

FOI 0099-14:

Extract from a Metropolitan Police Special Branch report on visit to Bangladesh in response to the attack on UK High Commissioner, 01 June 2004

Bangladesh overview

Bangladesh has a population of 140 million people and is reckoned to be the most densely populated country in the world. Annual per capita income is estimated at \$320. The current government is a coalition between the National Party and a number of minority parties, Khaleda Zia Begum is Prime Minister. The main opposition party is the Awami League, which is more secular and nationalist in character than the Bangladesh National Party.

A 2003 report by the organisation Transparency International found that Bangladesh was the most corrupt country in the world and that the Police were perceived to be the most corrupt institution in Bangladesh. Amnesty International's 2003 country report on Bangladesh found that 38 people died reportedly after torture in Army custody and 8 after torture in Police custody, 87 people were sentenced to death and several opposition politicians and journalists were arbitrarily detained.

Security

On Friday 21st May 2004 the UK High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Anwar Choudhury, was injured in a hand grenade attack at the Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Syhlet, Bangladesh. The attack resulted in three fatalities and some 47 further casualties, one of whom is a British citizen.

Protection issues

The Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine is the main mosque and community meeting place in the Sylhet area. It is a large three-storey building, which is routinely attended by in excess of five thousand worshippers at Friday afternoon prayers. There is a history of religious and political unrest at the Shrine, mostly recently culminating in a bomb (improvised grenade) attack on worshippers in January this year. This attack killed four people, no group has ever claimed responsibility.

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