



Bangladesh – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 28 April 2011

Treatment of Buddhists in Bangladesh. Any reports on discrimination, violence, human rights. Any reports on state protection for Buddhists?

The *2010 Freedom House* report for Bangladesh, in a section titled “Political Rights and Civil Liberties”, states:

“Islam is the official religion, but about 10 percent of the population is Hindu, and there are smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians. Although religious minorities have the right to worship freely, they face societal discrimination and remain underrepresented in politics and state employment.” (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World 2010 – Bangladesh*)

The 2010 *US Department of State* religious freedom report for Bangladesh states:

“There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period, although figures suggested such incidents declined significantly in comparison to the previous reporting period. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence from the Muslim majority.” (US Department of State (17 November 2010) *Bangladesh: International Religious Freedom Report 2010*)

In a section titled “Abuses of Religious Freedom” this report states:

“According to a report by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, on February 19, 2010, ethnic Bengali settlers attacked ethnic minorities in Baghaichhari Upazila, beating people and setting fire to approximately 500 minority homesteads and a Buddhist pagoda. At least three people died in the attacks including two members of minorities. Fleeing for their lives more than 500 families, accounting for more than 1,800 people, fled into the forest seeking refuge from further attacks. According to the report security forces were present during the attacks and did nothing to stop the violence. The government investigated these allegations and made some staffing changes to the military command in charge of security for the area during the reporting period.” (ibid)

A *Reuters* report on these attacks states:

“Bangladesh deployed the army at another southeastern hill town on Tuesday after 100 houses were burnt in fresh clashes between Buddhist tribals and Bengali Muslim settlers, police and witnesses said. At least one settler was killed and more than 50 people from both sides were injured in Khagrachhari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 300 km (188 miles) southeast of Dhaka, police said. Tribal people retaliated after being attacked by settlers while protesting against earlier deadly clashes between the two groups.” (Reuters (23 February 2010) *Fresh violence erupts in Bangladesh tribal region*)

A *Plus News Pakistan* report states:

“A group of Bangladeshi Buddhist monks demonstrated yesterday in front of the UN mission in Bangkok seeking its intervention in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. ‘We would like to request the United Nations to press the Bangladesh prime minister to end the military operation on Jumma indigenous people and stop the campaign to grab our land.’ The protesting monks termed the recent violence in the hills as ‘attacks on the Buddhist community’ perpetrated by the Bengali settlers and the Bangladesh military, the Radio Australia (ABC) reported.” (Plus News Pakistan (6 March 2010) *Bangladesh: Monks call on UN to stop 'violence against Buddhists'*)

An *Economic & Political Weekly* article comments on the background to this conflict as follows:

“The continued violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh is rooted in the state's policy of erasing the ethnic identity of the indigenous people and usurping their land for settling Bengali-speaking populations. In this, Bangladesh has followed the same policy as Pakistan and used the army and state machinery to suppress and evict the local people from their land and livelihoods. Unless the structural roots of this violence are addressed by the Bangladesh state, the cycle of violence will not end. On 19 and 20 February 2010, Bengali settlers backed by the Bangladesh armed forces attacked 14 indigenous villages in the Baghaichat region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. Land grab was the motive of the attacks (for details, see ACHR 2010). Six indigenous people, including a woman, were killed in firing by the armed forces, at least 25 persons were injured (including a member of Bangladesh army personnel in civilian dress), and about 300 houses (including a UNDP-funded village centre) were burnt to ashes. A church was vandalised and a Buddhist temple was gutted. Violence expanded to other areas like Khagrachari district town, Kaukhali, etc, in the following days and caused widespread destruction including the death of a Bengali settler.” (Economic & Political Weekly (20 March 2010) *Structural Roots of Violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*)

An *Indo-Asian News Service* report states:

“At least four people were killed and six villages of ethnic Buddhist minority tribals were burnt over a land dispute in south-eastern Bangladesh, officials said. The incident took place in the Khagrachari region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Daily Star reported Monday. The Chittagong Hill Tracts is home to a minority Buddhist population. Incidents of violence have occurred earlier in the wake of efforts by successive governments to settle Bengali Muslims on tribal land. An accord reached in 1997 has not been fully implemented.” (Indo-Asian News Service (18 April 2011) *Four dead in Bangladesh ethnic violence*)

A *Global Insight* report states:

“A flare-up of ethnic violence in Bangladesh's Southwest yesterday killed at least four people and injured 50 more. The deaths were the results of riots by Buddhist locals against ethnic Bengali (the main Bangladeshi ethnic group) settlers, ostensibly triggered by disputes over land. The violence reportedly continued for three hours, until riot police moved in and dispersed rioters. However, police were not able to prevent retaliatory attacks that injured an additional 20 people. An emergency situation was declared shortly after the incidents, with a ban in effect on the assembly of more than three people at one location, while the presence of security forces was significantly stepped up to prevent any further unrest.” (Global Insight (18 April 2011) *Ethnic Violence in South-Western Bangladesh Kills at Least 4, Injures 50*)

An *Indigenous Peoples Issues & Resources* report states:

“On 17 April 2011 Bengali settlers with the direct support of security forces made massive communal arson attack on five indigenous Jumma villages of Hafchari union of Ramgarh upazila and two villages in Manikchari upazila in Khagrachari district of Chittagong Hill Tracts. In this attack around 200 houses belonging to indigenous Jumma villagers including two Buddhist temples were completely burnt to ashes. At least 20 Jummas including three women were injured and at least half of dozen of Jummas were still missing. The Jummas have fled in to the jungle in the face of the settler attack.” (Indigenous Peoples Issues & Resources (18 April 2011) *Bangladesh: Massive Communal Arson Attack Upon Indigenous Jumma Peoples By Bengali Settlers With The Support Of Security Forces In Ramgarh*)

In a section titled “Summary of Attack” this report states:

“As a repercussion to it, the Bengali settlers under the protection of military force from Guimara brigade started attack upon Jumma people of Shankhola Para, Toikarma Para, Reemaram Para, Suludong Para and Pathachara villages of Hafchari union under Ramgarh upazila. The houses of the Jumma people have been looted and set ablaze. Though military forces were patrolling through out areas but they did not oppose Bengali settlers from setting fire to Jumma houses. The army kept patrolling along the road sides, on the other, Bengali settlers started setting fire entering to Jumma villages. In this attack, around 100 houses including one Buddhist temple at Shankhola Para were completely burnt to ashes, 15 houses at Toikarma (Kachu Bhante) Para, 15 houses at Reemaram Para, 25 houses at Suludong Para and 16 houses at Pathachara were set fire.” (ibid)

An *Agence France Presse* report states:

“Bangladesh's southeastern hills are again simmering with ethnic tension, raising concerns that a fragile peace reached 13 years ago will collapse. Hundreds of ethnic Chakma, a Buddhist tribal group indigenous to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, lost their homes in February when violence broke out between them and Muslim Bengali settlers, prompting a harsh army crackdown. ‘With the assistance of the army, the settlers came here to attack us,’ said Joshna Chakma, who lost her house and says her village has been plagued by violence since Bengali settlers and an army post arrived around two years ago. ‘Last year, there were 78 houses burned down by the settlers, helped by the army,’ said Joshna, who is a member of the local council in the remote Baghaichhari district.” (Agence France Presse (6 May 2010) *Tribal anger rises in Bangladesh's volatile hills*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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