

16 Christians Worshippers Kidnapped by Militants in Pakistan

Tuesday 24 June 2008, by [MUGHAL Aftab Alexander](#) (Date first published: 23 June 2008).

The Islamic militants kidnapped 16 Christians in a raid on June 21 around 8pm while they were worshipping at the house of Salamat Masih, a local Christian, in Christian locality of Bansarabad Academy Town in Peshawar, capital of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Pakistan. About 350 Christians, mostly belong to labor class, live in this locality.

Pastor Bashir Sharif was leading a prayer service before a child's birthday party when masked militants came in five land cruisers vans with heavy and light ammunition and kidnapped Christians on gun point and took them to Khayber Agency, near Afghanistan's border. According to a daily English newspaper, *The News on Sunday*, the militants had warned the residents of the Christian Colony to vacate the building, as it was once part of a local Madressa, Islamic seminary.

Local police official Mohammed Khan told the media that the abducted Christians were freed early on June 22. Sources says that the local administration of Bara, where the Christians were kept by the militants, had negotiations with the kidnappers and after a long discussion got the Christians released which were brought to the office of political agent and then felt for their homes.

"We condemn this act and, despite the recovery of the abductees, an enquiry will be held to uncover the faces behind the incident," state-run Pakistan Television news channel quoted Gilani as saying in a parliamentary session debating Pakistan's budget.

Although no militant organization has taken the responsibility so far, it seems that the Lashkar-e-Islam (LI) would be responsible for this heinous crime.

Mangal Bagh is the leader of LI, which has strong hold in Bara tehsil of Khyber Agency, tribal area. LI has been involved in many serious criminal acts since its formation. In a recent incident on June 21 and 22, at least 35 people were killed and 14 serious injuries, all Muslims, during a clash between the LI and Ansarul Islam, another militant organization for the control of an area in Khyber Agency. With every passing day, militants are gaining more power and authority in tribal and settled area of NWFP. To controlling the suicide bombings in Pakistan, the government is engaged in dialogue and making peace pacts with the Taliban. Moreover, in the recent weeks, many Taliban are released from jails. It is hard to believe on a recent statement of Mr. Rehman A Malik, Federal Interior Advisor, equivalent to federal minister. He told the National Assembly, lower house of the Parliament, on June 21 that targeted actions would be taken in certain parts of the NWFP to control the Taliban.

There are many militant organizations are openly operating in tribal areas of the province. Majority of them are united under Tehrik-i-Taliban and rule over all seven agencies of NWFP. They are also inroad in the settled areas of the frontier province. It is a serious indication that now they are also openly taking their operations in the capital of the province.

The local Taliban are pressing for Shariah Laws (Islamic laws) in the province, attacking girls schools and colleges, running their own courts, attacking and beating musical gatherings, destroying

barber shops and forcing people to have beard and ordering women to wear veil, collecting taxes, punishing alleged criminals and burning video and CD shops. They are also reportedly preparing suicide bombers.

Christians in NWFP are a very tiny minority and are constantly living under threat since the local Taliban groups are gaining more power and openly challenging the writ of the state. At least in two incidents, Christians of Charsadda City of NWFP received letters from militants last year in May in which they were asked to convert to Islam otherwise face the consequences. In some other incidents, Christians were kidnapped and tortured by the militants and later on released. Until now, no militant is arrested for committing these kidnapping crimes against poor and helpless Christians.