

Seminar Proceedings
BISS Auditorium, Dhaka
03 July, 2019



BANGLADESH-INDIA

**COOPERATION IN THE CHANGING
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT**



Bangladesh Institute of
International and
Strategic Studies (BISS)



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Published by

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
1/46, Old Elephant Road (West of Ramna Police Station),
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

Phone: (+88) (02) 9353808, 9336287, 8315808

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Website: www.biiss.org

Printed by

GraphNet Limited

95 Naya Paltan, Khan Tower

1st Floor, Dhaka-1000

Phone: 9354142, 9354133, 01715011303

E-mail: graphnet@gmail.com

Seminar on

Bangladesh – India Cooperation in the Changing Regional and Global Context

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organized a seminar on “Bangladesh–India Cooperation in the Changing Regional and Global Context” on 03 July 2019 at BISS auditorium. Professor Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister on International Affairs graced the seminar as the Chief Guest. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, former Chairman, Board of Governors of BISS chaired the Inaugural Session. Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS and Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy, Director General, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) delivered the Introductory Remarks.



The seminar was divided into two sessions and in these two sessions eight presentations were made on four different themes. The Inaugural Session was chaired by **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, former Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS. **Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy**, Director General, IDSA chaired Session-1 where Theme 1 covered “**Trade, Investment and Economic Cooperation**” and Theme 2 titled “**Bangladesh-India Maritime Cooperation**”. Session 2 was chaired by **Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**, Director General, BISS in which Theme 3 was on “**Enhancing Security Cooperation between Bangladesh and India**” and Theme 4 dealt with “**Managing Water Resources**”.

Inaugural Session

Professor Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister on International Affairs graced the Inaugural Session as the Chief Guest. The Introductory Remarks were delivered by Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS and Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy, Director General, IDSA. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, former Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS chaired the Inaugural Session.



Introductory Remarks



Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc

Director General, BISS

Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, commenced his speech by acknowledging the close working relationship that BISS and IDSA have developed over the years in terms of facilitating collaboration and exchange on different research related activities. He introduced the topic of the seminar and mentioned that although seminars on Bangladesh and India cooperation are held very occasionally, this particular event was different and special as the perspective of changing regional and global dynamics was attached to it. Following the introductory words, he began to elaborate his views on the topic of the seminar. He stated that since the turn of the 21st century, the world has been witnessing major shifts in the global political landscape. The nature of threats faced today gravely challenge peace and stability. In his speech, General Rahman intended to draw attention to the profound global changes that are happening around and touched upon their regional ramifications.

Major General Rahman pointed out that the eroding global leadership in providing collective goods was the most remarkable example of the changes in the current international order. He opined that the United States seems to revert to its isolationist policies. President Donald Trump's "America First" policy, his unmistakable assertion to crack down on "abuse of free trade" and his withdrawal from "the Paris Agreement" on climate change could seriously undermine America's ability to lead the world that it had been leading since long. There are concerns that these policies might weaken the existing security architecture in Europe and elsewhere. Another grave concern for global peace would be the United States budget cuts for United Nations peacekeeping missions across the world. General Rahman added that the United Kingdom's vote in favour of the Brexit also increased people's doubt on the long-term feasibility of similar regional integration mechanisms elsewhere in the world. According to him, all of these have raised serious questions regarding the viability of the existing international order and the role of a leader of the so-called 'free world'.

General Rahman highlighted on the global economy and its guiding principles. He noted that the global economy has been troubled by powerful crosswinds during the last global financial crisis. Disruptive turmoil in the financial market was slowing down the growth of industrially advanced economies. It had far-reaching implications for emerging nations like India, Bangladesh and many more. Its ramifications on new

emerging market economies in developing countries were very profound. Nevertheless, he observed that the divergence in performance between industrially advanced and emerging economies is pointed to an ongoing shift towards a multipolar world, with a reduced reliance on the US as the engine of global economy. This issue raised questions regarding the looming threat of a trade war between Washington and Beijing which might undermine the recovery of the global economy by significantly harming investment and also negatively affecting sales and jobs. On this note, General Rahman acknowledged that world economy is intricately linked with geopolitics. As the world continues to shift from a unipolar to a more or less multi-polar reality, the international system is exposed to profound instability. Regionally, both the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean regions are becoming increasingly troubled with waters due to great power rivalry. A complex web of alliance system is emerging out of this region. In this regard, he mentioned about geopolitical initiatives like the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP), QUAD, quality infrastructure programme of Japan and the Belt and Road Initiative. Few facts were presented to substantiate the argument on geopolitics. The sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the China Seas linking Europe, the Middle East and Africa with Asia are among the busiest in the world. Almost 90,000 vessels of the world's commercial fleet transport 9.84 billion tonnes of goods per year through this region. Hence, the security of this region is imperative for smooth operation of 50 per cent of the global annual trade.

General Rahman stated that under the presidency of Xi Jinping, China is continuing to build a strong strategic presence both in form of building key ports as part of its Maritime Silk Road model and a stronger naval force. While the US is gradually becoming isolationist with its 'America First' policy, China is becoming more outward-looking with its Belt and Road Initiative. He opined that such actions will bring about major changes in the region, particularly in South Asia. He added that in the global balance of power, opportunity for prosperity and security matter more than anything else. In this regard, he used the example of China. He stated that if China offers more opportunities for prosperity and security, countries would be attracted. This was visible in the region as some countries had already jumped into the boat. Therefore, he believed that an analysis of the balance of soft power between China and the US was required to understand the future trajectories of their economic and security potentials and their ability to provide public goods. However, he agreed that while connectivity remained a crucial prerequisite for economic development, a rule-based platform for such initiative is essential to ensure its feasibility.

General Rahman discussed about non-traditional security and stated that the nature of non-traditional security threats was rapidly changing. He used the example of the changing pattern of terrorism. He noted that in recent past, terrorists had been able to capture lands, form foreign fighter mercenaries and presented a truly global threat. He reaffirmed that terrorism and violent extremism in the name of any religion is deeply harmful for peace and prosperity. He opined that the threats posed by terrorism are no less grave than those posed by traditional security threats. The recent rise of right-wing terrorism inspired by far-right populism and its impact on political establishments in some countries are also highlighted in his discussion. General Rahman warned that unchecked rise of populism, coupled with a decaying appeal for liberal values would greatly undermine peace and stability all over the world.

Mass displacement caused by terrorism and unprecedented exodus of refugees are also identified as key non-traditional security concerns. General Rahman referred to the UNHCR report which estimated that roughly 65.5 million people are currently displaced worldwide, primarily as a result of violent conflicts. He observed that displaced population are more mobile than ever before, due to new transportation methods and communication technologies. This problem reached the shores of Bangladesh as well. The persecution of the Rohingya caused a colossal humanitarian crisis for Bangladesh. The most recent influx occurred following



violence in the Rakhine state of Myanmar from 25 August 2017 onwards. Bangladesh garnered all its efforts to engage the international community to stand beside to resolve the problem. Bangladesh sheltered more than 1.1 million Rohingyas. The entire international community acclaimed Bangladesh's humanitarian efforts in this regard. However, General Rahman shared his disappointment as the support from the trusted and most dependable friends, partners and neighbours of Bangladesh were not up to the expectation.

General Rahman then highlighted on the issue of climate change. He opined that the catastrophe caused by climate change is undoubtedly the biggest danger to human existence. He stated that the global population is currently around 7.3 billion which is growing gradually. Climate change will create more competition among a growing global population over scarce food, water and land. It will also trigger new security competition. Due to sea level rise, many nations, including Bangladesh, will lose much of their landmass, while some might completely disappear in the future. He further added that no security issue of the present time is graver than those posed by climate change. He noted that politics is intricately linked with climate change; so is food security. Therefore, time should not be squandered in resolving outstanding water sharing issues between the two friendly neighbours. Because the more time is spent on this, the more adversely it will affect the population of both countries.

General Rahman focused exclusively on Bangladesh-India relations in the final part of his deliberation. He stated that both the countries stand to gain substantially from the rapid economic growth that is already happening in the geographical vicinity. The ability to exploit different regional and sub-regional initiatives would be crucial for both countries. For this reason, Bangladesh-India relations are unique and significant. Apart from the geographical imperative that comes with being neighbours, long and historical ties, cultural

affinities, shared values and vision have necessitated that the countries have a cooperative partnership to achieve mutual national progress and prosperity. At this point, he highlighted the extraordinary assistance India provided during the War of Liberation in 1971. He expressed his sincerest thanks and gratitude to the people of India. He pointed that since then the bilateral relations of India and Bangladesh have widened and deepened to span over all aspects of bilateral relationships.

General Rahman recognized India as a major trading partner of Bangladesh. It is the second largest source of imports. However, Bangladesh-India bilateral trade is heavily tilted in favour of India. This trade deficit had narrowed to some extent in the last fiscal year, but experts observed that this trend will not sustain because of potential import growth in the months to come. This remains as a major concern in the bilateral relations. However, India has undertaken initiatives to reduce the trade gap by providing duty-free access to Bangladeshi products. Nevertheless, non-tariff barriers are also issues of concern for Bangladesh's exports to India. He stated that Bangladesh-India relations have come a long way in developing a mature relationship based on mutual necessities and complementarities. The landmark visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi ushered a new era in bilateral relations to forge closer ties of goodwill. Successive initiatives and achievements since then have driven the relationship into new heights. Cooperation has increased in the areas of energy in terms of electricity import from India, which can be a stepping stone for the regional electricity grid in South Asia. The Ganges Water Sharing Agreement was signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's first term in 1996. After assuming power in 2009, she took the initiative to break the deadlock on the Teesta water-sharing issue during the lean period. The two countries also worked out a solution for an interim water-sharing agreement in 2011, but this could not be concluded due to last-minute objections raised by the West Bengal government. Prime Minister Modi has assured the Prime Minister of Bangladesh that the agreement will be finalized. General Rahman mentioned that Bangladesh is eagerly looking forward to an early conclusion of the agreement, as it will open up newer opportunities for cooperation. He added that under these changing regional and global dynamics, Bangladesh needs to engage in dialogue with its trusted friend India to chart out the future direction of their relationship. He believed that it has become imperative that the bilateral relations are revisited and new avenues are found for deepening cooperation between Bangladesh and India. He opined that both countries equally feel the urgency to resolve all the outstanding bilateral issues while striving for advancing the cooperation to strengthen bilateral relations. General Rahman stated that Bangladesh and India need to explore every opportunity to work together to guarantee all potential enhancement of their bilateral relations for the sake of mutual prosperity. In this regard, it will be useful to bear in mind that both Bangladesh and India are among the worlds' top 10 countries by the size of population. Both countries have a lot to contribute to the future of this region. General Rahman shared his firm belief that if the two countries can change their respective maps by exchanging of enclaves in one of the most peaceful manner, then there are ample reasons to believe that all the outstanding issues between Bangladesh and India can also be resolved in a similar peaceful way. With this high note, he expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the distinguished guests and hoped that the seminar will be fruitful and enlightening and the participation of guests in the discussion sessions will be productive and enjoyable.

Introductory Remarks



Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy

Director General, IDSA

Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy began his speech by praising Bangladesh for the spectacular achievements in recent years and wished for the country's even greater success in the future. He stated that as neighbours, India and Bangladesh are not only bound by the threads of geography but also history, religion, culture, kinship and above all cricket. Both countries draw inspiration from the sacrifice made by the martyrs. Cultural icons like Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam are also revered poets in both countries. He believes India and Bangladesh have shared values and interconnected destinies. According to him, the Land Boundary Agreement was an historical moment which witnessed the demarcation of the border and exchange of enclaves without any rancor. According to Ambassador Chinoy, the settlement and demarcation of the maritime boundary of India and Bangladesh and intelligence sharing in recent years have further enhanced the understanding and confidence of the two countries. For that very reason, India and Bangladesh are considered to be great and trusted friends by each other.

Ambassador Chinoy stated that the IDSA-BIISS dialogue has evolved over the years into a very well-established platform for the discussion of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations. He recognized the effort of each member of both the organizations for making this possible. He believed that this dialogue would contribute to the great strides that India and Bangladesh have taken together under the dynamic leadership of the two leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to redefine and transform the ties forever. Ambassador Chinoy was positive that the renewal of their mandates at the political level spoke volumes for their popularity and their continued stewardship of the bilateral ties will undoubtedly be mutually beneficial to both countries. He stated that Bangladesh is the most important neighbour of India and ties with Dhaka are key pillars of India's security. Ambassador Chinoy mentioned that Bangladesh is a key player in the fulfilment of India's Act East policy as parts of India are "Bangladesh Locked" and Bangladesh acts as a bridge to North East India and the broader South East Asian region.

The Director General of IDSA believed that the India-Bangladesh ties have evolved into a role model for other bilateral relations, not only in South Asia but also in Asia. He stated that the theme of this year's dialogue is timely and of great interest to India, particularly at a time when the global scenario remains that

of rapid flux, one in which change and uncertainties are the only constants. Key drivers of globalization such as the liberal trading order and the flow of goods, services, capital and technology are being reassessed at every level. Protectionism has reared its head on trade issues and easy developmental finance often came with conditionality. Anti-migrant sentiments thwarted the free flow and circulation of talent which is essential to progress everywhere. Technology, the very key pillar of human progress, is abused and misused. The world seems to be on the brink of a sensational and intense battle on technological superiority in the age of artificial intelligence and quantum physics. Power everywhere seems to be fractured. State and non-state actors have acquired the means, capability and skill set to overcome asymmetry. Ambassador Chinoy observed that no single country is capable of enforcing its writ on all issues at all times. So, hedging in multi-alignments are the order of the day and they are the part of every country's toolkit at present.

Ambassador Chinoy noted that traditional and non-traditional security threats such as economic and military competition, climate change, cyber threats and energy, food security have grown in magnitude. The spectra of terrorism, especially cross border terrorism, remain real and continue to challenge peace and progress in the region. He further noted that global engines of economic growth of the past decades seem to have shifted to Asia, first to the Asia-pacific region, the part typically defined as East Asia and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and now more broadly to the Indo-pacific which includes South Asia. Ambassador Chinoy shared that the continent of Asia is home to 60 per cent of the global population and this vast population has been exposed to more than 6 per cent growth rate for an extended period. He opined that Asia is now the new fulcrum of geo-economic and geostrategic realignment whether in the form of Africa-EU Renewable Energy Cooperation Programme (RCEP) or the Belt and Road Initiative or the free and Open Indo-Pacific.

According to Ambassador Chinoy, high economic growth rate across the region are accompanied by some of the highest military expenditure of the world. He added that Asia is witnessing simultaneous rise of several powers and the challenge is to see how a new balance of power can be achieved and a new equilibrium can be forged in Asia. Here he wondered if the wisdom of Asian civilization can overcome the contradictions of trade and territorial disputes and geostrategic contestation that is possibly looming before the continent. But he had clear belief that the multipolarity in Asia will be a public good and will benefit all countries.

Ambassador Chinoy stated that for long, South Asia had been in the margins of economic miracle that characterized this continent. However, the region has now emerged as an area of great hope and potential and India is one of the fastest growing large economies. Bangladesh is also growing at an enviable 7 per cent per annum. But he lamented that South Asia remained one of the world's least connected regions and intra-regional trade in South Asia accounted for a little more than 5 per cent of the region's total trade. Whereas it accounted for 50 per cent of the total trade in East Asia and the Pacific and 22 per cent even in Sub-Saharan Africa. Undoubtedly, there is a need to improve the regional trade in South Asia by building greater trust and confidence as well as devising and putting appropriate policy framework in place. Ambassador Chinoy affirmed that the Asian century appears inevitable but it is unclear what kind of century it will be. So, he pondered whether it would be a century of peace and development as envisaged by everyone or would it evolve into long drawn contestation, conflict and possibly wars. These questions are relevant as the reigning hegemon the United States of America and the aspiring hegemon People's Republic of China have both questioned the very global system which permitted their respective rise.



Ambassador Chinoy noted that this situation is markedly different from the period of Cold War when there were certain kinds of equilibrium, stability and predictably. He added that it was also markedly different from the decade of unipolarity of the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He further added that the relations between the United States and China is rather complex and two rival powers have not been so interlinked by trade and mutual investment ties as they are at present. Never before all others have been so intertwined in a web of relations with the two countries and among themselves as in this present globalized world which made choices very difficult. Ambassador Chinoy stressed that despite all these challenges, it is required to strive and contribute to peace and progress. There are multiple opportunities for India and Bangladesh to work together on the basis of their respective mutual interest. He shared that Bangladesh's ongoing modernization blends in with India's rapid economic transformation. India has a government which seeks to ensure inclusive economic growth, not just in India but also for the region at large. He referred that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has time and again emphasized his wish to share prosperity with neighbours through his mantra "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas". India has designated Bangladesh as a key priority of its foreign and economic policy. India and Bangladesh trade have grown by 31.5 per cent in the last three years to US\$ 9.3 billion making Bangladesh India's largest trading partner in South Asia. Ambassador Chinoy noted that the coastal shipping agreement is one of the several innovative connectivity initiatives that are in various stages of implementation. He was positive that these would undoubtedly boost bilateral trade and strengthen people to people contacts.

He stated that India continues to be a reliable development partner for Bangladesh through multiple capacity building programmes and Bangladesh is the biggest development partner for India. India has extended three lines of credit totaling US\$ 8 billion to Bangladesh in the last eight years. He hoped that

Bangladesh will fully utilize the US\$ 500 million worth of LOC for defense purchase. He assured that the development partnership between the two countries will remain anchored in the principle of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit with demand being driven by Bangladesh's priorities. But Ambassador Chinoy was optimistic that more could be done together particularly in tandem with other countries like Japan for instance, which epitomizes the highest standard in technology and transparent project execution. He stated that Indian investment proposal in Bangladesh has exceeded US\$ 3 billion. He hoped that many more Indian companies will come to Bangladesh and see the opportunities that exist here. He also hoped that they will do even more in terms of their presence in the Indian economic zones that Bangladesh has kindly facilitated. This will incentivize their presence in Bangladesh. Ambassador Chinoy expected that the companies would make many more things in Bangladesh using its strength and export more to India which will in turn redress the trade imbalance that exists between the two countries.

Ambassador Chinoy was optimistic that there is potential for deepening India-Bangladesh engagement through digital programmes in areas such as maritime, energy, food, cyber security, humanitarian aid and disaster reliefs. He referred to the G20 summit in Argentina where India had given a clarion call to "build back better" disaster resilient infrastructure.

Ambassador Chinoy hoped to build an international cohesion of like-minded countries and he was sure that India and Bangladesh will find scope and space to work together in this sort of important field. He shared that India and Bangladesh could do more regarding counter terrorism, military training and also in the UN peace keeping operations. According to him, the shared maritime interest of both the countries remains anchored in developing blue economy. In this regard, India has proposed SAGAR which is "Security and Growth for All in the Region". He shared that India is keen to work with Bangladesh to ensure unimpeded commerce, freedom of navigation on the high seas, freedom of over flight on the high seas and to ensure that the key sea lanes of commerce and communication remains open and available to all. He believed that this is important for both countries, since the preponderance of trade is maritime conducted for both India and Bangladesh. He added that sub-regional cooperation and improved connectivity are also going to be catalyst for broader and deeper engagement. Ambassador Chinoy hoped that the discussion of the seminar will dwell on this entire gamut of issues and he was confident that the perspectives brought to the seminar by the participants would help unlock the true and full potential of Bangladesh-India relations. He hoped that the friendly ties will remain forever with such efforts. He ended his speech by calling upon all the think tanks in India and Bangladesh to do more and to talk to each other as frequently as they can.

Address by the Chief Guest



Professor Dr. Gowher Rizvi

Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister on International Affairs

Professor Dr. Gowher Rizvi in his speech said that although a number of seminars have been organized on the topic of 'Changing global and regional dynamics', it adds special value to be talking on the topic of current times, as it did in the 1990's, when the world order changed. The only difference is that then the world changed from a bipolar to a unipolar one. At present, from an optimistic point of view, it is changing from unipolar to a multipolar one and power is being dispersed throughout the globe. So, he hoped that the world will be a better place, only if it can go through the turbulent times but he affirmed that this period of turmoil is a very big one. The United States, which has traditionally been a source of global stability, has now become a source of instability. The respect for international law, internal and bilateral agreements has been thrown to the ruins by the US and no one knows when and where this will stop. Even the trans-Atlantic partnership between the US and Europe is now looking much more fragile than before. He said that if one looks at these factors, there is a sense of trepidation of difficulties ahead, but if one looks at it optimistically, there are always good days ahead of trouble and he personally believes that the world is going towards better days.

Dr. Rizvi said that the introductory remarks by the two Director Generals had been excellent and it would be very difficult to elaborate after their speeches. Thus, he focused on the regional than the global dynamics. He said that the Bangladesh-India relation is the most important for Bangladesh. The future and present of the two countries are linked with each other and one country cannot prosper without the help of another. There are a host of reasons why that is the case. Time and again Bangladesh remembers that in its Liberation War, India has sacrificed nearly two thousand lives. It can be observed carefully that there is no alternative due to the relationship and proximity. At the same time, he hoped that no one would contemplate



the idea that the two countries beget each other because if one looks into the past, it can be seen that the two countries has had issues and irritants in the past, but there has never been a problem that could not be, or has not been resolved. There had been issues in the past and there will be in the future which cannot be avoided, but it is a nearly perfect relationship, a match made in heaven. Bangladesh knows that and there is a need to nurture it for the future.

Dr. Rizvi said that General Rahman has rightly mentioned the perception that there are some anxieties because of the adverse balance of trade between Bangladesh and India. He opined that the balance of trade is only one of the indicators that dictate the economic relationship between the two countries. It is only natural that this balance will remain at the current stage of the economic development of Bangladesh as the traders and industrialists always go to the market where the product is the best and the cheapest. So, the import from India cannot be put down artificially. However, there are two answers to that situation. One of them is trade liberalization, which influenced Manmohan Singh's government to open up the Indian market. This opening of Indian market was more important psychologically than in reality, because Bangladesh does not have the capacity to supply to Indian market what it supplies to Bangladesh till now. This was nonetheless important and improved the balance marginally.

He opined that Indian investments would solve the trade imbalance and the government of Bangladesh is also emphasizing on it. There are some Indian investors in Bangladesh, but it made him uncomfortable

to say that many Indian investors are not familiar with Bangladesh. They are more familiar with the US, Europe and South-East Asia than Bangladesh and he requested IDSA to help Bangladesh get more Indian businessmen and industrialists to visit it. He said that Indian investment in Bangladesh is truly mutually beneficial. Bangladesh now has the manpower, the transport and the power structure that can be used for manufacturing of products for Indian domestic consumption which can then be traded back to India which would help the two countries to reach a balance in trade.

According to him, Bangladesh, compared to its neighbours India and China, is a small country; on the other hand, Bangladesh, with the population of 160 million, would be considered a big country. Bangladesh, as a developing country has its own priority. These priorities are- elimination of poverty, illiteracy, food shortages and make a prosperous, peaceful, liberal and secular democracy and with these priorities, Bangladesh has to move very cautiously. As he had mentioned before, the relationship with India is the centre of the foreign policy of Bangladesh and there is no debate about it, only efforts to grow it more and flourish it further. Bangladesh also has other neighbours, whom it cannot ignore or turn back to. He opined that in this regard, Bangladesh has done very well so far. It has maintained its traditional relations and it has also opened up trade and economic relations with China and others. It is exactly in the same spirit, Dr. Rizvi said that Bangladesh also wants to be a part of the Indo-Pacific initiative, since it is a win-win opportunity for Bangladesh. At the same time, Bangladesh cannot remain aloof of the Belt and Road Initiative, because that also gives Bangladesh opportunities which it must take advantage of. Bangladesh is not going to tilt one way or another, as a sovereign state it will maintain its independent position.

Dr. Rizvi then discussed about the previously mentioned issue of disappointment about India's role on Rohingya issue. He said that personally, he takes a bit different opinion and he understands that every nation has a number of national interests on an array of issues that must focus on and India as an emerging nation is also the same. So, for Bangladesh to take a position where it tells India that its 'us or them' is wrong and it is a notion that should be avoided altogether. The migration of the Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh was not the result of some local inter-communal conflict, it was a deliberate, planned and genocidal act. It was caused by some of the most gruesome atrocities that mankind has ever imagined. It was done to implement what Myanmar visions itself to be consisted of people of Buddhist-Chinese origin. In this vision, darker skin people who are Muslim do not fit in it. Myanmar has systemically removed the Rohingyas from their national identity and removed their citizenship status. This Rohingya incident has not happened overnight, it was a planned genocide and exodus of a minority population by Myanmar. He said that every country of the world has some sort of minority population and if the world tolerates this incident, then there can be more incidents where countries would expel people who do not fit in their vision of national identity. If the world just stands by and watch the Rohingya incident, then yes, it is Bangladesh's problem today, but it might turn into the whole world's problem tomorrow. Dr. Rizvi warned that this incident is in fact a warning call and should not be taken lightly.

He also added that, at the local level, this large exodus of Rohingya people in Bangladesh, at a place that is close to Indian border may create security problem for both the countries. So far, the Bangladesh government has done an excellent job of preventing radicalism and any sort of radical actions, but it may not last long. The Bangladesh government has already noticed that weapons are coming in the region. So, if the neighbouring countries and international community does not work together to solve the problem, this can

turn into a source of instability for the whole region. India and Bangladesh are both growing and aspiring for development. India is emerging rapidly as economic power and Bangladesh is aiming to become a developed country by 2041. But this Rohingya issue is one thing that can hamper those aspirations. Dr Rizvi hoped that, by borrowing the civilizational and community wisdom of India, Bangladesh will be able to find a solution. He ended his speech by saying that the best days for Bangladesh are ahead and it will surely get there.



Concluding Remarks by the Chair



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad

Former Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad started his remarks by saying that the relationship between Bangladesh and India is multifaceted in nature and is rooted in the shared history, common cultural background and geography of the two countries. India's critical role in support of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Bangladesh's War of Liberation in 1971 provides a critical foundation for the relationship between the two countries.

He stated that the wide-ranging relations of cooperation have weathered many challenges and have matured and grown to their highest levels since the early years of Bangladesh's independence by leaders of both countries. In the last five years, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held 10 meetings, jointly inaugurated 19 projects and signed over 90 bilateral agreements in different sectors such as security, power, trade and commerce, investment promotion, boundary demarcation, connectivity, development cooperation, infrastructure development, environment, education, culture, blue economy, people-to-people contact, health and taxation. In addition, cooperation in new areas such as space, IT, electronics, cyber security, civil nuclear energy is also being pursued. Bangladesh's honourable President Abdul Hamid has also visited India several times during this period and there have been numerous ministerial and senior officials' visits exchanged between the two sides.

Ambassador Ahmad continued that in recent years, notable progress has been made in almost all sectors of the bilateral relations with India under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement and the peaceful resolution of the maritime boundary issues have been the two most important watershed achievements of the bilateral relations in recent years.



He added that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is a staunch advocate of seamless connectivity. The newly restored railway links between the two countries and the launching of new bus services are the right steps towards that end. Some more new bus services are also in the pipeline. Cooperation in the power and energy sector has become one of the hallmarks of India-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh is currently importing about 1160 megawatt of power from India. The proposed construction of the 136km long India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur to supply diesel to Bangladesh from Numaligarh Refinery is another important milestone.

He said that as one of Bangladesh's major development partners, India has extended three lines of credits to Bangladesh in the last seven years amounting US\$ 8 billion. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade. In the last five years, total trade between the two countries has grown by more than 17 per cent. Since 2011, India has been providing duty-free quota-free access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines except tobacco and alcohol under South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). The other areas of cooperation between the two countries include security and border management, water issues, cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts, sub-regional cooperation and defense exchanges.

He stated that in spite of the steady growth in most fields, the unresolved issues of sharing of water of common rivers and occasional killing of people by security forces remain as major challenges for further strengthening of the cooperation and friendship between the two countries. He opined that existing dialogues and consultations between the two countries on sharing of Teesta water should continue to look for early conclusions. He suggested that it is time to think about working on an umbrella agreement covering all common rivers consisting of a code of conduct based on existing agreements between the two countries for sharing the common rivers. He added that lessons can be learnt from the Indian Federal Law on the use of common rivers by the different states in India.

Session - 1

Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy, Director General of IDSA chaired Session - 1 of the Seminar. Four presentations were made in Session 1 on two themes. Two presentations were made in Theme 1 titled “Trade, Investment and Economic Cooperation” while the presenters were Dr. Mahfuz Kabir, Research Director, BIISS and Mr. Rajorshi Roy, Research Analyst, IDSA. While Theme 2 dealt with “Bangladesh-India Maritime Cooperation” and the presenters were Dr. Smruti S Pattnaik, Research Fellow, IDSA and Mr. ASM Tarek Hasan Semul, Research Fellow, BIISS.



Theme 1:

Trade, Investment and Economic Cooperation



Dr. Mahfuz Kabir
Research Director, BISS

Dr. Mahfuz Kabir started his presentation with a quotation from the website of the Prime Minister's Office of India. The quotation referred to the conversation between the two prime ministers after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to congratulate him on the election win. He said that this quote sets the tone for the cooperation between the two countries for the next three years, as the areas are exclusively mentioned. The quote is as following:

“... The two leaders pledged to continue to raise the India-Bangladesh relationship to unprecedented new heights. They recognized the importance of rapidly completing on-going plans for deepening the partnership in security, trade, transportation, energy and people to people ties. Doing so within the next 3 years would have specific significance ...”

He said that everyone knows that there is a huge untapped trade potential between the two countries, but due to some problems such as lack of infrastructure and non-tariff barriers, the trade and investment is being impeded. Then he explained some of the enabling factors to unlock trade potentials. He said that Bangladesh is growing rapidly with a real GDP growth rate of more than 8 per cent and at the same time, India is also growing, the growth of the two countries is complementary to each other. In India, there is a huge middle-income group that is a big opportunity for the Bangladeshi manufacturers.

He added that if someone looks into the industry wise trade it can be seen that textile and clothes are the sectors in which there is a huge amount of intra-industry trade within the value chain. Bangladesh imports the raw materials, and machineries from India and it then produces RMG goods, which it exports back to the Indian market as well as the international market. Thus, the geographical proximity and long common border are strong enabling factors from the perspective of theory of international trade and economic integration. The investment linkages are also important. The Indian investors are coming to Bangladesh and now Bangladesh has opened itself and invited India to invest not only in the three special economic zones, but in all economic zones. Bangladesh government has identified that it wants to build one hundred economic zones where Indian investment can come in bigger volume. There is also chance to expand the trade complementarities. Often there are talks about how the two countries export similar products to the world market and to each other's market. So, now the trade complementarities are growing.

Looking into the pattern or the trend of trade, three future scenarios can be seen. In the last fiscal year Bangladesh's export to the Indian market has been doubled, but if one looks at the scenario over the last few years, the scenario is not that encouraging one because of the fluctuations, but still there have been more than 15 per cent of growth. Value of exports to India will be US\$ 2.33 billion by 2024-25 in 15.1 per cent growth per annum. But based on an optimistic scenario, it can be US\$ 10 billion or so would require a yearly average export growth rate of more than 40 per cent. Similarly, if the economies can be integrated, Bangladesh's import from India will also become double. Dr. Kabir opined that it is the trade potential, which if the countries can address constraints and infrastructural bottlenecks, can be explored.

Dr. Kabir then shared some statistics, according to the latest World Bank report, which calculated the static trade potential, the trade potential is more than US\$ 16 billion and the untapped export and trade potential is about US\$ 10 billion. This calculation was done in 2016. Currently, the trading is about US\$ 8 billion, so a huge trade potential is untapped.

Looking into the statistics of Bangladesh's export to India, it can be seen that though there are fluctuations, the average trend is upwards and an important feature is that Bangladesh's export growth rate is higher than India's export growth rate to Bangladesh. As for the products that are being exported, textile is the most dominating product accompanied by vegetable, edible oil and jute products. But the most dominating products are the textile goods and clothing; particularly the RMG goods. On the other hand, India's export to Bangladesh was about US\$ 9 billion and in the last fiscal year the growth was about 30 per cent. Cottons, cereals, vehicles, inputs of the RMG products and other manufacturing goods dominate imports. Another factor is that the top products contribute about 76 per cent to the total imports. So, both import and export are concentrated. So, the challenge here is to diversify the products, both in terms of imports and exports. The most dominating product in imports is the engineering products which are more than 30 per cent and then the agricultural products and cotton are 28 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. However, cotton is the most dominating in terms of individual item because Bangladesh is now manufacturing clothing. Dr. Kabir stated that, even though there is a huge trade deficit, Bangladesh is benefiting from importing cotton from India, because it is exporting clothing to both Indian and international market. The size of the RMG export to Indian market is also growing in the last fiscal year and about half of the exports from Bangladesh to India were RMG products. Bangladesh has developed specialization in this sector and from the neo-classical economic theory, India is producing the raw material and the intermediate products and Bangladesh is producing the finished good. This is a value chain-based trade



and he emphasized that the countries need to develop this kind of trade, because that will benefit both of the economies.

Dr. Kabir then talked about some of the issues which are irritating the relationship between the two countries. The trade restrictiveness is bigger for the South Asian countries in the Indian market, than it is for the outside world. So, even though there are lots of improvements, including the introduction of general sales tax and access to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the Indian market, the South Asian countries still face more trouble to access it. Looking into the imposed tariff, it is around 6 per cent in India and around 14 per cent in Bangladesh, but due to the non-tariff barriers, access to Indian market is tougher than the other countries. Then he talked about some of the non-tariff barriers and measures. The Bangladeshi traders, trade in India, flagged that the complicated administrative procedure, the testing facilities, frequent procedural changes and also the arbitrary factors are some issues in the long list of issues. Thus, it appears that the Indian market is more restrictive to the Bangladeshi traders who wish to export there. This is also intensified by the introduction of the anti-dumping duty on the jute products. Even though the duty is not only for Bangladesh, Nepal is also included in it. Looking into the size it can be seen that jute that normally dominates the exports is now in the second position. Also, there are lots of products that Bangladesh exports to international market and India also imports from the international market, but due to the implicit and explicit non-tariff barriers, those products are not imported from Bangladesh.

He added that there are also other issues for the development of trade and investment. For example, Bangladesh has now opened up its economic zones for Indian investors, those are Mongla, Bheramara and Chattogram. It has been assumed that the Chattogram Export Processing Zone (EPZ) will be more beneficial for India because the gateway for Bangladeshi goods in the international market is basically Chattogram. The joint statement made by the two countries during Prime Minister Modi's visit in 2015 and subsequent visit of Prime Minister Hasina in 2017, have lots of directions for trade and

investment and towards connectivity. These also include energy trade, specially the import of power from India to Bangladesh. He added that Prime Minister Modi has explicitly said that Bangladesh's trade deficit with India should be effectively addressed. Even though a specific course of action and timeline has not been mentioned, this kind of political direction gives message to the traders and bureaucrats to take specific actions.

Dr. Kabir focused on FDI and mentioned that the trend of FDI (both gross and net) shows that, though there are fluctuations, the figures are going up. There are two terms through which FDI is calculated which are stock and need, and telecom is the highest in terms of proportion in stocks which is 27 per cent. The investment in textile is 16 per cent, but Bangladesh expects more investment in clothing, especially in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). He said that from the informal conversation with traders, he came to know that RMG will not be a priority area in the SEZs. In terms of the value-chain based trade, he thinks that RMG sector will be more benefiting for both the countries. The data from December 2018 show that the FDI inflow was US\$ 121 million, but comparing it to the other countries, it can be seen that the investment of China is more than US\$ 1 billion. In the next fiscal year, Japan is expected to become the highest investor. This shows that Bangladesh is becoming one of the most fascinating destinations of FDI and India should come forward with its investment. This investment should be something in which more opportunity of employment would be generated and the value-chain based trade can be facilitated.

He then moved on to the issue of connectivity. There are a lot of initiatives that are going on in this area. Bangladesh is in the line of credit of India. The Ashuganj-Akhaura and Mongla port connectivity are now most discussed connectivity areas and the countries are talking about transshipment facilities. The transit has already started in a limited scale and a container depot has been established. But people can only understand the benefits of these things after they become functional and then it can go through trial and error process, but there is a need to establish both hard and soft infrastructure.

Dr. Kabir lastly focused on the way forward for increasing trade and investment between the two countries. First thing he mentioned is that Bangladesh needs to have more FDI from India. The other countries are competing with each other in investing in Bangladesh and India have to play a role in this regard. India is going to emerge as the third largest economy in 2023, by some predictions. So, it has to play a role in increasing investment (especially in value-chain based investment) in Bangladesh for the better economic integration in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and possibly other regional initiatives.

According to him, a new issue is the need for a post LDC strategy; Bangladesh is in the road of graduating from LDC status in 2024. It is now getting benefits for being in the LDC category but this will not continue for long. So, Bangladesh will need a comprehensive trade deal with India. Bangladesh till now does not have any experience in bilateral trade agreement, but it would need a comprehensive trade deal. Another issue that will be very important is the cooperation between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). Though there is a mutual recognition agreement, there is a need for testing more products and these initiatives can be connected with South Asian Regional Standards Association (SARSO), which is doing very well in its work. There is a need to utilize the connectivity initiatives, as there are lots of hard and soft infrastructures that can be used to boost trade between the two countries. The coastal shipping agreement has to be taken in talks, but the problem is that the third countries are not on board. Convincing the third country to join will make it more

commercially viable. India's technical and investment support in tourism sector of Bangladesh is also another avenue. India is one of the most prominent tourist destinations and Bangladesh is also aspiring to flourish its tourism sector, both in terms of business tourism and archeological sites as well. Specifically, Bangladesh can think about flourishing the tourism sites close to the SEZs, because that can create some sort of model in this area. The countries can also think about multi-country tour to attract the global tourists, which would trigger a value-chain led tourism sector.





Mr. Rajorshi Roy
Research Analyst, IDSA

Mr. Rajorshi Roy in his presentation pointed out India-Bangladesh economic partnership in the global and regional context, India-Bangladesh economic partnership beyond bilateralism and the challenges and opportunities of the India-Bangladesh relation as the key topics of his discussion. Mr. Roy mentioned that he would focus on how more pillars could be added to this bilateral economic partnership, as in the last five years there has been an unprecedented improvement in the frequency of economic exchanges but there are potentials for much more. He cited that India and Bangladesh have a 4,000 km long border which is India's longest border with any other country. Mr. Roy emphasized that there are growing economic complementarities and synergies between the two countries that need to be tapped but the sobering reality is that neither India nor Bangladesh comes in the top 10 export destinations. Mr. Roy illustrated through a map how India and Bangladesh can be a gateway to the neighbourhood. For India, Bangladesh can be a gateway to the North-East India and wider Southeast Asia. Similarly, for Bangladesh, India can be a gateway to Nepal and Bhutan. In this regard, he made a reference of the distance between Kolkata to Agartala and Tripura which is 1500/1600km through India but through Bangladesh the distance comes down to approximately 500 km.

After briefly talking about the bilateral position of India and Bangladesh, Mr. Rajorshi Roy gave an overview of the changing global dynamics. He shared that in the last few years, there has been significant global and regional churnings. Globalization has acquired a pejorative connotation with the tendency of nation states to look inwards. Questions have been raised regarding protectionism and rise of tariff and non-tariff barriers leading to disruptions in global supply chains which could impact the global economic growth. In this context, he shared his doubts regarding the future of rule-based multilateral trading order centered around free, fair and open trading system.

Mr. Roy opined that at the regional level, South Asia remained one of the least traded and integrated regions. Intra-regional trade in South Asia accounted for a little more than 5 per cent of the region's total trade whereas for East Asia and the Pacific it is 50 per cent and for Sub-Saharan Africa it is 22 per cent. India's border trade with its South Asian neighbours accounted for 2 per cent of India's total global trade in 2017-18. It was found that for few South Asian countries it is cheaper to trade with countries outside South Asia. As an example, it was mentioned that for India, it is cheaper to import the same set of goods from Brazil as compared to Pakistan. For Bangladesh, it is cheaper to trade with Brazil than with Nepal. In this regard, Mr. Roy shared a World Bank projection which stated that if the tariff and non-tariff barriers could be lifted, intra-regional trade within South Asia could become triple. Mr. Roy observed that this is something that needs

to be looked into. Emphasis needs to be given on regional economic collaboration. There are compelling reasons to improve regional transit and trade arrangements. Seamless multi-modal connectivity can help to promote interdependency. But he also pointed out that the transformative provisions that happen on account of scaling of effect need to be taken into account.

Mr. Roy emphasized on India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy' which seeks inclusive economic growth. He stated that Bangladesh is one of the most important neighbours of India and there exists significant convergence of interests between India and Bangladesh like fast-track economic growth and overcoming certain economic challenges. He added that India remains one of the world's fastest growing large economies, while Bangladesh has been clocking 7 per cent growth and is expected to be the 26th largest economy in the world by 2030. He opined that the business climate in both countries is favourable. The countries also have a young population with similar developmental aspirations. In this context, there is a great potential to generate new opportunities for trade and investment since there is likely to be an improvement in purchasing capacity, consumption and government spending. Both countries have stepped up their infrastructure spending in order to repair and overcome the crumbling infrastructure and build new one. Mr. Roy highlighted the economic development of Bangladesh in recent times and pointed out Bangladesh's overcoming of its least developed country status and becoming a developing country. This could lead to potential greater demand and consumption in future. In this regard, comprehensive economic agreements can be the call of the day which would involve greater trade integration, trade facilitation, harmonization of standards and up-gradation of transportation facility. Mr. Roy highlighted that Bangladesh is a key pillar of India's Act East policy and also various sub-regional grouping like the Bangladesh-Bhutan-Nepal-India (BBIN) Initiative and BIMSTEC. There exist joint working groups on power, water, transit and connectivity between the two countries which focus on improving people to people contact, trade and connectivity linkages. There is a potential to form regional electricity grid which could be effective for the energy deficient South Asian region and finally, there is a potential of collaboration with Japan, given the technology and efficient implementation of contracts of the country.

Mr. Roy shared that in the last few years, Bangladesh's exports to India have risen faster than the imports. The introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) was an important factor which resulted in the withdrawal of the 12 per cent countervailing duty on textiles. He believed that Bangladesh's comparative advantage should increase with the recent hiking of import duty on 328 textile goods which Bangladesh is exempted from. He mentioned that the 2017 agreement between BIS and BSTI is a productive step in terms of eliminating technical barriers. The border *haats* have also contributed in building trust in the bordering regions.

In discussing the trends in connectivity, Mr. Roy shared that connectivity is not just physical but people to people and digital. He stated that significant progress has been made in terms of inland waterways, coastal shipping and rail. The Akhaura-Agartala rail link could be a game changer. India and Bangladesh are participants of the Asian Highway Network (AHN) project. The two countries have increased air connectivity and improved consular services. In terms of cyber technology, Bangladesh has given access to high speed internet connectivity to India's North-Eastern part. There are also collaborations in terms of national knowledge between the research institutes of India and Bangladesh.

Following the trend of connectivity, Mr. Roy spoke about the development partnership between the two countries. He pointed out that the development partnership is demand-driven based on Bangladesh's priorities. In this regard, he mentioned some of the flagship projects like the Akhaura-Agartala rail link,



the dredging of inland water ways and the India-Bangladesh friendship pipeline. He noted that there has been significant improvement in the expansion of energy sector. It can be argued that the energy sector has been re-energized in the past five years. This includes the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for supply of power from Nepal. It is part of the wider regional cooperation between India, Bangladesh and greater South Asian and South-East Asian region. He also mentioned about the nuclear power plant at Rooppur.

Mr. Rajorshi Roy analyzed the key problems and challenges of India-Bangladesh economic cooperation. He stated that the challenge has always been regarding trade balance that is an account of the asymmetry in trade between the two countries. Limited items in the Bangladeshi export basket is another issue. There is also imposition of anti-dumping duties by India on the export of jute from Bangladesh. Similarly, Bangladesh has a minimum import price in respect of import of certain products from India. There is infrastructure deficit at certain places like Border *Haats* and also at Integrated Check Posts (ICPs), but they are being overcome right now. The challenges also include weigh bridges and double laboratory test. Mr. Roy mentioned about the recent increase in imports of refined edible palm and soybean oil from Bangladesh and pointed out that questions have been raised regarding the possibility of routing of third country origin oils into India. He mentioned that there are allegations that there have been few international tenders issued by the Government of Bangladesh which preclude participation of Indian companies on the basis of country of origin of services.

Speaking more about the challenges, Mr. Roy informed that the protocol on inland water ways is yet to pick up on account of structural deficiencies. There is need to dredge the inland waterways and steps are being taken to do so. In terms of non-tariff barriers, he mentioned that the use of Xanthan, the issue of labelling and marking are some of the issues that needs to be tackled. He pointed out the asymmetry in information which has led to certain inefficiency in the borders. The timely execution of projects is also something that needs to be looked into. Speaking of India's position, he admitted that there have been substantial delays when it comes to Pharma Raw Materials on account of approval of DGDA and also delays in obtaining test results at ports.

In the final part of the presentation, Mr. Roy spoke about the opportunities and the way forward. He stated that there is a need to identify ways to work together to create global supply chains. Bangladesh has strength in the apparel sector where as India has strength in the yarn and fabric sector. So, such value chains could be created in the textile sector. The export basket could be altered by entering into collaboration with each other and also with the involvement of Japan. He added that India has certain niche capabilities in sectors like education, health, skill development, energy, infrastructure, science and technology, information technology, e-governance, emerging high technology areas and banking and financial services which could add more pillars to the India–Bangladesh economic partnership. He added the possibility of forming Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Forum or business-to-business forum. He also spoke of the necessity to focus on renewable energy as Bangladesh's energy need is likely to increase. In this regard, he mentioned that India was the founding member of International Solar Alliance. Mr. Roy highlighted capacity building in terms of promoting entrepreneurship and innovation as a possible area of collaboration. He also spoke about identifying new routes for example Rajshahi-Duliajan river link and also cross border tripartite trade between Bangladesh and Bhutan. He proposed that it could be the Nakugaon land port in Bangladesh, Dalu Integrated Check Post in India and Gelephu in Bhutan. The possibility of introducing technology in terms of data exchange and risk management was also proposed. Finally, the possibility of altering the labeling of consumers, which had been an irritant for a long time, could be explored as a way forward regarding the economic cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

Theme 2: Bangladesh-India Maritime Cooperation



Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik
Research Fellow, IDSA

Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik mentioned that the question of cooperation on maritime issues has come up significantly in the recent past and this particular issue has come up especially in the aftermath of maritime boundary delimitation between Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. Perhaps that has made the cooperation possible, otherwise if the geography is considered, one often wonders why this cooperation, which has come about in the aftermath of 2015, was actually not possible earlier or nobody could think about it. So, obviously, the maritime boundary helped both the countries to look into this larger cooperation on the issue of maritime. In global context, the Indian Ocean is becoming too crowded and many powers are competing to protect their economic interests in terms of trade which takes place through the sea lanes of communication, more than 90 per cent of the trade takes place or process in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it is a significant part of the Indian Ocean.

The Bay of Bengal (BoB) has not got the attention it should have in the maritime sphere. She mentioned that the conflict that the three countries had over overlapping exclusive economic zone perhaps is one of the reasons. But now, BoB is not seen as something which is isolated from the larger plan which one sees in the Indian Ocean and part of the larger game plan which is happening in the Indian Ocean. So, the maritime issue becomes very significant.

Dr. Pattanaik pointed out that coastal shipping and coastal trade which takes place and the blue economy has emerged as a very new area of cooperation between the countries. When one looks at this kind of cooperation, these two are important apart from the security. For example, if one looks at the Indian Ocean and the Bay, remembers the 2004 incident of 10 trucks loaded arms which landed in Bangladesh, perhaps it had any kind of enhanced cooperation between the two countries and one could have looked at it. Again, another example is 2008 Mumbai attack, nobody could think that the sea could be one of the areas where one can feel threatened. So, this is the issue which needs a new way of looking. If the border is guarded much more closely, obviously the sea front will be used because these people are always looking for opportunities to get access to another country or to their own country with counter bands all. So, from the security and trade point of view, maritime issues are significant including the disaster relief in which India is one of the pioneers.

She added that in 2015, two important agreements between India and Bangladesh were signed on the cooperation in coastal shipping and blue economy. It actually forms a part of the larger development cooperation agreement, which India signed in 2011 and it provides a larger framework under which many of the cooperation had taken place. During Prime Minister Modi's visit, six important MoUs were signed between the two countries and these were basically on the cooperation between blue water economy which actually going to promote coastal trade in two ways. First, it will not only revitalize the protocol of inland waterways and transit which earlier signed for a year but now signed for five years and have a provision of auto renewal. So, it is needless to spend energy each year to look at the renewal of this protocol which earlier had to be signed every year. Therefore, she thought that it would allow certain focus on investment in improving the inland waterways and coastal shipping because both countries have agreed that Mongla and Chattogram port will be used for movement of goods from India where the multimodal transit network is already taking place using the Agartala-Dawki route. The agreement on blue economy includes collaboration on joint research on oceanography. MoU, that exists between Dhaka University and Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research, has to do much collaborative research especially in oceanography in the case of blue economy. She mentioned that there is a component of capacity building because exploring the blue economy needs enough capacity to explore those opportunities in the maritime sphere. The two countries have taken a very significant step to develop a kind of scientific research between the two countries.

She also mentioned about another significant thing which is using of the river sea category vessels. The two countries have agreed to use the river sea category of vessels which carry goods to Visakhapatnam, Kakinada and Paradip and also to the Chennai port. Recently 175 trucks were transported from Chennai to Bangladesh using this particular route and it took only five days whereas it will take 20-25 days in land route.

She further added that the two countries are moving towards coastal shipping. In terms of bilateral trade, third country's goods cannot be carried as both countries are using the Colombo and Singapore port, but the goods are off loaded and carried in smaller vessels to both India and Bangladesh which is costly. So, there is a proposal from Bangladesh side and India is also exploring whether they will allow a kind of third country product which can be received and unloaded in Chennai port and another ship will come and pick it up. Although bilateral relation is in progress, this has also been explored. One cannot say that nothing is going to change. Also, in the same time, the first Joint Working Group to operationalize the MoU on blue economy and coastal shipping has taken place among which the MoU on coastal shipping is operational. Another important cooperation between India and Bangladesh would be on shipping information and development of comprehensive maritime domain awareness which is very significant because scientific exchanges of data enhances the understanding of the ocean and activities related to it. It also helps to share information,



combat threat posed by transnational terrorist networks and establish coastal radar surveillance centre.

In this context, she mentioned one very important issue of India that the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) was inaugurated to collect data about ships, fishing boats and other vessels operating near Indian coast from multiple technical sources including the radar chain of the Indian Navy. Now, as the information are available with India's centre, probably it could be shared with Bangladesh which would help both the countries to enhance cooperation in the maritime sphere. Apart from that, the two navies have staff level meeting every year. They have proposed bilateral exercises between the two navies. There is also cooperation in hydrology and measures to augment maritime security in the BoB, cooperation and collaboration in shipbuilding as well as cooperation in the development of blue economy are some of the issues which have been proposed between the two countries. The navy to navy workouts are regularly held and Bangladesh navy is also regularly participating in the Milan series of exercise undertaken by the Indian navy at Port Blair and Bangladesh also participated in international free training at Visakhapatnam and it is a part of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which is spirited by India. Both countries have coordinated patrol. With Myanmar, India had coordinated patrol twice and with Bangladesh until now it took place once. She expressed hope that in future this could be enhanced.

There is also cooperation between the coast guards of the two countries which is very significant. She mentioned that the challenges the two countries face on the non-traditional security are drug paddling, terrorism and human trafficking which are very much related to the maritime side. Generally, most of the countries in South Asia, especially Bangladesh and India do not focus on maritime matters which still remain land-centric both in their concept of security and they should look much towards the sea. It is not the kind of phenomena which is very much relevant to India and Bangladesh only; it is also seen in Sri Lanka, a country

which is an island, but focuses too much on the army and not so much on the navy and maritime cooperation. In fact, without maritime way to block the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan army could not succeed. Bangladesh and India have made a start in 2015 and there is a long way to go and she hoped that both will reach the destination much sooner than later.



Mr. ASM Tarek Hasan Semul

Research Fellow, BISS

Mr. ASM Tarek Hasan Semul in his presentation mentioned that Dr. Pattanaik had rightly put forward the idea that why since 2015 the maritime security or maritime cooperation got significance in terms of Indo-Bangladesh relationship. During that period disputes were settled among Bangladesh, Myanmar and India. Since then, gradually, maritime issue had come up and got prominence whenever the Prime Ministers of both the countries visited each other or in diplomatic negotiations. At first, he drew attention towards the preeminence of Indian Ocean, which has received significant currency in the recent time and he shared some important information on why it is so. There are 65 per cent of oil reserves and 45 per cent of gas reserves in the Indian Ocean region. It encompasses 28 countries that accounts for 35 per cent of the global population and 19 per cent of global GDP representing a big market for business. He agreed with Dr. Pattanaik that over 80 per cent of the global trade somehow passes through these sea lines of communication. So, in his words, the Indian Ocean region is a very significant region in totality. He added that the BoB is the gateway to the Indian Ocean region for Bangladesh and India and for this it has a preeminent stake in India-Bangladesh relation and it will gain more momentum in the years to come.

He opined that both Bangladesh and India have interests to protect this sea line of communication in the BoB from the threat of maritime terrorism, piracy and natural disasters and also the traditional security threats that might emerge in this region as well. He addressed global geostrategic changes that will determine how the Bangladesh-India maritime relationship or cooperation will evolve in the coming years. He mentioned about two major changes that happened in the last two decades. The first change was the increased level of globalization and the countries got integrated with each other. Second one was the rise of Asia in terms of unipolarity as the United States of America (USA) has been making ways for other great powers to have a say in the world order. These were the major changes that are coming up and another change was the polarity change. Through China's rise as a potential great power, it is coming up with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and progressing irresistibly in the Indian Ocean to have a foothold. It triggered to have a counter measure from the USA to have a grand strategy in order to overcome those initiatives and they had introduced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. He commented that a kind of confrontational scenario might emerge in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia is in the fulcrum of this total strategic competition. These would have serious implications for Bangladesh, India and other South Asian neighbours in the coming years.

He said that for Beijing, it is very important to get a foothold in the Indian Ocean as it is known to all that it has a Malacca dilemma. It further wants to secure its trade and energy supply line through Myanmar to Yunnan province and to mainland China, which is very important for Beijing. With Beijing's increasing



advancements in the Indian Ocean, India is getting worried as it has own interests in this region. This kind of conflict or strategic competition between these two powers might have a volatile repercussion for the whole region.

He then flagged the importance of the BoB for Bangladesh. He shared the facts that Bangladesh is the eighth largest populous country in the world and has gained significant economic performance for having more than 6 per cent of GDP growth rate in last two decades which reached 7.1 per cent in 2019. On the basis of economic performance, Bangladesh has a great interest in the maritime security of the BoB region. He added that the main product or the export product of Bangladesh in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) and the lion share of that product is getting shipped through this sea line of communication. Thus, he stated that it is Bangladesh's interest that this region should be stable and there should be a maritime order which will allow a seamless communication, trade relation and open energy line.

Regarding the institutional arrangements that both Bangladesh and India could have in this region, he pointed out that BIMSTEC is working with economic focus among the littoral countries in the BoB, but it is very difficult to incorporate maritime security or maritime space within it as it solely focusses on economy. He opined that BIMSTEC after 20 years of its existence still is an underperforming organisation, so it cannot be an institutional arrangement to provide that kind security imperatives. There are other traditional and non-traditional threats in the maritime security as well.

He drew attention that the normal route of India and Bangladesh sea trade is going from Mumbai to either Singapore or Colombo and then reaching Chattogram and referred it as very ridiculous being the

neighbouring countries. He hoped that though it did not allow before but at present with the coastal shipping line, the distance and leak time can be reduced and trade will be much cheaper in terms of the coastal shipping arrangement. He further said that it has been agreed to have that kind of arrangement in order to reduce the leak time and cost of trade between the two countries. There has been a defence agreement that Bangladesh and India signed in 2017 and then there was also joint patrol at the coastline that Dr. Pattanaik addressed as well. He mentioned that there was other case of cooperation that has been put forward. For example, in New Delhi there was a joint taskforce between India-Bangladesh which was given the job to outline the sectors of maritime cooperation where both the countries can cooperate which was done and both the countries signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2017, after which India offered to train the Bangladeshi submariner by the Indian navy as well.

He focused on the issue of the acquisition of two Ming-class diesel electric submarines of Bangladesh from China. There has been misunderstanding between the two countries that why Bangladesh need such attack submarines which are aggressive sea-access denial weapons. He pointed out that Bangladesh do not have only one neighbour i.e. India, it also shares its boundary with another neighbour. So it is very important for Bangladesh to have a military deterrence that will work simultaneously with its diplomatic negotiation and clout. After that, both the countries can move forward with their relationship in terms of maritime cooperation and existence.

He drew attention to the fact that any kind of disruption in the coastal area of the BoB will create a difficult environment for any kind of investment, trade or shipping. For example, the Rohingya crisis is happening right near the BoB at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf region and in Chattogram where Bangladesh has huge amount of foreign investments. So, any kind of disruption between Bangladesh and Myanmar in terms of low intensity conflict or anything will disrupt the foreign investment in this area. So, it is very important in Bangladesh's perspective to resolve this issue as soon as possible. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh said in the parliament in June 2019 that the Rohingya population might turn into a security threat for Bangladesh, if it is not resolved within short time. So, he opined that it is very important for India and Bangladesh to understand that the Rohingya crisis has to be settled very soon because India also has its own trade and investment in this region and it is working closely with Bangladesh in many other sectors for example energy, trade, goods etc.

He recommended that both countries can move ahead and start a spearhead maritime security community which will provide an agreed order to be established in the BoB and the greater Indian Ocean region. He also suggested that they can take onboard the other South Asian neighbours and the BoB littorals and try to have a maritime security space community so that this region can be stabilized and security of this region can be ensured by the regional countries, not the extra regional powers. He explained why BIMSTEC would not be a viable option earlier and commented that Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is too bigger organization to have that kind of precise focus because it has many countries in it. He ended with the suggestion to have a focused security community to deal with all the traditional and non-traditional security threats of this region.

Open Discussion

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, former Chairman, Board of Governors of BISS commented that India is more experienced in terms of maritime sector compared to Bangladesh. So, Bangladesh can learn a lot from India's experience and expertise and then two countries can grow in the maritime sector both in parallel and joint efforts. As Mr. Rajorshi emphasized on regional cooperation in terms of trade and economic cooperation, Ambassador Ahmad mentioned that revitalization or revival of SAARC would be a very important step in strengthening regional cooperation. He suggested that India should lead in revitalizing SAARC and building smart leadership to bring all on board. In case of maritime cooperation, he also suggested to focus on issues like network of meteorological information and climate change, survey of resources, fishing resources as well as minerals and renewable energies in the BoB because that way countries share the maritime domain, sustainable extraction and utilization of resources both in fisheries resources as well as mineral resources. He also asked if they should pay attention to coastal economy and livelihood issues.



Ashraf Ibn Noor, R. Industries Ltd, Director, BEIOA & Ex. SVP, DCCI, raised the issue that the Indian government has barred the Bangladeshi seamen to board in the ships that are coming in. The Indian government has put out a long list of regulations and restrictions. He believed that these issues, that affect Bangladesh needs to be taken into consideration while making recommendations about India-Bangladesh relations, as the recommendations made by the scholars have an impact in policy making. He also mentioned that the coastal ships that are coming in are also below the mark in terms of quality and not really coastal ship worthy. He flagged another issue that the Ashuganj-Akhaura port will not be economically viable for Bangladesh if the tariff rates are not raised.



Maj Gen Imamuz-Zaman wanted to know more about the Act East Policy Affairs Department, recently formed by the Government of India. He also wanted suggestions from the Director General of IDSA on how Bangladesh can contribute to enhance the Act East Policy of India.

Ambassador Ashrafuddoula, Freedom Fighter and an Army Officer trained in India, said that the important thing in the friendship of Bangladesh and India was the fact that it has been built on the bloods of the two countries. So, the friendship is permanent and irreversible.



Referring to Dr. Pattanaik who said that Bangladesh is the most important country to India and also to Dr. Gowher Rizvi who said that India is central to Bangladesh's foreign policy, he questioned if that is so, what the symbol of friendship, trust and visibility is. He raised questions that if they were friends then why there are barbed wires between them and was that really a symbol of friendship or not.

He mentioned that India has a visa free regime with Nepal, why it cannot have with Bangladesh and why there is no free movement. He thinks that Bangladesh addressed all the issues and interests of India pertaining to this country including security, economy, border etc. He queried why India is not addressing Bangladesh in the same manner. From the international lens, the concept which emanated from India is the String of Pearls. He said that it beautifies the women, but the countries around India are ganging up with China to sting away India. He wanted to know whether India views Bangladesh as one of the pearls in that string.

He added that India shares a number of platforms with China like ASEAN, Shanghai Cooperation and many others and asked why it is not joining the BRI and what is preventing India to join. He referred to the proverb that, 'If you cannot change, then join it to change'. He shared his belief that through its economic power India can influence the decision making process in the BRI.



Mr. Alamgir Hossain, Research Officer, Bangladesh

Heritage Foundation mentioned that South Asia is one of the least regionally connected regions of the world and suggested that the countries need to increase regional connectivity. He wanted to know why India provides reservation about China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and if there is any security matter or not.



Prof. Begum Touheeda Faruki, Former Director General, Directorate of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Women's and Children Affairs expressed her wonder to know that the purchase of only two submarines

by Bangladesh was viewed as a concern for India. She

also mentioned that the Rohingya issue is not only confined

between Bangladesh and Myanmar and other countries also need to be involved in the issue.



Ms. Benuka Ferdousi, Research Fellow, BISS referred to non-tariff barriers as a long-standing issue in Bangladesh-India cooperation and wanted to know what improvements have been made in this regard in the past five to ten years as it was mentioned in the seminar that the relation between the two countries have been wonderful in this period. She also inquired Dr. Mahfuz Kabir regarding the sectors in which Bangladesh and India might have complementariness.

Mr. Saleh Ahmed Tita, Freelance Journalist mentioned that he has come to know that within next 10 years, 21 cities of India will be under drought and will be out of water. He believed that in the discussions on cooperation and other things between India and Bangladesh, the point to be noted that the surface water is the most important and valuable water which goes directly into the sea. He expressed his belief that India-Bangladesh will immediately start working on management of surface water which would start putting barrier over the coastal belt, to restrict the costliest sweet water. He suggested that those should be established in the coastal belt where the water goes into the sea, not putting barriers or dam in the Indian portion. He pointed out that it is also in the Delta Plan of Bangladesh which was adopted by the Government. He opined that not only 21 cities in India but also all cities of both the countries will be benefitted if such mechanism is adopted.



Maj Gen A M S A Amin, ndc, psc (retd.), Chairman, CSDS mentioned about the century of peace. He added that international relations develop on realism but it should also be considered that idealistic-view of century of peace is very important today. He also mentioned that to address this major aspect in this region, which is war-torn and the Pulwama was the last major issue, it needs a visionary, very long-term strategic thinking in developing peace. In terms of global context, today people are in the storm of geopolitical and geostrategic - a kind of major complex issue. He added that the USA, China, Russia, India, Myanmar all involved in the BoB and Indian Ocean. He added that there are lots of rough issues in Bangladesh-India relations such as Rohingya, Rampal, border killings, Teesta and then the Assam's NRC. He expressed that these issues need to be sorted out and it would be better as soon as it would be done. He wanted to know how SAARC can be revived towards regionalism.



M. S. Siddiqui, Legal Economist commented that some of the opinions of Mr. Rajorshi Roy seems contradictory to each other, as on the one hand Mr. Roy said that he was in support of global value chain, on the other hand he mentioned his concern over edible oil export from Bangladesh to India. Mr. Siddiqui stated that the export of edible oil was part of the value chain-based trade. Another issue that he specifically asked the Indian participants was regarding the non-tariff barriers. He said that whenever Bangladesh exports to India, whether it is battery, jute products or hydrogen per oxide, there are non-tariff barriers. He said that connectivity should not only include infrastructure, easy trade should also be included as well.





Professor Mahbub Ullah, University of Dhaka brought up the reference of Manu smriti which states that the immediate neighbour is an enemy and inquired if India still believes in this doctrine. He pointed out that SAARC was not discussed in the seminar and asked Ambassador Sujan R Chinoy whether India considers SAARC to be dead. Professor Mahbub Ullah also inquired about India's position on BCIM economic corridor and mentioned that the BCIM corridor could be instrumental in bringing three major countries of the region together, namely China, Bangladesh and India and be beneficial to all of them. He concluded by reaffirming his belief on international and inter-regional trade and opined that trade must be free, unrestricted and without any tariff and non-tariff barriers.



Responses by the Presenters



In his response Dr. Mahfuz Kabir talked on the non-tariff barriers and said that although there have been a number of initiatives such as SARSO and the mutual recognition agreement, there are still a host of issues that needs to be taken into consideration. But it is a big improvement that the non-tariff barriers are recognized. He opined that there is a need for a Joint Working Group which will deal with these issues. He also said that new complementariness is emerging, due to value chain-driven trade in new sectors such as agriculture, where India is exporting seed to Bangladesh. In this regard, he mentioned a World Bank paper which is regarded as one of the most downloaded papers in recent times. He believed that there is no alternative to the transport connectivity and

the new BIMSTEC Transport Master Plan, a US\$ 50 billion multimodal project will be a huge game changer. He said that Bangladesh and India should use these multilateral projects to improve trade and investment between them.

Dr. Smruti S Pattnaik noted that the coastal ships are very specific, only particular kinds of vessels are allowed which can operate both in the rivers and coastal areas. Seaworthiness is something for the two countries to look into. Ships coming in the coastal areas are not seaworthy and that actually will lead to the problem of transshipment because of problems in transporting goods. She added that for the moment, it is not seaworthy. She mentioned that there are some other kinds of problems and governments of both countries will look into that. Shipbuilding is one which both countries have advantage and probably they can collaborate on the shipbuilding sector. Two countries can come together and establish industries where basically the expertise of both countries can be utilized rather than duplicating and cutting each other in terms of the competition.



She further added that as far as the non-tariff barriers are concerned, the Rahim Afroze is the very old case and there are still some lingering in trade issues. Some of the entities have been identified by Dr. Kabir, for example, if one goes to the Sona Masjid area, there are truckloads of boulder which are coming in and some of the people from Bangladesh said to her that when trucks come in, then boulders are sent for laboratory tests to Rajshahi, before travelling to Dhaka. So, this is something that needs to be addressed. Some of the facilities have been established, for example, the laboratory testing, setting testing facilities near the border will definitely help. But there are a number of NTBs and the two countries are addressing it. It is not that two countries are not aware or interested to address it. As far as the BCIM is concerned, in the last year,

BCIM was part of the BRI, China has put BCIM out of the BRI. So, China realized India's reservation and it is not just Bangladesh, China and India, it has also Myanmar. She expressed that it will come up but in case of India-Bangladesh bilateral projects, it takes quite a bit of time to prepare the detailed project report to get the funding and other things. So, it is a work in progress. It must be admitted that the two countries have come a long way and there is a long way to go and they will definitely reach sooner than later.



While responding the questions regarding Bangladesh's acquisition of Chinese submarines and why it was threatening to India, **Mr. ASM Tarek Hasan Semul** said that while buying the submarines for the first time, it is also important to train one's naval crews. One of the worries from the Indian side was once buying the submarines, the training will start and naturally the Chinese will come and train the submariners. That would be a security dilemma for India because it has a base in the Visakhapatnam and it will be under Chinese surveillance. That issue was resolved by the Bangladeshi government. Bangladesh had always tried to follow a neutral foreign policy, it did not take sides between the friends and it always had a traditional cultural affinity with India understanding the Indian concerns. It tackled that very well and according to him Bangladesh, India and China all are working together at present. He cited an example that China wanted to build a deep sea port at Sonadia where Bangladesh took the Indian concern on board and did not give it to China. Now in Matarbari both India and China along with Japan are working together and building a power plant. He assured that Bangladesh would follow this kind of foreign policy in the near future as well. So, there should not be any concern of India with the Chinese submarines.

Ambassador Sujan R Chinoy responded various questions and comments of the open discussion. There were a number of comments and questions on SAARC that whether it has ended or can be revived and what is India's position on it. He assured that the general feeling in India is that the neighbourhood is extremely important and in fact South Asia as the neighbourhood is of extreme importance to India because it has such a large number of neighbours. He further assured that it is not possible for India to grow and prosper without having peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbour in a peaceful periphery. It is only then India can concentrate on its economic development. Therefore, India has attached greatest importance in looking for ways and means to improve its relations with all its neighbours. He narrated the impediments within SAARC that have come as a result of bilateral issues as "a fly in the ointment" and said those are best not to bring into the context of SAARC as it can be addressed separately. India tried to open up its market for much freer trade regime for its neighbours. He said that Bangladesh is one of the neighbours to whom Indian market has been always open, Sri Lanka is another one and for Nepal also there are special arrangements. With Pakistan it has not been possible to have the same level of trust and confidence in regard to the trade relation. He pointed to the fact that all might be aware of that Pakistan is not willing to offer India the most-favoured nation status and in the past India has unilaterally offered that to Pakistan. He said that in SAARC, it is obvious that all the members have to work as a group there and even a single country pulling itself out of the cooperative structure can act as a drug on the rest of the group as well. He revisited that when Prime Minister Modi's government came to power in India, one of the first things he suggested was the invitation to all the leaders of SAARC to attend his swearing-in ceremony in 2014. He also proposed a SAARC satellite, which aimed





at fulfilling the common needs of all the countries with regard to meteorological prediction, climate change, crop and weather patterns, dealing with disasters etc. It was not possible because one country did not want to come onboard. He further added that the same thing happened in the Motor Vehicle Agreement in this region, where again one country did not want to move along with the rest. He agreed that there are issues with SAARC at practical levels to be addressed and above all there are issues regarding terrorism etc. where the common concerns need to be mitigated.

He said that there are opportunities elsewhere in the region which should be utilized by all. So, he recommended that when there is a problematic part, it is better to avoid it and deal with the rest. Without throwing the baby out of the bath water, the rest can work together in the region and more work can be done by connecting with the eastern part of the region. Likewise, he suggested to think of ways and means to work together in the context of BIMSTEC or BBIN etc.

Closing Remarks by the Chair



Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy

Director General, IDSA

In his Closing Remarks, **Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy** stated that the world could not have economies that pretend to be entirely self-sufficient. He also acknowledged the fact that there is a pushback against globalization, as there is tendency towards greater primacy being given to national interest. In the case of America, it is seen as the America First Policy, but that is something being clearly followed by many countries. So, protectionism was not something that was unique to one or two countries, there were greater tendencies towards regional trade arrangements, which are been witnessed in the broader context of the Indo-Pacific as well in the form of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. Since all had seen both challenges and opportunities, the important task would be to see how to mitigate the threats and challenges and make most of the opportunities in this situation of flux when it comes to trade. In this region, he felt that both India and Bangladesh have economies that require FDI in somewhat similar areas, since he was looking at the 13 areas in which Bangladesh seeks greater Indian participation and almost all of them are the type that India too does well in the international market. So, there are opportunities to work together. He opined that at a time when large economies like China slowly becoming more expensive due to the receding labour cost arbitrage, it is important to make use of those opportunities that come in the way. There could be greater intra-regional trade and investment flows that will benefit all in the long run.

He wanted to resume answering the remaining questions where he talked about the SAARC satellite proposal which was nipped in the bud due to malice within the organization. He said that the rest can move in whatever way and configuration is present leaving that malice behind. About India's Act East Policy, he cleared the fact that it does not have an Act East Department. It has been the conversion of its Look East policy which started in early 1990's to an Act East Policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that as the part of

this Act East Policy, it has set up an Act East Forum with Japan in December 2017. He added that Japan and India had setup a bilateral Act East Forum in which India is looking to work with like-minded countries, not only with Japan. It took place in the context of Japan's enhanced partnership for quality infrastructure aimed in a *pro bono* manner for connectivity in the region. Since Japan also had stakes in South-East and was present in Asia as an economic power, so India undertook bilateral Act East Forum with Japan along with its own Act East policy. He updated that the former is currently in first flush and looking forward to work together in order to improve connectivity in India's North-East. As the seven sisters is relatively less developed, he was optimistic with the fact that the region is punching about their weight with human resources. He said that the large cities of India reflect that how the human resources from Northeast India are actually powering many sectors of India's economy including information technology sphere, hospitality sector, flying airlines as cabin crews and so on. Thus, they are actually leading in some ways and India hopes to see how to bring Japan more into capacity building in the Northeast by utilizing the resources present there to contribute to the burgeoning partnership with Japan. India had set up recently the Division for the Indo-Pacific in the Ministry of External Affairs, which aims to look at the gamut of issues in the Indo-Pacific in a holistic manner. This was because of the conceptual transition after the Second World War from the concept of Asia, which was mired basically in the colonial concepts of the British being part of this region, from East of Suez all the way to Shanghai and that transited into the concept known as Asia Pacific in the 1960's and 70's. At that time trades picked up across the Pacific and the largest of the economies in the world like the USA opened up its huge market first to Japan then to Korea, Singapore and then to the Asian tigers. That connectivity gave rise to the concept called the Asia Pacific. At present, it is the third phase where growth no longer is limited to the ASEAN countries or to the Far East, it has now percolated down mercifully to South Asia where countries like India, Bangladesh are leading the charge of the light brigade, showing the region that what can be done despite the impediments of lack of infrastructure, connectivity, poverty etc. So, in this context the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India had a new division, which is looking at this holistically.

On the question of barbed wire between India and Bangladesh, he believed that good fences make good neighbours which, according to him, are a basic premise. Having open border with Nepal is a legacy of history for India. That is very unique kind of thing that has been around for a long time and many people on both sides had been questioning it. He said that it was not the Nepalese saying to relook at the traditional treaties, there were many Indians asking why giving unilateral advantages to Nepalese to come and work in India. The Nepalese are present even in the local civil services and police forces of India from the level of deputy superintendent to police. He added that the fact is not true in converse; Indians cannot go, live and work in Nepal as they do. So he believed that there are people who can question it from both sides, as states and individuals are going to look at it differently. He focused on harboring and channelizing the emotions in a positive direction. He felt that there should be greater people to people contact and also felt that Bangladesh and India had done well with regard to liberalizing their visa regime for businessman as well. It had become so much easier to go to India, to get a visa, to renew a visa; sitting in the comforts of home it is possible to apply online now and the longer-term visa claim for five years or so is also easier. He hoped that there will be much more than this, more strength will be at the elbow of those officials who work on such matters and there will be further liberalization in this regard. He said that at the end of the day, the people live together, bake bread together and there is scope for greater friendship and collaboration.

On the question of String of Pearls, he said that it is not something that India wrote about. In his entire 38 years of career in the Indian Foreign Service and outside of it for the last five months at India's grand old think tank called the IDSA, he had never used this phrase or written about it in any official document. Still there was question for India that it's trusted friend and neighbour Bangladesh being a part of this malevolent

String of Pearls theory. He believed that Bangladesh will never be seen intrinsically as being anti-Indian, as it is not possible. The kind of stakes that they have together, the history of blood and flesh that they shared, the bright future prospects, the shared values and number of things that they have agreed upon. So, question of India being possessed by any kind of idea that Bangladesh being part of String of Pearls is not in his mind and he assumed that it is also the same in the mind of majority of people in India as well.

He then answered the question that why India is not a part of BRI. He said that BRI is actually something which had been around now for seven years starting since 2012. India has a major position with regard to the BRI and it is nothing against connectivity. All agreed in India that connectivity is extremely important for the region, without it there cannot be trade, people to people interaction etc. Capacity building projects are also important, along with building ports, bridges, railways, tunnels. India has a major issue with regard to the CPEC which is one of the six flagship programmes in the BRI that takes roughly US\$ 62 billion of its investment. This was because of the bilateral territorial issue between India and Pakistan. India view that CPEC passes through the territory which it regards as its own, which it calls Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. He said that it is very important to avoid projects that passes through territory that is disputed and such projects need to be carried out in consultation with those that are expected to be stakeholders in such a large architecturally speaking concept like BRI that links the entire region together. So, he requested to understand this from the Indian point of view, which has 1.2 billion people and a principal position in it. He also said that it is not something that can be changed overnight. There are concerns with regard to CPEC and those flows into the BRI. He shared his view that BRI was carried out and launched without adequate consultations in the region. By that he meant in plain and simple language that there was not enough consultation with India. It was something like take it or leave it, which included CPEC also, like a red flag.

He assured that India considers China to be an extremely important neighbour. They are working hard to create trust and friendly relations between them, he also spent his whole life in doing that. So, if someone questions it, then it will be like questioning his entire career. He informed about the bilateral initiatives between India and China like the Wuhan process, the first round of which went off very well in April last year between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping. The second round is going to be held later this year in India. Large number of bilateral issues get discussed at that level very informally. He termed the fact extraordinary that the Prime Ministers are so frequently talking and meeting multiple times in the course of a year. All the issues were discussed without any kind of hesitation when the two leaders met. He said that India and China will continue to work friendly, as it is not a zero-sum game. He referred to Dr. Gowher Rizvi who said that Bangladesh cannot tell India to choose between itself and Myanmar; similarly India will not ask Bangladesh to choose between itself and China. All are interdependent in this globalized world and will have to work together with all the neighbours. He said that whether comfort level ceases, let us allow sovereignty to take over and he will respect if Bangladesh have any concerns regarding it.

Regarding the question on 21 cities of India under drought, he said that this water crisis is a huge issue. It is not just a crisis for India, the world is reeling under a water crisis. Books had been written that future wars might be on account of water as well. Larger point is humanity needs newer solutions in terms of conservation and preservation of water and India desperately needs to do even more. When Prime Minister Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujrat, he particularly went to check dams and that was a very successful scheme. In the entire region of arid peninsula known as Kathiawar of Arabian Sea, drought rate goes to Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. The region has no water of its own, it is only because of harnessing water from the Narmada river. He said that it is very important for the coastal areas to look at how to do things together particularly, learn from each other and check dams to prevent water flowing out to vast oceans and

being lost forever. It takes away the richest soil and silt and everything that goes out with it. Chennai is dealing with unbridled construction, some of the lakes have dried up, which is going to plague all. Even if one is water suffice today, it could be water deficit tomorrow.

He added that India does not look at the Indo-Pacific in an exclusive term. He said that the people are wrong who believe that India is riding on an Indo-Pacific bandwagon and there is an alternative contradictory bandwagon choice to it. Prime Minister Modi said in a number of occasions that for India, Indo-Pacific is an inclusive one and not an exclusive one. India need all the large countries together and therefore, the Eurasian landmass is also important. It is not just a matter of time constraint, the terrestrial part is very important too. Whether a country is big or small, it is to be kept in mind that there will be issues but these need to be sorted out through bilateral discussions. He opined that peace dialogue is the only way forward.

He did not subscribe in any such thinking of Indian philosophy referring the immediate neighbour as an enemy and hoped that nor would any sane person from India would do so. So, he requested to believe that neighbours are best friends actually. They are the first point through which entry into one's own house is monitored. He reassured that among the neighbours of India, Bangladesh is the most important neighbour.



Session - 2

Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General of BISS chaired Session 2 of the Seminar. Four presentations were made on two themes. Theme 3 dealt with “Enhancing Security Cooperation between Bangladesh and India”, while Theme 4 discussed “Managing Water Resources”.



Theme 3: Enhancing Security Cooperation Between Bangladesh and India



Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik

Research Fellow, IDSA

Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik started by stating that security cooperation makes up one of the core issues of Bangladesh-India bilateral relation. As insecurity gives rise to mistrust and suspicion, security cooperation has been one of the strong pillars of Bangladesh-India relation. One might ask why security cooperation is so important. In her opinion, one of the things that has been so significant is the fact that in the post-Cold War period, the nature of security threats has changed and in this context, cooperation is extremely important. Without cooperation one can not have sustainable security. While the Cold War period emphasized much more on the military dimension of the security, with defense forces and all, the 1990's post-Cold War period focuses on non-military dimension such as terrorism. She gave example that when Bangladesh took action against terrorists after the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) bomb blast, there was regeneration of similar groups in Bardhaman. In her opinion, this points to the fact that there can be cross border connection between criminals which is facilitated by familiar ties, kinship affiliations and lingual similarities between the people of the two countries. Therefore, security cooperation become vital and the Bardhaman blast provided evidence for it.

As for the state of security cooperation, Dr. Pattanaik said that the cooperation started in 2009, when Bangladesh handed over some of the North-East separatists to the Indian forces, who had been hiding in Bangladesh. In her opinion, that was the beginning and created a level of trust between the two countries, which led to Indian government's own negotiation with various groups. This cross-border collaboration was one of the significant cooperations between India and Bangladesh. So, when one looks at the security sector, he/she can see that most of the security threats are of non-military nature, not confined within the border of a single country due to their trans-boundary nature. There are two to three dimensions in the security cooperation that is happening between India and Bangladesh. Number one of them is the intelligence sharing that is very significant. For example, after the Bardhaman blast, some of the family members of the attackers were arrested in Dhaka and both the Indian and the Bangladeshi forces were given access to everyone who were arrested by both the sides and that actually facilitated to recognize the larger network of the terrorist groups that existed in the two countries. It actually demonstrated that even if Bangladesh takes action against the terrorists or India takes action against the Northeastern insurgents, it is very natural that they would seek shelter across the border. So, she thinks that there is a need to replicate the terrorist's networks across the two countries at the state level. Without having a similar level network at the state level, it will become very difficult to defeat the terrorist networks in South Asia.

So, in her opinion, another important component in the India-Bangladesh security cooperation is terrorism. Lastly, there is the cooperation in border patrol which comes in the form of coordinated border patrol. Bangladesh and India have discussed and agreed upon which are the vulnerable border areas where the coordinated border patrol needs to take place. This is also a notable dimension of security cooperation given the relationship of the two countries in the past. There are also structural components, addressing some of the complications on the ground in terms of terrorism, drug trafficking or the movement of people especially human trafficking.

Dr. Pattanaik then talked about the structural components that have been put in place for the India-Bangladesh security cooperation. The first thing is the bilateral structure - the meeting of the Home Ministers. The meeting of the Defense Ministers is much less frequent, but there are regular meetings of the Home and Foreign secretaries, the Foreign Ministers meet as well. They all together make up a structure that deals with different aspects of India-Bangladesh security relations. For example, the Home Ministry meetings are very important in regards to dealing with the cross-border activities. The second component in the structure is the District Commissioner (DC) level meetings. The DCs who are posted at the border districts have regular meetings, as they are the ones who are in charge of law and order in the border areas. These meetings facilitate regular sharing of information and help to address the situations that arise. For example, if a criminal runs away to Bangladesh after committing crime then India can be informed through these meetings and the law and order of the border areas are being taken care of. So, both the coordinated border patrol and DC level meetings can take care the issues very effectively. There are also BGB-BSF meetings, a very old structure in place to take care of the border issues.

Additionally, beside the bilateral meetings, there are also multilateral arrangements such as SAARC and BIMSTEC, which also deal with terrorism. Though the multilateral arrangements are there, Dr. Pattanaik stated that the bilateral agreements, whether they are on terrorism or drug trafficking, have been more successful. Despite that, she said it does not mean that the countries have to deal with the issues of security bilaterally; multilateral levels can also be used to deal with these issues.



According to her opinion, in regards to the Bangladesh-India security cooperation, the structural arrangements that have been placed over the last 10 years are not dependent on bilateral institutional whims and fancies. There are times when the structural arrangements do not work, especially if there is a tendency among the bureaucracy to only show up without any intension of moving forward, but the fact that there is a structure in place means that the two parties have a chance of meeting. Few issues taken up by the two countries have a larger beneficial impact on the security cooperation. For example, the mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. There has been one instance where the Indian police handed over a person to Bangladesh forces, after he had escaped to India killing seven people in Bangladesh. Of course, that example is prominent due to media attention, but there are many other cases as well. Another initiative is the transfer of sentenced prisoner, under which prisoners can be transferred to their respective countries after they have served their sentence. She talked about the case of Anup Chetia, where he was again captured by the Bangladesh authority after he had served his sentence and not handed over to India, because there was no treaty at that time. Now there is a treaty for transfer, as a result, persons who have committed crimes in another country can be transferred to their respective countries after serving their sentences. This is a very significant development for the two countries.

Combating transnational terrorism is also very important. This is the area where large groups are operating. She cited the example of the 460 blasts in Bangladesh, where it was speculated that some of the offenders had come from India. So, having a channel of communication through which intelligence and

information can be shared is helpful, just as India has supplied information to Sri Lanka in the case of church bombing. There is also a MoU on the circulation of fake currencies which is a major problem in Rajshahi-Malda area. There is also a treaty on extradition of human trafficking, which is also significant. Most of the times there are debates on illegal migration, but sometimes people tend to forget that there are many people who have been moved to cross the border without consent. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh data which was presented at the Home Ministry level talks, the people trafficked are mostly women and children. Children are being trafficked to be turned into camel jockeys in the Middle East. So, in her opinion, even though the intelligence sharing forms the core of any kind of security cooperation, dealing with the day-to-day crimes is also very important.

On the way forward for the two countries, Dr. Pattanaik thinks that to a large scale, the security cooperation between the two countries have been formalized and institutionalized and given the fact that there is a meeting of minds between the two countries, this cooperation has been really excellent in the past ten years. The two countries now realize that a threat to one is a threat to the other, because most of the groups are now driven by ideologically motivated agenda that is very transnational. In dealing with these kinds of threats, which were not present before, the two countries have cooperated very nicely in the past few years. It is very clear that the two countries have been cooperating in security area successfully. Finally, in regards to the Rohingya issue, she said that though repatriation is the important factor for which pressure needs to be given to Myanmar, the larger security implication of the presence of refugees needs to be recognized. The two countries should also work together to handle the larger security threats faced by the two nations.



M Ashique Rahman

Research Fellow, BISS

M Ashique Rahman in his presentation mentioned that expanding security cooperation is not only needed for India but it is needed for South Asia and the Bay of Bengal region as a whole. Another important thing is that India-Bangladesh security cooperation has not been taken up by the scholars and academics in an organized way. He added that there is a lack of academic literature for Bangladesh-India security cooperation and any good write up focusing only on the security cooperation can be hardly found. He emphasized that academics need to focus on that.

He said that there had been a tremendous amount of security cooperation between Bangladesh and India in the last 10 years. In the context of expanding Bangladesh-India security cooperation, there have been diverging national interests or imperatives. In the last 10 years, due to various regional contexts, it is now more of a convergence. Bangladesh and India are having best of their relations with new governments in power. It is often said that government with less mandate, has less scope but now the two governments in both the countries have the highest mandate and there is a scope for enhancing security cooperation.

He focused on some security concerns or imperatives for cooperation and review of initiative and measures undertaken since 2009. Security involves both traditional and non-traditional security and now the latter has become more important and the issues are more crucial for the two countries to cooperate. He focused basically on the defence cooperation, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency cooperation and cross-border security issues.

In the case of defence cooperation, apart from regular exchange of senior military officials, visits, training programmes. There had been a number of MoUs between India and Bangladesh in 2017. First of all, they had an MoU between Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (Nilgiris), Tamil Nadu, India and Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh. They also had a MoU between National Defence College, Dhaka, Bangladesh and National Defence College, New Delhi, India. He mentioned that the most important defence cooperation is a MoU on Defence Cooperation Framework which is very new. It was debated to some extent whether they are going to have a defence pact or not but the end they have come up with a MoU. Under that understanding, there has been an agreement that India will provide US\$ 500 million as a line of credit (LOC) to support Bangladesh for military procurement. That is completely a new thing in terms of defence cooperation. Another significant cooperation in 2001 was Joint Military Exercises which was termed as – Sampriti. So far, they had eight such Joint Military Exercises, the last one was held in March 2019. He pointed out that Bangladesh has fulfilled the expectation of India that it

will not be a ground for any kind of insurgency, cross-border insurgency or cross-border criminal activities. Now, regarding counter terrorism cooperation, they have three very significant agreements - Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters, Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons and Agreement on Collaboration on Combating International Terrorism, Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking. Although the title of the agreement is on Combating International Terrorism, if one looks into the agreement, one will find that it covers fighting terrorism in all its forms. So, that gives an opportunity to cooperate not only on any terrorism but issues in all its forms. The agreement also provides a scope for Home Ministries of the respective countries, who have been designated as nodal point, a point of contact. Now, in case of counter terrorism, the Extradition Treaty is another significant agreement and then the Home Minister's Level Meeting and the Fortnight Bilateral Counter Terrorism Exercises which are a part of Sampriti.

He further mentioned that in case of border issue, India-Bangladesh cooperation reached the highest level since the border agreement was implemented and finally, enclaves were exchanged. But apart from that since 2015, they have a number of MoUs. Most of them were related to border issues like MoU on Prevention of Human Trafficking, MoU on Prevention of Smuggling and Circulation of Fake Currency Notes. Also, the two countries have adopted the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) in 2011. This plan takes up all the border issues together including human trafficking and drug smuggling and all kinds of problems in Bangladesh-India border. They set up coordinated patrolling at the border. The border management plan also set up five nodal offices both in BSF and BGB starting from the headquarter level to the regional level.

He also mentioned that some issues need to be addressed to strengthen this further. First of all, he opined to institutionalize intelligence sharing. With a separate institution, intelligence sharing becomes formal instead of remaining informal. In fact, the agreement on terrorism and drug trafficking mentioned about the intelligence sharing, but it seems that it aims to provide an institutional mechanism for intelligence sharing. Regarding the coordinated border management, he said that actually people discuss about having joint border patrolling but finally they came with a coordinated border patrolling and if one looks into the agreement of the coordinated border patrolling, he/she will see that still there are limitations in the coordination and patrolling of the border. If they try to implement it and prevent all those incidents that are happening, border killing needs to be stopped. It has declined significantly but still there are reports on killings in the border and in the 44th Director General (DG)-level meeting of BSF and BGB, the DG of BSF said that they are trying their best to reduce the number and now they are using non-lethal weapon for the BSF forces.

Regarding the Rohingya issue, he suggested that the Rohingya is a new issue and if one wants to include this in bilateral cooperation; both countries need to put this issue somewhere into the formal dialogue in a structured way. Other than just highlighting this issue and raising in this forum formally or sporadically, it should be put into formal dialogue or formal structured discussion. There is one weakness in the extradition treaty. Although it is a very good initiative, Bangladesh has extradition treaty only with two countries-India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and negotiation is going on with the United Kingdom. If one looks into the extradition treaty, there remain some weaknesses like the refusal clause. There had been refusal clause and refusal can be made on number of grounds. So, they need to look into that and need to reduce the



grounds. For example, he added, one ground is that as it is considered as a political issue, the requested countries can refuse. Now the question comes that who will define the issue is political or not? There are six or seven grounds on which request can be refused. To strengthen this cooperation, they need to look into those initiatives.

In conclusion, he said that from a realist perspective, there remains a disparity between Bangladesh and India and the relations between the two is difficult to come in equal footing but need to look into the equity and the justness aspect.

Theme 4: Managing Water Resources



Dr. Sufia Khanom

Senior Research Fellow, BISS

Dr. Sufia Khanom started her presentation by raising and answering two pressing questions central to the water resources management in South Asia. Her answers were negative on both the questions of whether there is plenty of water in South Asian region and whether there are enough strategies to manage it or not. Dr. Khanom mentioned that her paper would explore the security threat under this global context of climate change and finding probable ways to address the problem. After setting the ground of her presentation, Dr. Khanom gave an overview of the four major sections of her paper i.e., geopolitical importance of the riparian countries, hydro political dynamics of the present water sharing agreements and their position, role of environmental change and policy suggestions. Before moving to the main part of the presentation, she presented few facts regarding the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) Basin. She stated that India occupies total 64 per cent of the GBM basin, China occupies 18 per cent, Bhutan 3 per cent, Nepal 7 per cent and Bangladesh also occupies 7 per cent. This river system is not considered to be one transboundary river basin because it has distinct characteristics and flows through very different regions for most of its length. They join only few hundred kilometers on the upstream of the mouth of the Bay of Bengal. Each of the rivers has tributaries that are important by themselves in social, economic and political terms as well as for water availability and use. Many of these tributaries are transboundary in nature as well. The GBM river system is the 3rd largest fresh water outlet in the world being exceeded only by the Amazon and Congo river basin.

Dr. Khanom began her main discussion by explaining the geopolitical importance of the South Asian countries. First, she spoke about Nepal and Bhutan and opined that although these land locked countries are the source of hydro power electricity, they are dependent on China and India for other aspects like trade and connectivity. Although they are the upper riparian countries, at times they cannot decide their water resource



management independently. About India, she stated that it is the third largest energy consumer of the world and water is one of the vital components for its economic growth. Speaking of Bangladesh, she mentioned that as the country is at downstream end of the basin, it receives the run-off water after the use of other riparian countries. Bangladesh is dependent on working and managing those waters. Regarding China, she stated that the country is considered to be the world's most aggressive dam builder which has built around 22,000 dams over the transboundary rivers.

She highlighted on the hydro political dynamics of the GBM river basin and explained that water management cut across many other sectors like agriculture, connectivity, navigational uses, urbanization and many other things. As the river basin does not follow the geopolitical boundary, numerous political and administrative jurisdiction is involved. She mentioned about the diverse climate and topographic regimes of the GBM basin. She also spoke about the water related natural disasters. She opined that different countries face different kinds of natural disasters and they have different capacities to cope with such disasters. She noted that the lack of basin-wise information sharing mechanisms is another issue in this sector. As most of the water sharing negotiations are bilateral in nature, they are mostly governed by the geostrategic thinking of the individual countries. Bilateral agreements are broadly conducted only by the volumetric measures of the water that each country can claim in different seasons rather than the ecological, sociological and cultural perspective. It is seen that these types of water sharing agreements are mostly dominated by engineers rather than the ecologist and sociologists. The construction of large dams by the upstream riparian countries also create tension among the countries. Dr. Khanom opined that although Nepal and Bhutan are

independent, they have other constraints which do not allow them to take independent decisions. There are inter and intra-state conflict as well. Speaking of intra-state conflict, she used the example of West Bengal government and the Central government of India regarding the Teesta River sharing issue. According to her study, treaties cannot only solidify the power imbalance between the actors as treaties do not allow general people to intervene. The treaties are made by policy makers but sometimes they are subjected to questions by the general people. She gave the example of the Ganges Treaty of 1996 and mentioned that many people including media personalities did not agree to the Ganges water sharing treaty and they opined that Bangladesh did not get equal rights or share.

Discussing about multilateral governance policy and framework in South Asia, Dr. Khanom observed that there is an absence of such framework in terms of water resource management. China and India are not part of the UN convention on non-navigational use of water but Bangladesh and Nepal are part of this agreement. She opined that the state of information sharing is insufficient. Although there are bilateral agreements among the South Asian countries, there is no basin-wide information sharing mechanism. In regional forums like SAARC, environmental issue is given less priority. In 2014, there was a Ministerial level meeting but it was mainly focused on hydro power. Other environmental issues have been ignored in these meetings.

Dr. Khanom also shed light on the sub-regional hydroelectric initiative of Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Although the countries have agreed on certain form of negotiation, it is yet to be implemented. Some of the donor initiatives are in path like Mekong-Ganga Dialogue, but it is still at the dialogue level and there is uncertainty regarding its future. However, civil society organizations like Global Water Partnership, Bangladesh Water Partnership, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) are some of the organizations trying to form some sort of multilateral governance policy and framework and give policy suggestions to the government.

Dr. Khanom stated that water demand is a national interest of India. At times different literature blamed Bangladesh for unreasonably asking their share. There is decade long contention among the two countries over the Tipaimukh dam, Teesta water sharing and the Indian River Linking project. In this aspect, climate change is a new security threat for the GBM basin management. Climate prediction models do not provide any clear picture about impacts like drought and salinity which is very much diversified. Uncertainty regarding the accuracy of various climate change predictions and forecasts indicate that climate change will further increase the variability. So, the quantity and nature of run-off and sedimentation will change substantially which will be difficult to manage for the riparian countries. She referred to the Ganges basin which has one of the highest seasonal flow concentration and variability of rainfall in the world. She shared her doubts regarding the future of the basin when there will be 2 per cent increase in temperature and climate change would occur. She stated that when ice starts to melt, huge pressure will be created on the existing water projects. In short term, the GBM basin will gain huge water but in the long run it will dry out. Existing literature have identified this transboundary river basin as the most potential hydro political tension region in terms of water resource management.

There are various literatures regarding the management of multilateral governance system for the GBM basin. Dr. Khanom highlighted the governance model developed by Rittberger and his colleagues based on the Condition Triangle. The triangle has three elements i.e., power difference, cognitive community and problem condition. The geopolitical and hydro political dynamics are the problem condition of the GBM basin. Donor organizations, extra regional organizations or any other state can be part of the cognitive community

of GBM in order to solve the issue. India and China are regarded as big powers in the Asian region. If there is power difference, it is required to lessen it and consider the small states to solve this problem or to utilize these resources properly. According to Dr. Khanom, only then a fruitful multilateral governance system of GBM would be possible.

Dr. Khanom focused that the water-energy-food security nexus would be the main objective of managing the GBM basin. Various literatures suggested that the basin-wise management institution like the Ganges management institution, Meghna management institution or the Brahmaputra management institution can solve this problem or can utilize the resource fruitfully. They can share every information regarding this basin and manage it properly as every basin has unique characteristics. As a way forward to the water resource management, Dr. Khanom stressed on the importance of international law. All states following the international law could be the first ground of cooperation. Third parties can also be involved in different patterns. There can be diplomatic third-party involvement and economic third party like donor organizations, banks and relevant organizations to support the projects economically. Various projects like the Mekong-Ganga are being supported by donor organizations, not the basin sharing states. This can be used as an example in India and Bangladesh. Virtual stakeholders who are not sharing the basin can also participate and give policy suggestion. Basin management institutions of different states like the USA and Canada can be made virtual stakeholders.

In describing the situation of Bangladesh, Dr. Khanom referred to the national water management plant. According to it, only the north-east region of Bangladesh has surplus water. Rest of the region are not water surplus. Although it is seen in the media that Bangladesh is flooding and there is plenty of water, many parts of the country face different kind of water shortage ranging from salinity intrusion to seasonal drought. According to various reports, Bangladesh would be the most vulnerable country for climate change impacts which are already visible. There is water shortage in Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. In this condition, it is difficult to imagine what waits for Bangladesh in the future. Since most Bangladeshi people are dependent on natural resources, water is of utmost importance. If the water shortage problem becomes more acute in future, the life and livelihood of many would be threatened. So, equal share of trans-boundary water is not only a right for Bangladesh as a riparian country, but it is also a human security issue.

Dr. Khanom quoted "it is insane to do the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, because the results will be same." She opined if the agreements and discussions related to water sharing are conducted in the same manner like previous times, it will yield same result. So, it is needed to focus on different approaches to transboundary cooperation. Without the incorporation of multilateral actors and representation of people living in these basins as an active geopolitical agent, regional transboundary water cooperation would be hard to sustain in future. Dr. Khanom believed it was high time to stop hiding under the statistics of formal river agreement signed in the past. It is needed for the researchers and policy makers to look at the ability and progress of the existing agreements to face the climate related challenges in the near future. Dr. Khanom ended her presentation with a call to come forward, talk and listen to others and exchange views in order to make a beautiful and livable region for all.



Dr. Ashok Behuria
Senior Fellow, IDSA

Dr. Ashok Behuria noted that people are living in a corner of the world where the geostrategic equations are such that when any possible means to resolve issues is been adopted, nothing is going to happen. He shared the Indian experience of having two different treaties concerning river sharing - one with Pakistan and one with Bangladesh. In both the cases, there were no ideal solutions. The two cases were different as well. As there was an argument on having some multi-party engagement with third party negotiator, he mentioned that in case of Indus water treaty, it indeed had a third party negotiator and in case of Bangladesh it was bilaterally arrived treaty. Looking at the way these treaties have functioned over the years, he said that the bilaterally arrived one was much better. Because in case of Pakistan, in spite of the fact that it was mediated by the World Bank and without an exit clause, the treaty has not been such successful and Pakistan keep suspecting that India has been violating the terms of the treaty and trying to steal waters.

He said that the way the power equations are in this part of the world and the level of mistrust is such that one will not be able to resolve these issues. So, the elephant in the room is an abstract entity called mistrust, not any concrete body of problem that can be touched and seen. According to him, the main aim of the conferences like this should be to find the ways of dispelling this abstract concept of mistrust. He has been noticing that in a gathering like this where India-Bangladesh relationship is being discussed people brought in the issue of Pulwama. If people are talking about India-Bangladesh relations, there is a need to identify issues that are dividing the countries and how best to resolve that.

He expressed his happiness as the organizers did not talk about Farakka or Teesta Treaty and widen the scope of the discussion by bringing in water resource management. According to him, it was very well-judged relation of the issues, the way it was encapsulated and formulated and he complemented the organizers and participants for that, as the real issue is the water resource management. Couple of weeks back, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) came out with the World Water Development Report (WWDR), which says that 29 out of 48 countries in the Asia-Pacific region are going to be water insecure within years from now. The per capita water availability that India faces is only 1545 cubic metre per year; Bangladesh has a healthier account than that. India has a real crisis coming its way and Prime Minister Modi chose to talk about water in his first “Mann Ki Baat” programme after he was elected again. The first issue he focused on was water and that shows that how concerned Indians are about the issue. No upper riparian country in the entire world has been as generous as India has been, if one looks at the kind of concessions, terms and conditions of Indus water treaty. He explained it by saying if the distribution of water is seen, it was not river sharing, it was division of water resources. The upper three rivers are called

the Western rivers, which were gifted away to Pakistan and the Eastern rivers were for India. Looking at the annual discharge of both the sets of rivers, the western sets of rivers have cumulative discharge of about 130 MAF (Million Acre Feet) whereas in the eastern sets of rivers the cumulative discharge was only about 53 MAF. The case of India was letting about 130 MAF of water and lapsing on to only about 53 MAF. The climate change is an issue that has struck the region for years and though this has been debated but it was not been taken seriously. Now it is found that in upper Himalayas the glacial cover is going away. The discharges are decreasing day by day and same is the case in many places of the world.

He then focused on what should have been done even with the availability of mistrust and whether a multilateral approach would be more viable. He said that the region have the guilt of giving a lot of space to the governments, who are been perceived as omniscient and omnipresent and they have the power to do everything. The region is guilty of letting the governments take away lot of initiatives that should have rightfully come from the civil society, track II, track III and other tracks as well. Both the Indus and Farakka treaties have provisions for future cooperation. In the Indus treaty, there is a provision that the joint river commissions will come together and decide on future agenda for cooperation. This particular phrase which is contained in article 9 of the treaty was forgotten. Not only the government but also the civil societies also forgot, as a result there is no data including the glacial and hydrological data which makes bilateral conversations on the water related issues very difficult. Simultaneously, that should be also in forums like SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc. like the ASEAN countries are doing. He questioned that every country has its own national water resource management policy, but how often do these countries come together and discuss and learn from mistakes of the other countries. He opined that it is not the fault of the government. The hydrologists, glaciologists, water experts in these countries should have felt the need of coming together and discussing the issues at non-governmental levels. Governments have allowed conferences like this to be held in different countries all the time, but the problem is too much reliance on the government. The Governments are too overloaded to discuss these issues with the kind of importance that they deserve.

The second point he wanted to make is that these issues have always been dealt with a top-down approach. Only the ministers will come together; the joint secretaries will discuss and come out with something and then the civil society will start discussing it. That really defeats the very spirit of democracy, which is bottom up not top down. There is a need to equip the governments with ideas by which they can deal with these issues. These things should be kept in mind.

Several NGOs and INGOs like IUCN, the World Bank etc. have literatures on these issues which need to be widely discussed and deliberated upon and they have to be adopted into local situations. Issue of lack of trust and suspicion about each other is present, but how best those principles could be adopted to local conditions and how to evolve solutions to these issues need to be found out. People also need to discuss that at multi-track level, business and academic level also. He said that the role of civil society is very important in this regard.

Utilization and conservation of water is an issue that is receiving the least amount of attention in the universities, water related institutes, the ministries of water resource management in different countries. How to optimize water resource management and how to manage the water resources has been very important now. In that connection, a new term has come up which is called agro-environmental or agro-ecological education in the international level. This is something that should be discussed at the level of schools and colleges. He said that water use is something which has to be there forming a part of the syllabus.

Regular evaluation of existing plans, policies and programmes is also imperative. Donor involvement and intervention in this area is also very important. Because the governments in this part of the world is saddled with so many issues and the budgetary allocation are so low that things may not work until and unless the donor agencies are brought into the fold. There should be targeted investments in these areas also which will resolve the issues.

He said to remember that politics can always triumph all these activities that would be undertaken. The problem is that there are vested interest groups in different corners of the country who would like to survive on generation of suspicion and mistrust about the neighbours. Those constituencies may be very less numerical, but they have very important role to play in decision making of different countries. He focused on the need to find out a way in dealing with these constituencies as well and enhancing their understanding of these important issues.

He concluded by mentioning that there is a re-run of an old concept of joint basin development or management. This should be brought to the notice of civil society, activists, governments, non-government level to start discussing these issues. He hoped that only then people can deal with these threats that is there in the horizon in a very effective manner.



Open Discussion



Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, ndc, psc, (Retd), Treasurer, University of Asia Pacific, mentioned that almost all of the border killings are happening because of cow-smuggling. Cow-smuggling chains start from Rajasthan, Maharashtra to the local markets of Bangladesh. All levels of people are involved including the border security forces of both the countries, customs, police and all which has been irritating the relationship between the two countries and it is particularly hurting Bangladesh because the market of the cattle growers, who over the years have attained a sort of expertise, has been decreased by this smuggling. But there are interested quarters in both the countries who want this smuggling to go on and those killed are the carriers, poorest people living in the border. The governments of both sides and people should be aware not only the BGB or BSF.

Since 1984 or 1985, the staff colleges of the two countries have an exchange programme of students between the two sides. In the NDC, it was started in 2002 on a very limited level. It is now expanding but the regular forces need more interaction for confidence building measures, like there are small exercises on counter insurgency but this can also be extended to the Naval and Air Forces of both countries. Squadron of Bangladesh can be deployed in India for a 15-day period and do exercise just like Indian Naval ship can come to Chattogram and do exercise with Bangladesh Navy. In Bangladesh, there is no desert warfare training ground, whereas sometimes forces are deployed in deserts, in Africa for example, so they can have desert, mountain and water training. He expressed that the more is the cooperation, the more understanding can be made between the forces.

He also mentioned that Bangladesh and India had signed Ganges Water Treaty 20 years ago, but Bangladesh has not done its own homework. The Padma barrage, which was a prime importance, is still in sort of initial works. Bangladesh needs to start the Padma barrage very immediately and make sure of the use of its water. He marked that people in Bangladesh are very lucky that even today, despite the population nearly 180 million, the availability of freshwater is still highest in per capita. Bangladesh needs to get its homework done about the conservation of water. He opined that the way the water is polluted and misused is a criminal offence. In case of water conservancy, people get a two-three thousand taka monthly bill from WASA. He added that people need to look into themselves and try to understand the real value of water. Despite all the hostilities between Jordan and Israel, they have signed a water treaty in Jordan River and nobody touches the water. So, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and India can work out something for water.

Mr. Shamsul Haque, Director General (SAARC & BIMSTEC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shared some information that there are some silver linings in the area of water negotiation. He said that he had recently received some training



in water diplomacy which has opened his eyes. As water is a scarce resource, there is a necessity of protecting this resource and it is also necessary to solve the water issue bilaterally or multilaterally. There was a notional problem in the mind of the people of Bangladesh that India does not want to deal with the issue multilaterally. But now there are indications that India is willing to deal with the issue of Himalayan ecological health within the BIMSTEC forum and there is proposition for joint study on the issue. He said that water issues cannot be solved individually or bilaterally between Bangladesh and India; rather there is a need to involve Nepal and Bhutan. If possible, China can also be involved, since there is no indication what they are doing on the other side of the Himalayas. So, there is a need to deal with water issues multilaterally and it can be brought under this crew.



Professor Mahbub Ullah, University of Dhaka, stated that there are two aspects of water related issues i.e., management and sharing. He felt that throughout the discussion more emphasis had been given on the management of water rather than its sharing. He opined that sharing is no less important and solution lies in blending both sharing and management. He referred to former Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri's statement that Bangladesh does not suffer from water scarcity rather Bangladesh's problem is related to water management as the country cannot retain that part of water that goes to the Bay of Bengal. Professor Mahbub Ullah opined that as Bangladesh is geographically very unstable, it is difficult to build dams which will help to retain water and it is likely to take many years for such arrangement, but he believed that solution can only come through mutual discussion. He noted that international water law has moved from the concept of absolute sovereignty to the concept of equality or the concept of no significant harm. So, something should be done to share water between India and Bangladesh on the basis of equity and he hoped that Bangladesh would develop a good definition of equity in its own context.

Dr. Narayan Chadra Nath asked about the strategic approach of India to help in the problem of repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar as it is a security concern for Bangladesh. He also queried about the long-term plan for the solution of water resources of India and whether it is a regional approach or national approach. If it is a regional approach then problems of the upper riparian and lower riparian countries should be taken together. China, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh can address the problem collectively.



Mr. Tasnim Mohsin, Senior Reporter, Bonikbarta, wanted to know about the NRC as it is a security concern for Bangladesh side. Regarding the water issue, he asked why the bilateral meeting between Bangladesh and India Water Minister Level are still pending since 2010. He also wanted to know why Bangladesh cannot build barrage in the Padma and whether there is any reservation on that. He further asked whether Teesta water treaty is going to be signed or not.



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, former Chairman, Board of Governors of BISS asked that despite the long-standing consultations, arrangements and mechanisms why there is still a significant number of border killing and whether there are any suggestions about improving the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms and what more could be done in this regard. Ambassador Ahmad pointed out that joint basin management can only be possible if there is complete transparent information sharing and if so, how should the countries ensure it.

Mr. Nazmul Arifeen, Research Fellow of BISS wanted clarification of Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik's proposal regarding the replication of terrorist networks on both sides of the Bangladesh-India border to crack down terrorist groups. Mr. Arifeen opined that terrorists have a different way of operating and wanted to know how such networks would be replicated in the government level.



Responses by the Presenters

Responding to the question on replicating the network of the terrorist groups on Government level, Dr. Smruti S Pattnaik clarified that the terrorist groups have very good information sharing network while at the government level the information sharing is very scanty and often do not provide actionable information. So, what she meant by replicating is that the government also needs to network with each other in a similar fashion in order to keep an eye on the terrorists. According to her, she always feels that the terrorist groups are much more 'South-Asian' compared to the nations who are territorial and nationalistic.



On the issue of border killing, she said that the number of killings has been reduced with time. She had been following *The Daily Star* for a year and every time there was a killing in the border, she would look into which area the incident has taken place, whether it was one of the vulnerable areas where there is joint border patrol or not. What she found was that the killing was happening in one of the areas more frequently than other places and the timing of the firing was between 2 to 4 am. So, she concluded that perhaps there is not enough guarding from Bangladesh side. She stated that all of those killed are smugglers and even though they are smugglers, killing cannot be an answer. So, she believes that there needs to be more coordination between the two border patrol mechanisms. She was happy that now there is some sort of coordination compared to the situation existed 10 years back. She also agreed that the cattle being smuggled in Bangladesh are from Haryana and other Indian states, as there are no laws that stop the movement of cattle within Indian border from one state to another. So, they gather cattle in an area which is under police jurisdiction so that the BSF cannot interfere and then they move them across the border. Thus, India is losing revenue, because the cattle that come to Bangladesh side of the border are categorized as lost and found.

On the National Register of Citizens (NRC) issue of Assam, she said if one looks at the Assam White Paper and identification of illegal migrants through tribunal, it can be seen that there has not been much success in this area. That being said, the Government of India has been keeping the Government of Bangladesh informed. Therefore, even though there has been much concern from the general public of Bangladesh, there has not been any single word from the Government of Bangladesh on this issue. Though she understands that the concerns of the Bangladeshi people particularly at the wake of the Rohingya

issue, she remains confident that the issue will be resolved internally in whatever manner possible. Dr. Pattanaik stated that there is a need for India to be able to identify the illegal immigrants who they need to be repatriated.

On the Rohingya issue, she has been following the questions asked in the Indian parliament and answers that were given. India has been telling Myanmar that there is a need to resolve the issue in a proper manner. The Rohingya issue is a bilateral thing between Bangladesh and Myanmar; but with both the countries, India has excellent anti-insurgent cooperation. She said that a few days ago, the Myanmar and Indian forces went through an operation in the Myanmar border against the insurgents. India has also been building 500 houses in the Rakhine state so that the people can have a house when they go back. India will use its good offices but at the same time it understands that the issue is a bilateral one. She gave the example of refugee issue between Bhutan and Nepal in 1991, where India had used its good offices to get the two parties to sit together and talk. But the Rohingya issue is complicated and unless the internal situation of the Rakhine state does not improve, there will not be any position for them to repatriate. She declared that she totally agrees with the Bangladeshi position that the Rohingyas who have been forced to flee should be repatriated.



M Ashique Rahman added that the cooperation among the security forces will increase over the years. He mentioned that there was no agreement, no MoU between Bangladesh and India security cooperation before 10 or 12 years back. Now they have a number of agreements, MoUs, even have an extradition treaty. Bangladesh has extradition treaty only with two countries- India and the UAE and another is going on with the UK. It is expected that it is time for enhancing it further. He added that the

coordinated patrol was based on Coordinated Border management Plan (CBMP). It specifically mentioned that border forces will not be allowed to cross the international boundary line. He mentioned that the exchange of information is very important and for that it designated Home Ministries as nodal offices. But he suggested a kind of focal point or separate institution because even if there have Home Ministries then it has to go through Home Ministry, headquarters and then to the ground level. Similarly, it will come back. By that time, it comes back that information may not be needed at all. There is also a problem of verification whether the information has been received, how far it can be used and what the authenticity of that information is. Information sharing is also important. Intelligence sharing is operating in an informal way but he suggested a separate institution for it.



While responding, Dr. Ashok Behuria noted that as the topic was on water management, he confined himself to that, but he had also brought in the issue of sharing. He suggested that the way India has behaved in the past, there is no dearth of intention to stick to equal sharing. Farakka issue is one of such examples. Looking at the

issue of Teesta agreement in the 1983 for instance, there was almost equal distribution; 36 per cent for Bangladesh, 39 per cent for India and 25 per cent remain unallocated and mutual discussions were going on so that they could make it 50-50. In 2012, the new treaty to allocate water resources equally was decided. Because of the political differences in India, this could not come about. Way back in 2011, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also referred to this and thanked God that this was not an issue anymore between Bangladesh and India. He referred to the statement made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2017 saying very interestingly that water sharing is a very humane issue which goes further and said that rivers should nurture relationship, not become a source of discord. So, those are very genuine statements to make. But it was been caught up in local politics and internal politics because of having different parties in power in West Bengal and there are problems between the central government and West Bengal. He would imagine that within years from now Teesta issue would go away and resolved. So on sharing issue there is no dearth of intention, there is goodwill among the people of India also towards the people of Bangladesh. There is a prevailing consensus among the major political parties in India that this issue should be solved soon.

On the question of whether there is a long-term plan about water sharing, he mentioned that the ideas that are been tossed about in various conferences are also reaching the decision makers in India and in other places as well. People has started discussing so much that in BIMSTEC now perhaps some good news can be heard. Those issues will be discussed in multilateral fora as well. He stated that he would appreciate which will also bring all to understand the issue in all its complexities and deal with this issue in a pragmatic and progressive manner.

There was question on the joint basin management and whether India has adequate information at all. He said that during the course of Teesta agreement, in 2012-13 India had technical persons engaged, basically engineers and hydrologists. But he found it interesting they are forcing this issue. They have referred to not only Joint River Commission which is not meeting regularly, they also talked about Joint Expert's Commission, who will visit these locations and gather data jointly. So, there will be greater degree of reliability about the data that will be gathered. At present, there is no data after the water escapes from the Farakka dam. There will be joint technical group which will look at these issues. Gradually, these issues are being taken care of and at the official level also there is an effort to address these issues popping up in the horizon. If there is a joint effort, that will lead to transparency. For example, in the Indus Water Commission, there is suspicion but there is transparency. Because the nature of engagement is such that the Indus Commission from Pakistan and India will come together and discuss everything. All these dams that are being built by India and Pakistan had an unnecessary worry that India is violating the terms of the agreement. The terms of the agreement suggest that India can retain about 3.6 MAF of water in Jammu and Kashmir for its use. Till date, India has not even stored 0.6 MAF, even then, Pakistan had this nagging suspicion about India for arresting the flow of water or using water as a weapon. So, mistrust is at high level but he thanked to this treaty provision for which they are meeting again and again discussing these issues and thereby there is a transparent process emerging in the horizon and that is taking care of lot of worries in Pakistan. He said that there are elements in Pakistan trying to fuel the trouble. For instance, he said that at one level, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan came out and told that India is not stealing water, two days later he was made to remain silent and the chiefs of the terrorist organizations took out massive demonstrations on the streets of Lahore saying India is stealing water. That is a different ball

game altogether. He mentioned the way ahead is the three principles on which water sharing takes place - equity, efficiency and ecological or environmental sustainability. These three E's determine how water would be shared, which evolved from the integrated ecosystem management of IUCN. He concluded by saying that both the sides should take these principles and force them into decision making.

Concluding Remarks by the Chair



Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc

Director General, BISS

Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, DG, BISS, noted that both the countries have enough to do, work out and implement with free and frank attitude and example. If they do this continuously, the question of suspicion in the larger architecture of the security issues can be addressed. After the acquisition of the submarines, a lot of questions raised from the Indian side. Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign nation, it has its own foreign and defence policy, has an elected government and it is going as per the constitution. So, there is no matter of concern, rather a good neighbour can be happy. It will augment, not threaten. Two countries have not done enough to convince by and large the population and all sectors of the society that they are dependent on each other and really friends. Unfortunately, a country which was born by the blood of another country's soldier but after forty years the question is raised and still they are suspicious on security matters. When policymakers make their policy, they must take onboard the practitioners and the researchers. Their opinion must be taken, otherwise similar kind of problem will raise and the solution will never be a fruitful one.

He added that Joint Basin Development Plan is the most important option in water sharing. People often forget to see the perspective of others. If the issues are viewed from the perspective, there are a lot of discussions regarding the Teesta issue. Interestingly, the total water capacity of Teesta itself is the necessity of Bangladesh only. He mentioned that the necessity of everyone cannot be fulfilled. That is why the issue is always pushed towards the government level and always depends on the political level but very least is done at the expert level.

Closing Session Remarks



Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy

Director General, IDSA

Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy noted that it was a very comprehensive discussion with very useful presentations made by both sides. According to him, this has given them a very precious opportunity to speak frankly on issues in a manner often not possible at the official level. He began by saying that building fences physically is okay, but it is totally unacceptable to have mental fences which are against one another. One can have the best physical borders but unless it brings down and addresses the mental blocks, prejudices or images of the other that are so deeply embedded in the mind, all else will be relatively stymied, limited and futile. He invited to work for bringing down this mental blocks and mental fences and giving each other the benefit of doubt and to accept the fact that the other side is doing its best. He requested not to try and present one another with stark choices like take it or leave it, black or white, zero sum game, if you are not with us you are against us, choose between this or that etc. India cannot afford to do that with Bangladesh and vice versa. India and Bangladesh must do what is in the realm of possibility, they must do so taking into account the history, geography, sentiments of the local people and the lawful act. Both can have their constitutional, legal and regional hurdles to overcome when dealing with an important neighbour. There is a need to enhance dialogue at every level and need to promote dialogue at the level of the entrepreneurs, encourage people to pay more frequent visits and study for themselves the economic opportunities. As "Seeing is believing" - so, people should come to India, spend a few days, go around and he urged Bangladeshi entrepreneurs also to reach out and do more trade shows and investment seminars across India. At present, many parts of India have important industries, which have surplus investment that often goes overseas. He urged the establishments in Bangladesh to hold more investment seminars in India. They have to reach out to the investors, urge and convince them to invest here in Bangladesh. So, he suggested to encourage the officials

to meet more often and not always in a very formal construct. It implies for the defense personnel also and officials at every level should try and promote dialogue at the local level. When the local people talk to each other, there will be better pathway and innovative solutions to local problems. He stressed to begin early addressing the image of the other. Human mind is often wired to think in certain way because of the flow of information received over the years, real or perceived, which is natural. People must fight that and give the right kind of information to the youth, university students and school children. Structured programmes for school children to visit one another should be started. He said that neighbours tend to ignore each other because they are so close, thinking that they can always visit each other. For neighbours, it is important to encourage the youth to interact more freely. Trade and investment ties in this age need to expedite with double vigour and all must not rule out cooperation with third countries. As policies are concerned, he suggested that the countries can always take their governments on board, consult them and then do the best they can. India and Bangladesh must further relax their visa regimes on both side and make it very easy for people to meet one another and there can be more to do about border *haats* as well.

The more places people have to interact at local level and trade, less the likelihood of illegitimate goods and illegal migration; they would do so at authorized places as many as possible. As far as illicit trafficking is concerned, both countries still have to address it. Both the countries must work together to fight terrorism, which have done splendidly on this cause in recent years and more power to those who are engaged directly in this kind of cooperation. At the broader level, there are serious challenges that India and Bangladesh face which include climate change, disaster management and water management. Both countries need to learn from each other. Nobody is perfect and none of the country has all the information and data. They need to learn to put their heads together and see what best they can do. It is freaky to do the same thing in the same way as it gives the same results. But there is a necessity to break out of this mood and look for innovation and innovative ideas and results. So, let us try to do things differently. He expressed that both countries can try to be more flexible at the track 1.5 and track 2 levels apart from government to government. It is important for civil society, local activists, media and the people at large to be involved. He expressed that he will look forward to continue this dialogue once again in Bangladesh whenever opportunities present and visit in future to continue dialogue.

Remarks & Vote of Thanks



Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc
Director General, BISS

Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General of BISS in his Concluding Remarks marked that more engagement between the two countries is needed, the more they know each other, the more they will be able to find out the solution and move forward. He pointed out that back in 1994-95, about 13.5 cubic feet of natural gas was discovered in the Akyab Bay of the Myanmar and it was supposed to go to India through the passage of Bangladesh. Agreement was almost in the final stage, but unfortunately, who will get more and who will get less- this theory was applied both by India and Bangladesh. At the end of the day, the gas had been finally travelled to Kunming. Now, China is taking the gas although it is far from the Akiyab Bay. The closest door of Akyab is Chattogram port of Bangladesh from where it could easily go to India and both the countries could consume it. If both countries were successful in that venture, the regional dynamics could have been much different. People are talking about the Rohingya issue which could also have taken a different shape, could have resolved much amicably between the three stakeholders. They would have to depend on each other because they had already engaged and they would not disengage because of their mutual benefit. There would have been some meaningful engagement with partners, colleagues and neighbours. He opined that equal share theory will not work and the theory of win-win has to be applied and only then they will be able to resolve much of their crisis.

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The Editorial Board is thankful to Md. Jahan Shoieb, Research Fellow and Lam-ya Mostaque and Ayesha Binte Towhid, Research Officers for preparing the Seminar Proceedings.

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