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Bangladesh

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of one's choice. It also states that every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institutions. While the Government publicly supported freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem. Protests demanding that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims and instances of harassment continued sporadically, but the Government generally acted in an effective manner to protect Ahmadis and their property. Religion exerted a significant influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the Islamic consciousness of its political allies and the majority of its citizens.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report. Citizens were generally free to practice the religion of their choice; however, government officials, including the police, were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minority victims of harassment and violence. The Government and many civil society leaders stated that violence against religious minorities normally had political or economic motivations and could not be attributed only to religion.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence by the Muslim majority. Harassment of Ahmadis continued along with protests demanding that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims.

In October 2006, the national Government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in a coalition with Islamist parties Jamaat Islami and Islami Okiyya Jote, stepped down from power in favor of a constitutionally-mandated caretaker government charged with preparing the country for national elections in January 2007. However, in January 2007, President Iajuddin Ahmed announced a state of emergency to pre-empt widespread fears of a violent, one-sided election, and the next day, a new, nonpartisan caretaker government was sworn into office. Of the ten advisers or ministers in the new government, one is Christian. In the 300-seat Parliament that was dissolved in October 2006, religious minorities held eight seats.

During the 2001 national election campaign period, the acute animosity between the two mainstream political parties led to numerous acts of significant violence against religious minorities. By the end of the reporting period, there were no significant reports of violence against minority members involving political party activists.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In meetings with officials and in public statements, officers at the U.S. Embassy encouraged the Government to protect the rights of minorities. Publicly and privately, the Embassy denounced acts of religious intolerance and called on the Government to ensure due process for all citizens. Early in 2006, the Embassy urged senior leaders of both parties to prevent such acts of violence in the upcoming political campaign, and met with members of the Hindu community to underscore Embassy concern and strengthen lines of communication in the event of future problems. The Ambassador made several visits to minority religious communities around the country. In April 2007, she visited the Roman Catholic mission in Madhupur to meet with the Garo community after the death of one of their leaders at the hands of the military. For the second year in a row, the U.S. Government sponsored the successful visit of a prominent U.S. Muslim cleric who spoke to audiences about Qur'anic interpretations that support tolerance and gender equity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles, and its population is 150 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder is mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are found predominantly among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians could be found in many communities across the country; in cities such as Barisal City, Gournadi (Barisal), Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara in Dhaka, Christianpara in Mohakhali (Dhaka), Nagori in Gazipur. There also are small

populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, Animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers varied from a few thousand to 100 thousand adherents for each religious group. There is no indigenous Jewish community, nor a significant immigrant Jewish population in the country.

Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who did not participate actively in prayers or services. A national survey in late 2003 confirmed that religion was the first choice by a citizen for self-identification; atheism was extremely rare.

The majority of individuals classified as foreign residents are returned Bangladeshi emigres. There are approximately 30,000 Rohingya refugees, who practice Islam. There is no reliable estimate of the number of missionaries. Several faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operated in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice, profess, and propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of one's choice. While the Government publicly supports freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem.

While the right to propagate the religion of one's choice is guaranteed by the Constitution, local authorities and communities often objected to efforts to convert persons from Islam.

In general, government institutions and the courts protect religious freedom. The Government ran imam training academies and proclaimed Islamic days of festivals but did not dictate sermon content, select or pay clergy, or monitor content of religious education in madrassahs.

Shari'a (Islamic law) was not implemented formally and was not imposed on non-Muslims, but played an influential role in civil matters pertaining to the Muslim community. For instance, alternative dispute resolution was available to individuals for settling family disputes and other civil matters not related to land ownership. The arbitrator may rely on principles found in Shari'a for settling disputes, if both parties agree to the settlement. In addition, Muslim family law was loosely based on Shari'a.

In 2001, the high court ruled all fatwas, legal rulings based on Shari'a, illegal. In deeming all fatwas illegal, the high court intended to end the extrajudicial punishments and restrictions forced on local populations by religious leaders. However, the high court's prohibition also included pronouncements on purely religious matters such as the dates of festivals or the religious validity of marriage or divorce. Several weeks later, after an appeal was filed by a group of Islamic clerics, the appellate court stayed the high court's ruling, stating that while the appeal was pending, the ban on fatwas could not be implemented. It was unclear when the appeal was expected to be considered.

While Islamic tradition dictates that only muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa, village religious leaders sometimes made declarations in individual cases and called the declaration a fatwa. Sometimes this resulted in extrajudicial punishments, often against women, for their perceived moral transgressions.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differed slightly depending on the religion of the persons involved. Each religion had its own set of family laws. Muslim men may marry up to four wives; however, a Muslim man must get his first wife's signed permission before taking an additional wife. In contrast, Christian men may only marry one woman. Under Hindu law, unlimited polygamy is permitted and while there is no provision for divorce and legal separation, Hindu widows may legally remarry. There were no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different religious groups.

Religion exerted a powerful influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies, the Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, as well as the majority of its citizens.

In December 2006, the Awami League upset many of its minority and liberal supporters when it signed an electoral pact with the Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, a splinter Islamist group tied to violent Islamist militants. The agreement committed a future Awami League-led government to recognizing some fatwas and an official declaration that the Prophet Mohammad is the last prophet, a direct challenge to the Ahmadiyya community. Ahmadis and liberal Bangladeshis criticized the agreement as politically expedient and inconsistent with core party principles. Following this criticism and open rebellion among senior party leaders, the Awami League quietly allowed the agreement to lapse after imposition of the state of emergency.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. According to the Government, the Christian community did

not want government involvement in its religious affairs and requested that there not be any similar organization for their community; however, the Government told Christian leaders it would soon establish a welfare trust for Christians. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Hindu Welfare Trust had a fund of approximately \$1.7 million (120 million taka) in savings. Over the year, it received approximately \$30 thousand (2 million taka) from the Government. The trust, founded in the 1980s, used its money to repair temples, modify cremation pyres, and help destitute Hindu families afford medical treatment. In addition, approximately \$30 thousand (2 million taka) went towards annual Puja celebrations.

The Buddhist Welfare Trust, also founded in the 1980s, had a fund of \$425 thousand (30 million taka) at the end of the period covered by this report. The trust used funds to repair monasteries, organize training programs for Buddhist monks, and celebrate the Buddhist festival Purnima. There has been no public criticism of how the money is proportioned or distributed.

Major religious festivals and holy days of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian religious groups were celebrated as national holidays. The Bangladesh Christian Association lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday.

Religious organizations were not required to register with the Government; however, all NGOs, including religious organizations, were required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government had the legal authority to cancel the registration of an NGO suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and to take other actions, such as blocking foreign funds transfers, to limit its operation. During the reporting period, the Government cancelled the registration of one NGO, Revival of Islamic Heritage, because of alleged links to terrorism financing. In the past, members of NGOs intending to travel to religious freedom events abroad reported pressure by law enforcement and intelligence officials to remain at home, but there were no reports of this occurring during the reporting period.

Religion was taught in government schools, and parents had the right to have their children taught in their own religion. However, some claimed that many government-employed religious teachers of minority religious groups were neither members of the religion they taught nor qualified to teach it. Although transportation was not always available for children to attend religion classes away from school, in practice schools with few religious minority students often worked out arrangements with local churches or temples, which then directed religious studies outside of school hours. There were at least 25 thousand Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs. Some madrassahs were government-funded and some were privately-funded, according to a recent U.S. Government study. There were no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, proselytism was discouraged. Foreign missionaries were allowed to work, but as is the case with other foreign residents, they often faced delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In the past, some missionaries who were perceived to be converting Muslims to other religious groups were unable to renew their one-year religious worker visas. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces and others closely monitored their activities.

The Government continued to oppose court challenges to its 2004 statement banning Ahmadiyya publications on the grounds that the ban had not been promulgated officially and was, therefore, beyond judicial scrutiny. The high court had stayed the ban, making it unenforceable until the court ruled on it. With a few exceptions, police respected the high court's order.

There were no financial penalties imposed on the basis of religious beliefs; however, religious minorities were disadvantaged in access to military and government jobs, including elected office. While the Government has appointed some Hindus to senior civil service positions at the deputy secretary, joint secretary, and secretary levels, religious minorities remained underrepresented, especially at the higher ranks. One notable exception was the government-owned Bangladesh Bank, which employed approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Selection boards for government services often lacked minority representation. Employees were not required to disclose their religion, but it generally could be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination under the now-defunct Vested Property Act. The act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed the Government to expropriate "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands. The Government seized approximately 2.5 million acres of land from Hindus, affecting almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country. In April 2001, parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act, stipulating that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remained resident citizens. The Government was required to prepare a list of vested property holdings by October 2001, and claims were to have been filed within ninety days of the publication date. In 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act, which allowed the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties and gave control of the properties, including the right to lease them, to local government employees. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not prepared a list of such properties.

According to a study conducted by a Dhaka University professor, nearly 200,000 Hindu families have lost approximately 40,667 acres of land since 2001, despite the annulment of the Vested Property Act in the same year.

Marriage rituals and proceedings were governed by the family law of the religion of the parties concerned; however, marriages were also registered with the state. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Although Muslim men were permitted to have up to four wives, society strongly discourages polygamy, and it was rarely practiced. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. In rural areas, marriages sometimes were not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband was required to pay his former wife alimony for three months, but this law was not always enforced. There was little societal pressure to enforce it, and the courts were so backlogged it was difficult, if not impossible, to get redress through the courts. There were separate family laws for Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, based on their respective traditions with few significant differences. The major exception was that Hindu law permits unlimited polygamy and makes no provision for divorce or separation, which are forbidden according to the Hindu religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Feminist author Taslima Nasreen remained abroad during the period covered by this report, while criminal charges were pending against her for allegedly insulting the religious beliefs of the country's Muslims. In October 2002 a court sentenced Nasreen, in absentia, to a year in jail for her "derogatory remarks about Islam," in a case filed by a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader in 1999. Her books remained legally banned, but are openly sold by street hawkers.

In June 2005, the government in Dinajpur razed the homes of 65 families to make room for a government project. According to press reports, the evicted families consisted of fifteen families from the indigenous Santali Christian community and fifty Hindu families. The families have been allowed to continue living on the property, but the government has not provided any assistance in rebuilding their houses. The Christian community offered to provide them economic assistance.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

On May 1, 2007, three small, near-simultaneous explosions occurred at railway stations in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. There were no deaths, and only one injury. Police recovered signs at two blast sites with anti-Ahmadiyya inscriptions, along with a demand that NGO workers cease their work in Bangladesh within 10 days. The government ordered increased security at key installations, including Ahmadiyya institutions and NGOs. Although an unknown organization claiming to be a faction of Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks, the initial government findings were that these were the acts of a minor fringe group.

The Government executed six top leaders of the banned extremist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in March 2007. They had been charged with a series of bombings and suicide attacks in 2005, including the assassination of two judges in Jalakathi in November 2005. One of the deceased judges was Hindu, though there is no credible information that he was targeted because of his religion. The local prosecutor who argued the government's case in the Jalakathi killings was himself assassinated on April 11, apparently in reprisal for the JMB executions.

There have been no significant developments in the cases of the 2004 injury of the British high commissioner in a bomb explosion as he visited the Shahjalal Shrine. In February 2005, there were several explosions at Muslim shrines in the Sylhet area.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued not to enforce the ban on Ahmadiyya publications. Furthermore, protesters were generally stopped from hanging signs outside of Ahmadiyya mosques declaring them non-mosques or threatening the lives or property of Ahmadis. In March, police protected the local Ahmadiyya community when it removed an anti-Ahmadiyya signboard from one of their mosques in Khulna, the first time the police have provided such support.

The Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warned that action would be taken against those attempting to

disrupt the celebrations. Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Christian and Hindu festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, and Easter.

The Government helped support the Council for Interfaith Harmony-Bangladesh, an organization created in 2005 with a mandate to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence. This initiative came in response to a bombing campaign in the fall of 2005 by an Islamist extremist group seeking the imposition of Shari'a law. The organization has helped facilitate dialogue and panel discussions on religious matters, some of which have been covered by the local media.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives, religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes, were often unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they were often reluctant to seek recourse from a corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Police were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promotes an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against them. However, persons who practiced different religions often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their religious beliefs without interference from Sunnis.

Religious minorities were not underrepresented in the private sector. Some Hindus reported that Muslims tended to prefer hiring Hindus for some professional positions, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers and accountants.

Since 2001, it has been routine government practice to post law enforcement personnel at religious festivals and events, since religious gatherings are usually large and make easy and more attractive targets. Reported incidents included killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. These claims continued during the period covered by this report; however, many such reports could not be verified independently, and there were incidents of members of the Muslim community attacking each other on holidays as well, due to a perception that some events were un-Islamic. The Government sometimes failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who were often local gang leaders.

Attacks against the Hindu community at the hand of societal actors continued. According to the Bangladesh Buddhist-Hindu-Christian Unity Council, during the period from January to November 2006 there were a total of 86 killings, 174 attacks on temples, and 80 incidents of assault, rape, theft, looting, or other intimidation.

According to human rights organizations, the military continued to attempt to evict 120 families, 85 percent of them Hindu, from land in the Mirpur area of Dhaka abutting the military cantonment. A temple is also located on the property. The eviction was being carried out on the basis of a 1961 land purchase agreement by the military. The land owners challenged the land acquisition and eviction in court, and the case is still pending.

On June 26, 2007, according to press reports, a group of Muslim villagers attacked recent converts to Christianity in the village of Durbachari. On June 12 several dozen Hindus and Muslims converted to Christianity. In the June 26 incident, a group of Muslims in the village allegedly attacked some of the converts and gave them 24 hours to leave the village. Two or three Christians were injured when they were struck with sticks. Police have stationed a special protective team in the village Durbachari to prevent violence and ensure the converts are able to remain in their homes and work their fields. Police officers are also increased patrols of the village, and by the end of the period covered by this report, the district police superintendent had taken steps to reduce tensions in the area.

On April 28, 2007, Taher Miah raped a 10 year old Hindu girl from the village of Shibnagar. The family of the child filed a police complaint, and Taher was arrested.

On April 19, 2007, police arrested Abdul Malek in connection with the gang rape of a Hindu girl in Toktabonia, Amtali district. Reportedly, she left the village with the perpetrator, who promised to help her find employment. Three other suspects in the crime are being sought by police.

In April 2007, leaders of the Catholic Khasia community in Moulvibazar complained to the local government about harassment by local Forestry Department officials, who oversee the Monchhara Forest where many Khasia live. They stated several forest officials were filing false cases against members of their community, including the head of the local Catholic mission, in order to intimidate them.

The Forestry Department has also been involved in allegations of abuse against minority communities in other parts of the country during the reporting period. On March 18, 2007, Choilesh Ritchil, a Christian Garo from Madhupur, was arrested by local soldiers along with a relative. According to human rights organizations, Ritchil was tortured to death at a local army camp. The relative was released after also being tortured. Ritchil and other local Garos have also been involved in a legal battle with the Forestry Department, which oversees the Madhupur Forest where many Garos live

and work. The army denied torturing Ritchil, and claimed he died when he was intoxicated and ran into a tree while fleeing on foot.

The government arrested several high-level Forestry Department officials and charged them with corruption. Since these arrests, no new charges have been filed against indigenous groups living in the forests, and harassment has been curtailed considerably.

On October 28, 2006, Bashir Ahmed, a 27-year old Muslim, kidnapped Mary Das, a 12-year old Hindu girl in Chittagong and married her after conversion into Islam. Police failed to recover the girl or arrest Bashir Ahmed even after the girl's father filed a criminal case. Human rights investigators stated Bashir Ahmed habitually teased Mary Das on her way to school and lured her into going with him on the day of the kidnapping. Police filed charges against Bashir Ahmed and his relatives under the Prevention of Repression on Women and Children Act. Bangladeshi law prohibits marriage under 18 years of age.

Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period.

Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. During 2006 religious leaders issued 39 fatwas, demanding punishments ranging from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members.

There were approximately 100 thousand Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. While mainstream Muslims rejected some of the Ahmadiyya teachings, the majority supported Ahmadis right to practice without fear or persecution. However, Ahmadis continued to be subject to harassment and violence from those who denounced their teachings.

Since 2004, anti-Ahmadiyya extremists such as the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh and a splinter group, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolon Bangladesh (KNAB), have publicly demanded that the Government pass legislation declaring Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. The Government rejected the ultimatums and successfully kept protesters a safe distance from all Ahmadiyya buildings. According to media reports, State Minister for Religious Affairs, Mosharef Hossain Shajahan, stated "There may be difference of opinion among the followers of a religion, but no one can attack others for such a difference." The Ahmadiyya community complimented the Government for its responsiveness to their concerns and its professional handling of the protests.

The three small bombs that went off on May 1 in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet left one person in Chittagong injured. Signs left at the scenes of two of the bombings included messages threatening Ahmadis and NGOs. Police immediately increased protection of Ahmadiyya facilities around the country.

Local officials forced the cancellation of a regional Ahmadiyya conference in Panchagarh, scheduled for March 30 and 21, 2007, because of unspecified alleged security concerns. On January 11, 2007, police recovered 11 unexploded bombs from an Ahmadiyya graveyard in Brahmanbaria.

In early March 2007 police helped Ahmadiyya leaders remove an anti-Ahmadiyya signboard from their mosque in Khulna. The signboard read that the building was not a mosque and the Ahmadiyyas were not Muslims. The removal of the signboard was the first such action by police.

In June 2006, the KNAB again issued demands that the Government declare Ahmadis non-Muslims and on June 23, 2006, approximately 1,500 to 2,000 marchers attempted to seize an Ahmadiyya mosque near Dhaka. In response, police quickly deployed approximately 3 thousand police to prevent violence and prevent the protest from approaching the Ahmadiyya complex. KNAB supporters then attempted to block access to Dhaka-Zia International Airport but were stopped by the police. Some ten to twenty KNAB supporters were injured as a result. Following the KNAB's failure to seize the mosque, the group announced a dawn-to-dusk hartal (strike) and added the demand that Parliament pass a law declaring Muhammad as the last prophet; however, the hartal threat never materialized. A subsequent KNAB attempt to seize another Ahmadiyya mosque in Dhaka, in October 2006, was also dispersed by police before protestors were able to get near the facilities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with officials at all levels of the Government as well as with political party leaders and representatives of religious and minority communities. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy emphasized the importance of free and fair elections in early 2007, with a goal of averting the violence religious minorities experienced in 2001. When the elections were postponed and the state of emergency was declared, the Embassy expressed its concern about the need to respect human rights, including the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. Embassy staff traveled to regions of the country investigating human rights cases, including some involving religious minorities, and met with civil society members, NGOs, local religious leaders, and other citizens to discuss concerns about violence during the next election and to encourage law enforcement to take

proactive measures to protect the rights of religious minorities.

Embassy and visiting U.S. government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support.

The Embassy assisted U.S. faith-based relief organizations in guiding paperwork for approval of schools and other projects through government channels. The Government has been receptive to the discussion of such subjects and generally helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy has also acted as an advocate in the Home Ministry for these organizations in resolving problems with visas.

The Embassy encouraged the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After an initial pilot program, the U.S. Government provided, among other topics, course work for religious leaders on human rights and gender equality. For the second year in a row, the U.S. Government sponsored the visit of a prominent Muslim cleric from the United States to tour the country and speak to Bangladeshi audiences. He visited the northwestern city of Rajshahi and also addressed groups in Dhaka about Qur'anic interpretations that support religious tolerance and freedom, as well as gender equity.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Government continued to make religious freedom, especially the problems facing the Ahmadiyya community, a point of discussion in meetings with government officials. Embassy officers continued to visit the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom.

The Embassy continued to encourage Jamaat Islami to reiterate publicly its position that it supports tolerance and minority rights in the context of an attack on a religious minority member. Democracy and governance projects supported by the United States included tolerance and minority rights components.

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