



Persecution Watch

An initiative of the Religious Liberty Commission of EFI

1 – 15 February 2021

Religious Liberty Commission documented 11 incidents of hate and targeted violence against Christians in India in the first half of February 2021.

Madhya Pradesh once again led the tally with 4 incidents. According to a report by national media “in a month since the enactment of the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance to regulate interfaith marriages and conversion, 28 people have been booked and at least half of them are Christians, according to police records.” Maharashtra reported 3 incidents, Assam 2, followed by Bihar and Andhra Pradesh with 1 each.

At least two incidents that were recorded were of hate speech in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh with political leaders from a major political party targeting Christians through their speeches and thus attempting to stoke communal fires.

We appeal to the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Home Minister, and to the Heads of the respective state governments to deal stringently with the various right-wing organizations whose primary agenda is to create an atmosphere of fear among the Christian community and other religious minorities.

List of incidents from 1 – 15 February 2021

On 2 February in Jam village, Wardha district, Maharashtra, a Christian prayer meeting was disrupted by an irate businessman. Ramkumar Suryawanshi, a member of the Christ Church located in Hinganghat and working in a textile company, was in a prayer meeting at his home with a few pastors and family members when the manager of his company barged in. He demanded that the meeting be stopped immediately and accused Suryawanshi of converting people. He told him to vacate the staff residence and resign from his job at the company. After meeting the company President, the next day, he was able to save his job but had to vacate the staff quarter.

On 4 February in Betul district, Madhya Pradesh, Abdul Raheem, a Christian, was arrested by Nishatpura police. Police received a complaint from a certain Mr. Ansul Kamra and booked Raheem under IPC sections 327, 294, 323, 506 and 34. Raheem has been involved in Christian ministry in the locality.

On 4 February in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, Bharatiya Janata Party's national secretary and Andhra Pradesh co-in-charge, Sunil Deodhar, accused Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy of wanting everyone to become a Christian, and assured that an anti-conversion law

would be brought in if Jana Sena-BJP government came to power in the state. Speaking to a mainstream media, the BJP leader who has been camping in Andhra Pradesh for the past few months for the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-polls, also remarked that those Hindus who had converted to Christianity could not continue to take the benefits of reservation and Hindus who had converted to Christianity could not be considered as Scheduled Caste (SC). Deodhar further remarked that the church had political interests and demanded that video footages of those who visit churches regularly should be released and attendance registers of churches be made public.

On 6 February in Lakhnadon town, Seoni district, Madhya Pradesh, two missionaries of the India Evangelical Mission were falsely accused of involving in religious conversion activities during a wedding. The duo had been invited as guests to the wedding by a Christian family but had to leave midway after some religious extremists confronted them. Subsequently police arrived at the venue searching for the missionaries and took the Christian families to the nearby police station. The Christians were interrogated the entire night about the whereabouts of the missionaries.

On 7 February in Alirajpur district, Madhya Pradesh, a mob of religious extremists forcefully barged into a church. Around 25 people had gathered there for Sunday prayers. The mob threatened and physically assaulted the men and women. The assailants lodged a complaint at the Udaygarh police station alleging that people were being lured to Christianity in the church. Police detained all 25 Christians, interrogated them, and eventually registered an FIR against Pastor Dilip Vasuniya, under sections 3 and 5 of the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance, 2020. The pastor was sent to jail. Subsequently on 10 February, the pastor was released on bail.



Religious Extremists disrupt worship along with Police in Alirajpur

Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/QX9-M-XdXyw>

On 9 February in Gharmura, Hailakandi district, Assam, in another incident linked to border disputes between Assam and Mizoram, unidentified miscreants stormed into a Presbyterian mission school compound and beat up the headmaster, Mr. H. Vanlaldika, and his family members, with sticks and iron rods inflicting grievous injuries on them. Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitute Committee (MKHC), a conglomerate of leaders of major churches in Mizoram, vehemently condemned the attack on a religious place. The vandals torched houses, vandalized furniture, and vehicles. The family members, two of whom are young girls, were admitted at a hospital in Aizawl.



On 10 February in Alirajpur district, Madhya Pradesh, during a press conference Nagar Singh Chauhan, a former Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), remarked that they would continue to oppose Christian missionary activities in the district. He accused Christian missionaries of alluring and converting people. He also falsely claimed that the current MLA of Jobat city, Kalawati Bhuria, was protecting Christian missionaries who carry out religious conversions.



Nagar Singh Chaihan, BJP Leader making the remarks against Christians.



Hindu Yuva Janjati Sangathan protesting and shouting provocative slogans in front of Church in Alirajpur

On 13 February in Harsul village, Trimbak taluk, Nashik district, Maharashtra, villagers opposed a funeral ceremony that was to be conducted as per Christian rites. Pintu Rajaram Garel, a Christian, had lost his two-year old son due to an accident. The local villagers demanded that Pintu make monetary donations for their religious activities if he intended to bury his child. Eventually another Christian man offered his land for the burial.

On 13 February under Daniyawan police station, Patna district, Bihar, a Christian missionary was targeted by religious extremists and later handed over to Daniyawan police. The incident occurred near the Daniyawan High School where the missionary was distributing Christian literature on the street. The extremists - Radhe Shyam, P.R. Suman and Kunwar Vijay Paswan - accused the missionary of involving in the religious conversion of poor and marginalized people. SHO Munna Kumar forced the missionary to sign a bond stating that he will not involve in religious activities in the future.

On 13 February in Besa village, Nagpur Rural tehsil, Nagpur district, Maharashtra, Chitra Banjari and two other Christians, were confronted by local villagers who accused them of converting people to Christianity. The trio were in the house of a Christian family when a man barged into the house and filmed their discussions on his phone. He accused them of religious conversions, gathered the local villagers, and tried to hand them over to local police. However, the trio were able to leave the place safely.

On 14 February in Harijan Colony, Tezpur city, Assam, Manjit Masrakhiya, a church youth leader, and around 30 Christians were called to a meeting organized by a religious radical group in partnership with the Harijan Yuvak Sangha. The community leaders scolded the Christians for their religious beliefs and demanded that they stop their prayer services in the colony. When the Christians denied their demands, they were threatened of social boycott. Earlier on 20 January the religious radicals had confronted the Christians, vandalized their prayer hall, and accused them of tearing their religious flags. During the 14 February meeting the Christians, were warned that if they did not leave their faith, they would have to lose their jobs. Most of them work as cleaners and sweepers in the city. The Christians, who are affiliated to the Nazareth Baptist Church, are now in a state of shock and fear. Despite their best efforts to seek police's intervention, no help has arrived.

About RLC

The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) is an initiative of Evangelical Fellowship of India and is established in accordance with biblical principles to facilitate reconciliation, to promote religious liberty and fundamental freedoms for all, and to seek justice for those who are abused and oppressed. The RLC promotes through its activities a suitable response to violations of religious freedom in the complex context of India while speaking for the marginalized.

Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), founded in 1951, is the national alliance of evangelical Christians. Its membership includes over 54 protestant denominations and related congregations (over 65,000 Churches), over 200 Church related mission agencies and organizations and thousands of individual members. As a central network of evangelicals and a service organization, it represents the Evangelical voice and builds capacity to promote participation in nation building.

EFI is a charter member of the World Evangelical Alliance. The WEA is a global organization of evangelical Christian churches, serving more than 600 million evangelicals, founded in 1846. WEA has a consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.