

**Refugee Review Tribunal**

**AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** BGD17625  
**Country:** Bangladesh  
**Date:** 17 October 2005

Keywords: Bangladesh – Buddhists – Refugee Convention – India – Sri Lanka

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

- 1. Are Buddhists adversely treated in Bangladesh?**
- 2. Which of the following countries are signatories of the Refugees Convention: India; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Laos; Myanmar?**

## RESPONSE

### 1. Are Buddhists adversely treated in Bangladesh?

Information provided by the sources consulted indicates that persons of the Buddhist faith living in Bangladesh continue, in recent times, to suffer adverse treatment. Source materials gathered by RRT Country Research in recent years indicate that the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, who constitute the larger part of Bangladesh's Buddhist population (tribal peoples, such as the Chakma, Marma and Tripura, who are known collectively as the Jumma peoples), have been targeted on the basis of both their ethnicity and their faith, by government security forces and by Muslim ethnic Bengali settlers in the Chittagong region (owing to tensions arising from an ongoing struggle over the question of land ownership in the area). Source materials suggest that, elsewhere in Bangladesh, the violent harassment of Buddhist communities is less in evidence; although such persons remain subject to widespread practices of day-to-day discrimination, such as in the employment market (for information on the abuses committed against the indigenous Buddhist communities of Chittagong, see the source materials contained in: RRT Country Research 2001, *Research Response BGD17347*, 2 June – Attachment 1; for information on anti-Buddhist violence in the vicinity of Cox's Bazaar, see: RRT Country Research 2005 *Research Response BGD17303*, 18 April – Attachment 2; for information on the less violent, but still adverse, situation of Buddhist's living outside the Chittagong turmoil, see the source materials contained in: *Research Response BGD15957*, of 27 May 2003 – Attachment 3).

The Member may be interested to know that a Bangladesh civil rights organisation, the Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, has recently issued a white paper which suggests that numerous episodes of unreported sectarian violence have taken place in Bangladesh in recent times as a consequence of the politics of the present Bangladesh government. According to *The Hindustan Times*, the white paper claims that "more than 10,000 incidents of communal torture have taken place in the country during the last four years of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led right wing government of Khaleda Zia". The report is said to claim that "[e]ven priests of temples, Buddhist monks and elderly scholars could not escape murder" ('10,000 incidents of minority repression in Bangladesh since 2001' 2005, *Hindustan Times*, 11 October – Attachment 4).

Further to this, there have recently been reports of a likely upswing in sectarian violence in Bangladesh. The Indo-Asian News Service has reported that, according to the Xinhua news agency, "intelligence agencies have warned" that "[t]errorist groups in Bangladesh are planning attacks against non-Muslim religious leaders and non-Islamic places of worship". The full report is supplied as Attachment 5 ('Non-Muslims in Bangladesh under threat: report' 2005, *Hindustan Times*, source: Indo-Asian News Service, 22 August 2005 – Attachment 5).

### 2. Which of the following countries are signatories of the Refugees Convention: India; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Laos; Myanmar?

A revised list of the states and parties which are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol was recently published on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website on 2 September 2005. *None* of the states identified in Question 2 are listed in this document as being signatories to either of these

treaties. The current list is supplied as Attachment 6 ('States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol' 2005, UN High Commissioner for Refugees website, 1 September <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=3b73b0d63> – Accessed 17 October 2005 – Attachment 6).

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

Google search engine

UNHCR      *REFWORLD*      UNHCR Refugee Information Online

### Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research 2005 *Research Response BGD17347*, 2 June.
2. RRT Country Research 2005 *Research Response BGD17303*, 18 April.
3. RRT Country Research 2003 *Research Response BGD15957*, 27 May.
4. '10,000 incidents of minority repression in Bangladesh since 2001' 2005, *Hindustan Times*, 11 October. (FACTIVA)
5. 'Non-Muslims in Bangladesh under threat: report' 2005, *Hindustan Times*, source: Indo-Asian News Service, 22 August 2005. (FACTIVA)
6. 'States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol' 2005, UN High Commissioner for Refugees website, 1 September. (<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=3b73b0d63> – Accessed 17 October 2005)