

Table of Contents

- ***Hindus denounce violence amid attacks in Bangladesh***
 - ***Bangladesh church attacked twice by Buddhist radicals after weeks of threats: report***
 - ***Hindus, Buddhists and Christians say no to Islam as state religion***
 - ***Santal Christians return to ancestral faith***
 - ***With Islamist extremism going unchecked, Christians are facing rising persecution in Bangladesh***
 - ***What happened in Noagaon?***
 - ***Minorities protest in Dhaka against anti-Hindu violence***
 - ***Two Protestant churches targeted, attacked and ransacked***
-

Hindus denounce violence amid attacks in Bangladesh

By Julhas ALAM

AP News (18.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3AUvgGa> - Protests continued Monday in Bangladesh's capital to denounce a wave of violence against Hindus following an image posted on social media that was perceived as insulting to the country's Muslim majority.

New attacks took place Sunday night in a northern village, where unidentified people burned up to 26 homes of Hindus despite a warning by the government that such attacks would be firmly punished.

The violence has prompted the United Nations to urge the government to take actions to stop it.

On Monday, the followers of the Hindu group International Society for Krishna Consciousness were joined by students and teachers from Dhaka University in blocking a major intersection in Dhaka to demand justice. Several other Hindu groups also joined the peaceful protest at the Shahbagh intersection.

Attacks on Hindu temples have intensified since last Wednesday after a photo was posted on social media showing a copy of Islam's holy book, the Quran, at the feet of a statue at a Hindu temple in the eastern district of Cumilla.

Local media reported that six Hindus were killed in separate attacks, but the figures could not be confirmed independently. Local media downplayed their coverage of the violence, apparently under pressure from the government to control any new attacks as Hindus celebrated their largest religious festival, Durga Puja, that ended Friday.

Muslims also held street protests after the images came out on social media, especially Facebook.

Mia Seppo, the U.N.'s resident coordinator in Bangladesh, said in a Twitter post on Monday that the attacks on Hindus are against the values of the Bangladesh constitution and need to stop.

"We call upon Government to ensure protection of minorities and an impartial probe," Seppo said. "We call upon all to join hands to strengthen inclusive tolerant."

Asif Hasan, chief government administrator of northern Rangpur district, said Monday that attackers torched the homes of Hindus in a fishing village on Sunday night. They also stole cash, cattle and other valuables during the attack, he said. Hasan said 42 people were arrested.

On Monday, the Ministry of Home Affairs transferred seven police officials from troubled areas for failing to control the violence.

About 9% of Bangladesh's 160 million people are Hindu. Bangladesh follows a largely secular legal system based on British common law.

Photo : Hundreds of Hindus protesting against attacks on temples and the killing of two Hindu devotees in another district shout slogans in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Oct.18, 2021. A viral social media image perceived as insulting to the country's Muslim majority last week triggered protests and incidents of vandalism at Hindu temples across Bangladesh. About 9% of Bangladesh's 160 million are Hindus. (AP Photo/Mahmud Hossain Opu)

Bangladesh church attacked twice by Buddhist radicals after weeks of threats: report

By Emily Wood

The Christian Post (02.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3IBhPXQ> - A small Christian church in southeastern Bangladesh was attacked and destroyed twice amid weeks of threats from radical Buddhists against Christians who refused to re-convert to Buddhism. Many believers in the community are reportedly displaced from their homes.

Local reports say two attacks on the church in the village of Suandrapara in the hilly district of Rangamati came after weeks of threats.

Buddhist radicals reportedly told the Christians they would destroy the church if the church members did not tear it down themselves. The converted believers, however, refused to renounce their faith in Jesus.

"The radicals told us to destroy the church, but we will not," Tubel Chakma Poran Adetion, the church's assistant pastor, told [Asia News](#), the official press agency of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

"If we have to sacrifice our lives, we will. They threatened us to return to our old religion, but we will not return. Jesus Christ is our savior. We will die for him."

The pastor told the news outlet that believers at the church were previously Buddhists who “met Jesus Christ” in 2005.

The Christian residents of Suandrapara built the small brick-and-tin church in January through funding provided by the Bangladesh Bawm Tribal Baptist Church.

The pastor said they gathered and prayed daily despite threats and opposition from the Buddhist majority. The Christians were given a seven-day deadline to stop all church activities and re-convert to Buddhism.

The believers refused to comply.

Buddhist radicals led by Joan Chakma, the leader of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), a local political group, are accused of attacking the church on July 15. In doing so, the perpetrators broke the church gate, the cross and other parts of the church, Asia News reported.

The Buddhist radicals attacked the church again on July 22, damaging a wall, the door and the tin roof.

The attackers threatened more consequences if the Christians reported the incident to the media or the police.

Adetion said the church did not report the destruction to the police station for security reasons and the Christians’ desire to live in peace.

“We are a minority and Buddhists can do anything to us. We want peace by talking to them,” he told Asia News.

Rev. Leor P. Sarker, general secretary of the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF), a Protestant church organization in Bangladesh, explained to the press agency how church leaders are worried for the church in Ranfamati.

“We are concerned about our members,” Sarker was quoted as saying. “There are about 50 of them. They live in fear. Most of them are staying away from their homes to protect their life after the attack.

“We are praying for the attackers, that they may change their way of thinking and let our people live there in peace,” he continued.

Persecuted church watchdog organization Open Doors USA ranks Bangladesh at No. 31 on its 2021 [World Watch List](#) of countries where Christians face the greatest persecution. In Bangladesh, many believers must gather to worship in secret house churches for fear of attack.

Christians primarily face persecution from Islamic extremism, as the majority of the country is Muslim. However, Open Doors warns that Bangladeshi Christians also face persecution from the Buddhist minority.

Christians also faced discrimination from the government during the pandemic when many Christians suffered starvation or severe health issues after being left out of government relief, Open Doors reported.

Bangladesh’s population is nearly 170 million, and less than 1% identifies as Christian. Bangladesh also has the eighth-largest population in the world and is one of the most densely populated countries.

Bangladesh is also home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The country struggles to care for them despite help from the international community.

Photo : People leave service at a Christian church on March 20, 2016, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. | Allison Joyce/Getty Images

Hindus, Buddhists and Christians say no to Islam as state religion

Every year the anniversary of the constitutional amendment recognising Islam as state religion is marked as a 'black day'. "If this state of affairs continues, Islamic extremism and communalism will end up creating serious problems", says the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

By Sumon Corraya

Asia News (10.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2TTZB7T> - In Bangladesh, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religious leaders yesterday marked "Black Day" together. On 9 June 1988, Islam became state religion following the adoption of the eighth amendment to the constitution.

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) has promoted the initiative on June 9 each year. This year, in a virtual meeting due to the pandemic, representatives of the largest organisation defending the rights of religious minorities renewed its call for the amendment to be scrapped.

"With the amendment, the seed of sectarian politics were planted," said BHBCUC president Nirmol Rozario, a Catholic, speaking to *AsiaNews*. "In a country where Hindus, Buddhists and Christians also live, a single religion cannot be the state religion. We object to it."

Constitutionally, "Bangladesh is a secular country, but its state religion is Islam. This is a clear contradiction," Rozario explained. "If this state of affairs continues, Islamic extremism and communalism will end up creating serious problems."

At the meeting, Sultana Kamal, a prominent lawyer and human rights advocate, noted that secularism was asserted at the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 in a bloody war. Hence, she wonders why the current prime minister* agrees with such discrimination. "Usually," she noted, "constitutions are changed to improve them, but in our country in 1988 it was done to favour only one religious group."

In light of the present situation, BHBCUC general secretary Rana Dasgupta called for the establishment of a security commission for minority communities. "Religious minorities are often persecuted by the majority group. For our security, we strongly demand a minority ministry and a commission for religious communities."

* *The current Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, is the daughter of the Father of the Nation Mujibur Rahman.*

Santal Christians return to ancestral faith

Scores of people from the indigenous community are embracing their old Sarna religion, claiming the Church has neglected them

UCA News (28.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3vpmfIX> - Dozens of indigenous Santals who embraced Catholicism years ago have returned to their ancient, nature-worshipping Sarna religion, alleging a lack of social security and support from the [Church](#).

In the latest case, a Santal family returned to the Sarna faith in the presence of leaders of Santal villages in Niamatpur in Naogaon district on April 19.

A photo of the reconversion ceremony posted on Facebook triggered a heated debate among Christian and non-Christian Santals over the causes of conversion of Santals to Christianity and their return to their ancestral creed.

Santal leaders claimed that people from indigenous communities are returning to the old faith as they face negligence and lack of social support.

Others claimed that they became Christians "out of greed" and returned when their wishes were not fulfilled.

Noresh Tudu (not his real name) converted to Catholicism with his seven-member family in 2000. However, they renounced Christianity and returned to the Sarna faith in 2018.

Tudu, 42, a private job holder, says he was attracted to the Christian faith due to great social works by Catholic priests.

"I've seen some Catholic priests doing extraordinary work for Santal people. They have been providing medical facilities when needed and sent our children to schools and hostels. They stood beside us in any difficult situation such as land disputes or lack of food. I became a Christian because of their kindness, not because of greed," Tudu told UCA News.

However, Tudu claimed that he felt betrayed and frustrated when he faced social problems including a land dispute.

"My community abandoned me since I became a Christian. When I faced a legal case over a land dispute, no one from the Church came to support me. However, some people from my community stood beside me. I decided to return to my traditional faith to be united with my community," he added.

Tudu said 15 Santal families became Catholics with him in 2000 and all except for two have returned their traditional faith.

A Catholic priest said allegations of negligence and lack of support from the Church are baseless and suspected social pressure from the community was behind reconversion of ethnic Christians.

"This person never came to the Church for help and allegations of negligence are groundless. The Church never forces people to become Christians and respects people's right to religion," Columbian PIME missionary Father Belisario Ciro Montoya, parish priest of Christ the King Church in Naogaon, told UCA News.

Subas Murmu, 34, a Santal primary school teacher who follows the Sarna faith, has been a vocal critic of Christian evangelists who allegedly proselytize ethnic people by defaming their traditional faith.

"I have no problem with who is following which religion. But I cannot except when evangelists defame our traditional faith to make it an eyesore for people. They highlight the prejudices about our religion and convert Santals to Christianity with false propaganda. For years, this campaign of conversion has caused division within the Santal community," Murmu told UCA News.

He claimed that Santals who convert to Christianity are greedy as they are lured by promises of education for children and good jobs.

"Sometimes, indigenous people who marry Christians are also forced to become Christians. There are cases of Santals who converted due to promises of residence on church-owned land," he added.

Murmu alleged that mass conversion of Santals by Christian missionaries in the past has divided the community and the unity and harmony that existed in the community have been lost.

"I wish to establish a common platform for Santals regardless of whether they practice Christianity or the traditional faith. We need to be united and think about developing the community," he said.

Santals are one of the largest ethnic indigenous groups in India and Bangladesh and are believed to be among the earliest settlers on the Indian subcontinent. In Bangladesh, Santals are spread in various northern districts close to the Indian border.

Both in India and Bangladesh, Santals are among the most marginalized communities due to lack of education and extreme poverty.

Over the past decades, about 200,000 out of more than 250,000 Santals in Bangladesh have become Christians, according to the National Adivasi Council, which covers northern Bangladesh. Most converts have been extremely poor and the conditions of most Santals didn't change much even after changing faith, council leaders say.

[Dinajpur](#) and [Rajshahi](#) dioceses cover much of northern Bangladesh and both are predominantly indigenous, with Santals forming the majority of more than 110,000 Catholics.

Santal Christians, however, refuted claims that the faith didn't change the lives of people.

Subodh Baskey, a Santal Catholic and development worker, said his grandparents became Christians not to gain anything but because they loved Christianity, adding that his family didn't exploit the faith to get money, jobs or land.

"It is true that those who have become Christians are better off than other Santals or other indigenous groups. They have become educated, secured jobs and improved their lives," Baskey told UCA News.

He also alleged that many priests don't offer spiritual, pastoral and social care to ethnic Catholics.

"Today's priests are busy with themselves. They don't seem to take much spiritual care, they don't talk about the rights of the indigenous peoples, and they are not aware of how to provide social security. There are no statistics or research, but it is true such a negligent attitude has been driving some ethnic Santals to embrace their old faith," Baskey said.

Father Patrick Gomes, senior priest and coordinator of the Interreligious Commission in Rajshahi Diocese, said the Church does not offer any incentives to anyone who embraces Christianity.

"Every year, many ethnic brothers and sisters become Catholics out of passion, not greed. They are attracted to the Christian faith thanks to our polite and dignified services and preaching. If they are poor, they get monetary and other support from church groups like Caritas, which is open for poor people from any religion," Father Gomes told UCA News.

The priest said that those who become Catholics and then return to the old faith "are not Catholics from the heart."

"Some people become Catholics for social protection and material things. The Church is a minority and is often unable to provide everything. We keep in touch with people and work for justice and peace. It is true that even our best efforts won't seem good enough for some people," Father Gomes added.

In Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Christians make up less than half percent of more than 160 million people. There are an estimated 600,000 Christians, mostly Catholics, and about half of them hail from indigenous groups.

Photo : A photo of a reconversion ceremony posted on Facebook triggered a heated debate among Christian and non-Christian Santals in Bangladesh. (Photo supplied)

With Islamist extremism going unchecked, Christians are facing rising persecution in Bangladesh

Christian Today (26.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2PHmKID> - As Bangladesh celebrates 50 years since gaining independence, Christians are warning of growing persecution.

When Bangladesh declared independence from East Pakistan on 26 March 1971, the constitution promised that "every citizen has the right to profess, practice or propagate any religion."

In 2018, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated this promise, declaring that "Bangladesh takes particular pride in religious freedom and communal harmony in the region".

But an Open Doors partner in the country is warning of growing persecution - and inaction by the government.

"Persecution is on the rise in our nation and our Government don't seem to be willing or able to confront it," says Brother Ahmed.

"They are being pressurised by extreme Islamic groups and they don't want to stand up to them for fear of being portrayed as 'unIslamic.'"

Bangladesh is home to around 903,000 Christians - around 0.5% of the population - but they face an increasingly hostile climate.

In just the last two years, the country has risen 17 places to number 31 in the Open Doors World Watch Report.

The charity puts the rise down to three factors: widespread attacks on homes and places of worship by Islamic extremists; violent attacks on Christian Rohingya refugees who have faced violent attacks by radical Islamic groups in the refugee camps; and an increase in discrimination and intolerance against converts.

In May last year, a mother and her young daughter were killed in a horrific attack. While 30-year-old Shilpi and her five-year-old daughter, Supria, were sleeping in their room, someone threw a homemade bomb through an open window. They were badly burned and died a few days later.

Converts from Islam tend to suffer the worst persecution and are often forced to worship in secret for fear of attack.

Yet police are slow to act if a Christian reports an incident of persecution.

"When Christian communities report attacks or persecution, local police sometimes respond as late as 24 hours later. The will to protect religious minorities is very low," Brother Ahmed said.

There have also been reports during the pandemic of Christians being left with nothing to eat after being refused emergency aid.

This was the experience of Badol, a church leader trained by Open Doors partners whose family was shunned by the local community after their conversion.

"No one wants to talk, communicate or associate with us," he said.

During the pandemic, Badol and his family have been denied vital food and aid from the local authorities because of their faith.

"I had no work for around two months and it was really difficult to meet the needs of my family," he says.

"We live hand to mouth, so no work means no food."

The prime minister's assurances of religious freedom also seem to be undermined by his own threat to prosecute anyone who pronounces offensive comments against the Prophet Muhammad.

Brother Ahmed said: "Pandering to such sentiments is a deadly game to play; it's time the Government refused to compromise with extremism."

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
