

Pastor Shot to Death Outside His Church

The pastor of a church in Ludhiana, India, was shot dead by two motorcycle-borne assailants outside The Temple of God Church at Salem Tabri locality at around 8 p.m. Saturday night.

Witnesses said that two armed youth with their faces covered shot at Pastor Sultan Masih from close range. Pastor Sultan received a bullet wound to his head and two more penetrated his chest. The attack was captured on CCTV cameras installed at the church however the footage was too dark to identify the attackers.

Two local boys who witnessed the crime informed family members of the pastor and other parishioners of the church. Many rushed to help Masih and tried to stem the blood loss. They drove him to the nearest hospital.

Doctors at Dayanand Medical College & Hospital (DMC) in Ludhiana declared the pastor dead on arrival.

Masih is survived by wife Sarbjit, son Ali Shah, 26, and daughter Hanok, 18. The family lives on the first floor of the church's building.

His son Rahul Masih said his father, who was in charge of The Temple of God Church in Salem Tabri locality, had been living there for the last 30 years and had no enmity with anybody.

A police investigation is underway however the pastor is not known to have any enemies. Local Christians believe this is a hate attack based on the increasing persecution of Christians in India.

On Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. hundreds of Christians protested and blocked GT Road known as National Highway (NH)

1, in Salem Tabri for over 5 hours, ending at around 3:30 p.m. They refused to release the body of Masih until police agreed to undertake a full police investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice. Their sit-in-protest brought traffic to a standstill and vehicles travelling to Jalandhar side had to be diverted to other routes.

Incidents of persecution of Christians in India has risen over the past year, pushing it up to No .15 on the 2017 Open Doors World Watch List, up from 31 four years ago.

India experienced a huge escalation of attacks on its Christian minority in 2016. Attacks on Christians are led by Hindu nationalists acting largely with impunity a growing concern since the election of President Narendra Modi in 2014. Just over 2 percent of the country's population is Christian, and nearly 80 percent of Indians are Hindu.

Since the election of Modi national and provincial authorities tacitly permit persecution of a deprived Christians in India. Religious nationalists feel empowered under Modi who as a teenager joined Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh a known Hindu fascist group whose main aim is to turn India into a Hindu superpower and whose most revered alumni is Nathuram Godse the fanatic who assassinated Ghandi.

Mr. Modi's political party, Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), once called a three-day strike after alleging Pakistan' secret services were responsible for the death of 58 Hindu pilgrims in a burning train carriage – a claim that was unsubstantiated. The bloodiest anti-Muslim pogrom in modern history ensued in which Hindu men dragged wives and daughters on to the streets to be raped. It is estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 people were killed and tens of thousands found themselves homeless.

Religious nationalists increasingly attempt to forcibly convert non-Hindus to their dominant faith, willing to use

violence at the drop of a hat, when community discrimination and non-violent oppression fail to impose their religious beliefs on minority Christians.

Christians face huge socioeconomic problems, a consequence of decades of uninhibited oppression. Many came from the lowest social class, the Dalits, and as such have always been an easy target for Hindu fundamentalists.

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the British Asian Christian Association, said:

“This unprovoked attack on a Christian pastor before many members of his congregation is an attack on religious freedom. It resonates with the hatred Christians face on a daily basis in a nation that is becoming increasingly polarized under Modi’s government.

“Pastor Sultan Masih’s name is added to a growing list of Christian martyrs across the globe, and I will be praying for succor for his family and friends.

“Increasing attacks on Christians in India are a cause for international concern, yet since ending the 10-year diplomatic boycott of Narendra Mohdi in 2012, Britain has forged strong diplomatic ties with him. fermenting an unwillingness to condemn the known human rights atrocities under his regime.

“With nations in the West increasingly basing international diplomacy with India on financial grounds, little will be done to stem increasing non-Hindu hatred. Ominously this means assassinations of innocent Christian pastors in India are set to rise.” {eoa}