

Hindu Extremists Attack Nuns, Destroy Catholic Hospital Wall in India

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A Catholic hospital in India was attacked by a mob on March 12, leading to the destruction of the institution's water and power supply. Several nurses were also injured in the attack.

A mob assaults nuns at the Pushpa Mission Hospital in the temple town of Ujjain, India on March 12, 2018.

Ujjain: A Catholic hospital in India was attacked by a mob on March 12, leading to the destruction of the institution's water and power supply. Several nurses were also injured in the attack.

The Pushpa Mission Hospital is located in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, and is the oldest medical facility in the area.

The entrance of Puspha Mission Hospital in India.

Father Maria Stephen, the public relations officer for the Church in the Madhya Pradesh region, told Crux that the mob was made up of nearly 60 people, and also damaged the hospital gate, and terrified the hospital patients and staff.

"They also destroyed the back-up power generator and disconnected the water supply, putting the lives of nearly 200 patients including 12 in the intensive care unit in serious danger."

A Church official said the mob was led by Gagan Singh, the personal secretary of Chintamani Malviya, a Member of Parliament.

The attack may be connected to a land disputed over a property adjacent to the hospital, which the Diocese of Ujjain had refused to hand over to Singh.

Bishop Sebastian Vadakel told Crux the attack is "definitely an act against the Christian community."

"This dispute began around the end of January, where false claims were made of the ownership. We have all proper valid legal documents to prove ownership rights," the head of the Ujjain diocese said.

Attack On Pushpa Mission Hospital...

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Vadakkal led a delegation of Catholic dignitaries to meet the state governor Anandiben Patel, who was on a visit to Ujjain when the attack took place.

“We the minorities feel unsafe in the midst of repeated attacks on the Church personnel and institutions,” Stephen said.

“We want an explanation why the hospital has been attacked? There were nearly a hundred people who launched the attack on the front yard of emergency gate of the hospital, dug of the exit and pulled down the compound wall,” the priest said. “They even put up iron fencing on war footing inside the premise of the hospital. Despite several police vehicles passing by, not even a constable has turned up at the site while hooligans sitting at the encroached hospital front yard and abusing the media when they asked for explanations.”

Madhya Pradesh state has a population of 73 million. The state is over 90 percent Hindu and less than 1 percent Christian and is ruled by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which also controls the national government.

The BJP has strong links to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant Hindu nationalist organization. Malviya is a member of the BJP.

Archbishop Leo Cornelio of Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, strongly condemned the attack.

“It is a systematic planning to bring disturbance and violence among a peace loving community. This type of violence will not be tolerated anymore,” the archbishop said.

“I ask the authorities to take action on culprits immediately. It’s a cowardly action to destroy the hospital when the governor was visiting the Ujjain city,” he said.

The Catholic Church has since 1961 unchallenged ownership of the land on which the hospital is built. Forces aided by powerful political powers have demanded ownership of the land. The ownership of a part of the land has been challenged and the matter is sub judice awaiting judgment.

However, some “anti-social and anti-national elements” have been creating disturbances in the area. The incidents of March 12 follow earlier attacks on the hospital on three consecutive days since January 27 when rowdy people appeared outside the hospital, shouting, misbehaving and disturbing the hospital. They also prevented ambulances from carrying critically ill patients from entering the hospital premises.

The attack on the hospital is the third mob violence against Catholic institutions in the past three months.

In December 2017, mobs targeted Catholic priests and seminarians in Satna for carol singing. Hindu extremists targeted St Mary’s College in Vidisha in January demanding forcible worship of the Mother India goddess (Bharat Mata).

Catholics are a tiny minority in the state. The Ujjain diocese serves mostly Hindus in the fields of education and healthcare and social welfare in remote areas.

- Crux, MI