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PROCEEDINGS

Hybrid Seminar
on

GEOPOLITICS OF INDO-PACIFIC AND RECONNECTING THE BAY OF BENGAL LITTORALS

Monday, 28 February 2022

Jointly Organized by

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HYBRID SEMINAR ON

Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific and Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Littorals

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh have jointly organized a Hybrid Seminar on “Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific and Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Littorals” on 28 February 2022 at BIISS auditorium as part of the celebration of 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh. The Seminar was divided into two sessions: Inaugural Session and a Working Session. During the Inaugural Session, **Mr Muhammad Faruk Khan, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Parliament, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. **H E Mr ITO Naoki**, Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh, graced the occasion as the Special Guest. **Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address. **Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, paa**, Chairman, BIISS presided over the session and delivered the concluding remarks.



In the working session, amongst the speakers, **Professor Imtiaz Ahmed**, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, made a presentation on “The Changing Nature of Geopolitics: Making Sense of Bangladesh’s Position”, **Professor KIKUCHI Tsutomu**, Professor of International Political Economy, Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan, made a presentation on “Beyond US-China Relations: Japan’s Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific”, **Professor Lailufar Yasmin**, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, deliberated on “The Rise of the Indo-Pacific: Bangladesh-Japan Relations”, and **Professor TAKAHARA Akio**, Professor of Graduate School of Public Policy, The University of Tokyo, Japan, presented on “FOIP and Maritime Cooperation: Japan’s Initiative”. The working session was moderated by **Professor Rashed Uz Zaman**, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

Senior officials from different ministries of government, ambassadors and high commissioners, former diplomats, senior military officials, media, academia, researchers, teachers and students from different universities, and representatives from different international organizations participated in the Seminar and presented their valuable opinions in the open discussion session.



INAUGURAL SESSION

Welcome Address



Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman,
OSP, BSP, psc
Director General, BIISS

In his address of welcome, **Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**, Director General, BIISS welcomed all to the hybrid seminar on “Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific and Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Littorals” and expressed his gratitude to the Hon’ble Chief Guest and the Special Guest for gracing the occasion. He paid his deepest tribute to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and to all martyrs who laid their lives for the nation. He also mentioned the entire nation’s simultaneous celebration of the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation and the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh’s independence. Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman expressed that the Asian region portrays a vivid tapestry of shared history in all its glory and civilization. Its geographic position and deep cultural homogeneities have made the region as one of the most emerging and vibrant regions in the world. However, being a region of deeply entrenched identity politics, intra and inter-state conflicts, great power rivalry, and geostrategic competition, Asian region continues to be one of the volatile regions in the world as well.

He mentioned that with the gradual shift of centre of gravity of global power politics and the re-rise of China, the Asian region is becoming a hub of the 21st century's economic opportunities and growing centrality to global geopolitical calculations. Particularly, the Indo-Pacific region has gained centrality as a determiner of global peace and prosperity in the near future. He argued that power politics in this region has tinted more geopolitical hotspots and engendered overlapping political and economic partnerships and risks of conflicts. China's Belt and Road Initiative has also increased the geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca as a Sea Lane of Communication. He further argued that recent great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region has led to a geopolitical conundrum in this region which has created a greater concern among the littorals of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean region.



The Director General of BIISS has also expressed that being a key hotspot of connectivity, the Bay of Bengal bears great strategic importance. The Bay has been operating as a hub of strategic communion between the South and the Southeast Asian countries for more than 2000 years. The intersection of these countries as well as their strategic interests has made the region a locus of competition between the countries of the region and beyond. He expressed that Bangladesh, being one of the key littorals of the Bay, is envisioning to be a developed country by 2041, therefore, maritime resources are considered to be a major source of development and growth for Bangladesh. He also said that after the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes with India and Myanmar, Bangladesh is focusing on maritime partnership and connectivity for its development interests. Moreover, the geographic centrality of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal is seen as the gateway to South and Southeast Asia which allows it to play a key role in regional and interregional trade and commercial activities.

Emphasising on the importance of Bangladesh-Japan relations, General Maksudur Rahman said that true friendship and mutual cooperation is at the heart of the bilateral relationship of the two countries. Japan is one of Bangladesh's largest development partners. He expressed that the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative, announced in September 2014 during Prime Minister Shinzo ABE's visit to Dhaka, ushered a new era in the Bangladesh-Japan relationship. This initiative aims to make Bangladesh a centre of regional economy through enhancing connectivity and accelerating industrial growth between Bangladesh and its neighbours particularly, Nepal, Bhutan, and India's Northeastern regions. He also mentioned that Bangladesh is partnering with BIMSTEC to enhance connectivity in the Bay of Bengal regions and beyond.

Being a peace-loving nation, the Director General added that Bangladesh has become a pioneer of global peace and a role model for growth in the South Asian region. In line with the famous dictum of its foreign policy, "Friendship to all, malice towards none", Bangladesh always welcomes partnership and promotes regional connectivity for its own development interests, regional peace, and mutual prosperity.

He further expressed that in this backdrop, BIISS and the Japan Embassy in Dhaka jointly organised this hybrid seminar to understand the geopolitical realities of the Indo-Pacific region and how Japan and Bangladesh can work together to achieve the development goals of both the countries and to work together for ensuring peace and stability in the region. He also added that it is purely an academic exercise. He thanked the Japan Embassy in Dhaka for their collaboration with BIISS for facilitating the research effort. He was delighted to mention that Bangladesh and Japan are celebrating fifty years of their relationship and he expressed hope that this friendship will reach new heights in the future.

He once again expressed his gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Guest, the Special Guest, distinguished panelists, and the learned audience for encouraging the organisers with their kind participation. He also added that he was expecting respected Japanese speakers to join the seminar in person, but due to the Covid-19 situation, they could not join. He expressed his hope that in future, both of the esteemed Japanese scholars would visit Bangladesh and BIISS.

Speech of the Special Guest



H E Mr ITO Naoki

Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh

H E Mr ITO Naoki, Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh expressed his gratitude towards the Chairman and the Director General of BIISS for inviting him as the Special Guest. He also expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Guest of the Session, the distinguished speakers and the moderator for joining the hybrid seminar. He said that it was pleasant to be present at the Hybrid Seminar co-hosted by BIISS and the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh. He felt privileged to welcome distinguished scholars from Japan and Bangladesh to the seminar.

Ambassador ITO pointed out that the dynamism created by the confluence of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean has become an engine of economic growth for the entire world. The centre of gravity of the world economy is shifting towards the Himalayas. The Bay of Bengal should seize the momentum and enjoy more economic prosperity. In this context, Bangladesh, located in the Bay of Bengal, is a vital country in geopolitical terms, as it is situated at an intersection between the South Asia and the Southeast Asia regions. Bangladesh has shown its economic resilience despite the corona pandemic.

Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by almost 7 per cent in the last fiscal year. Without a doubt, Bangladesh will be the fastest growing economy in Asia this decade, and its per capita income will reach US\$3,000 soon. According to him, Japan views the development of Bangladesh as significant not only to Bangladesh itself but also to the overall stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

Ambassador ITO highlighted that Bangladesh needs to fully utilize its geographical advantage and increase its economic opportunities. In this regard, Japan has been developing Bangladesh's first deep-sea port in Matarbari, south of Chittagong, which constitutes a key infrastructure in the “Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B)”. This initiative was agreed upon by the Honourable Prime Ministers of Japan and Bangladesh in 2014. The new port and the economic zone will become the hubs of “Logistics,” “Power & Energy,” and “Waterfront Industry” in Bangladesh and the region.

He informed the audience that once completed, mother vessels can come directly to anchor at Matarbari and will not need to reload containers at Colombo or Singapore. The deep-sea port will connect Bangladesh to South Asia as a whole and South East Asia, and even to East Asia, including Japan. That will significantly enhance the economic opportunities of Bangladesh and open up greater possibilities for regional development.

In addition to the Matarbari deep-sea port, JICA is implementing several large-scale infrastructure projects under the BIG-B initiative. For example, in December this year, Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Line 6 (Dhaka Metro) will start its commercial operation, and Bangladesh Special Economic Zone in Araihaazar of Narayanganj district will be ready for international investment. This is the first economic zone developed by Japan. After that, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport will show the new face of the nation within a few years, when the JICA's loan project completes. He noted that these quality infrastructures will be a “game-changer” to widen the domestic economic base and share the benefits of increasing cargo transportation and people's interchange. Above all, they will boost connectivity in the region, which has the strategic significance of enhancing economic opportunities in the Bay of Bengal region. He added that Matarbari is the typical example of Japan's practical cooperation to promote a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” a vision to secure the region's peace, stability, and prosperity.

Ambassador ITO elaborated on the vision of FOIP that Japan aims to pursue. A “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” will ensure a rule-based international order in order to bring peace, stability, and prosperity for every country in the region. In this regard, Bangladesh is the country that recognizes the importance of rule-based maritime order and shares its value with Japan and other like-minded countries. He drew attention to the current situation in Ukraine and explained why respecting the rule-based international order and adhering to international law are all the more important and critical nowadays.



Ambassador ITO informed that with Bangladesh, Japan promotes various practical cooperation, including anti-terrorism, disaster prevention, and maritime safety and security. Japan granted 24 rescue boats to the Bangladesh Coast Guard last December to support their operations in the high disaster risk areas. In addition, JICA started a training program on “Coast Guard Policy” for Bangladesh Coast Guard officers. Currently, two officers are participating in the training program in Japan. Moreover, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force sent two ships for a port call to Chittagong last month. They conducted a goodwill exercise with the Bangladesh Navy to deepen their cooperation.

In 2026, Bangladesh will graduate from the least developed countries (LDC) status and aims to become a developed country in 2041 by achieving “Vision 2041”. Against the background of its rapid economic growth and political stability, Dhaka played a pivotal role as a centre of regional diplomacy and connectivity under the leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and at the celebration ceremony of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh and the 100th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu last March. He hoped that Bangladesh will undoubtedly play a more prominent role in promoting regional cooperation, reconnecting the Bay of Bengal littorals, and addressing the global agenda.

Ambassador ITO said that Bangladesh's current efforts for providing shelters and humanitarian assistance to displaced “Rohingya” from Myanmar are worthy of appreciation. According to him, lasting solutions to the issues are significant not only to Bangladesh but also to the stability of the entire region. This is a crucial issue in embodying the vision of FOIP. He suggested that the 1.1 million Rohingya refugees should not be the cause of instability in the region. He opined that Bangladesh and Japan should work towards the enabling environment of their early repatriation to Myanmar, as well as the improvement of education, skills, and livelihood opportunities of refugees in the camps in Cox’s Bazar to equip them for the ultimate repatriation.

He mentioned that Japan supports the government's relocation policy of refugees to Bhasan Char island. Japan committed itself last month as the first donor to fund US\$2 million to UNHCR and WFP for their operation on Bhasan Char. Bhasan Char should be part of the long-term solution. He shared that Japan also would like to build an idea to enhance connectivity from Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh to the Rakhine State of Myanmar, envisioning the possible situation five years from now. Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) can lead the discussions to promote regional economic development and connectivity. According to the Ambassador, once realized, it will improve people's lives on both sides of the border. “Rohingya” is the largest refugee population in this region. Japan will do its utmost to work towards resolving this issue together with the Government of Bangladesh and the international community.

In conclusion, Ambassador ITO highlighted that Japan and Bangladesh are time-tested friends, and this year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh. This milestone year should be celebrated in style. Earlier this month, the Embassy of Japan hold the event together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to celebrate the 50th anniversary. Japanese Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio sent a message for the event and emphasized that Bangladesh is an important partner in realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. Prime Minister KISHIDA said that the similarity of the flags of the two countries symbolizes our special relationship. The Japanese Prime Minister also expressed his determination to work more closely with the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the people of Bangladesh to elevate the bilateral relations to new heights. Japan will continue its efforts to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity in the region through realizing a vision of FOIP in close cooperation with Bangladesh. He thanked everyone once again hoping that the seminar would serve as a compass for that effort.

Speech of the Chief Guest



Mr Muhammad Faruk Khan, MP,
Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of
Foreign Affairs

Mr Muhammad Faruk Khan, MP, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Parliament, greeted everyone and said that it is a great pleasure for him to attend the hybrid seminar on the "Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal Littorals", which is an important and timely topic. In this auspicious month of February, he paid his tribute to all the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement who sacrificed their lives to protect our right to our mother tongue. He also paid deepest homage to the champions of the language movement, the greatest Bengali of all times, Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He also extended his appreciation to Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and the Embassy of Japan in Dhaka for hosting the seminar. He expressed his belief that the exchange of ideas in the seminar will help to generate a better understanding of the current strategic scenario and future areas of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. He hoped that the discussion in the seminar will be able to shed light on how littorals of the Bay of Bengal region can play a vital role in shaping the common and shared vision of the Indo-Pacific region.

He mentioned that the concept of “Indo-Pacific” has rapidly been emerging as both a region and an idea. As a region, the Indo-Pacific, which connects the Indian and Pacific oceans, serves as the world's economic and geopolitical centre. With rapid development due to the region's vitality, economic growth and more importantly, the growing strategic importance makes the region an epicentre of tensions between major powers. As a geostrategic idea, the Indo-Pacific has gained credit in the international arena. The term “Indo-Pacific” received much currency once the Japanese former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described it in 2007 as the “confluence of two seas”. Since then, both as a region and as a strategic idea, the Indo-Pacific is gaining prominence among the great powers and small nations alike. The shift of the centre of gravity towards Asia has been substantiated by the evolving geopolitical order of this region. The rise of China and India as major powers as well as Japan's rise as an economic powerhouse has ensued the geostrategic gravitation towards Asia. The region also elevates maritime thinking in the strategic discourse. Therefore, this region is supposed to play the primary role in the geostrategic competition of the rising powers over maritime domain as well.

Mr Muhammad Faruk Khan, MP, added that being located at the centre of the Indo-Pacific region, the Bay of Bengal holds economic and strategic importance. Given the emerging geopolitical context of the indo-pacific, the littoral region – the Bay of Bengal is witnessing increasing strategic attention due to major powers' growing interests in the area from economic, maritime and energy perspective. The growing strategic interests of the major powers for best utilization of the resources that the Bay offers and the increasing strategic aspirations of the rising powers related to the Bay, are gradually turning the Bay of Bengal region into a hub of converging and conflicting interests. Against this backdrop, the Bay of Bengal littorals' relations with the major powers will be the centre of attention in the coming days.



He further added that apart from the collective role of the Bay of Bengal littorals to tackle the rising geopolitical uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific, there is a growing expectation that middle power countries like Japan can play a more active role in ensuring peace and stability in this region. Japan has multi-layered relationships with countries across the region. Also, as a forerunner of the concept of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, Japan has the credence to engage with like-minded states to uphold regional opulence. Hence, it is expected that Japan can take the lead in building a strategy that is flexible and tailored to the needs of the region through a series of multilateral dialogues.

He noted that as one of the littorals of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh believes in peaceful coexistence. After successfully resolving the disputes with India and Myanmar over maritime border demarcation, Bangladesh wants to explore and utilize its vast marine resources. Doing so, we need a peaceful Bay of Bengal as well as a peaceful indo-pacific region. In the current reality, it is becoming evident that no single state will be able to dominate any region. And he strongly believes that, like Bangladesh, other littorals of the Bay of Bengal want to cooperate rather than antagonize each other. Therefore, practicing a multilateral framework becomes a need for allowing each country to pursue its aim on equal footing. For this to happen, it is necessary in the case of Bay of Bengal that the littorals need to give more credibility to multilateral arrangements. Supporting this principle, Bangladesh has confirmed its position that the country does not want dominance of any single country or group in the Indo-Pacific.

He mentioned that beside establishing sustainable regional prosperity across the Indo-Pacific, concerned actors need to stop any kind of conflict. It is known to all that Bangladesh is the worst sufferer of the Rohingya crisis. Thus, for establishing a free, open and secure Indo-pacific, Japan can utilize the opportunity of being an active player in finding a lasting solution to this crisis. As resolving Rohingya crisis is a pressing need and very relevant to the future stability of the indo-pacific region, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also sought support from Japan’s current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to involve actively in gearing up the sustainable repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas. With resolving conflicts and promoting multilateral engagements, littorals of the Bay of Bengal as well as the countries across the Indo-Pacific can enjoy sustainable prosperity.

While concluding he mentioned that with the dream of building the “Sonar Bangla”, the dream of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh will continue to support peace and inclusive development despite all difficulties. With these understandings, he wished to look forward to receiving valuable insights from the seminar on how Bangladesh, as a littoral of the Bay of Bengal, can play a role in making a peaceful Bay as well as a non-violent Indo-Pacific region for nurturing inclusive development. Having said these, he wished for successful deliberations and discussions in the seminar.

Remarks by the Session Chair



Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, paa
Chairman, Bangladesh Institute of International and
Strategic Studies (BIISS)

At the outset of his remarks, **Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, paa**, Chairman, BIISS mentioned that 2022 is a milestone year in Bangladesh-Japan bilateral relations. This year, the two countries are celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations. It is a time-tested friendship, which has grown in strength and depth with each passing year. Japan was one of the first OECD countries to recognize Bangladesh, and the foundations of the relations were established through the historical visit of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1973, who believed that Japan should be the role model for reconstruction and development for the war-devastated Bangladesh. The flags speak volumes of the symbiotic relations between our two countries and our peoples.

Ambassador Hossain informed the audience that Japan has emerged as Bangladesh's one of the most important development partners, as well as a very important trading partner. The exchange of high-level visits in recent years between the two countries has added further impetus to the growing bilateral relations and mutual recognition of the tremendous potential for further strengthening and deepening of the ties.

He added that the Indo-Pacific region has been witnessing renewed interest of the major powers and has emerged as a region having immense geopolitical, economic, and strategic importance. With a population of around 4.3 billion across 24 nations, the region is promising in terms of its geographical location, natural and human resources. The two oceans also provide sea routes for the flow of most of the world's goods and energy supplies. Indeed, billions of dollars are being invested to build new ports, roads, pipelines, and railways to develop connectivity throughout the region. The need for investment in infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region is massive, totalling about US\$50 trillion by 2040. He opined that given the fast-emerging economic and strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, it would indeed be a useful exercise to understand the challenges, prospects, and potentials of the region.

Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been intensely pursuing regional integration. Multi regional and sub-regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum, and Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative can become common platforms for the region to tap on the potentials through connectivity initiatives to reap the benefits of regional and sub-regional integration.

According to the Ambassador, the seminar, jointly organized by the Embassy of Japan in Dhaka and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) is a very timely endeavour. It was initiated to have a frank discussion on the subject and to identify how best to leverage these potentials based on a shared vision of a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific region for peace, stability and shared prosperity for all.

He opined that we are passing through a very significant time in the Indo-Pacific. He noted about the opportunities and potentials that the Indo-Pacific region holds. He echoed the need to build partnerships for the mutual benefits of the countries in the region and beyond as mentioned by the speakers. The strategic initiatives such as: Asia Rebalancing Strategy, Belt and Road Initiatives, "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), and the crucial geopolitical centrality of the Bay of Bengal have placed the Bay at the pivot of the Indo-Pacific. Despite the enormous opportunities for economic prosperity, the geo-political and strategic realities will be the key factors dictating the course of developing a shared vision for peace, prosperity, and stability.

There is a need for concerted efforts to have transparent discussions and deal with any misgivings or misperceptions that may be there on the geopolitical and geostrategic competitions and materialize the full potential of the Indo-Pacific for greater benefits of the countries and the people served by these two oceans through collaborative and cooperative actions. Bangladesh has always adhered to the dictum of “friendship to all and malice towards none” as enunciated by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bangladesh believes that peace remains imperative for economic development, prosperity, and stability.

He ended with a quote from a speech by Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, the Hon’ble Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, at the Plenary Session of a seminar titled ‘Asia Pacific in the Changing Global Order’: “Bangladesh is open to any global and regional initiative which is economic in nature and helps economic development”.





WORKING SESSION



Professor Imtiaz Ahmed

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka made a presentation on “The Changing Nature of Geopolitics: Making Sense of Bangladesh's Position”. Professor Imtiaz said that the first thing that one has to keep in mind is that it is the humans who create geopolitics, not the other way around. For that reason, he asked the audience to keep in mind that areas and countries can become geopolitically important but they can also become geopolitically irrelevant, if humans make a difference. He went on to quote the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet to help the audience understand why humans create geopolitics. Poet Nazim wrote, “Brother, just wait... As long as I've got honey in my pot, bees will come to it from Timbuktu ...”. So, the reason why an area becomes geopolitically important is because the region has got honey or resources; if the honey or resources is not there, the bees will not come, that was the important part of the argument that he made.

Professor Imtiaz said that if one goes back to the 18th century, when there was the greater Bengal, the largest economy in the world was China, so what is being seen today is not the rise of China rather the re-rise of China. Similarly, what is being seen now in South Asia, whether it is India or Bangladesh, is not the rise of India or the rise of Bangladesh rather the re-rise of Indian subcontinent. The reason is that in the 18th century China was the largest economy but undivided India was the second largest in the world, and in that undivided India, Bengal was the richest province. That is precisely the reason the Europeans came all the way to Bengal. One should not forget that the British entered the subcontinent through the Bengal. Explorers do not go to an area of poverty, do not spend their time and life to go to a poverty ridden area, they go to a rich area. He said that the arrival of the British marked the birth of international relations in South Asia and there is a precise date for that: it was in 1757 when they conquered Bengal. Here he showed the audience a picture of the event that showed the richness and arrival of the Europeans.

He said that the British and the Europeans had other ideas in their minds: colonialism. It was colonialism that brought the underdevelopment of Bengal. He talked particularly about the de-industrialization of the Dhaka city. The city of Dhaka was one of the largest cities in the 18th century that had a flourishing industry. There is statistics that shows the depopulation that happened during British period. Over the time industrialization of Britain occurred while de-industrialization ensued in Bengal. Europe become the Europe of today by the confluence of two phenomena - colonialism and slavery; without these two there would not be no rise of the west. He showed the audience a picture where the slaves were brought from Africa to Americas, where they worked on raw materials that was then brought to Europe. Some of the cities of Europe like Dundee and Manchester did not produce cotton but they became the leading producers of textiles because they got all the cotton from the colonies. In that process Bengal got into serious trouble to the point that the richest province in the 18th century ended up with a famine as early as 1770 and even in 1943-44. Churchill, who is now celebrated, had once said, “I hate Indians, they are beastly people with a beastly religion”. Churchill's man-made famine killed 3.5 to 5 million people in Bengal.

Bengal was also cartographically massacred by the British. The greater Bengal meant Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. And anyone familiar with Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah would know that Bengal, Bihar and Odisha were always together and that is why the Bay of Bengal got its name. But Bengal got cartographically massacred first through removing Assam and then through eliminating Bihar and Odisha. But even with that they were not satisfied. On religious grounds, Bengal was divided into east and west Bengal. Interestingly, when the 1905 partition took place and when it was revoked in 1911, Bengal was united but Bihar and Odisha were thrown out and nobody took the trouble of working on why that was so. Professor Imtiaz then showed the audience a slide with a quote from a letter written by Mr Rizly to Lord Carzon who was the viceroy of British India in 1904. It said, “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule... ”.

The cartographical massacre continued and in 1947 there was East Bengal, which became East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). But the process was not that easy, over a million people died in 1947 and the trauma continues even today from house to house.

He said that if anyone is interested in psychology will know that fear gets transferred from family to family and it becomes generational. Carl Gustav Jung was an experimental psychologist who made it very clear that the brain of the child is not really pure, it carries the fear and the love of parents, grandparents and so on. 1947 was the first genocide and in 1971 there was another genocide. He highlighted the trauma that Bangladeshi people have in their minds and quoted the poet Shamsur Rahman saying, “that I am standing, that is my pride”. He said that the poet had the civilizational understanding that the standing of Bangladeshis is very tough, since the whole history of Bangladesh is very traumatizing.

The Professor said that when one talks about Bengal and Bangladesh, one can go back to Bengal of 6th century BC. Bangladesh did not start in 1971, its history goes back to the 6th century BC. Out of all these traumas civilization wise, three exceptionalities came out of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has three South Asian exceptions; the first exception is that Bangladesh is the only South Asian country that calls itself the people’s republic. There are only five people’s republics in the world: North Korea, China, Algeria, Bangladesh and Laos. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman never had a second thought about what would be the name of the country because he knew that Bangladesh is the only South Asian country that has fought a liberation war.

This fighting of a liberation war is the second exceptionality, because it is extremely rare that in a liberation war you have people and the security forces fighting together. He gave an example of his own experience during 1971, when he left his parents to join the liberation forces and he had trained under a EPR Jawan in Agartala. That combination of security forces and civilians cannot be found in any other countries of South Asia. Some may talk about INA and Subhash Bose, but Subhash Bose did not carry through his plans, history went in a different direction.

And the third exception is the foreign policy principle. The Bangladesh foreign policy principle that “friendship towards all and malice towards none” is not post-1971 formulation, rather it can be found in the Awami League’s election manifesto of June 1970. It was said that if the Awami League comes to power in Pakistan, the foreign policy principle would be Friendship towards all, malice towards none. The Awami League under the leadership of Bangabandhu had the braveries to say that principle at that time, even though Pakistan was part of CENTO and SEATO. They boldly said that it will no longer be the case if Awami League comes to power in Pakistan. Professor Imtiaz said that one easily sees that the USA was not happy with that and Bangladesh has had a history of ups and downs with the USA all through.



In the global context, the 1940s and 1950s was marked by decolonization; from decolonization there was globalization and from globalization there was the rise of Asian economies. Japan had risen early on and now there is the re-rise of China, re-rise of India and there is also some talk about the re-rise of Bangladesh. Professor Imtiaz then highlighted the key numbers of Bangladesh's development in fifty years. Bangladesh has shown incredible progress: the GDP grows from US\$8 billion to US\$320 billion, per capita income increased from US\$93 to over US\$2000, and the life expectancy from 47 years to 73 years. In every category Bangladesh has made a difference. If one looks into the human development index, one can see that it's not only the development of GDP, even in human development Bangladesh has done really well, even compared to Pakistan and in many cases compared to India. In case of life expectancy, Bangladesh is almost at where China is, crossing both India and Pakistan. If one looks at the development momentum, pre and post pandemic, and even during pandemic, Bangladesh has done relatively well and the growth rate has almost reached seven percent. Bangladesh has somehow, due to various reasons, got through the pandemic up until this moment.

Professor Imtiaz then said that the re-rise of China has made people worried and there are now a number of alliances like the Indo-Pacific alliance, the QUAD and the Build Back Better World (B3W) that seems almost directed towards the BRI. There is also the linkages between Russia and China and, one has to look into where that will go and whether there will be different kinds of realignment between them. Somehow the pandemic has tested the limits of cooperation. Vaccine nationalism made a difference in Europe, as it is easily observable that Europe is not altogether. Even in QUAD, India and Japan had different understanding.

They thought that the QUAD would be of different kind. He then talked about the difference between BRI and the Build Back Better World partnership and said that looking deep into the categories, one can realize, they do not really clash. BRI is more into traditional infrastructure and the other one is non-traditional. BRI is about ports, highways and airports, but the US's B3W is about climate and health, digital technology, gender equity and equality. He humorously said that the last one would be problematic for some Asian countries because it has linkages with civil society and a lot of Asian countries do not have strong civil societies due to their differences in understanding.

He cautioned the audience about underestimating the power of the military industrial complex. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th US President, who was an army personnel, made it very clear in his farewell speech that one has to be very conscious of the military industrial complex. That advice applies even today. He said that the reason for which India and Japan are uncomfortable because the United States wanted to reproduce the military industrial complex through QUAD. His argument is that it seems like the QUAD is transforming into the TRIAD. And in the TRIAD there is the UK, Australia and US and not Japan or India, probably they are not comfortable with the 100 percent security understanding of QUAD.

Professor Imtiaz said that Bangladesh has had development without enmity. Bangladesh literally has no enemies. Myanmar has been trying very hard to make Bangladesh an enemy but Bangladesh is not interested in making Myanmar an enemy. Rather Bangladesh has traded with them, carried out mutual visits and even collaborations with Myanmar. Rohingya is not a Bangladesh-Myanmar problem, rather it is a Myanmar problem. He said that when it comes to development, Bangladesh is participating in all regional initiatives: SAARC, BBIN, BCIM, etc., as well as in Build Back Better World (B3W) so long it remains an economic security issue and not a military security issue. Therefore, when it comes to economic development Bangladesh is doing everything but not pursuing any military alliance neither anything that will have any other implications. He put it casually by saying that “your enemy is your enemy, your friend is your friend, we don’t want to make your enemy my enemy”. He concluded by emphasizing the point that Bengalis as a civilization has always invited people. Though they have suffered for it because guests overstayed and exploited the resources, even today every Bengali will invite guests and that has always been a part of Bengali history, culture and civilization.



Professor KIKUCHI Tsutomu

Aoyama Gakuin University & Senior Adjunct Fellow,
Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA)

Professor KIKUCHI Tsutomu, Professor, Aoyama Gakuin University & Adjunct Senior Fellow, Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA) thanked the organisers for providing him the opportunity to speak in the seminar. He made a presentation on “Beyond US-China Relations: Japan’s Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific”. His presentation was based on his interpretation or understanding of what the Japanese government has been doing so far. At first, he explained the background of Japan’s FOIP strategy/vision, then moved on to identifying three pillars to realize the vision of Japan based on his interpretation of Japan’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. Then he moved on to the discussion of the future of regional order in the Indo-Pacific, and finally, touched upon on the importance of Bangladesh in Japan’s Indo-Pacific visions.

In the background discussion, echoing Ambassador ITO Naoki, Professor KIKUCHI said that Japan has been pursuing the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” strategy and, it is based on Japan’s longtime experience in foreign relations. He expressed that rule-based orders have been providing excellent opportunities for Japan to maintain peace and prosperity for decades. Under the FOIP umbrella, Japan has been enhancing rule-based regional order in the Indo-Pacific but this regional order is now in flux. Therefore, Japan has a deep sense of uncertainty about the future of the regional order.

He opined that this region has many challenges for sustaining rule-based order. One is China's unilateral assertive and coercive behaviours; another one is growing concerns about US willingness to sustain the rule-based liberal regional order as well as regional security; and the other one is the rising tensions between the US and China. He argued that there has been growing concern that the Indo-Pacific order will be determined, in the future, by the US-China relations, whether they engage in confrontation or cooperation.

He further argued that the region has new opportunities and many stakeholders are committed to the rules-based order. Many countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia are now emerging as strong promoters of rule-based regional order. Not just the big powers like India, the small and medium-sized countries in the region are also embracing an open and rules-based order. These countries in the Indo-Pacific are seeking more independence/autonomy, rather than being pawns of power politics of the major powers. He opined that there has been understanding that these countries would have substantial impacts on the future regional order of the Indo-Pacific in the coming decades.

Professor KIKUCHI mentioned that to promote the FOIP, Japan has been pursuing different measures. He categorised those measures into three pillars to realize the vision. Firstly, keeping the US engaged in the region; secondly, Japan has been moving Southward to construct new networks of new alignments: bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral with the countries and institutions in the Indo-Pacific. Thirdly, constructive engagement with China. He explained all the three pillars in detail.

He also discussed that a stable order requires a structure of forces - a balance of forces - to support stable regional order. In this regard, the United States is an indispensable player in the foreseeable future. It is essential that the United States remains involved in the regional affairs and contributes to maintaining a balance of power in the region. He mentioned that, in the Indo-Pacific, the countries including Japan and Bangladesh have agencies to shape regional orders but the US presence gives us better agency, because if there is no balance of power, there are no agencies for small and medium-sized countries. And the US-Japan alliance is the key component of the rule-based order. He argued that the US-Japan alliance is one of the key instruments to keep the US engaged in the region.

He further discussed that Japan has moved Southward and actively engaged with the countries in the South including India, Australia, ASEAN countries and littoral states in South Asia and South Pacific Island nations. He mentioned that Japan has been developing a variety of new bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Japan has been doing a lot in its relations with South Asia including India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Also, Japan has been developing trilateral mechanisms like Japan-India-Australia, Japan-India-US and so forth. Referring to the comments of Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, he pointed out that Japan has been developing a quadrilateral security dialogue among Japan, India, the US and Australia.

Therefore, he argued that the QUAD is quite promising in regional arrangement to keep the US engaged in the region. It will also contribute to the promotion of public goods in the Indo-Pacific in the coming decades. The QUAD will also serve as a mechanism to put some institutional constraints against the US's unilateral behaviours. He further argued that a more networked structure is emerging within the Indo-Pacific region. There have been an increasing number of overlapping plurilateral groupings emerging in this region. Japan has been actively engaged in creating region-wide economic arrangements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), East Asia based regional arrangements such as RCEP and so forth.

He also mentioned that China is quite an important partner for Japan. Pressing for constructive engagement with China is one of the pillars of Japan's Indo-Pacific vision. Therefore, the important task is to create a regional architecture under which China shows respect for international rules and plays a constructive role for regional peace and prosperity. Japan's engagement with China is essential for regional peace and stability. It has to be underlined by Japan's enhanced regional position. He said that Japan has been expanding the areas of cooperation and also managing tensions in its relations with China. He also opined that Japan stands up to China when China takes different behaviour in international rules but at the same time it is getting along with China.

Raising the question of how the future regional order will be, he argued that Japan shares most of the concerns the US has of China. But Japan does not want to be fully entangled in US-China relations, either Cold War type confrontation or rapprochement (G2G between two countries). Japan looks for more space for manoeuvring and more autonomy in this emerging new regional environment. He added that Japan needs a regional architecture not defined only by US-China relations.

He emphasised that Japan must go beyond US-China relations. The Indo-Pacific is more than the US and China. The Indo-Pacific is not just a battle ground between two superpowers, but a playground for other countries to play constructive roles to enhance the rule-based regional order. They are not pawns being at the mercy of power politics between the US and China, but capable to navigate the "Great Game" over the future of the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, he opined that it is time to step away from the long-standing and old-fashioned assumption that only the major powers can define order.

He further expressed that the current flux of the regional order may give an opportunity to create a multipolar rule-based order. Bangladesh, he expressed, which is located on the strategic trade route of the Indo-Pacific, is a very important country for the realization of Japan's Indo-Pacific vision. Professor KIKUCHI highlighted the opportunity and potential of the Bay of Bengal economic zones. He opined that not only Japan but also almost all Indo-Pacific countries need a new market for investment and trade. They are feeling that they are too much exposed to an uncertain China economically. They need to diversify their economic relations. He emphasised that there is an urgent need to review the regional supply chains. Covid-19 clearly demonstrated how fragile our supply chains are.

They need to engage in reorienting the regional centre of economic gravity away from China by pursuing new interdependence with other potentially promising nations.

He said that new economic opportunities are emerging in the Bay of Bengal. In the past, the economies of South Asia and Southeast Asia were deeply intertwined around the Bay of Bengal. The possibility of linking the economic dynamism of South Asia and Southeast Asia around the Bay of Bengal is now emerging. The countries of this region have been demonstrating remarkable economic growth recently and undertaking more outward-looking economic policy. They have plenty of economic potential to being a centre of economic gravity, buttressed by abundant young labour to natural resources.

Besides, he also focused on obstacles and emerging difficulties, however, which can be overcome based on the experiences in the Asia-Pacific. The experiment of building an economically integrated Asia Pacific began in the 1980s, nearly 40 years ago, he added, to a large extent has been successful. The countries of the Asia-Pacific are connected through dense cross-border networks of investment and trade. He mentioned that he himself has been involved in creating mechanisms to promote Asia-Pacific economic interdependence since the late 1980s. At the beginning of the project, there had been an overwhelming amount of scepticism about the possibility of this experiment. He had to face many problems to promote cooperation in the Asia Pacific region such as diversity, fragmentation, mutual distrust, lack of habit of cooperation and so forth. He added that when he was involved in the Asia-Pacific economic cooperation project, most people did not believe that the Asia-Pacific economies would be connected closely through trade and investment. But two decades later, people are now witnessing numerous networks of economic relations among Asia-Pacific countries. He believes that it is quite a long term project but in the coming decades people can see an economically dynamic, integrated Bay of Bengal economic region.



Professor Lailufar Yasmin

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Professor Lailufar Yasmin, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, while presenting a paper titled, “The Rise of the Indo-Pacific: Bangladesh-Japan Relations”, noted at the outset that twenty-three years back she began her professional career at BIISS, therefore, she feels honoured and humbled to come back again to BIISS at this auspicious event marking 50 years of Bangladesh-Japan relationship. She added that as Bangladesh is celebrating its Golden Jubilee of independence, we can see that Bangladesh and Japan are also celebrating their 50 years of bilateral relationship which started on 10 February 1972. Japan was one of the earliest countries to grant sovereign recognition to the struggle of the Bangladeshis.

Professor Yasmin highlighted some major issues in her presentation which include the rise of the Indo-Pacific region, the state of the current world order and in that context Bangladesh-Japan relationship and the essence of it. She noted that with the recognition of Bangladesh’s struggle for independence in 1971, Bangladesh-Japan started this journey of bilateral friendship. This has been marked by high level political visits started with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s visit to Japan in 1973 and it is done with the perspective of our foreign policy foundation also laid out by Bangabandhu “friendship to all, malice towards none”. As we can see that Bangladesh was considered as a country during its inception as a sovereign country, but it had no tangible resources, it had a war-ravaged economy.

In this context, a number of states as well as international financial institutions and economic experts argued that Bangladesh is nothing but a “test case of development” as the survival of Bangladesh was questioned in several ways. During that period of time Japan was one of the few countries that landed undivided support to Bangladesh and assisted Bangladesh in a manner so that Bangladesh’s journey can take a positive direction.

She added that much have been talked already about the rise of the Indo-Pacific. As we can see the very coinage of the term “Indo-Pacific” was done in 1920s by a German scholar and expert of geopolitics Karl Haushofer. As the centre of gravity shifted to the West during the Cold War period, the Indo-Pacific region which was seen as a geographical whole: mixing both land-centric perspective and maritime perspective. So the contemporary shift actually brought the centrality of Indo-Pacific region back into international politics. But again we can see how with the rising easternization of the world, with the rise of an Asia that can say ‘no’, Indo-Pacific once again coming into vogue in the understanding of policymakers. Hence, she cited two examples as how the US in its two ocean policy shifted from Atlantic and Pacific to Pacific and Indian ocean. Similarly, China in its two ocean policy, prioritizes the Pacific and the Indian ocean.

We can also see how the idea of the rise of an Asia that can say ‘no’ was conceptualized first by Japanese politician and scholar Shintaro Ishihara in 1994, when he wrote along with former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad. And from there on, the rise of an Asia that can say “no”, rise of a Japan that can say “no”, and rise of a China that can say “no” discourses started to emerge and she hoped that in her lifetime she could witness rise of a Bangladesh that can say “no” too. However, she said that when we talk about international order, we can see how we are living in a very dangerous time. We find the international order to be fluid and quite unstable at present because there is a lack of clearly discernible poles of power as we have seen during the Cold War.

We can argue in many ways whether Cold War was beneficial or it affected foreign policies of the world. Despite that we had a kind of structural stability: two dragons were fighting and all the other animals were hiding. But now as we can see at the end of the Cold War, there is a very unstable international order. So, often scholars have started to point out that we live in a plurilateral world where states’ policies are followed by their immediate or short-term interests, and therefore, their long-term interests or their long-term friendships that were poised before, are often forgotten. Not only that we can see a mushrooming emergence of a number of security alliances or cooperative frameworks; often they may not make long-term implications for international politics. Then again, states with competing interests are bonding together. For example, same members we see in both QUAD and BRICS whose functions and policies also can be diversified. We also can see how a number of alliances which were forged before often come and work during their time of need.

Along with Professor Imtiaz Ahmed she also shared a chart illustrating the outstanding progress of Bangladesh in 50 years. In 1971,

GDP was just US\$8 billion and now it is US\$320 billion. She also mentioned about life expectancy, foreign currency reserves and agricultural productivity that have increased a lot. So, it has been a sort of holistic emergence or development of Bangladesh where we have not only emphasized on the way other countries see security, that is the traditional sense of maintaining security. Rather, we have emphasized on non-traditional aspects of security as well. Then she took an endeavour in finding an answer to the question of how Bangladesh has come to this stage today.

Quoting from Robert Frost's poem she mentioned that Bangladesh has rather pursued a "Road not Taken" policy as because Bangladesh has not followed the typical western model of development that is industrialization or trickle down which is provided by famous economist Rostow. According to Rostow, this is the only way for newly de-colonized states to develop their economies. But Bangladesh has not followed this typical path. Rather Bangladesh has harnessed the little resources that we have, maintained a steady economic policy, strong and robust political leadership and we have paid attention to our internal developments. And that is why during the entire COVID period people from all over the world were questioning whether our statistics were right or whether we were hiding something. We are not hiding something, rather, we have seen although, globally the number of hungry people has increased, but in Bangladesh we have been able to circulate our resources internally in a manner so that there are less number of people affected by COVID, became hungry and died because of lack of food. So, internally we have emphasized on expansion of farm agriculture, fisheries and so many other ways of internal entrepreneurship development. This is something often do not fall within the typical models of economics and that is why one of the scholars of economics Akhtar Mahmud has pointed out that Bangladesh has taken a path following Frank Sinatra's song, "I did it my way".

So, Bangladesh has also taken a road less travelled and we have done it in our ways which may come as a surprise. Bangladesh has not only followed economic diplomacy, rather, we emphasized cultivating relationships with countries who can come forward to our economic development needs as mentioned earlier by the honourable Foreign Minister that Bangladesh's door is open to any country of the world who comes up with economic opportunities. So, as Professor Imtiaz Ahmed has also pointed out that Bangladesh is one of the few countries or perhaps the only country in the world where growth has happened without enmity.

She also pointed out about the loans and grants that have been disbursed to Bangladesh. As we can see Japan has been one of the formidable partners of Bangladesh's growth. It has provided the highest amount of loans as well as grants compared to our other development partners.

Then she flagged on other bargaining points that Bangladesh can offer to the rest of the world. We have seen in the typical literature in the 1970s, 1980s and even in 1990s that Bangladesh is a land-locked country and Bangladesh has been a victim of geography. But by virtue of getting unhindered access to the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh has rather emerged as a country blessed by geography.

The Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh in 2014 identified “Bangladesh’s lynchpin position at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal” and its potential to act as an Indo-Pacific corridor. Now Bay of Bengal has provided us a transformation in understanding from a land-centric definition of neighbourhood to a maritime-centric definition of neighbourhood. Hence, we call the Bay of Bengal as our third neighbour. Not only that, she pointed out the reason why the Bay of Bengal is so significant.

During the entire period of colonialism, through maritime routes, the British entered into South Asia, they have entered through the Bay of Bengal. Once again in the twenty-first century, we are seeing how maritime chokepoints, maritime routes or Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) have acquired new strategic significance for us. And that is why the importance of the Bay of Bengal cannot be understated from Bangladesh’s perspective. Also let us not forget that we are a market of 168 million people. By 2040 our population will cross 200 million people and this is the time we need to identify who our friends are and how we can make a more habitable Bangladesh in eighteen years of time. Hence, she also pointed out that Bangladesh in its 50th anniversary as an independent sovereign country, has emerged as a middle power or in other words Bangladesh is often called as an emerging middle power. Given its geographic position or smaller geographic expanse, she prefers to call Bangladesh an emerging middle power, as it can also play the role of an agenda setter in international politics, although Bangladesh does not need to be an agenda setter in all matters in international politics.



It has been pointed out in 2020-2021 in the UN General Assembly and in other international forums that when it comes to Bangladesh's interest, it wants to be included in the agenda setting role. So from thereon, the rise of a strong and robust Bangladesh can be seen. This is where she finds a new Bangladesh is emerging.

Professor Yasmin then talked about Bangladesh-Japan friendship and how it matured over time. She mentioned various statistics that showed that Bangladesh is the biggest recipient of ODA from Japan. Japan joined the Development Assistance Committee in 1961 and made its first grant in 1969. Since then Japan has taken an active interest in being one of the top donors. Although the position varied, Japan has generally been one of the five leading donors in the world. Financial assistance from Japan saw a big boost since the development of Comprehensive Partnership between Japan and Bangladesh in 2014. In fiscal year 2020-2021, Japan provided more aid to Bangladesh than any other country amounting US\$2.63 billion. Since Bangladesh's independence, Japan has provided a total of US\$24.72 billion, which is almost evenly split between grants and loans. And here one can see why Bangladesh needs Japan by its side in its endeavour to emerge as a Bangladesh that can say 'no'.

Japan is also Bangladesh's top export destination in Asia. This importance cannot be overstated as one can see that the balance of trade is almost closing by US\$1.3 billion export from Bangladesh whereas Bangladesh imported worth of goods US\$1.8 billion. Hence, she believes that Bangladesh needs to work on how the balance of trade can be reduced between the two countries. For Bangladesh, most export goes to western countries, especially in Europe, North America and in Australia and New Zealand. Bangladesh needs to cultivate other export destinations as well.

In terms of business, Pew research in 2014 identified Bangladesh as one of the most pro-Japanese countries with 71 per cent favourable to Japan in Asia. Similarly, the Japanese Ministry of Commerce identified in 2019, 2020 and 2021 that Japanese businessmen hold the pro-Bangladeshi view. Especially, during the COVID-19 pandemic when Japanese money is shifting from China, Bangladesh is considered one of the key destinations for that money.

Professor Yasmin noted about the connectivity and other issues and said that the BIG-B is the big strategic initiative which envisions an integration of Asian region. For Bangladesh, particularly economic infrastructure, energy and development imperatives, are where Bangladesh and Japan are committed to work together. Here a number of projects that have already been mentioned, for example, the MRT line in Dhaka, the very beneficial deep sea port at Matarbari, terminal three of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and the economic zone at Araihaazar. All of these are part of BIG-B plans that have been carried out by Japan here. Importance of connectivity in this age is immense and as Parag Khanna mentioned connectivity is the 'arms race of the 21st century', so it cannot be overstated. Here Japan and Bangladesh have mutual interest in developing Bangladesh as a key player in the Asian region. So, the Japanese stance in connecting Cox's Bazar with Rakhine is crucial.

She argued that the Rohingya issue is there and Bangladesh needs to develop its relations and need more donors and friends to work on the Rohingya issue. But at the same time Bangladesh-Myanmar relations cannot be confined only to the Rohingya issue. Bangladesh needs to expand it to other areas and therefore it needs Japan and other countries to come forward in developing further business interests and developing other areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar relations. Because it is our neighbour, a lot of things can be changed like jobs or friends, but a country cannot ignore its geographic position. So, it has to learn to live with Myanmar, it has to learn to live with India and this is why once again Bangladesh needs to carefully tread through. Professor Yasmin also mentioned the growing geopolitical significance of the Indo-Pacific region and the Bay of Bengal, in light of Bangladesh holding the IORA chairmanship from last year. Here, she said Bangladesh can work on along with Japan in developing a number of cooperative mechanisms which will have some institutional base as well; as it will include both non-state actors, civil society members, track 2 diplomacy, track 1.5 diplomacy through which we will get to learn from each other.

While concluding her remarks, she mentioned that while one should not go back to history but one cannot move forward if they don't look at the past or look at the history. It is often said that the well of the past is too deep. So, everyone needs to go back and see how historically the Japan-Bangladesh relationship developed and matured and that they have many more potentials. As she had said at the beginning, more commonalities are there to bind these two countries than pointing out the differences between Bangladesh and Japan. So, there is a need to look at more people to people connectivity and people to people contacts so that people get to know each other. And instead of a top-down approach, there is a need to take an approach where sociological understanding of International Relations is applied. The state is not the only actor rather there is a need of non-state actor level development of relationship.

Hence, one can see how the Monbukagakusho MEXT Scholarship and a number of other scholarships have created a critical mass in Bangladesh who know about Japan, who want to learn more about Japan and promote Japan. So public diplomacy can be a great tool for Japan to make itself more visible in Bangladesh. And she stressed that the world is growing more volatile, so Bangladesh needs more friends at this very juncture, so that Bangladesh in its immediate issues and problems finds Japan always by its side.



Professor TAKAHARA Akio

Professor of Graduate School of Public Policy, The University of Tokyo, Japan

At the outset, **Professor TAKAHARA Akio**, Professor of Graduate School of Public Policy, The University of Tokyo thanked the organisers for providing him the opportunity to speak at the seminar. Referring to Professor Lailufar Yasmin's presentation, he said that through her presentation he had already learned a lot about Bangladesh.

The title of Professor TAKAHARA's presentation was "FOIP and Maritime Cooperation: Japan's Initiative". He mentioned that Professor KIKUCHI has given a vivid picture and explained almost everything that needs to be said about Japan's idea about the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". Therefore, he focussed on Japan's Maritime cooperation especially on the coast guards and what JICA has been doing to give some substance to the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific. He also talked about the three pillars which uphold the FOIP.

Firstly, commitment for peace and stability. He argued that everyone loves the status quo. No one wants any country to destabilize the order, the rule-based order we have been enjoying for decades. Therefore, peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific comes paramount.

Secondly, promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade. He emphasised that these principles are important to Bangladesh, to Japan's end and also to the rest of the region.

Thirdly, he argued that Japan likes to pursue economic prosperity and promote connectivity, which it has been doing in Bangladesh and in other countries. Therefore, these three tasks under the concept of free and open Indo-Pacific is something that JICA has been doing. Then he expressed that countries already know well how Japanese ODA functions. He categorised Japan's bilateral and multilateral assistance into three components - technical cooperation, ODA loans, and grant aid.

He then discussed in detail about JICA's technical cooperation in maritime safety and security. He said that JICA has technical cooperation projects and training programmes that are related to maritime safety and security policy. It helps officials to develop their ability to design a good policy and implement it. For example, maritime law enforcement, policing in the seas, search and rescue, disaster prevention, and environmental protection, and all of these are very important. He also highlighted about the ship safety, hydrography for charting & disaster management and all these programmes which Japan has been conducting with Japan's friends in the region. He provided a few examples of training like anti-piracy training, vessel operation training, forensic training, martial arts training, preventing spilled oil, environmental protection operation, search and rescue etc., and all sorts of programs.

He also added that there are some technical cooperations on grant aid and ODA loans. For example, as Ambassador ITO mentioned, he added, Japan has provided Bangladesh with 24 boats, four 20 metre boats and twenty 10 metre boats for rescue. Japan also provides patrol vessels to other countries. Japan provides systems for vessel traffic service, laser camera systems, direction finder, night-vision devices and other communication systems, lighthouses, buoy systems etc.

He further added that in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan provides programmes and facilities to countries including Djibouti, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines, Laos, Solomon Islands, Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. These are the concrete things Japan has been doing. He also opined that together with the big picture, it is important to understand these details to get a full picture of what Japan is trying to do and what it is implementing in the region.

He further highlighted China in the context of FOIP. As professor KIKUCHI had already mentioned, he added, it is very important to compete with China on the one hand over the strategic or geopolitical side of things. He argued that Japan is forced to compete with China on the one hand but at the same time they need to cooperate with China as well. He added that Japan has conducted a number of dialogues with China. In fact, he opined that, the concern is about what Japan has been doing, how can it continue to do that in the context of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific". Because many people think that FOIP is something that Japan has brought up to counter the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But that is not the case, because he argued that FOIP and BRI are compatible.

He emphasised on identifying what the BRI is at first. He added that it is very difficult as China has not given any clear definition of what the BRI is. He argued that the way China defines it, is like “under BRI we can achieve this, we can do that” but it is not very easy to give a clear definition of what it is. He opined that the concept itself is a creation of genius because it sounds very nice and attractive. He also added that there are so many projects that China has been conducting in the region. He said that he likened the concept of BRI as the constellations in the sky. There are so many stars in the sky and it is as if Xi Jinping pointed to the sky and said, “look at those stars, you see a dragon there, see a constellation there and that is what the Belt and Road initiative is.” It sounds good, looks so good, and our eyes are glittering with the renminbi, Professor TAKAHARA further added.

He also argued that he does not think that anybody has actually seen a constellation in reality because constellations do not exist in reality. They are only images in the human brain. The BRI is just like that. He defined the BRI as a signature project of Xi Jinping and it is a symbol of Xi’s power and authority in the world.

He expressed that people should not be mesmerised, should not be dazzled by the constellation, rather people should look at the stars which are tangible, one should look at the projects and find the projects that are good. As Mr. Shinzo Abe said, in 2017, if the projects meet four conditions, then Japan would like to cooperate with the BRI. Those are: openness, transparency, economic viability and the fiscal healthiness of the recipient nation. If all these four conditions are met, Japan is willing to cooperate with the BRI, he opined. He also said that they are hoping that Xi Jinping, in the future, can say the same about the free and open Indo-Pacific. President Xi will put some conditions, and if those conditions are met, China can cooperate with the Japanese version of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. He expressed that there is a possibility of this happening even though some people say that it is not possible, as there are a lot of competition and troubles. In this regard, he mentioned the Sino-Russia joint statement that came out on the first day of Beijing winter Olympics on the 4th of February in 2022, where both Russia and China said that they are highly vigilant about the American strategy of free and open Indo-Pacific. He expressed that they say very clearly - they are worried about the American strategy of FOIP, and leaves room for cooperation with Japan.

He argued that the phrase they use is a deliberate one, because they know that FOIP and BRI, both of them have two aspects: one is strategic and here the two ideas clash. But the other aspect is economic cooperation. The Americans are focusing on the former and the Japanese emphasises on the latter. If countries focus on the latter aspect, that is economic cooperation, the BRI and FOIP can completely coexist together. He also added that the two constellations can share the stars. One can say it is part of our constellation, the other can say it is also part of their constellation. He suggested that they can actually cooperate and Bangladesh can help in finding a good star, in designing and formulating a good star and implementing those projects. Therefore, it can be a symbolic project where FOIP and BRI are connected.

Open Discussion



Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former State Minister for Foreign Affairs, also congratulated BIIS and the Embassy of Japan for organizing the seminar. He said that when one looks at the Bangladesh-Japan relations, it involves retrieval of history. Japan was one of the countries that believed in Bangladesh. Even the most fantastic fantasy that was thought of in 1971 does not match the glittering reality (in economic terms) Bangladesh has achieved today. But this was not always the scenario. And that is why it is relevant to mention that the greatest Bengali of all times, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Japan so early after the independence. Long twenty years after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu and most of his family members except the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was very keen to visit Japan soon after her election in 1996. Mr Chowdhury said that he was greatly honoured to have been part of the entourage to that visit in Japan. They had discussed building relationships that will not be dependent on governments or exigencies of the situation at that time. Therefore, he said that the Chairman, the Director General and everyone from BIIS who have been a part of this seminar must be congratulated.

He then said that over the years, Bangladesh has not moved from Bangabandhu's enunciated theory, "friendship towards all and malice towards none". He made two comments based on his personal experience, from 1980-85 when he was working at a Japanese bank's loan sanction. There he could see the gravity of ethics to make commercial decisions. He said they were instructed not to indulge in a loan that links directly or indirectly to the proliferation of the nuclear weapons. He said that the world and the Japanese perception have changed. So, his suggestion was that as Bangladesh and Japan deepen their cultural ties, in a time that the stock exchange is so strong and drawing attention in the region and abroad, Japan should have a financial organized instructional arrangement. The second thing he suggested was that there are many things happening in between Japan and Bangladesh and there should be a Japan centre that would bring attention to all the possibilities that emerged. He said that the Hon'ble Prime Minister has very rightly and appropriately, on a number of occasions, reminded everyone of the blue economy. There he wanted to know from the speakers on how Bangladesh can deepen its relations with Japan to create an environment of cooperation. After the solution of the maritime boundaries, Bangladesh has to find better ways for exploiting the fullest potential of the blue economy.

The last point he said was that Bangladesh has made an unparalleled example by welcoming the oppressed Rohingyas from Myanmar. By choosing to do so, Bangladesh is committed to creating a peaceful condition where they can return. But Bangladesh has not declared Myanmar an adversarial state. Countries like China, Japan and India should know that if the problem continues, it is not going to hamper only Bangladesh, it is a global and a regional problem. One cannot have either BRI, QUAD or anything else unless this problem is forcibly resolved. He said that by “forcibly”, he does not mean by the power of weapons, rather by the weapon of language and negotiation.

Major General (Retd) AMSA Amin said that the 50th celebration of Japan-Bangladesh diplomatic relations holds a high significance. He echoed with the former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and said that the idea of the Japan centre should be the Japan-Bangladesh Centre because he believes that Bangladesh can learn from the Japanese modern history. Japan during the second world war was a very powerful country, but post WW-II, Japan totally transformed itself, from war to peace. Japan’s politics went through a very dynamic change, they established a very strong and stable democracy and over the last hundred years they had around seventy prime ministers. The cultural of political tolerance can be learned by Bangladesh from Japan to ensure its political stability and improve the political culture.



Major General (Retd) Jiban Kanai Das highlighted Professor Lailufar Yasmin’s suggestion on enhancing people-to-people contact to facilitate Bangladesh-Japan relations. He added that Bangladesh is training people to be caregivers and Japan will be benefited from it. He opined that the complementary term “geoeconomics” should be in consideration for future research purposes related to geopolitics. He also pointed out that the rise of China is not limited to the Indo-Pacific; rather, its rise as a global power also has significant connotations. China has the best economy, technology, and other expertise and it is one of Bangladesh’s best friends which it cannot lose. He noted that India and China, despite being connected through BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), etc., had a warlike situation in 2020. India banned some programmes and applications but the trade in 2020 was nearly US\$70 billion and it rose to US\$130 billion this year. He suggested that China should be considered as a power to be reckoned with and Bangladesh should be friends with China.

Shamser Mobin Chowdhury, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh government, thanked BIISS for organizing a seminar that is extremely timely and relevant for everyone. He referred to the point raised by the Ambassador of Japan when he talked about international order. He said that it is a very fundamental issue that everyone has to look at. He recalled a specific instance when Bangladesh and Japan handled a serious situation on rule based international order. He mentioned the 1977 hijack of a Japan airlines plane to Bangladesh where he was part of the negotiating team. He said that though it was an act of piracy and illegal act in international law but both Bangladesh and Japan governments of that time handled and resolved it without resorting to any forms of violence. The issue was resolved by both sides without any violence and without any loss of life. He said that the incident shows the degree of maturity with which Bangladesh and Japan look at both issues. He then asked Professor Yasmin, that while she is hoping about a “Bangladesh that can say no”, but why cannot Bangladesh also say yes if it is needed for the preservation of Bangladesh's national, social, political, economic and regional interests in the larger maritime arena. He also raised that Bangladesh military - Army, Navy and Air Force - of today has the capability to play a visible role, a peaceful friendship role. He said that Bangladesh is in the IOR and the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh should have more military exercises with all the stakeholders in the region, be it Australia, China, Japan or anyone else. He thinks that Bangladesh is in a position to do that, without being provocative but to demonstrate that Bangladesh also has achieved that status. He also noted about the remarks of the session Chair, where he used the term 'rise of Indo-pacific', and said that Indo-pacific is not a mythical land of Atlantis that sank and is rising again, it has always existed and now there is a chance to make use of it. Finally, he thanked BIISS for organizing such an important seminar.



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmed, former Chairman of BIISS, congratulated BIISS for organizing such an important and timely event. He made his first comment on the speech of the Ambassador of Japan, where he said that Bhasan Char should form part of the long term solution. Ambassador Ahmed said that it should not be the case. Bhasan Char is a temporary solution, it can be a model for finally resettlement of the Rohingyas in their own homes in Myanmar, but it cannot be part of the long term solution. He made another comment on Professor KIKUCHI's presentation, on what the professor had said about the 'great game' over the future of Asia. He said that the future of Asia should not be seen as a game. The moment the word game is used, it carries all kinds of meaning that would not be relished.

So, the use of the word game should be reconsidered. Lastly, he said that the whole seminar is about geopolitics. Whenever geopolitics is used, it is used to explain rivalries, rival alliances, conflicting interest, exclusion and confrontation. He then asked, can this be changed and used to explain friendship, cooperation, inclusion and complementarities, shared development and prosperity, working together to maximize advantages and minimize shortcomings so that everyone can benefit.

Ambassador Md. Abdul Hannan, former Ambassador of Bangladesh, said that he found a very interesting element from the reflection of Professor KIKUCHI where he floated the idea of a new bilateral and minilateralism concept for trade and development, and utterly emphasized on the “rule based system”. He asked Professor KIKUCHI how he would reconceptualize the fundamental principle of his proposed “new bilateralism and minilateralism” with the existing multilateral trading system of WTO. He said that three pillars mentioned by Professor TAKAHARA are very pertinent for Bangladesh's development and Japan's initiative for maritime cooperation. He said that he believes they are important for Bangladesh and the policymakers may give serious consideration to those for meaningful engagement, because this maritime cooperation as proposed by Japan would help Bangladesh for its much-required capacity building and skill development for its diversification and competitiveness in trade and development and ultimate sustainability in view of Bangladesh's graduation as a developing country.



Salahud Din Ahmed, Former Member of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, referred to an event where Professor Tomotaka TAKAHASHI of ROBO GARAGE.Co., Japan, demonstrated a very interesting robot which was dancing, singing, and providing a list of restaurants. In the event, Professor TAKAHASHI expressed his willingness to bring it to Bangladesh. He also wanted to show it to the young scholars of Robotics and homemakers who could enjoy the service of those Robots. He hoped that the proposed Japan-Bangladesh Centre would come into being and make this sort of demonstration possible.

Lieutenant General (Retd) Aminul Karim asked Professor KIKUCHI and Professor TAKAHARA if Japan is following a “hedging” policy against China. If so, then how it is managing the situation vis-à-vis its geopolitical concerns. He referred to professor TAKAHARA’s point that Japan is managing China in both ways which, according to him, was indicating hedging. He also asked about the possibilities of the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal getting intermingled.



Major General (Retd) Shahidul Haque, via Zoom, opined that the Ukraine crisis has unfolded some shortcomings of the alliance system. He wanted to know what the panel thinks about QUAD and IPA when one member of QUAD (India) had failed to support the resolution forwarded by another QUAD member (the US) in the UN Security Council.

Zubaida Faruqi, a student from the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, referred to the phrase “development without enmity” pointed out by Professor Imtiaz Ahmed. She illustrated some recent developments like the discussion of Bangladesh joining QUAD, the anomalies with the Chinese Ambassador, and the short dialogue between the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh and India. She also quoted the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh where he said, “Bangladesh makes its own foreign policy”. She wanted to know about the transition from a country that would stand neutral to a country that stands up for itself. She also asked Professor KIKUCHI how he would comprehend the possible increase of tension between China and Taiwan following the Ukraine crisis since Japan also has stakes in the region.



Responses from the Speakers



Professor Lailufar Yasmin

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Professor Lailufar Yasmin responding to the question, why it is being called the rise of the Indo pacific, said that the idea of Indo-pacific was already coined in the 1920s by Karl Haushofer who is also believed to have coined the term geo-politics. The region had always been here but due to geopolitical shifts the ‘pot of honey’ shifted to the west. With the inventions of the ICBMs and Cold War politics, the significance of geopolitics had shifted from Indo-Pacific to other regions.

Answering to the question, why Bangladesh cannot also say “yes”, she said that when she mentioned about the concept of an Asia that can say no, a Japan that can say no, possibly a Bangladesh that can say no, she was trying to imply a positive assertiveness coming from a country so that it can make its politics clear vis-à-vis international politics and to other countries. It does not mean that Bangladesh is indiscriminately going to say no to everyone; it means a mixture of yes and no, and Bangladesh will be able to do that with backs high up and chin up being sure of what it is agreeing to and this is what it is not agreeing to. This refers to positive assertiveness of a country in international politics.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka



Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, on the issue of geopolitics of cooperation said that when the term was invented in the 20th century, present reality was not there. This is a globalized world, and it is impossible to go back to Karl Haushofer. He said that humans can never go back, they can only go forward. Even the present is meaningless in physics because the moment one has said present, it becomes past. When the concept of geopolitics is discussed, it takes into consideration the context in which it has happened. Here he gave the example of Japan. Japan-China trade volume is more than Japan-US trade volume. These factors cannot be changed overnight. He said that this is why globalization and decolonization are so important because there is no going back to colonialism. With decolonization and globalization, comes the re-rise of Asian economies. Some of these economies are part of a very old civilizations and they will have part of their originality and context.

In the context of Bangladesh, he said that economics as a discipline has always looked at scarcity and he thinks it is a problem. Someone focusses on scarcity, s/he will end up with fear. From an economic perspective, the Bangladesh context looks like a miracle. That is because the business world is focussed on abundance and not scarcity. He said that even Europe became what it is after the Second World War because they emphasized on abundance, particularly on coal and steel. Bangladesh also focussed on abundance, what it has in abundance is people. If one considers two categories that made Bangladesh's economy what it is today, one is remittance, which comes from migrants and people who are abundant. This is also possible because of globalization. Without globalization, we would not have these migrants, who have been working in the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore. Most of the high rise buildings in Singapore used to be made by Bangladeshi workers. The second one is ready-made garments (RMG), where again people are needed. In the RMG sector, 90 per cent of workers are women. He said that Bangladeshi NGOs focussed on women and it eventually made a difference. He particularly gave credit to Grameen, BRAC and other NGOs. They focussed on women so when the RMG industry came, the women could come out of the village and work. And no other South Asian country can replicate this model. That is why he thought that abundance can also make a difference. He also emphasized that if the Government of Bangladesh wants to go ahead, the other thing that it needs to focus on is shipbuilding where in the initial phase there is a need for a lot of people. The shipbuilding industry is coming up a little bit but it has a potential that is huge.

He responded to Major General (Retd) Jibon Kanai Das that everyone is asking questions like whether NATO is irrelevant and why Germany is not allowed to have a gas pipeline on its own now that there is a situation in Europe. One of the problems is, in Germany, there are 119 US military bases and there is a cost for that. Former US President Donald Trump tried to change the system of cost-sharing and made an interesting argument that went viral. According to Trump, the US was investing billions of dollars for Germany, but Germany was pouring it into Russia. He opined that after the Ukraine crisis, it is time for NATO to sit down and see whether they can spend that much amount of money. The US has arguably 120-140 military bases in Japan. That helps Japan not to spend money on its military and develop economically in a very big way. He pointed out another way of asking the question “Why Ukraine wanted to join NATO”, which is to ask, “Why Russia attacked Ukraine in the first place”. According to him, Russia got terrified to the point how much NATO would expand towards the East. NATO started with 12 members and now there are 30. This is a threatening point for Russia given how it got invaded by the troops from the West twice – first, during the Napoleonic war; and, another time, when Hitler was carrying out invasion towards the East. He opined that brainstorming could be the way out to determine whether Japan can afford to raise the cost of maintaining the US bases. There are already a few pieces of literature that ask, to what extent the US should bear the cost and whether it will help the geopolitics of cooperation or if it will reproduce the geopolitics of conflict.

He replied to the queries of Major General (Retd) Shahidul Haque by mentioning that QUAD would always be a problem if it is seen from the perspective of the US. India has made it clear several times but somehow the message has not reached Washington. During the pandemic, there has been tension between the US and India regarding vaccine supply. That is why perhaps the transformation from QUAD to Triad took place. He believes that neither Japan nor India would have any problems with any alliances, but it gets complicated when the alliance is a security alliance. He opined that the solution to the Ukraine issue lies in making it a neutral zone. He suggested that Ukraine should follow the foreign policy principle of Bangladesh: Friendship to all and malice towards none. Then Ukraine would be able to focus more on economic development than its concern over the NATO membership.

He clarified upon the queries of Ms. Faruqi that Bangladesh was not asked to join QUAD and the question towards the Chinese Ambassador was a directed one. Bangladesh will not be part of any military alliance. That has historically been the trait. For example, he pointed out that Bangladesh was asked to send troops to Afghanistan, but it did not. The same thing happened during the Kuwait war. That has always been the case in both historical and civilizational ways. However, if it is an economic alliance, Bangladesh will be very eager to go. Earlier we did not have a win-win situation during the colonial period. But in the globalized era, every country has a chance to win if it is smart enough. According to Professor Ahmed, that is where we need to focus.



Professor TAKAHARA Akio

Professor of Graduate School of Public Policy,
The University of Tokyo, Japan

Professor TAKAHARA Akio responded to Maj. Gen. Jiban Kanai Das and said that the “rise” of China might not be entirely peaceful. He gave the example of Ukraine since it was looking forward to getting a NATO membership. This indicates why traditional security concerns are still very relevant.

To answer Major General Shahidul Haque’s question, Professor TAKAHARA said that India is facing a difficult situation in balancing the relations with the US and its long-term friend Russia. He also referred to Pakistan’s growing relationship with Russia. He opined that in the future, India’s commitment to QUAD will be stronger. QUAD will become more and more enhanced as a regional institution.

Referring to Lt. Gen Karim’s question, he said that, China’s rise has become a headache to many countries. Japan has been dubbed as the advanced country in meeting new challenges, be it an aging society or economic pollution. Japan has to consider China’s rise in terms of the capacity of maritime advancements in the past 15 years or so because China has started to act—in terms of introducing new policies, regular patrols, and moving towards Japan. However, in the simultaneous pursuit of both competition and cooperation, the competition side is going to intensify but cooperation will also deepen. So, the bigger challenge will be to coordinate among different voices and different interests not only in Japan but also in other countries including China. He echoed Professor KIKUCHI’s words that we need to stand up against China where we need to and also cooperate where it is needed.

To answer Ms. Faruqi’s question, he said that any hostility to Taiwan is going to be disastrous for everyone. Not only it will destroy the peace and stability of the region; the economic impact will also be huge. If Taiwan becomes a warzone, the foreigners and foreign interests in Taiwan and also Shanghai will face the impacts. He was quite certain that it will have a negative impact on the economy of Bangladesh as well.

Professor KIKUCHI Tsutomu

Aoyama Gakuin University & Senior Adjunct Fellow,
Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA)



Professor KIKUCHI Tsutomu, on the question of minilateralism and global order, said that minilateral arrangements have quite distinct characteristics. There have been rise of many minilateral arrangements in the Indo-Pacific recently. It is in response to the changing international relations of these nations. He said that multilateralism does not work well and bilateralism is not enough to deal with specific issues. So, the countries are looking for partners to jointly address challenges such as maritime security, joint training for law enforcement and so forth. But he does not think that they are in conflict with the international rules and norms. As for the economic relations, if one looks at the last few decades of the countries' relations with World Trade Organization (WTO) and global governance institutions, two processes can be seen. One is the strengthening of multilateral process such as WTO. But at the same time, there has been development of region-based economic arrangements such as regional free trade arrangements. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, there have been two big regional arrangements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) where Japan took the leadership role and the East Asia based free trading arrangement called ASEAN+6. Both are WTO+ without any conflict with basic rules and norms of WTO; rather, these have been strengthening the rules embedded in the global trading system.

Professor KIKUCHI responded to Major General Das's query saying that we need to keep the US engaged in the region. US-Japan alliance is a part of the rule-based order and with the US alliance, Japan is contributing to the stability and peace of the region. There is no nation in Asia that voluntarily wants to abandon the US involvement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Concluding Remarks by the Moderator



Professor Rashed Uz Zaman

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Professor Rashed Uz Zaman, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka in his remarks highlighted a number of important points. First, he recalled Ambassador Faiz's point that geopolitics is always about competition between states. He mentioned about the book by French writer Dominique Moïsi "The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, And Hope Are Reshaping the World". In the book, the author talks about geopolitics of hope, of emotions and of humiliation and asks the readers to rethink geopolitics along these three lines. Professor Zaman believes that a lot of the discussion on Bangladesh at the seminar was related to the geopolitics of hope—the hope and confidence about this country and the hope that stands in the days ahead. These also included hopes that Bangladesh will be able to flourish, it will be able to continue with its development trajectory and that bad things will not happen. But he also mentioned that the fear is also there. Therefore, the geopolitics of fear and geopolitics of humiliation also need to be taken into consideration. If one looks into the Ukraine situation, the geopolitics of humiliation is taking place in quite an interesting manner. And Fear is always there—the fear of enmity, the fear of competition, and that needs to be taken into consideration. Professor Zaman thinks that it is a very interesting way of looking into things, coming out of traditional geopolitics in which people are wielded into and there is a need to come out of that traditional sense.

The second point he made was about the 1905 partition. He said that while the ultimate political motive was always there, he also wanted the audience to think about the economic rationale put forward by the then British administrators: they envisioned an Eastern Bengal connected with Assam, connected with then Burma (today's Myanmar) going up to all the way to the Chinese region of Kunming, which is landlocked. He said that the economic rationale of 1905 is extremely important. Today there is a huge discussion on connectivity and economic programs. The big projects taking place in Chattogram that have been mentioned by the Japanese Ambassador. The British administrators at that time talked about these issues in a similar fashion. They looked at Chittagong port, they looked at the coal mines and the oil fields of Assam, and they looked at China and Myanmar railway connection, road and riverine connection system. He believes that this point is often neglected whenever people talk about the 1905 partition but should be taken into account.

The third point is about what the implications of the Ukraine crisis for security, for geopolitics and for global politics. The politics of alliances, he believes, is something that everyone needs to think a lot about. Professor Zaman said that this situation is going to engender a couple of interesting questions and definitely will have implications for Bangladesh. The implication will be in terms of whether the shift is going to go back to Europe. Is the world going to see the Cold War politics coming into play again? the Fulda gap, the heartland Europe, the tank formations and all that Cold War jargons—are those going to make a comeback? Whether the discourse of Indo-Pacific or the entire region is going to take a backseat should also be taken into consideration.

The fourth and last point Professor Zaman made is that when the British ruled in this region, the British Royal Navy ensured that the Indian Ocean would become British's lake, similar to what Romans had done to the Mediterranean Sea. He pointed out that while the British had dominance over the region, they did not have hegemony in the "Gramscian" way. This domination was there, but at the same time, the movement of people, of goods, of pilgrims and ideas continued unhindered throughout this region. By illustrating this example, he pointed out that geopolitics will always be there; national interest, vested interest and confrontation of interest will always be there. But at the same time, one should remember that people continue to move, ideas and trade continue to flourish despite the impediments. If the impediments are not there, the intensity of those movements will increase.

He referred to Sugata Bose's book "The Hundred Harijans" and said that the book shows the importance of littorals and how they were connected during the colonial period. He also referred to Sunil Amrith's book "Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants" where the author talks about how the people of undivided India went to Myanmar and turned it into a rice basket. Then he noted about Professor TAKAHARA's point of stars. Professor Zaman took the point from there and said that Oscar Wilde reminded his readers, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars". Professor TAKAHARA has said that the constellation is a construction, but Professor Zaman pointed out that the stars are there. So, referring to Oscar Wilde, he reiterated that while most people all over the world are in the gutters, some are looking at the stars and trying to change, and that is the positive note that everyone should focus on. Finally, he thanked the organizers and everyone present at the seminar for their support and enthusiasm.





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