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Breaking News - Monday June 01, 2009

## BANGLADESH: MUSLIM VILLAGERS BEAT EVANGELISTS IN SOUTHEAST

**Nearly four months later, Christian worker still suffering nerve damage.**

**FULGAZI, Bangladesh, June 1** (Compass Direct News) – Nearly four months after Muslim villagers in this southeastern Bangladesh sub-district furiously beat two evangelists for showing the "Jesus Film," one of the Christians is still receiving treatment for nerve damage to his hip.

Christian Life Bangladesh (CLB) worker Edward Biswas, 32, was admitted to Alabakth Physiotherapy Centre on May 5. Dr. Mohammad Saifuddin Julfikar told Compass that injuries Biswas sustained from the Feb. 8 attack in Feni district, some 150 kilometers (93 miles) southeast of Dhaka, had led to neurological complications in his hip.

"His hip joint was displaced, and one bone in the hip was fractured," Julfikar said.

Biswas told Compass that he and 21-year-old Dolonmoy Tripura first showed the film on Feb. 7 in a home in Chandpur village, where they also taught the more than 200 poor and mostly illiterate viewers about the dangers of arsenic in water, mother-and-child health care and AIDS prevention. United Nations Children's Fund reports say more than 30 million people are exposed to high levels of arsenic in water in Bangladesh and India.

Azad Mia of the same village requested they show the film at his house the following day. They went to his home the evening of Feb. 8, but because one of Mia's family members was ill they were unable to screen the film. As they returned home, Biswas said, some villagers told them to show the film at their home; the two evangelists suspected a trap.

"At first they tried to sweet-talk us into going to their house," Biswas said. "On our refusal to show the film, they tried to force us to go. I smelled a rat and again refused to go. Later they forcefully took us deep inside the village."

About 20 people gathered and began beating them, he said.

"Some of the elders of the village told them to release us, but they were adamant to see the movie," Biswas said. "They took us to a schoolyard, where we showed the 'Jesus Film' under tremendous compulsion. After showing 20 minutes of the first reel of the film, Muslim villagers again started beating us as we were lying on the ground. They punched and kicked us."

While 15 to 20 Muslims struck them, approximately 200 others present for the screening looked on, he said. The villagers also beat a Muslim who had transported the CLB workers about the village on a three-wheel rickshaw for the showing of the film.

The assailants also destroyed the film projector, generator, microphone and the four reels of the film, Biswas said.

"Several days after the beating, I came to know from some villagers that a family had become Christian around 10 years ago in the neighboring village," Biswas said. "All the villagers were angry, and they evicted that family from the village."

The attack was pre-planned, with the showing of the film seen as a legitimate pretext for beating them, he said. They also threatened Daud Mia, a Muslim villager who had allowed them to show the film in his house the previous day, said Biswas.

CLB Area Supervisor Gabriel Das took Biswas and Tripura to a local doctor for treatment. CLB Chairman Sunil Adhikary expressed concern about freedom of religion and the rights of minorities provided in the country's constitution.

"The beating was a flagrant violation of our rights," said Adhikary. "They showed the film, but they did not force anyone to be converted. We forgave the attackers and showed them the love of our God."

Since 2003 at least three CLB workers in Bangladesh have been killed – likely by Islamic extremists, say police and local officials – and several hundred have been injured.

In April Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed spoke about freedom of religion, democratic governance and equal opportunity in Bangladesh with Gerard Valin, vice-admiral of the French Navy and commander of the French Joint Forces in

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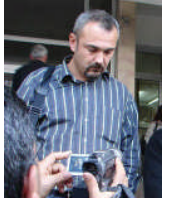
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the Indian Ocean, who was visiting the country. Hasina told the commander that Bangladesh would protect religious freedom for all faith groups, as well as ensure freedom of expression for all minorities.

END

\*\*\* A photo of Edward Biswas is available electronically. Contact Compass Direct News for pricing and transmittal.



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