

Bangladesh: Hindu minority must be protected

The Bangladeshi government must take urgent action to protect the country's Hindu minority following weeks of grave human rights abuses, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

Before the general election in October, the Hindu community was targetted, reportedly by supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for their perceived support for the rival Awami League. The backlash after the elections was systematic and severe. Bangladeshi press has reported that attackers have entered Hindu homes, beaten family members and looted their property.

"Successive governments have let down the Hindu minority in Bangladesh and the last two months show exactly how vulnerable the Hindu community is. The government must live up to its responsibility to protect all of its citizens and it must do it now," Amnesty International said.

On 5 November, a gang of about 25 youths reportedly attacked Hindu homes in the village of Daspara in Mithanala union, Mirersarai Upazila. Sunil Das Sandhu, 28, was hacked to death and 16 others were injured. The gang ransacked and looted houses, dragged family members out of their homes and beat them. Police arrested 12 people but it is not known if they have been charged.

More than one hundred women are believed to have been raped, often in front of their husbands or fathers. A number of Hindu girls have been abducted. One girl was reportedly abducted from her home at Razarchor, Barisal, after the attackers demanded a large sum of money

which her family could not pay. They also molested the girl's mother and aunt.

Hundreds of Hindu families have fled across the border into India in fear of their lives. A prominent journalist, Shahriar Kabir, went to India to speak with Hindu families who had fled and was arrested on his return. The authorities have said that his videos contained "objectionable and misleading statements that are detrimental to communal harmony and subversive of the state" and that he was involved in "tarnishing the image of Bangladesh and of the government in the outside world". These grounds however do not relate to any specific penal charges and Amnesty International is campaigning for his immediate and unconditional release.

The government has reportedly set up a committee to investigate the ongoing attacks on the Hindu community but Amnesty International is not aware of any progress it has made.

Amnesty International is calling on the government to take decisive action to protect the Hindu community. Specifically it should initiate a full, independent and impartial investigation into the attacks and bring to justice those responsible for them.

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For a copy of the report contact mcatsani@amnesty.org or call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>