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Bangladesh to celebrate Christmas under tight security

by Sumon Corraya

Asia News (23.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3aEHf0T> - Dhaka Metropolitan Police announced that scores of agents will be deployed to protect churches. "No roadside vendors will be allowed near churches," said Dhaka's police commissioner. "Church goers will be searched with metal detectors and other security instruments before entering."



Dhaka (AsiaNews) – Bangladesh's small Christian community will celebrate Christmas under conditions of maximum security, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) announced.

Christian leaders met with police representatives at DMP headquarters (*pictured*) in Dhaka. "We have taken proper security measures for ahead Christmas and New Year celebrations," said DMP Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam during the meeting. "I

recommended more than one prayer or Mass be conducted at churches to follow COVID-19 health safety guidelines.”

In Dhaka, all the areas where Christians live will be under tight security, the commissioner explained. “We will keep fire and ambulance services ready during Christmas celebration near churches with many police officers deployed. No roadside vendors will be allowed near churches. Church goers will be searched with metal detectors and other security instruments before entering,” he explained.

Commissioner Islam also said that religious sites should follow government guidelines like social distancing and wearing masks in church, mosque or temple.

“I ask those in charge of every church to provide soap for hand washing or disinfectant. For security reasons, all bags are prohibited in churches.”

On 1 July 2016, an Islamist commando **attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery** in Gulshan, killing 29 people, including nine Italians.

After the incident, the government deployed police agents at Dhaka’s main churches. During Christmas celebrations, police will provide security to all Bangladeshi churches.

Nirmol Rozario, president of the Bangladesh Christian Association, was one of the Christian leaders present at yesterday’s meeting.

“We thank the government for providing security during Christmas to all the churches in the country,” he said. “We hope to be able to celebrate our main religious festivity peacefully.”

Bangladeshi Catholics attacked, church demolished

Assaults follow attempted land grab.

By Fabian Gomes

Church Militant (23.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/376Nasq> - Armed Muslim militants attacked Catholics in the village of Ichhachhara in northeastern Bangladesh earlier this month, wounding faithful and desecrating their church — smashing windows and destroying books and other religious items.

Sources tell Church Militant the assault stems from a Sept. 21 incident in which Muslim Rafiq Ali, using fake documents, illegally seized farmland from local Catholic Jospur Amlorong.

Amlorong reported the land grab to authorities, and on Nov. 9, police evicted Ali from the stolen parcel.

But that evening, after law enforcement had left Ichhachhara, Ali — an influential leader from the nearby village of Tatriuli — returned, backed by dozens of Muslim supporters, and launched his attack.

Now, the district's Christians are living in fear, worried their lives are at risk.

"Ali and his people forcibly entered my property and took possession of it," Amlorong told Church Militant. "They threatened my life. They told me to leave the land. It is my only piece of land."

Amlorong is a member of the mainly Christian Khasi tribe. Like most Khasis, his betel leaf garden is the sole source of income for his family.

"If I lost my land, I couldn't live," said Amlorong, who has been battling cancer for the past three years. "Without treatment, I will die."

"Being I am Christian, Ali thought I am weak, but I will not leave my land until I draw my last breath," he vowed.

Amlorong noted that Ali and his cohort damaged many betel leaf plants during their occupation. "I lost BDT 500000 (roughly \$6,000) when my land was grabbed by Rafiq," he explained.

Attacks on Christians condemned

Local priest Fr. Joseph Gomes, OMI, condemned the attack on Ichhachhara's Catholics and their church.

"We want our Catholics to live in peace in their village. Rafiq Ali is trying to grab our church members' land — it is condemnable work. We want justice in this incident," he said.

"It is very sad that in addition to the attempted land grab, Ali attacked a house of God. He must be punished," Gomes emphasized.

Flora Babbly Talang, general secretary of a local development organization, also condemned Ali's attack on Ichhachhara faithful and their church and demanded the immediate arrest of all who participated.

She explained:

I don't know where Rafiq Ali is getting power to do this ill work against Christians. Police should find out who is behind him, giving him power. To ensure justice and stop persecution of Khasi Christians, we need to know.

Whenever there is an incident of encroachment on an ancestral property of any indigenous community, the authorities have to act swiftly. Otherwise, land grabbers might take over thousands of other betel leaf gardens in indigenous villages in a similar fashion.

Christians are often targets of persecution in Muslim-majority Bangladesh. Just 0.3% of the country's 166 million people are followers of Christ.

New assaults on Ahmadi Muslims in Bangladesh and Pakistan

BY FOREF EUROPE, AARON RHODES



FOREF (18.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2ZHhDLd> - The Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe (FOREF) appeals to the governments and civil societies of Bangladesh and Pakistan to protect members of the Ahmadi Muslim communities in both countries from crimes perpetrated against them, and to take steps to promote religious tolerance.

FOREF is deeply concerned by two recent incidents reported by the International Human Rights Committee (IHRC), which monitors religious freedom issues particularly as they affect Ahmadi Muslims.

The IHRC reports that in the Brahmanbaria District of **Bangladesh**, the body of a baby girl born to an Ahmadi family, who had died on 9 July at the age of three days, was removed from her grave a few hours after burial in the local government cemetery and dumped on a street. According to the IHRC, the act was committed by a crowd that had been incited by Muslim clerics claiming that Ahmadis should not be allowed burial in the cemetery, despite the fact that it has long been used by Muslims of different sects. Local police were aware of the incident but took no action against the perpetrators. The family of the deceased infant was forced to take the body away, and find an alternative burial site.



'Wall of martyrs' shows Pakistani Ahmadis who were killed for practising their faith [Asad Hashim/Al Jazeera]

In **Pakistan**, in Chak No. 79 of Sheikhpura District, vandals destroyed plaques on numerous Ahmadi graves during the last week of June 2020.

According to the IHRC, when the incident was reported to local police authorities, no action was taken. Instead of identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators of these crimes, the authorities advised the Ahmadi community to seek another place for burial of their dead.

Both of these incidents show the depth of religious bigotry and hatred suffered by Ahmadi Muslims, a problem that appears to be worsening not only in the aforementioned countries, but in others as well. We ask political and religious leaders to forcefully speak out against such acts, which reflect intolerance that has often lead to murders, torture, and discrimination.

Rohingya Christian family kidnapped, minor converted

Asia News (04.02.2020) - <http://bit.ly/2v4XIZF> -About 400 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militants destroyed the church and 25 Christian homes. Harassed women and girls; elders beaten. "We are Christians from birth. We ask to be recognized as such ". Pope Francis in Bangladesh met the refugees, "but we were not invited".

A Christian family was kidnapped in the Kutupalong refugee camp in the Cox's Bazar district, and an underage daughter was forced to marry and convert to Islam. Savel Islam Peter, one of the [Rohingya](#) Christian refugees attacked last week by Arsa militants (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) in the refugee camp, reveals this in an exclusive interview with *AsiaNews*. The kidnapping, he says, occurred the day after the attack on the camp on January 27th. The family, Saiful says, "was kidnapped for the faith. We are persecuted because we are Christians ".

Saiful is a Protestant member of the Bethel Church Rohingya Christian Fellowship. He reports that the people kidnapped are: Taher, 55, his wife Kurshida, 32, and his daughters Mizan, 14, and Mariam, 8. Two days ago, he adds, "a Muslim neighbor told us that Mizan was forced to marry an Islamic extremist who lives near Nowkar camp, while there is no news of the rest of the family ".

He is hospitalized in a district mission hospital because of the injuries sustained during the attack. He was attacked because he filmed the homes of burning Christians on video.

The police indicted him for filming the demolished houses. He said that "about 200 people from Arsa came to visit us carrying guns, knives, swords and iron bars".

At the moment, the families have been transferred to a UN camp. To those who question the presence of ARSA militants in the refugee camp, Saiful replies: "They really exist. We have encountered several in both the 2E and 2W camps. We have photos showing militant leaders carrying guns and knives. Many Rohingya Muslims detest them and I am sure they would be ready to testify that the members of ARSA are there."

The Rohingya are an ethnic minority, mostly Islamic, who have lived in Myanmar for decades. At [the outbreak of the violence in August 2017](#) between army soldiers and the Arsa armed group, at least 740 thousand people fled Burmese territory and camped in Bangladesh. Saiful highlights: "There is a hate speech that surrounds us, according to which for the Rohingya there is no other religion than the Islamic one. In reality, the Rohingyas were Hindus for a long time."

On the attack on Christian families, the man says: "The Rohingya Christian women and children were beaten terribly. Many young girls were sexually harassed in the nights. During attack, attackers touch private part of women. Their married gold and earrings have snatched away, so many women got permanent damage in the ear of fingers. My elderly people and man have cut with swords on the shoulders, backs or in the arms " "We have videos that demonstrate everything - he continues - at least 400 people attacked us. They stole all our belongings from homes, destroyed the church, took computers, projectors and other material for a value of 200 thousand taka [2,130 euros, ed.]".

At least 1,500 Rohingya Christians live in Bangladesh, who have arrived in various migratory waves since 1991. The only church for them is located in Camp 2, block 1, of Kutupalong. All "are Christians from birth, and not converted to Christianity after arriving in Bangladesh, as one would like to believe". Saiful denounces that "as early as last May, between 10 and 13, the criminals had destroyed the church. They returned between January 25 and 27 and demolished the church and 25 houses again."

"For years - Saiful notes - we have been asking to be recognized as Christians by the Muslim majority Rohingya. We hope that card. Patrick D'Rozario, head of the country's Catholic bishops, help us get the kidnapped back. In 2017, we learned [that Pope Francis came to Bangladesh and met Rohingya refugees](#). However, no one invited us to that meeting."

Alarm sounds over number of female jihadists in Bangladesh

Nearly 100 have been arrested or killed since deadly attack on Dhaka cafe in 2016, special conference told

By Stephan Uttom and Rock Ronald Rozario

UCA News (11.12.2019) - <http://bit.ly/2GV014d> - A growing number of Bangladeshi women taking up Islamic extremism and militancy is causing concern in the Muslim-majority South Asian country.

Dozens of female jihadists have been arrested and others killed since a terrorist attack on the Holey Artisan Café on July 1, 2016, left 20 people — including 17 foreigners — dead, according to a recent gathering in capital Dhaka.

The first National Conference on the Prevention of Extremism was held on Dec. 9 and brought together government officials, diplomats, security experts, academics and researchers.

A total of 85 female militants were arrested, while 11 others either committed suicide or were killed in shootouts during raids since the Holey Artisan tragedy, Abdul Mannan, deputy commissioner of the Bangladesh police's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Department, told the gathering.

He presented a research study that he said outlined the reasons why women were being radicalized.

"Our women are mostly loyal to their husbands, so if their husbands turn radical they follow suit," he told ucanews.

"Additionally, there is a lack of socioeconomic empowerment, extreme poverty and discrimination, while radical influences in the name of religious education are fueling extremism among women."

"Sometimes educated and qualified women are becoming radicalized out of frustration at not being able to fulfill their potential."

Social and economic empowerment can keep Bangladeshi women away from the clutches of extremists, according to Rita Roseline Costa, a women's rights activist and convener of the women's desk at the Catholic bishops' conference.

"Women need to be allowed to play their role properly — in decision making, economic activities and entitling equal rights. Only a few women are radicalized out of curiosity, but most do it after being influenced by family members they are dependent on," Costa told ucanews.

"Many women are not allowed to participate in social activities, and this exclusion makes them vulnerable to negative activities. Participation of women in social and cultural activities can reduce the risk of them getting involved in extremism."

Religious identity at forefront

Prof. Shantanu Majumder from Dhaka University's political science faculty presented a study paper, "Identity, Identity Politics and Elections in Bangladesh," at the conference. According to the study, more people in Bangladesh are "putting religious identity before national identity."

Majumder said he interviewed 208 people around the country and 148 put religious identity before national identity.

"When more people are concerned about their religious identity, there is a decline in people with a liberal and secular mindset," he told ucanews.

"Generally, Muslims believe they are victims of injustice and persecution all over the world. About 45 percent think they are victims of a conspiracy perpetrated by other religious groups, while 48 percent think their misery results from a lack of unity in their community.

“There is a common tendency among believers of all faiths to keep silent when members of the same faith commit a crime but are critical when crimes are committed by those from other faiths.”

Long known as a moderate Sunni-majority Muslim country, Bangladesh has seen a sharp rise in Islamic militancy in recent years.

Since 2013, homegrown militants, pledging allegiance to global jihadist outfits such as Islamic State and al-Qaeda, have murdered at least 50 atheist writers, publishers, liberal academics, LGBT activists, members of religious minorities and foreigners.

A Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor survived recent assassination attempts, while an elderly Catholic grocer was hacked to death. Meanwhile, dozens of Catholic priests, Christian leaders and aid workers have received death threats from militant groups.

In response, the government launched a massive anti-militancy drive that saw dozens of militants killed during raids and hundreds of leaders and members of militant outfits arrested and put on trial.