

21 people killed in New Year attack on church in Egypt

Twenty-one people died after a bomb attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria as worshippers were leaving a midnight service to celebrate the New Year. A further 79 people were injured.

Initially it was believed that a car bomb was used, but the Egyptian government later stated that they believed a suicide bomber was responsible. The interior ministry said the blast also damaged a mosque near the church and eight Muslims were among the wounded.



President Hosni Mubarak went on state TV and vowed to track down those behind the attack, pledging, "we will cut off the hands of terrorists and those plotting against Egypt's security". He added that the bombing was an attack on "all Egypt" and that "terrorism does not distinguish between Copt and Muslim".

The attack prompted angry clashes between Christians and local Muslims during which the mosque opposite the church was further damaged. The police used tear gas to disperse the crowds. Christmas Eve services passed off without incident on 6th January after heavy security was put in place around churches. (AFP, AP, Guardian, Middle East Concern)

PRAY... for all who have been bereaved, injured or traumatised by this attack and pray that the Egyptian government will take effective action to protect Christians.

Governor assassinated after speaking out on blasphemy Laws in Pakistan

The governor of Pakistan's Punjab province, Salman Taseer, was shot dead on 4 January by one of his own guards, Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri.



Governor Taseer was shot while leaving his car near a shopping centre in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The killer was taken into custody by the police and said that he killed the governor because of his views on Islamic blasphemy laws and because he had visited Christian woman, Asia Bibi, an alleged blasphemer, in jail and declared her innocent.

Governor Taseer visited Asia Bibi on 20 November (see picture) and had been outspoken on the blasphemy laws, which he called "black laws". Islamic religious groups had condemned Taseer and demanded his immediate removal as governor.

Asia Bibi has been held in solitary confinement for the past month because of threats against her, but there are renewed fears for her life in the aftermath of the governor's assassination.

(Guardian, Minorities Concern of Pakistan)

PRAY... for the protection of Asia Bibi (in jail) and her family (in hiding) and pray that the government of Pakistan will rule with righteousness and justice.

Mass arrest of Christians in Iran during Christmas



In the early hours of 26 December 2010, the Iranian government arrested 25 Christians in Tehran and other cities. The Governor General of Tehran Province, Morteza Tamadon (pictured), in a statement on 4 January, spoke of the "corrupting" influence of evangelical Christians and warned that further arrests are imminent.

The Christians who were arrested are believers from a Muslim background. Unconfirmed reports claim that over 50 more Christians were arrested.

Armed, plain-clothes, special security officers forcefully entered the homes of Christians while they were asleep, and verbally and physically abused them. They were handcuffed and taken for interrogation. Among those arrested were a number of single young women and five married couples. One couple was separated from their two-year old child, and another couple was forced to leave their breastfeeding baby.

After many hours of interrogation, eleven of the detained were released after signing statements that they would no longer participate in Christian activities. The other fourteen are still in prison: there has been no contact from eight of them, but six have been able to make very short calls to their families. No charges have been made, although it is clear that all were arrested for their active Christian faith. (*Elam, Middle East Concern*)

PRAY... that those detained will know the presence and peace of Jesus in their cells, and be released soon and that Christians throughout Iran will not be intimidated by these events.

Indian pastor survives murder attempt by Hindu extremists

Pastor Samuel Isaac narrowly survived a murder attempt on 2 January. He was attacked with an axe while leading a prayer service for Christians from a nomadic community in Davanagere, in the southern state of Karnataka. The attack took place in front of his wife and two sons. The attacker, named Basavaraju, objected to the pastor's presence among the nomads and alleged that he was out to make them Christians. The pastor told Basavaraju that the nomads had invited him to pray with them.

The blade missed his head but Pastor Isaac received serious neck injuries. He was taken to hospital where doctors closed the wound with twelve stitches. The attacker was arrested by police.

Two Christian preachers (named Babu and Krishna), assistants to Pastor Isaac, were arrested by police while visiting the hospital and questioned. They were then formally accused of "Promoting enmity between different groups on the basis of religion." Sajan K. George, chairman of the Global Council of Indian Christians said, "The extremists first disrupted a religious service, they beat the pastor and the faithful, threatened them with the worst consequences, and finally managed to have them arrested. This is a black mark on our secular democracy." (*Asia News, Global Council of Indian Christians, The Hindu*)



PRAY... that Pastor Isaac will fully recover from his injuries and that the false charges against Babu and Krishna will be dropped.



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