

# Bangla Hindus find a friend in American Jew

**HT Live Correspondent**

JEWISH BY birth and American by nationality, Richard L Benkin, a human rights activist, is fighting for the cause of Bangladeshi Hindus. He wants to provide them an international platform from where their human rights problems and other grievances could be aired and addressed.

Richard was in the city to mobilise support for the Bangladeshi Hindus living in exile.

Talking to reporters during an informal visit to Lucknow University, he regretted that Bangladeshi Hindus were the worst affected but no international agency had bothered to take heed of their woes.

"I'm in India to address the woes of Bangladeshi Hindus who have faced oppression at the hands of the Bangladesh government and its racist Vested Property Act. This act allows the Bangladesh government to confiscate property of an individual by declaring them as treason," he said

Richard said the Hebrew word hineini meant "Here I am for you." This is how Jews are supposed to answer when people look up to them for support, he said and added, "Here I'm because that is what my tradition and my values tell me to do."

According to him, Bangladeshi Hindus were facing serious and often life-threatening oppression. "Yet, no one seems to be stopping it. Since the Vested Property Act was



**Richard L Benkin**

*Human rights activist*

written into law, Hindus have fallen from about 18 per cent of the Bangladeshi population to only nine per cent. This precipitous decline came not from natural demographic forces or voluntary migration, but from a deliberate program of ethnic cleansing by successive Bangladeshi governments since 1974," he said.

Richard regretted that the United Nations, especially its misnomer human rights commission, had never concerned itself with the human rights of Hindus or Bangladeshis.

Arrest of a Muslim journalist friend in Bangladesh who was boldly writing for the interest of Bangladeshi Hindu, prompted Benkin to take the fight one step further.

With the help of US Congress, Benkin succeeded to free his journalist friend.

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