

# A WORLD IN MOTION

ISSUE 168 | 30 MARCH 2017

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The Westminster attack is the latest in a string of low-tech, high impact acts of terror in prominent locations around the world.

## P2 | INDIA

India's ruling party swept to victory in key local elections, further extending their influence and emboldening Hindu fundamentalists.

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An Israeli airstrike on a Hezbollah convoy deep within Syrian territory has led to threats of counter strikes by Syria against Israel.

## P4 | EVENTS

Business as Mission (BAM) one-day seminars are being held in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in May.



### THE NUMBERS: WESTMINSTER ATTACK



**22 March 2017**  
The date of the attack



**86 seconds**  
The duration of the attack



**7 July 2005**  
The date of the last terrorist attack (London bombings) on the British mainland to cause multiple casualties



**3,500**  
The number of witnesses interviewed by 25 March, in related enquiries

## TERROR ATTACK AT WESTMINSTER, LONDON



By *Cherolyn Amery*

The mother of Westminster attacker Khalid Masood has said she is "shocked, saddened and numbed" by his actions. Janet Ajao said she had "shed many tears for the people caught up in this horrendous incident". Masood killed three people when he drove a car into pedestrians last Wednesday [22 March]. He then fatally stabbed a police officer before being shot dead. Meanwhile, police say no evidence has been found of links between Masood and so-called Islamic State or al-Qaeda. (*BBC News*)

### Unknown motivations

Determining the timeline of the 86-second attack near London's parliament buildings has been far easier for investigators than reaching any definite conclusions about the motivations involved.

Masood was born as Adrian Elms, and while he had multiple criminal convictions (for violence, assault and public order offenses), he was not being monitored as a terror threat. It is unknown when exactly he converted to Islam, but he married a Pakistani-heritage Muslim woman in 2004, and he worked in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia as an English teacher in 2005-6 and in 2008-9. In March 2015, he visited Saudi Arabia again for a few days. British Prime Minister Theresa May told Parliament that he was "once investigated in relation to concerns about violent extremism", but the investigation was "some years ago" and Masood was a "peripheral figure".

Investigations into the recent attack are ongoing, but Deputy Assistant Police Commissioner Neil Basu said that "we must all accept there is a possibility we will never understand why he did this." While the Islamic State group claimed 'responsibility' for the attack, it is highly unlikely that Masood was directly connected to them; he may have been inspired

by the extremists, but there has been no evidence that he communicated with the group.

### 'New' mode of attack

The Westminster attack is the latest in a string of incidents that have made use of vehicles as weapons. In July 2016, a terrorist drove a truck into a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice and 86 were killed; in December 2016, a man did the same thing in a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12. In October 2014, an extremist killed a soldier and injured another person with a car at a strip mall in Quebec, and in November 2016, a young man (reportedly inspired by the Islamic State) injured 13 people with a car and then a knife at Ohio State University.

According to analysts, these attacks (especially those in Nice, Berlin and now London) form "an emerging model of strikes involving simple, everyday instruments but carried out in locations sure to draw global attention" (*Washington Post*). Frank Foley, a terrorism scholar at King's College London, says that "terrorists rely on a lot of people watching – [this] can be even better than having a lot of people dead" and that because the recent Westminster attack was on a "very prominent target", it immediately "flooded the media".

In 2010, Al-Qaeda's Yemeni branch promoted the use of trucks as weapons, and in 2014, the Islamic State posted a video message that called for supporters to make use of various 'simple' means to attack "the disbelieving American, Frenchman, or any of their allies", including rocks, knives, poison and cars. In November 2016, the Islamic State posted an online guide to vehicular attacks and suggested prominent targets like the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade in New York. The guide stated the following: "Vehicles are like knives, as they are extremely easy to acquire. But unlike knives which if found in one's possession can be a cause for suspicion, vehicles arouse absolutely no doubts due to their widespread use throughout the world."

### FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the aftermath of the Westminster attack, certain things occurred that fit the 'pattern' of what happens after such happenings in the Western world: world

# NEWS HEADLINES



Police detained hundreds of protesters across **Russia** on 26 March, including opposition leader Alexei Navalny, after thousands took to the streets to demonstrate against corruption and demand the resignation of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The protests, reckoned to be the biggest since a wave of anti-Kremlin demonstrations in 2011/2012, come a year before a presidential election that Vladimir Putin is expected to contest, running for what would be a fourth term.



**West African** forces freed 5,000 people being held in villages by Boko Haram, in an operation that killed more than 60 fighters and destroyed the Islamist group's hideout along the Nigeria-Cameroon border, a Cameroon official said.



EU leaders lined up to congratulate **Dutch** Prime Minister Mark Rutte on beating far-rightist Geert Wilders in the first of a series of European elections this year in which populist insurgent parties are hoping to rock the establishment. The centre-right prime minister had trailed in opinion polls for much of the campaign but emerged the clear victor of the 15 March election, albeit with fewer seats than before.

leaders condemned the attack and offered support to Britain, vigils were held, outrage and solidarity was expressed on social media, and Muslim leaders stated that the attack did not have anything to do with 'true Islam'. In this regularly repeated pattern, what kind of Christian response might make a difference?

Colin Chapman, author of "*Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenges of Islam*", wrote in an article for *Jubilee Centre* about the important role that Christians have to play as peacemakers and bridgebuilders: "One of the major problems in Western democracies is that since the link between religion and state has either been totally severed or become almost meaningless, Western governments find themselves at a loss in dealing with Muslims and Islam. Secular politicians can take strong measures to safeguard the rights of every community and to protect their countries from terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. But they simply don't have the world-view or the language to enable them to engage in a meaningful dialogue with Muslims who want to bring God into the public sphere."

Chapman also encourages believers to recognise important political issues that might need as much

critical attention as theological ones: "It is vital that we continue to ask the question 'Why? What are the reasons for the anger of Muslims, and do they have good reason to be angry?'"

After the 2013 Boston bombings and the 2015 Paris attacks, US pastor and author Ed Stetzer wrote some advice that is once again relevant after the Westminster attack in terms of a meaningful Christian response (condensed here): "Too many people make decisions about a group based on what they see on television news – and that's a bad place to make sweeping conclusions... Perhaps a better idea is to meet them [Muslims], learn about them and treat them as your neighbour... Times like these are filled with emotion, and that is normal. But let's make sure that our response is more tempered by the fruit of the Spirit than online rhetoric. Don't get caught up in debates and anger. This is a horrible [event], but our story is bigger than this and it ends in hope."

**PRAY > For Western leaders as they wrestle with how to deal with God in the public sphere, thus addressing spiritual concerns of their constituents > For believers to be the peacemakers and bridge-builders that Christ envisages for this broken world**

## SIGNIFICANT LOCAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA



By **Donnelly McClelland**

**N**arendra Modi's party won a landslide victory [on 11 March] in one of India's key states, a boost for the prime minister halfway through his first term. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took control of northern Uttar Pradesh state - India's most populous - with the biggest majority there since 1980. The result will strengthen the BJP in the upper house of India's parliament, where its reform efforts have been hampered by the lack of a majority. Mr Modi has been central to his party's election strategy. He campaigned aggressively on a promise to bring growth and modernisation, and to root out corruption. (*BBC News*)

### **Significance of these elections**

Many mainstream Western newspapers have written on the significance of upcoming elections in Europe this year, but not much has been said about elections in India. They may only be local elections, but they carry great significance. Firstly, the northern state of Uttar Pradesh is the country's most populous at 210 million people – if it were a country, it would rank as the world's fifth largest, more populous than Brazil. Secondly, the extent of the BJP's victory was not even remotely imagined by political analysts, polls or mainstream media. Thirdly, most see it as very much a personal victory for Prime Minister Modi, due to his aggressive campaigning on behalf of his party, and despite his much-debated, controversial demonetisation process late last year.

### **Emboldened Hindu fundamentalists**

Prime Minister Modi is a lifelong member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist and political pressure group founded in 1925. The backing of RSS members was crucial in helping his BJP party win the 2014 election. Since then, emboldened by the result, Mr Modi's most extreme nationalist supporters have routinely taken to the streets, using violence and intimidation to press their claim for a purely Hindu India. Muslims have reportedly been forced to convert to Hinduism, homes have been burnt down and people have even been murdered for allegedly consuming beef (cows having special status in the Hindu faith). Hindu nationalists have also been rewriting school textbooks in some states and holding training camps for teenage boys and girls in an apparent attempt to inculcate children into their cause.

Hindu filmmaker and journalist Mandakini Gahlot has been tracking the activities of most radical Hindu groups for several years and came to the following conclusion: "The last 18 months has brought ever more unreasonable, intolerant and sometimes violent displays of aggression towards anyone deemed to be diverting from their vision of a pure 'Hindustan'."

In theory, India is the world's most populous secular democracy. Their constitution is supposed to guarantee minority groups the freedom to practise their religion without fear. But, according to Ms Gahlot: "Today there are worrying signs everywhere suggesting that the intrinsic right to freedom of expression and affiliation is under threat. Prime Minister Modi's silence on the subject appears all the more ominous."

### **The BJP's religious freedom track record**

Although India's constitution prohibits religious discrimination and is supposed to emphasise legal equality of its citizens, there are now laws restricting these freedoms. In at least six of the 29 states, there

## NEWS HEADLINES



Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president overthrown in 2011 and the first leader to face trial after the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the region, was freed on 24 March, after six years in detention. The 88-year-old was cleared of the final murder charges against him, after facing trial in a litany of cases ranging from corruption to the killing of protesters whose 18-day revolt stunned the world and ended his 30-year rule.



Russia appears to have deployed special forces to an airbase in western Egypt near the border with Libya in recent days, US, Egyptian and diplomatic sources say, a move that would add to US concerns about Moscow's deepening role in Libya.



Pakistan has begun building a fence along its disputed 2,500 km (1,500 mile) border with Afghanistan to prevent incursions by militants, in a move likely to further strain relations between the two countries. Pakistan has blamed Pakistani Taliban militants it says are based on Afghan soil, for a spate of attacks at home in recent months.

are laws forbidding “forceful conversions”, and other states are also currently contemplating implementing similar laws. Hindu nationalists (which include the current ruling BJP) oppose the conversions of any Hindus to other religions.

The ruling BJP recently expressed concern over the rapid rise of Christianity in two states in India, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. *The Hindustan Times* published an article that claims that the Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh has risen from less than 1% in 1971 to more than 30% in 2011, while Manipur saw a rise from 19% in 1961 to more than 41% in 2011. Union minister Kiren Rijiju sparked much controversy with his recent comments when he claimed that the growing numbers of Christians in his home state of Arunachal Pradesh were as a result of conversions. He went on to say: “Hindu population is reducing in India because Hindus never convert people.”

There are no official reasons postulated for this rapid growth in the Christian population, but conversion is a possibility, though migration from elsewhere in India has also been considered as a contributory factor.

### FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Based on the 2011 census, Christianity is India's third-largest religion (after Hinduism - 79.8% and Islam - 14.28%) with approximately 27.8 million followers, constituting 2.3% of India's population. Christians are found across India, with major populations in parts of southern India, the Konkan coast and north-eastern India. The Church in India runs thousands of educational institutions and hospitals, which have contributed greatly to the development of the nation.

*Compassion International* is an international organisation that channels about \$45 million into the country every year, with all contributions passing through local churches. On 15 March this year, they were ordered by the Indian government to shut down their operation, which includes 589 centres serving 145,000 children. The government's actions can be traced back to 2011 when it changed its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act so that it could regulate NGOs it may not agree with philosophically. The move has been seen by many as another step towards Hindu nationalism. A stronger Mr Modi (and his ruling BJP), after these most recent local elections, could lead to further restrictions on the Church in India.

But a heartening outcome of *Compassion International's* closure is that about 40% of the churches who had been partnering with the organisation are still working with the children, despite the disappearance of the funding. CEO Santiago “Jimmy” Mellado says: “The local church is not going away. They were there before us; they’ll be there after us.”

Based on a report by the *Evangelical Fellowship of India*, Christianity is seeing a significant upward trend despite growing incidences of persecution. There were 147 registered cases in 2014, 177 in 2015 and 134 in the first six months of 2016. India is now number 15 on Open Doors’ list of countries where it’s hardest to be a Christian, up from number 31 in 2013.

**PRAY > For Indian leaders to uphold their constitution that grants freedom of religion and belief > For the Church in India to stand strong and firm amidst growing opposition, and to respond in love**

## STRAINED ISRAEL-SYRIA RELATIONS



By Andrew Richards

The Syrian leadership has sent messages to Israel warning that any further strikes by the IDF on targets within Syria's borders would be met with Scud rockets fired deep into the Jewish state, the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Diyar* reported Saturday. The report warned that Syria has over 800 Scud missiles and that Syria would not issue any warnings before the missile strikes because Israel does not warn before it hits. Israeli jets were reported to have carried out airstrikes near the Syrian capital of Damascus, hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to continue hitting weapons convoys and rebuffed claims Russia had ordered the strikes halted. (*Times of Israel*)

### Israel targets Hezbollah convoys

Syria's warning came after the Israeli air force carried out an airstrike inside Syria, on what Israeli intelligence say was a strike on a Hezbollah weapons

convoy. Attacks by Israel on Hezbollah convoys, especially targeted strikes on members of its leadership, are common, and have been going on for years without any international interference. Syria's reaction, however, to the latest Israeli incursion into sovereign Syrian territory, is cause for concern. Syria's ambassador to the UN, Bashar al-Jaafari, said Syria's response was a “game change” and that “Syria's forceful response to the Israeli attacks changed the rules of the game.”

Comments by Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Liberman, shows that Israel is not wanting to play games when it comes to its survival in the region. He responded to the use of Syrian air defence systems against Israeli aircraft saying: “The next time the Syrians use their air defence systems against our planes we will destroy them without the slightest hesitation.”

Antagonism with Israel is nothing new to the region, but the “diplomatic” handling of the latest incident could impact them dramatically. After Liberman responded to Syrian threats of Scud missiles, President Assad called on Moscow to intervene on their behalf, with Russia calling the Israeli ambassador to explain their country's actions. With Syria asking Russia to intervene, even via diplomatic channels, it would seem as if Russian support for the Syrian regime has somehow emboldened Mr Assad to stand up against Israel.

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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[www.incontextinternational.org](http://www.incontextinternational.org)

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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## External role-players

It's no secret that without Russian support, the Syrian regime of Mr Assad would have fallen long ago. But because of its support, Syria has been able to win strategic battles against the American-backed rebels and counter the advance of the Islamic State. What has also become clearer as the war in Syria marked six years on 15 March, is that the war has in many ways become a proxy war between Russia and the United States.

The same can be said of Iran and Israel when it comes to Hezbollah. From the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, Iran has supported the Assad regime in fighting rebel factions, by deploying Iranian Revolutionary Guard fighters that has given the Syrian army much needed expertise and superior fighting capabilities. Iran's involvement in Syria tells of its close relationship with the ruling Assad family who are also Shia Muslims. Israel has signalled repeatedly that it would not allow Iran to establish a permanent presence in Syria, nor permit Hezbollah to obtain game-changing weapons, such as advanced air-defence systems, anti-ship missiles and long-range guided missiles.

The Assad regime and its continued existence is also key to Iran's future ambition to one day make use of Syria's border with the Mediterranean Sea, to build a naval base there – something that will dramatically increase its ability to attack Israel.

For strategic reasons, in the same way as Iran, Russia will continue to uphold the Assad regime in exchange for the use of its naval base in Tartus.

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The current rhetoric and sabre-rattling between Israel and Syria, within the context of an already deeply complex war, increases the chances for a miscalculation that could result in a widening of the

conflict. However, since Syria's forces are currently already thinly spread due to fighting on multiple fronts (various rebel groups and the Islamic State) and their ally, Russia, is also heavily committed in both Syria and East Ukraine, open conflict with Israel seems unlikely.

Yet, it is at times like this that restraint is necessary. This is where Israel's key ally, the US, can play a strategic role. The US has in recent times reiterated their unwavering support for Israel (which had been waning under the previous Obama administration) and would most likely play a prominent role should the conflict escalate beyond words. Evangelical Christians make up the biggest pro-Israel bloc in the US. A *Bloomberg* poll revealed that almost 60% of evangelicals say the US should support Israel even if its interests diverge with American interests. There are tens of millions of American evangelicals, with a range of views, but at the core they are still solidly on the side of Israel.

This is not only true for Evangelical Christians in America, but many across the world. The challenge for all Christians is to maintain their support for Israel, offering a formidable opposition, while praying and striving for peace in the region. It is here where believers in the US can lead the way, since they regularly engage with their government representatives on issues concerning Israel and should offer clear, balanced and well-informed arguments, rather than emotionally-driven ones.

**PRAY > For the leadership of Israel and Syria to exhibit restraint > For the other key role-players to make a constructive contribution towards de-escalating the tension > For believers around the world to pray fervently for peace in the region and to be well-informed and balanced 'voices'**

## UPCOMING EVENTS



### **BUSINESS AS MISSION (BAM)**

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**PORT ELIZABETH**  
Friday 12 May

Registration Fee – R300.00 per person

Closing date for registration: Monday 24 April 2017

If you have any questions about these seminars, please contact Gustav ([gustav@incontextministries.org](mailto:gustav@incontextministries.org)). To register, please [CLICK HERE](#).