



Persecution & Prayer Alert

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada
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*"God is trustworthy, even in the darkest of times...
when we don't always understand the perplexing
situations of life. While letting go of those unnecessary
or former things, we can hold steadfastly onto Him –
knowing that He is lovingly holding firmly onto us."*

~ Karyn Marianne, VOMC's Editor-in-Chief

INDIA: Violence Leads to Dozens of Deaths

Sources: VOMC Contacts, Christianity Today, The Quint, Al Jazeera, CNN, Mirror Now

Ongoing ethnic tensions in the Indian state of Manipur ignited into a disturbing outbreak of violence after some took offence to a peaceful protest on May 3rd. During the resulting unrest, over 50 people had reportedly been killed, another 150 received injuries, and more than 50 church buildings were burned to the ground. At least 20,000 people have been forcibly displaced, many of them seeking protection in military camps. To view one of the eyewitness videos of the ongoing destruction, go to www.vomcanada.com/video/manipur2023.mp4.

In Manipur, along with other rural areas of India, traditional peoples of the region are specified as "scheduled tribes." These groups are given the right to own land in areas that are restricted to others, along with additional benefits as a reparation for past injustices. The majority Meitei people in the state have objected to what they see as unfair treatment and are seeking to gain the "scheduled tribe" status – an action opposed by other groups, such as the Kuki and Zo people living in the hill country.

The Meitei people, who make up more than 50 percent of the state's population, are predominantly Hindu. Politically and economically, they are the dominant people group in the state. Yet, the tribal communities, in contrast, are largely Christian. Unfortunately, the state government, which is currently controlled by the Hindu nationalist party (BJP), seem to have taken an "anti-tribal agenda." Large portions of the hill country, where the tribal people live, have been designated as protected forest. As a result, villages have been razed and the inhabitants evicted from their lands.

A mass rally was held on May 3rd in the city of Churachandpur. Thousands of tribal people gathered to express their concerns about government policies as they relate to the scheduled tribes. While the demonstration was peaceful, some "Meitei thugs" arrived to cause problems. Violence grew and began to spread, resulting in scenes of horrific violence throughout the state. Church buildings, in particular, seem to have been a target, with more than 50 places of worship destroyed during the riot. In some cases, this anti-Christian element has crossed ethnic lines, leading to the destruction of some Meitei church buildings in the capital city of Imphal.

The Indian military has taken an active part in attempting to quell the violence. While skirmishes continue to break out across Manipur, the attacks thankfully became less widespread after the first week. Although tensions remain high throughout the state, some are seeing a "ray of hope." As the violence dissipates, however, the challenge of finding a lasting solution remains.

Christian leaders have been actively involved by urging their members not to retaliate, as communities have set up barricades in an attempt to repel the attacks. Violence and prejudice are often multifaceted, as various ethnic, religious, economic and political elements (among many others) serve to intensify division and hatred. Followers of Christ are called to set aside such divisions (Galatians 3:28), despite the pull towards a more visceral response.

Efforts to make India a solely Hindu nation have played a major part in the political agenda of the BJP – the ruling party in many areas of India, including Manipur. In a recent interview, *Closer to the Fire* podcast host Greg Musselman spoke with Ramchand Saranu and Sushil George about ongoing problems relating to the anti-conversion legislation that now exists in many Indian states. To view this informative interview, go to www.vomcanada.com/video/india-defence.

Please prayerfully remember the people of Manipur who have been caught up in this scene of unresolved violence. Pray for the healing of victims who were injured, as well as needed protection for those whose lives remain in danger. May God's peace fill the hearts and minds of all who have been affected by this complicated conflict, including those who have lost loved ones during the attacks. Additionally, pray that His Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of citizens throughout this Indian state, bringing about an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance, as well as receptivity to the Gospel.

CHINA: Multiple Raids on Church Services

Source: ChinaAid

In a coordinated act, Chinese authorities raided five separate locations of the Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church during worship services on May 7th. Several church elders, preachers and co-workers were detained for interrogation, though most were released later that day. The worshippers meeting in each of the locations were ordered to disperse.

Pastor Huang Xiaoning was preaching in the Yuexiu branch of the church when the police arrived. When asked to stop preaching, he informed the officers that they had leased the venue

and the officials had no right to interfere. Although the officers stated that they were authorized to inspect the location, Pastor Huang referenced the Chinese constitution as it relates to personal freedoms, including the freedom of religious belief. A debate ensued between the pastor and an official from the Religious Affairs Bureau.

After the officers left, the landlord of the venue where the Yuexiu branch was meeting asked the worshippers to leave, due to concerns that the church may have broken some laws. Respecting that decision, Pastor Huang paid for the one hour they spent at the venue.

The Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church refused to join the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church and, as a result, was banned in July 2018. Although their building was confiscated, the church members continued meeting – changing venues each week. These believers have asked fellow Christians to pray for God's protection, and that He would continue to use them to glorify Him and testify of the saving grace He has made available through Christ. For more on the persecution facing Christians in China, go to www.vomcanada.com/china.htm.

Pray for the ongoing ministry of the Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church. Praise God for His continued work in and through this faithful congregation, as they continue to increase in numbers despite the ongoing opposition. May the words spoken to the officials during the raid help them to realize the truth of the Gospel and be used to ultimately lead them to faith in Christ. Please also pray that there will not be further legal action taken against the church nor its leaders.

PAKISTAN: Teen Girl Kidnapped at Gunpoint

Sources: CLAAS-UK, Pak Christian News

A Christian teenager named Sehar was kidnapped from her home in Okaro, Punjab, on April 23rd. At last report, police were continuing to search for her, along with the three Muslim men responsible for the abduction.

The 13-year-old girl worked at a local brick kiln, along with 11 of her siblings, to help support the family, since their elderly father is ill and unable to work. According to her brother Irfan, the three men on motorcycles kidnapped Sehar from her home at gunpoint and fled. One of the captors was recognized as Allah Rakha, who also worked at the kiln.

Allah Rakha was friends with Sehar's brother, Adil. According to their sister Saba, Adil had been "deceptively converted" to Islam by Allah only three months before. The family is concerned that Allah has similar plans for Sehar. "First he converted my younger brother Adil, and now he kidnapped my younger sister," Saba sadly states.

In Pakistan, young Christian girls are frequently kidnapped and then forcibly converted and married to their attackers. To learn more about the challenges encountered by the followers of Jesus in this South Asian nation, go to www.vomcanada.com/pakistan.htm.

Pray that Sehar's whereabouts will soon be discovered, so she can be returned to her family unharmed. May those responsible for her kidnapping be brought to justice. Please also intercede on behalf of the victim's family members who are struggling to meet their daily needs while having to deal with this added challenge. As they continue to await Sehar's hopeful return, pray that the Lord will abundantly provide for their practical needs and, at the same time, wonderfully minister to their troubled hearts (including Sehar's) with His love, comfort and peace.

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