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PRESS RELEASE

Bangladesh: Political dialogue and the way forward towards elections

A seminar on 'Political dialogue and the way forward towards elections' was held on Friday June 27, 2008, in the Moses Room, House of Lords to discuss Bangladesh's present caretaker government's election process and their dialogue with the political parties.

The seminar was chaired by Lord Avebury, Vice Chair of All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group and was attended by Awami League's leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury, ex - minister and political secretary to ex Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to exchange views and share Awami League's perspectives with concerns regarding the dialogue with the care taker government.

Speakers welcomed positive developments including the timely completion of the electoral register, but a resolution was passed unanimously calling for the immediate lifting of emergency rule. Some wanted the election to be held earlier than December, but the general feeling was that parties needed time to appoint candidates, draft manifestos, get them agreed with the memberships, and activate their local branches. There was some feeling that holding the Upazila elections (the lowest tier of local government outside the cities) before the national elections could give the present government power to control the management of the national elections.

Concern was expressed about the mass arrests of political activists, some of whom were alleged to have been tortured.

It was agreed that a delegation of Members of the UK and European Parliaments would seek a meeting with Lord Malloch-Brown, the Foreign Office Minister who deals with Bangladesh, to exchange views on the electoral preparations and identify further assistance the UK might usefully provide, in the light of this discussion

Ends

Participants included: Dr Charles Tannock MEP, Baroness Uddin, Human Rights Watch Asia Director Brad Adams, Amnesty International's South Asia researcher Abbas Faiz, Ex Cllr Talal Karim of Liberation, Jenny Lundström, Human Rights Officer, Global Human Rights Defence, The Hague, Newham Cllr Ayub Korom Ali, Md Kamaruddin of BNP, Westminster Cllr Mustaq Qureshi, Nazmul Chowdhury

Sharun, London Metropolitan University Students' Union, Sultan Shariff & Gous Sultan of Awami League.

Also present were Md Iqbal Hussain Khan, First Sec, Bangladesh High Commission, Tanya Brown, South Asia Team, Amnesty International, Simon Lever of Home Office, Simon Long, The Economist, M A Gani, AL, M A Rahim, AL, M A Sattar, President Bangla Press Club, Murad Qureshi AM, London Assembly Labour Group, Catherine McCoy, South Asia Team, Amnesty International, Meher Nigar Chowdhury, Rohima Begum, Rahela Sheikh, Anjumanara Anju of UK AL, Dr Dipu Moni, Women Affairs Sec, Bangladesh Awami League and Syed Abdul Hannan, Presidium Member , NAP amongst others.

*Yours sincerely
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