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'Anti-Christian campaign in India'

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Concern over a growing campaign of violence

Church leaders in India have raised concerns after a spate of attacks against the community over the past week.

They said it pointed to a growing hate campaign against the Christian minority which the government had done little to prevent.

A Roman Catholic priest was beaten to death in northern India earlier this week.

It was followed by a series of bombings in churches across southern India on Thursday.

The blasts took place in four churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and the coastal resort of Goa.

Terror campaign

Church leaders from across the country said the attacks were planned and suggested they were carried out by Hindu fundamentalist organisations.

"A secular, democratic and united India is being put to test today by communal and fundamental forces," said Delhi's Archbishop, Alan de Lastic.

"We are intrigued by the response of those in power and

“
A secular, democratic
and united India is being
put to test
”Archbishop Alan de
Lastic

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▶ The BBC's Satish Jacob in Delhi
"The Christian community in the country has been traumatised"
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saddened at the silence of the government," the archbishop said.

Church leaders said their community had never been targeted before and that the attacks had taken place only in the past two years - ever since the Hindu nationalist BJP came to power.



Alan de Lastic: The government is silent

Denial

But BJP leaders refuted the allegations with one suggesting that neighbouring Pakistan's spy agency - the ISI - was behind the attacks.

"Since we came to power there has been a campaign to denigrate us," said BJP spokesman Venkaiah Naidu.

The BBC's Satish Jacob said blaming the ISI was a new theory put forward by the BJP which had, until now, blamed such attacks on criminals.

In the worst case of anti-Christian violence, an Australian missionary was burnt to death along with his two sons in January 1999.

The attack - and several others that followed - were blamed on Hindu fundamentalists who opposed what they said was a campaign by the missionaries to convert low-caste Hindus to Christianity.

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