

Benny Hinn's Largest Crusade to Date Met With Massive Protests in India

Rioters burned images of Hinn and threw rocks at those attending his Festival of Blessings in the city of Bangalore

More than 7 million people attended evangelist Benny Hinn's recent Festival of Blessings in Bangalore, India, despite unprecedented rioting that led to at least 30 injuries.

Angered by allegations that Hinn was coming to convert Hindus, members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called for his visa to be revoked, and dissidents threw rocks at vehicles transporting nationals to the event. Others burned images of Hinn in effigy, demanding that the California-based minister "go back, go back, go back."

Indian news media reported that 300 buses were damaged during the meeting Jan. 21-23, which was attended and supported by local officials, including Chief Minister N. Dharnam Singh. "The programme has neither any impact on Hindus nor [has] it led to conversion of people into Christianity," Singh said, India's Central Chronicle reported. "BJP is obsessed with making an issue out of every religious issue."

Though no one on Hinn's team was harmed, Jon Wilson, vice president of events for Benny Hinn Ministries, said roughly 25 attendees visited the ministry's first aid center, with one little girl suffering a massive bump on her head after being hit by a rock.

"I never thought I would face such a thing," Hinn told Charisma. "It was frightening. People started to throw rocks, slash tires, burn cars. I think the scariest part was seeing me burned in effigy. Beating a dummy with sticks. I thought, My God. I thought I would be killed."

Indian media carried reports of the protests for days before the event, which was Hinn's second crusade in the nation. The first, held last year in Mumbai, drew what was then his largest crowd—some 4.8 million attendees.

The Bangalore event is Hinn's largest to date, and he said the news reports might have contributed to the record-setting crowd. Hinn said thousands of attendees reported miracles.

"I felt no struggle on the platform," Hinn said. "A lot of deaf and mute were healed. A lot of cripples. One young man jumped over a rail and hadn't walked in 20 years."

However, one man in the crowd died, and Hinn was blamed for his death. Police later said the cause of the man's death was unknown and that Hinn was not responsible, news reports said.

Anti-Christian forces in India have fiercely opposed evangelism efforts there for years, said Joseph D'Souza, president of the All India Christian Council. But he fears the crusade may have reawakened opposition that had begun to calm since the nation's recent election and the passing of an anti-conversion law.

"For those of us who have been involved in fighting for religious freedom this was a very complicated situation," D'Souza said.

Though he believes Hinn should have been given the freedom to hold the crusade, he attributes some of the violence to the publicity that preceded the event. He said the advertisements were perceived as targeting Hindus for conversion and drew attention to the vast scale of the event—a clear sign of foreign funding.

“We have just come out of a difficult seven years of head-on persecution by the BJP-led forces,” he said. “Due to the election results they are quiet now, but we must not give them ammunition to attack Christians. This crusade definitely gave them much ammunition. ... We must not lose the credibility Christians gained through the times of persecution.

“The fact of the matter is that God is doing a wonderful work across the land through locals and nationals, and this wonderful work is not drawing attention of those who are the enemies of the gospel,” D’Souza added. “The crowds that attend these crusades are representative of what God is doing on the ground.”

Because of India’s anti-conversion law, Hinn was not permitted to give an altar call, but he led the crowd in the sinner’s prayer en masse. No one knows how many people made professions of faith, Hinn said, but he noted that after last year’s India crusade 300 churches were planted to disciple new converts.

“The Lord knows how to get those people to the church because we’re not allowed by law to do it,” Hinn said. “The great thing is, I’m allowed on television to say anything I want. So when I get back I encourage [those who attended the crusade] to find a church.”

This month, Hinn is scheduled to host a healing crusade in Nigeria, where his team is anticipating the ministry's largest crowd ever, with 6 million to 8 million people expected each night.

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