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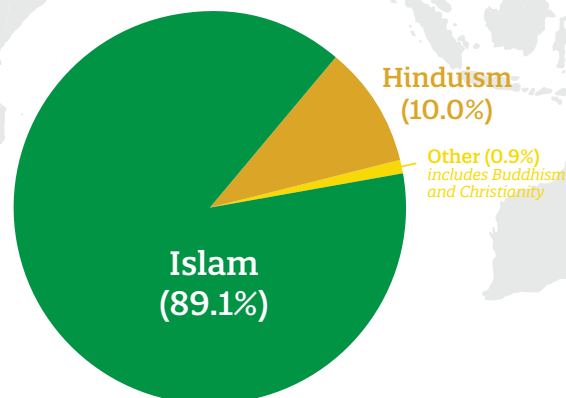
# Hindus in Bangladesh

## AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 2020

Islamist groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) and Hefazat-e-Islam (Hel), have historically posed the biggest threat to the rights, safety, and security of minorities in Bangladesh, and continue to do so today. In 1971, Pakistan attempted to prevent the secession of Bangladesh through a war in which the Pakistan army, in collaboration with local groups such as Jel, perpetrated a genocide of approximately 3 million people. During the genocide 200-400,000 women were raped and 10 million were displaced. A majority of the victims were Hindu. After ten months, and military intervention by India, Bangladesh became an independent country on December 16, 1971. Although Bangladesh was established as a secular and tolerant country at independence, it later established Islam as the state religion. The legal framework officially favors Muslims and treats religious minorities as second class citizens.



Religions of Bangladesh



Languages of Bangladesh



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## Status of Human Rights

While Islamists have been responsible for the majority of the violence in the country, the ruling Awami League (AL) has also contributed to deteriorating human rights conditions by suppressing dissent and basic civil rights, pursuing policies that appease and empower Islamists, maintaining and enforcing a legal framework that discriminates against minorities, and directly participating in or failing to stop acts of violence against minorities. Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Shiite Muslims, and Ahmadiyya Muslims frequently “face harassment and violence,

including mob violence against their houses of worship,” with little or no consequences.

The AL government has taken steps to arrest several members of Islamist extremist and terror groups, it has simultaneously allowed Islamism to grow by appeasing and empowering radical groups. Moreover, domestic Islamist terror groups, such as JMB and Ansarullah Bangla Team, have reported affiliations with ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS). The government, however, has refused to acknowledge the existence, activities, and connections of ISIS (or Islamic State) and AQIS in Bangladesh.

In 2020, 40,703 Hindus were affected in violent attacks, attacks on temples

and properties, rapes, forced conversions, and other incidents. During a particularly gruesome event in November, a Muslim mob of approximately 3,000 people targeted Hindu villages and destroyed over a hundred homes and at least 15 temples. These Hindu homes and houses of worship were looted, vandalized, and set on fire in Comilla and Brahmanbaria district, in some instances with people still inside. The violence was instigated after a Facebook post welcoming French President Macron’s stand against extremism was circulated. Two Hindus, including a kindergarten school principal who allegedly put up the post, were arrested by police under the Digital Security Act for hurting the sentiments of the Muslim community.

## Recommendations

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### GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

The GoB must implement the following recommendations to better protect religious minorities:

- › Create a separate Minority Rights Commission consistent with the demands of minority rights groups and the promises of the Awami League.
- › Undertake legal and constitutional reforms by removing provisions privileging Islam from the Constitution, blasphemy laws, and institute greater safeguards for religious freedom.
- › Stop appeasing and empowering Islamist groups such as Hefazat-e-Islam, while acknowledging and confronting the growing presence and activities of foreign Islamist terror groups, such as ISIS and al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent.
- › Take immediate steps to return previously confiscated properties under discriminatory property laws to their rightful Hindu owners, under the provisions of the Vested Property Return Bill of 2011.
- › Continue to conduct war crimes trials as long as necessary to achieve justice and accountability for events that occurred during the 1971 War of Independence.

### INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international community must engage the GoB on the terrorist activity and gross human right violations in the country:

- › The United States should designate Bangladesh as a “Special Watch List” country for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act.
- › Jel and ICS should be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the U.S. State Department under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224.
- › Under section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the U.S. should deny entry to any officials from Jel, ICS, and Hel that have engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom under section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act.
- › Despite the absence of an extradition treaty, the US should repatriate Ashrafuzzaman Khan and Abdul Jabbar to Bangladesh to face justice for war crimes committed in 1971.
- › The U.S. should support the GoB’s efforts to achieve justice for the victims of the 1971 genocide, whether through the tribunals or other mechanisms.

