

## News



Sr. Elis Lamin, a member of the Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco, talks to a child during a family visit in Nunchhara Punjee in Sylhet Diocese, in northeast Bangladesh. (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)



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About 20 kilometers from the local bus stop, and a 40-minute walk around a small hill, is a semi-furnished tin shed house where the [Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco](#) live.

In 2022, sisters came from Shillong, India, to [Nunchhara Punjee](#) in the Diocese of Sylhet in northeast Bangladesh to join the [Lokhipur Parish](#).

The Visitation sisters came to work in Bangladesh with the Khasi Indigenous people at the invitation of the then-bishop, now archbishop of Dhaka, [Bejoy N. D'Cruze](#).

"The Bangladeshi bishop talked to our superior and they both agreed and we came here," Visitation Sr. Mary Lyneda Lyndem, the local superior, told GSR. "We came to Bangladesh because as Jesus said, you have to go everywhere or to very far-flung villages to spread his word."

The diocese is mostly [Garo and Khasi](#) tribes, who are mainly Christians. About 50 tribal groups are working in the tea gardens, who mostly are Hindu.

"Priests didn't come here every Sunday; once every five or six weeks we got a priest," Anthony Lamin, a 47-year-old Khasi Catholic and village catechist told GSR. "The rest of the time, the Christians themselves led the prayers. I have been leading prayers here since about 2006."

Khasi, especially women, are not familiar with the Bengali language, even though Bengali is the predominant language of Bangladesh. Because the Visitation sisters speak Khasi, they are able to better work with the Indigenous population.

Only four Visitation sisters live in the diocese and now teach the youth, help with primary education, lead prayers and work with children. Lyndem is also a professional nurse and provides acupressure therapy to the villagers.



Sr. Mary Lyneda Lyndem provides acupressure therapy to a villager. (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)

"After the sisters came here, people were more interested in the church. Every family is praying in the evening," Lamin said. "Moreover, the children are learning to pray from the sisters in Khasi language. Since most of the mothers in the family do not speak Bengali, they could not teach their children."

Since the small hilly village of Nunchhara Punjee (a punjee is a cluster of houses within the cultural boundary of a community) is about 10 kilometers from Lokhipur Parish, regular village visits from diocesan priests and sisters are few and far between.

Daily evening prayers are now being offered by the villagers, joined by the Visitation sisters. The sisters also advise the villagers on family issues and health awareness, such as hygiene and nutritious foods.

When the Visitation sisters arrived in 2022, they were the first of their congregation in the area, so they resided with the [Associates of Mary Queen of the Apostles](#) sisters at Lokhipur.

"Every congregation has its motto and these sisters work accordingly. But it is sure that with their arrival we are getting some relief in terms of at least we [have] no need to go to Nunchhora Punjee. Because they do take care of Catholics there," said Sr. Mary Bimola, the superior of Mary Queen of the Apostles.

Although the Visitation sisters live at Nunchhora Punjee, they often visit other punjees as well.



An overview of Nunchhara Punjee (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)

About 90 Khasi punjees are sheltering [some 40,000 Khasi](#) people in the Sylhet Diocese. The land has been allotted to the Khasi from the government [for 99 years](#).

Following lease agreements, the Khasi people have been paying regular taxes to the government. The land is in jeopardy as the tea estate is looking to expand the tea plantation onto Khasi-occupied land.

"We are always in an eviction threat," Rana Surong, a Khasi Catholic, told GSR. "Our betel leaf has been regularly cut down by the powered men and they want to evict us and expand their tea garden."

Surong, the head of the Jhimai Punjee, alleged that government officials also did not cooperate with them.

"Land is our right and we want to live there fearlessly and the government should create this situation. But unfortunately, sometimes our road is also blocked by the tea state authorities," Surong added.

However, the Visitation sisters who visit the Punjees hope to empower the Catholics living there.

"Prayer is our main strength and we are doing it for the Khasi people. At the same time, we also pray for the change of those who are doing any kind of injustice to the Khasi," said Lyndem.

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The Khasi people make their livelihood from tree plantation on the hills and at the same time protect the environment. So much injustice on them is not acceptable, Lyndem added.

According to the Visitation directory 2024-2026, 201 nuns work in India, Bangladesh and South Sudan. They have 128 perpetually professed sisters, 50 temporarily professed sisters, and 23 novices.

However, the Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco in Bangladesh have no plans to start a formation house yet but are ready to work in any diocese.

"Some Bangladeshi girls already want to come to our congregation but we have no educational institutions, everyday holy Mass facilities, and priests are not available nearby," Lyndem said. "But we are willing to work in any diocese if the bishops want us."