

Please Pray for India's Suffering Christians

India welcomed President Trump in style this week, complete with traditional dancers, floral garlands, a tour of the famed Taj Mahal and a formal state dinner at the presidential palace in New Delhi. But the biggest moment was a huge afternoon rally on Feb. 24 at the world's largest cricket stadium in the city of Ahmedabad. The crowd of 110,000 cheering supporters was the largest live audience of Trump's career so far.

With giant screens showing images of Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the rally was designed to foster friendship between India and the United States. And President Trump poured on the love, calling Modi "a tremendously successful leader." After Modi officially welcomed Trump to "the biggest democracy in the world," Trump used the words "democratic," "peaceful" and "tolerant" to describe India.

I understand how diplomacy works. It's a slow dance. World leaders have to say a lot of nice things to each other before they can get down to serious business. But I hope at some point during our president's 36-hour visit, he told Prime Minister Modi that Americans know about India's horrific abuse of religious freedom.

Because when it comes to the persecution of Christians, India has one of the worst records in the world.

In an interview after the official India visit, Trump told *The New York Times* that he did raise the issue of religious freedom in his talks with Modi. "We did talk about religious freedom, and I will say that the prime minister was incredible on what he told me. He wants people to have religious freedom, and very strongly," Trump said.

I hope that's true. But If Modi truly wants to enforce

religious freedom in India, he will meet with a storm of resistance from his own political allies. The people who elected him are willing to burn churches and kill Christians—as well as Muslims—to create a Hindu state.

“Today, Christians across India are living in fear,” say leaders of the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America, or FIACONA. In a letter they wrote to Trump prior to this week’s visit, they said: “Pastors, social workers and ordinary Christians are arrested, tortured or killed. Christian properties are burnt or destroyed by supporters of the ruling party.”

That “ruling party” is the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP. It is a militantly pro-Hindu organization, and its core members want to make India a Hindu state. BJP militants don’t want Muslims in the country, they hate Christians as well—and they want to force all Indians to adopt a Hindu diet. They were emboldened in 2014 when Modi was elected.

According to the Alliance Defending Freedom India, at least 328 violent attacks on Indian Christians were documented there in 2019. Twelve more incidents took place in the state of Uttar Pradesh while the others happened in Haryana, Chattisgarh and Telangana, according to International Christian Concern.

“Nobody should be persecuted because of their faith,” says Tehmina Arora, a Supreme Court lawyer in India. He recently told *The Catholic Herald* that violence against Christians has become a trend. “In India, more and more Christians suffer from an increasing number of physical and verbal assaults,” he added.

Arora said most of the attacks are perpetrated by radical Hindu nationalists who stir up angry mobs. He also noted that only a small percentage of those cases were prosecuted by the police—because the police are sympathetic to the BJP. How can

we pray? Here are a few guidelines:

Pray for true freedom in India. The Bible instructs us to pray for kings and those in authority “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:2b, NASB). If India is a true democracy, the government must denounce mob rule and stop harassing and killing those who are not Hindus.

Pray for boldness for Christians. Many Christians in India feel alone and afraid. Pray that God will give them courage to live out their faith and to share the message of Christ regardless of the consequences.

Pray for a spiritual awakening in India. Jesus told us that when He sent the Holy Spirit into the world, He would “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8b). The Spirit is working in India. The gospel has been preached there since the first century, when the apostle Thomas first arrived from Israel. Churches are growing rapidly there today in spite of severe resistance. Pray that spiritual darkness is pushed back as the message of Jesus spreads.