

## Bangladesh Minorities in British Parliament



All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus:

# The Persecution of Minorities

## (Hindu, Christian & Buddhist)

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BOB BLACKMAN MP  
Member of Parliament for Harrow East



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA



In the backdrop of unfortunate incidents in Bangladesh, I am deeply disturbed by the heightened persecution of minorities in Bangladesh. I share your concern over the desecration of religious symbols, places of worship, people's private properties and threat to lives of several vulnerable individuals and their families. I express my deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the attacks in the recent months.

As the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus, I keep receiving regular updates on the situation in Bangladesh and have repeatedly raised the issue of violence against the Hindus in Bangladesh in the Parliament. During my visit to Bangladesh in September 2015 I had the opportunity to meet the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Hon'ble President of Bangladesh, Abdul Hamid and raise concerns over security of minority communities with them.

I make a note of the contributions made by my parliamentary colleagues Anne Main (St. Albans), Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green & Bow), Rehman Chishti (Gillingham & Rainham), Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar & Limehouse) and Jim Shannon (Strangford) in raising their concerns over the continued atrocities against the minorities in Bangladesh.

I would like to reassure you that the Government of the United Kingdom is extremely concerned about this issue. Infact at Bangladesh's 2<sup>nd</sup> Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in 2013, the United Kingdom government called on the Bangladesh Government to do more to protect vulnerable communities and individuals. I reiterate this plea with the Government of Bangladesh and hope that measures will be taken to protect vulnerable minority communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bob Blackman', with a long, flowing horizontal stroke at the end.

Bob Blackman MP  
Harrow East

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## **Human Rights seminar on Bangladesh, Extremism, Intolerance & Violence**

### **At the House of Commons**

#### **Introduction:**

Widespread and persistent violations of human rights & persecution of minority religious groups, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, tribal communities by extremist armed groups in Bangladesh is deeply worrying to all concerned with the country. Today's seminar is being held to highlight the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh and examine strategies to improve the human rights situation in it.

This Seminar, organised by the APPG for British Hindus & Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council UK, Europe chair of APPG Parliamentary Human Rights Group (UK), brings together politicians, researchers, academics, writers and human rights activists. It will,

- highlight the deteriorating human rights situation, especially for Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist, ethnic and tribal minorities in Bangladesh.
- discuss and explore strategies to challenge and counter the religious extremists through a coordinated common platform.
- strengthen links and build up a network of progressive groups and individuals to stand up to religious intolerance and violent extremism.

Religious extremism and terrorism exploit multiple societal failures in the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia and the Russian federation, but also rely on ideologies that reject secular governance as illegitimate. The atrocities of 9/11, the Madrid bombings, London attacks, the Bali bombings, and a large number of other acts of egregious violence pose a dire and unique challenge to peace and security throughout the world.

The recent ISIS-inspired Jihadi attack against innocent diners at the Dhaka Holey Artisan Bakery in Bangladesh's capital highlights the seriousness of an enduring threat to the peace and security of the country. The terrorists who commit these dreadful crimes are not organised as a single worldwide hierarchical group; they are small autonomous clusters or cells, whose principal common link is a millenarian ideology. They are dedicated to the destruction of secular government and the advent of a society based on an imagined model of the early 7th century. Local problems everywhere are exploited as one means to attract people to this worldview, aided by funding from wealthy patrons and governments of Islamic countries. It enables extremists to recruit devout members of society, who are discontented for various reasons, to participate in acts of terrorist violence to attain martyrdom.

The world is not entitled to forget the scale of the suffering of the people of Bangladesh and especially the grim fate of its Hindu minority during the war of liberation in 1971. It ranks with the worst mass killings of the twentieth century, alongside the Holocaust, the WWI Armenian genocide and Rwanda. Indeed assaults on minority communities have been rife since *before* the partition of India in 1947. The Bangladesh government itself estimates up to 3 million were killed during 1970-1971 and the occurrence of 200,000-400,000 rapes, in which even the most senior Pakistani officer of the province, Lt General Niazi participated without restraint. According to one report the mass murder of boys and

young men denuded entire communities and was the world's worst gendercide in half a millennium (<http://www.genocidebangladesh.org/>).

*"For month after month in all the regions of East Pakistan the massacres went on," writes Robert Payne. "They were not the small casual killings of young officers who wanted to demonstrate their efficiency, but organized massacres conducted by sophisticated staff officers, who knew exactly what they were doing. ...Soldiers went about their work mechanically and efficiently, until killing defenseless people became a habit like smoking cigarettes or drinking wine. ... Not since Hitler invaded Russia had there been so vast a massacre."* (Payne, *Massacre*, p. 29.)

Terrorism in contemporary Bangladesh is not only motivated by the aim of exterminating or expelling its minorities and creating an unsullied theocracy at home, but a global agenda as well. This is why events in Bangladesh are a matter of grave concern for the wider global community. Bangladesh is the fourth largest Islamic society in the world and the deepening roots of religiously motivated terrorism in it pose a significant challenge to peace and security in a world already besieged by terrorism from other sources. A handful of determined killers, influenced by intensifying extremist ideology in their country of origin and the right to visa-free travel, as EU or US nationals, will create an additional nightmare for national security agencies.

The global community has a stake in engaging with the government and people of Bangladesh to combat religious extremism, also a serious threat to its own citizens. Attacks by such extremists against minorities are only the first step in intimidating and imposing their authority on communities. This is why it is vitally important to encourage and assist the government of Bangladesh to act, by investigating and prosecuting heinous crimes like gang rape and frequent seizures of private property and desecration of religious places. A permanent haemorrhage of the minority population, fleeing abroad to escape grim oppression, only weakens the moral standing of established authority and eliminates voters who support politicians committed to human rights. The final stage of the triumph of extremism is likely to be the empowerment of political authority that has a benign attitude towards it because extremism has sunk deep roots in society and can mobilise to demand acceptance of their views. This scenario will be familiar from recent experience elsewhere in the world.

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**Human Rights Council**

Key findings from the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or beliefs, Heiner Bielefeldt's visit to Bangladesh from 31 August to 9 September 2015:

Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed by the Constitution (art. 39, para. 1), which, subject to law, public order and morality, protects the right of every citizen to profess, practise or propagate any religion and the right of every religious community or denomination to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions (art. 41, para. 1). Furthermore, no one attending any educational institution can be coerced to receive religious instruction or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own (art. 41, para. 2). 8. The motto of the Government in promoting freedom of religion or belief is "each unto his or her religion, festivals is for all".

The religious demography in Bangladesh has changed considerably in recent decades, mostly as a result of migration. When the demography changes rapidly, this can pose some challenges to the religious harmony in the country. This risk is even higher, if certain minorities feel vulnerable and insecure. 19. Most salient is the declining number of Hindus in the country. Whereas at the time of the independence of Bangladesh, in 1971, the Hindu population amounted to approximately 23 per cent of the country's entire population, current estimates put that figure at around 9 per cent. Apparently, this drastic decline has much to do with contested property issues, which the Government has been trying to resolve (see paras. 26-32 below) as well as the experience of a general vulnerability through harassment and at times even physical attacks.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in a country traditionally characterized by interreligious tolerance is often attributed to the growing influence of ultraconservative interpretations of Islam stemming from the Gulf region.

While condemning such threats and acts of violence committed in the name of religion and pledging to bring perpetrators to justice, government representatives at the same time have publicly admonished online activists who have expressed critical views on religion, in particular Islam, warning them "not to cross the limits" in their criticism of religion.

Unsettled property disputes constitute challenges in many societies, including in Bangladesh. In various ways, they are closely linked with problems concerning freedom of religion or belief. One link is the salient decline of the Hindu population in Bangladesh, which has shrunk significantly since the time of independence. The Government of Pakistan initially instituted the designation of minority owned land as "enemy property" under the provisions of the Enemy Property Act of 1965. That Act encompassed a series of discriminatory property laws targeting primarily Hindus and tribal communities in the eastern portion of the country (Bangladesh). 45. After achieving independence from Pakistan in 1971, the newly formed Bangladesh retained the inequitable provisions of the Enemy Property Act through the 1974 Vested Property Act. Hindus remained the main target, and the Vested Property Act caused many Hindu families to emigrate to India and other countries. As in many instances, when a person left the country for

any reason, whether temporarily or permanently, they were designated as an “enemy” under the Vested Property Act and their property was “vested” or seized by the State. Frequently, when one Hindu member of a family left the country, the family’s entire property was confiscated. 46. In reality, much of the confiscations carried out amounted to sheer land grabbing.

One particularly atrocious crime is the abduction of persons, mostly girls, with the purpose of forcing them to convert to another religion, while at the same time forcing them into an unwanted marriage, potentially even “marrying” them with their abductor. In addition to other elements of a brutal violation of human dignity, these crimes amount to rape or similar cruel abuses. Such incidents linger long in the memory of the affected families and communities, instilling in them yet another dimension of fear that they will in the long term lose out in the country.

Insecurity has also spread among civil society organizations. Within a few months, several online activists were killed, apparently because of the critical views that they had spread through social media. The general assumption is that the activists were “atheists” and had “insulted Islam”.

The idea is that students receive education in their own respective religions, which is to be taught by teachers who themselves profess the same religions. Obviously, this presupposes a sufficient number of available teachers trained to give religious education, which is not always the case. Moreover, the current threshold for setting up a separate class of religious education seems to be very high.

For instance, a Muslim woman cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man. In such cases, the only resort — apart from conversion or emigration — is by applying the Special Marriage Act of 1872. However, in order to have their marriage validated under the Special Marriage Act, the marrying couple must declare officially that they do not believe in any institutionalized religion. As a consequence of marrying under the terms of the Act, any member of an undivided family that professes the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain religion shall be deemed to effect his or her severance from such family (art. 22); and no person professing the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain religion who marries under the terms of the Act shall have any right of adoption (art. 25).

The Criminal Code of Bangladesh contains blasphemy laws that originate from the era of British colonial rule, including sanctions against “outraging religious feelings”. The offences mentioned in these two sections are only vaguely circumscribed and thus remain vulnerable to highly subjective invocations and arbitrary applications. For some Muslim clerics, the very existence of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community might already contain a provocation that allegedly “hurts” their feelings.



# STATEMENT FROM BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION ON DHAKA TERROR ATTACK



British  
High Commission  
Dhaka

From: [British High Commission Dhaka](#)

First published: 3 July 2016

Message from High Commissioner Alison Blake, Acting High Commissioner Mark Clayton, and the staff of the British High Commission in Dhaka.

The attack at Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka was a senseless act of terror against innocent people living and working in Bangladesh. We offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of all the victims who came from so many different nationalities, and pay tribute to those in the local law enforcement, security and emergency services who worked so tirelessly to help bring this terrible event to a conclusion and help all those affected.

As a close friend of Bangladesh and fellow members of the Commonwealth, the UK cares deeply about what happens here and stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Bangladesh in the global fight against the evils of terrorism and extremism.

The attacks took place as people are getting together to celebrate the festival of Eid ul Fitr and in the holy month of Ramadan, with its values of charity, compassion, and community spirit. We should do all that we can to strengthen our resolve to proclaim Islam as a religion of peace and to reject those who seek to justify violence in its name.



UK

## TERRORISM

There is a high threat from [terrorism](#) in Bangladesh.

Since September 2015 Daesh (formerly referred to as ISIL) has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh.

In late September and early October 2015 two foreign nationals were shot and killed. Since then and as recently as July 2016, attacks against religious minority groups including the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Shia and Ahmadiyya communities, have killed several people and injured many more. Previous methods of attack have included crude explosives, grenades, shootings and knife attacks.

On 1 July, a terrorist attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery in the Gulshan 2 district of Dhaka resulted in the death of 20 hostages, mainly foreign nationals and 2 police officers. Daesh has claimed responsibility for this attack.

Groups affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) are also active and have claimed responsibility for the murder of a number people who they consider to have views and lifestyles contrary to Islam. Online activists, including secular bloggers and two members of the LGBTI community, have been murdered most recently in April 2016.

## US Speaks out for Bangladeshi Hindus



The United States have called for stopping violence against minorities in Bangladesh , asking all political parties to oppose it and the government to use its power to maintain law and order.

The State Department's Spokesperson Jen Psaki told a press briefing in Washington that US was 'disappointed' at recent incidents of violence against minorities. The post Jan 5 elections was marked by attacks against Hindus in many areas of Bangladesh, especially in Jessore. They were allegedly attacked for voting in the parliament elections that the BNP-led opposition alliance had called all to boycott. The ruling Awami League and BNP later blamed each other for the attacks that displaced many Hindus at Abhoynagar in Jessore, where they are in a majority. "We condemn that in the strongest terms, the violence from all quarters that continues to mark the prevailing political impasse," State Department spokesperson Psaki said. "Violence is not an acceptable element of the political process," she said calling all to stop violence further

# TULSI GABBARD CALLS FOR END TO VIOLENCE AGAINST MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

Updated: April 22, 2016 00:33 IST\_

By Taboola



**Tulsi Gabbard is the first Hindu to be elected to the US House of Representatives.**

WASHINGTON: An influential Indian- American lawmaker on Thursday called for an end to violence against atheists, secularists, Hindus, Buddhists and other religious minorities in Bangladesh.

"In Bangladesh, discrimination and deadly violence against atheists, secularists, Hindus, Buddhists, and other religious minorities has unfortunately become a regular occurrence," Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard said in a statement on the House Floor. The two-term Democratic lawmaker from Hawaii, Ms Gabbard is the first Hindu to be elected to the US House of Representatives.

"This underscores the absolute necessity of not only defeating this global wave of intolerance, but standing up and fighting for the right of others to freely express their views regardless of whether you agree with those views or not," she said. "In Bangladesh, the horrendous, brutal street assassinations of members of minority religions, secularists, and atheists violate every single value we hold dear," she said.

Just two weeks ago, 28-year-old Nazimuddin Samad was hacked to death in Dhaka, Bangladesh after speaking out against the persecution of religious minorities on social media, she noted.

## Bangladesh: Wave of violent attacks against Hindu minority

A wave of violent attacks against Bangladesh's minority Hindu community shows the urgent need for the authorities to provide them with better protection, Amnesty International said. Over the past week, individuals taking part in strikes called for by Islamic parties have vandalised more than 40 Hindu temples across Bangladesh. Scores of shops and houses belonging to the Hindu community have also been burned down, leaving hundreds of people homeless. The attacks come in the context of large scale violent protests that have been raging across Bangladesh for weeks over the country's ongoing war crimes tribunal, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT).

Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh Researcher said: "The Hindu community in Bangladesh is at extreme risk, in particular at such a tense time in the country. It is shocking that they appear to be targeted simply for their religion. The authorities must ensure that they receive the protection they need.

"All political parties in Bangladesh should condemn strongly any violence against the Hindu community, and instruct all their members and supporters not to take part in such attacks.

"Given the obvious risks the Hindu minority faces in Bangladesh, these attacks were sadly predictable. We urge the authorities to take note of the violence and act to prevent further attacks." Survivors told Amnesty that the attackers were taking part in rallies organised by the opposition Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and its student group Chhatra Shibir. JI has publicly denied any involvement in violence against the Hindu community. Attacks have happened across Bangladesh, but mostly in remote areas in the country. The latest attack took place today in Daudkandi village, south-eastern Comilla district, where a Hindu temple was vandalised and burned down. One survivor told Amnesty that on 28 February, his family's village of Rajganj Bazar in the south-eastern Noakhali district was set on fire by people taking part in a JI-organised strike. "They moved into our properties and set fire to 30 of our houses. Seventy-six families were living in these houses. They also set fire to our temples – all are now vanished," the survivor said, who asked to remain anonymous because of concerns for his safety. He said the authorities have provided temporary accommodation for the affected families, who had lost almost all their belongings to theft or destruction in the violence. Another survivor said that on 2 March, a group of about 100 young men holding banners in support of JI looted and damaged four shops in Satkania near Chittagong and vandalised a Hindu temple in the village. Bangladesh's Hindu minority makes up only eight per cent of the population, and has historically been at risk of violence from the Muslim population – including during the independence war in 1971, and after elections in 2001.

Tensions have been running high in Bangladesh in recent weeks as JI and its student wing have called strikes and mass protests against the ICT, which has found some of its senior members guilty

for crimes committed during the 1971 war. Protesters have also been involved in violent clashes with police, who have used tear gas, rubber bullets or live ammunition against them. At least 60 people have been killed, mostly by police fire, but among the dead are also several policemen.

Abbas Faiz added: "While there are credible reports that police firing may have followed violent attacks against them by protesters, police use of excessive force cannot be discounted."

#### **BBC News**

##### **Bangladesh minorities terrorised after mob violence**

Saraswati Rani Das ran for her life with her two young children when a Muslim mob rampaged through her village in the southern Noakhali district of Bangladesh. "We heard the mob was coming towards our house. So, we just ran away. Our house was completely burnt. They looted all our belongings, including our savings. We have lost everything," Mrs Das says.

The attack started hours after a senior hard-line Islamist leader was sentenced to death by a special tribunal in late February. Jamaat-e-Islami Vice President Delwar Hossain Sayedee was given a death sentence for crimes committed during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. The sentencing triggered a wave of angry protest from the Islamist party's supporters.

Hindu community leaders allege that the attacks were coordinated and widespread. So far, they say, more than 50 temples have been damaged and more than 1,500 houses destroyed in the attacks, which took place in nearly 20

#### **Save minority Communities**

##### **HC Asks Govt. to ensure Adequate Security: 2014**

The High Court has directed the government to immediately provide adequate security to the minority communities and other people vulnerable to post-polls attacks.

the HC directive came yesterday in the wake of attacks on Hindus and people adherent to ruling Awami League across the country surrounding the January 5, 2014 elections.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Miza-mur Rahman and different organisations has demanded justice for the victims of the post-polls attacks.

#### **Hindu Rally in front White House**

##### **Barrack Obama asked to protect Hindus in Bangladesh**

Washington DC: The Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council's USA Chapter has given a memorandum to stop Persecution upon Bangladesh Minorities to the White House authorities at the end of a street agitation here to draw the kind attention of Barrack Hussein Obama, the President of USA on Thursday in Washington DC.

**HINDUS (PAGE 90)**

21.11 The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in their 'Profile of the internal displacement: situation' dated 28 March 2006, quoted various primary sources as follows:

"In the weeks following the 1 October [2001] general elections, Bangladesh witnessed an outburst of systematic attacks on the minority Hindu community across the country, in addition to attacks on activists of the freshly ousted 90 Awami League... By 8 October 2001, at least 30 people had been killed and more than 1,000 others injured. Their houses were torched, ransacked and in many cases seized, women were raped, and temples were desecrated... The Hindu-dominated areas in Barisal, Bhola, Pirojpur, Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Jhenidah, Bagerhat, Feni, Tangail, Noakhali, Natore, Bogra, Sirajganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria, Gazipur and Chittagong were the worst hit... Many Hindu families reportedly fled their homes and sought refuge in areas considered 'safe'. The *Bangladesh Observer* reported that at least 10,000 people of the minority community from Barisal district ran away from their homes following attacks by activists of the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami party and took shelter in neighbouring Gopalganj district, the electorate of the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Many others fled to the Indian State of Tripura and West Bengal. (HRF March 2002)...Post election violence and oppression against minority [sic] has displaced more than 15 thousand minority families in Barishal and Bagerhat districts...Islamic fundamentalists have initiated a rain [sic] of terror forcing minorities to endure living in a nightmare condition in those areas. (HRCBM) [45c] (p19-20)

The report added:

"Women were particularly targeted – in many cases rape of female family members made it impossible for families to stay in their villages ...By a letter dated 10 December 2002, the Special Rapporteur informed the Government that she had received information that more than 2,000 women in Bangladesh between the ages of 7 and 80 had been raped, gang-raped, beaten and subjected to degrading treatment by fundamentalist groups following the 1 October 2001 elections. Much of the violence allegedly took place in small villages, and the perpetrators in many cases were identified as activists of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) or the group Jamaat-e-Islami... (CHR, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women 14 January 2003)" [45c] (p20-21)

**BUDDHISTS (page 92)**

21.21 As stated in a report of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) dated 16 August 2005, the majority of the Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts practise Buddhism. [3v] For further information on the treatment of Buddhists, therefore, refer to Section 22: The Indigenous Jumma Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The 1991 Census showed that there were then 623,000 Buddhists in Bangladesh, of whom 575,000 were living in the Division of Chittagong. [43b] According to an estimate quoted by BuddhaNet, the Australian-based website of the Buddha Dharma Education Association, there were about one million Buddhists in Bangladesh by 2004, living mainly in the area of the city of Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Comilla, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and in Barisal. The Buddhists of Bangladesh belong to four groups of nations who have been gradually mixed together; the groups are the Austic, the Tibeto-Burman, the Dravians and the Aryans. According to historians the Tibeto-Burman consists of three tribes – the Pyu, the Kanyan and the Thet (Chakma). The Chakma tribes primarily reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Kanyan tribe is known as the Rakhine (Arakanese) group who still live in the South-Eastern part of Chittagong district. The plain Buddhists of Bangladesh, known as the Burua-Buddhist, are the ancient peoples of Bangladesh who have lived there for five thousand years, according to Arakanese chronology. [92a]

21.23 United News of Bangladesh announced on 29 August 2004 that six persons had been found guilty and sentenced to death for the April 2002 murder of a Buddhist monk, Gyan Jyoti Mohasthobir, in Raojan upazila. The murder was

attributed to a property dispute. [39d] However, reports obtained from the UK Bangladesh Hindu Baudha Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) indicate that there have, on occasion, been religiously motivated attacks against the Buddhist community. For example, it was reported on 16 June 2006 that a Buddhist temple (Bihar) in the village of Maischhari, in Khakdachari District, had been set on fire by Islamic fundamentalists. [57a]

## CHRISTIANS (Page 98)

21.36 A report from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, dated 9 August 2006, has quoted from various other sources as follows:

“There are an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Christians living in Bangladesh, the majority of whom are Catholic. The [2005 Religious Freedom Report] indicates that Bengali Christians are spread across Bangladesh, and that some indigenous (non-Bengali) groups are also Christian...Reported incidents against religious minorities, including Christians, have included killings, sexual assaults, extortion, intimidation, forced eviction, and attacks on places of worship... According to Open Doors (OD), an evangelical Christian organization that provides religious materials, training and support to Christians around the world, Christians, and particularly Muslims who convert to Christianity, are not safe in Bangladesh. According to the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, a US-based NGO, Muslim converts to Christianity generally do not openly practice their religion. Sources consulted indicate that Muslims who convert to Christianity could face rejection by their families and society and physical ‘danger’. A May 2005 U.S. Newswire article reports that Christian Freedom International (CFI), a US based human rights organization, found evidence of ‘persecution’ of Muslims who had converted to Christianity during a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh. Cited in the same article, the president of CFI indicated that Muslim women who convert to Christianity may be subject to beatings, abduction, rape, forced marriage and forced reconversion to Islam. Specific reports of Muslim women who converted to Christianity being subject to such treatment could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate [IRB]...The government has, however, taken measures to provide security at places of worship of religious minorities around the country. During Christmas celebrations in 2005, the government reportedly tightened security at churches across the country following a series of Islamic militant bombings earlier that year.”

The Canadian IRB report of 5 August 2003 had noted that proselytising is permitted under the law, but strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means most proselytising tends to be aimed at Hindus and tribal groups.

21.37 The 2004 Religious Freedom Report recorded that, in June 2001, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church in Gopalganj District during Sunday Mass, killing ten persons and injuring 20 others. A judicial commission was formed in 2001 to investigate the bombing, but its findings have subsequently been discredited. The Government has taken no action on the commission’s report and the police are reportedly not pursuing the case actively.

21.38 According to an article in *The Guardian* (UK) of 21 July 2003: “In the village of Fhainjana, a mob of 200 fundamentalists recently looted 10 Christian houses, allegedly assaulting many women and children. Christians were seriously beaten and others molested after refusing to give money to thugs in the village of Kamalapur, near Dhaka.”

21.39 The USSD 2005 report noted that, in September 2004, unidentified assailants killed Dr. Joseph Gomes, a Christian convert, near his home in Jamalpur district. Police arrested a local madrassah teacher, Maulana Abdus Sobhan Munshi, alias Michha Munshi, for the killing, held him for two weeks and then released him. By end-2006 no one else had been charged in connection with the crime. On 28 July 2005, unknown assailants in Faridpur district killed two employees of the NGO Christian Life Bangladesh, allegedly because they showed an evangelical film. Police arrested several suspects for the killing, but by the end of 2005 police had released all suspects and no charges had been filed.

21.40 The 2006 Religious Freedom Report records certain incidents of harassment and violence in which the victims were Christian. In July 2005, two Christian NGO workers were killed in Boalmari, Faridpur, reportedly after receiving threats from local leaders angry at their attempts to convert people to Christianity. Two men were arrested for the killings. In April 2006 it was reported that arsonists had burned down a church in a remote village in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, apparently in retaliation for the conversion of local Buddhists to Christianity.



Similar reports on the persecution of minorities were published by the Home office until the last report, Home Office UK Border Agency Country of Origin Report on Bangladesh 20 August 2010 (page 77)'.

## **Bangladesh: Post Poll Politics and Attacks on Minorities**

**A Statement from the  
Asian Human Rights Commission**  
January 13, 2014

### **BANGLADESH: Attacks on non-Muslims must stop now, forever**

Shame shadows Bangladesh again. Numerous attacks have been waged on the Hindu community across Bangladesh in the wake of the January 5th general 'election'. Houses and business establishments owned by Hindus have been targeted. Other ethnic and non-Muslim communities have also been attacked. Temples and religious sites have not been spared. Few hundred Hindu families have lost their property and savings in acts of vandalism, loot, and arson. Numerous women and children from minority communities, have fled their homes, and are in hiding in fear of further attacks. Their homes destroyed, some sleep under the open sky in the cold air of winter nights. Neither the state nor humanitarian organizations have responded with adequate food and shelter for the victims.

The Bangladesh Army has also been on the street to 'aid' the government since December 2013. All these forces have failed to prevent the attacks and protect the minority population. This is, of course, not the first such series of attacks; it is only the latest instance in a litany of shameful attacks on the dwindling minority population of Bangladesh. Attacking minorities has become an election tradition in the country.

### **How long can the non-Muslim communities sustain such barbarity?**

Targeting of non-Muslims for political gains is done by both parties that win and parties that lose elections. Of course, many Muslims also fall victim to the seasonal violence of elections; at least five lives have been lost in post election violence this year, not to mention over a hundred killed in the lead-up to the election. Apart from political gains, such attacks, orchestrated by powerful people, linked to the ruling or opposition parties, are often undertaken for grabbing land and assets. The attacks on Hindus, in particular, also open undue opportunities to politicians beyond borders, for earning 'extra' benefits, again, at the cost of the dignity and interests of the people of Bangladesh.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has had the opportunity to enquire after the well-being of victims in Chapatala village, Avoyanagar, in Jessore district. The victims' version of events contradicts the government's take. Residents of Chapatala state the following:

They say Mr. Ranjit Kumar Roy, a ruling party candidate, a Hindu, won the election. Cadres of the defeated candidate, Mr. Abdul Wahab – who was a leader of the Bangladesh Awami League until he was denied a ticket by the party this election – led the attacks. Supporters of few other political parties, those with links to the attack leaders, and local 'petty criminals', thieves and muggers, jointly committed the crimes. Around seventy lower caste Hindu families lost most of their assets as a result. Their houses and shops have been looted, belongings burnt.

The AHRC has learned that local administrations in some districts have provided relief and remuneration to some victims. While adequate relief is essential, and must cover all the affected, what is really required

is 'justice' for the victims. To ensure justice, the institution of a judicial probe commission is the need of the hour, to investigate and prosecute perpetrators regardless of their political or religious identity.

The realities are truly unfortunate, as Bangladesh has a long and commendable history of communal harmony, unlike neighbouring nations. The people, regardless of their religious background, fought for the country's independence in 1971. Together, they sacrificed lives on the battle field. Ordinary citizens of Bangladesh have deep bonds beyond their communal identities. It is, however, the shamelessly dirty politics atop the nation, and the unforgivable failure of the civil and police administration to prevent attacks on non-Muslims, that has butchered the people's history.

Similar reports of atrocities against the minorities were also published in 2015 report.

## BANGLADESH: WAVE OF VIOLENT ATTACKS AGAINST HINDU MINORITY

6 March 2013,

A wave of violent attacks against Bangladesh's minority Hindu community shows the urgent need for authorities to provide them with better protection, Amnesty International said.

Over the past week, individuals taking part in strikes called for by Islamic parties have vandalised more than 40 Hindu temples across Bangladesh.

Scores of shops and houses belonging to the Hindu community have also been burned down, leaving hundreds of people homeless.

The attacks come in the context of large scale violent protests that have been raging across Bangladesh for weeks over the country's ongoing war crimes tribunal, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT).

"The Hindu community in Bangladesh is at extreme risk, in particular at such a tense time in the country. It is shocking that they appear to be targeted simply for their religion. The authorities must ensure that they receive the protection they need," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh Researcher.

"All political parties in Bangladesh should condemn strongly any violence against the Hindu community, and to instruct all their members and supporters not to take part in such attacks."

Survivors told Amnesty International that the attackers were taking part in rallies organised by the opposition Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and its student group Chhatra Shibir.

JI has publicly denied any involvement in violence against the Hindu community.

Attacks have happened across Bangladesh, but mostly in remote areas in the country. The latest attack took place today in Daudkandi village, south-eastern Comilla district, where a Hindu temple was vandalised and burned down.

One survivor told Amnesty International that on 28 February, his family's village of Rajganj Bazar in the south-eastern Noakhali district was set on fire by people taking part in a JI-organised strike.

"They moved into our properties and set fire to 30 of our houses. Seventy-six families were living in these houses. They also set fire to our temples – all are now vanished," the survivor said, who asked to remain anonymous out of concerns for his safety.

He said the authorities have provided temporary accommodation to the affected families, who had lost almost all their belongings to theft or destruction in the violence.

Another survivor said that on 2 March, a group of about 100 young men holding banners in support of JI looted and damaged four shops in Satkania near Chittagong and vandalised a Hindu temple in the village.

"Given the obvious risks the Hindu minority faces in Bangladesh, these attacks were sadly predictable. We urge the authorities to take note of the violence and act to prevent further attacks," said Faiz.

Tensions have been running high in Bangladesh in recent weeks as JI and its student wing have called strikes and mass protests against the ICT, which has found some of its senior members guilty for crimes committed during the 1971 war.

Protesters have also been involved in violent clashes with police, who have used tear gas, rubber bullets or live ammunition against them. At least 60 people have been killed, mostly by police fire, but among the dead are also several policemen.

"While there are credible reports that police firing may have followed violent attacks against them by protesters, police use of excessive force cannot be discounted", Faiz said.

## US SPEAKS OUT FOR BANGLADESHI HINDUS

● JANUARY 19, 2014

- The United States have called for stopping violence against minorities in Bangladesh , asking all political parties to oppose it and the government to use its power to maintain law and order.
- The State Department's Spokesperson Jen Psaki told a press briefing in Washington that US was 'disappointed' at recent incidents of violence against minorities. The post Jan 5 elections was marked by attacks against Hindus in many areas of Bangladesh, especially in Jessore. They were allegedly attacked for voting in the parliament elections that the BNP-led opposition alliance had called all to boycott. The ruling Awami League and BNP later blamed each other for the attacks that displaced many Hindus at Abhoynagar in Jessore, where they are in a majority. "We condemn that in the strongest terms, the violence from all quarters that continues to mark the prevailing political impasse, "Stat0065 Department spokesperson Psaki

said. "Violence is not an acceptable element of the political process," she said calling all to stop violence further.

# The New York Times

## • Political Crisis in Bangladesh

Published: November 20, 2013

- Since the year began, a series of general strikes have paralyzed Bangladesh, and hundreds have died in violent clashes between rival political factions. Top opposition leaders and human rights activists have been arrested. Courts have delivered guilty verdicts and death sentences that flout the most basic standards of due process.
- Responsibility for this crisis sits squarely with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the Awami League party. Ms. Hasina seems determined to hang on to power in advance of general elections scheduled for January and to neutralize her opponents by any means necessary. In 2011, she scrapped a constitutional provision for the governing party to cede power to a neutral caretaker government three months before elections take place. Instead, Ms. Hasina set up an "all-party" government over which she presides. This is not acceptable to Khaleda Zia, a former prime minister who is the leader of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or B.N.P. The two are locked in a potentially explosive impasse.
- Meanwhile, the Jamaat-e-Islami party, an ally of the B.N.P., has been banned from participating in the upcoming elections. Many Bangladeshis who support the Awami League fear that Islamist parties are threatening the foundation of a country that fought bitterly to separate from Pakistan in 1971. But banning Jamaat-e-Islami from participating in the electoral process is only forcing frustrated supporters into the streets.
- Meanwhile, trials held by the International Crimes Tribunal in Bangladesh, which was set up in 2009 to try people accused of committing atrocities during the 1971 war with Pakistan, have targeted opposition leaders. The tribunal appears to be yet another tool to stifle political opponents.
- If violations of rights continue, Bangladesh could face pressure, including perhaps sanctions, from the international community. Prime Minister Hasina needs to restore autonomy to Bangladesh's judiciary, stop persecuting human rights activists and work with the political opposition to find an acceptable transitional government ahead of next year's election.

## BANGLADESH USCRIF REPORT 2015

- In 2014, societal discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and occasional violence against religious minority communities, especially the Hindu minority population, continued in Bangladesh. In addition, illegal land appropriations, commonly referred to as land-grabbing, and ownership disputes remain widespread, with a disproportionate number of religious minorities being targeted. In September 2014, a USCIRF staff member travelled to the country to assess the religious freedom situation. Background On January 5, 2014, Bangladesh held its parliamentary election, Post-election violence occurred in 16 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, with most attacks attributed to individuals and groups associated with the BNP and the main religious party Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat).
- The worst attacks occurred in minority-dominated villages. Dozens of Hindu properties were looted, vandalized, or set ablaze, and hundreds of Hindus fled their homes. Christian and Buddhist communities also were targeted. According to the country's 2011 census, approximately 90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Hindus are 9.5 percent of the total population, and all other faiths, including Christians and Buddhists, are less than one percent. Murder of Bloggers and Charges of Blasphemy After the reporting period, two self-professed secular bloggers were brutally murdered in separate incidents on public streets in Dhaka. Avijit Roy, an American citizen of Bangladeshi descent, was hacked to death on February 26, 2015; Roy's wife was critically injured. In 2013, individuals associated with Jamaat reportedly gave the government a list naming 84 other individuals they wanted to see investigated for blasphemy.
- Property Returns In 2011, the Vested Property Return Act established an application process for families or individuals to apply for the return of, or compensation for, Hindu property seized prior to Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971. However, Hindu communities and NGOs complain that the Act is too narrowly defined, the application process too cumbersome and convoluted, BANGLADESH Dozens of Hindu properties were looted, vandalized, or set ablaze, and hundreds of Hindus fled their homes. 194 USCIRF | ANNUAL REPORT 2015 and only a small percentage of eligible properties have been returned. Land Grabbing Representatives of minority communities told USCIRF that land-grabbing is a significant concern and is widespread throughout Bangladesh. Land-grabbing affects all communities, although religious minorities, particularly Hindus, appear disproportionately targeted for displacement from land they have claimed for generations. Reportedly, local police and political leaders, including some members of the national parliament, are occasionally involved in land-grabbing and/or shielding politically-influential individuals from prosecution.
- Recommendations In its engagement with Bangladesh, USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government should: urge Prime Minister Hasina and all government officials to frequently and publicly denounce religiously-divisive language and acts of religiously-motivated violence and harassment; assist the Bangladeshi government to provide local government officials, police officers and judges with training on international human rights standards, as well as how to investigate and adjudicate religiously-motivated violent acts; and urge the

government of Bangladesh to investigate claims of land-grabbing, rescind the order restricting NGO access to the Chittagong area, and revoke its blasphemy law.

- Take appropriate disciplinary or criminal actions against any police personnel who have failed to ensure the protection of members of the Hindu community.

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We would like to draw your kind attention to the following facts regarding the minorities of Bangladesh:

1. The number of religious minorities including Hindus has been declining rapidly (from 34% in 1947 and 19.80% in 1971 to 9% in 2014) in Bangladesh.
2. The political parties of Bangladesh in general are not committed to restoring the original spirit of the Liberation War of Bangladesh of 1971 and the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972.
3. The Enemy Properties Act of 1965 is still in force in the name of the Vested Property Act, enabling seizure of Hindu properties in a blatantly discriminatory way.
4. Since independence governments have failed to protect places of worship of minorities in Bangladesh.
5. The restoration of the important religious sites of Ramna Kalibari Temple and Ma Anandamoyi Ashram is still pending. The Debottar land of Shree Shree Dhakeswari National Temple been 'grabbed' and reduced from 6.75 acres to 2.75 acres approx.
6. Demographic changes are being instigated in Hindu–Buddhist dominated districts, particularly in Chittagong Hill Tracts.
7. Cases relating to persecution and oppression hitherto inflicted upon minorities are not being investigated.
8. There is no minority ministry /dept. to oversee the interests of religious minorities and regulate policy matters to redress sufferings and issues related to them.
9. There is no budgetary allocation for religious minorities in the National Budget and there is no special law to protect their specific interests.
10. Secular political parties are under threat and secular Bangladesh is gradually turning into a land of political thugs and religious extremists.

The Hindu population of Bangladesh has been in rapid decline for the last sixty years due to Islamic extremism...

### **Recommendations:**

Immediate and decisive action is needed by the government to address the situation of religious minorities in the country. We would like the following proposals to be put before the British and Bangladesh governments:

- Enact laws for the protection of the minorities such as a Human Rights Act, Minority Protection Act and Protection of Places of Worship.
- Set up a Minorities Rights Commission.
- Abolish all discriminatory laws, especially the Vested Property Act.
- UK Government to make recommendation for a United Nations special task force to investigate the disappearance of over 900,000 missing Hindus from Bangladesh



between 2001-2011, as noted in the European Parliament resolution on the situation in Bangladesh (resolution no. 2013/2561(RSP) para. M).

- Publicly condemn attacks against members of the Hindu community and other minorities.
- Take decisive action to protect members of minority communities against attacks.
- Initiate a full, impartial and independent investigation of all such attacks and make the results of the investigation public.
- Bring to justice all perpetrators of attacks regardless of their position in society or membership of political party.
- Provide compensation to victims of attacks.



**On the occasion of the unveiling of the  
Mahatma Gandhi London Statue**

## Hindu, Christian & Buddhist



## The Minorities (Hindu, Christian & Buddhist)



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