

Rapporteuring of
International Seminar
on
Contemporary Thoughts on Enhancing Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations
organised by
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
on 21 May 2014 at the BISS auditorium, Dhaka

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Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organised an International Seminar on “Contemporary Thoughts on Enhancing Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations”, on 21 May 2014 at the BISS auditorium, Dhaka. The Seminar comprised of two sessions. In the First Session, Major General S M Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc, Director General of BISS, delivered the Opening Address. Three presentations were made by Dr. M Jashim Uddin, Senior Research Fellow of BISS, Mr. Humayun Kabir, Senior Research Director of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), and Chandan Kumar Dey, Deputy Secretary, BRTA, Ministry of Communication, Bangladesh. After the presentations, there was an open discussion. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS chaired the session and summed up with the concluding speech. In the Second Session, two presentations were made by Mr. M Riaz Hamidullah, Director General of East Asia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Bangladesh, and Ambassador (Retd) U Wynn Lwin, Member of Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS). After that there was an open discussion. Mr. Md Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh chaired the session and summed up with the concluding speech. Senior civil and military officials including former ambassadors, foreign officials, members of the academia, businessmen, representatives of think-tanks, scholars, and policy makers participated in the two open discussion sessions and raised their valuable opinions, suggestions and questions on Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations.

Opening Address

In his Opening Address, Major General S M Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc, Director General of BISS, welcomed all to the International Seminar on “Contemporary Thoughts

on Enhancing Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations” organised by BIISS. This Seminar was a continuation of the bilateral track II level talk held in Singapore with the support of Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) Centre of Singapore and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Bangladesh. I am very grateful to MISIS delegation for their visit to BIISS.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have a long history of sharing political, cultural and economic affairs prior to their emergence as modern nation states. Both countries emphasise on closer ties and development of bilateral relations on the basis of peaceful co-existence, non-alignment and mutual respect for sovereignty and national dignity. Although the relationship did not continue as expected for last few decades for various reasons, the recent bilateral initiatives show prospect. The June 14-15 consultation meeting of 2013 reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral political, economic and security cooperation between the two countries. The two sides agreed to address jointly and comprehensively the entire range of trans-boundary crimes along the borders.

It can be undoubtedly said that stronger business ties between the two countries now have become a new demand from both sides as there are great potentials in utilizing natural resources in both the countries through mutual investment and exchange of expertise. Even though trade volumes between Bangladesh and Myanmar are low, the potential is very high. Along with huge potentials in the field of trade and commerce, there are also huge possibilities of multimodal communications in rail road and sea between the two countries. Though there are some challenges, both the countries should expand the helping hand toward each other to mutually resolve those bilateral irritants peacefully.

Against this background, the Director General of BIISS said that this International Seminar was organised to assess the prospects and avenues to strengthen bilateral ties between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He stated that today’s deliberations from the distinguished speakers floor discussions will give valuable policy inputs to both the Governments to forge stronger relations with each other for greater interest and welfare of the peoples of the two countries. At the end, he took this opportunity to thank all distinguished and learned audience for their kind presence in today’s Seminar.

Presentation I

Dr. M Jashim Uddin, in his presentation on “Scopes for Attaining a New Height in Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: Bangladesh Perspectives” stated that geo-strategic and geo-economic perspectives justify the necessity of strong Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Myanmar is the potential gateway for an alternative land route opening towards China and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh can also be a gateway for Myanmar to connect with eastern India and other parts of South and Western Asia. With the rise of middle class Bangladesh can become a potential market for Myanmar.

He said that despite having potentials in various fields, both countries have not been able to build meaningful bilateral relations owing to increasing influx of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, lack of effective and cooperative border management, lack of intelligence exchange and joint activities by the security forces, insignificant cross-border trade, lack of confidence, low level of people-to-people contact, lack of connectivity, etc. Dr. Jashim substantiated that lack of political will, regular exchange visit, trust and interest-based knowledge as well as ethnic tension in Rakhine state all are responsible to stuck up some key agreements and MoUs between Bangladesh and Myanmar e.g. ratifying land boundary agreement signed in 1998, meeting of Joint Commission, security dialogues proposed in 7th FOC in 2013, agreement signed in 2007 for road connectivity, MoU between chambers of commerce of the two countries in 2012 and renewal of cultural agreement expired in 2012.

Bangladesh believes that an amicable solution of Rohingya issue would not only improve security issues but also open up new avenues of cooperation between the two countries. He said that Bangladesh and Myanmar could cooperate with each other on energy, transport connectivity, trade and investment, microcredit, education, human resource development, tourism, culture, defence, etc. Myanmar could send its defence personnel to the BIPSOT to be trained in peace keeping operations. Both countries could jointly carry out exercises to combat maritime piracy in the Bay of Bengal. Furthermore, they could

cooperate for joint exploration of natural resources and amicable sharing of the maritime areas. Before that all, essential is people-to-people contact.

While providing policy recommendations, he stated that leaders of both countries must have their political will for bringing their relations to a new height. In this regard, mutual visits of high level leaders could play a vital role in reducing misperception. Forming various forums like business, journalist, student, interfaith dialogue, sports etc is essential. These will work as Track III diplomacy to shape and influence the Track I diplomacy. Connectivity is the key to boost up relations. Crucial is monitoring the follow up measures decided in various bilateral meetings to keep the commitment with sincerity. For enhancing people-to-people contact, both governments need to ensure smooth visa procedures. Both countries should encourage and provide incentives to each other to participate in trade fairs. Both nations can and should expand their defence and cultural cooperation. BIISS and MISIS can and should create more scope to exchange views and ideas. They could sign MoUs with more relevant think tanks and universities of the respective countries. They could jointly organise international seminars and dialogues on different potential areas of cooperation with the help of experts.

In conclusion, Dr. Jashim said that for attaining a new height in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations, we must go beyond our boundaries. Resolving existing challenges and seeking cooperation in potential areas can go simultaneously. For greater friendship, removing suspicion and opening up of minds are imperative. Finally, he said that taking measures for confidence building is of high importance.

Presentation II

In his presentation on “Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: Imperatives for Greater Cooperation”, Mr. Humayun Kabir first spoke on current state of relations between the two countries through examining bilateral issues. He focused on three major issues: Rohingya issue, smuggling and trafficking, and maritime boundary dispute in the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar does not consider Rohingyas as its nationals and Myanmar calls them

'Bengalis'. Bangladesh does not recognize these foreigners as refugees and calls those who are out of two camps undocumented Myanmar nationals. The constant influx of Rohingyas is causing strains on the economic and environmental resources in the Southeast of Bangladesh. If this issue remains unresolved, what will become alarming is the links of certain Rohingyas to terrorist groups. Drug traffickers, arms dealers and insurgent groups working together can become one of the greatest security threats and such nexus has already been identified at the Bangladesh-Myanmar borders. The way forward is peaceful, result-oriented negotiation, and both the countries must increase dialogue in order to find solutions to their outstanding issues.

On geopolitical and strategic dimensions of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations, Mr. Humayun Kabir discussed increasing importance of Bangladesh and Myanmar, the geopolitics of the Bay of Bengal, the US interests, the interests of China, and India's interests. He then identified and detailed new areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Infrastructure and connectivity are a central element in generating the expected benefits from the Bangladesh-Myanmar cooperation. It is imperative that both nations collaborate in the development of a multi-modal transport network allowing uninterrupted and seamless exchange. This is expected to increase bilateral trade through the use of eight ports – Chittagong, Mongla, Narayanganj and Teknaf in Bangladesh and Yangon, Patheingyi, Sittwe and Maungtaw ports in Myanmar. Improved maritime infrastructure that would also allow Bangladesh to serve its neighbours' hinterlands should become its long-term strategy. On the other hand, Myanmar has started inviting investments from businesses and industrialists from Bangladesh. Myanmar also intends on setting up wholesale markets along the border to increase bilateral trade with Bangladesh. Again, in terms of energy, negotiations with Myanmar are already underway, with the objective to supply 500 MW of hydropower to Bangladesh by 2017. Thus, both Bangladesh and Myanmar have the opportunity to increase connectivity as a necessity for their enhanced trade, investment and people-to-people interaction.

Outstanding issues can be impediments to bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In the case of Bangladesh and Myanmar, there are a few issues that remain

unresolved. If we look at the Rohingya issue the incapacity of the two governments to come to a mutual agreement is starting to affect Bangladesh's internal policy and security sphere. Although Bangladesh's bilateral relations do not solely resolve around this specific issue, the manner in which Myanmar decides to handle the problem will be crucial in setting the tone for their future cooperation. However, nowadays both regional and internal dynamics are changing for Bangladesh and Myanmar. Development and growth are facilitated by the international community and their internal reforms; hence there is even greater scope and imperatives for Bangladesh and Myanmar for increased cooperation between them.

Presentation III

In his presentation, Mr. Chandan Kumar Dey on "BCIM-EC Corridor: Opportunities and Challenges" detailed road corridors, status of BCIM road corridor, investigations to improve corridors in Bangladesh, and key challenges. He spoke on Bangladesh's accession to international agreement on Asian Highway. UN ESCAP adopted the agreement on 18 November 2003 which entered into force on 04 July 2005. Bangladesh signed the Instrument of Accession on 05 July 2009 which was effected on 10 August 2009. The Agreement entered into force on 08 November 2009. Mr. Chandan discussed Asian Highway 1, 2 and 41 in Bangladesh as well as BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistic Study (BTILS) that identified 14 corridors of regional significance – 7 of the 14 connect Bangladesh.

Afterwards, he talked about SAARC Highway corridors in Bangladesh, SASEC corridor 4, SASEC road corridor 9 and 5A as well as BCIM road corridor. He said that BCIM route crosses four countries through some challenging terrains; significant road improvement is needed in Assam, Manipur and Myanmar. He stated that BCIM forum emphasized reviving the famed Southern Silk Road. 2006 Delhi Forum envisaged a Road Rally across one of the arteries of Southern Silk Route. 13 participants conducted the BCIM Route Survey in February 2012 from Kunming to Kolkata. Around 80 delegates participated in Car Rally in 2013 from Kolkata to Kunming.

Mr. Chandan detailed BCIM road corridor in general and BCIM road corridor within Bangladesh in particular. He gave an overview of the status of BCIM Road Corridor in Bangladesh: mostly 2-lane highway with bituminous pavement; good riding quality along the corridor; feasibility study and detailed design are being carried out to improve different stretches along BCIM Corridor; only missing link is the ferry service on the river Padma between Paturia and Doulatdia. Mr. Chandan also gave a detailed picture on the MoU and bilateral agreement for direct road link with Myanmar. The MoU signed in 2004 and the bilateral agreement signed in 2007 between Bangladesh and Myanmar for direct road link. In the agreement, it was agreed that Bangladesh will construct 23 km from Taungbro to BawliBazar within Myanmar and the rest 110 km up to Kyawktaw will be constructed by Myanmar. Investment cost for upgrading 140 km was approximately US\$437.5 million. In Bangladesh portion, *Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Balukhali-Gundum* route is mostly part of AH-41 that is fairly developed.

Mr. Chandan subsequently spoke on additional route for BCIM-EC and intervention (e.g. routes, length, interventions and corridor) along road corridors in Bangladesh. He suggested that missing links on BCIM corridor need to be bridged, sub-standard sections need to be upgraded, PPP options should be explored, support from the DPs is needed, regional infrastructure fund is to be created, road geometry is essential to allow international traffic, harmonization of standards is needed, border facilitation measures and multimodal integration are vital, and implementation of agreement by constructing road link of Gundum/Taungbro-Bawlibazar-Kyauktaw is required.

Open Discussion for First Session

Dr. M. Enamul Huq, Former Inspector General of Police and Member of Law Commission, Bangladesh talked about the concerns of Mr. Humayun Kabir in regards to the treaty of extradition. Extradition comes into play when a person charged with a crime under state statutes flees the state. An individual charged with a federal crime may be moved from one state to another without any extradition procedures. Dr. Enamul asked

on whether the treaty of extradition would have a negative impact on trilateral relations among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar?

Dr. Mustafizur Rahman, Institute for Development Studies (IDS) spoke about the concerns of undocumented Myanmar Muslims (i.e. Rohingyas) residing in Bangladesh. He said that Rohingya issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar is a serious concern for the two. Rohingya issue should immediately be resolved. We must tackle this as neighbourly as possible. Dr. Mustafizur Rahman also spoke about the commonalities and differences of Asian Highway routes planned by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) vis-à-vis BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) routes.

Mr. Muhammad Mahfuzur Rahman, Director General of Americas, the MoFA of Bangladesh raised the issues of cross-border transactions for both goods and services between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He said that people-to-people contact between the two countries should be as simple as possible. Particularly, modalities of travel for tourists and business people must be easy e.g. visa regime should be less conditional. These will help both Bangladesh and Myanmar promote their physical connectivity-oriented bilateral trade and investment scenario.

Comodor Jubayer, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) talked about trafficking of drugs e.g. *fencidil* from India to Bangladesh and *yaba* from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Trafficking of drugs has been a great concern for the three countries. He said that rather than deploying Armed forces to tackle the concern, we should take joint initiatives on how to stop producing the drugs (particularly *fencidil* and *yaba*) immediately by the source countries.

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmed, Chairman, Board of Governors (BOG) of BISS said that treaty of extradition is only for criminals not to meet the challenges of undocumented Myanmar Muslims living in Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Myanmar have to deepen their bilateral economic relations as well as open new areas of collaboration so that a single

disputable aspect between the two countries cannot challenge imperatives for their greater cooperation.

While responding to Dr. M Enamul Huq, Mr. Humayun Kabir said that extradition treaty will not help Bangladesh return Rohingyas back home. As far as I know, there are three options to send them back: absorbing Rohingyas in Bangladesh; taking them back to Myanmar; and relocating Rohingyas in any third country. However, Rohingya issue is a big problem between Bangladesh and Myanmar. What is now important for Bangladesh is to manage its border strictly so that number of undocumented Rohingyas does not increase.

Mr. Chandan Kumar Dey, in his response, said that for BCIM-EC Corridor to be practically functioned, first we need to bargain with our benefits and then signing of an agreement which would create physical connectivity among the parties more purposeful. But before that, we need to understand routes planned by ESCAP and Asian Highway routes. Because, there are three routes available for BCIM-EC. Which one is more beneficial and ready to instant use needs to be examined also.

While responding, Dr. M Jashim Uddin said that Rohingya refugee is a humanitarian issue for both international community and Bangladesh. On the other hand, it is a serious security concern as well as threat for the latter. Since, more influx of Rohingya refugee from Myanmar to Bangladesh is going to be a cause of demographic change in the latter. Therefore, international community has to understand both humanitarian aspect and demographic change in the southeast of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rashed Maksud Khan, Founder Chairman, Bengal Fine Ceramic Ltd. said that good relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar are needed to resolve the issue of undocumented Myanmar Muslims residing in Bangladesh. Though the issue of maritime boundary between the two countries has been resolved at the international level, it could be settled bilaterally. The issue of Rohingya refugee should also be resolved bilaterally.

On the other hand, he stated that both Bangladesh and Myanmar could think of agricultural cooperation in the Rakhine State.

Mr. M. Mokammel Haque, Former Secretary, said that we need to work on four important areas. These are (i) knowing history of Myanmar, (ii) reducing trust deficit between the two countries, (iii) the issue of Rohingya refugee, and (iv) illegal trafficking of drugs. Besides, business relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar must be increased through Bangladesh-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce. Bangladesh has to produce such goods that are demanded in and could be traded to the market of Myanmar. On available maritime resources, beyond fishing we should also think of joint exploration of energy as well as trading of the energy. On the other hand, he focused on better road link between Bangladesh and Myanmar so that connectivity-oriented trade and investment relations could be facilitated.

Mr. Mahiuddin, the University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka said that knowing history of Myanmar is important for Bangladesh; otherwise you would not find enough space to bargain with the issue of Rohingya refugee. On the other hand, he focused on Asian Highway communication systems in that BCIM Economic Corridor is inter-linked with the communication. In this regard, BISS could prepare some policy suggestions for the MoFA of Bangladesh.

Ambassador (Retd) Shahed Aktar, Former Principal, Foreign Service Academy, talked about the context of extradition treaty. He said that it would indirectly be helpful to resolve the issue of Rohingya refugee between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bilaterally both countries should work on confidence building first, then multi-modal connectivity. These will increase closer collaboration between the two countries and help their disputable issues e.g. Rohingya refugee to be significantly progressed. He also stated that both Bangladesh and Myanmar could collaborate with each other through their like-minded institutes. Here the importance of track-2 level diplomacy comes forefront.

Ms. Saida Muna Tasneem, Director General of the UN, the MoFA of Bangladesh first welcomed the delegations of Myanmar came from the MISIS and then spoke on track-2 diplomacy. She recapitulated how Bangladesh is helping Myanmar in the United Nations that is at the multilateral level. Then she asked to the floor that how the UN i.e. the international community looks upon Bangladesh-Myanmar relations? She valued both countries' geostrategic position and their strategic interests; then focused on valuing Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

In replying, Daw Kyi Kyi Hla, Member of the Myanmar-ISIS (MISIS) said that we need to know the evidence-based truth. We might know half truth in regards to our conflicting issues, so we need to understand each other as well as cooperate fully with each other. On the issue of Rohingya refugee she said that we see it as an international humanitarian concern. Mr. U Than Tun, another Member of the Myanmar-ISIS (MISIS) said that ensuring peace with each other is essential. It would help both Myanmar and Bangladesh promote and deepen their bilateral interests.

Summing Up by Chair

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS stated that the special importance of Myanmar in Bangladesh's foreign policy can never diminish. The paper presenters as well the discussants from the floor have amply testified to this fact. Various aspects of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar – history, growth, challenges, new developments and prospects have been discussed by them in considerable details. Some suggestions as to how best to avail of the unfolding opportunities to further invigorate and revitalise win-win cooperation between the two countries have also been made by the three presenters as well as from the floor.

It is now high time that we take lessons from history and focus on the new positive developments and unfold opportunities to expand and deepen cooperation in all possible areas. Many such areas have already been identified. Some of these are: trade including border trade, road, rail, air and waterways connectivity including coastal shipping,

agriculture, fisheries, forestry, energy and mineral resources, cross border power grids, gas/oil pipelines, education, culture, sports as well as security and joint border management. One difficult but important effort must be to find a mutually satisfactory solution to the question of repatriation and rehabilitation of Myanmar refugees back to their homes and hearths with dignity. There should be more and more interactions between officials and exchanges of delegations including at the highest levels. New efforts should be made to implement various MoUs and agreements already in place. More and more confidence building measures, exchanges in the fields of culture, education and media, exchange of visits of business community, promoting tourism, greater interactions between civil society and think tanks should be emphasised.

It is clear from the presentations and all the preceding discussions that Myanmar is on course for sustained growth and development for years to come. It is also clear that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have reached new levels. I am confident that we have a very promising future for our relations and since we are starting from a low base we can only foresee our friendly cooperation growing in depth and width in the days ahead which will bring benefit to the peoples of both the countries. We now need to sustain what we have achieved and keep exploring new ways to further expand and deepen the win-win cooperation and friendship between our two countries.

At the end, the Chair thanked everyone, H. E. U Than Tun, Ambassador, The Embassy of the Union of Myanmar to Bangladesh, other Ambassadors and Members of the diplomatic corps for joining us today. He extended special thanks and gratitude to Ambassador U Wynn Lwin and member of his team for being with us today and for sharing their thoughts with us in this session. He thanked all the senior civil-military officials including former officials for taking time out to attend the Seminar. He also thanked members of academia, businessmen, representatives of think-tanks and the media for ensuring the success of the session by their enthusiastic participation. Finally, he extended his sincere thanks to everyone else, including BIISS colleagues, officers and staff of the Institute, who worked hard to make all arrangements for successfully hosting the event today.

Second Session

The second session was chaired by Mr. Shahidul haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh. Two papers were presented in the session. First paper was titled “BCIM-Genesis, Evolution and Way Forward”. It was presented by Mr. Riaz Hamidullah, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh. Second paper was on “Developing Bangladesh-Myanmar Cooperation.” Ambassador U Wynn Lwin, the Member of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies. It was presented by Ambassador U Wynn Lwin, member of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

At the beginning, Foreign Secretary thanked Myanmar’s delegations for their coming in Bangladesh and appreciated the civil society initiative to increase dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He added that such initiatives would augment new areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Mr. Riaz Hamidullah started his presentation by mentioning that he would make some thoughts on genesis and evolution of BCIM and he would cover mainly the way forwards for the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM). BCIM was firstly initiated in 1999 by the four organisations of Bangladesh, India, China and Myanmar. In recent years, there is a robust evolution of BCIM. He opined that BCIM is distinguished from other organisations; the organisation was initiated by the civil society organisations and engaged diplomatic practitioners. BCIM is different from other organisations like SAARC and SAFTA. BCIM addresses both bilateral and multi-lateral issues. BCIM is connecting thoughts. It is connecting growth centres like Kolkata, Chittagong and Kunming. The organisation focuses mainly on infrastructure and trade. The organisation covers Eastern China, North East of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The regions have commonality in terms of fragile ecology and endemic poverty. The socio-economic conditions of the region are also not good. An institute in Kunming made some assumptions about the development of the region: social and environmental stability, sub-region to be peaceful and efficient management of climate change.

The organisation is linking India and China which may lead towards a true Free Trade Area (FTA). Bangladesh and Myanmar are also going to be linked in this process. The

proposals of the UNESCAP for connectivity are also furthering the process. All such arrangements are leading towards a greater economic cooperation. The countries of the BCIM agreed on certain issues like mutual trust and respect and equal sharing of mutual benefits. The forum agreed for cooperation, not limited to, physical connectivity, trades of goods and services, investment and finance. However, the business chambers are also regularly meeting to enhance trade and investment in the region. The forum wants to promote an environmentally sustainable development process. The cooperation is not limited in the areas of trade only, but also adds agricultural and water resources issues, live and livelihood issues, people-to-people contact issues and mobilising experts of the region. The forum covers seven main areas: connectivity, energy, trade, infrastructure, goods and services, social and economic issues as well as political issues. The objectives, principles and modalities of the forum are based on common interest of the member countries. The countries of the cooperation are trying to form a common framework of cooperation, which covers infrastructure and expanding intraregional trade of good and services.

The motivational factors of BCIM is that the proposed BCIM Economic Corridor will certainly enhance the economic prosperity of the region and if the corridor is implement it is expected the GDP of the region would be doubled within 2040. It would make a remarkable change in the agriculture and infrastructure networks of the sub-region. In this respect, the mobilisations for cooperation in the region are essential.

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BCIM is an important initiative to integrate the region South Asian and South East Asia. It is also a unique effort to integrate markets in the region. During Chines Premier's last visit in India both countries agreed to make BCIM more effective. The second field level meeting of the region would be held in Chittagong. Then, the next meeting would be in Kolkata to finalise the process.

Ambassador U Wynn Lwin

Ambassador U Wynn Lwin thanked for inviting him in BISS. He said that to further the relations between the countries both countries need to review their relations of last forty

years. He added that he was involved in the first repatriation process of Myanmar's citizens whom came in Bangladesh in 1978. He had initiated the negotiation process between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He was also engaged in the land border agreement process between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

He said that Myanmar was one of the pioneering countries recognised Bangladesh in 1972, when he was working in India. He mentioned that the visit of Sheikh Hasina in Myanmar 2011 augmented a new era of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations and the leaders of both countries made a comprehensive discussion on bilateral issues. The new process of democratisation started a new phase in Myanmar. The country is now trying to ensure its rightful position in the international forums. Myanmar chaired the ASEAN summit in 2014. To ensure its position in the Bay of Bengal, the country tries to forge cooperation with other stakeholders. The country wants to be friend of international community. The country also wants to cooperate with international community with new modes for progress and development. Myanmar is searching for whole hearted cooperation bilaterally and multi-laterally. The country also wants to contribute regionally and internationally.

Bangladesh and Myanmar signed agreements in the areas of border trade. Both are regularly arranging secretary level meetings. The border demarcation between the countries is yet to complete. But, both countries need cooperation to prevent illegal border crossing and drug trafficking. In this respect, the role of civil society is essential. They help to find out practical solutions to forge good relations between the countries. In this respect, both countries should try to understand the difficulties of other countries. There have been ups and downs in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. But, the countries need to come forward to fulfil the basic needs of the people of their own counties.

On the issues of Rohingya, he opined that it is not important they are Muslim or Buddhist, if the countries can reduce poverty, the problems would certainly improve. To improve economy, both countries need to develop infrastructure and industrialisation. It would help them to create jobs. The agreement for border trade can facilitate such process.

He mentioned that Bangladesh and Myanmar share many social and cultural aspects. Hence, increasing people-to-people contact would help them to achieve a sustainable relation. The issue of arms smuggling and drug trafficking in the borders of Bangladesh and Myanmar is also a common challenge for both countries. The countries can work together to face such problems.

The sectarian violence that broke out in Rakhine State and spread to other parts of Myanmar, but the majority of the Myanmar people, including leading monks do not condone it but strongly condemn it. The problem is that when people are poor and needy they are easy to sway and prey upon. Rumours and misinformation spread deliberately by discontented elements and sometimes by irresponsible media that abuse their newly acquired freedom of expression do a lot of irresponsible damage. At present inter-faith dialogues are being conducted from the grass roots level and upwards to make the people understand that Buddhism is a religion of peace and that it believes that all religions promote goodness and kindness.

An all Myanmar Buddhist Monks' Conference was held on 12th and 13th May and its purpose was the purification of the monkhood. One of the resolutions passed stated specifically that any speeches published or audio-taped or videotaped would now be censored by a body of venerated monks. This resolution is specifically targeted at pamphlets, audiotapes or videotapes that has been circulated to incite the people. Another resolution concerned the purification of the Sangha (monkhood), meaning that action will be taken against those who break the Rules of Monkhood. This augurs well for the future of Buddhism and Myanmar.

Many workshop and seminars are also being held by civil society organisations to raise awareness among our people that democracy has no place for discrimination of any kind and that freedom does not mean the right to encroach on the freedoms and rights of others and taking the law into their own hands. The concern and anxiety of the people of Rakhine State is that the "population explosion" that is projected to worsen in Bangladesh in the coming years will overwhelm and swallow Rakhine State. This concern is shared by all the other ethnic races of Myanmar.

Myanmar has embarked on the path to democratisation is actually aware that it cannot ignore the international community to go its own way no matter the consequences; it has to abide by and act in accordance with and within the bounds of international law. The Rakhine ethnic peoples must also be made to understand especially with regard to the Bengali Muslim issue, that Myanmar cannot disregard international pressure especially the pressure of the combined weight of the Islamic countries. Giving fiery speeches and writing blistering articles to inflame the people is not the time to argue about who is right or wrong. It would be best if positive suggestions and good advice could be given to the government from the international perspective and within the legal framework.

Open discussion (second session)

Abdul Latif Masum, Professor, Government and Political Science, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka said that the issue of Rohingya refugee is a serious concern for both Bangladesh and Myanmar. This problem needs to be immediately solved with mutual trust and confidence between the two countries. The government of Myanmar should first change its political will. Otherwise, it would be impossible for both Bangladesh and Myanmar to strengthen their bilateral relations.

Mr. M. Mokammel Haque, Former Secretary, said that Myanmar was very close neighbour of us, but latter the failure of communication makes it far. He added that the countries should concentrate to both track-2 and G-2-G level discussions to meet the gap existing between Bangladesh and Myanmar. The government of Myanmar should welcome investment from Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. We could also think of import of energy from Myanmar. Like today's International Seminar, he focused on holding series of sessions on mutual interested areas with various stakeholders. This would help both Bangladesh and Myanmar deepen their politico-economic relations.

Mr. Humayun Kabir, Senior Research Director of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Dhaka asked to Daw Kyi Kyi Hla, Member of the Myanmar-ISIS (MISIS) on what

is the impression of Myanmar delegation about Rohingya refugee residing in Bangladesh. He also raised a question to Daw Kyi Kyi Hla: what is the other half of truth or evidence-based truth? What do you think about the trust deficit and lack of confidence between the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar?

While replying to Mr. Humayun Kabir, Daw Kyi Kyi Hla, Member of the Myanmar-ISIS (MISIS) said that you misunderstood me and the truth I stated. I said that you might have information on various disputable issues but the information might not be looked up so critically that could create mistrust and interrupt relations between the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar. We see Rohingya refugees as a humanitarian crisis and we are eager to increase our bilateral relations.

Air Comodor Mustafiz, NDC, focused on military cooperation to enhance connectivity, people to people contact and bilateral relations. He also spoke on cooperation on disaster management. He emphasized that connectivity with Myanmar would help us to be connected with China. He mentioned that during the Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Bangladesh government helped Myanmar. It is a good gesture and if both countries can continue such help it will help to forge a sustainable relations between the countries.

Ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman said that former UN Secretary General U Thant, who was the citizen of Myanmar, played praiseworthy role in the international arena. It helped to enhance image of Myanmar in the international forums. He mentioned that though both countries, Bangladesh and Myanmar, are close neighbours, they have also many differences. It because the countries The CSOs and think-tanks level cooperation can breach the gap. He suggested giving citizenship of Rakhaine

Shahriar Jaman, from press focused on mistrust between Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is possible to know something why and how Bangladesh government could reduce the mistrust, but what would you suggest from Myanmar side?

In his reply, Ambassador Lwin said that Bangladesh's mind should be clear if we want to reduce mistrust.

Ambassador Zamil mazid talked about building friendship with the diplomats of Myanmar. He said that relations should be a bridge not distinction. Refugee issue should immediately be resolved. Rohingya issue should not be mix up with bilateral economic relations. Multilateral cooperation through BCIM is important.

Muna, MOFA said that such institutional engagement (e.g. MISIS and BISS) and relations should continue and be increased to reduce trust deficit between Bangladesh and Myanmar. She talked about geo-strategic advantage, commonalities between the two countries, demographic advantage, joint exploration of resources, and increasing bilateral relations.

Cousular, Myanmar Embassy talked about BCIM's genesis; we should further development.

Mohiuddin, UPL said about building and increasing bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In this respect, BISS role in providing policy should be taken into consideration.

Imrul Kayes, former DG of BISS said that if China and Taiwan are investing and doing venture in Myanmar, why not Bangladesh and Myanmar can do that. Find out ways of cooperation in new areas.

In replying, the lady said that on building trust we should not nurse our grivence and recentment; try to reduce them

Munshi Faiz Chairman BOG, BISS talked about several points: pursuing economic development in Rakhaine state, pursue our governments make necessary opening up –

soft and hard infrastructure, humanitarian aspect/side of Rohingya issue, immediate resolution of rohingya issue, so that Rohingyas can get their home back.

In replying, M Riaz Hamidullah said that cooperation through BCIM should be furthered, it would help enhancing bilateral cooperation.