgarh/> - Twelve Christian villagers were injured in central India's Chhattisgarh state after they were attacked by Hindu fundamentalists, according to a Christian activist.

The villagers were part of a group of 40 Christians who had gathered on Saturday for what was supposed to be a mediation meeting to resolve tensions with members of the local Hindu community in the state's Bastar district. District officials and local police had called on members from both communities to reconcile their differences after months of discord between the two sides.

However, Christian villagers arrived to find nobody there from the district administration or their counterparts in the Hindu community, according to Arun Pannalal, president of the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum. Instead, he said, 50 Hindu fundamentalists armed with swords, sticks and axes showed up on a truck and started attacking the Christians, who they accused of engaging in forced conversions.

"The attack happened without any provocation," Pannalal said. "Christians had gathered for the meeting, which never happened and instead they were attacked."

However, district officials insist the attack was not part of any ongoing religious tensions, but a personal dispute.

"This incident is not related to any kind of religious thing happening in the village," Ankit Anand, district collector of Bastar district, told ucanews.com. "It was due to some personal issues between the two groups. The concerned authorities have spoken with both groups and now there is no reason for the tension to escalate in the area."

Anand said local police have filed cases against 15 people in connection with the attack.

Pannalal said four Hindu fundamentalists were arrested Sunday and Monday, though ucanews.com was unable to confirm this with police.

Pannalal, however, believes the attack was clearly part of escalating religious tensions between the two communities. In June, 50 villages in the district passed resolutions outlawing non-Hindu religious ceremonies. Pannalal is petitioning the state's high court to overturn the ban.

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## **Hindu hardliners influencing officials' treatment of Christians**

Persecuted church (22.10.2014) <http://persecutedchurch.info/2014/10/22/hindu-hardliners-influencing-officials-treatment-of-christians/> - Police and local officials in central Madhya Pradesh state have been harassing Christians at the behest of hardline Hindu groups, according to Christian leaders.

In one case, a Christian group was denied permission by the local administration in Alirajpur district to host an annual gathering October 6-9. As justification, the authorities said the event would have created social tensions in the area.

Kapil Sharma, president of the Moksha Foundation and an organizer of the event, told ucanews.com that the local administration is "playing at the hands of right-wing Hindu groups to target minority Christians".

Sharma said he also was asked to provide details about the event's funding sources and questioned about whether he was involved in any criminal or illegal activities.

The administration wants to "terrorize Christians," said Sharma, who converted to Christianity from the Hindu religion in 2006.

He said the recent series of incidents represented a basic denial of Christians' constitutional right to freedom of religion.

It was also in Alirajpur district that police declared invalid the marriage of 22-year old Christian Joseph Pawar and his 19-year old Hindu wife Ayushi Wani after the couple eloped.

Wani's family and radical Hindu groups objected to the marriage, alleging it was a ploy to convert a Hindu woman to Christianity. Police invalidated the marriage on October 3, claiming it violated Madhya Pradesh's anti-conversion laws.

Nirmal Singh, Pawar's relative, told ucanews.com that the couple had sent a digital copy of their marriage registration certificate to the Alirajpur district superintendent of police.

"But the officer seemed to have deleted the copy, joined [in support of] the Hindu group and declared their marriage void in violation of the law," Singh said.

Pawar and his mother have gone into hiding at an undisclosed location for reasons of safety, while the bride was sent to a "rehabilitation" facility, according to Singh. Such facilities are often used to hold women who have been caught engaging in prostitution, drug use or other such socially stigmatized activities.

Deepak Vijayvargiya, state spokesman for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said the annulment was a legal issue and that the ceremony did not follow the state's anti-conversion laws.

"It is a pure legal issue between the families of the boy and the girl and the administration," he told ucanews.com.

Richard James, Bhopal district president of the National Christian Forum, told ucanews.com that Hindu groups have been "more active and targeting minorities" since the BJP won recent national elections.

Christian leader and rights activist AC Michael of New Delhi said events in Madhya Pradesh reflect what is happening throughout India since the party assumed power.

"BJP cadres and their allied groups seem to believe that the victory in the election is a mandate for them to act upon their ideology of making India a Hindu nation. But they are sadly mistaken," Michael said.

Michael told ucanews.com that human rights groups have recorded more than 600 attacks on religious minorities in the country since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office.

"[Modi] has not said anything against the anti-Christian activities of these groups," Michael said.

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## **Karnataka rejects report on Mangalore church attacks**

Persecuted church (22.10.2014) <http://persecutedchurch.info/2014/10/22/karnataka-rejects-report-on-mangalore-church-attacks/> - Christian groups and leaders have been demanding rejection of this report with demonstrations and memoranda ever since it was submitted to the former BJP government. The groups demanding the rejection included Karnataka United Christians Forum for Human Rights, led by Archbishop Bernard Moras of Bangalore.

A series of anti-Christian attacks happened in Mangalore and other parts of coastal Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Chikmagalur in 2008, within months after state's first BJP government led by the B S Yeddyurappa came to power.

The present state cabinet, which met under the chairmanship of Congress chief minister Siddaramaiah, took note of the contradictory findings in panel report submitted to the government.

It also directed the State Home Department to take action against the perpetrators of the attacks based on the nine-point recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

Karnataka's Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T B Jayachandra, who briefed the reporters after the State Cabinet meeting, said when the report was submitted to the BJP government, he and other Congress leaders then in opposition, had termed the report as "politically motivated" attempt "to exonerate the Sangh Parivar outfits" like Bajrang Dal, Sri Ram Sene and even Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

The NHRC had recommended compensation to the victims and also the churches and other places of worship belonging to the Christian minority community and taking steps to prevent recurrence of such violence.

The Hindu group attacked Christians accusing pastors of engaging in "forcible conversion" with support of the police and tacit approval of the administration.

NHRC wanted stringent action against the police officers who supported the attackers and even beaten up the arrested Christians in police custody.

To a specific question on the NHRC recommendations appeared to be "totally one-sided," Jayachandra said: "NHRC is a statutory body. We have merely asked the Home Department to look into them and take appropriate action."

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## **Indian Christian man forced to separate from Hindu wife by right-wing activists**

World Watch Monitor (07.10.2014)

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/10/3413033/> - An Indian couple who married last week had their marriage annulled by police after pressure from Hindu nationalists.

The couple, Joseph Pawar and Ayushi Wani, were arrested in Gujarat after complaints that Pawar, a Christian, had lured his Hindu bride into marriage.

This latest incident adds to the pressure on Narendra Modi, the new prime minister of India, who is accused in a new report of remaining silent about the increased violence towards Christians and other religious minorities.

In the report, issued in New Delhi on Sept. 27, a group of Indian religious leaders accused Modi of remaining mute in the face of 600 incidents targeting religious minorities since his landslide election victory in May.

At the same time on the other side of the world, during Modi's five-day visit to the United States, neither he nor his hosts said a word about evidence indicating growing sectarian hostility at the hands of nationalist Hindus, whose political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP, swept Modi into national power.

The Sept. 30 meeting between Modi and U.S. President Barack Obama -- the first summit involving the leader of one of the world's oldest democracies, and the leader of the largest -- did not produce any public mention of religious freedom of any sort.

Diplomatic silence on the subject perhaps was to be expected. The U.S. had denied Modi a visa in 2005 when he was chief minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, where, in 2002, Hindu riots killed more than 1,200 people, mostly Muslims but also Christians. As Modi has led the BJP to control of the national government this year, Hindu violence against minorities, including Christians, has spiked.

Now prime minister of a country that claims one-sixth of the world's population, Modi was not subjected to any official public reminder of the sectarian violence to which he was connected, or the rebuff America had dealt him nearly 10 years ago. The words religion, religious, and Christian did not appear among the nearly 6,900 words that made up the leaders' joint statement, their public individual remarks, the US-India joint strategic vision statement, or Modi's speech three days earlier to the United Nations General Assembly.

Others were not concerned with diplomacy. Outside New York's Madison Square Garden on Sept. 28, protesters made a point of connecting Modi to the Gujarat violence, and accused him of supporting the murder of Christians, Muslims and even Hindus in India. Inside the arena, more than 18,000 people, mostly Indian expats living in America, gave Modi a rock-star reception to a speech he made in Hindi.

On the day of Modi's arrival in the U.S., Sept. 26, a group called the Coalition Against Genocide released a letter, signed by 11 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, that urged Obama to "discuss religious inclusion and the protection of religious minorities in India." Referencing Modi's connection to the 2002 violence, the letter said Modi "can play a constructive role by criticizing extremists and opening a dialogue in the country about violence aimed at religious minorities."

None of the 11 House members released any public statement about the letter or their support of it. One of the 11, Keith Ellison of Minnesota, is content to let the letter speak for itself, his press spokesman said.

The letter recalls Modi's post-election address to India, in which he said "a government has only one religion – India first."

"This statement is promising," the joint letter said. "However, given the reported increase in violence against Christians and Muslims, the reality on the ground in India's communities indicates that this promise must be followed by action."

If the subject of religious freedom was raised during the private sessions between Obama and Modi, neither mentioned it in the subsequent public statements.

"During a private dinner we spent most of our time talking about the economy," Obama said. The closest the two came to publicly referencing religious freedom was a mention in the joint statement about the "shared values, people-to-people ties, and pluralistic traditions" of India and the United States. And, in the strategic partnership vision statement was the acknowledgement that "our strategic partnership rests on our shared mission to provide equal opportunity for our people through democracy and freedom."

"The first 100 days of the new regime have, however, seen the rising pitch of a crescendo of hate speech against Muslims and Christians. Their identity derided, their patriotism scoffed at, their citizenship questioned, their faith mocked."

--Press statement summarizing report by Indian religious leaders

While the talk in Washington was of shared values and economic opportunity, back home, fears and anguish were growing over Modi's "silence" in the face of increasing verbal and physical attacks on Christians and Muslims alike.

More than 500 people took part in the four-hour protest Sept. 27 in New Delhi, at which a report titled "100 days under the New Regime – the state of Minorities" was released by bishops of different denominations along with Christian, Muslim and secular activists.

"The first 100 days of the new regime have, however, seen the rising pitch of a crescendo of hate speech against Muslims and Christians. Their identity derided, their patriotism scoffed at, their citizenship questioned, their faith mocked," said a press statement about the protest, providing a summary of the 92-page report compiled by Christian and other activists.

"The environment has degenerated into one of coercion, divisiveness, and suspicion. This has percolated to the small towns and villages of rural India, severing bonds forged in a

dialogue of life over the centuries," the statement read. "The attacks have assumed alarming proportions."

It said more than 600 incidents targeting religious minorities occurred between May to September, especially in areas that have held, or soon will hold, legislative elections.

"Both democracy and secularism are in grave danger under the government led by Modi," said Sheba Farooqui, of the All India Democratic Women's Association. "The condition of minority communities is dilapidating day by day due to indifference meted out and apathy shown by the government."

A C Michael, one of the protest organizers, told World Watch Monitor that "the common refrain was the silence of Prime Minister Modi."

Almost all the speakers "expressed shock over the silence of the Prime Minister on the increasing violence against minorities," said Michael, a former member of the Minority Commission of Delhi.

"The sad part is that the Prime Minister does not speak either in public or in (his) party against those indulging in hatred," said John Dayal, an outspoken Christian activist and secretary general of the All India Christian Council.

The 92-page report was endorsed by 33 groups, representing different faiths and secular groups.

"If solution to this menace is not meted out now, then in the coming times minorities will even lose their power of speech and expression," said Muslim activist Zafur-ul-Islam. "We have contributed a lot in nation building and we are also citizens of this country, as other communities are."

Said Bishop John Simon of Believers Church: "The Christians have done much admirable work in almost every social sphere, including health and education. Our contribution needs no elaboration. We have to get united in order to fight for our rights."

The protesters rejected Modi's call, made during his Aug. 15 Independence Day message, for a "10-year moratorium on religion-based violence."

"India has no place for hate and needs not a ten-year moratorium, but an end to the communal and targeted violence against religious minorities," the report said.

The report makes several demands:

- Zero tolerance for communal and targeted violence
- A stop to profiling and attacks on religious freedom
- Swift action against those who create religious tension
- A directive to police to apply the law equally
- A mechanism to defend of minority rights

"The blatant support from central (federal) and local political leaders to antisocial groups has triggered violence in many places," the press statement concerning the report said.

Unfazed by the criticism, the BJP in a brazen step has decided to praise 63 party workers who were jailed after the July 4 street violence in Moradabad in northern Uttar Pradesh state, in which the district magistrate was seriously injured, the Indian Express reported

on October 2. The BJP supporters had clashed with police after a meeting called to protest the removal of a loudspeaker from a temple in the town was disallowed.

Of the 600 incidents listed in the report, Muslims were the most frequent target, while Christians accounted for about three dozen. But it was an incident involving Christians that prompted the protest.

Christian leaders had met in New Delhi in late August following widespread reports that 72 Christians had “voluntarily” abandoned their faith, and that the Seventh-Day Adventist church had been “purified” and converted into a Hindu temple in a village about 160 kilometres southeast of New Delhi.

An ecumenical team visiting the village discovered the supposed mass conversion was a sham, and that a dozen pastors had been detained and beaten by police at the urging of a local BJP leader.

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## **India's Christian activists plan protests against violence and forced 'reconversions'**

WWM (08.09.2014) - More than 600 attacks on minority Muslims and Christians during the first 100 days of the new government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi have prompted Christians and activists to set out a series of protests.

At a September 2 meeting in New Delhi attended by over 50 Christian leaders, lawyers and social activists, several committees were set up to draw national attention to the “conspiracy” behind the sporadic violence.

On September 4, the core committee announced plans to bring out a “Minority Report on 100 days of Modi Governance,” detailing atrocities during the first 100 days of the new government. The government under the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, known for espousing Hindu nationalism, assumed power on May 26 after its landslide victory in the election to choose India's 16th Parliament.

Apart from the report, the coalition of Christian groups and secular social networks have announced a convention on minority rights on October 2 – the national holiday marking the birth of Mahatma Gandhi.

The convention will be followed two days later by a public protest in New Delhi.

The plan followed the capital's Christian leaders' response to two recent and widely report incidents of anti-Christian violence from Uttar Pradesh state, bordering New Delhi.

On August 27, a Seventh Day Adventist church in Asroi village in Aligarh district – 160 kilometres south-east of New Delhi – was ‘purified’ with a ritual and declared a temple by Hindu fundamentalists, after “re-converting” an extended family of Christian converts back to Hinduism.

Hindu fundamentalist groups sent out photos and a press release to claim that 72 low-caste Christian converts had returned to Hinduism.

“This is mere propaganda and a ploy to intimidate Christian congregations as a whole. Saffron (Hindu fundamentalist) groups are behind it,” Sundar Singh, a Dalit Christian activist who visited the village in a three-member fact finding team, reported at the September 2 meeting.

The fact-finding team reported that the "purification" ritual and the 'reconversion' of Christians had been held with over a dozen members of an extended family. Since the pastor had made only irregular visits to the village, Hindu fundamentalists targeted them.

"It was organised by Hindu fundamentalist outfits capitalising on the lapse of the pastor," pointed out Catholic priest Dominic Emmanuel, a member of the fact-finding team. The ritual was photographed and video graphed and sent to the media with the claim of reconversion of 72 Christians besides uploading it even on YouTube. "But there are only five Christian families with 30 members in the area," he added.

In a memorandum to the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state, the Christians have condemned the conversion of the church to a temple, urging him to intervene to protect their faith and their properties from the Hindu fundamentalists.

"The series of atrocities did not end with Asroi. At Hasayn in the same district, the pracharaks (Hindu activists) wanted to conduct the same purification inside the church but were stopped by the police," said Osmond Charles, an advocate.

While the Christian delegation was in Aligarh on August 30, another shocking incident alarmed the Christian activists in the national capital: a dozen pastors were illegally detained by the police on false "converting Hindus to Christians" charges at Surajpur village near Noida, on the border of New Delhi.

Pramod Singh, a senior Christian lawyer who rushed to the spot following the arrest of the pastors, told the meeting that Hindu fundamentalists led by a local BJP leader organised a protest at a village church gathering alleging "conversion."

"With a crowd of protesters making a spectacle, police took into custody pastors from the regular prayer meeting. When seven others reached the police station, they were also detained. The police even beat some of the pastors to please the Hindu mob creating a violent scene outside the police station," Singh said.

"The police chief of the area even told us that 'this is a Hindu nation.' The police have changed colours with the change of government," he said. While ten pastors were released late into the night, the remaining two were released only on the next day, despite Christian lawyers and leaders arguing with the police about the illegal detention.

The police on September 1 conceded that they found that the allegations against the pastors were "baseless," and that people were praying with the Christian pastors of their own volition.

John Dayal, an outspoken Indian Christian leader, told the meeting that "these incidents are not isolated. There is a clear strategy and plan behind it. Such instances are only spreading."

Dayal's warning has been confirmed by a September 3rd incident at Shivpuri district in central Madhya Pradesh where four Dalits who converted to Islam were publicly subjected to "re-conversion" by leading Hindu fundamentalist groups.

According to [the Indian Express](#), half a dozen Dalits who had expressed willingness to embrace Islam were not spared, either.

"Where is the freedom of religion guaranteed under the constitution?" asked Shabnam Hashmi, a prominent social activist at the September 2 meeting in New Delhi.

Hashmi, founder director of ANHAD (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy), pointed out that more than 600 incidents of violence against minorities have been reported in less

than 100 days of Modi's government. "It is time for all to join hands and protest," she urged.

Rev. Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India told the meeting that EFI is documenting the atrocities against Christians.

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## **Pastor Simon Stanley & believers beaten up in Coimbatore**

Persecuted church (13.08.2014) - Pastor. Simon Stanley has been taking care of Apostolic Christian Church in Perur near Coimbatore City. One of his believers named Bagavathi, who was staying in a nearby village named Goundanur invited Pastor Simon to come to his house and pray for his sick girl (12 years old who had a fractured hand). The pastor visited his house on Sunday (3rd Aug. 2014, evening about 7.00 pm) with a few believers and prayed for the girl.

Suddenly about 7.30 pm, around 10 member gang came and shouted at them and 6 of them forcefully entered the house and locked the door from inside. Then they beat all the people in the house including ladies and children using even vessels and with other household articles which were available in the house.

Many were severely injured and taken to the local hospital. Pastor Simon Stanley was taken to the Government Hospital of Coimbatore for further treatment. He was admitted there for 3 days. Since he had many injuries CT scan was done and he is still under treatment.

An FIR was filed in Perur Police station and Sub Inspector Murugavel is conducting the investigation. Yesterday 2 people were arrested and remanded to Judicial custody by the magistrate of Coimbatore Court. The news was published in the local papers and also covered by TV news channels.

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## **India's Christians face continued terror under BJP rule**

UP (05.08.2014) - As feared by many religious minorities in India, intimidations and attacks from the Sangh Parivar (Hindu nationalist movement) have escalated under the Bharathiya Janatha Party's (BJP) rule. Hindu radicals are now outright targeting Christians all across the country as a direct consequence of the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) assuming power. It won't be too long until this dangerous situation, made evident by the violent and widespread strategy of the Sangh Parivar, moves closer to the ultimate goal of the Sangh Parivar, India becoming a Hindu nation.

The right wing political party BJP, backed by the Sangh Parivar, achieved a landslide victory in India's recent general elections that concluded two months ago. Since their rise to power, attacks on religious minorities across India has increased.

Included in this wave of religious violence, a church in Uttar Pradesh (UP) was rampaged when a mob of Hindu radicals belonging to the Bajrangdal, a Hindu nationalist group, spitefully attacked the Christians. The attack took place while the Christians were having the Bible study on July 16 at around 2:30 p.m. in Sahakarinar village in UP. A group of 25 Hindu radicals led by Hemanth Singh stormed into the church and beat Rev. R. C.

Paul and other Christians gathered for the Bible study. The radicals gave no reason for their assault on the Christians during the attack.

The assailants used wooden lathies (clubs) and fists to beat the Christians, causing internal injuries. After attacking the Christians gathered at the church, they went up to the church's roof and desecrated the cross. After desecrating the cross, the group installed a saffron flag in place of cross. They also destroyed the church's musical instruments and pulpit as well as tearing apart Bibles and other Christian literature they found in the church.

Rev. Dinesh Sohil, another pastor who came to the aid of attacked Christians, was badly beaten and was taken to a local hospital for immediate treatment.

Rev. R. C. Paul who has been in charge of the church since 1991 said, "We were shaken and are very scared of the situation in the area. We are concerned of our safety, even going alone outside looks very dangerous at the moment. But," he continued, "We are encouraged by receiving so many phone calls and visits by [our] Christian brethren." He added, "If God is for us who can be against us."

Later, when Rev. R. C. Paul filed a complaint at the police station, the police arrested 12 suspected members of the group who attacked the church. Later, two more Bajrangdal leaders were arrested and were sent to jail for their involvement in the attack. Following the arrests, Bajrangdal activists staged a protest demanding the release of the people who led the attack on Christians.

In another incident in UP, the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) reported that on July 7 a church in a village called Saraiya was also attacked by members of Shiv Sena, another Hindu nationalist group, and BJP. The local BJP leader, Harendra Pratap Singh, and the leader of the local Shiv Sena, Acche Lal Tiwari, were spotted leading this attack. When the local Christians of Saraiya attempted to report the incident to the police, the police took the pastor and 11 other Christians into custody.

Chhattisgarh, one of India's eastern states, has also recently seen cases of violations of Christians' right to religious freedom. An aggressive campaign led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), yet another Hindu nationalist group, has led to a ban on the entry of and propagation of any non-Hindu religion by non-Hindu missionaries, especially Christians, in more than 50 villages of Chhattisgarh's Bastar region in the last six months.

According to Suresh Yadav, Bastar District President of the VHP, "Over 50 gram panchayats (village councils) in Bastar have passed orders under Section 129 (G) of the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj Act banning all 'non-Hindu religious propaganda, prayers and speeches in the villages.'"

Since BJP's rise to power, many Hindu nationalist groups have made clear their Hindutva agenda in both word and deed. The influence these groups have on the BJP-led government will likely continue to make Hindu radicals more aggressive, terrorizing India's minorities, particularly Christians. Will the pluralistic and secular fabric of India fraying under this wave of religious violence, many Christians in India are wondering how long until they see a 'Hindu India.'

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## **BJP win elicits mixed reaction from India's Christians**

By Anto Akkara

World Watch Monitor (19.06.2014) /

[https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/06/article\\_3190472.html/](https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/06/article_3190472.html/) - India's Christian leaders aren't quite unanimous, yet, on the meaning of the May election landslide that swept Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist party into control of the world's largest democracy.

On the one hand:

"Your ascension as Prime Minister of this great country and the overwhelming mandate...under your dynamic leadership are heavenly indications that many problems facing the country...would be addressed firmly and for the common good," Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, former president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, wrote to Modi.

On the other:

"We beg to differ from official church leaders on Narendra Modi," said a statement issued June 13 by the National Council of Churches in India, an advocacy group. It was written in response to national church bodies and leaders rushing to congratulate Modi.

The sceptics have reasons to be wary. Only hours after the new government was sworn in May 26, key ministers were declaring opposition to longstanding minority demands to strengthen anti-discrimination laws.

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. 28 on Open Doors' 2014 World Watch List, largely because of a streak of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, that envisions India as a purely Hindu state.

The Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, is the ruling party in three of the six Indian states with laws that forbid forced religious conversions — laws that are used frequently to shut down churches or intimidate Christians who speak about their faith. Even before its election mandate, the party had proposed stiffer penalties in one of those states, Madhya Pradesh, India's second-largest.

With Modi galvanizing the BJP ticket, running largely on a platform of economic revival and government reform, the party won 282 seats in the 543-member Indian Parliament. The National Democratic Alliance, a coalition encompassing the BJP, captured 336 seats. Support for the more secular Congress Party, which had ruled India for decade, eroded severely, dropping from 206 seats in 2009, to 44.

The congratulatory message from Cardinal Toppo, head of the Catholic church in the tribal heartland of Jharkhand where BJP virtually swept the polls, followed Modi's ascension to office, witnessed by the heads of South Asian nations attending the swearing in ceremony.

Archbishop Baselios mar Cleemis, head of the Catholic Church in India, was cautiously optimistic that the new government will "continue to uphold...secularism and principles of democracy to lead the Nation on the path of development."

The National Council of Churches in India, however, announced its intention to remain a cautious watchdog.

Quoting the Gospel of Luke, the council issued a statement that "we are reminded of the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus 'to bring good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour.' "

"We are to stand for just-peace, and should support all policies, endeavours and projects of the government within this 'just-peace' framework," the council statement said. "The 2014 Elections constitute the kairós (the critical decisive time) for the Church in India to be bearers of the 'Nazareth Manifesto' gospel in the country."

A group of Christian social activists, theologians and church lay leaders issued their own statement, which claimed they have "no problems with the Official Church Leaders in congratulating Modi on becoming the Prime Minister of India." However, "we have serious reservations and objections on their assessment...and their expectations from Modi to build a just India and a secular India."

"The church leaders should not rush to be admirers of the government. The hierarchy should watch the ground situation and remain alert to the real concerns of the people," said John Dayal, who issued the joint statement on behalf of the Christian activists and others, to World Watch Monitor.

Historically, Dayal pointed out, the BJP has demonstrated it is "out to pursue and realize the vision of a Hindu nation."

Kumar Swamy, national co-ordinator of the All Indian Christian Council, a Christian advocacy group, was even more blunt:

"I'm sure there will be increased sporadic, localised attacks (on) the Christian community," Swamy was [quoted June 2 by Christian Today](#). "Maybe not initially, because the BJP wants to keep its image secular and democratic, and show they care about the minority groups, so there may not be immediate major attacks taking place."

Joseph Dias, founder of the outspoken Catholic Secular Forum of Mumbai, claimed "the fringe groups are already on the loose."

Police already have arrested 20 members of the Hindu Rashtra Sena, or Hindu National Army, after Mohasin Shaikh, a Muslim computer engineer, was clubbed to death June 2 with hockey sticks in Pune, near Mumbai.

Police in western Maharashtra state claim that the attack in Pune by the Hindu outfit was a response to a posting on Facebook that denigrated Hindu political leaders.

Federal President Pranab Mukherji, in his address to the new Parliament on June 9, assured that religious minorities will be "partners in India's development" and in the new government's broad agenda.

Yet by that date, Dias said, "Some of the statements from the ministers show the same (Hindu nationalist) mind-set and agenda." Within 24 hours of Modi's swearing-in on May 26, a couple of key ministers had made comments that reiterate BJP's antipathy to the decades-old Christian demand for end to discrimination against Christian Dalits.

Dalit, a word meaning "trampled upon," refers to the "untouchables" of the lowest castes in Indian society. Often, Dalits eke out a living by carrying out menial jobs like scavenging while living segregated from upper castes in rural areas.

Since 1950 the federal government has set aside free education, government jobs and legislative seats for Hindu Dalits. None are provided to Christian and Muslim Dalits. Two-thirds of India's 28 million Christians are Dalits.

Thavarchand Gehlot, the social justice minister, told the media that the new government opposes a 4.5 percent job quota for minorities, a target proposed by the previous government. Reservation based on religion, he said, is "unconstitutional."

Minority affairs minister Najma Heptullah, the lone Muslim among the 46-member Modi cabinet, said quotas for minorities kill the "spirit of competition."

"We are not surprised by these comments. But we cannot keep quiet on a genuine cause because the BJP is in power," said Samuel Jayakumar, secretary of the National Council of Churches Commission on Policy, Governance and Public Witness.

Jayakumar took part in a strategy meeting of more than 40 Dalit Christian activists and church officials in New Delhi in May, which issued a frank statement prospects for minorities under the BJP government are "not very encouraging."

"Our hope is in the judiciary," Jayakumar said, in reference a 2004 petition for equal rights pending before the Indian apex court. "Once the government makes its stand clear on the issues in the Supreme Court, the judiciary can give its verdict."

Hope of a Christian being included in the Modi cabinet has come to naught. Christian circles were abuzz that P.A. Sangma, a prominent Catholic and BJP associate since he broke from the Congress party in 1998, would make it into the Modi cabinet, as he was elected to the Parliament for the 10<sup>th</sup> time, from the tiny Christian majority state of Meghalaya in the north-east.

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## **Sikhs want the attack on the Golden Temple to be recognized as genocide**

By Krista R. Burdine

World Religion News (18.06.2014) / <http://wwrn.org/articles/42748/> - In the 16th century, an early guru of Sikhism built a marble temple in Punjab, India, in the center of a holy lake of water called the Amritsar. Later, gold was applied to parts of the building, giving it the name Golden Temple. This temple became a favored pilgrimage site for Sikhs of India. Gurus would teach on love and compassion for all living things. Sikh gurus have lived in the Golden Temple over the centuries, and the Sikh holy scriptures are kept safe there.

### ***The storming of the Golden temple***

A young militant Sikh, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, created a base of operations in the Golden Temple in 1982, from which he began to demand the Indian state of Punjab, the area surrounding the Amritsar, be accorded to Sikhs as a homeland. More conservative Sikhs shared this desire as well, but as greater numbers of people joined Bhindranwale, the government of India deemed this movement a threat and danger to the control of power in Punjab. So on the week of June 3-8 of 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered Operation Blue Star and sent military forces to storm and empty out the Golden Temple. Thousands of militants and supporters were killed during the sweep.

Resulting tensions spilled over the entire country. Towns throughout Punjab were tossed and many thousands of young men were arrested and detained. In October, the Prime Minister was assassinated by two of her own bodyguards sympathetic to the Sikh cause.

In retaliation, another 3,000 Sikhs were killed rioting in the streets in the Indian capital of Delhi. Ultimately more than 37,000 Sikhs died during this turbulent period.

To this day, Sikhs still look for their holy pilgrimage site in Punjab to be recognized as a homeland independent of India's Hindu rule.

### **Sikhs today**

Thirty years later, Sikhs still seek an end to human rights violations in India. In June and November, the faithful regularly gather and reaffirm the desire to visit the Golden Temple in their own homeland. A major tenet of this religion is the value of self-determination, which underscores even further the sense of urgency its followers feel for achieving a sovereign territory. This year, large groups of protesters gathered around the world in solidarity to bring the matter before the world stage. Groups in New York and San Francisco held peaceful protest rallies in the United States.

A group of about 15,000 gathered in San Francisco, surprising organizers and placing a notable extra load on public transportation. The orange headgear worn by many of the faithful presented a colorful display and gave observers a visual sense of the significant numbers of Sikhs effectively living in exile in the Bay Area, greater California, and nearby states, as they wait and work for self-determination in Punjab.

### **Genocide**

The first picture that comes to mind when thinking of genocide is of the Jewish Holocaust. But other cultural and religious groups worldwide have faced the same horrific extermination in the name of preserving governments in power. Although the number of victims does not come close to the millions lost to the Holocaust, the storming of the Golden Temple could be considered a genocide because the Hindu government of India worked to systematically eradicate a cultural people group from the face of India.

Motions have been made in Parliament in the UK and in Australia, to recognize the 1984 events as genocide. In 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India did issue a formal apology for the terrible atrocities, and force the resignation of at least one official known to have been involved. But today's faithful around the world still seek further acknowledgement and progress in the arena of human rights. Through the continued fight for recognition, international protests and rallies raise awareness of human rights violations still happening today in the Punjab, around India, and across the world.

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## **Christian believer Nimmaka Laxmaya brutally murdered in daylight in Odissa**

Persecuted Church (12.06.2014) / <http://persecutedchurch.info/2014/06/12/christian-believer-nimmaka-laxmaya-brutally-murdered-in-daylight-in-odissa-2/> - Odissa, June 09, 2014:

**A believer named Nimmaka Laxmaya, aged about 50, attended prayer meeting in village: Vandidi, which is just 3 km from Dherubada village in Odissa. On his way back home he was murdered on 25th May. N.Laxmaya's last son wanted to take water baptism, for which his father and the whole family were so happy that his son is going to take water baptism. When he got baptized, he gave his**

**cloths to his father( which he had used for the baptism)to take home and he said to his father Nimmaka to come to pray for him.**

The murder was pre-planned. The fanatic perpetrators planned it a very cleverly and then they did this heinous crime with a master plan to kill someone a new believer to spread some kind of fear among the believers prayer groups of that particular area. As a result, out of fear nobody will come to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as their only Lord and personal Savior and ultimately the believers Church will be destroyed there.

**They prepared some fanatic young people and fed them with enough chicken, mutton and alcohol too as much as they can drink and gave them all directions on where, how, when to murder and then after what to do with the dead body etc. based on which the same group of young people did as per their instruction.**

While Nimmaka Laxmaya was alone on his way heading to his house they followed him without his knowledge and when they found him alone, took advantage of the situation as per their plan. They caught him on the road itself and tied his neck with his cloth and dragged him like an animal and smashed his head with a big stone available at that road side and killed him. Then when they found him dead, they carried his dead body to the nearby dense forest from that place. Then after few Minutes, his newly baptized son while going back home and passing by, saw his cloths on the ground drenched with fresh blood. Became frightened and looked here & there for help. Then he found someone dragging something to the forest road. He immediately ran behind them out of anxiety and recognized his father being dragged on the same forest road. He then shouted at the tormentors saying them that "this is my father, why you are doing to him like this," and while he became more closer to them, they threatened and scared him saying that, "if you come near then we will do the same thing to you as we did to your father.

**He's killed as he didn't listen to us and deny Jesus Christ. We shall do the same thing to you now." And they started catching the boy early and chased to kill him but by grace of God, the boy able could be able to run away from there to save his life. And he reached the meeting place being close by and reported to local leaders, Pastors and believers about the dreadful incidence he witnessed. Then all of them, rushed to that place where the murder had taken place and when all believers reached there, the murderers had been fled away from the spot.**

Then people reported the local police station and the police came and booked a case against the murderers and arrested them, took them into police custody and sent them to court for judgment.

**After this police action, these fanatic anti-social people and their supporters are seriously threatening our Leaders, Pastors, Believers and their family members to kill every Christians there one by one, if they go against them and they will chase out all of them from that place without giving any belongings back to them, means the perpetrators are now after the new believers there either to snatch away their lives or even their belongings at any cost if they do not deny Christ.**

Therefore our Pastors, Leaders. believers and their family members are in a very very trauma condition now under the prevailing tensed situation. Please pray for them and the especially for the bereaved family of Nimmaka for their reported the local police station and the police came and booked a case against the murderers and arrested them, took them into police custody and sent them to court for judgment.

**After this police action, these fanatic anti-social people and their supporters are seriously threatening our Leaders, Pastors, Believers and their family members to kill every Christians there one by one, if they go against them and they will chase out all of them from that place without giving any belongings back to them, means the perpetrators are now after the new believers there either to snatch away their lives or even their belongings at any cost if they do not deny Christ.**

Therefore our Pastors, Leaders, believers and their family members are in a very very trauma condition now under the prevailing tensed situation. Please pray for them and the especially for the bereaved family of Nimmaka for their safety and our Ministry. Nimmaka Laxman had six children consisting of 3 sons and 3 daughters. He was a daily laborer having no land, no proper house and no source of proper income. Three children are yet to get married ,two of them are studying. Even though, he was a poor man, he was a good believer

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## **India Sikh groups clash at Golden Temple**

BBC News (06.06.2014) - Several people have been injured after Sikh groups brandishing swords clashed at India's Golden Temple as special prayers were held to mark the deadly military offensive there in 1984.

Reports said the fight at Sikhism's holiest shrine was over who would speak first at the ceremony and that a scuffle broke out over a microphone.

Footage showed men running down temple steps lashing out with their swords.

Reports said at least three people had been taken to hospital with injuries.

The Indian government says 400 people and 87 soldiers were killed during the 1984 military raid to flush out Sikh separatists from the Golden Temple at Amritsar, codenamed Operation Blue Star.

But Sikh groups say the number of casualties was much higher and estimate it closer to 1,000.

On Friday, hundreds of Sikhs had gathered at the shrine to remember those killed in the June 6 raid 30 years ago, but the ceremony soon erupted into chaos.

Television footage showed the rival groups, sporting blue and orange turbans, fighting each other on a staircase and through the courtyard.

"Today we were supposed to have a solemn remembrance for the martyrs of 1984, so what has happened is very sad," Prem Singh Chandumajra, a spokesman for Punjab state's ruling party Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), told reporters.

"The temple has once again been dishonoured today."

Mr Chandumajra said the clashes in the holy place were unacceptable and that the temple management would take action against those involved.

A senior police official told the BBC the situation had been brought under control and the city was peaceful.

The 1984 military operation sparked off a chain of events that led to the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

That, in turn, led to days of anti-Sikh rioting in Delhi which left thousands dead - and Sikh groups argue that there has still been no accountability for either the army assault or the riots.

Earlier this year, Britain said it had given advice to the Indian military in the early stages of its planning for Operation Blue Star, and some Sikh groups are also calling for an independent investigation into this episode.

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## **India arrests after Muslim man beaten to death by hardline Hindus**

BBC News (05.06.2014) - Police in India say they have arrested 17 members of a hardline Hindu group after a Muslim man was beaten to death in the western city of Pune.

Mohsin Sadiq Shaikh, 28, was stopped by a group of men on Monday night and beaten with rods and sticks.

The attackers were angry over some "distorted" images of the 17th Century warrior king Shivaji and late Shiv Sena party leader Bal Thackeray on Facebook.

Officials say he was innocent and simply got up caught in clashes.

"Shaikh was returning home after prayers on Monday night when he was stopped by a group of about a dozen men who assaulted him brutally," senior police officer Manoj Patil told BBC Hindi.

"The attackers were accusing him of posting offensive photos on Facebook. When police reached the scene, the attackers had run away. Shaikh was taken to hospital, but he died from his injuries.

"There is no doubt that this was a case of religious hate crime," Mr Patil added.

He said the arrested men belonged to the Hindu Rashtra Sena (Hindu National Army), a small radical Hindu group.

At the weekend, police said there were clashes in Pune and other cities of Maharashtra state over the offensive images on Facebook. The images were later removed.

Officials said Shaikh, who worked in the IT department of a textile firm, was not involved in any way.

"Shaikh had no connection with these images. Police have arrested all the accused and we will take strict action against them," Maharashtra Home Minister RR Patil said.

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## **CSW urges incoming government to adopt measures to promote freedom of religion of belief**

CSW (23.05.2014) - Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) urges the incoming Indian government to adopt measures to ensure the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief for India's diverse communities.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claimed a decisive victory in the recent Indian general election, securing more than 50% of seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). The swearing-in ceremony for incoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on 26 May. The BJP has close ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group which construes India as a Hindu nation in which the minority Christians and Muslims are considered outsiders who threaten national integrity.

As Chief Minister of Gujarat State since October 2001, Modi has been praised for economic growth in the state. However, following the [Gujarat communal violence](#) of 2002, in which over 2,000 people, mostly Muslims died, there were strong and credible allegations of state complicity at highest level, with Chief Minister Narendra Modi widely accused of directing police not to obstruct attacks on Muslims.

During the election campaign, the [BJP manifesto](#) acknowledged India's diversity and promised to work towards making the aspirations of the Indian people a reality. The manifesto promises to "facilitate the setting up of a permanent Inter-faith Consultative mechanism to promote harmony and trust, under the auspices of religious leaders." The party also vows to maintain heritage sites and preserve the culture of minorities.

Despite these pledges, it remains to be seen to what extent Modi's administration will address human rights issues, particularly the rights of religious minorities. The All India Christian Council has noted that "early pronouncements by Modi associates in the party and the Sangh have provided little reassurance that security and freedom for Christians and other minorities would be high on the list of priorities for the new administration".

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We urge the incoming Indian administration to actively promote and defend the right to freedom of religion or belief for India's diverse communities. We continue to advocate for the implementation of the recommendations made in the [2008 report](#) of the former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, including the need for the authorities to take quick and effective measures to protect members of religious minorities from any attacks and to step up efforts to prevent communal violence. Efforts to work towards the introduction of a comprehensive framework to deal adequately with the consequences of communal and targeted violence should continue. We also continue to call for the establishment of an effective framework for the protection of human rights defenders across the country."

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## **Odisha: Christian family's home destroyed for third time by Hindu extremist**

The Catholic Secular Forum (21.05.2014) /

<http://persecutedchurch.info/2014/05/21/christian-family%E2%80%99s-home-destroyed-for-third-time-by-hindus-in-india/> - Odisha, May 12, 2014: **A Christian family have been left devastated after their home in Kandhamal was destroyed for the third time by Hindu extremists.**

The Digals of Budruka village were among hundreds of Christian families to lose their home in the outbreak of horrendous anti-Christian violence in December 2007 when Hindus rampaged through villages, torching houses and churches.

The Digals returned to the village two months later and rebuilt their house, but in August 2008 the attacks resumed with even greater ferocity, and their second home was also destroyed.

Around 60,000 Christians became homeless as a result of the violence; 91 lost their lives, and around 18,000 were wounded.

**The Digals left Budruka and went to stay with relatives in another village. They rebuilt their home in Budruka again this year, having received financial aid from the government. But a week before Easter, it was attacked and destroyed.**

Three people were arrested in connection with the incident but were subsequently released.

A local church leader said that the Digals were in tears as their third home was destroyed, shattering their hopes of being able to return to their village and cultivate their land.

**The latest incident highlights the ongoing threat to Christians in Orissa (Odisha) state. At the time of the 2007-08 violence, Christians were told by their Hindu attackers, "Come back Hindu or don't come back at all," and it seems that some Hindus are determined to keep Christians away.**

Three Dalit Christian families have also been driven out of their village in Orissa by the hundred or so Hindu families who live there. The Hindus confiscated the Christians' possessions, polluted their water well and banned them from interacting with other residents.

The Christians have been warned that their homes will be torn down, the land they own seized and their names struck off a government list for land allotment.

Many Christian families remain homeless following the 2007-08 violence. Barnabas Fund has been providing new homes and repairing damaged ones for hundreds of Christian families affected.

The outcome of the current general election, the results of which are expected to be announced on Friday (16 May), could prove ominous for the country's Christians if the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) defeats the ruling, secular Congress party as predicted.

The BJP has given support to extremist groups that attack Christians; it was in power in Orissa when the 2007-08 violence took place there. Leader Narendra Modi has done little to reassure the Christian community. When asked what steps he would take to ensure no churches were attacked if he became prime minister, Modi said, "I have never heard of such incidents taking place"

- barnabas team

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## **Indian elections: The scourge of Hindu extremist movements and their impact on religious minorities**

***Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) newly released report raises alarm over the situation of religious freedom in the world's largest democracy***

HRWF (19.05.2014) - In the last months and years, acts of intolerance and violence perpetrated by Hindu organizations, groups and individuals have occurred against religious minorities.

### ***Hindutva ideology***

"Hinduness", a word coined by [Vinayak Damodar Savarkar](#) in his [1923](#) pamphlet entitled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* is used to describe movements advocating political Hindu nationalism.

In a judgment, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that "no precise meaning can be ascribed to the terms "Hindu", "Hindutva" and "Hinduism"; and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limits of religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage.

In popular usage Hindutva has come to be identified with the guiding ideology of the [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh](#) (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization. The etymology of the word is peculiar, "Hindu-" coming from a Persian root while "-tva" is a Sanskrit suffix. "Hindutva" is thus usually translated as "Hinduness", describing a nationalist identity based around the Hindu religion. It is in many respects a syncretic ideology; though it draws heavily from Hindu philosophy rhetorically and holds Hindu historical and religious figures up as inspirational examples, it is also influenced by Western traditions that have no historical origins in Hinduism.

### ***Political embodiment of the Hindutva ideology***

This right-wing ideology has existed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but did not play a dominant role in Indian politics until the late 1980s. It then attracted many Hindus following two events. The first event was the use of a large Parliamentary Majority by the [Rajiv Gandhi](#) government to overturn a Supreme Court verdict that had angered conservative Muslims (see the Shah Bano case). The second was a dispute over a [16th century Mughal Babri Mosque](#) in [Ayodhya](#) that some Hindus claimed to be the birthplace and site of the original temple of Lord Rama. Hindu nationalists destroyed the mosque and then set about to kill and injure Muslims protesting against the destruction of the mosque. The BJP in elections in 1991 and 1996 saw an increase in their seats in the Indian Parliament with many observers putting the surge in votes due to the latter event. *Indian elections and the possibility of the [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP) forming the next government*

The Indian election is taking place in the world's second most populous nation and biggest democracy. Amid the fanfare of this election, exit polls predict that Narendra Modi and the BJP will form the next government. The BJP has often been accused of participation in religious violence and using religiously sensitive issues for political advantage. The BJP's xenophobic and intolerant ideology has contributed to fomenting communal tension. Although the party itself does not openly advocate violence or actions against religious minorities, members of the BJP have been linked to such violence. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and paramilitary organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS) and Bajrang Dal continue to seek support by evoking fears and resentment toward religious minority groups. The results have often been explosive. Social hostility and violence directed against Christians were especially alarming in 2013. Christians in particular are targeted for intimidation and violence. Moreover, vague and ambiguous laws have been used as cover to justify this violence. For instance, the Freedom of Religion Acts, originally intended to prevent forced or manipulative conversion, have been exploited by Hindu nationalist groups to restrict Christians' right to propagate their beliefs. The result has been a distressing climate of harassment, vigilantism and widespread impunity for religiously-motivated hate crimes.

### **Modi background**

Narendra Modi is a Hindu nationalist who was a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a far-right organization based on European fascist ideologies. The RSS still operates as a nationalist organization with the BJP being its political wing.

Modi has overseen a transformation of Gujrat due to economic growth levels under his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujrat. Modi has a reputation for removing corruption and promoting economic policies that remove red tape and create an enabling environment for growth. This is an even stronger pull factor given the last ten years of a Congress led government which has been mired in corruption scandals and slow economic growth. However he has a troublesome reputation and track record regarding religious minorities in India. Whilst he was Chief Minister of Gujarat, nearly 200 Muslims were killed with others being raped, severely beaten and displaced. It is alleged that he was complicit in these attacks against Muslims as his administration failed to act to prevent Hindu nationalists from attacking Muslims. This resulted in a travel ban being placed on Modi which prevented him from entering the United States and European Union on grounds that Modi violated religious freedom. However in 2012 many countries in the European Union overturned the ban.<sup>1</sup> Although several investigations have taken place, Modi has never been charged with an offence. However he has never apologized for his administration's failure to prevent the attack. Furthermore BJP activists have been behind several attacks on Christians in India and false accusations against Christians Pastors for forced conversions. More worryingly in the election campaign, a senior party member Amit Shah, General Secretary of the BJP, was banned from campaigning in Uttar Pradesh after he incited hatred against religious minorities. Worryingly, Amit Shah is likely to become the next Home Minister of India after the election.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* has carried out a preliminary enquiry about the Hindu groups that are behind numerous hate-motivated incidents and crimes targeting members of religious minorities.

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the European Union to follow events in India especially with the possibility of a new government in India led by Modi and the BJP This all the more vital given our research and the track record of Modi, the BJP and comments made by BJP officials in the election campaign.

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the EU to raise the issue with India in bilateral talks and in Human Rights Dialogues.

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** calls upon the Indian authorities to prosecute and condemn the authors of such incidents, and to develop a culture of tolerance among their population.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2014/02/25/time-end-narendra-modis-travel-ban-united-states/>

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## **Christian party asserts Dalit rights in Indian elections debut**

By Anto Akkara

World Watch Monitor (12.05.2014) - India's low-caste citizens are taking a sizable step into politics with a newly formed Christian political party and a campaign dedicated to earning seats in a new state assembly.

The election closed on May 12 for the residents of Seemandhra, a new state carved out of India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh, who initially went to the polls May 7 to elect 25 members to the Indian Parliament, along with 175 members of the new state assembly.

Launched in February, ahead of the national election, Sleeva Galilee, one of the founders the Indian Christian Secular Party, noted that the party has put up more than 60 candidates, the majority of them Dalit Christians.

"With this election, there will be certainly a change in the attitude of other political parties towards Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians have been long taken for a ride and treated as a vote bank," Galilee told World Watch Monitor. "We want to tell the main political parties that they cannot take our votes for granted any longer."

Dalit means 'trampled upon' and refers to people in low castes who are treated as 'untouchables' in caste-entrenched India. Dalits are a mixed population: living all over the country, speaking a variety of languages and practicing numerous religions.

The Constitution of India bans discrimination based on caste, but prejudice and discrimination toward Dalits is still rampant. The majority of Dalits have menial jobs such as scavenging, and they live segregated from people in upper castes.

This maltreatment is especially prevalent among Christians as a result of federal legislation, enacted in 1950, which enabled discrimination against the group. This law listed Hindu Dalits as Scheduled Caste and made them eligible for free education, set quotas for government jobs and seats in legislatures to improve their status. While the privileges were extended to Sikh Dalits in 1956 and Buddhist Dalits in 1990, they are still denied to Muslim and Christian Dalits.

In addition to the 1950 legislation against Muslim and Christian Dalits, Hindu nationalists are continuing to implement laws created to dissuade one from converting to another faith.

According to Open Doors International, a charity that supports Christians who live under pressure because of their faith, "Hindu nationalists, claim that every Indian has to be Hindu, continue to push their 'Hindutva' ideology through political parties, such as the BJP, which has strong support in the media. 'Anti-conversion laws' have been adopted in five states, and are frequently used as a pretext to disrupt church services and harass Christians. Pastors are frequently beaten up or killed, church buildings destroyed, and converts forced to flee their homes. Despite this, the church is growing, particularly among the lower castes."

Establishing a political party may be a powerful idea to help fight this inequality, but whether the new Indian Christian Secular Party can effectively carry that idea forward is a separate question, said Rev. Raj Bharat Patta, general secretary of Student Christian Movement in India.

The party "may not have much impact since it has come up all of a sudden and without much ground work," he told World Watch Monitor.

Franklin Caesar, a Dalit Christian activist, is skeptical of the Indian government's ability to provide justice. His petition seeking a judicial remedy for discrimination of Christian Dalits has been sitting before the federal Supreme Court for 10 years.

"Each time the [Congress party-led coalition] government was asked to make its stand clear on the issue by the [Supreme] Court, the government adopted evasive tactics," Caesar told World Watch Monitor. He also said the government failed to make its stance clear on the issue even after the Ranganath Misra commission - appointed by the government during the hearing of his case - confirmed that Dalit Christians suffer the same caste inequalities as other Dalits.

In addition to discrimination, many Christian Dalits do not make their faith public as it would deprive them of the Scheduled Caste status, shutting them out of government jobs, free education and state scholarship for studies.

"The number of Dalit Christians is much higher than what is projected in the census," said Patta, a pastor of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Galilee agrees, and said that since the actual number of Christians is much higher than documented, a Christian political party can make an impact in the elections with their nominal presence.

"We have a strong presence in many areas. Thousands of Christians are forced to hide their Christian identity and remain Hindu in government registers," said Galilee. He added that the number of church-goers is several times more than the two percent of Christian population of Andhra Pradesh with 85 million people.

India is ranked No. 28 in the 2014 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The World Watch List is published annually by Open Doors International.

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## **Lok Sabha elections 2014: 'Election' massacres of Muslims darken immigration debate**

By Frank Jack Daniel for Reuters

India Times (10.05.2014) / <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/asia/lok-sabha-elections-2014-election-massacres-of-muslims-darken-immigration-debate-147204.html> - From his hiding place in a cowshed, Sefaqul Islam watched as masked gunmen moved through his village, shot women and children dead with automatic rifles and tossed wounded survivors into the blazing remains of their homes.

The cattle herder's sister and seven-year-old nephew were among 41 Muslims killed by suspected tribal militants last week in Assam, the latest atrocity against people accused of being immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh.

"We will never go back to the village," said Islam, as he and dozens of Narayanguri's traumatised inhabitants erected bamboo-framed tents on the opposite bank of the Beki river.

Police and local residents said three separate attacks were carried out by militants from

the ethnic Bodo community as punishment for Muslims who failed to support their local candidate in the election, which is still going on across India.

The worst outbreak of communal violence in the northeastern region since 2012 has compounded fears among Muslims living along the India-Bangladesh border who feel they are being singled out by the man widely expected to be India's next prime minister - Narendra Modi.

The Hindu nationalist candidate, campaigning mainly on a ticket of economic growth, has ratcheted up rhetoric against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, saying they should have their "bags packed" ready to be sent home should he win.

"The infiltrators have to go, go and go," Modi said on Wednesday in West Bengal, which also borders Bangladesh. "Don't you think they have made your life miserable?"

A few miles from Narayanguri, in an area prone to religious violence, Modi made a similar speech a few days before the massacres, warning that Bangladeshis were taking over the state.

While there is no evidence Modi's words had any bearing on the latest bloodshed in a long-running conflict, his rivals say the speeches, which continued after the attacks, risk alienating many in India's Muslim minority of 150 million people.

He has distinguished between economic immigrants from Bangladesh and Hindu refugees, whom he calls "family" escaping religious persecution in the Muslim-majority nation.

The prospect of an Indian prime minister forcing Muslims of Bangladeshi origin to return home has also raised alarm bells in Dhaka, where the government said it would resist any such move.

"If they do it, the relationship between the two countries will be jeopardized, it will be damaged," said Bangladesh Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed.

"India, being a ... big country, a democratic country, a secular country, cannot take such a position."

### ***Modi's party defends stance***

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which opinion polls suggest will lead the next government after a staggered, five-week election that ends on Monday, denies stirring tensions in Assam and has firmly condemned the killings.

Party leaders say it has every right to address what it says is an issue of national security, because immigration is part of a bid by Bangladesh to expand its borders informally.

"This is a fight between ethnic people and suspected foreigners who have captured our land and our jobs," said Ranjit Kumar Das, a BJP legislator in Assam's state assembly who lives in Barpeta Road, the closest town to the massacre.

"(The violence) is the natural outcome," he said. "If there is no permanent solution it will happen again and again."

The BJP also accuses the Congress party, which rules in Assam but looks set to be toppled from power on a national level, of failing to prevent the violence despite warning signs that trouble was brewing after voting took place there.

For its part, Congress says Modi is playing a divisive and dangerous political game in Assam, and the row has thrust a local issue on to the national stage during an election.

Reaction to Modi's speeches on social media shows people are listening. Posts under the #deportbangladeshis tag were at the top of Twitter's trend list in India on Monday.

"This should (send) shivers down the spines of illegal muslim immigrant pests, mostly thieves and dacoits (bandits)!" read one comment attached to an article about the killings.

For most of his tireless, 10-month election campaign, Modi, 63, has focussed on his credentials as an efficient manager capable of ending the worst economic slowdown in decades.

But he has failed to shake off doubts that he and his party are prejudiced against Muslims and will favour the Hindu majority at their expense.

Those date back to the party's rise in the 1990s following a mob's destruction of a mosque.

Modi has been accused of not doing enough to stop communal riots in 2002 in Gujarat, where he is chief minister, in which more than 1,000 people died, most of them Muslims.

He has repeatedly denied wrongdoing, and a Supreme Court inquiry found no case to answer.

"This violence has a long history," said BJP spokesman MJ Akbar, referring to the Assam attacks. "This knee-jerk reaction of blaming Narendra Modi for everything is absurd."

### ***Fence and cameras?***

The situation on the ground is far more complex than Bodo against Muslim immigrants, BJP against Congress.

During this election, the BJP has tried to make inroads in the east of India where its support has traditionally been weak.

As part of the strategy, it has launched verbal attacks on leaders of Assam and West Bengal, accusing them of caring more for illegal immigrants than jobless youth from their own states.

Many local people in Assam, where the Muslim population has risen over the past century and now makes up some 30 percent of the population, agree with Modi. Nationwide Muslims account for around 13 percent of the population.

"Narendra Modi has boldly said what other politicians have not dared to utter so far," said Golap Saikia, a businessman in Assam's largest city, Guwahati. "Let us see how far he can achieve his commitment."

But even if Modi wants to deport illegal immigrants, identifying them would be a major problem.

Estimates suggest several million Bangladeshis and their descendents born in India have settled in the country over the decades, and a chief complaint of the BJP is that Congress gives immigrants voting papers.

Any push for mass deportation risks creating social unrest and leaving many of Assam's

Muslims in limbo, since Bangladesh is unlikely to take them back - a situation with parallels to the plight of stateless Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar.

The relatively large Muslim populations in eastern India is partly explained by events in 1971, when East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh after a war that triggered a wave of migration into Assam and other states.

Better job prospects in India have continued to lure people over the border.

The BJP may look to strengthen the 3,909 km (2,429 mile) frontier by completing a fence running along it and adding security cameras, said Kanchan Gupta, a member of the BJP's national executive who worked on the party's election manifesto.

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## **Bodies found, more missing after India massacre of Muslims**

By Biswajyoti Das

Reuters (07.05.2014) - Indian police searched for at least a dozen missing people on Wednesday after finding seven bodies floating down river from a national park in Assam where Muslim villagers were killed in a massacre that has marred the country's general election.

[India](#) is in the home stretch of a five-week election, which has heightened ethnic and religious tensions in some parts of the country, and in which a coalition led by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could be within reach of claiming a parliamentary majority.

The BJP has firmly condemned the violence, which it blames on the ruling Congress party. But the BJP's candidate for prime minister, Narendra Modi, has ramped up verbal attacks on illegal immigration by Muslims from nearby Bangladesh, drawing criticism from his opponents that he is stirring up trouble.

The worst election violence was in the northeastern state of Assam, where at least 41 people were killed by suspected militants belonging to the Bodo tribe in three massacres last week believed to be revenge attacks after Muslims voted against the Bodo candidate.

The brunt of the killing was in the village of Narayanguri on the [banks](#) of the Beki river and the fringes of the Manas national park, where masked gunmen burnt dozens of houses and shot more than 20 men, women and children. Villagers there insist more people are missing.

"We have deployed SDRF (State Disaster Response Team) to search in the Beki river for those missing people," A. P. Rout, Assam's Additional Director General of Police, told reporters.

He said villagers and police had found the remains of a six-month-old child and a 35-year-old woman, both floating in the river about 25 km (16 miles) from the site of the massacre that took place on Friday. Police later said five more corpses had been found floating in the river.

The Manas park is a UNESCO world heritage site that borders the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and is popular with Indian and foreign tourists drawn to its dense biodiversity and tigers.

The state chief minister, Tarun Gogoi, on Wednesday visited the sites of the killings and ordered a high level investigation.

(Writing by Frank Jack Daniel; Editing by Nick Macfie)

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## **India deploys army in Assam after 31 Muslims killed**

By Biswajyoti Das Reuters (03.05.2014) / <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/03/us-india-attacks-assam-idUSBREA4202L20140503> - India deployed troops to the state of Assam on Saturday after 31 Muslims were gunned down in three days of what police said were attacks by tribal militants who resent the presence of immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh.

The unrest in the tea-growing state comes towards the end of a marathon election across India that has heightened ethnic and religious divisions and which the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) looks set to win.

Security forces found the bodies of nine people with bullet wounds on Saturday, six of them women and children, the third day of violence that police have blamed on Bodo tribesmen attacking Muslim settlers as punishment for opposing their candidate in the election to the Indian parliament.

Bodo people are followers of the local Bathouist religion.

"We are scared to live in our village, unless security is provided by the government," said Anwar Islam, a Muslim who had come to buy food in Barama, a town about 30 km (20 miles) from the villages in the Baksa district where the violence erupted on Thursday and Friday.

He said men armed with rifles had come to his village, Masalpur, on bicycles and had then fired indiscriminately and set huts on fire.

Bodo representatives say many of the Muslims in Assam are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who encroach on ancestral Bodo lands. In 2012, clashes erupted in which dozens of people were killed and 400,000 fled their homes.

In addition to that violence, Assam has a history of sectarian strife and armed groups fighting for greater autonomy or secession from India.

### ***Modi faces criticism***

Election candidates, including the BJP's Narendra Modi, the front-runner for prime minister, have been calling for tighter border controls.

On Saturday, the ruling Congress party blamed Modi of using divisive rhetoric. "Modi is a model of dividing India," said Law Minister Kapil Sibal.

Modi said last week that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in the nearby state of West Bengal should have their "bags packed" in case he came to power, accusing the state government of being too soft.

"Modi should have been more responsible in his utterances," said Sabyasachi Basu Roy Chowdhury, a political science professor at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal.

"His words can be very damaging since, even if we consider that Bangladeshis are living here illegally, there is a question of human rights too."

But the BJP said it was the responsibility of the Congress party that governs the state to ensure law and order and crack down on militants.

Soldiers in convoys of trucks mounted with rifles were patrolling on Saturday in Baksa district, where some of the attacks took place.

Bodies covered with white sheets were laid out in a row at a police outpost on the edge of Barama for identification by relatives.

Most Muslims were staying together in big groups, villagers visiting the market in Barama said. Security forces found three children hiding in forests near the border with China.

The Bodo region faces what residents say is a tight race between a Bodo and a non-tribal candidate. A policeman was killed during the voting when the region went to the polls on April 24.

"There's heightened tension because of the election," said Ajai Sahni, executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi, although he said it was too early to be certain about exactly what had provoked the attacks.

India's staggered voting concludes on May 12 and results are due to be announced on May 16.

Modi is tainted by accusations that he turned a blind eye to, or even encouraged, Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002 in Gujarat, the state he has governed for 13 years. More than 1,000 people, most of them Muslims, were killed.

He has always denied the accusations and a Supreme Court inquiry did not find evidence to prosecute him.

(Additional reporting by Sujay Dhar in Kolkata; Writing by Shyamantha Asokan and Sanjeev Miglani; Editing by Robin Pomeroy)

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## **Indian media back federal probe in Assam violence**

BBC (05.05.2014) - Media in India are criticising poll-related violence in the north-eastern state of Assam as a federal team starts an investigation into the killings of 32 people.

A team from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) reached Assam on Monday to investigate the killings of mainly Muslim villagers by a separatist group.

Police blame the attacks on the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

The NDFB wants an independent homeland for the ethnic Bodo group to be carved out of Assam. Thursday's attacks took place in areas populated by non-Bodo people.

The incident comes in the middle of India's ongoing general election, and Muslim groups allege their community has come under attack because they did not support Bodo candidates.

Newspapers on Monday support the decision of the NIA to investigate the killings, saying the state government has failed to rein in the rebels.

The Indian Express criticises Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's inability to meet the "developmental needs" of the region and provide protection to the people.

"Nothing can explain the Mr Gogoi-led government's failure to anticipate and guard against such attacks during a fraught election season," the paper says.

The Deccan Herald feels that the government should promote a "sense of unity" in the ethnically mixed north-eastern India.

"The entire north-east is a crucible of different ethnic, religious and other groups... It should be the endeavour of the governments of the region to promote a sense of unity and commonalities among them," the paper says.

Mr Gogoi has rejected the opposition's demand to step down, saying he is "not a coward to flee the battlefield", the India Today website reports.

### ***Temple reopens***

Meanwhile, in another tragic case, 18 people died and 124 others were injured after a train derailed in Raigad district of the western state of Maharashtra on Sunday morning, The Indian Express reports.

The train's engine and its first two coaches suffered massive damages, the paper said.

The Indian Railways has ordered an investigation into the cause of the accident and announced compensation of 200,000 rupees (£2000; \$3,300) for the families of the dead, the paper adds.

And finally, the mountain temple of Kedarnath in the northern state of Uttarakhand has reopened to pilgrims after last year's devastating floods, the Hindustan Times reports.

"The yatra (pilgrimage) is regulated this time around and only 1,000 pilgrims have been allowed to go ahead from Sonprayag, the last stop for the vehicles," the paper says.

The route to the temple had suffered major damages in floods that left over 5,000 people dead in the state.

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## **Hindu houses attacked on Facebook rumours**

The Daily Star (29.04.2014) / <http://www.thedailystar.net/hindu-houses-attacked-on-facebook-rumours-22087> - At least 28 houses of Hindus were ransacked at Bakhsitarampur village in Homna upazila of Comilla on Sunday in an attack prompted by rumours that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had been defamed in Facebook posts by some Hindus.

Police have arrested 12 people for instigating violence and resorting to vandalism, Md Tofazzal Hossain Miah, deputy commissioner of Comilla, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Police, quoting witnesses, said several hundred people from Panchkipta village stormed the homes of Hindu families at the nearby Bakhsitarampur village around 3:00pm on Sunday after a rumour spread in the locality that two Hindu youths posted defamatory comments on social networking website Facebook about Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

In a state of panic, the Hindus fled their homes. However, no injury was reported.

Aslam Shikder, officer-in-charge of Homna Police Station, said police detained Utshab Das and Srinibas Das over the rumours, but the two denied posting any such remark on Facebook. A victim filed a case with the police station in this regard. A special operation was underway to nab the culprits, said DC Tofazzal Hossain Miah.

The district administration and police have been put on alert. Additional police force has been deployed at the remote village.

The district administration suspected that a religious fanatic group was responsible for the attack.

Soon after the attack, the upazila nirbahi officer visited the spot and distributed Tk 1,000 among each of the victim families.

Yesterday, the DC gave Tk 5,000, two bundles of corrugated tin and 20 kg of rice to each of the families.

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## **Bangladesh online bookstore drops author after death threats**

### ***Decision follows spate of attacks on bloggers and secularists***

UCA news (18.03.2014) / <http://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-online-bookstore-drops-author-after-death-threats/70517> A popular Bangladeshi online bookstore has stopped selling books by a popular writer after an Islamic militant issued death threats on Facebook to the website's owner.

Rokomari.com said in statement that it has stopped selling books authored by Avijit Roy, a Bangladesh-born engineer and writer, who is currently living in the United States.

Roy pioneered the popular Bangladeshi online blogging site *Freethinker* and rose to prominence with his books on philosophy, scientific thought and human rights issues.

The decision to withdraw his books was prompted by death threats posted to Facebook by Farabi Shafiur Rahman, an Islamist extremist allegedly linked to the hardline Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami.

Farabi accused Roy of defaming Islam and the Prophet Mohammed and blamed Rokomari.com chairman Mahmudul Hasan Sohag of "promoting atheism" by selling Roy's books.

In his Facebook post, Farabi specified the office address of Rokomari.com and called upon his "Islamist friends" in the adjacent locality to attack. He also told Sohag that he would suffer the same fate as Ahmed Rajib Haider, a popular blogger known by the pseudonym Thaba Baba, who was hacked to death last year by machete-wielding Islamic militants.

Rokomari.com released a statement saying that it was in the process of finalizing a policy to determine which books it would display on its website.

"After the recent controversies, we received a strong message. ...A review committee has already started working to shape a policy under which no book that raises controversy will be shown on our site," Rokomari.com said.

Roy termed the decision "surprising and shocking".

"My books are mostly on modern science and philosophy. These are not the books criticizing religious scriptures or any particular religion. They are mainly scientific books having references from reputed journals, books and newspapers," Roy told ucanews.com in an email.

He added that his books have never generated complaints over their content and that one of his books was on Bangladesh's annual best sellers list.

He also said Rokomari.com breached its own code of ethics by banning his books without contacting him or his publisher, but he was not considering legal action.

However, the website has come under fire from Roy's friends and readers. A Facebook page was created urging Bangladeshis to boycott Rokomari.com.

The death threat follows a spate of attacks on bloggers and secularists by Islamic hardliners.

Asif Mohiuddin, a well known self-styled "militant atheist" blogger narrowly escaped death after being stabbed near his office in Dhaka in January 2013 by members of a militant group with al-Qaeda ties.

Rajib was found dead near his Dhaka home on February 15, 2013, with his throat slit and machete wounds to his head. Seven college students and a Muslim cleric were charged with his murder.

Farabi threatened to kill the Muslim cleric who officiated at Rajib's funeral. Police later arrested Farabi on charges of "instigating the murder" but he was granted bail.

Following Rajib's death, fundamentalist Islamic groups launched massive nationwide protests demanding the execution of other atheist bloggers and the enactment of a blasphemy law, which led to violent clashes with government forces.

Since last year, the Bangladeshi government has blocked about a dozen websites and blogs to stem anti-blasphemy violence. It also set up a panel, which included intelligence chiefs, to search for potentially blasphemous content in social media.

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## **Andhra Pradesh is India's emerging hotbed of anti-Christian violence**

World Watch Monitor (04.03.2014) - Church leaders in India are alarmed over a dramatic increase in attacks on Christians in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where in recent weeks one pastor has been murdered, others beaten, and churches demolished.

The All India Christian Council documented 72 incidents of anti-Christian violence and hostility in Andhra Pradesh in 2013, nearly double the 39 recorded in 2012. Today the state, India's fifth-most populous, has the country's highest rate of anti-Christian incidents, according to the All India Christian Council.

"The jump from 39 incidents in 2012 to 72 incidents in 2013 is alarming, and the reasons for this escalated growth on the Christian minorities is the culmination of every effort of the right-wing political party to woo the majority of the communal agenda in the coming election of 2014," Moses Vatipalli, a project coordinator for the All India Christian Council, told WWM.

India's "communal agenda" arises from the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's promotion of "a clear vision of India's civilizational consciousness," which it says "has its roots in Bharatiya or Hindu world view." In that view, according to the party, "almost all religions practised in different parts of the world have existed peacefully in India and will continue to do so."

The reality is somewhat different. The BJP is the ruling party in three of the five Indian states with laws that forbid forced religious conversions — laws that frequently are used to shut down churches or intimidate Christians who speak about their faith. The party has proposed stiffer penalties in one of those states, Madhya Pradesh, India's second-largest.

Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat, another BJP-ruled state with anti-conversion laws on the books, is "the poster child for India's failure to punish the violent," said Katrina Lantos Swett, vice chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and Commissioner Mary Ann Glendon in a joint November opinion column.

While under BJP rule, Karnataka state had the country's highest rate of attacks against Christians from 2010 through 2012. In early 2013 the Indian National Congress Party took over; the number of attacks dropped from 50 in 2012 to 28 in 2013, according to the Global Council of Indian Christians.

The BJP holds only two of the 294 seats in the Andhra Pradesh State Assembly, but has been making inroads across India, including advances in two state assemblies during December elections. National parliamentary elections are scheduled for May, and Narendra Modi is the BJP's candidate for prime minister.

Meanwhile, pressure on Christians continues.

On Dec. 28 in the town of Narketpally in the Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh, Suverthamma Moses responded to a late-night knock at the door and was struck on the head with an iron bar, then stabbed. When her husband, Nama Moses, a Baptist pastor, rushed in, he was stabbed multiple times.

"The attack took less than 10 minutes while three extremists were standing outside the house. The neighbours later came to their rescue and rushed them to the Kameneni Hospital," Franklin Sudharkar, General Secretary of the All India Christian Council, told World Watch Monitor.

Moses and his wife survived the attack. Sudharkar said the Hindu Vahini, a nationalist youth organization suspected in the Dec. 28 stabbings, have severely injured at least six pastors in Andhra Pradesh.

On Jan. 10 in Vakirabad town, armed Hindu Vanihi militants knocked at the door of Hebron Church pastor O. Sanjeevi's house, then hit his wife with an iron rod after she opened the door. The attackers stabbed Pastor Sanjeevi eight times. He died three days later, leaving behind his wife and four children.

"About 250 church members he looked after felt bewildered and deprived by the incident," an area church leader, Rev. Madhusudan Das, of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, told World Watch Monitor.

In response to the killing, the Andhra Pradesh Federation of Churches petitioned the state chief minister and the National Human Rights Commission of India to improve protection for Christians.

On New Year's Eve, extremists in the town of Rajamundry set fire to a worship centre operated by a church named Dr. John Wesley of Young Holy Team, after the church members had conducted a night service.

And the morning of Feb. 2, a Sunday, the Bethel Gospel church building in Hyderabad, a western district of Andhra Pradesh, was burned to ashes.

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## **Evangelical clergyman stabbed to death in Andhra Pradesh**

Asia News (14.01.2014) - A group of strangers murdered an evangelical pastor in Andhra Pradesh and tried to kill his wife as well before they fled the scene of the crime.

At present, the government appears unable to deliver justice in the case, but was able to arrest a group of Christians who demonstrated to demand the arrest of the culprits.

The murder victim, Rev Sanjeevulu, died yesterday after two days of suffering.

According to some sources, on the afternoon of 11 January four men visited Rev Sanjeevulu's home in Vikarabad, a village that is 64 kilometres from the state capital of Hyderabad. The clergyman heads a group called the 'Friends of Hebron'.

On the doorstep of the reverend's home, the men said they wanted to "pray with the pastor," but as soon as he came out, they stabbed him seven times and beat him with clubs and sticks.

After she heard screams, Sanjeevulu's wife rushed to him, whereupon the attackers tried to kill her as well. Although she was stabbed, she luckily managed to escape and survived.

The pastor was admitted to Yashoda hospital (*pictured*) where, despite medical treatment, he died yesterday afternoon from his stab wounds.

The day after the attack, many Christians and friends of the clergyman went to the hospital where they expressed their sorrow for the attack.

Christian leaders in Hyderabad organised a *dharna* (sit-in protest) demanding justice from the government.

Some of the faithful marched outside the offices of the Chief Minister to demand the arrest of the culprits, but were themselves arrested.

Police did announce that it was launching an investigation into the incident.

Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Churches, told *AsiaNews* that he was "deeply saddened" by the murder of the clergyman.

"Although the motive of the attack is not yet known, we must strongly condemn the fact that anti-Christian persecution has made a comeback in Andhra Pradesh. We need to see justice done," George said.

"Approximately three months ago," he added, "we know that Sanjeevulu had a heated discussion with some members of a Hindu fundamentalist group, who threatened him. It could be premeditated murder." (N.C.)

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