



European Bangladesh Forum

(Voice of Bangladeshi Europeans)

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels conference calls for concerted efforts to thwart rise of religious fundamentalism in South Asia and beyond

Brussels, 23 June 2024: Speakers at an international conference on the ‘rise of fundamentalism: implications, challenges and threats’ held at the European Press Club in Brussels today said, fundamentalists are that section of the population who want to go by the fundamental religious norms, as may be explained by them, to be strictly followed in running the state. They try aggressively to make religious dictums mandatory by virtue of religious majority in population. Sane people everywhere must raise their strong voices against any form of extremism, specially religious ones, since they are very sensitive and can flare up very quickly. These type of fundamentalist radicalism has brought about various atrocities including genocides around the world in the past and also in recent



years.

The conference was organized by the Europe-based Bangladeshi diaspora organization, European Bangladesh Forum (EBF) in collaboration with the Belgium-based human rights organization, Global Solidarity for Peace and Switzerland-based International Human Rights Commission Bangladesh. Chaired by Ansar Ahmed Ullah, President of EBF-UK, the conference was addressed among others by Harry van Bommel, former Member of the Dutch Parliament, Niels van den Berge, former Member of the Dutch Parliament, Professor Dr. Tazeen Murshid, Director, Development Research Cooperation, Brussels, Dr Tommaso Virgili, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany, Chris Blackburn, British Political Analyst, UK & recipient of ‘Friend of Bangladesh’ award, Andy Vermaut, President of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue and EU

Climate Pact Ambassador, Belgium, Preeti Rahman, Deputy head of Bangladesh mission in Belgium, Pradip Kumar Dutta, Columnist and human rights activist. M M Murshed, President of Global Solidarity for Peace, Belgium, Khalilur Rahman Mamun, President of International HR Commission Bangladesh,



Switzerland, Jahangir Chowdhury Ratan, General Secretary of Belgium Awami League and Bikash Chowdhury, President, EBF, Netherlands. Tanim Chowdhury gave the opening speech. British political analyst and recipient of 'Friend of Bangladesh' award, Chris Blackburn who could not attend due to sudden illness, send a video recorded speech. It was screened during the program.

The speakers said, charities in Europe and North America are being abused by radical Islamist political movements abroad. These connections they said, raise significant concerns about the use of charitable fronts to further radical ideologies and support militant activities. The ongoing investigations and revelations highlight the need for greater scrutiny and accountability for organisations with potential links to extremist groups. In Bangladesh and elsewhere we find a tendency by some quarters to show the rise of religious fundamentalism as non-significant. But in real terms it is growing alarmingly fast. There is no reason to put it under the carpet, rather should be faced and done away with upfront, they continued.



In his paper veteran Dutch Member of the Parliament Harry van Bommel suggested that the European Union and the United States should put more pressure on the government of Pakistan to ensure that the educational system is based on human rights and basic freedoms. Pakistan needs the free world for various reasons. The world would be a better place with a free and democratic Pakistan, he

continued. Referring to the rise of extreme religious fundamentalism the veteran Dutch politician who was for nearly 20 years an MP in the Dutch parliament said, developments that led to the 9/11 attacks can not be understood by solely looking at Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan is an important root cause in this respect, he added.

Addressing the conference Chris Blackburn who could not attend on sudden physical illness said, Jamaat has powerful allies, funded and aided by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and were once patronised by the Gulf States, notably Saudi Arabia. These funds, he added, have fueled their Dawah activities, including public relations with Western academics, diplomats, and politicians who have been misled by Jamaat's duplicity. This has had a devastating effect on social cohesion and security policy in Europe and North America.

European academics, researchers, human rights activists from other civil society organisations and members of the Bangladesh community in different European countries including UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany participated in the program. The conference was live telecast by the London-based British Bangla News channel. Print and electronic media in the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Italy and Bangladesh widely covered the event. A total of 62 participants participated in the conference.

The poster features a blue background with yellow stars. At the top, the word 'Conference' is written in red. Below it, the title 'Rise of fundamentalism: implications, challenges & threats in South Asia & beyond' is displayed in white. The event details are listed in orange and white: 'Sunday 23 June 2024, 14:30-18:00 CEST, European Press Club, Brussels, Froissartstraat 95, 1040 Brussel, Belgium'. Logos for EBF, Global Solidarity for Peace, and IHRC are shown. A circular inset image depicts a crowd of people and a white van on a street.

Conference

'Rise of fundamentalism: implications, challenges & threats in South Asia & beyond'

Sunday 23 June 2024
14:30-18:00 CEST
European Press Club, Brussels
Froissartstraat 95, 1040 Brussel, Belgium

Organised by: European Bangladesh Forum (EBF)
In Collaboration with: Global Solidarity for Peace, Belgium
and
International Human Rights Commission Bangladesh, Geneva

EBF
European Bangladesh Forum

Global Solidarity for Peace
Human Rights Commission

IHRC

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