



Last updated: Wednesday June 03, 2009

News

Thursday February 05, 2009

BANGLADESH: MUSLIM PILGRIMS BEAT BIBLE STUDENT

Throng from annual event threatens to kill 20-year-old as he distributes Christian literature.



Rajen Murmo

DHAKA, Bangladesh, February 5 (Compass Direct News) – Pilgrims to a massive Islamic conference near this capital city on Sunday (Feb. 1) beat and threatened to kill a Bible school student as he distributed Christian literature.

Rajen Murmo, 20, a student at Believers' Church Bible College, was distributing the 32-page books among Muslims near the school along with 25 other students in Uttara town in northern Dhaka, just a few kilometers from the banks of a river in Tongi where the government claimed that 4 million Muslim pilgrims had gathered. They had massed for the annual, three-day World Muslim Congregation (*Bishwa Ijtema*).

Murmo told Compass that a man with a ragged beard in a loose white garment and white trousers, along with some other men, approached the students and told them Muslims did not abide by the Bible because the Quran had superseded it, rendering it outdated.

"Suddenly some of his outrageous entourage grasped me and asked where I got the books and who gave me the books. They wanted to know the address of my religious leaders and mission, but I did not give them the address," said Murmo. "If I had given them the address of the Bible college, they would have destroyed it. My blank denial to give information to them made them enraged, and they started beating me. They told me if I do not give the address of the religious leaders and mission, they would kill me."

A throng of more than 50 raucous Muslims kicked, slapped and punched him, he said, leaving him with a split lip. Clutching his collar and tearing his shirt, they insisted that he give them the school's address and that of his mission and Christian leaders; as he continued to refuse, their anger further flared, he said. A patrolling vehicle from the elite force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) consisting of army, navy, air force and police appeared and rescued him, Murmo said.

Later the mob persuaded the elite force to send him to a nearby police station, he said, and principal Amos Deory of the Bible college went to release him. Deory told Murmo that police officers expressed concern that if the RAB agents had not arrived in time, the angry pilgrims would have killed him.

The Rev. Kiron Roaza of Believers' Church told Compass that the Bible students were distributing the tracts as part of their regular evangelistic tasks. He said the beating was unwarranted as Bangladesh's constitution provides for the right to propagate one's faith.

Bangladeshi Muslims equate the annual World Muslim Congregation or *Bishwa Ijtema* with the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Islam's birthplace in Mecca, Saudi Arabia that last year was held Dec. 6-10. The Bangladeshi gathering just north of Dhaka, at which Muslims pray and listen to Islamic scholars from around the world, was first held in the 1960s.

The event was launched by *Tabligh Jamaat*, a missionary and revival group that shuns politics and urges Muslims to follow Islam in their everyday lives. Its stated purpose is to revive the tenets of Islam and promote peace and harmony. More than 10,000 foreigners from 108 countries attended the event, according to media reports, but most of the worshippers were rural Bangladeshis. Bangladesh is the world's third-largest Muslim-majority nation, with Muslims making up nearly 90 percent of its population of 150 million.

The Quran calls on all Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca if they have the means. The date changes from year to year based on the Islamic lunar calendar. The official SPA news agency of Saudi Arabia reported the total number of pilgrims to Mecca at nearly 2.4 million, about 1.73 million from abroad and 679,000 from within the kingdom, mostly foreign residents.

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*** Photos of Rajen Murmo are available electronically. Contact Compass Direct News for pricing and transmittal.

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