

INDIA: Police in India lay charges against 270 Christian 'liars'

Uttar Pradesh officials accuse Pentecostal congregation of lying about Hinduism, drugging people to convert them

By Saji Thomas, Bhopal

UCA News (12.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2N70dRz> – Police in India's Uttar Pradesh state have charged more than 270 Christians with "spreading lies about Hinduism and drugging people to try and convert them to Christianity."

Christians in Jaunpur district said on Sept. 10 that the move showed religious bias and was an attempt to terrorize Christians.

Police in the district filed the charges against 271 Christians of a Pentecostal church last week after being directed to do so by a local court.

The court directive followed a complaint lodged by activist group Hindu Jagran Manch that Christians were propagating misinformation about the Hindu religion and attempting to convert people during Sunday services.

Pastors Durga Prasad Yadav, Kirit Rai and Jitendra Ram were named on the charge sheet while the others were not identified.

The Hindu group said it went to court after the Christians refused to stop conducting Sunday prayer services despite repeated warnings.

The group's lawyer, Brijesh Singh, told the court that for the last few years the Christians had been urging people in surrounding districts to come to their church in the village of Bhundly and attend prayer services.

"After prayers every Sunday and Tuesday, the priests used to tell lies about the Hindu religion and convince people to embrace Christianity. They also used to give prohibited medicine and drugs to visitors and convert them while they were under their influence," the Indian Express newspaper quoted Singh as telling the court.

Local pastor A. Anil told ucanews.com that the allegations were "absolutely false and baseless."

Christians have been worshiping there for the past 15 years and never had any problem until the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party came to power, the pastor said.

Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu guru-turned politician, leads the party in the state.

Adityanath is also head priest of Gorakhnath Math, a Hindu temple in Gorakhpur, a town in the Hindu-majority state of some 200 million people.

Shibu Thomas, founder of Persecution Relief, an ecumenical forum that records incidents of persecution against Christians in India, told ucanews.com that hard-line Hindu activists had been threatening the pastors and their congregation against holding prayer meetings.

Opposition grew when the prayer meetings began to attract crowds when people claimed to be “healed by prayers.”

“The allegation of drugging people to convert people to Christianity is absurd – no one would do such a thing in Christianity,” Thomas said.

Hindu attacks on Christians across India have doubled as part of an unprecedented attempt to portray Christians as trying to destabilize the country, according to a Persecution Relief report in February. It recorded 736 incidents of persecution against Christians in 2017 against 348 in 2016.

Christians account for 2.3 per cent or 29 million of India’s population of 1.3 billion, some 80 percent of them Hindus.

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