



Plenary sitting

B8-1269/2015

24.11.2015

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 freedom of expression in Bangladesh
(2015/2970(RSP))

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on behalf of the S&D Group

**European Parliament resolution on the freedom of expression in Bangladesh
(2015/2970(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions, notably of 18 September 2014,
 - having regard to the Statements by the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, notably of 9 August 2015,
 - having regard to the Statements by the EEAS Spokesperson ,notably of 1 and 9 April 2015,
 - having regard to the preliminary findings of the country visit to Bangladesh by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief of 9 September 2015,
 - having regard to the EC-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement of 2001
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Bangladesh in 2000,
 - having regard to rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the EU has good, long-standing relations with Bangladesh, including through the Cooperation Agreement on partnership and development;
- B. whereas Bangladesh has made significant progress in recent years, in particular towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and in its economic performance;
- C. whereas the Government of Bangladesh has announced a ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards any violation of human rights by the enforcement agencies, and has passed a Police Reform Act providing for a code of conduct, model police stations and victim support centres in key police stations;
- D. whereas following the general elections of 5 January 2014, which were boycotted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the main opposition party –, the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina has taken several steps to limit civil rights;
- E. whereas on 6 August 2014 the Government of Bangladesh published its new media policy; whereas elements of this policy impose limits on media freedom, for example by banning speech that is ‘anti-state’, ‘ridicules the national ideology’ or ‘is inconsistent with Bangladesh’s culture’ and by restricting the reporting of ‘anarchy, rebellion, or violence’; whereas the government is planning to introduce a legislative framework through which to enforce the policy; whereas Bangladesh ranks 146th of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index;

- F. whereas on 31 October 2015, assailants burst into an office in the capital, Dhaka, armed with machetes and hacked to death Faisal Arefin Deepan, a publisher. On the same day, another publisher was critically injured, as were two other writers present.
- G. whereas the most recent attacks echo the unsolved killings earlier this year of five secularist bloggers and activists: Rajib Haider, Avijit Roy, Oyasiqur Rahman, Ananta Bijoy Das and, in August, Niladri Chattopadhyay
- H. whereas Ansarullah Bangla Team, a banned group inspired by al-Qaeda, has claimed responsibility for these killings of secular thinkers in Bangladesh and whereas it has published a “hit list” of those deemed to be critics of Islam and vowed that “no one who supports atheists will be spared
- I. whereas an Italian aid worker named Cesare Tavella and a Japanese man Konio Hoshi were shot and killed in September 2015 and it is yet unclear who were the authors;
- J. whereas security forces are carrying out extra-judicial killings, abductions and arbitrary arrests, particularly targeting opposition leaders and supporters such as those of the BNP;
- K. whereas on 21 Novemebr 2015 two senior Bangladeshi opposition leaders have been executed for war crimes committed during the 1971 independence war with Pakistan after their last-ditch pleas for clemency were rejected;
1. Is seriously concerned with the violations of freedom of expression and free media coverage in Bangladesh,
 2. Strongly condemns the attacks on publishers, bloggers and activists and deplors the loss of lives
 3. Strongly condemns the recent killing of foreign citizens;
 4. Strongly calls on Bangladeshi authorities to launch a credible and transparent investigation into the killing of publishers, bloggers and activists as well as foreign nationals to identify perpetrators of such heinous crimes and bring them to justice;
 5. Urges the Government of Bangladesh to recognise and respect freedom of the press and media and to allow human rights groups to play an important role in strengthening accountability and documenting human rights abuses; urges the Bangladeshi authorities to revoke the new media policy and abide by their obligations to allow free speech and expression;
 6. Asks for the full independence of the media to be restored, inter alia, dropping all charges against editors and journalists who have published content critical of the government, allow the immediate opening of all media houses and social media services that were shut and immediately restore full and unhindered access to all forms of publications, including electronic ones;
 7. Calls for the Cyber-Security Act of 2015 and the Information and Communication Technology Act are brought in line with international free speech standards, and drop the criminalisation of "anti-State" publications;

8. Asks the government of Bangladesh to allow international NGOs in the country to undertake their mission, including Amnesty International and Transparency International.
9. Urges the government of Bangladesh to launch an investigation into the extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances of opposition political activists in the country;
10. Urges for the release of all opposition political leaders that have been illegally detained for participating or being thought to be participating in protected speech and assembly;
11. Calls on the government of Bangladesh to accept the call for a national dialogue from opposition political parties and civil society organisations on the current crises, and strongly urges the government of Bangladesh to initiate dialogue with all democratic parties, to restore the democratic process by way of holding a credible, genuine, transparent and inclusive election and hold a national dialogue to overcome the current instability,
12. Asks of the EU to review its trade relations with Bangladesh until it ensures the return of democratic governance in the country;
13. Asks the EEAS and the EU delegation, as well as Member State delegations, to use all available instruments to ensure the respect of human rights and the rule of law in Bangladesh, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
14. Calls on the EU, in line with its Strategic Framework on human rights and democracy, to immediately raise the above concerns and recommendations with Bangladeshi authorities;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States;