

Real face of secularism in Bangladesh

By Md Abdun Nafi

In an agitated response to a question posed to him by a journalist from Ekattor TV, former captain of the Bangladesh national cricket team and present Awamiligue Leader Mr. Rakibul Hasan baulked, "They are Hindus, they are agents of the Indian High Commissions, these **** (indecent word) are enemies in our own house..."

Mr Rakibul Hasan's statement is symbolic to a certain extent. For the millions of Muslims residing in this country, have similar reservations. They think Hindus are agents, pimps of India. Everyone must have heard the story of the 'red ant and the black ant' at least once during their school days. I was told that Hindus were the red ants and Muslims were the black ants. In fact one of my lecturers even taught us that – "Hindu students are unclean and unhygienic". But the Hindu students enrolled in my school were quite hygienic and 'clean' fellows.

Once there was a Hindu principal in charge of a well reputed school in Chittagong. There was a student one time who had trouble enrolling there. Frustrated by those adversities one of the student's parents, a well-educated individual and someone I know personally, came out and complained to me, "When did Hindus grow so much in stature while living in this country?"

So according to this highly educated person, Hindus in Bangladesh should be mute, dumb and deadpan vegetarians. And one poke in the right spot should be enough to send them running for their lives to India. Mr Rakibul Hasan's interview also had another important viewpoint. For at one stage Mr Rakibul Hasan said, "It will become difficult for that journalist to live in Dhaka."

Now that last statement implies that it shouldn't be too difficult a task to chase Hindus away from a certain area (or country more like it). Consider the following warning issued by Minister Khondoker Musharraf just a few days ago, "If anyone even dares to eye Faridpur, I will pull his eyes out". Which means if a 'non-Muslim' in Dhaka city, Faridpur or anywhere in the country really decides to protest against any form of racism he has suffered against, or tries to report any influential individual, he will have his eyes gouged out and will be banished from the city of Dhaka. And that is why we tend to find regular reports on newspapers, where Hindu emigrants seem to go 'missing' from places, whenever an influential Muslim is in need to buy or acquire a piece of land or property.

Meanwhile even an army major resorted to deliver a dire warning to all the aboriginals settled in Bangladesh, "It will take only a month to wipe out all aboriginals".

That in fact is not too far from the truth. Aboriginals have been left toothless and defenseless for a while now after promises of a 'peace treaty' to be made, something which never materialised. If there were ever a group of people who would have taken a stand against this the religious oppression carried out in this country, it might have been the aboriginals. And now they are left in a limbo and have nothing. So as such how long do you think it would take for our "brave", heavily fortified army to discipline these toothless aboriginals?

The egotistic megalomaniac who threatened the aboriginals above also referred to them as 'thappa'. That is how aboriginals are perceived to be from the viewpoint of a major in the Bangladesh army. And someone like Mr Raqibul Hasan, a man amongst those who champion the ideals of freedom fighters, thinks that all non-Muslims are agents of India.

So, can you now see the secular and non-sectarian face of Bangladesh?

Bangladesh war crimes trial: Key accused

A controversial tribunal in Bangladesh has been investigating war crimes committed during the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan. BBC News profiles the main defendants.

Ghulam Azam – died in custody

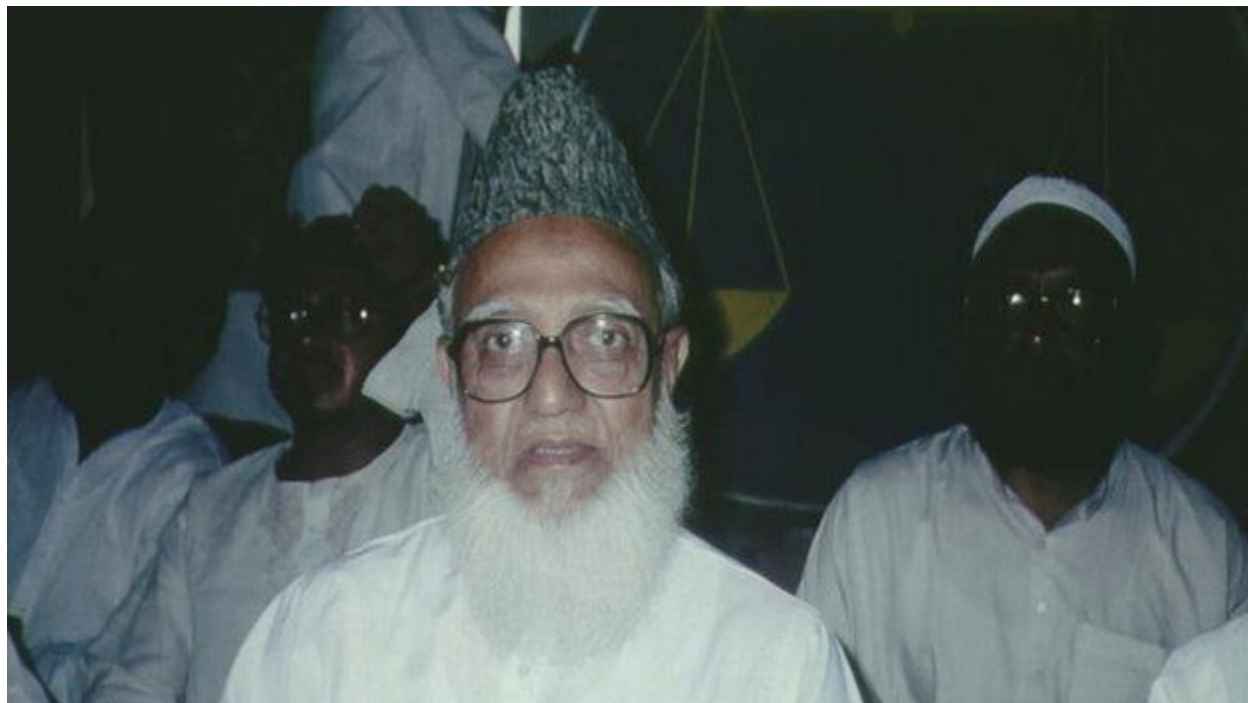
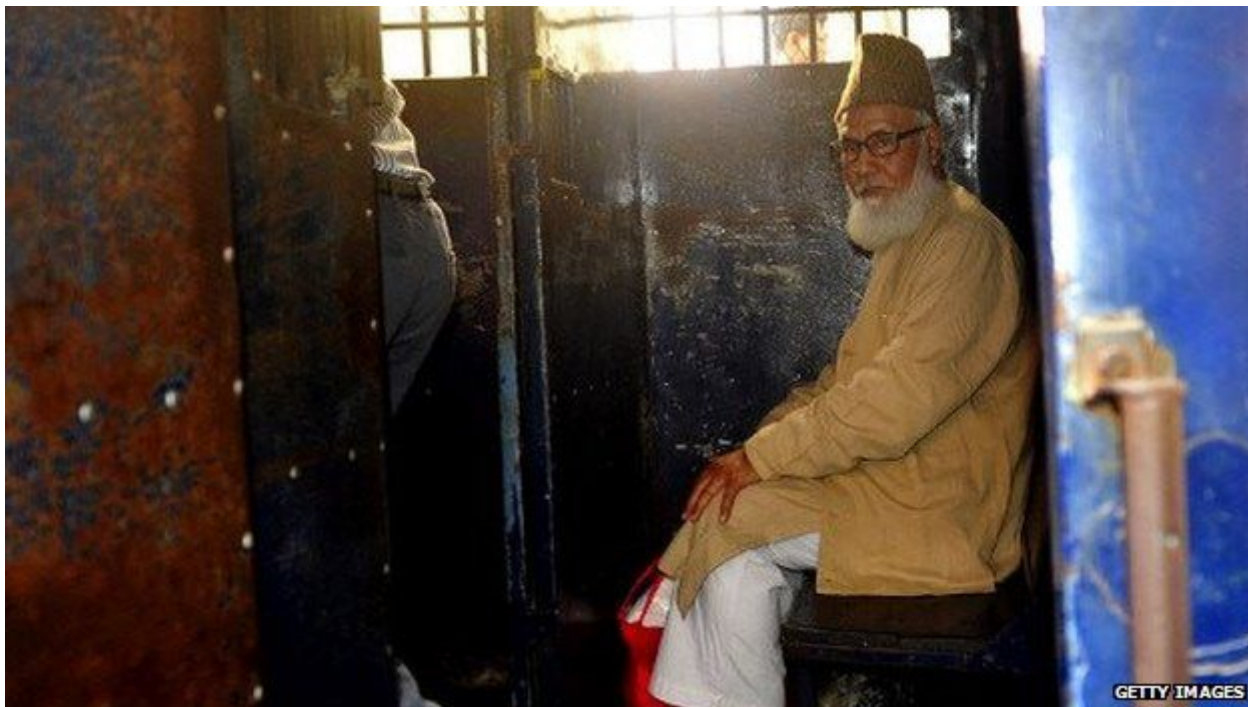


Image caption Mr Azam's supporters revered him as a scholar, but critics viewed him as a traitor. The former leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, was sentenced to 90 years in jail for crimes against humanity on 15 July 2013. Ghulam Azam, who was in his 90s, was the party's leader until 2000 when he retired from active politics. He died in October 2014 while an appeal against his conviction was pending. He had denied all the charges against him, which included genocide, murder, abduction and arson. Azam is alleged to have created and led pro-Pakistan militias which carried out numerous murders and rapes during the nine-month war. Described by his party colleagues as a writer and Islamic thinker, Azam was strongly opposed to Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan, arguing at the time that it would divide the Muslim community. He also cautioned that an independent Bangladesh would come under the political and economic influence of neighbouring India. Azam's supporters say he was widely respected across the Muslim world. But his detractors – mainly in the governing Awami League party – saw him as a traitor. In 1973, the government cancelled his citizenship for allegedly co-operating with Pakistani forces during the independence war. Azam lived as an exile in Pakistan and the UK but returned to Bangladesh in 1978 when the country was led by Gen Ziaur Rahman – the assassinated husband of the country's current opposition leader Khaleda Zia. The Supreme Court restored his citizenship in 1994.

Motiur Rahman Nizami – executed in May 2016



Image

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Image captionNizami had campaigned vociferously against independence

Nizami, who led Jamaat-e-Islami, was hanged in Dhaka's prison early on 11 May after refusing to seek mercy from Bangladesh's president. He was sentenced to death for war crimes in October 2014. The Supreme Court rejected his final appeal on 5 May 2016. Motiur Rahman Nizami, 73, faced 16 charges including genocide, murder, torture and rape. Nizami, born in 1943, had been an active supporter of the party since he was a student. At the time of the 1971 war, he was president of Islami Chhatra Sangha, then the party's student wing, and vociferously campaigned against the division of Pakistan. He was accused of setting up the al-Badr group, an auxiliary force that helped the Pakistani army identify and kill pro-independence Bengali activists.

Nizami, a Dhaka University graduate, was twice elected to the Bangladeshi parliament, serving as a minister in the government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) between 2001 and 2006. He had described the accusations against him as "the worst falsehood in history".

His supporters consider him to have been a competent and honest minister and an authority on Islamic teaching. They say he was widely respected in the Muslim world. Nizami wrote about 20 books, mostly on Islam. In 2009, he was judged to be among the top 50 most influential Muslims by an American Islamic think-tank.

Delwar Hossain Sayeedi – sentenced to life in jail



Image

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Image caption Sayeedi has previously travelled to the US and Europe to give lectures on the Koran

A prolific speaker and a well-known leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the 72-year-old former MP had his death sentence overturned on appeal and is now serving life in jail. He was found guilty in February 2013 of charges including murder, torture and rape. Arrested in June 2010, he was the first suspect to be indicted by the tribunal in 2011. State prosecutors accused him of working with the al-Badr group during the independence struggle and of carrying out numerous atrocities, including forcibly converting Hindus to Islam. His critics say that during the war he formed a small group to loot and seize the property of Bengali Hindus and those who supported independence. He denied all the allegations and after he was convicted there were widespread protests across Dhaka. Sayeedi's supporters say that – like many of his co-accused – he is an Islamic scholar and a conscientious member of various social organisations. He has travelled to the US and Europe to give lectures on the Koran and has written books on interpreting Islam. Some British MPs opposed his visit to the UK in 2006 because of his alleged extreme views, particularly his comments against the US and British role in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid – executed in November 2015



Image

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Image captionAli Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid was regarded for his oratory

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, 64, was the secretary-general of Jamaat-e-Islami and an influential figure within the party. He was executed in November 2015 after being sentenced to death in July 2013 – a decision that was upheld in June 2015 when the Supreme Court rejected his appeal. He was highly regarded for his organisational skills and oratory. He was social welfare minister in the BNP-led government from 2001-2006. A student leader in 1971, he was among those who supported Bangladesh remaining part of Pakistan. His critics say he was also an al-Badr leader responsible for the killings of a number of pro-independence Bangladeshi leaders and intellectuals. He strongly denied the allegations but the tribunal found him guilty of five charges, including abduction and murder. Like many other Jamaat leaders he went into hiding soon after independence, but resurfaced after Gen Ziaur Rahman came to power in a military coup in 1977. His supporters say his trial was nothing but a political vendetta by the ruling Awami League. They also say he was a successful minister known for his honesty and integrity.

Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury – executed in November 2015



Image captionSalahuddin Chowdhury was convicted of genocide and murder

A former minister, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury was a BNP MP and the most senior leader from the party to be sentenced for crimes against humanity. He was executed in November 2015 after the

Supreme Court rejected his appeal in June 2015.

Better known as Saqa, he was the eldest son of the late Muslim League and Chittagong-based leader Fazlul Quader Chowdhury and a member of the BNP's main policymaking body.

His father was the speaker of the National Assembly of undivided Pakistan in 1965 and campaigned for a united Pakistan.

The tribunal found him guilty of nine out of 23 charges including genocide, arson and persecuting people on religious and political grounds.

He was also accused of forcefully converting a number of Hindus to Islam.

The prosecution said that his father's residence in Chittagong was turned into a torture cell during the war. Chowdhury denied all the charges and the BNP – which did not exist at the time of the war – described his trial as a political vendetta.

Chowdhury complained at the time of his conviction that the verdict had come “from the [law] ministry”, saying it had been made available on the internet before it was formally announced in court.

Chowdhury's family alleged he was tortured while in custody. The authorities rejected the allegations.

Muhammad Kamaruzzaman – executed in April 2015



Image

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Image captionKamaruzzaman's lawyers said he did not receive a fair trial

The assistant secretary-general of Jamaat-e-Islami was found guilty in May 2013 of masterminding what the prosecution described as one of the bloodiest single episodes in the independence war.

The Supreme Court later upheld his death sentence on appeal and he was hanged in April 2015.

The war crimes tribunal heard that he played a prominent role alongside Pakistani troops in the “slaughter” of at least 120 unarmed farmers in the remote northern village of Sohagpur which subsequently became known as the “village of widows”.

Three women widowed as a result of the killings testified against Kamaruzzaman during his trial. They described how he led Pakistani troops to the village and helped the soldiers to line up and execute the farmers.

Kamaruzzaman was found guilty on five out of seven charges of crimes against humanity, including the murder and torture of unarmed civilians. His lawyers insisted that he did not receive a fair trial.

Working as a journalist after independence, Kamaruzzaman tried on several occasions to become an MP but was unsuccessful in each attempt.

Abdul Kader Mullah – executed in December 2013



Image

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Image caption Abdul Kader Mullah was convicted in February 2013 and hanged the following December

Abdul Kader Mullah, assistant secretary general of the Jamaat-e-Islami party since 2010 and a former executive editor of The Daily Sangram, was found guilty on five of six counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes on 5 February 2013.

He was sentenced to death in September of that year after a failed appeal and hanged in December.

Mullah, who denied all the charges, was convicted of killing 344 civilians as well as rape and other crimes. Many of the atrocities for which he was convicted took place in Dhaka's Mirpur area, earning him the name "Butcher of Mirpur".

He was sentenced by the tribunal to life in prison – which caused huge anger among many Bangladeshis who took to the streets demanding he be put to death. Prosecution and defence lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court. On 17 September the court increased his life jail term to a death sentence.

Mullah was born in 1948 in Faridpur district. He joined Jamaat's student wing, then known as Islami Chatra Sangha (ICS), while studying for a science degree at Rajendra College in Faridpur in 1966. When leaders of the Jamaat opposed the independence movement in East Pakistan in 1971, Mullah joined the feared paramilitary force al-Badr, prosecutors said.

He was charged in December 2011 with abetting the Pakistani army and actively participating in the 1971 atrocities. Following his death sentence the attorney general ruled out an appeal, meaning his only chance of clemency would have been a presidential pardon.

Pakistan, BD exchange protests on JI leader's hanging

As bilateral relations between Islamabad and Dhaka further deteriorated after the execution of Motiur Rehman Nizami, both the countries on Thursday summoned each other's envoys to record strong protests.

Pakistan brushed aside the charges by the Bangladesh government that Islamabad was interfering in its domestic policies related to the hanging of Motiur Rahman Nizami for alleged war crimes in 1971.

"It is not a matter of interference. The flawed trials pertain to the events before December 1971 and these gentlemen (who have been hanged) are being implicated for upholding the laws of Pakistan. The attempts by the government of Bangladesh to malign Pakistan, despite our keen desire to develop brotherly relations with it, are regrettable," the Spokesman at the Foreign Office said at the weekly media briefing.

Later, the director general South Asia at the Foreign Office summoned the acting high commissioner of Bangladesh and a strong protest was lodged at what it called "the unfortunate hanging" of Motiur Rahman Nizami on the alleged crimes committed before December 1971 through a "flawed judicial process".

"We have expressed our serious concern on the hanging and our concerns are conveyed through diplomatic channels. Let me clarify one thing, this was not a tit for tat response," said the spokesman.

The spokesman brushed aside impressions that Pakistan's response had been weak. "I don't agree that our response is weak. It is not a matter of weak or strong response, the aim is to convey our feelings. We have already expressed our deep concerns on the flawed trials. You might have seen the Human Rights Commission's response to the hanging as well as of those of the European Union," he added.

Pakistan says that it is seriously concerned as could be seen by a resolution adopted by parliament. "The 1974 Tripartite Agreement is the cornerstone of relations between the two countries. It needs to be emphasised that, as part of the agreement, the government of Bangladesh decided not to proceed with the trials as an act of clemency," said the spokesman.

Nevertheless, he pointed out that Pakistan reiterates its desire for friendly relations with Bangladesh. Turning to matters on its western borders, to a query, the spokesman said that the next round of QCG meeting was tentatively scheduled to take place this month.

"After the last QCG round, it was expected that talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban would take place before the next round. This was an expectation and not a compulsion. The challenge of bringing the Taliban and other groups to the table is a shared responsibility of the QCG members. Bringing parties in conflict to the negotiating table is an arduous task, requiring patience and persistence," he advised.

Pakistan feels that all the QCG members were of the view that the Taliban and other groups would gain more through negotiations than without them. "The fifth QCG meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place in May. In the meantime, efforts will continue to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table," he said.

Commenting on the closure of the Pak-Afghan border, the spokesman admitted that there were differences between the two sides on implementation of measures to manage and regulate the border, due to which the border had been temporarily closed. He explained that because the border was porous, illegal crossings and other associated issues were major challenges for both countries.

"To address the situation, the Government of Pakistan has decided to implement measures at Torkham for effective border management. It is in the interest of both the countries to have a well-regulated border," he said. He added that both sides are in contact with each other through a military-to-military channel to address this issue.

To another query, the spokesman said that dialogue with India was not linked to the forthcoming Saarc Summit. "In the context of dialogue, Pakistan is ready to start the dialogue but India is not. Whenever India is ready, we are ready to start it. I have also mentioned previously as well dialogue is the best and only option," he added.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani principal of City School in Dhaka Yasmeen was arrested by the Bangladesh's police. However, the Foreign Office said she was under protective custody of the Bangladesh police.

Reuters adds: Bangladesh has in the past few years been prosecuting people accused of carrying out crimes during the 1971 war, and has executed five of them, the most recent one, Motiur Rehman Nizami, on Wednesday. Bangladesh summoned the Pakistani ambassador in Dhaka to register its "strong protest" over statements by Pakistan.

"The government of Bangladesh deeply regrets that despite Bangladesh's repeated overtures, the malicious campaign by Pakistan against the trials of the crimes against humanity and genocide in Bangladesh is continuing," Bangladesh said in a statement.

International human rights groups say the tribunal's procedures fall short of international standards but Bangladesh rejects that and the trials are supported by many Bangladeshis. Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Bangladesh on Thursday over Nizami's hanging.

Bangladesh hangs War Criminal Nizami

Bangladesh hanged Islamist party leader Motiur Rahman Nizami on Wednesday for genocide and other crimes committed during the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan, the law minister said, risking an angry reaction from his supporters.

Nizami, head of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, was hanged at Dhaka Central jail just after midnight, Law Minister Anisul Haq told Reuters, after the Supreme Court rejected his final plea against a death sentence imposed by a special tribunal for genocide, rape and orchestrating the massacre of top intellectuals during the war.

Nizami, 73, a former legislator and minister during opposition leader Khaleda Zia's last term as prime minister, was sentenced to death in 2014

Hundreds of people flooded the streets of the capital, Dhaka, to cheer the execution. "We have waited for this day for a long 45 years," said war veteran Akram Hossain. "Justice has finally been served." But the war crimes tribunal set up by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2010 has sparked violence and drawn criticism from opposition politicians, including leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, that it is victimising Hasina's political opponents. Thousands of extra police and border guards were deployed in Dhaka and other major cities. Previous similar judgments and executions have triggered violence that killed around 200 people, mainly Jamaat activists and police. Five opposition politicians, including four Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, have been executed since late 2013 after being convicted by the tribunal. STRIKE CALL Jamaat-e-Islami, which has said the charges against Nizami were baseless, called for a nationwide strike on Wednesday in protest.

Calling Nizami a 'martyr', it said he was deprived of justice and made a victim of a political vendetta. The U.S. State Department said that while it supported justice being carried out for the 1971 atrocities, it was vital that the trials of those accused are free, fair and transparent and conducted in accordance with international agreements. "While we have seen limited progress in some cases, we still believe that further improvements to the ... process could ensure these proceedings meet domestic and international obligations," State Department spokeswoman Elizabeth Trudeau said in a statement. "Until these obligations can be consistently met, we have concerns about proceeding with executions." About three million people were killed, the government says, and thousands of women were raped during the 1971 war in which some factions, including the Jamaat-e-Islami, opposed the break from what was then called West Pakistan. The party denies that its leaders committed any atrocities. International human rights groups say the tribunal's procedures fall short of international standards.

The government denies the accusations. The execution comes as the Muslim-majority nation suffers a surge in militant violence in which atheist bloggers, academics, religious minorities and foreign aid workers have been killed. In April alone, five people, including a university teacher, two gay activists and a Hindu, were hacked to death by suspected Islamist militants. International human rights groups say a climate of intolerance in Bangladeshi politics has both motivated and provided cover for perpetrators of crimes of religious hatred. – See more at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/bangladesh-hangs-motiur-rahman-nizami-1971-war-crimes-2794434/#sthash.ig1rlxk5.dpuf>

ICR Foundation expressed their satisfaction over Nizami's verdict

The [International Crimes Research Foundation](#), a London based global research organisation has expressed their satisfaction over Matiur Rahman Nizami's review petition verdict. ICRF sent us a press release earlier today where they mentioned that "not only is the tribunal an embodiment of righteousness and justice in the country, today it is a role model for others around the

world to follow and leads by example when it comes to tackling the culture of non-justice. Even though it was established in 1971 in a bid to resolve international crimes and took nearly 39 years to come into full force, the tribunal has nonetheless managed to prove to the civil world that it is better to start late rather than not do it at all. Perhaps that won't change things significantly or instantly, but it is a significant step towards battling non-justice under any circumstances."

ICRF welcomed the death penalty given by the apex court of Bangladesh as this punishment is "within the justice system of Bangladesh and they express their utmost respect to that ICRF went further saying that that they fully respect the current ideas and opinions of those in favor of death penalties and those who are not, it is their belief that each nation reserves the right to enforce capital punishment, the way its constitution permits or allows it, which after all is one of its most fundamental rights. Therefore they respect the laws and the boundaries each nation has set out for them and they are fully entitled to deliver capital punishment the way they have devised them to be."

Though ICRF is satisfied about the standard and procedure of the ICTBD trial but they also commented that "there is still room for improvement regarding the security of ICTBD personnel as well as witness protection. ICRF thanked Bangladeshi government on that note who embarked and are successfully concluding this quest"

ICRF also mentioned that "Nizami's verdict and subsequent upholding by the Supreme Court as well as appellate division is another giant step forward for the justice system of Bangladesh and its implications. The whole world in fact is a beneficiary of the ICTBD's actions for the nature of international crimes is such that, they can be perceived as transgressions towards the whole of the human race in general. We hope that the ICTBD will reinvigorate and inspire justice systems around the world to jump into action."