

# Review: Year of horror for minority groups in Bangladesh

Monday 24 April 2017, by [RABBI Arifur Rahman](#) (Date first published: 29 December 2016).

Opportunistic groups have used religion as a political device creating an atmosphere of fear making hundreds of minorities leave Bangladesh in large numbers that experts say they have not seen since the Liberation War.

Although the constitution protects religious freedom and ensures equal status and equal rights in the practice all religions, vestiges from the Pakistan era like the Vested Property Act has remained in the constitution and is repeatedly used to grab minority owned lands with coercion and violence.

According to Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK) the reported number of incidents till November this year was 185 temples destroyed in the country and 180 homes ransacked and destroyed.

ASK acting executive director Nur Khan told the Dhaka tribune that the communal violence has been an on going problem since Independence.

The lack of political will to reform the police also plays a huge role in propagating violence.

“We saw in several media reports how the police themselves set Santals homes on fire in Gaibandha. The police are not independent from political influence and they still operate under the guideline set during the British era that used the them as riot police and not as community protectors and arbitrators of the law.”

Prominent economist Dr Abul Barkat recently published a research that said in three decades there will be no more Hindus left in Bangladesh.

According to the research, from 1964 to 2013 around 11.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh due to religious persecution and discrimination, that means on an average 632 Hindus left the country each day and 230,612 annually.

Before the Liberation War, the daily rate of migration was 705 while it was 512 during 1971-1981 and 438 during 1981-1991. The number increased to 767 persons each day during 1991-2001 while around 774 persons left the country during 2001-2012, Barkat’s research says.

The indigenous population has also been victim to communal and sexual violence this year with 24 cases of violence against indigenous women reported till June.

Kapaeeng Foundation says the reported number of cases till June were 4 indigenous women gang raped, 6 reported rape, 3 were killed after rape and 3 others were kidnapped.

The foundation’s Manager Hiron Mitra Chakma told the Dhaka Tribune: “Violence against minorities has increased in number this year but none of those cases has gone to trial and that lack of accountability lets people get away with rape and murder.

“In particular, the ruling party or influential locals will rape women and create communal violence to

grab lands owned by the minorities. When the minorities get scared and leave then the influential locals can use the Vested Property Act to claim that land,” he added.

Bangladesh Adivasi Forum General Secretary Sanjeeb Drong told the Dhaka Tribune: “It’s been 45 years since we gained independence but ethnic minorities are still far from asserting their civil, political, economic, social, cultural and human rights in this country. Instead the violence against the ethnic minority such as murder, attacks, land grabbing etc are increasing every year.”

### **Nasirnagar**

On October 30 Some 3,000 Muslims took part in the series of violent attacks on the Hindu localities of Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria over an alleged defamatory post against Islam by a Hindu youth, Rasraj Das, on Facebook.

The mob vandalised more than 100 houses and 17 temples and around 100 people including women were injured in the attacks.

It was later discovered that Rasraj’s account had been hacked.

On November 6, Health Minister Md Nasim said anti-liberation forces were behind the communal violence in Nasirnagar, Brahmanbara at a press conference at the Awami League Dhanmondi office.

When the local radical groups were using mosques to unite Muslims in Nasirnagar, a little known website [1] published a provocative content on the alleged blasphemous Facebook post shared from the timeline of Rasraj, to condemn the “arrest of six Muslims” for their involvement in the attacks and violent protests.

The content, published as a news item, was originally posted by “Noyon Chatterje,” a Facebook profile that has long been instigating hatred against Hindus in Bangladesh and India. Dhaka Tribune has learnt that the website is run by Chhatra Shibir activists.

After the October 30 attacks in Nasirnagar, temples and Puja pavilions were vandalised and looted in at least seven other districts.

### **Santals in Gobindaganj**

On November 6, over 1,000 Santal families were run out of their homes from Shahebganj Bagda farm, a property on which they claim historical ownership by police, local political activists and the workers Rangpur Sugar Mill. The attackers set fire to their homes and at least three Santal men were shot dead. At least 30 people including 17 indigenous men and eight law enforcers were injured in the conflict.

It was later uncovered that a local politician had lured them into settling on the land and later taken part in the eviction. Rangpur Sugar Mills lays claim to the 1,842-acre land, the largest state property in Bangladesh and uses it for farming sugar cane and leasing out to local businesses.

The Santal community took shelter under the open sky in neighbouring Santal villages. They stopped going out of these villages for fear of violence.

### **Other major incidents**

On January 8, a mob of miscreants with the help of local police allegedly attacked on indigenous people in Shialpara area under Akkelpur Upazila in Joypurhat with the motive to evict them from

their ancestral lands.

On February 26, around 4pm an indigenous woman was sexually assaulted in Ujobazar area of Sajek by police Constable Mohammad Sarowar Hossain of Baghaihat in Rangamti. Police has not taken any action against Sarowar.

On February 21, a priest was killed and a devotee shot at when miscreants attacked a Hindu temple in Debiganj upazila of Panchagarh this morning. Deceased Jogeshwar Das Dhikari, 50, was the priest of Sri Sri Shantu Santo Gaurio monastery. The incident also injured Gopal Chandra Roy, 32, was rushed to Rangpur Medical College and Hospital.

On March 28, in Shatkhira district, Ashasonhi Upazila, more than 100 Hindu families were attacked over a Union Parishad election.

Nahar in Srimangal, 96 families of Khasiya punjis have been given notice of eviction. There has been postponement because of the protests. 15 Khasiya spent time.

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**P.S.**

\* December 29, 2016:

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/review-year-horror-minority-groups-bangladesh>

This article was first published on Dhaka Tribune:

<http://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/12/28/review-year-horror-minority-groups>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] [www.banglamail71.com](http://www.banglamail71.com)