



PROCEEDINGS

Seminar on

Bangladesh and the United States Relations: Moving Towards Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership

Sunday, 24 April 2022



Organised by

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)



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BISS faculty with H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and H E Ambassador Peter Haas, US Ambassador to Bangladesh



SEMINAR ON

Bangladesh and the United States Relations: Moving Towards Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership

24 April 2022

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a hybrid seminar on Bangladesh and the United States Relations: Moving Towards Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership on 24 April 2022. **H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP**, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of Bangladesh, graced the occasion as the chief guest. **H E Peter Haas**, the US Ambassador to Bangladesh, was the special guest. **Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address. **Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA**, Chairman, BIISS, presided over the session and delivered the concluding remarks. Three presentations were deliberated during the Seminar along with remarks by the designated discussant. **Ruksana Kibria**, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, made a presentation on “The Evolving Bangladesh-US Relations.” **Brigadier General (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, ndc, psc, PhD**, Senior Fellow, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance, North South University and former Election Commissioner, Bangladesh, presented on “Bangladesh-US Partnership for Enhanced Security in South Asia”. **Ambassador Humayun Kabir**, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), deliberated on “Contemporary Dynamics of Bangladesh-US Relations and the Way Forward”. **Ambassador Tariq A Karim**, Director, Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies, Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), provided his insightful remarks as a distinguished discussant.



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

WELCOME ADDRESS



Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc

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

At the outset, **Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**, Director General, BIISS, paid his deepest homage to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and to all martyrs who had laid their lives down for the nation in the Liberation War of 1971. He gave a brief account of Bangladesh's foreign policy of "Friendship to all, malice towards none" while mentioning Bangladesh as a peace-loving country. Bangladesh always welcomes partnership, promotes regional cooperation for its own development interests, and peace for the region and beyond. He added that the country pursues a policy of mutual respect and follows non-interference and neutrality in other countries' foreign policies.

Major General Maksudur Rahman highlighted about the 50 years-long relationship between Bangladesh and the US as both countries continue to share a journey of mutual understanding and respect, and have developed strong cooperation, which has evolved into a partnership. Over the years, Bangladesh-US partnership has advanced in multidimensional sectors such as trade, energy cooperation, infrastructure development, information and communication technology (ICT), human resource development, security cooperation, etc. The US remains the largest export market and source of foreign direct investment for Bangladesh. Bangladesh and the US also have extensive cooperation in diverse regional and global security issues like counterterrorism, maritime security, climate security, etc.



He expressed his gratitude for US's proactive role in supporting the safe, dignified, and orderly repatriation of forcibly displaced Rohingyas. He mentioned about the US recognition of the genocide against Rohingyas in Myanmar. He also pointed out US assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic as the country donated 61 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to Bangladesh.

The Director General opined that Bangladesh could be a valuable partner with the US as the country sees Bangladesh as a key partner in its security and strategic interests of maintaining peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. He concluded by saying that continuous dialogues and regular discussions will help grow Bangladesh-US cooperation and partnership in multiple areas and pave the way for future cooperation.



PRESENTATIONS

The Evolving Bangladesh-US Relations



Professor Ruksana Kibria

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Professor Ruksana Kibria, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, noted that Bangladesh-US relationship is the most important diplomatic relationship for Bangladesh. The US recognised Bangladesh on 04 April 1972 when the latter was a war-torn country. Since then, their mutual relations evolved in a dramatic way. Until recently, Bangladesh had been on the margins of US strategic discourse regarding South Asia, which was and continues to be dominated by Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. From a Cold War era strategic stepchild, Bangladesh has apparently graduated into a strategic new kid on the bloc, so to speak, reflecting changes in the goals and priorities in US domestic and foreign policies. The transformations focused on Bangladesh, whose origins

can be traced back to the immediate post-Cold War years, actually gained momentum due to the confluence of the following developments: a) the expanding role of the US economic statecraft agenda in shaping the strategic environment; b) the post-2008 US economic recession; c) operation adjustments in US military deployment policy; d) incorporation of non-traditional security issues, especially humanitarian assistance and disaster relief into the core of building partner's capabilities and capacities; and e) post-Afghanistan emphasis on Asia. Enunciation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy added new significance to this region, and as a part of it, the Bay of Bengal is growing in terms of strategic significance, with critical sea routes passing through it and its wealth of hydrocarbon reserves. In the words of US president Joe Biden, "The future of each of our nations and indeed the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific, enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead." There is hardly any need for reiteration that as a Bay of Bengal littoral state, Bangladesh's strategic value has concomitantly and greatly enhanced. The US recognised Bangladesh on 04 April 1972, but there still exists a need for more research on the nature of US' relations with Bangladesh, she suggested.

Professor Kibria then spoke on various aspects of Bangladesh-US relations. The US is the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. Around 24 per cent of Bangladesh's trade takes place with the US. Bangladesh's annual exports and imports to and from the US amount to US\$7 billion and US\$1.6 billion, respectively. Since 1972, when the US pledged US\$300 million for Bangladesh, the latter has received over US\$8 billion as development assistance so far. The country has been a key foreign investor in the energy sector, especially in exploring natural gas, which presently stands at US\$4 billion. It is a major destination for Bangladesh's readymade garments exports. It continues to attract students to pursue higher studies, scientific research and access to coveted advanced technology, which attests to the compelling feature of the US. It should be kept in mind that despite being a superpower, military and economic alike, the real power of the US lies in its soft power, which plays a very significant role, even more than the hard power, i.e., military might. Thus, the US remains attractive to Bangladeshi students for higher studies. In spite of the hype of decline, it needs to be borne in mind that the country remains the most powerful economy in the world as well as its knowledge capital.





Professor Kibria then quoted Prince Metternich, the 19th-century Austrian statesman who said, "When the United States sneezes, rest of the world catches a cold." This is the reality. Remittance from the Bangladeshi diaspora in the US is the second largest, which in 2021 stood at more than US\$ 300 million. This makes a substantial economic contribution in Bangladesh which has interests in sustaining US engagement not only in the economic sector but the political realm as well. Interest is there on the US side in seeing Bangladesh uphold its identity as a moderate Muslim democracy. In the post-Cold War era, the inclusion of global issues like terrorism, counterterrorism, food security, health, pandemic, climate change, disaster management, piracy, etc., brought about a paradigm shift in the US' relations with Bangladesh and exponentially expanded the scope of cooperation in the fields of transnational and non-traditional security. Apart from assisting Dhaka in the 3 "Ds" of US policy, i.e., democracy, development and denying sanctuary for terrorists, Washington is encouraging Bangladesh's role in international peacekeeping operations, thus promoting US strategic objectives. A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report highlights the merits of using Bangladesh's strategic location to achieve US interests within the context of shifting the regional balance of power between China and India as well as strengthening military ties between the US Indo-Pacific Command and Bangladesh military.

Arguably, the most decisive development of the last 50 years of diplomatic relations was establishing a permanent common forum for coordinating bilateral meetings to first formalise the strategic partnership dialogue in May 2012 and the long-awaited Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Arrangement (TICFA). In strategic terms, these unprecedented developments have far-reaching implications for future Bangladesh-US relations. Dhaka and Washington cooperate on various security issues through bilateral dialogues, defence assistance and training. Both countries, in the last 50 years, also partnered on other issues like border security, maritime security, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, defence, trade and defence institution building. The modest US involvement in Bangladesh's military sector resulting from the initial focus on humanitarian assistance in 1972 was revised in 2012, facilitating greater cooperation between the militaries of the two countries. Active military-to-military cooperation got underway during the First Gulf War of 1991 when a contingent of Bangladeshi troops was dispatched to the Persian Gulf region. In the last two decades, several hundred Bangladeshi military officials received training in the US under the international military education training programme.



The US military and Bangladesh armed forces have been working in tandem to manage maritime security, natural disasters, security and counterterrorism. Bilateral ties between the two countries initially depended on trade and remittances but, since the

1990s, developed into one characterised by trade, investment and acknowledgement of economic strength as a currency of power in the 21st century. A supremely powerful tool in Washington's arsenal: the political and strategic dimensions assumed by the straight policy were demonstrated in trade negotiations with Dhaka and in concerted pursuit of the TICFA that would grant substantial advantages to the US in terms of greater market access, facilitation of its investments in Bangladesh's service sectors, protection of intellectual property rights, etc. Bangladesh's geopolitical location cannot be disregarded in any meaningful study of its bilateral relations with the US. It is argued that in the 21st century, the Indian Ocean is going to be the centre stage of big power rivalry over resources, dominance and power projection. In March 2021, Bangladesh and the US passed a draft agreement on the general security of military information required for purchasing sophisticated military equipment from the US. In order to enhance defence capacities which are in accordance with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, since the 1990s, Bangladesh has been buying more weapons from the US.

Professor Kibria opined that Bangladesh-US relations are important, at the same time, multifaceted and complex, evolving in an extraordinary manner with non-traditional security issues playing a significant role. While they are determined by economic and political factors, the subtle geopolitical dynamics are key to a correct appreciation of the transformation itself, without which Bangladesh, in terms of limited interests, in what would figure differently in US strategic calculations; how the budding partnership would further develop in absence of a well-articulated, long-term vision, remained to be seen. As far as the question of independent foreign policy is concerned, all countries have to adjust to changing global circumstances, and Bangladesh is no exception. It needs to rethink, retool and recalibrate its foreign policy. Bangladesh is cognizant of the reality of constant changes and accordingly designs its foreign policy based on the quest for dynamic equilibrium. For obvious reasons, the relationship asymmetry between a superpower and a developing country like Bangladesh cannot be anything but demanding for the latter. This partnership is expected to be important and fruitful but to what extent Bangladesh gets advantages from here depends largely on its ability to adjust to changing geopolitical realities and able leadership. Professor Kibria said it could be reiterated how Bangladesh and the US potentially offer more to each other and in which direction. She concluded by saying that this is a matter of speculation and, for Bangladesh, is likely to be very much challenging.

Bangladesh-US Partnership for Enhanced Security in South Asia



Brigadier General (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, ndc, psc, PhD

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

Brigadier General (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, ndc, psc, PhD, Senior Fellow, SIPG, highlighted the key aspects of security cooperation between Bangladesh and the US that include military training, exercises, military armament, counterterrorism, and civilian security cooperation, peacekeeping operations, military diplomacy, regional security and disaster management. Under military training, a number of officers from Bangladesh have gone through training from different US institutions. The main training is offered and conducted under "International Military Education Training (IMET)". A separate fund is allocated under the programme. This training is still continuing. Bangladesh has also invited US officers, and 14 of them attended Defence Services

Command and Staff College (DSCSC) in Mirpur, and one officer attended National Defence College. That is a very positive form of cooperation, he added.

Brigadier General Sakhawat informed the audience that Bangladesh and the US Military have been involved in a number of joint exercises. Some of those are: Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT), a Naval Exercise; Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Navy staff exercise; Exercise TIGER SHARK (Tri-Services Exercise held since 2010); TIGER LIGHTNING; COPE SOUTH: USAF and BAF joint exercise; BAGH HANGOR (likely to start in 2023 which will enhance bilateral training).

Another area of Bangladesh-US security cooperation Brigadier General Sakhawat mentioned was maritime security. This includes security from outside state forces and pirates, as well as preservation of the maritime resources and boundary. Bangladesh, a major Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean littoral country, aims at a free and open Indo-Pacific and is concerned about security of the region. The US has made a big contribution in developing the Bangladesh Coast Guard. There have been a number of crafts handed over to the Bangladesh Coast Guard. They are now capable of looking after at least the coastline of Bangladesh. The US needs to help Bangladesh in the field of sharing mechanisms of information to counter non-traditional maritime threats. The country recently donated 20 high-speed vessels to the Coast Guard and Navy to be used for enhancing maritime security. Bangladesh now seeks cooperation in the field of protection of the maritime environment as well.

Brigadier General Sakhawat then focused on cooperation related to counterterrorism and civil security that incorporates aviation and border security, including alert list development, civil maritime cooperation, security and human rights, building law enforcement and prosecutorial capacity, and border security—particularly the Rohingya issue. Recently, the US has recognised the genocide by Myanmar. Bangladesh welcomes that and hopes this cooperation will remain in the future and the US will find out some way or other to resolve the Rohingya crisis. He stressed that Bangladesh is not a country where terrorism will survive as the country's law enforcement agencies have been trained and equipped for counterterrorism.



Another major area of cooperation that Brigadier General Sakhawat highlighted is peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Bangladesh's peacekeeping mission started in 1988 when Bangladesh Army first took part in a small number to help the armistice between Iran and Iraq. Since then, Bangladesh has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs). It contributes around three per cent plus troops in UN peacekeeping missions. Currently, Bangladesh has 6,802 troops deployed mostly in civil and insurgency-torn African countries such as Mali, where many others would not deploy their troops. So far, 180,661 personnel of the Armed Forces, including the Police, have participated in UNPKO along with 11 Female Engagement Team.

Moreover, to train the peacekeepers, Bangladesh currently has the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT). It is a military-owned and operated institution that trains Bangladesh military and police personnel on peacekeeping in UN missions. The US has contributed to strengthening Bangladesh's peacekeeping operations. Since 2005, it has contributed nearly US\$44 million to support training, equipment, and facilities to enhance Bangladesh's peacekeeping capabilities. It has trained Bangladesh Army personnel in operating drones in Mali. The country proposed a

coordinated peacekeeping operations deployment by Bangladesh and US special forces in the Central African Republic, known as MINUSCA. The US has continuously supported training and capacity enhancement through Global Peace Operation Initiative Assistance (GPOI) at BIPSOT. Bangladesh seeks assistance for female accommodation for the training of women peacekeepers in BIPSOT to the UN and the US to help secure the fund.

Brigadier General Sakhawat noted that one of the biggest cooperation that the US has extended to Bangladesh is in the field of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Two significant rescue and relief operations organised by the US were Operation Sea Angel in 1991 and during the time of cyclone Sidr in 2007. One of the largest rescue and relief operations on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, i.e., the eastern coast of Chattogram, was named “Sea Angel”. It was a model of HADR adopted even during the time of Cyclone Sidr in 2007.

About 138,000 people died on 30 April 1991, and the US marines joined the operation by 10 May. A US amphibious task force, consisting of 15 ships and 2500 men, landed in Bangladesh to support the disaster management efforts taken by the Bangladesh Army. Lieutenant General Henry Charles Stackpole was the Marine Corps task force commander who became a household name in Bangladesh, particularly in the disaster area. The model was repeated in 2007 when the cyclone Sidr hit the western coast of the Bay of Bengal in Khulna and the Sundarbans area on 15 November 2007. Once again, US Marines came to the aid of the Bangladesh Armed Forces in the rescue operation. Since 2010, Bangladesh Armed Forces, in collaboration with the US Army, have carried out Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange (DREE) every year.

Brigadier General Sakhawat also focused on areas of further cooperation which have regional security ramifications. According to him, areas in which Bangladesh seeks cooperation are peaceful resolution of the Rohingya issue with Myanmar, border issues like anti-drug, anti-weapon smuggling, human-trafficking issues, curbing transnational organised crimes, and free and open Indo-Pacific, which Bangladesh supports and suggests.



In conclusion, the speaker said that there is wider scope for cooperation in security, particularly in procuring military equipment to support Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030. The foreign policy of Bangladesh is focused on to develop a peaceful region i. e., peaceful Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. He believes that Bangladesh and the US are cooperating in this regard. However, no relationship goes without ups and downs, hiccups, and the recent US sanctions on the elite security force of Bangladesh are one of those which might hamper the ongoing "war against terrorism" in the country. He suggested for enhancing military diplomacy as the ground prepared by peacekeepers. Besides, the US might consider cooperating with Bangladesh in setting up a regional disaster training centre with Bangladesh's experience in disaster management.

Contemporary Dynamics of Bangladesh-US Relations and the Way Forward



Ambassador Humayun Kabir

President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States

Ambassador Humayun Kabir, President, BEI, at the outset of his presentation stated that he had three tours of duty in the US. He joined the Bangladesh Embassy in the US in 1987 during the time of President Ronald Reagan. His last assignment in the US ended during the time of President Obama. He served twice in Washington and once in New York. As a junior officer, one of his hobbies was understanding American society because the US has always been an enigma to everyone. He used to try to go deep inside American society. This hobby helped him learn something that might be helpful today as a Bangladeshi diplomat.

Ambassador Kabir discussed Bangladesh-US relations from his experience and perspective. He identified four dynamics, e.g., economic, strategic, governance and humanitarian, to define the bilateral relationship. These are the real dynamics that are working or shaping up the relationship. Regarding economic dynamics, he added that in the last three years, a lot of interactions have taken place between Bangladesh and the US to energise the economic relationship. It is growing in a multi-dimensional way. In 2020, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun visited Bangladesh for two days and gave a lot of impetus to the economic relationship. The US now recognises Bangladesh as an economic upstart. In the strategic arena, the relationship is also gaining momentum. Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Stone on Indo-Pacific Strategy was in Bangladesh in September 2020. Referring to the governance dynamic, he pointed out that some critical issues shape the bilateral relationship. Lastly, the humanitarian dynamic is already ongoing concerning the Rohingya issue.

In terms of managing the relationship, he pointed out two assumptions. The first one is that the relationship is asymmetric. While Bangladesh always looks at the US from a bilateral perspective, the US looks at Bangladesh from a bilateral plus perspective. The second one is that the policy process of the US is consultative, inclusive, dispersed and socially driven. On the other hand, Bangladesh's policy process is slightly more bureaucratic. US policies are highly coordinated both inside and outside. In contrast, Bangladesh's policies have some difficulties and challenges in coordination that have some reflection even on its relationship with the US.

Ambassador Kabir then talked about the sensitivities of the relationship. Bangladesh has one of the most consequential relationships with the US. He highlighted some areas where both countries are converging and some areas where they are not. One of the areas of convergence is the normative frame. In this arena, Bangladesh and the US have been working with regard to respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful interaction among nations, democratic partnership, and promoting economic opportunities for mutual benefit and prosperity. Here, the diaspora plays an important role, as Secretary Blinken mentioned during his discussion with the Foreign Minister. Hence, in the normative arena, both countries can strengthen their convergence.



The second area of convergence is socially driven diplomacy. He stated that while looking at US diplomacy in Bangladesh, people tend to look at only the political aspects of diplomacy. However, the US policy has a substantial social focus in Bangladesh with regard to agriculture, private sector development, supporting civil society, disaster management, growing people-to-people connectivity, remittance, and vaccine support during Covid-19. Hence, it is essential to understand the US focus. While talking about the US policy towards Bangladesh, he stated that it is also crucial to understand the comprehensiveness of the US policy to evaluate and work through it.

The third area is the growing interdependencies. Both countries are increasingly becoming interdependent on political, diplomatic, strategic, environmental and economic fronts. Here, he gave an example of the formation of the US-Bangladesh Business Council, which is now promoting economic diplomacy between Bangladesh and the US. Bangladesh needs the US, and the US needs Bangladesh as both countries have a common future vision. In this regard, he also referred to President Biden's message during the celebration of 50 years of Bangladesh-US diplomatic relations. In the message, President Biden highlighted the strategic partnership and cooperation between the two countries in the

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Indo-Pacific, defence, democratic practices, climate change and the Rohingya issue. On Bangladesh's side, the visiting Foreign Minister emphasised diversification of investment, withdrawal or suspension of GSP, withdrawal of sanctions against government officials of Bangladesh and readiness to work with the US to strengthen democratic process and practices. These are some of the areas where Bangladesh and the US are working together. He suggested strengthening cooperation in these areas to consolidate or empower the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and the US in a positive frame.

He also focused on sensitive issues in bilateral relations. Governance issues, democratic process, human rights, including labour rights, the rule of law, freedom of expression and sanctions on government officials are the concerns from the Bangladesh side. On the trade side, the suspension of GSP is one concern. Bangladesh wants to withdraw that suspension. Besides, it has been trying to get duty-free market access to the US. He hoped that Bangladesh would get some duty-free market access to the US one day. In terms of investment, he recommended that the US could invest in diverse sectors of Bangladesh. Besides, in strategic and geopolitical arenas, some of the concerns include Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific strategy and its relationship with China, the emerging template of global interaction based on the bifurcation of the relationship between democracy and authoritarianism, health, climate, blue economy, and regional cooperation. He stressed that on these issues, both countries need to work together.

Ambassador Kabir then provided several policy recommendations to strengthen the Bangladesh-US bilateral relationship. First, both countries should understand the different approaches to managing the bilateral and bilateral plus relationship. The US always has a bilateral plus focus or frame to view Bangladesh. Hence, to understand and manage relations with the US, Bangladesh has to sharpen its diplomatic focus.



He also noted that contemporary problems started or emerged from the activism of social sectors, and then they recycled into the policy process and created some challenges. Thus, in his second way forward, he highlighted the significance of social actors in diplomacy. In the US, social actors have a huge role. The policy process is consultative and diverse. Bangladesh is also a socially driven country. Hence, it has the potential to involve the social sectors and elements in the policy process. It would help the country interact more with the US partners, e.g., the business community, civil society organisations, think tanks, etc. Thirdly, research is also vital. When American policymakers take a decision, it is based on evidence and thorough research. Therefore, to cope with them, Bangladesh also needs to develop its own research capacity significantly. Fourth, it is indeed necessary to ensure domestic coordination from the Bangladesh side. In this respect, Bangladesh could benefit from the diaspora community. The Bangladeshi diaspora community in the US could not be as functional as they have to be. This is because they are divided on the domestic political line. If they become professionalised, they could be much more useful and helpful in contributing to the US economy and benefit Bangladesh.

Finally, the Bangladesh-US relationship is highly consequential. Thus, more investment, along with professional and financial support, are required to build the diplomatic capacity of Bangladesh. He concluded the presentation by saying that as the world is becoming globalised and at the same time getting fragmented, diplomacy could be the only friend to ensure security and prosperity and determine the future course of action as a dignified nation.



REMARKS BY DESIGNATED DISCUSSANT



Ambassador Tariq A Karim

Director, Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies, Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB) and Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States

Ambassador Tariq A Karim, Director, Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies, Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), at the outset expressed his appreciation for the three distinguished paper presenters for comprehensively delineating the state of Bangladesh-US relations. He stated that Bangladesh and the US have passed 50 years of their relations and now looking forward to the coming 50 years ahead. Bangladesh came out of dependency on the US to become a case of development success. US citizens have always been with the people of Bangladesh. Thus, Bangladesh-US developed a citizen-to-citizen relationship through students, migrants, business people and others. He mentioned that the US looks upon to Bangladesh not as a "Basket Case" anymore but rather as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

He added that the changing dynamics of geopolitics shifted toward the Indian Ocean in recent times. If anyone looks upon the world from space, will find that the Indian Ocean is in the middle of this oceanic planet, known by the geographers as the “Middle Bay”. Bangladesh is at the apex of the Bay of Bengal, which is, in turn, in the centre of the Indian Ocean. He highlighted that for economic conditions, energy trade, population mass and different geopolitical reasons, the Indian Ocean became the epicentre of world politics. Ideas like Indo-Pacific and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have emerged, which many believe are competitive and complementary.



Ambassador Karim explained that the survival of Bangladesh was dependent on its foreign policy of “Friendship to all, malice to none”, which is situated in this competitive geopolitical scenario. He praised the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy of joining no alliance. Bangabandhu envisioned Bangladesh as the “Switzerland of the East”. He remembered the 200 years of neutrality of Switzerland, which helped them navigate through two world wars and avoid being dragged into great power competition among France, Germany and Italy. Bangabandhu had in mind that Bangladesh had achieved independence, but it needed to be a survivable state in the community of nations.

Ambassador Karim highlighted that Bangladesh now has enviable GDP growth and a vibrant, confident and energetic youth population that needs to be tapped. The US can assist Bangladesh in channelling this energy to skill development, industrial endeavours, and commercial, economic and scientific directions. He mentioned Ambassador Haas's remarks at his Centre previously and enunciated what Indo-Pacific Policy means, and he hoped that Ambassador Haas would reassert and clarify the policy to remove any obfuscation about it. According to him, Bangladesh needs to focus on where Bangladesh-US interest meets for mutual cooperation and development in this era of interdependency. The US can assist Bangladesh for what, where, who it is and what it can become.

Bangladesh is a champion of regional integration, harmony and peace to bring regional cooperation in South Asia and beyond. It is a Bay of Bengal littoral along with eight other countries, which makes the region's population a quarter of the world population. Their combined aggregate GDP is the 4th largest in the world after the US, China and the EU. He suggested that Bangladesh-US relations could bring prosperity to the region through Bay of Bengal economic cooperation and cooperation among business groups in future.

Ambassador Karim said that all western states with advanced, industrialised economies now, started in chaos in the beginning. Firstly, these states ensure economic prosperity. Then move towards addressing governance issues. Once the country puts their act together and stabilises the economy, states take initiatives to fix governance issues with collective efforts of government and civil society. He believes that Bangladesh has begun the process of the organic progression of becoming an industrialised advanced state from an underdeveloped state. In its 50 years, Bangladesh has shown resilience and growth, which provides a glimpse of a strong, inclusive and developed society ahead. It is a bridging state as it bridges the eastern and western hemispheres being at the heart of the oceanic world and bridging civilisations and economies. Thus, it provides Bangladesh with the opportunity of pursuing its prosperity along with the region.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Ambassador Muhammad Zamir

Former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh



Ambassador Muhammad Zamir, former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh, highlighted the US recognition of the genocide in Myanmar, which he believes is a significant step forward. He stressed upon the importance of also recognising Bangladesh's genocide during the Liberation War in 1971 and requested the US to come forward and recognise it. He expressed that a sentence from the White House mentioning that incident would greatly uplift the nation's perception of the US.

Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, ndc, psc

Treasurer, East West University



Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, ndc, psc, Treasurer, East West University, said that defence cooperation between the US and Bangladesh has been limited to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. However, it is high time both countries moved to more concrete cooperation. There is scope for



bilateral military exercises with a view to strengthening defence readiness and building operational interoperability. Besides, Bangladesh can now think of purchasing military equipment from the US. He commented that buying military equipment from the US is cost-efficient in the long run. Therefore, he hoped both countries would work together to bring in concrete military cooperation where there is an opportunity for enhancing defence capabilities.

Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, BPM, PPM

Director General, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)



Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, BPM, PPM, Director General, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), noted that he learnt various aspects of Bangladesh-US relations from the seminar. Bangladesh and the US are celebrating 50 years of their bilateral relationship this year. This relationship reached a new height of friendship and cooperation. Within this long 50 years, Bangladesh benefited from the US by acquiring knowledge, technology, and equipment. The law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh immensely benefited from these unique relations, he noted. Similarly, RAB acquired a good amount of equipment from the US. Moreover, there is cooperation between RAB and the US Department of Justice and the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP). The Internal Inquiry Cell in RAB headquarters was also established in 2011.

With the initiative of the US Embassy in Bangladesh, to ensure accountability of RAB personnel, training was conducted by ICITAP personnel on the basic criminal investigation, interview skills, and human rights. He informed that ICITAP trained 147

RAB personnel. These 147 RAB personnel provided training to other RAB officials later. Besides, RAB received operational equipment, training and management support from the US. For instance, Bangladesh received helicopters and training from US experts. These helicopters are used for operational purposes and humanitarian activities. Hence, this training and equipment helped Bangladesh to successfully counter terrorism, extremism, narcotics trade, and control human trafficking and illegal arms. RAB mainly works to counter-terrorism and drug trafficking, which are two prime mandates of the US. Hence, Bangladesh wants to take its relations with the US to new heights so that the elite forces can function smoothly and uphold human rights credentials. He also stated that Bangladesh wants to engage with the US for a safe and secure community.

Lieutenant General (Retd) Md. Mainul Islam, OSP, BGBM, awc, psc

Former Chief of General Staff, Bangladesh Army



Lieutenant General (Retd) Md. Mainul Islam, OSP, BGBM, awc, psc, former Chief of General Staff, Bangladesh Army, thanked both Ambassador Humayun Kabir and Ambassador Tariq A Karim for the way they explained the various dimensions of the US-Bangladesh relationship. However, he noted that there remains a gap in perception between the high level of government and the lower and people's level. The government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public representatives need to communicate these mutual benefits and advancement of Bangladesh-US relationship to the people. Because there are lot of criticisms of US policies and initiatives at the people's level.

He highlighted about the 1971 and noted that there was tremendous intelligence failure on the part of the US that they failed to recognize the atrocities done by the West Pakistan upon the innocent people of Bangladesh, then East Pakistan. Even in the first week of December 1971, the US intelligence did not know that the Mukti Bahini was controlling more than 90 per cent area and was on the verge of victory. In spite of that, the US moved the Seventh Fleet in the vicinity of Bangladesh, then East Pakistan. Similar intelligence failure occurred in the case of Iraq in 2004.

He also highlighted the fact that there are US military bases in many countries of the world totaling around 193 bases, and about 35,000 troops are stationed in military bases in Japan and South Korea. While the US has extended its military reach in many countries of the world, it still could not resolve many of the protracted conflict such as the Palestinian crisis. And the recent war in Ukraine also exhibits weakness in the US initiatives at the global level to resolve conflicts.

Ambassador Brigadier General (Retd) Chowdhury Khalequzzaman



Ambassador Brigadier General (Retd) Chowdhury Khalequzzaman in his remarks appreciated the formal declaration of the US that atrocities and ethnic violence committed by Myanmar's military against the Rohingya constitute genocide. He wanted to know the role of the US in repatriating the Rohingyas from Bangladesh. He then asked when the sanctions on RAB imposed by the US would be lifted.

Major General (Retd) A M S A Amin
Chair, Centre for Strategic & Development Studies



Major General (Retd) A M S A Amin shed light on the aspiration of the people of Bangladesh. He said that the expectation of current and future generations of Bangladesh is to be as good as the US or a first-world country. In this regard, he wanted to know from Ambassador Haas what the US can do to help the younger generation, who are as good and talented as anybody in the world, in terms of providing educational and ICT facilities. Besides, he suggested the US to widen and open up opportunities for Bangladeshi students.

Professor Dr Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain
Pro-Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)



Professor Dr Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), wanted to know from the panellists how to improve people-to-people relationships in the connection of mutual trust, mutual understanding, mutual faith, and mutual cultural transformation while taking into consideration social networks and social harmony.

REMARKS BY THE SPECIAL GUEST



H E Ambassador Peter Haas

US Ambassador to Bangladesh

H E Ambassador Peter Haas, US Ambassador to Bangladesh, noted that Bangladesh-US relations have reached a turning point. Over the past 50 years, the two countries built a robust relationship together, binding their cultures, peoples, and economies. The US is ready to move as fast as Bangladesh wants to expand and deepen its ties. While looking to the future, they must recognise that bilateral relationships will change as Bangladesh has changed. It is now one of the fastest growing economies in the Indo-Pacific, preparing for graduation from Least Developed Country status and racing ahead toward middle-income status. This change brings about a new dynamic. Simply put, the US conducts diplomacy with major economies and regional leaders differently. As the relationship grows, the conversation broadens. Bangladesh and US governments recently held several important dialogues—the Partnership Dialogue, the Bilateral

Security Dialogue, and other key engagements in Washington. In the coming weeks, they would also hold two more: the Bilateral Defence Dialogue and the High-Level Economic Consultation. Such conversations have, and will, identify opportunities to enhance the relationship. In this regard, the respective governments must decide whether and how to move towards words into action.

Ambassador Haas then highlighted three areas appropriate for growth in Bangladesh-US bilateral relations: security, human rights and democracy, and economic ties. His first focus was on the increase of defence cooperation. Bangladesh and the US engage as peers in defence and conduct several annual exercises. Their respective special operations forces are currently participating in a joint exercise called Tiger Shark; these engagements can be strengthened by bringing in other like-minded mutual partners. They can also move forward on two basic, foundational agreements, he opined. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) would set ground rules for exchanging sensitive information about military procurements. This framework would enable Bangladesh to modernise its military with US technology, contributing to Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) would allow their respective militaries to offer each other assistance on high seas, lend equipment or spare parts when an aircraft, vehicle, or vessel is in trouble, or exchange fuel and food. An ACSA has a real-world impact on safety and interoperability, like when a vessel ends up stranded in the Port of Beirut after the 2020 explosion or during joint humanitarian relief efforts in the Bay of Bengal. According to Ambassador Haas, there are lots of misperceptions about the GSOMIA and ACSA. They are technical agreements, do not reflect an "alliance" or "military pact", nor constitute a broad and vague defence cooperation agreement, such as the one Bangladesh signed with China in 2002. They are simple building blocks to a closer relationship and allow the US to help a country's armed forces advance their defence goals. Over 70 countries have signed such agreements with the US.

Regarding law enforcement, he said there is no scope for repeal of sanctions against the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) without concrete action and accountability. The US wants to see a RAB that remains effective at combatting terrorism but that does so while respecting basic human rights. However, RAB sanctions do not mean Bangladesh and the US could not enhance their strong law enforcement security cooperation. The US would continue to work with Bangladesh to combat transnational crime and terrorism, enhance border security, and prevent violent extremism. US support would continue

for Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime police, the Anti-Terrorism Unit, and specialised units of the Metropolitan Police in Chattogram, Sylhet, and Rajshahi. The signing of a proposed Memorandum of Agreement would facilitate US's ability to implement their Anti-Terrorism Assistance training programme and to donate new equipment to the police.



On democracy and human rights, Ambassador Haas noted that the two countries could work together to promote these values. The US is not perfect. The country embarked on its democratic renewal. This journey includes tackling its issues with police accountability and ensuring all Americans can cast their ballots on election day. It is also inviting other countries around the world to make similar commitments to strengthen their democracies. He expressed satisfaction over Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Dr A K Abdul Momen's statement that Bangladesh would welcome international observers during the next election and welcomed the Law Minister's commitment to reform the Digital Security Act to prevent further abuses. Holding an election consistent with international standards is not just about the day votes are actually cast. In effect, the elections have already started. Truly democratic elections require the space for civic discourse to take

place, an environment where journalists can investigate without fear, and the ability for civil society organisations to advocate broadly. Ambassador Haas said that the US would not pick a side in the upcoming elections. The US simply hopes for a democratic process that allows the Bangladeshi people to freely decide who will run their country.

Concerning economic ties, he said that the US is ready to move the economic relationship forward with Bangladesh. Next month, he would welcome the inaugural visit of the Executive Committee of the US-Bangladesh Business Council; the US Embassy would welcome the first ever full-time attaché from the US Department of Commerce this summer. This is a testament to the importance the country places on the growing two-way trade and investment relationship. As a middle-income country, Bangladesh would be competing on equal footing with major economies. Issues like intellectual property rights, supply chain efficiencies, access to quality higher education, and a transparent and inclusive business environment would thus become ever more important. How Bangladesh would regulate internet activity would, in turn, also impact foreign investment and the willingness of companies to do business in the country.

Ambassador Haas believes there are new opportunities, advantage of which can be taken together. For instance, the newly established US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has a US\$4 billion active portfolio in South Asia across multiple sectors, including clean energy, agriculture, healthcare, and banking. Unfortunately, the DFC is unable to operate in Bangladesh for the same reason Bangladesh is ineligible for the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade benefit: a lack of labour rights. The US is committed to supporting Bangladesh's labour rights journey through targeted development assistance. The country actively promotes freedom of association for Bangladeshi readymade garment factory workers and their unions. It will also welcome a new attaché from the Department of Labour in the coming year, enhancing the coordination on the ground. Nonetheless, it cannot be undertaken to enact and enforce laws that foster a transparent business environment, nor can meet the timelines laid out in the ILO Roadmap. These are up to Bangladesh, and the US is ready to assist.

Ambassador Haas opined that Bangladesh and the US have built a solid foundation together over the last 50 years. Their people-to-people ties is stronger than ever. Bangladeshi students prefer US universities, which is the 14th largest group of international students there and the fastest growing group. A vibrant diaspora community and strong business links keep the two countries closely interconnected. But today, the US-





Bangladesh relationship is at a turning point. The US is ready to enhance the partnership and realise the great potential of this relationship. He concluded by saying his country is ready to move as quickly as Bangladesh is.

REMARKS BY THE CHIEF GUEST



H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP

Honourable Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, Honourable Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, at the outset, expressed his joy on this auspicious occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-US diplomatic relations. He quoted US President Joe Biden's letter to the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that reads, "The drive, the resourcefulness and innovation of Bangladesh's rebuilding after the 1971 war and now forging a path of economic growth and development, serve as a model for the rest of the world. We are proud of our partnership and development, economic growth and counterterrorism. We work together to address the climate crisis, how to provide assistance to the Rohingya survivors of genocide and support United Nations Peacekeeping worldwide." The Foreign Minister was delighted to share this wonderful and great message from President Biden with the audience.

He mentioned that on 04 April, he was visiting the US with Ambassador Peter Haas to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-US relations. During this visit, he met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the USAID Administrator Samantha Power along with five lawmakers and five different institutions, as they expressed great enthusiasm to develop more partnerships and engagement with Bangladesh. The US is the largest cumulative investor in Bangladesh and the biggest single-country trading partner of Bangladesh. Although the Nixon Administration was not supporting Bangladesh's War of Liberation in 1971, people of the US and many lawmakers like Edward Kennedy, Senator Walter Mondale, Senator William Saxby, many intellectuals, professors, doctors, and even artists and singers were in favour of Bangladesh's liberation. The US administration or Nixon, and Kissinger opposed the cause due to tactical reasons, but the citizens of the US were supporting Bangladesh wholeheartedly.



Dr Momen stated that Bangladesh's relations with the US are much older than 50 years. In the 1770s, around 250 years ago in the US, there was a campaign, "No taxation without no representation", and liberation of the colonies. During that time, the British administration was fighting two wars simultaneously, one in Bengal and another in the US. They then imposed a huge tax on imported goods in the US. As a result, US citizens threw tea boxes in Boston, known as the Boston Tea Party. William Pitt the Elder, Prime

Minister of the UK, then, with the support of parliament, decided to let the US achieve freedom and chose to subjugate Bengal for exploitation. The sacrifice of Bengal had a role in the freedom of the US; thus comes the city hall named Pittsburgh, after William Pitt.

He mentioned his visit to the US and highlighted the discussion he had with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He added that Bangladesh and the US have had good relations for the last 50 years and are looking forward to having an even better relationship in the coming 50 years. He called the US, the champion of anti-terrorism movement across the world, and Bangladesh followed them and took up the same policies against terrorism. Bangladesh once had 495 bomb blasts at a time all over the country, had a bomb attack in court that injured a justice, and had an incidence of a terror attack against a high commissioner as well. Even the rally of Sheikh Hasina against terrorism was attacked by terrorists with grenades, killing 22 and injuring 370 people. He recalled that former US Ambassador James Francis Moriarty called RAB the “FBI of Bangladesh” for its success in countering violent extremism in the country since its creation. The Foreign Minister agreed that more accountability is necessary to ensure transparency through taking remedial measures. Thus, RAB has been playing a pivotal role in maintaining national and regional peace, security and stability. Therefore, he requested to re-examine the sanction against this great institution.

Dr Momen talked about the trade regime and asked to reduce tariffs to boost exports to kickstart the post-Covid-19 economic recovery of two-way trade, which currently stands up to US\$9 billion. Bangladesh is willing to export pharmaceuticals to the US apart from RMG and other goods. He urged the US to look forward to investing more in Bangladesh in the coming days. Bangladesh initiated 100 special economic zones and 28 high-tech parks, paving the way for further investments. He mentioned that 90 per cent of the investments are in the energy sector and offered to diversify the investments in various sectors like ICT, innovation, infrastructure, blue economy and skill development. He highlighted the discussion on labour issues and proposed to create a roadmap for improving the labour condition together as Bangladesh is already in progress with ILO and EU.

The Foreign Minister expressed his gratitude to the US administration for 29 million vaccine donations to Bangladesh during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is the highest single country donation to any state. Bangladesh managed the Covid-19 pandemic efficiently; despite having fewer resources. He expressed his deepest



condolences for the over one million deaths in the US during the pandemic. He highlighted the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's visit to the US in 1974. Bangabandhu met President Gerald Ford and talked about his non-alignment policy like he said, "Friendship to all, malice towards none". In 1972, the US recognised Bangladesh after victory and decided to send an ambassador to Bangladesh, which was delayed due to administrative reasons. When Bangladesh applied for UN membership, the US supported 15 out of 16 resolutions (one abstained). He mentioned that in September 1971, Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury visited New York and wanted to meet with the US permanent representative in the UN, who was none other than George H. W. Bush, who later became President of the US. The delegation was received with proper diplomatic decorum and protocols by him then. Upon leaving New York, the City Mayor of New York accorded VVIP treatment to the Bangladeshi delegation as well. He conveyed his heartfelt gratitude towards the people of the US for their support in the 1971 Liberation War, for the just cause and right to democracy of the Bengali people. He concluded by hoping for deeper bilateral engagements and mutual cooperation for reciprocal development in the coming 50 years.

CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR



Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA

Chairman, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

In his concluding remarks, **Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA**, Chairman, BIISS, hoped that Bangladesh would have more robust engagement with the US in the next 50 years based on pragmatism, sovereign equality, finding the US beside on its journey of development, peace and prosperity. He extended his very special thanks and gratitude to honourable Foreign Minister Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, for taking time out of his very busy schedule and gracing the programme as the chief guest. He also extended heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the special guest H E Mr. Peter Haas, for gracing the seminar with his presence. He thanked all the distinguished presenters, learned audience, the staff and officers of BIISS, who worked hard to make all arrangements to successfully host the programme and make it a success.

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