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**Crime and Violence
Update in Bangladesh:
An Analysis from BPO**

**Analyzing the Contemporary
Violence Against Ethnic
Minorities in South Asia**

**Violence against Religious
Minorities in Bangladesh**

CA PEACE REPORT
an initiative of
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From the Editor's Desk

In English, the word 'minority' is nineteen years older than 'majority' (1533 and 1552 respectively). One can also say that the former required an earlier definition than the latter amid social contestations in the early years of the modern era. However, the definition of 'minority' was still too narrow and partial. In 1533, it only described "either a condition or fact of being smaller, inferior or subordinate."¹ It took another two centuries before 'minority' came to be used in the contemporary sense of its meaning. In 1736, the term was used for the first time from a 'numerical' standpoint mainly to "describe the relationship between larger and smaller groups/values."² The 'minority' otherwise came to be understood numerically and to a larger group or the 'majority.' 'Minority' now became dialectically related to the 'majority.' But then there is something else in the pre-majority birth of the minority.

At first, the minority began to be defined not so much by its members as by those who considered themselves outside the domain of the minority and lacked a proper conformist identification. Put differently, those who could easily be conformed into some categories like 'outsiders,' 'aliens,' or differentiated in terms of race, religion, language, or ethnicity and were understandably less in number or relatively disempowered than the more significant (yet to be wholly conformist) population began to be labeled as the minority. Therefore, the issue of conformity became an essential yardstick in defining the latter. Interestingly, no sooner had the conformity of the minority been established than the non-minority or, conversely, the majority came into being and, similar to the minority, began to be viewed as *conforming* to this or that category of things. What we know as the 'majority,' therefore, could hide, particularly the manifold structures reproducing its power, and force identification of the 'minority' without itself being identified, and that is precisely the reason why the birth of the 'minority,' even as a concept, took place before the term 'majority' came into fashion. The 'majority' was there, but it remained at the back, making itself apparent only by labeling or categorizing the 'minority.' Such manifold yet hidden structures could range from the state's power and policing of the people to the schooling of the population, effectively marginalizing and alienating a particular section of the population mainly to reproduce the power of the majority. Only later did the 'majority' fall prey to the seductiveness of conformity, no doubt, often making a fool of itself by frequently changing its conforming categories.

Secondly, for both minority and majority, the labeling concretizes when members targeted "within the domain of the term start believing in the labeling." This is a cumbersome process. It takes years of constant hammering, including coercive measures, for the members to get acquainted with the term and start feeling almost the meanings embedded in it at an individual level. Not so much difference is there in the process of making up

¹ IP. Massey, *Minority Rights Discourse in India* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2002), p. 16.

² Ibid.

‘minority’ and ‘majority,’ except that the latter ends up believing in the power at its disposal in reproducing the marginalization and alienation of the former. Critics would argue that the ‘majority,’ too, ends up marginalized and alienated, at least from a section of the population. In this world of belief-making, both ‘minority’ and ‘majority,’ albeit with different outcomes, suffer from the divisive nature of their respective conformities.

Lastly, the birth of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ remains multiverse. There are different levels, phases, and categories, but all are intricately intertwined. Childhood, schooling, habitation, personal and collective communication, memories, gastronomic delights and taboos, marriage, religious and social rituals, governability, and even periodic coercion in the form of riots and policing, all in some form or the other tend to reproduce certain compositeness amongst the members. Any attempt to limit the issue to one or the other is bound to distort the very understanding of the composition, let alone devising methods to resolve the plight of the alienated and the marginalized.

The Bangladesh context is no less complicated.³ While the term ‘minority’ is readily translated as *shankhyalaghu* and the term ‘majority’ as *shankhyagorishtha*, the terms are yet to capture the imagination of all classes of people. When a sexual worker was asked to reflect on the *shankhyalaghu* or the ‘minority’ of the country, she quickly responded by saying: “Are you talking of the rich people? They are the *shankhyalaghu* (minority)!”⁴ This may not be exceptional. In some countries, a version of this has led to revolutionary outcomes. An Iranian scholar, while showing his uncle’s palatial mansion in the heart of Isfahan, now seized by the state, commented wryly that during Shah’s regime, the “rich started believing in their richness, which fuelled the revolution in Iran.” Not so different is the case with the recent national election in India, where Narendra Modi’s BJP won the election with relatively fewer seats and barely managed to form a government with ‘not-so-reliable’ coalition partners. Some critics point out that, among other things, voters found the grotesque display of richness by some of Modi’s super-rich business partners humiliating, which probably cost him some key seats, even in Faizabad, the home of the Ram Mandir. The reasoning, no doubt, is very wise. Moreover, and no less a critical point, during the partition of 1947, the Muslims and Hindus started believing in their ‘Muslim-ness’ and ‘Hindu-ness,’ respectively. However, a negligible section of the population participated in the carnage of each other’s population. There is some seductiveness in the terms, and it may not be complicated to pinpoint the time or the experience when a member starts believing in them. And when that happens, whatever contrary reasons are provided or even experienced, there is no stop for the members to be routinized, demeaned, and even demonized while fearing the other.

³ For a detailed discussion on the subject, see Imtiaz Ahmed and Amena Mohsin, *The Birth of Minority: State, Society and the Hindu Women of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, December 2005).

⁴ The in-depth survey, *State of Democracy in South Asia Project*, Centre for Developing Societies, Delhi, and Centre for Alternatives, Dhaka, December 2004.

But then most of the demeaning and demonizing takes the place of the empowered over the disempowered. These are posed in relatively neutral terms and not in terms of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ because in certain cases (the fate of Bengalis in undivided Pakistan, for instance), the relatively disempowered may not always be the ‘minority,’ at least not in the demographic sense of the term. In the post-1971 period, the Bengali Muslims have attained the distinction of being labeled as the empowered majority. At the same time, the relatively disempowered non-Muslims and non-Bengalis are referred to as the ‘minority.’ However, both terms remain problematic, and the correlation with empowerment may not always hold, mainly when addressed against an individual. A majoritarian individual, in this case, a Bengali Muslim, may feel as insecure as a minority. However, the reasons for the insecurity of the former would be, in most cases, qualitatively different from that of the latter. Conversely, a minoritarian member, in this case, a Bengali Hindu or even a Tripura Hindu, maybe more empowered individually than many in the majority. However, to their ‘community,’ such empowerment may be more elusive than real.

There is also a gendered element in the organization of the minority community. If Bengali Hindu women suffer double-layered domination (that is, from the standpoint of religion and gender), the members of non-Muslim, non-Bengali ethnic communities suffer yet another layer of domination, more precisely on the issue of language and culture. Such multiverse layers of dominating structures deepen and intensify the communities' socio-political identity, often making them rigid and unalterable. Not for nothing does the insecurity of the minority community feel most in the life and living of daughter, sister, wife, and mother, although the structures reproducing their insecurity are more public. It is this dialectic of private-public domains that has continued, somewhat tragically, to inform and shape the alienating features of minorities.

The life and living of a minority ended up being alienated from the majority community (and not so much from *all* members of the latter) not simply as part of a *fait accompli* or predetermined historical process but rather out of their own, very personal, bitter-sweet experiences. There is, therefore, a critical space where members of opposing communities, in marked contrast to the communalization and politicization of their respective communities, could mingle and join hands to resist the alienating structures of the modern state. And there lies much hope in overcoming the pitfalls of majority-minority discourse.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed
Executive Director,
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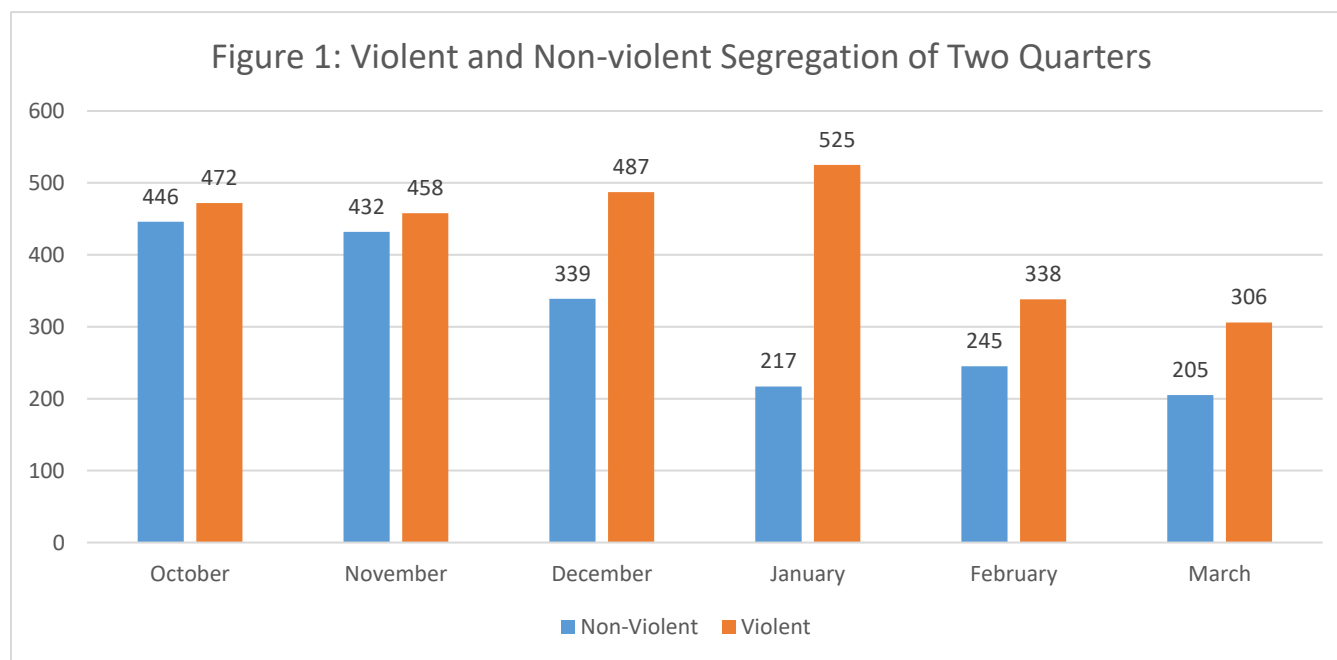
26 June 2024

Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

January-March 2024

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. From January to March 2024, BPO recorded 1169 violent⁵ and 667 non-violent incidents.⁶ Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the violent and non-violent incidents that occurred throughout this quarter alongside the monthly segregation of the

previous quarter (October-December 2023). Drawing a comparison between these two quarters, it is noticeable that non-violent incidents decreased significantly in January-March 2024 than in October-December 2023. On the other hand, the violent incidents went upward in January but took a downward turn in the following two months.



⁵ Violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

⁶ Non-violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

Table 1 summarises the updates on major violence types that constitute the most violent incidents. The Annex provides a brief description of each category.

Table 1 shows that most of the violent incidents fall under the Assault, Clash, Destruction of Property,

Sexual Assault, and Abduction categories. After January, Assaults, Clashes, and especially Destruction of property experienced a sharp decline, and other categories also showed a nominal up-and-down trend.

Table 1: Major violence types from January to March

Major Violence Types	January	February	March
Assault	332	249	229
Clash	81	37	45
Destruction of property	68	6	0
Sexual assault	28	22	15
Abduction/hostage	10	13	8
Fight	4	16	8
Mob violence (large group assault)	7	6	3
Violence against civilians	8	1	1
Violent demonstration	9	1	0
Other	2	5	1
Gunfight	3	0	2
Sabotage	3	1	1
Unclear	1	1	0

Table 2 depicts the comparison of consequences, the total number of killed, injured, sexually assaulted, abducted, and arrested in each month of the quarter in discussion. The number of deaths and injured persons went down from January, and the total number of arrests went up in February. In the last two

rows of the table, the changes in the total number of consequences in five categories are shown. The number of sexual assault victims has increased, whereas, in other categories, the numbers have changed from moderately to significantly.

Table 2: comparison of consequences between two quarters (October-December & January-March)

Months	Total Killed	Total Injured	Total Sexually Assaulted	Total Abducted	Total Arrested
January	240	1525	24	8	1073
February	211	931	28	16	1511
March	178	779	17	16	1396
Total number in this quarter	629	3235	69	40	3980
Total number in previous quarter	698	4122	65	67	9993
Increase/decrease	-9.89%	-21.52%	6.15%	-40.30%	-60.17%

Understanding the high number of assaults

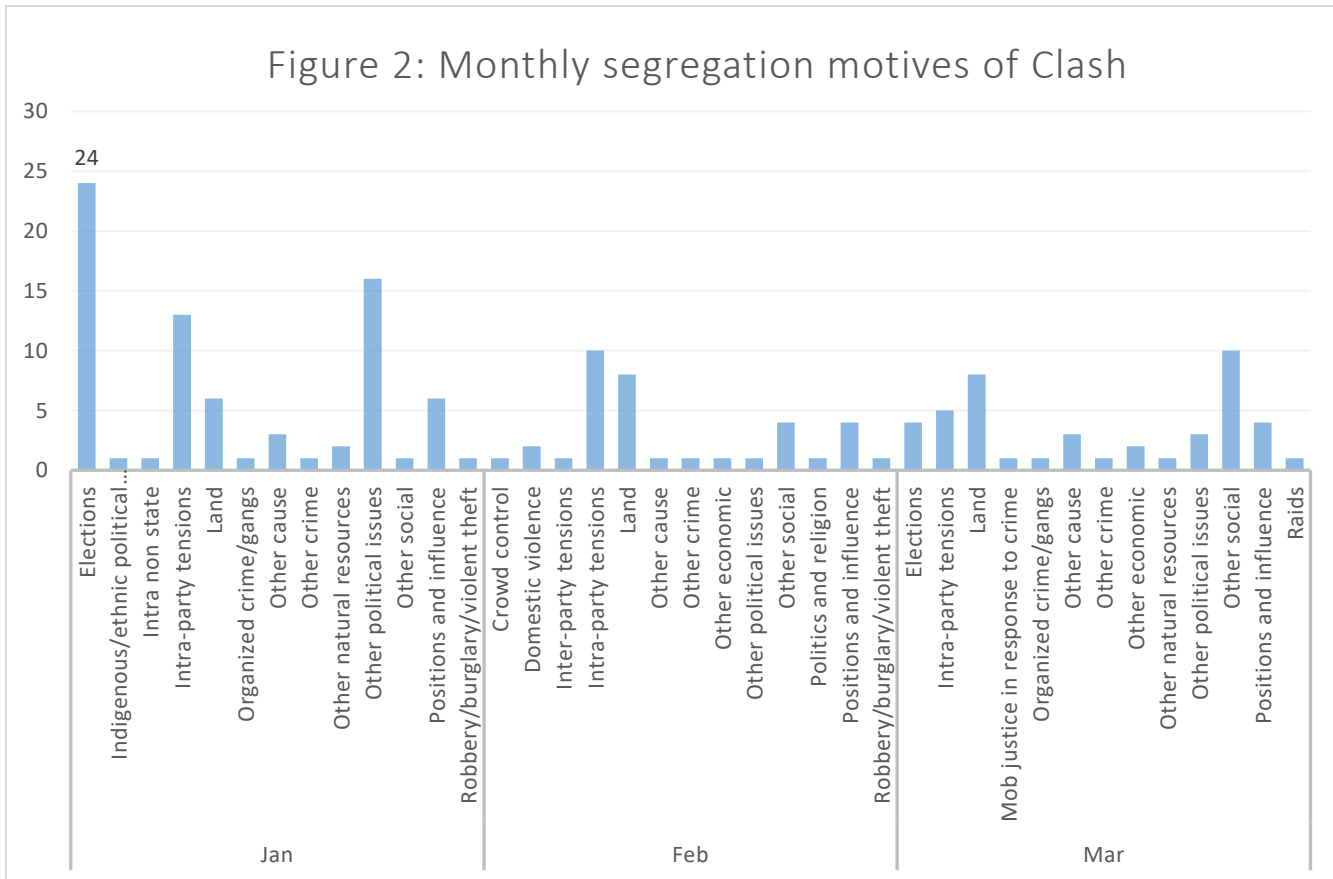
BPO enlists the inter-personal attacks carried out by different parties against one person/persons by another person/persons for various motives under the assault category. BPO recorded a total of 810 cases of assault in January-March 2024. The motives include domestic violence, dowry-related, land and other enmities related to economic factors, social-personal rivalry, attacks with criminal intent, suicide attempts, etc. In this quarter, the political and election-related attacks also took place. Under the assault category, 146 cases of suicide and attempted suicide were reported, and in those cases, 149 people were killed,

including 83 women. Besides, the recovery of unidentified dead bodies is also enlisted under this category.

Political Motives of Clashes

In January 2024, the motives of clashes were mostly politically dominated, continuing the previous quarter's trend and influencing the 12th General Election on 7 January 2024. In later months, clashes decreased significantly (see Table 1). Looking closely at Figure 2, the clash related to other motives remained unchanged. Still, the decline in politically motivated clashes contributed to the drop in the total number.

Figure 2: Monthly segregation motives of Clash



Sexual Assaults: Victims and perpetrators

Reported incidents of sexual assault have nominally decreased in this quarter than the previous one (66). Out of 65 reported cases of sexual assaults in January-March 2024, there were 15 gang rapes. The

perpetrators of these offenses were men of different ages, including eve-teasers, local miscreants, teachers, family members, relatives, neighbours, local political leaders, Upazila Chairmen, etc. However, the majority of the victims are girls. Seven boys were reportedly victims of sexual assault.

Destruction of Property significantly dropped after the Election

Destruction of Property (DoP) dropped drastically after January, and zero incidents related to DoP occurred in March. The sudden rise of DoP in November 2023 in the previous quarter was due to the approaching General Election. In January 2024, the primary motive of DoP was also election and political issues. The majority of the incidents were vandalism and arson attacks on public transports, election offices, party offices, etc., carried out by goons and miscreants. Two cases of DoP were associated with religious

sectarianism that occurred in January and February 2024.

Violence-Population nexus

Figure 3 provides a spatial glimpse into the divisional distribution of the recorded violent and non-violent incidents. The Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi divisions have the highest incident numbers. The number of violent incidents is higher than the number of non-violent incidents in all the divisions except for the Rajshahi Division. This trend is quite different from that of the previous quarter.

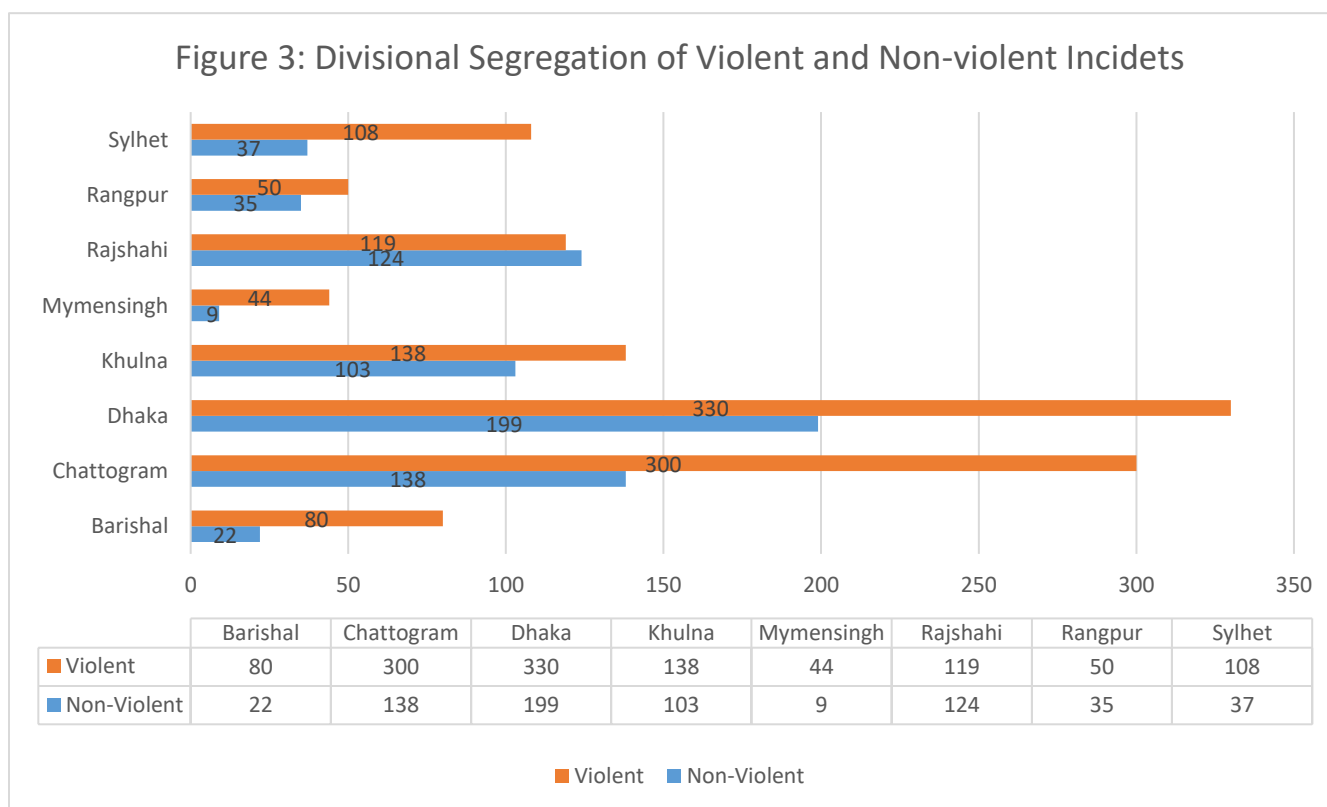
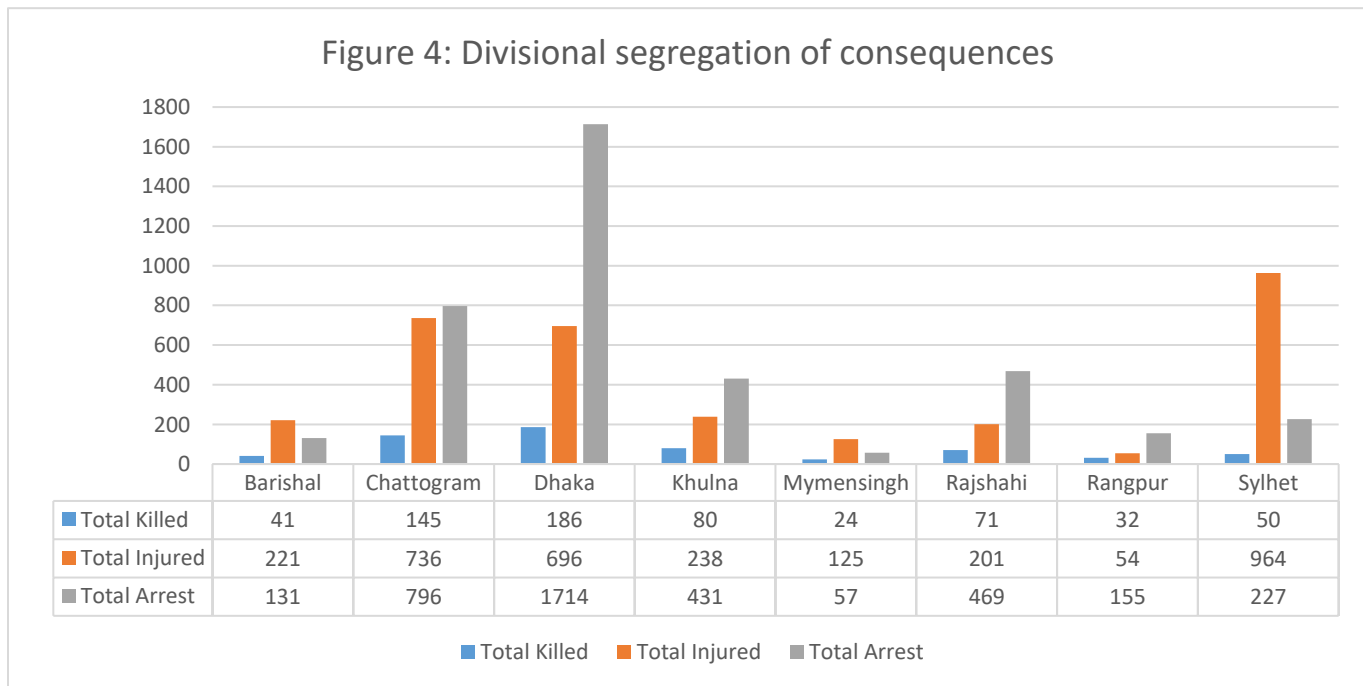


Figure 4 illustrates that the Dhaka, Chattogram, and Khulna are the first, second, and third in terms of death. The Khulna Division also has the fourth-highest injury count. This is worth mentioning because the Khulna division experienced lower injury and incident numbers in the previous quarter, but in this quarter,

the overall situation has worsened for this division. The Sylhet, the second most minor division in terms of population, has the highest injury count and experienced a sharp increase in injuries from the previous quarter.



However, a different picture emerges if the population ratio is applied to understand the incidence prevalence and consequences.⁷ The Khulna and Dhaka interchange their positions in the chart according to

the projected yearly rate per 100,000 population. The Khulna division ranked first in the incident rate, death rate, female death rate, and sexual assault rate categories. The Sylhet division has ranked first in injury

⁷ The population data is based on the Preliminary report on the Population & Housing Census 2022, Bangladesh by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Cited in:

[https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_\(English\)_August_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

rate, which is unsurprising. Also, an interesting finding is that Barishal, the most minor division in terms of population, has an equal death rate to the Khulna

division and the second-highest female death rate and injury rate (see Table 3).

Table 4: Comparison of projected Yearly rate of incidents and consequences in the Divisions

Divisions	Incident number in 3 months	Yearly rate by per 100,000	Total Death in 3 months	Yearly rate by per 100,000	Female death in 3 months	Yearly rate by per 100,000	Total Injury in 3 months	Yearly rate by per 100,000	Sexual Assault in 3 months	Yearly rate by per 100,000
Barishal	102	4.5	41	1.8 (1 st)	14	0.6 (2 nd)	221	9.7 (2 nd)	5	0.2
Chattogram	438 (2 nd)	5.3 (2 nd)	145 (2 nd)	1.7	32 (2 nd)	0.4	736 (2 nd)	8.9 (3 rd)	9 (3 rd)	0.1
Dhaka	529 (1 st)	4.8 (3 rd)	186 (1 st)	1.7	56 (1 st)	0.5 (3 rd)	696 (3 rd)	6.3	18 (1 st)	0.2
Khulna	241	5.5 (1 st)	80 (3 rd)	1.8 (1 st)	30 (3 rd)	0.7 (1 st)	238	5.5	12	0.3 (1 st)
Mymensingh	53	1.7	24	0.8	5	0.2	125	4.1	0	0.0
Rajshahi	243 (3 rd)	4.8 (3 rd)	71	1.4	26	0.5 (3 rd)	201	4.0	8	0.2
Rangpur	85	1.9	32	0.7	15	0.3	54	1.2	10 (2 nd)	0.2
Sylhet	145	5.3 (2 nd)	50	1.8 (1 st)	8	0.3	964 (1 st)	34.9 (1 st)	7	0.3 (1 st)

Analyzing the Contemporary Violence Against Ethnic Minorities in South Asia

Khandakar Tahmid Rezwan⁸

The terms ethnic and ethnicity are derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, which refers to a group of related lineages. In ethnic conflict research, the terms ethnic group, communal group, ethnic community, people, and minority are often used interchangeably. Two factors serve as the foundation for defining ethnic groups: first, the emphasis on cultural features, and second, the belief that such attributes distinguish the group from other members of society who lack the differentiating characteristics⁹. Many ethnic groups have been founded lately and gained political significance due to recent events. One example is the ethnic split between Hutu and Tutsi, which gained political clout only under the colonial divide-and-rule approach.¹⁰

Members of various ethnic groups frequently lived in concord, becoming adversaries only when political confrontations became ethnically based. Throughout this process, historians have contested the phrase ethnic conflict, often known as ethnic war or ethnic violence, which refers to political or social strife between ethnically distinct groups.¹¹ Ethnic violence relates to behaviours that physically harm someone based on their ethnicity. Collective violence, such as pogroms, riots, and massacres, is frequently connected with ethnic disagreements, although it can also occur in non-ethnic conflicts. Ethnic cleansing, ethnocide, and extreme situations such as the Holocaust are examples

of ethnic conflict¹². It is at this point that, owing to power structure and asymmetrical capabilities, a dominating group attempts to project power by homogenizing or eradicating ethnic diversity based on multivariate interests, launching a campaign of violence against ethnic minorities.

To explain, violence against ethnic minorities encompasses a wide range of intentional actions or systemic practices that target individuals or groups based on their ethnic or cultural origin, resulting in a variety of harms. This includes physical violence such as assault, murder, torture, and forced relocation, as well as structural violence created by discriminatory policies, laws, or socioeconomic systems that create disparities in access to resources and rights. Institutional violence exacerbates these issues by targeting government agencies, law enforcement, educational institutions, and healthcare systems, so reinforcing systemic injustices and disparities. Cultural violence emerges as efforts to eradicate, marginalize, or ridicule ethnic minorities' cultural history, language, practices, and identity. In contrast, symbolic violence reinforces negative views and biases through verbal abuse, hate speech, and stereotypes, contributing to an environment of dread and dehumanization. Economic violence is also generated by exploitative labour practices, economic marginalization, and unequal access to job opportunities, housing, and financial

⁸ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

⁹ "Ethnic identity, ethnicity, and ethnic group," Cited in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-conflict>. Accessed on 20 March 2024.

¹⁰ Catharine Newbury, "Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda," *Africa Today*, 1998.

¹¹ Bruce Gilley, "Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict," *Third World Quarterly*, 2004.

¹² Gerben, B. and D. Weisburd, eds., *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (New York: Springer, 2014).

resources based on ethnicity, all of which contribute to poverty and socioeconomic exclusion¹³.

Violence against ethnic minorities persists across the world. Each spatial dimension of violence against ethnic minorities includes both parallels and variances. It is assumed that violence, whether coercive or systemic, will be used to suppress and achieve political goals. South Asia, home to one-fifth of the world's population and has a rich colonial past, is a melting pot of ethnic groupings dating back to antiquity¹⁴. Ethnic tension in South Asia is tied to the process of nation-building. The South Asian area is likewise made up of a diverse range of cultural, ethnic, and religious groupings, and it has seen considerable conflict with nation-building processes. Borders, countries, religions, customs, conventions, traditions, and languages influence distinct South Asian ethnicities¹⁵. In addition to challenges to the secular state, which are particularly widespread in India, modernization factors have exacerbated ethnic conflicts in South Asia. Modernization, which emphasizes logical and legal frameworks, has tremendously impacted ethnic identities, frequently eroding traditional loyalties. The confluence of these reasons and exchanges between different groups has resulted in a route of exchange in which the boundary between ethos and cultural identities has grown complex and diversified¹⁶. As a result, the scope of ethnic violence is likewise difficult to determine. For example, in Pakistan, Baloch separatism may be classified as an ethnic insurgency, as well as domestic terrorism, as can Militant Groups like ULFA in North Eastern India.

¹³ Wilhelm, H. and J. Hagan, eds., *International Handbook of Violence Research* (New York: Springer, 2005).

¹⁴ Ali, R, Zobaida, N. and F. Zaman, eds., *Political Violence in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

In this framework, we shall examine recent incidents of violence against ethnic minority groups in the South Asian area by taking the recent data from 2020 to 2023, categorizing significant changes and statuses in each of the eight nations alphabetically. We attempted to separate the section on violence against religious minorities because there is a separate section of the report dedicated to the topic, and we focused solely on the issues of violence against ethnic minorities, which is violence perpetrated against a minority group exclusively based on their ethnicity. Violence against ethnic minorities can take many forms, including intra-ethnic tensions, inter-ethnic conflicts, and official pressure or irresponsibility.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan, with its culturally, linguistically, and religiously varied people, has significant problems based on past divides. Pashtuns are the biggest ethnic group (38%), followed by Tajiks (25%) and Hazaras (19%)¹⁷. The country's national anthem previously acknowledged 30 ethnic groups among its 27 million inhabitants, reflecting its diverse demographics. However, managing such variety has always been difficult, with preserving harmony among diverse groups providing a considerable barrier to peace and security. Since their return to power, the Taliban's activities have worsened ethnic tensions, with repressive measures aimed at non-Pashtuns and attempts to eradicate the Farsi language. Tribal nationalism and Islam are used as ideological instruments to stifle dissent, particularly against journalists and activists who oppose their agenda. Despite efforts to rebuild and grow following the

¹⁵ Mohd Amin Mir and Zulafqar Ahmed, "Ethnic Conflicts in South Asia Impediments to Regional Integration," *World Affairs*, 2020.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Abubakar Siddique, *Afghanistan's Ethnic Divides*, (Barcelona: Barcelona Centre For International Affairs, 2012)

Taliban's collapse, Afghanistan's future remains unpredictable, with the threat of ethnic war hanging significantly due to the acts of both rebel organizations and the difficulties of administering such a varied country¹⁸.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh includes a variety of ethnic minority groups, creating an enigma in how the state treats them. Ethnic populations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are given preferential treatment, but those in the lowlands get limited official protection.¹⁹ These

communities have separate languages and cultures that differ significantly from the overwhelming Bengali majority. The Kuki Chin National Front (KNF)'s increased actions have created a new and developing threat, with civilians, law enforcement authorities, and army personnel bearing the brunt of their constant attacks. Furthermore, the presence of Rohingya refugees adds to the country's ethnic diversity. Despite the variety, discrepancies in recognition and protection exist, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive policies that protect the rights and identities of all ethnic communities in Bangladesh.

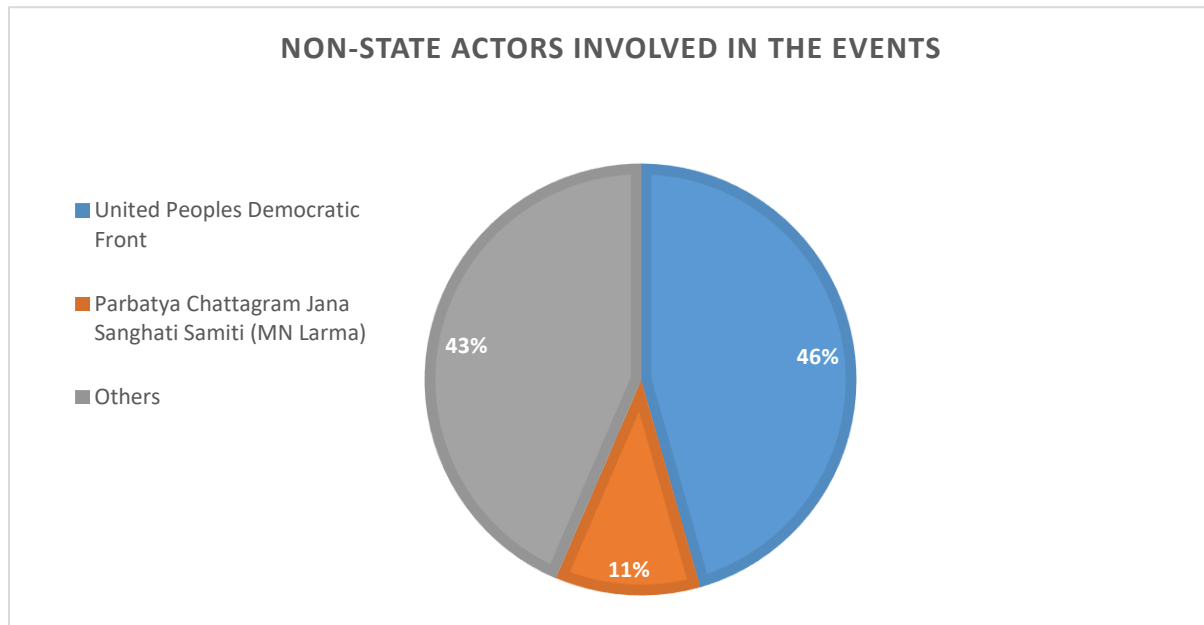


Figure 1: Non-State Actors involvement in the incidence from 2020-2023 (Source: BPO)

¹⁸ "Afghanistan," 2024, Cited in: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/afghanistan>. Accessed on 21 March, 2024.

¹⁹ Kunal Mukherjee, *Race, Ethnicity and Religion in Conflict Across Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

The BPO data shows that from 2020 to 2022, at least five gunfights occurred between UPDF and PCJSS over rivalry and influence. There are also incidents where the Army had a gunfight with the rebel ethnic faction. A mentionable case is of July 2022, where five gunfights took place, 3 between Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and United Peoples

Democratic Front (UPDF) and one each amongst UPDF factions and Army and PCJSS. A total of 5 people were killed in this row of confrontations, including an activist of UPDF and a man named Shyamol Chakma, who died in a crossfire between UPDF and PCJSS.²⁰

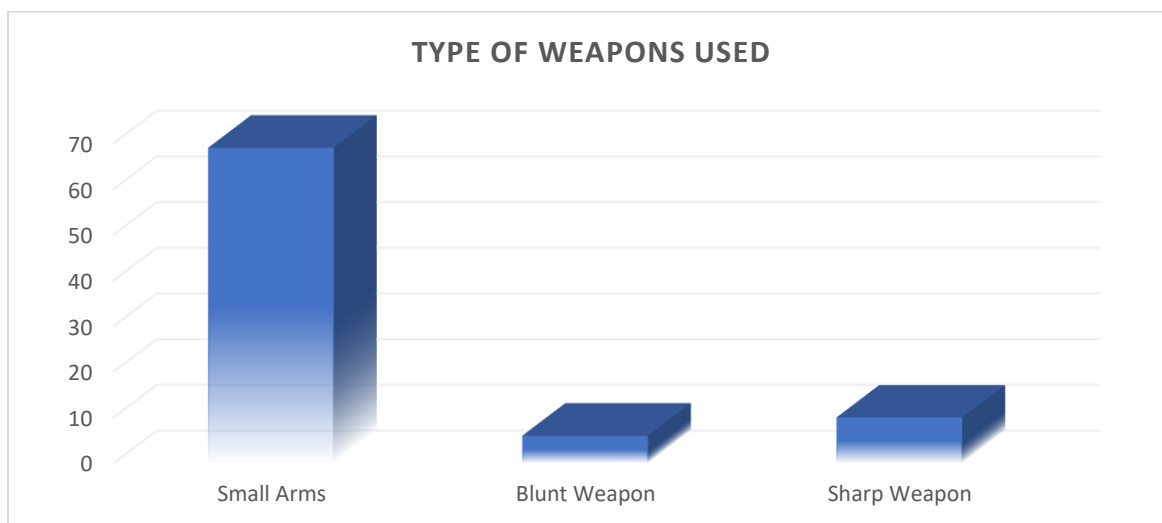


Figure 2: Type of weapons used in CHT to conduct violence (Source: BPO)

We can also observe that the proliferation of small arms and the use of these weapons are most common, and more than half of these events involved various groups' use of small arms. This underscores the severity of the conflict in CHT.

On the other hand, if we see the violence related to Rohingya refugees, there is a total of 879 incidents recorded from 2020 to 2022. The highest number of

deaths in a single incident took place on the 1st of March 2020, when in a gunfight with Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), seven members of Zakir Bahini were killed in Nhillia of Teknaf in Cox's Bazar.²¹ Significantly, the use of firearms is seen in at least 88 cases, which implies the potential for severe violence and proliferation of arms amongst extremist refugee groups.

²⁰ "UPDF man shot dead in Rangamati gunfight," Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/292839/updf-man-shot-dead-in-rangamati-gunfight>. Accessed on 24 March 2024.

²¹ "7 robbers killed in Cox's Bazar gunfight: Rab," Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/7-robbers-killed-coxs-bazar-gunfight-rab-1875259>. Accessed on 24 March 2024.

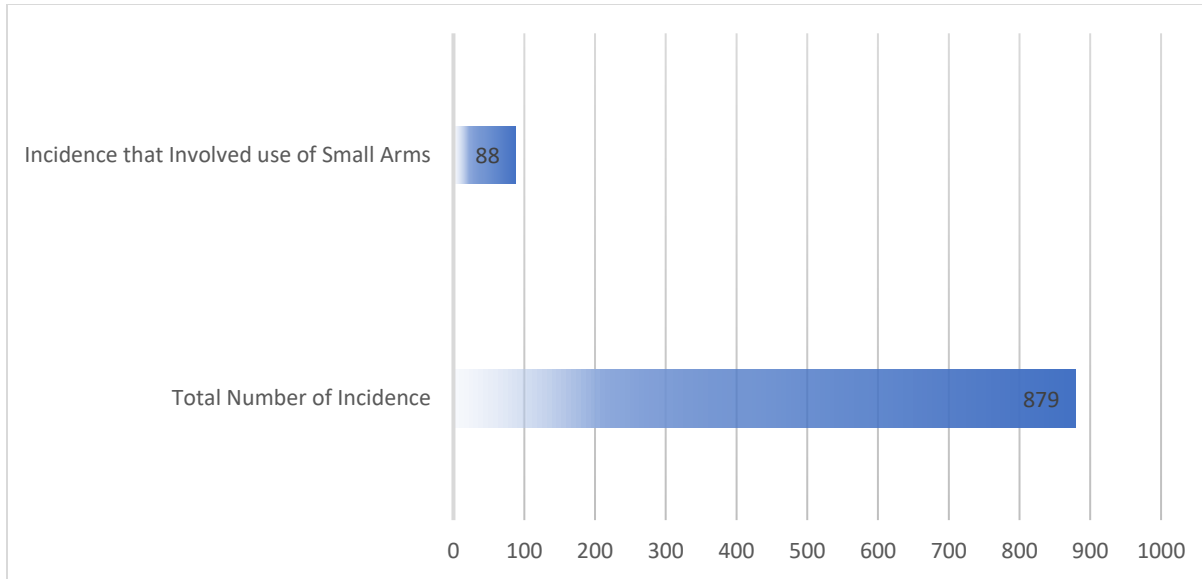


Figure 3: Incidence Involving Small Arms Vs Total Number of Incidence (Source: BPO)

Bhutan

The country that claims to be developing in terms of gross national happiness has a troubled history with the Lhotshampa people, who are ethnically Nepalese. Their names translate to People of the South. These persons had their citizenship revoked and were returned to a third nation in the mid-2010s. Approximately 50 Lhotshampa persons are incarcerated as political prisoners. However, six of them were freed in 2022. The Bhutanese government has continued to use systematic oppression and structural violence against them.²²

Maldives

The Maldives, known for its beautiful climate, has long been associated with serenity and peace. However, in recent years, the nation has faced two significant sources of violence: political upheaval (Maldivian Presidential Election, 2023) and faith-based terrorism (ISIS Activities). Despite these problems, no notable violent attacks against ethnic minorities in the state occurred between 2020 and 2023. Political instability has occasionally marred the normally serene environment of the Maldives, often caused by disputes inside the administration or between political groupings. These periods of unrest, while disruptive, have not resulted in widespread violence against ethnic minorities. Similarly, the emergence of faith-based

²² Suraj Budathoki, "The World's 'Happiest Country' Needs a Peace and Reconciliation Process," *The Wire*, 10 August 2022.

terrorism in the region raises security concerns. However, the targeting of ethnic minority groups has not been a common occurrence throughout this time.

Nepal

In Nepal, violence against minorities has primarily been motivated by religious rather than ethnic reasons. However, in 2020, several alarming instances highlighted the vulnerability of underprivileged groups. In July and August, following the deaths of two individuals in separate situations, independent activists and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) demanded investigations into accusations of mistreatment in the custody of security personnel. Both victims, Raj Kumar Chepang, 24, held by the army, and Bijay Mahara, 19, apprehended by police, were from underprivileged groups. The suffering of disadvantaged people persisted throughout the year, with claims of increased abuse and discrimination.²³ In July 2020, rangers defending Chitwan National Park were accused of demolishing dwellings belonging to Chepang indigenous people.

Similarly, in June, park officials in Bardia National Park sought to forcefully remove members of the Tharu indigenous population from their homes. These episodes highlighted the ongoing issues that minority groups confront in Nepal, which are frequently underreported or disregarded.²⁴ Human Rights Watch and other groups have emphasized the frequency of similar incidents, pointing to a larger pattern of discrimination and violence against vulnerable people in the country.

²³ “Nepal Events of 2020,” 2021, Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/nepal>. Accessed on 24 March 2024.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kaushik Deka, “The shameful blunders in Manipur,” *India Today*, 8 July 2023.

India

Minority violence in India has primarily been religious, with persecution, murder, and torture being used against Muslim and Dalit populations. However, recent events in India's North East Provinces have heightened inter-ethnic hostilities. On May 3, 2023, violence occurred in northeastern Manipur state between the dominant Meitei and minority Kuki Zo groups. By November, the death toll had risen to more than 200 people, with tens of thousands evacuated and hundreds of houses and churches damaged²⁵. The authorities replied by cutting down internet access throughout the state. Prime Minister Modi responded to the violence over three months later, triggered by a video released on July 20 of a Meitei mob stripping and displaying two Kuki women on May 4. Civil society activists accused BJP Chief Minister N. Biren Singh of exacerbating divisiveness in Manipur by giving political support to violent groups in the Hindu-majority Meitei community and stigmatizing the Kuki by accusing them of drug trafficking and sheltering Myanmar refugees²⁶. In August, the Supreme Court chastised the state police for losing control of the situation and directed special investigating teams to look into the violence, including sexual assault, in Manipur. By September 2023, more than a dozen United Nations experts had expressed worry about the escalating violence and atrocities in Manipur, noting the government's sluggish and poor reaction to the problem.

²⁶ “India Events of 2023,” 2024, Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/india>. Accessed on 25 March 2024.

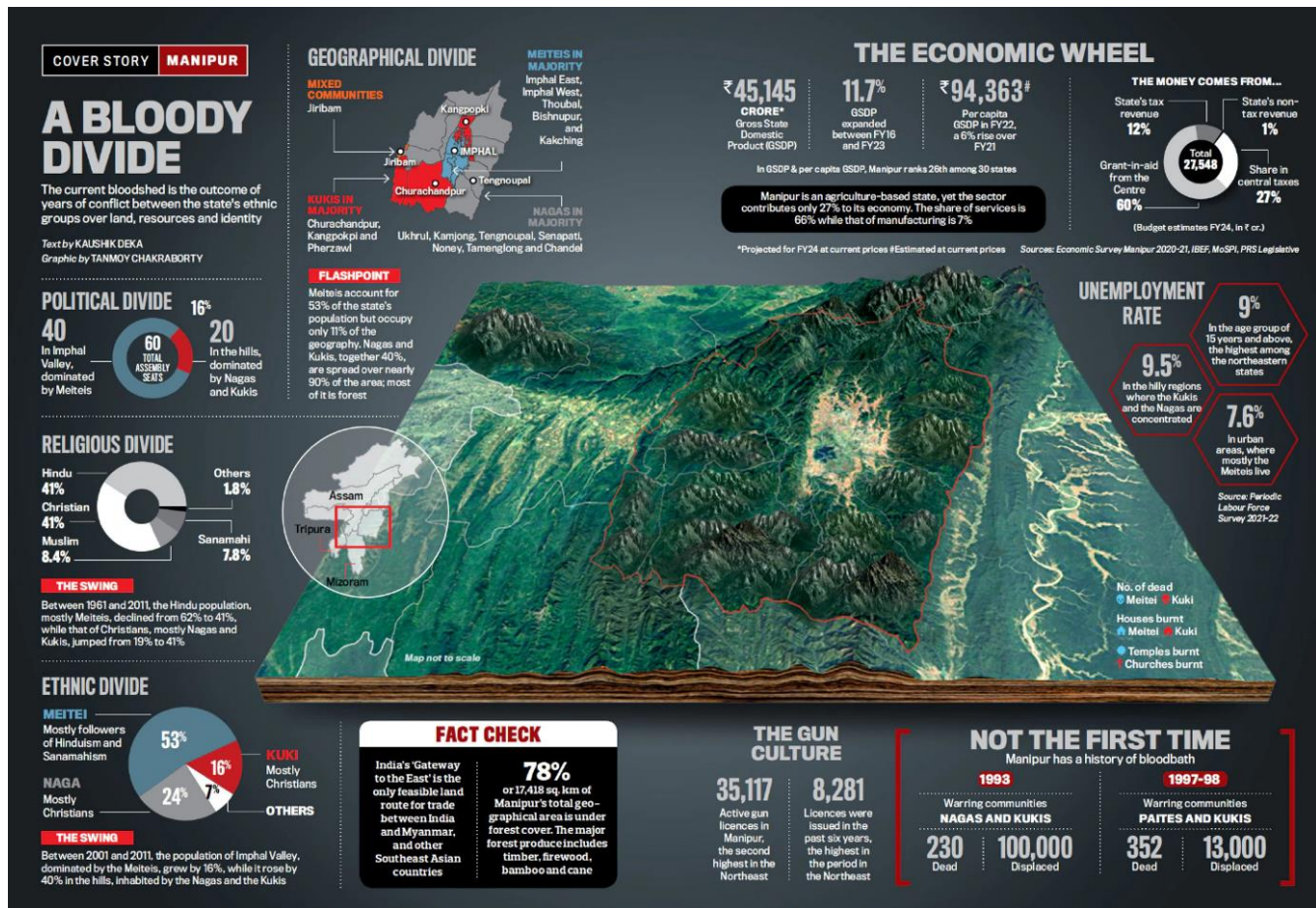


Figure 4: Infographics on Ethnic Conflict in Manipur, India. (Source: India Times)

Pakistan

Along Pakistan's western border, the Pashtuns in the north and the Baloch in the south have traditionally played essential roles in the country's ethnic fabric. Their role in Pakistani society now is determined by their geography, British colonial past, and connection with the state. For many years, the Pashtuns have

borne the brunt of Afghan jihad and military attacks against their tribes, while the Balochs have faced economic exploitation and army aggression from the central government of Pakistan. The nationalist movements that have developed from this region are distinct to the nature of the people, but the Pakistani state has treated them similarly.

Reported Fatalities from Organized Political Violence Involving Baloch Separatist Groups in the Makran Region January 2017 - July 2020

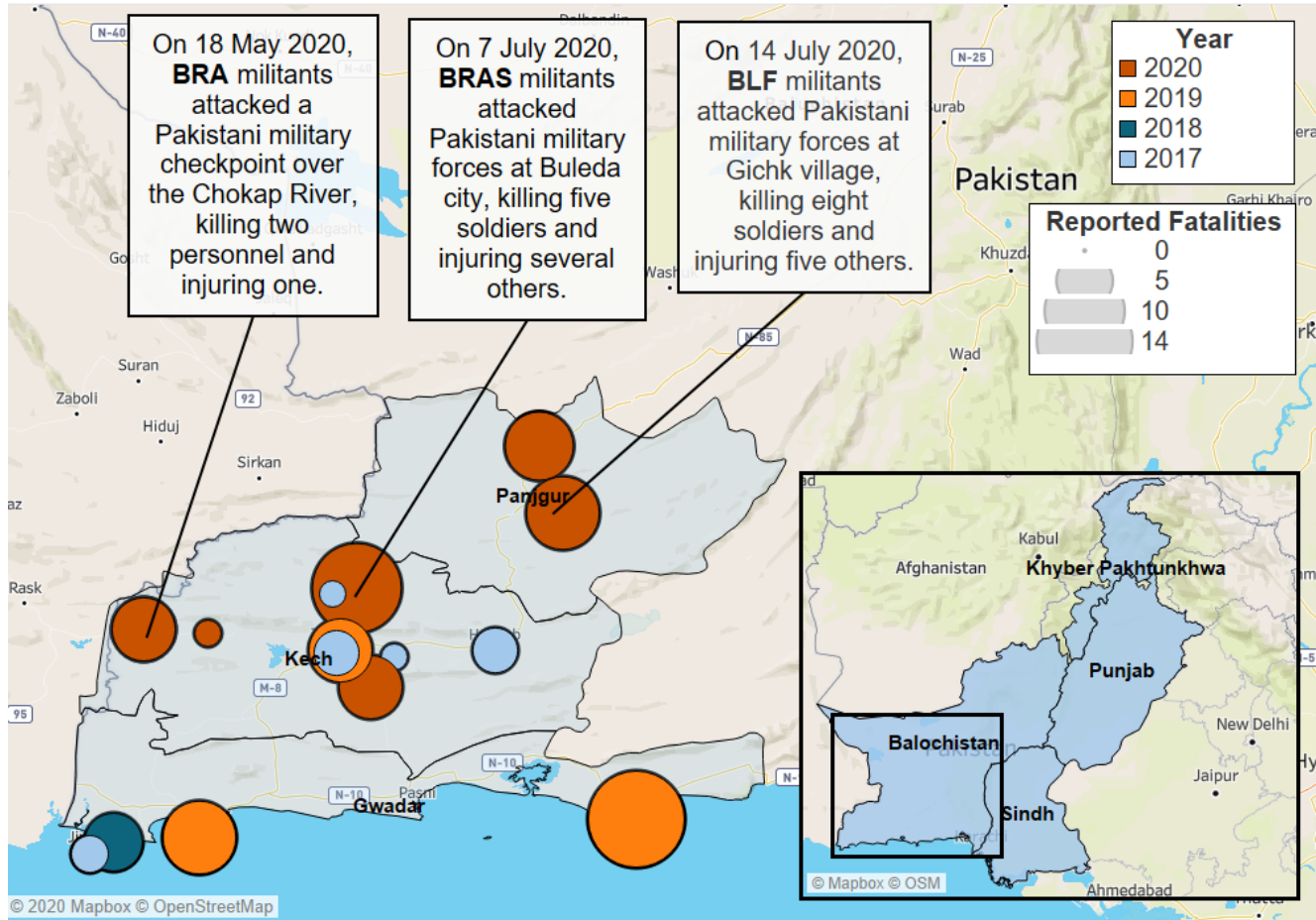


Figure 5: Infographics on Baloch Separatist Violence (Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project)

On March 7, 2020, activists and supporters of the Sindi, Baloch, and Pashtun ethnic communities staged a rally outside the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) headquarters in Geneva, protesting

Pakistan's atrocities against minorities and crimes against humanity. The 43rd United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva witnessed ongoing protests against Pakistan by activists from the

country's exiled minorities and ethnicities²⁷. The renowned Broken Chair sculpture in front of the United Nations Office in Geneva was subjected to regular protests through posters, installations, and demonstrators chanting anti-government chants. Pashtun activists waved black and white flags and placards reading Pakistan Stops Pashtun Genocide and Pashtun Nation Wants Justice during recent rallies against what activists described as genocide by the Pakistan Army in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA (tribal territories).

Repression against Afghan refugees is also on the rise as hatred between the Taliban and the Pakistani government grows. In October 2023, the government issued a 28-day ultimatum for illegal immigrants to depart the nation, threatening that law enforcement would deport them forcefully. According to Pakistani officials, 1.73 million unregistered Afghans reside there²⁸. The government defended the forced deportation of Afghans by alleging that Afghan nationals were responsible for the majority of suicide bombings in Pakistan in 2023. In 2023, Pakistani officials continued to threaten and abuse Afghan residents in Pakistan. Undocumented Afghans were still subject to mistreatment by police and district administrations, and many had difficulty finding work and attending school.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka had turbulence until 2009, when it successfully crushed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a predominantly Hindu Tamil Militia fighting for an independent Tamil State in North Sri Lanka. Following this time, ethnic conflict between the state and ethnic groups has decreased. There were no notable ethnic confrontations or violence in Sri Lanka between 2020 and 2023.

Conclusion

Although the situation in South Asia remains relatively moderate, escalation is always possible. Instead, conflict, clash, marginalization, repression, and deprivation can have a broader geopolitical and geographic impact. An ethnic conflict in North East India can have a spillover effect in the CHT of Bangladesh. The escalation of Baloch militants can result in broader intervention by the Pakistani Army, which can deteriorate the human rights situation in the region further. These can have a significant impact over relatively less violent-prone states like Bhutan or Nepal, where the rise of ethnic conflict and clashes in other South Asian states may motivate the government to take more aggressive actions against minorities, and minorities can, in the same manner, be encouraged to rise against repressive forces. Therefore, though overall stability persists, the potential and threat of a broader conflict remain equal.

²⁷ "Sindh, Baloch and Pashtuns protest against Pakistan Army atrocities outside UNHRC," 26 February 2020. Cited in <https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sindh-baloch-and-pashtuns->

[protest-against-pakistan-army-atrocities-outside-unhrc-282766](https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sindh-baloch-and-pashtuns-). Accessed on 27 March 2024.

²⁸ Abid Hussain, "'What's wrong?': The silence of Pakistanis on expulsion of Afghan refugees," *Al Jazeera*, 22 November 2023.

Violence Against Religious Minorities in Bangladesh

Syed Irfan Hasan²⁹

Introduction

Discrimination and violence against minorities are not new phenomena. The majority community has oppressed minorities for thousands of years. Persecutions and pogroms never leave them alone. The issue of minorities became a big problem with the rise of the Westphalian state system. One country's majority might be treated as another country's minority. Minorities can be categorized based on religious, ethnic, and linguistic lines. With the rise of fanatic religious sentiment and communal politics, the vulnerability of religious minority communities increased. The recent events in Bangladesh show the growing trend of violence against minorities, although the country has a long history of pluralism. The country even rejected the idea of the "Two Nation Theory" based on religion and fought an independence war to establish a secular state, breaking away from Pakistan.

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. The Muslim population consists of 90% of the total population. Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians are the three other religions after Islam. Among the religious minorities, Hindus comprise 8% of the total population, and Buddhists, Christians, and other faiths comprise 2%. Among all these religious minority communities, the Hindu community is more vulnerable to violence, considering several factors. The Hindu community has inherited the historical tension with

the majority community historically in the Indian subcontinent since the British period, thanks to the British "Divide and Rule" policy. Notwithstanding that Bangladesh promoted Bengali nationalism based on multiculturalism during its independence, the fervour gradually faded when communal politics were detected on the political radar.

Between January 2013 and September 2021, a total of 3,710 incidents targeting the Hindu community were recorded, as per the aggregated annual reports from the human rights group Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).³⁰ Between these nine years, approximately ten people from the Hindu community died in these incidents, and almost 862 were injured.³¹ The situation after 2009 was supposed to improve as the current government promotes pluralism instead of communalism. Although religious minorities in Bangladesh are not facing any violence at the state level, the violence is occurring at the grassroots level. The present situation has made minorities more vulnerable due to the spread of online disinformation, cyber threats, and bullying.

This write-up will focus on the three aspects of violence: 1. the threat of physical violence, 2. the threat of non-physical violence, and 3. the gender-based violence that religious minorities are facing.

²⁹ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

³⁰ Staff Correspondent, "3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs," *The Daily Star* (2021).

³¹ Ibid.

Tracing the Violence Against Religious Minorities

Violence against religious minorities is a grave concern globally. Bangladesh is not immune to this concern either. The threats come from the majority Muslim community towards religious minority communities, especially Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians. Violence against religious minorities can be categorized into three aspects.

- Threats of Physical Violence
- Threats of Non-Physical Violence
- Gender-based Violence

I. Threats of Physical Violence

Physical violence is the most vicious form of violence against any community. To intimidate any community, the perpetrators choose this method to satisfy their purpose. Religious minorities in Bangladesh also face various forms of physical violence.

Land related violence

Land is precious, like gold, in every corner of the earth, especially in overpopulated areas. For the religious minorities in Bangladesh, the threat of land grabbing is considered the most existential threat. Every religious

minority, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other communities, faces the same threat; the levels of threat may differ. In Bangladesh, even the Muslim people who do not have strong social positions face land grabbing by influential people. Religious minority communities are more accessible to target compared to majority Muslims. They regularly face threats, violence, and discrimination. The increased demand for land, competing with the skyrocketing population, and continuous competition over limited resources can be the primary reasons behind land grabbing. The issue of land grabbing turns communal when the vulnerability of religious minorities is targeted to fulfill the land grabbers' agenda. The legal systems are not even enough for the protection of minority lands from land grabbers.

Land grabbing is a continuous threat to religious minority groups, irrespective of the political parties in power. According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 26 incidents of land grabbing occurred from 2013 to 2021.³² In 2023, a local political leader allegedly grabbed eight acres of land from a Hindu man named Rathindra Nath Roy in Hatibandha Upazilla, Lalmonirhat.³³ He was even threatened by the supporters of that political leader, so he did not dare enter the land.³⁴ The land was submerged under the Teesta River many years ago, and suddenly, it resurfaced in the same area as Char.

³² Ibid.

³³ S Dilip Roy, "Farmer's land grabbed by AL men," *The Daily Star* (2023).

³⁴ Ibid.



Figure-1: Hindu Families attacked in Faridpur over land dispute (Source: *India Today*)

In 2024, the land of a 240-year-old Buddhist temple, Srimangal Buddha Bihar, was encroached upon disrespectfully by Kuakata Municipality to build a public toilet in Kuakata, Patuakhali.³⁵ Instead of protecting the religious site, authority is encroaching on the temple's land. Some locals accused influential people of planning to grab the land under the pretext of constructing toilets.

Both private land and the lands of religious sites are subject to grabbing. Local-level politicians, irrespective of their political affiliation, pose a significant threat as they use their muscle power to encroach on minority lands. Sometimes, the administration gets involved

with such activities to facilitate those local perpetrators.³⁶

Destruction of Property and Religious Sites

The destruction of minority religious sites in Bangladesh has been a continuous threat. This type of violence is the direct outcome of communal tension and its brutal repercussions. In the case of Bangladesh, any communal tensions in India also inflict severe repercussions here. Incidents of violence and vandalism against places of worship belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities are not uncommon phenomena. With significant damage to property and heritage sites, these incidents have a long-lasting effect on the psyche of the minority

³⁵ Shoaib Ahmed Sayam, "Toilets on temple land and our treatment of minorities," *The Daily Star* (2024).

³⁶ Ibid.

community. These acts not only represent a loss of cultural and religious heritage but also instill fear and insecurity among minority populations. Reports also surfaced of at least 1,677 instances of vandalism and deliberate burning of Hindu temples, deities, and sacred sites between 2013 and 2021.³⁷ At least 2,016 houses, shops, and businesses were vandalized.³⁸

In 2023, unidentified miscreants vandalized three idols of Hindu gods and goddesses that were brought for Durga Pooja in Faridpur.³⁹ In the years 2019 and 2020, the Ahmadiyya community faced assaults where 17 of their homes and four commercial establishments were targeted, resulting in injuries to a minimum of 50 individuals.⁴⁰



Figure 2: Attack on Ahmadiyya program (Source: New Age)

In 2014, two Hindu idols were vandalized by a miscreants group in Dimla Upazila, Nilphamari.⁴¹ At least eight idols were destroyed, and a Hindu temple had been vandalized by a group of miscreants in Gazipur.⁴² The goons left a note in which they

threatened the Hindu community. A group of unidentified miscreants destroyed two idols of Hindu gods and goddesses in the middle of the night in Satkhira Sadar.⁴³

³⁷ Staff Correspondent, “3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs,” *The Daily Star* (2021).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Star Correspondent, “Three Idols vandalized in Faridpur temple,” *The Daily Star* (2023).

⁴⁰ Staff Correspondent, “3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs,” *The Daily Star* (2021).

⁴¹ BPO data (2014).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

The destruction of property and religious sites is the most classic form of violence used to intimidate the religious minority community. Most of the violent incidents against religious minorities fall into this category. The lack of punishment for the perpetrators and the attempt to hide these incidents by the administration motivate the perpetrators to future violence instead of restraining them.

Electoral Violence Against Religious Minorities

Political violence is a big concern for religious minorities in Bangladesh, especially during the election period. Political parties manipulate the minority community for vote-bank politics. Various political parties use anti-minority sentiment for votes in elections. This type of instigation poses a direct threat to the minority community. During the election period, minority communities are targeted

deliberately. The ASK report highlights that 2014 was a particularly dire year for the Hindu community, which was disproportionately affected by violence following the elections on January 5.⁴⁴ The data reveals that in that year, there were attacks on 761 domiciles, 193 commercial establishments, and 247 temples within the Hindu community, culminating in one casualty.⁴⁵ This period is marked as the most tumultuous for the community within the reported timeframe.

In the 2024 election, a Hindu man named Barun Kumar Ghosh faced a tragic death as attackers dragged him outside a local shop and amputated one of his legs in Jhinaidaha.⁴⁶ The demise of Barun Ghosh has been referenced as a case study in the discourse surrounding the phenomenon of electoral violence targeting minority groups.

Date	Place	Faith	Incident	Damage	Perpetrator	Injury/Death
2014	Jashore	Hindu	Assault + Destruction of Property	House	Jamaat e Islami	Inj- 10
	Gaibandha	Hindu	Assault		Islami Chatro Shibir	Inj- 1
	Mymensingh	Christian	Destruction of Property	Church		
	Patuakhali	Hindu	Destruction of Property	Shop	Miscreants	
2016	Manikganj	Hindu	Destruction of Property	Houses	Supporters of local political leader	

⁴⁴ Staff Correspondent, “3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs,” *The Daily Star* (2021).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Staff Correspondent, “Awami League supporter hacked to death in Jhenaidah,” *BDNews24.com* (2024).

	Faridpur	Hindu	Assault+ Destruction of Property	House	Miscreants	Inj- 7
	Dhaka	Hindu	Assault		Miscreants	Inj- 1
	Madaripur	Hindu	Destruction of Property	Temple/ Idle	Miscreants	
	Cox's Bazar	Hindu	Assault+ Destruction of Property	Houses	Local political leader	Inj- 10
	Mymensingh	Hindu	Assault		Local political leader	Inj- 1
2022	Sunamganj	Hindu	Assault+ Destruction of Property	Temple	Miscreants	Inj- 10

Table I: Election Violence against Religious Minorities (2013-2022) based on BPO data analysis

During the election period, politics over religious minorities by various political parties made them more vulnerable. If one party claims their support, the other parties target them. They become victims of inter-party-political tensions. From temples to houses, nothing is spared by the perpetrators. The high number of injuries during these communal incidents denotes the severity of the threat of physical violence to religious minorities.

Violence through Spreading Online Disinformation

The spread of online misinformation, threats, and bullying directed at religious minorities represents a severe form of aggression that can lead to significant psychological harm and societal division. Online misinformation has now become a big concern, as

most of the communal incidents in Bangladesh happened due to online disinformation over the last ten years. Various incidents occurred based on a silly Facebook post or any post from a fake account. A group of people instigates the sentiment of Muslims to fulfill their agenda.

In 2016, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat and Towhidi Janata rampaged almost 17 Hindu temples, and the idols of those temples were either destroyed or damaged over a Facebook post purportedly from the account of a Hindu young man, Rasraj Das, in Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria.⁴⁷ Some temples were Goura Mandir, Jagannath Mandir, and Kashipara Mandir.⁴⁸ Amidst objections to the Facebook post, members of Towhidi Janata reportedly used loudspeakers at various mosques to deliver lengthy speeches to rouse the public.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Star Online Report, "3 more held over Nasirnagar attack," *The Daily Star* (2017).

⁴⁸ Rashidul Hasan, "Brahmanbaria Mayhem: Role of admin in question," *The Daily Star* (2017).

⁴⁹ Ibid.



Figure 3: Vandalization of Hindu temple in Brahmanbaria (Source: *Dhaka Tribune*)

In 2012, the fanatic Muslim mobs vandalized, burned, and looted 19 Buddhist temples in both Ukhiya and Ramu in Cox's Bazar.⁵⁰ The incident happened in response to disinformation circulating online. In 2022, angry villagers rampaged a temple, a grocery store, and several houses of the Hindu community on the allegation of an online post by a Hindu man on Facebook in Lohagara, Narail.⁵¹

Analyzing the most violent communal incidents, like Nasirnagar or Ramu, it is apparent that online disinformation is playing a significant role behind the scenes. Online disinformation circulates very quickly through various social media, and the perpetrators manipulate that disinformation to fulfill their agenda.

2. Threats of Non-Physical Violence

The threats do not always come physically; they sometimes come in non-physical form. Notwithstanding that non-physical violence does not harm anyone physically, it inflicts a long-lasting effect on the psychology of a minority.

Cyber-bullying and Hate Speech

Cyberbullying and hate speech are pressing concerns for religious minorities in Bangladesh. Members of groups like Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists are facing hostility on digital platforms. Online threats and bullying are also continuous psychological torture. This online aggression denotes hateful remarks on social media, the distribution of offensive memes, and private

⁵⁰ BSS, "Ramu incident shame for all", *The Daily Star* (2013).

⁵¹ Star Correspondent, "Hindu temple, houses, shops vandalised in Narail", *The Daily Star* (2022).

messages with abusive language aimed at their religious beliefs, dietary customs, and ethnic backgrounds.⁵²

Renowned film and television actor Chanchal Chowdhury experienced a wave of unwarranted

criticism and sectarian remarks, with some even urging him to change his faith following his Mother's Day tribute on Facebook.⁵³ The photo of his mother, adorned with traditional Hindu *sindoor*, surprised many fans who had not known about the actor's religious background.⁵⁴



Figure 4: Chanchal Chowdhury with his mother (Source: *Hindu Post*)

Cyberbullying is something that becomes a threat to one, even in personal space. If a celebrity is not spared from cyberbullying on social media, how vulnerable are the general religious minority people? The feeling of inferiority emerges naturally in the psyche of a minority, which leads to exclusion.

Identity Crisis and Migration Trend

The migration trend is more prevalent among Hindu communities in Bangladesh compared to other religious minority communities. The migration of the Hindu community to India has its historical lineage. During the period of the creation of India and Pakistan based on religion, a large number of Hindus and Muslims migrated to India. Although there is no more

⁵² Minhazur Rahman Rezvi and Md Rakib Hossain, "Exploring issues of online hate speech against minority religious groups in Bangladesh," *Global Knowledge Memory and Communication* (2023).

⁵³ Hindu Post Desk, "Popular actor Chanchal Chowdhury cyber-bullied after posting photo with sindoor-wearing mother: B'desh", *Hindu Post* (2021).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

involuntary migration, many accuse that the migration among Hindu communities mainly occurs due to the feeling of insecurity in this country.

The migration trend among the Buddhist community to any particular country has yet to be observed. However, after the 2012 Ramu incident, many youngsters have opted to migrate to European countries.

3. Gender-based Violence

Women are regarded as vulnerable to communal violence. In the event of any attack on a religious minority community, women are deliberately targeted to intimidate the community. Minority women in Bangladesh face bullying, sexual harassment, and various other types of harassment regularly regarding their attire, beliefs, or movements. In some extreme cases, rape incidents also occur. In 2014, two Hindu women were subjected to rape and an additional four experienced sexual assault.⁵⁵ This incident stunned the entire country. A Hindu woman leader of the Orao community in Jinarpur, Gomastapur, and Chapai Nawabganj was raped for 22 bighas of land in 2014.⁵⁶

In Biswanathpur village, located within the Kaligaonj sub-district of Satkhira, a group of assailants targeted Hindu households in 2003.⁵⁷ The assault resulted in the rape of three women and the destruction of multiple residences.⁵⁸ The report suggests that the motivations

⁵⁵ Staff Correspondent, “3,710 attacks on Hindu community in last 9yrs,” *The Daily Star* (2021).

⁵⁶ BPO data. Accessed on 20 March 2024.

⁵⁷ OMCT, “Bangladesh: politically motivated rape of three Hindu women,” *OMCT* (2003).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

behind the attack were political, with the intent of displacing the Hindu minority from their land.

Hindu women in Bangladesh are not only oppressed as a minority in a majority Muslim society but also discriminated against in their community. Hindu women are deprived of any proper inheritance law, and they are now allowed to give divorce to their husbands. Hindu men oppose any such inheritance law or right to divorce. A minority woman activist said,

*Many say that if Hindu women are given rights, they will be converted. Such propaganda is hateful, disrespectful, and objectionable to Hindu women.*⁵⁹

The accusation was made that a particular group has been organizing unauthorized events in public areas, claiming to resist the extension of rights to Hindu and Buddhist women.

Government, Civil Society, and Community Response

It is clearly stated in Article 29 of the constitution of Bangladesh that no discrimination would be done on the grounds of religion, race, caste, language, or any of them.⁶⁰ However, this constitutional article is not enough to protect religious minorities. The present government has taken several initiatives regarding the religious minority. One initiative was revising the 1965 Vested Property Act regarding Hindu-owned properties.⁶¹ In 2013, the present ruling party enacted

⁵⁹ Hireen Pandit, “Equal rights for Hindu women in the inheritance law,” *Prothom Alo* (2022).

⁶⁰ Article 26, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

⁶¹ Shafi Mostofa, “Minority rights at stake in Bangladesh,” *East Asia Forum* (2021).

the Vested Property Return Act to allow the original Hindu proprietors to recover their seized assets.⁶² Despite the government's initiative, the minority communities have still not gotten any benefits from the Act.

The resistance also comes from the minority community itself in the form of various organizational efforts. Hindu Buddha Oikka Parishad and Pooja Mandap Committee are two leading organizations that work for the protection of religious minorities. Another religious organization, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also protects the Hindu community. Civil society organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch are highly vocal about minority rights. However, they cannot play a very significant role because of many restrictions.

The administration also plays a proactive role in deterring violent incidents. However, there are widespread allegations against them regarding their late response to communal incidents and identifying the perpetrators. Even if the perpetrators are caught, they do not get enough punishment because of the loopholes in the judiciary system.⁶³

The Violence and Beyond

Religious minorities are victims of continuous violence, irrespective of the political parties in power. The local political leaders are even involved in such violence, especially in land-related disputes. Notwithstanding that the present government follows a secular agenda and has been in power since 2009, various data shows that violence against religious minorities is still

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

haunting society. In 2016, Hindu Buddha Christian Oikkya Parishad said,

Neither the state nor administration, political parties, nor civil society stand for protecting the rights of minorities.⁶⁴

Analyzing the existing violent incidents from the violent incidents from the previous year, it is apparent that the Hindu community is the most targeted community among the three main religious minorities. The Hindu community is mainly targeted for three reasons. Firstly, the Hindu population is significantly larger in number compared to other religious minority communities, and they live scattered all over the country, which makes them more vulnerable to violence. Secondly, Hindus and Muslims had a bitter past in 1947, when both communities faced several communal riots. Thirdly, if any communal incident happens against Muslims in India, the Hindu community in Bangladesh will face a ferocious repercussion. The interesting point is that the Buddhist community also faced the same type of violent repercussion in Ramu, Cox's Bazar when Rohingya Muslims were attacked in Myanmar in 2012.

Land and properties are the most precious things for a community to survive. One community cannot survive if its lands are grabbed and its properties are demolished. Rick Renzi said,

Homeownership is the cornerstone of a strong community.

Notwithstanding that religious fanaticism is regarded as the main reason for attacks on religious minority

⁶⁴ Star Online Report, "There's no-one to protect minorities: Oikkya Parishad," *The Daily Star* (2016).

communities, land grabbing and plundering of properties play a pivotal role in such violent activities. Various local political leaders and influential people

manipulate communal tensions to grab lands or seize the properties of minority communities.

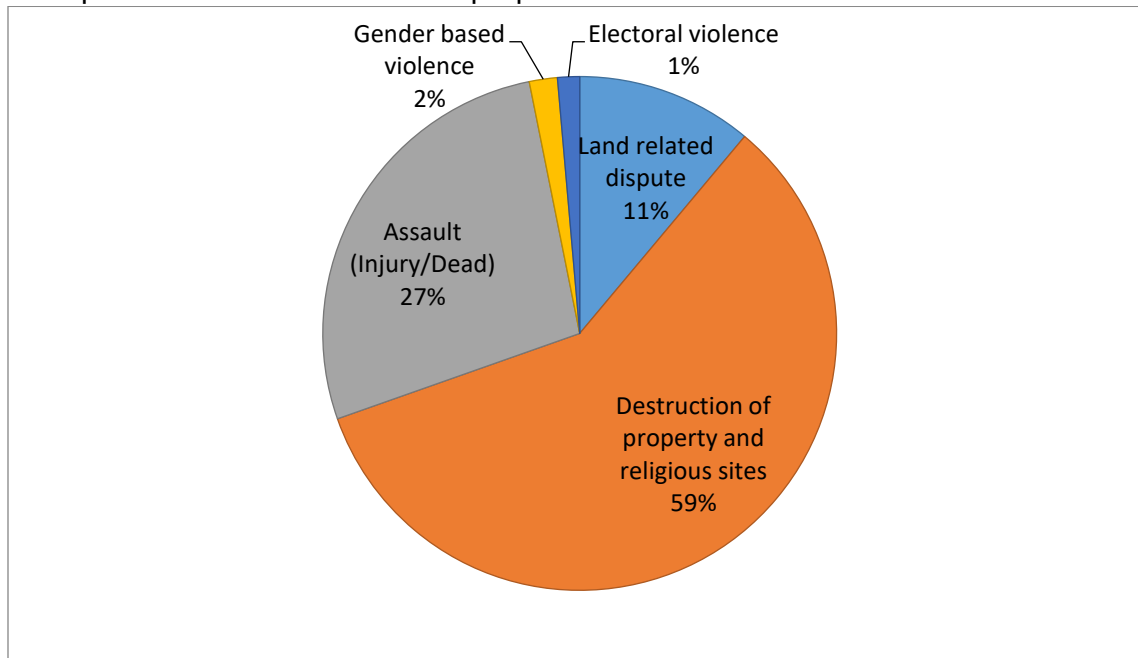


Chart: Violence against Religious Minorities in Bangladesh (2013-2022) based on BPO Data

An interesting fact comes from the BPO data analysis: almost 70% of incidents are associated with land-related disputes and destroying property and religious sites. This indicates that land and property-related interests play a significant factor in the communal violence against religious minorities. The target is to create fear among the community so that they sell or abandon their land or other properties. There is a trend of people migrating to India in the Hindu community because of the continuous insecurity in this country. The constant threats of land grabbing, vandalizing Hindu properties, and ransacking their holy temples exacerbate the fear among them. A sense of minority vigorously grows inside their psyche. This

sense of minority further marginalizes the religious minority psychologically, generation after generation.

The nexus between online platforms and communal violence has become deadly nowadays. Several violent communal incidents occurred due to the spreading of online disinformation. The Nasirnagar incident in Brahmanbaria was instigated through the use of online platforms. The initial instigation of Ramu's communal violence against the Buddhist community can also be traced back to a Facebook post. Online platforms are also used for bullying the minority community. Hate speech is spread through various online platforms that share disinformation and misinterpretations. Religious

minority people have become more vulnerable to online-based violence. The risk increases more when opportunists deliberately spread online disinformation by creating fake pages or accounts to fulfill their vicious agenda.

Hindu women are the primary target of online bullying, both as women and as a religious minority. They are the easiest target, even in physical violence against religious minority communities. According to the following BPO data analysis, almost 2% of incidents are gender-based violence that happened from 2013 to 2022. Sometimes, minority women are deliberately targeted to terrorize the community psychologically. Sometimes, it becomes a man-to-man ego clash in a patriarchal society. If men in one community cannot protect their women, that inflicts a long-lasting psychological effect on the psyche of that community. For that reason, women become more vulnerable during communal violence.

There is widespread allegation within the religious minority community regarding the role of minority organizations. Moreover, these organizations cannot protect people in times of need. The role of civil society organizations is also minimal due to a lot of pressure from the government. According to Rana Dasgupta of the Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikkya Parishad, communalism exists in the ruling party, administration, politics, and society.⁶⁵ The

administrative goodwill was also questioned during the Nasirnagar and Cumilla incidents. In addition to that, the lack of punishment for the perpetrators of communal violence and the slow judiciary system are significant barriers to eradicating communal violence for good.

Conclusion

The paper highlights a grave and complex issue where religious minorities, particularly the Hindu community, face systemic violence and discrimination. This violence is deeply rooted in historical conflicts, socio-political dynamics, and economic factors such as land disputes. The situation is exacerbated by the misuse of online platforms to spread disinformation and hate speech, which not only fuels communal tensions but also targets explicitly vulnerable groups like women. The persistent sense of insecurity and marginalization has profound psychological impacts on these communities, leading to a cycle of fear and displacement. It is imperative for all sectors of society—government, political parties, civil society, and individuals—to actively work towards protecting the rights of religious minorities, ensuring their safety, and fostering an environment of tolerance and inclusivity. Only through concerted efforts can the cycle of violence and fear be broken, allowing for the establishment of a truly equitable and harmonious society.

⁶⁵ Staff Correspondent, "Ruling party neglecting religious minorities," *The Daily Star* (2023).

Annex

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

Gunfight. A shootout between law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including the latter, does not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

Clash. Two-sided violence between groups outside of the context of war or insurgency. Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.

Assault. One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. Example: stabbing or shooting of someone by a perpetrator

Fight. Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. Example: brawl between 3-4 people.

Sexual assault. One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Destruction of property. One-sided violence is perpetrated with the intent of damaging property—examples are vandalism and arson.

Mob violence (large group assault). One-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and defenseless group. Examples: the lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority



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