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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 26, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



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Thursday, March 26, 2015

•(1310)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** Colleagues, we will now begin the 62nd meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is March 26, 2015. This meeting is being televised.

[English]

We've had a number of hearings into the treatment of religious minorities in Bangladesh. Today, to continue those hearings, we have on behalf of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, Anuradha Bose, who is that organization's adviser on parliamentary and governmental affairs.

Ms. Bose, welcome to the subcommittee. I just want to advise you that normally we ask our presenters to keep their presentations to 10 minutes or less. We don't impose this as a discipline, but the briefer the presentation, the longer the time available for questions and answers with the various members here. That tends to be the most productive part of the meeting, in my experience. We will turn things over to you, and when you are finished, we will go to those questions and answers. Please begin your testimony.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose (Adviser on Parliamentary and Governmental Affairs, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I wish to thank the clerk for making all the arrangements to get me up here because I have a cast on my leg and it was going to be very difficult for me to negotiate the Hill in this condition, so I must thank him. I thank you for asking me to come.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, members of the press, parliamentary staffers, friends, we are very grateful to be given another chance to appear before you.

I am Anu Bose. I'm the adviser to the executive committee on parliamentary and governmental affairs of BHBCUC. I'm also the liaison with the Christian community. My antecedents are in Bangladesh but I was born in West Bengal, Calcutta, now known as Kolkata. I am a Canadian by choice and also by marriage.

You have already received a written submission from us, so today I will confine my remarks to a few points because I would indeed like for you to be able to ask me questions, and I will do my best to

answer. If there is something that I cannot answer, then I will certainly get back to you after having spoken to the council.

First of all BHBCUC, or as we call ourselves the unity council for short, would like to debunk the myth that Bangladesh is a secular Muslim nation. I was very shocked to see these very words in a March 12 op-ed in the *National Post* written by a former aide to Minister Paradis. The idea of secularism has always been very contested throughout the short history of Bangladesh. The founding father, Sheikh Hasina's father, was secular, and the original Bangladesh constitution has secularity within it. Religious pluralism and freedom of religion are also enshrined in article 41.

You know they had two very long periods of military dictatorships. Two generals in quick succession, General Ziaur and General Ershad. They brought in amendments that abrogated the secular orientation of the constitution when they seized power, declared martial law, and then proceeded to reinvent themselves as presidents.

General Ziaur Rahman removed the secular principle by the fifth amendment and inserted the Islamic invocation "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful", in Arabic, into the preamble. But much more importantly, he allowed religion-based political parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, which had been banned, to function and flourish. In 1988, General Ershad declared Islam to be the state religion under the eighth amendment. The official name of the country remained and remains the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The fifth amendment was declared illegal by the high court in 2005 and confirmed again by the supreme court five years later. If we accept the National Secular Society of the U.K.'s definition of secularism, then Bangladesh, as a declared Muslim country, cannot be secular because it poses the primacy of Islam, and it is a Muslim majority country, over the others.

In our earlier submission, we had pointed out that there is a widely held perception that the ethnic and religious minority vote gravitates to the Awami League, the league of the founding father of Bangladesh.

There's more than a grain of truth in that. Our Dhaka colleagues, who are in the field, have been told by the minorities that, though they've been disappointed time and time again by the Awami League's lack of vigour in enforcing their rights, they prefer to stick with the devil they know, so they park their vote, *faute de mieux*, with the Awami League.

This tilt toward the Awami League has always laid minorities open to harassment and threats because they do tend to vote in a bloc. Even before that, there had been a systematic undercounting of the religious and ethnic minorities in the census. The census takers aren't the best or the most well-trained, but the minorities who have lost faith in their government tend to see this as part of some kind of conspiracy to keep them off the rolls.

I find it very painful to have to come here and speak on a subject in which I have an academic interest, but which I know does affect the minorities of Bangladesh badly; that is, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Islam in Bangladesh is not monolithic, but it is very syncretic. It absorbed a lot of Hindu and Buddhist cultural elements and it was certainly very open. The first interaction that Islam and Bangladesh had was through the Sufi tradition, which is a very gentle, mystic tradition. The Muslim communities developed away from the mainstream of Islam in greater India. The majority of the population is Sunni, but there are two conflicting tendencies within it. One is the Deobandi, which is a very strict, revivalist movement, somewhat akin to Wahhabism, dating from 1867. The Barelvi, which is very predominant in Pakistan, is a much more folksy kind of Islam.

The roots of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh lies in the politicization of Islam by the two successive military dictators, who needed this to create an aura of political legitimacy around them. General Ziaur also tried to curry favour with the gulf states by bringing in his amendments, but this paid off and soon Bangladesh was exporting hordes of its unemployed manual and white-collar workers, especially into Saudi Arabia.

Bangladesh was then transformed into, what I would call, a remittance junkie. In 2013, remittances from Saudi Arabia alone were estimated at more than \$1.3 billion U.S., while Canadian aid fluctuated between \$96 million and \$120 million, which is very small beer.

Many of these workers brought back a strict Wahhabi ideology, which is fairly close to but not quite Deobandi, and helped to create a support base. Then there was this intricate playing of footsie between the two largest political parties, the AL and the BNP, with Islamist fundamentalist parties, especially the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, which is a parliamentary Islamist party.

The Awami League legitimized the Deobandi-based Quomi madrasa movement, which has grown like mushrooms after rain and flourished. They are the progenitors of something called Hefazat-e-Islam, the helpers of Islam. If you remember, there were these huge marches after Friday prayers, practically every Friday, over these last few months, of young people, students of the Quomi madrasa, fighting running battles in the streets, and calling for death and hanging of secular people.

• (1315)

Nobody really knows how many groups flourish in Bangladesh. But what we do know is that we have a list of about 29, and there are overlapping leadership and overlapping and interlocking memberships.

I was really surprised to read that a four-member delegation of Daesh from Syria had come a-visiting to Chittagong and had met

with the top brass from banned Islamist organizations. People tell us that there are, in the depth of the Chittagong jungles, training camps. We have never been there because foreigners or even Bangladeshis who are not from the hill tribes, like Dr. Aditya Dewan, can go in there.

Now how do these people finance themselves? Most South Asian countries are plagued with illicit financial transfers, so it's very easy to tap into these sources. Also there are remittances. I don't know if you know that there is something called the *hundi* system, which is an informal system of money transfers through relatives or unregistered agents. There's a parallel economy, or an economy within an economy. The best authority on that is Dr. Abul Barkat, who is a professor of economics at Dhaka University. The data I have from him dates from 2008, so it's not very useful right now.

The space for secular dissent is also shrinking. You must have heard of the death of Avijit Roy, the blogger, the American citizen who was hacked to death and his wife badly injured on a Dhaka street. He was an American so the FBI came a-calling. But there was another one three years ago, an architect, a Bangladeshi, also an avowed atheist and blogger, who was also killed the same way in front of his house.

Both these gentlemen had received death threats. I was shocked to read that a professor at the elite Bangladesh University for Engineering and Technology, had been questioned about the death of this blogger. But the government has also cracked down on prominent atheist bloggers, accusing them of defaming the Prophet and Islam. Bangladesh is now ranked as 146 out of a 180 countries by Reporters without Borders on their press freedoms index.

Just before I close, I'd like to tell you about what is happening in Bangladesh right now. You must have all read that Bangladesh has been paralyzed since January 5 by a series of uniquely South Asian protest tactics, the *hartal* and the *abaradh*. Now the *hartal* is when you shut down the city. Mr. Sinha Roy who had visited his mother, had to go to the airport in an ambulance pretending he was ill, because there was no other way he could have caught his flight. He saw petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails being thrown all around him. He said it was the first time in his life, since he fled Bangladesh, that he was scared.

The *abaradh* is even more offensive. It means people blocking highways and railway tracks, strewing nails on the road and removing railway ties and lines. There's already been one derailment. Trains don't move, trucks don't move, and buses don't move. Al Jazeera says 1,200 vehicles have come under arson attacks and 112 people have died. There is no way we can verify. A huge number of people have been rounded up, sometimes innocent, and thrown into jail.

• (1320)

The country's economy has suffered \$21.7 billion in losses as of May 9. The garment industry, it's biggest export, has come to a halt. It has hit the poor, the daily waged workers, small shopkeepers, and people in the informal economy very hard, as they have little or no savings to fall back on. But neither of these two ladies are for the turning.

We have a series of recommendations, Mr. Chair. Do you want me to read them out or would you rather have the questions first?

**The Chair:** I think, given the time—we only have 35 minutes left—my preference would be to go directly to questions, but to collect those recommendations.

Are they available to us in both English and French, or just in English?

• (1325)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes, I sent them to...

**The Chair:** Perfect. Okay, we'll make sure they get circulated ASAP, then.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes. Even while I answer questions, I can bring up some of these.

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Just before we go to questions from somebody else, I wanted to ask you one just to make it clear.

Your organization is the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, but you also mentioned the case of an atheist blogger. Do you also represent other groups that are not mentioned within your...? Do you represent only Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, or all people who are suffering from persecution based on their beliefs?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We represent all the minority groups. We do have associates who are Muslims, even practising Muslims, and they are our supporters, like Dr. Shahriar Kabir, who we tried to get here to speak. But no, we are non-partisan, non-sectarian. We are secular but most of us, as you can see, have a faith.

**The Chair:** Of course, yes. I just wanted to find out the scope of the group. Thank you.

We'll start with Mr. Sweet. Just so you know, it's five-minute rounds each.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Your testimony was very good. With only five minutes, I'm just straining to see exactly what track I want to take. Maybe I'll just go with the protests right now, rather than the Friday marches.

The BNP has been calling for these protests. I'm trying to get from your testimony, are you implying that there's an Islamist influence behind the BNP? Are they victimizing everyone, from political views that they disagree with to religious minorities, or is there a difference between those kinds of persecutions?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Well, Mr. Sweet, the BNP is in a 20-party alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, which is a parliamentary Islamist party, and probably one of the oldest on the

subcontinent. Many of the other 20 parties also have an Islamist orientation. The idea of bringing the government to its knees goes beyond religion. It has to do with the fact that during the last election in January 2014, they boycotted and of course Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League won something of a victory. We certainly did not support the idea of a boycott.

But having done this, they now want to bring the party to its knees. They want a snap election, which they think they can win. The minorities are even more fearful of leaving their homes now because they fear they may be arrested by the police just for getting out there, if a petrol bomb doesn't do them in. It's a very perilous time for everybody.

**Mr. David Sweet:** By the way, just a clarification. You mentioned these 20 parties, and you mentioned the term "Islamist". Are we talking about extremists or are we talking about—

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay. I want to be clear in that regard.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I wanted to mention the granddaddy of all of these is Jamaat-e-Islami.

**Mr. David Sweet:** There's a double bind then for people from the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Ahmadiyya minorities in the sense that they could be arrested by the government and they could get caught up and killed in the violence of the Islamist-driven BNP.

Is that what you're saying?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Give me an idea about what recommendations you'd have for us with regard to dealing with the calamity of this proportion that's going on right now.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We would ask the Government of Canada to use the Commonwealth to act as an honest broker between the two warring leaders of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Get them to the table, to mediation, to break the political deadlock. We would look to the Commonwealth with the government spearheading this.

• (1330)

**Mr. David Sweet:** In that regard, you mentioned Daesh, which is often referred to as ISIS or ISIL.

What kind of evidence do you have that these training camps may be in Bangladesh?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We can give you references. The ones in Chittagong might be difficult to get but we do know there are. You must have some idea of the kind of interrogation that people get in that country. A lot of them do say things now. To what extent their confessions are valid, I have no way of knowing. We can certainly get you references.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. Marston, please.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Bose. It's nice to have you here today.

Following a little on Mr. Sweet's question, the relationship between the sitting government and the suggestion of ISIS in the country, what would be the relationship between the two in your view?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I don't think the Awami League in any way, shape, or form can be allied but they have had to make a pact with their own set of Islamists to stay where they are. Their biggest Mephistophelean fact as far as I'm concerned has been on the madrasa question.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** You spoke of the original Muslim group—

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Sufis.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Sufis. That brand of Islam was less aggressive.

Relative to the parliamentary Islamist party, are they part of that party or is that a more extreme view?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** No.

The parliamentary party would be more from the Deobandi, which I think Ms. Grewal would know about. The Deobandi are an Indian branch that could be a kind of Wahhabism. They were revivalist—

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** So they are more extreme.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** They are much more extreme.

Hindus, Sikhs, even Christians, get together with Sufis and go to Sufi shrines.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** That was my belief and that's why I posed the question.

It sounds as if maybe they're disaffected youth as is happening in so many countries and that they're being pulled to more of a fundamentalist, extreme view.

Most traditional religious groups have publications that espouse the values of their faith. If the minority groups your council represents were to put forward the publications, would that be used as some kind of evidence against them? You mentioned that many are fearful of injury, even going on the streets. Is the possibility there of documents being used as evidence against them?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** No, I don't think so. It might be used against the Christians—especially the newer, more evangelical, less mainstream Christians, who tend to leave tracks—but probably not the others. Hindus and Buddhists don't tend to have a lot of written stuff. Two Hindus cannot agree on what Hinduism is.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Again, the minority faith communities will have established churches, gurdwaras, or synagogues—I'm going through a variety of examples here. Are they being destroyed? Are they being attacked? Is there physical damage being done to them?

• (1335)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** A great deal has already been done. The attack on Buddhist temples would be because there are lot of saleable artifacts from very early Buddhist days, and these can command a huge amount of money on the black market and on eBay.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Are you suggesting then that it's not as much hoodlumism as it is a religious-based attack?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** It's both.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** It's both, isn't it?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** They know what's in there. There is gold in Hindu temples because the images are dressed in all kinds of gold ornaments, and people can see it from the outside. It's like Calcutta, where they say, "Let's go into the Catholic chapel, take the ciborium, and run", because they know what it's worth.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Do you have statistical information on this?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Plenty.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I presume that you will be submitting some of that to the committee.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We did already, in our first big submission. If you want, I can load you down with statistics and you wouldn't like me after that.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** It's always to the advantage of our research staff, as they help us prepare our reports, to have that kind of background.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I presume that's my time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** It is your time, but I just want to follow up on what you said.

If you have additional material you think is relevant, don't be shy about it being too much. Submit it to the clerk and he'll make sure the analysts get it. They will be able to use it in the preparation of the report we do.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** That remains a part of our committee record.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Ms. Grewal, please, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Bose, for taking time out of your busy schedule to come and share your thoughts with us today.

I understand that in Bangladesh there have been over 100 deaths since January and the police there have arrested thousands of activists and banned the opposition groups from holding demonstrations. Is there a danger that this heavy crackdown on anti-government protestors in Bangladesh will create an opening for militant extremism to take root in the country?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I don't know that it would open.... I think there is a lot of homegrown militancy there already. If they are not on the streets, they are definitely on social media. I am astounded by how tech-savvy they are and how well they use social media—not just the progressives, if you want to call them that, but all the political parties—to get people out onto the streets. It's difficult to say. You know, there are very nasty elements on both sides, including in the government.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Could you comment on the recent disappearance of opposition leader Salahuddin Ahmed and what this means for democracy in Bangladesh?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** It would be the same thing anywhere in the world. Mr. Salahuddin was exercising his right to dissent, and dissent is healthy for democracy.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Local and international rights groups say that they see a pattern of deaths among people being held by police or during what security forces describe as “encounters”. They claim all terrorists are criminals, so these deaths, they say, amount to a form of illegal execution. Could you comment on these claims?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I can't comment on these claims per se, but I think that this is, again, endemic to the subcontinent's countries. Extrajudicial killings, what they call “staged encounters”, are used all the time in India too. You don't know who or what; you have to take the security force's word for it. At the council, we absolutely abhor and condemn violence.

• (1340)

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Last month, Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi American blogger known for condemning religious extremism, was hacked to death on a street in Dhaka by two assailants wielding machetes, and Islamist extremists are suspected in the attack. Does Mr. Roy's death signify a changing Bangladeshi society, one that is moving away from secularism?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I would hope not but the space for secular thinkers is shrinking. Also, Mr. Roy has a lot of defenders. He came from a very prominent family with a Hindu last name, and the Americans have taken him to heart and come to, at least, his wife's aid. What is significant there is that, when he was being hacked to death, the police were hanging around. They did nothing. That is what makes us fearful.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Well, if all avenues of political discourse are closed, could Islamist parties that are part of electoral politics renounce the political system? What would this mean for religious minorities?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** The religious minorities do not feel safe anymore. It was one of our Muslim supporters who said that minorities are about to become an endangered species in this country. The minorities feel safe nowhere, not even within the four walls of the legislature.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** All right, thanks, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You are exactly five minutes and two seconds. Very precisely done, if I may say.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, please.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

This has been a fascinating discussion. I'm not a regular member of this committee; I'm replacing Mr. Cotler. I'm very pleased to do so and I've learned a lot in a very short period of time, but I'm not as familiar with the issue as he would be or the other members of the committee would be.

What I'm curious about is the constitution that you spoke about, attempts having been made to amend the constitution. Those

amendments, as I understand it, were struck down by the courts, so there is a solid secular constitution, I assume.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** It's difficult to say that it's a secular constitution. It says it's secular but it does have the Muslim invocation, which is religious. I don't think that it is a secular constitution as such, but the more egregious things have been removed. But removing from the constitution and the government's wholehearted support of a secular society are two different things. It is very difficult for any party that is in power in Bangladesh to be totally secular. The political culture of the place has changed.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** That would include the courts, I guess.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Well, the courts are still extremely well functioning, and I would say very much above board. In fact, I think Mr. Sinha Roy mentioned that it has a Hindu for chief justice now. Now that's a very forward-looking gesture. It has never happened before.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** So the courts are fairly neutral, or as neutral as they can be within the constitution that the country has.

In your opinion, if the constitution—I grant you it's not entirely secular, but it appears to have some kind of neutrality, if not total—were properly implemented, and assuming that on the other side of the equation, there wasn't the political and violent chaos that probably makes it very hard for things to get to courts in the first place, but if you didn't have that, could the constitution be properly implemented to create a stable functioning society where religious minorities would be protected?

• (1345)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We would like to think so but we don't have much confidence in it as long as these two warring ladies are at the helms of their respective parties. Because this is not a political battle. This is a battle of two men who have died and of these women carrying on their legacy. One is hiding behind the corpse of a father and another behind the corpse of a husband. It's reduced to the personal, which is why it is as bitter as it is. So no constitution can—

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** At this point, no....

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** At this point, or at any point....

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Oh, at any point? So even if violence subsided—

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes, because this is an enmity that is almost like a vendetta.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Okay, and it's just gripped the country.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** It's gripped the country from the day General Ziaur died.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Interesting.

I probably have a bit of time. Perhaps Ms. Grewal would like to take the time—whatever the rules of this committee are.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's very generous of you.

Actually we'll go to Mr. Wilks, who is the next speaker, and then if he has some time left over we'll transfer that to Ms. Grewal, and then we'll go on as we always do to Mr. Benskin.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. I will share my time with Ms. Grewal.

Thank you very much for the informative discussion today. I'm not a member of this committee. Mr. Hillier is, but he's away today.

I do want you to maybe just explain a little more for me with regard to the Awami League. You said that the minority lean toward that party even though they are subject to harassment and threats. Could you explain to me and break down for me the Awami League—what it consists of, and why the minority go to it even under threat of violence?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** The Awami League is the founding party of Bangladesh. It was the party of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was the father of Sheikh Hasina.

Bengalis, whether they are from West Bengal or from Bangladesh, are hellishly sentimental. They hold a very soft corner in their hearts for the founder's party, and he did try to make it into a secular country. He put it into the constitution and people will remember that, especially in the older generation. The younger generation says that it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. They're very cynical. The older people will still lean towards it and they will do it. If they can get to the votes, they will.

This is a strange phenomenon in South Asia. The middle and upper classes didn't used to vote. It's the poor who voted and they like the idea of voting, just as some of them also like the idea of ballot stuffing because they are paid to do it. But people do discuss politics and they do like to vote. It's a strange idea, but they do.

**Mr. David Wilks:** Why is it that the middle to upper classes are not, for lack of a better word, interested in voting? I understand why the poor would because they have a lot to gain by an opportunity to use their voice, but the middle to upper classes would have a lot to lose as well.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** You will forgive me, parliamentarians, for being a trifle cynical here. In Bangladesh you can get what you want. There are other ways of influencing politicians other than through the parliamentary process, so why should they bother putting somebody there who they can easily reach in many other ways, some of which are not very savoury?

My mother was an Indian politician, and I have some idea.

**Mr. David Wilks:** Thank you very much.

I'll share the rest of my time with Ms. Grewal.

**The Chair:** Ms. Grewal, you have three minutes if you want to use it.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Mr. Sweet has something.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet? That works, too.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Ms. Bose, thank you for your testimony.

Have you been on the ground yourself in Bangladesh in the recent past?

• (1350)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Not in the recent past, but when I taught at Birmingham I taught a lot of senior civil servants from Bangladesh, what they called permanent secretaries, who are at the DM level.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Do you have many sources in Bangladesh to keep you informed?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes, because Mr. Sinha Roy, and the founders of this particular chapter, all have family there and they keep in touch. I am a news junkie and since I learned to read in Bengali, I'm even more of one. I didn't used to know.

**Mr. David Sweet:** We've had a lot of discussion about many things, but no one to my knowledge or recollection has brought up the influence of surrounding countries—China, Burma, etc. What roles are these other countries playing? There has to be some kind of interest for them in Bangladesh's situation being unstable right now.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I know that India is not best pleased; they never have been. We should also remember that during the 1971 war many of the Awami League took refuge in India and then India came to Bangladesh's aid, so the ties there are fairly strong. As you know, India has a very porous border with Bangladesh. People have fields through which the border runs. There is a lot of smuggling there. India has always looked very warily at Bangladesh.

What surprises me even more is the influence of Pakistan, which is practically one continent away. With the advent of the military dictators, who were trained in military colleges in Pakistan, the influence came back. In the first few years there was a great chill between these countries, and rightly so. If you read Gary Bass's book, *The Blood Telegram*, you will see the enmity that existed and in some areas still exists, which is why the bloggers were able to bring all those people out onto the streets calling for the death penalty for any of the war criminals from 1971.

About China, it is hard to say; I have not much idea. But since I have been a student of the politics of Pakistan and Afghanistan, I can see where the links would come, especially with Pakistan.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Are the religious minorities suffering from a lot of human trafficking as well?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** I wouldn't know, but definitely there is some among the hill tribes and the plains tribes. This is something our Catholic counterparts would know about. From the hill tribes, yes, definitely—

**Mr. David Sweet:** Is it primarily for labour?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** No... or yes, it's for labour, if you call sex work labour.

**Mr. David Sweet:** So it is for sex work as well.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes, and it's because hill tribe women are considered very pretty—that's the stereotype—and also the most needy.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. Benskin, please.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Thank you, Dr. Bose, for your presence here and your testimony. There are many things at play here. I guess originally, like my colleague Mr. Sweet, I was trying to grapple with knowing where I want to go.

One thing I want to explore with you a bit is this. There is a tendency for us in the west to want to narrow things down to there being either a political or a religious problem. It seems to me that there is, in a sense, a playing of one off the other. The two generals have almost deliberately tried to put the religious element into the constitution and have fed it out to people, whereby they're picking up on it. It's almost a case of using it as, for lack of a better way of putting it, a distraction from their desire for a totalitarian type of process disguised as a secular or even a religious environment.

You touched on that, I think, when you were saying that the two warring ladies...that it's more personal than anything political or religious. I would like to explore this a little more with you, if you understand what I'm getting at.

• (1355)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Now, should I tackle the generals first, or should ladies go first, Mr. Benskin?

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Either would do, but I guess the generals, for the simple reason that it seems to me the ladies are the response to what began with the founders and the generals.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** We can start with the generals.

The generals, especially General Ziaur Rahman, came to power on a sea of blood, and he ended in a sea of blood. General Ziaur and after that General Ershad both needed to give themselves some political legitimacy, and they used religion. The idea of signing on the Islamist parties is something that yet another general, Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan, did; he brought them on in order to give himself legitimacy.

These two men needed legitimacy, and they thought the easiest way would be to give a banned party—in the case of General Ershad, the Jamaat-e-Islami parliamentary party—into his fold. This was to give him legitimacy. Now, he may say he could control these parties, but they got away, as they always have. So this was in order to create an aura of legitimacy about him. At the same time, he was trying to curry favour with the gulf, don't forget, to take the unemployed hordes off his hands. It's a cynical play but this is the way it was.

The two ladies are both very devout Muslims, but this is a personal enmity. When the personal becomes the political, in some cases it can be good, but here it has been a tragedy for the country. They have put their personal likes and dislikes above the good of the country, which is very difficult for many people, whether they are religious or irreligious or whatever, to subscribe to.

This country is poor enough. It cannot afford to lose the amount of money that it is losing. I can give you the figures from the chambers of commerce, but nobody will be able to give you the figures that a day labourer, a waged labourer, a woman working in a factory sewing garments for us is losing. All we can say is that we know they don't have the wherewithal to fall back on.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Thank you.

Caught up in all of this, then, are the religious minorities who are caught in the crossfire of all of this.

You mentioned Sufism as being an inspiration and a connection point, back in history. I've had the pleasure of working.... I did a film called *Adam's Wall*, in which I played a Sufi Muslim. As part of my education I spent some time with the Sufi, who were the only ones who actually would help me to learn how to pray properly—the imams in Montreal wouldn't do it. I learned about the beauty of Sufism. They're now in hiding in various parts of the world because of this crossfire, and it seems to me that the religious minorities now in Bangladesh are in the same predicament.

In what way can we in the west help to alleviate or work towards... I don't want to say "protecting" but alleviating that situation?

• (1400)

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Mr. Benskin, the Sufis are very few and far between now in Bangladesh.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** That I know. I meant the other religious minorities.

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** The alleviation, I don't know. There's always the question of bilateral dialogue. But I can tell you this much, Bangladeshi minorities would be very happy, if there's an election, if Canada were to send trained election monitors or support the formation of a Commonwealth election monitoring team. They would be very happy if the government would monitor all the funds that were going in from here to see that a percentage of this is going to the beneficiaries who are from religious and ethnic minorities. They would be very happy if you built capacity in the ministry.

How to do these things? I've put these things down because my background was, once upon a time, in development. Capacity-building is one thing, but that's a very long and not necessarily a successful exercise when it's time bound. If you could improve the lot of all Bangladeshis, then there would be less of a compunction to turn to violent ways of getting justice or what you think is justice.

You have to think of protecting the minorities within a larger framework because the minute there are special quotas for a minority—and I am against quotas—or special affirmative action or whatever, that will draw even more attention to themselves, and this is not what they want.

They say that if you're going to uphold our rights, you also have to see that there is a climate for this kind of thing and that it's a long-term thing. You could start with the educational system. Let them learn the alphabet and let them become literate. There is not much. There are government-run madrasas that do teach the curriculum as well as religious studies. But the Quomi madrasas, such as the ones the Deobandis run are absolutely and strictly religious education, and Ms. Grewal will know.

We have that in the country of our origin, too, so it's the education system. There are two books on the madrasas that have been written by Pakistan, but still.... West Bengal has madrasas and they are controlled by the government. They are regulated and government-run in some cases.

You have to start with the next generation.

**The Chair:** Just to be clear, West Bengal is a state in India, correct?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes. Bengal was divided into two partitions. West Bengal is where I was born. It's India. It's across the border from Bangladesh

**The Chair:** The madrasas there are run by the state of West Bengal?

**Dr. Anuradha Bose:** Yes. There are some in Bangladesh, too, run by the nation of Bangladesh. They're called Alia and these are called Quomi.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Bose, for coming. You've been very helpful.

Thank you, colleagues, for being so darned collegial, transferring time back and forth that way. It was very impressive. A model unlikely to be replicated on every other committee, but we can always hope.

This meeting is adjourned.

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