



PROCEEDINGS

Eminent Persons Lecture Series (EPLS)

BANGLADESH-PORTUGAL RELATIONS: QUEST FOR DEEPER BILATERAL COOPERATION

H E Dr Francisco André

**Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Republic of Portugal**

18 November 2022

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Bangladesh-Portugal Relations: Quest for Deeper Bilateral Cooperation



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Seminar as part of its Eminent Persons Lecture Series (EPLS) on Bangladesh-Portugal Relations: Quest for Deeper Bilateral Cooperation on 18 November 2022. H E Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. H E Dr Francisco André, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Republic of Portugal, attended the Seminar as a Guest Speaker, and Ambassador Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury, Secretary (West), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was present as a Discussant. Ambassador Kazi Intiaz Hossain, PAA, Chairman, BIISS, chaired the programme, and Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc, Director General, BIISS, delivered the Welcome Remarks.

Insightful discussion by the designated speakers was followed by a lively open discussion session where senior officials from the government of Bangladesh, former ambassadors, representatives from different foreign missions, businessmen, members of academia, researchers, teachers and students from various universities, and media representatives took part, and expressed their valuable opinions.

WELCOME ADDRESS



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

At the outset, Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc, Director General, BISS paid his deepest reverence to the memory of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and to all martyrs who laid their lives for our long-cherished independence. He also expressed his heartfelt gratitude to H E Dr Francisco André for his gracious presence in the Eminent Person Lecture.

The Director General recalled the historic linkage between Bangladesh and Portugal in the early 16th century when Dr Joan de Silveira travelled to the Eastern part of Bengal, now Bangladesh, in 1516, which was 18 years before Vasco da Gama reached India. For such historic ties, the legacies of Portuguese culture and its vivid influence even in culinary traditions in Bangladeshi society survived to this day. And, after Bangladesh's independence, it is found that Portugal was one of the European countries to recognise Bangladesh's independence. Since then, the two nations have enjoyed cordial and mutually beneficial bilateral relations.

In regard to trade relations between the two countries, it can be observed that Bangladesh is gradually improving its trade performance in the Portuguese market. According to the Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau, in the financial year 2020-21, Bangladesh exported goods to Portugal valued US\$ 75.97 million. In the 2021-22 financial year, it increased to US\$ 105.32 million. Both countries are currently working to establish direct shipping links to create new prospects for fast, cost-effective and reliable shipping for Bangladeshi exporters. Very recently, both countries have agreed to sign an agreement to avoid double taxation and fiscal evasion in an effort to conduct their commercial ties smoothly. A formal agreement is expected to be inked very shortly. And to further ease the trade relation, there is a future plan for having an MoU between the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh and the Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade of Portugal (AICEP). However, having said the sunny side of the trade relations between these two countries, the Director General pointed out that there is still much room for advancement in the current economic relationship since both countries have considerable potential to increase trade ties.



In the case of labour migration, General Pasha informed the audience that, after the United Kingdom and Italy, Portugal is home to a sizeable Bangladeshi diaspora which had been integrated into several Portuguese cities over the past decades. In some of the Portuguese cities, for example, in downtown Mouraria in the capital Lisbon, the

Bangladeshi community stands at the forefront. Even a street is commonly referred to as “Bangla Town”, since more than 40 of the 90 stores on Rua de Benfornoso Road in central Mouraria are owned by Bangladeshis. According to Portuguese Immigration Authorities, around 10,000 Bangladeshis with valid residence permits are currently residing in several Portuguese cities. Aside from migrants, many Bangladeshi students pursue their studies in Portugal. In this regard, he shared information given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in which it estimates that there are roughly 100 students currently enrolled at several universities in Portugal. However, he highlighted the necessity of a full-fledged Portuguese embassy in Bangladesh which can further assist the smooth flow of workers and facilitate Bangladeshi students enrolling in Portuguese universities.

The Director General, then, highlighted the issue of climate change. According to him, adapting to climate change can be an area where Bangladesh and Portugal can work together. It is because being coastal countries, both Bangladesh and Portugal face a common existential threat from climate change and sea level rise. This situation makes it imperative that the two countries strengthen their climatic cooperation. In regard to exploring seabed resources, he commented that both countries have ample potential for boosting partnerships in enhancing knowledge sharing and cooperation in the areas of oceanography and maritime affairs. In this regard, he highlighted that there is a future plan for signing an MoU between Bangladesh Maritime University and Algarve University on marine science. There is also a future plan of signing an MoU between the Chattogram Port Authority and the Port of Leixoes of Portugal. With such future plans, he hoped that the planned MoUs would be able to further strengthen the relationship in the field of maritime affairs.

In conclusion, the Director General highlighted Bangladesh’s remarkable economic growth and its continued amicable relations with the neighbourhood and beyond. Having said that, he commented that Bangladesh can offer a promising frontier to Portugal for expanding its cooperation in the diverse areas spanning renewable energy, green transition, marine technology, blue economy, and climate change. He suggested both countries consider advancing the bilateral relations forward to a productive partnership where the two countries can cooperate meaningfully.

ADDRESS BY THE GUEST SPEAKER



H E Dr Francisco André

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Republic of Portugal

At the outset, **H E Dr Francisco André** expressed his gratitude to be at BISS during his first visit to Bangladesh. He informed the audience that Portugal had the pleasure to welcome two important high-level visitors from Bangladesh and respected delegations. The State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md. Shahriar Alam, MP visited Portugal in May and in late June A K Abdul Momen, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh participated in the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference co-hosted by the governments of Portugal and Kenya. He said that they take pride in the 2022 UN Ocean Conference which occurred at a critical juncture of the planet when it is seeking to address many of the deep-rooted problems of the societies led by the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of the oceans in both mitigating challenges and helping out the communities at danger were highlighted at the Conference. There was strong cohesion across countries and stakeholders who moved the ocean climate agenda forward which is meaningful for both Bangladesh and Portugal that continued in the Sharm El Sheikh at COP27.

Dr André stated that the relationship between Portugal and Bangladesh is currently

going through a very positive moment and both countries intend to keep it in that way. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive not only in Bengal but also in Dhaka. The countries have long historical connections since the first Portuguese arrived at Chittagong more than five hundred years ago. The travels to the East of Bangladesh strongly contributed to the intensification of the South Asian heritage in the history of Portugal. Much has changed since then. The end of the Liberation War and the independence of Bangladesh led the country into a remarkable cycle of economic, political and cultural life. Bangladesh conquered its future and was able in the last decade to overcome the challenges, break barriers and make crucial democratic achievements. Bangladesh has achieved impressive economic and social progress over the last five decades building a modern economy and it is a member of important global and regional organisations. The bond between the two countries is not only historic but also contemporary and dynamic, allowing them to look into the future and take bilateral relations to a higher level.

Dr André said that Portugal and Bangladesh established diplomatic relations in 1974. In two years, the countries will be celebrating our 50th anniversary. His presence in Dhaka for the Second Political Consultation took place at the highest level four years after the first round. Such consultation is a strong step in elevating relationships to higher standards. As the countries move to the future, there is a need to seize the opportunities to expand the relations so that the countries reach their full potential. For instance, reinforcing trade, developing the energy, agro-food sector and promoting public transport. These can be common goals for both countries to explore together considering that challenges and different experiences exist. Bangladesh has been accomplishing remarkable results over the last decades not only economically but mainly because it has significantly improved the quality of life of its citizens as expressed through social indicators and reduced poverty level. That is leading this country to graduate from the United Nations Least Developed Countries (LDCs) list in 2026. He commented that it is indeed an outstanding milestone. He informed the audience that Portugal is currently finalising the approval of the Portuguese Cooperation Strategy 2030 which gives strong emphasis on generic quality and women's empowerment that is a clear path to achieve development. A country is not truly developed if its women are not properly heard and not inspired to take their place in society. The cooperation strategy will also focus on important sectors for both the countries such as education, health, good governance, and climate change apart from promoting partnerships with the private sectors and civil society.

Dr André then talked about the Bangladeshi community living in Portugal. He commented that he must recognise the bilateral relationship between the two countries which is strengthened every day by the presence of the Bangladeshi community in Portugal. Portugal is proud to host more than ten thousand Bangladeshi citizens. A vibrant community of hard-working men and women that is fully integrated into



Portuguese society gives also a valuable contribution to the development of the country. Like Bangladesh, Portugal has a large diaspora living all over the world who maintain their Portuguese roots alive and contribute to the growth of Portugal and the host country. This is why he optimistically hoped that the younger generation will develop as the Bangladeshi younger generation, even further their entrepreneurial spirit, energising not only internal commerce but also international trade and contributing to bringing the countries closer. Like Bangladesh, Portugal has been a champion country of the global migration compact as an advocate of safe, orderly, and regular migration. He said that they believe in respecting and fulfilment of human rights, and freedoms of all migrants and their important contribution to sustainable development.

Dr André noted that they are aware of the constraints that Bangladeshi nationals face regarding mobility to Portugal. In that view, there have been significant improvements in the laws and regulations of Portugal and also in the Embassy of Portugal in New Delhi. He informed the audience that Portugal is strongly considering the possibility of opening a Portuguese Consular in Dhaka to make life easier. He opined that he could not think of a better way to celebrate the 50th year of diplomatic relations than this. Portugal is very much determined to further expand its ties regarding the growing interest of the Portuguese. Dhaka University (DU) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Portuguese institution Camões - Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua of Portugal to establish academic links between the two institutions as well as to promote and

disseminate Portuguese language and culture in Bangladesh. He hoped that these steps will bring people and culture closer.



He then appreciated the agreement between the European Union (EU) and Bangladesh which has intensified cooperation in climate action, digitalization, connectivity and security taking into account the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Portugal is a strong supporter of multilateralism and a defender of international peace and security. He mentioned that Portugal is currently running as a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2027-2028 mandate. In their previous mandates, the UNSC always tried to be constructive and pragmatic, building bridges between different actors and continents. He hoped that Portugal would make a positive contribution to the work of the UNSC yet again. For Example, Portugal shares Bangladesh's view that the UNSC should reflect the geopolitical realities of the 21st century. It is willing to discuss the extension of both permanent and non-permanent members. It is essential to increase the representation of Africa, Latin America and Asia including Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the UNSC. The geopolitical reality today goes through a change. Therefore, there is a need to discuss different balances. Unfortunately, there are several conflicts and the War in Europe is raging after the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and it illegally attempted to annex Ukraine. However, he opined that the joint efforts in the UN proved to be fruitful. This is the only way possible to have a reliable and trustworthy partnership.

In conclusion, Dr André remarked that Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. There is enough room to deepen the engagement between the two countries in many sectors, namely by improving the commercial and trade exchanges. Bangladesh is one of the most populated countries in the world with steady population growth and a booming economy. A country filled with potential that must be taken advantage of for mutual benefit. The commemoration of the 50 years of diplomatic relations in 2024 would be an important mark in the history of the countries. Today, Bangladesh plays a significant role in the world and it is an important member of the global network of partnerships in the region of the world that is at the centre of the international agenda and the post-pandemic recovery. The people-to-people connections between Bangladesh and Portugal are vibrantly enhancing the partnership and realising the great potential of the relationship. He re-emphasised that Portugal is looking forward to continuing this journey.

REMARKS BY THE DISCUSSANT



Ambassador Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury

Secretary (West)

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

At the beginning of his remarks, Ambassador Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury expressed his profound homage to the greatest Bengali of all times, the Father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He praised the address given by the guest speaker, H E Dr Francisco André, for its excellent coverage of the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Portugal. Ambassador Chowdhury also reviewed the historical background of the two countries which started in the early 16th century. During that time, many Portuguese traders settled in Chattogram. Even though most of them left Chattogram city a century later, some of them settled, and their descendants are still living in the old parts of the city. The culture among the people of Dhaka and Chattogram has been largely influenced by the Portuguese traders. The Bengali language has acquired around 1500 Portuguese words. Ambassador Chowdhury informed the audience that he knows three words among those Portuguese words which are 'janala', 'kedara' and 'baranda'. He also recalled Portuguese scholar Manuel da Assumpção who compiled the

rules of Bengali Grammar for the first time in the 18th century. Portuguese missionaries are also the forerunners in expanding Christianity in Bangladesh. Portuguese names are common in the Christian community residing in Dhaka and Chattogram. The Gulbenkian Foundation – a Portuguese institution undertook the restoration of the 17th century Portuguese Church, called the Saint Rosary Church in Tejgaon, Dhaka.

On political relations, Ambassador Chowdhury stated that there is a good political relationship between Bangladesh and Portugal. Like the political relations, he commented that other areas of cooperation between these two friendly countries need to be enhanced to attain a satisfactory level. He mentioned that there has been no visit yet between the heads of state. The bilateral visit, especially at the level of Ministers and senior officials, started only a few years ago. He believed that the exchange of visits at various levels will augment cooperation in the identified areas and help to find out more areas of cooperation. As a gesture of Bangladesh's commitment to elevating its relationship with Portugal, Bangladesh established its residential mission in Portugal in July 2012. Moreover, in order to consolidate such relations, Bangladesh purchased a permanent property in Lisbon and shifted the embassy in December 2020. In this regard, he hoped that Portugal will also reciprocate this gesture by considering opening its resident diplomatic or consular posting in Dhaka.



Ambassador Chowdhury informed the audience about the recently held second political consultation between Bangladesh and Portugal where the entire gamut of the relations between the two countries was discussed. Since the current bilateral relations

in the various areas of cooperation are yet to attain full potential, he hoped that the next consultations will be held more frequently preferably once a year without procrastination. It may be recalled that, historically, trade was the motivating factor that brought Bengalese and Portuguese in contact. In this regard, he commented that the relations between the two friendly countries can be strengthened through enhanced trade. In the financial year 2021, Bangladesh exported to Portugal goods worth US\$ 75.97 million and imported from Portugal worth US\$ 12.1 million. These figures are almost insignificant with respect to the total trade volume of Bangladesh. Thus, according to him, there is no doubt that there are ample scopes to enhance this figure. Bangladesh is yet to sign the agreement on the avoidance of double taxation between the two countries. The completion of the agreement, he hoped, would allow the two countries to boost their trade volume. He also acknowledged longer times of Portuguese support for continuing the preferential market access for Bangladesh in the European Union.

In the realm of digitalisation and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, he noted that Bangladesh has made considerable advancement in this area. Bangladesh has developed a pool of human resources in this sector and has taken up a massive program of establishing high-tech parks in the country. Portugal is also a popular destination for ICT companies. He added that Bangladesh is eager to work with Portugal in this regard.

In the area of energy cooperation, Ambassador Chowdhury highlighted that Portugal is one of the leading countries in the world for renewable energy. It is pertinent to know that 60 per cent of Portugal's electricity comes from renewable energy sources. In this unfortunate time of energy crisis, the importance of renewable energy sources is badly felt. In this regard, he informed Bangladesh's eagerness to increase the share of renewable energy in the energy mix of the country. In this regard, he hoped that Portugal would come forward for cooperation with Bangladesh.

Ambassador Chowdhury, then, briefly spoke about the Bangladeshi diaspora in Portugal. He informed that Bangladesh has a focus on skilled labour migration both in terms of linguistic as well as in the professional level. The government of Bangladesh is attempting to raise the skill level of potential workers to prevent them from being caught in the unofficial migration system. To that end, he urged H E Fransisco André to recruit more Bangladeshi workers to Portugal, where there is a shortage of such workers.



Ambassador Chowdhury concluded his discussion by bringing up the issue of the Rohingya crisis. On this issue, he commented on the challenges the government of Bangladesh is having in its handling of the Rohingya crisis and the repatriation of Rohingyas. Concerning this issue, he requested the Portuguese government to extend their support in cooperation both in their own capacity as well as in the European Union forum as Portugal is an important member of the EU.

OPEN DISCUSSION



Mr Salahud Din Ahmed, Former Member of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, mentioned the word “জানালা” which came from the Portuguese word “Janela” meaning window. He hoped that there would be many windows of opportunity to deepen the ties between Bangladesh and Portugal. He identified two areas namely renewable energy and culture where cooperation can be achieved.

Brigadier General Hasan Md Shamsuddin, ndc, afwc, psc, M Phil (Retd), Head Researcher on Myanmar, Rohingya, and ASEAN Affairs, the Centre for Bangladesh and Global Affairs (CBGA) appreciated the Guest Speaker for his deliberation. He asked a question about how Portugal is planning to contribute to solving the Rohingya issue in the future.



Major General Jiban Kanai Das, ndu, psc (Retd), Former Director General of BIISS shared his experience of visiting Portugal five years ago where he had the chance to interact with the Bangladeshi communities living in Portugal who were deeply satisfied with the host country. He raised a question about sending caregivers for elderly people in Portugal. He asked whether there was any chance of Portugal being on the list of receiving countries of caregivers for elderly people.



Colonel Md Iftekhar Ahmed, afwc, psc, lsc, Former Research Director, BIISS mentioned that Bangladesh and Portugal have a strong apparel sector of US\$ 50 billion and US\$ 6 billion respectively. However, the current apparel export from Bangladesh to Portugal is about US\$ 250 million. So, he asked if there is any scope to increase the business opportunity in this area. He then asked the second question whether Portugal has any plan for extending opportunities for Bangladeshi students for studying in Lisbon through scholarship programs.

Brigadier General Mirza Ezazur Rahman BGBM, ndc, psc, sdmc, G+(ret'd) MPhil, Msc, MDS, Former Defence Advisor to Bangladesh High Commissions in Pakistan and Iran, raised three points to H E André. The first point was regarding the ties and cooperation related to the tourism sector. As both Europe and Bangladesh have scenic tourist spots, therefore, it is imperative that the visa procedure be simplified to encourage more travel between the EU countries and Bangladesh. The second point he raised was about the defence cooperation between the two countries. His query in this regard was whether two countries can promote the relationship in the defence sector. Cooperation on defence training and bilateral visits of senior defence officials can be considered in this context. Third point he raised was about sports diplomacy. In Bangladesh, there are many supporters of Cristiano Ronaldo, a Football player in Portugal's national Football team. Thus, having some friendly matches and people-to-people contact can immensely strengthen the relations between the two nations, he commented.



Lt Col Md Shahadat Hossain, psc (Ret'd), Freelance, Promoter and Consultant for Bangladesh-China Relations made two recommendations. Firstly, he advised for setting up formal opportunities for training in languages at the government level, including Portuguese language classes. Secondly, he proposed setting up centres for training and coordination in both capitals as a means of strengthening ties even further.

Major General A M S A Amin, ndc, psc (Retd.), Chairman, Centre for Security and Development Studies (CSDS) and former Ambassador, thanked Dr André for his visit to Bangladesh. He mentioned that he is the first Portuguese diplomat he has come across in his life and career. He also thanked the Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs for his diplomatic endeavour with Portugal. General Amin later quoted Alfred Thayer Mahan who said anyone who rules the sea, rules the world. Then he asked why Portugal has a small navy nowadays as there was a time it ruled the seas. Even though Portugal still possesses a significant number of submarines. He suggested that Bangladesh can cooperate in naval development with Portugal.



RESPONSES BY THE GUEST SPEAKER



H E Dr Francisco André in response to the question on energy, mentioned that during the Second Political Consultation both parties discussed the issue. In order to tackle the energy crisis, both countries need to focus on renewable energy. While most of the European countries are facing the consequences of the energy crisis, Portugal is in a different position when it comes to electricity as 60 per cent of electricity comes from renewable energy sources. In COP27, Portugal announced their objective to increase it up to 80 per cent within 2024. He commented that Portugal and Bangladesh can continue to work together in this area through sharing knowledge and using different sources of renewable energy. Regarding culture, he stated that Portugal should know more about Bangladeshi culture as well. The cultural ties between two countries are important as it can bring people closer which in turn can result in more economic opportunities.

On the Rohingya crisis, H E Dr Francisco André conveyed Portugal's full support and solidarity to Bangladesh in its response to the Rohingya issue. The current scenario in Myanmar is extremely unacceptable and has serious repercussions for the country. Bangladesh is bearing the brunt of this crisis. In this regard, Portugal will maintain its

support and solidarity with Bangladesh on the bilateral platform. Side by side, as an EU Member, Portugal will continue its effort inside the EU to pursue the objective of supporting Bangladesh to overcome this situation. He further informed the audience that the EU is not only condemning the situation but also providing political and financial support to Bangladesh for alleviating the burden. In December 2022, there will be the EU-ASEAN Summit which, according to him, can be an excellent opportunity to discuss and to see what the EU can do more as two important blocs of countries. He also brought an example of an EU country which has been suffering from migration and refugee crisis due to unfortunate events, wars and conflicts. He also mentioned the Russia-Ukraine war and shared that his country Portugal has welcomed more than 50 thousand refugees from Ukraine. Those Ukrainian refugees are already obtaining basic needs, for example, children are attending Portuguese schools. However, compared to the Rohingya crisis, he recognised this crisis as one of the most difficult crises that Bangladesh is facing. Therefore, he emphasised on involving more in getting a solution. According to him, no country alone can find a solution to a crisis like this. Bangladesh cannot be left facing this crisis alone. Thus, it requires the involvement of each and every country in this region to find a solution to this crisis.

Concerning the Bangladeshi community in Portugal, he reiterated once again that the people of Portugal are very proud of the Bangladeshi community as it is an amazing diaspora of hard-working people. Many of them started their career in different sectors of the Portuguese economy and now they have established their own business successfully. For that reason, H E André conveyed the Portuguese people's thankfulness to the community of Bangladeshi people for their contribution to the Portuguese economy.

On the issue of economic cooperation, H E André stated that both nations have earned a strong reputation for their ability to manage a thriving economy. However, there are still many untapped opportunities left that both countries can pursue together. In this regard, he suggested having a platform for dialogue between the economic communities of the two countries. Making such a platform, he said, needs to be a top priority for diplomats from the two countries in the days ahead.

Regarding the Bangladeshi students in Portugal, there are a large number of Bangladeshi students enrolled in Portuguese universities, he conceded. The Portuguese government would be quite happy to see that number rise. Many students are taking advantage of the European Union's Erasmus Mundus programme to study at universities in Portugal. However, talks are currently underway to increase the number of students from Bangladesh studying in Portugal not just within such a framework, but also through bilateral collaboration between Bangladesh and Portugal. When there is more contact between two countries, he stated that people from both cultures can have an easier time

understanding each other. Therefore, it's crucial that a larger number of students from Bangladesh go to Portugal for study purpose.

H. E. Dr. Francisco André in answer to the question of the Bangladeshi labour market in Portugal acknowledged that the Bangladeshi diaspora has a valuable contribution to Portugal. Portugal is an open country that has a cosmopolitan society in the homeland and has significant diasporas around the world. Portugal will welcome anyone from anywhere in their country as Portugal is opening a consular office in Dhaka before the golden jubilee of bilateral diplomatic relations so Bangladesh will be able to send more workers to Portugal for working in diverse sectors such as agriculture, IT, and health services. etc.

Responding to the tourism and visa issue, Dr. André said to resolve and improve such services Portugal will be working to create more representation in Bangladesh. These initiatives will improve two-way communication and develop much deeper collaboration. He insisted to create mechanisms to increase cooperation to shared knowledge and experience. About the possibility of bilateral naval cooperation, he suggested for overall defence cooperation that can be discussed between the two countries. On the issue of sports diplomacy, he said, sports diplomacy is a very good means to create people-to-people connectivity. But both countries can explore all sorts of diplomatic scopes to engage more in this endeavour.

He then commented that Bangladesh-Portugal relations are in the Poco or only a little bit. So, he suggested more diplomatic engagement for deeper cooperation and conducting bilateral visits. Currently, Bangladesh and Portugal going through a very special diplomatic relationship that is exceptional. Two countries had three bilateral visits and many more in the coming days. He hopes to keep the diplomatic pressure on their respective governments to increase these engagements and intensify the efforts. He believes that Bangladesh and Portugal will be completing all the legal tools to enhance bilateral cooperation. He concluded by saying that Bangladesh and Portugal will continue together to explore opportunities to engage with each other for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST



H E Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP

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

H. E. Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP started his remarks by saying that Bangladesh-Portugal has had an excellent year of relationship this year with three high-profile bilateral visits. H E Mr Alam has mentioned a similar event attended by H. E. Dr Andre and himself at Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre, Lisbon on 27th May 2022. He talked about stepping out of the diplomatic comfort zone for exploring new avenues for cooperation is always a good way to advance development in the international arena. He noted that Portugal and Bangladesh did not have any high-level dignitary visits in the past. But Bangladesh opening embassy in Portugal has opened new opportunities for developing bilateral relations with Portugal. Historical links between Bangladesh and Portugal have been revived through diplomatic visits ushering in a new era of cooperation. The state minister pointed out that Portuguese traders brought many fruits, vegetables, and spices which have now become regular cuisines for us. He also highlighted the business activities and missionary activities in Bengal centred around Chittagong which was known as the “Grand Port.” As Bangladesh-Portugal looks forward to the future we should also keep mindful of our shared heritage.

Honourable State minister then laid the five key areas for emphasis in order to enhance bilateral engagements with Portugal.

First, Bangladesh has a small but growing and well-organized diaspora community in Portugal. This community has a valuable contribution to the host society and has benefited from many migrant-friendly policies of the Portuguese government. There the diaspora community can act as a bridge between two states for enhancing people-to-people connectivity. Particularly, H. E. Mr Alam mentioned the visa regime to support the community and mentioned the commitment of the Portuguese government to act on the issue.

Second, State minister Mr Alam mentioned that Bangladesh-Portugal has many untapped potentials to explore for developing economic cooperation between the two countries. He believes that there are opportunities for further expanding two-way trade and investment between the two countries. Both countries can work to facilitate business to come close and work together and build complementarities. The state minister pointed out that Bangladesh and Portugal exploring the option for establishing direct shipping facilities as the work is in progress with Lisbon port and Chittagong port authority and consultation with shipping companies are going on. Bangladesh recently established direct shipping with Italy in the Adriatic Sea. Both countries are also exploring enhanced connectivity in digital and air space for deeper collaboration. Bangladesh will warmly welcome investment and expertise from the Portuguese in the blue economy, especially the possibility to explore offshore wind power facilities. Portugal produces 60% of its total energy through renewable energy (hydro, wind, and solar power) facilities and aims to produce 80% in the coming years. He believes that Bangladesh can learn a lot from the experience of Portugal in the renewable energy issue and find a common ground for cooperation ahead as Bangladesh aims to fulfil its commitments made to CVF and COP27.

Third, Bangladesh can count on Portugal to speak for Bangladesh in the European Union which is an important organization for Bangladesh. It is certainly beneficiary for Bangladesh to have a trusted partner in a such critically important institution. Portugal truly appreciates the best usage of the benefits the EU provides as Bangladesh remains to be one of the top utilizers of those in order to change the lives of its huge population and their livelihood. Bangladesh and Portugal will continue to work together under the new regime coming into the EU as far as EBA is concerned.



Fourth, the two countries remain aligned on the shared emphasis on multilateralism. United Nations is now being headed by an eminent political personality from Portugal, Secretary-General António Guterres. The state minister thanked Dr Andre and the Portuguese government for acknowledging the Rohingya crisis to be a regional concern and a crisis for the global community. He urged to Portugal for maintaining its voice and support for this humanitarian assistance, justice, accountability, and safe, dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas to their homeland. He expressed his gratitude to Portugal for its supportive approach to climate actions particularly for supporting the loss and damage agenda. He hopes that Bangladesh and Portugal will work together in conserving and protecting the ocean from climate change effects which is something they reinvigorated during the UN 2nd Ocean Conference. He mentioned that Bangladesh has duly noted Portugal's bid for joining UN Security Council for 2027-28 and Bangladesh will certainly consider supporting Portugal in order to have a friendly state in UNSC through which its voice can be heard in the forum.

Fifth, he highlighted the importance of investing in people-to-people connectivity between two countries. Bangladesh remains open to any suggestion for fostering cooperation in the tourism sector as Dr Andre visited many historical and natural tourist places in Bangladesh during his short visit. He expressed deep interest in building collaboration in the academic and research sector between the two countries. In this regard, he mentioned the University of Dhaka and Bangladesh University of Engineering

and Technology (BUET) took incremental steps already. Bangladesh and Portugal can facilitate through the diplomatic channel to invite relevant stakeholders for coming up with concrete proposals in advancing this cause for mutual benefit. The state minister also mentioned that both countries have started drawing plans for commemorating Bangladesh-Portugal diplomatic relations' golden jubilee in 2024 in a befitting manner. He concluded with the message of hope that the Bangladesh-Portugal renewed journey and engagement which has been initiated in 2022 will be the beginning of a mature, vibrant, and multi-dimensional interface in the years to come. He thanked Dr Andre for joining him in this EPLS and expressed his gratitude to the learned audience for their patient hearing.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR



Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA
Chairman, BISS

At the outset, **Ambassador Kazi Imtiaz Hossain, PAA, Chairman, BISS**, welcomed everyone to the Eminent Person Lecture Series (EPLS). Ambassador Hossain paid his deepest homage to the memory of the father of the nation, the greatest Bengali of all time, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his family members along with all the million martyrs who made supreme sacrifices for the liberation of Bangladesh. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Honourable Chief Guest H E Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and the honourable eminent person H E Dr Francisco André, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Republic of Portugal for gracing this occasion.

He mentioned that Portugal's relations with Bangladesh date back to the 16th Century as the Portuguese explorer Dr Joan De Silveira came to Bengal in 1516 before Vasco Da Gama arrived in India. This long relationship was continued since the independence

of Bangladesh in 1971. Bangladesh-Portugal diplomatic relations began in 1974. He highlighted that Bangladesh and Portugal share consensus on human rights, democracy, climate change, global warming, migration, immigration, terrorism-counterterrorism, bilateral trade, and economic issues which brought the two countries to a strong diplomatic stance on the international forum.

Honourable Chairman mentioned that Bangladesh established its first diplomatic mission in Lisbon in 2012 to strengthen the already existing excellent diplomatic relations. Bangladesh-Portugal held its first Foreign Office Consultation in Lisbon on December 2018 which was instrumental to identify concrete areas for cooperation like trade investment, skills development, blue economy and economic development, renewable energy, tourism, ICT, and people-to-people relations development, etc.



Ambassador Hossain highlighted that in 2022 2nd UN Ocean Conference was held in Lisbon where Bangladesh's Foreign minister A K Abdul Momen and Portuguese counterpart Dr. Joao Gomes Cravinho had a bilateral meeting on the side-line to boost our relations.

Ambassador Hossain believes that Bangladesh and Portugal are far away from realizing the true potential of diplomatic relations. Bangladesh-Portugal bilateral trade only accounts for 88.07 million Euros in 2020-2021 while Bangladesh's exported over 105.32 million euros in 2021-22 and imported 12.10 million euros in 2020-2021. He

pointed out that by enhanced interaction between both countries business communities can tap into the full potential for increased future trade and investment. A joint business council would accelerate further economic relations. Portuguese investors can best use Bangladesh's investment-friendly policies and incentives government for enhanced trade and commerce.

Ambassador Hossain pointed out that Bangladesh and Portugal are working together to develop direct shipping links to improve prospects for fast, cost-effective, and reliable supply chains for trade and commerce. He was happy to mention that an MoU regarding the direct shipping line is in process of signing soon. He also highlighted the fact that Portugal hosts a vibrant Bangladeshi diaspora community who are contributing to the economic development of both countries with their commercial activities. This community can work ahead to pave the way forward for people-to-people relations between the two countries.

Ambassador Hossain then said that being an important member of the European Union (EU) has been very supportive of the mutual interests-concerns and expressed his gratitude for the cooperation. He put forward the hope and belief that Portugal will continue to support and understand Bangladesh's cause, specifically, about the LDC graduation to a middle-income country and beyond.



At the end, Ambassador Hossain expressed his thanks and gratitude towards H E Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for taking out time, of his very busy schedule and gracing the programme as the chief guest. He especially thanked H E Dr Francisco André, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Republic of Portugal for gracing this occasion and his valuable lecture. He extended his heartfelt thanks to the distinguished discussant Ambassador Mr Shabbir Ahmed Chowdhury, Secretary (West), Ministry of Foreign Affairs for his insightful remarks. He thanked all the learned audience, 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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