



PROCEEDINGS

SEMINAR ON

**CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH:
SECURITY AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES**

30 August 2023

Organised By
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
to Host
National Defence College (NDC), India



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Publications Officer

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

1/46, Old Elephant Road (West of Ramna Police Station)

Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

Phone: (880-2) PABX: 48315808, 222223808, Ext. 136

Fax: (880-2) 48312625, e-mail: po@biiss.org

Website: www.biiss.org

Printed by

nymphhea

Hashim Tower, Suite 6C, 6th Floor

205/1/A, Tejgaon-Gulshan Link Road, Dhaka 1208

Phone: +88 02 222262032, +88 02 222262054

E-mail: info@nymphhea-bd.com

Website: www.nymphhea-bd.com

Seminar on

CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH: SECURITY AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) along with the Delegation from National Defence College (NDC), India, organised a Seminar on “Contemporary Bangladesh: Security and Economic Perspectives” on Wednesday, 30 August 2023 at BIISS Auditorium. Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address and Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker, Chairman, BIISS, presided over the event.



Three presentations were deliberated in the seminar. M Ashique Rahman, Senior Research Fellow of BIISS, delivered a presentation titled “India-Bangladesh Cooperation for Peace and Stability in South Asia”; Dr Atiur Rahman, Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank, and Honorary Professor of Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka presented the topic on “Amazing Transformation of Bangladesh Economy Despite Global Challenges”; and Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain PhD, ndc, psc, Ex-Election Commissioner, and Senior Fellow, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University (NSU), made his presentation on “FDMNs, Increasing Security Challenges and the Essentiality of Repatriation: Need for Regional Response”. These three presentations were followed by an open discussion session.

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Delegates from National Defence College (NDC), India and faculty members of BISS actively participated in the seminar and enriched it by presenting their valuable opinions, comments, suggestions, and observations during the open discussion session.



Welcome Address



Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc
Director General, BIIS

At the outset, Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc paid his solemn reverence to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and millions of martyrs who made supreme sacrifice in every struggle for our national emancipation and Independence.

The experience of the war empowered the people to have a strong resolve for the country and they have developed enormous resilience to ensure progress. The continuous efforts of the people for the past 52 years advanced the country to a respectful position regionally and internationally. According to the World Bank data Bangladesh had a sustained growth rate of nearly 7%, and life expectancy has reached to 72.4 years. The extension of transport and communication networks, industrialisation, and digitalisation has contributed to poverty eradication and made society more inclusive. Bangladesh is the second largest economy in South Asia, and it is argued that due to the economic progress of Bangladesh, the centre of gravity in South Asia has shifted from the West to Eastwards.

General Habib Uddin mentioned that Bangladesh has emerged as a gateway between South and South East Asia. Bangladesh is envisioned to be a modern, developed and knowledge-based country by 2041. Being a littoral country of the Bay of Bengal, the strategic importance of the country is also valued by all the stakeholders.

In the backdrop of brewing great power tussle and geopolitical competition, Bangladesh declared its Indo-Pacific Outlook, which identifies the vision and priorities of Bangladesh in the region. He highlighted that the vital foreign

policy document has followed the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's famous dictum "friendship to all and malice towards none". He believed that this principle guides Bangladesh in a realpolitik world that is stained by war, conflict, and competition and taught Bangladesh the value of defending inclusivity and multilateralism. Since independence, he mentioned that this peaceful approach remained Bangladesh's diplomatic forte, where Bangladesh has been engaged as a proactive actor in numerous normative and policymaking platforms and initiatives. As a responsible actor in the community of nations, Bangladesh has upheld its commitment by promoting international peace, stability, and security through participating in peacekeeping and peacebuilding engagements and strengthening its ties with many countries from the region and beyond.

The Director General mentioned that with "Vision 2041" in the centre, the main foreign policy objective of Bangladesh is obtaining economic development and prosperity for its people. Therefore, he pointed out that within the realities of emerging geopolitical conundrum and economic expectations, Bangladesh focuses on some of the strategies to achieve its foreign policy goals: firstly, Bangladesh focuses on economic cooperation and argues that it can benefit from all the countries of the region as well as an inclusive development can prevent tension among the stakeholders. Secondly, Bangladesh believes in peaceful settlement of the conflicts among the rival powers of the region. Thirdly, the country promotes the idea of multilateralism. It believes that multilateral forums can help the nations to resolve the conflicting issues amicably. Lastly, a culture of peace is a priority of Bangladesh. The Director General said that Bangladesh is committed to global peace and one of the examples of that is Bangladesh is often the top force contributing country to the UN peacekeeping and peace building efforts. However, in the milieu of economic rise and strategic realities, Bangladesh desires to achieve greater strategic autonomy in the region by engaging all the countries and promoting economic cooperation.

General Habib Uddin mentioned that Bangladesh and India enjoy a cemented relationship which has grown based on geographical proximity, shared borders, shared history and culture, and economic ties. India's contribution to Bangladesh's War of Liberation in 1971 has created the very foundation of this relationship. Since the last decade, the relationship has reached its peak and both countries have established a close partnership based on the issues of shared interests. Despite some irritants like the water-sharing issue, the DG mentioned that both countries have deep cooperation in transport connectivity, trade, infrastructure development, energy cooperation and maritime cooperation. The collaboration between the two nations is not limited to bilateral level only; it has extended at the regional and sub-regional levels as well, i. e., BIMSTEC, BBIN, IORA, where both countries are working together. He pointed out that both nations have shared interests in the international forums on the issues of climate change and non-traditional security areas like energy security, food security and cyber security. Therefore, enhanced cooperation between Bangladesh and India could work as a key factor in facing non-traditional security threats and ensuring regional stability he mentioned, which is the pre-condition for the shared prosperity and development of the region.

According to the Director General, at present, one of the key challenges for Bangladesh is the presence of more than 1.2 million Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh amid military persecution in Myanmar. Despite risking huge economic, social and ecological damages, Bangladesh is hosting this large number of Rohingya people only on humanitarian grounds. The Director General pointed out that the Rohingya crisis appears to be not only a concern for Bangladesh but also a concern for the peace and stability of this region. As a neighbour of both Bangladesh and Myanmar, India could have leverage to facilitate the repatriation process and contribute to a sustainable solution to the problem.

The Director General concluded his remarks by reiterating that Bangladesh pursues a policy of mutual respect and benefit, the principle of tolerance and peace, and solving problems with dialogue and negotiations. Bangladesh's priority is a stable and secured region which enables development and mutual benefits for all. To that end, he expressed his hope that the event would generate insightful discussion to further our understanding of economic development, security and their intricate relationship. Finally, General Pasha Habib Uddin sincerely thanked the head of the visiting delegation of NDC India, respected Chair, distinguished presenters, visiting delegation members of NDC, India, and colleagues from BISS for their participation in the Seminar.

Presentation One

Bangladesh-India Cooperation for Peace and Stability in South Asia



M Ashique Rahman
Senior Research Fellow, BISS

At the outset, Mr M Ashique Rahman, Senior Research Fellow, BISS provided an outline of his presentation highlighting the issues he intended to discuss. It included an overview of contemporary security and geopolitical environment of South Asia, discussions on enhancing bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India, background of how the relationship expanded, overview of the areas of cooperation at the regional and global level and some opinions regarding how to move forward with this relationship between Bangladesh and India.

Moving to the main part of the presentation, Mr Rahman elaborated his views on contemporary Bangladesh-India relations. He mentioned that there seems to be a general agreement among observers, researchers and policymakers that Bangladesh and India are having the best of their relationships. This phase is termed as the “Shonali Oddhai” i.e., the golden time of all times. In many discussions, both the Indian and Bangladeshi sides said that the kind of relationship both countries are having is a sort of role model for bilateral and regional cooperation. It all started in 2009. In 2009 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s government came to power in Bangladesh. Then the Narendra Modi

government came to power in India in 2014 with a very extensive mandate of the people. That gave the opportune moment for increasing the relationship. Now there is more of a convergence than divergence between the national interests of both Bangladesh and India. Mr Rahman reflected on two concepts i.e., Innenpolitik and Außenpolitik, which indicates domestic factors and foreign affairs respectively. So, both these environments and necessities compelled the two countries to come together and cooperate for the benefit of both countries.

It also started with the establishment of the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) in 2011 and since then the meeting are being held regularly. Last year, in 2022, the seventh round of the JCC meeting was held. This is one of the main consultative bodies to discuss the whole gamut of bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India. These consultative meetings cover several issues including economic, security, connectivity and people to people contacts.

Next, Mr Rahman talked about the contemporary security issues of South Asia. There are both traditional and non-traditional security concerns in the region. Selected issues were highlighted in the presentation. In terms of traditional security, there are border disputes among the regional countries, arms race and the presence of nuclear powers. There are also a number of separatist movements, ongoing insurgencies by the ethnic communities and protracted conflicts in the region. Speaking of the non-traditional security threats, he highlighted some concerns. The most important human security concerns include food security, economic security and also health security. There is also violent extremism, international and domestic terrorism and transnational crimes. The impact of climate change is another concern. Many of the countries are severely affected because of climate change and environmental degradation. Bangladesh is one of the severely affected countries as it has vast coastal region. Then there are domestic and regional security concerns that are posed by the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs). Bangladesh is hosting 1.2 million Rohingyas on humanitarian ground. They came in 2017 but now it has been almost six years that Bangladesh is facing certain problems that were not thought of. There are increasing number of criminal activities, drug trafficking and human trafficking which are creating serious security issues for the country and also for the region due to spillover effects.

At this stage of the presentation, Mr Rahman shared his view on the geopolitical environment. Here he mentioned about the Bay of Bengal region and the Indo-Pacific region as they are being emphasised in recent times. He referred to Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook that was published in April 2023. Mr Rahman observed that intense major power geopolitical competition is visible in the larger region of Indo-Pacific and also in the immediate region of Bay of Bengal. When it comes to geostrategic competition, there is competition for influence by major powers. Additionally, there is competition for resources as well as ensuring maritime security. Since there are a number of choke points and straits in this region, securing sea lanes of communication is one of the major concerns for the regional countries. Moreover, maritime boundary issues and territorial disputes are creating challenges for the geopolitical environment. Maritime criminal activities like piracy, theft and IUU fishing are also seen in this region. These situations provide the context and ground for the two neighbours to cooperate in the areas of security.



In this regard, Mr Rahman highlighted three main areas of discussions i.e., India-Bangladesh Defence Cooperation, India-Bangladesh cooperation on issues like counterterrorism and cooperation on border issues. First, he discussed defence cooperation. The visit by NDC India delegates is an example of the level of defense cooperation that the two countries are having. There is also regular exchange of senior military officials and officers training programs. In 2017, a number of MoUs were signed that provided the framework for increasing defence cooperation. There is an MoU on use of outer space and defence cooperation framework. Initially, the discussion was for a defence pact but later it turned into a framework. Both the parties signed the framework and that provided a ground for increasing defence cooperation between the two countries. At the same time in 2017, India made a proposal for a defence line of credit for half a billion dollars to support Bangladesh's military procurement. Both parties agreed but so far not much activity is going on. But new projects can be initiated to materialise this. One of the major things related to this sector of cooperation is the joint military exercise named 'Sampriti'. In June 2022, the tenth round of this exercise was held.

On the second point of security cooperation, Mr Rahman discussed the counter terrorism issue. This is a very significant issue as some countries severely suffered because of this menace. Extensive security cooperation was achieved during the 2010 visits. Three very important agreements were signed: the extradition treaty; agreement on mutual assistance on criminal matters and transfer of sentenced persons; and agreement on collaboration on combating international terrorism, organised crime and illicit drug trafficking. Bangladesh does not have such agreements with any other country. The extradition treaty was signed in January 2013 and also a Home-Minister level meeting was planned. The Home Minister level meeting has been going on for some years now. The seventh round was held in 2019. After that the meeting could not be held, likely due to COVID restrictions. Mr Rahman predicted that there might be a meeting planned before this year ends.

Third, Mr Rahman discussed the border issues. He expressed that there has been tremendous success in the relationship by complete implementation of the land boundary agreement. It was pending for a long time. Few years back the agreement finally came to realisation and could be implemented. There were also exchanges of enclaves. That problem was going on for decades. Apart from these issues, there was a MoU signed on 6th June 2015 on prevention of human trafficking and MoU to prevent smuggling and circulation of fake currency. And most important is the memorandum on coordinated border management that was adopted in 2011. That set up and laid out modalities for coordinated patrolling and also a set of five nodal officers both in The Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Mr Rahman also shared his views regarding India-Bangladesh cooperation at the regional and global level. At the international level, the cooperation is going on and there are certain factors that actually help to crystallise and increase this cooperation. For example, Bangladesh and India have similar understanding about international norms and values like non-interference, respect for sovereignty of other countries etc. Adherence to following and upholding the rule based and equitable global order is also common. Both the countries despise dominance and interference by other countries. Both the countries also have similar interests like climate change. Because of that, at all the international forums there is collaboration between Bangladesh and India regarding these issues.

At the regional level, Bangladesh and India are collaborating in all platforms and structures. Both are the members in almost all the frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN. Here Mr Rahman elaborated his views on BIMSTEC. Since 2015 BIMSTEC seems to have really picked up. A lot of activities started after 2015, especially since the Goa retreat in 2016. One of the very significant areas is the Security Advisors Conference that started in 2017. In addition, civil society collaborations like think-tank dialogue were also going on since 2018. As part of this process, the Track 1.5 Security Dialogue was held at BISS in the year 2019. Representatives from all member countries participated in that dialogue. However, because of the pandemic there seemed to be some discontinuation of this whole process. But it is very important to focus on BIMSTEC, because this is one of the opportunities for the regional countries of South Asia to discuss security issues. SAARC has become a non-starter and there are certain restrictions in SAARC to discuss security and bilateral security issues. But dialogue among the civil societies and think-tank platforms is really an opportunity for the regional countries to discuss regional security issues as well as other security issues that impact individual countries of the region. Mr Rahman shared that he is really looking forward to the BIMSTEC and member countries to restart these processes.

At this stage of the discussion, Mr Rahman raised a few issues that he felt need to be addressed for advancing this very well formulated and well-articulated relationship. First, although there are a number of MoUs, defence frameworks and defence cooperation, there is still a gap in intelligence sharing. There is no direct channel or direct communication for intelligence sharing. There are some at the informal level and at the individual level, but there is no arrangement through a formal channel. This is a very lengthy process. But this can be thought of since there is an extradition treaty and MoU on mutual legal assistance on criminal matters. This is the time when both countries can go for an institutionalised structure where intelligence can be formally shared not only on traditional issues or criminal issues, but in other non-traditional areas as well. Second, Mr Rahman highlighted that although border cooperation is going on and there are a number of MoUs and agreements for coordinated border management, nevertheless, at this stage, joint border patrolling can be thought of as both countries have a very good relationship and the trust between the two countries is well established. Thus, an advanced level of border cooperation can be considered. In this regard, the issue of border killing automatically comes in. A lot of discussions are ongoing and there are a lot of commitments from both sides, but one or two incidents of border killing is still experienced. This remains an issue for concern. Resolving this issue needs to be considered by both the countries. In addition, new issues can be included in the bilateral discussions. Here Mr Rahman highlighted one lacuna in the extradition treaty. Bangladesh and India have an extradition treaty but, in the agreement, a number of exceptions are kept. Mr Rahman hoped that there would be mutual discussions to agree and overcome those gaps.

Towards the end of the presentation, Mr Rahman reiterated that both countries are already doing very well. Both countries have made very successful advancements, but still there are rooms for improvement. Here Mr Rahman highlighted that security issues should be considered as a matter of common interest, rather than seeing these as individual and segregated concerns. The security issues should be seen more as a regional issue and should be dealt with pragmatism and realism rather than idealism. Mr Rahman emphasized that we all have to be realist and national interest comes first. Although there are some certain asymmetries between the two countries, when the countries are discussing, negotiating and cooperating, the issue of equity and justness should prevail.

Presentation Two

Amazing Transformation of Bangladesh Economy Despite Global Challenges



Professor Dr Atiur Rahman

Honorary Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

Dr Atiur Rahman, Honorary Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, thanked BISS for inviting him to speak before such an august gathering. Before delving into the discussion, he paid his deepest homage to the father of the nation, who was martyred in the month of August, and other martyrs who were killed on 15th of August. He also paid homage to the four national leaders who were brutally killed on the third November and to the martyrs of 1971, which also includes Bangladesh's friends from India who shed their blood in Bangladesh for our freedom.

Professor Rahman then said that Bangladesh is a very fascinating story yet to be told. Bangladesh has been making amazing economic transformation despite many global and local challenges. Over the last decade or so, Bangladesh has been marching forward with a development outlook that looks quite promising, but at the same time, is a bit complicated. Bangladesh hence, needs to look at the challenges that it is facing including security challenges, political economic challenges and global geopolitical challenges.

Bangladesh's story, for Professor Rahman, is very unusual in the sense that with so little, it has achieved so much. When Bangladesh started the journey in 1972, the size of the GDP was only US\$ 6 billion. The war in 1971, destroyed about two thirds of that – US\$ 4 billion of loss in 1971 according to the World Bank. With not even a dollar in our foreign exchange reserve, there were 80% people under poverty and a huge deficit in food. Bangladesh could face the crisis well because it had a leader who was very much charismatic, enthusiastic, and transformative. He gave the people a fighting spirit which helped fighting the war in 1971. That fighting spirit which I call social capital, that actually helped us recover in post-71 period that was the reconstruction phase. People of Bangladesh took the journey forward.

At that juncture, Professor Rahman referred to Rabindranath Tagore - a Nobel Laureate whom he considers not only a poet, but also a great social thinker. Tagore said, it is always good to have dream, unless you have big dream, you cannot really have big development. Our leader, our father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, gave us that dream when the country had nothing. The level of his dream is a subject to look at. What he says, that “our situation will not remain as dire as it is now.” He was talking about that period when there was a food deficit and there was starvation all around. Father of the nation said that Bangladesh has soil, jute, natural gas, tea, forests, fisheries and livestock. If this can be developed properly, Bangabandhu hoped that the days will change for better. So, that was the depth of his dream and he also mentioned about the global economic crisis that was going on, the high inflation, certainly the price of oil went up and the imports were very difficult to contain with exports.

Amid such dire situations, Bangabandhu was giving us hope. From that perspective, he is relevant even today because we are also going through a global economic crisis and a geopolitical crisis at the moment. About the economic transformation of Bangladesh, Professor Rahman referred to our GDP per capita transformation. Back in 1972 our per capita income, some say it was US\$ 99, some say it was US\$ 93, and during this three and a half years when Bangabandhu ruled, that went up to US\$ 60 some say. In another calculation we found it \$273. So, it was consistently going up and then after his demise, look at how it fell and it took nearly 13 years to really come back to the level he left and after that there was a bit of almost stagnation and the country again took up in the right direction after 1996. You can see the rise a bit then again straight line for a few years and then again from 2008 the curve started going up.

This amazing transformation has also been reflected in GDP per capita - almost quadrupled. In the last 13 years, the GDP of industrial sectors rose from 22% to 37%. Cereals production increased from 34,000 tons to 43,000 tons. In fact, the budget during these 13 years increased by seven times and the growth rate is 6% to 7% over the last 13 years. Similarly, the human development index has also been stunning. The expected life span increased from 65 to 73 years during this period. Child mortality also declined. It is only 21 per 1,000 annually. Maternal mortality has also come down to about 132.

Another achievement has been women empowerment. The primary teachers, especially the female teachers in the primary education literally doubled around this period and in other areas also women engagement has been fascinating. According to Emilia Fernandez (wrote an article in the July 23rd edition of Policy Watcher), Bangladesh has now become a case study of economic development in the world which few economists would have predicted. When Bangladesh overtook Pakistan in GDP growth in 2006 many dismissed it as a flick, but since then Bangladesh has surpassed Pakistan every year. Kaushik Basu in his Project Syndicate has talked about this and also tried to explain why this has happened.

For Bangladesh the sources of this inspirational growth are many. Number one is manufacturing. Whether a country is developing or not, is explained through how fast are we moving into manufacturing and Bangladesh's manufacturing – mostly led by RMG but other export-led industries are also growing - has been stunning. The

remittance has been helping Bangladesh's foreign exchange stability. Agriculture has been, as I would say, our most important pillar of success, creating scope for agro exports as well. Financing has become inclusive especially throughs – the use of digital technology to raise the bottom of the social pyramid. Now even a beggar does banking. Even the rickshaw pullers do banking every day a couple of times through their mobile financial services. Agent banking and digital technology has really pervaded. Everybody carries a bank like the Indians, in their pockets. Things have really transformed here. About Bkash and other digital financial services, there has been phenomenal growth here.

Professor Rahman then brought up the issue of women empowerment. He said that female labour force participation is one area where Bangladesh excels in and better than all of its neighbours including India. Formal labour force participation here has increased from 30 percent to 38 percent between 2009 and 2022, and latest figures say its above 40 percent. For India, it is, he said, probably still in the 20s and in Pakistan, it is even worse. This is one area he identified as one of the reasons why Bangladesh has been doing so well, particularly on the export front. The kind of growth the world is watching in Bangladesh's ready-made garments sector i.e., pioneering inclusive and sustainable development, has been a showcase for the rest of the world. In this regard, he referred to many other countries including African ones where Bangladesh's MFI – the microfinance initiatives are being replicated. Prime Minister of Bangladesh, in Paris Peace Forum, in November 2021, also acknowledged the achievements in agriculture, community healthcare, non-formal education, reproductive health, disaster management, and microfinance that have reached out in other parts of the world.

Professor Rahman then said that one of the milestones for Bangladesh's success has been reflected in the acceptance by the UN General Assembly on Bangladesh's graduation from LDC to developing countries. Of course, there are challenges of graduation but the recognition of Bangladesh as a developing country with all the three criteria together i.e., GNI per capita, human asset index, and economic vulnerability index is worth noting. Bangladesh surpassed many other countries and became officially recognised as a developing country which will be on books from 2026. This indicates that Bangladesh has been performing far better than many other LDCs and it's leading those countries now. Bangladesh's such magnificent progress, Professor Rahman explained by a quote of Stephen Durkheim [Hawking?] who said that "progress is not at all the result of a grand design". What happened in Bangladesh, for him, has happened because of not doing the wrong thing. This is very important, and it seems to have worked in Bangladesh and it serves as an example to others.

Bangladesh maintained a kind of political stability over the last decade or so despite all its fallouts which helped us grow like this. For a sustained growth, this stability matters, peace matters, and Bangladesh has been very focused on maintaining social and political stability, and that helped Bangladesh grow.

Bangladesh will face challenges on graduation like losing preferential market access to the West when it becomes a 'developing country'. The RMG sector of Bangladesh is likely to be the most affected. The country will have to be more stringent in implementing intellectual property rights which in turn would affect pharmaceutical and software industries. But again, this will take time and Professor Rahman said to the audience that there is nothing to be worried about at this stage. Not until 2033 the pharmaceuticals will be affected and by then Bangladesh probably will prepare itself for that transition. There may be lesser international support measures as well as higher interest rates on loans from international development partners, but even then, loans Bangladesh gets from the international partners are still long term, low cost, and with larger grace periods. Thus, Bangladesh will continue to get that support. In fact, the kind of program that Bangladesh has gone with the IMF and followed by other developing countries, he thinks, is where it has an opportunity, and he suggested that it should continue to exploit such opportunities as it is doing now.

Then Professor Rahman talked about Economic diplomacy. Economic diplomacy for suitable international support measures must go on, he said. Prior to acknowledging the particular challenges that LDC graduation presents, Bangladesh recognises that certain measures in the WTO can play in facilitating smooth and sustainable transition for these members after graduation and Bangladesh is engaging on that. He said that Bangladesh must continue to lead other graduating countries in bargaining at the international forum for suitable international support measures for smooth and sustainable graduation. He thinks Bangladesh is getting the support from the international community, because Bangladesh is moving along with the group who will be graduating in 2026. Bangladesh must capitalise this grand identity, collaborate with the LDCs, and lead a coalition of soon-to-graduate LDCs. In addition, as a future developing country, Bangladesh must cut deals with not only Europe but also with other countries. He also informed the audience that Canada has declared already that it will be providing tax free, quota free facilities and he's optimistic that other countries will also come forward. Thus, he thinks Bangladesh requires smart economic diplomacy.



In addition, with diplomatic interventions, Professor Rahman has also emphasised on domestic preparedness. For him, Bangladesh must also prioritise domestic preparedness for smooth and sustainable graduation. It won't be wise to only depend on the foreign support. Bangladesh must do whatever it can do by itself as well. Bangladesh must also look beyond reliance on LDC specific international support measures because 70 percent of merchandise exports is currently enjoying preferential access. So, Bangladesh must graduate from ISM driven exports to skills and productivity-driven competitiveness.

Professor Rahman then said that a structural transformation of the external sector is necessary because low technology manufacturers determine almost the entire export structures of Bangladesh—almost 93 percent come

from low skill exports. High dependence on apparel exports i.e., more than 75 percent of the merchandise exports depend on buyer-driven value chains and are dominated by lead firms from the global North. These all are there but Bangladesh must also cut deals with new markets and destinations. With satisfaction, he has informed the audience that Bangladesh rose 35 percent higher in the new destinations. There is a new progress in India as exports to India has picked up since April. If Bangladesh can catch even one percent of the total import of India, Bangladesh will grow three billion dollars in exports. He is hopeful that the Indian consumers are keen on having the kind of goods that we produce in Bangladesh and for that matter Bangladesh should continue to engage in economic diplomacy with its neighbours, and new markets.

Though not an alternative to investment, Professor Rahman still emphasised on trade connectivity. For him, it is the big question and Bangladesh-India connectivity is growing. The multi-modal connectivity that is in place at the moment is also growing. Referring to his latest visit in Chattogram along with the High Commissioner of India, he said that Chattogram seemed to be the new economic hub for Bangladesh and India. Chattogram will have the Matarbari Deep Sea Port, an improved bay terminal, and a modernised port. If these modernisation takes place, this will help serve as a centre for connectivity with the North-eastern states. About the railways, the Akhaura-Agartala rail is coming up, Ashuganj port is coming up, and other railway connections that we have like the Padma bridge he thinks can bring a tremendous growth in trade and investment. It will be a win-win situation for Bangladesh and India. The Japanese, who are investing in Matarbari, also thinks that Bangladesh will be a gateway to not only the ASEAN countries but also to the North-eastern part of India. These, for him, are very beneficial things that are developing on the economic front on connectivity.

Professor Rahman then talked about the challenges. For him, despite all the successes that he talked about, Bangladesh has challenges. One of the challenges right at the moment Bangladesh is facing is the macro-economic stability. This was Bangladesh's strongest point but its stunning macroeconomic stability has been weakened because of the COVID-19 crisis, followed by the Ukraine war and Bangladesh is having depletion in reserves. For an exchange reserve, inflation remains high, exchange rate volatility is there. Bangladesh must take the appropriate monetary and fiscal policy, particularly around this time. It must formulate and implement contractionary monetary and fiscal policies to start stabilising the macro economy. India in this regard has done well and Bangladesh may choose to learn how India has done it. Increased foreign exchange flow to bolster export and remittances is necessary. Further revamp social protection measures because of high inflation are necessary. Bangladesh needs to do more on social protection, for social cohesion and above all maintain socio-political stability. For him, Bangladesh's extraordinary gains in economy originated from the stability that it has in society and politics. Thus, it is pertinent to maintain that stability. If Bangladesh can maintain that political and social stability, the economic growth process will continue like the last decade or so.

Professor Rahman then said that apart from stability, further policy attention to infrastructure is also a must. Infrastructure should aim to enhance multimodal connectivity. Bangladesh needs 28 days to export against 18 days in Asia. 34 days to import against 20 days in Asia. This is the kind of weakness that Bangladesh has on connectivity. Export import costs will also be reduced if proper infrastructure is available. This cost in Bangladesh is the highest. Thus, Bangladesh needs to enhance connectivity and engaging the private sector in infrastructure development will be the key. In Bangladesh, only 1.1 percent of the GDP is in the private sector. India has done better on public-private partnership on infrastructures. All the airports in India have come up on the public-private partnership. Bangladesh now has decided to go into this. The elevated express highway is on public-private partnership. That is an area where Bangladesh needs to sustainably overcome the challenges.

About the potentials of the export-led growth of Bangladesh, Professor Rahman thinks that Bangladesh is likely to sustain further, however, the export-GDP ratio is still low. Bangladesh cannot rely mostly on RMG exports, it needs diversification. Both the countries can work together particularly in the border areas for ensuring diversification.

He suggested having big hospitals in places like Agartala so that Bangladesh and India both can get benefit out of that. The entire border region can become a special economic or free economic zone where both the countries can benefit. These are some of the forward-looking thinking which are a must do in the coming days. Enabling a regulatory environment can enhance cost competitiveness and enhanced use of technology can enhance productivity. A 25 percent increase in technology users can yield three percent increase in profits per worker, and their export and market diversification initiatives need to be coupled with effective economic diplomacy for better trade deals and increased FDI.

In Bangladesh, Professor Rahman said that economic interests are mostly focused while strategic interests are often not much. If there is a risk of intrusion into Bangladesh's security areas, Bangladesh should be careful. About Bangladesh's economic engagement with China, he said that Bangladesh's interest is only to enhance economic development. India does US\$ 100 billion plus trade with China. Thus, he finds nothing wrong in doing trade and investment with China. But, he said, if it really clouds our security space, probably Bangladesh needs to be a bit more careful.

Professor Rahman then said that the future will be all about digitisation and e-commerce. Thus, Bangladesh needs to focus on that. SME-related innovations will be the key to macroeconomic success. Bangladesh's agriculture, micro and small enterprises have really given strength, and focus on these sectors must continue. The role of the private sector will be pivotal in obtaining inclusive growth. The government really believes in private sector-led growth infrastructures that they facilitate, but essentially that is a private sector-led growth process, and India also does it the same way. So together probably a complementary growth process can be availed.

Linking higher education with industry, Professor Rahman said that it is important. One of the weakest points in Bangladesh in this regard is that the education quality of Bangladesh is not up to the mark. He thinks, Bangladesh can get the complementary support from India where education quality and skills are better. He thus wished that Bangladesh and India can cooperate on that front. The modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture must continue where both the countries are having some success. Smart urbanisation for sustainable progress is also needed. Rajshahi, he said, is one of the greener cities of Bangladesh and the rest of the country can follow that model to have a more sustainable urbanisation.

About trade hubs, Professor Rahman said that regional trade hubs must be utilised because Bangladesh is a very potential air hub, and can be a hub for the regional waterways. Already the Ganga Bilash and other cruises are coming up in this region so we should really continue that.

About fiscal policy reforms, he said that Bangladesh's tax GDP ratio is one of the lowest in South Asia and also in the world. He thinks it is a must to focus more on domestic resource mobilisations. If domestic resource mobilisation can be raised from 9% to 15%, probably Bangladesh's dependence on foreign aid would be much lower.

He thinks Bangladesh should look forward to that kind of modernisation and policies. He ended his discussion with another quote from the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in which she said, "with the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and the golden jubilee of independence as the backdrop we must work to take the country to new heights, and for that matter, we need social stability, political stability and the economic growth journey that we have undertaken." Professor Rahman said that he is sure that if Bangladesh can really remain calm during the next few months, Bangladesh will go to new heights, and Bangladesh will continue to be a surprise for many other countries.

Presentation Three

FDMNs, Increasing Security Challenges and the Essentiality of Repatriation: Need for Regional Response



Brigadier General (Rtd) M Sakhawat Hussain, ndc, psc

Senior Fellow, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University (NSU) and Former Election Commissioner of Bangladesh

Brigadier General (Rtd) M Sakhawat Hussain, ndc, psc mentioned that Bangladesh is facing the greatest challenge which is the Rohingya refugee crisis. They are also known as the forcefully displaced Myanmar nationals. He talked about the growing issue that Bangladesh is facing, which he noted as a potential threat, which is not an internal threat but it's becoming a complicated external threat for the region. This is not the first time that Bangladesh has first rowing a crisis, but this is the largest and longest Rohingya crisis that the country has faced. The first one started in 1978, then came in 1991. Finally, in 2017, the largest influx occurred. Bangladesh took in 1.1 million Rohingyas which is bigger than many European countries population.

Bangladesh has a very small space in terms of land and are facing problems as for six years Bangladesh could not repatriate a single Rohingya person. The Rohingyas are the permanent people within the framework of Myanmar and particularly the Rakhine, which was known to be Arakan. Arakan was important in the Second World War in

reconquering Myanmar, and Burma at that time and the people who played role at that time is the British or the British Indian army. So, there they have been for centuries. The Rohingyas have always been participated in the political process, even in the national election in Myanmar, they have been Members of Parliament. Even though there were Ministers from this community right at the beginning of Myanmar's independence. He pointed out how important the Rakhine State is then and it is today. It has been important throughout the British rule in India. The port of Sittwe, which is to be known as Akyab, was developed during that period by the Indians under the British Raj. There are three portion of Arakan which needs to be understood. One is the north; one is the centre and one is the South. The significance of the north is there most of the Rohingyas have been staying and they have been evicted mostly from the north, that is north of Kaladan river and in the South of Kaladan River Rohingya population is not as much as it was in the north. On 25th August 2017, most of the Rohingyas had already crossed over and Rohingyas came down to the Southeast of Bangladesh around 7,23,000 and previous left over who were still to be repatriated were about 3,00,000.

He pointed out that the Kutupalong camp is the largest refugee camp today in the world. Then he showed the government's effort to put them in a better camp made in the Bhasan Char, which is supposed to have 100,000 people going there, but only under 30,000 people have already been shifted. But that's not enough because Bangladesh is housing refugees in a small place and they're growing, and they are growing every year because there are newborns coming up. So, it is a tremendous human problem. It is not only a problem of Bangladesh, but it is also a problem of the region as well as the world. Geopolitical importance for Myanmar is known to all. The most important part is all along the Bay of Bengal which is near the Rakhine State that is why it is becoming so important and how the Rohingyas are getting implicated in that he discussed. Now the great powers rivalry is brewing and take note that India is very much investing in the northern Rakhine state where they opened the Kaladan project and EEZ already. So many multi-modal projects are going all through the northern Rakhine. And almost through the places where the Rohingyas have been living or they were staying, now comes down to the Super Highway. In maybe six years from now onward, he said, will be landing up in Thailand in Mao from Tamu, Myanmar. So, the highway coming from North to South, not through Rakhine State, but across the Irawati River. Under BRI, China already invested US\$ 7.5 billion in deep sea ports, gas fields and oil terminals mostly in Southern Rakhaine. Then comes the gas and oil pipeline, which is going to Kunming and delivery has already started or the trial has already started. The oil coming from the Middle East and Northern Africa is going through this pipeline. Similarly, the USA enters the scene. The USA does not have very much investment, but the most complicated issue that has come is the Burma Act. which he mentioned is definitely going to be a potential geopolitical and geostrategic issue in the Indo-Pacific. So, there are many major powers involved in Myanmar, particularly in the Rakhine State. The CMEC that is starting from Kunming, and you know CPAC is the on the West. This is how it overlaps between the QUAD and the BRI. India's Look East policy which is beneficial to all the regional countries if they can avail, for example, it will be very beneficial for Bangladesh too. But the problem that remains and is growing is the Rohingya issue.

Then he mentioned that the Burma Act was announced on 21 April 2021 which is an important document but the main issue that comes up as a concern for Bangladesh is the security aspect of the ethnic armed organization and People's Defence Force which is supposed to be supported without lethal weapons. He pointed out that as far as the US is concerned, it always starts with non-lethal and then it comes down to lethality. He highlighted that under the Burma Act, three or four of the insurgents are being supported mainly. They are Karen, Kachin, Kayan and Chin insurgents or 3K and 1C. But interestingly, the US already announced very recently their affiliation with NUG and PDF. That means they are now totally being led by the Burma Act, and there could be some other activities inside. So, NUG and the National Unity Consultative Council, have already established offices in Washington, DC. Brig Sakhawat mentioned that the Rohingya issue is now slowly getting complicated due to the Burma Act.

He reminded the audience that the Burma Act depends on how Bangladesh and Thailand react to the Act, whether it is cooperative or non-cooperative and the act cannot be implemented without these two countries. Then he

pointed out the internal and external regional security issues. Human trafficking is the first item that has probably been very unrated and it is reported that this trafficking takes place through North East India and goes into perhaps the other regional country or into the other part of India. Most of the women are being trafficked out of this camp and through the ocean, through the Bay of Bengal and also on land. With the increasing drug smuggling expanding the market, the bigger market for this drug is not in Bangladesh rather it is in India. Mumbai for example, is one of the biggest markets for drugs. Arm smuggling needs no elaboration, and it is almost established that this is the route through which arms have been smuggled through Bangladesh, and outside Bangladesh. The internal problems that we are facing now, increasing demographic changes in that particular region. Already the Rohingyas are more than the local population which is creating some sort of rift between the locals and the Rohingyas because of their job market shifting dynamics.

Then he talked about an internal issue which is the internal conflict between ARSA and RSO. There are two groups of Rohingyas who are fighting each other inside the camp and outside the camp, which could be very explosive. Extremism in Chittagong hill tracts and issues like KNF which has just come up in two years' time in the hilltops in Bangladesh with their connections with the Islamic terrorists that have been discovered has become a critical problem. It is not confirmed whether there is a connection with the Rohingyas though. Then the question of the Arakan Army comes up in his presentation. The Arakan Army has been a negative force in the Kaladan project. They have been kidnapping, a lot of engineers and workers and probably they were released for ransom but they remain a very important and strong force, who will be part of any kind of deliberation if Rohingyas have to be repatriated.

Brig Sakhawat mentioned the challenges for Bangladesh. First of all, the repatriation of the Rohingya issue remains the biggest challenge for Bangladesh and repatriation must happen as there is no other alternative to repatriation. Only open and sustainable repatriation is required. Maintaining a balanced policy between contesting powers in the region will be a challenge. He suggested that Bangladesh needs to be more robust to Myanmar Policy. He tried to highlight the dysfunctional international approach including the UN and the absence of any regional approach for meaningful repetition which Bangladesh lacks in the process. About the repatriation, three attempts have been made supported by China, but it didn't materialize. There was no regional approach he mentioned, but unfortunately, there is no talk from India or no pressure on Myanmar about the issue. Then Brig Sakhawat suggested that there are self-administered eight regions. If Myanmar takes back these Rohingyas, sustainable repatriation can be placed in such conditions or regions. In conclusion, he said that repatriation is the only way forward and bilateral efforts did not succeed. Bangladesh is now trying a trilateral approach where China is trying to mediate in between, but the absence of Indian effort is a concern for us. He believes a regional approach should be taken up for sustainable repatriation.

Open Discussion



Commodore Chander Pal Sanga,
Indian Navy

*Member, National Defence College, India,
Delegation*

Commodore Sanga shared his perspective regarding Mr Ashique Rahman's recommendation to shift from coordinated border patrolling to joint patrolling. Brigadier Sanga felt that at this stage of bilateral relationship, the two countries need to graduate in the maritime domain as well. Both countries are conducting maritime exercises but it is still in the coordinated patrol setup. He emphasised that as delimitation has been concluded, this is a good opportunity to shift to joint patrolling in the near future.

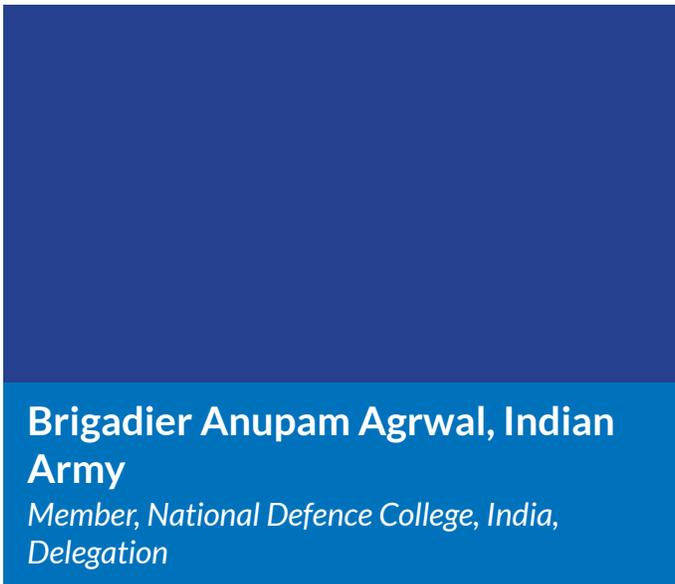


Brigadier Nalini Ranjan Panday,
VSM, Indian Army

*Member, National Defence College, India,
Delegation*

Brigadier NR Pandey stated that if one is looking for stability in South Asia, China cannot be ignored. He shared a few conflicting thoughts that had arisen in his mind and requested the presenter Mr Ashique Rahman's views regarding those. Brigadier Pandey observed that Bangladesh has been able to leverage Chinese aid at favourable terms many times. He enquired whether Bangladesh would be able to manage this economic aid

while not allowing any strategic inroads through the BRI project? He explained the context of this question by stating that, Bangladesh at one time gave the statement that Beijing is a very intricate development partner which will augment Bangladesh's capability to achieve Vision 2041. But at another instance, the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry gave a statement that the Chinese investments have raised a concern even with the government, or that the developing countries ought to be wary of Chinese investments under BRI to avoid debt trap. Moreover, 90 percent of Bangladesh's current and upcoming energy projects are financed by the Chinese. In addition, the Shenzhen and the Shanghai Stock Exchanges have bought 25 percent of stakes in Dhaka Stock Exchange. Furthermore, three of the major gas fields have been bought by Chinese state-owned companies which supply more than 50 per cent of gas for consumption of the Bangladesh population. So, there are strategic inroads which are evident, but the intent is there that Bangladesh do not want to allow them. He inquired how this gap would be bridged and how this paradox or antithesis that is developing will be balanced?



Brigadier Anupam Agrwal wanted to know how Bangladesh and India can partner beyond the South Asian region in the larger international forums like Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) or the Indian Ocean Symposium towards addressing larger global concerns?



Brigadier Suneja said that one of the foremost economic and intellectual exports from Bangladesh to India was the Grameen bank by Dr Md Yonus and this predates the economic boom that took place here. He thus wanted to understand from the panel what is the relevance of microfinance in the present day?



Commodore Bhagwat asked a question in respect to South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) which basically was signed in 2006 and till date it is not fully operational. He then asked what are the major challenges in that apart from issues like exclusion of certain items. He also wanted to know what are the other challenges that Professor Rahman sees?

Responses from the Speakers



M Ashique Rahman
Senior Research Fellow, BISS

In response to Brigadier Sanga's comment on border patrolling, Mr Rahman stated that he fully agrees to it. He said that there were some discussions regarding setting up radar surveillance systems in the maritime domain by both countries to cooperate in sharing information collected through that mechanism. Since both countries are considered to be trusted partners and are having the best of their relationship in this golden period, these sort of issues can be discussed.

Regarding the comment on Bangladesh's cooperation and collaboration with China and getting aid grants from that country, Mr Rahman shared that as Bangladesh is a developing country it wants to harness all potentials. Bangladesh wants to benefit from the support that it can get from all countries. The basic dictum of Bangladesh's foreign policy dictates to have friendship to all and malice to none. Bangladesh wants to cooperate with all countries but that is based on its own national interests. It does not want to sacrifice any security interests. So, as long as it is serving Bangladesh's purpose of development it is acceptable. But if it is any kind of military effort or military initiative from other countries, Bangladesh avoids such participation.

In response to Brigadier Anupam Agarwal question regarding cooperation on international fora, Mr Rahman noted that Bangladesh and India are already cooperating in such platforms. Both countries are participating in all the

conferences and hosting it as well. Bangladesh hosted the IORA conference in Dhaka very recently. So, cooperation is ongoing in all areas that are of mutual concerns. Since both Bangladesh and India have the same beliefs when it comes to international system and international norms and values like non-interference, no dominance by any other countries, respect for sovereignty etc., these provide the framework for the two countries to cooperate. Both countries now need to decide on the measures, initiative, tools and methods to move forward with further enhanced cooperation.



Professor Dr Atiur Rahman

Honorary Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

Professor Dr Atiur Rahman, Honorary Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, in response to the question of Brigadier Suneja said that, in Bangladesh, around thirty three million borrowers, mostly women, continued to borrow from the Microfinance Institutions (MFIs). There are seven hundred plus MFIs operating and regulated by microfinance regulatory authority (MRA) where the governor of the central bank happens to be the chairman. So, of course, Grameen bank has got a public entity that is regulated by the central bank but it is practically the board which actually runs the organisation. So, apparently on the microfinance front, that is not much of a crisis.

In response to the question of Colonel Bhagwat, Professor Dr Atiur Rahman said that SAARC couldn't take off because of a lack of alignment between the members, Pakistan in particular. SAFTA, probably because of being a subsidiary of SAARC, is still limping but a new kind of sub regional cooperation is thriving and emerging and particularly the Bangladesh-India economic relations is now very all-time high. There are still some opportunities to make this relationship even better. He brought one example that there is a suggestion from Bangladesh that if Bangladesh and India could come to an agreement on a quota on some essential items like rice and spices up to a certain level that can be continued regardless of what happens internally or externally in India. He thinks these kinds of economic trade relationships would give confidence in the economic relations between the two countries. The Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) that was signed could not really go far because of the legislative problems in Bhutan. So even without Bhutan, countries should move ahead on this MVA front. Bangladesh and India probably are going in those directions. At the moment, the waterways connectivity is also improving as lots of ports are coming up. He thus thinks, despite the weaknesses in SAFTA, Bangladesh India economic relations is really going very well in alignment with the political relation that is also all time high.

Remarks by Head of the Delegation



Brigadier Anil Kumar Pundir, Sena Medal

Secretary, National Defence College (NDC), India

Brigadier Anil Kumar Pundir, Sena Medal, Secretary, National Defence College (NDC), India, at the very outset thanked the Chairman, and Director General of BISS for organising this seminar. He apologised for their time limitations but assured that even within the short span of time, they have gained a lot from what the speakers have delivered. He then informed the audience that the team of officers he is leading here is already researching Bangladesh as a country and the entire region as such. In this entire group, there are three sub groups, one is already researching Bangladesh-India relations, another one is talking about and researching on the SAARC, and the third one is studying the Indian Ocean region. So, all three sub groups have been greatly benefitted from the speakers here. He said most of the topics discussed were relevant and matching with the sub-groups. He said that these three subgroups have heard from the Bangladesh ambassador in New Delhi, the perspective of the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, from the Indian Ambassador in Dhaka, from the three-service headquarters, and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh. But after having heard from an independent think tank i.e., BISS, Brigadier Pandey thinks the group cannot be benefitted better than what it is.



He said most of the concerned issues were adequately discussed. He thus thanked all the esteemed panellists, the Chair, and the Director General for taking out time and planning the session for them. Before concluding, he mentioned that the group paid homage to the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This group also paid homage and respect to the people who were present at that seminar. Finally, he thanked BISS for the session.

Remarks by the Session Chair



Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker
Chairman, BISS

Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker, Chairman, BISS, at the very outset thanked all the guests, distinguished speakers, and members of the delegations for their gracious presence. He then said that the world these days has been going through profound and rapid transformations. Matters that were normal or traditional yesterday, change overnight. What was not thought of or considered obsolete, suddenly assumes glaring magnitude now. For example, nobody thought of a pandemic, like the COVID-19, could wreak so much havoc worldwide regardless of countries being big or small, rich or poor. While it is still to fully recede, the Russo-Ukrainian war broke out creating a number of security challenges, conventional and non-conventional alike. Irregular immigration, growth and spread of intolerance, populism, renewed arms race, climate change threats, and other emerging challenges - are driving policymakers, policy managers, and people to rethink the very notion of security itself and their priorities.

Ambassador Sarker mentioned that being a littoral country of the Bay of Bengal, the strategic importance of the country is also valued by all stakeholders. In the backdrop of great powers' tussle and geopolitical competition, Bangladesh declared its Indo-Pacific Outlook which identifies the vision and priorities of Bangladesh in the region. Bangladesh, as a developing nation with resource constraints and a responsible member of the global community, has, in its course, been grappling with its fair share of emerging security challenges. Its geographic location, prospects, and vulnerabilities offer both opportunities and challenges in national, regional and international

contexts. On one hand, the country avails itself of forging and exploring greater economic partnerships and making its efforts for sub-regional, regional and international economic integration. On the other hand, strategic divisions and exclusionary proclivity and market fragmentation are looming showing disheartening horizons which could ultimately be self-defeating and destabilising to peace and stability that is everybody's goal. There are also threats of growing competition throughout the Indian Ocean region, climate change, pollution, and many more.

Ambassador Sarker added, despite Myanmar's non-cooperation and oftentimes provocative acts, Bangladesh continues to pursue diplomacy to resolve the Rohingya crisis peacefully. The Rohingya presence and lack of progress in repatriation remains an ever-increasing concern for Bangladesh.

Ambassador Sarker then talked about the past of Bangladesh. He said, after emergence as a war-ravaged country, Bangladesh faced widespread economic hardships, poverty and underdevelopment. Naturally, under the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's visionary guidance, growth and development got a central place in Bangladesh's domestic and foreign policy. But his brutal assassination and various disruptions delayed the process of attaining basic needs security. Fortunately, over the last decade and half, growth-driven policies of the government of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, resulted in a rising and well-performing economy of 7% annual growth with increase in per capita GDP three and half folds. Progress has been noteworthy in social indices too. The vital foreign policy document has followed the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's famous dictum 'Friendship to all malice to none.' This principle guides Bangladesh in a real political world. This is also evident in its sincere pursuit of enhancing regional and global cooperation within various economic frameworks including the BBIN, BIMSTEC, IORA, Climate Vulnerable Forum and more. Bangladesh is in the efforts of building bridges and connectivity for shared growth and prosperity. In recent times, it has been assessing the potential of joining the BRICS group, with a view to expanding economic growth and development.

Ambassador Sarker commented that traditional and nontraditional dimensions of security are closely interlinked in today's world, and cannot be seen separately from each other. Same for Bangladesh. The country's remarkable economic progress has somewhat been affected and slowed down by the pandemic and then Ukraine war. He



argued, weaponisation of Sanctions against some countries including Russia and supply chain disruptions are jeopardising Bangladesh's search for new markets in East Europe and Central Asia. The ready-made garments industry, the main export earner for Bangladesh is undergoing tough times due to global economic slow-down. That is a stark reminder of Bangladesh's need for diversifying production and economy at home and abroad in the form of import substitution and export expansion.

He added, growing racism, xenophobia, populism, and protectionism, a demonstration of which has been the mounting popular resentment against refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants, including workers. Several labour markets have now tightened their rules resulting in recruitment slow down which is affecting Bangladesh's workers outflow and remittance income. AI and the upcoming Fourth Industrial Revolution along with other disruptive innovations with attendant consequences will have their toll when those are increasingly applied, and job cuts happen. Some people and groups are already calling for de-globalisation. Other uncertainties and challenges stemming from geopolitical and geo-economic transformation with emerging and magnifying global challenges are often undertaking our capacity and pace for coping with those. He said that this nation's strength lies in its resilience and spirit of struggle against all odds and adversities – natural or man-made. Bangladesh has policies to encourage diversity; has a goal to achieve double digit growth based on Asia's highest growth rate till maintained. Bangladesh is trying to develop new sectors with greater performance to withstand shocks and it has undertaken mega projects for higher growth. Bangladesh has a keen gaze on its part of the Bay of Bengal - our quest for blue economic development and prosperity from there.

Ambassador Sarker expressed with optimism that people of Bangladesh have confidence in its dynamic and entrepreneurial private sector who are not afraid of taking risks here and everywhere. This nation's interfaith harmony, uniformity of language and culture, egalitarian society, demographic dividend of a large young people, and its inclusive development policy not to leave anybody behind, and above all, Bangladesh's peoples' millennia of philosophical quest for a culture of peace and inspiration and non-violence are giving us strength and inspiration to reach new heights. Bangladesh aspires to stand, rise, run, and fly together with all its friends and neighbours like India through greater economic integration for a securer, and more collaborative, stable, prosperous and peaceful future.

He then concluded his deliberation by thanking everyone present for their patient hearing. He particularly thanked the distinguished speakers for their excellent discussions, and the visiting delegation from NDC, India to come in a friendly gesture.

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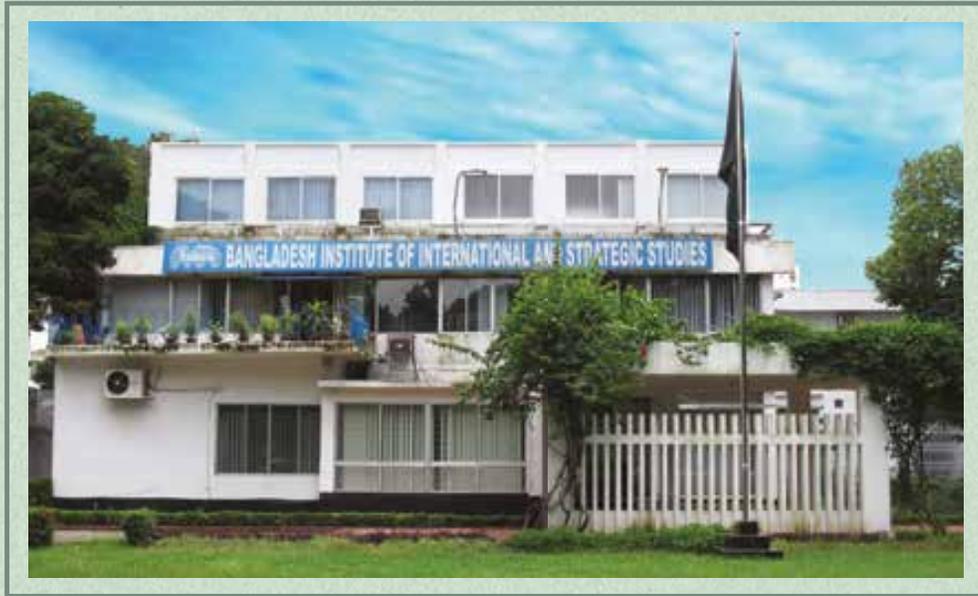
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Mailing Address

1/46, Old Elephant Road (West of Ramna Police Station), Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.
Fax: 88-02-48312625, info@biiss.org, website: www.biiss.org