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Bangladesh: Protect the Hindu minority and investigate recent attacks

Amnesty International strongly condemns the attacks on Hindu places of worship, homes and businesses in Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh by angry mobs on 30 October 2016. We urge the Bangladesh authorities to take effective steps to prevent any recurrence of such attacks and to protect the Hindu minority. Those responsible for these attacks must also be brought to justice.

According to media reports, hundreds of people, allegedly linked to the groups Hefajat-e-Islam and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, gathered to protest against a Facebook post which “insulted Islam”. It was made on Friday 28 October from the account of a local Hindu man, Rasraj Das, and showed a picture of Masjid al-Haram, the primary holy site of Muslims, with an image of the Hindu god Shiva edited onto its central structure, the Kaaba. The next day, Rasraj Das posted an apology and explanation that his Facebook account had been hacked and that he was not responsible for posting the image. He was arrested soon after by police on charges of “hurting religious sentiment” and is currently in detention.

Protests calling for the execution of Rasraj Das continued over the weekend, and on Sunday crowds of people, some carrying home-made weapons, turned on the Hindu community in several parts of Brahmanbaria district. At least 100 homes were vandalised and several temples looted. Scores of residents were injured. Security forces were called to the scene and arrested at least six individuals accused of involvement in the attacks. Despite the presence of security forces, however, media reports suggested that affected Hindu communities were in panic and fear further attacks.

Two cases have been lodged with the police by victims, accusing over 1,000 unidentified people allegedly involved in the attacks. There is concern however that, like in previous attacks on the Hindu minority, the perpetrators will not be brought to justice.

Amnesty International calls on the Bangladeshi authorities to:

- Publicly condemn attacks against members of the Hindu community and take effective steps to prevent any recurrence of attacks and other measures to ensure protection of members of the Hindu minority;
- Initiate a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the attacks

and make the result of this investigation public;

- Ensure that those suspected to be responsible are prosecuted in fair and transparent trials, without resort to the death penalty.
- Ensure that Rasraj Das is not charged with “hurting religious sentiment” or similar acts, and that any such charges already brought against him are dropped.

Background

Bangladesh’s Hindu minority has historically been subjected to discriminatory practices or attacks by violent groups in the Muslim-majority country. In 2013, for example, the Hindu minority was subjected to a [wave of violent attacks](#) during which 40 temples were vandalised and scores of shops and houses were burned down, leaving hundreds of people homeless. In 2001, hundreds of Hindu families were reportedly [driven off their land](#) by groups affiliated to the political parties, Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami. In some cases the attackers burnt homes and raped women, and several people were killed. As far as Amnesty International is aware, there have to date been no investigations into these attacks.

Furthermore, in the past two years there have been numerous attacks perpetrated by violent groups claiming to act in the name of Islam. Those killed in these attacks have included secular bloggers, and in 2016 prominent LGBTI rights defender Xulhaz Mannan, a university professor, a Hindu tailor accused of insulting Islam, and a Sufi Muslim leader. These attacks have been claimed by groups with purported links to Al-Qaeda or the armed group calling itself the Islamic State, yet no one has been held to account for them, although investigations are underway and arrests have been made in some of the cases.