



SEMINAR
on

“Harnessing the Youth Dividend: Peace and Security Imperatives for Bangladesh in a Changing World”

07 September 2025

Jointly Organised by



**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
&**



Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)



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Seminar on

“Harnessing the Youth Dividend: Peace and Security Imperatives for Bangladesh in a Changing World”

07 September 2025



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and Faculty of Security and Strategic Studies (FSSS), Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) jointly organised a Seminar on **“Harnessing the Youth Dividend: Peace and Security Imperatives for Bangladesh in a Changing World”** on Sunday, 07 September 2025, at the Shadhinota Auditorium, BUP. The Seminar was divided into four sessions, including an inaugural session.

Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng, Director General, BISS, delivered the welcome remarks. **Dr Shaila Solaiman**, Acting Chairman of the Department of International Relations, BUP, delivered the Keynote Address during the inaugural session. Afterwards, during Session One, titled *“Securing the Nation: The Ideas of Youth in Traditional Security Architecture”*, three presentations were made. **Mr. Nur Ahmed**, Research Officer, BISS made a presentation on “Strategic Role of Youth in Defining National

Security: Securing the Future of Bangladesh”; **Mr Md Abdul Hannan**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, BUP, presented on “Youth in Preserving Traditional Security Apparatus: Cross-Border Tension, Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Focus”; and **Arman Ahmed Rifath**, Student, Department of International Relations, BUP presented on “Bridging Divides: Youth Contributions to Strengthen National Defence”. The session was chaired by **Lt Gen (Retd) Muhammad Mahfuzur Rahman, SBP, OSP, reds, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD**, Former Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division.

In Session Two titled “*Youth Role in Tackling Non-traditional Security: Bridging Generations for National Resilience*”, **Mr Md Nahiyen Shajid Khan**, Research Officer, BIISS, made a presentation on “Youth against Illicit Networks: Tackling Drug Trade and Substance Abuse”; **Ms Fatema-Tuj-Juhra**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, BUP, presented on “Youth against Irregular Migration: Safeguarding Human Rights, Protecting Lives”; and **Ms Tasnia Tasnim Hossain**, Student, Department of International Relations, BUP, deliberated on “Climate Change and Natural Disaster as a National Security Threat: Youth in Action”. The session was chaired by **Dr Sazzad Siddiqui**, Associate Professor and Chairman, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka.

During Session Three titled “*Inclusion of Youth in the Peace System*”, **Dr Razia Sultana**, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS, made a presentation on “Beyond Employment: Skill Development as a Peace Strategy for Reducing Organised Crime”; **Mr Abdullah Shahnewaz**, Assistant Professor, Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights, BUP, deliberated on “Youth Leadership in Preventing Socio-Political Instability: Toward a Peaceful and Resilient Future”; and **Ms Sarah Sayara Rahman**, Student, Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights, BUP, made a presentation on “Youth as Peace Ambassadors: Promoting Harmony and Resilience against Intolerance”. **Ms Munira Sultana**, Deputy Manager, Skills Development Programme, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre (BYLC), chaired the session.

Major General Md Mahbub-ul Alam, BSP, ndc, afwc, psc, MPhil, PhD, Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), delivered the closing remarks.

WELCOME REMARKS



Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng

*Director General
Bangladesh Institute of International and
Strategic Studies*

Major General Iftekhar Anis opened the seminar by warmly greeting the Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals, Major General Md Mahbub-ul Alam, along with the session chairs, distinguished speakers, esteemed guests and students present. He extended his gratitude to the participants, noting that their presence underscored the importance of the discussion on harnessing the youth dividend for transforming Bangladesh's economy and society.

He highlighted that the concept of the youth dividend has become a prominent theme in Bangladesh's development discourse, inspired by experiences from other countries where young populations have made significant contributions to economic and social progress. While economic transformation remains central to this aspiration, he reminded the audience that youth engagement is equally vital for ensuring peace, security, and broader social development. Citing global examples from Rwanda, Kenya, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, he highlighted the crucial role young people have played in peacebuilding during times of conflict. He also referred to the international recognition of youth participation, mentioning United Nations Security Council Resolutions adopted in recent years that have encouraged the inclusion of youth in conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peace processes.

Major General Iftekhar stressed that the youth dividend is not automatic or guaranteed, noting that Bangladesh's experience demonstrates the importance of the quality of its youth force. He drew attention to persistent challenges, referencing the 2016 Labour Force Survey, which reported a youth unemployment rate more than double the national average, at 10.6 per cent. He also highlighted that nearly 30 per cent of young people were not engaged in education, employment, or training, raising serious policy concerns about the effectiveness of the education system, the labour market, and broader security implications. Furthermore, he cautioned that such an unemployed youth bulge could itself become a source of conflict, drawing parallels with the Arab Spring. To address this, he emphasised the need to equip

young people with skills aligned to the demands of the changing economy, particularly by bridging the gap between the education system and the labour market.

In addition to unemployment and inequality, he identified further challenges facing Bangladeshi youth, including political unrest, extremism, communal tensions, and cyber threats. Despite these issues, he reflected on the positive role youth have historically played in Bangladesh. Student movements and youth-led organisations have long contributed to democratic reforms and social justice. He mentioned the recent July Uprising as an example of youth power, noting how young people not only advocated for democratic reform but also took voluntary action to protect religious sites and vulnerable communities, while promoting dialogue and non-violence. He further observed how youth have combated misinformation on digital platforms through fact-checking and constructive engagement.

Major General Iftekhar also referred to youth contributions during non-political crises, including natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, where young people played leading roles in relief operations and in supporting vulnerable communities. Such actions, he noted, help to strengthen social cohesion and trust at the grassroots level. He also recognised the role of educated youth in countering radical ideologies by promoting tolerance, diversity, and inclusive narratives.

Turning to the way forward, he proposed several measures for harnessing the youth dividend to advance peace and security. These included promoting peace education in schools and universities, ensuring young people have space in policymaking processes including national security strategies, and recognising youth not just as future leaders but as leaders of today. He advocated for greater institutional support to youth-led initiatives through funding, training, and mentorship, as well as fostering intercultural dialogue to strengthen mutual understanding and address communal tensions.

He concluded by expressing his confidence that the seminar would serve as a platform to generate innovative ideas on how best to harness the youth dividend for peace and security, and he encouraged lively discussions and active participation from all attendees.

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Dr Shaila Solaiman

Acting Chairman

Department of International Relations, BUP

Dr Shaila Solaiman delivered the keynote address at the inaugural session, underscoring the timeliness and importance of the seminar on *Harnessing the Youth Dividend: Peace and Security Imperatives for Bangladesh in a Changing World*. She highlighted that Bangladesh is not only a young nation historically but also demographically, with its large youth population representing both a significant opportunity and a formidable challenge. How this energy is engaged today, she argued, will determine whether the country rises as a dynamic middle-income nation or struggles with unmet expectations.

Dr Solaiman noted that young people in Bangladesh are already shaping the peace and security landscape through their leadership in social movements, democratic reform, and activism on issues such as environmental protection and gender-based violence. Student protests in recent years have demonstrated their ability to hold authorities accountable. However, she stressed that more must be done to institutionalise youth participation in governance, particularly for underrepresented groups such as rural youth, women, and minority communities.

She structured her remarks around three areas: youth participation in traditional security domains, engagement with non-traditional security issues, and inclusion in peace processes.

On traditional security, she pointed out that Bangladesh's security environment is influenced by evolving threats, including geopolitical tensions, border management, terrorism, and cyber warfare. Once dominated by state security institutions, these areas are now shaped by the active involvement of young people. Thousands serve in the armed forces, police, and border agencies, while young IT professionals and volunteer groups play vital roles in countering cyber threats, supporting law enforcement during crises, and contributing to disaster relief.

Addressing non-traditional security, Dr Solaiman stressed that young people are both the most vulnerable to and the most powerful actors in confronting risks such as climate change, pandemics, and socio-economic instability. She highlighted their leadership in climate activism, renewable energy initiatives, health security during the COVID-19 pandemic, and digital innovation to combat misinformation. In these areas, youth have demonstrated resilience and creativity, helping to bridge generational divides and strengthen community security.

Turning to peace-building, she emphasised that sustainable peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, inclusion, and dialogue. Youth in Bangladesh have historically been catalysts for social and political change, from the language movement and liberation war to more recent movements such as the July 2024 Uprising. Their activism has consistently advanced democratic values and human rights. To sustain this role, Dr Solaiman called for youth forums to be institutionalised within policymaking, with educational systems fostering peace literacy and dialogue. She particularly stressed the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for women and marginalised youth in peace processes.

She referred to international frameworks, including UN Security Council resolutions that recognise youth as partners in peace and security. She urged Bangladesh to set a regional example by mainstreaming youth in peace-building strategies.

In conclusion, Dr Solaiman stated that the youth dividend must be recognised not merely as a demographic advantage but as a moral obligation. With deliberate investment in education, vocational training, and participatory platforms, the country could transform this dividend into a strategic asset for sustainable peace and security. Conversely, failure to act would risk turning this opportunity into a liability. She reminded the audience that the youth of Bangladesh are not only the future but also the present, already proven as guardians of national transformation.



SESSION ONE

Securing the Nation: The Ideas of Youth in Traditional Security Architecture

Presentation on “Strategic Role of Youth in Defining National Security: Securing the Future of Bangladesh”



Mr Nur Ahmed

Research Officer

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

Mr Nur Ahmed reflected on the gaps in defining Bangladesh’s national security, observing that the country still lacks a coherent and comprehensive security strategy. He argued that rather than focusing only on academic jargon from international relations, it was necessary to frame security in straightforward terms: safeguarding the nation-state from threats to its core values. Identifying and agreeing upon these cherished values, he noted, is central to ensuring consistency in policy and practice.

Drawing lessons from other contexts, he mentioned how some countries, such as those in Scandinavia, have prioritised freedom, peace, and security as their guiding values. In Bangladesh, however, a lack of national consensus, disagreements over historical narratives, and contested ideas of identity continue to complicate the formulation of a unified security framework. He emphasised that political will is unlikely to emerge without such consensus, as leaders act decisively only when they feel a clear mandate from the public.

In this process, youth have a vital role to play. If they are portrayed negatively, their participation becomes limited. Instead, by enabling their engagement through education, institutional inclusion, and opportunities for critical discourse, young people can become important contributors at the societal, community, and institutional levels. However, he stressed that the youth themselves must also find the motivation and critical insight to take part actively.

Mr Ahmed further underlined that security should no longer be viewed solely through the military lens. Bangladesh faces both traditional and non-traditional threats, and the boundary between the two is increasingly blurred. Challenges such as cybersecurity, climate change, health crises, and economic coercion now form part of the national security landscape. This, he suggested, calls for contributions from across academic and professional disciplines: engineers to strengthen cyber and defence technologies, economists to build resilience, medical scientists to prepare for biological risks, and scholars in the humanities to refine the country's narratives of identity and history.

As an international example, he referred to Australia's Youth National Security Strategy of 2021, developed through workshops with young participants and later acknowledged by policymakers. He suggested that similar models could inspire structured youth involvement in Bangladesh's own security discourse.

He concluded by noting that security is not only about policies and institutions but also about how issues are framed. Matters become securitised when presented as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures. Understanding this dynamic, he argued, is essential to distinguish between issues that belong in routine politics and those demanding urgent and exceptional responses. Ultimately, he stressed that young people must be recognised as central actors in shaping a coherent and forward-looking national security strategy.

Presentation on “Youth in Preserving Traditional Security Apparatus: Cross-Border Tension, Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Focus”



Md Abdul Hannan

Assistant Professor

Department of International Relations, BUP

Former U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon rightly said, “Young people are not the problem, they are the solution”. Certainly, youth can be the solution to most of our problems if they get the opportunity to flourish and develop properly. Youth around the world, have already created plenty of successful examples in mitigating cross-border tensions and combating human trafficking and smuggling. One can easily get motivated by contemplating how youth have contributed to connecting people from conflict-prone areas like Israel-Palestine or India-Pakistan through platforms like ‘Seeds of Peace’ and ‘Aaghaz-e-Dosti’. In the case of human trafficking, young people have not only conducted effective activism in India under the Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi’s ‘Bachpan Bachao Andolon’

but also, they have contributed to the production and ideation of knowledge against trafficking through initiatives taken by various spirited souls like Katarina Schwarz from the University of Nottingham, U.K. Youth platforms like Kenya’s Youth Against Drug Abuse (YADA) demonstrate how youth can play significant role in preventing drug trafficking. In Bangladesh, youth constitute one-fourth of the total population and many of them have made remarkable contributions in combating human trafficking and smuggling. However, their full potential remains to be properly harnessed. Effective government and non-government measures, societal initiatives and active nurture from family level can empower the youth to explore their potential and serve the world.

Presentation on “Bridging Divides: Youth Contributions to Strengthen National Defence”



Mr Arman Ahmed Rifath

Student

Department of International Relations, BUP

Mr Arman Ahmed Rifath started by arguing that this seminar itself is proof of youth participation in shaping national defence and young voices are being included in conversations that were once confined. This step, he mentioned, is a powerful sign that the youth are no longer on the sidelines, rather than being recognized as partners in building our nation’s security. He continued, while thinking of national defence, the image that often comes to mind is one of soldiers in uniform, tanks on the ground, or jets flying overhead. But in truth, defence is far more than that. It is the collective shield that safeguards

sovereignty, the spirit that preserves independence, and the strategy that assures citizens of safety and dignity. It is not confined to the military domain—it extends into politics, economics, technology, and society itself. And at the centre of this vast network of responsibilities stand the youth.

Mr Rifath reiterated from history that without strong defence, survival itself becomes uncertain. In the 1970s, Singapore was a small, vulnerable state with very few resources. Yet it invested in national service, modern technology, and the philosophy of total defence. That foresight transformed Singapore into one of the most secure and advanced nations in Asia. Our own history bears the same lesson. In 1971, it was the courage and sacrifice of young Bangladeshis—ordinary students, farmers, and workers—that secured our independence. They left behind comfort and security, and with nothing but determination and unity, carved out an independent Bangladesh. More than five decades later, in July 2024, it was once again the youth who stepped forward, demanding transparency, accountability, and a voice in shaping the nation’s destiny. They reminded us that defence policy cannot be kept behind closed doors—it must reflect the will and trust of the people.

Mr Rifath then unpacked the discussion on the centrality of youth in the discussion. Because they carry within them three unique strengths. First, they are a force for unity. In a country too often divided by politics or class, it is the youth who have the capacity to rise above differences and act for the greater good. Second, they are innovators. Defence today does not only demand bravery; it demands acquiring knowledge and adapting to new technologies in

the face of ever-changing warfare. And third, the youth are digital natives. In a time when disinformation spreads faster than bullets, young people are both the most vulnerable and the most capable of resisting. With their awareness and creativity, they can serve as guardians of truth, fact-checking, promoting digital literacy, and keeping our unity intact.

Mr Rifath considers that these strengths matter even more when we look at the realities of modern warfare. Conflicts are no longer confined to trenches and tanks; they are shaped by drones in the skies, satellites in orbit, and algorithms in cyberspace. In 2025, during the India–Pakistan standoff, both sides relied heavily on satellite intelligence, precision drones, and real-time cyber tools. The message was unmistakable: in our era, technology decides outcomes. And beyond these visible clashes, an even more dangerous battlefield has emerged—the battlefield of information. Disinformation campaigns can destabilise a society, erode trust in institutions, and divide communities without a single bullet being fired. This is why the role of youth is not just important but indispensable. Their unity, their innovation, and their digital literacy are precisely the tools needed to meet these new challenges head-on.

Mr Rifath then informed the audience about one of his conversations about geopolitics and the vulnerabilities of modern defence where he learned that *“No nation can truly be secure unless it can produce its own ammunition.”* He considers that as a reminder that defence is not the responsibility of soldiers or policymakers alone rather it is a coordinated effort of engineers, scientists, economists, and educators as well. Only when strategists and scientists, policymakers and innovators work hand in hand can a nation develop a resilient and future-proof defence. This is why youth from every discipline, whether in international relations, technology, business, or science, must come together to build the foundations of our security.

Mr Rifath then delved into the way forward and stated that youth must be considered as an asset to be nurtured. The government and institutions should create platforms where young people can contribute directly through youth-led think tanks, scholarships, training programmes, and cross-disciplinary collaborations. By channeling youthful energy into constructive service, Bangladesh can transform frustration into creativity, despair into resilience, and potential into national strength. Bangladesh was once described as a defender’s paradise but in a world shaped by shifting technology and unpredictable challenges, that paradise could all too easily become an enemy’s playground unless we adapt. With clinging towards outdated thinking, we risk being left behind. With empowering the youth, bridging the divides, and embracing innovation, the youth of Bangladesh will not only defend the nation, but they will also define its very future.

Mr Rifath ended by saying that the true strength of Bangladesh lies not in the might of its weapons, but in the spirit, vision, and determination of its young people. Bangladesh should trust them, empower them, and walk with them because the destiny of this nation will be written by their hands.

REMARKS BY THE SESSION CHAIR



Lt Gen (Retd) Muhammad Mahfuzur Rahman, SBP, OSP, rcds, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD,
*Former Principal Staff Officer
Armed Forces Division*

Lt Gen Muhammad Mahfuzur Rahman began his remarks by framing the discussion on securing the nation and highlighting the role of youth within the traditional security architecture. He noted that Bangladesh holds certain strengths in this regard. The country is often regarded as a defender's paradise, with its population depth providing a compensating factor for its limited geographical depth. He further emphasised that Bangladesh's defence policy, constitution and official documents establish its commitment to peace, allowing the use of military force only in self-defence. In this context,

victory is defined as the expulsion of enemy forces from national territory, which gives legitimacy to the country's security stance.

At the same time, he acknowledged several weaknesses. Geographically, Bangladesh is constrained by its position, being largely surrounded by India and possessing a concave coastline. The country also lacks a developed strategic culture, which is crucial for long-term stability and development. He explained that without security, there can be no stability, and without stability, development cannot be sustained. In this regard, he stressed the importance of building a strategic culture among elites, policymakers, the strategic community, academia and, significantly, the youth.

He added that Bangladesh faces challenges in establishing credible deterrence. As an example, he referred to the 2017 Rohingya crisis, during which Myanmar, under military control, was able to push nearly a million people into Bangladesh. This, he argued, reflected a perception that Bangladesh lacked the deterrent capacity to prevent such actions. Strengthening credible deterrence, therefore, was highlighted as an urgent priority.

SESSION TWO

Youth Role in Tackling Non-traditional Security: Bridging Generations for National Resilience

Presentation on “Youth against Illicit Networks: Tackling Drug Trade and Substance Abuse”



Mr Md Nahiyah Shajid Khan

Research Officer

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

Mr Md Nahiyah Shajid Khan delivered his speech on “Youth Against Illicit Networks: Tackling Drug Trade and Substance Abuse.” He stated that Bangladesh is at a critical juncture in its fight against drug trafficking and substance abuse, which severely threatens the demographic dividend. He mentioned that there are approximately 20 million substance users nationwide, amounting to nearly 5 per cent of the population. Alarmingly, 80 per cent of these users are youth, mostly under the age of 30, a period which should have been the most productive and energetic phase of their lives, but is instead being undermined by substance abuse.

He explained that Bangladesh’s geographical positioning is a major contributing factor. Located between the Golden Crescent, the Golden Triangle, and nearby drug-producing regions such as parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Nepal, and Bhutan, the country finds itself surrounded by three of the world’s largest drug-trade nexuses. This geographical reality has made Bangladesh the fifth-largest transit point for drug money laundering, with an estimated annual volume of nearly 500 million dollars. He highlighted that money and illicit substances are inseparably linked, each following the other. Citing a 2022 report by the Department of Narcotics Control, he said that 88.62 per cent of illicit drug users in Bangladesh come from low-income families, where domestic problems are the primary cause.

He observed that youth, instead of finding solace at home, are struggling within it, leading many towards addiction and wasting their most valuable years.

He pointed out that the most commonly used substances include Yaba, marijuana, and Phensedyl. Cannabis use is widespread among youth, while some who cannot access synthetic drugs resort to simple medicines such as sleeping pills to satisfy their addiction. He noted that the misuse of medicines for addiction is particularly alarming, as it turns everyday drugs into sources of abuse.

Mr Khan remarked that, unlike other regions of the world, Bangladesh has so far avoided violent cartel wars like those in South America, Africa, or parts of Southeast Asia. Instead, the trade is dominated by local peddlers, which makes drugs more discreetly accessible within communities and households. Nevertheless, he warned that this makes the problem deeply rooted in society.

Referring to global data presented by the UNODC (2023-2024), he explained that heroin and morphine remain key sources of synthetic drug production. Bangladesh's eastern and western borders show significant levels of drug seizures, indicating that although law enforcement has been active, the pressure on the borders is intensifying, and it remains uncertain how long this can be contained.

He emphasised that Myanmar now plays a central role in the regional drug trade. After the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Myanmar emerged as the world's largest opium producer. For Myanmar, drugs are not merely substances but an economic lifeline that finances insurgent groups such as the Shan and Kachin, strengthens their internal power dynamics, and fuels conflict. He noted that around 50 factories producing narcotics are situated across Southeast and South Asia, including Bangladesh and India. In Bangladesh, the Teknaf and Ukhia borders remain the key routes for drug inflow, often using the same paths through which over a million refugees entered the country.

He further explained that Bangladesh's role as a transit hub makes it highly vulnerable, while supply networks from neighbouring states continuously exert pressure on law enforcement agencies. Despite these challenges, he emphasised that youth must be seen not only as victims but also as the greatest defence against this menace.

Highlighting global initiatives, he referred to the *Generation Justice (Gen-Just)* agenda, discussed in May 2024 and scheduled for a global summit in Abu Dhabi in 2026, which stresses meaningful youth engagement in crime prevention and the reintegration of young offenders. He mentioned that in line with this approach, Bangladesh has renamed the Department of Prisons as the Department of Correction, recognising young offenders as individuals who need rehabilitation rather than punishment. He also noted UNODC's youth empowerment and inclusive justice reform frameworks as essential tools for the future.

He reiterated that the drug problem is not regional but global, and therefore international cooperation is essential. Initiatives include youth forums, drug use prevention centres, research grants, and regional campaigns. Bangladesh, he asserted, has remained at the forefront of counter-narcotics efforts. The government has treated around 20,000 affected individuals, while community support and peer recovery programmes are being

introduced, similar to de-radicalisation strategies. The UNODC has also been facilitating regional dialogues and intelligence sharing, although sustainable progress requires long-term resource allocation.

Mr Khan concluded on a hopeful note, stressing the role of educational institutions in introducing evidence-based prevention curricula, training teachers as prevention advocates, and establishing peer-support networks. He emphasised that families and communities must play a foundational role in nurturing youth, while modern prevention efforts can leverage technology, which young people are best equipped to use. He concluded with the reminder that Bangladesh's youth population represents both the greatest risk and the greatest opportunity. With great power comes great responsibility, and he expressed confidence that the youth of Bangladesh, if properly guided, are capable of overcoming this challenge.

Presentation on “Youth against Irregular Migration: Safeguarding Human Rights, Protecting Lives”



Ms Fatema-Tuj-Juhra

Assistant Professor

Department of International Relations, BUP

Ms Fatema-Tuj-Juhra began her speech by highlighting the importance of harnessing the youth dividend, focusing on the theme “*Youth Against Irregular Migration: Safeguarding Human Rights, Protecting Lives.*” She introduced her discussion with a narrative that illustrated the harsh realities of irregular migration. She described the case of a Bangladeshi mother who proudly declared that her son had become a green card holder in the United States. However, she was vague about his journey, only stating that he had paid 50 to 60 lakh taka to sub-agents. The route had taken him from Bangladesh to

Dubai, then to an African country such as Ghana, and later to Brazil. Along with 35 other passengers, he crossed the Amazon rainforest before reaching the US–Mexico border, where they sought asylum. Tragically, only three survived, while 32 lost their lives.

Against this background, she explained that Bangladesh is the sixth largest migrant-sending country and the eighth largest remittance-receiving country, as reported by the IOM in 2022. She outlined three major irregular migration routes. The first is from Bangladesh to Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. The second is from Bangladesh to Gulf countries such as Dubai or Saudi Arabia. The third is from Bangladesh to Libya via Gulf countries, and onwards to Italy. She also referred to a dangerous route popularly known as the “Tarzan visa” route, along with other nicknames such as “Dolphin visa.”

She stressed that Bangladesh ranks among the highest countries in terms of sending irregular migrants, alongside Syria, Tunisia, Guinea, and Egypt. The consequences of irregular migration include death, human rights violations, lack of work permits, and uncertainty about whether migrants can ever return home. She pointed out that youth, particularly those aged between 15 and 29, constitute the largest group of irregular migrants, making them highly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Ms Fatema-Tuj-Juhra shared the example of Gambia, where the grassroots organisation *Youth Against Irregular Migration* was established in 2017. Founded by young people repatriated from Libya, the organisation works to inform aspiring migrants about

the risks of irregular migration and provides counselling for returnees. It also collaborates with IOM, ILO, and other regional organisations. Another example she mentioned was Sri Lanka, which has successfully promoted safe migration through youth engagement. The Sri Lankan government conducts multilingual campaigns, produces myth-busting content such as videos and infographics, and employs interactive storytelling by sharing the experiences of returnees. It also engages the diaspora community through online sessions. Research by Sri Lanka's Department of Census and Statistics indicated that awareness campaigns had contributed to a decline in irregular migration.

Turning to Bangladesh, she identified three key grassroots organisations: Young Power in Social Action, based in Cox's Bazar, which promotes safe migration; BRAC's Migration Programme, which focuses on reintegration of returnees; and Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme, a Dhaka-based organisation raising awareness through campaigns. She stressed that these initiatives are largely driven by young people.

She outlined several challenges to youth engagement in countering irregular migration. These included poverty, unemployment, lack of vocational and technical training, cultural and social barriers, and the social stigma faced by returnees. She also mentioned the trust deficit, particularly in rural areas where villagers tend to believe traffickers more than youth activists. Institutional weaknesses were also noted, including limited youth representation in migration governance, lack of rural-focused campaigns, and the strong networks of traffickers who actively promote disinformation. She further highlighted the regional and global dimensions of migration, observing that ASEAN has strong migration frameworks and Sri Lanka is an active member of the Bali Process, whereas Bangladesh, despite being a member, lacks meaningful engagement.

She proposed several recommendations. These included policy and institutional reforms such as establishing a youth-integrated branch within the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare; awareness campaigns through peer-to-peer initiatives; and stronger collaboration with organisations such as the ILO and the IOM. She emphasised the need for protection and support structures, as well as employment and entrepreneurship opportunities to address the root causes of irregular migration. She suggested greater regional cooperation through BIMSTEC, SAARC, and the Bali Process, and encouraged partnerships with countries like Sri Lanka and Gambia. Finally, she recommended stronger monitoring and accountability measures, including the development of mobile applications to report illegal recruiters. She concluded by expressing optimism that these measures could help harness the youth dividend to counter irregular migration.

Presentation on “Climate Change and Natural Disaster as a National Security Threat: Youth in Action”



Ms Tasnia Tasnim Hossain

Student

Department of International Relations, BUP

Ms Tasnia Tasnim Hossain delivered her speech on “*Climate Change and Natural Disasters as a National Security Threat: Youth in Action.*” She explained that while climate and the environment were once considered the foundation of survival, in recent decades they had emerged as destabilising forces. She stated that the greenhouse effect had driven temperature rise, melted ice caps, and caused sea levels to rise, which in turn had fuelled extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms. Although climate change alone did not directly cause conflict, it reshaped the conditions in which societies

interacted. It acted as a threat multiplier, intensifying disputes over scarce resources and driving mass displacement.

At the domestic level, she highlighted that fragile states with weak governance or extremist ideologies are particularly vulnerable. Climate impacts prompted people to migrate to cities, but limited opportunities often led to social dislocation, economic hardship, and increased susceptibility to extremism. She then presented several examples of how climate change and natural disasters had undermined security. In 2023, South Sudan experienced simultaneous flooding and drought, leaving 64 per cent of its population in severe hunger. In 2022, catastrophic flooding in Pakistan submerged nearly one-third of the country, killed more than 1,700 people, and caused damage of US\$ 14.8 billion. In 2023, two powerful earthquakes struck Turkey and Syria, killing over 50,000 people.

Ms Tasnia highlighted that such disasters not only threatened national security but also created cross-border security challenges. She cited research linking rising temperatures with a rise in civil wars, including findings by Princeton University and UC Berkeley that a one-degree Celsius increase could result in a 4.5 per cent rise in civil wars in the same year. She referred to the Darfur conflict, which had been described by the UN Secretary-General as the world’s first climate change conflict, and to the Syrian civil war, where years of drought had pushed rural families into cities, worsening sectarian tensions and fuelling violence.

She also highlighted the strategic vulnerabilities of military installations, such as

Diego Garcia, a key US base experiencing sea level rise of over five millimetres per year, which threatens its infrastructure and overall security. Closer to home, she reminded the audience of the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, which killed around 138,000 people and caused extensive damage to aircraft and infrastructure. She mentioned the Ganges water dispute with India, which had resulted in shortages during dry seasons until the 1996 water-sharing treaty was signed. She also referred to the August 2024 floods in Bangladesh caused by heavy rains and the sudden release of water from a dam in India's Tripura without prior notice.

She drew attention to the findings of a 2009 survey by the Integrated Disaster Management Programme and JICA, which warned of a major earthquake expected in Bangladesh between 2020 and 2030, with the potential to collapse 72,000 buildings and damage over 135,000 more. She then compared these figures with the costs of conventional war, noting that the Russo-Ukrainian War had caused US\$ 176 billion in direct financial damage, with reconstruction costs estimated at US\$ 524 billion. By contrast, climate change was projected to cost the US economy up to US\$ 500 billion annually by the end of the century, underscoring its severity as a security threat.

Ms Tasnia noted that climate change also reshaped power dynamics. She discussed tensions over the Nile River, where Egypt feared water scarcity due to Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. She also highlighted the Arctic, where melting ice had opened the Northwest Passage, reducing shipping distances but creating disputes between the United States, Russia, China, and NATO members.

She warned that by 2050, sea level rise could submerge up to 17 per cent of Bangladesh, with Saint Martin's Island at risk of disappearing. Such displacement would threaten Bangladesh's maritime boundaries, undermine sovereignty, and fuel internal and cross-border conflicts.

Ms Tasnia emphasised the critical role of youth in tackling these challenges. Globally, young people had already demonstrated leadership, from Greta Thunberg's movement to the UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change. In Bangladesh, youth could contribute by teaching swimming to reduce flood-related drownings, supporting climate and disaster preparedness education, volunteering during disasters, engaging in advocacy, promoting green technologies, and participating in forest and vegetation conservation. She concluded that climate change and natural disasters posed profound threats to national and global security, but youth, as a powerful force for change, were uniquely positioned to drive solutions through education, advocacy, and green innovation.

Open Discussion



Sumaya Iqram

Student

Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights Studies, BUP

Ms Sumaya Iqram expressed appreciation for the session and inquired of Md Nahiyen Shajid Khan how future strategies could avoid reproducing inequalities in prevention efforts, particularly for digitally connected youth. At the same time, rural and marginalised populations were excluded. Md Nahiyen Shajid Khan responded that the issue was highly relevant, noting that Bangladesh continued to face economic inequality, unemployment, and limited digital access. He emphasised that government intervention was essential, alongside

initiatives by NGOs and civil society, to extend services to rural areas. He further highlighted the importance of short-, medium-, and long-term planning, with appropriately allocated resources, to ensure the inclusion of marginalised communities.

Habib Aziz Zoha

Student

Department of International Relations, DU

Mr Habib Aziz Zoha asked Ms Tasnia whether youth efforts to address climate issues should remain separate or be centralised. Ms Tasnia replied that a coherent and institutionalised approach would be more effective. She argued that government coordination of youth initiatives was crucial, as fragmented efforts in Bangladesh had limited impact compared to global examples such as Greta Thunberg's movement and the UN Youth Advisory Group.



REMARKS BY THE SESSION CHAIR



Dr Sazzad Siddiqui

*Associate Professor & Chairman
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, DU*

Dr Sazzad Siddiqui commended Fatema-Tuj-Juhra for addressing a critical subject in a structured and convincing manner. He raised concerns regarding whether youth should be expected to confront such overwhelming challenges independently, emphasising that they must be incentivised and guided towards sustainable opportunities rather than being left unsupported. While acknowledging the high quality of the recommendations, he stressed that education must be delivered in a synchronised and well-coordinated

manner to avoid ineffectiveness and ensure that real needs are addressed. He underlined the importance of providing employment opportunities and fostering a strong educational environment aligns with both national and global demands, arguing that only under these conditions can young people develop the resilience necessary to resist irregular migration and similar challenges.

Dr Siddiqui further commended Ms Tasnia for engaging with the debate on the economic costs of traditional warfare compared to those of climate change, noting that this was a pressing issue influencing global economic and academic discussions. He observed Bangladesh's efforts through educational institutions and initiatives such as environmental and peace cafés, remarking that these platforms contributed to addressing the root causes of ecological degradation and human suffering.

Summarising the session, Dr Siddiqui reflected that discussions on non-traditional security often drew upon the Copenhagen School, which had shifted the focus from state-centric to human-centric security. He noted that since the 1980s, the field had diversified to include ecology and peace, creating opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship. Citing Albert Einstein, he remarked that nationalism remained a persistent challenge, influencing migration, cross-border conflicts, and broader insecurities. He praised the seminar's approach of having students and teachers present side by side, describing it as a refreshing departure from traditional academic culture. He concluded by acknowledging the organisers and expressing hope for more such academic discussions in the future.

SESSION THREE

Inclusion of Youth in the Peace System

Presentation on “Beyond Employment: Skill Development as a Peace Strategy for Reducing Organised Crime”



Dr Razia Sultana

Senior Research Fellow

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

Dr Razia Sultana began her speech by recalling two news stories of violent incidents involving youth, one from the *Dhaka Tribune* and another from *The Daily Star*. The first was the killing of Jahid Hassan, a 22-year-old student, by his classmates due to political and ideological divisions. The second was the fatal stabbing of a woman near Farmgate during a robbery committed by a 19-year-old youth. She noted that such incidents reflect the growing threat of organised crime in Bangladesh.

She argued that organised crime undermines peace and security and is increasingly linked to youth involvement. Presenting her paper “*Beyond Unemployment: Skill Development as a Peace Strategy for Reducing Organised Crime*,” she explained that the issue is not new globally, but in Bangladesh, it has become a pressing and contemporary challenge. With a demographic transition where the majority of the population is under 35, she questioned whether society is adequately prepared to integrate youth into mainstream activities in a constructive way.

Citing a 2020 study, she highlighted that one in five Bangladeshi youth suffer from depression due to unemployment and lack of socio-emotional skills. She argued that skill development should therefore be considered a prime peace strategy to promote social harmony and reduce youth vulnerability to crime.

She defined organised crime as group-based illegal activities, often carried out by *mastans* or teenage gangs (*kishor gangs*), which now number around 250 across Bangladesh, with 50 in Dhaka alone. She observed that their presence contributes to insecurity, particularly

for women after dark. The main organised crimes in Bangladesh, she noted, are drug-related (20 per cent), theft and robbery (14 per cent), and political violence involving youth.

Dr Sultana identified several causes of organised crime: weak law and order, gaps in the criminal justice system, lack of inter-ministerial coordination, family disintegration, generational gaps, and criminal family backgrounds. She also pointed to educational inequality between madrasa, Bangla-medium, and English-medium systems, as well as poverty and economic disparity. The political exploitation of youth and widespread corruption further fuel the problem.

She stressed that the absence of education and skill development contributes directly to unemployment and organised crime. Youth, she argued, are a strategic asset not only for the economy but also for diplomacy, policy, and social resilience. As Bangladesh aims for LDC graduation and its Vision 2041 goals, it is urgent to harness the demographic dividend, as this opportunity will not last beyond 2030.

She proposed both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down approach should include investment in education, vocational training, and digital literacy; strengthening law and order, especially in border areas and urban slums; and providing financial safety nets through STEM-driven entrepreneurship, freelancing opportunities, and market-oriented education. She stressed the need for a comprehensive policy to align training with labour market demands.

The bottom-up approach, she explained, must involve families, communities, and youth themselves. Good parenting, community-driven initiatives by NGOs, and self-motivation among youth can foster resilience. She emphasised that youth must empower themselves through empathy, self-awareness, skill-building, and innovation, both locally and globally.

Concluding, she quoted Lao Tzu: *“Give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.”* She explained that skills and training offer long-term solutions, empowering youth to contribute positively to society and reducing their vulnerability to crime.

Presentation on “Youth Leadership in Preventing Socio-political Instability: Toward a Peaceful and Resilient Future”



Mr Abdullah Shahnewaz

Assistant Professor

Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights, BUP

Mr Abdullah Shahnewaz delivered a speech titled “*Youth Leadership in Preventing Socio-Political Instability: Towards a Peaceful and Resilient Future*.” He explained that socio-political instability refers to periods when societies experience unrest, turmoil, and sometimes the risk of breakdown. Such instability often manifests in communal violence, ethnic insurgencies, religious extremism, ideological hostility, disputes over power sharing, and identity-based politics.

He stressed that this issue was significant because in conflict-affected countries, instability not only disrupts peace but also fuels intolerance, mistrust, and polarisation. It challenges state-building and weakens social cohesion. He noted that youth leadership raises the crucial question of how young people can act as agents of stability rather than victims of conflict.

According to him, history shows that young people have never remained passive in the face of conflict. They contribute before conflict through preventive measures, during conflict through peace efforts and humanitarian assistance, and after conflict through rebuilding societies. Youth involvement, he emphasised, operates at multiple levels: individually by raising awareness, within communities through networks and volunteerism, nationally by pushing for governance reforms, and internationally through participation in global peace forums and advocacy.

He provided global examples of successful youth-led initiatives. In South Sudan, the *Anataban* campaign used art and creative expression to denounce violence. In Somaliland, youth dialogue initiatives reduced misunderstandings between rival groups. *Never Again Rwanda* promoted peace education and reconciliation after the genocide. In Turkey, young peace-builders worked to prevent radicalisation and encourage dialogue. In Kenya, a youth-driven organisation advocated for human rights and peaceful coexistence. These cases demonstrated that youth bring innovative approaches-whether through art, dialogue, education, or advocacy- to address instability.

Shahnewaz then highlighted that youth leadership was not only about preventing instability but also about building resilience. He mentioned community-based resilience models, such as *GenPeace* in the Philippines, which engaged youth in the Mindanao peace process. He pointed out that digital tools were being used for peace-building, with social media and apps serving as early warning systems and platforms for peace messaging. He further explained that youth-led climate action contributed to peace-building by addressing environmental stressors that often fuel conflict. He also discussed insider mediation at grassroots levels, where young people facilitated culturally sensitive conflict resolution. For him, resilience meant that societies not only withstood shocks but also emerged stronger, with youth at the centre.

Turning to Bangladesh, he noted that youth had historically played a transformative role in shaping society. Their contributions included advancing democratic aspirations and governance through awareness campaigns, dialogues, and participation in decision-making processes. They had demanded transparency, accountability, and reforms. In addressing inequalities in the job market, he referred to youth mobilisation against the quota system, which many perceived as limiting merit-based opportunities amid high youth unemployment.

He added that youth-led groups worked to build inclusive societies by promoting gender equality, respect for diversity, and representation of marginalised groups. They also responded promptly to natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, mobilising relief efforts and supporting climate resilience initiatives. He emphasised that activism and volunteerism were key components of youth engagement in Bangladesh, where young people led campaigns on education, health, the environment, and social justice. However, he noted that many initiatives were poorly coordinated, lacked institutional recognition, and faced numerous challenges.

He identified significant barriers to youth leadership, including stereotypes that portrayed youth as troublemakers rather than peacemakers. He emphasised that generational gaps and hierarchical structures often discouraged youth from questioning authority. Political underrepresentation also hindered youth participation in peace and security processes. Limited financial resources and inadequate capacity-building opportunities further restricted youth engagement.

For the way forward, Shahnewaz recommended recognising and supporting youth peace-builders through institutional trust, providing financial assistance for sustainability, and creating opportunities for skill development in leadership, negotiation, and project management. He emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces for youth collaboration and mentorship, as well as integrating youth perspectives into research and policy agendas. He concluded that empowering youth was not only about creating opportunities but also about investing in peace and resilience for future generations. He ended by quoting Kofi Annan, stating that any society failing to harness the energy and creativity of its youth would be left behind.

Presentation on “Youth as Peace Ambassadors: Promoting Harmony and Resilience against Intolerance”



Mr Sarah Sayara Rahman

Student

Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights, BUP

Ms Sarah Sayara Rahman delivered her speech on “*Youth as Peace Ambassadors: Promoting Harmony and Resilience against Intolerance.*” She noted that intolerance, whether religious, political, cultural, or digital, was on the rise globally. This rising intolerance, she said, weakened the ability of societies to live peacefully, spread mistrust, created division, and obstructed progress. In Bangladesh, the issue was particularly significant as it undermined the unity built through decades of struggle. She emphasised that intolerance was not merely a social

problem but a threat to national peace and security.

She highlighted that peace should not only be defined as the absence of war, which is termed negative peace, but also as positive peace, where justice, equality, and fairness prevail. In Bangladesh, intolerance threatened both forms. It could manifest directly through hate speech, discrimination, and violence, or indirectly through structural violence such as unequal access to resources and exclusion of minorities.

She pointed out that Bangladesh’s youth, who made up more than half of the population, represented a unique opportunity. If properly engaged, this demographic dividend could challenge both direct and structural violence, moving society from fragile negative peace towards sustainable positive peace. She defined peace ambassadors not as officials or diplomats, but as ordinary individuals who promoted dialogue over division, empathy over hostility, and mediation before conflicts escalated. In today’s interconnected world, these ambassadors operate both at the grassroots and on digital and global platforms, including the United Nations.

She asked why youth should take on this role rather than established leaders or institutions. She answered that young people were both the most vulnerable to intolerance and the most capable of countering it. In Bangladesh, where the youth population was among the largest in South Asia, young people were energetic, adaptable, and technologically skilled, while also being directly affected by intolerance in schools, workplaces, and online spaces.

These characteristics positioned them to reshape narratives and lead sustainable peace movements.

She identified several layers of intolerance in Bangladesh, including cultural and religious divisions, gender discrimination, ethnic marginalisation, and the growing problem of online hate speech and cyberbullying. She noted that youth were not only victims but also active problem-solvers. They promoted harmony through interfaith and intercultural dialogues, volunteerism, awareness campaigns, and creative platforms such as arts, sports, and media, which served as universal languages for unity.

She added that harmony must be complemented by resilience. Resilience, she explained, referred to a society's ability to withstand intolerance and prevent it from escalating into violence. Youth could build resilience by promoting critical thinking and media literacy, practising democratic values, championing gender equality and inclusivity, and supporting vulnerable groups to prevent exclusion.

She further stated that the role of youth in peace-building was not confined to Bangladesh. Globally, the United Nations has acknowledged this role, particularly through the UN Youth Strategy 2030 and Security Council Resolution 2250, which recognised young people not only as victims of conflict but as partners in peace. Programmes such as UN Volunteers provided platforms for youth to contribute to peace and security efforts.

However, she observed that challenges remained. These included insufficient platforms for meaningful participation, lack of resources and institutional support, political manipulation of student groups, hierarchical barriers, and the risk of burnout.

For the way forward, she recommended institutionalising youth roles in national peace strategies, strengthening partnerships across government, private sector, NGOs, and international actors, and supporting youth-led initiatives. Most importantly, she stressed the need to practise peace in daily life, whether at home, in schools, workplaces, or online.

She concluded that when young people acted as peace ambassadors, they reshaped society by transforming conflict into dialogue and exclusion into inclusion. She affirmed that investing in youth meant investing in long-term peace and stability for Bangladesh.

Open Discussion

A participant suggested focusing greater attention on implementation gaps in Bangladesh's Youth Policy 2017, the inclusion of case studies, and addressing youth from different socio-economic classes, including those from upper and middle classes who are involved in organised crime. They also highlighted the need to discuss youth entrepreneurship success stories and ground realities alongside theoretical analysis.

A participant from the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre added that peace-building also required attention to behavioural values and mindsets. They stressed that changing behaviour was difficult because people resisted losing established habits and comforts. They advised that while advocacy was important, understanding resistance and the perspectives of different age groups was equally necessary.

One participant raised a point to Assistant Professor Fatima-Tuj-Juhra, observing that when discussing youth as tech-savvy, there was a tendency to overlook rural youth, who made up nearly 60 per cent of the population. Many rural young people lacked access to social media platforms like TikTok or Facebook. The participant suggested that BISS and BUP could organise specific programmes addressing both urban and rural youth, as their challenges and experiences differed significantly. In response, Munirah Sultana acknowledged the observation and stated that it was essential to recognise the diversity of youth experiences. She pointed out that when young people raised issues, others were not always willing to listen. She emphasised the importance of understanding different perspectives before addressing problems and highlighted inclusivity as crucial to building peace.



Mr Shair

Student

Department of International Relations

Another participant, **Mr Shair**, asked Dr Razia Sultana how Bangladesh could overcome barriers such as budgetary limitations, exclusionary policies, and climate shocks to improve social protection and strengthen youth engagement. In response, Dr Razia Sultana acknowledged the challenges of limited budget allocations in a highly populated country. She emphasised that NGOs and voluntary organisations, alongside government efforts, had a vital role in youth capacity-building. She added that youth themselves had to harness opportunities, including through social media as a form of soft power, and reiterated the importance of education despite resource limitations.



Ms Maisha Momtaj

Student

Department of Peace, Conflict and Human Rights

Another participant, **Ms Maisha Momtaj** inquired whether trauma and family background were underestimated factors in driving youth towards violence. Dr Razia Sultana agreed, noting that socio-psychological issues were often neglected. She stressed the importance of understanding youth preferences and perspectives, highlighting the absence of adequate psychological support mechanisms in universities and public institutions. She suggested that the private sector could contribute resources to address these needs, especially for vulnerable groups such as street children and youth

from fragmented families.

Ms Rafia Islam

Intern

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

Ms Rafia Islam inquired about how initiatives could be redesigned to reach better at-risk groups, including school dropouts, returning migrants, and unemployed youth. Dr Razia Sultana replied that school dropout rates had increased, especially among rural girls, due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. She recommended reintroducing incentives for rural education, expanding vocational training in rural areas, and engaging NGOs, private sectors, and government actors in inclusive policymaking. Abdullah Shahnewaz added that inclusive peace-building required identifying vulnerable youth and ensuring both policy and societal mechanisms for their inclusion.



REMARKS BY THE SESSION CHAIR



Mr Munira Sultana

Deputy Manager

*Skills Development Programme at the
Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre (BYLC)*

Ms Munira Sultana reflected on Dr Razia Sultana's presentation and observed that it highlighted important aspects of youth engagement in peacebuilding. She noted that no one is born a criminal, but that social, economic, and political factors could push individuals towards crime. She emphasised that inclusivity in peacebuilding required addressing the roots of organised crime while recognising the role of youth leadership in preventing instability and promoting resilience.

Munira Sultana then reflected on remarks made by Abdullah Shahnewaz, noting that discussions about youth often carried a preconceived notion that they were more inclined to seek benefits than to contribute to society. She argued that recent events had demonstrated the contrary, with youth actively addressing their issues and advocating for their rights. She further highlighted the importance of recognising diversity, which has existed in the country for centuries. According to her, the capacities of youth were not being adequately developed—from upbringing at home, through the education system, and into the workplace. She stressed that inclusivity should encompass all groups, including marginalised and vulnerable communities, and should consider diversity in age, gender, and mindset. She emphasised that inclusivity was not a limited concept and should not be undermined by discouragement or challenges ahead.

Finally, Ms Munira Sultana reflected on the points raised by Ms Sarah Sayara Rahman. She observed that the discussions underscored the vulnerability of youth within existing systems, the need for tolerance of diversity to advance the nation, and the importance of resilience in maintaining peace and harmony in everyday life. She concluded by noting that Bangladesh already had numerous youth ambassadors working towards peace and inclusivity, and their efforts should be recognised and supported as part of building a more inclusive society. She then invited further remarks from the audience.

CLOSING REMARKS



Major General Md Mahbub-ul Alam,
BSP, ndc, afwc, psc, MPhil, PhD
Vice Chancellor
Bangladesh University of Professionals

Major General Md Mahbub-ul Alam, BSP Vice Chancellor of the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), delivered the closing remarks, once again welcoming all participants to the university and thanking them for their active engagement throughout the seminar. He expressed his deep appreciation to the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) for their invaluable partnership in convening the event, noting that the collaboration between BUP and BIISS stood as a testament to the power of shared vision and collective action. Such cooperation, he emphasised, was crucial

in addressing contemporary challenges through unified rather than isolated efforts.

He also extended his gratitude to the distinguished session chairs, whose guidance and expertise had been instrumental in steering the complex discussions and ensuring that the deliberations were both insightful and productive.

Reflecting on the seminar, Major General Alam observed that young people should not be viewed merely as a demographic to be managed but as a dynamic force to be harnessed. Their energy, creativity, and fresh perspectives were seen as vital for addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. He remarked that the event had demonstrated the value of partnerships between academia, government, and civil society, which provide essential opportunities to connect theoretical insights with practical realities. Such initiatives, he noted, prepare students and researchers to engage with real-world problems while fostering critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a global perspective on citizenship.

He also highlighted that the day's discussions had repeatedly underscored the vital role of youth in national security, from their contributions to defence and responses to non-traditional threats, to their active involvement in building a just, inclusive, and peaceful society. Integrating youth innovation, digital skills, and new perspectives would, he suggested, make the nation stronger and more resilient.

Major General Alam commended all presenters for their contributions, describing their work as valuable not only for academia but also for advancing the broader discourse on peace and security. He made special mention of the three student paper presenters, praising them for the excellence of their work and their confident delivery.

In closing, Major General Alam once again expressed his gratitude to BIISS for their role as an educational partner and to the Dean and all associated personnel of the Faculty of Security and Strategic Studies for their efforts in organising the seminar.

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