

Like the SCV, the Klan uses the flag to represent "heritage, not hate," said Berry, whose group was started by Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Unlike the SCV, non-whites are not allowed in the Klan. The two groups have no connection, Berry said. But the Klan, which says it believes first in the U.S. Constitution, says the SCV ought to be able to display the Confederate flag.

"If it isn't OK to fly the Confederate flag in the U.S., why is it OK for blacks to fly the African flag?" Berry said. "We would defend the right of the SCV to fly its flag. Nobody should be able to take that right away."

CHRISTIAN VILLAGE BURNED BY HINDUS—WAVE OF SECULAR VIOLENCE GOES BACK TO CHRISTMAS DAY

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I was very distressed to see an article in the March 19 issue of the New York Times reporting that in the village of Ranaloi in India, a mob chanting "Victory to Lord Ram" burned down 157 of 250 homes of Christians. I thank my good friend Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh for calling my attention to this atrocity, which unfortunately is not an isolated incident but part of a wave of anti-Christian violence that began on Christmas Day.

Since Christmas, several Christian churches, prayer halls, and religious missions were destroyed by Hindu extremists affiliated with the Bajrang Dal, a part of the VHP, a militant Hindu organization that belongs to the same family of organizations as the ruling BJP. The VHP also praised the Hindus who raped four nuns, calling them "patriotic youth" and denouncing the nuns as "antinational elements." In January a missionary and his two very young sons were burned to death in their jeep by a gang of Hindus chanting "Victory to Hannuman," then another nun was raped. In early February the bodies of two more Christians have been found in the state of Orissa. At least four priests have been murdered. In 1997, police broke up a Christian religious festival with gunfire. A country that engages in such practices should be declared a religious oppressor and perhaps a terrorist state.

This latest incident took place during the period of Lent, leading up to Easter. With Easter coming in April, followed soon after by the 300th anniversary of the Sikh Nation, we may now have the best opportunity to raise the consciousness of the world to the religious tyranny that exists just under the veneer of Indian democracy.

Although India has democratic elections, for Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalits, and so many others, there is no democracy. No matter who they elect, the result is more killing and more oppression. Is this true democracy? As I have said before, this is not democracy, it is merely the opportunity to choose one's oppressors.

The only solution is freedom for all the people of South Asia. As the world's only superpower and the beacon of freedom for the world, the United States must do whatever it can to extend the blessings of liberty to all

people living under tyrannical, intolerant leaders, even if they claim to be democratic. We should stop funding this repressive government with American aid, impose economic sanctions as we did against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and go on record urging India to allow a plebiscite—a free, democratic vote—in Punjab, Khalistan, in Kashmir, in Christian Nagaland, and throughout their polyglot state to decide the future political status of these regions. This is the only way to end the genocide, settle the differences, and finally bring lasting peace to this troubled tinderbox known as South Asia.

Freedom is not only America's founding principle, it is our mission. Let us carry that mission to the deserving peoples and nations of the subcontinent. We look forward to the day when the glow of freedom shines on all the people of South Asia and the world.

[From The New York Times, Mar. 19, 1999]

157 HOMES BURNED IN RELIGIOUS CLASH IN INDIA

(By Celia W. Dugger)

BHUBANESWAR, INDIA, MARCH 18.—Less than two months after a Hindu mob killed a Christian missionary from Australia and his two young sons here in the eastern state of Orissa, Hindus and Christians clashed in a village this week, and 157 of the 250 Christian homes were burned down, state officials say.

The officials said they presumed that Hindus set the fires on Tuesday, but have no solid evidence. Christian villagers interviewed by television reporters blamed Hindus, who they said shouted "Victory to Lord Ram," a Hindu god, as they set the fires. Thirteen people were wounded, three by gunfire, and the police have arrested more than 40 people, officials said.

The tensions in the village—Ranaloi, in southern Orissa—developed after someone painted a trident, symbol of the Hindu god Shiva, over a Christian cross on a boulder about a mile outside the village.

The violence is part of a growing number of attacks on Christians in India in the last year. Church officials and opposition political parties say the problem has worsened since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party became the head of a national coalition Government a year ago. Party leaders say they oppose the violence.

It is not clear who was responsible for the violence in Orissa, which is governed by the Congress Party. The state's Chief Minister, J.B. Patnaik, resigned after the killing of the missionary, Graham Staines, and his sons, Timothy, 10, and Philip, 6.

D.P. Wadhwa, the Indian Supreme Court Justice who was named by the Government to head an inquiry into the Staines killings, harshly criticized the central Government for failing to provide resources to investigate. The commission of inquiry, which was set up six weeks ago, is due to issue its findings in two weeks but has yet to field a team of independent investigators or to be given functional offices to work from.

The state police blamed a mob that they said was led by a man from the Bajrang Dal, a Hindu nationalist youth group that belongs to the same family of Hindu nationalist organizations as the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Leaders of the Bajrang Dal denied involvement, and said the violence was a backlash against what they called the Christians' deceitful efforts to convert impoverished, illiterate Indians.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1214—DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VETERANS' CLAIMS ADJUDICATION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, for years our Nation's veterans who submitted a claim to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for benefits associated with their military service, particularly service-connected disability compensation, have been forced to contend with a VA claims adjudication process which has been both too slow and too inaccurate. Too often the adjudication of a veterans' claim has taken not days, not weeks, not months, but years.

Recent information suggests that after waiting years for a decision, one out of three veterans may find that the decision made by VA was wrong. Untimely and inaccurate decision-making by the VA, and particularly the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), have been twin problems which have plagued veterans, veterans service organizations and Members of Congress who have sought to assist their veterans constituents.

While experience clearly indicated otherwise, VBA consistently reported that the quality of its work was nearly error free as measured by VBA. Between 1993 and 1997, VA was reporting an accuracy rate of 97%. This was unfortunately like the fox not only guarding the hen house, but also keeping the inventory of hens.

To his credit, the Under Secretary of Veterans Benefits, Mr. Joe Thompson instituted, on a trial basis, a new system for measuring the quality of the claims adjudication work performed by VBA. This new quality measure, the Strategic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) was tested and used operationally in 1998.

STAR use has been focused on claims submitted by veterans which require the VA to rate the claim, make a determination as to whether a medical disability is service-connected or non-service-connected and determine the degree of disability manifest. Using the STAR methodology, the accuracy of various actions taken during the adjudication process are used to determine if the case was correctly or incorrectly decided. A case is either all right or all wrong. Using STAR, the accuracy rate was 64%—less than two out of three claims were correctly decided.

While STAR has provided a more realistic assessment of the quality of VA claims adjudication, STAR does not currently meet generally accepted governmental standards for independence and separation of duties. Reviews of regional office decisions are made by persons who are also decision makers. There is not sufficient staff provided for reviewing enough cases to make statistically valid accuracy determinations at the regional office level. In order to pinpoint errors, it is important to be able to identify regional offices which have specific high or low accuracy rates and to ascertain the reasons for discrepancies between regional offices.

In addition to the problems documented by the STAR report, VBA is facing the impending