

Bangladesh Seminar on

Elections, Democracy & the rule of Law

27 October 2015

House of Lords, London, United Kingdom

Here we highlights

-sufferings of minorities in Bangladesh-

Objectives

The objectives of my presentation are:

- To highlight **where Bangladesh was** at the time of its birth in term of practising the principles of democracy, nationalism, secularism and **where is it now.**
- Highlighting the **deteriorating minorities' situations in Bangladesh**
- What is to be done to **protect and establish the rule of Law and Democracy** in real term.

Constitution

- 1972 – Within a year of independence Bangladesh adopted a magnificent constitution having Secularism with democracy, socialism and nationalism as basic principles of the republic where politics based on religion was forbidden.
- **Lots of changes have been made since then...**
- In January 1975, the military government declared the “People’s Republic of Bangladesh” as the **“Islamic Republic of Bangladesh”** over state radio.
- And later in 1977, General Ziaur Rahman removed the principle of secularism from the preamble of the Constitution and added a clause that provided **“absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah.”** The decree was subsequently legitimized by the second parliament of Bangladesh.
- Similarly, during General Rahman’s regime, a purely Islamic address **‘Bismillaher Rahmaner Rahim’** was inserted at the beginning of the Constitutional text.

Constitution continues...

- General Hussein Muhammad Ershad went a step further in 1988 and perpetuated religion-based politics by **officially making Islam the state religion** through the 8th amendment to the Constitution.
- With the annulment of **the 5th amendment in 2010**, the concept of secularism was, at least **in part**, reinstated. But, inspite of the removal of the 5th amendment, the true meaning of secularism as enunciated during the early **1970's has yet to be applied to our society.**
- As I am emphasising on minorities issues here today, may I draw your attention to the current version-Part 1, paragraph 2A- where it says..... ..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.**

.....However in real term- Minorities passing their worst time ever.....

..They have been used and abused by all political parties as scapegoat..

...They were tortured and their temple and assets were always vandalized for no reasons....

Recent Attacks on Minorities

- 2001- “During the probe, we found a total of 355 politically motivated murders while 3,270 incidents of rape, arson, looting and other atrocities,”
- The gang rape case of Purnima Shil is well known to all.



- “BNP supporters reportedly attacked Hindus because of their perceived support for the rival Awami League party during elections”. – Amnesty International.

Recent Attacks on Minorities continues...

- 2013 – “Wave of violent attack against Hindu minority” – Amnesty International 7th March 2013.
- **Bangladesh minorities bear brunt of violence. Homes and places of worship targeted as violence sweeps country in aftermath of controversial war crimes verdicts...Al Jazeera 24 March 2013**



Ref: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/03/201332472510585942.html>

- Four people were killed and 34 were injured. 300 Hindu temples and 1500 business and properties destroyed – BHBCUC

Presented by: AJIT SAHA – Campaign for the Protection of Religious Minorities in Bangladesh (CPRMB)

Attacks on Minorities in Bangladesh

- 2014 - After the 5th January elections, it is widely reported that workers and supporters of the opposition parties began attacking the minority. “They raped, looted, vandalized and set the Hindu houses on fire in several districts across the country” – BBC



- Around 160 incidents of attacks and atrocities on Hindus took place in 21 districts after the January 5 parliamentary polls causing loss of Hindu properties worth ৳4 million. Such atrocities included injuring Hindu people, damaging their houses, temples and business establishments and setting them on fire, and looting valuables causing a loss of around ৳40 lakh in 70 of those attacks... The Daily Star, On 23 February 2014.
- It was condemned nationally and internationally

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Killings of Bloggers continues....

- Bangladesh is officially secular but critics say the government is indifferent to attacks on bloggers by Islamist militants.
- Recently, Blogger Avijit Roy, Annta Bijoy Das, Niloy Neel (from Hindu community)– all were killed due to their atheist or secular views.



No Justice

- There has been **no judicial trial** for any of the atrocities mentioned since 1990 except the trial of Purnima Shil.
- In 2014 the Government supported rehabilitation far better than before.
- **Justice is promised but yet to be delivered.**
- There is **no peace and liberty for general Hindus** in democratic Bangladesh
- It is an illusive concept.

Who is behind the attacks?

- All the major political parties are **blaming each other.**
- Majority media reports blaming BNP and Jamaat –they always denied it.
- They are **criminals and cowards.**

20% in 1971

Equality = Discrimination

9% in 2014

- **Political representation is far below** the percentage of population.
- **Top posts are very rare** in Judiciary, Army, Air Force, Navy, Police and Boarder Security Force.
- Lower level civil services are representative but not at top level.
- **Hindus** are treated as **second class** citizen in Bangladesh.

Equality = Discrimination

- **Land grabbing** has been going on since 1947 and continuing ever since. **Current ruling party's MPs and minister's names are also in the list.**

- The Vested property /Enemy Property Act 1965.

Until all the confiscated properties are returned to their rightful owners, the stigma of the Enemy/Vested Property Act will keep haunting our national ideals.

- Thousands of family affected and progress is poor to return the land to the rightful owners.
- **Killing Secular Bloggers became a regular event !**

Effect of Violence and Discrimination

- **Low moral.**
- Becoming **poorer and powerless** without any political and economic backing.
- **Ethnic cleansing – Minorities are migrating** in an ever increasing number. Less than 9% now from 20% in 1971.
- Their numbers is predicted to be **nil in 20 years** according to Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman of NHRC

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What Liberty and Equality means to Hindus in democratic Bangladesh ?

- **Constant attacks** since 1991.
- Attacks has been intensified in 2013 to 2015.
- “The Bangladesh Government **has failed completely to protect** the Hindus” Chairman NHRC (National Human Rights Commission)
- No Justice for them. **No trial of communal violence.**
- **Land grabbing since 1947** and the latest case was directly related with a MP of the ruling party.
- **No proper political representation.**
- Top posts are very rare in Judiciary, Army, Air Force, Navy, Police and Boarder Security Force.

Action to Protect Minorities

- **Complete Restoration of 1972 constitution in real term.**
- **Safety and security** - Immediate protection of the religious minorities by law enforcement agencies.
- **Judicial Enquiry** – To identify the perpetrator and bring them to justice. If there is any political party behind it they are to be named.
- **Speedy Trial** – **Justice delayed is justice denied.** Perpetrators to be put on trial quickly to set example to deter and assure the minority people.
- **Minority Protection Act – In line with British Race Relations Act 1968.**
- **Minority Commission / Ministry / Dept** – To monitor and evaluate all minority issues.
- Jobs in Army and Public Sectors – To be monitored by all the departments and periodic reports to be published.
- Resource allocation – **All initiatives to be adequately funded.**

The Rise of Islamic Fanaticism in democratic secular Bangladesh

- Bangladesh is a secular democracy. Recent survey shows that majority of the people would like it to remain so.
- The democratic, secular and religious minorities are terrified with the prospect of rising Islamic fanaticism in Bangladesh.
- The Western countries must understand from the mistakes in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Once those fanatics are in power terrorism will be exported.

Questions for the Government

- What Government will be doing to **combat the religious fanaticism** and to **improve the minorities democratic right??**.
- If they believe in true democratic secularism **then why are they afraid of taking action to ban politics in the name of religion.**
- What they will be doing in future to **promote and recruit religious minorities** in judiciary, military, and civil services?

Questions for the opposition

With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism some religious minorities have same questions:

- **Can Hindus rely more** on BNP and other parties than AL to protect them in the future?
- What is their **relationship** with the parties that do not believe in democratic secularism? **Like Jamaat and Hefazat.**
- Will they set up an independent judicial inquiry to investigate atrocities on minorities?

Conclusion – THANK YOU

- Thank you for your attention.
- **Discrimination** enshrined **in the Constitution**, or the supreme law of the land, **horrific incidents** of violence, **hidden discrimination** that violates basic rights, and the **legalized infringement of property rights** are the **major facets of the victimization of Hindus in Bangladesh**
- I hope that I have been able to make you aware of the sufferings of the minorities in Bangladesh.
- **Minorities need your help for their survival.**