

Government Officials Watch as Angry Mob Destroys Indian Church

On March 12 in a southeast India village, the local newspaper published allegations that Divya Jyoti Church had been built on government land.

The next day, a crowd equipped with a backhoe demolished the small church building, encountering no resistance from the leaders of Guriya Village, in Chhattisgarh state.

Divya Jyoti Pastor Budhram Baghel said the church building had stood on land belonging to him.

“A temporary shed had been constructed in 2006 on this land after permission from the authorities and the same was later replaced by a permanent building,” said Rev. Rakesh Dass, a friend of Baghel’s.

Three residents of Gadia village, Yogeshwar Kashyap and two people identified as Lakhmuram and Shyamlal, filed a complaint that the building encroached on government land. Their allegations were published in the local newspaper, Dass said.

The crowd arrived the next day, led by Kailash Rathi and Yogendra Kaushik, officers of the local Visva Hindu Parishad, or VHP, a Hindu nationalist organization.

Budhram tried to summon help, but it did not arrive quickly enough to prevent the demolition. Those who protested were assaulted by members of the crowd, Christian witnesses said. They said several local officials, including the revenue officer, land officer, village head, police chief and a group of police officers, watched the demolition without objection.

“They didn’t even measure the land,” Dass said.

The church filed a complaint at the Lohandiguda Police Station on March 13 and held a silent protest rally on March 16. A memorandum regarding the demolition also has been submitted to the Collector & District Magistrate of Jagdalpur, a nearby major city.