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Bangladesh: Fresh wave of migration feared as Islamist killers target Hindus

BY [GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN](#) on [JUNE 19, 2016](#) in [ASIA TIMES NEWS & FEATURES](#), [SOUTH ASIA](#)

Secular bloggers were the first Islamist killers in Bangladesh went after. Next they targeted foreigners, publishers and minority Shiite Muslims. The past weeks witnessed a rise in the number of deadly attacks against Hindus. It is feared that this may trigger a fresh wave of migration of Hindus from Bangladesh

A number of people have been murdered in Bangladesh since 2013, and most of those dead were Hindus, a minority community in a Muslim majority nation, which split from Pakistan in 1971 — a secession seen as freedom from a long demeaning existence of intellectual imprisonment and other kinds of cruelty.

Incidentally, the overwhelmingly Hindu India helped Bangladesh — which was then known as East Pakistan — win its independence.

In the latest murders, a Hindu priest, 70-year-old Ananda Gopal Ganguly, was attacked with sharp weapons as he was cycling towards his temple in Jhenaidah, southwestern Bangladesh. The culprits rode motorcycles.

Days after the priest's decapitated body was found in a field, a Hindu monastery worker, Nityaranjan Pandein his 60s died after a gang slaughtered him in the northwestern district of Pabna.

Besides Hindus, secularists, atheists and bloggers had been targeted by militants in the past. In January, a homoeopath, who had converted to Christianity, was found murdered in Jhenaidah.

Recently, a Christian grocer was killed in northern Natore and an anti-terror senior police officer's wife was shot dead in the port city of Chittagong.

The al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) claimed these murders

Violence against minorities, especially Hindus, intensified in 2014 after al-Qaeda announced its arrival on the Indian subcontinent. Indian intelligence sources believe that al-Qaeda — which is now called Ansar-ul-Islam — is behind the recent murderous attacks in Bangladesh.

Dhaka says these extremist organisations do not have a foothold in Bangladesh.



Relatives console Shefali, wife of Hindu priest Ananda Gopal Ganguly who beheaded in a field near his temple in western Jhenaidah district



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But then there are other radical Islamic groups in the country that are home grown, and security forces have been battling them. Two key members of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were shot dead in a pitched battle at Dhaka, and another was killed in a northwestern district.

The country's Home Minister, Asaduzzaman Khan, averred that the main opposition, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, was responsible for the killings, but he quickly added that he would not rule out a wider conspiracy involving a foreign spy agency.

The aggression against people, especially Hindus, has triggered panic — worsened by a whispering warning that the IS has arrived in Bangladesh — resulting in migration plans among the already dwindling community there.

"I don't know whether it is IS or some other group decapitating Hindus, but it is quite clear that this persecution is not the same as the one we saw earlier. It is a new phenomenon," Kajal Debnath, who heads the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council, told the *Times of India* from Dhaka.

"Earlier, they would rape Hindu girls or torch our temples and houses, forcing Hindus to abandon their property and migrate to India. It was mostly about grabbing Hindu land and property. But now they are killing ordinary landless, poor Hindus with no social or economic standing, and the message is entirely different... A fresh wave of migration of Hindus out of Bangladesh will begin quietly," he said.

In 1947, when the subcontinent was partitioned into India and Pakistan (which had two wings, East and West, separated by a large Indian territory), 31% of Pakistanis were Hindus. Most of them lived in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) — which borders India's West Bengal. The two regions share a common culture, language and even food habit.

But the 2011 Bangladesh census found that the percentage of Hindus had dropped to 8.5.

The 2001 Indian census revealed that there were 3 million migrants from Bangladesh, a movement that began in the months following the 1971 secessionist war. The census estimated that 50 Bangladeshis are migrating to India every day.

A Dhaka-based journalist, Saleem Samad, contends that the exodus may have increased in the past five years.

"Even though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has elevated Hindus to prominent positions in her government, most Hindus remain marginalized and persecuted. There has been systemic discrimination and violence against them," says Samad.

"Islamization of the country gathered momentum during the military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990), and the common perception in Bangladesh today is that Hindus are infidels," he said.

In 1992, when fanatics demolished the 300-year-old historic Babri Masjid (mosque) at Ayodhya (a Hindu religious city in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh), Hindus in Bangladesh faced terrible torture and humiliation.

While large-scale brutality against Muslims in India has stopped after the early years of 2000, neighboring Bangladesh appears unable to check such sectarian atrocities.

Gautaman Bhaskaran is an author, commentator and movie critic, who has worked with The Statesman in Kolkata and The Hindu in Chennai for 35 years. He now writes for the Hindustan Times, the Gulf Times and Seoul Times.

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