

Annexure 4

South Asia

Bangladeshi Hindus under attack, temples destroyed

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Zeenews Bureau

Dhaka: The revenge attacks on Hindus that began after a top Islamist leader was sentenced to death for war crimes continue unabated in Bangladesh with the government appearing to be in position to contain the violence.

Delwar Hossain Sayedee, vice-president of the Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami, was sentenced to death on February 28 for crimes including rape and murder committed during the 1971 independence conflict. The death sentence to Sayedee and other Jel leaders has triggered the worst violence in the Muslim-majority country since independence; 85 people have so far lost their lives in the unrest.

Hindus, their houses and temples had come under attacks in districts like Noakhali, Satkhira and Sirajganj.

As per an organisation that looks after Hindu temples in the country, 47 temples and at least 700 Hindu houses had either been torched or vandalised by members of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir. Jamaat, which is an ally of Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nation Party, has denied any role in the attacks, blaming supporters of the ruling Awami League party for the violence.

For the record, Zia has demanded that the government identify and punish the perpetrators through "neutral" investigation and compensate the victims. "I called upon the administration and law enforcers to prevent such attacks on minorities with an iron fist," said Khaleda.

However, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni had said last week told diplomats last week that Jamaat and Shibir attacked Hindu temples and houses in a "pre-planned manner".

Amnesty International has made an urgent appeal to the Bangladesh government to provide its minority better protection.

"The Hindu community in Bangladesh is at extreme risk, in particular at such a tense time in the country. It is shocking that they appear to be targeted simply for their religion. The authorities must ensure that they receive the protection they need," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty's Researcher. Hindus, who make up 8-10 percent of Bangladesh's 153 million-strong population, are traditionally seen as supporters of the Awami League, which brands itself as a secular party.

They were the main targets during Bangladesh's 1971 independence war against Pakistan and during post-poll violence in 2001 when a centre-right party allied with Jamaat won a two-thirds majority.

http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/bangladeshi-hindus-under-attack-temples-destroyed_835239.html