


UK Seminar calls for respecting human rights

 UNB, LONDON

July 25: A seminar on 'Human Rights in Bangladesh' was held in a Committee Room at the Houses of Lords here Tuesday concern over detention of a large number of people and lack of prosecutorial and judicial capacity to hold the trial promptly.

Organised by the International Bangladesh Foundation and chaired by Lord Avebury, the Vice Chair of All Party Parliamentary Rights Group and Chairman of International Bangladesh Foundation, the seminar was attended by MPs, MEP, representatives of human rights organisations including Commonwealth Secretariat, Liberation, Saferworld, Ahmad Association, International Crisis Group, Jago Bangladesh, London School of Economics, and University of London.

In his opening remarks, Lord Avebury said whilst attention has rightly been focused on the caretaker government's strategy free and fair elections; the reformation of the political system and the eradication of corruption, there is concern also about human rights.

He said the establishment of a national human rights commission, as promised by the government, was a priority.

The seminar expressed concern over allegations of torture in custody and restrictions on freedom of political parties to decide how to democratise themselves.

Ashraf Uddin, acting High Commissioner for Bangladesh, gave a comprehensive presentation on the caretaker government's to minority and human rights in its reform plans.

He said a draft of the law on the Human Rights Commission was about to be circulated to stakeholders for consultation.

Baroness Uddin, Chair of All Party Group on Bangladesh; Amnesty International's South Asia researcher Abbas Faiz; Friends of Bangladesh Chair Ms Ann Main MP; Labour MP David Drew; Human Rights Watch Asia Director Brad Adams a Friends of Bangladesh Chair Dr Charles Tannock MEP took part in the discussion.

Other contributors included Harry Cohen MP, Tower Hamlets Mayor Cllr Ann Jackson, Awami League representative MA representative Barrister Jushna Miah, Gano Forum's representative Cllr Ayub Korom Ali, Respect Cllr Lutfa Begum, Bangla T Liton, ex Cllr Talal Karim and Akik Rahman Chowdhury.

British Parliamentarians expressed their concern about the "undignified arrest" of former Prime Minister and Awami League Sheikh Hasina and the denial of her application for bail.

The AL representative said Sheikh Hasina was arrested and imprisoned under emergency powers that appear to deny her rights, including legal representation.

Others criticised the use of emergency powers generally, as it was undermining the rule of law, and it was said that some had been wrongfully arrested and subjected to ill treatment.

It was suggested that the restrictions on political activity would have to be lifted before the local elections, now scheduled for 2008. It was also suggested that a delegation of parliamentarians should visit Bangladesh to observe the situation.

Lord Avebury in his concluding remarks said: "We as fellow members of the Commonwealth, and with the ties of family and friendship that bind us together, want to see Bangladesh go through a new liberation, emerging with strong political, legal and human rights institutions."

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