

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies

Organized

Panel Discussion

On

“Journalist’s Take on Bangladesh General Election 2026: Future of Indo-Bangladesh Relations”

Date 13th March,2026

Venue- Anchorage, Polo Floatel at 9/10 Kolkata Jetty, Strand Road between

Time 4 to 6pm

On Thursday, March 13, the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) held a discussion session at the floating restaurant Flotel, located near Babughat in Kolkata. Three notable journalists from Kolkata took part in this discussion. These individuals were among the top reporters from India who travelled to Bangladesh to cover the nation’s 13th National Parliamentary Election: Amal Sarkar (The Wall), Anamitra Chatterjee (Ei Samay), and Arkomoy Datta Majumdar (India Today). The session was chaired by Prof. Arindam Mukherjee, the Director of ISCS.

This parliamentary election in Bangladesh was significant as it was the first instance where the polls occurred without the involvement of the country’s largest party-the outgoing ruling Awami League. All three journalists were in Bangladesh on the day of the election. They observed a unique festive atmosphere on Election Day. However, despite the interim government led by Md. Yunus officially banning the Awami League, the party’s importance in the electoral context actually grew. Both opposing factions-the BNP and *Jamaat-e-Islami*-were eager to win over the League’s traditional voter base. Ultimately, the journalists concluded that those League supporters who did participate in the voting opted to back the BNP.

All three journalists who reported on the election voiced doubts about the genuine intent behind the referendum that coincided with the parliamentary elections. Drawing from their firsthand experiences in journalism, they contended that conducting a national election alongside a referendum on the same day is an unusual approach. Specifically, they found the referendum ballot-which included numerous issues-to be quite inconsistent; they argued that asking for a single “Yes” or “No” answer on a ballot that covers such a wide array of topics is fundamentally perplexing.

Journalist Anamitra Chatterjee claimed that the referendum-purportedly organized to amend the constitution under the guise of implementing the “July Charter” while effectively circumventing established democratic principles-was, in truth, merely an effort to create an Islamic constitution. He believed that the BNP and *Jamaat-e-Islami* had only pretended to be rivals to ensure the election proceeded smoothly. He also pointed out that Tarique Rahman won the Dhaka-17 constituency by a margin of just over 4,000 votes; to secure Tarique’s win, compromises had to be made-specifically, by allowing certain leaders from the opposing side to achieve their own electoral victories. According to Anamitra, the entire process unfolded through a shared understanding. There was no rival candidate contesting against Hasnat Abdullah. Nahid Islam also clinched victory at the very last moment. Even *Jamaat’s Amir*,

Shafiqur, emerged victorious in the final moments after lagging behind for a significant time. Anamitra has described this election as a “media coup.”

Amal Sarkar shares a similar viewpoint, noting that there were clear inconsistencies in both the voting process and the subsequent results announcement. He also believes that effectively sidelining the Awami League from the electoral process was a challenging task. Sarkar suspects that several parties were involved in orchestrating this outcome. Arkomoy Datta Majumdar points out that there were reasons to suspect manipulation, particularly during the vote-counting phase. He claims that *Jamaat* was leading during the early counting stages in rural areas. The BNP was optimistic about winning between 170 and 180 seats; however, they could not have anticipated surpassing the 200-seat threshold.

Anamitra asserts that there have been previous plans in the United States to position Muhammad Yunus as the leader of Bangladesh, aiming to elevate him to the highest office in the country. Amal Sarkar believes that the main focus of this election was the Liberation War of 1971. With the Awami League absent, the BNP was eager to win by leveraging the emotions tied to that significant year. At the same time, *Jamaat* made deliberate efforts to present itself as a moderate Islamic political party. As a result, in an unprecedented action, *Jamaat* nominated a Hindu candidate in one specific constituency.

Throughout the day’s events, as they shared their experiences related to the election, the journalists suggested looking into ways to enhance the positive relations between the citizens of the two countries in the future. This would also include promoting collaboration at the administrative level, considering their proximity as neighboring nations. The session wrapped up with the viewing of a documentary that detailed the election of Bangladesh’s 13th National Parliament.