



Persecution Watch

An initiative of the Religious Liberty Commission of EFI

15 – 31 January 2021

Indian Christians face at least 29 attacks in the first month of the new year 2021.

The first month of 2021 brought no respite to Christians in India as the Religious Liberty Commission recorded 29 incidents where Christians were targeted, opposed, threatened or physically attacked.

The state of Madhya Pradesh led the tally with 9 incidents recorded against Christians, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 6 and Chhattisgarh with 5 incidents. Odisha saw three incidents, while Maharashtra saw two and Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Telangana recorded one incident each.

Incidentally, both Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have recently brought in strict ordinances that aim to prohibit religious conversions and there are at least 4 incidents where Christians have been accused and charged under the provisions of the recently passed ordinances in the states – three in Madhya Pradesh and one, reportedly, in Uttar Pradesh. Concerns have been raised about these ordinances being unconstitutional and they are being challenged in court.

The drummed up bogey of conversion was the alleged reason behind most of the incidents as all religious conversions are increasingly viewed as criminal acts even though the constitution allows them. A Christian wedding in Anuppur, Madhya Pradesh was stopped by the police on the pretext of religious conversion. Most often, local political leaders and religious right wing radicals are said to have been behind the incidents.

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 15 – 31 January 2021

On 17 January in Ambua village, Alirajpur district, Madhya Pradesh, police personnel barged into a prayer meeting conducted by Pastor Mukesh Davar and took him to the Ambua police station. Reportedly some religious extremists had filed a complaint that the pastor was involved in illegal religious conversion activities. After many Christian advocacy organizations made phone calls to the station and requested a fair investigation, the pastor was let go without any charges.

On 17 January in Gopalganj district, Bihar, religious fanatics along with police personnel disrupted a prayer meeting led by Pastor Kamlesh Kumar. The pastor is affiliated to the

Assembly Church of Jesus Christ. They verbally abused the Christians gathered at the meeting and warned them to stop converting others to Christianity. They kept looking for the pastor who had hid himself in another room. Consequently, the mob left the place. The pastor has been leading Christian prayers at a rented hall in the locality for the past eight years and around 80 to 100 Christians gather every Sunday.

On 17 January in Potanga village, Barkagaon tehsil, Hazaribagh district, Jharkhand, around fifty villagers physically assaulted Anita Hansda and her mother for their Christian beliefs. Anita and her mom attend the Believers Church. With the support of a Christian advocacy group Anita filed a police complaint at the Barkagaon police station. Though the police confronted the attackers and warned them of legal consequences, the villagers filed a counter complaint against the Christians.

On 18 January in Juna Bilwa village, Barwani district, Madhya Pradesh, villagers convened a meeting alleging that religious conversions were being carried out in the region by Christian missionaries. They were particularly agitated by Pastor Kiran Badole who has been conducting prayers in the village since 2004 and around 100 to 150 Christians gather regularly. The meeting was attended by local press reporters. The villagers accused the Christians of eroding their tribal traditions and customs.

On 18 January in Bagbahan village, Bastar district, Chhattisgarh, a Christian couple – Bal Singh and his wife Gudiya – were ostracized from the village. They had recently accepted the Christian faith. Thrown out of their home by their family, they resorted for help from Pastor Salim Hakku, who arranged a rented house for them to stay.

On 20 January in BTR Nagar Colony, Mahabubabad city, Telangana, around 30 people, allegedly belonging to Bajrang Dal, demolished the boundary wall of a church. Pastor Afzal has been regularly conducting prayer services at the church. A complaint was lodged against the vandals at the Mahabubabad Town police station.

On 20 January in Garwar block, Ballia district, Uttar Pradesh, religious extremists confronted Pastor Jag Jeevan Ram and other Christians, warning them to desist from gathering for prayers at the Budhua village. They threatened the Christians that they would demolish their church on the ensuing Sunday. Shocked by the incident, the pastor approached the local police station for protection and help.

On 20 January in Madhopura village, Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh, a radical mob along with police personnel barged in to Balu Minama's house and disrupted a Christian prayer meeting. They threatened Pastor Hatesingh Gundiya, Pastor Gulab Singh, and Kamlesh Bamaniya to stop coming to the village and holding prayer services. Police also confiscated Pastor Hatesingh's AADHAAR Card.

On 22 January in Bangaon village, Ner tehsil, Yavatmal district, Maharashtra, an FIR was registered against Pastor Sanjay Diwe, his wife Asmita Diwe, Gaurav, and Bhushan. The four had been invited to the home of a Christian family for a prayer meeting. During the prayer, an observer recorded a video of the program and lodged a police complaint alleging that the Christians were promoting enmity between religious communities. The FIR was filed under sections 153A, 295A, 143, and 188 of IPC.

On 22 January at JP Nagar police station, Amroha district, Uttar Pradesh, Pastor Daniel Masih and Ramavtar Patil were interrogated on allegations of converting people through inducement. Masih and Patil work with Vishwa Vani, a Christian organization. Reportedly certain religious radicals had complained to the police that the organization was involved in conversion activities. However, no FIR was registered against the pastor.

On 24 January at Pulgaon police station, Durg district, Chhattisgarh, local villagers provoked by religious radicals, affiliated to a major political party, surrounded the police station demanding arrest of four Christian families residing in Peeparchhedi village. The enraged group accused the Christians of converting the locals. Upon heightening tension, additional police force was summoned. Pastor Vikram Philip conducts prayers for the four Christian families.



On 26 January at Bhanwarkuan police station, Indore district, Madhya Pradesh, religious radicals barged into the Sat Prakashan Communication Centre and disrupted a Christian prayer meeting. The radicals manhandled the Christians and raised provocative slogans. Police arrived at the spot, and instead of arresting the assailants, registered a case against 11 Christians who were charged under the M.P. Freedom of Religion Act. Rakesh Kaushal and Rani Kaushal, a couple and residents of Nayapura Gujarkheda Mahu, are two among the eleven accused.

On 26 January morning in Padampur village, Malkangiri district, Odisha, religious radicals demolished a church building and physically assaulted the church members. The next day Mutai Khilla, a Christian woman, registered an FIR, bearing number 0029, at Malkangiri police station against the vandals.



On 27 January in Lalbarra tehsil, Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh, religious radicals disrupted a Christian prayer meeting and called local police. Police took Chattarsingh Katre, Mahendra Nagdeve and Ulghanj Nathan into custody and filed an FIR falsely charging them with involvement in religious conversion work.

On 28 January in Guba Garden, Kalyanpur town, Kanpur district, Uttar Pradesh, Kalyanpur police arrested Pastor Pankaj Malik on allegations of engaging in religious conversion activities. He was kept in custody the entire night. The next day multiple advocacy groups

contacted the police demanding a fair investigation. Subsequently the pastor was let go without any charges.

On 31 January in Dheephri village, Pipalda tehsil, Kota district, Rajasthan, Dilkush Mahaveer, a Christian, was summoned at the Khatauli police station. Sources reported that Mahaveer had been construction a prayer hall at his property after gaining permission from the village panchayat. However, certain religious extremists had complained to the police that he was illegally constructing the building. Pastor Senthil Kumar conducts regular prayers in the village.

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.