

Church Bomber in Nepal Repents, Admits India Link

Disillusioned with Hindu nationalists, the leader of a militant Hindu extremist group says contact with Christians in prison led him to repent of bombing a Catholic church in Kathmandu, Nepal, in May 2008.

Ram Prasad

Mainali, the 37-year-old chief of the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), was arrested on Sept. 5 for exploding a bomb in the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, in the Lalitpur area of Kathmandu on May 23. The explosion killed a teenager and a newly married woman from India's Bihar state and injured more than a dozen others.

In Kathmandu's jail in the Nakkhu area, Mainali told Compass Direct News that he regretted bombing the church.

"I bombed the church so that I could help re-establish Nepal as a Hindu nation," he said.

"There are Catholic nations, there are Protestant nations and there are also Islamic nations, but there is no Hindu nation. But I was wrong. Creating a religious war cannot solve anything, it will only harm people."

Mainali, who is

married and has two small daughters, added that he wanted members of all religions to be friendly with one other.

Asked how the change in him came about, he said he had been attending a prison fellowship since he was transferred to Nakkhu Jail from Central Jail four months ago.

"I have been reading the Bible also, to know what it says," he said.

Of the 450 prisoners in the Nakkhu Jail, around 150 attend the Nakkhu Gospel Church inside the prison premises.

Mainali said he began reading the Bible after experiencing the graciousness of prison Christians.

"Although I bombed the church, Christians come to meet me everyday," he said. "No rightwing Hindu has come to meet me even once."

Jeevan Rai Majhi, leader of the inmates of Nakkhu Jail and also a leader of the church, confirmed that Mainali had been attending the church, praying and reading the Bible regularly. *Union of Catholic Asian News* reported on Nov. 30 that Mainali had sent a handwritten letter to a monthly Christian newsmagazine in Nepal, *Hamro Ashish* (Our Blessing), saying he had repented of his deeds in the

prison.

Asked if Nepal should be a Hindu nation, Mainali said he just wanted the country to become a monarchy again, "but not with Gyanendra as the king." In 2006 a pro-democracy movement in Nepal led to the ouster of the army-backed regime of Hindu King Gyanendra, and Parliament proclaimed the Himalayan kingdom a secular, federal state.

Mainali said the NDA still exists but is not active. It was formed in New Delhi in 2007 at a meeting attended by a large number of Hindu nationalists from India, he said. Since bombing the church in Kathmandu, the group has threatened to drive all Christians from the country.

"The NDA was started in February or March 2007 at the Birla Mandir [a Hindu temple in central Delhi] at a meeting which was attended by many leaders from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [World Hindu Council], the Bajrang Dal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Shiv Sena party," he said. Mainali declined to name the leaders of these Hindu extremist groups present at the meeting.

The NDA is also believed to be responsible for the killing of a Catholic priest, Father John Prakash Moyalan, principal of the Don Bosco educational institution in Dharan

city in eastern Nepal, in June 2008.

Nepal was a Hindu monarchy until 1990, after which the king was forced to introduce political reforms mainly by Maoists (extreme Marxists). In 2006, Nepal adopted an interim constitution making it a secular nation, which infuriated Hindu nationalists in Nepal and India. In 2008 Nepal became a federal democratic republic.

Mainali said the NDA was receiving about 500,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$6,590) every month from the organizations. He declined to divulge how the Hindu extremist groups in India funded the NDA. Mainali also said that the NDA bought arms from an Indian separatist militia in the northeastern state of Assam, the United Liberation Front of Asom or ULFA. Although most of the ULFA members are nominally Christian, he said, "they sold arms to us as a purely business deal."

The ULFA is a banned organization in India and classified as a terrorist outfit since 1990. The U.S. Department of State has listed it under the "Other Groups of Concern" category.

Of the roughly

30 million people in Nepal, a meagre .5 percent are Christian, and more than 80 percent are Hindu, according to the 2001 census.