



**PROCEEDINGS**

**Hybrid Seminar on**

# **BIISS Research Colloquium 2022**

**20 December 2022**



**Organised by**

**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)**



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# **BIISS Research Colloquium 2022**

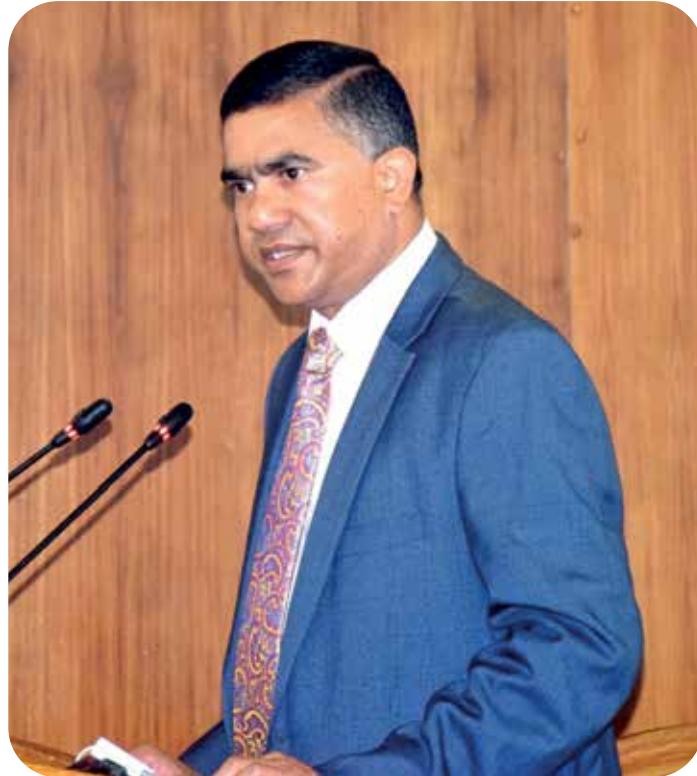
## **20 December 2022**

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Research Colloquium on 20 December 2022 at the BIISS auditorium. H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, graced the programme as the Chief Guest. Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA, Chairman, BIISS, chaired the inaugural session. Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address. The programme had three sessions; each session had a designated chair, theme and three presenters. All sessions were followed by open discussions.



# Session I: Bangladesh's Regional and Global Outreach

## Welcome Address



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

At the outset, **Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc**, Director General, BIISS, welcomed everyone to the Institute's first-ever research colloquium. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to **Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP**, the honourable foreign minister, for his gracious presence at the event as the chief guest. He paid solemn reverence to the memory of the Father of the Nation, the greatest Bengali of all time, **Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**. On the occasion of Bangladesh's 52nd Victory Day, he extended his sincere homage to 3 million martyrs who made their supreme sacrifice and to two hundred thousand women who were abused and tortured during the War of Liberation in 1971.



Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc, informed the audience that the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies is a statutory institution established by the government of Bangladesh in 1978 with the aim of undertaking and promoting research on international affairs, security and strategic issues. Every year, BIISS undertakes independent and collaborative research on a wide range of topics. In the year 2022, BIISS conducted its research activities based on three broad themes. The first theme was “Foreign Policy and Global Outreach.” Under this theme, there were four sub-themes, namely, Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy: Future Outlook, Regional Cooperation, Multilateralism, and Outreach in Emerging Regions. The second theme was “Security and Strategic Affairs,” with five sub-themes: defence policy analysis, Rohingya issues, terrorism and counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and peacebuilding. “Diplomacy and Negotiations” was the third theme, and sub-themes were Environmental and Hydrodiplomacy, Climate Negotiation, and Trade and Investment Negotiations. Under these 3 themes, 31 individual research projects were selected for the calendar year 2022, of which 26 are either completed or nearing completion. The rest are carried forward to the next year’s research plan.

To accomplish individual and group research projects, BIISS organises in-house seminars for proposal and paper presentations throughout the year as well. For professional skill development, it organises workshops for its faculty members on research methodology, editing, and referencing. Monthly researchers’ meetings are organised every single month in order to stay abreast of the most significant events taking place in the national and international arena.

As a part of disseminating knowledge, BIISS also organised 10 Hybrid seminars and 2 Eminent Person Lectures (EPLS) in 2022. The institute organised 4 roundtable discussions and an interactive talk session with **H E Ms Michelle Bachelet**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Like previous years, in the calendar year 2022, BIISS published all issues of its quarterly journals. It regularly publishes books, BIISS papers, and seminar proceedings. In 2022, BIISS published 1 book named *Glimpses of Bangladesh*, a BIISS paper titled *Repatriation of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals: Political Security and Humanitarian Assistance*, and 9 seminar proceedings.

With a view to enhancing BIISS' exposure nationally and internationally, for the first time, BIISS is going to take part in the Ekushey Book Fair at the Bangla Academy next year. He expressed his optimism that this will extend BIISS' reach to a wider segment of readers and acquaint the visitors with the institute's research activities.



The Director General mentioned that the colloquium will represent BIISS' selected works researchers have successfully completed this year. In light of the selected themes for 2022, three sessions have been designed. Presentations in each session will shed light on important aspects pertinent to Bangladesh's foreign policy and outreach, security, diplomacy and negotiations. He again expressed his sincere gratitude to the honourable chief guest, presenters, session chairs, and the learned audience for encouraging BIISS with their kind participation and hoped that each of the sessions would generate productive discussion and the exchange of valuable ideas to serve the greater interest of Bangladesh, especially in areas of foreign policy, security and strategic affairs.



# Presentation

## **Bangladesh and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): Future Dynamics and Role of Bangladesh**

Moutusi Islam, presented on “Bangladesh and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): The Future Dynamics and the Role of Bangladesh”. It addressed three research questions. First, what are the opportunities IORA provides for Bangladesh? Second, what are the constraints that will determine the future dynamics? And finally, how to make Bangladesh’s role effective in IORA?



### **Moutusi Islam**

Research Fellow, BIISS

She first gave a brief overview of IORA. Nelson Mandela pushed the idea of the establishment of a regional organisation back in 1995 that led to the establishment of IORA’s predecessor, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) on 07 March 1997. Despite the initial enthusiasm,

IORA underperformed as a platform for enhancing regional cooperation. Main reason was the lack of strong leadership. But scenarios have changed since 2010. Increasing strategic and political attention to the Indian Ocean, advent of the 'Indo-Pacific' and emerging challenges have pushed the IORA back into limelight. Since 2011, the IORA has been through a revitalisation process when India, Australia, Indonesia and South Africa took chairmanship of the organisation. During this time, IORA was able to identify its six priority areas of cooperation and two cross-cutting focus areas. IORA not only deepened in priority areas but also widened in terms of membership. IORA's founding membership of 14 states expanded to 23. It now has 10 dialogue partners including China, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, Turkey, South Korea, Russia, the UK and the US. Inclusion of Russia as a dialogue partner has completed all the P5 members in IORA.

While talking about structure of the IORA, she noted that the Council of Ministers (COM), comprising of foreign ministers, constitutes the highest decision-making body and meets annually; the Committee of Senior Officials (CSOs) oversees the overall functioning of the association. Besides, cooperation is facilitated through various substructures, including the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG), the Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF) and working groups of each priority area.

She briefly discussed Bangladesh in IORA. Looking back, Bangladesh has been actively participating in all IORA arrangements since 1999 when it became a member of IOR-ARC. However, significance of the organisation was realised following the demarcation of its maritime boundary when maritime security and blue economy became important priority areas for Bangladesh. A major policy deliberation on maritime cooperation was reflected in the speech of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she attended the IORA's first Leaders' Summit in 2017 and urged IORA leaders to promote maritime cooperation for a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean region. In 2019, Bangladesh was officially designated as IORA vice chairman and successfully arranged a high-profile conference on blue economy namely "the 3rd IORA Blue Economy Ministerial Conference" which produced the "Dhaka Declaration on Blue Economy". In 2021, on the occasion of assuming chairmanship of IORA, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon IORA members to make best efforts to develop blue economies.



Ms Islam mentioned that the Chair's role is to arrange, coordinate, host and preside over meetings of IORA. Besides, the Chair also plays a leading-role in agenda-setting and consensus-building within IORA. IORA has a special system named "Troika", consisting of the Chair, the Vice-Chair and the previous Chair, which gives policy direction to IORA institutions. Therefore, Bangladesh will remain in Troika and part of the leadership up to 2025.

She then highlighted rising international profile of Bangladesh. There is an increasing number of scholars that highlights Bangladesh's rising economic and diplomatic profile in the international arena. Its economic success has led scholars to brand it as a 'Bangladesh Miracle' or a 'Bangladesh Surprise'. Even more noteworthy are improvements in social indicators. Bangladesh is also considered as an important actor due to its geopolitical position. It has contributed greatly to global peace and security through UN peacekeeping missions. Its successful chairmanship in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) has shown the country can lead as well. Thus, her paper argues Bangladesh's rising international profile created opportunity to play a bigger role in IORA.

While discussing the opportunities IORA provides for Bangladesh, Ms Islam identified four of them. The first is the geostrategic opportunity for Bangladesh;

the Indian Ocean's strategic position is undoubtedly the first consideration for Bangladesh's involvement in the region through the mechanism of the IORA. From a geostrategic perspective, the Indian Ocean is a highly potential ground for power politics. Here, multilateralism can be an effective strategy for Bangladesh to minimise the challenges emerging from the new geopolitical order in the Indo-Pacific region. Institutions like IORA bear great significance. One important point here she highlighted is the presence of most of the prominent actors of the Indo-Pacific in IORA either as members or dialogue partners. During Bangladesh's chairmanship, IORA adopted the "IORA's outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP)" in 2022 which was led by India. Besides, the IORA Action Plan (2022-2027) has emphasised ensuring freedom of navigation in accordance with International Law, including UNCLOS is mentioned as one of the strategic goals and developing guidelines on an integrated IORA maritime policy is given priority. Furthermore, initiative has been taken to formulate guidelines for strategic management and criteria for dialogue partners which is expected to pave the way for cooperation with and support from the Dialogue Partners to the fullest extent.

On economic potentials, she mentioned that Bangladesh has been strengthening bilateral economic ties with major countries of the Indian Ocean. Its trade with the major Rim countries stood at only US\$40.5 million in 1995 which has increased to approximately US\$ 15 billion in 2016 and 27 billion in 2021, respectively. Although it is challenging to have greater regionalism and economic integration in the current scenario however, Bangladesh can take advantage of IORA forums like Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF) which is working as a platform to expand cooperation with the business community and private sector. One opportunity for Bangladesh here is the election of Sheikh Fazle Fahim, a former president of the FBCCI, as the chairman of IORBF. During its chairmanship, Bangladesh has already undertaken a range of activities to reinvigorate the organisation. Just in the previous month, IORBF successfully hosted a Leadership Summit, in Dhaka.



The third is blue economy opportunities. Bangladesh can use the opportunity to promote the blue economy and make the themes of the Blue Economy at the centre of IORA activities. Bangladesh is playing a key role in this regard; during vice chairmanship of IORA, it hosted the third ministerial conference of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in Dhaka in 2019, where participants unanimously called for sustainable use of blue economy resources resulting in the “Dhaka Declaration on Blue Economy”. In 2022, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and IORA signed an MoU to expand collaboration in marine scientific research and deep-seabed exploration in support of blue economy of the IOR.

She talked about the final opportunity which is addressing emerging security issues. IORA provides a forum to address the emerging security threats that are vital for Bangladesh such as climate change and natural disasters and marine pollution. The country has proposed to include climate change as a cross-cutting issue of IORA during the 22nd COM. Marine pollution is another maritime security concern for Indian Ocean littorals including Bangladesh. IORA Declaration on Combating Marine Debris and “Strategic Framework of Action on Marine Debris” in the Indian Ocean which is scheduled to be adopted in 2023 during Bangladesh’s chairmanship.

Ms Islam then highlighted some of the achievements of Bangladesh in IORA so far. The first is the formulation of the Second Action Plan (2022-2027) which has clear strategic objectives for each priority area with a specific timeframe divided into short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Bangladesh's agenda setting effort was seen in the 22nd COM when it proposed to include climate change as a cross-cutting issue of IORA. The IORA Development Initiative which can be the funding arm of blue economy projects. Adoption of IORA's outlook on the Indo-Pacific has provided the IORA centric version of Indo-Pacific. Besides, Bangladesh has revitalised the IORBF.

She identified several key challenges of IORA that will affect Bangladesh-IORA future dynamics. The first challenge is diversity. The Indian Ocean has incredible diversity in terms of religion, language, ethnicity and culture. This is undoubtedly a potential obstacle in creating regional identity and realising more functional cooperation in the future. The second challenge is, the IORA lacks the political will to set up an effective regional institution. The highest-level meeting held by the IORA at present is a council of foreign ministers; the summit of heads of government took place only once in 2017. Various IORA working groups are handled by senior officials or at even more junior levels. Third challenge is lack of visibility. Knowledge about the IORA and each other is still not high among IORA countries. People do not readily see how IORA impacts their lives, nor do they realise what potential it has to affect their lives for the better. Fourth challenge is lack of resources, which not only places constraints on the ability of members to participate in or to fund IORA activities, but also limits the ability of the Secretariat to serve the association adequately. The provision of consensus-based decision making has arguably prevented IORA from serving as a platform to engage with the more complex geostrategic and security challenges facing the region. Although maritime safety and security is now included in IORA's agenda, the focus has been predominantly on less controversial matters of cooperation around safety at sea, search and rescue and similar matters. The struggle for Bangladesh as chair of IORA, however, will be to continue to build on the momentum the organisation has achieved since its revival and implement the targets set out at the Second Action Plan (2022-2027).



She provided certain recommendations for Bangladesh in order to ensure an effective role. First, it should seek to strengthen linkages between the IORA Agenda with its domestic and foreign policy goals of maritime security. Second, it should engage to increase IORA's visibility with a view to raising the organisation's profile globally. Bangladesh could propose to hold another summit level meeting. Third, it could try to ensure that the voice of every member state is heard. Capacity building is prioritised which can be seen in proposing the IORA Development Agency-Dhaka Development Initiative renamed as IORA Development Initiative (IDI) as a means to share expertise and build capacity among members. The proposed establishment of the IORA Development Fund is expected to narrow the gap between advanced economies and LDCs of IORA. However, there is a need for more people-centred and concrete development projects. Fourth, Bangladesh needs to bring IORA's dialogue partners into its broader cooperation projects. An excellent first step in that direction is the Ministerial 'Strategic Dialogue' held between IORA members which is conducive for enhanced engagement of Dialogue Partners and strengthened cooperation. IORA is in the right direction to formulate the "Guidelines on the Strategic Management of IORA's Engagement with Dialogue Partners". Fifth, strengthening IORA's relations and engagement with other international and regional organisations needs to be given priority. Bangladesh, together with the vice chair Sri Lanka, should pursue IORA's closer engagement

with BIMSTEC to enhance its profile in the Bay of Bengal area as well. Sixth, it is necessary to focus on strengthening the secretariat. IORA Action Plan (2022-2027) intends to strengthen the secretariat. However, Bangladesh could push the idea of empowering the Secretary General. Finally, Bangladesh needs to create a mechanism with a view to monitoring implementation of the IORA Second Action Plan (2022-2026). However, there is an absence of formal mechanism through which monitoring implementation of the Action Plan will be ensured. One option could be assigning the Working Group of each priority area to periodically monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan.

# Regional Competition in the Bay of Bengal: Implications for Bangladesh



**Md Nahiyan Shajid Khan**

Research Officer, BIISS

Md Nahiyan Shajid Khan presented “Regional Competition in the Bay of Bengal: Implications for Bangladesh.” He started his deliberation with the quote of Robert Kaplan, “The Indian Ocean unified the oceans and connects the world from Africa to the far East.” In US naval strategist Alfred Mahan’s words: ‘Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters.’ He said that the idea of the Indo-Pacific Strategy has now evolved into a much more comprehensive and complex concept which was first proposed by former prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, who talked about “broader Asia” for “prosperity.” He pointed out that targeting the Indo-Pacific and connecting the Bay of Bengal region and the Indian ocean, the US, Japan, Australia, the EU, under EU countries like France, Germany, Netherlands taking up their own indigenous Indo-Pacific Strategies. China building projects like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India taking Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) project indicates

how important this region has become. He identified that Bangladesh sits on the very convergent point of South Asia and Southeast Asia, right on top of the Bay of Bengal. Thus, Bangladesh will soon have to decide how to navigate through this growing competition in the Bay of Bengal.

Mr. Khan talked about the nature of regional competitions and how it emerges. He mentioned a RAND Corporation study of 2022 which identified the characteristics of Regional Competition. Firstly, relative power (economic and military), resources, territorial claims, and evolving global order. Competitions unfold in a multipolar world system, shift in global order, pressure on existing status quo, technological revolution and natural crises like climate change, pandemic and calamities induced imbalance in the existing world system. Such crises fuel competitions, which do not arise by accident but occur when major powers' objectives and interests collide with one another and they try to achieve their own goals at the expense of the other. Countries try to achieve favourable regional order, increase relative power in military and economic terms, and access resources to gain leverage over others. In terms of resources, Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal have rich natural resources accumulated scattered across the region, particularly, oil, gas, etc. The region holds 7.7 billion barrels of oil, 266 billion CFT gas, scandium, yttrium and many rare earth minerals in the South China Sea alone. It also contains one-third of the entire world's marine biodiversity and provides about 10 percent of the world's fish catch. In the South China Sea, six countries have conflicting interests including different territorial claims. He mentioned that Bangladesh solved its maritime disputes with neighbours through multilateral process. In the changing global order, difference between great power and emerging middle power is narrowing down in recent times, thus competitions are arising.

Mr Khan highlighted why the Bay of Bengal is important. This region hosts nearly 2 billion people, the combined economy stands at US\$3 trillion, and one-third of global trade goods pass by this region. Massive deposits of oil, gas, and marine resources in the region. The region has fastest growth of 7.3 per cent on an average per year driven by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. For all these reasons, major powers like the US, the EU, China etc., are looking forward to building footing here through establishing infrastructure, gaining market access, achieving technological support, securing investment, and financing for national and regional growth.



After that, he identified the importance of Bangladesh in current geopolitical context. Bangladesh is the bridge between Southeast and South Asia. Half of the demographic composition of Bangladesh is youth. This does not mean it has economic advantage due to such a large labour force, but also this has military implications. In a scenario of conflict, Bangladesh can mobilise significant manpower for military purpose too. It has shown tremendous economic development since 2009 as the economy grew 188 per cent. Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and expected to be the 9th largest consumer market globally by 2030. Bangladesh with this massive economic growth increased urbanisation and industrialisation. By 2030, about 48% of Bangladeshis will live in cities. Last but not the least, Bangladesh is on the apex of Bay of Bengal which put it on important Sea Lane of Communication (SLOCs). It hosts three out of 12 ports in the region. Thus, it makes Bangladesh a possible connectivity hub for the region. All these factors made it a strategically important state in the Indo-Pacific.



Mr Khan highlighted the brewing competition in the Indo-Pacific region in turn, Bay of Bengal. From the coast of Africa to the Far East in Asia, major powers undertaking different He talked about the Chinese network of port facilities across Indian ocean for military and commercial purposes known as the “String of Pearl.” Then China took up the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project extending from China to Europe through land and sea. Afterwards, he mentioned about the “Global Security Initiative” or GSI adopted by

China. GSI talks about opposing unilateralism, saying no to group politics, avoiding bloc confrontation, the use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction etc. China has recently taken up assertive diplomacy like 'Wolf-warrior Diplomacy,' 'debt trap policy' etc. to gain advantage in the region. Though debt trap is called a myth by Chatham House in their study but this policy still raises controversy. Mr Khan then highlighted on various US documents published as their Indo-Pacific policy. Firstly, the 2017 National Security Strategy, then came out the Indo-Pacific Strategy 2018. Afterwards, the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region and Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision came out in 2019. Lastly, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States 2022 from White House was published. Later, National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy 2022 came out from the Department of Defence. All these talked about rerise of Asia and rise of revisionist power fuelling great power competition in the region. Thus, Bangladesh and Bay of Bengal being a part of the Indo-Pacific region, cannot stay out of this rising competition between great powers.

There are five challenges for Bangladesh which are needed to be addressed in this regional cooperation. First, the lack of regionalism in South Asia or Bay of Bengal. Institutions like ASEAN, the EU, etc. are navigating through regional competitions collectively, but South Asian or Bay of Bengal states are failing to do so. Second, repatriation of Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs). Bangladesh has been hosting over a million Rohingyas for over five years. This repatriation process is long overdue. With rise of competition in the region, the Rohingya issue might go out of focus which will hamper dignified, safe and voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar. Third, he talked about recovery from the aftershock of Covid-19 pandemic. Bangladesh, like every other country in the world, was hit hard by the pandemic. It is still recovering from the economic damage caused. In such a state, regional competition might create future difficulties in the process. Fourth, Russo-Ukrainian War put forward significant challenges to Bangladesh. Bangladesh suffered in order to secure food and energy for the population during the early stage of war. Fifth and last, keeping mutually beneficial relations with all major powers acting in the region. Having friendly relations with them all will be a diplomatic challenge for Bangladesh.



Mr Khan pointed out three ways forward for Bangladesh to be used in navigating through such uncharted waters. The country needs to maintain its strategic hedging in the region to avoid being dragged into regional competition. He underscored that Bangladesh needs to increase its proactive role to maintain peace and stability in the region. He stated that minilateralism under the umbrella of multilateralism can be an effective method to maintain a sound foreign policy.

# Diversifying Export Basket and Market: Role of Bangladesh Foreign Missions



## Dr Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, BIISS

Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

**Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**, Research Director, BIISS, talked about the export of Bangladesh, especially how to expand the market and diversify Bangladesh's export basket. Bangladesh has witnessed considerable changes in exports of over about last three decades and it has undergone a set of unilateral trade liberalisation policies starting since the 1990s. The corresponding result was that Bangladesh had a significantly higher export-GDP ratio and it was increasing steadily in the middle of 2010 and then the export of goods was significantly concentrated towards a very few products with an overwhelming majority share of RMGs. RMG products are basically dominating Bangladesh's export basket—more than 85 per cent of total exports. He mentioned this as a concern because, though the export-GDP ratio increased from 2011 to 2018, subsequently it reduced. He identified two inherent connotations from this trend. Firstly, Bangladesh's domestic economy has increased significantly so it has the strength shown by the positive sign but from the other side, it can be viewed negatively. To him, there is a kind of pessimism that



Bangladesh has still not much trade diversification. If Bangladesh had diversified product and services basket, it could be possible to achieve higher export-GDP ratio. In this regard, he brought the case of Vietnam and said, Vietnam currently have more than US\$300 billion in export and the export-GDP ratio is about 100 per cent. As a result, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing global economic crisis and smaller size of their GDP, Vietnam was doing very well in terms of exports just because of diversification of goods and services. Similarly, other countries who have diversified their products are also doing very well in this regard.

However, there are some positive aspects where Bangladesh has done very well and with that kind of hope and he expected that after graduation from LDC, Bangladesh can grow very well. One of the major reasons he referred is the good track record. Even during the global financial crisis, the domestic economy of Bangladesh had performed well which eventually gave strength. For example, during the challenge of the global financial crisis in 2007-2009, and amid the USA-China trade war started back in 2018, Bangladesh was able to uphold its economic growth. Even though Bangladesh had done very well in terms of the export of goods and services, currently, he said, it is facing an economic slowdown because of the Russia-Ukraine war. This war is disrupting the massive global supply chain and the rapid deceleration in global trade. It is a concern since it has created uncertainty and the end period of this war is unknown. All the countries of the world are facing serious external crisis.

At this juncture, Dr Kabir talked about the export trend of Bangladesh over the last four decades; there was a continuous growth except the 2019-20 with a huge fluctuation. There was a lot of series in favour of diversification. It portrayed that the basket was diversified, the portfolio was diversified and definitely, the fluctuation was less. He informed the audience that if the basket remains concentrated then the fluctuation becomes higher. Thus, prior to referring to the data of Bangladesh Bank, he said that the trend of export of Bangladesh is encouraging despite having a slight downfall in 2019-20. To identify the reason behind this trend, he found that, out of the total 20 sectors, half of the sectors had a significant contribution. 50 per cent of export services was diversified. As a result, Bangladesh did not face any remarkable decline during 2019-20. Currently, export of services of Bangladesh is about 16 per cent of total exports and in 2021-22, total export of goods and services was around US\$61 billion. It exceeded the target of export policy of Bangladesh,

and it is expected that according to the Export Policy 2021-24, Bangladesh can achieve the target of US\$80 billion. It has overarching objectives like Vision 2030, 2031, and 2041. By 2031, it wants to be an upper middle-income country and by 2041, an industrially developed, high-income country. There is a clear guideline in the 8th five-year plan to address challenges and tap opportunities in broader development spectrum which also describes export diversification, he mentioned.



Currently, the basket of goods and services is heavily concentrated and export earnings are heavily dependent on RMG and RMG allied products though there are some potential goods that may be proven helpful for accelerating Bangladesh's export earnings. Dr Kabir mentioned about existence of value chain linkage in the RMG and textiles sectors. On destinations and markets, he said export of Bangladesh's goods is mostly destined to few fixed markets like Europe, North America, and some other developed countries and developing countries like India. Recently export performance of Bangladesh to India has increased significantly; e.g., in the last fiscal year, it exported about US\$2 billion worth goods and more than US\$2 billion worth services. Looking deeper into this, Dr Kabir identified Bangladesh exports around 54 per cent to the EU, UK, 24 per cent in North America, 4 per cent to SAARC, 1 per cent to ASEAN, 1 per cent to South America, and less than 1 per cent to Africa. He then said, Bangladesh can explore a vast part of the world to export Bangladeshi goods. In terms of the composition of



export items, he said, among the total exports, knitwear is 44.57 per cent, woven garments are 37.25 per cent, and other items made of textiles is 3.34 per cent. Altogether, the RMG export is 87.47 per cent. Considering the case of export alone of goods in November 2022, he informed that contribution of the RMG sector is over 85 per cent. About services, he said there are a large number of sectors and sub-sectors. Major destinations in this regard are the US (24 per cent), China (15 per cent), Singapore (14 per cent), India (9 per cent), Russia (7 per cent), Germany (5 per cent), and others (21 per cent). The service sector, Dr Kabir argued, is fairly diversified but there is still room for development. However, comparing with other countries, Bangladesh currently has the least diversification considering the trend of the export diversification index.

Dr Kabir then talked about future opportunities of export. He said, China would be a good destination for Bangladesh but unfortunately it could not be grabbed. In China, the potential is very higher since there is 98 per cent of duty-free access to the product. Bangladesh however is yet to materialise this potential. There are other countries like UAE and UK where Bangladesh can export since these countries are exporting from other countries of the world. This, he saw as an opportunity for Bangladesh. Dr Kabir also tried to identify the footprint of Bangladesh's export to the world in terms of the export of goods and having the commercial wings in the Bangladeshi embassies. He focused on this particular issue to identify, to what extent the commercial wings are helpful to expand market for Bangladeshi goods and services. He identified, the impact of commercial wings are concentrated mostly towards South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia. Bangladesh do not have any kind of footprint through commercial wings in Africa and Latin America. If Bangladesh considers the case of export in some of the parts of the world, absence of commercial wing is an obstacle, he argued. Almost a similar case he identified in the export of services. He further argued that, in the mission where the commercial wings exist, Bangladeshi market is doing well, and there are other regions where Bangladesh needs to establish commercial wings. There are countries and regions around the world where Bangladesh is doing very well in terms of exporting services but there is no commercial wing, and he added, it is necessary.



Having said that, he also identified that performance of some of the commercial wings can be accelerated. For example, he brought the cases of Myanmar, Yangon, and Tehran. Commercial wings in these three places are not currently performing satisfactorily but strategically these locations are important in terms of expanding our commercial services. Apart, there are other places like Switzerland and Singapore where Bangladesh has the footprint to expand commercial interest but still the performance is not very well. Other countries in these places are doing very well through their missions and Bangladesh should also try. On the other hand, there are countries like Poland, Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Turkey and Sweden where Bangladeshi missions are performing well despite the absence of commercial wing. For example, in Poland, Bangladesh is exporting more than US\$2 billion. Thus, he suggested that Bangladesh may think of establishing commercial wings to expand more goods and services in these destinations. In terms of services, Dr Kabir said the commercial wings so far are performing good but there are a few areas where Bangladesh can still work on. Bangladesh may think about Luxembourg, and Malaysia for example. He said the country has a lot of potentials in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. In terms of commercial missions, Bangladesh does not have commercial missions in some places like Hong Kong, Netherlands, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia. Bangladesh is doing very good in Hong Kong where export of services is around US\$1 billion. More or less similar picture is seen for the Netherlands, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia.



Bangladesh has good potential, but there is no commercial wing. If the wings can be established, Dr Kabir said, Bangladesh may probably expand its export horizon.

About export market priorities, he said electrical, and electronics items can be considered. There are 100 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to attract foreign investment. In addition, lots of local investment is also coming. He mentioned, these investments may be utilized in the electrical, and electronics sector as well as in the light engineering items. In addition, Bangladesh has a lot of potential in the plastic sector, especially considering the recycling aspect. Pharmaceutical product is also another potential sector for Bangladesh. The software and IT enabled services is also performing very well which already has about half a billion market and the size is increasing. Then travel and tourism, handicrafts and GI products, raw & processed crab and eel, Tea - especially organic and value-added tea, frozen food and fish, raw and processed vegetables, jute diversified products are important for



Bangladesh's export basket. Among these, raw and processed crab and eel have also been identified in export policy for 2021-2024. Nowadays, economies are moving towards more environment friendly products which can help flourishing

our jute diversified products in the world market. In terms of frozen food and fish, Bangladesh was traditionally doing well but there is now scope for expansion.

In terms of recommendations, Dr Kabir at first focused on a central comprehensive repository of information. He advised to establish this by the Ministry of Commerce. This may comprise information about exportable goods including pictorials, that can be used by the foreign mission for horizontal expansion of the export market. Later, he talked about economic diplomacy. Through the foreign mission, Bangladesh should be strengthened and updated as prime minister Sheikh Hasina clearly instructed this. Then, he mentioned the issue of nation branding. He said, Bangladesh should create its own brands which is very much important in its traditional and diversified products. Then, he suggested to arrange a solo exhibition of and to participate in international trade fairs with Bangladesh's diversified products. It would facilitate the creation of new markets and increase exports. He suggested for opting a strategy for market diversification. Some regions still have untapped export potential, which should be realised through this strategy. Through this strategy, Bangladesh, he assumes, will be able to catch the market of Africa, South America, and other parts of Southeast and East Asia; emphasis should be given on training and orientation of diplomats and commercial officers. To him, it is a core thing because other foreign missions in Bangladesh are doing the same thing and the impact is evident. He acknowledged the fact that foreign missions of Bangladesh in different countries are already working for that matter, but it should be done more rigorously, so that they can impact actively.

About the global value chain, he said it has already been mentioned in the 8th Five Year Plan document and also in the export policy so that Bangladesh can integrate itself with the regional and global value chain. Currently, Bangladesh has only one sector – textile and clothing. Through this sector, he said Bangladesh can link in the global and regional value chain. However, Bangladesh also has to explore other sectors like light engineering sectors so that it can be integrated in the global value chain even in a greater magnitude. Through the value chain, Bangladesh can also integrate in intra-industry trade which, he thought, is very much required. Bangladesh now has seven out of the ten greenest factories in the world. By flagging this, it can attract more investment. Foreign investors can come over to invest and take Bangladeshi products to their corresponding markets. He again mentioned the fact that Bangladesh should establish commercial wing in the

Hague, Rome, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Ankara, Riyadh, Lisbon, and Vienna since trade performance in these places are excellent despite such wing is not there. He emphasised on establishing commercial wing there. About Yangon and Tehran, he said these are underperformers; there are other underperformers as well. He advised for regular evaluation of these commercial wings so that they perform better in the future.

# Open Discussion



**Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain**, Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals, mentioned Alfred T Mahan, who published a book in 1892 titled *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1892* in which he examined the effect of sea power upon the course of history. He quoted Lord Curzon, “In the 21st century, the Indian Ocean is going to be the ocean of the century”. He then referred to his book which was published in 1992

titled *Superpower and Security in the Indian Ocean: A South Asian Perspective*. In his book, he explained the role of European powers in this ocean. The motive of external powers regarding the ocean still exists. He made another comment regarding the membership of IORA. There are about 54 littoral countries in the Indian Ocean; however, IORA has only 23 member states and is not much known to media. It needs to gear up efforts to keep itself alive.

**Mr. M.S. Siddiqui**, legal economist, commended the presentation of Dr Mahfuz Kabir. However, he provided his own observations. One of the hurdles Bangladesh is going to face is the LDC graduation. The presentation highlighted the increase of exports through diversification but Bangladesh does not have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). There are structural hurdles as well. For instance, Bangladesh is lagging behind in trade facilitation and reform in the taxation system. He mentioned that lack of Bond licence is another obstacle for export diversification.





**Salahud Din Ahmed**, former member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, praised Dr Kabir's recommendation of a comprehensive information repository. He referred to his presentation on underperformance of commercial wings and asked if there was a possibility to change the name of the commercial wings.

**Dr Zahid Khan**, Group Captain, Bangladesh Air Force, thanked BIISS for organising the colloquium. He commented that the paper on “Bangladesh and IORA” could focus on one aspect of opportunities e.g., trade. He then talked about the danger of oil spills in the Indian Ocean and urged IORA members to tackle the issue urgently.



About the Regional Competition of Bay of Bengal presentation, he mentioned that every academic research should be based on at least one theory. He suggested that Glenn Snyder's “stability–instability paradox” or “Regional security complex” of Barry Buzan could be used for the study. These theories will support the argument better in the study. Lastly, he commented that study should look beyond a simplistic narrative of “why Bangladesh,” rather the study can look into a comparative analysis with Myanmar.



**Saume Saptaparna Nath**, Research Associate, KRF Center for Bangladesh and Global Affairs, asked how can Bangladesh create inclusivity in the IORA between strategic rivals as far as the blue economy is concerned.

**Colonel Md Iftekhar Ahmed**, afwc, psc, lsc, former research director, BISS, suggested that IORA should have a secretariat in IORA member states and create an executive body for better governance and initiate coalition forces with member state's contribution from their armed forces.



**Prof Begum Touheeda Faruki**, former director general, Department of Women and Gender Affairs, said Bangladesh successfully resolved the maritime disputes with India and Myanmar and can also play an important role in IORA.

**Brig Gen Mirza Ezazur Rahman (Ret'd)** asked if there is any research that signifies the benefit Bangladesh derived from the newly gained maritime region.



# Responses from the Speakers



In response to the LDC graduation issue, Dr Kabir said Bangladesh has already formulated strategies for LDC graduation and is on the right track to overcome any challenges emerging from the LDC graduation. Bangladesh is hopeful to secure GSP+ facilities in the EU market and the FTA issues is clearly mentioned in the export policy and eighth five-year plan. There are still some challenges present and Bangladesh has a lot of room for studying and improving the performance of foreign missions. Foreign missions' commercial wings are to be emphasised for improving the country's exports



**Moutusi Islam** clarified the issue of membership in IORA. In order to become a member of IORA, the state has to apply for the membership. According to the IORA Charter, states must adhere to the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter of the Association to become a member. Then the expansion of membership will be decided by members on the basis of consensus. She gave examples of Pakistan and Myanmar, countries that applied for membership but failed to become one due to lack of consensus.

On the visibility of IORA, Ms Islam agreed that IORA needs to increase visibility in order to raise its global profile. During the chairmanship of Bangladesh, there have been certain developments in this regard. For instance, celebration of the annual foundation day as IORA Day, the Secretary General's media familiarisation visits to member states and implementation of the IORA Champion Awards, etc. She commented that the media indeed needs to highlight positive views on IORA.

Regarding measures on oil spills, she mentioned that the issue of marine pollution has been highlighted in IORA in recent times; Indonesia and Germany initiated a project entitled "IORA Action Against Marine Debris", which aims at developing an "IORA Declaration on Combating Marine Debris" and a "Strategic Framework of Action on Marine Debris in the Indian Ocean" which is expected to be adopted in 2023.



Referring to the question on inclusivity, she clarified that India is not a dialogue partner, rather an IORA member. Bangladesh, as chair, is on the right path ensuring inclusivity in IORA. The motto is rightly framed by Bangladesh focusing on inclusivity. Capacity building is prioritised which can be seen in proposing the Dhaka Development Initiative renamed as IORA Development Initiative (IDI) which is a means to share expertise and build capacity among members. The proposed establishment of the IORA Development Fund is expected to narrow the gap between advanced economies and LDCs of IORA. Besides, IORA is in the right direction to formulate the “Guidelines on the Strategic Management of IORA’s Engagement with Dialogue Partners”.

About establishing the IORA Secretariat, she clarified that IORA already has a secretariat in Mauritius. It has a Secretary General as well. The current Secretary General is Dr Salman Al Farisi from Indonesia.

**Md Nahiyun Shajid Khan**, in response to Group Captain (Retd.) Dr Zahid Khan, he mentioned that in his study, he used the Rand Corporation’s model for regional competition for analysis. He believed that theories always would give solid



foundation to any research and he would assess the possibility of incorporating them in the study. Upon suggestions from Dr. Khan, he agreed to study the possibility

of incorporating the stability-instability theory and regional security dynamic in his works. About the issue of comparison with Myanmar, he highlighted that this study was not looking into assessing a competition with any of the neighbouring countries or beyond, rather it focused on looking into Bangladesh's position in the rising regional competition.

# Speech by the Chief Guest



**H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP**

Honourable Foreign Minister Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

**H E Dr A K Abdul Momen**, MP, Honourable Foreign Minister Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, began his speech by saying that the month December is the month of victory achieved in 1971. He paid profound respects to the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose unprecedented, charismatic leadership and long struggles helped Bangladesh achieve its long-cherished independence. He also paid sincere homage to three million martyrs whose supreme sacrifice made Bangladesh a free nation, freedom fighters for their invaluable contribution and two lakh women who sacrificed their honour for liberation of the country. Bangladesh follows a foreign policy based on the guiding principle of great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and that principle is "Friendship to all, malice towards none". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), under the dynamic leadership and guidance of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is successfully conducting all its diplomatic activities to make the country a Sonar Bangla, a prosperous and peaceful country

which had always been the dream of the Father of the Nation. The ministry has played a significant role in all development activities and roadmaps adopted by the government in the last 14 years in line with the Vision 2021 and Vision 2041 as set by the H.E. Prime Minister; in order to achieve those goals (visions 2021, 2030 and 2041), they have developed certain packages. There are three packages; one is known as public diplomacy which has five components—increasing total inward investment in the country, increasing exports and also diversify products, gainful employment of Bangladeshi people both at home and abroad, technology transfer, providing quality services to Bangladeshi diaspora and others. There is a complement for reinforcing this package and that is public diplomacy. This diplomacy is designed in a manner to help achieve aforementioned goals, particularly the country's inward FDI. If a government employee from Bangladesh tells others that the country is a land of opportunities, has a vibrant economy with higher rate of return on investments vis-à-vis its neighbours, e.g., India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, many may not believe that. However, if some public figure abroad who is there because of his/her personal credibility and says Bangladesh is a land of opportunities, many people will believe that. Therefore, MOFA has designed the public diplomacy package. In addition, they are promoting another package, and that is, over the last 14 years, made notable progress in GDP growth rates and various socioeconomic indicators. More peace and stability would be needed for sustaining this progress. Any distortion or disturbance in peace and stability hinders countries from sustaining their achievement of development goals. In order to sustain the development trajectory, MOFA is promoting another package, known as regional peace and stability package.

The country has been able to graduate into a developing country with unprecedented level of development activities that have been taking place in recent times. This has been possible due to successful pursuit of diplomacy by Bangladesh at the UN. In order to uplift image of Bangladesh as a peaceful, progressive and responsible country, the government has been strengthening bilateral relations with neighbours and other nations by successful manoeuvring of its foreign policy as well as diplomacy. With a view to facing the recently emerged global challenges, the government also has initiated a well-planned by its visible presence in the international mainstream, strengthening regional and subregional cooperation. An exemplary role has been created for implementing a successful and realistic application of humanitarian diplomacy as well, particularly for Rohingya repatriation.

The outstanding contribution of humanity by H.E. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by accommodating and providing shelter to the persecuted Rohingyas of Myanmar in Bangladesh is indeed rare in global history. These successful endeavours have earned Bangladesh much reputation in the international arena. Even, in the case of climate change, the country has been playing a leadership role to save the planet earth. The whole world is passing through rapid transformations alongside many challenges. Here, each country has its own way to come to terms with the time. Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh wants to approach this change through people's empowerment and developing the agents of change. This empowerment comes from skills and knowledge which in turn, is developed through meaningful research on each issue that poses challenges to Bangladesh's progress.



BIISS, as a prime research body of the Bangladesh government, plays an important role in this regard, hoping to advance knowledge and understanding contemporary international and strategic issues in national and regional perspectives. This is what BIISS is contributing to and its researchers are striving for. It is therefore, the researchers and especially the young ones, who are agents of change to pursue knowledge for a glorious future. Dr. Momen referred to the presentations and it was said empirical data at times talks about the past, but

if one looks at the future or forward besides empirical data and their analyses, there might also be need for looking into qualitative aspects of the scenario or environment around other stakeholders. BIISS' works are grounded in various political, economic and social issues that cause instability as well as factors that can lead towards international cooperation. The institute has unique conveying power; it brings together various ministries of the government including defence and foreign, both publicly and privately to discuss, explore and shape important security policies. It holds important events each year involving noteworthy political figures, scholars, academics, journalists, civil servants, think tanks, distinguished personalities—from both home and abroad. The very idea of such an institute is to work together for getting stakeholders into creating creative solutions that will benefit all people. Its driving vision is that of a world where peace prevails over conflict, training on promotion of national culture, monitoring national security developments, and finally, establishing a constructive relationship between relevant academic and executive entities active in the field of security and strategy. He expected BIISS would assist them in finding and implementing solutions to successfully manage challenges and crises. Through its research and educational efforts, the institute seeks to advance strategic thinking, contribute to conflict prevention, promote the development of a peaceful and prosperous world. In this way, striving to anticipate new security challenges, threats and elaborate possible methods to address them before they become critical, is very crucial for the institute. For successful implementation of responsibility, its importance should not remain limited merely within Bangladesh; with globally recognized valuable research work, its reputation has the potential to go beyond the national boundary. Dr. Momen expected BIISS to have such capable researchers and believed it was working for developing more of such research persons in coming days. He spoke of his optimism about the younger generation of the country as reflected from papers presented in the session as he believed they had the potential to work towards their aim.

There is need for research works on strategic studies involving changing environment, especially in this time due to the fact that increasingly complex and competitive situations have appeared worldwide. Bangladesh's geopolitical location as a basin country in the Bay of Bengal is a determining fact influencing its domestic and international affairs. From various economic and strategic perspectives, the Bay of Bengal's geopolitical significance can be analysed. He



encouraged and welcomed more creative research papers in these regards in future. Strategic research is an approach to gaining valuable strategic insights, where the government has to work continuously with global security and economic issues. Hence, obtaining in-depth data driven facts helps to build the insights on current trends and analyses covering wide range of global political and security questions to take timely decisions; this has both short- and long-term impacts for the government and the country. In present global realities, BISS researchers must understand that the field of strategic studies also needs to recognise the global roots of strategic thinking, actions and incorporate non-Western perspectives too. Rise of new actors, notably India and China, pose both intellectual and policy challenges, and require more informed thinking. In the changing world, this field must adapt therefore, to a global outlook to remain relevant. There is, similarly, a need of moving beyond the conventional dominance of Western perspectives. In recent times, it seems the Cold War is reappearing and forcing polarization; in the Indo-Pacific region particularly, attempts are being made in this regard. In Myanmar, citizens have been deprived of their inalienable rights partly due to the sustained venom of hatred against them as an ethnic minority. Newer groups and blocs are coming in the Indo-Pacific too. Rising global temperatures, climatic devastations, their impacts on Bangladesh and the region, fear of radicalism and security risks, prospects of receiving means for implementing the SDGs, transfer of technology, money and challenges of graduation from the LDC category, etc.,

are all burning issues. Dr. Momen hoped BIISS could undertake works to address them and advise the Bangladesh government accordingly.

Strategic research backed by facts and information can help a government plan and implement its survival and growth strategies. It also assists to understand hidden opportunities from multiple viewpoints, e.g., geopolitical situations, a nation's inclinations and principles, political alignment strategies, etc. Such research offers growth strategies for leaders, enabling them in making informed economic decisions. An innovative institute's access to strategic insights can tremendously assist a government in taking wise decisions and thus help avoid an economic debacle or impending war. Dr. Momen suggested BIISS publications should be studied by key decision makers and commented upon by officials from the cabinet. BIISS publications have conveying power and their international policy perspectives can make them an important factor in global strategic thinking. All great powers have high-quality research and strong think tanks. Hence, Bangladesh should also take efficient steps in research and education concerning strategic studies. BIISS is a well-known research organisation in South Asia. It has been working relentlessly for the nation and providing inputs which are helping the government in many ways in policy formulation and maintaining relationships with the international community including various organisations. He said MOFA expects more innovative research activities alongside traditional ones as regards the ongoing economic turmoil and uncertainties. There is need of looking into new opportunity that is coming up; he, in this respect, mentioned the mangrove afforestation project undertaken by the UAE aimed at combatting climate change impacts. The same could be said of Saudi Arabia, who is trying to develop a whole new region and a city. For that purpose, a lot of expertise would be required. If Bangladesh could understand what sort of expertise, it should then try to develop a prescription/recommendation for its universities so that certain universities might also initiate for developing that kind of expertise. This would assist the country's people to become more competitive in catching the market when it would be opened. However, Dr Momen also said these issues were not often talked about. He suggested research institutions like BIISS attach more attention to these and avail the opportunities. For example, Saudi Arabia is planning to spend about US\$40 billion to combat climate change impacts and would also go for several afforestation projects, not only in the Middle East but also in Africa. Bangladesh could think of taking



own goals at the same time. He added that his ministry expects more innovative research along with traditional ones concerning global climatic, political, economic crises, and BIISS would play a greater role. The ministry is ready to extend any assistance in these regards and enhance its global recognition. That will help not only Bangladesh but also other countries. He concluded by referring to a recent debate about the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF) and the QUAD; BIISS was called in to look into these and he thanked the institute for providing a report assessing whether joining the IPEF would be good for Bangladesh or not

# Remarks by the Chair



**Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA**  
Chairman, BIISS

Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain thanked the speakers for their presentations. He said their statements were not only comprehensive, but also gave guidance towards which Bangladesh should be heading. The presenters, he added, had tried to provide a pathway to deal with issues that are contemporary, issues that are relevant, and issues that have implications to Bangladesh, be it in a bilateral, regional or global context.

He informed the audience that, the challenges Bangladesh faces, the evolving global situation, and the impact these may put on Bangladesh are the primary subjects to study by the BIISS officers. He asked them to provide ideas for making BIISS more relevant in both academic and policy levels. He also thanked the guests for their appreciation and assured that such kind words surely give encouragement, and confidence to officers of BIISS to work in a more focused manner; such confidence will lead to carry out research in a well-directed way. Finally, he thanked all guests, panellists, and audience present both physically and online.



## Session II: Security and Strategic Affairs Presentations



Five Decades of National Security of Bangladesh: Evolving Nature and Policy Options

**M Ashique Rahman**

Senior Research Fellow, BIISS

M Ashique Rahman, Senior Research Fellow of BIISS, in this presentation analysed the evolution of the concepts of security and national security. Then he moved to study how the concept of security and national security evolved among the epistemic community in Bangladesh. After that, he looked into whether that evolution is reflected in the policies of the government, i.e., if they are commensurate with the evolution. He ended his presentation with making some policy suggestions for policymakers.

Mr Rahman said that the concept of national security has been one of the most evolving concepts in international relations in general and particularly

in security studies. He mentioned that the concept has evolved from traditional understanding of security to non-traditional understanding for over five to seven decades and in mid 1990s the emergence of human security understanding has essentially changed the “referent object” of security understanding. He highlighted different definitions of security studies from the 1940s to 1990s. During World War II, national security meant state’s security, war, military security were the focus of the discipline which continued till the 1960s. Afterwards, former World Bank president, Robert McNamara said, “Security means development,” thus started a new focus in the study. He pointed out that in the early 1980s, the idea of “non-traditional” security emerged from different scholars’ study, notably, Ken Booth. Ken Booth said, “Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from the physical and human constraints.....security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin.” Muhammad Ayoob wrote that, “Security-insecurity is defined in relation to vulnerabilities – both internal and external – that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes.” During this time Mr. Rahman mentioned that scholars like Giacomo Luciani and Stephen Walt continued and emphasised on the traditional security concept as the main focus of the national security study. He underscores an important to note is that, such evolution of security understanding has been buttressed/complemented by the transformation of international relations/security studies theories viz., realism/liberalism to Critical Security Studies (CSS) encompassing constructivism and post-positivism or post-structuralism.

Mr Rahman briefly reviewed the existing literature on national security of Bangladesh shows extensive research on the conceptualization of national security of Bangladesh. He mentioned that most of the studies are focused on elaborate discussion on various security threats/concerns and how to address them. He divided the period of literature into five different decades, after independence – 1970s, the period of 1980s, Post-Cold War Period and lastly, contemporary times since 2009.



Mr Rahman pointed out K Subramanyam's writing on "Security of Bangladesh" in Economic and Political Weekly published on 06 May, 1972. He noted in his writing that Myanmar is a national security concern for Bangladesh. Another piece from Christopher H. Bateman, "National Security and Nationalism in Bangladesh" published in Asian Survey in 1979, discussed security of Bangladesh from a state level approach. He mentioned a couple of pieces by Talukdar Maniruzzaman and Rounaq Jahan but focusing mostly on political crisis aspect viz Talukdar Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh in 1974: Economic Crisis and Political Polarisation," Asian Survey, published in February 1975 all looked into the traditional notion of national security.

In the 1980s, understanding of security started to develop and BIISS drove the discipline from the front. Articles like Shah Salah Uddin, "Strategic Matrix and National Security", 1984 and Abdul Hafiz, "National Security and Small States: A Third World Perspective", 1986 spearheaded the study. First book on national security came in 1987 by Abdul Hafiz and Abdur Rob Khan, "Security of Small States." Later, Dr Talukder Maniruzzaman, "The Security of Small States in the Third World", Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defense published in 1982.

He mentioned that Ishtiaq Hossain wrote on "Management of Bangladesh's National Security Problems", The Roundtable in 1991 and Iftekharuzzaman,

“Challenges to the Security of Bangladesh: Primacy of the Political and Socio-Economic”, Arms Control, 1992 talked about the non-traditional security issues of Bangladesh in the post-cold war era. Then Humayun Kabir edited “National Security of Bangladesh in the Twenty-first Century” in June 2000 published from BIISS and the Major General M A Mubeen and Humayun Kabir edited “25 Years of BIISS: An Anthology” published in June 2003; covered traditional and non-traditional security issues of Bangladesh extensively. Afterwards BIISS took the initiative and published three volumes of books titled “Bangladesh National Security” respectively in 2007, 2008, 2009. Finally, Shahedul Anam Khan wrote article on “Good Governance and National Security” published in BIISS Journal, 2010. He highlighted these academic publications to assess and gave an overview of the evolution and development of the idea of national security in the epistemic community of Bangladesh in last five decades.

Mr Rahman shed light on policy initiatives the government undertook over the years. The first official document was the “National Defence Policy” after independence. After a long gap in 2010 under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took initiative to revise the policy. In 2018, the government adopted another “National Defence Policy.” Afterwards, Bangladesh adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of 2015 which indicates the government’s efforts to accommodate traditional and non-traditional security perspectives. He pointed out that Bangladesh adopted “The National Cybersecurity Strategy of Bangladesh 2014” and a revision is in discussion. Government also developed different high level coordination committees headed by the Prime Minister and ministerial level committees led by the Home Minister.



Mr Rahman finally moved to his policy recommendation of his presentation. He pointed out that in every writing he mentioned called Bangladesh a “weak state” or “small state.” He suggested to come out of “weak state”, “small state” construction as Bangladesh can no longer be denominated in such a category; scholars and policymakers have no need to make a choice between traditional and non-traditional security, rather should take a comprehensive approach. He said traditional security needs to be given emphasis, hence, increasing military capabilities through procurement and modernization to ensure national security. Late he added that Bangladesh needs to devise sectoral policies. He mentioned that like the social security policy or cyber security policy, policies can be taken for example a national security strategy for terrorism. He then proposed that it is high time for National Security Strategy Paper for adaptation. Bangladesh can follow the footsteps of the developed state like the US to formulate our own national security strategy. SRF Rahman then put forward a request to the policymakers that making official policies public document at least the abridged version. Through this government will help the cause of the research community and especially for the citizens to know what the government is doing about critical issues like national security. Last but not least, Bangladesh can also think of establishing a National Security Council. He mentioned that Bangladesh in 1982 formed a National Security Council with nine members which was headed by President Abdus Sattar.

Members include the three defence services chiefs with five other members. But unfortunately, the initiative faded away later. He suggested that Bangladesh's epistemic community and policymakers along with all the stakeholders should work collectively to study and work on national security issues.

# Cyberspace and National Security: A Framework for Critical Infrastructure (CI) Protection in Bangladesh



**Nahian Reza Sabriet**

Research Officer, BIISS

Under the broad theme of cybersecurity, Mr Nahian Reza Sabriet presented his paper titled “Cyberspace and National Security: A Framework for Critical Information Infrastructure of Bangladesh.” At the outset, he explained an emerging concept called “hybrid security space.” This space includes cyber threats that originate from and affect both traditional (i.e., state) and non-traditional security issues. He flagged a common misconception about critical information infrastructure (CII) or critical infrastructure (CI) of cybersecurity. Although it may seem at first glance that CI only talks about critical vulnerabilities; in reality, these are elements of critical importance. Unfortunately, specialised security domains like maritime security and cyber security are still studied from a land or territorial perspective. Therefore, it is important to conceptualise and analyse cybersecurity from an exclusively “cyber” angle.

He informed the audience about some relevant concepts. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) defines cybersecurity as global solutions to the threats posed by hacking and compromising computer systems. However, it is a narrow definition. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) provides a broader definition as it talks about an extended “cyber environment” comprising multiple stakeholders, multiple countries and multifaceted (i.e., traditional and non-traditional) security threats. To define CI, the US Department of Homeland Security talks about important resources, structures and networks, either physical or electronic, whose loss or failure will impact national security, national economy, national public health and combination thereof. Scholars are now increasingly looking at both the market oriented as well as security-oriented framework for critical infrastructure. Bangladesh Government’s e-Government Computer Incident Response Team (BGD e-GOV CIRT) defines it as infrastructure that would hamper economic and national security of the country if it were negatively impacted or eliminated. The Information and Communication Technology Division, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology identified 29 institutes as CI. The list includes different types of public infrastructure, i.e., Power Grid Company of Bangladesh, National Board of Revenue, National Data Center of Bangladesh Computer Council, Bangladesh Bank, other scheduled banks, Dhaka and Chittagong stock exchanges, Central Depository of Bangladesh and Immigration Police.

Bangladesh has maintained a stable position in the global cybersecurity indices over the past few years. However, one has to be cautious since data and indices may not always represent absolute reality when it comes to non-traditional security threats. In these cases, the sources of threats are also not easily identifiable. For example, researchers who work on cyber infrastructures face an “attribution problem” as the perpetrator is not always distinctively attributable. It can be a state, a non-state group, and sometimes, even the machine itself can malfunction and become a threat to the infrastructure. Although cybersecurity experts vouch for a multi-stakeholder approach, a significant number of them consider the state as the primary coordinator and the highest-level player. When the issue is of vital national interests, one simply cannot ignore the importance of state and its executive or legislative powers. States also have the authority over drafting and implementation of national cyber defence policies. Data for cyber indices are aggregated, compiled and analysed based on infections per country. Thus, CI or



cybersecurity cannot be separated from national security frameworks or policies.



Mr. Sabriet thinks there is a dearth of literature from non-Western authors on cybersecurity and CI protection. The statement is even more relevant in South Asian context since South American and Southeast Asian scholars have made notable contributions to the field. He conducted this qualitative research as an attempt to bridge the gap. The research incorporates both primary and secondary data, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), journal articles, news reports and policy documents. It suggests a four-tiered framework for CI protection: technical defence (unit level), critical information protection (institutional level), responsive resilience (architectural level) and strategic agility (state level).

Among technical defence tools, Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) is commonly used. It can remotely control and coordinate large CI networks like power grids or water development system. In Bangladesh's CI defence structure, SCADA tools were first adopted in the 1990s; however, industry-wide implementation has not been achieved yet. Bangladesh is now aiming at further developments in this area by taking advantage of optical fibre and alternative micro-technologies. Power stations in Chattogram, Mymensingh, Comilla and Sylhet zones are already using SCADA to connect and supervise their 79 sub-

stations. Nevertheless, the complexity in SCADA's architectural management has recently been seen during the accidental power outage in November 2022. It was not a cyber-hacking incident; rather, a transportability restraint resulted from unreported and unnoticed electricity draining at load dispatch centres. It also shows the importance of real-time monitoring and threat detection. Many countries like Italy are also using it for smooth functioning of traffic systems, which is a part of their core CI. In Bangladesh, it can be useful for detecting vehicle, human and freight movements in high security areas like international airports, sea ports and land borders. Here, use of AI and AI-powered tools can also help the state prelimit threats, machine-failure and prepare its networks accordingly.

As regards critical information protection, Mr Sabriet underscored the importance of data sanctuary and cryptography. Cryptography is widely used for protecting passwords ranging from credit and debit cards to biometric kits of smartphones; one must not forget this data is also being channelled to software companies in many parts of the world. Legally or illegally, anybody can use it. As the world is progressing towards a digital or paperless market, the future of crypto-mining and energy consumption has led to heated debates among scholars. Before embarking on massive technological advancement in this field, Bangladesh must ensure optimum energy usage as uncontrolled use of fossil fuel for crypto-mining leads to significant environmental damages. He also believes that maintaining a vulnerability index is crucial for cyber preparedness and CI protection. This is where research organisations like BIISS can play pertinent roles. The most important part of data protection of CI can be facilitated by institutionalised cyber insurance. In South Asia, understanding of cyber insurance is still at an incipient level. A small number of companies provide insurance to institutions and individuals in dispersed manner. However, it is time to realise that cyber insurance needs a broader and holistic approach since not only the institutions but also governments require cyber insurance to protect their data. Undoubtedly, the concept of CI further validates this argument.



The third stage of CI protection framework is responsive resilience. It can be ensured by maintaining an uninterrupted cyber supply chain. Mr. Sabriet opined that cyber supply chain has to be taken very seriously since, with every passing day, the global Information Technology (IT) sector is expanding unprecedently. Simultaneously, the fourth industrial revolution is opening up investment opportunities for small-scale manufacturers and remote economies. However, considering the CI of a country, quality of products needs to compliment the quantity. Universally renowned companies like Apple have a certification process, i.e., Made for i-devices (MFi) certification, that ensures quality of third-party accessories for their hardware. At the national levels, states can use similar certification for IT products. Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Digital Security Agency can be viable responsible bodies in this regard. Another important issue is packet switching at district and divisional levels which can ensure location-specific protection of data. Instead of transferring data of a particular CI altogether, it will divide them into certain groups so that these “data packets” can be isolated, quarantined or even destroyed in case of an emergency. At the same time, there must be human alternatives to support AI malfunctions. The last component of this tier is awareness and training. He lauded the initiatives taken by the Bangladesh government for awareness building and capacity development. The 2022 Report of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) highlighted Bangladesh's

strength in this field. The government's decision to introduce cyber gym at tertiary education levels, provision of funds for graduate and PhD level research will also expedite future developments.

Mr. Sabriet then moved to the final tier of the framework where states or equivalent authorities formulate strategies for smooth functioning of the three remaining tiers. It includes formulation of repeatable and adaptive strategies, inclusion of CI into legal documents and facilitating cyber diplomacy. He noted that the Digital Security Act of Bangladesh dedicates separate provisions for critical infrastructure and punishable offences if anyone violates it. He emphasised on cyber diplomacy and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). This form of diplomacy was extremely helpful for preserving diplomatic momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cyber diplomacy has also helped Bangladesh connect with countries like the Lao PDR and Samoa and explore new options for engagements. At the same time, existing bilateral relations with countries like India and Thailand have also been energised by it.

He finished the presentation with a phrase commonly used by cybersecurity enthusiasts: "beyond guns, gates and guards." To understand the real meaning of cybersecurity and CI, one has to think beyond traditional security infrastructures. Cybersecurity cannot be ensured by increasing arms, building physical walls or appointing human guards; everyone should look at it from a fresh lens to understand the shifting dynamics. He hoped that the proposed framework would contribute to the government's journey towards "Smart Bangladesh".

# Taiwan as a Flashpoint in US-China Competition: Implications of a Potential Fallout in Bangladesh



## Ayesha Binte Towhid

Research Officer, BIISS

Ms Ayesha Binte Towhid presented a summary of her ongoing research on “Taiwan as a Flashpoint in US-China Competition: Implications of a Potential Fallout in Bangladesh”. She stated that the Taiwan question is an issue from the Chinese civil war that continues to impact the cross-strait relation and the US-China competition. It holds the potential to disrupt regional stability and have global consequences. Both the US and China want to see a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan question but they have different interpretations of the topic. This has made the issue filled with complexity, uncertainty and prone to miscalculations.

When it comes to the US-China competition, there are many literatures discussing how this issue is evolving in the Bay of Bengal, in the wider Indian Ocean and also as part of the Indo-Pacific region. But when it comes to discussion

of flashpoints with relevance to Bangladesh, it is quite understudied. This is the research gap that the study aimed to address. The study is based on three research questions. First, why is Taiwan considered a flashpoint in the US-China competition? Second, will there be an escalation centering Taiwan? If so, what are the probable scenarios? Third, what are the implications of a potential fallout in Bangladesh?

To answer the first question, Ms Towhid explained the differing ideological standpoint regarding the issue. In Chinese perspective, Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People's Republic of China and it is a sacred duty to achieve the great reunification. It is considered as part of China's core interests. China believes in One China Principle and sees peaceful reunification under "One China, Two systems" as the only acceptable solution. Although China advocates for a peaceful reunification, changes in domestic politics inside Taiwan has made China harden its position. China takes a strong position against the "Taiwan independence separatist forces in Taiwan and interference of external forces" in the island. For that purpose, China promulgated the Anti-Secession Law which indicates the possibility to employ non-peaceful means under specific conditions to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Escalation of tension was seen during the US Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit. The recently published White paper of China vowed not to renounce the use of force, and take all necessary measures to guard against external interference and all separatist activities.

China's approach towards Taiwan has been dependent on the position of the ruling party in Taiwan. Since the democratisation of Taiwan, its position on the cross-strait relation has undergone different phases. There were difficult phases but when the Kuomintang (KMT) returned to power in 2008, there was institutionalised dialogues between both sides and there was stability in cross-strait relations. Since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came in power in 2016, the cross-strait relation deteriorated. The DPP has been calling for defending sovereignty and democracy of the island. This has put cross-strait relations in a conflicting position.





Next, Ms Towhid discussed the US's view regarding the topic. Since the US-China rapprochement, the US maintains the One China Policy which is a recognition of the PRC as the only legitimate government of China. But the US's interpretation of 'One China policy' is different from the 'One-China Principle' held by the PRC. The US acknowledges the Chinese position that Taiwan was part of China but it does not recognise Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan. This is one of the reasons why there is so much complexity regarding this issue. Under the Taiwan Relations Act, the US supports Taiwan's self-defence and it also maintains the capacity to resist force or coercion against Taiwan. Here is another complexity. Although the US maintains the capacity, it does not commit that it will come to Taiwan's defence. Here the US maintains "Strategic Ambiguity" i.e., purposeful uncertainty about the conditions or nature of possible intervention in a conflict centering Taiwan. These two areas are critical for understanding the complexities regarding Taiwan at present.

Besides these ideological reasons, Taiwan's strategic importance is a major consideration. First, Taiwan is part of the 'first island chain' which is a hypothetical concept formulated by the US strategists in the 1940s to contain the former USSR and China. This concept still remains relevant for the US. For China, having control over Taiwan allows it to solidify its position in the first island chain. It also

allows China to break into the Pacific and operate eastwards. This would change the strategic balance in the Western Pacific. This will be concerning for the US. Second, the location of Taiwan is important for both parties to maintain influence in the South China Sea and East China Sea. Third, Taiwan dominates the global semiconductor and advanced chip manufacturing capacity. Semiconductor supply is connected to the US's national security. Losing access to Taiwan's semiconductor industry would threaten the US's military and technological leadership. According to US based reports, cutting off US's access to it would allow America's adversary to gain upper hand in every domain of warfare. So strategically the semiconductor industry is very important for both the US and China. Fourth, Taiwan strait is one of the busiest sea lanes of communications. It is the primary route for maritime trade for China and other countries of this region. Maintaining freedom of navigation through the strait is of crucial importance. Lastly, this flashpoint is a determiner of the evolving regional security order. The Taiwan issue has become a symbol of how it is likely to evolve. For the US, it is a question of upholding the liberal rules-based order and the security architecture it maintains in this region. For China, resolving the Taiwan issue on its own terms would demonstrate its strength as a rising power and make scope for greater parity with the US in the Indo-Pacific region. These reasons make the island so valuable for China and the US.

At this stage of the presentation, Ms Towhid discussed the second research question regarding scenarios of tension escalation. In envisioning China's campaigns, different American strategists have come up with different ideas over the years. In their views, it can start with destabilisation tactics in Taiwan strait, different forms of blockade, joint strikes and counter-interventions if external forces come to Taiwan's support. Finally, it can take the form of amphibious attack on the offshore islands or Taiwan as a whole. Previously, when such strategies were discussed, it was usually associated with doubts regarding China's capabilities to conduct campaigns of such magnitude. However, in recent years, writings of American security experts suggest that China has made unparalleled advances in its military domain and doubting its capabilities would be a serious misperception. That is why discussion regarding this topic has been predominant in the security and strategic studies field.



Next, she discussed probable responses from the US and its allies. Sanctions are likely to be the first action. However, unlike the wide-ranging sanctions on Russia or other countries, imposing strict measures on China will be very complex owing to its huge interconnection in the global economy. Experts predict that sanctions against China would be very specific and limited to selected organisations and people. Recently, the US has imposed sanctions on selected Chinese nationals and entities on allegations of human rights issues. Next, there is likely to be an increase in arms supply and training to Taiwan. There will also be heightened insecurity of other states who have territorial disputes with China and countries who see China's behaviour as assertive. In response, countries are likely to strengthen multilateral corporations like QUAD. They could think about expanding it to include more members sharing similar concerns. They can also speed track coalition formations in the Indo-Pacific as mentioned in the US National Security Strategy 2022. Regarding the question whether the US will shift from its position of strategic ambiguity and directly intervene remains unclear. The US continues to maintain strategic ambiguity regarding its response to China's use of force. Some recent statements from The US President Biden have brought up debates whether the US is moving from strategic ambiguity to some form of clarity. However, the official US position remains unchanged. Thus, it is very difficult to predict whether there will be a direct involvement of the US.

After analysing the scenario, Ms Towhid discussed implications for Bangladesh. Bangladesh adheres to the ‘One China’. In different interactions with Chinese officials in the past few months, Bangladesh has reiterated its firm position on this. The position of Bangladesh remains very clear in this regard. However, the US-China tension surrounding the Taiwan issue is going to bring several newer challenges for Bangladesh that need to be carefully evaluated. It is going to be a very difficult task for Bangladesh to navigate the complexity and maintain balanced relations with both China and the US in the face of a crisis. Bangladesh is already having a difficult time in navigating the competing grand strategies like Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative. New initiatives like Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and Global Security Initiative (GSI) are also being introduced. Balancing such competitive initiatives will be difficult for regional countries.

Next, there is growing polarisation between democracy and autocracy in the world. The US sees the Taiwan issue as part of its role to defend and uphold democracy in the Indo-Pacific region. Gradually there are going to be more polarisation along these lines. As a democratic country Bangladesh believes in upholding democracy but it does not want to take any positions targeting any country. In such scenarios, a lot of effort needs to be given to remain firm in non-aligned position. There will also be difficulties regarding maintenance of defence cooperation. Here it is important to reflect on Bangladesh’s dependency on China for defence supplies. Escalation of tension and potential application of sanctions on China is likely to impact defence trade. The current case of Russia can be taken as an example. A number of countries had to suspend defence purchase plans due to difficulty in transactions and fear of secondary sanctions. Bangladesh needs to look for ways to continue with purchases of deals in-process, supply of spare parts and maintenance of existing defence equipment. At the same time, it is important to explore supply diversification. Bangladesh has been diversifying its sources in recent years, now it is about time to take this issue into consideration as well. At the same time, developing the indigenous industry is also important for the long term.



Ms Towhid highlighted that the impact on trade is critical. In a situation of escalated tension, Bangladesh is likely to face difficulties in ready-made garments (RMG) export to Western market using raw materials from China. Bangladesh's RMG sector is reliant on the yarn, fabric and cotton imported from China. These materials are used to make the garment products which are then exported to the US and European market. Escalation of the crisis and restrictive measures imposed on China will impact Bangladesh's trade with the West. This concern was already visible last year centering Xinjiang. When the US restricted importing products produced or manufactured wholly or in part in Xinjiang centering the Uyghur issue, there were concerns among the garment industry stakeholders in Bangladesh. Restrictions on China centering Taiwan would be wider. This would put countries like Bangladesh in even difficult positions as the cost of raw materials would significantly go up and the supply chain would be disrupted.

There will also be an impact on the global supply chain. Depending on the nature of tension and how long it continues, regular shipping routes would be hampered. This is likely to impact the chains. Bangladesh would be impacted in the process as the duration of shipment and cost would go up significantly. There is also the possibility that international cooperation on shared challenges will be difficult. Following Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022, China

suspended many issue-specific cooperation with the US, including climate change. Future escalation of tension and repetition of such actions would be concerning for countries like Bangladesh who are dependent on international cooperation to address such issues.

In conclusion, an intensification of the US-China competition is very much in the horizon. An escalation of the crisis may not be inevitable but very much possible. No doubt that both the US and China face difficult calculations in their respective countries. Both sides realise the risks associated with this issue and thus have been engaging in discussions. However, owing to the strategic significance of the island and the cost of losing influence over it is so high that states might be compelled to take risks. If it does, it is likely to escalate very quickly leaving less time to prepare. The Ukraine crisis is a good learning case. So, it is important for Bangladesh to take these into consideration and prepare ahead to avoid shocks and surprises.

# Open Discussion



## Colonel Iftekhar Ahmed (Retd)

former Research Director, BIISS

Colonel Iftekhar Ahmed (Retd) asked Senior Research Fellow Ashique Rahman that as most countries consider nuclear threat to be the most dangerous threat and most advanced countries are making underground nuclear shelters, what is the alternative option for Bangladesh? His second question was to Research Officer Nahian Reza Sabriet. He inquired if Bangladesh could really protect itself from another cyber-attack on its banks?

**Dr Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan**



Dr Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan also directed his first question to Senior Research Fellow Ashique Rahman. He asked how would the evolving nature of Bangladesh's national security be characterised? He opined that there seems to be a pursuit to become a regional powerhouse and dependency on normative value. In that case, he inquired how the Rohingya crisis can be manifested as it has a destabilising factor. Regarding the referent object of security shifting from state to individual, he inquired what has been the national security priorities over the past five decades and which dimension got relatively higher priority. Next, Dr Khan asked Research Officer Nahian Reza Sabri if he thought there was a need for offensive cyber security capability in the national security agenda as hacking services have proliferated all over the world. He inquired whether an offensive element should be included in the strategy.



### **Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury (Retd)**



Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury (Retd) opined that whenever the Taiwan issue is discussed, the Taiwanese opinion is not heard. A child who was born in 1949 is now seventy plus. They have never seen China or a communist regime. As Taiwan is now a multi-party democracy and is practising democracy where people can express their differing opinion, and as China is moving more and more towards an authoritarian, dictatorial rule far away from what was initially conceived and practised by Deng Xiaoping, the gap is widening between the two. He shared that note should be taken of Taiwanese people and their thoughts about their future.

# Responses from the Speakers



Mr Ashique Rahman stated that regarding the nuclear security question, Bangladesh is in favour of peaceful resolution of all kinds of conflicts. This is the position taken by Bangladesh at the international level. Any kind of fallout that leads to a nuclear incident is not wanted. In South Asia, there are two countries with nuclear capabilities. It is expected that they resolve their dispute peacefully. In Bangladesh there is the Rooppur nuclear power plant. There is ample preparation by the government and the agencies involved in the process for maintaining safety. The security measures for the materials and installations are put in place so that nothing serious happens. But it is always important to remain prepared.

About Bangladesh's position on security, Mr Rahman opined it is important to come out of the earlier view of a small state not having a larger voice in the global and regional issues. Now Bangladesh can have a larger voice. By giving shelter to millions of refugees, Bangladesh has set a norm of humanitarian intervention and the state behaving in a humanitarian way. From the economic point of view, Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing countries in the world and the fastest growing country in the region, Bangladesh should take the lead. Bangladesh's participation in the United Nations regarding the Ukraine war showed that



Bangladesh is going in that direction.

In answering the question regarding the priority between national security and human security, Mr Rahman stated that there should not be a trade-off or competition between the national security understanding and human security understanding. As a student of security studies, he thinks there should be differentiation. The understanding should be that national security has one sort of construction, policy directions and requirements of policies. If human security approach is adopted, then policies and focus will be different. There should not be a competition regarding which one to prioritise. Both are important. Rather than prioritising, there should be a comprehensive approach so that both needs can be fulfilled and national security as well as human security is ensured. These are not exclusive issues and one cannot be chosen at the expense of another.



**Ms Ayesha Binte Towhid** answered the question directed to her by Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury (Retd). She said she understood the concern of including Taiwanese opinion, but it is difficult to bring their opinion under a uniform banner as it is so diverse. That is why she preferred to discuss the views of the two leading political parties. The generational gap between those who have memories of 1949 and those who do not is there. This also influences the identity choice in the island. But there are mixed views regarding that so it cannot be generalised.

When it comes to the official position, it is subjected to the ruling party in power. That determines the nature of cross-strait relations and their interpretations of different issues. Presently the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has a position which is different from the previous ones. That is why in discussions of cross-strait relations, it is difficult to see Taiwan based on one uniform opinion and hence discussion based on the view of political parties is preferable.

**Mr Nahian Reza Sabriet** said that any absolute prediction is nearly impossible regarding o cyber-attacks on central banks. However, rigorous research and data analysis can help concerned institutes prepare ahead of time. A comprehensive cybersecurity index will also be useful in this regard. When the attack on Bangladesh Bank took place in 2016, the idea of CI was not well-understood. But now, GoB has decided to include Bangladesh Bank and five other scheduled banks in the list of CI. It shows that the government is taking cybersecurity of financial infrastructure seriously. At the primary stage, only the Power Development Board (PDB), Bangladesh Bank and Titas Gas were being referred to as CI institutes in Bangladesh. The current list includes not only Bangladesh Bank, but also Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank and Rupali Bank. It signifies the country is gradually moving towards a comprehensive understanding of CI framework. In future, each bank has to develop their respective district or location based cyber architecture. Hence, the concept of cyber insurance is also significant since critical information will be encrypted and secure even if another attack takes place.

He then addressed the question related to Bangladesh's need for an offensive cyber security strategy. Since national cybersecurity strategies are shared publicly, they have diplomatic and political connotations. Bangladesh has always preferred a non-coercive strategy. An offensive strategy is not compatible with Bangladesh's policy dicta. Rather, it should emphasise on cyber diplomacy and utilise it as a means for expanding bilateral and multilateral relations. An offensive He then addressed the question related to Bangladesh's need for an offensive cyber security strategy. Since national cybersecurity strategies are shared publicly, they have diplomatic and political connotations. Bangladesh has always preferred a non-coercive strategy. An offensive strategy is not compatible with Bangladesh's policy dicta. Rather, it should emphasise on cyber diplomacy and utilise it as a means for expanding bilateral and multilateral relations. An offensive strategy also makes it less flexible. Moreover, it requires clear identification of threats and attackers,





which is possible in the domain of cybersecurity. He referred to the attribution problem mentioned during the presentation. There are multiple stakeholders, i.e., states, business entities, hacktivists and the market itself. Interplay among these entities in cyberspace shifts rapidly. On the other hand, increasing cyber armaments can lead to a new form of security dilemma. Defensive cybersecurity strategy will also facilitate a collective security understanding and regional frameworks like Indo-Pacific or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) cybersecurity strategy. These will promote a community-based understanding of cybersecurity. But primary focus should be on real-time data, information protection and insurance policies.

# Session III: Diplomacy and Negotiations

## Presentations

Soft Power Diplomacy in the Changing Global Scenario: Challenges and Way Forward for Bangladesh



**Dr Razia Sultana**

Senior Research Fellow, BIISS

Dr. Razia Sultana began by saying that in contemporary politics, importance of soft power demands some pressing concerns, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent outcomes like food and oil crisis, high inflation rates, overall economic downturn—all bound for affecting countries regardless of their size. Interestingly, significant changes have been witnessed in behaviours of countries, e.g., previously neutral Sweden and Finland joining NATO, increase in Germany's defence budget, the China-Taiwan crisis, raise questions if countries are going back to policy of hard power instead of soft power while pursuing their foreign policy goals in changing and challenging circumstances. Like other countries, soft power is an important instrument for Bangladesh to achieve its

foreign policy goals. In the changing international political context, the country has been trying to pursue its own version of soft power diplomacy at regional and global levels. It is crucial to revisit how such diplomacy has shaped the country's foreign policy in the fabric of current global politics. Hence, her argument was that countries like Bangladesh who have scarcity of hard power, should opt for soft power resources. In support of this, she raised three basic questions—1) How has soft power diplomacy shaped Bangladesh's foreign policy? 2) What are the key predicaments in pursuing soft power diplomacy? 3) How can the country promote soft power diplomacy? She then defined soft power according to Joseph Nye, the actual proponent of soft power diplomacy. Nye said about this concept in the 1990s and repeated in 2008, "soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment." It is also viewed as some sort of national power that is deliberately or purposefully used by the actors in international relations to achieve strategic goals. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, soft power diplomacy is tied up with and reflected in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's core dictum—"Friendship to all, malice towards none". This means increasing hard power capacity is opposed to its foreign policy objective which primarily focuses on peace instead of engaging in conflicts with any country. There are ample differences between hard and soft powers as they work in opposing directions. Hard power is basically exercise of influence through coercion. In international relations, it is like the "carrot and stick" policy, reliance on military force, payments, economic sanctions, etc. Conversely, soft power uses attraction and persuasion to change minds; it has the ability to influence behaviour patterns and uses sources like culture, government values, global alliances in pronounced manners.

When hard and soft powers are discussed, that invariably raises the question of smart power these days. Because in international politics, power is an important factor in determining the position of a country. In the changing scenario, it is clearly visible that big powers, apart from their hard power capacities, tend substantially to rely on blended power, i.e., combination of hard and soft powers, popularly known as smart power. It mainly is a synthesis, a skillful combination of strategies based on both powers. Here, Dr. Razia raised a question about actors of which countries can influence soft power diplomacy the most, i.e., how soft power can work to enhance the image of respective countries. Number of countries using soft power is quite big. She began with Middle Eastern nations like Qatar who have

developed a unique identity and global sphere of influence by using soft power tools such as sports. Here, she mentioned the 22nd FIFA World Cup Tournament that concluded on 18 December 2022 held by Qatar. The country has been a strong voice for global Muslim Ummah and continues unwavering support for Palestine. In the greater framework, Qatar successfully brands its image by connecting with the world through social media, the Al-Jazeera channel, tourism, particularly travel by the Qatar Airlines. Turkey is another potential country, commonly known as the gateway between Europe and Asia. The country always opts for peace and stability, has undertaken a number of soft power initiatives, like being a mediator in the present Russo-Ukrainian War. She referred then to North American countries regarding soft power. According to the Global Soft Power Index Study 2022, the US rose back to top position through its extensive vaccination diplomacy, albeit the country is known widely for exercising hard power; from Oceania, she spoke of Australia which has the ability to influence other as the country is strengthened by various soft power tools like education, research, innovation and of course, multiculturalism. Asian nations like Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China are progressing well owing to launching of noteworthy soft power initiatives which are rare even in the West. South Korea has successfully nurtured and blended pop culture with traditional ones that has been seen in the recent football world cup; those who followed Jeon Jung-kook and the K-Pop, know very well how South Korea this time has through their song and music.



In South Asia, India has always successfully attracted foreign investors by promoting tourism, film and music. Therefore, what could be key instruments of soft power diplomacy in Bangladesh in current context? Dr. Razia said that in the last decade or so, development has been a vital tool of soft power in the country. The government is actively working on certain development targets, such as graduating from the LDC category by 2026, attaining a zero-poverty line by 2031 and becoming a developed country by 2041. Second is, ensuring growth by promotion of science and technology, which is another key soft power tool for Bangladesh. Third is nation branding which is a relatively new concept in the country which it can do through promotion of tourism, culture, exports and immigration. Then comes Bangladesh unflinching commitments to safeguarding and expansion of peace, secularism, nationalism, democracy, gender equality and women empowerment. She mentioned of diplomacy and foreign policy; these two elements go hand in hand, as diplomacy is identified as a crucial tool to negotiate with other nations in different areas. For any country, culture is an important component in pursuing its national interests. This can be called some kind of public diplomacy where certain aspects of culture, e.g., language, religion, films, sports, drama, art, education etc., play very important role. Bangladesh has already made significant achievements in strengthening soft power instruments; for example, peace is the cornerstone of its foreign policy. The country strongly promotes the slogan “humanity for the sake of world peace”. Sheltering over 1.2 million Rohingyas is an effective evidence of that position which has won worldwide praise. Bangladeshi peacekeepers are also praised worldwide, especially in war-torn countries. The country is on proper track to utilise health diplomacy; till now, it has been one of the top recipients of vaccines under COVAX facilities. In global negotiations on climate change, Bangladesh has achieved a distinct position. The country, moreover, can make world-class movies with directors and filmmakers able to choose equally good themes based on contemporary important issues. To optimise its interests at regional levels, Bangladesh focuses on soft power tools like engaging with various regional and subregional blocs for ensuring energy supplies.

However, while exercising soft power tools, Bangladesh is not without challenges. In the Global Soft Power Index of 2020, it ranked 57 out of 60 countries, a position that barely changed in 2021 or 22. This is not a good position. Various challenges hinder the implementation of soft power diplomacy, e.g., lack of effective public diplomacy, lack of coordination among different ministries,

establishing a conducive environment, etc. Then come digital challenges. Despite enhancing large-scale digitalisation, there is considerable deficiency of digital knowledge which remains a bar in advancing soft power strategies. The country nonetheless, is endowed with huge talents and a significant portion of its populace is youth; unfortunately, the education sector at this moment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, has been facing adverse conditions owing to lack of digitalization in remote areas. Challenges related with development, the war in Ukraine, pandemic—all come together due to economic recession, high inflation and price of commodities, impacting trade and investment negatively.

On overcoming these challenges and promulgating soft power tools in years to come especially in changing global circumstances, Dr. Razia said it was high time to strengthen those tools of Bangladesh. That should first be exercised with neighbours. She referred to H.E. Foreign Minister, who stressed on broadening relations with neighbours with a view to expand the country's market. Here, she gave an example: in Bangladesh, there is access for about 80 Indian TV channels but Bangladeshi ones are restricted in India. Hence, Bangladesh needs to reach the markets in neighbouring countries with use of soft power tools. Secondly, she spoke on multilateral cooperation. To ensure smooth access into global markets, the country should actively engage with multilateral fora, and also needs to increase negotiation capacities for greater engagement of regional blocs. Thirdly, Bangladesh has done a lot in terms of selling its brand like "made in Bangladesh" to retain its global image but there remains lot more to be done. There are many achievements in the textile and garments sectors, but there are still needs of selling the brands in ICT, pharmaceuticals, and other emerging areas. Another important issue is "Digital Bangladesh", which has been a roadmap as well as a slogan for the country to fulfill its dream of becoming a developed country by 2041. Thus, digital diplomacy can be an area that requires more attention. Incorporation of new, younger, enthusiastic cohorts of officials is crucial for strengthening soft power diplomacy of Bangladesh. Then came image building. People-to-people connectivity is commonly known as people's diplomacy to connect with foreign people. Here Dr. Razia brought cases of Argentina and Bangladesh as glaring example in this regard. These two nations are located thousands of miles apart and there is very little cultural commonality, but football seems to be bringing them closer. Bangladeshi support for Argentine Football star Lionel Messi is so strong that Argentine Foreign Minister H.E. Santiago A. Cafiero, expressed



interest in establishing diplomatic ties and open their embassy in Bangladesh after 40 years. Referring again to Bangladesh's foreign minister who emphasized on public diplomacy for promotion of trade and investment, Dr. Razia said it was good news that Argentine foreign minister expressed interest in those regards. They are interested in taking skilled workers from Bangladesh. The country does not have strong hard power mechanisms and cannot strengthen those capacities overnight, soft power can be an effective approach while making effective foreign policy. Since the country has certain development goals ahead, it should therefore, promote its own soft power strategies attaching greater significance on conceptual and operational levels. Because, the concept of soft power diplomacy has been an evolving phenomenon, especially when there are volatile situations as now. Without a well-designed or skilled leadership, nothing can be achieved in this unprecedented time. She concluded by citing former speaker of US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, "The real key is not how many enemies do I kill. The real key is how many alliances I gain."

### Economic Diplomacy of Bangladesh: From Basket Case to Middle-Income Country

**Md Rafid Abrar Miah**, Research Officer, BISS



Md Rafid Abrar Miah started his speech by sketching the condition of Bangladesh in the post-liberation war period in 1971; from the very beginning of its journey, Bangladesh was a subject to scepticism and depicted as a ‘poster-child of Malthusia.’ People were barely positive about its growth and development as economic growth of a country depends upon few variables and the Pakistan military strategically destroyed many of those. For example, he mentioned the destruction they waged in communication, ports, bridges, transportation systems, and most importantly, agricultural sectors. This eventually resulted in ‘-13%’ GDP growth rate. In 1972, the national poverty rate was as high as ‘71%’, the population was growing exponentially, trade was at a minimum, and literacy rate was significantly lower.

All these features, Mr Abrar argued, let Bangladesh be labelled as ‘Bottomless Basket’ and considered as a malevolent ‘test case of development’. This eventually placed it among the least scorers of all economic and social indices. Then again, within the five decades, Bangladesh has proven all assumptions wrong and now considered as a ‘new Asian miracle’. He reminded the audience the country is soon to be graduated from the LDC category and already graduated to LMIC from LIC.

At this juncture, he raised the question that how Bangladesh evolved as a success case of development from a mere ‘test case of development’? Drivers of growth and development are many and vary from case to case. In Bangladesh’s case, he argued, the major driver was economic diplomacy, which helped attract FDI, ensure ODA, and create foreign market for exporting goods and services.

Then, he discussed the five development decades of Bangladesh. The first decade was the decade of reconstruction. In this time, focus was shifted towards a market-based system. The following decade is labelled as the lost decade. Despite some measures, growth was still low, poverty was higher, and the total development budget was aid dependent. In the third decade – the 90s, Bangladesh started developing. In the second half of the decade, exports increased three times than the first half. From 1995, he identified, Bangladesh started attracting FDI. Besides, the then government decided to promote agriculture by providing substantial subsidies despite opposition from aid providing international agencies like the World Bank. As a result, agricultural production in the country increased, leading to self-sufficiency. Opposing major donors at a nascent stage of the economy was a

quite bold decision to make, Mr Abrar argued that to him, it benefitted Bangladesh significantly. In the following decade, he said, though Bangladesh witnessed some political turmoil, exports and imports grew remarkably. Moreover, GDP growth rate and FDI slightly increased.

The fifth decade, for him, is the most successful decade in this journey. In this decade, Bangladesh graduated from a low-income country to a lower middle-income country. GDP growth was record high - over 7 percent for consecutive 3 years. The poverty ratio was 20.5 percent and extreme poverty rate was about 11 percent before outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. A projection by PriceWATERhouseCoopers said Bangladesh would be the 28th largest economy by 2030 and 23rd by 2050.



After brief discussion on the five decades, he talked about the drivers of development. One major driver for Bangladesh's development he considered is the FDI. FDI in nations like Bangladesh, at the very least, can play an essential part in accomplishing the country's socioeconomic objectives, particularly poverty reduction goals. He referred to a 2016 study that showed a very positive relation between per capita GDP growth rate and FDI in Bangladesh. It explained that FDI in Bangladesh is contributing to reducing poverty, generating employment, and accelerating trade.

Second major driver is ODA. It assists Bangladesh in a variety of initiatives that in turn, aided in economic development and social welfare. Between 2006 and 2018, ODA aided Bangladesh in developing its economy sustainably. This assistance was provided in the form of grants or concessional loans, and it aided Bangladesh in graduating from the Lower Middle-Income country category.

Some other issues he mentioned were the DFQF facility, preferential ROO, and foreign trade specific economic diplomacy. International Support Measure (ISM) related facilities, however, were enjoyed due to regional arrangements like SAFTA. Adoption of investor-friendly policies, legislation, and laws like establishment of 100 Economic Zones (EZs), fostering electricity generation, energy diversification, developed communication systems, and communication technology contributed also to growth and development of Bangladesh, he said. FDI, ODA, and market access – nothing could be possible without prudent economic diplomacy. To deal with issues of Bangladesh's foreign trade-specific economic diplomacy, the GoB exercises several instruments including finalising and updating legally binding contracts; strengthening role of foreign missions of Bangladesh; delinking trade diplomacy at multilateral, regional, plurilateral and bilateral levels; exercising consular and commercial diplomacy; marketing 'Brand Bangladesh' with its product image; liberalising trade regime (e.g., restructuring tariff structure), increasing efficiency of trade negotiators and engaging Bangladeshi diaspora in prospective countries/regions to enhance its international trade. Through these, the country paved its way towards 'miraculous growth' and was able to secure its dual graduation.

While referring to challenges, he said competitive pricing and large volume delivery are critical strengths of Bangladesh's industries. For him, high demand for Bangladeshi products is driven by its low price rather than the quality. Hence, loss of ISM in exports will put its economy under immense trouble. Referring to historical evidence, he reminded that, considerable number of economies, especially developing countries, failed to accelerate at the pre-graduation growth momentum. As a result, they get stuck in the Middle-Income Trap for a long time. LDC graduation, he argued, would cause a considerable amount of trade loss due to erosion of trade support measures. Instead of existing DFQF and preferential ROO facilities, Bangladesh then will be entitled for standard rates that, is assumed, to reduce nearly US\$ 4bn a year. Though it is a tentative assessment, the amount will not be much different. As a reason for such a big loss, he showed the amount of

tariff duty Bangladesh would face in the US and EU markets which is 15.62 percent and more than 9 percent, respectively.

Middle income graduation labels Bangladesh as a non-blend country. As such, it will lose eligibility for getting both concessional and non-concessional loans. Partners like India and China have already raised interest rates. Following this transformation, loans will be primarily non-concessional, with harsher conditions and tougher terms. On debt, he said, though till now Bangladesh's external sector debt and debt service payments have been quite impressive, after graduation, the situation will be more stringent. Amid such a situation, Mr Abrar provided few policy suggestions. He said, adaptation of strategies should include various policy



options at national level and changes/improvements at firm-level business and operational practices. The coping strategies, at least in trade-related aspects, must keep price lowering issues in the centre, as he strongly suggested. To do so, he advised three pathways—(a) bilateral trade negotiation with potential importers; (b) reducing production cost by techno-centric interventions; and (c) improving the state of local governance. Among these three, he labelled bilateral trade negotiation and agreement as the most pivotal. Without bilateral FTAs, Bangladesh might not be able to continue its growth. Thus, product-based, country-specific customised negotiation is a must for optimum level of export. In addition, he emphasised on

export diversification. It has to be prioritised since mere dependence on RMG products will not bring good news for long. He also considered quality aid as a pivotal factor for that matter.

Finally, he mentioned attracting investment as another factor. Bangladesh, to his understanding, now needs to attract more FDIs. It may be through economic zones, special economic zones, or EPZs. Technology transfer should also be promoted in this regard. For him, if these measures can be adopted, Bangladesh is expected to be the 28th largest economy of the world by 2030, as predicted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and will be able to bypass the threat of being trapped in the middle-income category.

### Climate Diplomacy of Bangladesh: Lessons from COP 27 and Way Forward

**Dr Sufia Khanom**, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS



**Dr Sufia Khanom** commenced her presentation by conceptualising “climate diplomacy.” Referring to the European Commission, she said that strands of climate diplomacy at the political level have four pillars: multilateralism, peace and security, domestic action and global ambition, advocacy and outreach.



First is the commitment to multilateralism, particularly to implementation of the Paris Agreement. The second one is addressing the implication of climate change on peace and security, followed by the third, which is accelerating domestic action and raising global ambition. Fourth is enhancing international climate cooperation through advocacy and outreach. Thus, in a nutshell, climate diplomacy encompasses the use of diplomatic tools to support the ambition and functioning of the international climate change regime, avert negative impacts of climate change risk, and call for peace, stability, and prosperity. Climate diplomacy calls for preparing appropriate risk assessments and risk management strategies at global and strategic levels. It means prioritising climate action with partners worldwide in diplomatic dialogue, works as part of public diplomacy and external policy instruments. This includes reaching out to partner countries bilaterally and making the case for more ambitious climate action. By taking cross-cutting issues into account, climate diplomacy addresses security and stability, implications of climate change, and entry actions or early actions on security risk. She further added that climate diplomacy requires a strong network of partners, including representatives from civil society, private sector, and environmental and climate organisations. Such diplomacy can contribute also to regional stability.

Dr Khanom highlighted the evolution of positions and country groupings in climate change negotiations. Before 2001, there were just two groups, developed and developing countries. This was mainly based on the idea of climate justice. From 2001 to 2009, a major shift occurred. There was a splintering of developed and developing countries, for instance, the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and Australia; the rest of the umbrella group, Russia; and the Environmental Integrity Group, which includes countries like Switzerland, Korea, and Mexico. The other groups include Group 77+China, OPEC, the Africa group, Latin America plus the Caribbean group, the Small Island group, Central Asia, and the Asia group. Since 2009 and beyond, the groups have been further divided into other small groups, for example, Like-Minded Groups, AILAC countries, ALBA countries, LDCs, etc. Over the years, climate negotiations have become more complex. Referring to the illustration of all climate negotiation blocs, she demonstrated how difficult and complex climate negotiations have become nowadays due to the existence of a wide range of groupings. Bangladesh participates in climate negotiations as part of the LDC group and Group 77 plus China.

To discuss the politics, practices, and priorities of climate diplomacy, Dr Khanom highlighted the issue of climate justice first. She mentioned that, at the very beginning, before 2000, the concept of climate diplomacy was based on the north-south divide. It was assumed that due to activities of developed countries,



southern part of the globe was suffering from impacts of climate change. She also highlighted the political economy behind climate diplomacy before discussing the politics behind coalition formation. According to her, politically powerful countries are in a better position to form a coalition. She argued that it is crucial to focus on reducing the complexity of negotiations and improving the bargaining power of less politically powerful states. Besides, there is the issue of fragmented leadership in climate diplomacy. Leaders are divided, mainly due to their focus on national priorities and national interests. Finally, she highlighted the lack of consistency in climate diplomacy. In this regard, she discussed issues like climate mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, as well as the debate between science and politics. Scientists think science should lead climate diplomacy. But politicians think this is an issue of politics. There is a clear conflict between science and politics in climate negotiations and climate diplomacy. There is another debate in climate diplomacy, which is environment vs. economy. In many cases, it can be seen that economy has been prioritised over environmental conservation. She also highlighted the issue



of non-state actors and argued that their absence in the main negotiation room is making them invisible in the climate diplomacy process.

Dr Khanom then talked about the climate change context of Bangladesh and what the country has achieved at COP27. Bangladesh is already identified as one of the most vulnerable countries and ranks seventh on the global risk index. Due to impacts of climate change, Bangladesh will lose about 2 to 9 percent of its GDP every year. Poverty will grow by 15 percent by 2030. And about 13.3 million people will become “climate migrants”. The country will need US\$ 230 billion by 2050 to increase its adaptation capacity. For a developing country like Bangladesh, this amount is huge.

In the case of climate negotiations, Bangladesh participates as part of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which is basically a para-negotiation bloc trying to influence formal negotiation groups like the Umbrella Group, AILAC, and LDC group. Through this platform, Bangladesh is also trying to connect with other climate negotiation groups, like the Africa Group.

Dr Khanom divided the major outcomes of COP27 into four parts: climate mitigation, climate adaptation, climate finance, and loss and damage. Regarding climate mitigation, the target is to reduce 43 percent of emissions. For climate change adaptation, there was no substantive development apart from some measures in the early warning system. It was unclear how to deal with the rising climate bill following COP27. There was no concrete framework for establishing the loss and damage fund. She also touched upon the issue of CMA. Bangladesh has already formulated the National Adaptation Plan (NAP); 40 countries have also prepared theirs. Unfortunately, countries who have produced the NDC, are mostly developing ones. She highlighted outcomes of long-term financing, new collective quantifiable goals, the Santiago Network, and the transnational committee to manage loss and damage funds.

At this point, Dr Khanom raised some of the questions she believes will be crucial in the coming days, especially at the next COP28 in the UAE. These are: How to significantly reduce GHG emissions and dependence on fossil fuels? How much money would be raised for the loss and damage fund? Who will contribute? Who will be the beneficiaries? Who will manage the fund? What will be the

criteria to trigger a payout? How to involve financial institutions in mainstream climate change action How to move from the planning and discussion phase to the implementation phase? And What will COP28 achieve when it is hosted by a major fossil fuel exporter?



She went on to provide some policy recommendations, especially for Bangladesh. According to her, Bangladesh needs to pursue the branding of Bangladesh in climate diplomacy as the country has lots of experts and good initiatives to showcase. It can support other climate-vulnerable countries, especially African countries. The country needs to invest in developing a national mechanism to tackle loss and damage. It requires a more balanced representation in the negotiation team, as well as increased capacity. The country needs to engage the private sector and the youth. She concluded the presentation with a quote from former British premier Gordon Brown, “We cannot compromise with the earth; we cannot compromise with the catastrophe of unchecked climate change, so we must compromise with one another.”

# Open Discussion



## Air Commodore (retd) Ishfaq Ilahi

**Chowdhury**, in reference to presentations, said there is a need for developing the level of Bangladeshi workers' technological knowledge. The country's image in the Middle East has become synonymous with being a provider of municipal workers. However, if there could be initiatives in the country to develop their skills, e.g., train them as drivers, crane operators, air condition mechanics, that would assist them in securing better jobs. Just as the country's education system should emphasise on such issues, people should also accept these as challenges. On the garments industry, he said there is a need of going for high-end products; currently, Bangladesh manufactures low-end ones, but has good prospects for high-end products too and some people already are focusing on that. Other challenges he mentioned concerning Bangladesh were those of elderly people and falling birthrates in the country, although there has been rise in life expectancy, which is a good sign. After 20 years or so from now, one would require to decide whether he/she would be rich and old or poor and old. This would become a substantial challenge in the future.

**Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**, research director, BIISS, said the Official Development Assistance (ODA) would really be a tough challenge ahead for Bangladesh; because, just before the COVID-19 pandemic onset, the country had been receiving about US\$ 06 billion a year and need an additional 03 billion with respect to the additional fund requirement calculation made by the Bangladesh Planning Commission back in 2017. Altogether, the figure stood at US\$ 09 billion. But there is no surety when things would return to normal and Bangladesh would be receiving the money in order to achieve the SDGs. Studies are being conducted about LDC graduation, for assessing repercussions on the economy and what could be the way out. On FTA, he said it would not be easy. Even though talks regarding an FTA with India began back in 2006, the government was ready and the World Bank was supportive with technical studies, studies are still being conducted but there



remain uncertainties. Bangladesh is also hopeful to sign FTAs with other regional countries, China, Malaysia etc., but there are uncertainties too. Regarding FTA with the EU, he said the country is thinking of signing an FTA with them as there was a discussion that Vietnam had signed an FTA with them and consequently, receiving various benefits. However, as of now, the EU was no more interested in FTAs and that includes Bangladesh. Now Bangladesh is trying to sign a bilateral investment treaty with the EU that will hopefully facilitate its exports to that region a lot. Referring to Dr. Khanom's presentation, he said there was an interesting aspect of the climate change market. On one hand, one might consider the case of China, the biggest emitter of carbon but on the other, they are the biggest of renewable energy (RE) technologies as well. He termed this as a dichotomy. Russia is not on the side of scientists who are providing information on climate change, nor on the side of emitters. Thus, there remain lots of differences in opinions and among political sides. There is also the adaptation gap. The requirement is US\$ 100 billion but the adaptation report of 2020 says that only 28.7 billion had been provided in reality. What would be next? Dr. Kabir then asked if there was any clear commitment from the global community to compensate the LDCs. There was nothing visible in this regard and these countries are facing the impacts of global economic slowdown. On the UAE, he said there are huge lobbies in work from major fossil fuel producers; the IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency) is in the UAE. Hence, interesting things could be seen in the next COP.



**Salahud Din Ahmed**, former member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), referred to Dr. Khanom's presentation and spoke on the issue of not honouring or appropriately valuing climate experts of Bangladesh, who are of international level though. People in this country hesitate even to recognize them. One probable reason according to him was the hegemony or bureaucracy over meritocracy. There was a necessity for coming out of such mindset.



**Colonel (retd) Iftekhar Ahmed**, said there are many littoral countries who may be affected by climate change, which is very natural as it is coming naturally. Every country is looking for allocations from the climate resilience fund that is being created. But the amount of funds gathered so far is very scanty in relation to the amount needed. Bangladesh could be getting nearly US\$ 100 billion. Shall the country wait for that up to the next COPs and probably this fund will never come?



# Response from the Panelists



## **Dr Sufia Khanom**

Senior Research Fellow, BIISS

Dr Khanom agreed with Dr Mahfuz Kabir on the issue of fossil fuel lobbyists at COP summits and predicted that COP 28 would be the summit for those lobbies. They were vividly present at COP 27, and their presence would be much more prominent in the UAE, she added. Regarding Bangladesh's participation in climate negotiations, she stressed the importance of incorporating experts into the negotiation process. She also highlighted the importance of working with other climate-vulnerable countries to strengthen the collective voice with regard to climate change.



**Md Rafid Abrar Miah**

Research Officer, BIISS

Md Rafid Abrar Miah agreed with Air Cdre (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury that the ageing population would be a challenge for Bangladesh in the future and the country needs to devise a plan beforehand to tackle that. About FTAs with the EU and other countries, he noted that this is a challenging task, but the country needs to pursue this issue for its economic development. He stressed the importance of green economic policy and mentioned that all economic and development activities should be continued in a way that would have a minimal impact on biodiversity and the environment.



### **Dr Razia Sultana**

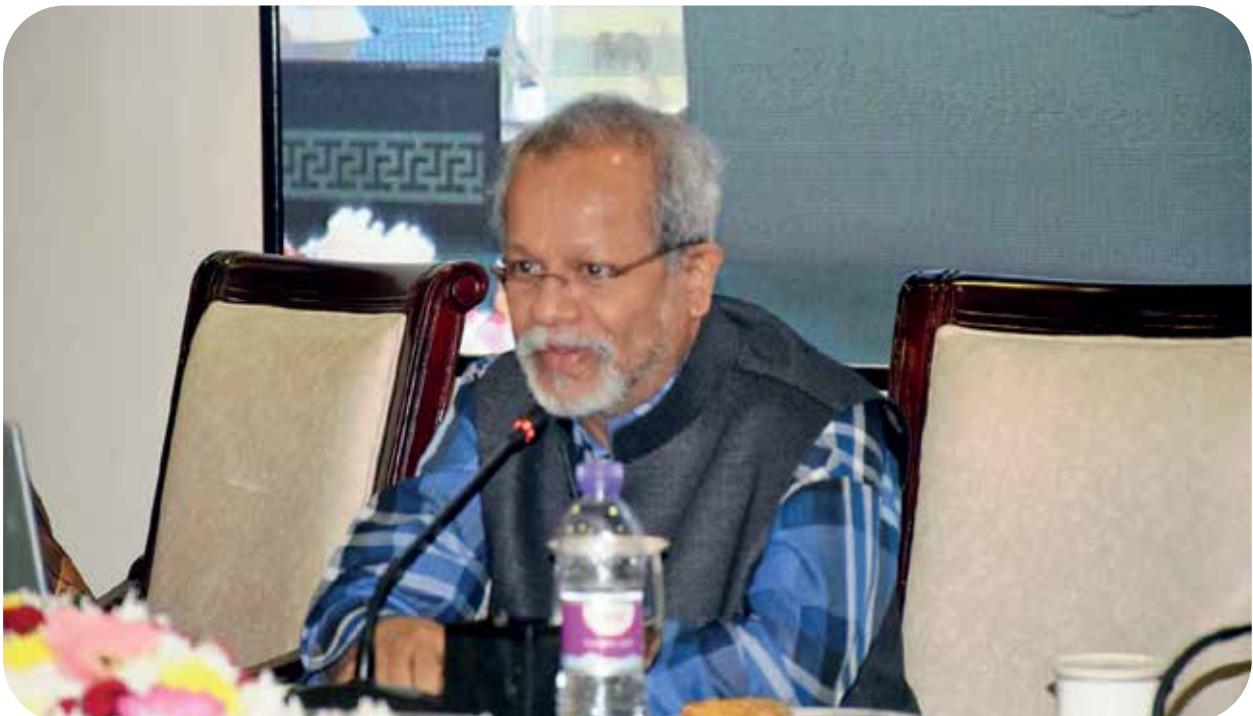
Senior Research Fellow, BISS

Underscoring the importance of power in international politics, Dr Razia Sultana, referred to Hans J Morgenthau, “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim.” She acknowledged the importance of increasing the skills of Bangladeshi migrant workers; failing to address the issue will be a big challenge for the country, and adversely impact its manpower export. If Bangladesh wants to cope with the fourth industrial revolution, it needs to keep upgrading its capacity and human resources. In this regard, she stressed vocational training. She acknowledged the efforts of the Bangladesh government in education, research and appreciated the initiatives, like introduction of new scholarships, during the time of Covid pandemic. She also highlighted the importance of technological development in rural areas of the country and suggested opening a soft-power wing in MOFA.



# Closing Remarks by the Chair

**Professor Dr Imtiaz Ahmed** lauded the young researchers for their efforts and presenting their studies eloquently. He added that in the current research field, a Bangladeshi epistemology is missing. The sources of knowledge are mostly western sources. History of Asia and South Asia is extraordinary, visionary and far greater than mainstream western history. Sources of literature must go back to



**Professor Dr Imtiaz Ahmed**

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

South Asia's own civilisational linkages. It can go back to the 6th century when the region had a republican system. The republic was established much before the Greek republic and Raja Gopal was also an elected king. Dr Ahmed requested BIISS to undertake such research projects given its 44 years of reputation as a think-tank. Unfortunately, people's minds are still colonised and they are stuck in the colonial discourse. International Relations (IR) is not discussed in a much bigger and holistic way. Bengal was the richest province in the 18th century in undivided India. Its contribution is not negligible in today's world as well. Besides its 170 million people, Bangladesh is now hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas,

which is a bigger population than Bhutan's and is still surviving. He thinks there should be a colloquium for three to four days on epistemology. To fulfil the gap in these discourses, technology is important as it helps a researcher connect with scholars and journalists across the world. A researcher has to read non-western media more seriously as the media itself is not free of politics. He believes BIISS should uphold this spirit. It should be the place where people come to know about the Mughal foreign policy and look back at the enormous view of Bengal trading. Researchers should also study more South Asian strategic thinkers like Kautilya. Research methodology has to be innovative and creative. The realist paradigm cannot take research far. The discourse is indeed based on insecurity. It suggests that, for security, one needs weapons which is contradictory to the foreign policy principle of Bangladesh. Its foreign policy is based on the dictum of "Friendship to all and malice towards none." It was mentioned in the Awami League's 1970 Election Manifesto by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bangladesh cannot deviate from this civilisational route. At a time, when the whole world was in the height of the Cold War, he came up with the idea. One should not see Bangladesh from the lenses of Machiavelli and Morgenthau. They did not know Bengal or Bangladesh.

Dr Ahmed talked about diplomacy and referred to the South Asian dialect called Prasanga and Prasangika. The meaning of these terms can be translated as "theory of contemporariness". Kautilya looked at the geopolitical mapping as a circle of space, not a circle of states whereas realist scholars looked at it in a wrong way. The foreign policy of Bangladesh has to incorporate all the circles and different dimensions, i.e., political, economic, cultural and psychological.

The world is moving towards multipolarity and there is no way to stop it. Regionally, multipolarity was seen before in Europe, South Asia and Africa. But there was no multipolarity at a global scale. There was unipolarity with Pax Britannica and after the Second World War, there was a bipolar world. Following the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Pax Americana was there. He believes that multipolarity is inevitable; so is the rise of China, India and Brazil. They were big powers back in the 18th century or earlier. China was the largest economy in the 18th century; India was the second largest economy in the world and Bengal was its richest province. On the other hand, globalisation compliments multipolarity. People worldwide are now surprised at Bangladesh's

relations with the Argentinians seen in the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Physically, the two countries are far apart but this distance is no longer a dominating factor in bilateral relations. Virtually, the two countries are just a screen apart. He opined that diplomacy and negotiation should be practised having this multipolarity in mind. Similarly, one has to depend on Chinese and Korean resources as much as Japanese sources while conducting academic research. Dependence on one source will distort reality. He shared his recent experience from Singapore where people seemed very keen regarding the issue of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Bangladesh and Singapore. There are 5.6 million people in Singapore and they can never threaten 170 million people. These 5.6 million are eager to have an affair with Bangladesh. It is worth looking into it seriously and utilising the enormous opportunities and professionalism present in Singapore.



According to him, “theyouth” is relatively missing in contemporary discourses. It is because researchers are now trapped in the American dream or some other dreams. They need to have a Bangladeshi dream. He referred to the famous quote, “I think, therefore I am” and suggested looking at it from the perspective of “I dream, therefore I am.”. Humans are the only species who can dream well. They have to be engaged with Bangladesh in a way so that even if they are outside, they can stay connected. This is where the diaspora becomes relevant. Bangladesh can change

the entire geography with only six high speed trains connecting eight divisions. Students from other divisions will be able attend their classes and go back to their village or city. Bangladesh also needs 64 comprehensive hospitals in 64 districts. Infrastructure is the dream of future. Health, agriculture and education should also be part of that dream. He emphasised on the need of cultural engagement with the youth. This can reduce the influence of fundamentalists. He asked everyone to read Rabindranath Tagore's literature on soft power. Poems and festivals can also be useful for projecting soft power of the country.

Meritorious people who left the country cannot be blamed. But there must be ways to keep them connected. He suggested everyone to note what China has done in this regard. Chinese meritorious students go everywhere. But the Chinese are confident that, by the time they are finished with their studies, it will have its exclusive infrastructure. China will fulfil their dreams. Bangladesh should also think of something similar and this will make a massive difference. Dr Ahmed concluded his remarks reiterating that Bangladeshi researchers must have their own ways of thinking and looking at it. This is the best way to develop a Bangladesh-centric epistemology.

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