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Bangladeshi Muslims torch Buddhist temples, homes

AP (01.10.2012) - Thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims set fire to at least 10 Buddhist temples and 40 homes in anger over a Facebook photo of a burned Quran before authorities restored order.

The situation was under control Sunday afternoon after extra security officers were deployed and the government banned public gatherings in the troubled areas near the southern border with Myanmar, said Nojibul Islam, a police chief in the coastal district of Cox's Bazar.

He said at least 20 people were injured in the attacks that started late Saturday after a photo of a burned copy of the Muslim holy book was posted on Facebook. The rioters blamed the photo on a local Buddhist boy, though it was not immediately clear if he actually posted the photo.

Bangladesh's popular English-language Daily Star newspaper quoted the boy as saying that the photo was mistakenly tagged on his Facebook profile. The newspaper reported that soon after the violence started, the boy's Facebook account was closed and police escorted him and his mother to safety.

Joinul Bari, chief government administrator in Cox's Bazar district, said authorities detained the boy's parents and were investigating.

Buddhists make up less than 1 percent of Muslim-majority Bangladesh's 150 million people.

The Bangladeshi violence follows protests that erupted in Muslim countries over the past month after a low-budget film, "Innocence of Muslims," produced by a U.S. citizen denigrated the Prophet Muhammad by portraying Islam's holiest figure as a fraud, womanizer and child molester.

Some two dozen demonstrators have been killed in protests that attacked symbols of U.S. and the West, including diplomatic compounds.

Angry Muslim mob surrounds Christian orphanage workers, attacks employee

International Christian Concern (24.02.12) - International Christian Concern (ICC) has learned that on January 27th, an angry Muslim mob surrounded and attacked several Christians orphanage workers who were attempting to assist an impoverished family in the Gopalganj district of Bangladesh.

The Christians were working with the Washington based non-profit Bangla Hope, which founded an orphanage in the country's capital, Dhaka, in 2005. In an interview with ICC, Mr. Panuel Baroi, a local employee of Bangla Hope, said that the group of orphanage workers were surrounded by an angry mob soon after picking up an 18 month old Bangladeshi girl whose father could no longer support her.

"[The] crowd was very angry and shouting at us... they said we are here stealing babies to convert them to Christianity, that we are making people Christians...suddenly a guy hit me from behind, just below my head. I started falling and somebody held me up" said Mr. Baroi. The crowd also reportedly shouted obscenities and started spitting on the group before the group was detained by local authorities.

After being detained, the authorities interrogated the orphanage workers for approximately six hours. Despite presenting legal documentation for their work, the Bangla Hope employees were forced to leave behind all of the children they had picked up before they could return to the orphanage.

"They saw a baby being given to our workers and then they saw some [Americans]...and assumed it was trafficking" said Ms. Hazel Burns, a Washington based manager for Bangla Hope, in an interview with ICC. Despite this being the first such incident she could recall, Ms. Burns reported that Bangla Hope would probably not be traveling back to the area again in the future.

International Christian Concern's Regional Manager for Southeast Asia, Ryan Morgan, said "While we are very thankful that this incident did not result in any loss of life, we are also very alarmed by the blatant anti-Christian sentiment displayed and the dangerous precedent such an event can set. We call on federal authorities in Dhaka to enforce the rule of law, to bring those responsible for the attack to justice, and to protect all individuals regardless of their personal religious beliefs, especially when those individuals are working within the law to aid the most vulnerable members of society."
