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Three arrested after Nepal church bombings

World Watch Monitor (29.09.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1FFAqbp> - Three people have been arrested in connection with the recent bombing of two churches in Nepal's easternmost Jhapa district.

The bombings took place on 14 September, hours after Nepal's Constituent Assembly had rejected calls to revert the country to a Hindu state. Both churches suffered structural damage, but nobody was hurt.

Bombs were also planted at two other churches, but police successfully defused one, while another exploded, injuring two policemen, after it had been removed from the church.

Pamphlets promoting the radical Hindu organisation, Hindu Morcha Nepal, were reportedly found at each of the churches.

Those arrested were Ram Bhandari, 51, Krishna Chudal, 56, and Ramchandra Baniya, 45. Police said they were still hunting four further suspects, including the suspected ringleader, Madhav Bhandari, who is believed to have been behind the creation of the Hindu Morcha Nepal group, which was formed by merging six nationalist groups, including Nepal Shiv Sena.

Hindu Morcha Nepal has published a press statement, calling for Christian leaders to leave Nepal and for converts to Christianity to return to Hinduism. The group says the "Christianization" of Nepal is the main cause of disruption to Nepal's religious unity and that it wants Nepal to return to its former status as a Hindu Kingdom.

"From today, the Morcha declares Nepal a Christian-free Hindu nation. We warn all the Christian religious leaders to leave Nepal, and appeal to all those who converted to Christianity to return home [convert back to Hinduism]," says the statement.

The group also demands serious discussions about amending the constitution, threatening strikes if no action is taken by authorities.

Hindu Morcha Nepal says the authorities did not take into account the will of the Nepali people, and instead only considered the opinion of 2 per cent of the population, which roughly equates to the Christian population of Nepal.

Nepal became a secular state in 2007, after the abolition of the monarchy a year before, but the country has witnessed a rise in Hindu nationalism, led by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPP-N).

Christians feared that removing the term secularism from the constitution would embolden nationalists, as World Watch Monitor reported in August.

Although Nepal stayed secular, Christians remain fearful following the adoption on 20 September of a constitution which included controversial amendments to Article 31(3), which now states: "Any act to convert another person from one religion to another, or any act or behaviour to undermine or jeopardise the religion of another [will be] punishable by law".

Attempting to convert someone to another religion was already prohibited in Nepal, but the amendments mean that anything perceived as "evangelistic" is now punishable by law. Christians fear this could eventually render all Christian activity illegal.

Background

One of the groups subsumed by Hindu Morcha Nepal was the Nepal Defence Army (NDA), the former head of which, Ram Prasad Mainali, was recently released from prison.

World Watch Monitor interviewed him in 2009, while he was serving a prison sentence for the bombing of a Catholic church in Kathmandu.

Two people were killed and a dozen others injured in the 2009 blast at the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption. Mainali told World Watch Monitor he regretted his actions and had repented of his crime, since becoming interested in Christianity.

However, Nepali investigators later claimed he had only pretended to repent in order to disguise the terrorist activities he was still engaged in from prison. In March 2011, six suspected colleagues of Mainali were arrested while in possession of powerful "socket bombs".

Mainali had earlier told World Watch Monitor that he formed the NDA in 2007 with the support of Hindu nationalists in India to re-establish the Hindu monarchy.

The NDA was believed to be responsible for several bombings of mosques and churches, killing Muslims and Christians, including the Rev. John Prakash Moyalan, a Catholic priest, in 2008.

Churches bombed as Nepal stays secular

World Watch Monitor (15.09.2015) - <http://wwrn.org/articles/45011/> - Nepal's Constituent Assembly rejected calls to revert the country to a Hindu state on Monday (14 Sep.), sparking violent protests, reports AP.

Bombs went off at two churches in Nepal's easternmost Jhapa district late on 14 Sep. The churches suffered structural damage, but nobody was hurt, according to The Kathmandu Post.

Three police officers were injured on the morning of 15 Sep. while attempting to defuse a bomb which reportedly failed to detonate at a third church. Pamphlets promoting the radical Hindu organisation, Hindu Morcha Nepal, were found at all three sites.

The BBC reports that 30 people have been killed in recent weeks "in violence over ethnic minorities' appeals for better representation in the constitution".

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Human sacrifice in a religious ritual

Desperate father kidnapped and murdered a ten-year-old boy in religious ritual after a holy man told him a human sacrifice would save his ailing son in Nepal

Mail Online (27.07.2015) - <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3176306/Desperate-father-kidnapped-murdered-ten-year-old-boy-religious-ritual-holy-man-told-human-sacrifice-save-ailing-son-Nepal.html> - A desperate father kidnapped and murdered a ten-year-old boy after a holy man told him that a human sacrifice to the gods may save his ailing son.

During police interrogation, Kodai Hirijan, 35, admitted to slitting the boys throat with a sickle to 'chase away the evil spirits' from his 18-year-old son who often fell ill Bijaya.

When Jivan Kohar, 10, was found in a bush on the outskirts of the village in southwest Nepal, police said his head was almost severed from his body.

Mr Hirijan was told by a local shaman, who many believe to have spiritual powers in the rural village, that his son's body was occupied by a spirit that was making him ill.

He told the Himalayan Times: 'When inquired, the spirit that had taken over Bijaya said it needed 'human meat' to leave. So we made a plan to sacrifice Jivan.'

After being told how to cure his son, Hirijan admitted they found Jivan Kohar, 10, playing with friends in the village and lured him away by promising him a pack of biscuits and 50 rupees (49 cents)

He was then taken to a temple on the outskirts of the village where shaman Ganga Harijan helped to preside over a special religious ritual.

The group then held him down while one slit his throat. Police found him dumped on the outskirts of the village three days after he went missing.

Murdered Jivan was believed to be the son of his neighbour.

Mr Hirijan had fled to India when he was eventually caught and his wife told police what her husband had done.

The Kathmandu Post reported police have also arrested nine others, including a number of his relatives and the shaman who advised him to make the human sacrifice.

It's believed that five have already confessed to what they have done, including Kodai Harijan.

Among those arrested are thought to be Hirijan's sick son, three of his brothers, a neighbour and the holy man, believed to be known as shaman Ganga Harijan.

The murder took place in the rural Kudiya village in southwest Nepal in the Nawalparasi district which borders India.

It is home to some of the country's poorest and most uneducated people, known as the 'untouchables', in reference to their low caste.

The caste system is a local social ranking which has a huge influence on the way people are thought of within local society.

Sacrifices within this lower caste are common within the low ranks in the country's mainly Hindu population.

Hundreds of thousands of animals were sacrificed in the Gadhimai festival every five years, which last took place in December and is believed brings prosperity.

Hari Prasad Mainai, Nawalparasi's chief district officer, told CNN: 'It's very unfortunate what happened.

'From the government level, we are going to launch an awareness program against these superstitions in the villages of Nawalparasi district.'

Nepal bans religious conversion in new draft constitution

Julia A. Seymour

WORLD (20.07.2015) - <http://wwrn.org/articles/44741/> - Christians and Muslims in Nepal are criticizing the draft version of a new constitution that bans religious conversion.

Spurred to action by the recent earthquake, Nepal's government introduced the draft for public comment on June 30, Reuters reported. Religious minorities are concerned about its impact on their religious freedom and the government's haste to finalize the document as soon as August.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) warned language about religious conversion in the draft version "fails to allow for choosing and changing one's faith to be seen as a positive individual choice or as a matter of individual rights, as required and guaranteed by international treaties."

The draft states that "any act which may be contrary to public health, public decency or morality or incitement to breach public peace or act to convert another person from one religion to another or any act or behavior to undermine or jeopardize the religion of each other is not allowed and such act shall be punishable by law."

Martin Dore, CSW's Nepal advocacy officer, said that would make it "illegal" to change religion, evangelize, or even explain one's religion—all violations of Nepal's international agreements.

"There is a purpose to stop all evangelism and talking about another faith in the words 'incitement to breach public peace' and the banning of 'an act or behavior to undermine or jeopardize the religion of another,'" Dore said.

Nepal's Hindu Rastriya Prajatantra Party lobbied for the inclusion of a conversion ban and has called for Nepal to become an officially Hindu state again. Hindu nationalists from India also seem to be influencing Nepal. CSW warned in June the vice chairman of India's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party met with Nepalese officials and urged them to institute a religious conversion ban.

Christianity has been growing in Nepal, with some high-profile converts from Hinduism. But in recent months there has been an uptick in accusations of forced conversions, according to CSW.

In 2011, Nepalese lawmakers attempted to make conversion to anything other than Hinduism or Buddhism illegal, according to Open Doors spokeswoman Emily Fuentes. But the legislation was not adopted.

Christians and Muslims are minorities in the former Hindu monarchy, which is why both groups want Nepal's new constitution to keep the nation "secular."

"We want secularism to be institutionalized in such a way that it is an unchangeable provision in the new constitution. We want the constitution to ensure religious rights and form a religious commission," said C. B. Gahatraj, general secretary of the National Federation of Christians. Muslims also want permission to have their own religious courts.

Catholic officials in Nepal also called for the word "secular" to be inserted into the constitution and asked for Christianity to be officially recognized, according to Catholic News Service (CNS).

Christians in Nepal currently do not experience "significant" persecution and they are free to start churches, Dore said. But they don't have legal rights to register their churches, nor can they acquire burial ground. Asia News reported that under the transitional constitution proselytizing was banned, but Nepali citizens could still "express" their faith even through missionary and charity work.

Christians forced to convert to Buddhism

Barnabas Fund (02.03.2015) - Christians living in Borang village in Nepal's Dhading district that were forced to convert to Buddhism and ordered to stop all Christian worship.

Commissioned by a political leader of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), a Nepalese nationalist party, a Buddhist monk was sent to Borang village to convert this mainly Christian community. Upon arriving, all of the Christian villagers were locked inside a hall and forced to accept Buddhist teachings. They were instructed to bow before a Buddhist statue, go around the village carrying Buddhist scriptures on their heads, and to place Buddhist flags on their houses.

The pastor and elders of the church did not comply with the orders and were attacked. The elders managed to escape; however, the pastor was captured and beaten for three days. He was then forced to sign a document stating that it would stop running the church and he would not report the incident to the authorities or leave the village.

Led by the Buddhist monk, a group of assailants attacked the church on 1 February, attempting to set the building on fire. They also attacked the pastor's home by cutting off the electricity and phone lines. Not allowed to use the phone or leave the village, the pastor is still in Borang. Local Christians told Barnabas Fund that they are particularly concerned about his health since there is no information about his current condition.
