

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)
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Address by

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Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS

On the Inaugural Session of a

Workshop on

“National Security and Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh”

Organized jointly by

BIISS and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) with the support of

Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), USA,

on 16 November 2009

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim,

Honourable Adviser, Mr. H T Imam, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister,
Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh

Learned Chair Mr. Farooq Sobhan, President BEI,

Colonel David Shanahan (Retd), Acting Dean, APCSS,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Participants of the Workshop,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning,

It's my privilege and pleasure to welcome you all to the Inaugural Session of three days long Workshop on “National Security and Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh”. The Workshop is jointly organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) with the support of Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu, Hawaii, USA,

The aim of this Workshop is to discuss the priorities Bangladesh faces in achieving national security development and civil-military interactions, how these priorities should be ranked, and what challenges lie ahead in materializing the ideas formulated into permanent practices. This Workshop is being held to bring together high-level Bangladeshi officials from the security sectors and government as well to deliberate upon the current state of civil-military relations and the future prospects for this relationship. The outcome of the workshop is intended to provide an opening step in renewing the dialogue on the security sector in Bangladesh and to construct a series of steps and ways forward that will allow for new ideas on civil-military relations that can be put into practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The concept of national security, although as old as nation-state itself, came to be widely used and discussed in international relations following World War II. It is generally viewed in terms of power, avoiding war or is equated with survival, and for some it is the relative freedom from harmful threats. In the literature on International Relations the concept has been used more in militaristic sense. The widely used and accepted definition of the concept is purely a military one: security is the immunity of a state or nation to threats emanating from outside its boundaries. The military approach to national security is based on the assumption that the principal threat to security comes from other nations. There is however a growing shift from military biased classical definition of security. Views have emerged that human welfare cannot be ensured if security is solely addressed from the traditional security paradigm. In present day context it can clearly be stated that, ensuring human welfare is an inseparable part of the National Security System, which are now very widely discussed as non-traditional security issues. Security issues like climate change, natural disasters, migration, health hazards, conflicts within the society, etc are now widely discussed security concerns.

Civil-Military relation is a widely talked about issue, and can be said to be interaction of political institutions with the organisation of the armed forces in the management of state affairs. It involves a complex balance of power and attitude between civilian and military groups. Nations that have developed a balance pattern of Civil-Military relations have a great advantage in national security; on the other hand the nations that failed, squander their resources and run risks to its security. The fine balancing between the social values and functional imperatives by the military is the nub of the problem of Civil-Military relations.

In Bangladesh perspective since independence it generated lot of debate time to time as the country has been ruled differently either civil or military or mixed civil/military at various stages of its political history. Since early 1990s Civil-Military relations in Bangladesh appeared to be at the threshold of a new and auspicious beginning. By coincidence regeneration of the democratic process in Bangladesh came about at the same time when cold war had ended, and era of democratisation across most of the third world had begun. The role of military in Bangladesh in upholding democratic process and supremacy of constitution thus far has been commendable. This has again been demonstrated in their constructive role which paved the way for recent transition to democracy after two years of political turmoil.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

BISS has devoted significant part of its activities in pioneering new and contemporary thoughts and ideas by organizing seminars, conferences, workshops and symposiums on the vital issues of national, regional and international concern since it was established in 1978. BEI, an emerging think tank is also working on similar issues of

national and international importance..This workshop is a part of broader BISS and BEI activities. And our effort is strongly being supported by APCSS, a US dept of def academic institute, which addresses global and regional security issues with particular focus on Asia-Pacific region. In the backdrop of our restarted journey to democracy only eleven months ago, it will certainly be interesting to observe the proceeding for the next three days.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that we all will be greatly rewarded from this workshop on “National Security and Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh”. Let me express our sincere gratitude and thanks to Honourable Adviser, Mr. H T Imam, Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister, Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, for sparing his valuable time from a very busy schedule and gracing this inaugural session of the workshop as the Chief Guest.

I thank you all for participating in today’s session.