

Another Hindutva laboratory in the making in Madhya Pradesh

Contributed by Correspondent
Saturday, 28 January 2006
Last Updated Friday, 06 November 2009

On 25 January 2006, seven policemen from the Kalidevi police station in Jhabua entered the house of Rev Rai Singh, who was praying with Rev Hateh Singh, and started abusing and manhandling them. On 26 January 2006, a group of Bajrang Dal activists stopped 20 Christians who were travelling to Nagpur from Jabalpur and brutally assaulted them. Thereafter they compelled some of them to sign affidavits, saying they were being forcibly taken to Nagpur against their will and got the pastors travelling with them arrested. On 28 January 2006 about 30 saffron-clad Bajrang Dal activists attacked a gathering of Christians, including 25 pastors, who were observing a day of prayer and fasting in Bhopal. In four days three major attacks were made against the minority Christian community in Madhya Pradesh, lying close to Gujarat, a state notorious for its Hindutva laboratory. Could it be that all these attacks were systematically staged to shift the focus on Shabri Kumbh Mela slated to be held in Dangs district of Gujarat from 11-13 February 2006. Alarmed by the development, the All India Christian Council (aicc), the apex body representing the Christian community in the country, immediately despatched a delegation of leaders, headed by aicc general secretary Dr Abraham Mathai to study the situation in Madhya Pradesh. The team went around and found the situation very serious. In gross violation of human rights, Christians of Chapri village near Jhabua gathered to pray at the residence of Rai Singh Ambliya on 25 January 2006 at 10.30 am. A group of nine policemen belonging to Kalidevi Police Station in Jhabua barged into the prayer room and started to beat up the pastor. They also attacked another pastor Hateh Singh Rawat, who was also present at the prayer meeting. The policemen then bundled them into their vehicle and took them to the police station repeatedly threatening them of dire consequences if they continued to hold prayer meetings. The pastors were locked up for more than four hours during which time they were subjected to third degree methods. The injured pastors had to be taken to hospital the following day. However they were denied medical aid by the hospital authorities who insisted that the pastors first obtain written permission from the police. The two pastors are still in police lock-up. The whole incident took place in the presence of Kalidevi Police station sub-inspector Samrath Devanji.

The Christians in Chapri village are in a state of shock. They said the attacks were aimed to intimidate the Christian community in the district. It was against this shocking background Chief Minister Shivraj Chauhan arrived in Jhabua for Republic Day celebrations the following day! Ironically Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh had called on the government of Madhya Pradesh to protect the Christian community in Jhabua from systematic attacks by Hindutva forces just a few days ago. On the following day, in a well-planned move, two Christian leaders residing in the Civil Lines area of Jabalpur and one Christian leader from Dindori, close to Jabalpur, were arrested based on a complaint by the activists of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), accusing them of forcibly converting 23 tribals from Dindori. Acting on the directions of Sudhir Agarwal of Dharam Raksha Samiti (affiliated to the RSS) raided Gurudev lodge in Madan Mahal area of Jabalpur to scare away the tribals who were on their way to attend a Christian convention organised by the Church of Nazarene at Nagpur. After the raid, the police team led by Police-Inspector Siddarth Chaudhary arrested the three Christian leaders - Pravin Pawar, Sanat Pawar and Maclin Masih. As the news spread, a mob of Hindu activists arrived on the scene. They assaulted them even as the police tried to register a case against the Christian leaders. The activists belonging to the RSS shouted anti-Christian slogans and tried to incite communal feelings. The situation in Jabalpur continues to be volatile and the Christians fear a wave of anti-Christian violence against them. The pastors were taken to the police station and put in lock-up. They have been booked under Section 420 and Article 4 of the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance. The police have also confiscated Christian literature, documents related to the Church of Nazarene and 35 passenger tickets of a private bus agency. Indira Iyengar, member of the Madhya Pradesh State Minority Commission said she had spoken to the police officials in Jabalpur and they appeared biased against the Christians. When Iyengar questioned a senior police official regarding the arrest of the tribals when they were going to Nagpur of their own free will, he refused to answer. The police also did not have any answer when Iyengar questioned them to know how three Christians could force 23 tribals to travel to a place they did not want to go. Two days later, at around 9.30 am a prayer meeting was held at L-210, Bharti Niketan, Govindpura Bhopal. All of a sudden around 30 Hindu activists began pelting stones, shattering the glass windows and trying to break open the doors. With saffron-coloured scarf around their necks and carrying hockey sticks and rods, they attacked the hapless pastors. Among those seriously injured are Pastor Kishore Sadhwani, Pastor SB Francis, Pastor Irwin Pereira, Bro Sandeep Kumar Minj, Pastor David Sudarshan, Bro Johan Kumar, Bro Anand Kumar and Bro Vyas Narayan. They have been admitted to hospital for treatment. In a memorandum to Union Minister of Minority Affairs AR Antulay, the aicc apprised him of the alarming situation in BJP-ruled states. The Christian Council said these violent incidents showed a growing trend of targeting a hapless minority community in violation of their right to worship and freedom of faith. "It is a mindless terrorising of the Christian community without any regard to its developmental contribution in the field of social work, health and education. If the strict laws like POTA are meant to counter terrorism, there is perhaps no better way to counter this unabated spate of terror than by applying them against the proponents of religious terrorism and hatred." The Council demanded that the government enforce stringent laws to discourage such wanton acts of terror against the minority community.