

**BANGLADESHI HINDU BUDDHIST & CHRISTIANS UNITY
COUNCIL EUROPE (An ethno religious minority & tribal civil
rights advocacy group) & HUMAN RIGHTS CONGRESS FOR
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**Subject: "Minorities and the Right to Education" Submitted by: Mr.
Amarendra Roy, President of BHBCUC Europe and Director HRCBM-EU
Board & External Relations.**

Honourable President, Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen,

Good morning. The process of Islamization during Zia and Ershad regimes in Bangladesh renewed the flow of minorities due to unequal application of Law humiliation, discrimination in service and violation of human rights.

The term 'minority' refers to disadvantaged group of citizens, who are not the privileged ones, at the top, but the under-privileged at the bottom. (Atlantes Magazine, 29th January 1975).

In case of Bangladesh, minorities can be classified as religious and ethno-religious.

Persons belonging to religious minorities have a faith which is different to that held by the majority whereas ethno-religious minority may have languages and/or religious faith that is different than that held by the majority.

Minorities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh:

Minorities both religious and ethno-religious minorities are subject to state sponsored discrimination when it comes to rights to education. Let's consider the case of indigenous people of Bangladesh, most of the children from indigenous ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged by an education system that does not recognize their language, culture or future livelihood realities. For these reasons the majority of ethnic indigenous children quickly lose interest in school and leave. When they enter school they are taught in a language they do not know or understand. As a result the dropout rate for indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is much higher than the estimated national rate with more than 60 percent of children dropping out especially in the early years. (ADB, 2001)

In addition, both religious and ethno-religious minorities are facing cultural genocide due to the increasing influence of Islamization in the education system. During the last few years, question papers of both secondary and higher secondary board examination have intentionally framed questions that are inappropriate for minority students.

Even the very language of the country is also being constantly reworked on reducing influence of Sanskrit. Though Bengali language has been developed from the offshoot of Sanskrit's known as "Pali", government has enacted institutions that are hitherto working to remove influence of Sanskrit by redefining word construct and

increasing the influence of Arabi and Urdu. In Bangladesh, Sanskrit is considered associated with Hindu literatures.

As a result, Bengali language in Bangladesh has developed a strong influence of Arabian words. Such changes in language itself threatens the very cultural existence of other religious minorities in the country as their mother tongue itself has been manipulated to include influence of words that coincide with Islamic culture and tradition.

In addition to the changes of Bengali language, the Syllabus in the secondary level of education curriculum has been manipulated giving it communal tune while ignoring historical significance and contribution of religious minorities in literature as well in country's history.

In fact the very establishment of secular education system is being threatened due to integrating Islamic history, culture and tradition to the curriculum of the higher education system.

Many of the minority institutions that used to provide needed cultural studies for the religious minority groups has been fallen victim of black law such as vested property act.

The Sanskrit and Hindu religious University (Saraswata Samaj) in Dhaka was in operation before independence of Bangladesh in 1971, has been closed after the independence. It's land and assets was confiscated by the government of Bangladesh in a bid to wipe out Hindu educational system.

There has been allegation that minority candidates of Bangladesh Civil Service exam are directly discriminated. Despite their outstanding result, those candidates are deprived of deserved placements. Until today, no public document has been released depicting the result of minority candidates and their placement since 1972. The PSC (Public Service Commission) and Ministry of Establishment have thus far reluctant to reveal minority representation in civil service exam or placement thereof.

Many media and eye witness reports alleged that PSC members, government personnel and Bangladesh Civil Service examinees have intentionally instigated verbal abuses towards minority candidates. They have even manipulated the exam performance by penciling poor marks in the viva voce. The most severe incidents were reported during 22nd to 27th BCS exams. According to a former member, a Hindu examinee stood first in the written test of 22nd BCS examination, but finally this candidate was dropped from the merit list because he failed to get pass marks in the viva voce. In order to understand the discriminations and irregularities in the BCS examinations, especially since 1991, the written and viva voce marks of the minority examinees that failed may be compared with the successful Muslims examinees." (The Daily Star, 03 July.07)

Another major threat to regular education system is the acceptance of Madrasa based education as the equivalent of regular education system. During 2001 to 2006, the then ruling party have deployed Madrasa educated person to head various government institution undermining the regular education system.

Government has invested heavily in madrasa education then in regular education system and thus creating a new generation of government officials and section of the population who are to look for solution to all problem based upon those prescribe in Islamic religious books.□□Therefore, there is a dire need to strengthen

existing higher education system in Bangladesh as well initiate project that will provide opportunity for ethnic minorities and religious minorities to obtain true education without compromising their cultural rights.

□ Thank you for patiently listening to me. □ Amarendra Roy. a.roy@sunrise.ch