

## EBF's Geneva Conference: Uphold Secularism to counter violent extremism

European Bangladesh Forum (EBF) organised a Conference titled “Countering Violent Extremism: European Context and the Bangladeshi Diaspora” and its impact and policy options to defend secularism and democracy on 22 March 2018 at The Palais des Nations, United Nation, Geneva. The key objectives of the Geneva Conference among others were to uphold secularism to counter violent terrorism and rise of extremism in the name of religion across the globe including Bangladesh. This was a follow-up of the conference held at the European Press Club in Brussels on 11 July 2017.

The Geneva Conference discussed the role of the government and the civil society that might help formulate Action Programs. The conference brought together 51 participants including secular forces, activists, think tanks, and politicians both national and European. The event moreover got the attention of media creating a strong public opinion in favour of the cause. The Conference underscored the need for an active role of the diaspora communities and the civil society as well to counter extremism and terrorism in Europe as well as home countries in the global South. They also expressed satisfaction over the Bangladesh government's effort to counter terrorism and defusing political Islam.

Mr. Jakob de Jonge, Director of The Hague Peace, the Netherlands chaired two sessions of the conference while the conference was addressed by Dr. Sigfried O. Wolf, Director of Research, South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF), Belgium, Ms. Nicola Spafford Furey, Vice President, Earth Focus Foun-



dation, Geneva, Dr. Willem van der Geest, Principal Economist, formerly Director at UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), New York, Ms. Dr. Shammi Ahmed, Expert on International Development and formerly Senior Advisor at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Asia-Pacific Zone, Ms. Samia Zaman, Editor and CEO of Ekattor TV, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Mr. Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, exiled Chairman of United Kashmir People's National Party(UKPNP), Geneva. A written paper sent by Ms. Karima Bennouna, UN Special Rapporteur, OHCHR, Geneva, who could not attend the conference was read out in the conference by EBF President Mr Ansar Ahmed Ullah.

**Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf:** Dr. Wolf in his keynote speech accused Jamaat e Islami (JeI) of being responsible for the spread of violence and terrorism in Bangladesh. JeI are trying to replace parliamentary democracy and secularism with a theocratic Islamic state. The increasingly presence of JeI risks turning Bangladesh into a major hub of terrorist activities, he added. Indeed, JeI contributed to this process through its own media, with propaganda as a key tool for influencing society. Now-a-days, in order to indoctrinate and mobilise people, the JeI and its affiliated organisations also rely on the internet and social media. Most importantly, JeI violently suppresses critical voices, denouncing them as anti-Islam and blasphemous. The attack on supporters of the secular oriented ‘Shahbag movement’ is a dramatic example of this tendency.

**Ms. Karima Bennouna, UN Rapporteur:** In his written statement said, “I have repeatedly alerted the international community to the fact that rising tides of fundamentalism and extremism, in diverse forms, and whether espoused by State or non-State actors, today represent major threats to human rights, including cultural rights, worldwide. They are growing challenges that must be faced with urgency, using a human rights approach. In my thematic report to the Human Rights Council on fundamentalism, extremism and cultural rights (A/HRC/34/56, paras. 71-72), I addressed the situation in Bangladesh, underscoring my grave concern about jihadist attacks on writers, publishers and free-thinkers in Bangladesh and the placing of others on a death list”.

**Dr. Willem van der Geest:** in his turn Dr. Willem introduced his presentation as ‘economistic’ rather than economic.

Violence is quickly spreading in a peaceful country as Bangladesh. Peacefulness confirmed by a global peace index that put the country



first than USA and India. In addition. Bangladesh is doing better than Pakistan and India in terms of violence, conflict, and expenditure on military and security. Notwithstanding these positive outcomes, extra and non-judicial deaths, fatalities and incidents enormously and alarmingly increased. The example that Dr. Willem brings up is Islamic terrorism. It is not a new phenomenon but nowadays its trend is very high (40% of the death happened in the hands of Islamist forces). Along with these terrifying numbers, political violence – especially murders of journalists and lawmakers- represents another big share.

What is the consequence of that on society? Dr. Willem found that such situation is not bad for Bangladesh’s economy. Actually, it is doing better than ever before. There are not negative correlations with the growth, only a switch of expenditure from social or public purpose to security or military expenditure. However, it negatively affects the social expenditure like education and health, the core in the fight against violent extremism. As a response to violent extremism and terrorism in Bangladesh, Dr. Willem strongly recommends to focusing on sustainable development goals, particularly on building peace, justice and strong institutions, and putting more emphasis on keeping peace in the society.

# How safe is Europe today? Issue of foreign fighters deeper than it seems

Brussels: A few weeks ago, Belgium lowered the national threat level almost two years after the attacks that killed 32 people in Brussels. The level was dropped to two from three on a four-tier scale. The move indicates the threat has fallen to medium from serious, meaning an attack is now considered unlikely, rather than probable. Also, France ended its state of emergency in November, almost two



years after the 2015 Paris attacks that killed 130 people. Simultaneously, French President Emmanuel Macron signed a sweeping counterterrorism law to replace the state of emergency. The law gives enforcement agencies greater authority to conduct searches, close religious facilities and restrict the movements of people suspected of having extremist ties.

Both the Brussels and Paris attacks had perpetrators whom had been deported from Turkey. Turkish authorities had warned France twice about the threat posed by one of the Paris attackers and deported one of the Brussels attackers to the Netherlands, and Belgium failed to cooperate to stop him from being freed.

The majority of Daesh extremists who left Europe to join the group in Syria and Iraq have either been killed or prevented from escaping back to their home country. It is believed that a good portion of European foreign terrorist fighters returned and most of them are behind bars. There are others suspected to be under the radar of authorities, continuing their lives as normal. The psychology of a person who has witnessed or maybe conducted brutal acts in a war zone leads to many questions. Receiving military training, experiencing changes in behaviour and character, being exposed to propaganda and many external factors are what make European authorities think. Governments and the EU have taken various steps to tighten security measures, including steps to identify and track those who joined extremist groups.

*(With a focus on how Europe handles the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, Daily Sabah, a Turkish newspaper spoke to a number of experts working on this area. Here we publish the interview of Mr. Thomas Renard, a senior research fellow at the Royal Institute for International Relations (EGMONT) in Brussels. Thomas Renard was one of the speakers at the EBF conference in Brussels on 11 July 2017.)*

## **Thomas Renard:**

*Question 1: It is estimated that some 30,000 foreign fighters went to Iraq and Syria to join Daesh, including a significant portion from European countries. Now that the group has lost almost all of its territorial gains and the majority of its fighters, what is the current state of those who joined from Europe?*

There is not an official figure on how many European foreign fighters left for Syria and Iraq to join extremist groups, but there is a consensus that the number is around 5,000. There is a figure that 1,500 fighters have come back to Europe, one-third of them to the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. The



rest of them were from France, the U.K. and other countries. It is important to realize that they came back in waves. The first wave was in 2012, the second was 2014 when Daesh was established and, since early 2016, there were only very few returns. One of the main reasons for this significant drop was the military pressure on Daesh that essentially led to an intensification of military retreat, which prevented people from traveling from back and forth between Syria or Iraq and Europe. This also led Daesh to tighten control over fighters – there were those who would fight until death, and those who attempted to desert were mostly executed.

*Question 2: Some of them have returned to their home countries. How should governments handle these people who received military training?*

Almost 99 percent of these people who joined an extremist group were known by European governments. It is unlikely that someone went there without being known by authorities. This means that while they were still prepared for their country or any other From there, they detention, waiting than a year. Trials person by the intel- sent to prison be- U.N. Security Union directive on means that anyone who travelled to Syria or Iraq to join a terrorist organization, receive training or provide morale to the organization will be prosecuted and convicted. During the time in jail, these people go through disengagement trajectories while serving their sentences. Authorities will make sure they abandon violence and change their behaviour, not ideology. Once out of prison, they will be provided with assistance to help them to reintegrate into society.



*Question 3: What are the main reasons for these people to leave a non-violent environment? Was weak European reaction to massacres in Syria and religious-related problems in their home countries part of the reasons that led them to join Daesh?*

Over the past few years, many cases were investigated and there is not a single pattern leading someone to radicalize. There are multiple motivations. Discrimination and integration can be part of radicalization, but they are not the main reasons, as many of those who joined had jobs and settled lives. It is mental vulnerability combined with local factors, such as presence of recruiters and also the international context. The defeat or weakening of Daesh is definitely a positive factor in fighting terrorism in Europe and elsewhere. The terrorist threat in Europe is not over, but it is declining. I'm a bit cautious to say that if Europe had involved itself in the war before the establishment of Daesh to defeat it, before getting bigger, it would have worked. The reason is that the experience Europe or other states have in combating terrorist organizations in external territory has very mixed results. If we look at what has been experienced in Afghanistan, Iraq or other places, we see that participation in such wars in external territories, your actions create unintended consequences. Sometimes it leads you to being perceived as an occupational force, as an invader, and this leads to a local narrative and this strengthens the group you want to defeat. I think the reluctance of President Barack Obama, France and the U.K. to go into Syria was based on these points.

*Question 4: Is Europe ready to cope with the problem now?*

Since early 2016, Europe has done a lot of work not only in terms of laws, but also steps to tackle the root causes of radicalization. Europe is better equipped, but this does not mean nothing will happen and everything is just perfect. Certain mistakes happened, like in the case of the Brussels attack, in

which the attacker was a person extradited by Turkey. At those times, there were no extradition agreement between Turkey and Belgium. Therefore, he was sent back to the Netherlands. This is why he was left free. Turkey warned the Netherlands, but Belgium didn't. I think what really matters is that today we have learned from the mistakes. A number of countries had similar issues, and it is important that we have worked out this problem of extradition. So basically, we have analysed the mistakes of the past, we have learned from them and now we are working so that it never happens again.

## **Bangladesh wants to bring back Tarique from UK: Sk. Hasina**

London: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said in London on 17 April that Bangladesh wants to bring back BNP's acting chairperson, Tarique Rahman from the UK as he is convicted by Bangladeshi court. "We're in talks with British government about it. And definitely we'll take him back one day and he'll have to face the court," she said.



The prime minister said this while answering questions at an event titled 'Bangladesh's Development Story: Policies, Progresses and Prospects' at Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London. She spoke at the programme as the keynote speaker arranged by ODI. Sheikh Hasina said the UK is a liberal country and anybody can take shelter and refuge there.

"Tarique is convicted for crimes he committed," she said. The prime minister also criticized the UK for giving shelter to a convicted person like him.

### **Rohingyas**

While responding to a question regarding the repatriation of the Rohingya from Bangladesh, she said Bangladesh and Myanmar have signed agreements in this regard. "But unfortunately, they're not taking any initiative, which is the problem." Sheikh Hasina said as Myanmar is the next door neighbor of Bangladesh, the government is showing a friendly gesture to it. "Ministers of Bangladesh and Myanmar visited both the countries, and our Foreign Minister had talks with the neighboring countries of Myanmar like China, Laos and Thailand to have a possible solution to the problem," she said.

The PM said Myanmar showed their eagerness to take back them but they did not take back any one practically. "That's why we need more international pressure on Myanmar so that they take back their Rohingya nationals immediately," she said. Hasina said the Myanmar government must ensure the safety and the livelihood of the repatriated Rohingyas. For providing the Rohingyas with a better living place in Bangladesh, the government is arranging accommodation in an island where some 100,000 Rohingyas can take shelter, she said. About the recent 'repatriation' of a family by the Myanmar government, Hasina said no family was taken from any camp in Bangladesh. Hasina mentioned that the Myanmar government perhaps wants to show the world that they are taking back the Rohingyas. "This is a good sign. Why did they take back only one family? We've given names of 8,000 families, but they didn't take them back any of them." The prime minister, however, appreciated the move of Myanmar and said they should start the full repatriation process (UNB, London).

### **Bangladesh, UNHCR agree on voluntary return of Rohingya refugees**

UN refugee agency UNHCR and the Bangladesh government finalised a memorandum of understanding in Geneva relating to the voluntary return of Rohingya refugees once conditions in Myanmar are conducive.

# ICC War crimes prosecutor seeks jurisdiction over Rohingya deportations

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in the Hague asked it to rule on whether it had jurisdiction over the deportations of Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh, a possible crime against humanity, according to a filing published recently. A ruling affirming jurisdiction could pave the way for Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to investigate the deportation of many thousands of Rohingya, though Myanmar is unlikely to cooperate.

‘This is not an abstract question but a concrete one, affecting whether the Court may exercise jurisdiction ... to investigate and, if necessary, prosecute,’ Bensouda said in the filing. The main reason for doubt over jurisdiction is that, while Bangladesh is a member of the court, Myanmar is not. Bensouda argued that, given the cross-border nature of the crime of deportation, a ruling in favour of ICC jurisdiction would be in line with established legal principles. But she acknowledged uncertainty around the definition of the crime of deportation and limits of the court’s jurisdiction. Her request is the first of its kind filed at the court. She asked the court to call a hearing to hear her arguments, as well as those of other interested parties.

According to the United Nations, some 700,000 mostly Muslim Rohingya fled their homes into Bangladesh after militant attacks in August last year triggered a military crackdown that the United Nations has said constitutes ethnic cleansing. Myanmar rejects that charge, saying its forces have been waging a legitimate campaign against Rohingya who attacked government forces. Many in Myanmar regard the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. (New Age)

## Principles on Media and Good Governance announced to counter threats to freedom of expression

by- Ansar Ahmed Ullah

As leaders from the 53 Commonwealth countries prepare to fly to London for a Summit meeting next week, six Commonwealth organizations unveiled proposals for a 12-point Commonwealth code of conduct aimed at reducing the heavy toll of journalists’ killings and other threats to the media’s right to report on 11 April at Senate House, University of London.

The Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance was made public at the University of London’s Senate House, the home of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS).



Dr. Sue Onslow, Deputy Director of the Institute, who opened the meeting to mark the publication of the Principles, said, “Governments are always keen to shape the political message. Media freedom is hard won and needs constant vigilance and active defence”.

Figures published by UNESCO, the UN Agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression, show that fifty-seven journalists were killed for their work in Commonwealth countries between 2013 and 2017. Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland said last year that the number of journalists killed for doing their jobs represented “a serious indictment of

our collective efforts to build a safer and more inclusive future.” The Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance were drawn up by a Working Group representing journalists, academics, parliamentarians, lawyers, legal educators and human rights advocates across the Commonwealth.

The document reflects international standards and best practice with regard to the relationships between the media and the three branches of government, effective protections for the independence of the media and its role in informing the public, the media’s respect for accuracy and fairness, and promoting member states’ observance of the principles. Desmond Browne QC, who represented the Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) on the Working Group, said, “The CLA has been proud to play a part in drafting these important Principles. The intention is that they should provide a universal Code for the Commonwealth which will protect both freedom of expression and the activities of responsible journalists.” UNESCO’s statistics show that fewer than ten percent of all killings of journalists in Commonwealth countries have resulted in those responsible being brought to justice. Human rights groups say that high rate of impunity is at odds with the Commonwealth’s commitments to the rule of law and protecting the media’s legitimate right to report in the public interest.

## Sheikh Mujib Lecture 2018 in London held

**By -Ansar Ahmed Ullah**

The 7<sup>th</sup> March Foundation and SOAS South Asia Institute, University of London held the first ever Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Lecture 2018 on 10 April 2018. The inaugural lecture took place at the Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, University of London celebrating the life and work of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 7 March, timed to commemorate a momentous day in the history of Bengali-speaking people in Bangladesh and the diaspora.

The inaugural Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Lecture was given by James Manor, Emeka Anyaoku Professor Emeritus of Commonwealth Studies in the School of Advanced Study, University of London. In his Lecture titled ‘*Understanding Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: The Hard Road to Bangladesh’s Independence and the Meaning of March 7<sup>th</sup>*’ Prof James Manor said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the father of the nation. He had to wage a much more severe struggle for a democratic alternative to military rule and for the independence of Bangladesh than most leaders of the other new nations of Asia and Africa. Unlike many other such leaders, he understood the need to build a strong party harsh challenges that subtle tactician. He teeth of intolerance.

When opportunities progress through negotiations with civility. But action were required, shrewd sense of timing ed. This was vividly on 7 March 1971, a country’s history. He was also willing to make great personal sacrifices – not least, twelve years in the jails of undivided Pakistan. Young people today, born after his assassination during a military coup in 1975, need to hear his story.



organisation to meet the he faced. He was also a stressed secularism in the

appeared to emerge to make tations, he treated adverb when the defiant words and he led the way with a when other leaders hesitated apparent in his great speech turning point in his coun-

Welcoming speech was given by Professor Edward Simpson, Director SOAS South Asia Institute and introductory remarks were made by Nooruddin Ahmed, Chair of 7<sup>th</sup> March Foundation. The lecture was followed by a reception which provided opportunity for networking amongst academics, politi-

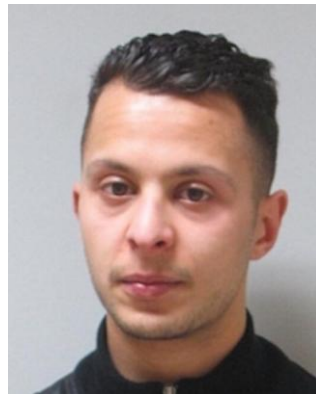


cians, policy makers, business, religious and community leaders, students and a wide range of people from the fields of art, culture and literature. The Lecture was originally planned for 7 March to coincide with Bangabandhu's famous speech on 7 March in 1971 but due to industrial action by university staff the date had to be moved to April.

## Paris attacks: Abdeslam gets 20 year sentence

A Belgian court has sentenced Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam and a co-accused to 20 years in prison on Monday for trying to kill police during a shootout in Brussels in 2016. According to a news published on 23 April 2018, the Judge Marie-France Keutgen told the courtroom that 28-year-old Abdeslam and Tunisian Sofien Ayari, 24, had been found guilty of 'attempted terrorist murder' during the shootout in March 2016.

Abdeslam is in a French prison awaiting trial for his role in the Islamic State attacks in Paris in November 2015 in which 130 people were killed. Prosecutors say he is the lone survivor of a suicide squad. By the time of the shootout in March 15, 2016, Abdeslam had been fleeing Paris the night his elder brother blew himself up at a cafe. Prosecutors who accuse Abdeslam of helping organise the attacks and around Europe say he, too, would have died if his suicide vest had not failed to detonate. His lawyers do not dispute Abdeslam was in Paris during the attacks. They finally stumbled across him when, with French officers, they went to inspect a suspect apartment in Forest and then came under a hail of gunfire which wounded four of them. After a three-hour siege ended with marksmen killing a 35-year-old Algerian called Mochache. Abdeslam's DNA found at the scene linked him to the shootout and that led to his arrest three days later in a different apartment in Brussels. Four days after his arrest, suicide bombers attacked Brussels Airport and the city's metro, killing 32 people. Officials believe Abdeslam had links with the bombers and that they brought forward their attack because they feared Abdeslam might reveal their plans under interrogation. Abdeslam was present on the opening day of the trial, but refused to answer the judge's questions. (New Age)



## Laskar-e-Tayab active in Rohingya camps

According to a report published in different media in Bangladesh, the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation, Laskar e Tayab has now been working openly in the Rohingya refugee camps in Coxsbazar. It has been active for quite some time under the banner of Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation Pakistan. It is said that this organisation is an umbrella organisation of Laskar-e-Tayab to raise fund and work on humanitarian issues. Its headquarter is based in Karachi of Pakistan. According to a social media report, a number of pro-Jamaat leaders and public representatives of Ukhia and Teknaf in Coxsbazar are involved with the activities of Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation. This organisation is running its relief activities in Kutupalong of Tekhnaf, Hoaikong and Shamlapur of Teknaf. Three local Bangladeshi public representatives are behind the activities of Laskar e Tayab, the report says. These public representatives are directly running the activities of the Foundation. The Upazilla level leaders of Jamaat and Chattra Shibir are also seen in the areas.

The local government administration seems to be ignorant of this organisation, although it has been working for long under the banner of the NGO. The report further says, according to the FBI and US



department of Treasury, one Shahid Mahmud is the Vice Chairman of Karachi-based Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation and this Pakistani citizen is involved with Laskar e Tayab. It is in the list of US department of Treasury's Counter terrorism. Ms. Nazneen Sarwar Kaberi, daughter of a local freedom fighter who lives in Coxsbazar said, this is an international conspiracy to run the activities of the Foundation, supported by Laskar-e-Tayab. She said, the Foundation is conspiring using Rohingyas at the instigation of Pakistan. On the other hand, the District Jamaat e Islam Ameer, Maulana Mostafizur Rahma said, no one from Jamaat is involved with the Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation. Those who are involved are not leaders of district or Upazilla Jamaat. There might be some Ward-level leaders, but Jamaat will not take their responsibilities.

Rohingya Relief and Repatriation Commission, Mohammad Abul Kalam said, 'we have received information of one NGO named FiF in Kutupalong Rohingya camp that they are distributing some relief and winter clothes. We are looking into it how they got the permission or working without any permission.' We shall also look into the allegation if the Foundation has any link with Laskar e Tayab. The In-charge of Kutupalong Refugee camp Rezaul Karim said, this organisation does not have any permission to work.

## **Rohingyas: 15 murders, 148 other offences in camps in Bangladesh camps since Aug 2017**

A number of crimes were committed in Bangladesh camps including rape, abduction, smuggling, and attempted robbery, according to reports published in different news media in Bangladesh recently. About 336 Rohingyas have been accused in 163 cases over the incidents. Although the situation is serious, the local police declares that, the offences committed by the Rohingyas are not so 'alarming' considering the large presence of refugees within the camps in Bangladesh.

"The numbers suggest the trend of committing crimes is not significant among the Rohingyas." "They have come from a confined place. But the crimes have not set off alarms just yet." "The crimes that took place here are actually caused by dislikes. These are crimes that happen when a huge number of people stay in a secluded place," said the Deputy Inspector General of Police, SM Moniruzzaman, to bdnews24.

in Bangladesh have concerns over the ingya refugees who persecution in Myanmar of the current crimes abroad and image after they had Bangladeshi passports. more Rohingyas have refugees' camps after



Law-enforcing agencies been airing security around 400,000 Roh- have fled decades of mar. As officials allege, refugees had committed soiled Bangladesh's travelled with forged Around 700,00 and arrived in Bangladesh Myanmar last year

launched a military operation, dubbed 'ethnic cleansing' by the UN. According to security experts, criminals can easily use the displaced population.

Concerns that have been denied by DIG Moniruzzaman saying that the Rohingya camps were under close watch in order to stop crimes. "Not only are the police, but executive magistrates, RAB and BGB are also working there. The army is also there for relief work. It's really difficult to commit any crime in the presence of so many agencies," he added.

Recently, the two countries signed an agreement on repatriating the displaced Myanmar nationals.

Bangladesh government is also planning to relocate some of the Rohingyas to Noakhali's Bhasan Char island. However, many are worried that the Rohingyas may engage in militancy after being forced out of Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Some non-government organisations have been banned for their suspicious activities. Moniruzzaman said, "We have identified some NGOs who have their own agendas. The NGO Bureau and the foreign ministry are monitoring those closely."

## White House is right to suspend aid to Pakistan

President Trump's decision to freeze approximately \$2 billion in US security assistance to Pakistan has received cautious support from senior lawmakers and foreign policy analysts. While the political and military calculus of suspending aid payments is complex, the Trump administration's approach is sound. The \$33.9 billion Washington has sent to Islamabad since 2002 may have earned it the right to supply American military efforts in Afghanistan through Pakistani territory, but it has failed to deter Pakistan from undermining those same efforts through its support for extremist groups. Although Washington and Islamabad successfully worked together in the hunt for senior Al Qaeda members during the early years of the war, ties between the two countries have since been held hostage to mutual distrust, personality conflict, and even outright hostility. The occasional display of grudging cooperation notwithstanding, Pakistan has repeatedly shown its unwillingness to sever ties with US enemies in Afghanistan and South Asia.



American priorities in the region are not Pakistani priorities. Washington and Islamabad have sharply different views on what constitutes success in Afghanistan, on how the Pakistani military should conduct its campaign against militancy, and on the nature of India's regional influence. Since 9/11, the United States has viewed Afghanistan as, first and foremost, a counter-terrorism problem. On the other hand, Pakistan's main goal in Afghanistan, is to prevent the country from forging a strategic relationship with India. The historical and geopolitical rivalry with its larger neighbour has governed Pakistan's national security policy since its founding in 1947. Pakistan's military leadership has long seen Afghanistan as an arena in which to combat an Indian influence they view as destabilising, perfidious, and threatening to Pakistan's own sovereignty and national security. Indian investment in Afghanistan and constructive Indian-Afghan relations are understood by Pakistani government as efforts by India to enhance its geopolitical power at the expense of the own country, and to increase pressure on Pakistan's military via a new front on its western border. However, Pakistani officials realise how economically vibrant, politically stable, and militarily capable New Delhi is in comparison to Islamabad. Pakistan has recognized this strategic imbalance and attempted to enhance it in different ways such as by accelerating the pace of its nuclear weapons development or by continuing to develop relationships with extremist groups that can be counted on to help check Indian influence.



Relations became more distant between America and Pakistan due to the disputed territory of Kashmir, where Pakistan-based extremist groups have

launched attacks on military installations and killed hundreds of civilians. While the Pakistani government has always denied direct involvement with these organisations, US officials believe that Islamabad continues to view these militants as critical anti-India tools in its national security toolbox. A dispute that got increasingly worsened. In 2008, after a group of militants attacked the Indian Embassy in Kabul, US officials blamed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate for assisting in the attack. Yet even these com-

plaints, made in public and backed by strong evidence, failed to change the Pakistanis' behaviour. Washington mistakenly believed Pakistani leaders would change the India-centric outlook that had been ingrained in the national psyche for seven decades in exchange for tens of billions of dollars. As long as Pakistan's leadership continues to view India as its main concern, its ties to these extremist groups will always be worth more than tens of billions of dollars from Washington.

Pakistan is not a true ally, friend, or partner to the United States, but a nation whose security interests and counterterrorism goals in South Asia are not aligned with what Washington is hoping to accomplish. American policymakers must take a step back, thoroughly evaluate the US relationship with Pakistan, and determine whether further cooperation is even possible. That decision must be made carefully and explained to the American taxpayers whose hard-earned money has, for decades, funded Pakistan's aid payments. Until then, it is long past time for Washington to stop throwing good money after bad. (Courtesy: BD News24/ -Daniel R. DePetris)

## Freedom fighter Kakon Bibi laid to rest

Gallantry awarded freedom fighter Kakon Bibi was laid to rest with the state honour in her village Jirargaon at Doarabazar upazila in Sunamganj recently. The Doarabazar police accorded her a guard of honour on behalf of the state before she was buried. Prime minister Sheikh Hasina, speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, liberation war affairs minister AKM Mozammel



tion war affairs minister AKM Mozammel messages on Thursday expressed deep death of Kakon Bibi. Bir Pratik Kakon breathed her last at Sylhet Osmani Medical of 92. She was suffering from heart and

Kakon Bibi was detained by the Pakistani army at the beginning of the Liberation War in 1971 and was brutally tortured. After being released by the occupational force, she decided to join with the liberation war leaving her 3-month daughter, Sakina Begum. She started to work as a spy. In July the occupation army detained her again, though they released her after torturing for 7 days in a camp at the Doarabazar. Later, she joined the freedom fighters and participated in a couple of battles. In 1996, government honoured her with the award Bir Pratik, though the government announcement was not included in any gazette so far, Sakina Begum, her daughter said.

## Anti-Muslim hate crimes rise 91% in Toronto

New data shows a 91 percent spike in hate crimes against the Muslims in Peel Region in the Greater Toronto area or GTA. According to a Peel Police Services Board report released on Thursday, there were 158 incidents reported 59 the year before. It said 106 of the total number of property offences like graf-



ed. to police in 2017, up from the majority of the crimes, incidents, were mischief-to-fiti, the CBC News report-

Peel is one of the five re-City, York, Durham and and located around 48 kil-Toronto. Last month, Peel incidents which they believe were "hate-motivated" in which a woman was seen placing torn-out pages of the Quran and making Islamophobic comments in one of those incidents. The woman had also gone to two Islamic centres in Mississauga, around 30 kilometres from downtown Toronto, and verbally abused the worshippers. Police said a man filmed the woman while she was distributing 'inflam-



matory flyers' and openly saying her name to the passersby. Police believe two suspects are responsible for approximately 60 percent of those crimes.

Toronto also has seen a jump in hate and bias incidents in 2017, according to the report. Last summer, a Mississauga man was charged with one count of willful promotion of hatred against an identifiable group after he posted a YouTube video offering a \$1,000 reward for recordings of Muslim students during prayer. Meanwhile, the Statistics Canada data showed the number of incidents targeting Jewish people declined to 178 in 2015, compared with 213 the previous year. (bdnews24.com)

## **EBF conference on Bangladesh Elections at House of Lords**

EBF will organize a conference on “the Challenge of Parliamentary Democracy: Secularism in Bangladesh” at the House of Lords in London in mid-August. The conference will bring together secular groups, activists, academics, politicians, journalists and will help create strong public opinion in favour of secular forces and against Islamist extremist groups.

The Conference is planned at a time when Bangladesh is set to hold its next general elections in January 2018 amidst considerable political uncertainty with 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 elections but BNP leader, Begum Khaleda Zia has threatened to boycott the elections if they are not held under a non-elected/non-party caretaker government. Khaleda Zia is now in jail on corruption charges.

There will also be a press conference by the visiting speaker from Bangladesh and other speakers from Europe before the conference at the House of Lord. Separate television talk shows will also be organized with the main speakers.

## **Cairo Declaration to fight against communal forces**

A three country conference at the Egyptian Cultural Forum in Cairo held on 18 April called upon the secular forces to be united and set up a united platform to fight the anti-secular and anti-

ity forces the globe. It chaired by celebrated and secular and Presi-Secular Shahriar Among the confer-was attend-Bangladesh



sador in Egypt Mohammad Ali Sorcar, Turkish Pen Centre's former President Tarik Gunersel and senior Turkish journalist Mohsen Arishi. A recent film made by Shahriar Kabir on Sufism was also screened on the day.

human-across was the writer activist dent of Forum, Kabir. others enced by ambas-