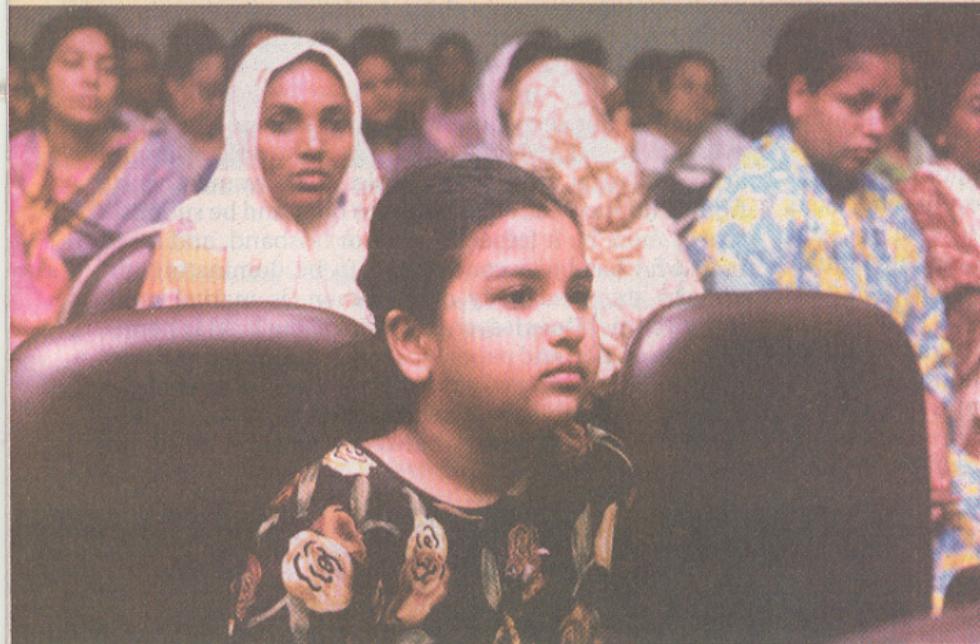


HUMAN RIGHTS: LOCAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Activism on Call

ELITA KARIM

The plenary session on 'Human Rights: Local and Global Perspectives,' dealt with the issues and rights concerning religious minorities and indigenous communities. Sara Hossain, Supreme Court Advocate, spoke about the rights belonging to the various indigenous communities and strongly opposed the military occupation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.



"I see no reason as to why I, as a citizen of this country, should go through the military checks and attain all kinds of permissions in order to visit those areas, which happen to be a part of Bangladesh," she stated.

According to Hossain, the media plays a very important role by allowing these communities to better understand their rights, thereby enabling them to fight injustice. "We should take advantage of media, the various NGOs in the country and the organisations like Manusher Jonno, for instance and have them portray the truth, which many courts and law enforcers in the country are unable to do," she said.

Hossain stated that religion was being used as a pretext to breach laws and create strife between people, thereby violating human rights in the process. She mentioned that the day the court was going to give its hearing on the banning of the Ahmadiyya books, the entire area

was filled with religious fanatics. She said: "One may call them extremists or fundamentalists. They were lined up in the courtroom, spreading a silent tremor within everyone present, including the judge. This was done only to prove that they could have their own way, and would go to any level possible to get the judgement inclined towards their own wishes."

Advocate Shahdeen Malik stressed that the creation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) violated human rights, despite the fact that they were initially there for public protection and security. "It's sometimes a wonder and ridiculous to have the atrocities committed by RAB splayed all over newspaper headlines every other day," exclaimed Malik. "Not only do we know the exact name and the identity of the person who gets killed by RAB, but also the exact time as well."

Asma Jehangir discussed the issue of human rights from a global point of view. "It's a wide subject and rather vague," she began. "Trying to establish a proper attitude towards human rights is like trying to catch one little fish in the ocean." According to Jehangir, one cannot always get everything done in courts.

"One has to develop hunches and intuitions to have a firm stand and fight it," she said. "I have worked in both the levels, from grass-root to the United Nations. Believe me when I say that human rights are respected much more in the grass-root levels rather than within the higher officials." She also explained that the UN is made up of governments of various countries of the world, and hence is "slow, if not retarded".

"An activist always has to stay thick-skinned," said Jehangir. "He/she should never give up and continue with the activity as long as possible." Although the world has progressed technologically, Jehangir claimed that it is like "moving a mountain if it comes to changing the mentality of a society. If we do not have open minds, we won't be able to relate ourselves with others and thus feel the need to have human rights."