

# Indian Baptist church worker arrested for ‘magical healing’

December 6, 2024

Assam state police arrested a Baptist church worker Nov. 22 on charges of violating a new law intended to curb “magical healing.” The arrest came after he prayed for villagers in the northeastern India state.

Pranjal Bhuyan, was arrested and remanded to judicial custody for 14 days for violating the Assam Magical Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Act, 2024, and attempting to convert people to Christianity, the *Union of Catholic Asian News* reported.

International Christian Concern reported, “locals grew concerned that Pastor Bhuyan had been preaching the Bible to children during sessions, so they prevented their children from going to his house for studies,” a few months ago.

Those parents “filed a complaint with the village police, and Pastor Bhuyan was detained under the Assam Magical Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Act.”

Bhuyan is the first person to be arrested since the act came into effect, ICC noted.

## History of the bill

On Feb. 26, the Legislative Assembly of Assam passed the [Assam Healing \(Prevention of Evil\) Practices Bill](#), 2024. The bill’s preamble states its aim is to “bring social awakening in the society and to create healthy, science-based knowledge and safe social environment to protect human health against evil and sinister practices,”

Additionally, it aims to “eradicate non-scientific healing practices with ulterior motives for exploiting the innocent people.”

However, [\*The Hindu\*](#) news outlet reported the bill was introduced by the “Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika on behalf of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who had earlier said it was needed to ban magical healing practices with the explicit goal of curbing evangelism.”

The Assam Christian Forum, an interdenominational Christian body, strongly countered the chief minister’s “misguided and misleading” statement that magical healing equals proselytization when the bill was introduced.

“Healing in our context is not synonymous with proselytization. It is a compassionate response to human suffering, irrespective of religious affiliation,” the Assam Christian Forum chief said, according to *The Hindu*.

Despite opposition from Christian groups, the governor of Assam [assented](#) to the legislation March 15.

The Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi runs the state government.

“The BJP and its supporters oppose Christian missionary work, considering it a challenge to their aim of establishing Hindu hegemony in India,” according to *UCA News*.

## **Prayers for peace amid rising attacks**

On March 15, the same day the governor assented to the anti-magical healing act, an interdenominational prayer gathering was held to “unite people from diverse backgrounds under the common goal of fostering peace and harmony,” *Matters India* reported.

More than 25,000 Christians representing various denominations and from different ethnic and linguistic communities gathered at Udalguri town in Assam and prayed for 90 minutes.

“Troubles began for the Assam Christians in early February when a Hindu group gave Christian schools in Assam an ultimatum to remove from them Christian symbols including religious habits and cassocks.

“Addressing a press conference on Feb. 7, Satya Ranjan Borah, president of the Kutumba Surakshya Parishad (family protection council) threatened dire consequences for Christian schools that defied their 15-day ultimatum.

“After the deadline ended, threatening posters began to appear in front of Christian educational institutions,” the *Matters India* report said.

ICC noted, “The Assam Christian Forum chief and the Archbishop of Assam have strongly condemned the ‘wrongful arrest’ (of Bhuyan).

“The leaders have unequivocally said that the law’s cognizable and non-bailable offenses grant police the broad authority to arrest and detain anyone without due process, compromising citizens’ rights, even to go to their own relative’s house for prayer.”

Under Section 6(a) of the prevention of magical healing legislation, a person convicted of violating the provisions of the act may be punished with imprisonment for up to one year for a first offense—which can extend to three years—or with a fine of 50,000 rupees (about \$600) or both.

While Bhuyan is the first Christian yet to have been arrested under the Assam Magical Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Act, 2024, the Assam Christian Forum spokesman explained other Christians have been booked under false accusations under the older Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectional Advertisements Act), 1954.

Although in force since 1954, “no case was filed against Christians under this act until now,” he explained.

Bhuyan has been released after posting bail, but the serious charges brought against him must be contested in court. Once police register and submit cases on arrests made under either the 1954 act or the 2024 act, the cases are charged to the court and will begin.

Assam Christian Forum is involved in the cases and “standing with the victims, while helping them through the legal process,” a spokesman for the group explained.

Other reports classify Bhuyan as a pastor, but the Assam Christian Forum spokesman clarified by text that Bhuyan is a church worker serving as “Project Incharge” with the [Gologhat Baptist Church](#), one of the largest and oldest Baptist churches in Assam state, established in 1898.

In a release dated Nov. 28, Assam Christian Forum noted: “The Christian community in Assam has made significant contributions to nation-building, education, health, media, literature, social service, skill development and more. Despite this, they are being targeted for their faith.”

The release highlighted attacks on institutions, police investigations, false accusations and the Assam Magical Healing (Prevention of Evil) Act, 2024, as the areas of major concern for attacks against Christians in Assam state over the past year.

*UCA News* reports, “Christians comprise 3.74 percent of Assam’s 31 million people, above the national average of 2.3 percent.”