



REPORT

Bangladesh Seminar

ON

**“Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh:
Challenging Radicalism & the Way Forward”**

Venue: House of Lords, London

Thursday 25 October 2018



Background

In December 2018 Bangladesh is set to hold its next general election but there is considerable political uncertainty with one of Bangladesh's main political party – the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) - failing to agree on an election process. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has proposed of forming a cross-party interim cabinet to supervise the election but BNP leader, Khaleda Zia, has threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected/non-party caretaker government.

Another key issue causing tension between the two main parties is the appeasement of Islamists by the BNP. Islamo fascist party Jamaat-e-Islami is a partner of the BNP-led Alliance. Despite objections from all quarters including the EU, BNP has refused to sever ties with Jamaat. The world community is aware of BNP/Jamaat-led violence against minority communities when they were in power.

To ensure Bangladesh remains a secular democratic politically stable state and to foster and promote secular rule in Bangladesh, the European Bangladesh Forum (EBF), a network of European Bengali diaspora, organised a Seminar on “Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Challenging Radicalism & the Way Forward” on Thursday 25 October 2018 at the House of Lords in London.

The House of Lords Seminar brought together European politicians including MPs, Lord, policy makers, journalists, secular activists and different nationals living in the U.K. and Bangladeshi diaspora from other European countries to create strong public opinion in favour of secular forces and against the Islamist extremist groups including Jamaat. This will also strengthen European and global stake holders to address a phenomenon that is indeed a threat to humanity, global peace and exchange good practices of prevention. It may be mentioned that the House of Lords seminar was a follow-up event of the Geneva Conference of EBF at the UN building on 22 March 2018 and another at the European Press Club in Brussels on 11 July 2016.

EBF also organized a separate Community Meeting in the same evening at a local restaurant in Brick Lane, London. A TV talk show was organized on the above issue on a UK based Bengali satellite TV channel (Channel iON) on 23 October 2018.

PROGRAM

Seminar

“Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Challenging Radicalism & the Way Forward”

Venue: House of Lords, London

25 October 2018, 3pm-4.30pm

Name/organisation	Presentation title	Time
Chair/Host Lord Paul Bew, Chair, Patron, European Bangladesh Forum	Introduction, the challenges & future of Democracy, maintenance of Religious freedom and Risk posed by Extremism in light of the forthcoming Election.	15:00
Mr. Ansar Ahmed Ullah EBF President	Opening address	15:05
keynote Speakers		
Mr. Syed Badrul Ahsan, Editor in Charge, The Asian Age, Dhaka, Bangladesh	The Secularism Issue in Bangladesh: What is at stake?	15.10
Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf, Director, Research, South Asia Democratic Forum & affiliated Senior Researcher, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University. Germany	Radicalisation and the Upcoming 2018 Elections in Bangladesh	15.25
Mr. Shahriar Kabir, President, Forum for Secular Bangladesh	Radicalisation of Politics & Society in Bangladesh	15.40
Mr. Roberta Bonazzi, European Foundation for Democracy, Brussels	Prevention of Radicalisation in Europe: Key Challenges	15.55
Discussants		16.10
Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick MP, UK	Vice-Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh	
Dr. Martyn Frampton, Queen Mary University of London	Reader in Modern History School of History Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)	
Q & A Session		16:20
Conclusion & Way Forward		16:30

SPEAKERS PROFILE

Lord Paul Bew, Patron, European Bangladesh Forum, UK

Lord Bew was appointed as Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on 1 September 2013. Lord Bew joined Queen's University Belfast in 1979 and was made Professor of Irish Politics in 1991. He acted as historical adviser to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry between 1998 and 2001 and was appointed as a non-party-political peer by the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission in February 2007 following his contributions to the Good Friday Agreement. In 2007 he served on the Local London Authority Bill Select Committee and in 2011 served on the Joint Committee on the Defamation Bill. Lord Bew is a Visiting Professor at King's College London.



Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Vice Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh

Mr Jim Fitzpatrick was born and raised in Glasgow. In 1974 he became a firefighter with the London Fire Brigade. On 1st May 1997 Jim was elected Member of Parliament for Poplar and Canning Town. During government he held a number of Ministerial positions.



He is the Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Bangladesh. EBF leaders held meetings with Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick on Bangladesh issues.

Dr Martyn Frampton, Reader in Modern History, Queen Mary University, London

Mr Martyn Frampton joined Queen Mary in 2009. He has worked primarily in the spheres of modern British and Irish history until now. He also has a burgeoning interest in Anglo-US foreign policy and its role in the



development of the modern Middle East and the politics of Islamism. Frampton was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he earned a Starred First in History. He also holds an MPhil in International Relations and a doctorate in History. He authored the Policy Exchange pamphlet 'Unsettled Belonging: Britain's Muslim Communities', which found that despite the greater religiosity and social conservatism of British Muslims, their life-styles are largely secular with only limited interest in sharia finance or separate religious education.

Ms. Roberta Bonazzi, President, European Foundation for Democracy, Brussels

Ms Roberta Bonazzi founded the European Foundation for Democracy in 2005 and has guided its growth for over a decade. Her expertise focuses on prevention of radicalisation, foreign policy, democratic reforms and extremism more broadly. She has directed successful pan-European campaigns on these and related issues including on the use of social media by terrorist organisations to recruit and radicalise vulnerable people. She publishes and appears regularly in international media. Fluent in English, Italian, French and German, Roberta holds a degree in Political Sciences and International Relations from the University of Milan and a post graduate degree in international relations from the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI). He took part as an expert in the previous programs of EBF in Brussels.



Mr. Syed Badrul Ahsan, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Eminent journalist, columnist and writer Mr Syed Badrul Ahsan was appointed as the Editor-in-Charge of The Asian Age newspaper on 26 March 2018. He is well-known for his books besides a number of translations, he has reviewed a large number of important books on politics and literature. Before moving to The Asian Age, Syed Badrul Ahsan served in the Daily Observer, The Daily Star, the Morning Sun, The Bangladesh Observer, The Independent, News Today, New Age and the New Nation, where he started his journalistic career in the early 1980s. Badrul is also a regular contributor to the Indian Express, Dhaka Tribune, Dhaka Courier and UNB. He has reviewed books for Asian Affairs, the quarterly journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (RSAA) in London.



Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf, South Asia Democratic Forum, Brussels

Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf is Director of Research at the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF), a Brussels based think tank and Senior Researcher (member) at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University. He completed his degrees in Master of Arts (2003) in South Asian political science and Doctor of Philosophy (2009) from Heidelberg University. Additionally, he is an affiliated Researcher at the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU, Durham University, UK) and a former Research fellow at the Institute of Political Science (IPW, Heidelberg University) and Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH, New Delhi, India) as well as a former visiting fellow at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST, Islamabad, Pakistan). He was a member of the external expert group of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force, German Federal Foreign Office, and worked as a Consultant for the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany. Dr Wolf is the co-author of 'A Political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia' (Routledge; London 2006), co-editor of 'Terrorism Revisited. Islamism, Political Violence and State-Sponsorship' and co-edited the book, "Terrorism Revisited: Islamism, Political Violence and State-Sponsorship (Contemporary South Asian Studies)" with Paula Casaca, former Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in 2017. Dr Wolf took part in the previous conferences of EBF on similar issues in Brussels.



Mr. Shahriar Kabir, President, Forum for Secular Bangladesh, Dhaka

Mr. Shahriar Kabir is a Bangladeshi journalist, filmmaker, human rights activist and author of more than 100 books focusing on human rights, secularism, communalism and fundamentalism. He was imprisoned twice in 2001 and 2002 for protesting against government-sponsored minority persecution and was declared a 'Prisoner of Conscience' by Amnesty International, while several international forums and human rights defenders campaigned for his release. He has addressed international conferences, seminars and workshops on issues of terrorism, peace, secularism, interfaith harmony and human rights. At present he is the President of 'Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Trial of War Criminals of 1971', General Secretary of 'South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism & Communalism' and Trustee Secretary of 'MSSK Trust'. He took part as an expert in the previous programs of EBF in Brussels and London and met the British Lord, MPs, MEPs with EBF leaders.



REPORT

Fight Militant and Communal Extremists for Free and Fair Election

London, October 25: Speakers at a seminar at the House of Lords in London on "Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Challenging Radicalism & the Way Forward" on 25 October 2018 called upon the European governments to reassess their views of Jihadist groups and said, Europe needs to understand that the rise of radicalisation and religiously-motivated violence is not a localized phenomenon in Bangladesh and in the South Asian countries, it has serious ramifications for Europe too. They called for effective engagement with the Bangladesh authorities to combat fanatic indoctrination, terrorism and other forms of political violence.

Organised by European Bangladeshi diaspora organisation, European Bangladesh Forum (EBF) the seminar was hosted by Lord Paul Bew, Patron of EBF. The speakers at the seminar were: Jim Fitzpatrick, Member of the British Parliament and Vice Chairman of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh, Syed Badrul Ahsan, Chief Editor of The Asian Age, Bangladesh, Roberta Bonazzi, founder and President of the European Foundation for Democracy & head of Brussels chapter of Counter Extremism Project (CEP), Dr. Siegfried O Wolf, German political scientist and Director of South Asia Democratic Forum, Shahriar Kabir, President of Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Martyn Frampton of Queen Mary University of London. Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF gave the welcome speech.



The seminar was held at a time when Bangladesh is preparing for the next general elections in December this year amidst threats of boycott by one of the major political parties, BNP. BNP had earlier threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected, non-party caretaker government.

Speakers in the seminar said, secular politics is today in broad outlines restored in a significant way, but warned at the same time, the forces against secularism should not be underestimated or ignored, especially at a time when Bangladesh prepares for the next general elections end of the year. They hoped that there will be a free and fair elections where all can exercise their rights of franchise.

Dr. Siegfried Wolf said, western government should not allow parties supporting or patronising terrorism to use their territories and must stop granting them safe-haven, freedom of movement. Political parties that directly or indirectly associate – either through individual members

or third entities (Muslim Charity and cultural organisations) – with violent Jihadist organisations must be considered as a part of the Jihadist movement, he opined.

Writer and journalist from Dhaka, Shahriar Kabir said, from 2001 to 2006 Bangladesh witnessed an unprecedented persecution of religious minorities, mostly the Hindus. In order to convert Bangladesh into a monolithic Muslim country he added, BNP-Jamat alliance forced more than a quarter million hapless Hindus to leave Bangladesh and take shelter in neighboring India. Despite protests the then BNP coalition government did not take any measure, on the contrary several secular civil society leaders were thrown behind the bar, he added.



Roberta Bonazzi said, radicalization is a global phenomenon and it has no boundary. That is why it needs multilevel cooperation among civil societies and also in the government levels. In this respect Bangladesh needs support and cooperation from European countries and at the same time Europe has a lot to learn from Bangladesh from its successful operation against militancy and religion-based extremism.

Earlier, Lord Paul Bew in his welcome address said, we have to look at the root of violent extremism and religion-based violence, which is not only the significant issue for Bangladesh, but also significant for the European countries including United Kingdom. Through the analysis of the European and global perspectives of the militancy and terrorism, we have to increase mutual understanding and cooperation to ensure the sustainable policy and strategy to fight against all sorts of extremist threats and violence. Among others, General Secretary of World Sindhi Congress Lakhu Luhana, Director of Humane First Ajanta Deb Roy and writer Priyajit Debsarkar spoke in the seminar.

About 50 participants from Bangladeshi and European representatives from UK, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany took part in the seminar. Among others, President of UK Awami League Sultan Mahmud Sharif, President of EBF Ansar Ahmed Ullah, Vice President Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Senior Journalist Syed Anas Pasha and President of Bangladesh National Human Rights Alliance Arun Barua spoke in the views exchange meeting held after seminar.

REPORT IN DETAILS

Lord Paul Bew, Patron, European Bangladesh Forum (EBF):

We have to look at the root of violent extremism and religion-based violence, which is not only the significant issue for Bangladesh, but also significant for the European countries including United Kingdom. Through the analysis of the European and global perspectives of the militancy and terrorism, we have to increase mutual understanding and cooperation to ensure the sustainable policy and strategy to fight against all sorts of extremist threats and violence.

Dr Siegfried Wolf, Director (Research), SADF and affiliated Senior Researcher, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University, Germany:

It's a great honour and pleasure for me to share my views on the contemporary developments in Bangladesh with you, especially regarding the process of radicalisation in the context of the up-coming elections. As you all know, radicalisation is a tremendously complex phenomenon and there are numerous ways to address this issue. However, to find suitable approaches, it is most important to understand the main sources and drivers of radicalisation. Basically, there is no particular trajectory, event or actor responsible for radicalisation, but a whole matrix of interwoven and mutual reinforcing streams. Having this in mind, besides earlier processes of religion-based radicalisation, particularly pushed by former military regimes and the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition government of 2001 to 2005, one can identify several major trends in Bangladesh today.



(Photo from left: Khalid Mahmood MP & Shadow Minister, Roberta Bonazzi & Dr. Siegfried Wolf)

Firstly, there is an increase in places for radicalization. The most 'traditional spots' for radicalisation in Bangladesh are madrasas and universities. However, the country is witnessing the emergence of new spaces for radicalisation. The internet which is already known for being an effective medium for radicalisation and recruitment continues to gain momentum. Moreover, refugee camps, especially the ones undocumented, as well as prisons are getting increasingly becoming as places for radicalization. Besides being different in nature, both, refugee camps as well as the prisons, are extraordinarily vulnerable areas - offering extremists opportunities to spread radical notions and

recruit. Here, the latest massive influx of Rohingya refugees determines not only a tremendous humanitarian task but also contains a severe security challenge.



Furthermore, Bangladesh's experiences during the last decade - including the period of the caretaker government of 2006-2008 - large scale raids by the law enforcement agencies lead to subsequent huge numbers of imprisonments. Here, the specific conditions of detention facilities turn them into potent incubators of radicalization, as hubs for recruitment and brain wash places for Islamist militants.

Secondly, we have an increase in number of drivers of radicalisation. Despite the efforts of the current government, not only we have a rising number of militant Jihadists groups operating in Bangladesh but also increasing activities of international terrorist groups in the country, namely Al Qaeda and ISIS. It is interesting to note that earlier this year, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control added 'ISIS-Bangladesh' to its' sanctions list for global terrorism. Also, there are clear indications of a growing entrenchment of local terror groups within the global Jihadi movement.

Thirdly, there is an increase in forms and targets of radicalisation. Besides the already mentioned prisoners and refugees as very specific target groups, Islamic extremists are trying to radicalise all sections of the society. This also includes youth and women. Otherwise, there is also a broadening of the different types of attacks: from target killing of individuals to large scale attacks at public places.

Fourthly, the latest enhancement of political polarisation and societal fragmentation gave space for further radicalisation, militancy, and growth of Jihadist groups.

In sum, one must state that these selected trends are just some of the most visible expressions of radicalisation that threaten democracy, secularism and stability in Bangladesh. However, it is of utmost importance to understand how much the country's administrative structure, media, and society is at risk due to entrenched radicalised thinking and acting. In this context, it becomes apparent that especially the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami – or in brief Jamaat - takes on a key role, which can be linked with most of the trajectories and facets of radicalisation in the country.

Here one must realize that Jamaat is not a political party in the common understanding of the concept; it is an ideologically geared movement running several organisations. Furthermore, there is a need to identify Jamaat as a part of the global Jihadist movement maintaining numerous linkages with international Islamists organisations via its affiliates and/or individual members.

Additionally, Jamaat has a high leverage among the diaspora, especially within the social and religious-cultural networks.

Jamaat agenda seeks to bring about a social and political transformation that is diametrically opposed to the founding principles of Bangladesh. More concretely, Jamaat cultivates notions which are not in line with the concept of liberal democracy for its' goal is to establish a theocratic Islamic state. It camouflages the exclusive and anti-secular nature of a religious fundamentalist regime by using democratic state terminology and focusing on the social and economic concerns of the people. Against



this backdrop, the rise of Jamaat relates to the increase of intolerance, violence and terrorism in Bangladesh.

In sum, Jamaat's socio-political thought and action promotes modern Jihadism as an alternative to the notions of the nation-state, secularism and democracy.

To achieve its goals, Jamaat turned into a disciplined cadre organisation with a high level of organisational structure countrywide. Furthermore, and most importantly, Jamaat follows a threefold or 'three-front' strategy:

Firstly, Jamaat undermines the political system from within, using the opportunities offered by democratic processes, which is the formal 'political front' of the Jamaat. Here, the participation in elections is seen as a pure 'tactical necessity'.

Secondly, Jamaat was building a network of 'social movement organisations' (including NGOs) to engage in social care, development and religious-cultural activities as well as media and educational centres. Aim is to penetrate all segments of the society, which can be called the 'societal front' of Jamaat.

Thirdly, Jamaat engages in violence, using a network of members, associates and 'loosely-linked' groups and individuals. This 'violent action front' supports the political and societal fronts as a tool of last resort.

Last but not least, Jamaat combines systematically these strategies into a portfolio of comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and multi-dimensional campaigns.

Considering the efficient application of these strategies and the subsequent leverage in state and society, the argument that Jamaat is not an electoral issue anymore does not match the realities on the ground. Despite the failure to register for election, Jamaat announced that it aims to take part with

own candidates in all constituencies – either on a BNP ticket or as independent candidates. In both cases, the Jamaat with its affiliated organization and disciplined cadres will function as a crucial factor in the upcoming elections. Against this backdrop, one must be aware that the Jamaat is willing to use all of its three major strategies to influence the country's electoral politics. Having said this, one should expect following flashpoints:

1. Instrumentalization of the civil society and high-jacking of social & political movements through the radical Islamist groups.

Traditionally, social and political movements have been prominent in organisation of broad sections of society to overthrow authoritarian regimes, both civilian and military. Being aware of the influence of these movements, especially about the rising domestic and international recognition of them, there are a growing number of allegations that the Jamaat tries to instrumentalize this 'participatory element' among Bangladesh's society for their partisan interests. (Photo below: Jim Fitzpatrick, MP)



The second major flashpoint will be Electoral violence:

Generally, political violence in post-independent Bangladesh has had a long history affecting all political actors in the country, in one way or the other. Latter includes incidents of mass violence stemming from the process of political as well as religious radicalization, target killing of political opponents, harassment, black-mailing, among other atrocities. However, the most worrisome trend is the increasing appearance of incidents in which mass violence and violent -Islamist driven- extremism is not only interwoven but also systematically conducted. This is gaining importance, especially in the context of elections in Bangladesh. Historically, the country's electoral arena is featured by an extremely critical level of 'unhealthy contestation' between the different competing actors. Subsequently, incidents of politically motivated violence occurred rather as a norm than an exception.

In contrast, religiously motivated violence appeared in the past are rather episodic and embedded in a specific localized conflictual context. However, this phenomenon underwent a tectonic shift since the BNP- Jamaat coalition were in power from 2001 to 2006. Since then, Bangladesh, particularly during election time, is not only featured by extremely violent street protests targeting law enforcement agencies as well as common people but also by increased number of incidents - specifically against the religious minorities. In this context, it is important to mention that the Jamaat and other Islamist parties -as well as their militant affiliates/sympathizers- are attacking minorities for ideological and electoral related reasons.

(1) Regarding the ideological dimension of the attacks one can state that the Jamaat and like-minded organisations are targeting Bangladesh's minorities, especially the Hindus, as part of their anti-India strategy. This dates to the liberation war when Jamaat claimed that the Awami League and the local Hindu community were Indian agents seeking to turn East Pakistan into a 'Hindu state'. Members of Jamaat and BNP including their respective student wings are conducting 'large-scale orchestrated attacks on the homes, businesses, and places of worship of minorities. The violence also targets Christians and Buddhists.



(2) Besides the ideological rationale behind Jamaat attacks against minorities, there are clear indications that these violent actions also serve electoral purposes. It is known that the minorities are voting largely for the Awami League and not for the BNP or Jamaat. As such, the Jamaat's attacks against the minorities are aiming at the destruction of vote banks for the AL in general and as a punitive measure for not voting in favour of BNP or Jamaat.

Besides the politically motivated violence, there are concerns that the elections might also provoke domestic and international terrorist groups to conduct attacks to disturb the elections and undermine the efforts of the government to conduct free and fair elections. Historically, Bangladesh is known for its relatively low level of terrorist incidents (despite the growing numbers during the last years) compared with other countries in the extended regions, like India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Last but not least, the role which the BNP will play during the next elections will be decisive on the course of the event.

The involvement of members of the BNP in political violence, especially during election time, is well documented. Furthermore, the alliance of the BNP with the Jamaat is identified by numerous observers as a factor which is creating a favourable and enabling environment for radicalisation and militancy in Bangladesh. Subsequently, much depends on the willingness and ability of the BNP to break the political pact with the Jamaat in general and Islamist parties in particular. In this context, it is reported that the BNP formed a new 'broader' political alliance, called Jatiya Oikya Front. However, the potential new allies are obviously not willing to accept the Jamaat as part of this new grouping. In consequence, it appears at the moment that the BNP will most likely be a part of two alliances. As per experts, the major rationale behind this 'double alliance strategy' is that the BNP leadership does not want to give up the opportunity to capitalize the remarkable 'vote bank' of the Islamist parties, foremost the one of the Jamaat. However, it also seems that this strategy is not uncontested within

the BNP rank and files. After witnessing severe disagreements over the nomination of candidates in recent local elections with the Jamaat as partner in the current '20-party alliance', some elements within the BNP seemed to question the alliance between both parties. Nevertheless, the BNP leadership – at least officially- continues to defend their collaboration with the Jamaat, arguing that it serves purely 'political gains and could be severed when necessary'. However, this rationale gets questioned by some observers rising the issue over the influence of the Jamaat within the decision-making process of the BNP. Here it is argued that the Jamaat possesses such a strong leverage that a break-up on the part of the BNP seems to be unlikely. Linked with this assessment is the question as to how far the cooperation of the BNP with the Jamaat is purely based on electoral consideration? Or is it also ideologically motivated? Latter one gets usually rejected by BNP officials.

Last not but not least, besides the puzzle over the BNP links with Jamaat there is also the question over the ability and willingness of the BNP to take on a constructive role in the political process and agenda setting, for example in formulating a comprehensive economic and social policy approaches. Until now, there are no convincing signs in this direction. As such, the political will and ability of 'Islamist parties' to take part in democratic processes needs to be reconsidered by the international community, especially in Europe. Here, the European governments must reassess their view of Jihadist groups and need to pay more attention to the full complexity of the processes of radicalisation and Jihadist threat in Bangladesh. There is a need to understand that the rise of radicalisation and religiously motivated violence is not a localized phenomenon in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. It has severe ramifications for Europe too.

Syed Badrul Ahsan, Editor in Charge, The Asian Age, Bangladesh

Bangladesh's political history has been one of a series of upheavals dating back to the partition of India in 1947. The country, renamed East Bengal and then East Pakistan, was incorporated in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as its eastern province, a status it held till it opted for sovereignty on the basis of a secular Bengali nationalism 24 years later in 1971. In other words, Muslim Bengali nationalism which was instrumental in the inclusion of the eastern segment of what once was united Bengal in the Pakistan state began to reconfigure itself into a secular Bengali idea of nationhood with the Language Movement of 1952. (Photo below from right: Shahriar Kabir, Syed Badrul Ahsan and Ajanta Deb Roy).

The principle of secularism developed gradually in the 1950s, gaining momentum in the 1960s and especially with the radical Six-Point demand for autonomy placed before Pakistan's establishment by the future founder of the state of



Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971, brought about through a nine-month guerrilla war against Pakistan following the repudiation of the

results of the general election of December 1970, marked the ultimate triumph of secular politics in the country.

And yet, for all the euphoria associated with the arrival of independence, secularism came under assault in the early phase of the new country. The violent coup d'état of August 1975, followed by the commandeering of the state by two military regimes in quick succession along with a rehabilitation of political elements who through collaboration with the Pakistan army in 1971 had sought to prevent the emergence of Bangladesh, set in motion a series of acts which steadily and progressively eroded the nation's core secular base.

Today, secular politics in broad outlines stands restored in significant measure and forms the core of national life. But much more needs to be done for secular Bengali nationalism which culminated in battlefield victory in 1971 to regain its original form. The forces arrayed against secularism cannot be underestimated or ignored or dismissed out of hand, now that the people of Bangladesh prepare for a new exercise of the ballot at the forthcoming general elections.

Shahriar Kabir, President, Forum for Secular Bangladesh

Bangladesh emerged as a secular democratic country in 1971 through a bloody liberation war against Pakistan in which three million lives were sacrificed. During the nine-month long Liberation War Pakistani Army Junta and its local collaborators, mainly Jamat-e Islami branded the Bengali freedom fighters and freedom loving Bengalis as 'Enemies of Islam', thus justified ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in the name of Islam.

In its five-thousand-year-old history of Bangladesh people belong to different faiths always lived with peace and amity, and enjoyed a rich tradition of secular humanism. History of Islam in Bengal is almost a millennium old.



The Sufis who preached Islam in Bengal respected local faiths and traditions, developed a unique culture of syncretism, which integrated in the Muslim societies in Bengal and other parts of South Asia. (Photo: Lord Paul Bew is flanked by the President of

EBF Ansar Ahmed Ullah and Writer Shahriar Kabir, in the left). Though most of the people of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) supported Pakistan movement in 1940s, but after the inception of Pakistan in 1947 when installing Urdu as the State language was suggested by its creators, people of East Bengal rejected it and realized their mistake. Notwithstanding Jinnah's wish for a country where religion would be separated from state affairs, soon after his death leaders of Muslim League, Jamat-e Islami, and other religion-based parties decided that Pakistan would be an Islamic country. As a result, 'Objective Resolution' was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 12 March 1949. The Pakistani 'Objectives Resolution' proclaimed 'Sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the state of Pakistan, through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust.' From

August 14, 1947 to March 25, 1971 Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. Punjab based Pakistani ruling elite treated Bangladesh as their colony. Whenever Bengalis fought for democracy and/or equal rights Pakistani ruling class branded them as enemy of Pakistan and Islam.

The leaders of the Bangladesh Liberation War said many times that this struggle is for secular democracy, not merely for a separate country. After achieving the victory Bangladesh adopted a magnificent Constitution on 4 November 1972, declared four basic principles of the republic, namely— 1) Democracy, 2) Nationalism, 3) Secularism and 4) Socialism. Furthermore, in order to protect secularism from radical politics and ideology— formation of political parties or any other organization on the basis of religion was also prohibited, which was never liked by pro-Pakistanis.

Notwithstanding ban on religion-based parties like Jamat all pro-Pakistani political organizations continued clandestine activities. Simultaneously Pakistan-sympathizers active in civil-military administration continued their conspiracy to reverse the course of history, which continued and concluded with the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation along with his family members and colleagues in 1975.



(Photo: Lord Paul Bew in middle is flanked by the speakers at the House of Lords)

Major General Ziaur Rahman, despite being a freedom fighter, was the main beneficiary and important actor of Bangabandhu's killing. As soon as he consolidated his position as Head of a Military junta Gen. Zia freely doctored the history and spirit of the Liberation War from the Constitution and allowed Jamat-e Islami and other Islamic parties to reestablish themselves. Gen. Ziaur Rahman then founded BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), which took several steps to radicalize secular democratic elements in the politics and the society of Bangladesh. Top collaborators of General Yahia's Army Junta of 1971 became Prime Minister and senior Ministers in his administration. When he lifted the ban on religion-based parties 66 political parties were formed in the name of religion during 1976-1977.

Jamat-e Islami started expanding its socio-economic-cultural base and an underground terrorist network since early 1980s. JEI received billions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries during 1980-1990s and used the money to expand its political, economic and social network at home and abroad.

The irony of the history of Bangladesh is that a country created on the basis of secular democracy, most of the time it was ruled by pro-Islamist radical forces. During the tenure of BNP-Jamat led

coalition govt. in 2001-2006 there was a mushroom growth of terrorism in Bangladesh. At least 125 Islamic militant outfits that we know more or less active were linked with JEI.

From 2001-2006 we have seen unprecedented persecution of religious minorities, mostly the Hindus. In order to convert Bangladesh into a monolithic Muslim country BNP-Jamat alliance forced more than quarter million hapless Hindus to leave Bangladesh and take shelter in neighboring India. 'Forum for Secular Bangladesh' and other progressive socio-cultural organizations and members of the civil society strongly protested ongoing persecution of religious minorities but the then Govt. didn't pay any attention to our cry. On the contrary several secular civil society leaders were thrown behind the bar including Prof. Muntassir Mamoon and myself. Our arrest had drawn the attention of international community, many international human rights bodies, and individuals including Nobel Laureates, who condemned such arbitrary arrests and repression on minorities and free thinkers by BNP-Jamat govt. All such actions of BNP-JEI alliance contributed to radicalization of Bangladeshi society and politics.



Present govt. of Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina indeed curbed Islamic militancy significantly, which was appreciated by international community as well, but until and unless the ideological base of Islamic militancy remains unnoticed or untouched, it won't be possible to stop the growth of terrorism in the name of Islam. JEI and other like-minded Islamic organizations inspired by the writings of Abul Ala Maududi, Hasan Al Banna and Syed Qutb are radicalizing minds of our youth through different type of activities.

Traditionally radicalism is quite alien to Bangladeshi society. We can cite many examples from our ancient history and cultural tradition that negate any kind of extremism in the name of religion.

Lack of secular humane values, inequality of wealth, social injustice, intolerance and bad governance are generating radicalization resulting in killing people belonging to different faiths, different views or lifestyle, as well as destroying the icons of human civilization. No government can fight terrorism alone, which is generated in the name of a global religion.

In order to protect human civilization civil society should come forward to prepare a de-radicalization strategy and counter-radicalization policy for respective governments, which will promote secular humanism, as well as ensure democracy, peace, amity and social justice across the world.

Roberta Bonazzi, Director, European Foundation for Democracy, Brussels

Our organization European Foundation for Democracy has been working on the issue of radicalization



since 2005. We have been working since then and it has created lot of awareness and cooperation among governments, authorities and other levels against radicalization. It has many facets, perception and understanding as a term. It is a global phenomenon, which

(Photo: Roberta

Bonazzi in the left is seen with Dr. Siegfried Wolf during the seminar) has no boundary. To combat radicalization more efforts, engagement and commitment from all sectors have increased specially after 9/11. The approaches and notion also moved from counter terrorism and repressive type of approach, to an approach which focuses more on the counter-radicalization or better to say prevention of radicalization. In Europe United Kingdom and Denmark are among those, who have more experience on this approach of prevention. In Italy the concept of prevention of radicalization is relatively new one and so there is no systematic way of preventing radicalization.

The negative side of growing awareness on radicalization is that it leads to growing of fear among the public, rejection of radical extremists and also leads to racism, anger and frustration which provide arguments to other extremist groups. We know Islamic extremists, but we have other forms of extremism too. Extremists are not only European, not from Middle East exclusively or not from Asia. There are also significant operational exchanges among several extremist and radical groups. Just one example from Italy, that there are small communities from Asia, Bangladesh and Pakistan and several of them were arrested, as they cooperated with their leaders or masters from Asia. Recently one year and a half ago a well-known Salafist preacher originally from Italy, who lived in Australia, was captured in Philippine on his way to divert young people to join ISIS.

I heard that Bangladesh needs more help and support from the West, from Europe to develop democracy and secular system. I would say, Europe also needs support from Bangladesh to understand, what lies behind radicalization, its nature and ideologies. Because one of the big challenges Europe is facing is the lack of understanding the ideological framework behind the radicalization. It is important to make a distinction between religion and ideology. Religion pertains to the private sphere. But the totalitarian ideology like Islamic ideology has exclusive political goal, that is totally opposite to democracy. This is a big challenge, because there is very little understanding of these differences also in the Western non-Muslim world. There is also deep fear in mentioning or debating, that touches on religion, because of sense of ignorance.

We have to increase work with the civil society organizations, particularly with the front-line professionals, who themselves are very vulnerable. We should have better monitoring and evaluation of the programs and funding. So far, we have more monitoring and evaluation of the process rather than the impacts. According to the practitioners and law enforcers, prisons, schools and increasingly refugee centres are three most vulnerable for radicalization, where radicalization processes are present and evident. There are no effective or proven programs or approaches, which may there rightly



work. In the schools the teachers and social workers should know how to answer difficult and sensitive questions with the reference of government documents.

Otherwise, those vulnerable groups will go and find the answer of their difficult question somewhere else.

There are actors or representatives from these ideological groups like Islamic preachers, who are ready to give their answer. Europe was totally unprepared to deal with the massive flow of refugees in 2015 and next years. So, it is a matter of concern how to integrate them. The major mistake was that the European countries considered these refugees as Muslim and not as individuals and they engaged only Islamic and Islamist groups to integrate these refugees. The final mistake is to focus only on the violent extremists and not to focus at the non-violent ideologists.

Martyn Frampton, Queen Mary University London



When Jamat is not allowed to take part in the election, if their individual candidates like former Jamat leaders are elected what kind of laws they may enact in Bangladesh? This question comes just in case of the worst situation, if it happens.

Question and Answer Session

Q.1. Lakhu Luhana, General Secretary, World Sindhi Congress

The situation, that has been told about Bangladesh, is also reality and even worse with the Sindhi people, as military run state Pakistan is using the religious and sectarian radicalization among and against the Sindhi people and to undermine the minorities. So, these are our situations, but coming back to the situation of Bangladesh I have two questions:



In terms of radicalization what is the role of Pakistan to promote religious fundamental forces in Bangladesh?

What is the current state of understanding within the British and European policy makers about the issue of radicalization, while the radicalization is increasing in UK and other European societies and because there are very large Pakistani and Bangladeshi

communities in UK, who in almost 27 seats decide who are going to win?

And how can we raise the awareness about the current situation of radicalization in Bangladesh and the threat? What should be our role as civil society representatives to prevent radicalization and religion-based extremism?

Q. 2 Abdullah Zakaria

How should we form the counter narrative, the discussion to tackle this situation? Who are funding and what are the channel of resources behind the radicalization and religion-based extremism? Why do not we put our attention to stop those channels of resources?

Q. 3 Priyajit Debsarkar

Who are funding and what are the channels of resources behind the radicalization and religion-based extremism?

Q.4 Ajanta Deb Roy, Director, Humane First

I would like to emphasize on the point of countering terrorism ideologically and prevention of radicalization. What we have seen after the election of 2014 is the increase or growth of radicalization in Bangladesh and the government successfully tackled a number of radical attacks on minorities and especially on Hindu communities. But I would like to draw the attention of the panelists: how the government is going to take steps to prevent the attack on religious minorities, which usually take place before and after the national election?

At the same time what we see even within the policy makers and within the government that they are funding Qawmi Madrasahs and empowering Islamic parties, like Hefazat Islam, which are radicalized or promoting radicalization. So how is it helping in prevention of radicalization and how it is helping the secular forces of Bangladesh, if we empower the radical voices? Is it not contradictory?

Replies from the Panelists

Syed Badrul Ahsan:

We certainly expect a very good election based on the situation what we have seen in the recent past. In the national election in 2014, about 153 members were elected without any opposition, which was criticized by some people saying that it was an illegal election. But the Government followed the right legal system as it is instructed in the constitution, though some main opposition parties did not take part in the election. This time BNP seems determined to take part in the election, which is a good sign for all of us. In the meantime, the Chairperson of BNP Begum Khaleda Zia and her son exiled in London have been convicted in several cases. BNP and its chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia made a mistake by transferring the authority or leadership of the party to a convicted person Tareq Zia, who is exiled in UK and convicted for ten years.

However, we see that recently some political parties including BNP have formed National Unity Front (NUF) under the leadership of Dr Kamal Hossain, who was Law Minister and played a prime role in writing the constitution of Bangladesh in 1972. Under his leadership the Unity Front has been formed couple of weeks ago. One of the key components of the Unity Front is BNP, which proves that they are interested to take part in the election. Prof Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury, who was also the founding member of BNP and President of Bangladesh during the BNP government, may also join the Unity Front. Dr Kamal Hossain was part of the Shiekh Mujibur Rahman government, part of the secular government and Bangladesh Awami League, but he did not any question about the relation between BNP and Jamat. On the other hand, Badruddoza Chowdhury demanded that BNP should leave Jamat, only then he may join the National Front but BNP has provided no clear signal of leaving Jamat.

However, we expect free and fair election and the government is also keen to make the election a credible one and recognized within the country and abroad and BNP will be there.



Dr Siegfried Wolf

We expect free and fair election and conditions are there, though there are some internal troubles in the election commission. But we are worried about the peaceful election. According to their latest statements BNP is willing to take part in the election. But their demands did not change and I see no constructive demand they placed. Their demands are for years the same like back to the caretaker government, release of Khaleda Zia etc. which are not possible to fulfill as constitution does not allow it. So, I do not know what may happen, if they are strict to their demands. Many leaders of BNP are imprisoned and there are also internal conflicts in BNP. However, Jamat has much more money than other parties and even than the Awami League.

To this question: who funds terrorists and radical organizations, I would say, that certain states support terrorists and religion-based extremists in Bangladesh.

Roberta Bonazzi Radicalization is a global phenomenon, but in the case of prevention we have to work in the local level, like Germany, Italy and Sweden now work in the local contexts to deradicalize the religion-based extremists.

The policy of European countries of empowering the radical groups, I find, that is nonsense. Empowering organizations who are openly or secretly patronizing radical forces and at the same time to offer support to the secular voices make no sense at all. You cannot empower such a group which would work against you.

Shahriar Kabir It is very important, what was asked about the financing of terrorism and the role of Pakistan. I want to say that Pakistan financed extremism and terrorism. Jamat Islami Bangladesh is the wing of Pakistani Jamat Islami and it is the Pakistani secret service ISI, who financed BNP and Jamat in the 2001 election, which has been reported in Pakistani newspapers and in 2011 Air Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan filed a writ petition in the High Court asking why ISI financed political parties in Bangladesh. That time I asked the Vice President of our Pakistan Chapter and my friend Haider Farooq Maududi, who is the son of the founder of Jamat Islami, who is very much critical to Jamat Islami, and he considers Jamat not as Bangladeshi party, rather ISI considers them as Pakistani party. So, money is coming from Pakistan. Even Jamat Islami is also active here in UK like an international party with its chapters in different countries and Pakistan is its headquarter.



Pakistan Jamat Islami and Muslim Brotherhood are focusing on South Asia. In 2008 Middle Eastern governments including Saudi Arab and its neighbors supplied 50 Billion Pounds to Jamat Islami and Brotherhood to focus on South Asia.

Bangladesh Jamat Islami has developed a huge economic empire through business and other development or charity organizations even in London. Some British charity organizations are collecting money from UK and funded Madrasa in the southern district of Bangladesh, which has been recently found as factory of weapons for Jamat. So, money is also going from Britain. If you watch the television channels here, you will see that round the clock they are collecting money for poor people and for charity works. But you do not know where the money is going.

There is another strategic failure of the Western countries that they are trying to combat the religion-based extremism directly and consider the terrorism as isolated threat to law and order situation. But it is actually a philosophical conflict, which should be prevented through ideological strategy. But there is no de-radicalization policy or counter radicalization policy. What Syed Qutub, Hasan Al Banna and Syed Abul Ala Maududi wrote, is a philosophy, philosophical issue and political definitely. So, they should fight them ideologically, as Western countries in the 80s fought communism ideologically.

You should support secular organizations and secular governments like the present government in Bangladesh. But as Ajanta said, they are promoting radical organizations. There is a tendency that the government is supporting the religious organizations. But it is reality that most of the time since 1975 Bangladesh was ruled by radical governments and they have recruited their resources in every sector of the administration. The present government has succeeded to de-radicalize the politicized army.

We asked the government to recognize private Madrasahs and to have a control on the Madrasahs and to modify the curriculum. The government has already started to do it and is changing the curriculum of Madrasahs. If the government continues for the next terms, they will be successful to modify the whole curriculum in the Madrasahs changing the components of radicalization.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The House of Lords Seminar emphasised the need for:

- **Ensure implementation of the Jamaat exclusion from the elections:** There should be a process to monitor the potential Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) activities before and during the elections, especially to see if Jel leaders or members are contesting the elections as candidates with the symbol of BNP or any other Islamist parties or the 20-party alliance led by BNP or as independent candidates. It must be ensured that the judicial justification of the exclusion of the Jel from registering for the election will be fully respected. In this context it must be controlled if there are efforts for the so-called 'double-membership' (overt or covert/hidden), to see if Jel members are trying to join other parties to infiltrate the party structures and influence their agendas and electoral campaign.
- **Safe and enabling environment for minority participation:** Increased security measures need to be taken for the protection of religious minorities, especially before and during the upcoming election. In this context, it must be ensured that a safe and enabling environment is established for the participation of minorities in the electoral process.
- **Ban on using religion and speeches of hate:** There must be a ban on using religion (religious terminology) and speeches of hate against the minorities.
- **International security cooperation and support:** There is a need for intensified cooperation (including financial, technical and training support) from the European Union (EU) to Bangladesh regarding the handling of security related issues (especially policing and potential counter-terrorism tasks) during elections. In this context, there is also the need for intelligence collaboration (especially between the 'Five Eyes'¹ and the Government of Bangladesh) regarding the potential threat of international Jihadist groups (like ISIS, al-Qaeda, or foreign networks of domestic groups) trying to undermine a free and fair election process. The

¹ The term 'Five Eyes' refers to a western intelligence network including respective agencies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). For more information regarding the need for an increased intelligence cooperation between the GoB with western states, see: Wolf, Siegfried O. (2016, June 23). Rising Islamism in Bangladesh is a European concern too. SADF Focus, No. 16. South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF), Brussels, Belgium.
<https://www.sadf.eu/sadf-focus-16-rising-islamism-bangladesh-european-concern/>

western governments in general and the EU in particular should encourage cross-border cooperation to combat terrorism in South Asia and beyond.

- **Strengthening of civil society:** Cooperation with and support for civil society organisation with clear secular and democratic agendas through the international community is strongly suggested. Furthermore, a civil society dialogue between the EU and Bangladesh should be initiated. In this context, it must be also ensured that the civil society in Bangladesh as well as abroad is protected against Jihadist and other militant threats so that it can work safely and freely without any fear and flourish. In this context, the measures need to be conducted to promote a culture of tolerance and combatting 'ideologies of hate'.
- **Campaign and lobbying at EU level:** vigorous campaign, seminars and lobbying against the threats of religious extremist groups in Europe need to be continued and more interactions with the European politicians and secular groups need to be done. The need for an active role of the Diaspora communities and the civil society to build public opinion in favour of secular democracy and to counter religious extremism and terrorism in Europe as well as home countries in the South.
- **Monitoring undue foreign influence:** There must be measures conducted to undermine undue foreign influence on political parties, especially regarding potential financial support for electoral campaigns in order to influence the agenda setting. In this context, there is a need for a regulation to ensure a transparency regarding party finance.

In total 50 participants from different stakeholders including MPs, Lord, human rights and secular activists, representatives from Europe-based organisations, academics, journalists, tv reporters and different nationals including Bangladeshis from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland participated in the Seminar. There is a limitation of participants in the House of Lords, but according to the host of this Seminar, Lord Paul Bew the presence was very good.

Media Coverage: The House of Lords Seminar got wide print and electronic media coverage in Bangladesh and Europe. The Seminar news was telecast by at least to our knowledge 3 Bangladeshi TV channels from London. The event was also covered by a number of on-line media and organisations' websites in Europe.

MEDIA COVERAGE



DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH

Published: 03:59 AM, 27 October 2018

London seminar underscores need for secular politics

AA Correspondent



Speakers at a seminar held at the House of Lords in London on Thursday on the theme, "Challenges to Parliamentary Democracy and Threats of Radicalization in Bangladesh: Way Forward", called upon European governments to reassess their views of Jihadist groups and noted that Europe needs to understand that the rise of radicalization and religiously-motivated violence is not only a localized phenomenon in Bangladesh and in South Asian countries, but has serious ramifications for Europe too.

They called for effective engagement with the Bangladesh authorities to combat fanatic indoctrination, terrorism and other forms of political violence. Organized by the European Bangladesh Forum (EBF), the seminar was hosted by Lord Paul Bew, Patron of EBF.

Speakers at the seminar were Jim Fitzpatrick, Member of the British House of Commons and Vice Chairman of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh; Syed Badrul Ahsan, Editor-in-Charge, The Asian Age, Bangladesh; Roberta Bonazzi, founder and President of the European Foundation for Democracy; Dr. Siegfried O Wolf, German political scientist and Director of South Asia Democratic Forum; Shahriar Kabir, President, Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Martyn Frampton of Queen Mary University, London. Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF, delivered the welcome speech.

The seminar was held against the background of preparations in Bangladesh for the forthcoming general elections in the country in December this year amidst threats of boycott by one of the major political parties, the BNP. The BNP had earlier threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected, non-party caretaker government.

Speakers at the seminar were of the view that secular politics has in broad outlines been restored in a significant way, but warned at the same time that the forces arrayed against secularism should not be underestimated or ignored.

Syed Badrul Ahsan, dwelling on the issue of what is at stake for the country, informed the audience of the history of the struggle for secular politics in Bangladesh. He noted that the emergence of Bangladesh was in essence a revolt against the communal politics pursued in Pakistan in the twenty four years between 1947 and 1971.

But while liberal, secular politics was established in Bangladesh with the achievement of freedom, he said, there has ironically been a progressive decline in the secular ethos of the country since the assassinations of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the four national leaders in 1975. Ahsan briefed the seminar on the damage done to the constitutional basis of the country through the moves made by the military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman and General H.M. Ershad to foist religion on national politics. He pointed to the inordinate influence of the Hefazat-e-Islam, despite widespread condemnation of its 13-point demand of a fanatical nature, on national politics.

Secularism, he said, had a long way to go considering the alarming decline in the figures for the Hindu population of the country.

Dr Siegfried Wolf said western government should not allow parties supporting or patronizing terrorism to use their territories and must stop granting them safe-haven, freedom of movement. Political parties that directly or indirectly associate - either through individual members or third entities (Muslim Charity and cultural organizations) - with violent Jihadist organizations must be considered as part of the Jihadist movement, he opined.

In his remarks, Shahriar Kabir said from 2001 to 2006 Bangladesh witnessed an unprecedented persecution of religious minorities, mostly Hindus. In order to convert Bangladesh into a monolithic Muslim country, he added, the BNP-Jamat alliance forced more than a quarter million hapless Hindus to leave Bangladesh and take shelter in neighbouring India. Despite protests the then BNP coalition government did not take any measure. On the contrary, several secular civil society leaders were put behind bars, he added.

Roberta Bonazzi said, radicalization is a global phenomenon has no boundaries. That is why it needs multi-level cooperation among civil societies and also at government-to-government levels. In this respect Bangladesh needs support and cooperation from European countries and at the same time Europe has a lot to learn from Bangladesh from its successful operation against militancy and religion-based extremism.

Earlier, Lord Paul Bew, in his welcome address said, "We have to look at the root of violent extremism and religion-based violence, which is not only a significant issue for Bangladesh, but also significant for European countries, including the United Kingdom. Through analyses of European and global perspectives of militancy and terrorism, we have to increase mutual understanding and cooperation to ensure a sustainable policy and strategy against all sorts of extremist threats and violence."

Among others, General Secretary of World Sindhi Congress, Lakhu Luhana, Director of Humane First Ajanta Deb Roy and writer Priyajit Debsarkar registered their comments on the subjects raised at the seminar.

<https://dailyasianage.com/news/146478/london-seminar-underscores-need-for-secular-politics>

English

Seminar in House of Lords: Fight Militant and Communal Extremists for Free and Fair Election

26th October 2018 Editor Desk 0 Comments

Special

correspondent

Shottobani, London 26 Oct 2018



London: Speakers at a seminar at the House of Lords in London on “Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: Challenging Radicalism & the Way Forward” on 25 October 2018 called upon the European governments to reassess their views of Jihadist groups and said, Europe needs to understand

that the rise of radicalisation and religiously-motivated violence is not a localized phenomenon in Bangladesh and in the South Asian countries, it has serious ramifications for Europe too. They called for effective engagement with the Bangladesh authorities to combat fanatic indoctrination, terrorism and other forms of political violence.

Organised by European Bangladeshi diaspora organisation, European Bangladesh Forum (EBF) the seminar was hosted by Lord Paul Bew, Patron of EBF. The speakers at the seminar were: Jim Fitzpatrick, Member of the British Parliament and Vice Chairman of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh, Syed Badrul Ahsan, Chief Editor of The Asian Age, Bangladesh, Roberta Bonazzi, founder and President of the European Foundation for Democracy, Dr. Siegfried O Wolf, German political scientist and Director of South Asia Democratic Forum, Shahriar Kabir, President of Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Martyn Frampton of Queen Mary University of London. Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF gave the welcome speech. The seminar was held at a time when Bangladesh is preparing for the next general elections in December this year amidst threats of boycott by one of the major political parties, BNP. BNP had earlier threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected, non-party caretaker government.

Speakers in the seminar said, secular politics is today in broad outlines restored in a significant way, but warned at the same time, the forces against secularism should not be underestimated or ignored, especially at a time when Bangladesh prepares for the next general elections end of the year. They hoped that there will be a free and fair elections where all can exercise their rights of franchise.

Dr. Siegfried Wolf said, western government should not allow parties supporting or patronising terrorism to use their territories and must stop granting them safe-haven, freedom of movement. Political parties that directly or indirectly associate – either through individual members or third entities (Muslim Charity and cultural organisations) – with violent Jihadist organisations must be considered as a part of the Jihadist movement, he opined.

Writer and journalist from Dhaka, Shahriar Kabir said, from 2001 to 2006 Bangladesh witnessed an unprecedented persecution of religious minorities, mostly the Hindus. In order to convert Bangladesh into a monolithic Muslim country he added, BNP-Jamat alliance forced more than a quarter million hapless Hindus to leave Bangladesh and take shelter in neighbouring India. Despite protests the then BNP coalition government did not take any measure, on the contrary several secular civil society leaders were thrown behind the bar, he added.

Roberta Bonazzi said, radicalization is a global phenomenon and it has no boundary. That is why it needs multilevel cooperation among civil societies and also in the government levels. In this respect Bangladesh needs support and cooperation from European countries and at the same time Europe has a lot to learn from Bangladesh from its successful operation against militancy and religion-based extremism.

Earlier, Lord Paul Bew in his welcome address said, we have to look at the root of violent extremism and religion-based violence, which is not only the significant issue for Bangladesh, but also significant for the European countries including United Kingdom. Through the analysis of the European and global perspectives of the militancy and terrorism, we have to increase mutual understanding and cooperation to ensure the sustainable policy and strategy to fight against all sorts of extremist threats and violence. Among others, General Secretary of World Sindhi Congress Lakhu Luhana, Director of Humane First Ajanta Deb Roy and writer Priyajit Debsarkar spoke in the seminar.

In total 50 participants from Bangladeshi and European representatives from UK, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany took part in the seminar.

<http://shottobani.com/archives/47839>

কালের কণ্ঠ

বাংলাদেশের গণতন্ত্র নিয়ে যুক্তরাজ্যে সেমিনার

লন্ডন প্রতিনিধি

২৭ অক্টোবর, ২০১৮ ০০:০০ Dhaka

শনিবার | ২৭ অক্টোবর ২০১৮ | ১২ কার্তিক ১৪২৫ | ১৬ সফর ১৪৪০

by Taboola

বাংলাদেশের গণতন্ত্র ও ধর্মীয় উগ্রবাদ নিয়ে যুক্তরাজ্যে সেমিনার হয়েছে। গত বৃহস্পতিবার দেশটির হাউস অব লর্ডসে ‘বাংলাদেশে সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রের জন্য মৌলবাদী হুমকি এবং করণীয়’ শীর্ষক এ সেমিনার হয়। সেখানে বক্তারা জিহাদি গোষ্ঠীগুলোর ব্যাপারে তাঁদের বিশ্লেষণ নতুন করে নিরূপণ করতে ইউরোপের দেশগুলোকে আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন।

ইউরোপে বাংলাদেশি অভিবাসীদের সংস্থা—ইউরোপিয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরাম (ইবিএফ) এ সেমিনার আয়োজন করে। তাতে ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টের সদস্য এবং বাংলাদেশবিষয়ক সর্বদলীয় সংসদীয় কমিটির সহসভাপতি জিম ফিজপ্যাট্রিক এমপি, দি এশিয়ান এইজ পত্রিকার প্রধান সম্পাদক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান, ব্রাসেলসভিত্তিক দক্ষিণ এশিয়া গণতান্ত্রিক ফোরামের পরিচালক ড. জিগফ্রিড উলফ, ঘাতক দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির প্রমুখ বক্তব্য দেন।

বক্তারা বলেন, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ রাজনৈতিক আদর্শ সমাজের বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হলেও বিরোধী শক্তির ব্যাপারে সতর্ক থাকতে হবে; অবহেলা করা যাবে না। বক্তারা আশা প্রকাশ করেন, আসন্ন জাতীয় নির্বাচন হবে অবাধ ও নিরপেক্ষ এবং দেশের সব মানুষ নিজেদের ভোটাধিকার প্রয়োগের সুযোগ পাবে।

<http://www.kalerkantho.com/print-edition/news/2018/10/27/696312>

(Bengali national daily newspaper, KALER KONTA, Dhaka on 26 October 2018)



„Europe needs to understand rise of Radicalisation”

By **our voice** October 29, 2018 Germany



Photo: EBF/OV

London, October 25 (Our Voice): Europe-based Diaspora organization, European Bangladesh Forum (EBF) organized a seminar at the House of Lords in London on “Challenges to Parliamentary Democracy and Threats of Radicalization in Bangladesh: Way Forward” on 25 October 2018. This was a follow-up event of the 22 March 2018 conference on “Countering Violent Extremism: European Context and the Bangladeshi Diaspora” held at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Speakers at the House of Lords seminar called upon the European governments to reassess their views of Jihadist groups and said, Europe needs to understand that the rise of radicalisation and religiously-motivated violence is not a localized phenomenon in Bangladesh and in the South Asian countries, it has serious ramifications for Europe too. They called for effective engagement with the

Bangladesh authorities to combat fanatic indoctrination, terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The seminar was hosted by Lord Paul Bew, Patron of EBF. It was addressed by Jim Fitzpatrick, Member of the British Parliament and Vice Chairman of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh, Roberta Bonazzi, founder and President of the European Foundation for Democracy, Dr. Siegfried O Wolf, German political scientist and Director of South Asia Democratic Forum, Shahriar Kabir, President of Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Martyn Frampton of Queen Mary University of London and Syed Badrul Ahsan, Chief Editor of The Asian Age, Bangladesh. Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF gave the welcome speech.

The seminar was held at a time when Bangladesh is preparing for the next general elections in December this year amidst threats of boycott by one of the major political parties, BNP. BNP had earlier threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected, non-party caretaker government.

Speakers in the seminar said, secular politics is today in broad outlines restored in a significant way, but warned at the same time, the forces against secularism should not be underestimated or ignored, especially at a time when Bangladesh prepares for the next general elections end of the year. They hoped that there will be a free and fair elections where all can exercise their rights of franchise.

Dr. Siegfried Wolf said, western government should not allow parties supporting or patronising terrorism to use their territories and must stop granting them safe-haven, freedom of movement. Political parties that directly or indirectly associate – either through individual members or third entities (Muslim Charity and cultural organisations) – with violent Jihadist organisations must be considered as a part of the Jihadist movement, he opined.

Writer and journalist from Dhaka, Shahriar Kabir said, from 2001 to 2006 Bangladesh witnessed an unprecedented persecution of religious minorities, mostly the Hindus. In order to convert Bangladesh into a monolithic Muslim country he added, BNP-Jamat alliance forced more than a quarter million hapless Hindus to leave Bangladesh and take shelter in neighboring India. Despite protests the then BNP coalition government did not take any measure, on the contrary several secular civil society leaders were thrown behind the bar, he added.

Roberta Bonazzi said, radicalization is a global phenomenon and it has no boundary. That is why it needs multilevel cooperation among civil societies and also in the government levels. In this respect Bangladesh needs support and cooperation from European countries and at the same time Europe has a lot to learn from Bangladesh from its successful operation against militancy and religion-based extremism.

Earlier, Lord Paul Bew in his welcome address said, we have to look at the root of violent extremism and religion-based violence, which is not only the significant issue for Bangladesh, but also significant for the European countries including United Kingdom. Through the analysis of the European and global perspectives of the militancy and terrorism, we have to increase mutual understanding and cooperation to ensure the sustainable policy and strategy to fight against all sorts of extremist threats and violence. Among others, General Secretary of World Sindhi Congress Lakhu Luhana, Director of Humane First Ajanta Deb Roy and writer Priyajit Debsarkar spoke in the seminar.

Nearly 50 participants from different nationals including Bangladeshi and British and European representatives from UK, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany took part in the seminar.

<http://our-voice-online.com/fight-militant-and-communal-extremists-for-free-and-fair-election/>

বাংলাদেশ ব্রিটেন ব্রেকিং নিউজ London, 26 2018



ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টে সেমিনার: নির্বাচন কেন্দ্রীক সহিংসতা মোকাবেলাই মূল চ্যালেঞ্জ

26th October 2018 Editor Desk, London

স্পেশালকরেসপন্ডেন্ট
সত্যবাদী

পার্লামেন্ট হাউস, লন্ডন: 'নির্বাচন কেন্দ্রীক জঙ্গী সহিংসতা মোকাবেলাই বাংলাদেশে মূল চ্যালেঞ্জ'- ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্ট হাউসে অনুষ্ঠিত 'পার্লামেন্টারী ডেমক্রেসী ইন বাংলাদেশ: চ্যালেঞ্জিং রেডিক্যালিজম এন্ড ওয়ে ফরওয়ার্ড'-শীর্ষক একটি সেমিনারের উপসংহারে এমন মন্তব্যই এসেছে বক্তাদের কাছ থেকে। বলা হয়েছে ২০০১ সালের নির্বাচন পরবর্তী সাম্প্রদায়িক সহিংসতা দেশটির সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ের মধ্যে যে বিভিষিকার ক্ষত সৃষ্টি করেছিলো তা এখনও

শুকায়েনি। বৃহস্পতিবার স্থানীয় সময় বিকেল ৩টা থেকে সাড়ে ৪টা পর্যন্ত হাউস অব লর্ডসের কমিটি রুম-১ অনুষ্ঠিত হয় এই সেমিনার।

ইউরোপীয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরামের উদ্যোগে ব্রিটিশ হাউস অফ লর্ডসের প্রবীন সদস্য লর্ড পল বিউ এর আমন্ত্রণে সেমিনারে বক্তা হিসেবে অংশ নিয়েছিলেন সাউথ এশিয়া ডেমোক্রেটিক ফোরামের রিসার্চার, জার্মানির হাইডেলবার্গ ইউনিভার্সিটির বিশিষ্ট গবেষক সেগফ্রিড ও ওল্ফ, ব্রাসেলসের ইউরোপীয়ান ফাউন্ডেশন ফর ডেমোক্রেসীর রোবার্টা বোনারজি, লন্ডন কুইনমেরী ইউনিভার্সিটির মার্টিন ফ্রান্সপটন, ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টের বাংলাদেশ বিষয়ক অল পার্টি পার্লামেন্টারী গ্রুপের ভাইস চেয়ার জিম ফিট্জপেট্রিক, বাংলাদেশের ইংরেজী জাতীয় দৈনিক দ্যা 'এশিয়ান এইজ' এর এডিটর ইন চার্জ সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান এবং একাত্তরের ঘাতক দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির। সেমিনারের সার্বিক তত্ত্বাবধানে ছিলেন ইউরোপীয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরামের সহসভাপতি বিকাশ চৌধুরী বড়ুয়া ও যুক্তরাজ্য নির্মূল কমিটির সাধারণ সম্পাদক জামাল খান।



আমন্ত্রক লর্ড পল বিউ-এর সভাপতিত্বে এবং ইউরোপীয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরামের সভাপতি, সাংবাদিক ও মানবাধিকার কর্মী আনসার আহমেদ উল্লাহর স্বাগত বক্তব্যের মাধ্যমে শুরু হওয়া সেমিনারে বক্তারা বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে বাংলাদেশের সাম্প্রতিক

উন্নয়নের প্রশংসা করে বলেন, জঙ্গী সহিংসতা মোকাবেলার সফলতার উপরই নির্ভর করছে এই অগ্রযাত্রা অব্যাহত রাখা। বিদেশী আলোচকরা বাংলাদেশের আসন্ন নির্বাচন ও সর্বশেষ রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি জানার আগ্রহ প্রকাশ করে নির্বাচন কেন্দ্রিক সহিংসতা মোকাবেলায় সরকারের প্রস্তুতি সম্পর্কে জানতে চান বাংলাদেশী আলোচক শাহরিয়ার কবির ও সাংবাদিক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসানের কাছে। যুদ্ধাপরাধের দায়ে অভিযুক্ত জামাতে ইসলামীর প্রতি ইঙ্গিত করে সকল দলের অংশগ্রহণে একটি গ্রহণযোগ্য নির্বাচনের উপর গুরুত্বারোপ করে তারা বলেন, উগ্র সাম্প্রদায়িক শক্তিগুলোকে নির্বাচনের বাইরে রেখে আগামী পার্লামেন্ট গঠনে গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনৈতিক দলগুলোর ঐক্যমতে আসা উচিত। বিদেশী বক্তারা ২০০১ সালের নির্বাচন পরবর্তী সাম্প্রদায়িক সহিংসতার কথা স্মরণ করে, সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ের উপর সহিংস হামলার ঘটনা শুধু ২০০১ সাল নয়, সাম্প্রতিক সময় পর্যন্তও অব্যাহত রয়েছে বলে মন্তব্য করেন। তারা বলেন, বিগত কয়েকটি জাতীয় নির্বাচনসহ স্থানীয় নির্বাচনেও লক্ষ্য করা গেছে নির্বাচনকে কেন্দ্র করে উগ্রবাদী সংগঠন গুলোর প্রত্যক্ষ মদদে বাংলাদেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানে সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায় হত্যা ও নির্যাতনের শিকার হয়েছে। এসময় তারা ২০১৪ সালের জাতীয় নির্বাচনকে কেন্দ্র করে দেশব্যাপী হরতাল অবরোধের নামে বাসে ট্রেনে অগ্নি সংযোগ, জাতীয় সম্পদের ক্ষতি সাধন এবং দেশের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে হিন্দু মেয়েদের ধর্ষন, হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়ের ব্যবসা বানিজ্য এবং বাড়ীঘরে লুটপাটের ঘটনা উল্লেখ করেন। তারা বলেন, ‘সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ের উপর এমন সহিংসতাকে একটি গণতান্ত্রিক সমাজে দুষ্কৃত হিসেবেই আমরা চিহ্নিত করতে চাই’। সাম্প্রদায়িক এই সহিংস গোষ্ঠিকে মোকাবেলায় সরকারসহ গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনৈতিক দলগুলোর সম্মিলিত উদ্যোগ কামনা করেন তারা।

আসন্ন নির্বাচনে সাম্প্রদায়িক শক্তি ও তার দোসরদের সহিংসতার বিদেশী বক্তাদের আশংকার সাথে একমত পোষন করে একাত্তরের ঘাতক দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির বলেন, ‘এই আশংকা আমাদেরও। বিষয়টি নিয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশনের সাথে কথা বলেছি আমরা। বলেছি যুদ্ধাপরাধী সাম্প্রদায়িক জামাতে ইসলামীর কোন নেতাকে কোন দলের প্রতীকেই নির্বাচন করতে দেয়া যাবেনা। এ ইস্যুতে নির্বাচন কমিশনের অস্পষ্ট ভূমিকায় হতাশা ব্যক্ত করে তিনি বলেন, বাংলাদেশের সংবিধানের প্রতি জামাতে ইসলামীর আস্থাহীনতার কারনে দলটিকে নিবন্ধন দেয়নি নির্বাচন কমিশন। সুতরাং দল হিসেবে তারা নির্বাচন করতে পারবেনা এটি ঠিক। কিন্তু অন্য দলের প্রতীক নিয়ে বিতর্কিত এই দলের নেতাদের নির্বাচনে অংশগ্রহণ আটকানো না গেলে শুধু নিবন্ধন বাতিলে তো কোন লাভ হলোনা। শাহরিয়ার কবির বলেন, বাংলাদেশে সহিংস রাজনীতির উত্থান জামাত নামক এই

অভিশপ্ত দলটির হাত ধরেই। সুতরাং মূল শিকড় যদি উপড়ে ফেলা না যায় তাহলে জঙ্গী সহিংসতা আমাদের জন্য চ্যালেঞ্জ হিসেবেই থেকে যাবে। আসন্ন নির্বাচনে জঙ্গী সহিংসতা বিষয়ে সেমিনারের বিদেশী আলোচকদের উদ্বেগ বাংলাদেশ সরকারের কাছে পৌছে দেয়ার চেষ্টা করবেন বলে সেমিনারকে আশ্বস্ত করেন শাহরিয়ার কবির। অন্যতম আলোচক সাংবাদিক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান বাংলাদেশের সাম্প্রতিক রাজনৈতিক মেরুকরণকে জটিল আখ্যায়িত করে সেমিনারকে বলেন, সেক্যুলার মূল্যবোধের কথা বাংলাদেশের সংবিধানে সন্নিবেশিত করেছিলেন যিনি, সেই ড. কামাল হোসেন আজ যুদ্ধপরাধের দায়ে চিহ্নিত উগ্র সাম্প্রদায়িক দল জামাতের রাজনৈতিক জোটের সাথে সখ্য করেছেন, বর্ধিত করেছেন জোট, হয়েছে বর্ধিত জোটের নেতা। পাশাপাশি জামাতকে বাংলাদেশের রাষ্ট্রীয় ক্ষমতায় নিয়ে আসার অন্যতম মূল কারিগর ডা: বদরুদ্দোজা চৌধুরী নেমেছেন জামাত বিরোধীতায়। তিনি বলেন, ক্ষমতার রাজনীতির এই জটিল খেলায় আগামী নির্বাচন অবশ্যই বাংলাদেশের জন্য একটি চ্যালেঞ্জ। এই চ্যালেঞ্জ মোকাবেলায় দড় মনোবলের জনপ্রস্তুতি প্রয়োজন বলে মন্তব্য করেন তিনি।

সেমিনারের প্রশ্নোত্তর পর্বে হেফাজতের সাথে সরকারের সাম্প্রতিক দহরম মহরমের বিষয়েও প্রশ্ন উঠে। জঙ্গীবাদ মোকাবেলায় বর্তমান সরকারের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকার প্রশংসা করে গণজাগরণ মঞ্চ যুক্তরাজ্য শাখার সমন্বয়ক অজন্তা দেব রায় হেফাজতের মত একটি উগ্র ধর্মান্ধ শক্তিকে কাছে টেনে নিয়ে সরকারের পক্ষে উগ্রবাদ মোকাবিলা কতটুকু সম্ভব, এমন প্রশ্ন তুলেন সেমিনারে। বাংলাদেশের উগ্র ধর্মান্ধ শক্তিগুলোর সাথে পাকিস্তানের যোগসূত্র নিয়ে জানতে চান পাকিস্তানের একজন মানবাধিকার কর্মী।

প্রশ্নকর্তাদের এমন প্রশ্নের উত্তর বাংলাদেশ সরকারের কাছ থেকে অবশ্যই আসা উচিত বলে সমাপনী বক্তব্যে মন্তব্য করেন সেমিনারের আমন্ত্রক লর্ড পল বিউ। তিনি বলেন, এসব বিষয়ে সরকার, রাজনৈতিক দলসমূহ এবং সচেতন নাগরিকদের আরো সতর্কতা অবলম্বন করতে হবে।

http://shottobani.com/archives/47821?fbclid=IwAR1KXR-vt4w7iZaGQuT81KeDzqKGs9og_Ch7mw3sXJua-4XpCInoTsgKCE

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ব্রিটিশ সংসদে বাংলাদেশের গণতন্ত্র নিয়ে সেমিনার নির্বাচনকেন্দ্রিক সহিংসতা মোকাবেলাই মূল চ্যালেঞ্জ

■ সৈয়দ আনাস পাশা, লন্ডন

‘নির্বাচনকেন্দ্রিক জঙ্গি সহিংসতা মোকাবেলাই বাংলাদেশে মূল চ্যালেঞ্জ’- ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্ট হাউসে অনুষ্ঠিত ‘পার্লামেন্টারি ডেমোক্রেসি ইন বাংলাদেশ : চ্যালেঞ্জিং রেডিক্যালিজম অ্যান্ড ওয়ে ফরওয়ার্ড’ শীর্ষক সেমিনারের উপসংহারে এমন মন্তব্যই উঠে এসেছে বক্তাদের কাছ থেকে। তারা আরও বলেছেন, ২০০১ সালের নির্বাচন-পরবর্তী সাম্প্রদায়িক সহিংসতা দেশটির সংখ্যালঘুদের মধ্যে যে বিভীষিকার ক্ষত সৃষ্টি করেছিল, তা এখনও শুকায়নি।

ইউরোপিয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরামের উদ্যোগে ব্রিটিশ হাউস অব লর্ডসের প্রবীণ সদস্য লর্ড পল বিউর আমন্ত্রণে বৃহস্পতিবার স্থানীয় সময় বিকেলে অনুষ্ঠিত এ সেমিনারে বক্তা হিসেবে অংশ নেন সাউথ এশিয়া ডেমোক্রেটিক ফোরামের রিসার্চার, জার্মানির হাইডেলবার্গ ইউনিভার্সিটির গবেষক স্বেগফ্রিড ও ওল্ফ, ব্রাসেলসের ইউরোপিয়ান ফাউন্ডেশন ফর ডেমোক্রেসির রোবার্টা বোনাঞ্জি, লন্ডন কুইনমেরি ইউনিভার্সিটির মার্টিন ফ্রান্সপটন, ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টের বাংলাদেশ বিষয়ক অল পার্টি পার্লামেন্টারি গ্রুপের ভাইস চেয়ার জিম ফিটজপেট্রিক, বাংলাদেশের ইংরেজি জাতীয় দৈনিক ‘দ্য এশিয়ান এইজ’-এর এডিটর ইন চার্জ সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান এবং একান্তরের ঘাতক দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির। সেমিনারের সার্বিক তত্ত্বাবধানে ছিলেন ইউরোপিয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরামের প্রেসিডেন্ট বিকাশ চৌধুরী বড়ুয়া।

লর্ড পল বিউর সভাপতিত্বে সেমিনারে স্বাগত বক্তব্য দেন ইউরোপিয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরাম লন্ডন শাখার প্রেসিডেন্ট, ■ পৃষ্ঠা ১৭ : কলাম ১

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পরবর্তী অংশ

নির্বাচনকেন্দ্রিক সহিংসতা

[দ্বিতীয় পৃষ্ঠার পর]

সাংবাদিক ও মানবাধিকারকর্মী আনসার আহমেদ উল্লাহ। বক্তারা বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে বাংলাদেশের সাম্প্রতিক উন্নয়নের প্রশংসা করে বলেন, জঙ্গি সহিংসতা মোকাবেলার সফলতার ওপরই নির্ভর করছে এই অগ্রযাত্রা ধরে রাখা। বিদেশি আলোচকরা বাংলাদেশের আসন্ন নির্বাচন ও সর্বশেষ রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি জানার আগ্রহ প্রকাশ করে নির্বাচনকেন্দ্রিক সহিংসতা মোকাবেলায় সরকারের প্রস্তুতি সম্পর্কে জানতে চান। এ সময় তারা বলেন, সংখ্যালঘুদের ওপর সহিংস হামলার ঘটনা শুধু ২০০১ সালে নয়, সাম্প্রতিক সময়েও অব্যাহত রয়েছে। বিগত কয়েকটি জাতীয় নির্বাচনসহ স্থানীয় নির্বাচনেও লক্ষ্য করা গেছে নির্বাচনকে কেন্দ্র করে উগ্রবাদী সংগঠনগুলোর প্রত্যক্ষ মদদে বাংলাদেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানে সংখ্যালঘু হত্যা ও নির্যাতনের শিকার হয়েছে। এ সময় তারা ২০১৪ সালের জাতীয় নির্বাচনকে কেন্দ্র করে দেশব্যাপী হরতাল-অবরোধের নামে বাস-ট্রেনে অগ্নিসংযোগ, জাতীয় সম্পদের ক্ষতিসাধন এবং দেশের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়ের ওপর হামলা, তাদের ব্যবসাপ্রতিষ্ঠান ও বাড়িঘরে লুটপাটের ঘটনা উল্লেখ করেন। তারা বলেন, সংখ্যালঘুদের ওপর এমন সহিংসতাকে একটি গণতান্ত্রিক সমাজে দুষ্কৃত হিসেবেই চিহ্নিত করতে চাই। এ সহিংস গোষ্ঠীকে মোকাবেলায় সরকারসহ গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনৈতিক দলগুলোর সম্মিলিত উদ্যোগও কামনা করেন তারা।

একান্তরের ঘাতক দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির তাদের বক্তব্যের প্রশংসা করে বলেন, 'এই আশঙ্কা আমাদেরও। বিষয়টি নিয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশনের সঙ্গে আমরা কথা বলেছি। বলেছি জামায়াতের কোনো নেতাকে কোনো দলের প্রতীকেই নির্বাচন করতে দেওয়া যাবে না। এ ইস্যুতে নির্বাচন কমিশনের অস্পষ্ট ভূমিকা আমাদের হতাশ করেছে।' তিনি বলেন, বাংলাদেশের সংবিধানের প্রতি জামায়াতের আত্মহীনতার কারণে দলটিকে নিবন্ধন দেয়নি নির্বাচন কমিশন। তাই দল হিসেবে তারা নির্বাচন করতে পারবে না। তবে অন্য দলের প্রতীক নিয়ে বিতর্কিত এই দলের নেতাদের নির্বাচনে অংশগ্রহণ আটকানো না গেলে শুধু নিবন্ধন বাতিলে তো কোনো লাভ হবে না।

শাহরিয়ার কবির বলেন, বাংলাদেশে সহিংস রাজনীতির উত্থান জামায়াত নামক এই অভিশপ্ত দলটির হাত ধরেই। সুতরাং মূল শিকড় যদি উপড়ে ফেলা না যায় তাহলে জঙ্গি সহিংসতা আমাদের জন্য চ্যালেঞ্জ হিসেবেই থেকে যাবে।

সাংবাদিক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান বলেন, সেকুলার মূল্যবোধের কথা বাংলাদেশের সংবিধানে সন্নিবেশিত করেছিলেন যিনি, সেই ড. কামাল হোসেন আজ যুদ্ধাপরাধের দায়ে চিহ্নিত জামায়াতের রাজনৈতিক জোটের সঙ্গে সখা করেছেন। ক্ষমতার রাজনীতির এই জটিল খেলায় আগামী নির্বাচন অবশ্যই বাংলাদেশের জন্য একটি চ্যালেঞ্জ।



জঙ্গি ও সাম্প্রদায়িক গোষ্ঠীকে রুখতে ঐক্যবদ্ধভাবে কাজ করার আহ্বান

By ourvoice, Germany

অক্টোবর ২৯, ২০১৮



Photo: EBF/OV

লন্ডন, ২৭ অক্টোবর (আওয়ার ভয়েস) – যুক্তরাজ্যের হাউজ অফ লর্ডস এ বৃহস্পতিবার “বাংলাদেশে সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রের জন্য মৌলবাদী হুমকি এবং করণীয়” শীর্ষক সেমিনারে বক্তাগণ জিহাদি গোষ্ঠীগুলোর ব্যাপারে তাদের বিশ্লেষণ নতুন করে নিরূপণ করার জন্য ইউরোপীয় দেশগুলোর প্রতি আহ্বান জানিয়ে বলেন, ইউরোপের নীতিনির্ধারকদের এটা সঠিকভাবে বোঝা উচিত যে, বাংলাদেশ এবং দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলোতে মৌলবাদী চরমপন্থা এবং ধর্ম ভিত্তিক সহিংসতার উত্থান কোন স্থানীয় সমস্যা নয়, বরং এটা ইউরোপের জন্যও সমানভাবে বড়মাপের হুমকি। তাই বক্তারা বাংলাদেশে গোঁড়া ধর্মাত্মতা ভিত্তিক এবং সবধরনের রাজনৈতিক সহিংসতার মূল উৎপাতনে বাংলাদেশকে সহযোগিতার আহ্বান জানান।

ইউরোপে বাংলাদেশি অভিবাসীদের সংস্থা ইউরোপিয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরাম ইবিএফ এর শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষী লর্ড পল বিউ এর আমন্ত্রণে এই সেমিনারের আয়োজন করে ইবিএফ। সেমিনারে অন্যান্যের মধ্যে ব্রিটিশ সংসদের সদস্য এবং বাংলাদেশ বিষয়ে সর্বদলীয় সাংসদীয় কমিটির সহ-সভাপতি জিম ফিজপ্যাট্রিক, দ্য

এশিয়ান এইজ পত্রিকার প্রধান সম্পাদক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান, জার্মান রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞানী হাইডেলবার্গ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের দক্ষিণ এশিয়া ইন্সটিটিউট এর গবেষক ও ব্রাসেলস ভিত্তিক দক্ষিণ এশিয়া গণতান্ত্রিক ফোরাম এর পরিচালক ডঃ জিগফ্রিড ভোলফ, লন্ডন স্কুল অফ ইকোনমিক্স এর ডঃ ডেভিড লুইস, ফোরাম ফর সেকুলার বাংলাদেশ এর সভাপতি শাহরিয়ার কবির, ইউরোপিয়ান ফাউন্ডেশন ফর ডেমক্রেসি এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা সভাপতি রবার্ট বনাজি, এবং লন্ডনস্থ কুইন ম্যারি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের মার্টিন ফ্রান্সপটিন বক্তৃতা করেন।

স্বাগত বক্তব্য রাখেন ইবিএফ সভাপতি আনসার আহমেদ উল্লাহ। সেমিনার এমন এক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সময়ে অনুষ্ঠিত হল, যখন চলতি বছরের ডিসেম্বর মাসে বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় নির্বাচনের জন্য প্রস্তুত হচ্ছে, এবং অন্যতম প্রধান বিরোধী দল বিএনপি আসন্ন নির্বাচন বর্জনের হুমকি দিয়ে আসছে। এর আগেও জাতীয় নির্বাচন অনিবার্চিত নির্দলীয় কেয়ারটেকার সরকারের অধীন না হলে নির্বাচন বর্জনের হুমকি দিয়েছিল বিএনপি।

বক্তারা সেমিনারে বলেন, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ রাজনৈতিক আদর্শ সমাজের বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হলেও একইসাথে সতর্ক থাকতে হবে যে, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ আদর্শের বিরোধী শক্তিকেও তুচ্ছ করে দেখা যাবে না এবং অবহেলা করা যাবে না, বিশেষভাবে বাংলাদেশ যখন এই বছরের শেষে জাতীয় নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠানের প্রস্তুতি নিচ্ছে। তাঁরা আশা প্রকাশ করেন যে, আসন্ন জাতীয় নির্বাচন হবে অবাধ ও নিরপেক্ষ এবং দেশের সব মানুষ স্বাধীনভাবে নিজেদের ভোটাধিকার প্রয়োগের সুযোগ পাবেন।

ডঃ জিগফ্রিড ভোলফ বলেন, পশ্চিমের দেশগুলোর কোনভাবেই এমন দল এবং গোষ্ঠীগুলোকে নিজেদের ভূখন্ডকে তাদের স্বর্গরাজ্য বানাতে দেওয়া উচিত হবে না, যারা কোনভাবে সন্ত্রাসী গোষ্ঠীকে মদদ দেয়। তিনি আরও বলেন, যেসব রাজনৈতিক দল প্রত্যক্ষভাবে কিংবা পরোক্ষভাবে, সরাসরি কিংবা বিভিন্ন উন্নয়ন সংস্থার নামে কিংবা সাংস্কৃতিক গোষ্ঠীর নামে সহিংস সন্ত্রাসী সংগঠনগুলোকে সহযোগিতা করছে তাদেরকেও জঙ্গীবাদী গোষ্ঠী হিসেবে বিবেচনা করে তাদেরকে প্রতিহত করতে হবে।

ঢাকা থেকে আগত লেখক ও সাংবাদিক শাহরিয়ার কবির বলেন, ২০০১ থেকে ২০০৬ সাল পর্যন্ত সময়ে বাংলাদেশ ধর্মীয় সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায় এবং বিশেষভাবে হিন্দু জনগোষ্ঠীর উপরে নৃশংস নিপীড়ন প্রত্যক্ষ করেছে। তিনি আরও বলেন, বিএনপি-জামাত চক্র বাংলাদেশকে একটি গোঁড়া ইসলামী রাষ্ট্রে পরিণত করতে চায়। আর সেজন্য তারা লক্ষাধিক হিন্দু নারীপুরুষকে বাংলাদেশ থেকে উচ্ছেদ করেছে। সেসময় এসব নির্যাতনের বিখণ্ড-প্রতিবাদে ভ্রূক্ষেপ না করে বিএনপি সরকার সুশীল সমাজের নেতাদের কারাগারে নিক্ষেপ করেছিল।

সেমিনারে অন্যান্যের মধ্যে বক্তব্য রাখেন ওয়ার্ল্ড সিন্ধি কংগ্রেস এর জেনারেল সেক্রেটারি লাখু লুহানা, হিউমেন ফার্স্ট এর পরিচালক অজন্তা দেব রায় এবং লেখক প্রিয়জিত দেবসরকার। সেমিনারে যুক্তরাজ্য, সুইজারল্যান্ড, নেদারল্যান্ডস, বেলজিয়াম, জার্মানি সহ ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন দেশ থেকে আগত অর্ধশতাধিক প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশী এবং ইউরোপীয় প্রতিনিধি অংশগ্রহণ করেন।

এদিকে সেমিনারের পর ব্রিকলেনের একটি হোটেলে মতবিনিময় সভায় অন্যান্যের মধ্যে বক্তব্য রাখেন সেকুলার ফোরামের সভাপতি বিশিষ্ট লেখক, সাংবাদিক শাহরিয়ার কবির, ইবিএফ সভাপতি আনসার আহমেদ উল্লাহ, বিকাশ চৌধুরী, যুক্তরাজ্য আওয়ামী লীগের সভাপতি সুলতান মাহমুদ শরীফ, বাংলাদেশ ন্যাশনাল হিউম্যান রাইটস এ্যালায়েন্স এর সভাপতি অরুণ বড়ুয়া এবং সিনিয়র সাংবাদিক সৈয়দ আনাস পাশা।

<http://our-voice-online.com/bn/%E0%A6%9C%E0%A6%99%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%97%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%93-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AE%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%A6%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%B7/>

দৈনিক সুনামগঞ্জের খবর

আধারচেরা আলোর ঝলক

London, 26 October 2018

জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচনে সমস্যা উগ্রবাদ ও ষড়যন্ত্র

অক্টোবর ২৬, ২০১৮

লন্ডন প্রতিনিধি

সকল দলের অংশগ্রহণে বাংলাদেশের একাদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন সম্পন্ন করতে হলে সবচেয়ে বড় সমস্যা হচ্ছে উগ্রবাদ এবং দেশী-বিদেশী ষড়যন্ত্র। এসব বিষয়ে সরকার, রাজনৈতিক দলসমূহ এবং সচেতন নাগরিকদের আরো সতর্কতা অবলম্বন করতে হবে। ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টের উচ্চকক্ষ হাউজ অব লর্ডসে “পার্লামেন্টারী ডেমক্রেসী ইন বাংলাদেশ: চ্যালেঞ্জিং রেডিক্যালিজম এন্ড ওয়েফরওয়ার্ড” শীর্ষক সেমিনারে আলোচকবৃন্দ এ অভিমত ব্যক্ত করেন।

আলোচকবৃন্দ বলেন ২০১৮ সালের শেষে বা ২০১৯ সালের শুরুতে আসছে একাদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচনকে সামনে রেখে দেশের অন্যতম বৃহৎ রাজনৈতিক দল বাংলাদেশ জাতীয়তাবাদী দল (বিএনপি) ও তাদের মিত্র জামাতে ইসলামী এবং অন্যান্য উগ্রবাদী সংগঠনগুলোর একগুয়েমী দাবি থেকে সরে না আসলে কোন অবস্থাতেই সুষ্ঠু নির্বাচন সম্ভব নয়।



অন্যদিকে বাংলাদেশ সরকারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা ঘোষণা দিয়েছেন বর্তমানে জাতীয় সংসদে প্রতিনিধিত্ব করছে এমন রাজনৈতিক দলগুলোর সদস্যদের নিয়ে সংবিধানের আলোকে একটি অন্তর্বর্তিকালীন সরকার গঠন করা হবে। কিন্তু নির্বাচন কমিশনের উপর সরকারের কোন প্রভাব থাকবেনা। একই বক্তব্য সংসদে প্রধান বিরোধীদল জাতীয় পার্টিরও।

আলোচকরা তাদের অভিমত ব্যক্ত করে বলেন, বিগত কয়েকটি জাতীয় নির্বাচনে এমনকি স্থানীয় নির্বাচনেও লক্ষ্য করা গেছে নির্বাচনকে কেন্দ্র করে জামাতে ইসলামীসহ উগ্রবাদী সংগঠন গুলোর প্রত্যক্ষ মদদে দেশের বিভিন্নস্থানে সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায় হত্যা নির্যাতনের শিকার হয়েছে। বিশেষ করে ২০১৪ সালের জাতীয় নির্বাচনে, নির্বাচন পূর্ব এবং পরবর্তিতে উগ্রবাদী সংগঠন জামাতে ইসলামী ও ইসলামী ছাত্রশিবিরের সদস্যদের দ্বারা এবং তৎকালীন বিরোধীদল বিএনপির প্রত্যক্ষ মদদে দেশব্যাপী হরতাল অবরোধের নামে বাসে, ট্রেনে অগ্নি সংযোগ, জাতীয় সম্পদের ক্ষতি সাধন এবং দেশের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে অসংখ্য। হিন্দু মেয়েদের ধর্ষণ, হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়ের ব্যবসা বাণিজ্য এবং বাড়ীঘরে লুটপাটের ঘটনা ঘটেছে। এসব অমানবিক ঘটনার কোনটিরই বিচার হয়নি। এসব বিষয়ে সরকার এবং নির্বাচনে অংশ নেয়া রাজনৈতিক দলসমূহ এবং প্রার্থীদের আরো সচেতন হবে হবে। সেই সাথে সকলে যাতে অবাধে তাদের ভোটাধিকার প্রয়োগ করতে পারে সে বিষয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশনকে আরো সচেষ্ট হতে হবে।

২৫ অক্টোবর বৃহস্পতিবার হাউজ অব লর্ডসের কমিটি রোম ওয়ানে লর্ড পল বিউয়ের আমন্ত্রণে এবং ইউরোপীয়ান বাংলাদেশ ফোরাম (ইবিএফ) আয়োজিত সেমিনারে অনুষ্ঠানের শুরুতে স্বাগত বক্তব্য রাখেন ইবিএফ লন্ডন সাপ্টারের প্রেসিডেন্ট সাংবাদিক ও মানবাধিকার কর্মী আনসার আহমেদ উল্লাহ।

কীনোট স্পীকার হিসেবে বক্তব্য রাখেন বাংলাদেশ থেকে আগত সাংবাদিক সৈয়দ বদরুল আহসান। আলোচনায় অংশ নেন ড. সেগফিন্ড ওল্ল জার্মান পলিটিশিয়ান সাইনটিস্ট ও গবেষক সাউথ এশিয়া ইন্সটিটিউট ইউনিভারসিটি হ্যাডবার্গ জার্মানী, একাত্তরের ঘাতক-দালাল নির্মূল কমিটির প্রেসিডেন্ট সাংবাদিক মানবাধিকার কর্মী শাহরিয়ার কবীর, মিস রোবেরতা বোনারজি ফাউন্ডার এন্ড প্রেসিডেন্ট অব দ্য ইউরোপীয়ান ফাউন্ডেশন ফর ডেমক্রেসী এন্ড ওয়ার্ক উইথ কাউন্টার টেররিজম প্রজেক্ট (সিইপি) হেড অব ব্যাসেস চাপ্টার, সাবেক ব্রিটিশ মন্ত্রী জিম ফ্রিজপেট্রিক এমপি ভাইস চেয়ার অল পার্টি পার্লামেন্টারী গ্রুপ অন বাংলাদেশ, মার্টিন ফার্মপটন কুইন মেরী ইউনিভারসিটি লন্ডন।

লন্ডন সময় বিকেল তিনটা থেকে চারটা ত্রিশ মিনিট পর্যন্ত দেড়ঘণ্টা ব্যাপী এই সেমিনারে বৃটেনে বসবাসরত বিপুল সংখ্যক প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশী ও বিভিন্ন দেশের নাগরিকরা উপস্থিত ছিলেন।

সেমিনারের সকল বক্তাই তাদের অভিমত ব্যক্ত করে বলেন, বাংলাদেশে উন্নয়ন, উগ্রবাদ প্রতিরোধ ও সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রের অগ্রযাত্রাকে অব্যাহত রাখতে সরকার, সংসদের প্রধান বিরোধী জাতীয় পার্টি সহ অন্যান্য দলসমূহকে সংবিধানের আলোকে আরো নমনীয় হতে হবে সেই সাথে সংখ্যালঘুদের স্বার্থ রক্ষা ও গণতন্ত্রের অগ্রযাত্রাকে অব্যাহত রাখতে সব রাজনৈকি দল সমূহকে আরো সচেষ্টিত হতে হবে।

অনুষ্ঠানের শেষ পর্বে দর্শক সাড়ি থেকে প্রশ্ন-উত্তর পর্বে অংশ নেন মি. লাকুহান, জাকারিয়া আহমদ, অজয়ন্তা দেব রায়, প্রিয়জিত সরকার।

<http://sunamganjerkhobor.com/%E0%A6%9C%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%80%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%82%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%9A%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B8/>



London 26 October 2018

TV Coverage of House of Lords Conference of EBF



(Photo above: London TV Channel S telecast news of House of Lords Seminar on 25 October 2018)



(Photo above: Editor of The Asian Age, Syed Badrul Ahsan at a TV talk show organised by EBF at Channel iON in London on Radicalisation and Election issues of Bangladesh on 23 October 2018)



(Above: TV Channel iON telecast EBF seminar news in its regular news on 25 October 2018)



