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What happened in Noagaon?

By Syed Fattahul Alim

The Financial Expert (22.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3IH19vH> - The vandalism perpetrated by a mob against the residents of Noagon village in Shallaupazila in the country's northeastern district of Sunamganj on March 17 has drawn widespread attention and criticism from all sections of society. The spontaneous public protests and posts on the social media by people from all walks of life show how united the people of Bangladesh are when a member or members of any minority ethnic or religious group is subjected to violence or any kind of injustice at the hands of a vested quarter whatever its ethno-religious or other kinds of identity.

In the violent incident in question, the victims were the members of the Hindu community while the attacking mob were allegedly from surrounding villages.

Some 90 Hindu families were victims of the attack. Their houses were ransacked and their valuables looted. Also, some Hindu religious places of worship were vandalised. However, no death has been reported so far from the scene of violence.

But who were those attackers? It is said that the incident occurred following a facebook post by a Hindu youth from that village critiquing the views of a Muslim cleric who is also a leader of a pro-Islamic platform, Hefazat-e-Islam. So, an accusing finger is being pointed at the members of that religious platform for the March 17 mayhem in Noagaon.

The media was also quick to tell the easy story. The international media also did the same quoting local media painting a grim story of thousands of Islamist fanatics participating in a communal attack on the Hindu population sponsored by an extremist Islamist group. But all these reports went viral even before police could properly investigate the incident.

However, the leaders of the Hefazat-e-Islam denied their involvement in the incident.

Meanwhile, the police carried out raids and arrested some 33 suspects and filed cases against hundreds of unidentified suspects. Interestingly, of the arrested people, the main suspect is learnt to be a member of the nearby Saramangal union council and is said to be an activist of a front organisation of the ruling party.

And according to some eyewitness reports, scores, not hundreds, let alone thousands, were involved in the attack.

So, to all appearances, some vested quarters whose motives are far removed from anything religious were behind the incident. And the members of pro-Islamic religious platform alleged to have been involved in the vandalism were used as pawns by powerful quarters. With further police investigation into the unfortunate incident, the identities of

the instigators of the vandalism and its perpetrators will hopefully come out and the violence-mongers brought to justice.

Compared to many neighbouring and even Western countries, the number and frequency of incidents as can be called communal violence are few in Bangladesh. Most importantly, a closer scrutiny of such past cases of violence against minority groups would reveal that the instigators behind the incidents and goons involved in the violence had a purely secular motive of grabbing lands or other kinds of property belonging to the victims who are poor and helpless. And who does not know that the poor members of a religious or ethnic minority are the most helpless people on earth and as such are also the easiest prey for the predators looking for their quarry?

As could be gathered from the local people, at the heart of the vandalism in question were also such non-communal, non-religious, but grossly material interests such as lands or water bodies on which the villagers depended for their livelihood. Needless to say, the victims of Noagaon were also very poor people of the Hindu community.

But before the facts could come to light, a smokescreen was created and the real culprits took shelter behind it.

Stereotyping religious, ethnic and racial identities is an old, favourite game of the global corporate capitalism. And its cronies in the media, civil society and politics dance to its tune to their advantage.

Photo: Dhaka Tribune

Minorities protest in Dhaka against anti-Hindu violence

Christians, Buddhists and Hindus held a rally to protest against an attack by Muslim radicals against the Hindu community in Sunamganj District. The mob desecrated a temple. One minority leader lamented the fact that "the police and local authorities were silent" on the day the country celebrated 50 years of independence and the creation of a secular state.

by Sumon Corraya

AsiaNews (22.03.2021) – <https://bit.ly/2Qp8Gnn> – The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council organised a rally on Saturday in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka to protest against an attack three days earlier against the Hindu community in Noagaon, a village in Shalla (Sunamganj District). About a hundred leaders from religious minorities took part in the initiative.

On Wednesday of last week, supporters of the *Hefajat-e-Islam* Group and other radical Islamists attacked Hindu homes. A mob of several hundred men from Noagaon and nearby villages came with hand-made weapons forced their way into the homes and looted them.

Following the incident, the police arrested a local official, Shahidul Islam Swadhin, who also heads the local section of the Jubo League youth organisation.

At the rally in Dhaka, participants condemned the attack in Sunamganj. Christian James Subrata Hajra, deputy secretary general of the Bangladesh Christian Association, said he was tired of having to protest the persecution of minorities.

"We live in an independent country," he said. "If the persecution does not stop, we minority groups will have to stage even bigger protests." He urged the government to arrest all those responsible for the attack on Hindus.

Buddhist leader Ushaton Talukdar, president of *the* Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, is saddened by the indifference towards those who spread hate.

"While Hindus were being attacked, the police and local authorities were silent. They could have protected them but didn't. In an independent country, we religious minorities shouldn't live in fear. I call on the government to ensure justice."

Hindu leader Neem Chandra Bhowmik stressed the importance of unity among minorities. "Yesterday I visited the village of Noagaon," he said. "I saw what kind of attack was carried out. Radical fanatics have destroyed not only houses, but also desecrated the Hindu temple. This is a very sad fact that requires exemplary punishment."

What makes the attack on a minority even more serious is that it coincided with the country's celebration of **50 years of independence**. Protesters noted that Bangladesh was born in 1971 after a bloody war to set up a secular state in which people of all creeds could live together as brothers.

Photo: AsiaNews.it

Two Protestant churches targeted, attacked and ransacked

Forest Department officials tore down a Seventh-day Adventist church in Bandarban district for lack of construction permit. Extremists attacked another Protestant church in northern Bangladesh because of the presence of new Christians. For the Bangladesh Christian Association, everyone should be guaranteed the right to practise their own religion and justice should be done.

by Sumon Corraya

Asia News(04.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2PtCAq9> - Bandarban – A recent attack against two churches, one of which was demolished, is causing concern among Bangladeshi Christians.

On 25 February, 10 Forest Department employees tore down the Sathirampara Seventh-day Adventist church in Ali Kadam, Bandarban district. The building was under construction. The congregation was replacing the old bamboo hut used as a church with a brick building.

The Forest Department said that the community was not authorised to build on land under its jurisdiction. Yet, the area already has four mosques, three Buddhist temples, four large markets as well as public and private schools. No problems were reported in connection with any of these structures.

Sathiram Tripura, one of the leaders of Sathirampara Church, told AsiaNews that people from two villages in the hills have been coming to his makeshift house of prayer for many years.

"Members of the community set aside the money for 15 years to build the brick church," he explained. "Not being able to finish the construction is very sad."

The demolition took place while the men of the community were working in the forest. The community includes more than a hundred people who now find themselves praying in the open air, Tripura noted.

Without a church the situation will become very difficult when the rainy season begins. However, for Forest Department official S M Kawsar, his agency did not destroy any church, it simply cleared government land.

"Construction takes a permit and Christians did not have it," he explained. "In this village, there are only three or four Christian families. There is no need for a church."

Another incident occurred a few days earlier in Aditmari, Lalmonirhat district (northern Bangladesh). A group of local Muslims attacked Emmanuel Church on 10 February, which is located in a predominantly Muslim village. The Protestant house of prayer has existed since 2003.

Local pastor Rev Lovlu S. Levy said that four people destroyed the church sign, cut trees, forced the entrance, and stole 30 chairs and two carpets worth 14,000 taka (US\$ 165).

"Residents in this area are fundamentalists," he explained. "When I first went to the police they did not want to file the report of what happened; they also told me not to inform journalists of the attack."

Violence against the church appears to be the result of anti-Christian propaganda at a local Islamic meeting place (waz mahfil) where Muslim religious leaders engage in hate speech.

Rev Lovlu S. Levy also reports that anger against Christians is linked to the fact that new members have joined the community.

"Muslims are angry because we have received Christ, which is why they attack us. Now we live in fear, ten new believers have fled the village for their safety."

Bangladesh Christian Association President Nirmol Rozario condemned these two episodes of violence.

With respect to the Sathirampara Church in Bandarban district he noted that everyone has the right to practise their religion. "I call on the local authorities to ensure that Christians can soon build their own church."

As for the attack in Aditmari, "radical Muslims tried to frighten Christians. We condemn the attack and demand justice."

Photo: AsiaNews.it