



**Temples and residences of Hindu minority attacked in Rajganj of
Begumganj Upazila in Noakhali district
Fact Finding Report
Odhikar**

On February 28, 2013 the International Crimes Tribunal-1¹ sentenced Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh², Delwar Hossain Sayeedi with death penalty for crimes committed against humanity during the liberation war of 1971. In protest against the judgment, Jamaat-e-Islami called for *hartal*³ all over the country, which claimed five lives in brutal clashes between the police and the activists in Begumganj Upazila of Noakhali district's Dotter Haat. Many others were severely wounded. Hindu residences and temples were looted and set ablaze by the miscreants following the verdict. *Hartal* supporters started movement as early as 8:00am in the morning near Rajganj Bazar Road. At around 2:30pm, outraged activists in small groups got together and set fire on temples and houses of the Hindu families. Six temples were attacked and 78 families suffered during the violence.

Odhikar conducted a fact finding mission into the matter and interviewed:

- Victims of the incident
- Eyewitnesses
- Members of the law enforcement agencies

**Chandan Kumar Bhuiyan, Ganga Prashad Bhuiyan Bari, Tungirpar, Rajgani,
Begumganj, Noakhali**

Chandan Kumar Bhuiyan informed Odhikar that on February 28, 2013, Jamaat-e-Islami along with some other Islamist groups demonstrated in support of *hartal* and the leaders and activists of the ruling party launched anti-*hartal* demonstration. Nobody expected that protesters would attack houses of Hindu families at 2:30pm, loot and set them afire. Mr. Bhuiyan said that two rooms of Bhuiyan Bari were set ablaze and two rooms were burgled. Moreover, two rooms of neighbouring residences at Chowdhury Bari were also set on fire and two rooms were



¹ War crimes tribunal in Bangladesh set up in 2009 to investigate and prosecute suspects for the genocide committed in 1971 by the Pakistani Army and their local collaborators during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

² Largest Islamist political party in Bangladesh

³ strike

burgled. Miscreants also attacked the nearby Shoshan Temple and damaged idols and valuables inside. The families took shelter far away for safety. The Begumganj Police Station was alerted 30 minutes after the damning incident. Almost an hour later the police reached the area of incident. Awami League's lawmaker from that constituency Mr. Ekramul Haq and District Commissioner Md. Sirajul Islam then visited the affected area and declared to provide with compensation of Taka 50 thousand to each of the families whose houses were burned, Taka 20 thousand to each of the families whose houses were looted and also mentioned to pay Taka100,000 for each temple that had been damaged.

Rani Chowdhury, Ganga Prashad Bhuiyan Bari, Tungirpar, Rajganj, Begumganj, Noakhali

Rani Chowdhury told Odhikar that on February 28, 2013 at around 2:30pm, some miscreants attacked her residence. Houses of four families out of five in the same line were set on fire, while one was badly damaged and looted. Attacks continued for about 30 minutes. At around 3:30pm, the police reached to the affected area. Rani Chowdhury said that although the government primarily provided some relief and paltry financial aid, she received none.



Shunil Chandra Das, Aladingor, Rajganj, Begumganj, Noakhali

Shunil Chandra Das told Odhikar that around 150 people came very aggressively and hurled bricks at the house from a road by the side of a temple at around 1:30pm on February 28, 2013. All of them carried sharp weapons such as curved knives and meat choppers. The miscreants suddenly hit the temporary wall of Shunil's house that was made of tin and eventually had set the house on fire. 15 out of 18 adjacent houses also caught fire and were completely burnt while other houses were



looted. On March 1, 2013 at around 3:00am, Chairman of Rajganj Union Parisad Harun-ur-Rashid visited the affected area with members of the police. On the same day, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO)⁴ Khandaker Nurul Haq visited the area and provided with bags of rice, five kilogrammes of potato and two kilogrammes of pulse to each victimised families. Later Ekram (MP) came and provided each family with one bag of rice and Tk 12,000/- cash with four bundles of tin for shelter.

Dipali Rani Shil, resided right beside Hari Shebasrom Temple in Rajganj, Dokkhin (South) Aladingor, Begumganj, Noakhali

Dipali Rani informed Odhikar that she was with her family in her house on February 28, 2013. At around 1:30pm about 200 people marched towards her house and the temple. She said that she couldn't recognise anyone as all seemed outsiders. They damaged the main idol inside the temple. The attackers used sticks and carried sharp weapons such as curved knives and meat choppers etc. They hit the doors and windows of their houses and looted valuables by barging in the house. The miscreants further broke and looted 10 other neighbouring houses. Same day at around 11:45 at night, the police had set up a temporary camp near the place to ensure security. On March 1, 2013 UNO Khandaker Nurul Haq visited the area and provided each family with four bundles of tin for shelter and Taka 12 thousand in cash.



Officer-in-Charge SM Ahsanul Islam, Begumganj Police Station, Begumganj

SM Ahsanul Islam informed Odhikar that Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi was sentenced to death on February 28, 2013. But Police had no information regarding the attack on the Hindu temples and residences of the religious minority in Rajganj following the death penalty. From 9:30am, police patrol had been on duty in Rajganj and they were successful in peacefully managing to move away the barricade set by the activists on that day. Later at around 2:00pm right after hearing the news of the attack against Hindu minorities, 3 vans of police arrived at the scene to control the situation near Rajganj Bazar. The activists in support of 'hartal' had cut down trees and blocked the roads. Thousands of people started throwing bricks to the police. Present there was UNO Khandaker Nurul Haq who used a microphone requesting the mass to calm down. However then the crowd got more aggressive and started to throw cocktail bombs and sharp weapons at the police. When many members

⁴ Bangladesh Government official from Civil Service, responsible for a particular Upazila

of the police were injured, the UNO ordered the police to open fire. With regard to this, SI Mizanur Rahman filed a case. Case number: 1, Date: 01/03/13. In the FIR⁵ they mentioned names of 71 people with 1500-2000 unknown persons believed to be involved. The case is being investigated by Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) Mr. Ibrahim Khalil.

Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) Ibrahim Khalil, Begumganj Police Station, Behumganj, Noakhali

Ibrahim Khalil informed Odhikar that on February 28, 2013 in the incident of Rajganj, the case that was filed by complainant SI Mizanur Rahman was being investigated by him. Out of 71 accused mentioned in the FIR, 34 were arrested. Ibrahim Khalil informed that his force is working hard to arrest the rest of the accused and they arrested more 29 people suspected to be involved in that incident.

Khandaker Nurul Haq, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Begumganj, Noakhali

Khandaker Nurul Haq informed Odhikar that on February 28, 2013 right after the religious minorities were attacked during the ‘hartal’, they went near Rajganj Bazar when they faced the aggressive activists. ‘Hartal’ supporters were so many that the police could not take control over them. Out of 78 families attacked on that day, 21 families had all their movable and immovable properties completely destroyed. The loss has been estimated at around Taka 61 lakh and 11 thousand. Aid to the victims from the UNO totaled to 1 metric ton of rice, 170 bundles of corrugated metal sheets, Taka 4 lakh in cash and 4 lakh 80 thousand for re-housing.

Odhikar’s comments

Odhikar condemns the attack on Hindu temples and residences during the *hartal*. Odhikar believes that the government failed to protect lives and properties of Hindu minorities and have throughout been inefficient in maintaining political stability. Odhikar urges the government to take immediate necessary actions to bring the perpetrator in the court of law.

-End of Report-

⁵ First Information Report that is required to be filled in a police station