



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Human Rights: Bangladesh

SPEECH

Monday, 18 March 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 18 March 2013
Page 2543
Questioner
Speaker Husic, Ed, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (20:35): At the outset I seek leave to amend my own motion by omitting paragraph (2) and replacing it with a new paragraph as circulated in my name:

(2) shows concern at recent violence and reports of human rights violations in Bangladesh, expresses regret at the loss of life and injuries involved, and calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to advocate non-violence; and

Leave granted.

Mr HUSIC: One of the great privileges I have enjoyed as a member of parliament over the past few years has been the opportunity to get out amongst the various communities in the Chifley electorate, to get to know how people who have come to call Australia home have set up their new lives and to hear their stories. One such community, relatively small in number but undeniably big in spirit, is the Bangladeshi community.

Perhaps because of the circumstances they have left behind, the Bangladeshi community, I have found, is particularly community minded and very generous in spirit. The community often gets together to raise funds to send back to Bangladesh to assist those in less fortunate circumstances and help those affected by issues that I want to raise tonight, but they also extend that generosity to their new home, Australia.

I mention at this point the energetic contribution of Dr Abdul Haq, who each year hosts the Biggest Morning Tea at Blacktown's Village Green. I have been to a number of these events now and I have seen how the community has rallied to raise much-needed money to fund the Cancer Council's vital research, prevention programs and support services. My colleagues the members for Parramatta and Greenway have also attended and supported these functions, and we have also been delighted to sample the spread of Bangladeshi food and warm hospitality.

Dr Haq and the community have also been active in raising funds for those in need back in Bangladesh. I particularly want to commend the community for the money they have helped raise to lift the quality of health care and services in Bangladesh. Their latest project has been focused on harnessing local donations to support the construction of a new hospital—a sizable venture but one they are determined to see become reality. Another person I have been pleased to meet with is Dr Nargis Banu, an environmental scientist who lives in the electorate of Chifley and who, along with her work in this field, hosts a community radio program on SWR FM 99.9, based in Blacktown. The program has run since 2004 and is called the Voice of Bangladesh. Through this program—and I have had the pleasure of participating in the program—Dr Barnu works to raise awareness of various sociocultural issues such as women's rights, domestic violence, multiculturalism and the value of civic participation.

Through my connection with the community, I have also come to know of some of the circumstances which resulted in Bangladeshis leaving their homeland to make a new life for themselves in Australia. This nation of over 160 million people only came into being in 1971, but has struggled with division and terrible conflict over the decades.

As a country that is often subjected to terrible flooding, it is challenged by the impact of climate change. Despite the economy growing between five and six per cent per year since 1996, political instability, massive problems with income disparity, infrastructure deficiencies and unreliable power supply have all combined to hold back this nation from what it can truly be. Given these circumstances, the best thing that could help ensure Bangladesh to lift itself from its economic and social challenge is widespread political and economic reform.

The Bangladeshi Australians I have spoken with express their alarm at human rights violations that have occurred, and in particular war crimes that have been committed in conflicts past. As is often the case, the instance of true reconciliation within nations torn by fierce conflict can only happen in part with a commitment to recognise and acknowledge these events and also to hold to account those who have clearly crossed the line of humanity and engaged in truly horrific acts.

The Bangladeshi government that came to power in 2009 set up tribunals to deal with these war crimes, and longstanding tensions have re-emerged in the community dating back to the bitter war of independence. While one can appreciate why this might occur, Bangladesh cannot afford to move away from the need to continue the pursuit of justice for the benefit of longer term reconciliation. I remain concerned by the reports I hear, particularly those that have claimed that in the last few weeks over 140 people have been shot dead, with about 25,000 opposition leaders and activists implicated in different cases and arrested. These are matters of great concern, and there can be no winners in the current political climate. I call on all parties to advocate restraint and nonviolence to ensure that reconciliation can occur in a country that has been marred by conflict.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O'Neill): Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Laurie Ferguson: I second the amendment and reserve my right to continue my remarks later.