

**Country Lecture
on**

Beyond Bilateral Ties: Unlocking New Avenues in Bangladesh- Philippines Cooperation

Sunday, 31 August 2025

Organised by



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

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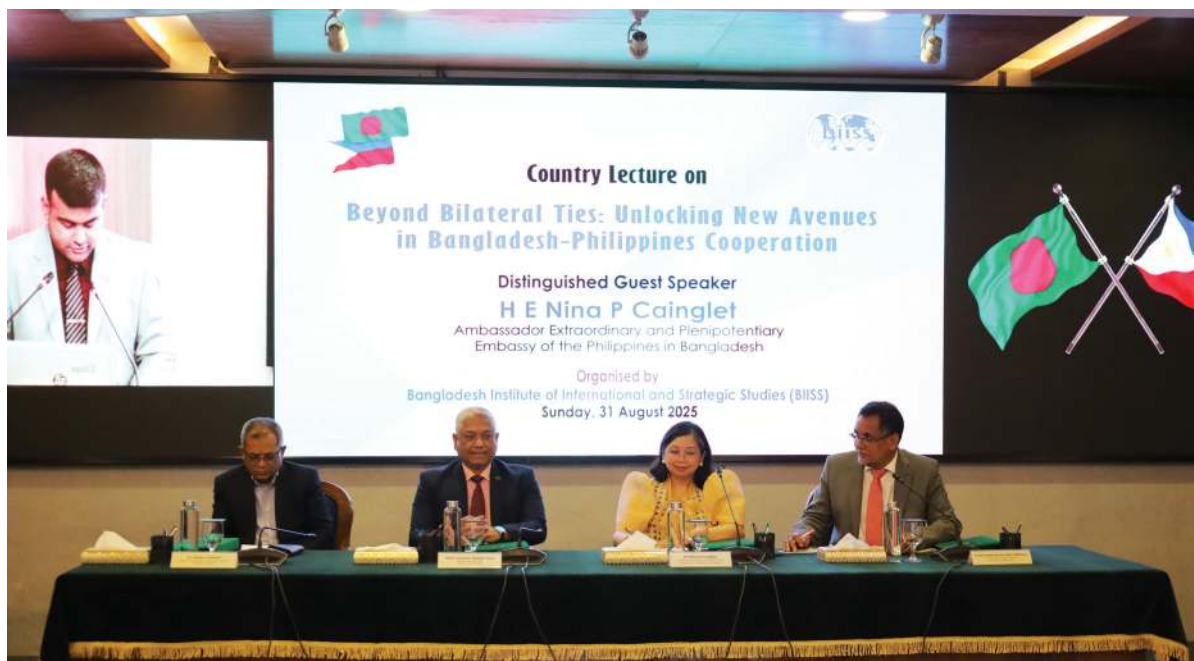
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Country Lecture on Beyond Bilateral Ties: Unlocking New Avenues in Bangladesh-Philippines Cooperation

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Lecture titled 'Beyond Bilateral Ties: Unlocking New Avenues in Bangladesh-Philippines Cooperation' on Sunday, 31 August 2025 at the BIISS auditorium, Dhaka. **H E Ms Nina P Cainglet**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of the Philippines to the People's Republic of Bangladesh graced the Lecture as the Distinguished Guest Speaker. **Dr Delwar Hossain**, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka set the tone of the Lecture. The Lecture began with the Welcome Addresses of the Director General of BIISS, **Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng**. The Session was moderated by **Ambassador Md Ruhul Alam Siddique**, Former Acting Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Senior officials from different ministries, former diplomats, senior military officials, representatives from media, researchers, academics, students from various universities, representatives from different think tanks, and international organisations participated in the Lecture and enriched it by presenting their valuable opinions, comments, suggestions, and observations during the open discussion session.



Welcome Address



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

Director General

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)

Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng, in his welcome address, said the bond between Bangladesh and the Philippines has been one marked with solidarity and mutual respect. The Philippines was one of the first nations to lend support to Bangladesh's struggle for independence and later endorsed its membership in the UN. This was not just a diplomatic act, but a gesture of fraternity that laid the foundation of an enduring partnership. Over the decades, their institutionalised relations had been maintained through resident missions

in each other's capitals and multiple agreements in trade, shipping, economic cooperation and investment. These formal ties had been reinforced by their common commitment to multilateralism, whether within the UN or through engagement with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) related mechanisms and other regional platforms.

The Indo-Pacific region had been experiencing unprecedented dynamism, geopolitical re-balancing, rapid economic shifts and mounting challenges from climate change and technological disruptions. In such a context, Bangladesh and the Philippines had every reason to look beyond conventional diplomacy and envision newer, innovative forms of cooperation. Currently, Bangladesh is considered as a vibrant manufacturing hub with growing global competitiveness in textiles, pharmaceuticals and shipbuilding. The Philippines, on the other hand, established itself as a leader in technology-enabled services, maritime governance and disaster risk management.

These complementary strengths provided a strong basis for deepening engagement. Blue Economy has been one such frontier. Both nations were maritime in character, and sustainable fisheries management, port development and maritime security offer immense potential. Equally significant would be human capital development. Both countries' people were at the heart of their cooperation. They both hosted vibrant diasporas worldwide and shared common interests in ensuring protection of migrant workers, enhancing their skills and creating opportunities for labour mobility. Other areas, e.g., agriculture, renewable energy and climate change adaptation, called for joint research, policy exchange and pilot projects. Both are highly vulnerable to climate-induced risks, and their shared experiences in resilience building could set examples for the wider region. General Anis expected the

discussions today would provide practical recommendations that could inform government policies and private sector initiatives alike. He also mentioned that deliberations would be documented, disseminated and shared with policymakers, foreign missions, universities, think tanks and international bodies. The insights generated here would fit into a broader framework for building long-term partnerships. If history gave the foundation, the present offered the rationale and the future beckoned them to act with vision. The Bangladesh-Philippines relationship should not remain confined to bilateral diplomacy alone. It must be situated within the larger canvas of regional cooperation, especially at a time when the Indo-Pacific was standing at the centre of global politics and economics. These two nations, though geographically distant, were founded by similar aspirations, inclusive development, peace, stability, and resilience against vulnerabilities. They shared a common belief that regional prosperity could not be achieved by one nation's efforts only. It would need cooperation, mutual learning, and joint action. He concluded by urging all to explore how Bangladesh and the Philippines could collaborate in regional and multilateral fora to champion the voices of developing countries, ensuring that globalisation becomes more equitable and advances a truly inclusive Indo-Pacific order.



Setting the Tone



Dr Delwar Hossain

Professor

Department of International Relations

University of Dhaka

Dr Delwar Hossain began his deliberation by terming bilateral relations as the core of foreign policy and international relations. A lot of different aspects could be talked about; however, to be very, to some extent, even cynical, what actually matters at the end of the day under the Westphalian structure of global order, actually, bilateral relations in terms of cooperation and friendship, help not only bilateral cooperation, but also global peace and security. Hence, according to him, the title of the lecture was very relevant and useful. He then focused on four points.

Dr Hossain said he would firstly try to explain and understand the context of Bangladesh-Philippines bilateral relations, which was very important, as General Anis touched upon several really important factors; his task was made easier, he opined. He would also consider something paradoxical or puzzling when he would speak on the Bangladesh-Philippines relationship, potentials for cooperation, which was the main thrust of the lecture, and then, what should be done in these regards.

Bangladesh and the Philippines have vital geostrategic positions. Bangladesh is a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. On the other hand, the Philippines is a bridge between East and Southeast Asia. This provides them special importance in the broader context of Asian geopolitics or even beyond. It also helped to understand the comparative standing of both nations. Looking at the major economies of South and Southeast Asia, one could see their standings. Although India was not included here, it had the largest economy in this group of countries. Apart from that, one could see Bangladesh had quite a strong position, but that was not recognised by Southeast Asian or many countries of the world. It would be important, therefore, to understand Bangladesh's progress or advancement in terms of economy; the country's trade with ASEAN would provide some understanding of the paradox, as well as why Bangladesh and the Philippines had a low volume of bilateral trade and economic engagement in comparison to other Southeast Asian countries. Similarly, with Myanmar, the volume was low, let alone investment. This would also help understand the state of bilateral relations between the two countries.

If Bangladesh-Philippine relations were contextualised from a bilateral point of view, one could see that the country recognised Bangladesh in the very early days of its independence. Besides, they continued their friendship, indicating high-level trust. Unfortunately, there had

been very limited growth of bilateral cooperation. When this relationship was considered in the present context, and even if there were discussions on it, for example, 10 years back, that same importance could be found in the contexts of trade, investment, strategic, and various other aspects. Hence, the potentials for cooperation were high. Bilaterally, they were positioned well to expand their relationship, promote friendship to a great extent that would benefit not only themselves, but also in the regional context and beyond.

In the regional and global contexts of understanding Bangladesh-Philippine relations, obviously, geopolitical factors cannot be avoided. As said by General Anis, the Indo-Pacific region had become very important over the last two decades; however, it was not the only region that had become so. Worldwide, geopolitics has been undergoing noticeable changes. Friends have become competitors and, to some extent, even hostile towards each other. All could see how the US and China were reframing and repositioning their relations. Thus, geopolitical factors were very much obvious. This led to some compulsions for close cooperation between the two countries, i.e., Bangladesh and the Philippines. Conversely, to understand the difficulties of maintaining this kind of cooperation, it should be noted that although the Look East policy of Bangladesh did not officially get much momentum, the country had a clear emphasis in its foreign relations with Southeast and East Asian countries. That was the real kind of evidence seen for a few decades. Moreover, Asian linkages of understanding Bangladesh-Philippine relations were crucial. There were discussions on South-South cooperation, but that cooperation was mostly on paper; countries of the South attached less importance to this initiative when they actually wanted to implement policy decisions or take concrete actions that would benefit the global South.



Dr Hossain said another factor to understand the importance of the Bangladesh-Philippines relations was middle power solidarity. Bangladesh maintained solidarity with various parties, with particular emphasis on global South solidarity. Similarly, middle power solidarity was important, as Bangladesh and the Philippines shared notable similarities in economy, military, diplomacy, and culture. Such solidarity was vital to consider in the present

context of global politics. About the puzzle he mentioned earlier, he said, on the one hand, the Philippines recognised Bangladesh in 1972. Bangladesh established its mission there in 1981 and has been maintaining it. They were enjoying a continuous friendship, with a high level of mutual trust and political will. But on the other hand, there was the sad reality. When data about Bangladesh-Philippines relations regarding trade, investment, or other aspects was analysed, it could be seen that the growth was pretty much limited in terms of trade, investment, and even cultural interactions; expansion of the relationship remained very limited. By contrast, there were enormous opportunities in terms of friendship, trust, and political will. This would obviously need to change, and the gap was supposed to have been taken care of much earlier. It was now high time to think about the puzzle. For understanding the potentials, there were three major areas.

Regarding economic cooperation, undoubtedly, every discussion focused on the prospect of expanding trade volume or trade cooperation between the two countries in terms of increasing exports and imports, diversifying trading goods and services; there was also the necessity of thinking about the possibility of signing an FTA. Connectivity, particularly air connectivity, was extremely important, as opined by Dr Hossain. Maritime connectivity in the context of the blue economy and the maritime nature of the two nations would be similarly important. Prospects in investment could be identified and assessed, where the process could start with different ideas or sectors, which could surely benefit the two countries when they engage investors from both sides. Tourism and energy were two important sectors that would also help build the partnership. In diplomatic and strategic partnerships, Bangladesh and the Philippines had common regional perspectives that required to be strongly promoted. They could work together for a common interest in ASEAN regionalism, where Bangladesh had a very limited presence. The country was trying to become a sectoral dialogue partner of the bloc, which it should have obtained much earlier, as he said. The Philippines could support Bangladesh for this purpose. That would not only help Bangladesh but also ASEAN. They could work together in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal. Other important areas could be military cooperation, maritime security and addressing nontraditional security threats. Military diplomacy was another important area where they could also develop more exchange of defence personnel, bilateral visits and diplomatic support for resolving the Rohingya crisis.

Dr Hossain believed the Philippines would appreciate the way Bangladesh was actually facing the challenge of sheltering more than 1.2 million Rohingyas in its territory. Another important aspect was working together for global peace, development and security. Because when he would speak on South-South cooperation or middle power solidarity, that would really make a concrete kind of consideration that the two countries could work together to deal with great power conflicts or rivalries, the signature aspect of global politics in the current phase. Be it South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, South America or Europe, great power rivalry was crucial to address. Then would come the issue of promoting free trade rules and an equity-based economic order. In spite of not having much influence, Bangladesh and the Philippines could raise their voice against continuing wars like those in Ukraine, Israel's war in Gaza, or many such conflicts, which were profoundly harming global peace, alongside creating hurdles for global security. In cultural and social partnerships, knowledge and experiences could be shared. There was a need to build civil society networks and strengthen people-to-people networks, particularly since there existed a knowledge deficit about Bangladesh in the Philippines and vice versa. More research and academic exchanges would be needed

to understand each other from a knowledge perspective. Environmental cooperation was an area they could work on, and disaster management was another common area, as identified by General Anis.

Political will and mutual understanding were key strengths of this relationship. Whatever expectations Bangladesh pursue from bilateral cooperation, be it in its relationship with the US, Russia, China, India, or the Philippines, those two points would remain constant. This was a major strength of Bangladesh-Philippines relations, which expanded it to a great extent and a level that would benefit the two nations and other factors. Convergence was another strength of bilateral relations between the two sides. The convergence in economic development, a common regional economic outlook, and shared global challenges, whether military or nonmilitary, stemming from US President Donald J Trump's reciprocal universal tariffs. These created a serious compulsion for all countries to cooperate bilaterally and also multilaterally.

Market and demand were significant strengths for Bangladesh and the Philippines. Both nations had their domestic markets with high stakes for the growing middle class. An important factor to consider here was Asian connections. The two countries had their routes linked with Asia, which should be highlighted in their policy and perspectives. They could obviously undertake a lot of specific measures or exchanges, but broadly speaking, Dr Hossain emphasised on the need of consolidating bilateral diplomacy. Such diplomacy between these two sides was in good shape, but it should be made more effective to achieve the goal of bilateral cooperation and other vital issues. Policy paradigms should also be changed to influence mindsets. If Bangladesh-Philippines relations were considered over the last four decades or more, the geographical distance could somehow have some impacts. However, in today's world, as it is understood in terms of globalisation and various developments in technology, distance would not matter. Therefore, a different policy outlook/paradigm would be required for observing the future of Bangladesh-Philippines relations. The role of business communities and civil society organisations would be very important. There are some organisations, e.g., the Bangladesh-Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Philippines Society, and Filipino expatriates in Bangladesh. They should get more involved in the process. Dr Hossain re-emphasised on the South-South cooperation and middle power solidarity, boosting social and cultural interactions. For a better future, there remained the need to utilise extant, shared opportunities. Opportunities would not be meaningful as long as they remain confined within papers or discussions; they should be converted into policies and then implemented. Bilateral and multilateral dimensions should be emphasised as well. The title of the Lecture clearly focused on the multilateral dimensions of Bangladesh-Philippines relations, which was crucial. Decisions should be implemented, and there should be rigorous follow-ups. As per Dr Hossain, who had been in the field for about 40 years, there were lots of symbols in diplomacy. A summit would become a symbol only if it failed in contributing to actions. Hence, actions would be needed. Symbols were important, but there was also a need to go beyond the symbolism of bilateral cooperation. This applied not only to Bangladesh-Philippines relations, but also to many other types of bilateral relations. This is why there was a need to go beyond symbols and undertake an action-oriented approach. He concluded by saying there was no scope for missing the train of consolidating Bangladesh-Philippines relations; otherwise, the same puzzle and paradox Bangladesh had faced would continue to exist.

Remarks by the Distinguished Guest Speaker



H E Nina P Cainglet

*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Embassy of the Philippines in Bangladesh*

H E Nina P Cainglet began her remarks by outlining the structure of her presentation, which was divided into two parts. She noted that she would first take the audience on a journey to the Philippines, often referred to as the “Pearl of the Orient”. Thereafter, she would transition from Southeast Asia to South Asia to discuss Bangladesh, focusing on ongoing cooperation, enduring friendship, and prospects for a deeper partnership between the two countries. In her description, Ambassador Cainglet highlighted that the Philippines, as previously shown on the map, is an archipelago comprising of 7,641 islands. The country is endowed with breathtaking natural beauty, a vibrant culture, and a history that is as rich and complex as its diverse landscapes. From its ancient origins to its modern-day dynamism, the Philippines offers a compelling narrative of resilience, identity, and unwavering spirit. She explained that the Philippines is located at the heart of the Southeast Asian region. As a nation surrounded entirely by water, it does not share any land borders with other countries. Geographically, it lies in the Western Pacific Ocean, bounded in the west by the West Philippine Sea, in the east by the Pacific Ocean, in the south by the Sulu and Celebes Seas, and in the north by the Bashi Channel.

Ambassador Cainglet elaborated the indigenous history of the Philippines, emphasising its legacy as a seafaring nation. By the fourth century, Filipino seafarers were already renowned for their maritime prowess, navigation expertise, and trading skills. They had mastered deep-sea diving and developed sophisticated boats constructed with plant-based ropes. These maritime skills enabled the archipelago to flourish as a hub of commerce, with coastal communities actively engaging in trade and cultural exchanges with neighbouring Asian civilisations and the various sultanates of maritime Southeast Asia. At that time, society was organised into barangays, which are independent political units that later inspired the country’s modern local government system. Women also played prominent roles in guiding and leading their communities. She further noted that after centuries of colonial rule under Spain, the US, and Japan, and during these periods that fuelled a strong spirit of nationalism, the Philippines emerged as a resilient and independent republic. Today, it stands as a vibrant democracy, functioning as a unitary state under a democratic constitutional republic, governed by a president as chief executive.

To ensure a system of checks and balances, the Philippine government is structured into three interdependent branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary. Each possesses distinct powers and responsibilities vested by the Philippine Constitution. The president serves both as head of state and head of government, in addition to acting as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and chief architect of Philippine foreign policy. Ambassador Cainglet explained that the legislative branch is bicameral, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives, which together form the Congress of the Philippines. Both chambers exercise nearly equal powers, and any bill or resolution must secure the approval of both before being forwarded to the president for signature. The judicial branch, she added, is anchored by the Supreme Court of the Philippines. Its justices are appointed by the president, based on the recommendations of the Judicial and Bar Council. Beneath the Supreme Court are various collegiate courts, regular courts, and Sharia courts, each with specific jurisdictions across the archipelago. The Philippines also provides for the establishment of three independent constitutional commissions. These include the Civil Service Commission, which functions as the central personnel agency of the government, thereby ensuring a conducive work environment and overseeing the administration of civil service examinations.



Ambassador Cainglet proceeded by highlighting the Philippines' independent constitutional commissions. She explained that the Commission on Elections is tasked with enforcing and administering all laws related to elections, plebiscites, and referendums. It also oversees voting by Filipinos abroad and, in May 2025, implemented the country's first-ever online overseas voting system. She added that the Commission on Audit is responsible for examining, auditing, and settling all revenues and expenditures of public funds and properties used by the government. This robust governmental framework, she noted, is designed to ensure that the approximately 117 million Filipinos, both within the archipelago and abroad, are assured of their rights and provided with the services they deserve.

Ambassador Cainglet then turned to the linguistic and cultural identity of the Philippines. She explained that the 1987 Constitution designates Filipino, which is essentially a standardised form of Tagalog, as the national language and one of the country's official languages alongside English. Other regional languages are granted auxiliary official status within their respective areas and are widely used in education. On average, a Filipino speaks at least three languages: Filipino, English, and their mother tongue. This multilingualism reflects the country's rich linguistic diversity, comprising at least 131 languages and 77 major ethno-linguistic groups. Many of these groups are classified as indigenous peoples under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997, preserving unique traditions and ways of life. She also noted the significance of the Moro peoples, primarily Muslim-majority groups from Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan, who represent a distinct cultural and historical segment of the population. She described Filipino culture as an intricate tapestry woven from indigenous heritage, centuries of colonial influence, and contemporary global interactions. The Spanish colonial era, which spanned over three centuries, left a profound imprint on Filipino society. The widespread introduction of Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, shaped religious practices, social norms, and artistic expression. Today, around 80 per cent of Filipinos identify as Catholic. Spanish influence also extended to architecture, cuisine, and language, creating a unique blend of Eastern and Western traditions.



Following nearly five decades under the US, the Philippines developed strong educational institutions and a society where English is widely spoken and taught. Today, the country provides world-class education across diverse fields, and a significant number of Filipino teachers are employed abroad, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, to meet the global demand for English language instruction. Ambassador Cainglet stressed that despite centuries of external influence, core Filipino cultural traits have endured and thrived. Filipinos, she observed, are highly relational, rooted in the value of *kapwa*, the belief that “the other person is also yourself”. They are renowned for their hospitality, strong sense of family and community, respect for elders, and communal resilience, exemplified by *bayanihan*, or

mutual assistance, particularly in times of adversity. The country's cultural landscape, she explained, consistently reflects this distinctive Filipino blend of indigenous and foreign influences.

She then addressed tourism, describing it as one of the Philippines' key drivers of economic growth. Blessed with natural beauty, including beaches, rivers, waterfalls, and mountains, the archipelago attracts visitors from around the world. Eco-wellness tourism has also grown in popularity, generating employment and livelihood opportunities for local communities, fostering skills development, and contributing to regional economic growth. Ambassador Cainglet also elaborated on the country's economic performance. The economy of the Philippines is driven by strong domestic demand and consumption, supported by key industries such as manufacturing, agribusiness, high-value information technology, business process management services, and renewable energy. She emphasised that government initiatives aim to stimulate investment and job creation through legislative reforms and continued investment in human capital and infrastructure. With a young, English-speaking population and a median age of 25, the Philippines has a competitive advantage in the global economy. She highlighted the contribution of overseas Filipinos, noting that remittances reached a record high of US\$ 38.3 billion in 2024. Despite global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and rising commodity prices, the country's GDP grew by a robust 5.6 per cent in 2024 and has averaged more than 6 per cent over the past three years, positioning the Philippines among the region's strongest growth performers. Sustained recovery and ongoing reforms, she added, are paving the way for the country to attain upper-middle-income status by 2025. The economic outlook remains strong, with growth expected to be among the fastest in the region, supported by stable inflation, easing monetary policies, and continued public investment.

On regional engagement, Ambassador Cainglet recalled that the Philippines, as one of the five founding members of ASEAN in 1967, has consistently advocated for a more people-oriented and people-centred regional community. She noted that in the coming year, the Philippines will assume the ASEAN Chairmanship, guided by both its national priorities and ASEAN's regional agenda. These priorities include climate change, food and energy security, sustainable development, the digital economy, social protection, women's empowerment, and cooperation on migrant workers. She emphasised that this role presents an opportunity to help shape the regional architecture and the future direction of ASEAN, in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. She stressed that the Philippines intends to build on ASEAN's long-standing traditions of consultation, consensus, and mutual respect while championing peace and security, promoting shared prosperity, and fostering people's empowerment. The Philippines will also commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, continuing to advocate peace and stability through dialogue, adherence to international law, and enhanced cooperation on both traditional and non-traditional security issues. Ambassador Cainglet then reflected on the Philippines' contributions at the global level. As one of the original 51 founding member states of the United Nations in 1945, and one of only four Asian countries to sign the UN Charter at the San Francisco Conference, the Philippines has consistently played an active role in multilateralism. She underscored the country's contributions to peace and security, sustainable development, and humanitarian action.

She noted that in July 2024, the Philippines spearheaded the first-ever Human Rights Council resolution on the human rights of seafarers, setting a global precedent to protect the

welfare of 1.9 million seafarers worldwide. Building on this achievement, she announced that the Philippines would host the International Conference on Seafarers' Human Rights, Safety, and Well-being in Manila, scheduled on 01 – 03 September 2025. Ambassador Cainglet continued by noting that officials from Bangladesh's Ministry of Shipping and Ministry of Foreign Affairs were participating in this conference. She recalled that in October 2024, the Philippines had also hosted the first International Conference on Women, Peace, and Security, which brought together ministers and high-level officials from 80 countries to forge new pathways for advancing women's roles in peace and security.

In April 2025, the Philippines hosted the High-Level Conference on Middle-Income Countries, attended by over 2,200 participants from 24 countries. The two-day event featured in-depth discussions on the key challenges and opportunities facing middle-income countries, including financing for development, green transition, South-South cooperation, and forging new-generation partnerships with the United Nations development system. Looking ahead, in November 2025, the Philippines is set to host the International Conference on Nuclear Technology for Plastic Pollution, in partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Ambassador Cainglet emphasised that in further advancing its advocacy on key global issues, the Philippines had also launched its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2027–2028 term. She cited the clear articulation of President Ferdinand R Marcos Jr, who has consistently underscored the Philippines' advocacy for the peaceful settlement of disputes as the correct pathway to achieving peace, security, and prosperity.

Turning to Philippines-Bangladesh relations, Ambassador Cainglet underlined the historical depth of the bilateral partnership. Known as the first Asian republic, the Philippines has consistently championed democracy, human rights, and a rules-based international order. It was also among the first countries to recognise Bangladesh's independence and openly supported its admission to the United Nations in 1974. In addition, the Philippines extended support to Bangladesh in its successful bid to become the 26th member of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 2006. She recalled that Bangladesh had also played a crucial role in supporting the Philippines during the final peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front in 1996. Over the past five decades, both countries have nurtured cordial and mutually beneficial relations.

On defence cooperation, Ambassador Cainglet explained that even without a formal framework, there have been ongoing trainings and exchanges between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Bangladesh Armed Forces since 1996. The Philippines has also regularly received delegations from the National Defence College of Bangladesh and the Defence Services Command and Staff College as part of their overseas study tours, the most recent of which took place in 2025. She noted that from 1980 to 2025, the two countries signed 15 bilateral agreements covering a wide range of sectors, including trade, investment, culture, economic and technical cooperation, merchant shipping, avoidance of double taxation, sports, and foreign policy consultations. Current proposals for further cooperation include agreements in agriculture, academic collaboration, nursing and education, customs matters, information and media cooperation, recognition of certificates under the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), migrant workers, and a memorandum of understanding between the national defence colleges of the two countries.

She expressed optimism that new agreements would soon be finalised to further strengthen the partnership.

To take stock of bilateral relations, Ambassador Cainglet explained that both countries hold regular foreign policy consultations between their foreign ministries, with the Philippines poised to host the third round in Manila. In view of their shared interests, she identified several areas of cooperation that could be further explored. First, she highlighted opportunities in maritime cooperation. These include sustainable fishing practices through knowledge-sharing on marine protected areas and community-based management; marine aquaculture initiatives such as oyster cultivation, which is of particular interest to Bangladesh; and environmental protection through joint efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and other destructive practices. Collaboration could also be expanded to maritime education. The Philippines supplies 25 per cent of the world's seafarers and manages port operations and logistics, both of which are critical for countries reliant on maritime trade.

She identified a second area of potential cooperation in agriculture and climate change adaptation. Since both the Philippines and Bangladesh share similar weather conditions and regularly face natural disasters such as flooding and cyclones, collaboration could include knowledge-sharing on climate-resilient infrastructure, flood management systems, disaster evacuation centres, joint development of early warning systems, and capacity-building programmes for local officials. Ambassador Cainglet also pointed to renewable energy as a promising sector for cooperation. Potential areas include geothermal, hydropower, biomass, solar, and wind energy projects. Such collaboration, she noted, would contribute to energy security, stabilisation of energy costs, reduction of carbon emissions, and overall improvements in public health. She then discussed economic cooperation, noting that the balance of trade has largely favoured Bangladesh. In 2024, Bangladesh ranked as the Philippines' 48th trading partner, 52nd export destination, and 50th import source. Bangladesh's top exports to the Philippines include apparel, clothing accessories, and pharmaceutical products, while the Philippines primarily exports electrical machinery, iron, and steel. With the support of the Bangladesh Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Embassy has been actively engaging with industry leaders in the private sector to promote stronger trade ties.

Ambassador Cainglet underscored several areas where Philippine exports could expand, including coconut-based products such as energy drinks from coconut sap, refined and bleached deodorised (RBD) coconut oil, virgin coconut oil, and coconut-derived cosmetics and personal care items. She also pointed to opportunities in processed foods, including the Philippines' world-renowned dried mangoes, with potential for joint ventures in mango processing to take advantage of Bangladesh's abundant seasonal harvests. Additionally, creative products such as textiles, home furnishings, and native crafts could be promoted, showcasing Filipino craftsmanship and design excellence. At the same time, she suggested that products from Bangladesh could find stronger markets in the Philippines. These include ready-made garments and textiles, particularly sustainable fabrics that would appeal to eco-conscious consumers, as well as high-quality leather products, which could be paired with Philippine design expertise to create premium exports for third-country markets. Other promising sectors include affordable generic pharmaceuticals and light engineering products suited to the needs of the Philippines.

She further explained that since her arrival in Dhaka in December 2024, her team had been pursuing various economic diplomacy initiatives. The Philippines welcomes investments from Bangladesh in sectors such as IT-BPM, automotive manufacturing, agro-processing, copper, textiles and garments, clinical research and trials, and pharmaceuticals. She emphasised that by complementing each other's strengths, the private sectors of both countries can explore joint ventures in several areas, including nursing, education, and training. She highlighted the multifaceted avenues of cooperation between the two nations, emphasising shared values, common challenges, and mutual aspirations for prosperity and resilience. She began by stressing the complementarities between Bangladesh's expanding healthcare workforce and the Philippines' global reputation in nursing, noting the potential for collaboration in skills development. Special attention was given to tourism and hospitality training, where the Philippines' long-standing expertise could contribute significantly to the growth of Bangladesh's tourism sector. Furthermore, she underscored opportunities in the IT-BPM sector and sustainable agrotechnology to boost productivity, ensure resource efficiency, and address environmental concerns such as greenhouse gas emissions.



Ambassador Cainglet strongly emphasised on cultural cooperation, pointing to genuine stories of friendship between Filipinos and Bangladeshis both domestically and abroad. She proposed deepening people-to-people linkages through student and youth exchange programmes, university partnerships, and academic immersion initiatives. As an example, she highlighted the recent visit of 17 students and five faculty members from Biliran Province State University of the Philippines who participated in Daffodil International University's (DIU) Asia Pacific Summer Programme. She also mentioned that DIU maintains partnerships with 83 universities and colleges in the Philippines, a testament to the vibrant academic linkages already underway. Beyond academia, she envisioned broader cultural cooperation through arts showcases, joint exhibitions, film festivals, concerts, and theatre productions celebrating both nations' rich traditions. She drew attention to the co-produced film *Ali*, which was recognised at the 78th Cannes Film Festival, as an inspiring example of collaborative

creativity. Ambassador Cainglet also suggested artisan workshops, joint textile exhibitions, and intercultural dialogues as means to foster entrepreneurship, youth engagement, and heritage-based livelihoods. She further noted the value of culinary diplomacy, citing the Filipino Culinary Night hosted at the Dhaka Regency Hotel in June 2024. She also expressed enthusiasm for Bangladesh's participation in the upcoming Terra Madre Pacific Festival in the Philippines, which will celebrate biodiversity and sustainable food systems.

On regional and multilateral cooperation, Ambassador Cainglet praised Bangladesh's successful hosting of the 21st ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime in Dhaka in April 2025, which was co-chaired with the Philippines and the US. She noted that the meeting had enabled constructive dialogue on pressing issues such as illicit drugs, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear security, preventing and countering violent extremism, trafficking, and border management. She also welcomed Bangladesh's role in strengthening disaster relief cooperation through its co-chairmanship of the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, alongside Vietnam and Sri Lanka, stressing the Philippines' solidarity as a fellow disaster-prone nation. Ambassador Cainglet reaffirmed the importance of the ARF as a platform for building trust, confidence, and collaboration on security challenges across the Asia-Pacific.

In the multilateral sphere, she highlighted shared initiatives where the Philippines and Bangladesh have worked closely, including the protection of migrant workers, food security, family farming, and advancing the annual Human Rights Council resolution on climate change and human rights. She commended Bangladesh's successful initiative to proclaim 06 July as World Dignity Day and reaffirmed the Philippines' support for this contribution. She stressed that both countries are committed to advancing the dignity, rights, and welfare of their peoples through such global engagements.

Concluding her remarks, Ambassador Cainglet described Bangladesh and the Philippines as "natural partners" united by shared principles, hopes, and aspirations. She called for stronger cooperation in defence and security, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges that promote tolerance, break stereotypes, and foster lifelong friendships. She urged both countries to invest in complementarities within their economic and manufacturing processes to maximise benefits from regional and global value chains. She further encouraged building on best practices in education, skills development, and knowledge management to empower citizens, protect workers' rights, and promote overseas welfare. She emphasised the importance of leveraging respective strengths to confront common challenges such as natural disasters, climate change, energy insecurity, food insecurity, and the need for inclusive and sustainable development.

Finally, Ambassador Cainglet reaffirmed that the Philippines and Bangladesh remain guided by the fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter: respect for human rights, equality of nations, adherence to international law, and promotion of social progress and higher standards of living. She concluded with optimism, expressing confidence that closer collaboration will pave the way for a stronger partnership and a brighter future for both countries and their peoples.

Open Discussion



Salahud Din Ahmed

Former Member

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC)

Salahud Din Ahmed, referring to the terms philia and phobia, noted that when a country had philia in its name, there was no reason for suspicion about its nature, suggesting that the Philippines was indeed a natural partner for Bangladesh. He appreciated the Ambassador's remarks about vibrant democracy, checks and balances, and robust governance. He was particularly interested in the functioning of commissions, especially the Civil Service Commission, as well as the provision allowing citizens abroad to vote—something from which Bangladesh could learn. He referred to the mention

of Daffodil University's cultural and academic exchanges and asked whether similar initiatives could be replicated with other universities or institutions. He concluded by expressing delight at the concept of "gastro-diplomacy", describing it as a mouthwatering term.

Ambassador Mahbub Uz Zaman

Former Ambassador

Ambassador Mahbub Uz Zaman described the discussion as excellent and stimulating, offering observations rather than direct questions. He referred to Professor Delwar's keynote speech, which stressed the importance of regional cooperation through the ARF. He highlighted Bangladesh's ongoing engagements in this regard and underscored the significance of ASEAN membership. He requested the Philippines' strong support and endorsement for Bangladesh's membership bid, particularly as the Philippines would chair ASEAN in 2026.

He also emphasised the potential of sectoral partnerships through Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), noting that such an approach would be mutually beneficial. Drawing on his experience as Bangladesh's ambassador to Singapore, he recalled cooperation with the Philippines under the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and



Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Convention on anti-piracy. He pointed out the need for greater collaboration on piracy and smuggling, which were often exaggerated by larger powers but harmed regional reputations. He argued that military cooperation should expand into non-traditional areas, such as tackling piracy, smuggling, and other transnational threats. Regarding the Indo-Pacific, he stressed that the security architecture should be inclusive, broad-based, open, and transparent. He emphasised the importance of integrating China into this framework through dialogue to avoid the risk of polarisation, arms races, and escalating tensions. Turning to the Rohingya issue, he noted ASEAN's ministerial statement supporting safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation. He urged the Philippines, as the incoming ASEAN chair, to help build consensus and maintain ASEAN's humanitarian engagement through mechanisms such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre). Finally, he stressed the need for greater cooperation under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers (ICMW), especially to safeguard the interests of migrant workers in the Middle East and other regions.



Ambassador M Shameem Ahsan

Former Ambassador

Ambassador M Shameem Ahsan, expressed his gratitude to Ambassador Nina Cainglet and BIIS for organising the Lecture. He described it as an enlightening session on a friendly nation, which Bangladesh needed to learn more. He welcomed the Ambassador to Bangladesh, noting that she had been in Dhaka only since December 2024.

He then posed several questions. First, he asked what, in her opinion, was the greatest challenge Bangladesh faced, given her recent experience in the country. He linked this question to Bangladesh's significant political developments in 2024, and highlighted the Rohingya issue as a pressing burden, both economically and geopolitically. He further asked how renewed attention could be drawn to this crisis, particularly since the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus did not explicitly mention the Rohingya issue. Secondly, he raised the matter of free trade, observing that despite enthusiasm for liberalisation, recent reciprocal tariffs had demonstrated limitations. He noted that disputes were increasingly being taken to Washington rather than the World Trade Organization (WTO), which cast doubt on the credibility of free trade. Thirdly, he referred to the BIDA Investment Summit and enquired whether there had been Filipino participation. He sought the Ambassador's assessment of the summit. He also asked about the effectiveness of the ASEAN Third Country Committee in Dhaka, which comprised eight member states, and whether the Ambassador had begun engaging with it. Finally, he questioned why ASEAN should welcome Bangladesh as a member if the country were to formally pursue accession.

Ambassador Md Mustafizur Rahman

Former Ambassador of Bangladesh to India

Ambassador Md Mustafizur Rahman commended Professor Delwar Hossain and Her Excellency Ambassador Nina Cainglet for their comprehensive presentations. He noted that both Bangladesh and the Philippines, as members of the Global South, share common challenges and opportunities. He highlighted labour migration as a critical issue for both economies, pointing out that the Philippines ranks among the top four countries globally for remittance inflows while Bangladesh ranks around seventh or eighth. He observed that the Philippines has developed a strong welfare system and reintegration programmes for returning migrant workers and suggested that Bangladesh could benefit from studying these experiences. He asked how Bangladesh might emulate such practices as lessons learnt.



Humayun Rashid

President

Bangladesh Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BPCCI)

Humayun Rashid offered reflections from the private sector. He emphasised the importance of skill development for Bangladesh's youth, noting opportunities to learn from the Philippines in technology and training. He also pointed to agro-based opportunities, citing the Philippines' significant exports of coconut, banana and pineapple. Improved connectivity, including the possibility of Philippine Airlines operations following the expansion of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport Dhaka's third terminal, was raised as a means to strengthen business ties. He further mentioned challenges faced by a Filipino renewable energy investor due to shortcomings in Bangladesh's bidding and regulatory framework and stressed the need for greater cooperation in areas such as outsourcing, maritime skills, and shipbuilding.

Ambassador Majeda Rafiqun Nessa

Former Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Philippines

Ambassador Majeda Rafiqun Nessa recalled her tenure between 2010 and 2012. She reflected on her efforts to conclude bilateral agreements and her work with both business and diplomatic communities. She also recalled her engagement in peacebuilding initiatives in Mindanao, which earned her the Albany Peace Award, and noted her visits to Iloilo City and its river summit. She expressed satisfaction at seeing continued progress in bilateral relations.



Student

*Department of International Relations
University of Dhaka*

A student from the Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka raised a question on cultural exchange. She observed that Bangladesh has limited exposure to the Philippines or East Asia more broadly, and asked how cultural ties could be expanded. He pointed to the examples of Japan and South Korea, which had invested in cultural diplomacy and robust entertainment industries, and suggested that Bangladesh and the Philippines might explore similar initiatives.

Mujtoba Ahmed Murshed

Former Advisor

BIMSTEC Secretariate

Mujtoba Ahmed Morshed expressed his appreciation for the presentations, particularly noting the contribution of Professor Delwar. He commended both the professor and the ambassador for their insightful presentations. He observed that while there are numerous avenues for bilateral cooperation, prioritisation is essential in determining how the two countries—Bangladesh and the Philippines—can effectively collaborate. From the perspective of Bangladesh, he emphasised the importance of having a strong and effective diplomatic apparatus. Referring to Professor Delwar’s point regarding Bangladesh’s limited global recognition despite its strengths, Mr Morshed noted that this lack of visibility was, to some extent, due to Bangladesh’s own shortcomings in national branding and international engagement. He acknowledged that the Rohingya issue had already been addressed during the session. Mr Morshed further mentioned Bangladesh’s aspiration to attain observer or full membership in regional bodies such as ASEAN but acknowledged existing limitations. He recalled that, a few weeks prior, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad had commented on ASEAN’s stringent criteria for membership, suggesting that the organisation currently maintains a closed stance.



In light of this, he proposed exploring enhanced cooperation between ASEAN and BIMSTEC, given their geographical proximity and the large combined population of BIMSTEC member states—approximately 1.6 billion. He suggested that if these two regional groupings could work more closely, it might yield significant mutual benefits. Drawing on his own experience as an advisor at the BIMSTEC Secretariat, he shared that discussions around maritime cooperation—including the delineation of maritime routes—had already been initiated. In this context, he referenced potential maritime collaboration between Bangladesh and the Philippines, which also falls under the scope of BIMSTEC’s planning framework. He concluded by reaffirming the importance of fostering greater cooperation between the two regional frameworks—ASEAN and BIMSTEC.

Fahim Shahriar

*CEO and Co-Founder
SustainLaunch Labs*

Fahim Shahriar introduced an initiative titled Impact Tours, designed to attract international visitors to explore historic cities, experience local culture, and engage with sustainable practices. He mentioned that discussions were ongoing with De La Salle University in Manila to support this initiative. He proposed the idea of a joint Bangladesh–Philippines tourism programme, co-created to reflect community values and underpinned by key objectives such as youth empowerment, sustainable practices, and the promotion of tourism.



Rafia Islam

Intern

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

Rafia Islam highlighted academic exchanges and tourism as two of the most significant areas for strengthening ties between Bangladesh and the Philippines. She suggested that collaborative initiatives in these sectors could help deepen bilateral relations. She also raised the importance of more flexible visa policies and reciprocal arrangements to facilitate stronger people-to-people connections.



Commodore Sheikh Mahmudul Hassan, (H), OSP, NPP, AOWC, PSC, BN (Retd)

Additional Secretary

Maritime Affairs Unit, MoFA

Commodore Sheikh Mahmudul Hassan, (H), OSP, NPP, AOWC, PSC, BN (Retd) directed the discussion towards prospects for further collaboration in maritime affairs. He focused on several specific areas where Bangladesh and the Philippines, as maritime nations, could work together. He highlighted sustainable ocean governance as a priority, noting that both countries were engaged in marine spatial planning. He observed that the Philippines had a long history of

maritime governance and stressed that joint efforts in this area would be valuable. He also emphasised the potential of the blue economy, with particular reference to marine fisheries, aquaculture, and marine biotechnology. In this regard, he noted that collaboration between researchers and the pharmaceutical industries of both countries could open new avenues of development in marine biotechnology. He further underscored the importance of academic exchanges in ocean science. He pointed to the presence of universities in Bangladesh offering programmes in this field, with the Maritime University serving as a specialised institution that could engage in joint collaboration with universities and research organisations in the Philippines. Another significant aspect he mentioned was the global reputation of Filipino seafarers, which he attributed to their strong training systems. He observed that, although Bangladesh had five or six maritime academies, there was room for collaboration with the Philippines to improve the quality of training for Bangladeshi seafarers. He expressed the view that such cooperation would enhance the competitiveness of Bangladeshi seafarers within the international maritime community.

Response from the Distinguished Guest Speaker



H E Nina P Cainglet

*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Embassy of the Philippines in Bangladesh*

Ambassador Cainglet expressed her appreciation for the questions and observed that some of them overlapped. She highlighted the surprising discovery of the extensive partnerships between Daffodil University and Philippine universities, noting that it was the first time the embassy had learned of such broad cooperation. She considered it remarkable that a state university from the Philippines had been able to send a delegation to Bangladesh for nearly ten days, where they engaged not only in academic exchanges but also in social business initiatives. She emphasised that the

programme had widened participants' understanding of Bangladesh and might well have been the first delegation of its kind.

She explained that embassies typically seek to establish university twinning programmes, which often lead to the recognition of certificates. Identifying additional universities for collaboration was, in her view, a priority, as was working towards mutual accreditation. Ambassador Cainglet further noted that many Bangladeshi students were pursuing pilot training and religious studies in the Philippines. Additionally, pharmaceutical companies were sending their mid-level managers to the Asian Institute of Management for professional training. She stressed that such opportunities demonstrated how geographical distance should not be seen as a barrier and reiterated that connectivity remained a priority for the embassy.

Turning to the subject of gastro-diplomacy, she explained that the Philippines was actively promoting this concept through the *Slow Food* movement, which values traditional cooking, local and indigenous products, and cultural heritage. She observed that gastro-diplomacy benefited farmers, fisherfolk, and artisans. She also announced an upcoming event in November 2025 in Sylhet, organised by a prominent Bangladeshi chef, where Asian countries would showcase their cuisines.

On ASEAN's sectoral dialogue application, she clarified that a moratorium was currently in place owing to the large number of applications. Until this was lifted, all requests would remain on hold. She pointed out that ASEAN had clear guidelines for external partnerships,

focusing on strengthening political, economic, social, and cultural relations with both ASEAN as a whole and its individual member states. She added that tangible cooperation was a key criterion and noted that Bangladesh's representation in Jakarta had already presented credentials and was identifying areas of cooperation for inclusion in a roadmap, which is required for applications.

With respect to defence cooperation, Ambassador Cainglet mentioned that exchanges had been ongoing and suggested broadening the areas of discussion. She referred to the Rohingya crisis, the five-point consensus, and the role of the AHA Centre, noting that ASEAN had engaged with these issues. She recalled that ASEAN representatives had participated in the recent stakeholder dialogue, where the seven-point agenda outlined by the Chief Adviser would feed into discussions at the forthcoming high-level conference in New York. She confirmed that ASEAN would also take part in that meeting.

The ambassador explained that the embassy relayed such information back to the capital for policy considerations. She remarked that no Filipino investors had yet joined the BIDA Investment Summit, largely because the invitation had been received only a month in advance but expressed confidence that upcoming visits through the Philippines–Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry would generate stronger interest. She stressed the importance of cultural, academic, business, and tourism exchanges as avenues for enhanced cooperation.

Ambassador Nina noted that, to her knowledge, there was no official exchange between ASEAN and BIMSTEC, although ASEAN had existing engagements with other regional groups. She suggested that this could be an area worth exploring, particularly in the fields of tourism and entrepreneurship.

She elaborated on the concept of entrepreneurship based on cultural heritage and explained that tourism today could take many forms. She referred to examples such as farm tourism, where visitors learn agricultural practices and engage with local communities, and wellness tourism, which allows travellers to improve their health by experiencing wellness environments abroad. She also mentioned medical tourism as another important sector.

Recalling a recent example, she referred to Bangladesh's hosting of the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Tourism Programme, in which two regional tourism directors from the Philippines had participated. She considered this a valuable opportunity for them to become familiar with sustainable tourism initiatives in Bangladesh and suggested that such areas could be further developed given the shared interests of both countries in sustainable and equitable tourism.

Turning to academic exchanges, Ambassador Cainglet observed that partnerships between universities were often the driving force behind such initiatives. She welcomed the possibility of collaboration with De La Salle University in Manila, noting that it was among the Philippines' leading institutions, and considered this to complement earlier discussions on academic cooperation. She added that this was the first time she had heard of such a proposed exchange with De La Salle University but emphasised that both Bangladesh and the Philippines possessed a large number of universities, meaning there was no shortage of potential partners.

She further stressed that future partnerships should go beyond basic institutional links by incorporating formal credit recognition and deeper investments in student mobility, thereby making exchanges more meaningful and sustainable. She also acknowledged that easier visa policies would support these exchanges and confirmed that progress was already underway. She referred to an earlier initiative by the Philippines side to work on a memorandum of understanding regarding visa waivers for diplomatic and official passport holders, which she viewed as a positive step that could be built upon gradually.

In relation to maritime affairs, she thanked participants for raising these issues and agreed that they were of shared importance. She noted that both countries had a strong interest in sustainable fishing practices, particularly in efforts to rebuild fish stocks, protect livelihoods, and reduce the risks of overfishing. She also supported collaboration in aquaculture, highlighting the need to exchange good practices in food safety, biosecurity, and environmental management.

She referred to her own experience working with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Italy, where the Philippines and Bangladesh had engaged closely under the Asia Group, particularly on issues relating to food security and the blue economy. She further observed that the Philippines was well recognised for its highly trained seafarers and explained that its maritime training centres complied with international standards such as the STCW. She encouraged further exchanges on maritime education as a means of strengthening cooperation.

Finally, she clarified that the ASEAN Committee in Dhaka was technically a third-country committee comprising eight members, rather than a full ASEAN committee, due to structural constraints. The Ambassador underlined that opportunities existed in food security and the blue economy, though the challenge lay in formalising cooperation. She suggested that the upcoming third policy consultations hosted by the Philippines would be an appropriate platform to place these issues on the agenda. Nevertheless, she viewed it as a useful platform for ambassadors to share perspectives and collaborate on initiatives while in Dhaka. She concluded by thanking participants for their questions.

Summing up by the Moderator



Ambassador Md Ruhul Alam Siddique

Former Acting Foreign Secretary

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

In the summing up, **Ambassador Md Ruhul Alam Siddique** extended gratitude to Her Excellency. Appreciation is also expressed to all participants for their thought-provoking questions and valuable contributions, which have enriched today's discussion. Insightful answers and perspectives on the issues raised have been provided by Ambassador Nina and Professor Delwar Hossain. With this, the session—comprehensive, engaging, and full of ideas—has reached its conclusion.

Citing the Welcome Address delivered by Major General Iftakhar and the presentation of Professor Delwar Hossain, Ambassador Siddique agreed that the current level of engagement does not yet reflect the goodwill or the depth of the historical ties between the two countries. Bangladesh was recognised by the Philippines in 1972, and resident missions were established in each other's capitals in 1981. Despite forty-four years of diplomatic presence, the extent of the relationship is not yet seen to match the available goodwill and opportunities.

The moderator mentioned that challenges, strengths, and future opportunities were identified by Professor Dr Delwar Hossain, with emphasis placed on practical actions rather than discussions. It was noted that sustained programmes and initiatives are essential for strengthening and deepening the bilateral relationship. Shared areas such as middle-power cooperation and South–South collaboration were also underlined as key pathways for progress.

Focusing on the presentation of the Distinguished Guest Speaker, Ambassador Siddique mentioned that an elaborate and comprehensive presentation was delivered by the Ambassador, in which the introductory section provided an overview of the Philippines, enabling a meaningful connection between the two nations. The strengths of both countries were acknowledged, along with potential areas of linkage. The questions and observations that followed reflected a keen interest in furthering bilateral understanding and cooperation.

It emerged from the discussions that two broad areas deserve particular attention—bilateral and regional cooperation. Interestingly, trade was not a primary focus, perhaps because it was understood that it might not be the most beneficial avenue at this stage. Instead, agriculture, maritime affairs, and skill development were identified as key sectors for collaboration. Other areas such as the blue economy, fisheries, tourism, education, and

multilateral engagement were also emphasised. In the regional and multilateral context, strong support for Bangladesh's inclusion in ASEAN—as a dialogue or sectoral partner—was expressed as a shared expectation. It was hoped that such an initiative would be supported by the Philippines. The Rohingya issue was also discussed, and it was emphasised that continued support from the Philippines is expected for the dignified and safe repatriation of the refugees, as reflected in the deliberations.

The protection of maritime workers' rights was identified as another area requiring attention. The Philippines' experience in establishing strong mechanisms for safeguarding expatriate workers' rights was cited as a model from which Bangladesh can learn. It was mentioned that a visit by Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to the Philippines is planned in this regard. The importance of exchanges—academic, professional, and cultural—was also underlined. Such exchanges are encouraged at multiple levels, including political, governmental, and community. Enhanced people-to-people contact was viewed as the foundation for stronger bilateral relations. The simplification of visa procedures was noted as a supportive measure, though not seen as a major obstacle to engagement.

The moderator mentioned that connectivity was identified as a key factor, extending beyond physical links such as air and sea routes to people-to-people connections. The need for deeper mutual understanding between the two societies was highlighted. It was observed that with improved connectivity between peoples, all other areas of cooperation would naturally advance. Ongoing cooperation at the multilateral level was acknowledged, including collaboration in the South-South Group and contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Shared positions on global issues such as climate change and disaster management were noted. It was concluded that cooperation between Bangladesh and the Philippines can be further deepened through sustained engagement in international forums.

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