



Home Office

# **Country Policy and Information Note**

## **Bangladesh: Religious minorities and atheists**

**Version 3.0**

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# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#) / Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

### **Feedback**

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

### **Independent Advisory Group on Country Information**

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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# Assessment

Updated: 30 March 2022

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by state or non-state actors due to the person's religion or lack of religion.

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### 1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 This note focuses primarily on the situation for Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Ahmadi Muslims and atheists.

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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## 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed religion (incl. Atheists).
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Risk

### a. State treatment: general

- 2.4.1 Bangladesh is a majority Islamic country, with the 2013 census showing 89% of the population belonged to the Sunni Islamic faith. The 2013 census data estimated religious minorities to account for just over 10% of the population. The population of Bangladesh in 2022 is estimated to be over 167 million, meaning that those belonging to religious minorities could now be as many as 16.7 million.
- 2.4.2 The largest religious minorities, as recorded in the 2013 census, were Hindus (approximately 10% or 15.2 million of the population in 2013), who mainly reside in the north and southwest of the country, though concentrated numbers of Hindus can also be found in the south, east and north of the country.

- 2.4.3 The remaining 1% of the population is made up mainly by the following religions:
- Christians, (mostly Roman Catholic and Protestant) who mainly reside in Barisal, Khulna and Gazipur.
  - Buddhists, who mainly reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the north of the country.
  - Ahmadis, who reportedly reside in Dhaka, Brahmanbaria and Kishoreganj.
- 2.4.4 Bangladesh is a secular pluralist parliamentary democracy. The constitution and other laws hold that Islam is the state religion but ensure equal status and equal rights for all religions, specifically mentioning Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. The constitution also ensures secularism is upheld by prohibiting the abuse of religion for political purposes and by prohibiting discrimination or persecution of persons protecting any religion. It provides for the right to profess, practise, or propagate all religions 'subject to law, public order, and morality', and states religious communities or denominations have the right to establish and manage their religious institutions. The constitution stipulates that no one attending any educational institution shall be required to receive instruction in, or participate in ceremonies or worship pertaining to, a religion to which they do not belong (see [Legal context](#) and State treatment - [Overview](#)).
- 2.4.5 The constitution also provides for the guarantee of freedom of thought and conscience and of speech and expression. However, in practice the government sometimes fails to protect these rights especially if they are deemed to criticise religious sentiment (see [Legal context](#), [Blasphemy / religious defamation](#) and, on freedom of speech, the Country Policy and Information Note on [Bangladesh: Journalists, publishers and internet bloggers](#)).
- 2.4.6 The law provides for the prosecution of offences committed against places of worship such as criminal damage and trespassing, and offences committed against individuals due to their religion, such as intentional insulting words or behaviour. However, there are examples of these laws and those under the Digital Security Act (which carries a sentence upon conviction of up to 10 years imprisonment), being used to arrest and detain those allegedly speaking out against or insulting the principles of Islam. For example, in 2019, a Hindu man was accused of posting blasphemous content on Facebook and arrested and detained under the DSA, in 2021, a 17-year-old Hindu girl was arrested and detained for a Facebook post critical of Islam and in 2020, a Sufi Muslim musician was arrested and detained for criticising Islam on YouTube. The DSA has reportedly encouraged non-state actors to target and pursue cases against individuals from varying backgrounds, platforms and religions suspected of blasphemy (see [Penal code](#), [Blasphemy / religious defamation](#) and [Atheists /and secularists](#)).
- 2.4.7 President Abdul Hamid regularly hosts receptions to commemorate each of the principal Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian holidays and has publicly emphasised the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for religious minorities (see State treatment – [Overview](#)).



- 2.4.8 There are no laws prohibiting religious conversion. However, it can be viewed as apostasy. Inter-faith marriages can take place under the Special Marriage Act although, under the Act, couples must declare their disbelief in any traditional religion (see [Religious conversion](#), [Inter-faith marriages](#) and [Personal status laws](#)).
- 2.4.9 There are no legal restrictions preventing Hindus, Buddhists, Christians or Ahmadis from freely practising their religion, accessing state schools, health or other government services (see Legal context – [Education](#), [State treatment](#) and [Access to services](#)).
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### b. State treatment of Hindus

- 2.4.11 In general, Hindus are able to express and practise their faith freely throughout Bangladesh, including at established temples. Hindus are historically affected by land appropriation through the Vested Property Act – which allowed the government to confiscate property from persons it deems as an enemy of the state. Despite laws allowing for the return of, or compensation for, seized property, a large percentage of claims remain unresolved or have been denied by government officials, and ‘land grabs’ and forced evictions are reported to continue (though the extent of which is not clear) despite the Vested Property Act no longer existing, due to lack of documentation proving ownership (see [Land appropriation](#)).
- 2.4.12 Hindus in Bangladesh may face instances of local state discrimination in relation to land ownership. However, in general, the treatment of Hindus by the state is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.
- 2.4.13 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### c. State treatment of Buddhists

- 2.4.14 Buddhists are a small minority (under 1% of the population) in Bangladesh, with most Buddhists being indigenous people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a group of districts within the Chittagong Division in south eastern Bangladesh, bordering India and Myanmar. In general, Buddhists are able to express and practise their faith freely throughout Bangladesh, including at established monasteries (see [Religious demography](#) and State treatment of religious minorities - [Buddhists](#)).
- 2.4.15 There is little evidence to suggest that Buddhists in Bangladesh face state discrimination and, in general, the treatment of Buddhists by the state is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on

the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.

- 2.4.16 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### d. State treatment of Christians

- 2.4.17 In general, Christians are able to express and practice their faith freely throughout Bangladesh, including at established churches. A Christian education system operates throughout Bangladesh and is open to members of all faiths. The system is held in high regard by the communities in which the schools and universities operate, which provides Christians with a degree of protection against harassment at the local level. Christians are not represented in the political sphere (see Legal context – [Education](#), State treatment of religious minorities – [Christians, Religious minorities' representation in the political sphere](#) and Access to services – [Christians](#)).

- 2.4.18 There is little evidence to suggest that Christians in Bangladesh face state discrimination and, in general, the treatment of Christians by the state is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.

- 2.4.19 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### e. State treatment of Ahmadis

- 2.4.20 Available evidence suggests that government officials have different opinions regarding Ahmadis. Whereas some maintain a neutral position on religious issues; others have openly declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims.

- 2.4.21 There is limited evidence to suggest that Ahmadis in Bangladesh are directly discriminated against by the state. The government has come under pressure from Islamist groups to declare Ahmadis 'non-Muslim' and there is evidence that the police have been instructed to bring the position and activities of the Ahmadis under nationwide surveillance. However, in general, the treatment of Ahmadis by the state is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.

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#### f. State treatment of Atheists and people accused of 'hurting religious sentiment'

- 2.4.22 Although a secular country, the government is sometimes seen as using religion to achieve political goals. Some who have expressed atheistic or secularist beliefs, particularly in relation to Islam – including online bloggers and activists – have been arrested and detained on the grounds of religious

defamation. The authorities sometimes use legal provisions, such as the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act or Digital Security Act (DSA), to harass, arrest, detain or prosecute persons who have published material that is deemed to be critical of the state, the constitution or the ruling party, and thus considered seditious or defamatory. It is also a criminal offence to publish material that is deemed to hurt religious sentiment or values or that may spread hatred or hostility that threatens public order, decency, or morality. The DSA also provides for extra-territorial application of the law, so comments made or articles published outside of Bangladesh which contravene the law may also be punishable under this legislation with up to 10 years in prison. The UN has expressed concern that the DSA is not in line with international human rights laws (see [Blasphemy / religious defamation](#), State treatment – [Atheists](#)).

- 2.4.23 Several atheist bloggers left Bangladesh following a spate of violent attacks against them by Islamist militants between 2013 and 2016. Whilst continuing to blog from abroad, they fear arrest under defamation laws if they return to the country. One prominent blogger indicated his family in Bangladesh face police harassment on account of his absence and that he receives threatening calls from the police about his continuing online activity (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Atheists](#)).
- 2.4.24 Most recently, in February 2020, musician Rita Dewan criticised Islam and the role of Allah in a recorded performance which was uploaded to YouTube. Four separate cases were filed against her under the Digital Security Act and Bangladesh's Penal Code. In three of the cases, she was accused of "insulting religion", "creating outrage by insulting religious belief", "provoking breach of peace" and "making statements conducing to public mischief" under sections 295A, 298, 504 and 505 of the Penal Code 1860. Another case under section 28 of the DSA accuses her of "publishing and broadcasting information hurtful to religious values and sentiment". After the complaints were withdrawn, she was acquitted in two cases under the Penal Code. However, she could still face up to 10 years' imprisonment along with a fine of up to £17,600 if convicted of the DSA offence. Furthermore, in October 2021, a 17-year-old Hindu girl was arrested under the DSA in Dinajpur over a Facebook post and could be sentenced up to 7 years in prison if convicted. She has been detained at a facility since her arrest on charges of "hurting religious sentiment" and "advancing to deteriorate law and order" (see [Blasphemy and religious defamation](#) and State treatment – [Atheists](#)).
- 2.4.25 Atheists accused of blasphemy or religious defamation (for example, converts from Islam, atheists, secularists, or anyone deemed to offend the religion of Islam) are likely to face legal sanction, including imprisonment. Atheists are likely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to Bangladesh.

2.4.26 For further information on online activists, see also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Bangladesh: Journalists, publishers and internet bloggers](#).

2.4.27 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### g. Societal treatment: general

2.4.28 Bangladesh is densely populated and religiously diverse. Religious minorities live throughout the country. Inter-religious relations and coexistence are generally positive and peaceful, with many religious festivals jointly celebrated by people of different faiths (see [Religious demography](#) and [Societal treatment and inter-religious relations](#)).

2.4.29 There are instances of communal violence which continue to result in deaths, injuries, violence, assaults and damage to property (see [Societal treatment and inter-religious relations](#)).

2.4.30 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### h. Societal treatment of Hindus

2.4.31 In general, Hindus are able to express and practise their faith freely throughout Bangladesh without facing harassment. However, they face some abuses, including by Islamic religious extremists, such as vandalism to temples and homes, physical violence, threats and harassment and rape and abduction of Hindu women and girls (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#) and [Hindus](#)).

2.4.32 Hindus, their property, and places of worship face targeted attacks, either committed or incited by Islamists, particularly during heightened political tensions, during election periods and during the October 2021 Durga Puja religious festival. In October 2021, after a Hindu man was accused of desecrating the Holy Qur'an, communal violence broke out when Islamists attacked Hindus and their places of worship, resulting in hundreds of Hindus becoming injured and at least two being killed. Hindus are also affected by land seizures, which have been a factor in some attacks (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#), [Hindus](#) and [Land appropriation](#)).

2.4.33 However, in general, the level of societal treatment of Hindus is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.

2.4.34 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### i. Societal treatment of Buddhists

- 2.4.35 In general, Buddhists are able to express and practice their faith freely throughout Bangladesh without facing societal restrictions (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Buddhists](#)). Buddhist indigenous communities have been vulnerable to occasional societal violence and land appropriation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere in Bangladesh in the last 10 years, though the incidents are isolated and not indicative of general treatment of Buddhists in Bangladesh (see Societal treatment – [Buddhists](#) and [Land appropriation](#)).
- 2.4.36 However, in general, the level of societal treatment of Buddhists is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.
- 2.4.37 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### j. Societal treatment of Christians

- 2.4.38 In general, Christians are able to express and practise their faith freely throughout Bangladesh without facing societal restrictions (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Christians](#)).
- 2.4.39 Available evidence suggests that Christians experience societal violence in the form of occasional localised incidents including physical attacks, land grabs, harassment and social isolation; particularly those who have converted from Islam without the support of their community or family who can face social isolation. Rumours that churches are seeking to convert Muslims and local tensions over inter-faith relationships have also occasionally led to threats against Christian individuals and institutions (see Religious conversion and Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Christians](#)).
- 2.4.40 Christians are affected by land seizures, which have also been a factor in some attacks (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Christians](#) and [Land appropriation](#)).
- 2.4.41 Christians in Bangladesh may face instances of societal discrimination but in general, the level of societal treatment is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.
- 2.4.42 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### k. Societal treatment of Ahmadis

- 2.4.43 There is limited information on societal treatment of Ahmadis in Bangladesh, though reportage in 2021 highlighted an incident whereby locals exhumed the body of an Ahmadi infant they did not accept being buried in a Muslim, government-owned cemetery, before discarding the body on a roadside in

Sadar Upazila in the Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Ahmadis](#)).

- 2.4.44 Extremist groups and many traditional Muslims regard Ahmadis as apostates and have called for the community to be designated as non-Muslims. The most recently recorded incident of violence against the Ahmadi community was January 2020, when a mosque belonging to the Ahmadi community was attacked in Brahanbaria town by madrassa students. Witnesses report that Ahmadi homes nearby were also targeted. Following the incident, the students rallied in front of the Brahmanbaria Press Club demanding for a law to be passed to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslims. It has been reported by The South Asian Collective that, according to the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat Bangladesh (the branch of the worldwide Ahmadi Muslim community in Bangladesh) since 1963, 13 Ahmadiyas have been killed, and since 2000, around 100 attacks on the Ahmadiya community recorded. There have been few recorded incidents of violence against Ahmadis in the past three years, though incidents are not always reported in the national media (see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Ahmadis](#)).
- 2.4.45 Ahmadis in Bangladesh may face instances of societal discrimination including physical attacks which are sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to Bangladesh.
- 2.4.46 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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#### I. Societal treatment of Atheists

- 2.4.47 The level of societal discrimination faced by a person who does not actively seek to publicly express their lack or rejection of religion is generally low. However, high profile atheist and secularist bloggers and activists, deemed to have defamed Islam, face a high risk of discrimination in the form of threats and physical violence by Islamic extremists. Recorded incidents between 2013 and 2018 show that writers, journalists, intellectuals, and artists who publicly insulted Islam were targeted by radical Islamists and resulted in a wave of attacks, some fatal, and consequently led to many bloggers fleeing the country. One blogger who fled Bangladesh reportedly receives threats online and over the phone and continues to feel unsafe, guarding his whereabouts and movements and fearing retaliation by Islamic fundamentalists if he comes out of hiding or returns to Bangladesh (see [Blasphemy / religious defamation](#), Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Atheists](#) and for further information on bloggers and activists, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Journalists, the press and social media).
- 2.4.48 Those who openly express their atheistic beliefs, including by blogging, are likely to be subject to treatment, including harassment and violence, that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of

various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. However, each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.

- 2.4.49 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by non-state actors, including rogue state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection. Whilst there is a functioning criminal justice system, the effectiveness and conduct of the police varies (see [Avenues of redress](#) and Country Policy and Information Note on [Bangladesh - Actors of Protection](#)).
- 2.5.3 In recent years, there have been some examples of local administrative and police officials demonstrating a general apathy toward promoting religious tolerance, strengthening protections for religious minorities, properly investigating crimes, and ensuring accountability for attacks against religious minorities. Anti-minority bias and corruption among local officials is compounded by issues of low capacity that continue to plague law enforcement institutions in many parts of the country. However, the Bangladeshi authorities have been shown to respond to outbreaks of violence, protect victims, investigate and convict those responsible for abuses against the largest religious minorities, for example, including during a spate of Islamist attacks against religious minorities throughout Bangladesh between 2013-2016, and after a wave of attacks against Hindus during the Durga Puja festival in October 2021. In November 2020 police responded to the murder of a man wrongly accused of desecrating the Quran by arresting 49 individuals in relation to the killing and mob violence that occurred, although the progress of the case is unknown. The authorities and judiciary have also been seen to pursue, detain and convict those who commit offences against atheists (see State treatment and attitudes: [Overview and Atheists /and secularists](#)).
- 2.5.4 The authorities have been shown to respond to attacks against members of the Ahmadi community, though have been criticised by some locals for not preventing attacks in the first place. The state responded to an incident in 2020 whereby locals exhumed the body of an Ahmadi infant they did not accept being buried in a Muslim cemetery, but it is unclear whether or not the perpetrators were arrested, detained or charged (see State treatment – [Ahmadis](#)).
- 2.5.5 State-security is provided at religious sites, festivals, and events held by religious minorities, which are considered potential targets for violence (see State treatment and attitudes: [Overview](#)).
- 2.5.6 Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to associations or unions, on the provision they have objectives consistent with the constitution and are not formed for the purpose of destroying religious, social or

communal harmony; for creating discrimination on any grounds; or for organising terrorist or militant activities. The Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) is one of the main religious organisations in Bangladesh, who work to protect the human rights of the religious and ethnic minorities. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also allocates funds to trusts for each of the religious minorities, who work towards protecting religious minorities and their places of worship (see Avenues of redress – [Civil Society Organisations](#) and [State-funded Trusts](#)).

- 2.5.7 In general, the state appears willing and able to offer effective protection to religious minorities, and the person will have access to, and be able to avail themselves of, the protection of the authorities. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. However, Atheists and people accused of ‘hurting religious sentiment’ who are open about their beliefs are unlikely to be afforded effective protection. Each case must be considered on its own facts and merits.
- 2.5.8 A person’s reluctance to seek protection does not mean that effective protection is not available. It should be noted that protection does not need to eliminate the risk of discrimination and violence. The standard to be applied is a practical standard which takes proper account of the duty which the state owes to all its nationals. There must be a reasonable willingness by the law enforcement agencies to detect, prosecute and punish offenders.
- 2.5.9 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Bangladesh has a population of around 164 million, where freedom of movement is generally unrestricted (see Internal relocation and the Country Policy and Information Note [Bangladesh: Background, including internal relocation](#)).
- 2.6.2 Where the person’s fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.3 Where the person’s fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of non-state actors, in general they will be able to relocate to escape that risk. However, Atheists and people accused of ‘hurting religious sentiment’ who are open about their beliefs are unlikely to be able to internally relocate.
- 2.6.4 While the onus is on the person to establish a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm, decision makers must demonstrate that internal relocation is reasonable (or not unduly harsh) having regard to the individual circumstances of the person. Considering religious beliefs alone, Decision Makers may consider the concentrations of each religious group according to geographical areas as outlined in paragraphs 2.4.1 – 2.4.2 when considering viable internal relocation options.
- 2.6.5 For general information and analysis on internal relocation see the Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on [Bangladesh: Background, including internal relocation](#) and, in the case of women, the CPIN on [Bangladesh: women fearing gender-based violence](#).



- 2.6.6 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

Section 3 updated: 30 March 2022

## 3. Religious demography

### 3.1 Overview

3.1.1 According to World Population Review, in 2022, Bangladesh had a total population of approximately 167 million<sup>1</sup>.

3.1.2 The United States Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Bangladesh, covering events in 2020 and published 12 May 2021 (USSD IRF 2020 report) noted that:

‘According to the 2013 government census, the most recent official data available, Sunni Muslims constitute 89 percent of the population and Hindus 10 percent. The remainder of the population is predominantly Christian, mostly Roman Catholic, and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. The country also has small numbers of Shia Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims, Baha’is, animists, agnostics, and atheists. Leaders from religious minority communities estimate their respective numbers to be between a few thousand and 100,000 adherents.’<sup>2</sup>

3.1.3 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), a UK-based NGO aimed at advocating for minority religious groups worldwide, noted in 2019 that:

‘The majority ethnicity is Bengali, an ethno-linguistic group, comprising over 98 per cent of the population. According to the 2011 Census, approximately 1.8 per cent of the population are indigenous “Adivasis”, amounting to around 1.6 million – though some community representatives claim the actual figure is considerably higher. The majority live in the plains of the north and southeast, as well as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where they are also referred to as Jumma. The predominant groups are Chakmas, Marma and Tripura. The government recognizes 50 ethnic groups but not does recognize the concept of indigenous peoples.

‘Bangladesh’s trajectory in the decades since independence has seen a shrinking in its religious diversity, reflected in the relative decline of religious minorities from 23.1 per cent of the population in 1971 to 9.6 per cent today – a contraction largely due to the mass migration of its Hindu population...

‘However, while the majority of Muslims are Sunni, a small proportion are Shi’a and as such represent a sectarian minority. Similarly, the approximately 100,000 Ahmadis, who self-identify as Muslim, have for decades been stigmatized by extremist groups who have called for the community to be formally designated as non-Muslim.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Population Review, ‘[Bangladesh Population 2022 \(live\)](#)’, nd

<sup>2</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, page 2, 12 May 2021

<sup>3</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh minorities and indigenous peoples](#)’, June 2019

## 3.2 Geographical breakdown of religious minorities

### 3.2.1 The USSD IRF 2020 report detailed:

‘Ethnic minorities concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and northern districts generally practice a non-Islamic faith. The Garo in Mymensingh are predominantly Christian, as are some of the Santal in Gaibandha. Most Buddhists are members of the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the CHT. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians live in communities across the country, with relatively high concentrations in Barishal City and Gournadi in Barishal District, Baniarchar in Gopalganj District, Monipuripara and Christianpara in Dhaka City, and in the cities of Gazipur and Khulna.’

### 3.2.2 The same report also highlighted the religious demography of Rohingya refugees, the largest non-citizen group resident in Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>:

‘The largest noncitizen population is Rohingya, nearly all Muslim. Human Rights Watch estimates approximately 1,500 Rohingya in the refugee settlements are Christians; approximately 450 are Hindu. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than one million Rohingya refugees fled Burma in successive waves since the early 1990s. Most recently, in August 2017, approximately 740,000 Rohingya fleeing violence in Burma took refuge in the country. Nearly all who arrived during the 2017 influx sought shelter in and around the refugee settlements of Kutupalong and Nayapara in Cox’s Bazar District.’<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2.3 With regard to Hindus in Bangladesh, MRGI detailed: ‘...Today, though distributed across Bangladesh, the Hindu population is particularly concentrated in the north and southwest of the country.’<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.4 The DFAT Country Information Report on Bangladesh, published 2019 (DFAT country report 2019) noted that, ‘Most Hindus are ethnically and linguistically Bengali, and are not physically distinguishable from the majority Muslim population. Hindus live throughout Bangladesh, including in Dhaka. There are, however, a small number of ‘Hindu belts’ in the south, east and north of the country where Hindus comprise up to 40 per cent of the local population. Some exclusively Hindu villages exist, although most villages are religiously mixed.’<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2.5 Considering Christians in Bangladesh, MRGI noted in July 2018, ‘Christians make up 0.3 per cent of Bangladesh’s population, according to official data, concentrated primarily in Barisal, Khulna and Gazipur.’<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2.6 Specifically considering Christians in Bangladesh, the DFAT country report 2019 outlined:

‘Christianity first arrived in Bangladesh in the 15th century with Portuguese traders. Bangladesh has historically hosted three distinct Christian groups: the descendants of those converted by the Portuguese, who are

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<sup>4</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 2), 12 May 2021

<sup>5</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 2-3), 12 May 2021

<sup>6</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh – Hindus](#)’, July 2018

<sup>7</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.43, page 21), 22 August 2019

<sup>8</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh – Christians](#)’, July 2018

predominantly Catholic; the descendants of those converted during the British era, who are predominantly Protestant; and indigenous peoples who converted en masse both before and after independence. With many of the first two groups emigrating from Bangladesh in recent decades, the third group now comprises the majority of Bangladeshi Christians. Christians living in and around Dhaka are not easily distinguishable from other Bengalis, although many Catholics have identifiable surnames (often of Portuguese origin).<sup>9</sup>

3.2.7 MRGI noted, with specific reference to Buddhists, ‘Bangladesh’s Buddhists, who represent less than 1 per cent of the national population, are mostly concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern areas of the country.’<sup>10</sup>

3.2.8 In June 2017, the Dhaka Tribune, a Bangladeshi news source, reported that the Ahmadi community can be found in ‘... Bakshibazar in Dhaka... 10,000 Ahmadi living in Brahmanbaria. Another 3,500 in Kishoreganj and 3,000 more in Mymensingh.’<sup>11</sup>

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Section 4 updated: 30 March 2022

## 4. Legal context

### 4.1 Constitution

4.1.1 Bangladesh is a secular state and the [Constitution of Bangladesh](#) provides for the freedom to profess, practise and propagate religion (Article 41)<sup>12</sup>.

4.1.2 The constitution outlines the following Articles concerning religious freedom:

- **‘Article 2A. The state religion.** The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.
- **‘Article 12. Secularism and freedom of religion.** The principle of secularism shall be realised by the elimination of a. communism in all its forms; b. the granting by the State of political status in favour of any religion; c. the abuse of religion for political purposes; d. any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion.
- **‘Article 28. Discrimination on grounds of religion, etc.** 1. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on ground only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. 2. Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life. 3. No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution. 4. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making

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<sup>9</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.55, page 23), 22 August 2019

<sup>10</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh – Buddhists](#)’, July 2018

<sup>11</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[How Ahmadiyya faith found space in Bangladesh](#)’, 16 June 2017

<sup>12</sup> [Constitution of Bangladesh](#), 4 November 1972 (reinstated 1986, reviewed 2011)

special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

- **‘Article 41. Freedom of religion.** 1. Subject to law, public order and morality- a. every citizen has the right to profess, practice or propagate any religion; b. every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions. 2. No person attending any educational institution shall be required 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.’<sup>13</sup>

4.1.3 The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief undertook a visit to Bangladesh from 31 August to 9 September 2015. In his report (UNSR report 2016), the Special Rapporteur noted:

‘Besides the guarantees provided by the Constitution, the Government has also enacted laws and acts to uphold and protect religious values. It has taken different initiatives through the 2006 National Cultural Policy, the 2010 National Education Policy, the 2011 National Women Development Policy and other social welfare policies in promoting religious harmony. The Government provides basic education on religion for children and adults as well as budgetary allocations for the development of religious minority groups through separate religious welfare trusts for Hindus, Buddhists and Christians to establish and repair religious institutions, for example. The state makes the main festivals of all religions public holidays for a nationwide celebration.’<sup>14</sup>

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## 4.2 Personal status laws

4.2.1 The UNSR report 2016 noted:

‘Whereas most aspects of the law in Bangladesh are secular, personal status issues – such as marriage, family life, divorce, custody of children, maintenance and inheritance – remain governed by religious laws. Depending on the religious backgrounds of the concerned individuals, provisions of Islamic law, Hindu law, Canon law, etc. apply. Buddhists do not have their own personal status law in Bangladesh, but fall under the Hindu law. Projects supported by the Government to design a specific personal status law for the Buddhist community so far seem to have failed. Representatives of the Baha’i community reported that it applies its own family laws, which are recognized by the Government.’<sup>15</sup>

4.2.2 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that:

‘Family law concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption contains separate provisions for Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. These laws are enforced in the same secular courts. A separate civil family law applies to mixed-faith families or those of other faiths or no faith. The family law of the religion of the two parties concerned governs their marriage rituals and proceedings. A

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<sup>13</sup> [Constitution of Bangladesh](#), 4 November 1972 (reinstated 1986, reviewed 2011)

<sup>14</sup> HRC, [‘Report of the Special Rapporteur’](#), (para 8), 22 January 2016

<sup>15</sup> HRC, [‘Report of the Special Rapporteur’](#), (para 73), 22 January 2016

Muslim man may have as many as four wives, although he must obtain the written consent of his existing wife or wives before marrying again. A Christian man may marry only one woman.

'Hindu men may have multiple wives. Officially, Hindus have no options for divorce, although informal divorces do occur. Hindu women may inherit property under the law. Buddhists are subject to the same laws as Hindus. Divorced Hindus and Buddhists may not legally remarry. Divorced men and women of other religions and widowed individuals of any religion may remarry... To be legally recognized, Muslim marriages must be registered with the state by either the couple or the cleric performing the marriage; however, some marriages are not. Registration of marriages for Hindus and Christians is optional, and other faiths may determine their own guidelines'<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.2.3 The same report outlined:

'Under the Muslim family ordinance, a Muslim man may marry women of any Abrahamic faith; however, a Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim. Under the ordinance, a widow receives one-eighth of her husband's estate if she is his only wife, and the remainder is divided among the children; each female child receives half the share of each male child. Wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Civil courts must approve divorces. The law requires a Muslim man to pay a former wife three months of alimony, but these protections generally apply only to registered marriages; unregistered marriages are by definition undocumented and difficult to substantiate. Authorities do not always enforce the alimony requirement even in cases involving registered marriages.

'Alternative dispute resolution is available to all citizens, including Muslims, for settling out of court family arguments and other civil matters not related to land ownership. With the consent of both parties, lawyers may be identified to facilitate the arbitration, the results of which may be used in court.

'Fatwas may be issued only by Muslim religious scholars, and not by local religious leaders, to settle matters of religious practice. Fatwas may neither be invoked to justify meting out punishment, nor may they supersede existing secular law.'<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.2.4 The USSD IRF report 2020 further outlined:

'The code regulating prisons allows for observance of religious commemorations by prisoners, including access to extra food on feast days or permission to fast for religious reasons. The law does not guarantee prisoners regular access to clergy or regular religious services, but prison authorities may arrange special religious programs for them. Prison authorities are required to provide prisoners facing the death penalty access to a religious figure from a faith of their choice before execution.'<sup>18</sup>

(see also [Inter-faith marriages](#)).

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<sup>16</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 4-5), 12 May 2021

<sup>17</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 5), 12 May 2021

<sup>18</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 5-6), 12 May 2021

### 4.3 Education

4.3.1 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that ‘Religious studies are compulsory and are part of the curriculum for grades three through 10 in all public government-accredited schools. Private schools do not have this requirement. Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian students receive instruction in their own religious beliefs, although the teachers are not always adherents of the students’ faith.’<sup>19</sup>

4.3.2 The UNSR report 2016 noted:

‘In government schools, “religion” constitutes a mandatory subject, which seems to combine elements of neutral information with elements of religious instruction. 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.

‘Despite the Government’s efforts to increase the number of teachers who profess minority religions, as laid out in the 2010 National Education Policy, the Special Rapporteur heard a number of examples that revealed technical problems in the implementation of that policy. In the absence of adequately skilled teachers from minorities, it may happen that Buddhist, Christian or Hindu children receive religious education from teachers who have not had any specific training on the subject. This appears to affect children mainly from religious minorities, such as Buddhists or Christians, who might have to opt for another religion class in order to obtain the necessary academic points to further their studies. This somehow nourishes fears among the communities that their children might be alienated from their own religions. In a particularly disturbing case, students were reportedly requested in an exam to state the reasons why Ahmadis should be declared “non-Muslims”’<sup>20</sup>

4.3.3 The report continued:

‘In the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, the Special Rapporteur visited a school operated by the Buddhist community, in which students from Hindu, Buddhist and Christian backgrounds – mostly from indigenous families – learn together. The Christian community also runs quite a number of schools, usually called “missionary schools”, all of which follow the national curriculum. The vast majority of students in the Christian schools come from non-Christian religious backgrounds. Some interlocutors complained that the Christian communities face increasing problems in preserving their internal autonomy, as local administration reportedly interferes arbitrarily in the selection of principals or other governing positions concerning those schools.’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 5), 12 May 2021

<sup>20</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 65-66), 22 January 2016

<sup>21</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 70), 22 January 2016

## 4.4 Registration of religious groups

### 4.4.1 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that:

‘Individual houses of worship are not required to register with the government. Religious groups seeking to form associations with multiple houses of worship, however, must register as NGOs with either the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) if they receive foreign assistance for development projects or with the Ministry of Social Welfare if they do not. The law requires the NGOAB to approve and monitor all foreign-funded projects. The NGOAB Director General has the authority to impose sanctions on NGOs for violating the law, including fines of up to three times the amount of the foreign donation, or closure of the NGO. NGOs are also subject to penalties for “derogatory” comments about the constitution or constitutional institutions (i.e., the government). Expatriate staff must receive a security clearance from the National Security Intelligence, Special Branch of Police, and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, although the standards for this clearance are not transparent. Registration requirements and procedures for religious groups are the same as for secular associations. Registration requirements with the Ministry of Social Welfare include certifying the name being registered is not taken, and providing the bylaws/constitution of the organization; a security clearance for leaders of the organization from the National Security Intelligence; minutes of the meeting appointing the executive committee; a list of all executive committee and general members and photographs of principal officers; work plan; copy of the deed or lease of the organization’s office and a list of property owned; a budget; and a recommendation by a local government representative.’<sup>22</sup>

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## 4.5 Penal code

### 4.5.1 The [Bangladesh Penal Code of 1860](#) (BPC) outlined the following articles regarding offences related to religion:

- **‘Article 295.** Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class.— Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.
- **‘Article 295A.** Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.— Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Bangladesh, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

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<sup>22</sup> USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh’](#), (page 4), 12 May 2021



- **‘Article 296.** Disturbing religious assembly.—Whoever voluntarily causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship, or religious ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
- **‘Article 297.** Trespassing on burial places, etc.—Whoever, with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person or with the knowledge that the feelings of any person are likely to be wounded, or that the religion of any person is likely to be insulted thereby, commits any trespass in any place of worship or on any place of sepulture, or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites or as a depository for the remains of the dead, or offers any indignity to any human corpse, or causes disturbance to any persons assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
- **‘Article 298.** Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings.—Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that persons or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.’<sup>23</sup>

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#### 4.6 Blasphemy / religious defamation

4.6.1 The UNSR report 2016 detailed the introduction and uses of the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Digital Security Act in Bangladesh:

‘Section 57 of the [Information and Communication Technology Act 2006](#) [ICT Act] was called by some the “online version” of section 295A of the Criminal Code. At the same time, the application of section 57 of the Act is even wider and the punishments threatened are by far more draconian.

‘The latest amendment to the Information and Communication Technology Act was made on 6 October 2013. Section 57 of the 2013 Act states that the publishing or transmitting on a website in electronic form of any defamatory or false information is considered to be a cognizable and non-bailable offence. Moreover, punishment for committing this offence has been amended from a maximum of 10 years of imprisonment, with no minimum, to a minimum of 7 years of imprisonment and maximum of 14 years.’<sup>24</sup>

4.6.2 On 8 October 2018, bdnews24, a Bangladesh-based news website report that the Bangladesh President Md Abdul Hamid signed the [Digital Security Bill 2018](#) into law amid objections from several media and rights organisations. Amongst some of the concerns raised were that section 32 of the new Bill will ‘hinder investigative reporting on corruption’ and it also

<sup>23</sup> [Bangladesh Penal Code](#), Chapter 18, 6 October 1860

<sup>24</sup> HRC, [‘Report of the Special Rapporteur’](#), (para 84-85), 22 January 2016

'empowers the police to search, confiscate or make arrests without a warrant'<sup>25</sup>, whilst elements of Section 57 of the ICT Act remain within the new Digital Security Act<sup>26 27</sup>.

4.6.3 Considering religious defamation and blasphemy in Bangladesh, the DFAT country report 2019 noted that:

'Religion, particularly Islam, is a central part of Bangladeshi culture and identity. Publicly professed atheism is very uncommon. Islamist organisations have consistently used the pejorative label 'atheist' against individuals who have publicly criticised Islamic fundamentalism or who have questioned the role of Islam in the state, including those advocating for secular values. The government has periodically used the blasphemy laws against such individuals, often following complaints from Islamist organisations. Such activities peaked in 2013-14, when there were a number of high-profile arrests and prosecutions. In December 2017, immigration authorities detained a blogger at Dhaka airport who had reportedly criticised Islam in his social media posts, leading to protests by hundreds. Authorities reportedly charged the blogger under the ICT Act... a year after the head of an Islamic seminary had filed a case against him. The current status of his case is unclear. In addition to official sanction, individuals who have publicly criticised Islamic fundamentalism or have criticised the role of Islam in the state have faced significant societal pressure in the form of threats and violence from Islamist militant organisations. Militants committed a number of high profile murders of alleged "atheists" in 2013-16, focusing in particular on bloggers whose writings were deemed to be "un-Islamic". While there have been arrests and successful prosecutions in some of these cases, others remain unsolved...'<sup>28</sup>

4.6.4 The same report continued:

'...Bangladeshi authorities conducted extensive counter-terrorism operations in response to the wave of militant attacks, including arresting a number of militants connected with the attacks. While condemning the threats and acts of violence, however, the government has tended to attribute blame for militant attacks to the victims for criticising religion. Following the 2015 attacks, for example, the Home Minister stated that bloggers should be careful not to write anything that might hurt any religion, beliefs and religious leaders, while the Prime Minister stated it was unacceptable for anyone to write against the Prophet or other religions...

'Under the Digital Security Act 2018... the government can inspect and seize communications equipment, including that of bloggers. While these provisions are not necessarily aimed at bloggers who are critical of religion, it is likely that bloggers in general are less likely to express their opinions online and, if they do, they may be targeted or not offered state protection. Islamist bloggers may be similarly affected.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bdnews24, '[Bangladesh president approves Digital Security Act](#)', 8 October 2018

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, '[Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act](#)', 20 September 2018

<sup>27</sup> Bdnews24, '[Bangladesh passes Digital Security Act](#)', 19 September 2018

<sup>28</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.37-3.38, page 20-21), 22 August 2019

<sup>29</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.39-3.40, page 21), 22 August 2019

(For further information on online activists, see also the Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Journalists, publishers and internet bloggers.

4.6.5 More recently, the USSD IRF report 2020 outlined:

‘Under the penal code, statements or acts made with a “deliberate and malicious” intent to insult religious sentiments are subject to fines or up to two years in prison. Although the code does not further define this prohibited intent, the courts have interpreted it to include insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The criminal code allows the government to confiscate all copies of any newspaper, magazine, or other publication containing language that “creates enmity and hatred among the citizens or denigrates religious beliefs.” The law applies similar restrictions to online publications. While there is no specific blasphemy law, authorities use the penal code, as well as a section of the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Digital Security Act, to charge individuals for acts perceived to be a slight against Islam. The Information and Communication Act criminalizes several forms of online expression, including “obscene material,” “expression(s) likely to cause deterioration of law and order,” and “statements hurting religious sentiments.” The Digital Security Act likewise criminalizes publication or broadcast of “any information that hurts religious values or sentiments,” by denying bail and increasing penalties of up to 10 years in prison.

‘The constitution prohibits freedom of association if an association is formed for the purpose of “destroying religious harmony”, the peaceful coexistence of religious communities, or creating discrimination on religious grounds.’<sup>30</sup>

4.6.6 The same report noted that, in March 2020, ‘... the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights requested the government to “urgently revise the Digital Security Act, to ensure that it is in line with international human rights laws and that it provides for checks and balances against arbitrary arrest, detention, and other undue restrictions of the rights of individuals to the legitimate exercise of their freedom of expression and opinion.”’<sup>31</sup>

4.6.1 Humanists International stated that in 2020 alone, individuals accused under the Digital Security Act had been ‘arbitrarily arrested, forcibly disappeared, held in pretrial detention for indefinite periods and in some cases, tortured.’<sup>32</sup>

4.6.2 On 8 July 2021, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO human rights report 2020) noted in their annual report on human rights that: ‘While the [Bangladesh] Government continued to give strong support to religious freedom, religious minorities, including Ahmadiyya Muslims and Hindus, reported that they had been targeted by extremists who used section 28(2) of the DSA (harming religious sentiment) to file cases against them.’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 3), 12 May 2021

<sup>31</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 7), 12 May 2021

<sup>32</sup> HI, ‘[Bangladesh should drop spurious charges against blogger Asad Noor](#)’, 4 August 2020

<sup>33</sup> FCDO, ‘[Human Rights and Democracy: 2020...](#)’, 8 July 2021

- 4.6.3 In July 2021, Amnesty International released a report on the state crackdown of freedom of expression online, within which a recent case of arrest under the DSA is highlighted:

'In February 2020, a YouTube channel uploaded video of a stage performance of Baul (mystic) musician Rita Dewan. In the argumentative performance, the 39-year-old musician criticised Islam and the role of Allah (God). Soon after her recorded performance was uploaded on YouTube, she started receiving death threats on her mobile phone... In the following 10 months, the authorities lodged four separate cases against Rita Dewan filed by four different individuals under the Digital Security Act and Bangladesh's Penal Code. In three of the cases, she is accused of "insulting religion", "creating outrage by insulting religious belief", "provoking breach of peace" and "making statements conducing to public mischief" under sections 295A, 298, 504 and 505 of the Penal Code 1860. Another case under section 28 of the Digital Security Act (DSA) accuses her of "publishing and broadcasting information hurtful to religious values and sentiment". Of the four cases, she was acquitted in two under the Penal Code after the individuals withdrew the complaints. Nevertheless, she could still face up to 10 years in jail along with a fine of up to two million Bangladeshi takas...[£17,609] if convicted in only the case under the DSA.'<sup>34</sup>

- 4.6.1 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Bangladesh report, published May 2020 (USCIRF IRF report 2020) noted that:

'In January 2020, Sufi folk singer Shariat Sarker was arrested under the DSA after an Islamic scholar filed charges that comments made by Sarker, and uploaded to YouTube after a December 2019 performance, hurt the "religious sentiments" of Muslims. The offending remarks included arguments that the Qur'an does not prohibit music and statements he has made against religion being used as a political tool. Sarker was imprisoned after having his bail petition rejected while he awaits trial.'<sup>35</sup>

- 4.6.2 Additionally, on 25 November 2021, the Daily Star, a Bangladeshi newspaper, reported on the case of a 17-year-old girl belonging to the Hindu faith who was detained in 2020:

'Amnesty International today urged Bangladeshi authorities to immediately release Dipti Rani Das, a 17-year-old girl, who has been languishing at a correctional facility since October 28 last year for a Facebook post.

Dipti was booked under the draconian Digital Security Act on charges of "hurting religious sentiment" and "advancing to deteriorate law and order", Amnesty said...

'... Dipti Rani Das was arrested in Dinajpur, Bangladesh, on October 28 under the Digital Security Act (2018) over a Facebook post.

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<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International, '[No Space for Dissent – Bangladesh's Crackdown...](#)', July 2021

<sup>35</sup> USCIRF, '[Country update: Bangladesh](#)', page 3, 11 May 2020

'After her arrest, she has since been in detention at a correctional facility in Rajshahi, a northern district in Bangladesh, and could face up to seven years in jail if convicted.

'After being denied bail three times at a lower court, a High Court granted her bail on May 11. However, the bail order was stayed through an appeal by the deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, her home district.'<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.6.3 The USCIRF IRF 2020 report observed that the DSA has encouraged non-state actors to target those accused of blasphemy:

'The presence of such laws also encourages non-state actors to target individuals suspected of blasphemy. In October 2019, for example, the religious group Shorbodolio Muslim Oikya Parishad (All Party Muslim Unity Council) called for the death of a Hindu man after accusing him of posting blasphemous content on Facebook that insulted the Prophet Muhammad. The accused individual was arrested under the DSA...

'It was later revealed that the accused individual had his Facebook account hacked and was being blackmailed for money under threat of having additional blasphemous content posted under his name. After this revelation, however, the leadership of the Shorbodolio Muslim Oikya Parishad continued to call for punitive action against the Hindu man, rather than the two Muslim men behind the posts...'<sup>37</sup>

(See also State treatment – [Atheists](#) and Societal treatment – [Atheists](#) for more information on treatment of those accused of blasphemy).

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## 4.7 Religious minorities' representation in the political sphere

### 4.7.1 MRGI noted, in 2018, with specific reference to Hindus:

'Though there have been some signs of improvement towards greater inclusion, with the appointment of a number of Hindu minority members to senior positions – in January 2015, for instance, the government appointed the first Hindu to hold the office of chief justice in the Supreme Court – they remain under-represented in official circles. With 14 Hindu members, the current parliament has the highest levels of representation of the community in the country's history, compared to six in 1991, five in 1996, three in 2001 and ten in 2008. Nevertheless, even the current number amounts to just 4 per cent of the parliament, a fraction of their proportion within the national population. Historically, too, Hindu MPs have been concentrated in one party: since 1991, save for one exception, all Hindus elected to parliament were members of the Awami League.'<sup>38</sup>

### 4.7.2 The DFAT country report 2019 also highlighted Hindus' place within Bangladeshi politics:

'Hindus have made a significant contribution to Bangladeshi public life, including in politics, government, academia, business, and the arts. While they have traditionally supported the AL [Awami League – ruling party since

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<sup>36</sup> The Daily Star, '[Release Dipti Rani Das held under DSA immediately...](#)', 25 November 2021

<sup>37</sup> USCIRF, '[Country update: Bangladesh](#)', page 3, 11 May 2020

<sup>38</sup> MRGI, '[Bangladesh: Hindus information page](#)', July 2018

2009] and other left-leaning parties such as the Communist Party, all major political parties have fielded Hindu candidates. While the current AL Cabinet has Hindu members, the overall level of Hindu political representation remains low and Hindu community groups have campaigned for reserved seats in parliament...'<sup>39</sup>

- 4.7.1 Freedom House's 2021 report on political rights and civil liberties, covering events in 2020, assessed that religious minorities remained underrepresented in politics and state agencies<sup>40</sup>.

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## 4.8 Religious conversion

- 4.8.1 Leaving Islam is seen as shameful or apostasy<sup>41</sup>, and can also be considered blasphemous by Islamic extremists. Professor of Law, Javaid Rehman, who investigated 'the uses and abuses of certain interpretations of Sharia law and the Quran', wrote in a 2010 publication:

'Apostasy (also known as Ridda) occurs when a Muslim (by his words or actions) renounces and rejects Islam. Rejection or criticism of the All Mighty or His Prophet is perceived as an insult to Islam, offensive and routinely regarded as blasphemous... Blasphemy connotes the insult of God or Prophet Mohammad and other revered figures in Islam, and can be committed by believers and non-believers alike. Apostasy from Islam and blasphemy against Islam therefore remain (and have always remained) unacceptable.'<sup>42</sup>

(see also [Blasphemy / religious defamation](#)).

- 4.8.2 The SR report 2016 detailed findings on the prevalence of religious conversion in Bangladesh, and the consequences for those who convert:

'Religious conversions are generally rare and, when they do occur, mostly take place in the context of interreligious marriages. However, conversions have also occurred outside such marriages, in particular from Buddhism to Christianity or from various religions to Islam. On occasion, Muslims have converted to Christianity or to the Baha'i faith. Within the Mro indigenous people, who traditionally practise Buddhism, some tens of thousands have turned to a newly founded religion named "Krama".

'Those who convert to another religion are sometimes ostracized socially for having allegedly converted not for genuine reasons, but for the expectation of material benefits or owing to other non-religious incentives. Sometimes, even the offspring of converts can be ostracized, generations after the conversion. Some converts have actually gone into hiding or concealed their newly adopted faith for fear of social stigmatization.

'However, feelings of insecurity exist not only among converts, but also in communities from which people have converted. Smaller minority communities in particular have expressed concerns that they would in the

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<sup>39</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.45, page 22), 22 August 2019

<sup>40</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021 – Bangladesh](#)', (section B4), 3 March 2021

<sup>41</sup> World, '[Attacks on non-Muslims increase in Bangladesh](#)', 25 July 2016

<sup>42</sup> Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, '[Freedom of expression...](#)', (page 4), March 2010

long term lose their members to the predominant Islam or to Christian missionaries, which fosters suspicion of other communities. Furthermore, rumours and unrealistic projections can damage the general harmonious relations between the followers of different religious groups.<sup>143</sup>

4.8.3 The UNSR report 2016 also highlighted findings with regard to forced conversions:

‘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.’<sup>144</sup>

4.8.4 More recently, the DFAT country report 2019 noted that:

‘There are no laws prohibiting religious conversion in Bangladesh... Rumours that Christian churches are seeking to convert Muslims have occasionally led to localised violence against Christian individuals and institutions. In separate incidents in early 2016, Islamist militants murdered Christian converts in Jhenaidah, west of Dhaka, and in Kurigram, northern Bangladesh.

‘NGOs and the domestic media have reported that Islamist groups have forcibly converted non-Muslim indigenous children in the CHT and other rural areas. The reports allege that the groups convince parents to relinquish custody of their children by claiming they will provide the children with a higher quality of education and lifestyle in Dhaka and other developed cities. The groups instead forcibly convert the children to Islam and place them in madrassahs without their parents’ knowledge or consent. In January 2017, police in Bandarban (in the CHT) arrested two men for the alleged trafficking of four children aged between nine and 13...’<sup>145</sup>

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Section 5 updated: 30 March 2022

## 5. State treatment

### 5.1 Overview

5.1.1 In his 2016 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stated that he:

‘... repeatedly came across assessments that constitutional provisions, legal norms and political reform agendas lack consistent implementation, in particular at the local level. This problem seems to affect various societal sectors, such as education, public welfare, religious affairs, property issues and even guarantees of physical safety by law enforcement agencies. Some members of religious minorities attributed this problem to the mindset of

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<sup>43</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 57-59), 22 January 2016

<sup>44</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 51), 22 January 2016

<sup>45</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.33-3.34, page 20), 22 August 2019

certain people working in the administration who allegedly do not accept minorities and thus tend to obstruct the implementation of laws favourable to them. Others pointed to widespread corruption, which leaves economically impoverished strata of society without sufficient influence. Moreover, some referred to a lack of systematic monitoring, resulting in much arbitrariness exercised by local authorities, in particular in remote areas. ... People living in the intersection of different vulnerabilities – religious minority status, gender, low economic income etc. – may suffer even more.<sup>46</sup>

5.1.2 Considering state treatment of religious minorities and atheists generally, the USSD IRF report 2020 outlined:

‘Human rights organizations reported a decrease in the use of extrajudicial fatwas by village community leaders and local religious leaders to punish individuals for perceived “moral transgressions” during the year. In 2019, there was a reported 54 percent decrease in reported cases of fatwa and village out-of-court arbitrations overall. Media attributed the decline to civil society activism. Fatwas, however, continued throughout the year, including a November edict issued against a sculpture honoring Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the country.’<sup>47</sup>

5.1.3 The same report noted:

‘Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and members of other minority religious communities, who are also sometimes members of ethnic minority groups, continued to report property and land ownership disputes and forced evictions, including by the government, which remained unresolved at year’s end. Some human rights activists said it was often difficult to determine whether these disputes and evictions were a result of deliberate government discrimination against religious minorities or of government inefficiency. The government continued construction projects on land traditionally owned by indigenous communities in the Moulvibazar and Modhupur forest areas. According to minority religious associations, such disputes occurred in areas near new roads or industrial development zones, where land prices had recently increased. They also stated local police, civil authorities, and political leaders enabled property appropriation for financial gain or shielded politically influential property appropriators from prosecution. Some human rights groups continued to attribute lack of resolution of some of these disputes to ineffective judicial and land registry systems and the targeted communities’ insufficient political and financial clout, rather than to government policy disfavoring religious or ethnic minorities. Indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in particular, have large communities of Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians. A portion of these communities speak tribal languages and do not speak Bangla, making it difficult to access government registrations and services and further disenfranchising these groups.

‘The government continued to place law enforcement personnel at religious sites, festivals, and events considered potential targets for violence, including the Hindu festival of Durga Puja, celebrations during the Christian

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<sup>46</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 40 and 42), 22 January 2016

<sup>47</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 7), 12 May 2021



holidays of Christmas and Easter, and the Buddhist festival of Buddha Purnima. During the year, the government assisted places of worship implement COVID-19 precautions during major festivals.

'President Abdul Hamid continued to host receptions to commemorate each of the principal Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian holidays and emphasized the importance of religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for religious minorities. In January, the Election Commission rescheduled local Dhaka elections after students and faith groups protested scheduling the election during a Hindu festival.'<sup>48</sup>

- 5.1.4 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Bangladesh report published May 2020 outlined the government's attempts to tackle religious extremism:

'The Bangladeshi government, concerned by the rise of religious extremism and continuing violent attacks against religious minorities, has increased its attention to this problem at the national level. Following the 2012 mob attack against Buddhist monasteries in Ramu, Prime Minister Hasina visited the area, met with the Buddhist community, and pledged government support for reconstruction of the destroyed monasteries. A year later, she presided over an opening ceremony for the rebuilt religious institutions. Beginning in 2016, the government instituted a sweeping crackdown on religious extremism, leading to over 14,000 arrests of suspected militants along with subsequent efforts to challenge the hate speech of radical Islamic clerics. In April 2019, under directions from Prime Minister Hasina, imams across the country delivered a khutbah, or sermon, during Friday prayers denouncing terrorism and extremism.'<sup>49</sup>

- 5.1.5 The USSD IRF report 2020 also found that, with regard to the state's pursuit of those accused of committing offences against religious minorities: 'At year's end, the death sentence of seven individuals for their roles in the July 2016 killing of 22 mostly non-Muslim individuals at the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka remained on appeal with the High Court. In November 2019, a Bangladesh Special Tribunal convicted and sentenced the seven, while acquitting an eighth defendant.'<sup>50</sup>

- 5.1.6 In March 2021, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion or belief, noted in a report (CSW report 2021):

'Religious minority groups in Bangladesh continue to face discrimination in the law, in society and in their treatment by enforcement agencies. Although secularism is enshrined in Article 12 of the 1972 constitution, Article 2(A) asserts that Islam is the state religion and that other religions may be practised in peace and harmony. However, a series of attacks that took place between 2013 and 2017 resulted in the deaths of several bloggers, atheists and members of religious minority groups: a worrying indication that anyone holding or expressing an opinion contrary to the state and to Islam could be under threat. Religious minorities and indigenous communities

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<sup>48</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 8-9), 12 May 2021

<sup>49</sup> USCIRF, '[Country update: Bangladesh](#)', page 4, 11 May 2020

<sup>50</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 6), 12 May 2021

continue to be targets of discrimination, violence and land grabbing in Bangladesh.<sup>51</sup>

5.1.7 The same report also referenced how restrictive laws affect religious minorities in Bangladesh:

‘Land grabbing remains a serious issue for religious minorities in Bangladesh. While the Enemy Property Act historically used to strip Hindus of their property has been repealed. Despite the repeal of the legislation, many Hindu families have been stripped of their rights and unable to recover their landholdings. The Association of Land Reform and Development estimates that 75% of approximately three million pending court cases relate to land disputes. The government has failed to take effective measures to reverse the impact of property seizures. There are also concerns that the space for civil society and dissent is being curbed, with rising threats and attacks against secular activists, human rights defenders, and religious minorities. These concerns are intensified by new and revised laws that impede freedom of expression, particularly the Digital Security Act (DSA) which replaced the Information and Technology Act 2006 (ICT Act) and poses restrictions on freedom of expression. Several provisions under the new Act contain vague and overly broad provisions, which is used by the government to silent dissent and further curb freedom of speech and expression.’<sup>52</sup>

5.1.8 According to Bangladesh Post, in a 2021 article authored by a Secretary within the Awami League:

‘Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina adopted zero tolerance policy towards terrorism and violence against people belonging to religious minorities. ‘Dhormo Jaar Jaar, Utsob Shobar,’ (Religion as per one’s own, but festivals common to all)- is not only a mere slogan adopted by Awami League, but also a depiction of religious harmony in Bengali society and culture for hundreds of years. Our government always provides adequate protections during the festivals of religious minorities...’<sup>53</sup>

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## 5.2 Hindus

5.2.1 In 2018, MRGI noted:

‘Hindu communities continue to suffer disproportionately from land grabbing. Importantly, land appropriations were until recently enabled by the so-called Vested Property Act (formerly known as the Enemy Property Act during Pakistani rule), a piece of legislation that allowed authorities to take over “enemy” land, much of it in practice belonging to Hindus. This led to the expropriation of as much as 2.6 million acres between 1965 and 2006, with devastating effects for an estimated 1.2 million Hindu households. Since then, there have been numerous attempts by Hindus who lost property through the Act to reclaim it, particularly since the creation of the Vested Properties Return (Amendment) Bill of 2011, which required the government

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<sup>51</sup> CSW, ‘[Bangladesh: General Briefing](#)’, page 1, March 2021

<sup>52</sup> CSW, ‘[Bangladesh: General Briefing](#)’, page 1, March 2021

<sup>53</sup> Bangladesh Post, ‘[Who stands by religious minorities in Bangladesh?](#)’ 24 October 2021

to publish details of those properties which can be returned to their rightful owners. However, implementation has so far been limited, with many of those who have attempted to restore property ownership reportedly intimidated and thousands of cases delayed in a legal limbo, meaning relatively few cases have so far been resolved in practice.<sup>54</sup>

#### 5.2.2 The USSD IRF report 2020 outlined:

‘There was no progress in the court case regarding a 2016 attack on Hindu individuals, homes, and temples in Brahmanbaria District; victims expressed frustration to media over the continued investigation into the incident.

‘Biplob Chandra Baidya, a Hindu man, remained imprisoned since October 2019 for anti-Islam messages posted to his Facebook account, which he stated was hacked. Rioters vandalized homes and religious temples following the postings.’<sup>55</sup>

#### 5.2.3 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that, ‘On March 12, according to media reports, a Bangladeshi Speedy Trial Tribunal convicted and sentenced to death four Muslim members of JMB, a violent extremist group, for their involvement in the 2016 killing of a Hindu priest. The victim, Jogeshwar Roy, chief priest at Sri Swanta Gouria Monastery, was stabbed to death while organizing prayers at the temple.’<sup>56</sup>

#### 5.2.4 According to Bangladesh Post, in an article authored by a Secretary within the Awami League:

‘This year, about 35,000 Durga Pujas mandaps were organized across the country and went off peacefully except some undesired and heinous incidents in Cumilla, Chandpur, Noakhali, Feni and Rangpur. Festivals of religious minorities, like the Durga Puja, have been provided adequate security by the government. In 2017, over 30,000 Durga Puja mandaps were organized across the country, and went off without any security issue. In 2018, 31,272 Durga Pujas mandaps were managed in Bangladesh. The total number of Durga Pujas mandaps rose to 35000 in this year which signifies the fact that the government has been adequately supportive to organizing the puja mandaps in terms of providing security and other facilities.’<sup>57</sup>

#### 5.2.5 On 3 January 2022, The Times of India, an Indian English-language newspaper reported on the police response to offences committed against Hindus:

‘... Police have registered complaints over alleged desecration [desecration] of three temples in Bangladesh as members of the minority Hindu community staged protests demanding the arrest of culprits behind the incident in Lalmonirhat district, bordering India, a media report said on Sunday.

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<sup>54</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh: Hindus information page](#)’, July 2018

<sup>55</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 6), 12 May 2021

<sup>56</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 6), 12 May 2021

<sup>57</sup> Bangladesh Post, ‘[Who stands by religious minorities in Bangladesh?](#)’ 24 October 2021

'The protests began after raw animal meat packed in polythene bags were hung on the doors of three Hindu temples and a house in a village of Lalmonirhat district in the early hours of Friday...

'Four complaints were filed at a local police station on Friday night over the matter, the paper added. The Muslim residents in the area condemned the incident, attributing it to elements wanting to disrupt interfaith harmony, said a local journalist. On Saturday, members of the local Hindu community staged protests at a temple, demanding the arrest of the culprits.

"Police have assured us that the culprits will be arrested," said Dilip Kumar Singh, president of the Hatibandha Upazila Puja Udjapan Parishad, adding that the incident could be linked to the local union parishad polls held on December 26.

'Police official Ershadul Alam said they were investigating the incident. He said that additional police force had been deployed in the area and a search had been launched to track down the "miscreants". "All involved will be brought to book," he said.'<sup>58</sup>

(For further information on police responses to societal violence against Hindus, see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#) and [Hindus](#)).

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### 5.3 Buddhists

#### 5.3.1 Gulf News, a Dubai-based newspaper, reported in 2017 on the Bangladeshi police response to threatened violence against Buddhists:

'Bangladesh authorities on Friday deployed hundreds of police to protect Buddhist temples in the region where about 400,000 Muslim Rohingyas have sought refuge from unrest in Myanmar.

'The move came amid fears of attacks on the religious minority in revenge for events in Buddhist-dominated Myanmar.

'Thousands of supporters of a hardline Islamist group staged protests in the border town of Cox's Bazar after Friday prayers, calling on Myanmar to halt what they called the "genocide" of the Rohingya - who are in the minority in Myanmar.

'Most of the Rohingya refugees have fled to camps around the Bangladesh border city where there were already 300,000 Rohingya before the latest unrest erupted on August 25.

'There has been a huge outpouring of sympathy in Bangladesh for the persecuted Muslim group, with media giving blanket coverage to accounts of massacres and torture by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militia.

'Cox's Bazar police chief Iqbal Hossain said 550 police have been deployed in the region, including at 145 Buddhist temples, to prevent ethnic violence.

'He said police had stepped up security so local Buddhists, who have been established for centuries, "don't feel panicked".

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<sup>58</sup> TOI, ['3 temples desecrated in Bangladesh, police register complaints'](#), 3 January 2022

“It's a preventive measure," he told AFP. "We've also set up check-posts across the district."

'The reinforcements have come from the port city of Chittagong to watch temples, including the 300-year-old Kendriya Shima Bihar at Ramu, which hosts important Buddhist relics.

'Police were also patrolling outside Buddhist temples in Ukhia and Teknaf - the nearby towns where most of the newly arrived 400,000 Rohingya refugee took refuge.

'District authorities have also set up an inter-religious communal harmony committee since the Rohingya crisis started.

'Jyotirmoy Barua, a top lawyer from the Buddhist community, told AFP that some 20 armed police were at a temple at Ramu in Cox's Bazar on Friday.<sup>59</sup>

(For more information on police responses to violence against Buddhists, see Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#) and [Buddhists](#)).

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## 5.4 Christians

5.4.1 In December 2021, the Dhaka Tribune, a Bangladeshi newspaper reported that:

'The Christians of different groups in Bangladesh and elsewhere across the world will celebrate Christmas Day, the birthday of Jesus Christ, a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader, on Saturday.

'They will offer special prayers, illuminate churches and install makeshift Christmas trees at homes and places of worship and missions across the country.

'Elderly people of the community, attired in the outfit of Santa Claus, usually make fun with children and distribute gifts among kids as part of universal Christian practice.

'In separate messages, President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina greeted the members of the Christian community on the occasion.

'They called upon the Christians to celebrate the holy day by maintaining proper health guidelines amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

'In his message, President Hamid said Bangladesh is a shining example of communal harmony in the world and urged all to consolidate the long-standing tradition irrespective of religion, caste and position.<sup>60</sup>

(For further information on police response to societal violence against Christians, see also Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#) and [Christians](#)).

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<sup>59</sup> Gulf News, '[Bangladesh guards Buddhists amid Rohingya backlash fears](#)', 15 September 2017

<sup>60</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Bangladesh to celebrate Christmas Day Saturday](#)', 24 December 2021

## 5.5 Atheists and secularists

### 5.5.1 In considering state treatment of atheists and secularists, the UNSR report 2016 outlined:

‘Some interlocutors expressed concerns that Government agencies partially compromise the principle of secularism by increasingly employing religious concepts in their political rhetoric, possibly with the intention to appease Islamists militants. In order to combat the “politicization of religion”, measures may be put in place that lead to the “religionization of politics” — ironically even under the auspices of a Government that is committed to upholding the constitutional principles of secularism. In other words, while the Government may be fighting the instrumentalization of religion, it could at the same time be seen as using religion to achieve political goals. This may erode the credibility of the Government’s profession of inclusive secularism.’<sup>61</sup>

### 5.5.2 According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), an organisation working for the rights of secularists, ‘Between 2015-2018, at least nine humanist writers, bloggers and secular publishers were killed by non-state actors. During this period, the attacks expanded to include civil society actors, academics and religious figures with diverse views. The Bangladeshi authorities have failed to provide adequate protection to secular writers or to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice feeding a climate of fear and self-censorship.’<sup>62</sup>

### 5.5.3 The same source noted:

‘In July 2020, police indicated that seeking to arrest human rights activist and secular blogger Asaduzzaman Noor, also known as Asad Noor, after new criminal charges were brought against him under the Digital Security Act on July 14 for “spreading rumours” and “defaming Islam” via a Facebook video. Noor has previously been targeted under the DSA’s predecessor, the 2013 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act. In January 2017, the then 25-year old was arrested at Dhaka airport and charged with defamation of religion for content he had posted on social media. Though released briefly on bail in August 2018, he was subsequently re-arrested after a radical Islamic organization known as Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh called for him to be imprisoned and subjected to the death penalty. He was only released from prison again in January 2019. These charges against him remain outstanding. He lives in hiding following threats to his life.’<sup>63</sup>

### 5.5.4 The USSD IRF report 2020 highlighted police response to societal violence against men accused of desecrating the Quran in October 2020:

‘After a crowd attacked Jewel and his companion, officials attempted to protect them in the local government office. The crowd, however, broke into the office and grabbed Jewel. Although his companion successfully fled to the rooftop, Jewel was beaten to death... The crowd also attacked law enforcement officers, and police opened fire in what was described as a measure to bring the situation under control, although no casualties were

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<sup>61</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, (para 35), 22 January 2016

<sup>62</sup> IHEU, ‘[Bangladesh information page](#)’, 13 October 2020

<sup>63</sup> IHEU, ‘[Bangladesh information page](#)’, 13 October 2020

reported. Police authorities formed a government human rights investigation committee team that found after three days of review no evidence Jewel desecrated the Quran.’<sup>64</sup>

(see also Societal treatment and Interreligious relations – [Atheists](#) for further information on this incident).

5.5.5 New Age Bangladesh, a Bangladeshi English-language daily newspaper, reported on the same case in November 2020:

‘The lynching and burning by a local mob took place in the presence of police personnel, upazila nirbahi officer and an elected representative in the border region... The investigators said that a similar incident was reported in 2014 and they are now examining whether the same people were behind the killing and burning on Thursday.

‘The police, meanwhile, filed a case against 49 individuals and scores of unidentified people for obstructing the government work while the victim’s cousin Saiful Islam filed a murder case and the local union council chairman Abu Sayeed Md Newaz Nishat filed the third case over attacking, vandalising and torching public properties on that evening.

‘The police investigators said they sent five suspects to the judicial magistrate court in Lalmonirhat seeking permission to interrogate them in custody while a number of locals were quizzed to determine the attackers and instigators.’<sup>65</sup>

5.5.6 On 16 February 2021, the BBC reported on the state response to the murder of an atheist man who was murdered for his beliefs:

‘A court in Bangladesh has sentenced five men to death and one to life in jail for hacking a secular blogger to death six years ago in Dhaka.

‘Avijit Roy, based in the US and of Bangladeshi origin, was attacked with machetes as he left a book fair in the capital in February 2015.

‘It was one of a spate of attacks on secular figures, which were blamed on Islamist militants....

...‘Roy, an atheist, had angered hardliners with his writings on religion...

‘The assault was carried out by a banned group, Ansar al-Islam, which is believed to be linked with al-Qaeda, the court heard.

‘Two of the group were tried in absentia, including former army major Syed Ziaul Haque, who is accused of leading the attackers. He was sentenced to be hanged for murdering Roy, as were four others: Abu Siddique Sohel, Mozammel Hossain, Arafat Rahman and Akram Hossain, who along with Syed Ziaul Haque is still on the run.

‘Shafiur Rahman Farabi was given life in jail, after being arrested in March 2015.

‘In June 2016 police said they had shot dead the main suspect - a man they named as Sharif - in the killing of Roy in a gun battle near the capital.

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<sup>64</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 10), 12 May 2021

<sup>65</sup> New Age Bangladesh, ‘[No credible evidence of dishonouring Quran found](#)’, 2 November 2020

“Charges against them were proved beyond any doubt. The court gave them the highest punishment,” public prosecutor Golam Sarwar Khan said after the verdict outside the Special Anti-Terrorism Tribunal in Dhaka.<sup>66</sup>

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## 5.6 Ahmadis

- 5.6.1 According to the UNSR report 2016, government officials have different opinions regarding Ahmadis: some maintain a neutral position on religious issues; others have openly declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims, thus supporting the view of radical Islamists. The Government of Bangladesh assured the Special Rapporteur that it does not endorse such views<sup>67</sup>.
- 5.6.2 In June 2017, the Dhaka Tribune reported on treatment of Ahmadis in Bangladesh following an attack on an Ahmadi cleric. Local Ahmadis of Kishoreganj, Brahmanbaria and Mymensingh said local MPs acted neutrally during the Awami League government<sup>68</sup>. An Ahmadi cleric told the Dhaka Tribune, “We receive help from the government and the law enforcement agencies. But they only respond after we have been attacked”.<sup>69</sup>
- 5.6.3 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that, following intervention by law enforcement after locals exhumed the body of an Ahmadi infant they did not accept being buried in a Muslim cemetery, the family agreed to rebury the infant in a separate Ahmadi cemetery<sup>70</sup>. The same report noted ‘Human rights groups not associated with Ahmadiyya Islam termed the incident a “crude example of violence against religious minorities and abuse of human rights.”’<sup>71</sup>
- 5.6.4 According to a 2020 article by OpIndia, an India-based news website, ‘The re-burial was reportedly facilitated by a local councillor Azad Hazari. “The dead body was buried at the graveyard of the Ahmadiyya community at Kandirpara village after we spoke with the locals,” Mohammed Salim, Officer-in-Charge of Brahmanbaria Sadar police station. However, he did not answer when asked by reporters whether action will be taken against the perpetrators.’<sup>72</sup>
- 5.6.5 The CSW report 2021 also found that: ‘Bangladesh’s Ahmadiyya community is particularly vulnerable and faces increased harassment, as Islamist groups demand that the government declares Ahmadis as non-Muslims. There is evidence that police have been instructed to bring the position and activities of the Ahmadis under nationwide surveillance, including by approaching members of the community outside of their mosques to collect personal details.’<sup>73</sup>
- 5.6.6 According to the South Asia State of Minorities Report 2021: Hate Speech Against Minorities by the South Asia Collective (SASM report 2021), a group

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<sup>66</sup> BBC, [‘Bangladesh Avijit Roy murder: Five sentenced to die for machete attack...’](#) 16 February 2021

<sup>67</sup>HRC, [‘Report of the Special Rapporteur’](#), (para 36), 22 January 2016

<sup>68</sup> Dhaka Tribune, [‘A life of constant fear for the Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh’](#), 16 June 2017

<sup>69</sup> Dhaka Tribune, [‘A life of constant fear for the Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh’](#), 16 June 2017

<sup>70</sup> USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh’](#), (page 10), 12 May 2021

<sup>71</sup> USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh’](#), (page 10), 12 May 2021

<sup>72</sup> OpIndia, [‘Bangladesh: Islamists dig up the grave of an Ahmadi newborn...’](#), 14 July 2020

<sup>73</sup> CSW, [‘Bangladesh: General Briefing’](#), page 1, March 2021



of human rights activists and organisations working for the rights of minorities in South Asia, ‘The state has taken a ‘see- no-evil’ policy in addressing the repression of the Ahmadiyya community. It neither responds to the pleas of Islamist groups nor comes forward to ensure the constitutional rights of the Ahmadiyas. According to the Ahmadiyas, the government responds to them only when they have been attacked.’<sup>74</sup>

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## 5.7 Land appropriation

5.7.1 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that, ‘The Restoration of Vested Property Act allows the government to return property confiscated from individuals, mostly Hindus, whom it formerly declared enemies of the state. In the past, authorities used the act to seize property abandoned by minority religious groups, especially Hindus, who fled the country, particularly following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965’<sup>75</sup>

5.7.2 The DFAT country report 2019 outlined how religious minorities have been affected by the Vested Property Act:

‘Like other minorities, the Hindu community is disproportionately affected by historical and continuing land appropriation (“land grabbing”). During the 1965 war between Pakistan and India, the then-Pakistani government designated Hindus as “enemies” and many had their property seized under the Enemy Property Act (1965). The Vested Properties Return (Amendment) Act (2011) allowed Hindus to apply for the return of, or compensation for, property seized under the 1965 Act. However, Hindu communities and advocacy organisations have complained that the Act is too narrowly defined, and the application process cumbersome and convoluted. In June 2016, an NGO representing organisations with claims for property returns alleged that government officials tasked with reviewing claims were denying them even when required documentation was in order, or were classifying properties as state-owned and therefore not eligible for return. The NGO reported that 70 per cent of all claims remained unresolved four years after the enactment of the 2011 Act.’<sup>76</sup>

5.7.3 The USSD IRF report 2020 detailed:

‘According to the Ministry of Land’s 2018-2019 report, the most recent figures available, as of 2018, authorities had adjudicated 26,791 of 114,749 property-restitution cases filed under the Restoration of Vested Property Act. Of these judgments, the owners, primarily Hindus, won 12,190 of the cases, recovering 10,255 acres of land, while the government won the remaining 14,791 cases. Media reports, rights activists, and the BHBCUC attributed the slow return of land seized under relevant legislation from Hindus who had left for India to judicial inefficiency and general government indifference.’<sup>77</sup>

5.7.4 The USCIRF IRF report 2020 noted that: ‘There are also continued reports of land grabs within religious minority communities, including seizure of their

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<sup>74</sup> TSAC, ‘[South Asia... Minorities Report 2021: Hate Speech Against Minorities](#)’, December 2021

<sup>75</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 6), 12 May 2021

<sup>76</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.46, page 22), 22 August 2019

<sup>77</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 7-8), 12 May 2021

houses of worship. Such actions are often preceded by physical assaults on families to drive them off their land and reportedly occur with the complicity or direct involvement of local government officials. In September 2019, in recognition of this ongoing problem at the local level, the Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury stated that his ministry sent letters to district commissioners that grabbed land should be returned to the rightful owners and the act should be treated as a criminal offense...<sup>78</sup>

5.7.5 MRGI noted, with reference to land grabbing from Buddhist communities:

‘In many areas of Bangladesh, land grabbing has devastated indigenous Buddhist communities as their ancestral territory has been seized by powerful local actors. In Kuakata, for example, land donated by the state to the indigenous Rakhine community was subsequently seized illegally and used to build a shopping complex. Residents in the area have struggled to maintain their spiritual traditions as cremation grounds, sacred waterways and temples have been damaged or looted. While there were no fewer than 19 Buddhist temples in the area as of 1906, today only one remains.’<sup>79</sup>

5.7.6 The USSD IRF 2020 report noted that: ‘Members of religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, who were sometimes also members of ethnic minorities, stated the government remained ineffective in preventing forced evictions and land seizures stemming from land disputes.’<sup>80</sup>

(see also [State treatment](#), Societal treatment and inter-religious relations – [Overview](#) and [Hindus](#) for further information on land appropriation).

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Section 6 updated: 30 March 2022

## 6. Societal treatment and inter-religious relations

### 6.1 Overview

6.1.1 In considering inter-religious relations generally, the UNSR report 2016 noted:

‘Everyone with whom the Special Rapporteur had a chance to speak agreed that people generally live peacefully together across religious divides in Bangladesh...

‘The Special Rapporteur heard much about the many religious festivals in the country that are jointly celebrated by people of different religious backgrounds by going to the parade, sharing food with neighbours and giving sweets to children. This illustrates that people not only live side by side, but also try to get to know about and respect each other’s religion.

‘During his visit to an Islamic school in a Hindu neighbourhood, the Hindus happened to be celebrating a festival honouring Krishna’s birthday. The Special Rapporteur heard the Hindu music played in the background, in which Krishna’s flute was very noticeable, while at the same time Muslim

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<sup>78</sup> USCIRF, ‘[Country update: Bangladesh](#)’, page 2, 11 May 2020

<sup>79</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh – Buddhists](#)’, July 2018

<sup>80</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 1), 12 May 2021

students played in their schoolyard or studied in their classrooms. He takes this as an example of the relaxed atmosphere of interreligious coexistence, which generally prevails in the country.<sup>81</sup>

6.1.2 In April 2021, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a non-profit German foundation working towards the advancement of socio-political and economic development, published a report on democracy in Bangladesh, and noted that: ‘Intolerance and hatred towards the imagined or perceived “others” or “out group”, particularly on the basis of a singular religious identity, is on the rise at a staggering pace.’<sup>82</sup>

6.1.3 The USCIRF IRF report 2020 observed that:

‘...religious minorities...face societal discrimination and campaigns of harassment and intimidation from extremist groups, which includes the spread of hate speech and disinformation on social media. Conservative Muslim clerics and Sunni hardline groups have repeatedly denounced non-Muslim faiths, including accusing Christians of forcing Muslims to convert, as well as speaking against other Muslim sects... Religious groups, such as Hefazat-e-Islam, also have continued to exert pressure on the Bangladeshi government for policy changes, most notably in the country’s educational curricula and ensuring that religious minorities are edited out of Ministry of Education-approved textbooks. This inflammatory rhetoric is regularly accompanied by physical assaults against religious minorities, often not only for the purposes of land grabs and monetary extortion, but also to express anger over alleged blasphemy or personal disputes, or simply to instill [instil] fear in the broader community...’<sup>83</sup>

6.1.4 Foreign Policy, an American news publication focused on global affairs, current events, and domestic and international policy, reported in February 2022: ‘In Bangladesh, allegations of blasphemy, often made by ordinary citizens, are particularly potent at mobilizing the country’s Muslim majority against minority communities...’

‘Facebook has amplified the spread of such speech, especially when it is promoted by political and religious elites eager to demonstrate their populist bona fides. Over the last decade, these Facebook posts have triggered severe anti-minority violence across Bangladesh. Over the last decade, these Facebook posts have triggered severe anti-minority violence across Bangladesh. In the country’s first major instance of Facebook-inspired violence, thousands of Muslims attacked a Buddhist enclave in 2012 after a photo of a burned Quran—which tagged the account of a Buddhist man—circulated on the platform. In the wake of the violence, at least 1,000 Buddhist families fled their homes.

‘The attack set off what has since become a dire annual trend...’

‘Over the last decade, Islamists have killed dozens of allegedly blasphemous bloggers, whether Hindus, atheists, or Muslims, after first learning of their online posts, a troubling trend that has pushed many others to flee the country. They have also targeted minority Muslim sects, such as the

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<sup>81</sup> HRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)’, para 12, page 15-16, 22 January 2016

<sup>82</sup> FES, [The Future of Liberal Democracy in Bangladesh after the COVID-19...](#), page 6, April 2021

<sup>83</sup> USCIRF, ‘[Country update: Bangladesh](#)’, pages 3-4, 11 May 2020

Ahmadiyya, for their supposedly blasphemous heterodox beliefs. Fear of blasphemy has gone digital—and Facebook has accelerated its ability to stoke conflict...<sup>84</sup>

6.1.5 The DFAT country report 2019 highlighted, with particular reference to inter-religious violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, ‘disputes between predominantly Muslim Bengali settlers and indigenous groups in the CHT from minority religions occur frequently, particularly over land ownership and usage with Muslim settlers.’<sup>85</sup>

6.1.6 According to the IHEU: ‘Communal violence and political dysfunction remain significant problems in Bangladesh. At least 101 people were reported to have been injured in violence against religious minorities in the first 10 months of 2019. Further, at least 65 temples, monasteries or statues were attacked and 53 homes of religious minorities were attacked and set on fire.’<sup>86</sup>

6.1.7 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted:

‘According to the BHBCUC [Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Community Council], communal attacks against ethnic and religious minorities occurred throughout the year, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The BHBCUC counted 17 deaths in religious and ethnic minority communities between March and September [2020]... In November [2020], protesters demonstrated in Dhaka, Chattogram, and other parts of the country against communal attacks on minority religious communities. Saying government actions were not enough, protesters demanded tough action and accountability for perpetrators who they stated were harming religious harmony in the country.’<sup>87</sup>

6.1.8 The FCDO Human Rights and Democracy report 2020 noted that, in 2020, ‘There were attacks on 67 minority places of worship, including temples, monasteries and statues.’<sup>88</sup>

6.1.9 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World annual report on political rights and civil liberties, published 3 March 2021, outlined:

‘Members of minority groups—including Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and Shiite and Ahmadiyya Muslims—face harassment and violence, including mob violence against their houses of worship. In October 2019, a Muslim mob attacked Hindu residences in Barisal after false rumors circulated that a Hindu man posted blasphemous content on Facebook. In May 2020, in the same town, a mob attacked a Hindu man’s shop and subsequently clashed with police, injuring 10 people. These incidents are part of a pattern in recent years in which violence against religious or other minorities appears to have been deliberately provoked through social media.’<sup>89</sup>

6.1.10 The CSW report 2021 highlighted:

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<sup>84</sup> Foreign Policy, [How Facebook Fuels Religious Violence](#), 4 February 2022

<sup>85</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.47-3.49, page 22-23), 22 August 2019

<sup>86</sup> IHEU, ‘[Bangladesh information page](#)’, 13 October 2020

<sup>87</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 11), 12 May 2021

<sup>88</sup> FCDO, ‘[Human Rights and Democracy: 2020...](#)’, 8 July 2021

<sup>89</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2021 Bangladesh](#)’, section D2, 3 March 2021

‘According to the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad, widespread violence against ethnic and religious minorities had increased after the general elections in 2018. Places of worship belonging to Ahmadi and Shi’a Muslims, as well as Buddhists and Hindus have all been attacked in recent years. Concerns have also been raised over the Waz Mahfil (Islamic gathering) sermons that take place during winter in rural areas. The sermons, preached by radical clerics, often contain inflammatory hate speech and discriminatory language towards religious minorities, which fuel an environment of fear and intolerance. Numerous Christian leaders have also been threatened.’<sup>90</sup>

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## 6.2 Hindus

### 6.2.1 In considering societal treatment of Hindus, MRGI noted:

‘Major political events such as national elections have served as flashpoints for communal violence, with Hindus the worst affected. In early 2014, for instance, in the build up to the election, Hindus were subjected to threats and attacks to intimidate communities ahead of the vote. In the wake of the Awami League’s electoral victory, Hindus and other minorities continued to be targeted, with a large number of Hindu temples burnt down, vandalized and looted. The refusal of communities to boycott the elections led to widespread violence in certain areas, such as Malopara, where Jamaat-e-Islami activists spread false rumours that a number of their members had been killed in clashes to incite largescale attacks against the community. An estimated 500 Hindu families from Gopalpur village alone lost their homes in the violence.’

### 6.2.2 The same source also noted:

‘More recently, Hindus have been targeted not only in intercommunal attacks but increasingly by extremist militants. On 5 December 2015, a series of blasts targeting a Hindu ceremony in Dinjapur left six worshippers injured. A few days later, another temple in Dinajpur was attacked by militants with guns and bombs, leaving nine injured. But though the recent spate of terror attacks is highly significant, they represent only one part of the violence and discrimination that religious minorities in Bangladesh experience on an almost daily basis. Communal violence also remains commonplace. Leading rights organization Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) reports that, between January and June 2016, violence targeting Hindus in Bangladesh resulted in the burning of 66 homes, 24 people being injured and the destruction of at least 49 temples, monasteries or statues. Much of this violence is carried out at a local level by individuals or groups rather than militants, often driven by personal disputes, land grabbing and the apparent impunity that characterizes many attacks.

‘Within the Hindu community, the Dalit population remains especially marginalized and subject to discrimination not only by the majority population but also by more affluent, higher-caste Hindus who may, for example, exclude them from certain rituals and from shared spaces such as temples,

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<sup>90</sup> CSW, [‘Bangladesh: General Briefing’](#), page 1, March 2021

restaurants and markets. Isolated in remote rural settlements or segregated in poorly serviced urban “colonies”, they face widespread poverty, ostracization and food insecurity. Besides exclusion from many areas of employment, they have also been subjected to land grabbing, violence and forced conversion. As a result, anti-discrimination measures aimed at improving the situation of Bangladesh’s Hindus need to take particular account of this highly marginalized group.’<sup>91</sup>

6.2.3 The DFAT country report 2019 noted that:

‘In the lead-up to and following the 2014 elections, activists from the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party (see Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)) launched a wave of attacks against the Hindu community, killing more than two dozen, destroying hundreds of homes and businesses, and displacing thousands. DFAT understands that the primary motivation for the anti-Hindu violence, which was most prevalent in the northwest, was resentment over the testimony of Hindu witnesses in International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) proceedings (see International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)). In the aftermath of the violence, the High Court ruled that law enforcement agencies had “seriously failed” to protect members of vulnerable groups, including Hindus. The government responded by providing assistance to victims and helping communities restore religious and private property damaged in the violence. The 2018 election was not characterised by such violence.

‘The small-scale localised attacks carried out by Islamist militant groups against minority religious and social groups across the country in 2013-16 killed or seriously injured several Hindus. Police were despatched to protect temples and clergy in response to the attacks and to death threats made by militants...’<sup>92</sup>

6.2.4 The same report outlined:

‘There have been occasional cases of mob violence against Hindu targets. In October 2016, a mob of at least 100 violently attacked a Hindu village in Brahmanbaria district in east-central Bangladesh. Although police reinforcements and paramilitary border guards were despatched to the area, the attack left dozens injured, and at least 15 Hindu temples and over 200 Hindu homes badly damaged and looted. Initial media reports suggested Islamists had incited the violence by alleging a Hindu had posted on Facebook an edited photograph of a Hindu deity seated atop the Kaaba in Mecca. A subsequent government investigation found the Facebook photograph had been planted, most likely as a means to incite the violence. A NCHR investigation concluded that the incident was a pre-planned effort aimed at appropriating Hindu land. Authorities arrested and/or charged more than 1000 people connected to the incident, including a local police officer, while the AL suspended three local leaders from the party for their involvement. In a separate incident in November 2017, a mob of approximately 20,000 in Rangpur district in northern Bangladesh set fire to and vandalised approximately 30 private homes belonging to Hindus. The violence followed a Facebook posting judged to demean the Prophet

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<sup>91</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh: Hindus information page](#),’ July 2018

<sup>92</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.47-3.49, page 22-23), 22 August 2019

Muhammad. A press report stated one person was killed during the incident, and five suffered critical injuries. Police arrested more than 50 in the wake of the attack, and the government pledged to compensate those affected.<sup>93</sup>

- 6.2.5 The USSD IRF report 2020 outlined: ‘In June [2020], the Bangladesh chapter of the World Hindu Federation released a press statement detailing a series of 30 incidents against Hindus in May. These included as many as four incidents in which Hindus were killed, according to the federation. The report also noted incidents of temple vandalism, forced conversion, rapes, and abductions of Hindu girls and women.’<sup>94</sup>
- 6.2.6 The same report noted:  
‘In November [2020], according to Hindu activist groups and widely reported in media, a Muslim crowd burned, looted, and vandalized Hindu family homes in Cumilla District, Chattogram Division. Local press outlets reported the crowd was incited by rumors that local Hindu residents supported the publication in the French magazine Charlie Hebdo of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed, initially published in 2015 and reprinted in France in September. In remarks to the press, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan promised “stern, punitive actions” against the culprits and increased police presence in the affected village following the attack. By the end of the year, police arrested 16 suspects in connection with the violence.’<sup>95</sup>
- 6.2.7 The CSW report 2021 also highlighted: ‘Hindu and indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to gender based violence, with evidence of repeated cases of rape, forced marriage and conversion of minors disproportionately targeting Hindus. The decline in Hindu population has been linked to sustained attacks on the community, forcing the population size to reduce drastically from 23% in 1971 to just 8%.’<sup>96</sup>
- 6.2.8 On 8 March 2020, the Bangladesh National Hindu Grand Alliance (BNHGA), an organisation for the rights of Hindus in Bangladesh, tweeted in regard to ongoing instances of vandalism of Hindu idols and places of worship<sup>97</sup>:

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<sup>93</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.47-3.49, page 22-23), 22 August 2019

<sup>94</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 11), 12 May 2021

<sup>95</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 11), 12 May 2021

<sup>96</sup> CSW, ‘[Bangladesh: General Briefing](#)’, page 1, March 2021

<sup>97</sup> BNHGA (@BangladeshGrand on Twitter.com), ‘[Tweet dated 12:47pm, 8 March 2020](#)’



Bangladesh National Hindu Grand Alliance  
@BangladeshGrand



Every day at some place idol vandalism and fire at Hindu home !!!

On Saturday (07/03/2020), the miscreants robbed the idol at Kali Temple in Naori Para village of Kalmakanda upazila of Netrokona district.

Where is Bangladesh now of communal and communal harmony ???



12:47 PM · Mar 8, 2020 · Twitter Web App

6.2.9 On 16 October 2021, Raju Das, a Hindu activist living in Bangladesh posted the following news on the gang rape and assault of a Hindu woman and girls on Twitter<sup>98</sup>:



Raju Das 🇬🇧  
@RajuDas7777



An insane jihadi group gang-raped a Hindu mother, daughter and mother's sister's daughter in Hajiganj, Chandpur district of Bangladesh on October 13 during Durga Puja. The 10-year-old Hindu girl who was gang-raped died this morning and her mother's condition is very critical.

2:28 PM · Oct 16, 2021 · Twitter for Android

493 Retweets 62 Quote Tweets 556 Likes

<sup>98</sup> Raju Das (@RajuDas7777 on Twitter.com), ['Tweet dated 2:28pm UK time, 16 October 2021'](#)



- 6.2.10 The same activist has also posted in relation to multiple instances of vandalism by Islamist groups on Hindu temples<sup>99</sup>, clothing stores<sup>100</sup> and properties<sup>101</sup> of Hindus between October and November 2021.
- 6.2.11 On 27 December 2021, bdnews24, a Bangladeshi news website reported on the events that sparked violence during the Durga Puja in October 2021:  
'As the Hindu community across the country celebrated Durga Puja, their biggest religious festival in October, a provocative social media campaign surrounding the alleged dishonouring of the Quran at a puja venue in Cumilla touched off a horrific chain of events.  
'Muslim fanatics laid waste to temples and places of worship in the city, leaving scores of people injured. What started in Cumilla soon rippled through to other parts of the country as the Hindu community across Bangladesh faced atrocities which are unprecedented in recent times.  
'The scars run deep and the trauma lingers on. "The fear that the attacks stoked still exist. We can't say are over it [even after two months of the attacks]," said Haradhan Chakrabarty, leader of Chandmoni Temple Committee in Cumilla.  
"Actually, nobody discusses the issue. Many of us are fuming with fear, grudges and agony. It is burning inside like a chaff fire. In this country, this is the life we have," he said.'<sup>102</sup>
- 6.2.12 Bdnews24 said that such targeted attacks against Hindus have been rare during the last few decades but:  
'According to Manabadhikar Shongskriti Forum (MSF), a human rights group, at least 53 incidents of vandalism and arson attacks targeting [targeting] puja venues and temples took place in 19 districts in October.  
'As many as 70 places of worship were attacked and torched in the space of just three days amid the Durga Puja festival, according to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.  
'Nine lives were lost and at least 200 people injured between Oct 13-20. Among the dead, six were Muslims and three were Hindus.  
'Following the violence in Cumilla around Durga Puja, at least 29 Hindu homes in Pirganj were attacked, vandalised and burnt on Oct 17. Once again, Facebook was at the centre of it all as a post on the social media platform that allegedly hurt Muslim sentiments set off the attacks.  
'As police focused on nabbing the perpetrators, it came in for heavy criticism for failing to prevent the attacks.  
'On Oct 18, the Police Headquarters issued a statement, saying a total of 450 people had been detained in 71 cases filed over the attacks by religious fanatics.

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<sup>99</sup> Raju Das (@RajuDas7777 on Twitter.com), ['Tweet dated 1:48pm UK time, 2 November 2021'](#)

<sup>100</sup> Raju Das (@RajuDas7777 on Twitter.com), ['Tweet dated 7:38pm UK time, 19 October 2021'](#)

<sup>101</sup> Raju Das (@RajuDas7777 on Twitter.com), ['Tweet dated 7:28pm UK time, 31 October 2021'](#)

<sup>102</sup> Bdnews24, ['2021: When anti-Hindu attacks blunted the spirit of secularism...'](#), 27 December 2021

'However, the attackers are yet to be indicted, according to lawyer Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

"The chief justice ordered the trial of the cases related to communal violence to be completed in 90 days after the complaints were filed," he said.

"Two months have passed but we haven't seen any charges formally pressed. Some case dossiers were filed and police arrested some suspects. But we have no idea when the criminals will undergo trials."

'The government promised financial aid to repair the vandalised temples but the funds haven't yet been disbursed, according to Haradhan Chakrabarty, leader of Chandmoni Temple Committee in Cumilla.'<sup>103</sup>

#### 6.2.13 The same article continued:

'The issue of anti-Hindu violence during Durga Puja was also discussed when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sat down with Indian President Ram Nath Kovind during his recent visit to Dhaka.

"While speaking about the problems that occurred during Durga Puja, the prime minister said no one is treated as a minority in Bangladesh and everyone is given equal rights," State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam had said after the meeting.

'In the past, many people would come forward to prevent such violence but that was not the case this time around, according to some victims. There weren't any political activists who stood by them in their hour of need, they claimed.

"The honourable prime minister announced a zero-tolerance policy against communal violence. Only eight to 10 days after her announcement, another attack took place in Habiganj. Now, we need to see what lies ahead for this zero-tolerance policy," said Rana Dasgupta.

'The realisation of secularism, one of the four preambles of Bangladesh's Constitution, is connected to many other issues, believes Akbar Ali Khan, a former adviser to the caretaker government.

"Bangladesh has successfully achieved nationalism. There's nothing to worry about. But we need to worry about democracy and secularism in the country. Because, a country which does not have democracy cannot have sustainable secularism," he said at a recent event.'<sup>104</sup>

#### 6.2.14 On 18 October 2021, The New Indian Express, an Indian daily newspaper, also reported on violence perpetrated by Muslims against Hindus during the Durga Puja and the police response:

'A Hindu temple has been vandalised in Bangladesh in a fresh case of communal unrest amidst days of violence unleashed by unidentified Muslim bigots who attacked the minority community's places of worship during the Durga Puja celebrations over alleged blasphemy, prompting a minority group to announce a countrywide hunger strike, media reports said on Sunday.

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<sup>103</sup> Bdnews24, '[2021: When anti-Hindu attacks blunted the spirit of secularism...](#)', 27 December 2021

<sup>104</sup> Bdnews24, '[2021: When anti-Hindu attacks blunted the spirit of secularism...](#)', 27 December 2021

'Hindu-owned temples and shops in Feni, about 157 kms from the country's capital, have been vandalised and robbed during fresh clashes on Saturday which broke out after an attack on demonstrators who were protesting against the attacks on Durga Puja venues in several places in Bangladesh, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

'It said that the clashes left at least 40 people, including the Officer In-charge Nizamuddin of Feni Model Police Station, injured in the clashes.

'On Saturday night, authorities deployed additional police forces and the paramilitary force -- Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), after several temples and businesses owned by Hindus were vandalised and robbed during clashes that lasted from 4:30 PM (local time) to midnight, the report said.

'The report said that some miscreants on Saturday vandalised six idols at the Daniapara Maha Shoshan Kali Mandir in Rashunia union of Sirajdikhan upazila in Munshiganj, about 40 kms from here. It said that protests against attacks and vandalism on Hindu temples during the Durga Puja celebrations continued across the country on Saturday, as did the vandalism that led to the public outcry.'<sup>105</sup>

6.2.15 The Daily Star, a Bangladeshi-based newspaper, reported on the state response to violence committed against Hindus during the Durga Puja festivities in 2021:

'The High Court today directed the authorities concerned to conduct judicial inquiries into the incidents of violence and attacks on Hindu temples and mandaps during Durga Puja in six districts -- between October 13 and 18.

'The districts are: Cumilla, Feni, Noakhali, Chattogram, Chandpur and Rangpur.

'The court also asked the chief metropolitan magistrates and chief judicial magistrates to submit the inquiry reports to it in 60 days.

'At the same time, the HC issued a rule asking the local administrations concerned to explain in four weeks why their inaction and failure to protect Hindu citizens and their properties in the districts during their biggest religious festival should not be declared illegal.

'The HC bench of Justice Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah came up with the order and rule after hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyers Anup Kumar Saha and Mintu Chandra Das seeking necessary directives on the issue.

'They submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC on October 21, saying that eight people were killed and many others were injured and puja mandaps, temples and their properties were vandalised and looted during the "mindless communal attacks and violence" between October 13 and 18 this year.'<sup>106</sup>

6.2.16 On 24 October 2021, the Bangladesh Post outlined the criminal cases lodged in the aftermath of the Durga Puja violence:

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<sup>105</sup> The New Indian Express, '[Bangladesh Durga Puja violence...](#)', 18 October 2021

<sup>106</sup> The Daily Star, '[...attacks during Durga Puja... judicial probes in 6 districts](#)', 28 October 2021

‘Starting from the Cumilla incident till date, 71 criminal cases are lodged and about 500 people are arrested on charges of communal attacks and violence all over the country. A number of new cases are being processed. The police and the law enforcing agencies are working hard and driving operations to arrest the accused people and the suspected ones.’<sup>107</sup>

6.2.17 In October 2021, Asia News reported that following the violence during Durga Puja:

‘Hindus, Buddhists and Christians took part in a hunger strike in solidarity with the Hindu community which recently came under attack from Muslim radicals.

‘Seven people have died in the sectarian clashes and hundreds of houses have been set on fire since 13 October, when Durga Puja celebrations were underway.

“Please stop the persecution of the Hindu community. The government should guarantee our security,” pleaded Neem Chandra Bhowmik, one of Bangladesh’s main Hindu leaders.’<sup>108</sup>

6.2.18 The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) also outlined other instances of attacks against Hindu property in their annual human rights report on Bangladesh, published 25 January 2021:

‘There are allegations that criminals vandalized Hindu temples, effigies and looted goods from temples, including the Krishna temple located at Gopal Sadhu's house in Suapur Village of Dhamrai under Dhaka district on 3 March<sup>279</sup>, effigies of two temples of Harlal Thakur and Gorachan Gain in Jafrabad Village under Dashmina Upazila of Patuakhali District on 10 April<sup>280</sup>, idols of Kali temple at Kudumganj Bazar under Durgapur Upazila in Netrokona District on 4 May<sup>281</sup> and seven idols of Shomshan (crematorium) Kali and Shiva Temple in Bijoy Nagar under Araihasar Upazila in Narayanganj district on 4 August.’<sup>109</sup>

6.2.19 In October 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW), reported that: ‘A Bangladeshi human rights group, Ain o Salish Kendra, has reported at least 3,679 attacks on the Hindu community since January 2013, including vandalism, arson, and targeted violence. The authorities repeatedly fail to investigate and prosecute such violence.’<sup>110</sup>

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## 6.3 Buddhists

6.3.1 With specific reference to Buddhists in Bangladesh, the DFAT country report 2019 outlined:

‘There have been occasional instances of societal violence elsewhere in Bangladesh that have targeted Buddhists based on religion. The most serious incident occurred in September 2012, when up to 25,000 Islamists burned several Buddhist temples and approximately 50 Buddhist houses in

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<sup>107</sup> Bangladesh Post, ‘[Who stands by religious minorities in Bangladesh?](#)’ 24 October 2021

<sup>108</sup> Asia News, ‘[Religious minorities go on hunger strike against sectarian violence](#)’, 25 October 2021

<sup>109</sup> FIDH, ‘[Annual Human Rights Report 2020 Bangladesh](#)’, 25 January 2021

<sup>110</sup> HRW, ‘[Bangladesh: Deadly attacks on Hindu festival](#)’, 21 October 2021

Cox's Bazar during protests against a Facebook posting by a Buddhist man that showed a desecrated Koran... Separately, Islamist militants in the CHT killed one Buddhist monk in May 2016 during the wave of militant attacks against minorities...'<sup>111</sup>

- 6.3.2 The IHEU noted: 'Violence against... Buddhists has increased in recent years. The Buddhists mostly belong to indigenous hill tribes in south-eastern Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts), an area still dealing with the consequences of a twenty year civil conflict between the Shanti Bahini and Bangladeshi military.

'In October 2018, unidentified individuals destroyed a Buddhist monastery in Khagrachhari District in the Chittagong Hill Tract region. In August 2019, a Buddhist monk was murdered.'<sup>112</sup>

- 6.3.3 In July 2021, Al Jazeera reported that:

'On the night of May 31, Agrojyoti Bhante was brutally attacked by two machete-wielding men at a monastery in Khagrachari, 270km (168 miles) south of capital Dhaka in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

'The attackers, later identified as two Bengali construction workers who worked at the monastery, also looted about 60,000 takas (\$700) from the monastery and left the 47-year-old Buddhist monk, belonging to one of Bangladesh's Indigenous communities, for dead.'<sup>113</sup>

- 6.3.4 In November 2021, The Asian Independent reported on an attack on a Buddhist temple in Bangladesh:

'Members of five tribal organisations of Tripura held a protest on Monday in front of Bangladesh Assistant High Commission here condemning the attack and torching of the Katakhal Forest Buddhist Monastery under Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district in the neighbouring country.

'A joint statement of the five tribal organisations on Monday said that at least 8 indigenous persons, including women, belonging to the Chakma community were injured during the attack on October 24.

'These organisations submitted a memorandum to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina through the Assistant High Commissioner Mohammad Jobayed Hosen.

'The memorandum said that the attack on the Katakhal Forest Buddhist Monastery took place following a series of incidents of vandalism and arson of Hindu temples, Durga Puja pandals and attacks on Hindu minorities from October 13, which shows that the government of Bangladesh has not taken any measure to ensure protection of the religious minorities in the country.'<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.52 – 3.53, page 23), 22 August 2019

<sup>112</sup> IHEU, '[Bangladesh information page](#)', 13 October 2020

<sup>113</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Attacks, land grabs leave Bangladesh's Indigenous groups on edge](#)', 30 July 2021

<sup>114</sup> TAI, '[Attack on Buddhist monastery in B'desh triggers protest in Tripura](#)', 2 November 2021

## 6.4 Christians

### 6.4.1 The DFAT country report 2019 noted:

'The small-scale localised attacks carried out by Islamist militant groups against minority religious and social groups across the country in 2013-16 killed or seriously injured several Christians. Authorities despatched police to protect churches and clergy in response to the attacks, and in response to death threats made by militants. Isolated attacks and threats by militants against Christians continue to be reported, but these claims sometimes lack credibility. For example, in December 2017 a Catholic priest was reported to have been abducted in the northeast, subsequently turned up alive in Sylhet after claiming to have escaped his kidnappers. At a subsequent press conference, police accused the priest of staging the kidnapping, claiming to have CCTV footage of him checking into hotels and riding his own motorcycle during his absence.'<sup>115</sup>

### 6.4.2 The USSD IRF report 2020 outlined:

'The Christian Welfare Trust and other human rights NGOs continued to report harassment, communal threats of physical violence, and social isolation for converts to Christianity from Islam and Hinduism. The NGOs said individuals commonly associated a person's faith with his or her surname. In spite of constitutional guarantees protecting an individual's right to change faiths, according to the Christian Welfare Trust, when someone's professed faith deviated from the faith tradition commonly linked with his or her surname, particularly if the professed faith was Christianity, harassment, threats, and social isolation could ensue'<sup>116</sup>

### 6.4.3 The Christian Aid Mission, an NGO working for the rights of Christians worldwide, noted in an undated information page:

'The Christian population comprises an extremely small percentage of the population, less than a fraction of 1%, and faces persecution from Muslim communities and radical Muslim groups. Multiple Islamic terrorist groups, including the Islamic State (ISIS), have networks in Bangladesh. Many Christians meet in underground house churches. Believers who belong to ethnic minorities face the highest levels persecution, like those from the Rohingya refugee population, nearly 1 million of whom live in Bangladesh.'<sup>117</sup>

### 6.4.4 Open Doors UK, an organisation supporting persecuted communities of Christians around the world, stated in an undated article:

'Women and girls are most vulnerable to persecution from their family, friends and community. Violence (including acid attacks), rape, abduction and forced marriage are common forms of religious persecution—and this violence has reportedly increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>115</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.59, page 24), 22 August 2019

<sup>116</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 11-12), 12 May 2021

<sup>117</sup> Christian Aid Mission, '[Bangladesh information page](#)', nd

'Men are often threatened and beaten for 'betraying their culture and religion', and some have fled their homes. Church leaders, in particular, often face false accusations of coercive conversions...'<sup>118</sup>

6.4.5 The South Asia Research Institute for Minorities (SARIM) reported on 7 January 2022 that:

'Indigenous Christians are living in fear after violence by land grabbers from the Muslim-majority community in Bangladesh's Rajshahi district.

'At least 10 Christians were beaten while two of them landed in hospital in critical condition in Badhair village in the Tanore area of the northern district in the past week.

'The village is home to more than 200 indigenous people, mostly Christians. They are now scared to step out of their homes. The men fear going to the market while children are not being sent to school, say locals.

'The cause for the attacks is 12,500 square meters of khas land (government-owned fallow land) on which 23 indigenous families have been settled for years. Some influential people want to remove them and occupy the land themselves.

'Biplob Tudu, 40, an indigenous Santal who was taken to Tanor subdistrict hospital in critical condition, said he was attacked while returning home from the market in a three-wheeled vehicle on Jan. 3.'<sup>119</sup>

6.4.6 More recently, on 2 February 2022, Asia News reported on the death of an elderly Christian man, thought to have been killed after testifying as a witness against a Muslim man accused of rape:

'...Malkam D'Costa, 91, died last week at his home in Padrishibpur, a village in Barisal (south-central Bangladesh). He was the eldest member of the local Catholic community.

'His lifeless body was found in the morning, killed by drugs, which were also given to five members of his family who ended up in hospital.

'No one is able to say what happened. But the incident has outraged and sparked fear among local Christians who have reason to believe that it was not just a robbery gone wrong, but a deliberate attack against a Christian family.

'In fact, in 2021, a neighbour of Malkam D 'Costa was also forced to take a sleeping pill and then raped while she was alone at home. Her husband is employed as a nightwatchman at a Catholic school.

'Once she regained consciousness, she filed a complaint against a Muslim man, Mohammad Alam, and Malkam D 'Costa's son testified in her favour despite the fact that the accused's family put pressure on him to get the charges dropped.

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<sup>118</sup> Open Doors UK, '[Bangladesh](#)', undated

<sup>119</sup> SARIM, '[Indigenous Christians living in fear in Bangladesh village](#)', 7 January 2022

'For this reason, the Christians in Padrishibpur believe that the killing was an act of revenge connected to the rape case.'<sup>120</sup>

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## 6.5 Atheists

- 6.5.1 According to the International Federation of Journalists, no bloggers were killed during the reporting period (May 2019-April 2020) and a large number of atheist bloggers have left the country seeking asylum abroad, whilst 'Others remain in hiding in the country and remain active on social media and blogs using pseudonyms. Secular bloggers and critics of Islam face risks from all quarters including government and militants, as well as by the society and the country's laws which criminalise expressing opinions that "hurt religious sentiment".'<sup>121</sup>
- 6.5.2 In August 2020, Huffington Post India provided an insight to the lives of some secular bloggers who were now living abroad having left Bangladesh, mostly in 2015, following a spate of killings of atheist writers and intellectuals by Islamists<sup>122</sup>. The report noted:  
'According to journalist Omar Faroque, a special correspondent of the Dhaka-based Somoy TV, atheist bloggers would not be safe in Bangladesh even now. "There would not be much societal pressure on them, just like there was no major case of social harassment of atheist bloggers even at that time. They faced threats from religious organisations and militant groups. And that threat prevails," he said.'<sup>123</sup>
- 6.5.3 The same report stated that some so-called rationalist bloggers remained in Bangladesh, but wrote under an alias:  
'Marufur Rahman Khan is a 21-year-old and one of the editors of Shongshoy who lives in Bangladesh. Khan said that some of the bloggers living in the country use pen names, while others who reveal their real identity write on science and women's issues but avoid direct criticism of religious beliefs.  
"Islamists can freely publish books and air their opinion against atheism, secularism, feminism, and homosexuality. But members from these communities are not allowed to express their beliefs or the lack of it. Too few in the country can write anything under their own name directly criticizing religion," said Khan.'<sup>124</sup>
- 6.5.4 The same article reported on bloggers living in exile, referring to atheist blogger, Camelia Kamal and her blogger-husband, Subrata Adhikary, who fled Bangladesh in 2015, but continue to write on social media<sup>125</sup>. Huffington Post noted: 'Though they have lived in Sweden for the past five years, the distance from Bangladesh has not made them feel safe. Emails and phone calls that claimed familiarity with their whereabouts made the couple move

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<sup>120</sup> AsiaNews, '[A 91-year-old Christian villager drugged and killed in Barisal](#)', 2 February 2022

<sup>121</sup> IFJ, '[States of Control: South Asia Press Freedom Report 2019-20](#)' (page 28), 3 May 2020

<sup>122</sup> HP, '[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)', 3 August 2020

<sup>123</sup> HP, '[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)', 3 August 2020

<sup>124</sup> HP, '[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)', 3 August 2020

<sup>125</sup> HP, '[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)', 3 August 2020



homes several times. “We try not to live in the same place for more than 6-7 months,” Kamal told HuffPost India.<sup>126</sup>

6.5.5 Other bloggers told Huffington Post India of the threats and insults they frequently received: “Religious fundamentalism has no borders. Their ideological brethren could be living next to me. I try to closely guard information related to my movements and whereabouts. I am not completely safe anywhere,” said Haque, who has been working with a German-language newspaper for the past two years.<sup>127</sup>

6.5.6 Huffington Post also added ‘Five years on, these bloggers see hardly any possibility of going back ever again. “I will either be jailed by the government or killed by Islamic fundamentalists,” said Haque. “Democracy, secularism, and freethinking have died in Bangladesh. The government has struck a deal with fundamentalist forces”.<sup>128</sup>

6.5.7 According to the same source, ‘Bangladesh’s largest religious organization Hefazat-e-Islam’s Narayanganj district unit president Abdul Awal said on July 24 [2020] at a gathering to offer namaaz [prayer], “We would have torn the atheists into pieces and soothed the pained hearts of the Muslims, only if we could reach them. Unfortunately, we are not being able to reach them at present”.<sup>129</sup>

6.5.8 The USSD IRF report 2020 outlined a more recent attack against accused ‘atheists’:

‘In October, according to police and local reports, a crowd of several hundred persons carrying sticks beat to death Abu Yunus Md Shahidunnabi Jewel and then set his body on fire. According to local press accounts, Jewel and a companion visited a mosque while away from his hometown, and while viewing the mosque’s Quran and Hadith, the Quran fell to the ground. A rumor quickly spread that had desecrated the sacred text... Although his companion successfully fled to the rooftop, Jewel was beaten to death. After Jewel was killed, according to eyewitnesses and video clips, the crowd burned his body while chanting, “Nara E Takbeer Allahu Akbar,” loosely translated as “Shout out loud, God is greatest.”<sup>130</sup>

6.5.9 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report 2021 noted: ‘Those with secular or nonconformist views can face societal opprobrium and attacks from hardline Islamist groups.’<sup>131</sup>

(For further information on inter-religious societal attacks on religious minorities, see [Inter-religious relations and instances of extremism](#)).

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<sup>126</sup> HP, ‘[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)’, 3 August 2020

<sup>127</sup> HP, ‘[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)’, 3 August 2020

<sup>128</sup> HP, ‘[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)’, 3 August 2020

<sup>129</sup> HP, ‘[How Bangladeshi Bloggers Paid The Price For Protesting Religious...](#)’, 3 August 2020

<sup>130</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 10), 12 May 2021

<sup>131</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2021 – Bangladesh](#)’, section D2, 3 March 2021

## 6.6 Ahmadis

### 6.6.1 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted, with reference to societal treatment of Ahmadi Muslims:

'...in July [2020] major news outlets reported the exhuming and subsequent dumping of an Ahmadi Muslim infant's body on the roadside in Brahmanbaria District. In a public statement, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community said the infant was born prematurely and died three days after birth. The bereaved family had buried the infant in a government cemetery, which according to the media reports caused local residents to become infuriated, not believing it appropriate to bury an Ahmadi Muslim's body in a government cemetery for Muslims.'<sup>132</sup>

(see also State treatment – [Ahmadis](#) for further information on the state response to the incident).

### 6.6.2 MRGI considered societal violence against Ahmadis:

'Ahmadi community leaders have highlighted that, while the community has struggled against a backdrop of continued violence, few of these incidents are reported in national media. Discrimination against the community has become part of daily life for its members. This is reflected in the fact that many of the attacks carried out against the community are not perpetrated by isolated extremist cells but by crowds of locals, in many cases mobilized by preachers or politicians. In February 2013, the destruction of a venue scheduled to host the centenary celebrations of the Ahmadi community in Bangladesh, for instance, was carried out by a mob reportedly numbering as many as 20,000 people. Ahmadi leaders complained that police failed to adequately protect the site from attack.

'Indeed, extremist movements within the country have at times enjoyed clear signs of wider support among some Bangladeshis. On 6 April 2013, for instance, demonstrations staged by the group Hefazat-e-Islam saw at least half a million supporters take to the streets in Dhaka with a series of demands that included hanging of atheist bloggers, the imposition of an anti-blasphemy law with the death penalty and the designation of Ahmadis as 'non-Muslims'.

'More recently, a suicide bombing of an Ahmadi congregation in Bagmara on 25 December 2015 left three worshippers injured, with ISIS claiming responsibility for the attack. An attack in May 2017 saw three assailants armed with machetes attack an Ahmadi place in Khanpur in northern Bangladesh, leaving a cleric seriously injured. While in these cases the attackers were fewer in number, the established pattern of larger-scale assaults was resumed in March 2018, when a mob of 70-80 people attacked an Ahmadiyya mosque in Madarganj upazila of Jamalpur district. The attackers had just been practicing their Friday prayers in a local mosque nearby. Twenty-two Ahmadis were injured.'<sup>133</sup>

### 6.6.3 The USCIRF IRF report 2020 noted a more recent instance of societal violence against Ahmadis: 'In early February 2019, extremist groups led

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<sup>132</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 10), 12 May 2021

<sup>133</sup> MRGI, '[Bangladesh: Ahmadis information page](#)', July 2018

coordinated attacks against the homes of Ahmadi Muslims in Panchagarh ahead of an annual Ahmadiyya convention known as a Jalsa, despite local authorities having already canceled the three-day event. Approximately 50 Ahmadi Muslims were injured in the attacks.<sup>134</sup>

- 6.6.4 The CSW report 2021 also detailed that: ‘Bangladesh’s Ahmadiyya community is particularly vulnerable and faces increased harassment, as Islamist groups demand that the government declares Ahmadis as non-Muslims.’<sup>135</sup>
- 6.6.5 The same report also outlined a recent incident against Ahmadis in Bangladesh: ‘On 14 January 2020 Masjid Baitul Wahed, a mosque belonging to the Ahmadiyya community, was attacked in Brahanbaria town by madrassa students. Witnesses report that Ahmadi homes nearby were also targeted. Following the incident, the students rallied in front of the Brahmanbaria Press Club demanding for a law to be passed to declare Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslims.’<sup>136</sup>
- 6.6.6 The SASM report 2021 outlined, ‘According to the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat Bangladesh, since 1963, 13 Ahmadiyas have been killed, and since 2000, around 100 attacks on the Ahmadiya community recorded.’<sup>137</sup>

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## 6.7 Inter-faith marriages

- 6.7.1 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that ‘Marriage between members of different religious groups occurs under civil law’<sup>138</sup> although the DFAT country report 2019 found that ‘interfaith marriage is uncommon and is generally regarded poorly within society.’<sup>139</sup>
- 6.7.2 A 2016 article published in the International Journal of Education, Culture and Society indicated that mixed marriages in Bangladesh ‘... can present problems, but the mix is not restricted to religion. Sunni/Shia, rich/poor, educated/uneducated marriages can encounter resistance, but this resistance begins in the family. If the family accepts a marriage, so will the community. Such resistance is much more likely to be encountered at the village level than in cities and towns, where mixed marriages are more frequent.’<sup>140</sup>
- 6.7.3 In a 2018 article by the Dhaka Tribune, it was noted:
- ‘Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. While the society of Bangladesh can’t be dubbed as strictly religious, a strong social stigma is attached with interfaith marriage between Muslim and other faiths. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Centre from 2008 to 2012, only 10 percent Bangladeshi Muslims are comfortable with their daughter marrying a

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<sup>134</sup> USCIRF, ‘[Country update: Bangladesh](#)’, page 4, 11 May 2020

<sup>135</sup> CSW, ‘[Bangladesh: General Briefing](#)’, page 1, March 2021

<sup>136</sup> CSW, ‘[Bangladesh: General Briefing](#)’, page 1, March 2021

<sup>137</sup> TSAC, ‘[South Asia...Minorities Report 2021: Hate Speech Against Minorities](#)’, December 2021

<sup>138</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)’, (page 5), 12 May 2021

<sup>139</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.30, page 19), 22 August 2019

<sup>140</sup> International Journal, ‘[Interreligious Marriage in Bangladesh](#)’, (page 45), 28 September 2016

Christian. The percentage of acceptance rises to 14 when it's about marriage between his son and any non-Muslim girl.<sup>141</sup>

6.7.4 The same article continued:

'In Bangladesh, inter-faith marriages are generally frowned upon. It's also difficult because in theory, Islam doesn't allow its adherents to convert or denounce his/her religion. Denouncing one's religion is to be punishable by death according to Sharia law. Besides these complexities, inter-faith marriages are likely to incite conservatism and social backlash. Even the government of Bangladesh has shown very little efforts to amend the already flawed laws. Besides, there are reports that hard-line Islamic terrorist organizations have expressed their anger and threatened to kill any Muslim who partakes in inter-faith marriages.'<sup>142</sup>

6.7.5 The UNSR report 2016 also outlined findings on inter-religious relationships in Bangladesh:

'Interreligious marriages, although slowly becoming more popular in urban areas, have been very rare in Bangladesh. The striking paucity of interreligious marriages in a country in which people of different religious orientations have always lived side by side is a surprising phenomenon. There are good reasons to assume that difficulties arising from the existing structure of personal status laws are a main factor explaining that situation. While some interreligious constellations can be accommodated within the existing system, in accordance with the rules of the concerned religious communities, others cannot.

'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 Jaina religion shall be deemed to effect his or her severance from such family (art. 22); and no person professing the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jaina religion who marries under the terms of the Act shall have any right of adoption (art. 25)...

'This unusual stipulation constitutes a factually insurmountable hurdle for many people. Either they understand themselves as believers rather than non-believers, or they would in any case prefer not to publicly proclaim non-belief for fear of societal ostracism or other inimical reactions. As long as the stipulation of declaring non-belief exists as a precondition to resorting to the Special Marriage Act, then the Act does not provide in reality the option of a civil marriage open to everyone who would like to make use of it, for instance, in order to overcome obstacles for certain interreligious marriage constellations within the current system of personal status laws.'<sup>143</sup> (see [Personal status laws](#)).

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<sup>141</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Interfaith marriages and the law of the land](#)', 18 December 2018

<sup>142</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Interfaith marriages and the law of the land](#)', 18 December 2018

<sup>143</sup> HRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)', (para 77-79), 22 January 2016

- 6.7.6 According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) an NGO advocating for secularists worldwide:

‘While theoretically individuals could declare themselves atheist in order to marry, those belonging to the Muslim faith could face accusations of ‘apostasy’. Interfaith marriage is subject to considerable social stigma.

‘The long out-dated and ambiguous 1872 Special Marriage Act III-allows a person of no religious faith to get married. However, both parties must renounce their belief in front of the “Registrar” as non-believers. Couples married under this act are not allowed to adopt; succession, maintenance, custody and guardianship of children and inheritance is not clearly defined either, creating an unclear legal situation.’<sup>144</sup>

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Section 7 updated: 30 March 2022

## 7. Access to services

- 7.1.1 The DFAT country report 2019 noted that, ‘No legal or other restrictions prevent Hindus from freely practising their faith, or from participating in broader society.’<sup>145</sup>
- 7.1.2 The DFAT country report 2019 noted that:
- ‘No legal or other restrictions prevent Christians from freely practising their faith, and Christians are entitled to equal treatment under the Constitution. Christians are able to access state schools, hospitals and other services. Christians have made a significant contribution to public life, particularly in relation to social welfare – a legacy of historical and continuing missionary efforts. The Christian education system, which operates throughout the country from primary to tertiary levels and is open to all faiths, is held in high regard by the communities in which Christian schools and universities operate...’<sup>146</sup>
- 7.1.3 Despite this, MRGI do note that, in regard to discrimination against Christians in areas such as employment and housing: ‘...[The lives of Christians] in Bangladesh have often been characterized by discrimination in many areas of their lives, including employment or housing. There have been reports of some Muslim landlords refusing to rent apartments to Christian families, for example, and Christians and other minorities typically work disproportionately in the most marginalized, poorly paid jobs such as street sweepers.’<sup>147</sup>
- 7.1.4 The [Constitution of Bangladesh](#) confirms that ‘No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion... be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or

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<sup>144</sup> IHEU, ‘[Bangladesh information page](#)’, 13 October 2020

<sup>145</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.45, page 22), 22 August 2019

<sup>146</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 3.56, page 24), 22 August 2019

<sup>147</sup> MRGI, ‘[Bangladesh – Christians](#)’, July 2018

resort, or admission to any educational institution<sup>148</sup> and outlines Buddhists' equal treatment under the constitution<sup>149</sup>.

- 7.1.5 CPIT could not find information to show that Ahmadis are denied access to services in Bangladesh in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).

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Section 8 updated: 30 March 2022

## 8. Avenues of redress

### 8.1 Police and judiciary

- 8.1.1 The USCIRF IRF 2020 report noted that: 'In recent years, a number of local administrative and police officials have demonstrated a general apathy toward promoting religious tolerance, strengthening protections for religious minorities, properly investigating crimes, and ensuring accountability for attacks against religious minorities.'<sup>150</sup>

- 8.1.2 The same report noted that: 'The apathy, and at times complicity, of local officials for discrimination and attacks against minorities has created a culture of impunity for non-state actors to continue to resort to violence, especially with regard to land grabs or personal disputes. Anti-minority bias and corruption among local officials is compounded by issues of low capacity that continue to plague law enforcement institutions in many part of the country.'<sup>151</sup>

- 8.1.3 See [State treatment](#) for information on police and state responses to violence against religious minorities and [CPIN: Actors of protection, Bangladesh, April 2020](#) for information on the police and judiciary in Bangladesh.

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### 8.2 State-funded Trusts

- 8.2.1 According to The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) website:

'Since the start of operations in 1980 as an independent Ministry, Ministry of Religious Affairs is performing all kinds of Religious Affairs Activities of the Government by the offices and organizations under the Ministry named Islamic Foundation, Office of the Waqf Administrator, Haj Office Dhaka, Haj Office Jeddah/Makkah, Hindu Religious Welfare Trust, Buddhist Religious Welfare Trust, Christian Religious Welfare Trust and various branches of the Ministry.

'The main objective of the Ministry is to improve the religious affairs. It works to contribute in the national development through human resource development and working in encouragement of brotherhood, values, religious belief in both national and international level.'<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> HRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)', (para 8), 22 January 2016

<sup>149</sup> HRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur](#)', (para 8), 22 January 2016

<sup>150</sup> USCIRF, '[Country update: Bangladesh](#)', page 4, 11 May 2020

<sup>151</sup> USCIRF, '[Country update: Bangladesh](#)', page 5, 11 May 2020

<sup>152</sup> MoRA, '[About Ministry – History and introduction](#)', nd

## 8.2.2 The USSD IRF report 2020 noted that:

'The Ministry of Religious Affairs had a budget of 16.93 billion taka (\$199.2 million) for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, which covers July 2020-June 2021. The budget included 14.25 billion taka (\$167.6 million) allocated for development through various autonomous religious bodies. The government provided the Islamic Foundation, administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 8.12 billion taka (\$95.5 million). The Hindu Welfare Trust received 1.435 billion taka (\$16.9 million), and the Buddhist Welfare Trust received 46.8 million taka (\$551,000) of the total development allocation. While the Christian Welfare Trust did not receive development funding from the 2020-2021 budget, it received seven million taka (\$82,400) to run its office.'<sup>153</sup>

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## 8.3 Civil society organisations

### 8.3.1 In considering the existence of civil society organisations in Bangladesh, the DFAT country report 2019 noted:

'Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to form associations or unions, provided they have objectives consistent with the Constitution and are not formed for the purpose of destroying religious, social or communal harmony; for creating discrimination on any grounds; or for organising terrorist or militant activities. Bangladesh has an active civil society sector that conducts activities on a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic issues. All civil society organisations (CSOs), including religious organisations, are required to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare. The NGO Affairs Bureau, which sits within the Office of the Prime Minister, facilitates the activities of CSOs in the country. CSOs working on sensitive topics or groups (including religious issues, human rights, indigenous people, sexual or gender diverse people, Rohingya refugees, corruption, and workers' rights) have reported an increasing level of formal and informal government restrictions in recent years. These restrictions have included bureaucratic obstacles in the form of repeated audits or delayed approvals by the National Board of Revenue, legal harassment under the ICT Act and/or the DSA (see Media) and the temporary freezing of bank accounts, overt monitoring by intelligence agencies, and the disruption of planned events. The government has often countered CSO criticism through the media, sometimes with intimidating or threatening remarks. In July 2016, for example, the State Minister for Social Welfare told Parliament that his ministry would investigate and cancel the registration of any NGO involved in 'anti-state activities...'<sup>154</sup>

### 8.3.2 The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist and Christian Unity Council note on their website: 'Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist & Christian [sic] Unity Council, USA (BHBCUC, USA) is dedicated to protecting the human rights of the religious and ethnic minorities [sic] of Bangladesh. We enlist the legislators, NGOs, members [sic] of the civil societies, and governments of democratic nations

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<sup>153</sup> USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh](#)', (page 8), 12 May 2021

<sup>154</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)', (para 3.98, page 30), 22 August 2019

including Bangladesh to help the minorities of Bangladesh [sic] regain their rights as equal citizens of the country and live there with human dignity.<sup>155</sup>

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## 9. Internal relocation

### 9.1 Freedom of movement

#### 9.1.1 Considering Bangladesh citizens ability to move and relocate throughout the country, the DFAT country report 2019 noted:

‘Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh, to reside and settle in any place therein, and to leave and re-enter Bangladesh. There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Bangladesh, and Bangladeshis can and do relocate for a variety of reasons. Major cities, such as Dhaka and Chittagong, offer greater opportunities for employment... As noted in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) indigenous people, the CHT is a heavily militarised area. Access to large sections of the CHT is restricted, and military checkpoints prevent free movement in the CHT by local people. Local NGOs report that many indigenous people have left the CHT to live in other parts of the country.’<sup>156</sup>

(For further information on internal relocation in Bangladesh, see Country Policy and Information Note: [Background information, including internal relocation, Bangladesh, April 2020.](#))

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<sup>155</sup> BHBCUC, ‘[Homepage](#)’, nd

<sup>156</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report, Bangladesh](#)’, (para 5.22-5.23 page 48), 22 August 2019



# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legal context
  - Constitution
  - Personal status laws
  - Penal Code
  - Conversion laws
  - Digital Security Act / Communication Technology Act
- Religious demography and geographical breakdown
- State treatment of religious minorities
- Societal treatment of religious minorities
- Religious minorities' access to services
- Inter-religious relations
  - Interfaith marriages
  - Instances of extremism
- Avenues of redress
- Existence of NGOs and government accountability

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- version **3.0**
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