

Attacks on Christians Spike as Hindu Nationalists Set to Take Control of India

The Christian minority of India is very concerned about its future in India. The reason for this concern: Exit poll predictions from India's general elections. Currently, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), looks set to form the next national government of India.

At the center of the NDA is Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat and likely nominee as India's next prime minister, and his Hindu nationalist party BJP. Christians are distressed knowing BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda, an ideology that seeks to create a purely Hindu India.

As a matter of concern, Andhra Pradesh, a state located on India's eastern coastline, has seen the highest number of attacks (41) on Christians in India in 2013. Andhra Pradesh is believed to have the highest Christian population in India, yet there seems to be an orchestrated hate campaign by Hindu radical groups, including Sangh Parivar and RSS, being carried out across the state. Brutal attacks on the Christian leaders falsely accused of forcible conversion seemed to increase with the approach of the general elections.

Pastor Christopher from the Malakpet area of Hyderabad told International Christian Concern (ICC) of a gruesome incident that shook him and his entire congregation to the core. On Feb. 2, Bethel Gospel Church, where Pastor Christopher preaches, was set on fire by unknown assailants suspected to be connected to Hindu radical groups. The anti-Christian activists carried out the attack during the early morning hours to inflict maximum damage to the church.

The church was burnt to ashes, everything inside the church including carpets, musical instruments, speakers and chairs were utterly destroyed.

"We are living in fear," the pastor told ICC. "There have been continuous threats from the Hindu radicals. We Christians are treated as second class citizens in this country."

During his 15 years of service, Pastor Christopher has been threatened by the Hindu radical group RSS on many occasions. Once he was threatened by RSS to stop all church activities or else they would "chop him into pieces."

Christopher fears the intensity of these Hindu radicals will only increase if BJP comes to power in the government. But Christopher also believes if an increase in persecution is to be India's future, he hopes this situation will unite the Indian church.

On Feb. 23, more than 30 youths belonging to the Hindu radical group Hindu Vahini barged into a Christian home during a prayer meeting in Marepalli village. These youths were shouting Hindu nationalist slogans as they attacked the small Christian community. Pastor Devaraju, the leader of that community, was verbally abused by the youths with vulgar language.

In an interview with ICC, Pastor Devaraju describes what it is like to be a pastor in a state where most of India's anti-Christian attacks take place.

"Surviving as a pastor in India at the hands of Hindu radicals is every day a challenge. There is no guarantee that I will come back home if I go for gospel work," he says.

In another incident, the Rev. B. Rajarathnam and his wife, both of whom belong to a Mennonite Brethren Church, were attacked by Hindu radicals in Chadurupally village. During a Hindu festive (Holi) on March 17, more than 15 assailants,

likely connected to Hindu radical groups, stormed into the pastor's house and started beating him and his wife.

During the attack, the pastor's wife, who is in her 60s, fell to the ground unconscious after being punched and slapped multiple times. Onlookers took her to the hospital for treatment immediately following the attack.

The attackers also demolished a wall of the pastor's home, causing serious damage to the house.

"There is an increasing trouble emerging for the Christian community with Modi projected as prime minister," Rajarathnam says. "It is a matter of deep distress for Christians."

"There is huge discrepancy when it comes to delivery of justice for religious minorities in this country, and with Modi as prime minister, India will become an even more unsafe place for religious minorities," the Rev. Ronald John, a Christian leader in India, says.

The attacks on Christians by Hindu radicals continue to flare up all across India as the general elections draw to a close. The Christian community as a whole fears that it will only get worse if BJP and their front man, Modi, assume control of one of the world's largest democratic government. Foreseeing the coming threat, many Christian leaders have urged their followers to pray for the future of India's Christians. They are praying—are you?