



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Bangladesh

Bangladesh – BGD38411 – Treatment of
women from religious minorities –
Buddhism/Buddhists – Chittagong District
– Chandanaish
25 March 2011

1. Chandanaish/Chittagong District – please obtain a demographic/religious profile for this area.

A complete demographic profile could not be located in the sources consulted for either Chandanaish or the Chittagong District. Nevertheless, the Buddhist population “are predominantly found among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.”¹ The Buddhist community in Chittagong is of significance, as it is the only Buddhist community in Bangladesh.²

Almost 90 percent of the population of Bangladesh are Sunni³ Muslim, 9.3 percent are Hindu, 0.6 percent Buddhist⁴ and 0.5 percent as Christian⁵ (predominantly Roman Catholic).⁶ The 2009 *Operational Guidance Note: Bangladesh* produced by the UK Home Office notes “small populations of Shi’a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha’is, Animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers vary from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents for each faith.”⁷

Country Advice BGD38116 completed in February 2011 provides information on the recent attacks on Buddhists in the Chittagong Hills District in 2010. Specifically, the Advice notes that:

there is some evidence that monks in the CHT [Chittagong Hills Tracts] may be at greater risk of harm than ordinary Buddhist members. As many as three Buddhist temples were destroyed and monks were forced to flee for safety in the February

¹ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, 26 October, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127363.htm> - Accessed 24 March 2011 – Attachment 1

² Country Advice Section 2011, *Country Advice BGD38116*, 24 February – Attachment 2

³ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Operational Guidance Note: Bangladesh*, 6 February 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/498c47b72.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 3

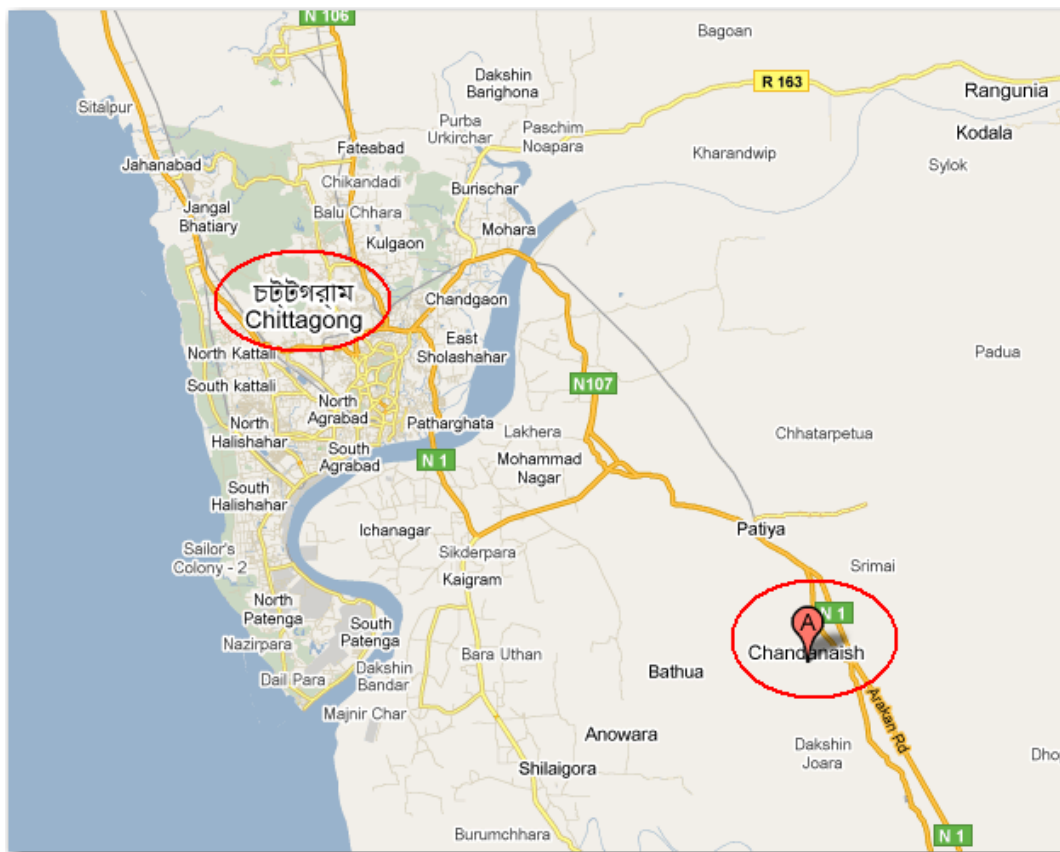
⁴ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Bangladesh*, 20 August 2010, <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/bangladesh-260810.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 4

⁵ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Bangladesh*, 20 August 2010, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c7247e82.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 4

⁶ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Operational Guidance Note: Bangladesh*, 6 February 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/498c47b72.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 3; see also United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Bangladesh*, 20 August 2010, <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/bangladesh-260810.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 4

⁷ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Operational Guidance Note: Bangladesh*, 6 February 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/498c47b72.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 3

2010 attacks. One leading Buddhist advocate based in Thailand indicated at that time that the safety of the monks in the CHT had reached a critical condition.⁸



2. Do reports verify the targeting of Buddhist women and families for kidnapping, conversion and forcible marriage?

Bangladeshi women from religious minorities have continued to experience high levels of physical and sexual violence including abductions and forced conversions perpetrated by members of the Muslim majority. This violence takes place in the context of significant underreporting of incidents and weak enforcement of laws protecting women, particularly in rural areas.⁹ As the 1993 US Department of State *Country Report on Human Rights Practices-Bangladesh* noted of the 1,108 cases filed under the *Cruelty to Women Law*, 14 cases had been prosecuted, resulting in only one conviction.¹⁰

Sources dating from the 1990s detailing specific instances of violence against Buddhist women in Chittagong or Chandanais were scarce. Nevertheless, sources were located which discuss the treatment of indigenous women, and women belonging to religious minorities in Bangladesh throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Several sources focused on the treatment of Hindu women in Bangladesh - this may be due, in part, to the significant minority Hindu

⁸ Country Advice Section 2011, *Country Advice BGD38116*, 24 February

⁹ United States Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1993 - Bangladesh*, 30 January 1994, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6aa8418.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011 – Attachment 5

¹⁰ United States Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1993 - Bangladesh*, 30 January 1994, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6aa8418.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011 – Attachment 5

population in Bangladesh (at almost 10 percent of the total population) compared with the very small Buddhist population (at 0.6 percent).

The Hindu community are involved in advocating for the rights of Hindu and women from other minority religions in Bangladesh and Pakistan. For instance, the blog *Hindubd* posted an article in May 2010, 'Hindus of Bangladesh', detailing the violence experienced by "minorities, the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and tribal people" throughout the period 1992-2010, which has affected "hundreds of thousands of minority families". The violence ranges from "**gang rape and abduction of minor children to elderly women**, brutality, murders, attack on temples, churches and orphanage, looting, land grabbing, eviction and **forced conversion to Islam**."¹¹ The site also lists the names and case histories of several Hindu women who have been either gang raped and/or forcibly converted to Islam during the 2000s in both Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹²

A 2004 report presented by the President of the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Unity Council, Dr. Niranjana Ray, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Working Group on Minorities, details an extended history of violence against women belonging to religious minorities, with particular reference to "forced conversion to Islam" and "ethnic minority cleansing":

Since 1946 the minorities of Bangladesh have been targets of discrimination and religious racial profiling as well as hate crime ... Gang rape, murder, threatening, **forced conversion to Islam**, living there to pay infidel security tax **and ethnic minority cleansing are day to day incidents**... whereas the minorities of Bangladesh represented approximately 30% of the population in 1941, they constitute a bare 10% today.¹³

This report goes on to note an incident in 2003 in which the Islamic terrorist organisation *Harkat-E-Islam Al-Jihad*:

issued a letter of ultimatum to the religious minority businessmen and minority leaders of the *Awami League* [the relatively progressive party] of Manikgonj, threatening to wage attacks on their families and burn down their dwelling houses unless they converted to Islam within seven days of receipt of the letter (The *Daily Sangbad*, Nov. 3, 2003).¹⁴

¹¹ Brahmachari, R. 2010, 'Kidnapping of Hindu Girls for Raping or Conversion and Marriage to Muslims', 12 May, *hindubd.blogspot*, <http://hindubd.blogspot.com/2010/05/kidnapping-of-hindu-girls-for-rape-or.html> - Accessed 25 March 2011, Attachment 6

¹² Brahmachari, R. 2010, 'Kidnapping of Hindu Girls for Raping or Conversion and Marriage to Muslims', 12 May, *hindubd.blogspot*, <http://hindubd.blogspot.com/2010/05/kidnapping-of-hindu-girls-for-rape-or.html> - Accessed 25 March 2011, Attachment 6. See also, <http://www.faithfreedom.org/articles/persecution-by-islam/kidnapping-of-hindu-girls-for-rape-or-conversion-and-marriage-to-muslims-2/> - Accessed 25 March 2011

¹³ Ray, N. President, Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Unity Council 2004, 'Torture and Cleansing of Religious and Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh', *10th Session of Working Group on Minorities*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, March 1-5, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/docs/BHBCCS3a.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 7

¹⁴ Ray, N. President, Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Unity Council 2004, 'Torture and Cleansing of Religious and Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh', *10th Session of Working Group on Minorities*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, March 1-5, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/docs/BHBCCS3a.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 7. A copy of the letter can be found here: http://www.hrcbm.org/news/sangbad_11_032003_harkat.html

Non-government organisations continue to emphasise the position of women belonging to religious minorities in Bangladesh as one which continues to be subject to high levels of physical and sexual violence, and frequently denied state protection. In their submission to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2008, the Asia Indigenous People's Pact Foundation (AIPP) stated that although the Constitution of Bangladesh prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion and place of birth, "indigenous peoples are the victim of social, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic discrimination."¹⁵ AIPP reported that "indigenous women in Bangladesh are victims not only of repression and negligence, but also of violence like rape, kidnap and murder. Rampant violation of women's human rights takes place not only within a home or public but also during police custody."¹⁶ Similarly, in submissions to the same UNHRC meeting, the Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC, Ontario) noted that:

women from the minority communities face ... serious violations of their civil rights. Many laws that discriminate against women are still on the statute books. Further, **successive governments have turned a blind eye to sexual assaults, rape, forcible confinement and forced conversions of minority women, particularly Hindus. Women victims are faced with inadequate legislative safeguards and uncooperative and more often, hostile police authorities when they seek redress.**¹⁷

It is of note that in the US Department of State's 1993 *Country Report on Human Rights Practices-Bangladesh* states,

Property ownership, particularly for Hindus, has been a contentious issue since independence, when many Hindus lost land holdings due to unequal application of the law. **Reported cases of violence directed against religious minority communities has resulted in loss of property**, most recently in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri mosque in India in December 1992. These actions are a symptom of the communal tensions that have prompted some people belonging to minority groups to leave Bangladesh, causing a slow but steady decline in the relative size of the country's minority population, especially Hindus.¹⁸

3. Deleted.

¹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, *Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(c) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 - Bangladesh*, 24 November 2008, A/HRC/WG.6/4/BGD/3, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49465a0c0.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 8

¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(c) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 - Bangladesh*, 24 November 2008, A/HRC/WG.6/4/BGD/3, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49465a0c0.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 8

¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(c) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 - Bangladesh*, 24 November 2008, A/HRC/WG.6/4/BGD/3, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49465a0c0.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011, Attachment 8

¹⁸ United States Department of State, *U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1993 - Bangladesh*, 30 January 1994, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6aa8418.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011 - Attachment 5

Attachments

1. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, 26 October, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127363.htm> - Accessed 24 March 2011
2. Country Advice Section 2011, *Country Advice BGD38116*, 24 February
3. United Kingdom: Home Office, *Operational Guidance Note: Bangladesh*, 6 February 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/498c47b72.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011
4. United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Bangladesh*, 20 August 2010, <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/bangladesh-260810.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011
5. United States Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1993 - Bangladesh*, 30 January 1994, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6aa8418.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011
6. Brahmachari, R. 2010, 'Kidnapping of Hindu Girls for Raping or Conversion and Marriage to Muslims', 12 May, *hindubd.blogspot*, <http://hindubd.blogspot.com/2010/05/kidnapping-of-hindu-girls-for-raping-or.html> - Accessed 25 March 2011
7. Ray, N. President, Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Unity Council 2004, 'Torture and Cleansing of Religious and Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh', *10th Session of Working Group on Minorities*, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, March 1-5, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/docs/BHBCCS3a.doc> - Accessed 24 March 2011
8. UN Human Rights Council, *Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(c) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 - Bangladesh*, 24 November 2008, A/HRC/WG.6/4/BGD/3, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49465a0c0.html> - Accessed 24 March 2011