



Plenary sitting

B8-0533/2018

13.11.2018

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on The human rights situation in Bangladesh
(2018/2927(RSP))

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on behalf of the ECR Group

B8-0533/2018

European Parliament resolution on The human rights situation in Bangladesh (2018/2927(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Bangladesh;
- having regard to the Universal Period Review on Bangladesh of May 2018;
- having regard to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh;
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- having regard to the World Press Freedom Index 2018;
- having regard to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief of 1981;
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure;

A. whereas Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries with its 166 million people crammed into a delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra River systems which empty into the Bay of Bengal;

B. whereas poverty is deep and widespread, but Bangladesh has in recent years slowed population growth and improved access to healthcare and education;

C. whereas Bangladesh is a parliamentary republic with elections planned to take place by the end of December 2018;

D. whereas the Constitution of Bangladesh states that “fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed”;

E. whereas the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review of May 2018 praised Bangladesh for its “remarkable progress” in improving human rights in recent years;

F. whereas Bangladesh was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in October 2018;

G. whereas, despite progress, concerns continue to be raised about the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh, particularly in areas relating to freedom of expression, extremist attacks and sectarian violence against religious and other minority communities, its retention of the death penalty, and corruption in the justice system;

H. whereas efforts to improve the human rights situation in Bangladesh have faced setbacks including the 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis, and the threat from violent extremism, including groups affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS);

I. whereas Professor Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation in Myanmar, said the people of Bangladesh “have shown the world the definition of humanity as they continue, despite their own hardships to host the Rohingya people”;

J. whereas terrorist attacks have seen the government pursue a strict “zero tolerance” approach with allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearances involving law enforcement agencies;

K. whereas concerns about the treatment of women and girls also remain, the death penalty is still a legal punishment for a wide range of offences, and homosexuality is illegal;

L. whereas the 2018 Global Slavery Index (GSI) placed Bangladesh 92nd out of 167 countries for the estimated percentage of people living in conditions which the GSI described as modern slavery;

M. whereas opposition political parties continued to raise allegations of politically motivated court cases against their members, including senior leaders, and of the government restricting their ability to campaign publicly;

N. whereas opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is currently serving 10 years in jail for corruption and is subsequently barred from contesting next month’s elections; whereas she denies the charges, which her supporters claim were politically motivated; whereas her five year sentence was subsequently doubled by the Bangladesh High Court and she has been convicted of further offences in the meantime;

O. whereas the resignation under pressure of the Chief Justice, Surendra Kumar Sinha, in November 2017 following a Supreme Court ruling against the government in a constitutional case, raised questions about the independence of the judiciary;

P. whereas Bangladesh ranked 146th out of 180 countries in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index;

Q. whereas earlier this month award winning photographer and activist Shahidul Alam was denied bail for a fourth time having been held for three months in a high profile freedom of speech case; whereas he was arrested in August and accused of making “false” and “provocative” statements on television and Facebook during student protests

R. whereas Mr Alam is being investigated under Bangladesh's internet laws which critics say are used to stifle dissent and harass journalists;

S. whereas despite genuine media pluralism in Bangladesh, self-censorship is reportedly growing as a result of violence against journalists and media outlets, and the almost systematic impunity enjoyed by those responsible;

T. whereas in 2017 at least 25 journalists and several hundred bloggers and Facebook users were prosecuted under the Information and Communication Technology Act, which penalises online content that is regarded as defamatory or blasphemous;

U. whereas in 2017 Bangladesh became the top-ranked country for gender equality in South Asia, according to the Global Gender Gap Index;

V. whereas despite improvements, child marriage remains widespread with Bangladesh having one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world;

W. whereas Bangladesh also has high levels of violence against women and girls, with more than 80 per cent of married Bangladeshi women report suffering physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse from a partner;

1. Supports the people and Government of Bangladesh in their ongoing reform process, and offers its help in strengthening democratic structures and measures which protect fundamental rights and freedoms;

2. Encourages the Government of Bangladesh to implement the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review, particularly in areas such as independence of the judiciary, civil and political rights, freedom of the media, economic, social and cultural rights, and the rights of women and girls;

3. Praises the people and government of Bangladesh for their response to the Rohingya refugee crisis and their ongoing support since August 2017;

4. Welcomes the fact there has been no repetition of the terrorist attacks of 2015-16 against religious minorities, bloggers, or LGBTI rights activists, but notes with concern local level discrimination and violence against such groups and individuals;

5. Demands an end to impunity for those members of the Bangladesh security services involved in arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings;

6. Voices concern that the authorities have charged a large number of journalists under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Telecommunications Act 2006, which criminalises the posting online of inflammatory or derogatory information against the state or individuals;

7. Expresses concern, however, that the recently adopted Digital Security Act 2018 could be used by the Bangladeshi authorities to further undermine freedom of the press and expression;

8. Calls for the immediate release of Shahidul Alam as a sign of commitment from the authorities to press freedom and freedom of expression both on and offline;

9. Condemns the actions of law enforcement authorities which continue to arrest opposition activists and calls for tolerance of political plurality, particularly in the run-up to the December 2018 elections;

10. Notes the prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on embezzlement and other charges, and claims by her supporters they are politically motivated;
11. Calls on the authorities to take appropriate legal action against those discriminating or committing attacks and making threats against religious and other minority groups in Bangladesh;
12. Urges the Government of Bangladesh to implement their commitments under the Sustainability Compact in 2017 in relation to labour laws in order to bring them into line with international standards;
13. Expresses concern that workplace officials who attack or threaten workers, particularly those involved with trade unions, are not held accountable for such behaviour;
14. Expresses concern that while the 2017 Child Marriage Restraint Act includes provisions on strengthening prevention and on prosecution of offenders, it contains a clause allowing marriage under the age of 18 under special circumstances with parental consent and court permission; calls for this loophole to be closed as a matter of urgency in the interests of child protection;
15. Welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Bangladesh to address issues relating to modern slavery, and encourages further measures to continue this positive progress;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the EEAS, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and the Presiding Officer and Members of the Jatiya Sangsad.