

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT 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.

Questions

- 1. Please provide information about the origins of the Ahmadiyya religion in Bangladesh; the beliefs and religious practices of the Ahmadiyyas; and how these differ from those of Sunnis.**
- 2. Please provide the names of any significant Ahmadiyya religious figures/leaders in Bangladesh in the early to mid-1990s.**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information about the origins of the Ahmadiyya religion in Bangladesh; the beliefs and religious practices of the Ahmadiyyas; and how these differ from those of Sunnis.**

Please see the following research responses for background information on the Ahmadiyya religion's beliefs and religious practices:

- RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response BGD17010*, (Q.1), 1 October – Attachment 1
- RRT Country Research 2002, *Research Response BGD15501*, (Q1-2) 23 October – Attachment 2
- RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response BGD15853*, (Q.1) 16 April – Attachment 3

Further to the advice offered in these responses, several other sources have been consulted and provide information detailing the origins of the Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh.

In the 2005 Human Rights Watch report, *Breach of Faith, Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh*, Human Rights Watch state that approximately 100,000 Ahmadi's

live in Bangladesh at present and violence towards the Ahmadiyya community has occurred for almost two decades:

Ahmadis have lived in what is present-day Bangladesh since the early 1900s. Roughly 100,000 Ahmadis live in Bangladesh today. Violence towards the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh has occurred for almost two decades. The recent upsurge in the persecution of the Ahmadis can be understood as part of a gradual trend in Bangladesh away from the country's secular roots toward more blending of religion and politics. This Islamization of government can be explained partially by examining the history of Bangladesh.

(Human Rights Watch 2005, *Breach of Faith, Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh*, Human Rights Watch website, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/bangladesh0605/index.htm> -- Accessed 27 September 2005 – Attachment 4).

In describing the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's origins, the same Human Rights Watch report provides the following information:

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (the official name of the community) is a contemporary messianic movement founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908), who was born in the small village of Qadian in Punjab, India. The Ahmadiyya community is also referred to derogatorily by some as the "Qadiani" (or "Kadiyani") community, a term derived from the birthplace of the founder of the movement. In 1889, Ahmad declared that he had received divine revelation authorizing him to accept the *baya'ah*, or allegiance of the faithful. In 1891, he claimed to be the expected mahdi or messiah of the latter days, the "Awaited One" of the monotheist community of religions, and the messiah foretold by the Prophet Mohammed.

(Human Rights Watch 2005, *Breach of Faith, Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh*, Human Rights Watch website, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/bangladesh0605/index.htm> – Accessed 27 September 2005 – Attachment 4).

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch reports that the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya are likened to that of mainstream Islam. The major difference between Ahmadi's and followers of mainstream Islam is that the Ahmadiyya do not believe that Mohammed was the last prophet. In this way, they reject the fundamental tenet of Islam of *Khatme Nabuwat* – literally the finality of prophethood:

Ahmad described his teachings, incorporating both Sufic and orthodox Islamic, Hindu and Christian elements, as an attempt to revitalise Islam in the face of the British Raj, proselytizing Protestant Christianity, and resurgent Hinduism. Thus, the Ahmadiyya community believes that Ahmad conceived the community as a revivalist movement within Islam and not as a new religion...

Members of the Ahmadiyya community ("Ahmadis") profess to be Muslims. They contend that Ahmad meant to revive the true spirit and message of Islam that the Prophet Mohammed introduced and preached. Virtually all mainstream sects believe that Ahmad proclaimed himself as a prophet, thereby rejecting a fundamental tenet of Islam: *Khatme Nabuwat* (literally, the belief in the "finality of prophethood" – that the Prophet Mohammed was the last of the line of prophets leading back through Jesus, Moses and Abraham). Ahmadis respond that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a non-law bearing prophet subordinate in status to Prophet Mohammed; he came to illuminate and reform Islam, as predicted by Prophet Mohammed. For Ahmad and his followers, the Arabic *Khatme Nabuwat* does not refer to the finality of prophethood in a literal sense – that is, to prophethood's chronological cessation – but rather to its culmination and exemplification in the Prophet Mohammed (Human Rights Watch 2005, *Breach of Faith, Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh*,

Human Rights Watch website, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/bangladesh0605/index.htm> – Accessed 27 September 2005 – Attachment 4).

The Al Islam website also provides an overview of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and offers the following summary of the Ahmadiyya's core values and beliefs:

The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam was created under divine guidance with the objective to rejuvenate Islamic moral and spiritual values. It encourages interfaith dialogue, and diligently defends Islam and tries to correct misunderstandings about Islam in the West. It advocates peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths. It firmly believes in and acts upon the Qur'anic teaching: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2.257). It strongly rejects violence and terrorism in any form and for any reason.

The Movement offers a clear presentation of Islamic wisdom, philosophy, morals and spirituality as derived from the Holy Qu'ran and the practice (Sunnah) of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) ('The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam – An Overview' 2005, Al Islam website, <http://www.alislam.org/introduction/index.html> – Accessed 28 September 2005 – Attachment 5).

The Banglapedia website states that Ahmadiyyas are similar to orthodox Muslims in the manner in which they pray five times a day, follow the teachings of Allah in the Quran and also observe the month-long fasting in Ramadan. The differences in belief from orthodox Islam is in the belief in the crucifixion of Jesus and the coming of the Prophet or Imam Mehdi. The following excerpt entitled 'Ahmadiyya' by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh on the Banglapedia site details the religious practices of the Ahmadiyya:

Many tenets of the Ahmadiyas are similar to those of orthodox Islam. They believe in Allah and recognise Muhammad (Sm) as the Prophet. They believe that what has been said by Allah in the Quran and what has been collected as the sayings of the Prophet of Islam are all true. They also believe that anybody who deviates from the Islamic shariah is a disbeliever and is against Islam. They have faith in all the prophets and in the scriptures specified in the Quran. Ahmadiyas say their namaz (prayers), five times a day, observe the month-long fasting in Ramadan, and pay zakat. But they do not follow many elements of Islamic aqida (faith) and amal (action). The issues in which Ahmadiyas differ with Muslims include (a) the death of Jesus Christ, (b) the recognition of Hazrat Muhammad's (Sm) as the last prophet, and (c) the advent of Imam Mehdi and the Messiah.

Ahmadis believe that Prophet Muhammad (Sm) is not khatimun nabiyyin, the final prophet, but khatamun nabiyyin, the perfect and complete prophet. He is so great that, according to them, following him, one can even reach the stage of subsidiary prophethood. They believe that the founder of the community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, is the recipient of this spiritual status.

The fundamental difference in opinion of Ahmadiyas with Muslims is on the crucifixion of Jesus. Unlike Christians and Muslims, Ahmadiyas believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, he only fainted on the cross and was brought down. Later, he revived and travelled to India to preach to the ten tribes of Israel who had been driven out by Nebuchadnezzar. Ahmadiyas believe that Jesus died a natural death in ripe old age.

Ahmadiyas also differ from orthodox Muslims about the coming of Imam Mehdi. Orthodox Muslims believe that before the world comes to an end, Islam will be at its worst and that and there will be no true religion. At this time, Jesus will descend from heaven as the Messiah and will break all crosses, the symbol of Christianity, and kill all pigs, the symbol of evil

(‘Ahmadiyya’ 2005, Banglapedia website, http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/A_0103.htm
-- Accessed 27 September 2005 – Attachment 6).

A cultural profile of the Ahmadiyya compiled by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board from 1991, describes the Ahmadis as a peaceful group whose practices adhere to the major tenets of Islam except for their belief in the prophethood of their founder:

Ahmadis are a devout and peaceful people, who except for their belief in the prophethood of the founder, adhere to all other tenets of Islam. Because of their reinterpretation of jihad as the peaceful propagation of their faith, they are dedicated to missionary work. Ahmadis observe the five daily prayers and are exhorted to offer also a voluntary midnight prayer. In public, Ahmadis fold their arms hand to elbow at the beginning of the prayer, and thus can be easily distinguished from other Muslims. They are enjoined from praying behind a non-Ahmadiyyah imam, but do not object if orthodox Muslims wish to pray behind their imam. They are also forbidden to join in a funeral prayer which is led by an imam who considers them to be apostates...

The movement also imposes certain restrictions on the life-style which its members are permitted to lead. According to Tahrir Jadeed (The New Scheme), which was first announced by Mahmud Amad in 1934, Ahmadis are forbidden to attend cinemas, theatres, circuses, and places of amusement in general, and are urged to adopt a simple mode of life in matters such as food, dress, housing and furnishings (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1991 *Cultural Profile: The Ahmadiyya* – Attachment 7).

According to *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, authored by Waheed Ahmad in 1995 and available on the Al Islam site, the practice of Tahrir e-Jadeed came into effect in 1935:

In November 1935, Khalifatul Masih II initiated the scheme of Tahrir-e-Jadeed. Under the nineteen demands of this scheme, the Ahmadiyya Community was urged to lead a simple life, to make sacrifices in the cause of Islam and to volunteer their lives for missionary work. The scheme was initially proposed for a period of three years but was made permanent very soon. Under this scheme of Tehrike Jadeed today, missionary programmes are being carried out all over the world (Ahmad, Waheed 2005, *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, Al Islam website <http://www.alislam.org/books/religiousknowledge/sec5.html> – Accessed 28 September 2005 – Attachment 8)

Furthermore, there are many similarities in the practices of mainstream Islam and Ahmadiyya Muslims. According to *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, Waheed Amad states that Ahmadis practice their religion in the same manner as mainstream Muslims:

As far as the fundamental beliefs or acts of worship are concerned, the Ahmadi Muslims have neither taken anything out nor added anything new to the religion of Islam. The Ahmadi Muslims make their declaration of faith by reciting the same Kalima which was recited by the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself; they say their Prayers and fast in the same manner as the Holy Prophet of Islam did; and their Qiblah, their Ka’ba, their Azan and their Quran are all exactly the same as that of the other Muslims (Ahmad, Waheed 1995, *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, Al Islam website <http://www.alislam.org/books/religiousknowledge/sec5.html> – Accessed 28 September 2005 – Attachment 8)

Waheed Amad outlines the basic three differences in belief that distinguish Ahmadi Muslims from mainstream Sunni Muslims. These differences are concerned with the finality of the prophethood of Mohammed, Jesus Christ’s ascension into heaven and the identity of the Promised Messiah. As elaborated below:

DIFFERENCES WITH SUNNI MUSLIMS

There are basically three beliefs held by Ahmadi Muslims which separate them from the mainstream of Sunni Islam. These three beliefs concern:

- o The finality of Muhammad's prophethood.
- o Jesus Christ's ascension to heaven, and
- o the identity of the Promised Messiah

These three areas of contention between Ahmadi and Sunni Muslims are briefly described below:

The Finality of Muhammad's Prophethood

In verse 41 of Surah al Ahzab, the Prophet Muhammad has been given the title of Khataman Nabiyyeen, the Seal of the Prophets. A majority of the Muslims interpret from this verse that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was chronologically the last Prophet and that no new Prophet can come after him. They also believe the phenomenon of prophetic revelation to be closed for ever.

According to the Ahmadi Muslims, the expression 'Seal of the Prophets' does not mean that the Holy Prophet is chronologically the last Prophet. A seal is a mark of distinction and, in this case, implies great perfection of prophethood. Ahmadis believe that the door to prophethood is always open. However, a new prophet after the Prophet Muhammad must be a follower of his and must be from within the fold of Islam. Ahmadi Muslims do believe that the Prophet Muhammad was the last law giving Prophet and that no new law giving prophet can come after him.

Jesus Christ's Ascension to Heaven

The Sunni Muslims believe that Jesus was not put on the cross and that his place was actually taken by someone who resembled him. Jesus, according to them, was physically raised to heaven.

Ahmadis believe that Jesus was indeed put on the cross, but only for a few hours. They believe that Jesus, after recovering from his wounds, traveled East to Kashmir where he died a natural death and remains buried in a tomb in Srinagar, in Mohallah Khanyar.

The Identity of the Promised Messiah

A majority of the Sunni Muslims believe that Jesus Christ himself will return one day as the latter day Messiah.

Ahmadi Muslims believe that since Jesus Christ has already died, it can only be someone else who can appear as the latter day Messiah. Ahmadis believe that this Promised Messiah has already come in the person of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad alaihisslam of Qadian.

These are the three important areas of contention between the Ahmadi and Sunni Muslims. In all other essential Islamic beliefs, the two groups hold more or less similar views. (Ahmad, Waheed 1995, *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, Al Islam website <http://www.alislam.org/books/religiousknowledge/sec5.html> – Accessed 28 September 2005 – Attachment 8).

Further to the Ahmadis belief and view of prophethood and Moiz Amjad on the Understanding Islam website provides a distinction between Ahmadi and Sunni Muslims:

The major difference between the *Sunnis* and the *Ahmadis* relates to the belief regarding the continuation/discontinuation of the institute of prophethood. Muslims, whether *Sunnis* or Shiites, believe that Mohammed (pbuh) was the last prophet and messenger of God; whereas the *Ahmadis* believe that the institution of prophethood continues even after the Prophet (pbuh). The *Ahmadis* further hold that *Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian* was a prophet of God (Amjad, Moiz, 2000, 'Difference between Sunnis and Ahmadis', Understanding Islam website

<http://www.understanding-islam.com/related/text.asp?type=question&qid=295&sscatid=374>

– Accessed 10 October 2005 – Attachment 9).

As further elaborated in the article by Drishtipat: Voice of Human Rights, the differences between Sunnis and Ahmadiyyas are marked by their belief in the last Prophet and by the majority population status of Sunni Muslims in Bangladesh:

Ninety percent of Bangladesh's 130 million population comprises Sunni Muslims. Hailing from the central Bangladesh region of Brahmanbaria, the Ahmadiyyas follow the same rituals as the Sunnis, apart from their belief that Imam Mehdi, the last messenger of Prophet Muhammad, has already arrived to uphold Islam as it was preached 1400 years ago. The Sunnis, on the other hand, believe Mehdi has not yet arrived (Shan, Karier 2004 'Newsflash: New Wave of Intolerance: Bangladesh Cracks Down on Muslim Sect' Drishtipat: Voice of Human Rights website,

<http://www.drishtipat.org/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=66> – Accessed

10/10/05 – Attachment 10).

2. Please provide the names of any significant Ahmadiyya religious figures/leaders in Bangladesh in the early to mid-1990s.

Several sources were consulted in an attempt to provide the names of significant Ahmadiyya religious leaders in Bangladesh in the early to mid-1990s. Information regarding the identification of the significant Ahmadiyya leaders in Bangladesh in the early to mid-1990s in available Tribunal resources is scarce and henceforth, external sources were consulted.

A request for expert information was sent to Mobasherur Rahman, National Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh on September 30, 2005. The e-mail requested the names of any significant Ahmadiyya religious leaders in Bangladesh in the early to mid 1990s. It also requested a chronological list of the National Ameer's for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Bangladesh for the years 1990 to 1996. (RRT Country Research, 2005 'Request for Expert Information – Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh' September 30 2005 – Attachment 11).

On 13 October 2005 correspondence was received by the Tribunal from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh, in reply to the request for expert information. The facsimile from Mobasherur Rahman contains a list of both significant Ahmadi leaders in the Jamat Executive Committee as well as a chronological list of National Ameers for Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh from 1987 through to the present:

(A) Here are the names of some prominent Ahmadi leaders who held various ranks in the Jamat Executive Committee:

- (01) Late Abdul Bari, Former Addl. Ameer.
- (02) Late Makbul Ahmad Khan, Former Naeb Ameer.
- (03) Late Dr. Abdus Smad Khan Chawdhury, Former Naeb Ameer.
- (04) Late A.T.M Haque, Former Naeb Ameer.
- (05) Late Mohammad Shamsur Rahman, Former Naeb Ameer.
- (06) Dr. Tarique Saiful Islam, Naeb Ameer
- (07) Prof. Meer Mobashsher Ali, Naeb Ameer
- (08) Mr. Jahidur Rahman, Former General Secretary.
- (09) Mr. Mohammad Habibullah, Former General Secretary.
- (10) Mr. Kawsar Ali Mollah, General Secretary

(B) The list of National Ameers (president) are given below:

No	Name	Period
01	Mr. Mohammad Mostafa Ali	1987-1995
02	Late Ahmad Tawfique Chawdhury	1995-1997
03	Mr Meer Mohammad Ali	1997-2003
04	Mr. Mobasherur Rahman	2003-to-date

(Rahman, M. 2005, 'Facsimile to RRT Country Research from Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat', 12 October – Attachment 12).

Information about the circumstances facing Ahmadi leaders during the early to-mid 1990s is contained in a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade DFAT Cable DA24880 dated 11 August 1992. The cable reports that the National Ameer at that time had been in hiding since 1990 and that a number of Ahmadi leaders had been arrested in 1988/89:

The Director of one of the biggest and most active human rights organisations in Bangladesh told us that approximately 3,000 Ahmadis had settled near Bogra, a district in North West Bangladesh. In 1988/89 under the former Ershad government, a number of Ahmadi leaders had been arrested and the Injil Sharif (Arabic version of the Bible which was reportedly distributed in Bangladesh by a number of organisations with Christian affiliations including the Ahmadis) had been banned...

We were told that the leader of the Ahmadi sect has been in hiding since 1990 when an arrest warrant was issued against him. (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1992, DFAT Cable DA24880 – *Refugee Status Determination: Information Request* 11 August – Attachment 13).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine

UNHCR *REFWORLD* UNHCR Refugee Information Online

The Persecution.Org website <http://thepersecution.org>

Al Islam website: The official website of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

<http://www.alislam.org>

Understanding Islam website www.understandingislam.com

Drishtipat: Voice of Human Rights website <http://www.drishtipat.org>
 ReligionFacts.com website <http://religionfacts.com>
 aaiil.org website: The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the propagation of Islam
<http://aaiil.org>
 Banglapedia website <http://banglapedia.search.com>
 Human Rights Watch website <http://hrw.org>

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response BGD17010*, 1 October.
2. RRT Country Research 2002, *Research Response BGD15501*, 23 October.
3. RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response BGD15853*, 16 April.
4. Human Rights Watch 2005, *Breach of Faith, Persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh*, Human Rights Watch website,
<http://hrw.org/reports/2005/bangladesh0605/index.htm> – Accessed 27 September 2005
5. ‘The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam --An Overview’ 2005, Al Islam website,
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6. ‘Ahmadiyya’ 2005, Banglapedia website
http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/A_0103.htm – Accessed 27 September 2005
7. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1991 *Cultural Profile: The Ahmadiyya*. (RRT Library)
8. Ahmad, Waheed 1995, *A Book of Religious Knowledge*, Al Islam website
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9. Amjad, Moiz, 2000, ‘Difference between Sunnis and Ahmadis’, Understanding Islam website
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11. RRT Country Research 2005, 'Request for Expert Information – Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh', 30 September.
12. Rahman, M. 2005, 'Facsimile to RRT Country Research from Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat', 12 October.
13. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1992, DFAT Cable DA24880 – *Refugee Status Determination: Information Request*, 11 August. (Bangladesh CISNET CX2724)