

Brussels Conference on Countering violent extremism: **‘Diaspora should be more active to counter violent extremism in Europe and home’**

European Bangladesh Forum (EBF), a platform of Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe organised an international conference on ‘Countering violent extremism: Global context and Bangladeshi diaspora’ at Brussels Press Club on 11 July 2017. The conference participated by the European parliamentarians, researchers, academics, university teachers, representatives from human rights organisations and European and Bangladeshi community members from different European countries underscored the need for finding out a common strategy in order to uphold secularism to counter violent extremism and rise of Islamism across the globe including Bangladesh. Speakers observed that terrorism in Bangladesh is not a pure extension of global terrorist phenomena. It is a complexion of domestic politics, local and foreign patronage, and regional geo-politics and inspired by a mixture of Taliban, Al Qaeda and ISIS ideology. It is driven by the jihadi Islam theocracy. Terrorism is breed in the radicalized societies often aided by the perceived deprivation. Speaking on the situation in Bangladesh they said, the secular and multi-cultural political stronghold in Bangladesh are considered as potential threats to the political Islam. Islam-based political parties focused on political strategy based



on Jihadi Islam, a philosophy drawn from Wahabi segment of Islam and its sub continental version called, Moududism.

It may be mentioned that the Brussels Conference provided a platform for South Asians and Europe-

ans activists/policy makers to come together to understand the impact of Islamist terrorism and explore ways to provide assistance to those who are under attack from the Islamists. It also provided an opportunity to form network of Bangladeshi migrant organisations in Europe, European policy makers, elected representatives, human rights organisations and European NGOs working in Bangladesh.

Divided in two separate sessions, the conference was addressed by the Member of the European Parliament from Conservative Party, U.K, Van Oden Geoffrey, Member of the European Parliament from Social Democratic Party, Italy Brando Benifei, former Member of Parlia-

ment from Socialist Party Netherlands Harry van Bommel, former Member of Parliament from Labour Party Netherlands Amma Asante, Executive Director of the Institute of Conflict, Law & Development Studies (ICLDS), Dhaka Major General (Retired) Abdur Rashid, European Humanist Federation senior official Julie Pernet, Senior journalist from Bangladesh and Special Correspondent of The Asian Age Saleem Samad, Head of the Counter Extremism Project in

Brussels and President of European Foundation for Democracy Roberta Bonazzi, Senior Research Fellow of Egmont - Royal Institute for International Relations



Thomas Renard and head of EU office of Front Line Defenders, Brussels Emma Achilli. The sessions were chaired by Professor Chetan Bhatt of the Centre for Study of Human Rights, London School of Economics, U.K and Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF U.K.

In total 84 participants took part in the conference. They were members of the European Parliament, members of the Dutch parliament, senior officials from European rights based organisations, researchers, academics, university teachers, students, activists, inter faiths activists, journalists, members of the European and Bangladeshi diaspora communities and representatives of different organisations from across Europe including Switzerland, France, Denmark, U.K., Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Bangladesh. Organisations which were represented in the conference among others were: European Humanist Federation, Brussels, European



Foundation for Democracy, Brussels, Royal Institute for International Relations, Centre for Study of Human Rights of London School of Economics, Brussels-Dhaka Peace Committee, Brussels, Front Line Defenders, South Asian Democratic Forum (SADF), European External Action Service (EEAS) Bangladesh Desk EU, Man-

agium Belgium, Ergmond Institute Belgium, Active Citizen Europe, Vrij Universiteit Brussels (VUB), House of Integration Germany, Institute of Conflict, Law and Development Studies (ICLDS) Dhaka, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Netherlands and Belgium, Brussels Press Club, Bangabandhu Foundation Germany, Belgium Jubo League and Secular Forum (Nirmul Committee) U.K.

The conference got huge media coverage both print and electronic in Bangladesh and London. Nine television channels from Dhaka, London and Paris telecast the news of the event while 20 newspapers from Dhaka and London published the news with photos of the event (in Ben-

gali and English). The conference observed that efforts should be made to help religious and community leaders to reach out to vulnerable youngsters. It further said, countering violent extremism requires a framework that views Muslims as a source of strength rather than suspicion. The conference was told that driving out ISIS from Syria does not mean the end of the fight. The jihadi movement will survive ISIS anyway. What is alarming is that a virtual caliphate is already emerging on the ruins of the caliphate in the Levant. It is virtual in the sense that it does not require any physical territory. The jihadi ideology focuses on the conquest of vulnerable minds, not lands. It is also virtual for it relies on the internet and social media to propagate its ideas, recruit new militants, connect them together, and encourage or even guide violent actions

Terming the returnees a serious threat the speakers said, returnees are likely to play a key role in the recruiting and training of the next jihadi wave. It is therefore imperative to monitor them very closely, and seek to limit their influence as much as possible. Expressing satisfaction over the Bangladesh government's effort to counter terrorism and defusing political Islam, some speakers said, radicalization is a global issue and unfortunately Bangladesh's feet has been gradually dragged into the terror network map. They 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 focused on social inclusion and integration of the young generation against radicalisation and terrorism. Speakers underscored the need for organising similar programs engaging with the Bangladeshi diaspora, mainstream population, policy makers and other stakeholders and create a strong platform to fight terrorism across the globe.

Bangladesh's efforts in counter terrorism is lauded by US

The US Department of State has said while terrorist attacks in 2016 decreased by 9 percent globally, at the same time Bangladesh experienced a significant increase in such activities. However, the department praised Bangladesh's efforts and cooperation with the United States and international community in counter terrorism, law enforcement and strengthening control of its borders.



The US, in its annual "Country Reports on Terrorism 2016" released in Washington on Wednesday, said Bangladesh government articulated a zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism and made numerous arrests of terrorist suspects. It observed that the Government of Bangladesh often attributed extremist violence to the political opposition and local militants. Both al-

Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and ISIS claimed responsibility for a significant number of the attacks that took place in Bangladesh.

Terrorist outfits used social media to spread their radical ideologies and solicit followers from Bangladesh. Bangladesh was featured in multiple publications, videos and websites associated with ISIS and AQIS, it said. The report mentioned that ISIS claimed responsibility for 18 attacks in Bangladesh in 2016.

It also said that the Department of State was working with Bangladesh to assist in developing a screening infrastructure to better secure its borders. It added that Bangladesh continued to participate in the US State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance programme and received counterterrorism-focused training for law enforcement officers. Bangladesh also received a Department of Justice prosecutorial skills training, and community policing support in targeted areas of the country. US' Special Operations Command Pacific continued security and stability engagements with Bangladesh Army, Navy, BGB and Coastguard.

The report found that the main terrorist finance threat to Bangladesh is from domestic groups that operate using small-scale funding derived through micro-financing methods. While the country faces significant domestic terrorist finance risks, Bangladesh law enforcement and intelligence agencies demonstrate a strong understanding of these risks. Still, the judicial sector is under resourced for carrying out prosecutions and obtaining convictions and the banking and non-banking sectors require further implementation of preventative measures, it said. (Courtesy: The Daily Star)

Muslim world in peril for militancy

Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said, the Muslim Ummah was facing danger and crisis as some people chose the wrong path of militancy. “The whole Muslim Ummah has got trapped in danger due to some people's move to take a confusing path [of militancy]. We won't allow militancy and terrorism to be active in our country,” she said.

The Prime Minister was inaugurating the Hajj Programme-2017 at the Hajj Camp in the city's Ashkona recently. She added, some people were misusing Islam by killing innocent people in the name of



the religion. “As a result, innocent Muslims across the world are facing harassment and even losing their lives.” Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also said Islam is the religion of peace and there is no scope in Islam for killing innocent people, Hasina told the programme.

(Photo: Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina exchanging greetings with hajj pilgrims after inaugurating

this year's Hajj Programme at the Ashkona Hajj Camp in Dhaka recently)

“No one has the right to kill innocent people; the almighty Allah will give the last verdict. Why can't they keep confidence and trust in Him?” About suicidal attempts by militants, she said Islam never permits taking own life. “Islam never said one would go to heaven by committing suicide. Some people are creating this confusion...we don't want our people to take this confusing path.” Terming hajjis the guests of Allah, Hasina urged them to pray for Bangladesh so that people can live in peace and the government can continue the pace of development.

Bangladesh will do ‘everything’ to take back illegal citizens from Europe; Global terrorism discussed at EU

Law Minister Anisul Huq has assured European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos of taking back illegal Bangladeshis living in parts of the world. Bangladesh will “do everything” for that, Huq said.

They were meeting in Brussels where the Law Minister and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam were recently visiting. Referring to nearly 10 million skilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi workers abroad, Huq said, Bangladesh always promotes “safe, orderly and regular migration”. “Under no circumstances, Bangladesh will jeopardise its overseas (including EU) labour market through irregular migration.”

Commissioner Avramopoulos appreciated Bangladesh’s position and this would keep the EU’s doors open for future regular migration of Bangladeshis. In 2016 alone, 20,000 Bangladeshis got registered in EU countries, he said. After inter-ministerial consultations, the proposed standard operating procedure for smooth repatriation of irregular Bangladeshis from Europe has been sent to the law ministry for vetting, on which he promised to take “expedited action”.



Avramopoulos emphasised the need for “close collaborative” efforts to combat trans-national traffickers and expressed willingness to work closely with Bangladesh. He also mentioned EU’s readiness to finance projects aimed at skills development and livelihood programme for the returnees. Bangladesh sought “sustained and strong” EU support to resolve the Rohingya refugee issue, referring to the gross violation of human rights of the Muslim population in the northern Rakhine state of Myanmar.

Both sides also discussed the scourge of global terrorism and agreed to work closely to combat terrorism and violent extremism. The two ministers also met Vice Chair of the European Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights Cristian Dan Preda.

‘ISIS local chief recruiter targets youths from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka’

Mohammed Shafi Armar, fugitive chief recruiter of the Islamic State in the Indian subcontinent. Photo taken from NDTV. A fugitive chief recruiter of the Islamic State in the Indian subcontinent has targeted youths from three countries -- India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka -- to involve them with the global terror outfit.

Mohammed Shafi Armar, a tech savvy, has been operating on Facebook and other personal messenger services to contact, brainwash and recruit youths from the three nations, reports NDTV . He has been named a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” by the US yesterday, becoming the first Indian leader of the terror outfit against whom America has sponsored sanctions. The US State Treasury Department, while updating its list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT), has included in it Armar, a native of Bhatkal in Karnataka, clearing the way for sanctions against him, adds the report.

An Interpol Red Corner notice is also pending against the 30-year-old Armar, who has many aliases like “Chhote Maula”, “Anjan Bhai” and “Yousuf al-Hindi”. “Mohammed Shafi Armar is a leader and head recruiter in India for the Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) group, ISIS,” the State Department said.



“He has cultivated a group of dozens of ISIS sympathisers who are involved in terrorist activities across India, such as plotting attacks, procuring weapons, and identifying locations for terrorist training camps,” said the statement. Armar was said to have left for Pakistan along with his elder brother after the crackdown on Indian Mujahideen cadres. After a fight with Bhatkal brothers, including Riyaz, the founder of Indian Mujahideen, in Pakistan, Armar is believed to have created Ansar ul

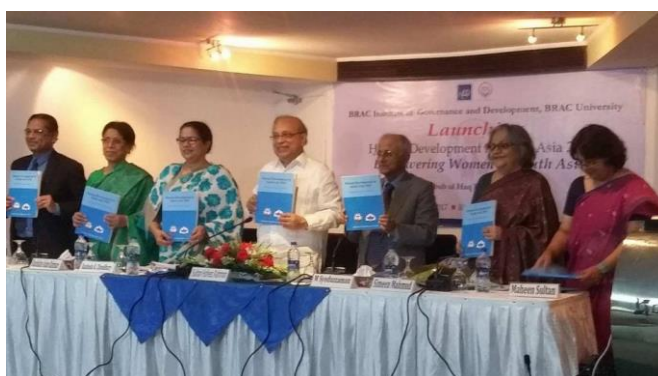
Tawhid, which later pledged its allegiance to the ISIS, NDTV reports. His links to the ISIS were also the highlight of the interrogation of Yasin Bhatkal, who was arrested near the Nepal border in 2013.

Armar first came on the radar of investigation agencies when the NIA was probing suspected ISIS cadres in Ratlam of Madhya Pradesh. During the interrogation of alleged IS operatives, it emerged that Armar was motivating and radicalising Muslim youths in India. He was said to have been recruiting youths for the Jund ul Khalifa-e-Hind through online radicalisation. (Courtesy: Star Online Report)

‘Religious fundamentalism’- new challenge for women empowerment

Dhaka: Religious fundamentalism is an emerging challenge to women empowerment, said academics and women rights activists at a program recently. Bangladesh has made significant progress in women empowerment in the spheres of education, health and economic aspects, but gender inequality still remains a major challenge, they said.

“Hefazat Islam are intervening in the national curriculum of our text books. Communal thoughts of who is Muslim and who is Hindu are being instilled into children’s brains...these are the challenges that we need to counter,” Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education and also adviser to government speaking at the “Human Development 2016: Empowering Asia”. Mahbub ul Pakistan prepared launched by the Governance and BRAC University in the city.



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Violence against women costs some 2.4 percent of GDP, said Professor Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue. There have been many laws framed in Bangladesh to ensure gender equality but the enforcement of the laws remains a big concern, he said. He also noted that use of technology to spread fundamentalism is a huge challenge for women empowerment.

UK Secular Forum gets award for campaign against extremism

London: Tower Hamlets Speaker honoured the UK Nirmul Committee (Secular Forum) at a ceremony at the Speaker's parlour, Town Hall. Councillor Khales Uddin Ahmed, Speaker of Council, who presided the service said, 'We have honoured an organisation which has tirelessly campaigned against extremism and promoted community cohesion amongst various faith & ethnic groups for the last twenty five years'.

Speaker Khales Uddin Ahmed presented the Nirmul Committee with a Crest which was received by Nirmul Committee's Assistant Secretary Jamal Ahmed Khan, Treasurer Shah Mustafijur Rahman Belal and Central executive member Ansar Ahmed Ullah on behalf of the UK Nirmul Committee. Ansar Ahmed Ullah is also President of EBF U.K.



The UK Nirmul Committee which is celebrating its 25th anniversary of campaign against sectarianism and extremism was formed to support the campaign against racism, fascism, extremism and fundamentalism..

Retrospect: Kalyanpur raid: one year on- A 'turning point' in fight against terror

Dhaka: The operation “Storm 26” in the capital's Kalyanpur last year was a turning point for law enforcers as documents seized at a “Neo JMB” den there and information gathered subsequently helped law enforcers fight back against the country's rising terror network, counterterrorism officials said. If not for the July 26 operation in which nine militants were killed, police could not have prevented some further terror attacks. They also won back public trust that eroded following the Gulshan café attack earlier that month.



“It was the operation through which we fought back against militancy and it was a turning point for us,” DMP's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit chief Monirul Islam said recently at a press conference marking one year of “Storm 26”. Following the Holey Artisan Bakery siege in Gulshan on July 1 last year and the murder

of 20 hostages including 17 foreigners at the upscale eatery, there was information that militants would carry out some more massive attacks in three to four places. Foreign nationals in Dhaka and Narayanganj were mainly on their target list, he said, adding a house was rented in Narayanganj to carry out the attacks.

“The Kalyanpur operation was very important. After the Gulshan attack, the nation got into an embarrassing situation and fear gripped the people and foreigners,” Monirul said, adding that through the successful operation, they could prove their capabilities. The counterterrorism unit, formed in February 2016, gained new experiences from the operation and the confidence of its personnel also rose

sharply following the success, the CTTC told The Daily Star. During a block raid in the neighbourhood, police stumbled across the militant den on the fourth floor of a house named Taj Manzil, locally known as Jahaz Building. Police say those killed in the operation include five suicide squad members from “Neo JMB”. They also captured Rakibul Hasan Reagan alive. Reagan divulged crucial information about the “Neo JMB” leadership, its key members and their targets, CTTC officials said. (Courtesy: Daily star).

'3 Bangladeshi extremists traced in Philippines'

Three among 89 foreign extremists, fighting in the Philippines, were identified as Bangladeshis, Philippines-based news portal Philstar.com reported recently. The report said that a police intelligence report obtained by Kyodo showed the suspected included 28 Indonesians, 21 Malaysians, 4 Bangladeshis, 1 Singaporean and 1 Indian-Singaporean. Na- of the rest five suspected extremists were yet to be lished, said the re- port. Quoting Japan-based agency Kyodo News, the said that the information vealed by Philippine offi- meeting with Indonesian laysian counterparts in June 22.



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According to the report, at least 89 ‘suspected foreign fighters’ are in various parts of Mindanao, including Marawi City, the area attacked by Islamic State-inspired Maute terrorists on May 23.

Philippine security forces, however, are verifying information about the alleged presence of the suspected terrorists in Mindanao, said Filipino presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella on Saturday. ‘Authorities are still validating the report that 89 suspected foreign fighters are in Mindanao,’ he said in a statement. Abella said it was possible that the foreigners entered the Philippines through the southern backdoor, where the point of entry was Mindanao via Indonesia or Malaysia, he added.

The extremists militants in Indonesia and Philippines were encouraged by series of terror attacks in Bangladesh from early 2013 to July 1, 2017 Gulshan cafe attack and they wanted to follow the model of the attacks in their home countries, according to a recent report of Indonesia-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict. On June 22, Armed Forces Eastern Mindanao Command deputy chief Brigadier General Gilbert Gapay revealed that there were at least 40 foreign extremists in the Philippines. On June 22, Armed Forces Eastern Mindanao Command deputy chief Brigadier General Gilbert Gapay revealed that there were at least 40 foreign extremists in the Philippines.

He said that security forces already knew the names of the ‘jihadists’, including Malaysians, Indonesians, Arabs and Pakistanis. A Bangladesh official told New Age past week that there was no specific information of Bangladeshi joining to Abu Sayyaf or any extremist group in the Philippines directly from Bangladesh. (Courtesy: New Age)