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Enact law against caste-based discrimination

**Dalit community urges govt
Staff Correspondent**

Representatives from the Dalit community yesterday demanded enactment of a special law establishing caste-based discrimination as a punishable offence.

They formed a human chain in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh in the city to press their demand and called for an end to caste-based discrimination and prejudice.

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR) with support from Nagorik Uddyog organised the event to mark the World Dignity Day and the International Human Rights Day.



Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement forms a human chain at Shahbagh in the city yesterday demanding steps to end caste-based discrimination.

Mukul Sikdar, chairperson of BDERM, said Dalits are considered untouchables and forced to live a dejected and isolated life. They are deprived of human rights.

He added that the society needs Dalits to do all the menial work but refuses to meet their basic needs.

Dalits are often evicted from their colonies and their children are denied admission in schools for their identity, Mukul said.

According to an unofficial estimate, there are around 60 lakh Dalits in Bangladesh. The term Dalit is widely used to refer to the suppressed and social outcasts, including low caste Hindus, sweepers, waste scavengers, cobblers, leather workers and landless labourers.

Speakers at the human chain demanded an end to eviction of Dalits from their colonies, allotment of khas land to them, special quota in schools for the children of Dalits, recognition of Dalit freedom fighters and special social protection schemes for them such as old-age allowance, allowance for widows and vulnerable group feeding.

Zakir Hossain, chief executive of Nagorik Uddyog, researcher Mazharul Islam and BDERM leaders B Solomon, Moni Rani Das, Master Kanai Lal and Banani Biswas attended the human chain programme.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad organised a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium where the Dalits placed a set of demands, including reserved seat for them in parliament, special cell for Dalits in the Human Rights Commission, and permanent status for sweepers in the Dhaka City Corporation.

The press conference was organised with support from the Self-Help Association for Rural People Through Education and Entrepreneurship (SHAREE), Barcik and Oxfam.

Nirmal Chandra Das, secretary general of Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad, presented the keynote paper.

He said Harijans and Dalits are socially excluded and considered lowest in the social order. They do not have right to entry to the public places such as hotels, restaurants and temples.

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