



ELECTION BULLETIN 2008

BANGLADESH HINDU BUDDHIST CHRISTIAN UNITY COUNCIL (BHBCUC)

Election Monday World is watching

Election in Bangladesh will be held on Monday, 29th Dec 2008. All the major political parties are taking part. Thousands of foreign observers, journalists are in Bangladesh now to see, ensure and certify that the election is free, fair, non-violent and acceptable. Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, Global chapters are watching the election along with other organizations. Our main concern is that, religious minorities should be able to exercise their fundamental rights to vote and they should not be threatened, persecuted for that, before & after the election. We have appealed to the civilized world to take the issue of minority safety seriously, so that no repetition of 2001 happened this time. We are happy that world is watching. BHBCUC is publishing election bulletins and this is its 3rd bulletin. We will continue publishing our bulletins as long as it is required. You can get the bulletins in our webpage www.bhbcuc-usa.org

Minorities feel insecure in Bangladesh?

Daily Prothom Alo, Dhaka: Saturday, 27th Dec2008: Editorial/Post Editorial: (Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karjon, Israfil Shaheen; Biman Chandra Barua, Abul Monsoor Ahmed, Lipika Tripura, Rubayat Ferdous): To know the condition of the minorities in Bangladesh an 'Opinion Poll' was conducted recently and its results were published on 5th Dec 2008 in a pre-election exchange of opinion meeting of 'Sompriti Moncho' in Asiatic Society in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It reveals the pity condition of the minorities. In the opinion poll, 1542 people took part and there were 14 questions and all people did not answer all questions.

First three questions were on Vested (Enemy) Property. In reply to 1st question, 555 or 38.6% people answered that, they lost their property due to Enemy Property Act. 2nd question was answered by 1440 people and out of that 880 or 61% answered that their relatives lost land due to enemy property act. In reply to 3rd question 826 or 59.5% people told that, they are on the verge of losing their property due to enemy property act.

In reply to another question, if they were threatened or tortured after 2001 election? 899 people or 64.76% answered 'Yes'. Does police took action? 28.1% said yes, 70% said, No, police remain inactive. Is your family feels insecure being a minority? 536 people or 38.2% directly said, 'Yes'. "Sometimes we feel insecure" answered 648 or 46.2%. (Only a portion was translated from Bengali to English).

চন্দনাইশে ১১ হিন্দু ধর্মাবলম্বীকে পুড়িয়ে মারার চেষ্টা

■ চট্টগ্রাম বুয়ে

চট্টগ্রামের চন্দনাইশে গত রোববার গভীর রাতে এক হিন্দু পরিবারকে আগুন দিয়ে পুড়িয়ে মারার চেষ্টা চালানোর চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে। ওই পরিবারের সদস্যদের চিৎকারে স্থানীয় লোকজন এসে তাদের উদ্ধার করে। ধারণা করা হচ্ছে, সংখ্যালঘু ভোটারদের ভয়ভীতি প্রদর্শনের জন্য এ অগ্নিসংযোগের ঘটনা ঘটানো হয়।

সমকালের চন্দনাইশ প্রতিনিধি শহীদ উদ্দিন চৌধুরী জানান, চন্দনাইশ উপজেলার বরমা ইউনিয়নের মাইগাথা গ্রামের হিন্দুপাড়ায় গত রোববার রাতে ১১ সদস্যের একটি সংখ্যালঘু দিনমজুর পরিবারকে ঘুমন্ত অবস্থায় পুড়িয়ে মারার চেষ্টা করা হয়। দুর্ভাগ্যবশত হিন্দুপাড়ার মৃত মনিম লাল দেব ছেলে ননী গোপাল দেব বাড়িতে ইনজেকশনের বড় সিরিঞ্জের মাধ্যমে পেট্রোল ছিটিয়ে ঘরের চালের এক কোনায় এবং ভেন্টিলেটর দিয়ে

ভেতরে আগুন ধরিয়ে দেয়। আগুন দেওয়ার আগে দুর্ভাগ্যবশত ঘরের প্রতিটি দরজায় তালা লাগিয়ে দেয়। কিছুক্ষণের মধ্যে আগুনের উত্তাপ পেয়ে পরিবারের ঘুমন্ত সদস্যরা জেগে উঠে চিৎকার শুরু করেন। চিৎকার শুনে স্থানীয় লোকজন এগিয়ে এসে তালা ভেঙে ভেতর থেকে তাদের উদ্ধার করে এবং আগুন নিভিয়ে ফেলে। এ ব্যাপারে ননী গোপাল দেব ছেলে তখন দে বানী হয়ে চন্দনাইশ থানায় একটি মামলা দায়ের করেছেন।

আগুন দিয়ে পুড়িয়ে মারার চেষ্টার ঘটনাকে পরিকল্পিত বলে উল্লেখ করেছেন বরমা ইউপি চেয়ারম্যান নুরুল ইসলাম। নির্বাচনের আগে সংখ্যালঘুদের ভয়ভীতি প্রদর্শনের জন্য এ ঘটনা ঘটানো হয়েছে বলে তিনি জানান।

প্রসঙ্গত, ২০০১ সালের নির্বাচনের কয়েক দিন আগে ননী গোপালের ভাই দফাদার পরিমল দেব ছেলে সুমন দেব (১৮) দুর্ভাগ্যে গুলি করে হত্যা করেছিল।

Perpetrators tried to kill 11 members of a Hindu family setting fire to their house: A repetition of Banshkhali?

Perpetrators tried to kill 11 members of a Hindu family setting fire to their house at the dead night. The incident happened at Chandanaishe, Chittagong on last Sunday, 21st Dec 2008. Fortunately, the family survived when hearing their cry, local people came to their rescue. The culprits spray petrol to the house, locked all the doors from outside and set fire the house and fled away. When the family awake at the smoke & heat, they find that all the doors are locked from outside. They started shouting and local people came to their rescue. They broke all the locks and opened the doors. Tapan Dey, filed a GD in the local police station. Borma UP chairman Nurul Islam told that, the incident is well planned and frightening the Hindus before election was the motive. Note that, Sumon Dey of the same extended family was killed before 2001 election. This incident reminds that, in Banshkhali, 11 people of a Hindu family were burnt to death during BNP-Jamaat rule. The Jugantor, 23 Dec.2008 & The Shamokal, 23 Dec.2008.



Suman Barua, Secretary General, SRG Welfare Society, Chittagong, Bangladesh



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Minorities Feel Insecure in Khulna-4 & Khulna-5

Janakantha, 27th Dec 2008: Staff reporter/ Khulna Office: Minorities are in fear in two constituencies in Khulna, those are Khulna-4 & Khulna-5. In Khulna-5 (Dumuria/Fultata), Jamaat is pressuring Hindus to vote for their candidate and in other area Khulna-4 (Dighalia/Rupsa/Terokhada Upajila), a Hindu-Buddhist-Christian leader Dulal Chandra Paul was beaten by the BNP activists UP member Abul Hossain. They also attacked his house and molested his wife & daughter in law. These two areas were worst hit in 2001 by the BNP/Jamaat goons (Only a small relevant portion was translated).

5 Deity Destroyed In Mirjapur

Janakantha, 27th Dec 2008: Own correspondent: Terrorists destroyed 5 deities in a Kali Temple in Tangail (Mirjapur, Warshi union, Vatgram, Ourpara Village) on last Thursday. This incident, just before election, caused Hindus scary. Mohajote candidate of the area told that, terrorists are trying to refrain Hindus to go to the polling booths. He also informed that, during BNP-Jamaat Jote, 11 deities were destroyed here by the cadres of BNP/Jamaat.

Worldwide Conference Call of BHBCUC **Ensure Minority Safety**

Bangladesh Hindu Buddhists Christian Unity Council global chapters joined in a conference call on Saturday, 27th Dec 2008, just before the election. Global Unity Council leaders called upon the government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety of the religious minorities before & after the election. Citing the unprecedented atrocities on the minorities after the election of 2001, the leaders cautioned, any such atrocity will not be tolerated and government has to do whatever needed to stop minority persecution. Leaders called upon the world bodies to watch the situation and take appropriate measure to stop any atrocities. Leaders from 8 countries joined the conference call and it lasted about 2 hours. Those countries are Bangladesh, India, America, Switzerland, France, UK the Netherlands & Sweden.



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Jamaat will enact Blasphemy law

Jamaat-e-Islami in its election manifesto said it would initiate enactment of 'blasphemy law' to prevent anti-religious publicities or criticism of religion in books, newspapers or electronic media and punish those responsible, if the BNP-led four-party alliance is voted to power.

The party willing to establish a rule in the country based on the ideals of Islam said it would initiate measures to spread the ideals of Islam through all mediums, including radio, television and newspapers.

"Forkania madrasa and mosque-based mass education will be given priority. Mass education will also be introduced in all religious institutions," the Jamaat manifesto reads.

In another effort and in 1993, Jamaat tried to introduce blasphemy bill but failed.

The question why is the Jamaat so hell bent on introducing blasphemy law when the Quran or the hadith does not mention of blasphemy? Jamaat justifies by citing the UK, there is blasphemy law in the United Kingdom... and nothing is wrong about it, "the Jamaat chief said without knowing whether the act is practiced or not in the UK any longer.

Under the proposed bill, the two acts of 295B and 295C, insult to Quran and insult to prophet, will carry life imprisonment and the second act will carry death or life imprisonment with fine. This act is the exact copy of Pakistani blasphemy act. It is obvious who Nizami is trying to please. This would be their first phase of their Islamic land where they would be able to send anybody to life imprisonment on the excuse of protecting religion.

The question is, why a religion which has come through 1400 years facing many obstacles & difficulties, would require a law to protect it? Can't they rest without turning this country into a Talibani state?

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(London).



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Vol 7 Issue 50. Dec 26, 2008 **Perspective**

Freeing Bangladesh from Extremism

Hana Shams Ahmed

A Google search on The Daily Star's website for 'Sector Commander's Forum' (SCF) gives 87 results. Ever since its formation late last year, this group has been making media appearances (very well covered by the news reports, features and op-eds in DS) with two major demands -- a trial of the 1971 war criminals and the barring of the known war criminals from taking part in the upcoming national elections. Very reasonable demands. After all isn't it contradictory for a person who opposed the formation of the nation to sit in the parliament of that same nation?

Unfortunately demands from the SCF and other progressive, secular groups and members of the civil society have fallen on deaf ears. Now Jamaat's men fund the Rajshahi Islami Bank Medical College Hospital (IBMCH) where they organise free eye camps for 200 freedom fighters on our Victory Day. A vice-president of Jatiya Muktiyoddha Parishad (JMP) also said that they receive 'donations' from Jamaat for the 'welfare' of freedom fighters. In its election manifesto the party has said that it would 'strengthen the liberation war ministry and the Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust and increase allowances for the freedom fighters' families'. I sometimes get exasperated trying to explain to my four-year-old son that it is not possible to erase crayon marks with an eraser. Now who is going to explain to Jamaat that it is not possible to erase the rape and murder they helped to mastermind 37 years ago with such insincere acts of philanthropy towards the comrades of those rape and murder victims.

The Pakistanis tried to obliterate Bangla because it was said to be 'the language of the Hindus', but we fought for our identity, we are still proud of fighting the communal forces out of our beloved country. So why now are we taking a step in the wrong direction? Why now should we let ourselves be led away from our beliefs by a group of people who use religion to advance their political ambitions?

In the 1991 elections Jamaat won 18 seats in Parliament (BNP won), in the 1996 elections they won 3 seats in Parliament (AL won) and in 2001 they again won 17 seats (BNP-led four-party coalition won the elections). So when my friend calls me up and says we should be happy if Jamaat wins 15 seats at this year's election it makes me think how this party has such a stronghold over the country's politics. It's still a mystery as to why other political parties have so little faith in their own strength that they need to form coalitions with religious groups. Even Awami League,



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Extremists call for the complete scrapping of a policy to give more rights to women.

which wins the most votes from minority groups, had a brief romance with a religious political outfit Khelafat-e-Majlish just before emergency was declared, terming it a “tactical electoral ploy”.

But religious political groups are not the only threat to secular values. There are the three terrorist groups -- Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (HUJI) which recently floated Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) but were thankfully denied registration by the EC and the 'non-violent' Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) Bangladesh.

In 2005 JMB carried out a near-simultaneous series of blasts in 63 of 64 districts across Bangladesh, planting 458 locally made bombs, and handed out leaflets which said, “We are the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way the Prophet, Sahabis [companions of the Prophet] and heroic Mujahideen have done for centuries. . . . It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh”. The group was also responsible for unleashing a reign of terror all over Bangladesh that year by blowing up court houses, press clubs and schools, summary executions of innocent villagers and sending out letters with bomb threats. Harkat-ul-Jihad gained notoriety for terrorising the nation since the early nineties. It had attempted to kill Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, and stands accused of carrying out the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally in 2004. The JMB/HUJI threats seem to be looming large once again before the election only three days away. The Special Security Forces (SSF) has stated that both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are targets for terrorist attacks. The activities of the HT are a little less easier to follow. With headquarters in Britain and operating in more than 100 countries its members are teachers in universities some of whom were arrested this year for distributing leaflets asking for everyone to join in their campaign to “take oath for establishing the rule of Khilafat by dethroning the present ruler” (the caretaker government) and to “unite Muslims and revive their lost glory”.

Jugnu Mohsin Managing Editor and Publisher of The Friday Times, Lahore writes the story of 21-year-old Ajmal 'Qasai', the sole surviving terrorist of the Mumbai attacks (dubbed India's



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9/11). Ajmal's story is not unique. It is a story of many poor Pakistanis who have taken to jihad and radical Islam as a way of claiming an identity and a livelihood in a state that has failed to provide both. Amir Qasai, Ajmal's father, like many other fathers was poor and could not educate his sons or marry off his daughter. A similar story no doubt to the many young men in the poverty-stricken villages all over Bangladesh, recruited by these groups for their 'cause'.

In India and in Pakistan, as well as in Bangladesh the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor has been a major cause for disillusionment and frustration amongst the burgeoning majority (i.e. the poor). Any government that comes to power must address this issue. I think about Dhaka 15 years ago when Eid shopping meant going to New Market and Gawsia. There were all kinds of people shopping at the same place; no one felt out of place and no one had to dress a certain way to shop there. Now there are guards in front of the fancy malls, there is an unspoken understanding of who can enter them and who should be shopping at their rightful place in New Market. The buzzword is that we are trying to become 'Singapore'. Singapore is a great place, hardly any poverty. Unfortunately Bangladesh is only pining to become one percent Singapore. And the rest?

While a rise in the number of people joining extremist groups shows a clear sign of the disillusionment faced by the poor and the governments' failure to address the issues, successive governments have also failed to address violence and prejudicial attitude towards religious minorities. It's not just extreme terrorist activities that expose the existence of a communal mindset. While in India the BJP-supported 'cleansing' acts of Muslim, Christian and Sikh minorities destroyed its image of a secular democracy, in Bangladesh the slide in the number of Hindus should be a case for concern for the government which comes to power in the New Year.

According to a study by Professor Abul Barkat, of Dhaka University's Department of Economics, the Hindu population has dropped from 18% in 1961 to 9% in 2001. The total Hindu population in 2001 was 11.4 million, half the expected 22.8 million it should be as per growth estimates. Already there are reports in the media that certain religious bigots have been distributing leaflets asking people not to "go against Islam" and refrain from voting for Hindu candidates. The past BNP government already has a revolting record of minority oppression. Land-grabbing, looting, raping and killing of Hindus in 2001 was very similar to a parallel scenario by the BJP government supported persecution of Muslims and Christians in India. In 2005, the same BNP government failed to provide protection to the Ahmadiya minorities from religious zealots working under the banner of the Khatme Nabuwat Movement. The government failed to revoke its ban on Ahmadiya literature, or to prosecute the vandals who attacked the mosques. BNP and Jamaat have always maintained their strong opposition towards the historic CHT Peace Treaty that promised to give rights to the most marginalised indigenous people of the country. Under the caretaker government the only two large political parties representing the rights of the Pahari people of CHT UPDF (United Peoples Democratic Front) and PCJSS (Parbotto Chottogram Jonoshonghoti Samity) have been denied registration by the EC.

The first casualties of communalism are usually freedom of speech and women. Bigots have always felt threatened by the two. Little wonder then that Taslima Nasreen may never be able to come back to Bangladesh, that Humayan Azad's books incited such rage amongst fundamentalist groups. It is no wonder then that Mufti Mohammad Nuruddin, the acting khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque who headed the committee which 'reviewed' the National Women Development Policy said, "A woman cannot enjoy rights equal to a man's because a woman is not

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Photo: SK Enamul Haq

equal to a man by birth” and asked for the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to be withdrawn. It is also little wonder that the caretaker government worked with amazing speed at the complaint of the bigots and ordered the airport and civil aviation authorities to take down the sculptures of the bauls after 50 lakh takas had already spent on it.

Secularism does not mean going against religion. Nor is it anti-Islamic in the least, as many bigots will try to have us believe. Secularism means that the government of a country should not carry out its duties or frame policies based on any religious texts. Inherent in the idea of secularism is the plurality of religion and tolerance. The military dictators, who ruled the country after the murder of the founding father, initiated the idea of religion-based politics to achieve their own personal gain. Economic motives for violence have always been around and minorities have always had to bear the brunt of this violence. Any party that comes to power in the election that is to take place three days from now must unequivocally embrace the idea of secularism, that is religious plurality and tolerance. Secular sentiments need to exist at the very grass-root level, where Christian and Muslim families will live as good neighbours in a small village in Noakhali, where a Muslim voter will vote for a Hindu candidate because he believes the candidate is worthy to represent his village and not have to fear that the worst hell awaits him because he voted a 'non-believer' to power. Khushwant Singh, in his book 'The End of India' coins a motto that he believes should be a guide for modern India, “Work is worship, but worship is not work”. With the rising communal sentiment in Bangladesh leading to nothing but violence and insecurity, this motto should give any party that comes to power in 2009, something to think about.

<http://thedailystar.net/magazine/2008/12/03/perspective.htm>

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