

271 Pentecostal Christians Charged With Converting Hindus Through Lies, Drugs

Two hundred and seventy-one Christians in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh have been charged with a range of crimes including attempting to convert Hindus through the use of drugs and by spreading lies about Hinduism.

Of the 271, just three were named—pastors Durga Prasad Yadav, Kirit Rai and Jitendra Ram—in the charges filed in Jaunpur district, 200km southeast of the state capital Lucknow, on Sept. 5.

The 271 were initially cleared of any wrongdoing by a court in August, but now stand “accused of various criminal offenses, like fraud, defiling places of worship, prejudice against national integration”, Deputy Police Superintendent Anil Kumar Pandey told AsiaNews.

“In Uttar Pradesh Hindu radicals have fabricated unfounded accusations against innocent Pentecostal Christians,” Sajan K. George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), told [AsiaNews](#).

“There has been a surge in persecution against Christians. Pentecostal pastors and Christian groups are under the constant watch of radical elements and the police,” he added.

A local pastor said the allegations were “absolutely false and baseless.” He told UCAN Christians had been worshiping in the area for the past 15 years and that it never had caused any problems until the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power.

A lawyer for those who filed the complaint said the suspects

had been trying for years to persuade people to convert to Christianity and come to church.

“After the prayers on Sunday and Tuesday, they used to spread false information about Hinduism to persuade people to embrace Christianity,” the lawyer said. “In addition, the accused handed out banned medications and drugs to visitors and under their effect influenced them to become Christians.”

‘State-sponsored Violence’

On Sunday, Sept. 16, police in Jaunpur stopped people from attending a church service in Bhulandih, tweeted the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

“Fanatic groups disrupted worship services & shouted anti-Christian slogans even in Churches in many places in Jaunpur, some reportedly even in the presence of the police,” the commission tweeted. In another tweet, it said another pastor had been arrested on Friday, Sept. 14.

According to religious freedom group ADF India, Uttar Pradesh experienced the highest number of violent attacks against Christians in any state—26— in the first half of 2018.

A volunteer who helps victims of such violence told World Watch Monitor in July: “Violent attacks which the Christian minorities had been experiencing in Uttar Pradesh are all part of the state machinery; it is state-sponsored violence. The attackers are well aware that Christians in rural areas especially can be easily targeted.”

‘Rise of Vigilantism’

Meanwhile a new United Nations report says the ruling BJP party, under current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, “has been linked to incidents of violence against members of Dalit, Muslim, tribal and Christian communities”, reports UCAN.

The report on contemporary forms of racism, racial

discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, submitted by the U.N.'s special rapporteur on human rights, Tendayi Achiume, found evidence of the "use of inflammatory remarks by BJP leaders against minority groups" and the "rise of vigilantism targeting Muslims and Dalits".

"You take a newspaper or watch news on television. Whenever [BJP] leaders speak, they speak openly against those groups who are already suffering and are never interested in defending them," said Christian leader A.C. Michael in the report. "There were even calls to banish Christians and Muslims to other countries, instigating violence against these people," he added.

India is 11th on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

According to the 2011 census, nearly 80 percent of India's population is Hindu, with Islam the second largest religion (14 percent) and the remaining 6 percent belonging to other religions such as Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism or Jainism.
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