

GCDG report on freedom of religion or belief in relation to death and honouring the deceased

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the dignity of religion and of the dead, in the past year (August 2024 to October 2025) there have been over a hundred incidents where the right to funeral rites, burial/cremation was obstructed by the state, where bodies were exhumed from graves and set on fire, graves vandalized and desecrated, skeletons stolen, necrophilia, and insecurity in cemeteries/cremation grounds. Religious and faith-based communities, CSOs, and academics have said these incidents affected not only minorities; the majority Muslim community's Sufis and the Ahmadiyya community were also concerned.

Challenges and Violations:

Desecration of graves and corpses:

Since August 2024, countless incidents of desecration of graves and corpses have taken place in Bangladesh. Notable among them are:

- **On 12 September 2025**, the grave of Qari Sirajul Islam Bokul was set on fire in the early hours of the morning ^[1].
- **On 5 September 2025**, Islamist extremists in Rajbari district exhumed the body of Nurul Haque (Nura Pagla), paraded it on the streets, and set it on fire ^[2].
- **On 26 April 2025**, the grave of martyr Faizul Islam Rajon, killed in the “Anti-Discrimination Student Movement 2024,” was vandalized in Keraniganj, Dhaka ^[3].
- **On 17 September 2024**, the grave of former MP and freedom fighter Main Uddin Khan Badal in Chattogram was vandalized and set ablaze ^[4].
- **On 9 September 2024**, hundreds of armed madrasa students, incited by announcements over loudspeakers, attacked a shrine, exhumed three graves, and carried away remains ^[5].

In recent months, numerous cemeteries across the country have witnessed body-snatching incidents:

- **20 October 2025 (night):** 16 remains exhumed from a cemetery in Shahjadpur, Sirajganj, sparking outrage among families concerned about graveyard security ^[6].
- **24 August 2025 (reported):** 30 remains were taken from 3 villages in Saghata, Gaibandha ^[7].
- **3 July 2025 (night):** 17 remains exhumed from a cemetery in Sujanagar, Pabna ^[8].
- **1 June 2025 (night):** 5 remains exhumed from a cemetery in Panchagarh Municipality ^[9].
- **19 May 2025 (night):** 5 remains exhumed from a cemetery in Manikganj Sadar ^[10].
- **8 February 2025 (early morning):** 5 remains taken from a graveyard in Daulatkhan, Bhola ^[11].
- **25 October 2024 (night):** 5 remains exhumed in Sreepur, Gazipur ^[12].
- **21 October 2024 (night):** 7 remains taken from a graveyard in Ranisankail, Thakurgaon ^[13].
- **4 September 2024:** 8 remains exhumed from a cemetery in Tangail ^[14].

Additionally, on **20 October 2025**, a necrophilia incident occurred at Mymensingh Medical morgue involving the body of a young woman ^[15].

State mismanagement:

Although religious doctrine requires prompt burial/cremation, six victims killed in the 2024 uprising were stored in morgues and buried one year later ^[16], which is tantamount to desecration.

State-sanctioned negligence:

No postmortem, no inquest, no death certificates ^[17], even for the victims of the Gopalganj massacre in Bangladesh on 16 July 2025 ^[18].

Although the interim government has issued several statements calling on the law enforcement agencies to take action in this regard, regrettably, no visible action has yet been observed concerning the law-and-order situation.

Pre-festival attacks:

In just 13 days before Durga Puja 2024, 17 idols were vandalized across 13 districts ^[19]. In 2025, several more idol vandalism cases occurred:

- **26 September 2025 (midnight):** Idols vandalized in a century-old temple in Shibalaya, Manikganj ^[20].
- **23 September 2025 (early morning):** Durga idol vandalized in Shaikupa, Jhenaidah ^[21].
- **20 September 2025 (night):** 7 idols vandalized in Sarishabari, Jamalpur ^[22].
- **17 September 2025:** 6 idols vandalized at a Durga Puja pandal in Kashimpur, Gazipur ^[23].
- **14 September 2024 (8:30 pm):** Durga idols vandalized at a temple in Mirpur, Kushtia; CCTV cameras stolen ^[24].
- **1 March 2025 (night):** Saraswati idol vandalized in Kazipur, Sirajganj ^[25].
- **31 January 2025 (night):** Saraswati idol vandalized in Faridpur ^[26].

On 25 December 2024, during Christmas, 17 churches across Bangladesh were set on fire ^[27], confirmed by Nirmol Rozario, a senior leader of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

Over the past year, the Muslim majority's **Sufi and Ahmadiyya communities** have also faced nearly 200 attacks. According to the World Sufi Organization, from **5 August 2024 to 19 September 2025**, 185 shrines and khanqahs were attacked or set on fire ^[28] - a serious affront to Sufi believers.

A research report by Canada's **Global Center for Democratic Governance** documented numerous cases of shrine vandalism, arson, and looting, supported by photographs ^[29].

Impact:

Familial impact: Desecration of graves and corpses causes deep psychological trauma to families. For example, the Rajbari family, whose relative's body was exhumed and burned, has broken down emotionally and lives in fear. Families of shrine custodians have fled their homes under death threats and are living in hiding.

Communal impact: Insecurity at cemeteries/cremation grounds has created fear among communities about performing religious rites properly.

Social impact: Unclaimed bodies left in morgues create public health risks. Moreover, public confidence in law enforcement is eroding.

References:

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