

Bangladesh

European Parliament resolution on Bangladesh

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Bangladesh, in particular its resolution of 14 April 2005 on Bangladesh¹,
 - having regard to the visit to Dhaka by the EU Troika of Regional Directors from 23 to 25 January 2006,
 - having regard to the declaration of 16 March 2006 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union welcoming the arrest of two terrorist leaders by the Bangladeshi authorities,
 - having regard to the statement of 30 October 2006 by the UN Secretary-General on Bangladesh,
 - having regard to the Cooperation Agreement between the European Community and the People's Republic of Bangladesh on Partnership and Development²,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. welcoming the fact that a caretaker government has been formed and is entrusted with the task of preparing for the next parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, but noting with concern that many of the necessary preconditions in terms of the neutrality of electoral preparations have yet to be met,
- B. welcoming the fact that Bangladesh is a very important partner of the European Union, which has made progress in its economic performance; noting, however, that the country continues to suffer from serious political difficulties, massive corruption, poverty, widespread popular discontent and Islamist militancy,
- C. whereas the compilation of the electoral register has been heavily criticised by domestic and international observers; whereas according to an estimate by the Commission, 13 million invalid names have been added to the register,
- D. whereas in 2006, three journalists were killed and at least 95 others were attacked, and 55 press correspondents were the targets of intimidation because of articles considered to be 'non-Islamic'; and whereas in the course of the year, more than 70 journalists have been forced to flee the country following threats, according to reports of 'Reporters sans Frontières' on press freedom in Bangladesh,
- E. having regard to the particularly shocking case of Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, director of the Bangladeshi newspaper Weekly Blitz, journalist who advocates dialogue

¹ OJ C 33 E, 9.2.2006, p. 594.

² OJ L 118, 27.4.2001, p. 48.

between religions and recognition of Israel, who was arrested on 29 November 2003 and is in danger of being condemned to death at his trial for sedition, which was due to open on 13 November 2006,

- F. whereas violence perpetrated by paramilitary organisations with an Islamist orientation decreased as a result of steps taken by the former government in the latter part of its tenure,
 - G. whereas Bangladesh has had a longstanding tradition of secular democracy, including respect for human rights and women's rights, independence of the judiciary and freedom of the press;
 - H. whereas the EU has welcomed the arrest of two suspected terrorist leaders, and considers this to be a significant achievement which demonstrates Bangladesh's commitment to the fight against terrorism,
 - I. whereas in spring 2006, the government took drastic measures to curb extremism, but whereas Islamist groups continue openly to target members of religious minority communities,
1. Deplores recent acts of violence and strongly condemns the physical attacks on journalists, NGO staff, trade unionists and others, and the violence related to the forthcoming general election and the transitional arrangements;
 2. Recognises the importance of the elections and calls for a strong and decisive caretaker government, which will counteract instability and instil confidence in free and fair parliamentary elections conducted in accordance with international standards, with the participation of all parties and within the planned timeframe;
 3. Calls on the Bangladeshi Caretaker Government, led by President Iajuddin Ahmed, to take immediate steps to reconstitute the Election Commission, so as to ensure that it can perform, and can be seen to perform, its work in a truly neutral manner;
 4. Calls on the Caretaker Government to create a climate in which all members of the electorate will feel genuinely free to use their right to vote, notably by disarming supporters of Islamist groups engaged in actions and propaganda characterised by religious intolerance;
 5. Calls on the Election Commission, in cooperation with domestic and international experts, to improve the quality and accuracy of the voter register;
 6. Calls on the BNP, the AL and all other political parties to reach agreement on all controversial electoral issues, to avoid political violence and instability and to develop political programmes which will improve the standard of the population's living conditions;
 7. Calls for a review of the trial, and for the acquittal, of Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, the charges against whom run counter to all the standards of international law and the conventions against violations of press freedom;
 8. Calls on the authorities to put an end to the climate of impunity and to bring to justice the

perpetrators of violence and harassment directed towards journalists in Bangladesh;

9. Calls on the Council and the Commission to monitor carefully the human rights situation, the political situation and press freedom in Bangladesh and to draw up programmes in the framework of EU-Bangladesh cooperation to promote freedom of the press and freedom of speech;
10. Calls on the Caretaker Government to guarantee media balance during the election campaign;
11. Reaffirms its commitment to Bangladesh's unique tradition of religious tolerance and secularism, as enshrined in the country's longstanding cultural traditions and artistic heritage, and as endorsed in Parliament's previous resolutions;
12. Welcomes the recent conviction by a court of two Islamic militants for murdering a Christian convert, but condemns the imposition of a death penalty;
13. Welcomes the Commission's decision to send an EU Election Observation Mission to observe the forthcoming general election, and urges the rapid establishment of a short-term political Election Observation Mission by Parliament;
14. Calls on the Commission to use its good offices with other donors and with the Bangladeshi Government to promote the adoption of effective measures in line with the provisions of this resolution;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh, the Election Commission of Bangladesh and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.