



भारत नीति प्रतिष्ठान  
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Growing Fundamentalism and

**RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN**

**BANGLADESH**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Elections for Bangladesh Parliament were held recently that were marred by unprecedented violence. The constitutionality of this election was questioned by fundamentalists in that country. Execution of Mollah Qadir was preceded by these elections that let loose reign of terror on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. This report documents the execution of Mollah Qadir, its aftermath and reaction over trouble in the subcontinent. Parliamentary elections also find its mention in this report.

### **Looking back to 1971**

In 1971 the liberation war of Bangladesh was opposed by Jamaat-E-Islami as they were completely against breaking away from Pakistan. The Pro-Pakistan group opposed the Independence movement of East Pakistan on the ground that it was against Islam to break away from Pakistan.

Mollah Qaider, who came to be known as the “Butcher of Mirpur” after the liberation war, first joined the paramilitary force, All Badra during the liberation war of Bangladesh. Later it was found that he had sworn allegiance to a Pro-Pakistan group known as Rajakars Militia during the war.

After the war Mollah was charged with killing 334 civilians and raping of women which included minors a part from abetting with the army of Pakistan in committing atrocities upon people who wanted freedom from Pakistan.

### **Bangladesh High Court declared ‘Jamaat-E-Islami’ Illegal**

On August 2, 2013 the High Court of Bangladesh declared Jamaat-E-Islami as an illegal political outfit. The judgment came after a long legal battle fought by Bangladesh Tarikat Federation's secretary-general Rezaul Haque Chandpuri and 24 others on this matter. In the petition Tarikat Federation claimed that Jamaat as a political party contradicted the basic ethos of the constitution of Bangladesh. Six Jamaat leaders including the party's founder Ghulam Azam were recently convicted for war crimes and crime against humanity in Bangladesh Liberation War.

### **Execution of Mollah Quider**

On December 5, 2013, Supreme Court of Bangladesh cleared the way for the execution of a senior leader of the fundamentalist organization Jamaat-e-Islami. The court overturned the tribunal's ruling that sentenced him for life for 1971 war genocide. The apex court headed by the chief justice M Mazammel Hossain sentenced death penalty to Abdul Quader Mollah, an assistant general of Jamaat in September reversing special tribunal's verdict. Finally the execution of Mollah took place at Dhaka Central Jail on 12-12-2013 "He told us that he is proud to be a martyr for the cause of the Islamic movement in the country," said his son, Hasan Jamil<sup>1</sup>.

### **Jamaat has called the execution a "Political Murder"**

Jamaat didn't waste time to instigate people against the execution. Hundreds of people gathered in Dhaka in reaction to his death but Jamaat-e-Islami warned that it would avenge his death. It had called for a general strike. Jamaat has also called the execution a ‘political murder’ and warned of exacting revenge for ‘every drop’ of Molla's blood<sup>2</sup>. The reaction of Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami was not different. So, various Pakistani activists of Jamaat-e-Islami held protests in various towns giving vent to their anger over the execution of Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami leader and war criminal Abdul Qaider Mollah. Activists of Jamiat also offered funeral prayers on (date) Friday for Mollah. Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Daawa protested in Hyderabad in India against execution. They criticized the Pakistan government for not playing its role in defending its patriotic sons who had struggled for the integrity of the country. Further Jamaat-ud-Daawa leaders also condemned the execution of Mollah. They said that instead of raising its voice against injustice, the Pakistan government was busy in potato and onion trade with India. Such utterances of Jamaat leaders proved their profound anti-national stances. Not only that Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Abdul Waheed Qureshi, Shaikh Shaukat Ali and others urged the government to sever diplomatic ties with Bangladesh and expel its Ambassador.<sup>3</sup>

Here, it is noteworthy that the Hindu Population which was over 30 per cent at the time of partition is currently between 10 and 12 per cent.

## Hawk-Eye on Bangladesh's Election

The country's main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party, called for a boycott after the government refused to put in place an impartial caretaker government ahead of the elections, which has been customary in Bangladesh since 1996. This is seen as a guard against government manipulation. Finding the encouragement from such statements, protesters have set vehicles on fire and hurled bricks and homemade explosives demanding that the government must hold elections on terms that are accepted to the Opposition. There is nothing to celebrate about the recent elections as its validity and impartiality is resented. The country is being choked by the toxic political culture in which winner takes all and there is no room for reconciliation with the Opposing. Amid all these noises, Sheikh Hasina was sworn in as the Prime Minister with the backdrop of putting the opposition leader Khaleda Zia under house arrest and banning 21 political parties. The absence of Opposition raises concerns about the credibility of the elections<sup>4</sup>.

The Statesman on January 6, 2014 reported 200 pool related clashes and a low turnout marred the Bangladesh's general election boycotted by the opposition parties. International community described it as a farce even as 21 people were killed in the poll-related violence and over 200 polling stations were torched. As a result most of the voters preferred to stay at home fearing violence during the polling in 147 out of 300 constituencies in 59 districts. Moreover, voting was suspended at 160 centers due to violence and snatching of ballot boxes and papers. Opposition activists set over 200 polling stations on fire. Continuing political violence during strikes enforced by the Opposition since November has left over 150 people dead. For this 10th Parliament, elections were held just for 147 out of 300 seats in 59 of 64 districts of the country, as 153 candidates were elected unopposed.<sup>5</sup>

The Indian Express reported on January 4, 2013 that 77 per cent of Bangladeshis rejected elections. More than three-fourth of Bangladeshis opposed this general election which is being boycotted by the main Opposition, a Dhaka Tribunal poll showed. Reaction of the people has found 77 per cent of people believed elections without the opposition BNP was unacceptable.

## Urdu Media Response on Bangladesh Elections and plights of Hindus

- Dainik Munsif writes in its editorial on December 14, "The hanging was the result of political clash between the two political Begums, as only by taking cognisance of merely one or two witnesses, the senior leaders of Jamaat was executed. It is a below-the-belt attack on rising wave of Islam and its crusaders."
- Munsif even termed the Sheikh Hasina government as 'anti-Islamic.' In its editorial on December 16, it says, "Sheikh Hasina fears that without such dictatorial moves, her party Awaami League would be wiped out."
- The mouthpiece of Jammata-e-Islami in India, Daawat, in its special editorial on December 22, says that the dictator Hasina is forcing Bangladesh for a civil war. "India may have to lose its peace and harmony, if it remains supporting the Hasina government in the same way," it states.
- Mashrik newspaper, in its news items of December 20, prominently published the news items relating to condemnation of Mollah's hanging in the Pakistan National Assembly, with unanimous vote of motion.
- Hyderabad-based dailies Munsif and Siyasat, along with Delhi-based Sahafat and Aziz-ul-Hindu had also published Mollah's hanging and the consequent demonstrations with prominence.
- Salaar Daily writes in its editorial on December 10: "The hanging of Molla has wrecked havoc in Bangladesh and it is alarming for neighbour countries. The Tribunal also appears partial." In another editorial of the same newspaper on December 16, the execution of Mollah was determined a 'conspiracy against Pakistan Army'.

### **Atrocities on Hindus**

Members of the Hindu community are being targeted in the post-poll violence in Bangladesh. Thousands of Hindu homes and shops were burnt down by Jamaat activists following the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's re-election. The reaction of a Hindu leader is clearly indicative of atrocities on Hindus living in Bangladesh. "Hindu houses and temples have been burnt and our women are being raped and humiliated the way it was done in 1971. We cannot stay inside our homes," said Babul Krishna Hawaldar, a Hindu leader in Bangladesh. A portion of the Kali Temple in Netrakona district was gutted when unidentified persons set it on fire. Meanwhile, the police arrested a Jamaat-e-Islami leader from northern Bogra district for his alleged involvement with sabotage in different areas. Superintendent of police Mojammel Haque said that they arrested 11 more Jamaat activists from the district on charges of anti-national activities.<sup>6</sup> Leading daily Ittefaq made it more explicit, "The Jamaat-Shibir cadres launched despicable attacks on Hindu community in four districts the day after 10th parliamentary elections were complete. Hundreds of houses of Hindus were torched and looted since Sunday night in Dinajpur, Jessore, Satkhira and Thakurgaon."<sup>7</sup>

The Hindu newspaper reported on January 8, 2014 that a large number of Hindus took shelter in the temples, while others have fled to some other villages. They are very scared to return even after assurances from the local administration. "Most of these attacks took place in the minority- dominated villages in the northern districts of Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Rajshahi, the southern district of Chittagong and western Jessore. In Jessore, the miscreants vandalised at least 46 Hindu houses and establishments and torched six others on (date) Sunday night, alleging that minority people had voted for the Awami League. In Thakurgaon, the Jamaat-led terrorists unleashed violence on the religious minorities. Jamaat-Shibir and BNP activists went on the rampage, damaging and looting 65 houses and 30 shops and set paddy on fire stored in courtyards in several homes. About 700 elderly and young women, men and children of Malopara took shelter at Deyapara village across the Bhairab river. About 100 houses of Hindus were vandalized and torched. In Dinajpur, at least 350 houses and 50 shops in five villages were damaged, set ablaze and looted. According to the locals, around 2,000 Jamaat-Shibir men, armed with sharp weapons and sticks, launched the attack on Kornai village on Sunday. Several hundred men, women and children fled their homes. In Chittagong, Hindus are under threat following attacks on poll night in Satkania, Loahagara and Banskhali upazillas, considered a stronghold of the Jamaat-Shibir. In Loahagara, Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised and looted several shops owned by Hindus at Hindu Haat.

India Today on January 7, 2014 reported that as per The Daily Star and several other newspapers, activists of main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its key-ally fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami attacked Hindu households in western Jessore and northwestern Dinajpur as soon as the voting ended on Sunday afternoon. Media report said that BNP and Jamaat men looted, vandalized and burned Hindu houses in Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Lalmonirhat, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jessore. The villagers told reporters that 400-500 Jamaat activists exploded about 250 bombs, vandalized a hundred houses and torched 10 to 12 others. Of around 1,200 to 1,500 people in the village, inhabited mostly by fishermen, 700 fled their houses soon after the attack. They took shelter in the nearby villages while some of them hid in orchards. In Dinajpur, at least 350 houses and 50 shops were damaged, set ablaze and looted. According to locals, around 2,000 Jamaat men armed with sharp weapons and sticks launched the attack at Kornai village on Sunday evening 9. The Statesman on January 6, 2014 also underlined the containerizing disturbing political violence during strikes enforced by the opposition since November have left over 150 people dead.

The Daily Star (05.2.2014) reported that villagers expressed their anguish on such a horrible loss of life and property. "We left our house in 1971 as the Pakistan army and razakars set fire to our village. And we are passing through the same ordeal in 2014," lamented Bishwajit Sarkar of Malopara village in Abhaynagar, Jessore. His small shop was looted and fishing nets at his house were burned down.

Bishwajit's neighbour Mayarani is an elderly woman who works as a domestic help in nearby houses. Jamaat-Shibir activists looted all her belongings, even the small quantity of rice she had stored in her hut. While talking to our Jessore correspondent, she said she now had only one item of clothing left, and that was saree she was wearing. According to villagers, Jamaat-Shibir activists of Prembag, Chanpadanga, Bahirghat, Beledanga and some adjacent areas threatened voters of Malopara not to go to the polling stations<sup>9</sup>.

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In this picture taken on January 5, 2014, Bangladeshi resident wanting to vote was attacked by protestors in a field in Rajshahi, some 260 km from Dhaka

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