

India tells Vatican it is capable of handling Orissa situation

India has told the Vatican that while it strongly condemned the recent attacks on Christians and other religious groups in Orissa, as a 'flourishing democracy' it was totally capable of dealing with the situation and restoring 'law and order' in the trouble-torn state.

This was conveyed by senior officials of the Indian foreign ministry to the representative of the Holy See in New Delhi, Arch Bishop Pedro Lopez Quintana.

Arch Bishop Quintana and others from the Holy See mission in [New Delhi](#) met Indian officials last week after the Vatican issued a statement expressing concern over the attacks on Christians and others as a 'sin against God and humanity.'

But keeping up the pressure on India, the Italian foreign ministry on Monday called the Indian ambassador in Rome Arif S. Khan to its headquarters to express its 'deep concern and sensitivity' on the recent attacks on Christians in Orissa.

India, however, did not respond to the Italian decision and even refrained from issuing a formal statement about the meeting.

Sources said one reason why South Block had not summoned the Italian representative is because Rome's envoy here, Roberto Toscano, has not yet presented his credentials.

'In the course of their meeting Ambassador Massolo expressed the Italian government's deep concern and sensitivity regarding the recurrent episodes of inter-religious violence in the Indian state of Orissa resulting in numerous Christian, among other, victims within the context of the critical situation developing in that region,' a statement put out by the Italian foreign ministry in its website Tuesday said.

It added, 'The Secretary General was hopeful that the firm measures already adopted by the Indian authorities - fully illustrated by Ambassador Khan - are successful in quelling the violence and reinstating dialogue and mutual respect between the various segments of Indian society.'

The decision to convene the meeting with the Indian ambassador was taken at a cabinet meeting of the Italian government presided by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi last week.

The statement pointed out that Italy appreciates, 'the well-established practices of peaceful co-existence that have marked India's modern democracy and, under these dramatic circumstances, confirmed Italy and India's deep friendship and broad-based pro-active collaboration as two nations founded on the values of pluralism and respect for fundamental human rights, particularly that of religious freedom.'

Though the foreign ministry statement on the meeting was cautious, the Italian government has made it clear that it would ask France, which has the current chair of the European Union, to raise the issue of attacks on Christians in India at the forthcoming summit between the two sides in Marseilles later this month.

In its statement on Aug 26 the Vatican had condemned the attacks and described them as 'an

affront to dignity, people's freedom and endanger peaceful coexistence.'

The Vatican spokesman had also condemned the death of Hindu religious leader Swami Lakhmananda Saraswati whose killing had sparked off a series of attacks on the local Christian community.

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