

The problem with land policy

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If we evaluate the policy of land administration in Bangladesh, in the wider political and economic context, we will notice that the way in which land is currently administered remains firmly rooted in practices established during the colonial era. The British, from the outset, gave high priority to the organisation of a centrally controlled management system that was designed to maintain political control and secure a steady source of state finance.

Relatively little has changed in the post-independence era. Attempts at re-distributive reform through the establishment of land ceilings have been a feature of both the Pakistan and the Bangladesh periods. But whilst ostensibly designed to place land in the hands of the tiller, and to return water bodies to those who fish them, the reforms have largely been circumvented by the wealthy and powerful.

High population densities and increasing fragmentation of holdings mean, in any case, that the scope for re-distribution declines as time passes. Tenants' rights, including security of tenure, are enshrined in legislation. These are currently almost invariably ignored in practice, and may offer some scope for intervention.

Measures are also in place promising the landless access to government land created by alluvion, and to a range of water bodies. NGOs concerned with the land issue have tended, in recent years, to focus their attention on the different means by which these rights may, in practice, be secured.

If we go through the land policy and administration timeline, we will see that Hindu rulers of ancient India introduced land revenue systems. Sher Shah reforms introduced a regular system of land measurement, together with the assessment and collection of revenue. The British established an elaborate system of land surveys and registration based on the concept of net assets. This was designed to encourage the peasantry to settle in remote and marginal land, thus boosting revenue collection. The system continues, with some modifications, in the very different circumstances that now prevail.

In 1793, the Permanent Settlement Act vested rights to own land to a class of zamindars. Whilst intended to usher in the re-organisation of agriculture along capitalist lines, this had the actual effect of creating multiple-layers of sub-tenants.

In 1882, the Transfer of Property Act, the forerunner of the present registration procedures, was passed. From 1888 to 1940, a Cadastral Survey (CS) of undivided Bengal created the original record of land rights. This is often still accepted as evidence by modern courts.

In 1908, the Registration Act established land registers kept by the sub-registrar, an official under the Ministry of Law. These assess and collect "ad valorem" based registration fees, stamp duty and transfer tax, and provide deeds relating to the transfer of land. Ninety thousand cadastral maps, covering the whole of contemporary

Bangladesh, were published in 1927. These are still considered to be the most reliable cartographic record by modern courts.

In 1946, the Tebhaga sharecroppers' movement campaigned for reforms in ratios and procedures governing division of produce. But nobody, now, really represents their interests, or carries the movement forward.

In 1947, Pakistan continued with a version of the net asset system but this declined in importance due to reduced frequency of settlements and poor maintenance of land records. In 1950, the zamindari system was abolished. Control of land was passed to the Revenue Department, which subsequently became the Ministry of Land.

The 1951 East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act (EBSATA) promoted the goal of retaining the agricultural character of land by giving cultivators first right of purchase and prohibiting other uses; but the large number of exceptions, and poor enforcement, diluted its impact. A land ceiling of 33.3 acres was imposed.

From 1950 to the early 1970s, a leftist movement targeted the landless poor and marginal farmers, but whilst land reform continued to excite the popular imagination, little was done by way of implementation. From 1956 to 62 a State Acquisition Survey was conducted, based on the CS blueprint, and in 1961, land ceiling was raised to 125 acres. In 1965 survey and revisional settlement operations commenced, but progress was very slow and by 1995 it had only been completed in 10% of all thanas.

In 1972, a land ceiling of 33.3 acres was re-established and various presidential orders provided for the distribution of khas land amongst the landless. It was expected that 2.5 million acres of excess land would be released, but in reality there was far less.

In 1976, a variety of land-related charges were consolidated into the Land Development Tax, which covers the whole country except CHT, but deficiencies in the record system mean that individual holdings cannot be checked, and switches to more heavily taxed non-agricultural uses frequently go unrecorded.

In 1984, the Land Reform Ordinance limited future land acquisitions to 21 acres whilst retaining present ceilings. Benami (ceiling avoiding) transfers to relations were outlawed, but again evasion was easy. Legal recognition to the rights of sharecroppers was given for the first time, and sharecropping was established as the only admissible form of tenancy contract.

In the late 1980s, the Mueyed Committee recommended that functions of Land Registration (sub-registrar) and record (Tehsil) be brought together in a single office at field level, but this was ignored.

In 1988, the cluster village program resettled landless people on state land, but only 800, with some 32,000 households, had been formed by 1996. In 1989, Board of Land Administration split into Land Appeals Board and Land Reforms Board to deal with the ever increasing volume of quasi-judicial appeals. In 1991, a land administration manual lay down detailed instructions regarding inspection and supervision of Union and Thana land offices.

In 1997, a new Agricultural Khas Land Management and Settlement Policy was introduced. In 1998, total khas land was found to be 0.75 million acres (or 3% of arable land area). But the actual amount remains unclear as a result of de facto private control arising from

informal local settlements.

The present day administration of land splits into four different functions, divided between two ministries. The Directorate of Land Records and Surveys (DLRS) in the Ministry of Land conducts cadastral surveys, from which it produces mouza (revenue village) maps showing individual plots of land and khatian (individual land record certificates).

The Land Reform Board, also in the Ministry of Land, has a number of functions that it discharges through Upazilla Land Offices and Union Tehsil offices. It administers Khas (public) land, and manages abandoned and vested property. It updates maps and land records between surveys, and sets and collects the Land Development Tax. It is also formally responsible for the implementation of land reform legislation and the implementation of tenant's rights.

The Land Appeals Board (again in the Ministry of Land), is the highest revenue court in the land, serving as the final arbiter in matters of khas land, changes in records, plot demarcation and taxation which cannot be resolved at lower levels. As such, it represents the final link in a chain running upwards from the Assistant Commissioner (Land) and the Nirbahi Officer at the Upazilla, through the Additional Deputy Collector (Revenue) and the Deputy Revenue Collector at the District.

Finally, the Department of Land Registration in the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs records land mutations arising through sale, inheritance or other forms of transfer, and reports changes to the Ministry of Land as well as collects the Immovable Property Transfer Tax.

The land survey process is referred to as land settlement and is administered by the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys. At headquarters there is a diara settlement officer who oversees surveys in riverine areas and major urban

centres where frequent changes of ownership take place.

The Amin and two chairmen are responsible for drawing revised mouza map showing changes in area, location and characteristics of land followed by demarcation of boundaries. These are temporary junior staff. Insecurity and low pay affect their morale, performance, accuracy and reliability. Besides, they have to depend on the local elite for board and lodging during season and are thus open to their influence.

Display of notices and beating of drums summons owners, neighbours and interested parties to khatianpur at which each claimant presents his case and the Amin fills up the columns of the khatian form giving plot number, khatian number, classification of land that affects land revenue, area, crops grown, name of owner, agricultural practices, and this khatian also officially contains information on tenancy since 1984 Land Reform. Again poorly paid field workers are susceptible to bribery here. Besides, in practise, tenancy is rarely recorded because of pressure from the rich.

Tehsildar, assisted by a clerk, hears each owner, listens to any disputes and, if satisfied, attests the khatian by signing it in red. Otherwise a re-survey may be ordered. Sixty khatians may be attested in a day, but there are particular backlogs at this stage. It may take two years to clear the work of one field season.

Where objections arise, cases are heard by ASO with decisions recorded in violet. Under these circumstances, these mid level staffs have few chances for promotion, and extra field allowances that used to be provided have been stopped. Naturally this encourages corruption.

ZSO and ASO hear appeals at Upazilla level and some are referred to District level where decisions marked in black. Again long delays are caused by shortage of suitably qualified staff to hear

appeals.

Map correction, amalgamation and splitting up of jamas (interests) are done by the permanent surveyors and their supporting staffs. As documents are about to be dispatched for printing, powerful local people often intervene to lobby for changes.

Formerly, both khatians and maps were printed centrally at DLRS presses. Zonal offices now produce khatians, which has speeded up the process, but maps continue to be printed centrally and compositors names are now printed on khatians which has significantly reduced tampering at this stage. Methods are antiquated and equipment is obsolete. Besides, newly promoted, inexperienced officials are usually given responsibility for complex tasks. Khatians and maps arriving heavily exceed the capacity to process, causing increasing backlog (estimates of size of which vary widely).

Once completed, copies of the ROR are passed to DC, thana, and union land offices for land management, with originals retained in the district office, under lock and key.

The records are then updated as a consequence of sale, and transfer is done through mutation process. Tehsil registers are not freely open to inspection, but for payment of a small fee, landowners are formally entitled to a certified copy of the ROR and mouza map. In this situation, local officials are unable to keep records updated. If they could, there would be no need for revisional settlement. In practice a substantial bribe must be paid to access registers, effectively restricting access to the better off.

In the case of the land transfer process through sale the reality is that some transfers occur on an entirely unofficial basis, perhaps when land is mortgaged, but this is becoming less common. Some buyers may not check the AC records first and even if they do, these may well not be up to date. The deed writers and Sub-Registrar

collude to ensure that this step only proceeds if a bribe is paid first, whilst the buyer and seller may also collude to reduce the amount of Immoveable Property Transfer Tax (IPTT), which is levied at 10% of the sale value. There is no requirement to check the legality of the transaction and it is not uncommon for the same plot to be "sold" to several different buyers, although this is much more frequent in urban areas. This is supposed to be issued within a month, but frequently takes a year and the payment of a bribe. The AC (Land) generally does not update the record unless he is paid a bribe to do so.

The diversity of ways in which land records may be updated and the problems associated with each, give rise to numerous disputes in which the rich and powerful inevitably enjoy the upper hand. Where a decision relating to the recording of land title is disputed, the appeals process starts from Tehsildar and then moves progressively upwards until the appellants, and other interested parties, either accept the judgement given, or lack the resources to proceed further.

Many issues are dealt with in informal local shalish and so never reach the Land Appeals Board. Where suits do enter the formal system, the cost is considerable and suits can take 15-20 years to resolve, with different parties often each in possession of documentation from different official bodies. Only the rich and well connected are able to climb all the way to the top.

Where a settlement survey is under operation, appeals passing beyond the Tehsildar are supposed to be heard by the ASO and if not resolved there then pass on directly to the District level. All civil court proceedings relating to land should formally be suspended when a settlement is in process, but this would lead to even further delays and is thus generally ignored, adding further confusion by having two channels in operation at the same time.

What will elections bring?

If Bangladesh could ever create autonomous regional governments, much of the concentration of power that is facilitating unprecedented corruption would start melting away in the competitive environment among the elected governments. The essence of democracy is in decentralization and debate. Local, regional, and central government together will anchor democracy in Bangladesh, break monopoly of power and cut down corruption. The idea is neither new nor illogical.

BRIG GEN (RETD) JAHANGIR KABIR NDC, PSC

It is not fair to say that the people are suffering from election mania these days. A large majority of the public seems to be resigned to the misfortune of another round of stale elections.

Will elections bring down the endemic corruption, or nepotism or favouritism in government offices? Can elections do anything to improve the law and order situation, or stop extra-judicial killings? Will power generation and distribution improve? Will teachers and labourers get a better deal? Will people get some relief from the skyrocketing prices of essentials?

How rich does one have to be to seek public office? Can people themselves bear the cost of electioneering or do they have to again vote for rich migrant politicians, being offered little choice? Is it going to be a free, fair, and transparent election? This host of questions is agitating the public mind.

How can the most corrupt country in the world have a free, fair, and transparent election? When the corruption in the political arena is increasing at an alarming rate, even after becoming world champion, the politicians still claim that people are very much enthusiastic.

Personally, my interest in voting has dwindled a great deal since the last time, for I do not want to be a party to the country's most corrupt in the world status. Where are the honest faces, or new mechanisms that can generate some measure of hope?

If there is tons of black money rolling, it will be out to buy the election. Regarding the Anti-Corruption Commission, a Dhaka University professor told me: "We have everything in our hospitals except the doctor and the medicine."

Bangladesh has all kinds of commissions and ombudsmen along with most corrupt in the world status. Paper commissions are at least better than the real ones, as paper ones do not waste taxpayer money.

Officially, a candidate cannot spend more than Tk 600,000. On the ground, this is a joke. Election expenditure varies between Tk 20 million and 200 million -- affordable only to the ultra rich few. Money and muscle are, mostly, the deciding factors in national elections.

Who has a minimum of twenty million and willingness to spend to become an MP for the next five years? That is a minimum of pro rata Tk 4 million for every year of joining the national parliament -- equivalent to an expensive apartment in Gulshan for every year's membership in this exclusive club.

Election Commission, a classical Nidhi Ram Sharkar, lot of egotism without matching ability, is happy as long as they get expenditure bill of less than Tk 600,000. The way money was wasted on the voter list alone, people might not be too unhappy if somebody steals the taxpayer's money outright.

Metro Dhaka has only nine parliamentary constituencies, but the residents of the capital provide over eighty percent of the candidates in national assembly election.

It is like tendering for business all over the countryside when only the first class contractors of Dhaka can compete.

The people of rural Bangladesh, where 80% of the people live, can only vote (if they are lucky), but cannot compete in the election because it is too expensive for them. That is how people outside Dhaka are deceived by a fine finesse in the name of so-called adult franchise and democracy. The all-important election for the fairness of governance in the present pattern of one vote in five years is dangerously close to a failed mechanism.

We have to quickly find out a more meaningful system of governance to earn the confidence of the people. After they have gone through three successive democratic franchises with tolerable interruption, rural people find fault in both election and absentee representation.

Democratically elected governments are legal, but when legality fails to blend with ethics, deprivation and frustration threaten the stability of a society. The unprecedented growth of terrorism is the result of social frustration. Democracy is increasingly failing to stop people from coming on to the streets for their basic needs.

The people of the countryside must have more participation and resident politicians of Dhaka must not monopolise the politics of Bangladesh. If the caretaker government is necessary for fair election, a minimum period of residency in the constituency may be made a condition for the representation of the people in the parliament.

Most of the black money is earned, and hoarded, in Dhaka. Politicians in the rural areas do not have that kind of money. Resident politicians should be empowered to contest the election in their home constituencies to cut down black money influence and muscle power. It will automatically reduce the election expenditure.

Besides, elected upazilla councils may not be a panacea, but they will fill the void and work as a brake on the free run of the non-resident politicians. That is why MPs and Dhaka based politicians are so much against the upazilla election. All quarters, including intellectuals, must ask for upazilla election along with the national one.

If Bangladesh could ever create autonomous regional governments, much of the concentration of power that is facilitating unprecedented corruption would start melting away in the competitive environment among the elected governments. The essence of democracy is in decentralization and debate. Local, regional, and central government together will anchor democracy in Bangladesh, break monopoly of power and cut down corruption.

The idea is neither new nor illogical. Between upazilla and central government, we are feeling the void of middle government (regional or provincial) by the bureaucrats in districts and divisions. It is ridiculous to conceive of an elected local government (upazilla) under bureaucratic middle government (districts and divisions). Those who are interested to see the people of Bangladesh get a better deal must work on three layers of government.

Who is to blame for road accidents?

It is clear that both pedestrians and drivers on the one hand had incomplete knowledge of traffic rules, and on the other hand, their observed behaviour proved that they disregarded the rules. This blatant, and at times nonchalant, disregard for traffic rules can only spell disaster, and it is. Various awareness programs for the pedestrians and drivers, and enforcement of the traffic rules could improve this situation, and bring down the number of such road accidents.

MD ABDUL ALIM

RECENTLY World Health Organization (WHO) predicted that by 2020 road accidents will be the third leading cause of "disability adjusted life years" (DALY), putting road safety well ahead of wars, HIV/Aids, malaria and other "acts of violence" as a health problem.

Around one million fatalities are caused by road accidents each year, of which the vast majority is in the developing countries. The rate of road accidents is increasing in number, especially when compared with highly motorized countries. Road safety problems represent a very significant domestic, social, and economic problem in developing countries.

Globally, it is estimated that road accidents cost over \$500 billion each year, and on the other hand, \$65 billion each year in developing countries (based on a typical cost of between 1 and 4 percent of a country's gross national product).

In low-income countries and regions the majority of road deaths are among pedestrians, drivers, passengers, cyclists, users of motorized two wheelers, and occupants of buses and minibuses. Bangladesh faces these challenges severely. People are dying everyday.

Statistics show that the death rate per ten thousand registered vehicles is 125 persons in this country. The main, amongst many, reasons behind the accidents are their ignorance of different road

safety issues. In other words, lack of formal training to drive, and tendency to ignore traffic law, narrow roads, roads with many turns, unauthorized vehicles, overloaded vehicles, and illegal parking are the main causes of accidents.

With a view to assessing the level of knowledge and behaviour of pedestrians and drivers of the eastern part of Bangladesh, a study was conducted on 831 pedestrians and 170 drivers. A total number of 1,856 pedestrians and 2,400 vehicles in six spots of a road were observed to determine behaviour. Some important road safety issues were included in this study.

Pedestrians' knowledge regarding rules of walking and crossing road, following signs and symbols, and drivers' knowledge of vehicles, rules of overtaking, speed, using lanes, conforming to traffic signs and symbols were determined.

The study shows that less than half of the pedestrians had knowledge of walking along the right side of the road. 63% percent of them knew that a group of pedestrians must walk in line instead of walking side by side. Besides, pedestrians should use lamps while walking at night but half of the respondents did not know they should carry lamps.

In most cases, the driver is thought to be guilty for causing an accident. But the pedestrians are also to blame in many cases. The survey shows that very few pedestrians knew how to use the zebra-crossing and over-bridges to cross roads. Where there were no such

provisions that they can avail of, over half of the respondents did not know that they should have a look to the left and the right side of the road before crossing. Very few know that they had to stand at a safe place before they were about to cross over. The survey further revealed that very few pedestrians had the notion of following signs and symbols. Majority of them did not know that gossiping and selling goods on the roads might obstruct the traffic and increase the risk of accidents.

The pedestrian should walk along the right side of the road to avoid getting into accidents. It was seen in the observation of pedestrians that one-third of them walked along the right side of the road and majority of them did not walk in lines. The study reveals that only 36% pedestrians stood at a safe place of the road, and out of these, more than half of them did not look both sides before crossing.

The issues that are considered in this study are very important for the drivers. These are: speed, overtaking other vehicles, changing lanes, overloading of vehicles, following signs and symbols, illegal parking, and driving vehicles under the effect of medicines for specific diseases.

The survey brought to light that the majority of drivers did not have legal license, blue book, and insurance and fitness certificates, and they, like pedestrians, were very little aware of road safety issues. There is a specific speed limit for drivers on local roads and on high-

ways. With regard to overtaking, the majority of the drivers (89%) considered turning of a road to be a very risky place to overtake while very few of them knew overtaking is forbidden at the junction of roads, zebra-crossing, and near narrow bridges.

As regards changing of lanes, half of the drivers did not know the rules of changing lanes while driving their vehicles. They also had incomplete knowledge of the lines drawn on the road. Their knowledge of signs and symbols was also very poor.

As a whole, drivers not only had little knowledge, but their behaviour also proved that they did not care about the traffic rules and regulations. The practice of entering into highways from side roads was observed. On the other hand, they did not follow the overtaking rules. Majority of the drivers did not park their vehicles in right places. Drivers also ignored the rule regarding overloading, which is one of the greatest risk factors on the road. Most of the vehicles observed on the road were overloaded. Drivers should not drive after taking medication for fever and cold because this type of medicine causes drowsiness and tiredness, and may cause accident. Almost half of the drivers ignored this rule.

It is clear that both pedestrians and drivers on the one hand had incomplete knowledge of traffic rules, and on the other hand, their observed behaviour proved that they disregarded the rules. This blatant, and at times nonchalant, disregard for traffic rules can only spell disaster, and it is. Various awareness programs for the pedestrians and drivers, and enforcement of the traffic rules could improve this situation, and bring down the number of such road accidents. Otherwise, the impact of this type of accidents, caused by sheer ignorance, will continue to affect us as well as our future generations.

If you want sharia law, you should go and live in Saudi

SHAHID MALIK

SCOTLAND Yard described it as a plot "to commit mass murder on an unimaginable scale." John Reid, UK Home Secretary, concurred, "The terror threat to the public was unprecedented, the biggest that Britain had ever faced." As it transpired, there was nothing melodramatic about these descriptions. It was to be a "terror spectacular" beyond our worst nightmares, involving blowing up a dozen aeroplanes in mid-air over the Atlantic Ocean, with the wiful massacre of more than 1,000 innocent men, women and children.

Last Tuesday, after a 90-minute meeting with John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, to discuss the challenges of extremism and foreign policy, I emerged and was immediately asked by the media whether I agreed that what British Muslims needed were Islamic holidays and sharia (Islamic law), I

thought I had walked into some parallel universe.

Sadly this was not a joke. These issues had apparently formed part of the discussion the day before between Prescott, Ruth Kelly, the communities minister, and a selection of "Muslim leaders." I realised then that it wasn't me and the media who were living in a parallel universe -- although certain "Muslim leaders" might well be.

Maybe some of these "leaders" believed that cabinet ministers were being alarmist, that the terror threat posed by British extremists was exaggerated. Maybe they thought that the entire plot and threat were the "mother of all smokescreens," a bid to divert our attention from the killing fields of Lebanon. Or maybe it was another symptom of that epidemic that is afflicting far too many Muslims: denial. Out of touch with reality, frightened to propose any real

solutions for fear of "selling out," but always keen to exact a concession - a sad but too often true caricature of some so-called Muslim leaders.

Other members of the Muslim community I am sure would have cringed as I did when listening to Dr Syed Aziz Pasha, secretary-general of the Union of Muslim Organisations of the UK and Ireland, who explained his demand for sharia and more holidays: "If you give us religious rights we will be in a better position to convince young people that they are being treated equally along with other citizens." He has done much good work over the years but this is clearly not one of his better moments.

Who speaks for Muslims? The government has a near impossible task but I'm sure even it realises that we need to look beyond some of the usual suspects and, crucially, to find mechanisms directly to engage with young people, where

many of our challenges lie. To me the plot seemed all too real: I flew back from the United States that very week; my sister, her husband and their two kids live in New York so we all regularly shuttle to and fro. If the alleged plot had been realised we could all have been "statistics".

As I have repeatedly said, in this world of indiscriminate terrorist bombings, where Muslims are just as likely to be the victims of terrorism as other British and US citizens, we Muslims have an equal stake in fighting extremism. Hundreds of Muslims died on 9/11 and 7/7. But more importantly, given that these acts are carried out in the name of our religion -- Islam -- we have a greater responsibility not merely to condemn but to confront the extremists. In addition to being the targets of terrorism, Muslims will inevitably be the targets of any backlash.

Given this context, most Muslims

will perhaps feel disappointed at some of the comments of those "leaders" who went in to bat on their behalf. Of course self-indulgent bad timing is not the sole preserve of Muslim leaders: David Cameron's gross misjudgment of the national mood in his criticisms of how the government had failed to keep us safe and secure were just as crass. Cameron's stance, in undermining the unity required from our leaders on such occasions of national unease, played into the extremists' hands.

So too, unfortunately, did the comments of some of the "Muslim leaders" who demanded sharia for British Muslims rather than the existing legal system. The call for special public holidays for Muslims was unnecessary, impracticable and divisive. Most employers already allow their staff to take such days out of their annual leave. And what about special holidays for

Sikhs, Hindus, Jews? If we amended our laws to accommodate all such requests, then all the king's horses and all the king's men wouldn't be able to put our workplaces and communities back together again.

When it comes to sharia, Muhammad ibn Adam, the respected Islamic scholar, says: "It is necessary by sharia to abide by the laws of the country one lives in, regardless of the nature of the law, as long as the law doesn't demand something that is against Islam." It is narrated in the Koran that the prophet Muhammad (pbu) said, "It is necessary upon a Muslim to listen to and obey the ruler, as long as one is not ordered to carry out a sin." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2796 and Sunan Tirmidhi).

In Britain there are no laws that force Muslims to do something against sharia and Muslims enjoy the freedom to worship and follow

their religion, as do all other faiths. Compare Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, a sharia regime where women are forbidden to drive; or Turkey, a secular country where women are forbidden to wear the hijab; or Tunisia, where civil servants are forbidden to wear a beard.

I believe that as a Muslim there is no better place to live than Britain. That doesn't mean that all in the garden is rosy; often Islamophobia is palpable. But my message is: whether you are white, Asian, black, Muslim, Christian or Jew, if you don't like where you're living you have two choices: either you live elsewhere, or you engage in the political process, attempt to create change and ultimately respect the will of the majority.

When Lord Ahmed, the Muslim Labour peer, heard my comments -- I said essentially that if Muslims wanted sharia they should go and

live somewhere where they have it -- he accused me of doing the BNP's [British National Party's] work. He is entitled to his opinion. However, a little honesty, like mine, in this whole debate might just restore trust in politicians and ease the population's anxieties.

Since I made my remarks, my office has been overwhelmed with support. I also know that some Muslims feel uncomfortable, not necessarily because they disagree but because they feel targeted. But what I want to say to my fellow British Muslims is that in this country we enjoy freedoms, rights and privileges of which Muslims elsewhere can only dream. We should appreciate that fact and have the confidence to fulfil the obligations and responsibilities as part of our contract with our country and as dictated by sharia law.

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