

30 August 2013, Friday ✦ 10.30am – 12.00pm ✦  
Lee Sheridan Conference Room, Eu Tong Sen Building, NUS (BTC)

## ***“Bengali” and “Bangladeshi”:* The use of Islamic and Secular Identities in Bangladesh**

by Ms. Adeeba Aziz Khan

***Barrister-at-Law, English and Welsh Bar by Lincoln’s Inn***

### **ABSTRACT**

Bangladeshis today are experiencing two separate and conflicting types of nationalism and collective identity. There are those who support the ideology of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in alliance with Jamaat-i-Islami, who define Bangladeshi identity based on religion and territoriality and those who support the ideology of the Awami League (AL) who define Bengali identity on the basis of ethnicity, language and secularism. Since Bangladesh’s independence in 1971, successive regimes have used constitutional amendments in order to define and re-define what it means to be ‘Bangladeshi’ and electoral violence, politics of the street, muscle politics, regular disruptions to daily life through hartals, curfews and aggressive politics continue to be instigated by using these rivaling ideologies as and when it suits political parties.

The paper analyses the key pledges in each national election campaign since 1991 and most recently in the 2013 City Corporation Polls by the BNP and the AL and their allies in order to establish how the use of ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ has supported the political parties to alternate power. The paper concludes that these two competing ideologies have very little practical implication for Bangladesh. I argue that collective memory is fabricated and exaggerated by political parties in order to create a platform, differentiate themselves from other groups, maintain factional competition and patron-client links and discredit other parties – leading to the contentious politics of the day.

### **ABOUT THE SPEAKER**



Ms. Adeeba Aziz Khan is a Barrister-at-Law called to the English and Welsh Bar by Lincoln’s Inn and is also an Advocate of the Bangladesh Bar. She studied Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and is currently pursuing her PhD with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Her teaching experience includes Public Law and Comparative Constitutional Law. Her research interests include South Asian Constitutional Law, Patronage and Elections in South Asia and Modern South Asian History. Prior to returning to academia, Ms. Khan worked at Dr. Kamal Hossain and Associates in Bangladesh focusing on Public Interest Litigation and Drew and Napier LLC in Singapore as a Foreign Lawyer. Her recent publications include articles in the Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law, International Journal of Small Economies and Bangladesh Human Rights Reports for Ain O Shalish Kendro. She has recently presented papers at University of Cambridge and Aarhus University.

**Admission is free.**

Please RSVP via email at [cals@nus.edu.sg](mailto:cals@nus.edu.sg)

**Closing Date of registration : 28 August 2013, Wednesday, 5pm**