

## **State-sanctioned killing in Bangladesh**

**By Amy Dowler**

The death penalty in Bangladesh is something of a black box. Its implementation is routinely reported and the legal processes surrounding it are well known, but there is very little to be found on, for example, the human rights conditions of those on death row, execution procedures (other than that it is by hanging) and so on. This is in part a symptom of the fact that the death penalty is a routine and ordinary facet of the law in Bangladesh and not subject to any special scrutiny or particular controversy. Of course it is difficult to assess these things from afar, but there also appears to be a lack of popular opposition to the death penalty or advocates for those sentenced to death.

In 2007 there were at least 130 people sentenced to death in Bangladesh, and there are thought to be roughly 1000 prisoners currently on death row with nearly half as many on the run. The last known executions were those of six convicted terrorists in March 2007. Siddiquil Islam Bangla Bhai, Atuar Rahman Sunny, Majilsh-e-Shura, Abdul Awal, Iftekhar Hasan Al Mamun and Khaled Saifullah Faroque were each hung at a number of different jails across the country. These executions were extensively reported, but mostly in the context of terrorism rather than human rights: there appears to be little qualms in the Bangladeshi English language press over the use of the death penalty.

There are however some opposing voices to be found in the editorial pages of a minority of the English language press. These writers seek to appeal to pragmatic, rather than abstract or moral arguments, citing statistics that show that the death penalty fails to act as a deterrent. Similarly, international civil society is largely mute on the death penalty in Bangladesh. Other than Amnesty International which reports on execution numbers and runs campaigns against individual executions, most groups focus on other issues. This is seen clearly in the proceedings of the European Human Rights Conference on Bangladesh titled Extremism, Intolerance and Violence, in which the death penalty is almost entirely overshadowed by the issue of extra-judicial killings.

Little is known of the legal representation afforded to those facing state-sanctioned death in Bangladesh, and there is evidence of trials and laws that have failed to meet international standards. Bangladesh continues to defend the death penalty in the international arena and has voted against a UN resolution calling for a moratorium on executions. The death penalty continues to be implemented without extensive scrutiny or debate in Bangladesh, a country with myriad problems running from political instability to natural disasters to domestic violence. These problems currently appear to overshadow the issue of capital punishment in Bangladesh – both questioning its merits in a general sense, and examination of its implementation – both from domestic and international perspectives.