



**Book Launching Seminar on**  
**“Look Africa:**  
**Exploring New Horizons for Bangladesh”**

**24 February 2025**



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



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Book Launching Seminar on  
**Look Africa: Exploring New  
Horizons for Bangladesh**

**Monday, 24 February, 2025**



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a book launching seminar titled “**Look Africa: Exploring New Horizons for Bangladesh**” on 24 February, 2025 at the BIISS auditorium. Md Touhid Hossain, Honourable Foreign Adviser for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, graced the event as the Chief Guest. **Ambassador Humayun Kabir**, President of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), chaired the session. **Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng**, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address.

**Dr Razia Sultana**, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS, presented insights on the book. Followed by her, **Mr AFM Zahid-Ul-Islam**, former Director General of the Africa Wing and current Director General of the North America Wing, MoFA, provided an overview of Africa-Bangladesh relations. Afterwards, two distinguished discussants, **Dr Munshi Sulaiman**, Professor and Research Director of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), and **Dr Marufa Akter**, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Global Studies and Governance at Independent University (IUB), shared their perspectives on the book.

The book launching seminar concluded with a panel discussion involving the authors of the book and remarks from other notable guests for fostering a rich exchange of ideas and identifying potential in the African region.

## Welcome Address



**Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng,**  
Director General, BIISS

On behalf of BIISS, **Major General Iftekhar Anis** welcomed all to the book launching seminar on “Look Africa: Exploring New Horizons for Bangladesh.” He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Guest for gracing the occasion with his presence. He opined that the launch of the book on Look Africa is a timely and insightful publication that delves into the untapped potential of Bangladesh’s relations with African countries. He opined that despite the growing importance of South-South cooperation in the contemporary geopolitical and economic landscape, the engagement between Bangladesh and Africa remains a relatively underexplored area in academic and policy discourse. This publication, he mentioned, is the culmination of a seminar organised by BIISS to explore opportunities for strengthening cooperation between Bangladesh and African countries. It reflects the Institute’s dedication to translating discussions from various seminars and roundtables into meaningful contributions to policy and academic discourse. The book is a result of rigorous research and thoughtful deliberation, aimed at providing the readers with a deeper understanding of how Bangladesh can effectively expand its outreach to Africa for mutual benefit.

Being the Chief Editor of this book, Major General Anis took the opportunity to explain the rationale behind the publication of this book and highlight the key themes it addresses. Firstly,

as explained by him, expanding foreign policy options is essential for any country seeking to safeguard its national interests, and Bangladesh is no exception. The country is now looking beyond the established spheres of influence to broaden its global engagement. Africa, with its growing economies and untapped potential, presents a promising avenue for Bangladesh to foster mutually beneficial partnerships. Secondly, with the LDC graduation knocking at the door, Bangladesh stands to lose trade benefits associated with its LDC status. In this context, Africa presents a viable alternative market that Bangladesh must explore to sustain its economic momentum. Thirdly, strengthening diplomatic ties with African countries is more crucial than ever. A key priority will be expanding Bangladesh's diplomatic presence and identifying new export destinations, particularly in less-explored markets. Lastly, he added that the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War have disrupted global economic and political existing opportunities and, in some cases, introducing stricter trade conditions. In this uncertain landscape, Africa's emerging economies offer a crucial alternative for Bangladesh's trade and investment ambitions.



The Director General also remarked that the publication of this book has brought together a diverse group of academics, seasoned practitioners, and emerging researchers, each contributing valuable perspectives on Bangladesh-Africa relations. Collectively, they have authored 13 insightful chapters, covering a wide range of critical issues. This book explores key areas such as diplomatic engagements, socio-cultural exchanges, and economic cooperation, providing an in-depth analysis of how these ties can be strengthened. It also delves into trade and investment opportunities, highlighting the potential for economic growth and business collaborations between the two regions. Additionally, the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in fostering digital connectivity is examined, along with discussions on the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

Major General Anis further noted that, beyond economic and diplomatic dimensions, the book addresses topics such as human migration, emphasising the movement of labour and skills between Bangladesh and Africa. The potential for agricultural cooperation is also explored, recognising the opportunities for knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and food security initiatives. Given the shared vulnerabilities to climate change, the book sheds light on the need for joint strategies in climate adaptation and resilience-building. In addition, the book highlights the role of defence diplomacy and peacekeeping, areas where Bangladesh has already made a significant mark on the global stage. By examining Bangladesh's contributions to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and the scope for further defence cooperation, it underscores the potential for deeper engagement in stabilisation efforts.

In the end, the Director General warmly invited all to explore the book and delve into its diverse range of topics. Regarding the book, he hoped that the readers would find it not only informative but also thought-provoking, inspiring further research and policy discussions. He also took this moment to express his heartfelt appreciation to his fellow editorial board members. He concluded by extending his sincere gratitude to the Honourable Chief Guest, distinguished panelists, and esteemed participants for their presence and support.

## Presentation on the Book



### Dr Razia Sultana

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

**Dr Razia Sultana**, in her presentation, highlighted the significance of the book and shared the insights into the book. She explained that the book's journey was quite lengthy, noting its origins in a BIISS seminar organised in 2022. Dr Sultana observed that the book's themes had gained importance in the evolving global situation, characterising contemporary global politics as being in transition, becoming more conflictual than peaceful and more volatile than stable. She pointed out several factors affecting a country's bilateral and multilateral relationships, including the rise of middle powers, Cold War-like situations through the Russia-Ukraine War, economic challenges from COVID-19, and the presence of non-state actors. She also mentioned the remarkable transformation due to Donald Trump's return to the presidency and its potential impact on international development cooperation and global trade.

Dr Sultana noted that for Bangladesh, the book became more meaningful following the July Uprising, which she described as bringing new momentum to the country's foreign policy posture. She emphasised that in International Relations, national interest is permanent rather than friendships or enmities, quoting Lord Palmerston's 19<sup>th</sup>-century statement, which denotes that it is the national interest which guides a country's foreign policy. She suggested that as Bangladesh navigates numerous challenges ranging from the economy to the environment, it should cultivate alternative bilateral relations, with Africa being a viable option. She described



Africa as a continent of 54 countries with abundant natural resources and rich culture, holding strategic importance in global geopolitics with growing influence on issues like climate change, sustainable development, peace, and security.

Dr Sultana then outlined the book's organisation, mentioning it contained 13 chapters covering socio-cultural economic landscapes and common grounds for cooperation, like culture, climate change, trade, and investment, among others. She provided a brief overview of each chapter's content and authors, covering diplomatic ties, socio-cultural cooperation, trade investments, digital market opportunities, migration, agricultural engagement, climate change initiatives, peacekeeping, and future collaboration possibilities. She concluded by emphasising that the book represented South-South cooperation and invited feedback from attendees, mentioning its availability at the bookstores.

## Africa-Bangladesh Relations: An Overview



### AFM Zahid-Ul-Islam

Former Director General Africa Wing and Current Director General  
North America Wing Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

**AFM Zahid-Ul-Islam** discussed the evolution of Bangladesh-Africa relations and future opportunities. He traced these relations to the early 1970s, when many African countries recognised Bangladesh's sovereignty following its independence. He noted that Bangladesh's solidarity with African struggles against colonialism formed the foundation for lasting partnerships. He mentioned how high-level engagement followed in the 1970s and 1980s, including visits to Egypt and Algeria and the establishment of embassies in key African capitals. He highlighted Bangladesh's initiative of sending teachers, doctors, and engineers during that time to Libya as demonstrating a commitment to mutual development.

Mr Islam stated that Bangladesh currently maintains missions in nine African countries, with the Sudan mission temporarily suspended due to political unrest. He added that Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco maintain embassies in Dhaka. He described how cooperation deepened in the 1980s regarding peace and security, with Bangladesh's deployment of observers to Namibia in 1989 marking the beginning of its peacekeeping legacy in Africa—a commitment that continues today with forces serving in Congo and other parts of Africa.



Mr Islam acknowledged that despite strong political and security foundations, the economic potential of the partnership had not been fully realised. He mentioned that since 2012, Bangladesh had reinvigorated its Africa policy with an economic focus, including an inter-ministerial fact-finding mission that explored opportunities in several countries. He identified contract farming as a promising initiative, with entrepreneurs already venturing into farming in Sudan, Tanzania, and Ethiopia despite policy challenges. He reported that the MoFA had signed memorandums of understanding (MoU)s with several African nations and held consultations identifying energy collaboration as a key area for cooperation.

Mr Islam emphasised that with Africa's GDP projected to reach US\$29 trillion by 2050, the continent represents a dynamic market, though challenges such as the absence of free trade agreements and high tariffs limit current trade are highly prevalent. He stressed the need for Bangladesh to prioritise trade agreement negotiations to expand market access and diversify exports beyond ready-made garments (RMG). He called for active participation from the business community, noting that while the government would facilitate policies, entrepreneurs and industry leaders need to take numerous initiatives to boost trade and investment. He concluded by acknowledging that Bangladesh-Africa relationships had yet to reach their full potential and expressed confidence that the book would inspire reimagined engagement with Africa.

## Distinguished Discussants of the Book



### Dr Munshi Sulaiman

Director of Research & Professor of the Master of Development Studies  
BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)

**Dr Munshi Sulaiman** shared reflections based on his ten years of experience living in East Africa, particularly Uganda, Kenya, and Somalia. He acknowledged having read portions of the book thoroughly while skimming others, he mainly focused on three main points: timing, economic orientation, and cultural understanding. Regarding timing, Dr Sulaiman agreed with the book's assessment that Bangladesh might be late in engaging with Africa, realising that Western powers had been looking at Africa for centuries, while countries like India and China had been involved for a long time. He then suggested that Bangladesh needs to think differently about its approach.

On his second point, Dr Sulaiman questioned the book's heavy economic orientation, asking whether Africa needed "just another seller." He found the book lacking sufficient discussion on culture, emphasising the importance of understanding how Africans perceive Bangladesh rather than solely focusing on what the latter wants from the relationship. He suggested that if the relationship were trade-focused, Bangladesh should determine what Africa actually wants.

Regarding his third point, Dr Sulaiman emphasised that Bangladesh could learn significantly from African culture—not just art and music, but everyday interactions, humility, and



contentment. He contrasted the peace he experienced in Africa with the rush and chaos he observed upon returning to Bangladesh, suggesting Bangladeshis should return to their roots and learn from Africa, the cradle of Homo Sapiens. He advocated for a mindset change, realising that typical Bangladeshis often associate Africa with negatives like Ebola or war, while missing the continent's beauty.

Dr Sulaiman recommended that students of International Relations and Global Affairs spend time studying in African countries to learn about their culture during their formative years. He praised the quality of service he received from Uganda's National Social Security Fund, suggesting Bangladesh could learn from such glaring examples. He concluded by highlighting positive representations of Bangladesh in Africa, such as roads named "Bangla Road" after Bangladeshi peacekeepers who built them, and pharmaceutical investments that made medicines more affordable. He emphasised that Bangladesh needed to consider not just what it wants to sell, but what Africa wants, to build a meaningful relationship.



### Dr Marufa Akter

Associate Professor and Head, Department of Global Studies and Governance (GSG)  
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)

**Dr Marufa Akter** began her discussion by acknowledging her lack of direct experience with Africa or expertise in African Studies, stating that her comments would come from an academic perspective focusing on the book's value for researchers and students in International Relations and Global Studies. She commended the book's title, "Look Africa: Exploring New Horizons for Bangladesh," as it signalled a paradigm shift in Bangladesh's global engagement, which had traditionally focused on regional partnerships with South Asia, the Middle East, and Western powers.

Dr Akter praised BIISS for taking up this challenge and producing a book she had been seeking when teaching courses on African Studies and Genocide Studies. She interpreted the title as suggesting a proactive search for new horizons, portraying Africa not as a distant or exotic other, but as a dynamic region ripe for collaboration. She also stated that the title encapsulated a call for action, encouraging policymakers and practitioners to broaden their horizons and consider Africa's untapped potential.

Regarding the book's content, Dr Akter highlighted its comprehensive coverage across 13 chapters, ranging from economic diplomacy and trade diversification to cultural exchange,

innovation, migration, and sustainable development. She appreciated the book's unique blend of academic scholars and experienced policymakers, creating a hybrid approach that enriched the work significantly. However, she suggested that adding a chapter on women's empowerment would have been valuable given Africa's progress in this area.



On methodology, Dr Akter observed that most chapters employed narrative or case study approaches, with only a few adopting clear mixed-method research. She identified some gaps in primary data, which she considered important for making analyses generalisable to other contexts. Despite this critique, she acknowledged the book's strong academic contribution to exploring under-researched dimensions of South-South cooperation.

Dr Akter identified key messages from the book, including the historical roots and shared struggles between Bangladesh and African countries, untapped economic potential, innovative security engagement through UN peacekeeping, and the involvement of non-state actors in shaping international relations. She concluded by emphasising the book's significance for young researchers and students, offering valuable insights into alternative paradigms of international cooperation and fostering understanding of global governance challenges.

## Panel Discussions with the Authors



### Ambassador Mashfee Binte Shams

Assistant Secretary General ii, Executive Committee of the Association of Former BCS (FA)  
Ambassadors of Bangladesh (AoFA)

**Ambassador Mashfee Binte Shams** extended her gratitude to the distinguished chair, Chief Guest, Director General, and Chairman of BIISS, along with other esteemed guests, for their innovative and remarkable initiative and expressed her appreciation for being included in this significant endeavour. Reflecting on the journey that led to this initiative, Ambassador Shams recalled that it began during her tenure as Secretary (East) at MoFA when she was overseeing the Africa Wing. At that time, BIISS had invited her to present a paper at a seminar focused on Africa. She acknowledged that even then, the seminar was a commendable effort, which eventually evolved into the publication of the book being discussed at the event.

While contributing to the book, she noted the longstanding solidarity between African countries and Bangladesh, emphasising that African nations were among the first to recognise Bangladesh's independence. She highlighted the shared perspectives of both regions on global issues, such as colonialism, racial discrimination, and apartheid in South Africa. Recalling Bangladesh's early diplomatic initiatives, she mentioned that one of the country's first overseas missions was established in Africa, as referenced by the Director General Major General Iftekhar Anis.

However, Ambassador Shams acknowledged that over the years, due to competing challenges and internal struggles, Bangladesh had somewhat overlooked its bilateral relations with Africa. While engagement continued in multilateral forums such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Commonwealth, direct diplomatic focus had waned. She was pleased to observe that, in the past 10 to 15 years, Bangladesh had renewed its attention towards Africa, with several diplomatic missions being established, including the most recent ones in Mauritius and Nigeria.

Despite this progress, Ambassador Shams emphasised that these efforts remained insufficient. In her view, Bangladesh needed at least five to eight more diplomatic missions in Africa to ensure adequate representation. She cited an example from a friendly country, where an Ambassador remarked that their government had established embassies in every African country. This, she noted, became a decisive factor when seeking support for a security council candidacy, as a country had questioned why it should offer its vote when there was no diplomatic representation from that nation in its territory.

Ambassador Shams then pointed out that Bangladesh had, over the years, developed diplomatic mechanisms such as foreign office consultations and joint commissions with multiple African countries. She also referred to the signing of MoUs and agreements, which serve as fundamental building blocks in fostering stronger diplomatic ties. She took the opportunity to highlight the role of the Foreign Service Academy, which, since 2023, had begun offering courses for diplomats from friendly countries, including those from Africa.

Ambassador Shams addressed a critical question—how African nations perceive Bangladesh. She remarked that the world was witnessing a renewed geopolitical interest in Africa, sometimes referred to as the “new scramble for Africa.” However, she asserted that Bangladesh did not wish to partake in such a competition. Instead, the country sought to establish diplomatic relations based on mutual benefit, cooperation, and knowledge exchange. She expressed her hope that this book would not be a standalone publication but rather the first volume in a continuing series exploring and strengthening Bangladesh-Africa relations. Ambassador Shams concluded her remarks by thanking the audience and reiterating her optimism for the future of Bangladesh’s diplomatic engagement with Africa.



### Professor Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas

Department of International Relations, Dhaka University

Speaking on behalf of both him and his co-author, Mr Himel Raman, **Professor Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas** acknowledged the significant contributions of his co-author, commending his dedication and efforts in shaping the discourse on Bangladesh-Africa relations. He recognised the engaging discussions that had emerged throughout the seminar, highlighting the role of the editorial panel in facilitating and defending these thought-provoking exchanges.

Dr Biswas concurred with Dr M Raman's assertion on the importance of cultural cooperation and the need to understand cultural dimensions in fostering stronger relations. He noted that one of the key objectives of their chapter was to examine the deep-rooted cultural ties between Bangladesh and Africa, which as their research revealed, date back to pre-colonial times. Among the significant historical events they explored, he emphasised the travels of the renowned Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta, whose journey provided critical insights into early interactions between the regions. Additionally, he highlighted Bangladesh's historical diplomatic relations with present-day Kenya in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as another vital aspect of these connections. Dr Biswas underscored that migration and population movements have long been catalysts for cultural cooperation and affinities between continents. However, he raised an important question: to what extent are these historical connections still relevant in contemporary times? He noted that while their chapter attempted to address this. Further exploration is required to understand how these historical ties translate into modern-day diplomatic, cultural, and economic engagement.

One of the key challenges identified in their study was the need to move beyond a colonial perspective when analysing cultural relations between Africa and South Asia. He noted that Africa, as a continent of immense cultural and ethnic diversity, should not be viewed through the limited lens of colonial narratives, as doing so often oversimplifies and misrepresents the complexities of its societies. Instead, he advocated for a decolonised understanding of Africa's evolving cultural landscape and how Bangladesh can effectively engage with it in a manner that is mutually beneficial.

Turning to more recent cultural exchanges, Professor Biswas highlighted the presence of African footballers in Bangladesh since the 1980s. He recalled how players from various African nations had competed in Bangladesh's premier football leagues, particularly representing Abahani and Mohammedan. More recently, an African footballer had even acquired Bangladeshi nationality and joined the national team. While this may be seen as an isolated example, he emphasised its broader significance as an indicator of increasing people-to-people connections and the potential for further cultural and sports diplomacy.

Despite these engagements, Dr Biswas pointed out a notable gap in cultural exchange—Bangladesh has yet to establish a substantial presence in the African cultural market. Most importantly, African cultural industries, particularly the film sector, remain largely unfamiliar to Bangladeshi audiences. He mentioned Nigeria's Nollywood—one of the world's largest film industries—as an example of an underexplored cultural asset. In an era dominated by Over The Top platforms and mobile-based digital content consumption, he emphasised that Bangladesh should actively engage in cultural diplomacy by promoting its films, music, and other cultural products in Africa, incorporating subtitles to facilitate accessibility. Similarly, he suggested that Bangladesh should make a concerted effort to appreciate and enjoy African cultural resources, thereby fostering a more reciprocal cultural relationship.

Professor Biswas briefly touched on the role of Bangladesh in the UN peacekeeping efforts in Africa, noting that a separate chapter in the book focuses extensively on this subject. However, he stressed the need to deconstruct certain misconceptions about Africa, particularly the idea that conflict defines its cultural identity. He observed that many African nations have successfully rebuilt themselves through innovative state and nation-building programmes, reclaiming and revitalising their indigenous cultural identities beyond colonial influences. Recognising and understanding these developments, he argued, is essential for Bangladesh to engage meaningfully with African nations in cultural, economic, and diplomatic spheres.

In conclusion, Professor Dr Biswas expressed his gratitude to all those involved in the discussion, particularly Mr Himel Raman, for his invaluable contributions being the co-author. He reiterated the need for continuous engagement between Bangladesh and Africa, emphasising that cultural diplomacy should play a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations. He expressed optimism that through such exchanges, both regions could foster deeper mutual understanding and cooperation in the years ahead.



**Pinaky Shankar (Rahul), Senior Research Analyst**

on behalf of

Dr Masrur Reaz, Chairman, Policy Exchange Bangladesh

At the event, **Pinaky Shankar (Rahul)** spoke on behalf of Dr Masrur Reaz, providing an overview of their chapter on expanding Bangladesh's trade and investment opportunities in Africa. He highlighted Africa's emergence as a global economic hub, with its 1.4 billion people across 54 nations, and emphasised the significant untapped potential for Bangladesh in the area of trade and investment. Notably, Bangladesh's exports to Africa have surged nearly sixfold in just two years—from US\$300 million to US\$1.8 billion—demonstrating increasing economic engagement. Key exports include ready-made garments (RMG), leather, jute products, agricultural goods, seafood, pharmaceuticals, and ceramics, with major trade partners such as South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, and Kenya. The chapter also explores sectoral opportunities, particularly in RMG, pharmaceuticals, and digital services, given Africa's 75% reliance on pharmaceutical imports and its ongoing digital transformation, which aligns with Bangladesh's growing Information Technology (IT) and freelancing sectors. However, challenges persist, including complex regulations, limited diplomatic and business networks, and financing risks, which hinder deeper trade relations. To address these, the authors recommend expanding trade missions, strengthening diplomatic and economic ties, and facilitating private sector investment, while carefully managing risks—similar to the approaches of China, India, and Turkey. While concluding the discussion, Mr Rahul underscored that with strategic engagement and proactive investment policies, Bangladesh could significantly expand its trade and investment footprint in Africa, unlocking new economic frontiers for sustainable growth.



### Mr Shams Mahmud

President, Bangladesh-Thai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BTCCI)

At the outset, **Mr Shams Mahmud** delivered a compelling speech, drawing from personal experiences and professional insights to highlight the potential for expanding Bangladesh-Africa trade and investment relations. He began by emphasising how his time in Africa profoundly shaped his understanding of business, teaching him the importance of humanity before commerce. Sharing two significant anecdotes, he illustrated how African leaders approach business with a strong ethical and strategic mindset.

He recounted his experience with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, now the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), who was Ethiopia's Foreign Minister during that time. When Mr Mahmud was appointed Honorary Consul at the age of 32, Dr Ghebreyesus invited him for discussions on attracting investment from Bangladesh. He explained that Bangladesh is held in high regard in Africa, particularly due to its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and its long-standing historical connections with Ethiopia, dating back over 500 years. The presence of mercenaries from Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) in the Mughal Empire, who rose to prominent military ranks, serves as an example of these deep-rooted ties. Ethiopia also closely followed Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971, relating it to their own historical struggles.

Mr Mahmud then shared a business lesson he learned from Dr Ghebreyesus, who invited him to observe investment negotiations with Chinese companies. One company, during discussions, asked about the minimum wage in Ethiopia, prompting Dr Ghebreyesus to mark a cross on his notepad. Another company requested business-class tickets for their families in exchange for

investment incentives, leading him to make another cross. Later, Dr Ghebreyesus explained his rationale: the first company's emphasis on minimum wage instead of living wage suggested an exploitative mindset, which Ethiopia rejected. The second company's request for free business-class tickets, despite claiming a US\$10 million investment, raised concerns about their financial integrity. These insights revealed how African nations scrutinise potential investors, prioritising ethical business practices and long-term commitment over superficial financial proposals.

Mr Mahmud also noted that several Bangladeshi companies are already active in Ethiopia and across Africa, particularly in IT services and river dredging projects. However, due to Africa's weaker financial infrastructure, many Bangladeshi businesses operate via Dubai or Singapore, meaning trade data often does not reflect the true scale of Bangladesh's engagement in Africa. The lack of a structured banking system, back-to-back Letters of Credit (LCs), and hard currency shortages remain key obstacles to direct trade and investment in Africa, making financial risk mitigation a crucial area for improvement.

Reflecting on China's strategic investment approach, Mr Mahmud observed that Chinese companies do not invest in isolation. Instead of setting up individual textile factories, they implement a comprehensive industrial approach, bringing together a spinning mill, a fabric production unit, and a garment factory, often bundled with a financing company. This integrated investment model ensures sustainability and maximises economic impact. He suggested that Bangladesh should adopt a similarly structured approach when entering African markets.

Finally, Mr Mahmud emphasised that while investment in Africa requires substantial capital, Bangladesh should focus on the "low-hanging fruit"—the service industry. He cited the example of Jollibee, a Filipino fast-food franchise that became a global brand, arguing that Bangladesh should leverage its strong service-based businesses, such as accounting firms, IT outsourcing, and software companies, to expand into Africa. Encouraging small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to enter African markets would not only enhance trade but also help Bangladeshi businesses become global players. In conclusion, Mr Mahmud urged stakeholders to adopt a strategic and structured investment approach, emphasising long-term sustainability, ethical business practices, and a focus on service sector expansion to strengthen Bangladesh's footprint in Africa.



### Mr Nahian Reza Sabriet

Graduate Student, Syracuse University, United States (US)

Joining the session online, **Mr Nahian Reza Sabriet** briefly summarise his chapter. At the beginning, he expressed his heartfelt gratitude to BIISS, the Director General, and everyone involved with the book, including his co-author and other editors. He explained that, in the chapter, they attempted to analyse the current trajectories of the digital market using a mixed-method approach to determine the starting points for the next steps. He mentioned that the chapter covered various drivers, opportunities, and challenges, which he chose not to repeat. Instead, he focused on two key aspects highlighted in the chapter: youth and the public. He pointed out that the digital market currently emphasised youth-centric and people-centric policymaking.

Mr Sabriet noted that conventional wisdom often led people to associate artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, and the Internet of Things (IoT) with technologies like satellites or quantum computing. However, he argued that Bangladesh-African relations could offer an alternative perspective by integrating artificial intelligence with agriculture. He suggested that this integration could also involve youth, bringing them into the framework.

Mr Sabriet provided examples such as precision agriculture and virtual agronomy, which combined agricultural and virtual collaborations, already occurring in many regions. He also appreciated some innovative ideas they had encountered, such as combining on-the-acre and enterprise-focused approaches to agriculture, which could guide the next steps. He emphasised that if young people were included in this process and encouraged to integrate AI into

agriculture, it could significantly impact the sector's future. Furthermore, Mr Sabriet highlighted that Africa had 65 to 70% of its labour force in agriculture, underscoring the sector's importance for both Africa and Bangladesh. He suggested that this was a key area to build upon. To support this, the chapter also introduced the idea of digital public infrastructure and institutions for digital infrastructure, alongside the mobilisation of youth through mobile internet penetration and other digital tools.

Towards the end of his speech, Mr Sabriet stressed the asymmetrical nature of the research, as it involved a comparison between a single country and an entire continent. He noted that each section of the research could provide valuable insights into future studies. He concluded by emphasising the need for continued research, particularly more quantitative studies, as one of the discussions had also suggested. He advocated for further exploration of predictive probabilities and other interconnected issues that could inform future actions and policies.



### **Md Rafid Abrar Miah**

Research Officer

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

As a co-author, **Mr Rafid Abrar Miah** stated that he was speaking on behalf of Professor Kazi Maruful Islam. He explained that, unlike other chapters, their chapter presented a method that Bangladesh had followed over the past few years to localise its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He highlighted that the SDGs comprised 169 targets within 17 goals and that the African continent, consisting of 54 countries, had varying priorities, necessities, and vulnerabilities. He pointed out that not all SDG targets were equally significant for every country or even within different regions of a single country.

With this philosophical perspective in mind, they had employed a participatory rural appraisal method across 64 districts of Bangladesh to develop an SDG localisation model, starting in 2021. He mentioned that it took them three years to complete the study. Through the chapter, they had made a dedicated effort to offer this model to Sub-Saharan African countries, providing a detailed step-by-step guideline on selecting and defining priorities. He emphasised the importance of a bottom-up approach, which involved engaging local people across different genders and demographic backgrounds.

Mr Miah further explained that the chapter aimed to contextualise the necessity of a structured, step-by-step model that could be implemented in various African countries while allowing for necessary adaptations based on specific contexts. He expressed hope that this would be a valuable contribution from Bangladesh to Sub-Saharan African nations and conveyed their willingness to offer assistance and share their knowledge in this regard.



### Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker

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

**Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker** began his remarks by providing the background of the chapter he contributed for this book. He recalled that during the 1990s, while serving in a diplomatic mission in Paris, he started contemplating food security and the ongoing crisis in this area. These thoughts and intuitions led him to write his chapter on innovative cultivation, in which he presented three key theories. The first focused on expanding the existing land surface available for cultivation; the second on maximising the utilisation of sunlight; and the third on preserving underground water without affecting surface cultivation.

Ambassador Sarker explained that his interest in agriculture, particularly in its broader aspects, had evolved over time. His diplomatic studies and interactions with African colleagues made him realise how little was known about Africa, even among diplomats. He noted that this lack of awareness about Africa's possibilities and prospects prompted him to further study the continent and engage in discussions with African diplomats throughout his career. These experiences greatly enhanced his understanding of Africa, a region he described as still largely undiscovered.

Ambassador Sarker then went on to describe how his extensive work within the frameworks of the Commonwealth, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and later the D-8 group provided him with further insights into economic engagement opportunities with Africa. He developed certain thoughts and models of cooperation and realised that Bangladesh was already lagging while other countries, particularly former colonial powers, had long been engaged with

Africa. Over time, Africa's deep dependency on its colonial partners had shifted, allowing new actors to establish economic, diplomatic, military, and strategic ties with the resource-rich continent. Motivated by these realisations, he wrote a report and submitted it to the MoFAs' African Wing. He noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, several virtual discussions were held, involving business communities, private sector representatives, and civil service officials. However, despite these engagements, no significant practical steps were taken.

Upon joining BIISS, Ambassador Sarker shared that he learned about the "Look Africa" book initiative, which he considered a timely and appropriate step. He observed that there had been limited focus on broader agricultural strategies and practical approaches for economic engagement with African countries. This realisation led him to contribute his chapter, which proposed practical and simple ways to initiate and strengthen Bangladesh's collaboration with Africa. He emphasised that working together with African partners in these areas could pave the way for further cooperation in other fields.

Ambassador Sarker mentioned that he had already submitted a strategic paper to the MoFA, outlining practical steps for advancing this engagement. He planned to hold further discussions with the Ministry's current administration. Additionally, he acknowledged suggestions to develop a second or even third volume of the initiative to expand and continue conversations with African partners. He stressed the urgency of the matter, stating that Bangladesh was already late in engaging with Africa and that efforts should involve not only civil servants and the private sector but also professionals from digital and other relevant fields.



### Dr Sufia Khanom

Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

**Dr Sufia Khanom** stated that in her chapter, she aimed to explore the shared climate vulnerabilities of Africa and Bangladesh, along with the collaborative opportunities to enhance climate resilience and advocate for equitable global policies. She highlighted that both African countries and Bangladesh faced significant climate-related challenges, including rising temperatures, sea level rise, and erratic weather patterns. These issues affected various sectors such as agriculture, health, infrastructure, and public health. She pointed out that limited resources and infrastructure, combined with low adaptive capacity, exacerbated the challenges of responding to climate change. However, she emphasised that these vulnerabilities also created opportunities for collaboration, particularly in utilising available resources to achieve the SDGs.

Dr Khanom explained that her chapter examined the common climate challenges and negotiation stances of African countries and Bangladesh, highlighting their alignment in international platforms such as the Group of 77 and the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group during Conference of the parties (COP) negotiations. She underscored the potential for mutual learning, particularly from Bangladesh's expertise in disaster preparedness, river management, and climate-resilient agriculture. Additionally, she identified key barriers to effective climate action, including corruption, governance deficits, and inconsistent policy analysis, particularly in relation to climate finance. She shared her thought that Africa's evolving diplomatic engagement and Bangladesh's innovative adaptation strategies provided opportunities for collective climate action and South-South cooperation. She concluded by emphasising some initiatives like fostering solidarity and knowledge exchange between both regions that she believes could strengthen their capacities to address climate-related risks and advocate for fair global climate policies.



### Brigadier General Md Shamim Kamal (Retd)

**Brigadier General Md Shamim Kamal (Retd)** stated that he was actively implementing a project on the ground and considered it a privilege to discuss the challenges and potential engagement in Africa. He mentioned that he had worked in South Sudan on a project aimed at fostering bilateral interests between Bangladesh and South Sudan. In his article, which was part of his PhD research, he explored ways to connect the two countries through the lens of military diplomacy.

Brigadier General Kamal expressed his concern that, while grand words were often used in discussions, little was implemented on the ground. Drawing from his personal experience in South Sudan, he shared that he had initiated his business engagement there, with the core philosophy of establishing a “little Bangladesh” on African soil. He had specifically chosen East Africa as the region to launch his enterprise in 2023. Over the past two years, he had successfully introduced and branded Bangladeshi products in South Sudan.

Brigadier General Kamal also noted that South Sudan remained a largely untapped market, referring to it as a “virgin country.” He emphasised that traditional government-to-government (G-to-G) diplomacy was challenging to implement in South Sudan, since past efforts had faced significant obstacles. He mentioned that during the previous government regime, two MOUs were nearly signed, particularly in large-scale agriculture and visa facilitation, but they were ultimately shelved.

Brigadier General Kamal shared his commitment to the region, explaining that after his retirement, he had expanded his work to Uganda and Kenya. He highlighted a key concern

among potential investors: security and return on investment (ROI). He argued that if everyone prioritised these concerns, progress would be difficult, and he stressed that no other country had yet made a significant breakthrough in South Sudan.

Brigadier General Kamal revealed that Bangladeshi businessmen controlled 90% of South Sudan's internet business, despite receiving little diplomatic support from the Bangladeshi mission in Ethiopia. He recounted a recent meeting with South Sudan's defense minister, who had repeatedly requested his involvement in the agriculture sector. Although he had secured several square kilometers (sq.m.) of land with legal documentation, he had not yet been able to start agricultural projects. However, he had successfully imported Bangladeshi products such as electronics, RMGs, and medicine, facing virtually no competition in these sectors.

Brigadier General Kamal emphasised the need for courage and initiative, particularly in entrepreneurship, citing Ryan Holiday's perspective that entrepreneurship is about doing something new rather than simply copying existing ideas. He urged Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and investors to explore opportunities in South Sudan, arguing that the country offered a far more accessible and profitable investment environment compared to other African nations.



### **Dr Md Touhidul Islam**

Associate Professor, Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka

**Dr Touhidul Islam** explained that his chapter focused mainly on Bangladesh's engagement in peacekeeping missions across African countries. He highlighted that Africa is a continent rich in culture, language, ethnicity, and natural resources, yet, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, the majority of ongoing conflicts are currently concentrated in Africa. However, he emphasised that this does not mean the entire continent is in conflict, as disputes and tensions exist in every part of the world.

Dr Islam pointed out the crucial role of international peacekeepers, particularly those deployed under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). He informed that Bangladesh has been a key contributor to UN peacekeeping efforts and has often been relied upon in various missions. Referring to data up to 2022, he mentioned that Bangladesh had completed 55 peacekeeping missions, including military, police, and observer missions, with 28 of these missions taking place in Africa.

His discussion in the chapter primarily revolved around the challenges faced by Bangladeshi peacekeepers in African contexts and the areas that require further attention. He stressed that one of the most pressing issues is the presence of unpredictable threats in contemporary African conflicts. He pointed out that non-state actors in these regions often wield significant power, making large-scale engagements particularly challenging. He also acknowledged the sacrifices made by Bangladeshi peacekeepers, with over 175 personnel having lost their lives in UN missions and more than 250 sustaining severe injuries.

However, Dr Islam argued that these challenges should not be attributed to the shortcomings of the peacekeepers themselves but rather to a lack of contextual understanding. He emphasised that traditional peacekeeping approaches are often insufficient in these complex environments. To address these issues, he proposed two key policy recommendations. Firstly, peacekeepers should be provided with a more thorough pre-deployment briefing, ensuring they have a deeper understanding of the political and cultural landscapes of their assigned locations. He viewed that short-term training of two to six months is not adequate in preparing peacekeepers for the realities on the ground.

Secondly, Dr Islam stressed the importance of cultural engagement, as winning the hearts and minds of local populations is crucial in peacekeeping operations. He highlighted that peacekeepers should actively work to integrate into local communities and establish meaningful relationships. He concluded by reiterating that fostering social connections and partnerships with local actors would significantly enhance the effectiveness of Bangladesh's peacekeeping missions.



### Dr Delwar Hossain

Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

**Professor Dr Delwar Hossain** expressed his gratitude to the honourable Chief Guest, the Chair of the session, distinguished guests, and participants before addressing the key points of his chapter. He stated that the chapter he had written was more than just a conclusion, as he aimed to emphasise a crucial point, which was highlighted on page 224 of the book. He noted that this point had also been stressed by several other speakers that there is an urgent need to change the mindset regarding Africa.

Dr Hossain argued that Bangladesh has already lost valuable opportunities to establish strong relations with Africa, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s, and as a result, the country is significantly behind. He reflected on his visits to two African countries, where he observed how other nations—including not just global powers like China, the US, and European countries, but also regional players like Pakistan—had already established a strong presence in Africa long before Bangladesh. While acknowledging Bangladesh's ongoing efforts, he emphasised that the country is late in taking action and must act swiftly to strengthen its relations with Africa.

Professor Hossain congratulated BIISS on publishing the book, describing it as an important academic contribution that compiles diverse issues in a single volume, which will be immensely beneficial for students. He commended the effort, considering it a commendable initiative and expressing his honour in being part of it. He further emphasised Africa's economic transformation, pointing out that out of the 20 fastest-growing economies in the world, 11 are in

Africa. He described this as a major achievement, underscoring the historical and geopolitical ties between Bangladesh and Africa. However, he stressed that beyond geopolitics, Africa's rapid economic growth presents a compelling reason for Bangladesh to prioritise stronger engagement with the continent.

In this regard, Dr Hossain outlined four key points. First, he called for a strong policy focus on Bangladesh-Africa relations, stressing that the government, particularly the MoFA, must take concrete steps to launch new initiatives to enhance these relations. Second, he highlighted the lack of academic interest of Africa, citing the example of the African Studies course offered at Dhaka University, which struggles to attract students. He stressed the need to generate interest among young people and students on Africa. Third, he stressed the importance of research and publications, sharing his experience of 30 years in academia. He pointed out that there is a significant gap in the literature on African Studies as well as Bangladesh's relations with various regions, including the Middle East, Latin America, and Central Asia. He urged BIISS to take the lead in a project to produce at least 10 country-specific books on Africa, covering nations such as Nigeria and Rwanda. He suggested that this initiative could involve university scholars and researchers in Bangladesh, many of whom have the expertise to contribute meaningfully.

Finally, Professor Hossain acknowledged the importance of G-to-G relations but argued that such relationships have limitations. He emphasised the need for people-to-people connections and urged Bangladesh to cultivate strong linkages with African civil society, which he described as robust and rapidly evolving. He cautioned against viewing Africa through the lens of the 1970s and 1980s, asserting that the continent has transformed, just as Bangladesh itself has evolved into a new Bangladesh. He called for a mutual process of learning between the two regions, emphasising that changing the narratives in literature and discourse would also help reshape perceptions of Bangladesh in Africa. Finally, he concluded by reiterating the importance of BIISS's role in taking this initiative forward and expressed hope that the book launch seminar would stimulate further discussions on the future of the Bangladesh-Africa relationship.

## Remarks by the Guests



### Major MS Mashi

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC)

**Major MS Mashi** reflected on the comprehensive overview of the book and shared his comments, particularly in relation to the insights provided by Dr Munshi Solaiman and Dr Marufa Akhter. He acknowledged their discussions on peacekeeping operations and culture, emphasising that Africa's most pressing need for ensuring global ties is security. He further highlighted the intrinsic connection between security and cultural preservation, stating that in order for Africa to safeguard its rich cultural heritage, security must be ensured. He recognised Bangladesh's significant role in peacekeeping operations, echoing with others that the country has been at the forefront of such missions.

However, Major Mashi raised an important question regarding future discussions on Bangladesh's defense contributions beyond peacekeeping. He inquired whether a second volume of the Look Africa book would be considered, specifically one that explores Bangladesh's role in defense collaboration beyond peacekeeping operations. He expressed interest in seeing Bangladesh engage in a way that demonstrates its commitment to preserving Africa's culture. He suggested that if African nations perceive Bangladesh as a country invested in the protection and promotion of their cultural heritage, it could lead to deeper partnerships, including economic investments and resource-sharing. Major Mashi concluded by reiterating that this would be an intriguing area to explore in a potential second volume of the book and expressed hope that Bangladesh would pursue such discussions in the future.



**Mr Salahud Din Ahmed**  
Former Member of Energy Regulatory Commission

**Mr Salahud Din Ahmed** noted that he had been engaged in academia to some extent, though he regarded his contributions as modest. He stated that he had been attentively listening to the discussions, particularly when Ambassador Kabir, remarked that every effort had been undertaken with heartfelt dedication. He believed that a similar level of commitment had been evident in the contributions to the book on Bangladesh-Africa relations, as those involved had put great thought and effort into their work.

Mr Ahmed observed that many contributors seemed to anticipate further editions of the book and suggested that, if possible, a WhatsApp group could be created for the contributors, academics, professionals, and business leaders present at the discussion. According to him, such a platform would allow participants to continue exchanging ideas, which could then be incorporated into future editions of the book. He also recalled that Professor Akhter and Professor Sulaiman had discussed significant themes such as culture and women's empowerment. Given this, he humbly proposed that readers to be allowed to share their reflections and comments in the suggested forum, which could serve as a growing body of knowledge.

## Speech By the Chief Guest



**Md Touhid Hossain**

Honourable Advisor

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

At the outset, **Md Touhid Hossain**, Honourable Foreign Adviser, stated that the event was not only a celebration of a remarkable publication but also a reflection of the growing need to engage with Africa. He emphasised that it embodied the commitment to forging a dynamic and mutually beneficial partnership, one that was rooted in their shared history and collective aspirations for a prosperous future. Following that, the honourable Foreign Adviser paid his heartfelt tribute to the heroes and martyrs who had shaped the nation. He remembered with deep reverence the courageous martyrs of the language movement and the selfless sacrifices of those who lost their lives during the liberation war. Their legacy formed the bedrock upon which the nation's aspirations for peace, progress, and international solidarity were built. He also honoured the brave souls of the student uprising in July and August 2024, whose call for a new Bangladesh defined by freedom, equality, justice, and dignity would continue to inspire both at home and on the international stage.

The Honourable Foreign Adviser then shared his long experience in Africa and mentioned that Bangladesh had engaged with Africa for quite some time, not recently. He acknowledged that there were limitations in the country's abilities and resources. For many African countries, foreign engagements often focused on the mining sector, which Bangladesh was not involved in.

This made the mining sector a significant area that was excluded from Bangladesh's involvement. However, he pointed out that even during the apartheid era in South Africa, when the country's passports prohibited travel there, Bangladeshi professionals had gone to South Africa and worked in this region. When apartheid ended, there were already professionals who had been working in South Africa for 15 years.

The Honourable Foreign Adviser stated that the engagement with Africa went back further than most people typically thought. He recalled other instances of engagement, mentioning that he had been to South Africa and travelled extensively within the country. He noted that in every remote location, which they referred to as areas similar to slums, there were Bangladeshis providing general goods and day-to-day necessities. Additionally, in the north and east of Mozambique, he had travelled along several tracks. He explained that many Bangladeshis went into remote villages to purchase agricultural products using small trucks, bringing them to the towns and selling them to warehouses or silos. He emphasised that it was not true that Bangladeshis had not been present in Africa. However, he reiterated that one major area of exclusion for Bangladesh was the mining sector, which other countries with significant engagements in mining had access to.



The Chief Guest explained that Bangladesh could not engage in some sectors, such as software, in the same detailed way as in others. He mentioned that, in some cases, he had found individuals going into the north of Zambia to engage in fish culture in the lakes, where they placed nets in the waters, introduced fish fries, and then sold them. This area, located hundreds of kilometers from the capital, had small individual markets that many large producers were not interested in. He emphasised that these areas needed to be explored further. He noted that traditionally, sectors like agriculture could be a way for Bangladesh to engage, and the options are still open. He expressed surprise upon learning that in South Sudan, a major producer of software was a Bangladeshi firm, showing that Bangladesh had already entered areas where it

had expertise. He pointed out that software was an area where Bangladesh could expand, though it may not be one of the major producers or providers.

Honourable Foreign Adviser highlighted the many youngsters in the field who were actively contributing to the industry. He explained that nets used in fish culture in Zambia were made in Bangladesh, transported there, and then used in the lakes. In this regard, he stated that, despite the country's limited capacities, Bangladesh had been engaged with Africa. However, big businesses have not entered these markets due to the small size of individual markets. He also highlighted that in many countries, there was significant scope for more exports of Bangladesh's primary products, such as RMG, which could provide more opportunities. Then, he highlighted that transformation is happening both in Bangladesh and Africa, and this shift is important. The need to recognise this transformation and engage in areas where it can benefit both parties is essential. He also spoke about the concept of *Ubuntu*, a South African cultural philosophy that emphasises the idea, "I am because we are" As an individual, one is nothing, but as a group, they are much bigger and stronger. This spirit of unity is central to *Ubuntu*.



The Chief Guest highlighted that despite Africa's vast diversity, there is a remarkable sense of unity. Even countries that may be in conflict come together to vote during elections. The importance of international support in elections was also mentioned, since no election can be won without support in the global system. Africa, with its 55 or 56 member states, demonstrates how unity can be achieved despite differences, a lesson that Bangladesh can learn from. While Bangladesh is not as diverse as Africa, it is far more disunited, and this is an aspect that needs attention. He further expressed that Africa is entering a final horizon of opportunity, not for exploitation, but for cooperation. Cooperation with Africa can be extended in various areas where Bangladesh has expertise. There are opportunities for interaction in fields such as cotton production, where a gentleman running a cotton ginning plant near Port Sudan continues to

thrive even amid civil conflict. His cotton is imported by other countries, including Bangladesh, which is a major cotton importer. Though there are challenges like communication and transportation, these obstacles can be overcome. He stated that these are the areas where meaningful progress and cooperation can be made.

Regarding the publication, the Honourable Foreign Adviser expressed his belief that it would help dispel many of the myths and misunderstandings about Africa. He pointed out that Westerns had often referred to Africa as the “dark continent,” claiming they had come to bring light to it. However, in doing so, they exploited the continent and destroyed many societies. He also mentioned that he had written a book on Africa, which was expected to be published in the next two to three days at the book fair. However, he clarified that the book was not based on research work but rather on his personal experiences and observations on this continent.

The Honourable Foreign Adviser also mentioned that during his travels, he began to develop a deeper understanding. He explained that he tried to depict the people of Africa, comparing them to the people of Bangladesh, suggesting that it was an easy connection to make. He emphasised that his perspective was not based on research but rather on personal observations.

In his experience, the people of Africa were much more enlightened than outsiders often believed. Some individuals in Africa were exceptionally skilled writers, producing work of such high quality that it surpassed even the best articles seen in local newspapers. The ideas and thoughts expressed by these individuals were brilliant. In conclusion, the Honourable Foreign Adviser stressed the importance of tapping into each other's knowledge, learning from Africa, and offering Bangladesh's expertise in return. He concluded by stating that indeed, the future of Bangladesh-Africa relations holds great potential.

## Concluding Remarks by the Session Chair



### Ambassador M Humayun Kabir President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)

**Ambassador M Humayun Kabir** explained that he had been tasked with summarising the key takeaways from the session but felt that the depth and breadth of the discussions made it difficult to do so comprehensively. Instead, he opted to highlight a few significant points. He noted that the Honourable Foreign Advisor and several distinguished speakers had emphasised the role of the younger generation in Bangladesh and Africa, stating that they were actively shaping their own future. According to him, it had been recognised that their efforts would redefine relations and open new opportunities for collaboration, which was seen as a promising development.

Ambassador Kabir further acknowledged BIISS for undertaking what he described as an excellent initiative. He mentioned that some speakers had suggested the book could serve as a textbook, providing valuable insights into Bangladesh-Africa relations. He pointed out that accessing books from Bangladesh while living abroad had often been difficult, making this publication particularly significant. He stated that the book had been recognised as a meaningful contribution to global knowledge, demonstrating that Bangladesh was capable of engaging beyond its immediate interests and making intellectual contributions to the broader discourse.

Ambassador Kabir also stressed the importance of engaging future generations, recalling that Professor Delwar Hossain had highlighted this aspect. He stated that efforts should be made to

encourage young people to examine Africa from a more informed perspective. Furthermore, as he noted, it was suggested that Bangladesh's education system could be adapted to attract African students, similar to how India and China had become major destinations for African learners. He remarked that such initiatives would enhance people-to-people connections and strengthen bilateral ties.

Ambassador Kabir reiterated that while G-to-G relations were essential in providing a framework for cooperation, the role of non-state actors should not be underestimated. He observed that the private sector had been a key driver of Bangladesh's economy and suggested that, if it had been successful domestically, similar contributions could be made abroad, particularly in Africa. He also mentioned that opportunities could be created for African entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, fostering business and economic collaboration.

Ambassador Kabir highlighted the importance of a shift in mindset, stating that Bangladesh's growing interest in Africa was an encouraging sign. He expressed his appreciation for BIISS and its contributors for fostering this engagement. Additionally, he acknowledged the efforts of the Chairman, the Director General, and all those involved in the initiative, describing their contributions as both intellectually enriching and practically valuable for future generations.

Ambassador Kabir expressed his sincere gratitude to the Honourable Foreign Advisor for his time and patience. He appreciated his support and expressed hope that some of the key points raised during the discussion would be considered at the policy level, contributing to the strengthening of Bangladesh-Africa relations. He also extended his thanks to the Chairman and the Director General of BIISS for allowing him to be part of what he described as an insightful and forward-looking discussion. He expressed his gratitude to all contributors, commentators, and attendees for their participation, engagement, and valuable insights. In concluding his remarks, Ambassador Kabir acknowledged that while more time for discussion would have been welcome, every meaningful exchange must eventually come to an end. He once again expressed his appreciation and extended his gratitude to all those present.

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