THUGS, POLICE AT CALCUTTA CHURCH ELECTIONS

Posted on November 10, 2013 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

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KOLKATA, India, Nov. 10, 2013--The age-old Armenian community of Kolkata (Calcutta) gathered today behind the closed doors of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth to elect a new committee that would manage the assets of the church which runs into millions of dollars.

Every four years the community meets at a general meeting to elect a committee that would manage the affairs of the community. This year's election was remarkable as some Armenians were left behind the closed gates of the church.

"At about 10 am we arrived at the church and found the gates locked. We were denied entry," said Anthranick Khachatourian, one of the Armenians kept out of the meeting. Khachatourian is a Kolkata-born Armenian who was baptized at the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth. He is currently involved with NGOs in Kolkata and Jharkand.

"What is going on here is genocide without the killing," said Khachatourian. "It is a well-concieved plan to wipe out our community. They have shut down the Davidian Girls School in the name of repairs and the doors of our Armenian clubs are always closed. The church seems to have money for the Hindus, the Anglo-Indians and the Buddhists, while the local poor Armenians are left neglected," said Khachatourian, who said he wasn't allowed entry because the committee knew he would expose them.

"At about 10:30 am, thirty minutes before the general meeting a truck full of some 40 young thugs arrived at the scene and threatened to beat us up," said Max Khachadourian, Anthranick's father who was also left out of the meeting. He said the thugs had said that the church authorities had called them to the scene and promised them refreshments for their services. There was also a big contingent of police force called at the scene. "Why did the church authorities have to bring around 50 policemen and policewomen against three Armenians? Were we such a danger to them?" questioned Max, who said the police had told them that they had orders to arrest them, if they tried getting in.

Margaret Sarkies-Keller was also not allowed to the meeting. She said she was informed that she did not have the right to be present at the meeting and to vote. "I am a full-blooded Armenian and my father Charles (Chacha) Sarkies served this church for 30 years until his death in 2011. I was baptized in this very church and they won't let me in," said Sarkies-Keller who is an Australian citizen but has a Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card. She also alleged that she had received threats from the thugs called by the church committee.

"They did not offer appropriate care to my father when he was sick," said a tearful Sarkies-Keller. "He was totally neglected and died with bed-sores all over his body. I will never forgive them," she said and added that she wanted to restore dignity and respect in the community.

Calling the elections null and void, Sonia John, the former chairperson of the church, expressed her dissatisfaction about the state of affairs. “People like the clergy and the Armenian teachers who were not entitled to vote had been brought in to ensure that they win,” said Sonia John, who was not allowed entry to the previous general body meeting in 2009 on the grounds that she wasn’t Armenian. The wardens had brought a case against her regarding her Armenian identity in the Calcutta High Court which she won. That is why she wasn’t stopped from taking part this year.

The three Armenians have filed a complaint at the local police station and have no intention of letting the matter go.

“We are going to stay and fight these people. We need to make sure our community is looked after and taken care off. All the money left by the benevolent Armenians are for the local Armenians. We want to make sure they get what is rightfully theirs. What is happening now is disgraceful and an insult to the rich legacy our forefathers left behind in this country. We may have lost this battle today, but the war to revive our community is still on," said Khachatourian.

By late Sunday, Nov. 10, the Armenian church committee could not be contacted regarding the above allegations.