

Made in Bangladesh... in the darkness of the night

By Kabir Ahmed

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It is a weak, cruel and evil government that brutally kills its own people in the darkness of the night. Reports from the scene attest to an electricity blackout in Motijhil on 5th May when over 100,000 protestors gathered in Dhaka to protest government violence and violation of human rights. During the electricity blackout government forces were said to have killed thousands of innocent people by live gun-fire. The international response to this barbarity is shameful. There is no outcry from the international community, as long as Bangladesh keeps providing the world with cheap clothing through its many sweatshop factories.

This is what someone wrote on Facebook and made me sit in my seat for a few minutes and ponder. There is uproar on social media and pictures are being uploaded that makes you want to weep; so horrific that you are reluctant to give it a second viewing. Most of the information that is available is in Bangla and for the third generation of Bangladeshi Muslims and general British people it is difficult to understand and decipher facts.

Why is there violence in Bangladesh?

Since widespread violence erupted on February 28th 2013, hundreds if not thousands of people have been killed in Bangladesh, mostly shot dead by the police. Many were protesting at the death sentence given to the world-renown scholar and orator, 'Allama Delwar Hussain Sayeedi, who belongs to the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami opposition party. He and other leaders of the Jamaat and the Bangladesh National Party, main opposition, have been accused of war crimes committed during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. They reject these accusations and are prepared to stand in a court that is fair and recognised by the international community.

Moreover, some bloggers from Shahbag (in Dhaka) insulted Islam and the Prophet Peace be Upon Him. Evidence emerged to confirm that some of the bloggers were extremist atheists and secularists who had the audacity to say, 'If your Allah came [to save Sayeedi] we would hang Him too...'

These insults and clear rhetoric of blasphemy against Islam, Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and Islamic symbols, angered ordinary Bangladeshi Muslims, who constitute of over 90% of the population. The masses of Muslims responded to these attacks and insults as would any other community whose very foundations were under attack. The Muslims of Bangladesh felt it was their moral duty to voice their anger and defend the honour of their Religion and their Lord.



Police remain indifferent to Awami thugs pulling an elderly man by his beard

Who is killing who?

The ruling Awami League party established the "International Crimes Tribunal" (ICT) to try people they accused of committing crimes during 1971. No Pakistanis have come before the court, nor have any ruling Awami League leaders who supported the Pakistan-side during the war, or even those who publicly committed war crimes after the war. The only people in the dock are those belonging to the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Bangladesh National Party. This clearly smacks of a politically-motivated move to create a one party state in Bangladesh in order to destroy democracy and for the ruling party to stay in power.

As the two largest opposition parties, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Bangladesh National Party, they have been protesting and demonstrating against this unfair, unjust and internationally-discredited tribunal and the subsequent arrests of opposition leaders in the name of 1971 war crimes. However, instead of allowing peaceful protestors which is the democratic right of every citizen of Bangladesh, the state security forces resorted to live ammunition and tear gas to dispel and in many cases kill protestors in broad daylight. Naturally, anger and hatred towards the current government is increasing.

More recently a group by the name of Hefazote Islam (representing most madrassas and Islamic institutions in Bangladesh) came to prominence. They have been demanding the government to rule by Islamic principles and end the secular rule since the majority of the population is Muslim. They have presented the government with a list of demands which they want the government to meet.

What happened on 5th May 2013?

On Sunday 5th May 2013, the people of Bangladesh from across the breadth and width of the country converged on Dhaka to demand the Awami League government meet their 13-point demands or resign from office. Hundreds and thousands came and took over Motijhil Shapla Square in Dhaka. The people of Bangladesh were resolute and committed to stay in the square until their demands were met.

At 3am, the power to the street lights were cut, media and journalist were forced out. Several media stations were shut down, namely those belonging to the Jamaat-e-Islami. The security forces opened fire on protestors, many were asleep at the time. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, over 2,500 people were killed during the electricity blackout (<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-088-2013>).

So what should happen in Bangladesh?

Numerous human rights organisations and campaign groups have offered their explanation of developments in Bangladesh and what needs to be done to avert further violation of human rights and an end to violence. Chief among them is the Bangladesh Crisis Group (BCG - <http://bangladeshcrisisgroup.com/>), which works for human rights and liberty for the people of Bangladesh.

The current crisis in Bangladesh can only be resolved if a line is drawn under this. This will not be achieved through the execution of innocent people, or those charged under discredited courts. The BCG have suggested that the Bangladeshi leadership, the current government, grow up and agree to look forward. One practical way could be the formation of a 'Truth and Reconciliation' Commission, akin to one that had taken place in South Africa after years of Apartheid. Those accused of war crimes should be put to trial but the current discredited ICT needs to be free and fair, and recognised by international standards.

Bangladeshis feel terribly betrayed by democratically-elected and successive governments. Unless the attitude of the Bangladeshi politics is substantially changed, confidence in democracy will forever be lost. Currently democracy is seen only as a tool for various political parties to use to come to power and squander the wealth of the nation. Bangladesh needs a clean and selfless political movement.

Our beloved country is impoverished due to the sheer mismanagement of our resources. The country has abundant quantities of minerals and natural resources, and a population of some 160 million. Authentic and honest leadership could make it a powerful nation and economy. Corrupt political practices have brought the country to its knees. We can't and must not let this go on anymore. It is high time everyone concerned raises their voices in unison.



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