

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT 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.

Questions

1. Please provide any research regarding the treatment of Christians in Bangladesh.
2. Please provide any research regarding the treatment of converts from Islam to Christianity in Bangladesh.

RESPONSE

1. Please provide any research regarding the treatment of Christians in Bangladesh.

The struggle for political power in Bangladesh has seen traditional political parties, *Bangladesh National Party* (BNP) and the *Awami League* (AL), locked in a dispute since 2004. According to the International Crisis Group website, the principal beneficiary of this political equation has been the increasingly influential militant Islamist fringe, led by legitimate governing parties like the BNP coalition partner, *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) but extending to the violently militant *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* (JMJB) and the *Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB) parties. According to the International Crisis Group, underground terrorist groups have been cultivated and sheltered by those in power ('Bangladesh Today' 2006, International Crisis Group website, 23 October <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=4462> – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 1).

According to the latest US Department of State report, Muslims form a permanent majority in Bangladesh with 88.3 per cent of the population, followed by Hindus at 10.5 per cent and Christians at 0.3 per cent (US Department of State 2006, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, September <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3452.htm> – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 2).

The rise of Islamic militant organisations has led to an increase in attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, especially on Hindus and Christians. While Bangladesh is party to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which ensures the rights to freedom of religion and expression, it has, nevertheless, tolerated violent assaults by Islamic extremists on religious minority communities. According to Human Rights Watch, over the last few years, religious intolerance has increased dramatically as several thousand Hindus, Buddhists and Christians have fled the country (Human Rights Watch World Report 2006, *World Report: Asia* – Attachment 3). Amnesty International has expressed concern that attacks by Islamic extremists are carried out with impunity and has requested the Bangladeshi Government to provide adequate protection to the members of the minority community (Amnesty International 2006, *Bangladesh: Briefing to political parties for a human rights agenda*, 23 October – Attachment 4).

According to the UK Home Office October 2006 report:

“There are an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Christians living in Bangladesh, the majority of whom is Catholic. The [2005 Religious Freedom Report] indicates that Bengali Christians are spread across Bangladesh, and that some indigenous (non-Bengali) groups are also Christian...Reported incidents against religious minorities, including Christians, have included killings, sexual assaults, extortion, intimidation, forced eviction, and attacks on places of worship...” (UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report: Bangladesh*, October – Attachment 5).

On 19 September 2005, Bishop Moses Costa of the Dinajpur diocese in Bangladesh expressed concern over an increase in Islamic fundamentalism. In August 2005, there were four hundred and thirty four bombings in sixty three districts in Bangladesh. Catholics and Protestant leaders in the country sent a letter to the Prime Minister requesting protection for Christians (‘Bangladesh: Christians worried by rising Islamic fundamentalism’ 2005, *Catholic World News* website, 19 September <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=39696> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 6).

In August 2005, the General Secretary of the Church of Bangladesh, Dipak Karmakar, protested against an increase in violence on Christians.

Karmakar accused the government of sheltering the culprits saying that no arrests have been made and are not likely to be made even though Christians have marched in protest in Dhaka. He said that the Islamic fundamentalist lobby has spread into the government machinery as the administration is presently headed by a coalition in which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party shares power with the Jamat-e-Islami party (‘Bangladesh & Sri Lanka Christians Face Persecution Threat’ 2005, *Christian Today* website, 27 August <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/bangladesh.sri.lanka.christians.face.persecution.threat./3800.htm> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 7).

In July 2005, two Christian men, Tapan Kumar Roy and Liplal Marandi, were murdered by Muslims in Dhopapara village in Bangladesh for showing a film about Jesus.

Police and village residents said the victims were at home asleep when their door was kicked in at around 2am on 29 July. The attackers broke in and stabbed the two men several times. Resident said the killers chained the doors of the house to prevent anyone from going to the victims’ aid. However, some people who heard their cries rushed to the scene and took them to Bolamari hospital, where they were declared dead. Police transferred the bodies to the hospital Faridpur Sadar for autopsy and they have arrested a suspect.

Abdur Rouf, a police officer in Bolamari, said the double homicide is the outcome of long-standing enmities. Harun Ar Rashid, assistant superintendent of police in Faridpur, told reporters the two may have been killed because they are Christians. Although police have not yet managed to determine the motive of the brutal homicide, some suspect it is linked to the victims' religious activities, among them screening films on the life of Jesus. According to residents, other than films on the life of Jesus Christ, Roy and Marandi invited people to watch television programs about the risk of poisoning from well water, about health risks facing women and children, about preventing marriages between people who are too young, and about the risk of AIDS ('Bangladesh: Two Christians are killed by unknown attackers' 2005, *Asia News* website, 3 August <http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=3842> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 8; 'CHRISTIANS CALL FOR JUSTICE IN MURDERS' 2005, *Compass Direct News* website, 23 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/newslongen.php?idelement=3938> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 9).

On 8 March 2005, *Christian Monitor* reported that a local evangelist at Jalalpur district was beheaded by Muslim militants.

A group of ten Muslim militants beheaded a local evangelist and preacher on 8 March, and have threatened his wife and children. Dulal Sarkar worked with the Bangladesh Free Baptist Church in Jalalpur village, and his murder came one week after he had shared his faith with several Muslim villagers. His ministry led to the planting of several churches in the area. Dulal's wife Aruna reported the murder to the police who arrested three of the ten attackers. Since then, Aruna has been threatened again and forced to move from house to house for the safety of her five children. The seven remaining attackers have reportedly tried to bribe local police to release the three arrested from prison. They have connections to the Muslim fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami political party, the third largest in Bangladesh.

Local Christians fear that Jamaat-e-Islami will use its political influence to prevent the case from coming to court ('Evangelist Beheaded' 2005, *Christian Monitor* website, 10 April http://www.christianmonitor.org/documents.php?type=Newsletters&item_ID=209&action=display&lang=English& – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 10).

According to the *Associated Baptist Press* website, in September 2004, a Christian physician, Abdul Gani Gomes, was beheaded in the district of Jamalpur and in 2003, a Christian leader was murdered by a group of eight men. Christian evangelist, Hridoy Roy, was repeatedly stabbed after being tied to the bed ('Beheading of Christian leader in Bangladesh second in a year' 2005, *Associated Baptist Press* website, 19 May <http://www.abpnews.com/341.article> – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 11). In November 2006, a Bangladesh court sentenced two Islamic militants of the banned JMJB party to death after they confessed to killing Gomes ('Bangladeshi Court Sentences Militants to Death for Killing Christian Convert' 2006, *Fox News* website, 9 November <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,228361,00.html> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 12).

On 3 June 2001, Islamic extremists bombed Jalilpur Catholic Missionary School, killing ten people and injuring more than two dozen others (Hertz, T. 2001, 'Bangladesh: Bomb Kills Ten Christians', *Christianity Today* website, 6 August <http://www.ctlibrary.com/6524> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 13).

2. Please provide any research regarding the treatment of converts from Islam to Christianity in Bangladesh.

In the last thirty years, there has been an increase in the number of Muslims converting to Christianity. According to one estimate, in the period between 1971 and 1991, the number of Christian converts in Bangladesh has risen from two hundred thousand to four hundred thousand (Islam, S. 2006, 'The Crafty Project: Christianization of Bangladesh', Kavkaz Center website, 10 November <http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2006/11/10/6350.shtml> – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 14). With an increase in the number of Christian converts, violent attacks and discrimination against the converts have also increased from members of the Islamic militant groups such as JI, JMJB, and JMB.

According to the Christian Open Doors International website, Muslim converts to Christianity worship in secret for fear of reprisals from extremists.

There are two types of churches in Bangladesh: the Underground Church (consisting of converts from Islam) and the Visible Church, consisting nearly entirely of converts from Hinduism. The Underground Church can be further divided into a group who worship in secret, and a group meeting openly (this happens when whole villages turn to Christ) ('Bangladesh in brief' (undated), Open Doors International website http://sb.od.org/index.php?supp_page=bangladesh&supp_lang=en&PHPSESSID=1df095813172de2d781266c40bb714f5 – Accessed 20 November 2006 – Attachment 15).

The UK Home Office October 2006 reports of persecution of Muslims who convert to Christianity.

According to Open Doors (OD), an evangelical Christian organization that provides religious materials, training and support to Christians around the world, Christians, and particularly Muslims who convert to Christianity, are not safe in Bangladesh. Muslim converts to Christianity generally do not openly practice their religion. According to the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, a US-based NGO, Sources consulted indicate that Muslims who convert to Christianity could face rejection by their families and society and physical 'danger'. A May 2005 U.S. Newswire article reports that Christian Freedom International (CFI), a US based human rights organization, found evidence of 'persecution' of Muslims who had converted to Christianity during a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh. Cited in the same article, the president of CFI indicated that Muslim women who convert to Christianity may be subject to beatings, abduction, rape, forced marriage and forced reconversion to Islam. Specific reports of Muslim women who converted to Christianity being subject to such treatment could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate [IRB]...The government has, however, taken measures to provide security at places of worship of religious minorities around the country. During Christmas celebrations in 2005, the government reportedly tightened security at churches across the country following a series of Islamic militant bombings earlier that year" (UK Home Office 2006, *Country of Origin Information Report: Bangladesh*, October – Attachment 5).

According to the Christians Unite website, a recent Christian convert, Andrew, was targeted by Muslim extremists. According to the alleged plot, four drivers of four different buses were hired by a Muslim group to crash into a Bangladeshi Christians' sport utility vehicle. "Andrew was rammed by a bus while in the front passenger seat of his moving vehicle. His left elbow was broken, and his right forearm was embedded with glass and severely lacerated" (Martin, A. 2006, 'Christian Narrowly Escapes Murder Attempt in Bangladesh', Christians Unite website, 22 August http://news.christiansunite.com/Religion_News/religion04950.shtml – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 16).

Christian converts face a number of problems in Bangladesh and one such example was recently reported by the Christian Freedom International website. Christian convert, Jahurul Islam of the village of Sengua in Bangladesh tells his story of discrimination and abuse.

I got a job several times in the garments factory in the Dhaka city, but I could not work in one place for more than three or four months because as a Christian from Muslim background and I am always compelled to share the Gospel with Muslims. I was always fired from my job after my employer found out that I converted to Christianity from Islam. Every place I worked hated me when they came to know about my conversion.

I lost all my land properties for my conversion into Christianity. My neighbor named Shamsul Haque confiscated my 55 decimals land property by force because I am a Christian. He made a case against me to the Jamalpur District court. He always threatens to kill me. He threatens me telling that I will be killed like Dr. Ghoni was killed. Dr. Ghoni was my good friend. He was killed very brutally attacked, tortured and killed for his conversion to Christianity from Islam.

One of my uncles named Abul Kasem confiscated my 12 decimals of other land property because I became Christian.

Moulovi Lutfor Rahman and many others keep threatening me for my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They told me that they are the members of JMB, a radical Islamic group.

A lot of allegations were brought to the court by the people of Muslim community in my area because I became Christian from Muslim. They charged false case against me into the court.

In 2001 I got a job as a teacher in school that is eight kilometers far from my home. But when the headmaster of the school came to know that I have become Christian from Muslim he got angry with me. And he proposed me, "If you don't come back to the Muslim Religion, you must be let out from the school?" He fired me from the job ('The Testimony of Jahurul Islam' 2006, Christian Freedom International website, July <http://www.christianfreedom.org/PersecutionAlert/Jahurul%20Islam.html> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 17).

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Amnesty International www.amnesty.org

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International Crisis Group website www.crisisgroup.org

International News & Politics

Associated Baptist Press website www.abpnews.com

Christian Today website www.christiantoday.com

Asia News website www.asianews.it

Fox News website www.foxnews.com

Catholic World News www.cwnews.com

Christian Monitor website www.christianmonitor.org

Christian Freedom International website www.christianfreedom.org

Christians Unite website www.news.christiansunite.com

Compass Direct News website www.compassdirect.com

Open Doors International website <http://sb.od.org/>

Search Engines

Google search engine www.google.com.au/

Yahoo search engine www.yahoo.com

Exalead search engine www.exalead.com

Lycos search engine www.lycos.com

Alta Vista search engine www.altavista.com

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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