

The Business Standard

22 December 2024

Bay of Bengal must be a region of collaboration, says foreign affairs adviser

Touhid made the remarks while addressing the inaugural session of an international seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" in the capital



Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain at an international seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" in the capital today (22 December).
Photo: TBS

Aligning diverse interests to transform the Bay of Bengal into a region of collaboration and sustainable development is a must, rather than conflict and competition, said Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain today (22 December).

"The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability. While this reflects its increasing significance, it also raises the stakes for cooperation and competition," he said.

Touhid made the remarks while addressing the inaugural session of an international seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" in the capital.

The seminar, jointly organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), was sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh.

The event was attended by Japan's Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori among other dignitaries.



[Mutual trust between Bangladesh and India essential for regional connectivity: Japanese ambassador](#)

Highlighting the historical importance of the Bay of Bengal, Touhid said, "The Bay of Bengal—historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture—continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy.

"With its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration, the Bay has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity."

Calling for a united approach to unlock the region's potential, he added, "By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations."

The foreign affairs adviser also emphasised Bangladesh's strategic role in regional connectivity and global trade.

"With its strategic location and growing industrial base, Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain. In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities," he said.

Source: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bay-bengal-must-be-region-collaboration-says-foreign-affairs-adviser-1024381>

Dhaka Tribune

22 December 2024

Foreign adviser: Bangladesh must address pressing challenges, seize opportunities

Myanmar border situation complicated further as Arakan Army takes control, he says

Stressing that peace and harmony among littoral states are crucial to unlocking the Bay of Bengal's potential, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain emphasized on Sunday that Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," Adviser Touhid said while speaking at a seminar in the capital.

He emphasized their collective task to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention; and a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," Adviser Touhid said while speaking at a seminar.

Supported by the Embassy of Japan, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), in collaboration with the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO) hosted the international seminar on "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" at the BISS auditorium.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori delivered a speech at the seminar, with the first working session chaired by Tarik A Karim, chairperson of the Bay of Bengal Institute, Cosmos Foundation.

Other speakers included Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker, chairman of BISS and Major General Iftekhar Anis, director General of BISS.

With its strategic location and growing industrial base, the Adviser said: "Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain. In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities."

As Bangladesh approaches its graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category in 2026, Touhid said that it stands at a critical juncture, facing both significant opportunities and complex challenges.

The impending loss of preferential trade benefits and concessional financing necessitates a shift towards more competitive and innovative economic strategies.

"To address these challenges effectively, Bangladesh must prioritize diversifying its trade portfolio, elevating the quality and value of its exports, and investing in advanced technologies to drive productivity and economic growth," Touhid said.

"Partnerships with regional and extra-regional stakeholders, particularly Japan, can provide the technological and financial support needed for Bangladesh to overcome these hardships," he added.

Japan's expertise in areas such as renewable energy, digital trade and maritime logistics can play a transformative role in this context, said the Adviser, adding that the Bay of Bengal is not only an economic resource but also an ecological treasure.

Therefore, he said, preserving its marine biodiversity and addressing some pressing challenges such as climate change, illegal fishing and maritime security are essential for the long-term prosperity in this region.

"We are aware of the civil war situation currently prevailing in Myanmar, and the 1.2 million Rohingyas who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities and are sheltered in Bangladesh for the last 7 plus years," Touhid highlighted.

He further added that there has been no progress in their repatriation and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army taking control of the entire border with Bangladesh.

Touhid Hossain is just back from an informal consultation in Bangkok at the invitation of the Thai Foreign Minister, where the Foreign Ministers of Myanmar and Laos, Deputy Foreign Minister of China and the Indian Foreign Secretary were present.

"I told them in no uncertain terms that peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Myanmar can go back to their homes with security and rights," he said.

"It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return," he said.

The Bay of Bengal—historically a nexus of connection, commerce and culture—continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy.

With its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration, the Bay has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity, said Adviser Touhid.

"The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability. While this reflects its increasing significance, it also raises the stakes for cooperation and competition," he claimed.

He also said that the transition from labour-intensive to technology-driven industries and enhanced regional and global supply chain integration is critical in this respect.

"Initiatives like the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain," championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology and labour," he said.

Japan has been a steadfast partner in Bangladesh's journey for more than five decades.

Through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) and investments in key sectors such as infrastructure, energy and education, Japan has demonstrated its transformative potential of cooperation, Hossain said.

"These initiatives not only strengthen Bangladesh's economic resilience but also pave the way for a more interconnected and prosperous Bay of Bengal region," Adviser Touhid said.

Touhid said that the seminar will play a crucial role in deepening our understanding of the shared perspectives of Japan and Bangladesh regarding the convergence of interests in the Bay of Bengal region.

He thanked the Japanese Ambassador for spending his last day with this important seminar, saying "We are very grateful to you, Ambassador."

The Ambassador is scheduled to leave Dhaka for Tokyo by a Biman Bangladesh flight on Sunday.

Source: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/368805/foreign-adviser-bangladesh-must-address-pressing>

New Age

23 December 2024

Peace in Myanmar crucial for unlocking Bay of Bengal's potential: Touhid



Foreign adviser Md Touhid Hossain addresses an international seminar titled Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interest, at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in the capital. on Sunday. | BSS photo

Foreign adviser Md Touhid Hossain on Sunday said that peace in Myanmar is crucial to unlocking Bay of Bengal's potential, while sustainable Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine state is essential for harmony in the neighboring country amid its ongoing civil war.

'Peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Myanmar can go back to their homes with security and rights,' he said.

The foreign adviser was speaking as the chief guest at an international seminar titled 'Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interest, at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in the capital.

He said the peace and harmony in the littoral states including Myanmar is essential to realise the potentials of the Bay of Bengal.

Noting that the civil war situation is currently prevailing in Myanmar, he said, in last seven years 1.2 million Rohingyas, who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities, are sheltered in Bangladesh.

'There has been no progress in their repatriation and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army taking control the entire border with Bangladesh,' he said.

Referring to his recent attendance at the informal consultation in Bangkok on Myanmar situation at the invitation of the Thai foreign minister, Touhid said he warned them that without secured and dignified return of Rohingyas to Rakhine, peace and order would not be established there.

The foreign ministers of Myanmar and Laos, deputy foreign minister of China and Indian foreign secretary also attended that crucial meeting on Thursday last.

‘It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return,’ said the foreign adviser.

BIISS and Institute of Developing Economies, Sponsored by the embassy of Japan in Bangladesh jointly organised the seminar.

Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori spoke as the special guest while BIISS chairman ambassador Gousal Azam Sarkar chaired the inaugural session and director general Major General Iftekhar Anis gave the welcome speech.

Turning to Bay of Bengal, Touhid said, ‘Hence, our collective task is to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention’.

He said that the Bay of Bengal has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity with its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration.

The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability, he added.

Noting that the Bay, historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture - continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy, the adviser underlined to turn it into a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

‘By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations,’ he observed.

He said Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain with its strategic location and growing industrial base.

‘In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities,’ the adviser mentioned.

He acknowledged that initiatives like the 'Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain,' championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology, and labour.

The adviser lauded Japans overall initiatives to the Bangladesh's development saying that it is not only strengthening Bangladesh's economic resilience but also pave the way for a more interconnected and prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

Touhid emphasised that the Bay of Bengal is both an economic resource and an ecological treasure, highlighting the importance of preserving its marine biodiversity and addressing critical challenges such as climate change, illegal fishing, and maritime security for the region's long-term prosperity.

Source: <https://www.newagebd.net/post/foreign-affairs/253451/peace-in-myanmar-crucial-for-unlocking-bay-of-bengals-potential-touhid>

Bangladesh must address pressing challenges: Foreign Adviser

Stressing that peace and harmony among littoral states are crucial to unlocking the Bay of Bengal's potential, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain emphasised on Sunday that Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," Adviser Hossain said while speaking at a seminar in the capital.

He laid emphasis on their collective task to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict, a hub of connectivity rather than contention, and a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," Adviser Hossain said while speaking at a seminar.

Supported by the Embassy of Japan, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), in collaboration with the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO) hosted the international seminar on "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" at the BIISS auditorium.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori delivered a speech at the seminar, with the first working session chaired by Tarik A Karim, Chairperson of the Bay of Bengal Institute, Cosmos Foundation. Other speakers included Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker, Chairman of BIISS, and Major General Iftekhar Anis, Director General of BIISS.

With its strategic location and growing industrial base, the Adviser said Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain. In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities, he said.

As Bangladesh approaches its graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category in 2026, Adviser Hossain said, it stands at a critical juncture, facing both significant opportunities and complex challenges.

The impending loss of preferential trade benefits and concessional financing necessitates a shift towards more competitive and innovative economic strategies.

"To address these challenges effectively, Bangladesh must prioritise diversifying its trade portfolio, elevating the quality and value of its exports, and investing in advanced technologies to drive productivity and economic growth," Hossain said.

Partnerships with regional and extra-regional stakeholders, particularly Japan, can provide the technological and financial support needed for Bangladesh to overcome these hardships, he said.

Japan's expertise in areas such as renewable energy, digital trade, and maritime logistics can play a transformative role in this context, said the Adviser, adding that the Bay of Bengal is not only an economic resource but also an ecological treasure.

Therefore, he said, preserving its marine biodiversity and addressing some pressing challenges such as climate change, illegal fishing, and maritime security are essential for the long-term prosperity in this region.

"We are aware of the civil war situation currently prevailing in Myanmar, and the 1.2 million Rohingyas who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities, and are sheltered in Bangladesh for the last 7 plus years," Hossain said.

There has been no progress in their repatriation and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army taking control of the entire border with Bangladesh, he said.

The Adviser is just back from an informal consultation in Bangkok at the invitation of the Thai Foreign Minister, where the Foreign Ministers of Myanmar and Laos, Deputy Foreign Minister of China and the Indian Foreign Secretary were present.

"I told them in no uncertain terms that peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Myanmar can go back to their homes with security and rights," Hossain said.

It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return, he said.

The Bay of Bengal-historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture-continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy.

With its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration, the Bay has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity, said Adviser Hossain.

"The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability," he said.

While this reflects its increasing significance, it also raises the stakes for cooperation and competition, Hossain said.

The transition from labour-intensive to technology-driven industries and enhanced regional and global supply chain integration is critical in this respect, Hossain said.

Initiatives like the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain," championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology, and labour, he said.

Japan has been a steadfast partner in Bangladesh's journey for more than five decades.

Through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) and investments in key sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and education, Japan has demonstrated its transformative potential of cooperation, Hossain said.

"These initiatives not only strengthen Bangladesh's economic resilience but also pave the way for a more interconnected and prosperous Bay of Bengal region," he said.

Hossain said the seminar will play a crucial role in deepening our understanding of the shared perspectives of Japan and Bangladesh regarding the convergence of interests in the Bay of Bengal region.

He thanked the Japanese Ambassador for spending his last day with this important seminar. "We are very grateful to you, Ambassador."

The Ambassador is scheduled to leave Dhaka for Tokyo by a Biman Bangladesh flight later today (Sunday).

Source: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/bangladesh-must-address-pressing-challenges-foreign-adviser>

The Daily Star

22 December 2024

Peace, Rohingya repatriation vital for Bay of Bengal's potential: Adviser Touhid

Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain today said peace in Myanmar is crucial to unlocking the Bay of Bengal's potential, while sustainable Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine state is essential for harmony in the neighboring country amid its ongoing civil war.

"Peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Bangladesh can go back to their homes with security and rights," he said.

The foreign adviser was speaking as the chief guest at an international seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) in the capital.

He said peace and harmony in the littoral states, including Myanmar, is essential to realising the potential of the Bay of Bengal.

Noting that a civil war situation is currently prevailing in Myanmar, he said that in the last seven years, 1.2 million Rohingyas, who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities, have been sheltered in Bangladesh.

"There has been no progress in their repatriation, and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army, taking control of the entire border with Bangladesh," he said.

Referring to his recent attendance at the informal consultation in Bangkok on the Myanmar situation at the invitation of the Thai foreign minister, he said that he warned them that without the secured and dignified return of Rohingyas to Rakhine, peace and order would not be established there.

The foreign ministers of Myanmar and Laos, the deputy foreign minister of China, and the Indian foreign secretary also attended that crucial meeting last Thursday.

"It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return," said the foreign adviser.

BIISS and the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, jointly organised the seminar.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori spoke as the special guest, while BIISS Chairman Ambassador Gousal Azam Sarkar chaired the inaugural session, and Director General Major General Iftekhar Anis gave the welcome speech.

Turning to the Bay of Bengal, Touhid said, "Hence, our collective task is to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention."

He said the Bay of Bengal has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity with its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration.

The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability, he added.

Noting that the Bay, historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture, continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy, the adviser underlined the need to turn it into a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," he observed.

He said Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain with its strategic location and growing industrial base.

"In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities," the adviser mentioned.

He acknowledged that initiatives like the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain", championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology, and labor.

Source: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/peace-rohingya-repatriation-vital-bay-bengals-potential-adviser-touhid-3782101>

The Daily Sun

22 December 2024

Peace, Rohingya repatriation vital for Bay of Bengal's potential: Adviser Touhid

The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, he says



Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain today said peace in Myanmar is crucial to unlocking Bay of Bengal's potential, while sustainable Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine state is essential for harmony in the neighboring country amid its ongoing civil war.

"Peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Myanmar can go back to their homes with security and rights," he said.

The foreign adviser was speaking as the chief guest at an international seminar titled 'Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interest,' at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in the capital.

He said the peace and harmony in the littoral states including Myanmar is essential to realise the potentials of the Bay of Bengal.

Noting that the civil war situation is currently prevailing in Myanmar, he said, in last seven years 1.2 million Rohingyas, who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities, are sheltered in Bangladesh.

"There has been no progress in their repatriation and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army taking control the entire border with Bangladesh," he said.

Referring to his recent attendance at the informal consultation in Bangkok on Myanmar situation at the invitation of the Thai foreign minister, Touhid said he warned them that without

secured and dignified return of Rohingyas to Rakhine, peace and order would not be established there.

The foreign ministers of Myanmar and Laos, deputy foreign minister of China and Indian foreign secretary also attended that crucial meeting on Thursday last.

"It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return," said the foreign adviser.

BISS and Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), Sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh jointly organized the seminar.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori spoke as the special guest while BISS Chairman Ambassador Gousal Azam Sarkar chaired the inaugural session and Director General Major General Iftekhar Anis gave the welcome speech.

Turning to Bay of Bengal, Touhid said, "Hence, our collective task is to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention".

He said that the Bay of Bengal has emerged as a focal point of geopolitical and economic activity with its vast natural resources, crucial shipping routes, and potential for economic integration.

The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability, he added.

Noting that the Bay, historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture - continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy, the adviser underlined to turn it into a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

"By fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations," he observed.

He said Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain with its strategic location and growing industrial base.

"In order to unlock these possibilities, Bangladesh must address pressing challenges and seize emerging opportunities," the adviser mentioned.

He acknowledged that initiatives like the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Value Chain," championed by Japan, provide a blueprint for achieving this transformation by leveraging investment, technology, and labour.

The adviser lauded Japans overall initiatives to the Bangladesh's development saying that it is not only strengthening Bangladesh's economic resilience but also pave the way for a more interconnected and prosperous Bay of Bengal region.

Touhid emphasized that the Bay of Bengal is both an economic resource and an ecological treasure, highlighting the importance of preserving its marine biodiversity and addressing critical challenges such as climate change, illegal fishing, and maritime security for the region's long-term prosperity.

Source: <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/783223>

The Daily Observer

23 December 2024

Trust between BD, India vital for regional stability: Japanese envoy

BD can become a regional transit hub, key player in global value chain: Touhid

Participants in a seminar on Sunday had called for enhanced trust, political dialogue, and cooperation to unlock the immense opportunities offered by the Bay of Bengal's strategic location and resources.

"The Bay of Bengal is now witnessing heightened attention from regional and global powers, with nations and institutions recognising its critical role as a driver of growth and stability," they said.

They also said that the Bay, historically a nexus of connection, commerce, and culture, continues to hold immense strategic importance as a maritime crossroads linking South and Southeast Asia to the global economy, now the time is to turn it into a model for sustainable and inclusive development.

Speakers made these comments at an international seminar titled "Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring the Convergence of Interests" at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) here. BIISS and the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO), sponsored by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, jointly organised the seminar.

BIISS Chairman Ambassador Gousal Azam Sarkar chaired the inaugural session, and Director General Major General Iftekhar Anis gave the welcome speech.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori Iwama, addressing the event, stressed that trust between Bangladesh and India is vital for fostering collaboration across the region.

"As a friend of Bangladesh and India, Japan believes the relationship based on mutual trust between the two countries is essential to exploring regional connectivity," he said.

He also praised recent foreign office consultations between Dhaka and Delhi, noting their relevance to achieving regional stability.

Iwama reiterated the importance of the spirit of connectivity transcending borders and politics to ensure mutual growth. "Creating the trust needed for regional stability is crucial," he said, urging Bangladesh and India to work closely.

Taking part in the discussion, Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said, "Hence, our collective task is to align diverse interests, ensuring that the Bay of Bengal becomes a region of collaboration rather than conflict; a hub of connectivity rather than contention."

He also underlined Bangladesh's strategic role in regional connectivity, stating, "With its strategic location and growing industrial base, Bangladesh is uniquely poised to become a regional transit hub and a key player in the global value chain. However, this requires addressing pressing challenges and seizing emerging opportunities."

He said by fostering strategic partnerships, embracing a unified vision, and adopting innovative approaches, we can unlock the vast potential of this region, benefiting all stakeholders and creating a legacy of prosperity for future generations.

"Peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingyas lodged in Bangladesh can go back to their homes with security and rights," he said.

Referring to his recent attendance at the informal consultation in Bangkok on the Myanmar situation at the invitation of the Thai foreign minister, he said that he warned them that without the secured and dignified return of Rohingyas to Rakhine, peace and order would not be established there.

The foreign ministers of Myanmar and Laos, the deputy foreign minister of China, and the Indian foreign secretary also attended that crucial meeting last Thursday.

"It is incumbent on Myanmar and the regional powers to create a congenial atmosphere for their return," said the foreign adviser.

Noting that a civil war situation is currently prevailing in Myanmar, he said that in the last seven years, 1.2 million Rohingyas, who were forcibly displaced from the Rakhine state under extreme atrocities, have been sheltered in Bangladesh.

"There has been no progress in their repatriation, and the situation is further complicated by a non-state actor, the Arakan Army, taking control of the entire border with Bangladesh," he said.

In a working session, economist Dr Selim Raihan identified political and economic challenges as major obstacles to regional integration among Bay of Bengal nations, including Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

"The bilateral political issues have been made a hostage to the deadlock," he said. While some progress has been made, he noted that agreements often lack implementation.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, stressed the importance of political consultation.

"If we do not have good political relations, we will not be able to do well. Political consultation is crucial," she said.

Shams Mahmud, president of the Bangladesh-Thai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, suggested drawing inspiration from ASEAN countries to strengthen ties with neighbours like India.

The seminar featured contributions from BIISS Director General Maj Gen Iftekhar Anis, Comos Foundation Bay of Bengal President Tariq A Karim, IDE-JETRO President Kimura Fukunari, Economic Integration Studies Group, Development Studies Center Director Umezaki So, Policy Exchange Bangladesh Chairman and CEO M Masrur Reaz, Toyo University Department of Regional Development Studies Professor Tsubota Kenmei, and other regional experts.

Source: <https://www.observerbd.com/news/504123>