

Protests Erupt After Lawmaker Offers Cash Rewards for Attacking Christian Leaders

India's Catholic bishops have issued a sharp rebuke of Maharashtra state authorities for their inaction after a ruling party legislator publicly offered cash rewards for assaults on Christian leaders.

In a statement released Monday, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) decried the failure to prosecute BJP MLA Gopichand Padalkar following his June 17 speech in Sangli District, in which he pledged up to ₹500,000 (approximately \$5,756 USD) for those "bashing up missionaries" and ₹1.1 million (about \$12,663 USD) for attacks on Christian leaders.

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The CBCI expressed "deep anguish and alarm over the growing climate of hostility and violence directed against minority communities in the country," calling Padalkar's remarks "a clear instance of incitement to religiously motivated violence, amounting to a grave offense under Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023."

As reported by The Christian Post, the bishops added that Padalkar's tiered reward system "warrants immediate and decisive legal intervention, particularly when the incitement is explicit, direct and poses an imminent threat to public order."



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Open Doors has ranked India 11th on its 2025 World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most severe persecution.

Despite widespread protests, including a six-hour demonstration on July 11 in Mumbai's Azad Maidan attended by thousands of Christians and prominent political figures, the CBCI lamented that "law enforcement authorities have reportedly failed to register even a First Information Report (FIR). This inaction stands in stark contrast to the swift legal response often seen against students, activists and opposition leaders for far less serious expressions, such as social media posts or peaceful dissent."

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Church leaders from across India have condemned Padalkar's rhetoric. The Rev. Vijayesh Lal of the Evangelical Fellowship of India warned, "No elected representative should ever incentivize attacks on any citizen based on their faith," while Raphael D'Souza, former president of the Bombay Catholic Sabha, noted the "lack of response" even as the state assembly sat in session. BJP representatives have distanced the party from Padalkar's statements, labeling them his "personal views" and "highly irresponsible."

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Let us join in prayer for all Christians enduring persecution around the world, asking God to grant them hope and strength amidst their trials, and to move the hearts of those in power toward justice and compassion.

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