

Nepal Church Bomber Faked Repentance

The chief of a militant Hindu extremist group sought to disguise his extortion and terror activities from behind bars by claiming he had repented of bombing a church in Nepal and showing interest in Christianity, according to investigators.

The revelation emerged when Nepal's premier investigation agency foiled a plot to explode a series of bombs devised by Ram Prasad Mainali, former chief of the Hindu militant outfit Nepal Defence Army (NDA), in the capital city of Kathmandu. Police on March 4 arrested six cohorts of Mainali carrying powerful "socket bombs" – home-made, hand grenade-type weapons made from plumbing joints – and high-explosive powder, to be used as part of a plan to extort money from industrialists, The Himalayan Times reported.

In an interview last year, Mainali had told Compass that his interaction with Christians inside jail in Kathmandu's Nakkhu area had led him to repent of his deeds and read the Bible. Mainali was arrested on Sept. 5, 2009 for exploding a bomb in a Catholic parish in Kathmandu, Our Lady of the Assumption, which killed a teenager and a newly married woman and injured more than a dozen others on May 23 of that year.

Prior to the Compass interview, Mainali had sent a handwritten letter from the prison to a monthly Christian newsmagazine in Nepal, Hamro Ashish (Our Blessing), saying he regretted having attacked Christians.

A local Christian worker who had known Mainali said the church bomber used Christianity to evade police surveillance.

"I was disheartened when I recently learned that Mainali had threatened some pastors with violent attacks, demanding protection money from them," he told Compass on condition of

anonymity.

The source said Mainali threatened him and pastors he knew by phone. He suspected that a fellow prisoner, Jeevan Rai Majhi, previously considered a convert to Christianity, had given the pastors' phone numbers to Mainali. Majhi, formerly a notorious criminal, had allegedly accepted Christ inside the prison, and jail authorities made him the prison leader. He also led a Bible study group in the prison.

"Some prisoners who attend the Bible study in the Nakkhu Jail told me that Mainali shared the extortion money with Majhi, which aroused jealousy among other prisoners, who reported it to the jail authorities," the source said.

Around 150 prisoners attend the Nakkhu Gospel Church inside the prison premises, though Majhi is no longer leading it. Both Mainali and Majhi were recently transferred, Mainali to the Dilli-Bazaar Jail and Majhi to the Mid-Nepal Central Jail.

Deputy Inspector General of Police and Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) Director Rajendra Singh Bhandari told *The Kathmandu Post* that the arrest of Mainali's men was a "tremendous achievement" that averted "mass casualties" in the capital.

"It seems that Mainali had filled the arrestees' minds with dreams of earning quick bucks through terror," the daily quoted another investigation official as saying.

The Christian source said he still hoped for genuine repentance in Mainali and Majhi.

"Mainali and Majhi must have at least some knowledge of the Bible," he said. "So I am still hopeful that they would reflect on who God is and truly repent of their ways as they spend their time in prison cells incommunicado [prohibited from speaking with any outsider]."

According to *The Kathmandu Post*, the CIB had been observing Mainali following complaints that he had demanded large sums of money from businessmen and others.

“He had been making phone calls and sending demand letters to them,” the daily reported on March 4.

Compass requested an interview with Mainali at the Dilli-Bazaar Jail, which officials refused.

“We have orders not to allow Mainali to meet anyone,” said one official.

Mainali had earlier told Compass that he formed the NDA with the support of Hindu nationalists in India in 2007 to re-establish the Hindu monarchy, which fell after a decade-long armed struggle by former Maoist guerrillas peaked in 2006, when all political parties joined protests against King Gyanendra.

The NDA is also believed to be responsible for bombing mosques and killing Muslims and Christians, including the Rev. John Prakash Moyalan, a Catholic priest who was principal of the Don Bosco educational institution in eastern Nepal, in June 2008. While Christians in Nepal faced persecution at the hands of the Hindu monarchy until 2006, non-state actors have been attacking them since the country began transitioning to a secular democracy.

“Several incidents of religiously incited violence directed at minority religions and their property have been recorded since the signing of the peace accord [between the interim government and the Maoists in 2006],” a local Non-Governmental Organization, Informal Sector Service Sector (INSEC), noted last year.

“Although moves have been made to promote religious tolerance and a climate of peace and cooperation, this area must continuously be monitored,” stated an INSEC report,

“Commitment versus Reality,” which mentioned attacks on Christians by Mainali’s outfit.

Of the roughly 30 million people in Nepal, only .5 percent are Christian, and more than 80 percent are Hindu, according to the 2001 census. The actual number of Christians, however, is believed to be much higher.