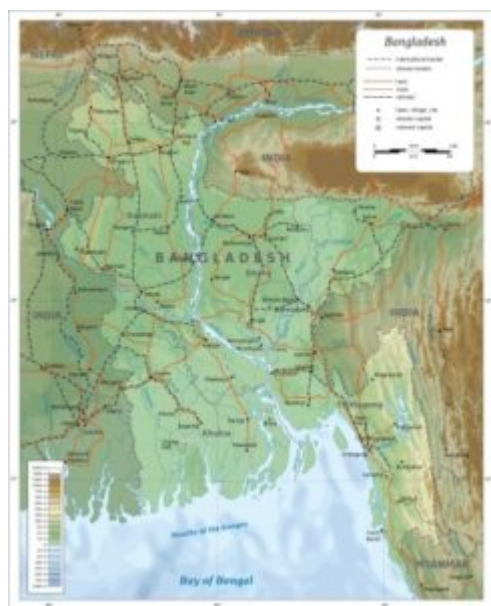


On the raging student movement in Bangladesh

July 28, 2024



Right now, Bangladesh has been functionally turned into a prison and a graveyard. Students have observed a nationwide strike across Bangladesh on Thursday (18th July 2024) which have been called “Bangla blockade”.

What is the reason behind this movement? Is this primarily a movement of traitors, razakars? Is this protest just against quotas?

This movement was sparked off by the recent judgement of the country’s high court that has ruled to bring back the quota system which was halted in the year 2018. Government education and jobs in Bangladesh are 56% under quota, out of which 30% consists of the freedom fighter quota. The Bangladeshi system is not a quota system for marginalized or deprived peoples, which we are used to in the Indian reservation system.

Rather, this is an attempt by Awami League to permanently create a vote bank for themselves through the creation of a privileged class that receives preferential treatment. It is worth noting that this time many descendants of freedom fighters have spoken in support of the movement.

In 2018, the government under pressure from a mass movement was forced to order a halt this quota. This order was challenged in court. Why had the government not passed a clear cut law regarding the same issue where affirmative action for genuinely deprived peoples is initiated and separated from the “muktijoddha quota” (trans: freedom fighter quota)?

In 2018, students had demanded a reform of the 30% quota for the families of freedom fighters. And the Hasina government had completely removed the 26% reservations kept for marginalized and deprived peoples along with these quotas.

When the same was taken to court, the quota system in its entirety has been brought back. It is not impossible that some people in the movement are conservative, and some are against quotas for women.

However, the arrowhead of the movement is pointed at the freedom fighter quota.

This movement is so strong because under late capitalism there are very few jobs in underdeveloped Bangladesh resulting in hundreds of thousands of young people hopefully applying annually for a few thousand secure government jobs.

The Bangladeshi government does not look after the interests of the many. They serve international capital, including big capitalists of China and India and look to line the pockets of the ruling party and political leaders with profit. One of the slogans of the student movement is “Bhuya! Bhuya” (trans: Fake! Fake!). The underlying meaning is that “freedom fighter family” is often a bogus label given to those close to the Awami League.

Sheikh Hasina has tried to label this movement as one of Razakars. In 1971, Razakars assisted the Pakistanis and were traitors to the Bangladeshi cause. The protesters have responded with the slogan “Ami ke? Tumi ke? Rajakar! Rajakar! Ke bolechhe? Ke bolecche? Shwoirachar! Shwoirachar!” (trans: Who am I? Who are you? Rajakar! Rajakar! Who says so? Who says so? Who says so? Dictator! Dictator!) The word “Razakar” from the mouth of Sheikh Hasina is similar to the utterance “antinational” or “terrorist” from the mouth of Narendra Modi.

Masses of students have joined this movement in Bangladesh. As of 6 pm, 18th of July, 2024, 64 people have been martyred. But this movement has not been able to organize itself in a clear leftist direction. Organizations like Jamaat-e-Islami exist in Bangladesh.

Haseena has labelled the movement as one completely of Razakars in order to exploit the presence of these organizations. This is of course a failure of left organizations that they have not been able to create a strong counter polarity in their favour. Out of these, the Workers’ Party (known to be close to the CPIM) and sections of JASAD/JSD are completely subservient to Hasina. Others are supportive of the movement but we cannot claim that they are giving any direction to it.

We support the democratic movement of Bangladesh against unjust quotas and at the same time support the system of reservation directed at removing social discrimination. We support the democratic movement of the people against the authoritarian Bangladeshi government and support the demand for democratic and free and fair elections which was raised by a united left in 2023.

It is an important task in India to stand in solidarity with the movement in Bangladesh for history will read the progressive movements of both countries as intertwined.

We also strongly condemn the actions of the Kolkata police who detained protesters in solidarity with Bangladesh and sent them to Lalbazar (HQ of Kolkata police). May the democratic movement of the people stand strong against the union of dictators!

[This article was published by Radical Socialist on July 19, 2024, and on International Viewpoint, July 21, 2024.]