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INDIA | Hindu Radicals Disrupt Prayer Meeting

A mob of 20 men attacked Yeshu Darbar Church in Pratapgarh District, Uttar Pradesh, India on July 2. The perpetrators were identified as belonging to Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV), a youth militia group which defends the Hindutva ideology.

The mob trespassed into the church grounds armed with sticks, firearms and shouting anti-Christian slogans while a prayer meeting was underway. The prayer meeting was disrupted when a gun was fired into the air. The mob then attacked the worshipers, including women and children, resulting in eight wounded, who were taken to a local community health center.

Reports indicate that church furniture, sound systems, motorbikes, hymn books and Bibles were among the property damaged. According to a local monitoring group, a First Information Report (FIR) under the Indian Penal Code has been registered against the 20 perpetrators.

The Hindu Yuva Vahini was founded by the current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, in 2002 and has been provoking communal tensions in Uttar Pradesh for more than a decade.

In May 2017, a group of Hindu Yuva Vahini men killed a Muslim man named Ghulam Ahmad in Bulandshahr following allegations that he had helped a young Muslim man to secretly marry a Hindu woman. Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) victory in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls in 2017, the Hindu Yuva Vahini have been emboldened, instilling fear among religious minorities and carrying out vigilante attacks, including lynching people for alleged beef slaughter.

Dr. John Dayal, a civil rights activist and writer, said, "This is a case where social, political and caste entitlement and arrogance has reached its pinnacle. The mob shares caste and political identity with the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, who rode to power in his record of violent religious bigotry. Impunity is total in the state where Muslims and Christians bear the brunt of the ruling ideology. It needs to be remembered that Uttar Pradesh does not have an anti-conversion law, and yet even the police and judiciary presume that evangelical activity and even prayer groups are illegal or a criminal activity. We fear more violence as India now prepares for the general elections in 2019.

Even in its early phase, the electoral campaign is more acrid than it was in 2013 for the last general election in 2014.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “Intolerance towards religious minority communities is deepening in India, and anxiety among members of these communities is running high. We urge the government of India to honor its commitments under international law to protect and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief for all Indians, regardless of creed.”