

Special Seminar

# Moving from MDGs to SDGs

## Bangladesh Experience and Expectation

### Proceedings

17 September 2015



**Chief Guest**  
**Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP**  
Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

**Organised by**  
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)  
Thursday, 17 September 2015



**Moving from MDGs to SDGs**  
**Bangladesh Experience and Expectation**

**Chief Guest**  
**Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi**  
Deputy to the Hon'ble Prime Minister on International Affairs, Government of Bangladesh

**Special Guest**  
**Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP**  
State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh

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Special Seminar

# Moving from MDGs to SDGs: Bangladesh Experience and Expectation



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised the seminar to commemorate the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Bangladesh's accession into the UN and provide inputs for use at the exchange of views event titled "MDGs to SDGs: A Way Forward" to be hosted by the Bangladesh delegation to the 70<sup>th</sup> UNGA session on 29 September 2015 in New York. The Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be the Chief Guest in the event, expected to be attended by the UN Secretary General as well as other high profile leaders and dignitaries from different countries.

The seminar was divided into four sessions. The opening session provided an overview and described the background of the special seminar. **Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP**, Foreign Minister, Government of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest of the session. Subsequently, two working sessions covered thematic and sectoral issues regarding the successes of MDGs in Bangladesh and drawing lessons for a meaningful transition to SDGs. Professional and eminent sector experts provided their analytical inputs in these sessions. The seminar was concluded with a closing session where **Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi**, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister on International Affairs, Government of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest and **Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP**, State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh was the special guest. A wide range of invited guests were present and took active part in the seminar including Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, Acting Ambassador of the Russian Federation, few other senior diplomats and dignitaries, scholars, higher government officials, business representatives, NGO and development activists, and media professionals.



## Welcome Remarks

**Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**  
Director General, BIISS

Today, we have organised this seminar to commemorate the 41st anniversary of Bangladesh admission to United Nations. We are all aware that the Millennium Development Goals are going to end this year. Bangladesh has already met several targets of the MDGs. The latest publication of Bangladesh MDGs Progress Report 2015, published by General Economics Division shows that Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the areas of poverty alleviation, food security, primary school enrollment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education, lower infant and under five mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, improving immunisation coverage and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases. The country's huge success on fulfilling different goals of MDGs has also been recognised by the international organisations and the country has received UN award for this.

As the framework of MDGs is on the verge of its time period, world leaders are now negotiating on a more comprehensive framework of development incorporating three strands of sustainability namely social, economic and environmental. This development agenda, known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will replace the MDGs once those expire at the end of 2015. This new development framework will focus on some of the burning issues like total eradication of poverty, availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, action against climate change and sustainability of all development activities which are also very important in the context of Bangladesh. Given the resource and capacity constraints, maintaining development progress remains an uphill task for Bangladesh. However, having seen the magnificent progress of Bangladesh over the last two decades, I firmly believe that, our country will overcome all the hurdles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals the way we have achieved Millennium Development Goals.

Let me share a quotation that I learned three decades before – “An action without vision is wastage of time, a vision without action is a dream but a vision with action can change the world”. Despite all the odds, we set the vision to graduate from LDC to Developing Country by 2021. However, since our actions were vision oriented, we hope to achieve the target of becoming a developing country even before 2021. In the similar coin we hope to set our action oriented vision to achieve the goals of SDGs.

With this high note, I feel honoured and privileged to host this august gathering and assure you to support in every possible manner in attaining the objective of today's seminar.



# Address by the Chief Guest

**Mr Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali, MP**

Foreign Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

The MDGs were the first ever global blueprint for fighting poverty on such scale. When the Millennium Declaration was adopted in September 2000, no one perhaps had any illusion that it would manage to solve all the world's problems. Yet, the MDG's have given the hope that it is within the existing means to create a new world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also offers a set of bold, ambitious and innovative package to transform the world. Therefore, the expectations around it would be also be high. The experience with the MDGs implies that Bangladesh has every reason to feel energised about the promises that beckon us in another decade and a half.

Bangladesh's MDG score card does bear the proof that it can deliver on the international communities; that the country can attain the goals through inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships and that investments made in Bangladesh are worth its dividends. In the last fifteen years, Bangladesh has witnessed one of the fastest reductions in poverty anywhere in the world within a limited resource base. The country has met the target in reducing the proportion of population below the national poverty line three years ahead of time, which presently stands at 22.4 per cent. It has reached the targets in reducing infant mortality rate from 92 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 46 now; and in decreasing the prevalence of underweight children less than five years of age from 66 per cent in 1990 to 32.6 per cent at present. In terms of education, the country has achieved nearly cent percent enrolment in primary schools; and attained gender parity with more girls than boys in primary and secondary schools. It has met the targets in preventing malarial deaths and in raising the share of people using an improved drinking water source.

There are, however, certain key lessons to be drawn from Bangladesh's experience with the MDG's as the country turns the page to the SDG chapter. It may be relevant to highlight some of them. *First*, there is no alternative to robust political will to pursue the development pathway defined by these time-bound internationally agreed goals. *Second*, the political will needs to be translated into specific action plans at the national level, ideally through integration with the national development strategy. *Third*, it is imperative to build national ownership through involving a cross section of actors, including the civil society and media, for implementing the internationally agreed development goals. The partnership forged among the various actors would need to be recalibrated and re-energised from time to time in response to the shifting ground realities. *Fourth*, there needs to be a healthy mix of domestic and external resource mobilisation with a view to ensuring scaling up and sustainability of the proven interventions. Transparency and accountability in resource management would be crucial for achieving buy-in among all concerned actors. *Fifth*, international partnership must deliver on the relevant international commitments and go beyond the traditional official development assistance to encompass meaningful and equitable terms for international trade, investment, migration and technology transfer. The gaps in fulfilling certain critical targets under MDGs on Global Partnership would not augur well for the legitimate expectations Bangladesh has around the SDGs. And finally, there is a critical need for investing in enhanced capacity building for data collection and analysis to promote effective

monitoring and evaluation. The lack of sufficient data has posed considerable challenge in tracking progress under certain MDG targets; which needs to be duly factored in while designing the measurable indicators under the SDGs.

The 2030 agenda contains a fairly large portfolio of issues where each country should find some issues of its core interest. The well-crafted and balanced package is certainly quite far-reaching in its aspiration to eliminate poverty, consolidate development gains, and establish durable peace and prosperity. It duly recognises peace and stability as essential preconditions for sustainable development, and addresses the rather sensitive issues like conflicts, good governance and human rights in the context of development underpinned by social justice.

The rise of terrorism, violent extremism and armed conflicts poses some of the greatest risks to international peace and development. Similarly, the threats of climate change are only too real for the world to remain on a denial or delaying mode. Much of our hard earned development gains are likely to be washed away unless we are able to forge consensus to save our planet through some bold, ambitious and sustainable measures to be put into effect now or never. The persistent inequities due to geography, gender, ethnicity or disability deserve our focused attention to ensure that "no one is left behind" in our shared development pursuits.





# Summing up by the Chair

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**  
Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS

Bangladesh is among the top achievers in terms of the MDG's. We have already met several targets of the MDG's like reducing headcount poverty and poverty gap ratio, gender parity in primary and secondary education, under five mortality rate reduction, containing HIV infection, combating malaria and other communicable diseases. In addition the country has made remarkable progress in reducing the infant and maternal mortality rates and improving immunization coverage.

Bangladesh has been at the forefront of the SDG's dialogues from the beginning. As one of the top performing countries of MDG's, she now looks equally confident to embrace the new goals set that are the SDG's. Like the MDG's, the SDG's are also set towards international development. SDG's were first discussed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20). In July 2014, the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals presented a proposal to the Assembly containing 17 goals, 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. In December that year, the UNGA accepted that the development agenda after 2015 would be based on OWG's proposals. The title of the agenda is Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The goals include:

End of poverty, end of hunger, health for all, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, energy, sustainable economic growth and employment, reducing inequality within and among countries, combating climate change, conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, terrestrial ecosystems, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, inclusive safe and sustainable habitats, and strengthening global partnership for sustainable development . Inclusiveness, equity, equality and sustainability are the main refrains throughout and it ends with emphasising global partnership.



## Working Session I

# Achievements and Expectations in MDGs



## Presentation 1: Bangladesh's Experience with MDGs

**Dr Mahfuz Kabir**

Senior Research Fellow, BIISS

Bangladesh's MDGs Progress Report 2015 basically represents the nominal experiences of Bangladesh in achieving MDGs. In terms of cardinal measures, the country achieved a lot because back in 2000 it was unimaginable for Bangladesh to achieve the goals. Considering the baseline in 1991, it was really hard to think of eradication of poverty. But according to the current statistics, it is really commendable success for Bangladesh to eradicate poverty at a very faster rate and Bangladesh has become a showcase for many countries including the LDCs and even for some developing countries. The goals are very easy to understand for all sections of the society including the policymakers and the activists in different parts of the world.

Where does Bangladesh stand regarding MDGs? In terms of poverty, women empowerment, education, maternal health and child health; Bangladesh has made good progress and can touch upon the targets by 2015. What were the major driving forces of successes for Bangladesh? Impressive and consistent growth of Bangladesh with

growth of GDP over six per cent in the last 10 years despite many challenges like political turmoil, infrastructure deficiency and poor service delivery. All quarters of the world really admire this impressive and stable growth. The pro-poor growth is really a positive initiative in order to eradicate poverty in sustainable way and this initiative has a good impact in reducing poverty. Inclusive growth is another factor in poverty reduction that basically played a good role in employment generation. The Bangladesh Progress Report describes that the targets have already been achieved are quantitative indicators but there are qualitative parts of it that are half done and need to be accounted properly. So there is hope because there are already a lot of achievements but there is no scope of complacency because we have a long way to go because there are SDGs in front of us.

Hunger was a nightmare for Bangladesh in the context of 2000 when MDGs were endorsed. Compared to the baseline in 1991-92, the poverty rate was 56.7 per cent and in 2013 it is only 26.2 per cent where the target for 2015 was 29 per cent. So, Bangladesh has already achieved the target. Still reducing hunger is a big success but there are some challenges like poverty pockets but these challenges are manageable. There are some other issues like unemployment of young population. In Monga prone area like Rangpur, the success in reduction of poverty is really good.

The rate of equitable access to education is really commendable because the net enrolment rate is currently 97.7 per cent though the target was 100 per cent. There are problems like year-to-year dropout and total dropout even though the government is trying hard to address the problem. Bangladesh government is considering and admitting the challenge that is really a good sign because if the government can realise the problem then it is easy to address the challenges. So Bangladesh is strongly progressing in terms of that indicator and there are improvements in completion of targets. There are a lot of quality enhancement programmes that are really working well. The country achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education. The stipend programme in secondary education is really bringing the girls children into education though there is a question of amount of stipend. Other challenges are quality and retention but these are manageable.

When women empowerment is discussed, the focus remains on political, economic and social empowerment of women. In the social and economic arena, there is lot of improvements. Role of microcredit has been a real good factor in empowering women because through microcredit programmes women are becoming entrepreneurs. That is a big success for Bangladesh. There is also an increasing in the number of women MPs in the National Parliament. Now, 20 per cent of total seats in the parliament are occupied by women. A challenge in economic arena is low participation of woman in labour force. Unemployment rate among women is also high compared to their male counterparts.

Bangladesh has been a good example in reducing child mortality rate. In 1991, the rate was 146 and now it is 46. The target for 2015 is 48. So it is almost achieved. There are many successful programmes for immunisation, control of diarrhoea diseases and Vitamin A supplementation. Vitamin A supplementation rate was 86 per cent in 2007 and now it is more than 90 per cent. There are some emerging challenges like inequalities among the population segments and childhood injuries. Bangladesh is a story of success in improving maternal health. Maternal mortality declined from 322 in 2001 to 194 in 2010, a 40 per cent decline in nine years. Average annual rate of decline from 1990 has been about 3.3 per cent, while MDG requirement is 3 per cent. About 43.5 per cent of women aged 15-49 years with a live birth in the last 2 years were attended by skilled health personnel in 2012-13, which was only 24.4 per cent in 2009. Maternal allowance and voucher schemes of the government contributed positively in bringing successes in this area.

Bangladesh is not in an alarming position because prevalence of HIV/AIDS is currently less than 0.1 per cent which is still below an epidemic level. Prevalence of malaria per 100,000 population was 441.5 in 2005, which came down to 202 in 2013. Children with fever who are treated with appropriate anti-malarial drugs was 80 per cent in 2008, which was recorded at 89.5 per cent in 2013 and the target is to achieve 90 per cent in 2015. The death rate associated with TB was 61 per 100,000 populations in 1990. The status is 45 in 2012 on track. The

government is taking many programmes to combat these, like there is a programme called DOTs for combating TB. Despite of taking these initiatives there is still presence of challenges.

The main challenge in ensuring environmental sustainability is coverage of forest area. The data of 2014 shows that only 13.4 per cent of the total area is covered by forest and the area having tree cover is much lower than the target set for 2015 (20 per cent). Another problem is carbon emission. As Bangladesh is actively working to become a middle-income country, there is a positive linkage between carbon emission and expansion of economic activities. On the other hand, 97.9 per cent of the population of Bangladesh is using improved drinking water source. However, the challenges are arsenic and salinity intrusion, access to safe water – challenge of inequality. These challenges are met in an innovative ways by the government, NGOs, and private sector.

The grave performance is observed in goal-eight, developing a global partnership for development. ODA disbursed as a proportion of Bangladesh's GDP has declined from 5.59 per cent from early-1990s to 1.78 per cent in 2013-14; annual average of 2.62 per cent. Despite the failure of donors, Bangladesh is doing very well in meeting MDGs. Another problem is Digital Divide. But still, Bangladesh is doing well in ICT sector as there is a target of the government to move ahead towards a Digital Bangladesh. In this aspect, the problem is inequality because if you go to remote areas then there is lack of good access to ICT sectors.

So, what are the experiences for Bangladesh? So far, the experience is comfortable for different stakeholders in Bangladesh. There is a major change that the grassroots people are really appreciating the targets and active in meeting the goals by taking different interventions like Mothers' Club, Child Club, Education Club, etc. Ownership is also a reason for success because everybody owns the problem as well as the goals. In policy, strategy, plans and programmes the government is taking MDGs in addressing different policies like PRSP, the sixth and seventh five-year plan, and 'Vision 2021'. Now it is the time to say Good bye to MDGs but there is a question that is it the death of MDGs. Nevertheless, the successes of MDGs should be transmitted to attain the goals of SDGs.





## Presentation 2:

# Learning from the MDGs and Lessons for the SDGs

**Professor Dr Mustafizur Rahman**

Executive Director, CPD

This is very timely to think of MDGs and SDGs. SDG is not the death of MDGs rather it is the continuum of MDGs to finish the unfinished targets of MDGs. The lessons for implementing MDGs will be very relevant in implementing the goals of SDGs. The first learning from MDGs is that the concept was North-dominated, either by Northern governments or the NGOs in the North working in the Southern part of the world. But, SDGs have been more inclusive because the governments from South have been included in the discourse. After the September 2015 Summit, the Southern think tanks and civil societies will also be included in the discourse. Between 1990-2000 and 2000-2015, there have been accelerations as well as slowdown in implementing different goals of MDGs. It means Bangladesh was not that focused in some of the areas of MDGs but there is a scope to be active in the context of SDGs.

The second learning is that SDGs will be universal and the goals will not only be met by average number but also by ethnic communities, by gender, by geographical distributions and by special distribution. Though the average in some cases sounds good but average conceals many truths. It is a good aspect that SDGs will be implemented in a way of distributive justice. In different policy documents like five-year plan, PRSP, etc. it has been seen there are many targets that were included in the policy papers as well as there were many targets that were not addressed properly. But in the context of SDGs the policy documents will have to reflect the SDG targets and goals for their successful attainment.

The strength for Bangladesh is that along with our five-year plan the country has sector-specific policy that goes more in-depth to achieve the goals. Many of our key policy documents like National Education Policy, PEDP are in line with the targets of MDGs. Another factor is investment allocation for attaining the goals. The learning here is that not only the priorities will be tuned according to SDGs but also the allocative distribution will have to be done according to these priorities.

The SDG documents speak about data revolution. It is known to all that what cannot be measured and cannot be monitored. So, there must have information and data management to measure the progress. Data has to be generated both by gender and division. Now what are the challenges of SDGs? It is critically important to keep the key elements of SDGs in perspective.

The synthesis report of the UN Secretary General on the post-2015 agenda, "The Road to Dignity: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet" was published in December 2014. The report presents six elements for delivering on the SDGs which "... would help frame and reinforce the universal, integrated and transformative nature of a sustainable development agenda ...". The six elements are: Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities; People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children; Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy; Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children; Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions; and Partnership: to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development. All of these are right

based targets and indicators. So, if this discourse is contextualised, then it will be a major challenge for the government because all of these are rights of the citizens.

The agenda of SDGs is Inclusive, transformative, integrated and universal. As all targets are integrated so it will be a big challenge to achieve the goals comprehensively and parallelly. The other challenge from MDGs was weaker global partnership. An important issue with respect to SDGs is how their implementation will be financed. Public finance (domestic resource mobilisation) and foreign aid are expected to continue to be central to supporting the implementation of the SDGs, but they will not be adequate. Other potential sources of financing include: resources generated from the private sector (including remittances); crackdown on illicit financial flows and corruption; trade and market access; and foreign direct investment

When these can be done successfully, then the development partners can be asked to do their part.

If monitoring of 8 MDGs, 20 targets and 60 indicators have posed serious challenges at the national level, how about 17 SDGs, 169 targets and over 300 indicators? Capacity of national statistics office and other government agencies will be tested. Accessibility, quality and timeliness of data will be critical. To fix a reference year 2010 or 2015 will be a challenge. Rapid technological progress should be put into effective use. So improvement in governance, devolution of power, and empowerment of the people can help implement the unfinished agenda of MDGs and also the new commitments that will be taking for the next 15 years.





## Presentation 3: Education and Health: Perspectives from Income Inequality

**Dr Binayak Sen**

Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

Without addressing the concern of income inequality, Bangladesh cannot achieve the unfinished task of MDGs as well as the new challenges approached by SDGs in the area of education, health and nutrition. The BIDS report titled "Fighting Human Poverty: Bangladesh Human Development Report 2000" took a very optimistic term on meeting the social MDGs in early 2000s. In the decade of 2000, the country was aided by the additional forces of economic growth and poverty reduction which provided an additional boost meeting education, health and nutritional MDGs in the decade of 2000 and 2010.

What explains the Bangladesh's success story in health and education MDGs? The first thing is that the MDGs is a case of higher social progress at a relatively lower level of income which was predicted by Amartya Sen and Mahbubul Haq. It was shown that it is possible not to wait for economic growth to do the trade but even at a lower level of income address the avoidable health and educational inequality. Five aspects can be identified in the success story of Bangladesh. *First*, a low cost solution can be filled in meeting health and education MDGs by sustaining a low public expenditure. The public expenditure-GDP ratio increased by one percentage point in 1990s and only a modest increase even now. Therefore, Bangladesh's success story was done through maintaining a fiscal realism. It was low cost because it was focused on preventive rather than curative health care, quantitative target as opposed to qualitative ones, and providing infrastructural facilities and access instead of institutional improvement. These are the pluses and minuses associated with low cost solution. The second factor of success was the strategic ownership and leadership provided at the country and the sectoral level irrespective of successive regimes. A persistent commitment is observed in family planning, education, food production, poverty reduction, and primary education. Therefore, there has been a sustained political commitment to attain the MDGs. The *third* factor is the visible role of economic empowerment of women through social mobilisation by a long cooperative tradition and strong NGO presence. There is also an additional factor of initial social cohesion in Bangladesh can be seen in overall positive attitude towards family planning. All these contribute to female economic empowerment. The *fourth* ingredient of success is the supportive role of sustained and poverty reducing economic growth. There has been a focus on utilising the unskilled labor to agriculture, rural non-farm, readymade garments and international migration. The *fifth* and less emphasised factor is the hidden role of inclusive ideology in shaping pro-poor, pro-women and pro-MDGs activities. Several countries which did well on MDGs typically had preserved the citizen rights irrespective of the status of democracy. In Bangladesh, there is an impact of the great liberation war on economic and political aspects.

The SDGs include the second generation challenges of MDGs like quantity to quality shift, social growth ingredient, and thinking horizontal as well as vertical inequality. MDGs had eight goals whereas SDGs has 17 goals multiplied by many indicators. In the transition from MDGs to SDGs discourse, one of the crucial goals is reducing income inequality. It demands that by 2030, growth of income of the bottom 40 per cent population should be achieved progressively and sustainably which will be higher than the national level. This is very

important conditionality that Bangladesh is committing to. Reducing income inequality is important to meet up health and educational needs. Income inequality affects the poverty reduction and through that channel affects the size of private investments in education and health. Once wellbeing of poor people increases, they can invest more on health and educational expenditure of their family members. This has been an important driver of human development in East Asia and this has also been a supportive driver in case of Bangladesh in the decade of 2010 and 2010. Faster improvement in mortality, nutrition and education are the additional forces of poverty reduction. If income inequality increases, poverty reduction decreases.

High income inequality often leads to lower taxation or spending capacity of the government due to superior lobbying power of the politically powerful upper income group. As a result, pro-poor public goods are under-supplied. For instance, government-provided education and health system in Bangladesh suffered from lack of access or inferior-good syndrome. Same applied to public social protection because of the lobbying power of the rich, they cannot be taxed and as a result, social protection system is underfunded and suffers from tokenism. In general, public spending ratios are higher in country with higher tax-GDP ratio and lower income inequality. Income inequality affects the health and educational outcomes through the channel of social cohesion. Countries with high income inequality are marked by sharp distributional conflicts. In Bangladesh, income inequality is explained by earned and unearned income where inequality is usually higher in the latter case. Unearned incomes affect the delivery of health and educational services and the governance of a country. Therefore, reducing income inequality is important in attaining the first five goals in SDGs.

Conventional studies undermined the importance of income inequality and over-emphasised the role of economic growth by arguing that in the growth process the structural transformation will occur which is the rising part of the Kuznets's curve and then when everybody moves out from agricultural to non-agricultural sector or rural to urban areas then income inequality will fall. Therefore, that is the turning point of Kuznets' inverted 'U' shaped curve. Empirical evidence suggests that rising part of Kuznets curve is not inevitable, *i.e.*, not that the every country pursuing higher growth rate have to go through the process of not equalising. Nevertheless, once one country is on riding path, there is no automatic guarantee that the country will reach the downward stage—the turning point from which income inequality declines. In Bangladesh, the discourse of inequality is restricted only to the consumption inequality and very few works have been done on analysing and assessing the factors of income inequality. According to Amartya Sen, income and economic inequality are not similar. To establish health and educational equality we have to act both on income and consumption inequality.

European experiences suggested how inequality can be moderated through the fiscal increment or effective use of direct tax measure. Asset inequality can be moderated by introducing wealth tax or by introducing inheritance tax. There are other innovative tax measures which can moderate the wealth inequality. In Bangladesh, much can be done in case of wealth tax, direct taxation, and income taxation. Assets may be physical as well as financial asset, and there are issues through which Bangladesh can try to adjust income. There is a reverse feedback running from non-income inequality to persistent high income inequality which is the crux of the problem. If income inequality is not addressed now and if it reproduces health and educational inequality, it would not remain as a one-way traffic. They would not be able to compete at the same level with the rich. They would not be able to avail quality education or even quality primary education. Often some of the growth signals create problem in this regard. Although female enrolment has improved in the secondary education, male dropout has increased specially among the poor households. They are not being able to compete with the rich as the income inequality persists because of the demand for education and health. Thus, education and health inequality would affect the overall inequality by keeping the poor people locked in low skilled occupation or having systemic health shocked.

# Open Discussion

- Conventional logic argues that high income growth can manage the structural transformation in a reasonable level of income inequality to the extent than might bother about income inequality and pro-growth policies.
- Countries suffering most from initial income inequality should think about pro-inequality policy and the countries suffering from lack of income should think about pro-growth policies. Some of the countries of pure types might be from this debate have some scopes to apply progressive capital taxation tools. This tool can

be applied have to be adjusted taking into account the particular country's reality. Bangladesh can think of tax instrument called surcharge taxes on property.

- Several countries like China, Taiwan, and Korea ensured accelerating growth rate, which is not accompanied by rising inequality. Korea accelerated its growth from 4 to 8 per cent, and reduced inequality. South Asia should be open minded and should learn from these experiences.
- Male versus female dropout is a very important area of concern. In rural labor market the growth rate is increasing fast since the year of 2009. There is a structural break in the agricultural wage rate. As a response to that trend,

many poor households are in a dilemma whether to continue in the educational stream or to participate immediately in the labour market for wellbeing. The nature of this trend is that it is welfare-enhancing in the short run, but is initiating poverty trap in the long run. The girls are being educated but they have to be made productive part of the labour force. Although female labour force participation is increasing, most of the increase is in the unpaid family work. Their share in the formal and informal wage work is still very low. In a broad sense, assessment should be conducted on what Bangladesh is doing with the secondary school girls who get stipend, what proportion of them are entering into the labor market, and whether the country harnesses enough growth from those human development investments



- Once poverty reduction has initiated in sufficient number but not so sufficient as to alleviate them to the status of middle class, then they are stacked between slightly above the poverty line but below the middle class line. This is regarded as the segment of vulnerable non-poor who cannot pressurise for social change suitable to sustain poverty reduction and development. The return from the asset is higher than the GDP growth rate. So, income inequality is increasing even in the developed country at a faster rate and rising social tension.



- Many middle-income countries particularly in Latin America and Asia are in the middle-income trap. They are not being able to get out of the middle income and go into the upper-income category. One of the reasons is that although they have high income level, there is also significant income inequality. Income inequality is the binding constraint for these countries to go out from the middle-income trap and moves toward upper income categories. Therefore, income inequality is becoming a very important issue. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many countries are experiencing high income inequality which is not acceptable. Reducing income inequality has to be in-built into the growth process. Therefore, good governance and reducing income inequality are very closely connected. In a country like Bangladesh the fiscal policies and good governance have to move together.

- Education of girls has several social dimensions. Therefore, how many girls are entering the labour force should be looked at because it has a lot of positive social dimensions and lessons for the next generation. Male dropout is connected with the existing educational system. One of the major weaknesses is that the country has not really developed the vocational stream. Students drop out because they do not get any difference between passing class five or passing class eight. If the country could develop a vocational stream in the educational system, they could be immediately employed and we can also take the advantage of global labour market. Therefore, in the education system Bangladesh has to look at what the education system is, and what aspirations and opportunities the students have once they pass the threshold. Therefore, introduction of a strong vocational stream will change the dynamics of this discourse.



## Working Session II

# From MDGs to SDGs: Expectations and Way Forward



**Presentation 1:**  
**Eradicating Poverty, Inclusive  
Growth and Graduation to Middle-  
Income Country**

**Dr Qazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad**  
Chairman, PKSF

Globally, during the MDG period, poverty was defined on the basis of PPP which was US\$1 or Tk.22 a day. Now, the definition of poverty line on the basis of PPP is US\$1.25 or Tk.36 a day. Unfortunately, this definition does not capture the whole scenario of actual poverty because of its multidimensional nature. The difference between traditional and multidimensional aspect of poverty is it incorporates several aspects of poverty such as a person's access to education, health service, housing facility, electricity, water and many other things. But in the tradition aspect, defining on the basis of a small amount of money does not give the proper idea about how the person is suffering from other dimensions of poverty. United Nations (UN) has started publishing Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) since 2010 and according to MPI, on average countries are 21% more poverty stricken compared to tradition money metric measure. MPI uses three dimensions namely – health, education and standard of living

and ten indicators to calculate poverty. Some countries like Bolivia, Bhutan, etc. have already started measuring poverty on the basis of multidimensional aspects. In Bangladesh, a pilot project has been taken to measure multidimensional poverty. MPI helps identify how a person is suffering in poverty from what dimension and indicator. As a result, attention can be given on that particular aspect of that individual.

Bangladesh has been officially using Cost of Basic Need (CBN) Approach to measure poverty which is 2,122 kilocalorie a day and a small amount of money. Bangladesh has made substantial progress in alleviation of poverty based on CBN approach by reducing poverty from 40 per cent in 2005 to 24 per cent and extreme poverty from 24 per cent in 2005 to 11-12 per cent. The country has also met the target of MDG regarding poverty well ahead of time.

In the SDGs, number one goal is again poverty eradication where emphasise has given to eradicate it from everywhere. According to SDG, poverty will not be allowed to persist in anywhere, any country, any region. Here, global community and country leaders both have to play their own role. In Bangladesh, groups those are in extreme poverty are – street people, female agriculture worker, people living in *haor* and *baor*, people living in hills, *dalits*, disabled people. These people have failed to participate in the mainstream development process. In the budget and 7<sup>th</sup> five-year plan, problems of these people have to be addressed.

In case of inclusiveness, everybody has to be included according to the SDGs. Inclusiveness is a very difficult concept to define. In its simplest form, it should include everybody, whatever their circumstances are, create opportunities for them so that they can take the advantage of the policies and programmes of the government. However, creating opportunities are not enough and it is equally important to create institutions so that left out people can participate in the mainstream activities. In addition, policies and institutions should be coherent so that the country can pursue inclusive growth.

Another important thing is, Bangladesh is maintaining 6 per cent plus average growth for the last seven to eight years and this year it is 6.51 per cent, which is very good under the present circumstances. But, this growth has to be adequately distributed. It is very important to ensure that everyone is included in the process. In this case, what is necessary is to emphasise agricultural and non-agricultural activities of the rural areas. Rural economy is now one of the most important things as it directly addresses poverty.

About disparity, it can be said that globally there exists extreme disparity. Globally, only 85 people control same wealth as the bottom 3.5 billion people have. In the future, only 1 per cent of the rich population of the world will control half of the world wealth. In US, 1 per cent of the population control 40 per cent of the total wealth. Fortunately, in Bangladesh, we are much better position in term of income disparity and consumption disparity. Over the last few years, there has been some improvement in case of disparity within the society but still it is very high and it must be addressed in order to have an inclusive growth. That can be done by promoting agriculture and non-agricultural rural activities and emphasising informal sectors of the urban areas.

Climate change is also creating some problem. Because of natural disasters national development is also hindered. Because of it, non-poor becomes poor, poor becomes extremely poor and extreme poor becomes asset less. To fight against climate change, the country has created Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, Trust Fund and Resilience Fund. Bangladesh has also decided to pursue a low carbon path but under some conditions which includes – not to compromise with the national growth, not to compromise with the poverty reduction growth rate and receiving assistance in term of money and technology from development partners. Over the last six years, the budgetary allocation to the trust fund has been almost US\$400 million but resilience fund has disbursement of only US\$130 million in spite of a commitment of US\$190 million. Not only that, this year, the development partners

have decided to provide soft loans in place of grants. Bangladesh should raise its voice in the global stage and should look forward to regional cooperation especially south-south cooperation. There is a rough estimation that about 1 to 1.5 per cent of the total GDP is lost due to increased number of natural disasters for which the country is not responsible. In the last year at the UN Climate Summit, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh expressed her commitment that the country will pursue low carbon path and will not cross the limit of average carbon emission selected for developing countries.

Bangladesh has recently achieved the status of lower middle income country and according to World Bank; the country's per capita income is US\$1,080. But the country has to fulfil three conditions to become a middle income country. For the first condition, the country has to maintain per capita income on average US\$1,190 for three consecutive years. Considering the present situation, the country is on the path to fulfil that condition. Between the other two conditions, one is economic vulnerability – and here the country has already achieved the goal by scoring 32 out of 100 in the economic vulnerability index. However, on the last condition, which is human capability, the country has to do some work to achieve the required score of 66 from its present score of 62.

However, graduation from LDC to middle income country can create some new challenges for the country. Now, LDCs enjoy some facilities in the international arena and one of them is getting concessional loan from ADB, World Bank and other financial institutions. Not only that, LDCs are not required to reduce greenhouse gas emission. Graduation from LDC to middle income can create some problems in these areas. But, the government is well aware about that and formed a committee in 2013 with Cabinet Secretary as a chair to look after all those stuff.

The best thing about Bangladesh is now the country is focusing on human being and the growth process is human centred. According to the definition of sustainable development proposed in 1992 Earth Summit, the process of growth should be economically robust, socially acceptable and it should protect climate. In 2012 Rio+20 Summit, the same definition is given and highest priority is given to human being. So, in Bangladesh, government and other stakeholders are trying to focus on 'Vision 2021' in which it is very clearly stated that all development activities should be people oriented.





## Presentation 2: Access to Resources, Environment and Climate Change

**Professor Dr Niaz Ahmed Khan**

Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

MDGs definitive focus on environment (and Climate Change as an associated phenomenon) has been somewhat limited and myopic. Only the goal seven of MDG constituted a starting point for a development agenda focusing on environmental sustainability. However, it did not address some of the rapidly emerging priority issues of climate change or disaster risk management which includes - ensuring universal access to sustainable energy, linking basic access to water and sanitation within a broader 'water agenda' including water resources management and access and equity considerations for marginalised communities.

Bangladesh has gradual improvement in the target 7.1 of MDGs which is proportion of land areas covered by forest from 9 per cent in 1991 to 13 per cent in 2014. However, the country is still lagging behind the target in forest cover situation. In case of CO2 emission, the country has a gradual increase from 0.14 per capita US\$1 GDP to 0.21. This reflects the intense period of development intervention activity and degree of industrialisation that the country had over the period. The country has also made some progress in case of protected areas (terrestrial and marine) but still lags behind from the target. In case of proportion of population using an improved drinking water source and improved sanitation facility, the country's performance is gradually improving over the years and it has almost achieved the target. However, in calculation of population using an improved drinking water source, two risk factors namely – arsenic contamination and salinity intrusion has not taken into account. So, when the country will set its target to meet the SDGs, this cavity must be well addressed. One area, where, the Asia pacific Region as a whole should be aware that is fossil fuel combustion, which has increased by 161% from 1990 to 2008 compared to global rise of 44 per cent.

Building of SDGs conceptual framework, people, partnership, planet, peace and prosperity will work as five basic pillars under three thematic areas namely – equity, human rights and sustainability. Some crucial factors of SDGs where the country has to strongly negotiate are Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, water access and efficiency, sustainable energy, food security, sustainable agriculture, etc.

Among the 17 goals of Sustainable Development, Goal 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 have direct relevance with environment and climate change. Bangladesh, as a country, has the in-house capacity to lead the international diplomacy focusing of environment and climate change. Some relevant areas for the country to leverage SDGs are – access to resources, leadership in climate change diplomacy, coordinated approach to resource use and environmental governance.

# Open Discussion

- A cross-cutting issue that left out in the discussion, which is technology. It was just sporadically mentioned here and there. And it has been recognised in the climate change negotiation. In Bangladesh the technological issue for the SDGs should be considered in all the goals and prospects.
- The goal-seven of SDGs is ensuring access of reliable energy for all and goal number nine is on sustainable industrialisation. Energy has not become available for everybody. Now almost 40 per cent people are outside the network of energy and power. On the other hand, the government has taken initiatives to reduce energy shortage which are mostly non-renewable means like solar energy in rural and some urban areas, and Rampal projects which is fully based on coal. So, in one hand the government is trying to get the people in a reliable energy access on the other hand, making space to welcome some of the environmental threats and vulnerabilities. Is there any space to act equally on this big concern or how to strategically act on this matter to ensure access to clean and sustainable energy?
- Although the role of technology has not been covered prominently but behind every process there is technology. Sustainable progress cannot be achieved without technology. However, considerable amount of money is required to get access to modern technology.
- The idea of having integrated national level survey on the carbon emission record can be initiated. At individual research level, the Khulna University and the University of Chittagong have taken some initiatives. But it is not a national level survey. Better ideas of carbon emission can be promoted from the national level. This will help us to negotiate more on this in the international diplomatic level.



## Summary by the Chair

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**  
Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS

One important point is balancing development and environment. What is important is to understand that to make progress on the development, focus should also be on reducing environmental damage. There will be damage but wayout must be devised to ensure as much as less emitting possible and finding the greener ways of development.

# Closing Session



## Summary of the Sessions

**Mr M Shahidul Haque**  
Foreign Secretary, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

It is very difficult to characterise the very rich issue of this discussion. In the inaugural session, our honourable Foreign Minister made the opening statement where he highlighted the features from our MDG experience like political will, how political will shapes into decisions, action plan, ownership, working with domestic resources. He pointed out two important challenges and one of them is climate change. Throughout the whole seminar with all the presentations, the thing came on very clearly that Bangladesh has made a very significant progress which could come as almost a miracle despite our limitations, lack of resource availability and market access. But still there is certain challenges that we need to take on.

The second thing that came out very prominently that there was conducive policy environment. Political leadership has made this achievement possible. This is something we can learn from our own MDG implementation process and how we can use it in terms of SDGs. One thing is also clear that we have to build our future strategy on the MDGs achievement that we have made so far and it is not only for us, it is also for the other countries and there is a question of continuity rather saying that we have moved into a higher place.

Throughout the whole seminar, we have discussed series of issues clustering around all the seven MDG goals though we did not dig up deeply but we strongly looked at education and health. Inequality also

came very strongly on discussion. We discuss about poverty, what will happen when we will become a middle income country and. Environment also came very strongly in the discussion. Now when we moving into SDGs, we make broader inclusive ambition and all the countries agreed to make years of long consultation and reached to the SDGs. It was drafted by the international civil service. Thus, it is very inclusive, broad based process and ultimately culminated into a one year long inter-governmental negotiation in New York. It is inclusive inter-governmental process but not only government but also civil society business partners and international organisations were involved. It was a different kind of negotiation that for the first time we see. The process is very inclusive. Although it was led by the government but in the room, it was full of civil society members, business and international organisations. So, it was a different kind of negotiation that for the first time we saw and we have not seen anything like that in the past.

Now we have 17 goals and 169 targets. One good thing is, this time all countries are expected to show their achievement curve and not only the "developing countries". So that is the major feature that we have dealt with. In terms of goals, the MDGs were more of quantitative indicators but if you look at the SDGs, these are very qualitative indicators. So there is a substantive change in terms of our understanding on how we would like to see our world in 2030.

Our honourable Prime Minister is leading the Bangladesh delegation and she is led Bangladesh in the Millennium Declaration Summit. In terms of transition to MDGs, we are in a better place but that is not the end of the journey and is not the end of the story. I would like to share with you the discussion of intergovernmental negotiation. In the intergovernmental negotiation, there were two or three areas that came out very prominently. One is the whole issue of inequality. Bangladesh delegation took a lead role in the areas like inequality, climate change and the issue of migration. In terms of climate change, in term of water, for the first time, trans-boundary water sharing featured out at target and goals which is also an achievement of Bangladesh delegation in the intergovernmental negotiation. We all agreed that, in the SDG process, inequality comes like a major issue that we need to look at if we want to graduate into a higher level of development. We saw that, in the earlier draft, the inequality was dropped, and they featured out in the second draft and dropped again. But, finally, it survived as one of the goals. Another major break is when the issue "governance" came in. Finally, all agreed that governance is also equally important in terms of development.

We are going there with lot of hope, lot of achievement and hopefully, when we will come back, we will back with huge responsibilities. And one thing I just like to flag is the issue of global indicators. We have 17 goals and 169 targets but when it comes to indicator against which every country will be judged and how much they have achieved over the last fifteen years, there were global indicators. They thought, there will be a intergovernmental negotiation, there will be agreement on global indicator. But, at the end, it became impossible because of the country context. How Bangladesh will show its scorecard against Netherland is totally different. So they all decided that indicators will be decided at the country level and this is the beginning of our SDG process. The Honourable Prime Minister has already signed a memo and the process is already started of putting together a huge strategy, which will be known as a SDG strategy. Then we will see how the indicators will be chosen through a very consultative process.

It was a very good beginning, very interesting discussion and I think there is a very big aspiration among the people to see that we will not only go to 2021 as a middle income country but 2041 as the Prime Minister has set the goal to become a develop country. We are extremely hopeful.



# Remarks by the Guest of Honour

**Dr N Paraneithara**

World Health Organization (WHO), Representative to Bangladesh

One SDG goal that is hunger. Bangladesh has performed very well on MDG. Bangladesh started working on MDGs well before in early-2000s. However, there is a caveat that the SDGs would be challenging task to attain. However, the Bangladesh government is committed to incorporate the national planning with the international standard. The Bangladesh team has performed wonderfully in the SDG negotiating process. Bangladesh could be the model of development even in the SDGs. The United Nations continued to be a trusted partner of the Government of Bangladesh and looks forward to the next stage of this partnership on SDGs.





# Address by the Special Guest

**Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP**

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

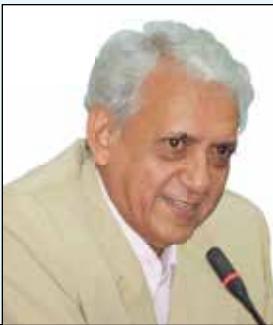
The topic on which you have deliberated over the last few hours has a considerable significance for Bangladesh. It is very timely- as the deadline for the attainment of MDGs is nearing and the new development agenda for the next 15 years is all agreed and about to be launched. The MDGs mark a historic mobilisation of global effort to achieve a set of Development objectives. MDGs aimed at ending poverty and hunger, improving education, gender equality, and health, and promoting development. In achieving the goals most countries have made meaningful progress; though the progress has been uneven within and among countries, for example, the Sub-Saharan African nations have performed poorly.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, is a forerunner in achieving MDGs. Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we have made significant progress in poverty alleviation, ensuring food security, primary school enrolment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education, lowering infant and under five mortality rate and maternal mortality rate, improving immunisation coverage and reducing communicable diseases. We have attained these progresses in spite of various challenges and constraints in both global and local level. As you all know, Honourable Prime Minister has received a number of prestigious awards from United Nations and other organisations for her remarkable success in achieving many of the goals and targets.

Now we need to look forward and best prepare ourselves for the journey of reaching SDGs which are more ambitious. The new agenda that the global community has agreed upon is a much more people-centric and inter-linked menu of Goals and Targets. With three dimensions of development- social, economic and environmental, SDGs incorporate the needs and concerns of all countries, people and groups. The good thing is, we have a rich credential in achieving MDGs. Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina joined other world leaders in adopting the Millennium Declaration at the UN and this is a rare fit for any country, for a leader that she will be in New York to adopt the landmark document in the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 that reflects the commitment of a nation to global development endeavours. We led implementation of MDG by example. We will do so again in the case of SDGs. I am pleased to know that the SDG framework has been given due importance in formulating our next Five Year Plan and has already incorporated various goals and targets in the Plan.

I would like to exercise a bit of caution here. I would echo what the development practitioners and economists are saying, that is, with a business as usual approach, the transformative development agenda like this will be impossible to achieve. SDGs can only be achieved if the financing, partnerships, implementation and monitoring measures are put in place that will require States and other non-state actors to adopt appropriate development policies and mobilise all available resources to transform lofty principles into the modus operandi. In this regard efforts of national authorities must be complimented by regional and international cooperation. This was the area where the MDGs registered least progress globally. So we need paradigm shift in our approach as well as need to enable global environment in terms of trade, aide and technology transfer as we mobilise our domestic resources.

I am sure, all these issues came up in your discussion and a lot of perspectives and reflections have emerged in course of the day. This is in a way initiation of a longer debate. We hope to continue this discussion in New York, through a similar event that we are organising on the sideline of the UN General Assembly and where we expect a number of high dignitaries to be present and share perspectives.



# Address by the Chief Guest

**Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi**

Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister on International Affairs  
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is in a really good position. The Prime Minister Sheikh Hasinawill be in New York in a few days to launch the SDGs. She was also in there where the MDGs were launched. So she has tremendous experience over MDGs. She has in able to see through much of the implementation and she will bring experience on SDGs. There is no doubt given Bangladesh's commitment, given its capacity and given the political will that exists in the country to fulfill the MDGs. However, what is very important to realiseis that when this discussion on MDGs have ended and when the SDGswill be agreed upon in the few weeks' time, there will be the technical part of the discussion, and the politics will begin. And it is in politics that the implementation will depend on. Although Bangladesh is proud of MDGs, there is lot of things that developing countries must do like what are their obligations and how these will be measured. If Bangladesh is going to make sustainable development goals successful, there will be a strong need to have a greater and equal partnership despite partners being unequal. It is extremely important because SDGs have costs,whichcannot be simply covered by developing countries. There were commitments from developed countries on cooperation though resource disbursement but how much of it have actually been materialised is still a big question. Therefore, unless the developed world begins to fully equip and grant it's committed of resources, it will be lot easier and much faster. Here the role of negotiations on SDGs is absolutely important.



Prepared by: Dr Mahfuz Kabir (Senior Research Fellow) with support from Sajid Karim, Md. Nazmul Islam, Shanjida Shahab Uddin and Sultana Jareen (Research Officer), and Roksana Mohammed (Intern)



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) is a statutory institution established on 25 June, 1978 by the Government of Bangladesh. It undertakes and promotes research and deliberation on international affairs, security and developmental issues. It also advances knowledge and understanding of contemporary international, strategic and developmental issues in national and regional perspectives.

The special seminar titled "**Moving from MDGs to SDGs: Bangladesh Experience and Expectation**" was organised by BIISS on 17 September 2015 to commemorate the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Bangladesh's accession into the United Nations (UN) on the same day and provide inputs for use at the exchange of views event titled "MDGs to SDGs: A Way Forward" hosted by the Bangladesh delegation to the 70<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly session on 29 September 2015 at the UN Headquarters, New York.

The seminar was divided into four sessions including the two working sessions. The opening session provided an overview and described the background of the special seminar. Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP, Foreign Minister, Government of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest of the session. The seminar was concluded with a closing session where Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister on International Affairs, Government of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest and Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh was the special guest.

Eminent economists and experts spoke on various important areas of MDGs and SDGs in the two working sessions. They include Dr Qazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad, Chairman, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF); Professor Dr Mustafizur Rahman, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); Dr Binayak Sen, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS); Professor Dr Niaz Ahmed Khan, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka; and Dr Mahfuz Kabir, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS.

A wide range of guests were present and took active part in the seminar including Ambassadors and High Commissioners, senior diplomats and dignitaries, higher government officials, scholars, business representatives, NGO and development activists, and media professionals.



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