

Bangladesh: Islamists again violently oppose women's rights - Secularists need to resist firmly

Tuesday 31 May 2011, by [BBC](#), [New Age \(Bangladesh\)](#), [The Daily Star](#) (Date first published: 7 April 2011).

Bangladesh: The Muslim Right opposes government's secular decisions. Selected media reports and editorial comments.

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Police disperse Bangladesh protests against women's rights

Thursday 7 April 2011

BBC News, 4 April 2011

Police in Bangladesh broke up angry protesters blocking a main highway in the capital Dhaka, over a new law giving women equal property rights.

Dozens were arrested and injured as police used tear gas and batons.

Schools, businesses and offices across the country remained closed in a nationwide strike enforced by a group of Islamic parties.

Bangladesh has a secular legal system, but in matters relating to inheritance it follows Sharia law.

Under Bangladeshi law a woman normally inherits half as much as her brother. But under the new rules, every child would inherit an equal amount.

Protesters blocked a key road linking the capital, Dhaka, with the main port of Chittagong. Officials say around 100 protesters have been taken into custody.

"The protesters blocked the highway for sometime. The road has been cleared now," Mahbubur Rahman, a senior police officer told the BBC.

But Fazlul Huq Amini, who heads the Islamic Law Implementation Committee, said the strike was

successful and “people spontaneously supported the protest”.

Protesters, organised by the Islami Oiko Jote (Unity group), argue that the new proposals go against the Koran.

The government says its new policy does not violate Islam and aims to give women greater rights in employment, inheritance and education.

Our correspondent says the proposed law has been welcomed by women’s rights groups. They say the policy has the support of the majority of people in the country.

Although the hardline religious parties do not have major political influence, their campaign to portray some of the government’s policies as anti-Islamic could have an impact on rural areas of the country in the long term, according to our correspondent.

Women’s policy detractors

The Daily Star, April 4, 2011

Editorial

Don’t use religion for party politics

WE are saddened and worried that in the name of Islam some people have been trying to create confusion around the issue of the proposed national policy on women. In many ways, it is a repeat of what these very elements tried doing recently about the education policy, a move that created some unnecessary confusion. Now when a progressive step is being taken to ensure that Bangladesh’s women enjoy equal rights with men politically, economically and socially, these extreme elements are busy spreading the false notion that the proposed policy goes against the Quran and Sunnah. It does nothing of the sort. Indeed, we are outraged that where Islam once caused a positive transformation in people’s thoughts and even now symbolizes equality and self-esteem for all men and women, some quarters are happy to convey the impression that Islam stands against granting equal rights to women. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A section of people, who base their politics on misinterpretation of religion, have called for a hartal today. We wonder if they and their followers went through the entirety of the proposed policy before raising the bogey of Islam and the Quran being in danger should rights be accorded to Bangladesh’s women. Nowhere in the policy is there any mention or even a suggestion of its being in contravention of the Quran and Sunnah. The truth is that the policy simply means to ensure a more pro-active role for women in the various sectors of national life and thus make it possible for them to pursue life in dignity and freedom. Those are principles which are enshrined in the Quran as well. The ignorance of those behind the current ruckus is therefore inexcusable.

The women’s policy is surely a necessary one and a good one. It ought to be a step forward not just for women but for the whole nation as well. We ask those agitating against it to desist from denigrating Islam by using it as a weapon for political propaganda.

ILIC hartal and duplicity of dominant political class

New Age, 5 April 2011

Editorial

THE dawn-to-dusk hartal, enforced on Monday by the Islamic Law Implementation Committee, a combine of some religion-based political organisations, under the leadership of the Islami Oikya Jote faction of Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini, tends to indicate that these undemocratic organisations have the mettle, organisational or otherwise, to undermine the universal democratic principles, defy the constitution and the judiciary of the country, and, most importantly, get away with it. According to a report front-paged in New Age on Tuesday, the pickets attacked the cars of two members of parliament, vandalised nearly 150 vehicles, set fire to a petrol pump and a police van, and clashed with law enforcers during the hartal hours at several districts, which left some 250 people, including 50 policemen, injured. While the hartal and the concomitant violence and vandalism by the pro-hartal elements are deplorable, not least because they were driven by a cause that is undemocratic, unconstitutional and illegal, the express reluctance of the mainstream political parties, especially the ruling Awami League and the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, to take a decisive stance was simply disgraceful. Both these parties, which have alternatively run the country for most of the past two decades, appeared more concerned about appeasing these undemocratic organisations, with the former bending backward to assure them that the government's women development policy is in no way contradicts Islamic values and the latter extending moral support to the general strike. So much for their self-professed commitment to consolidating democracy, upholding the constitution and the rule of law, and protecting and promoting women's rights.

Perhaps, it is foolhardy to expect either of the two parties to take a decisive position against the religion-based organisations; after all, both these parties have time and again turned to them for political and electoral expediency in their crude struggle for state power. Here it is pertinent to point out that the ruling Awami League made a pact with one such organisation, prior to the last generation elections, that it would not enact any law contrary to the tenets of Islam, to secure the latter's electoral support. Similarly, the BNP has also not sought to disentangle itself from as Jamaat-e-Islami.

As such, the repeated public statements by key functionaries of the government and the Awami League since the cabinet approved the women development policy, insisting that the policy is not anti-Islam, and exhortation to the Islamic Law Implementation Committee to call off the general strike, a privilege that it has hardly ever afforded to the BNP-led opposition alliance, were only expected as was the BNP's moral support for the hartal. Regrettably still, the political theatrics, initiated by the committee and played along by the mainstream political parties, seems to have overshadowed the issue at hand, i.e. the national women development policy. The policy, which, as we have pointed out in these columns on more occasions than one before, seems geared more towards avoiding any backlash from the forces that are evidently against the democratic equality between men and women, than genuinely addressing women's rights.

Hence, the politically conscious and democratically oriented sections of society, especially the women's rights organisations, need to realise that protection of women's rights is hardly a top priority for the mainstream political parties and that they need to organise themselves, mobilise

public opinion and sustain pressure for a women development policy that truly ensure women's equal rights in every sphere.

P.S.

* From SIAWI:

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