



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Treatment of Hindus in Bangladesh.

Freedom House in its annual report on Bangladesh states:

“Islam is the official religion, but about 10 percent of the population is Hindu, and there are smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians. Although religious minorities have the right to worship freely, they face societal discrimination and remain underrepresented in politics and state employment. A trend of increased intolerance and attacks on minorities was reversed in 2009, as the new government made explicit commitments to defend minority rights and deployed police to protect vulnerable groups like the 100,000-strong Ahmadiyya sect. Ahmadis are considered heretical by some mainstream Muslims, and they have faced physical attacks, boycotts, and demands by extremist groups that they be declared non-Muslims by the state. Other positive steps taken by the avowedly secular AL government included the appointment of several individuals from minority groups to leadership positions, the initiation of curriculum reform in the religious schools (madrassahs), and the provision of additional security at religious celebrations.” (Freedom House (May 2010) *Bangladesh: "Freedom in the World 2010"*)

A report from *US Commission on International Religious Freedom* states:

“Attacks on members of religious or ethnic minorities or their properties, including thefts and vandalism at Hindu temples, continue to be a problem, although it is difficult to distinguish criminal intent from religious animosity or other possible motives. Weak and corrupt law enforcement leaves members of religious minority communities vulnerable to harassment and sometimes violence, particularly sexual violence against women, by members of the Muslim majority. Although the constitution provides protections for women and minorities, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Ahmadis, tribal peoples, and other minorities must regularly grapple with societal discrimination, as well as face prejudice that hinders their ability to access public services, the legal system, and government, military, and police employment. Religious minorities are also underrepresented in elected political offices, including the national parliament.” (US Commission on International Religious Freedom (May 2010) *Annual report on religious freedom 2010*)

The *US Department of State's* annual report on Bangladesh states:

“The constitution incorporates elements of Islam but stipulates the right--subject to law, public order, and morality--to profess, practice, or propagate the religion of one's choice. The government generally respected this right in practice. Religion shaped the platforms of some political parties, but the government was

sensitive to the religious sentiments of most citizens. Violence against religious and ethnic minorities was a problem occasionally. Discrimination against members of religious minorities, such as Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, existed at both the governmental and societal levels, and religious minorities were disadvantaged in practice in such areas as access to government jobs, political office, and justice. The secular AL government, however, appointed some members of the minority communities to senior government and diplomatic positions. In the new cabinet, three of the 38 ministers were non-Muslims." (US Department of State (11 March 2010) *Bangladesh: "Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009"*)

The annual report on religious freedom in Bangladesh from the *US Department of State* details:

"Attacks against the Hindu community continued, although numbers dropped significantly from the previous year. According to the Bangladesh Buddhist-Hindu-Christian Unity Council (BHBCOP), during the period from April 2008 to March 2009, there were three killings, 10 attacks on or occupation of temples, 12 incidents of land grabbing, two cases of rape, and three kidnappings.

According to Shamokal, the daily newspaper in Bangla, on March 30, 2009, 50 police officers and 100 others evicted approximately 400 individuals, mostly Hindus, from Sutrapur in old Dhaka and destroyed their ancestral homes with hammers. The mob, allegedly led by the brother of a local Awami League politician, also destroyed the oldest Shiva temple in Kalirghat. The individuals evicted claimed that the land was registered in their name in 1945 and that they had been paying municipal taxes and utility bills. After the passage of the Vested Property Act, the area was registered as "vested property." The Hindu residents alleged that several powerful local leaders had filed a case claiming the property. Police sided against the Hindu occupants, claiming they had been illegally occupying the land." (US Department of State (26 October 2009) *Bangladesh: "International Religious Freedom Report 2009"*)

A report by the *UK Border Agency (Home Office)* under the heading 'Hindus' states:

"According to the 2008 Annual Report of the NGO Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK):

"As noted in previous years' reports, incidents of harassment against the Hindu minority community continued at a low level, almost as a persistent 'background noise' in the country's overall human rights situation. There were arguments, often by those who wished to deny specific religious discrimination that such incidents of harassment, looting, rape, etc., occur against all impoverished communities in Bangladesh. Religious minorities continue to be most vulnerable ... Temples appeared to be a vulnerable target, with several major cases reported by the press this year [2008] ... An attack on Kotiadi monastery, Kishoreganj, which resulted in the rape of one monastery occupant and death of the elderly priest Abinash Chandra Goshai; destruction of idols of two hundred year old temple at Gouranadi arson at Badarganj temple, Rangpur; and destruction of idols at Aghoiljhara, Barisal district ... Thus whether the motivation was looting or communal attack, or a combination of both, the

lack of punishment for one incident appears to create an enabling environment for more attacks in same location. Even more worrying are incidents that happen with support of local authorities, as in Bagerhat, where attempts to build a structure on temple land resulted in hundreds of Hindu community members surrounding the offices of municipal authorities demanding the temple area be left intact for Kirtan, Kobi Gaan and other religious events. In many cases of attacks against minority community, the local police appeared reluctant to take the cases seriously. In cases where there is sustained reporting, it is often revealed that land grabbing is a primary motive behind the violence... The footprint of the Vested Property Act can be seen both in the targeting of Hindu land as more vulnerable to legal maneuvers, as well as the frequent exhortations to 'move to India'." (Home Office UK Border Agency (11 August 2009) *Country of Origin Information Report Bangladesh* -pg. 100 21.17)

A report from Internal *Displacement Monitoring Centre* states:

"Violence against religious minorities living outside the CHT resulting in loss of land has continued to be reported since 2001. From July 2007 until April 2008, 39 cases of land-grabbing targeting the Hindu community were reported (US-DoS, September 2008). However, unlike in 2007, in 2008 there were no reports of the army's involvement in eviction of Hindus (USDoS, September 2008). A 2008 Dhaka University study revealed that nearly 200,000 Hindu families had lost almost 41,000 acres of land since 2001 (USDoS, September 2008)." (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (formerly Global IDP Project) (16 July 2009) *Bangladesh: "Indigenous people and religious minorities still affected by displacement"*)

References

Freedom House (May 2010) *Bangladesh: "Freedom in the World 2010"*
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[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/%28httpInfoFiles%29/5E9692B6E4E0A918C12575F5004F95C3/\\$file/Bangladesh_Overview_Jul09.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/%28httpInfoFiles%29/5E9692B6E4E0A918C12575F5004F95C3/$file/Bangladesh_Overview_Jul09.pdf)
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International

European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

Online newspapers

Refugee Documentation Centre Library

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UK Border Agency (Home Office)

UNHCR Refworld

US Commission on International Religious Freedom

US Department of State