

Why Muslims

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conference room at the UN Headquarters.

More than a year has gone by since thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar's Rakhine State to escape "genocide" in their homeland, Hasina mentioned. "We cannot just ignore the plight of the forcibly evicted Rohingyas in one of the largest displacements in human history. Currently, we're hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh."

Hasina said repression on the Rohingya Muslims is nothing new. Their exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh had taken place in three phases -- in 1978, 1991-92 and 2017-18, and their recent exodus is the biggest one. The repatriation of the Rohingyas to their homeland does not seem to be the only sustainable solution to the problem, she said underscoring the need for collective responsibility and ensuring the rights and privileges of the Rohingyas by Myanmar.

The PM said it is the people of Bangladesh who are bearing the brunt of the Rohingya crisis time and again.

"The government has stood by the Rohingyas by opening the border and providing emergency support, having been guided by our morale and human principles. However, our resolution to humanity should not be penalised. The prolonged presence of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh poses serious challenges to our economy, environment and security."

She mentioned that as a responsible neighbour, Bangladesh has engaged with Myanmar in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis from the very beginning.

"We have signed two instruments for repatriation of the Rohingyas ... However, persistent international pressure can complement the bilateral front to change Myanmar's well-planned political position of annihilating an entire race."

She urged the Muslim Ummah to mount pressure on Myanmar to create conducive environment for sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas and ensuring accountability of those who committed atrocities against the Muslim minority.

Hasina also stressed the importance of the OIC member states' engagement in the UN system, including the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, as well as other relevant international organisations to address the massive human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims.

"Above all, we need to solve the issue at the earliest."

The PM also mentioned that she proposed a five-point action last September for resolving the Rohingya crisis peacefully.

"It's a matter of great regret that the repatriation process is yet to start. "I would like to reiterate that the Rohingya crisis is a political one deeply rooted in Myanmar. Thus, its solution lies with Myanmar," she said.

OIC Secretary General Yousef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimeen was present at the programme.

Global

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General's Special Envoy on Myanmar Ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini at the UN headquarters.

Shahidul said the heads of the international agencies also hoped that the next general election would be a free, fair and participatory one.

While discussing the Rohingya issue, they highly praised Hasina for her liberal policy and humane gesture in this regard.

Shahidul said the PM emphasised that the international community should create a pressure so that Rohingyas could go back to Myanmar soon.

Christine Burgener said she would be able to convince the Myanmar government to create a conducive environment in the northern Rakhine State so that the Rohingya could go back to their country.

Magistrate, cops

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On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued the victims.

Talking to The Daily Star, Safiul Alam, additional deputy commissioner of Pabna, said the victims were taking important government documents to Pabna from BG Press in the capital. Setu was leading the seven-member team.

Two navy

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added the ISPR director.

According to sources, the incident happened at Bangladesh Navy Ship -- Titas -- at the outer anchorage's firing range around 3:00pm.

After the incident, the ship reached Chattogram's Patenga area in the evening.

We're not vote bank

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election in 1991, yet again creating a communal atmosphere. And the party that came to power carried out torture and repression on the minority people for 27 straight days.

Similar incitements of communal hatred were also perpetrated before the 2001 elections. And we saw a continued repression on the minority communities during the five-year tenure of the BNP-led alliance government. There was an exception in the 2008 polls and we anticipated that such incidents will never repeat.

But that was not to be. Since 2013, there have been communal attacks over the war crimes trial. In almost all the elections -- be it national or local government -- in the last five years, we saw minority communities being attacked although most of the candidates in those elections were from the ruling Awami League. But regrettably, the state and the administration remained silent. In fact, no visible step has been taken by any political party or government against the perpetrators since 1991.

As the national election is approaching, we fear that the minority communities might again become the easy target of communal attacks.

TDS: The minority people are often considered a "vote bank" of the Awami League, a party that has been in power for about 10 years. Why does such a fear exist then?

Rana: The religious and ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh are not the vote bank of any political party. They were the victims of destruction, genocide and rape during the Liberation War in 1971. They were forced to leave the country. Most of the 1 crore refugees at that time were from the minority communities. Despite such sacrifices, they are sometimes considered to be trouble or danger in this independent Bangladesh. Still, the minorities cling to the Liberation War as the spirit of the war is something that is related with their existence.

Now in the politics dominated by two parties, the minorities think that they have no alternative except one party. When the Bangalee nationalism was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism after the 1975 change-over, it was actually a replacement of religion-based Pakistani nationalism. So we are not the vote bank of any particular political party, they are in favour of the language-based nationalism.

The minority communities across the globe always favour comparatively democratic and secular forces. Even in India, the minorities have political alternatives. But because of the two-party political system in Bangladesh, the minorities have no alternative here.

Now the candidates for whom the minority people cast vote assume that the votes are their right. Some of them think that if the minority people stay in the country, they will get votes, and if the minorities leave the country, they will get their land. In contrast, some think if the minorities leave, it will save the country and the religion.

TDS: What is your expectation from the political parties and the state ahead of the elections? What is your suggestion?

Rana: Casting vote is a fundamental right of a citizen. We want that right to be ensured. We want that every member of the minority communities votes for his or her favourite candidate in a safe, free and peaceful atmosphere. We want that the political parties will not nominate anyone who, being a public representative, is or was communal, land grabber and either perpetrated repression on the minority communities or was involved directly or indirectly in anti-minority activities. If any such candidate is nominated, the minority community will not cast vote in that particular constituency.

TDS: Minority communities came under attack in several places, including Ramu (Cox's Bazar), Nasirnagar (Brahmanbaria) and Rangpur, over the last several years. Are the people in those places still in fear? Do you think the state ensured justice to the victims?

Rana: Not only in Ramu or Nasirnagar, such incidents took place in almost everywhere, especially after 2011. So a sense of fear still exists there. In the Ramu incident, around 15 cases were filed and two investigations -- one by police and other by the local administration -- were carried out. The administrative enquiry found involvement of local Awami League, BNP and Jamaat men. But police in its report excluded the names of the ruling party men. Several other locals told me that witnesses were not giving testimonies as the perpetrators remained off the hook and were threatening them.

Whenever such an incident takes place, cases are filed and a handful of people are arrested. But a few months later, police come up with a report admitting the occurrence of the incident but cites inadequate witnesses. The state still could not come out of the culture of impunity with regard to the minority repression. Therefore, the attackers are encouraged and the

victims feel insecure.

TDS: Hindu priests, Buddhist monks and Christians became victims of targeted attacks by militants groups in 2015 and 2016. Do you think there is a change in the situation now?

Rana: Militancy is the highest form of fundamentalism and communalism. It's an ideology which has to be replaced by a counter ideology. But some political parties are doing politics along with the fanatics while others compromising with them to gain their interests, although all of them are talking against militancy. So militants are being encouraged and waiting for a chance. It's not possible to root out militancy only by the law enforcement agencies. If the country wants to get rid of the curse of militancy, we have to forge a unity like we did in 1971 and defeat fanaticism with a counter ideology. But no such step is visible.

TDS: Following the post-polls attack on minority community in 2001, the AL-led government had formed a judicial commission which came up with a report after a long investigation. What is the update on the matter?

Rana: Following a High Court directive, the Awami League government formed a judicial commission, led by retired district judge Mohammad Sahabuddin, in 2009. We along with many other organisations submitted information and documents on 15,000 incidents of minority repression after the 2001 polls. The committee submitted a report in January 2012 after investigating 5,000 incidents. We met Sahara Khatun and MK Alamgir (two successive home ministers) and demanded that the report is published and steps are taken in line the committee's recommendations to bring an end to the culture of impunity. But regrettably, the report was not published and no step was taken. The crimes were committed by the BNP-Jamaat men, but why did the Awami League remain tight-lipped when it came to taking actions against them? Isn't it giving an opportunity to the BNP-Jamaat? Isn't it a deal of criminalised politics?

In its report, the commission suggested taking action against many, including 25 ministers and lawmakers of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government, for their involvement. The recommendations of the committee must be implemented in order to end the culture of impunity.

TDS: The percentage of the minority population has declined since the country's liberation. What are the reasons behind it? Do you find any government's action to change such a trend?

Rana: In 1947, minority population constitutes 29.7 percent of the population of East Pakistan while the percentage came down to around 20 percent in 1971. It stood at 9.7 percent in 2011 as per the latest census.

The Pakistani rulers repressed the minority community and forced them to leave the country in order to turn Bangalees into minorities. After the 1975 changeover, the communities were victimised by the so-called Enemy Property Act and frequent attacks. In the name of settlement, the indigenous people were driven away from hill tracts. All such attacks and discriminations forced many minorities to leave the country. From a grand rally in December, 2015, we demanded formation of a parliamentary commission to find out the reason(s) behind the gradual decline in the minority population percentage since 1947 and recommended taking steps to stop the trend, but to no avail.

TDS: Several current MPs and ministers belong to the minority communities. How do you evaluate their roles to protect the interests of the communities?

Rana: The minority communities are utterly frustrated with the lawmakers. After the demise of veteran Awami League leader Suranjit Sengupta, the minority people find it hard to consider the 17 lawmakers from their communities to be their real friend. The minority people want that the lawmakers would speak for them in parliament. But the lawmakers are afraid of speaking out as they fear that they would fall down from the parties' good book. These lawmakers are playing the role of escapist, which is very painful.

TDS: What did the Oikya Parishad do in the last 30 years to protect the rights of the minority communities?

Rana: We are not a political party. We are a platform working with human rights issues. We have been able to make the minority people aware of their political and civic rights at the grassroots level. It is because of the Parishad that the minority issue has become a national issue and has drawn international attention. We have played key role in enacting or amending several important acts, including Vested Property Return Act and Hindu Marriage Registration Act. We can voice demands, pursue and forge unity on an issue and that is what we have been doing all these years.

Editors' Council

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minister issued a letter to it requesting postponement of the human chain and proposing discussions.

In a press statement, Mahfuz Anam, general secretary of the Parishad, said all the stakeholders of the media, including the editors' platform, thought that the recently passed Digital Security Bill was a serious blow to media freedom.

"We had expressed our concerns to the government over the bill before its passage. Even during the parliamentary committee meetings, the Parishad and other stakeholders had made specific objections and registered protests against certain sections of the bill.

"The opposition lawmakers too demanded that the bill is not passed in parliament. The way the government passed the bill by voice vote, ignoring all oppositions and objections, was considered regretful."

The statement further said, "Against such a backdrop, we had no alternative but to take to the streets. As part of that, the Parishad had decided to form a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club on September 29. Different journalist organisations, including Dhaka Reporters Unity, also decided to stage similar protests.

"In this context, Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu took into account the concerns of Sampadak Parishad and proposed talks with the Parishad and other stakeholders in the media on September 30 [Sunday]. We welcome this proposal and have decided to postpone the human chain scheduled for September 29.

"We are always interested to solve a problem through discussions. In the past, we responded positively whenever the minister proposed any discussion; although we can't say those were fruitful.

"This time, we expect the sections of the bill, which may gag the media, will be removed following the proposed discussion. However, we will continue to register our protest if that does not happen. We hope that the government will take initiatives to amend the bill, considering the concerns of all stakeholders of the media."

UZ chairman

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my political rivals cooked up the story of rape only to create controversy about me ahead of the next national polls," Harun said.

The OC said police would take necessary actions after receiving the medical report from the One Stop Crisis Centre. The report is expected to be available within a week.

Armed assailants

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was also admitted to the hospital.

According to Milon, the attack came after his newspaper published a news item on the daily's online edition yesterday under the headline, "Gambling spree in Rajshahi city".

The news included a video of gamblers' activity at a students' dormitory near Rajshahi Stadium.

"They attacked us because they were angry over the news item," he told this correspondent.

The attacks began at 9:00am, with Liton being the first target.

Calling him out of his home, a group led by one Tareq, an alleged leader of a gambling ring, beat Liton up in the city's Shalbagan area. At one stage, they brought hot water from a tea stall nearby and poured it on him.

Liton was later admitted to RMCH. He told reporters that the attackers suspected him of assisting in the publication of the news.

Around 9:30am, the group attacked Milon's house in Sagarpara area of the city, but he was not home at the time. They broke into his house and ransacked several furniture. They shouted at his family members and threatened to shoot Nur at sight.

Around 11:30am, seven of the attackers caught Milon at a motorcycle garage in Ranibazar area and started beating him up with sticks and pipes.

Locals who witnessed the attack chased the assailants and later, police and locals managed to catch three of them -- Tareq, Ripon and Shawan -- from the scene.

After Tareq's attack, while Milon was recovering from the first attack at the motorcycle garage, another group of seven people, brandishing firearms, attacked him again.

"I was getting my motorcycle serviced at the garage and I could not move. I did not anticipate that they would open fire on me," said Nur.

"They shot twice. They missed the first shot but the second one hit my nephew when he tried to save me."

Locals caught two of the attackers - - Sajib with a pistol and Arif-- from the scene. They were later handed over to police.

Two separate cases were filed against the five arrested and four to five unnamed associates, said OC Amanullah.

Rajshahi Press Club announced a human chain on Sunday denouncing the attacks.

Tigers' heart

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still rallied to beat two-time champions Pakistan by 37 runs in Abu Dhabi.

While that meant that Bangladesh made the final for the third time in the last four editions, it also meant that they would have one less day than the more-fancied India to recuperate after toiling in heat that they had never played in as a team.

There is also a contrast between the respective strengths of the sides. Bangladesh have routinely lost two wickets inside the first 10 overs and have played out the 50 overs only once in five matches. Meanwhile India have only lost more than three wickets on the two occasions when they played at less than full strength -- against Hong Kong in their first match when they lost seven wickets for 285 and against Afghanistan, when they were bowled out for 252.

"It was difficult [winning against Pakistan] with performers like Shakib and Tamim not playing," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza at the pre-final press conference yesterday. "The good thing that the boys have done is that they did not given up, although we lost to Afghanistan in the group stage and again against India [exactly a week before the final], but still they fought back.

"There are some concerns with our batting, but Mushfiqur [Rahim, the second-highest scorer in the tournament with 297 runs] is in great form. [Mohammad] Mithun is playing well, [Mahmudullah] Riyad also batted well. If our top order can click it will be fine. But again I think that India are a far better team -- number one in the world. They came here as favourites, but you never know, anything can happen on a good day. We have to be mentally strong and fight till the end."

Previously 'missing'

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The five, along with another arrestee, were produced before a Dhaka court yesterday in a case filed with Wari Police Station under the Explosive Substances Act.

The court placed the five youths on three-day remand each and asked police to interrogate the other, a juvenile, for two days at the entrance to Juvenile Correction Centre in Gazipur.

The sixth, Mosharraf Hossain Maaz, is a ninth grader of a madrasa.

Earlier in the day, Inspector Nazrul Islam of Detective Branch (East Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police filed the case against 39 people, including the six arrestees, the Chhatra Shibir president, secretary general and some other top leaders of the pro-Jamaat student front.

According to the case statement, the six, all leaders and activists of Chhatra Shibir, were picked up during a raid on a mess in the capital's Wari around 10:00pm on Wednesday.

Police also claimed to have recovered 150kg explosive materials and some organisational publications of Shibir during the raid.

But family members say Shafiul and Monirul were picked up along with

The fort of the Alexandrine

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India, was named after the emperor Alexander the Great, who transported the birds from Punjab to Europe and the Mediterranean, where they were prized by royalty, nobility and warlords alike, said Professor Dr SM Iqbal, local bird expert and associate professor of the Zoology department in Govt MM Ali College in Tangail.

Since then, throughout the world, the birds were treated like royalty, making them a popular house pet as they found their place in paintings and literature, especially in aristocratic societies, he added.

Dr Iqbal further said the Alexandrine parakeet, scientifically known as *Psittacula Eupatria*, is comparatively larger sized, as opposed to other species of parakeets like the Rose-ringed or Red-breasted in Bangladesh.

While known widely for its history and grandeur, the species is rapidly declining in the sub-continent. In some parts of north Bengal in India and Sri Lanka, their declining numbers have caught the attention of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), who had listed the Alexandrine Parakeet as a "near threatened species" four years ago.

Dr Iqbal said the birds were high in number and found in almost every region in the country during the 80s. However, due to continuous capturing, persecution and loss of habitat, their numbers began to decrease.

Since then, the birds had been sighted on rare occasions. In 2008, one pair was discovered in Lalmonirhat by a conservationist, said Dr Iqbal, adding that the High Court area in the capital has some trees that house a few of them.

After their decline, the birds were first found in Bogura in 2010 by Dr Iqbal. It was in the grand old

While India will have a settled team, Bangladesh have not played the same team for two matches in succession throughout the tournament. The injuries have forced them to get creative, such as batting left-handed opener Imrul Kayes at six to combat Rashid's leg-spin on Sunday. There may be a change today, with left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam coming into replace batsman Mominul Haque to try and contain India's vaunted batting order.

Imrul could also slot back into the opening position, pulling Soumya down to the lower middle order. With the way things have gone, it is a fool's errand to guess their plans. Mashrafe also has an injury to his right little from when he spectacularly caught Pakistan's Shoaib Malik on Wednesday. However, there is no danger of the captain not playing in the title clash.

The crux of the battle may be in the top order because the two teams match up pretty evenly with the ball. Bangladesh have not conceded more than the 255 for seven Afghanistan scored against them last Thursday. As Mashrafe said, if it goes according to form, the top-ranked India should come out on top against the seventh-ranked Bangladesh. But if the Tigers can find the solution to the top order woes at the most opportune time, they will have performed above themselves and could conjure an unlikely result.

Bangladesh also have the invisible hand of momentum going in their favour, having won their last two matches with spirited performances.

However, it should also be remembered that they have never won a final, including a loss to India in the last Asia Cup final at home and in the Nidahas Trophy in March.

Hayat in front of Shahjalal International Airport on September 12 when they went there to receive their parents returning from hajj.

Later in the day, some plainclothes men identifying themselves as detectives allegedly picked up Shafiullah and Maaz from a mess in the capital's Jatrabari.

However, the news of the arrests has brought at least some relief to the families of the missing youths.

"I am slightly relieved to know that my sons are still alive. I am eagerly waiting to see and embrace them," Ramisa Khanam, mother of Shafiul and Monirul, told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

"My sons were taken away from me in front of the airport. What can I say about the police claim and the case?"

The case statement says the arrestees admitted gathering at the Wari mess to carry out destructive activities to destabilise the polls-time government. They collected the explosive materials from different parts of the country.

The Chhatra Shibir president, secretary general and some other top leaders had met at the mess several times, it added.

Mahogany tree, in Demazani Bazar where he saw a pair of *Chandana tias* residing peacefully with *Shobuj tia* (Rose-ringed parakeet). Within a week of finding them, he invited local stakeholders to an open meeting to preserve this now rare species of birds and thus formed the Chandana Tia Conservation Committee to raise awareness about the birds amongst the locals.

Starting with just two, the tree now houses around 10-12 Alexandrine parakeets, divided in two groups.

Generally, Alexandrine parakeets live in forests, woodlands, agricultural lands and tall trees in mangrove forests. They feed on a variety of wild and cultivated seeds, buds, fruits and nuts.

Dr Iqbal said, "These birds normally breed between November and April in their selective nest areas. They usually nest in tree hollows, but sometimes use tree holes excavated by themselves or cracks in buildings."

One of the largest parakeets, the Alexandrine parakeets, Dr Iqbal said, need big tree hollows to set up their nests. Therefore, they choose only big trees, usually aged, to live and breed in. He added that if they breed in a tree hollow once, they don't leave the place for as long as the tree survives.

Dr Iqbal hoped that their population would flourish if we can ensure the end of illegal wild-life trade and deforestation, adding that arranging adequate food for them throughout the year can help increase their numbers in the area.

Shahjahanpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Fuara Khatun said, "Three months ago, the tree was declared a sanctuary for the *Chandana tia*," adding that they will take all kinds of measures in the future to not only preserve the species but also help it thrive.