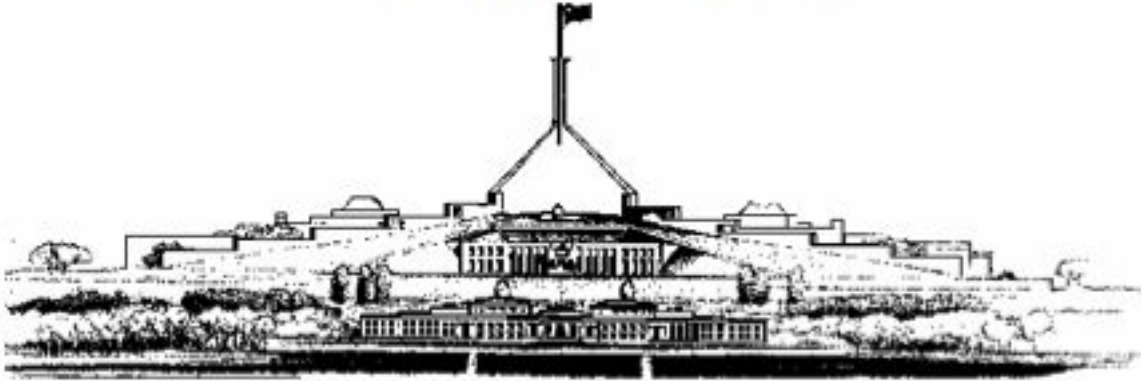




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Human Rights: Bangladesh

SPEECH

Monday, 18 March 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 18 March 2013 Page 184 Questioner Speaker Ferguson, Laurie, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (20:45): I am afraid there are different analyses to that of the previous speaker regarding what is going on in Bangladesh at the moment. I adhere to Amnesty International's analysis of 'a wave of violent attacks against Bangladesh's Hindu minority'. I am concerned at the vandalism and destruction of 40 temples and the destruction of shops and houses. To quote Amnesty International, the situation of the Hindu minority 'is at extreme risk'. Amnesty has further commented that the government must ensure that they receive the protection they need. We have a situation where courageous students at Jahangirnagar University have joined with people of all religions to resist this latest onslaught.

I am not for a moment saying that the International Crimes Tribunal is perfect. There was the dismissal of a previous judge of the tribunal because of his improper consultations with the prosecuting side of the case. Similarly, there have been other issues. However, after the death sentence was placed on Delwar Hossain Sayedee, Jamaat-i-Islami, an extreme Islamist group that has a very bad track record within the country, went on what was essentially a campaign of attacks upon minorities.

Khaleda Zia, the opposition BNP leader, has certainly lifted the heat in this dispute by speaking of 'genocide'. In Bangladeshi politics, the use of this language refers very much to the 1971 struggle for independence. As I said, I do not for a moment say that this crimes tribunal has been a perfect instrument. I totally oppose the death penalty as I do in its instigation in this case. However, we have a situation where things are accelerating. What worries me even further are recent pronouncements by the BJP in India, where they are utilising the events in Bangladesh to say that this has been totally instigated by the Pakistani government and its security apparatus the ISI, saying that they are behind the scenes—and I do not accept that for a moment, but this is typical of the escalation that can occur in these situations. The *Economist* of 9 March stated that the opposition BNP was 'behaving more like an insurgency than a political party'. Children are being 'as human shields' and the eyes have been gouged out of policeman.

I do not for a moment defend excesses by civilian police forces; however, we have a situation where there have been attacks on police stations throughout the country. We have a situation where minorities are being assailed. At the end of the day, I do not care if somebody is a leader of a political party and that he is a religious leader. I do not care what his current position is; the situation is that this country should investigate fully those people guilty of murder, abduction, rape, torture and persecution during the heroic struggle for independence in 1971. Equally of course, we have on the other side of the fence, dissatisfaction by some people aligned with the Awami League that Molla only got a court sentence.

We have situations where many of the attacks that have occurred on the Hindu minority are followed immediately after Jamaat-i-Islami demonstrations. So you have a big rally; you all get around protesting about this death sentence; and then coincidentally, strangely, a few moments later, the Hindus are attacked, et cetera.

I am proud to be the chair of the Bangladeshi Friendship Group. My electorate has Sydney's greatest concentration of Bangladeshis. I associate with all of them, regardless of their religious beliefs, and I have had significant number of Muslims ringing me, expressing concern at the current situation. We have a situation where the Jamaat-e-Islamists and the extreme measures they are undertaking endanger democracy in the country. They endanger the secular history of the country, and it is important that I put on the record tonight that this is not simply an attempt by the Awami League to somehow manipulate some upcoming election. It has nothing to do with that whatsoever. The real crisis in the country is that the BNP has unfortunately associated itself with this extreme militancy, this attack on civil institutions and this defence of people who are war criminals.