

Hindu Fanatics in Wave of Violence Against Christians

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(Rhys Blakely, The Australian)

The mob appeared an hour after sunset, armed with axes, clubs and paraffin. The carnage that followed would have been much worse if the Christians of Gadragaon, a remote village in northeast India, had not been warned by text message: "The Hindus are coming to kill you." The alert gave most enough time to flee to the jungle, where 114 of them would hide for a week, drinking rainwater and foraging for food.

But the warning did not come early enough for those unable to run. "They doused him with petrol and taunted him; we could hear him screaming," said Ravindra Nath Prahara, 45, of his paralysed brother, Rasananda, 35, who was burned alive by Hindu fanatics. "I could have tried to save him. But we had to save ourselves."

The attack on Gadragaon, by a mob that chanted "Hail Mother India" as they razed the village, was among the first of the grim litany of atrocities committed against minority Christians in the state of Orissa over the past two weeks. The Vatican has called the wave of violence "a sin against God and humanity".

A nun has been gang-raped; a worker at a church-run orphanage burned alive.

In the Kandhamal district, the site of the worst attacks, Kamalini Naik, who was seven months pregnant, was ordered to denounce Christianity and convert to Hinduism by a baying mob. When she refused, she and her one-year-old son were "cut into pieces", witnesses said.

So far, 36 deaths have been recorded by the Catholic Church - compared with 16 by the state authorities, which have been accused of being complicit in the tragedy.

"It is hard to tell (how many are dead). The mobs are burning their victims," said Father Ajay Singh, who is trying to keep a list of the dead in the office of the Archbishop in Bhubaneswar, the state capital.

Hindu extremists claimed the attacks were a spontaneous reaction to the murder of a local Hindu leader. Others believe they were orchestrated - as the purge began, trees were felled to block roads across the region to prevent Christians from escaping.

On Thursday, India's Supreme Court ordered the Orissa Government to answer charges that local police had stood by.

Despite Orissa being enormously rich in mineral resources, its low-caste Hindus and tribal populations are among the world's poorest. It is from these groups that most Christian converts

have come - attracted by the opportunity to study at church-run schools and leave the lowest rungs of Hinduism's rigid caste system.

"There is resentment among some Hindus that the church has reached out to these people," said Father Prabodha Pradhan, one of many Christians in Orissa who owe their lives to Hindus who hid them as they were hunted by fanatics.

There are now fears that the attacks directed against Christians in Orissa may be replicated against other religious minorities across India as far-right Hindu groups seek to mobilise support ahead of general elections that must be held before May.

Source Article Link:

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