



Proceedings
Eminent Persons Lecture Series (EPLS)

**COMMEMORATING THE SILVER JUBILEE
OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN
SOUTH AFRICA AND BANGLADESH**

H.E. Dr. Anil Sooklal
Deputy Director-General, Asia and Middle East,
Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), South Africa

BISS Auditorium, Dhaka
04 September 2019

Organized by



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

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Introduction



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organized a lecture in its Eminent Persons Lecture Series (EPLS), titled “Commemorating the Silver Jubilee of Diplomatic Relations between South Africa and Bangladesh”, on 04 September 2019. His Excellency Ambassador Dr. Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director-General, Asia and the Middle East, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), South Africa, graced the occasion as the guest speaker. Her Excellency Ms. Makhotsu M. Soty, Deputy Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, South Africa, was also present and spoke at the event. Major General AKM Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS commenced the session with his address of welcome. Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Government of Bangladesh, chaired and concluded the session.

Evolution, current status and future prospects of expanding Bangladesh-South Africa relations and cooperation, certain issues of worldwide concern, their immediate and possible impacts on interstate affairs, need of maintaining the existing multilateral system, enhancing Asia-Africa collaboration, reform of global institutions and norms, etc, were discussed in the programme.

Welcome Address



Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc
Director General, BISS

Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS mentioned that this year Bangladesh is celebrating the silver jubilee of diplomatic relations with South Africa. Bangladesh and South Africa have historic relationship. There exist strong bilateral ties between the two and they have been working closely for a long time. Spirit of the relation between these two nations lay in the philosophy of great leader Nelson Mandela. He quoted Mandela who during his visit to Dhaka in March 1997, said, "I have deep respect



for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Standing in this great country today, I also want to be a friend of Bangladesh... Standing here as a friend of Bangladesh, I want to say that we will fight hunger, poverty and any other problem facing us.”



Reflecting on bilateral relations, General Rahman emphasized that the key focus of Bangladesh-South Africa bilateral relations is enhancing the bonds through solidarity, friendship and cooperation. Bangladesh is also working to promote south-south cooperation for implementing the 2030 Agenda. South Africa is a member of the BRICS economic bloc and Bangladesh is trying to strengthen ties with BRICS countries to exploit opportunities. The scope of trade and economic relations between the two countries is expanding; still, there is huge potential to strengthen these relations to foster economic growth and create employment opportunities. Bangladesh and South Africa are longstanding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Commonwealth of Nations. They are also members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional

Cooperation (IORA-RC). Their mutual relation is becoming more important in terms of trade, opportunities for future south-south multilateral and bilateral diplomatic cooperation.

Bangladesh and South Africa have huge potential of bilateral trade and investment. On trade and investment, he informed that in 2018, Bangladesh exported total US\$ 104.11 million to and imported US\$ 246.19 million from South Africa. Thus, there is an immense potential to further strengthen the relationship in trade and investment. Bangladesh has massive investment opportunities in different sectors including readymade garments, pharmaceuticals, fisheries, leather products, tourism etc, as it is moving fast towards becoming a developed country by 2041. He opined that both countries have substantial scope of closer cooperation in education, skills, technology transfer and maritime economy. South Africa has developed a diversified manufacturing base that has shown its resilience and potential to compete in the global economy. In this sector, both countries can share their experiences. They can work together in the identified priority areas that will be for the mutual benefit of them both.

He stressed that under the changing global and regional dynamics, both countries need to work for solidifying the bilateral relations and find new avenues for deepening their cooperation. Bangladesh and South Africa need to explore every opportunity to work together to guarantee all potential enhancement of their bilateral relations for the sake of mutual prosperity.

Lastly, on a lighter note, General Rahman remarked that both countries can also work very closely in the field of cricket. Bangladesh has its first bowling coach, trainer, team coach from South Africa thus, they should teach Bangladesh in swing and out swing, Yorker and full length ball.

Lecture by the Guest Speaker



Ambassador Dr. Anil Sooklal

*Deputy Director-General, Asia and Middle East,
Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), South Africa*

At the outset, Ambassador **Dr. Anil Sooklal**, Deputy Director-General, Asia and Middle East, DIRCO, South Africa said that he was honoured to be afforded the opportunity to commemorate a historic event in the shared history of Bangladesh and South Africa. It was almost exactly 25 years ago, on 10 September 1994, that Bangladesh and South Africa formalized their bilateral diplomatic relations. South Africa wishes to express its gratitude to Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi people for their contribution in its fight for freedom, liberation and democracy. This year, the country celebrated 25 years of a free democratic republic. Bangladesh since its own independence, remained a most principled supporter in their struggle against apartheid, racial discrimination, and consistently called on the international community to take action against the apartheid regime. It is, therefore, befitting they celebrate, with their esteemed friends in Dhaka today, their freedom, the warm bond of friendship and solidarity that binds two countries together.

He recalled with pride the visit to Bangladesh in 1997 by President Nelson Mandela, to participate in the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's Independence. In his speech at a public rally in Dhaka on 26 March 1997, President Mandela thanked the people of Bangladesh by stating: **"The long distance between our countries did not make you care less for our needs. You all know that none can be free until all are free. For your selfless support, for making our cause your own, we thank you."**

South Africa's relations with Bangladesh are based on the vision of President Mandela. He was committed to social justice and freedom for all, worked tirelessly for promotion and protection of human rights internationally. He was a symbol of hope for the oppressed and marginalized across the globe. He dedicated his life in service of humanity and contributed immensely to the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world. Dr. Sooklal paid tribute to the dynamic and visionary leadership of late president Mandela and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose commitment and sacrifice enabled both countries to enjoy



the freedom and democracy they have today. Madiba and Bangabandhu, both respected as the “Father of the Nation”, were far ahead of their time and history. Both leaders ventured to do what their contemporaries would not have dared to do. They fought colonialism, followed by a war against an oppressor. They took unpopular, but courageous decisions. Both were imprisoned for extended periods but their legacies are encapsulated in a life committed to reconciliation and nation-building. Bangabandhu stated that: **“To do anything great, one has to be ready to sacrifice and show one’s devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice are not capable of doing anything worthy.”** He dedicated his life to fighting for the just causes of East Bengal, demanded for Bengali to be made one of the state languages, free the Muslim League leadership from the clutches of a few aristocrats in Pakistan, fair and equitable allocation of the country’s resources between its two wings—East and West.

The ambassador noted that Bangladesh attained its independence on 26 March 1971 as the culmination of decades of struggle for freedom and statehood under the inspiring and resolute leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At his call, the Bengali people rose in resistance and waged an epic war for the liberation of their land. Upon taking office, the government under his leadership, had to deal with countless problems of a war ravaged country. Law and order had to be restored, infrastructure developed and the government had to address the most immediate needs of underdevelopment and large-scale poverty. The struggle for freedom against the apartheid oppressors in South Africa mirrored Bangladesh’s struggle for nationhood. Therefore, they also celebrate Madiba and Bangabandhu’s dedication to forge a close partnership between the two continents to fight colonialism in any form and emancipate the people of the global south from poverty and underdevelopment, in their common struggle for a fairer world. The 1955 Bandung Conference that gave rise to the “Bandung Spirit” of south-south cooperation, underscored the principles of mutual interest, solidarity and respect for national sovereignty. These principles continue to play an important role in shaping and guiding the relation between South Africa and Bangladesh. South Africa prides itself for being a progressive society and part of a progressive humanity that observes and respects the equality of all

people and all sovereign states. The country is firmly committed to upholding this as one of the cornerstones of their foreign policy for the pursuit of global peace and prosperity through cooperation and partnership, multilateralism, consistent and fair application of a rule based global architecture. They maintain this position at a very uncertain time internationally, when unilateral action is threatening to undermine this multilateral architecture. The emergence of unilateralism is taking place against the backdrop of rising nationalism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. It takes place at a time when problems facing the world, like from climate change, terrorism, from migration to poverty, that require ever closer collaboration among countries of the world.

It is important to emphasize that institutions, which had been set up over the last 70 years to mediate and manage international relations, should not be abandoned. Rather, focus should be given to strengthen and where necessary, reform them to become more effective and inclusive. This approach is reinforced by a number of recent global developments. The resurgence of geopolitical rivalry, which has not been experienced since the Cold War era, has severely negative implications for global peace and security. There is a growing challenge to many multilateral arrangements, such as the withdrawal from commitment made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on climate change, financing for development and in nuclear non-proliferation, etc. Rise of trade protectionism threatens multilateral trading system that was agreed upon in Marrakech in 1994 and Doha in 2001. While globalization brought many opportunities and much progress, it has contributed also to rising inequality among and within states. These challenges are



by no means insurmountable. However, they do require a return to a cooperative and inclusive approach to international relations.

South Africa values its relations with Bangladesh and recognizes there is much to learn from Bangladesh in achieving socioeconomic goals within set timeframes. Bangladesh has made enormous strides in addressing socioeconomic challenges faced by not only the people of Bangladesh but the wider region also. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is well on its way to achieving the Vision 2021 and Vision 2041 as it strives to transform into a “Sonar Bangla”, having already attained the status of a lower-middle income country and crossed the thresholds for graduating out of least developed country category. Due to these achievements of the present government, Bangladesh is now recognized worldwide as a “Development Miracle”.

The World Bank in an April 2019 report, ranked Bangladesh amongst the top five fastest growing economies in the world. The economy has grown at an astounding rate of more than 6 per cent for seven consecutive years, and lifted many of Bangladesh’s poorest citizens out of destitution. According to the World Bank, the number of people living in extreme poverty has shrunk from about 19 per cent of the population to about 9 per cent over the same period. Development in social indices has also shown positive results due to human capital development. The literacy rate has increased by 72 per cent and life expectancy increased to 72 compared to India’s 68. Within South Asia, Bangladesh ranks first in gender equality, second in foreign exchange earnings and third in life expectancy. The country also plays a key role in advancing south-south





cooperation and Dr. Sooklal congratulated Bangladesh for establishment of the South-South Centre for Knowledge and Innovation to promote closer cooperation among developing nations as the world address challenges arising from the 4th Industrial Revolution.

While talking about South Africa's foreign policy objectives, he said it is an extension of their national policy and based on national interest and objectives. The development of South Africa is inextricably linked to that of the African regeneration; to this end, the African Agenda is central to their foreign policy aims and objectives. Consequently, they have defined and continue to pursue an African Agenda which is predicated on the entrenchment of democracy, equality, respect for human rights, peace and security, and acceleration of economic growth for the betterment of all African citizens.

South African foreign policy prioritizes the development of their immediate neighbours in the Southern African region. As member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it is committed to pursuing regional integration and industrialization. They believe that the development of regional value chains and industrialization in the region will not only assist in addressing South Africa's own domestic socioeconomic challenges, but those of the region too. Their vision is that a fully integrated, industrialized and prosperous Southern African region can attract more investment in their region. Beyond their immediate region, South Africa remains committed to taking the African Agenda forward, including Africa's development and its place in world affairs. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) that came into effect in May 2019 will promote intra-Africa trade and offer an opportunity to create larger economies of scale, a bigger market and improve the prospects of the continent to attract investment. It will see a market of over 1 billion people with a combined GDP of around US\$ 3.3 trillion, comprised of 55 African countries and become the largest free trade area globally. He invited Bangladesh to use South Africa as a springboard into the continent to leverage these opportunities available. South Africa is further involved in conflict resolution, prevention and mediation, peacekeeping and peace-building on the African continent. The involvement has been informed by their drive to ensure an African Renaissance for all of Africa with the goal of their continent being at peace

with itself. This goal is in line with their understanding that one cannot have peace without development and development without peace.

Advancement of the African continent in turn, is also itself connected intricately to that of the developing countries of the global south, and the *Agenda 2063* emphasizes the value of strategic partnerships as they strive for prosperity and peace on the continent. Hence, it is the second pillar of South Africa's foreign policy; namely south-south cooperation. It is under this pillar that close cooperation with Bangladesh occurs in a host of international groupings and also forms the basis of both countries' bilateral relations.

In January 2019, South Africa assumed its non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) under the theme: "Continuing the Legacy: Working for a Just and Peaceful World". This is guided by the legacy of president Mandela. The country will promote maintenance of international peace and security through advocating for peaceful settlement of disputes and inclusive dialogue. He said that they shared Bangladesh's concern on the violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law in occupied Palestine territory, and noted with concern the humanitarian disaster unfolding on Bangladesh's borders with Myanmar. South Africa also commends efforts of the Bangladesh government, for assisting these vulnerable people and call for a peaceful and sustainable resolution to this matter.

Ambassador Sooklal informed that South Africa recognizes the impressive contribution of Bangladesh as one of the largest troop and police providers to the United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the current participation in six missions in Africa. A stated ambition of the *Agenda 2063* is *Silencing of the Guns* by 2020. As South Africa prepares to take over the chairmanship of the African Union in 2020, they are highly aware of their responsibility and rely on partnerships forged with countries of the global south. They recognize they have a partner in Bangladesh in achieving this noble ambition. Guided by the philosophy of "friendship to all and malice to none", Bangladesh initiated the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Culture of Peace and Non-Violence and South Africa will join the international community in celebrating the 20th anniversary of this resolution in September 2019. He added that during their tenure, they would also seek to ensure the work of the UNSC mainstream a gender perspective, including in its resolutions. Peace cannot be achieved without participation of women in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, post-conflict peacebuilding and governance. Promotion of Women, Peace and Security in the Resolution of Conflict will be on the agenda when South Africa takes over the UNSC presidency in October this year.

Both South Africa and Bangladesh are longstanding members of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), the Commonwealth, the G77 plus China and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). IORA is very important to South Africa; they consider it as a result of the vision of president Mandela when during a visit to India in 1995, he acknowledged that: "The natural urge of the facts of history and geography... should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic cooperation and other peaceful endeavours. Recent changes in the international system demand that the countries of the Indian Ocean shall become a single platform." The theme of South Africa's IORA chairmanship (2017-2019): "IORA—Uniting the Peoples of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Middle East through Enhanced Cooperation for peace, Stability and Sustainable Development", acknowledged and stressed the importance of the Indian Ocean becoming a zone of peace and stability for cooperation and development. The Indian Ocean rim region is at the crossroads of global economic powerhouses where greater trade and economic connectivity are being developed.

Within this shifting global economic and geopolitical landscape of the 21st century, the "Indo-Pacific" has been identified as the new area of interest. This contributes also to the perception that the Indian Ocean

rim region is becoming an increasingly contested space. In this myriad of security and socioeconomic challenges facing the region, it will be crucial to have a strong IORA at its core. South Africa joins IORA members expressing their gratitude to the Bangladesh government for making a special contribution to support the strengthening of the IORA Secretariat. He congratulated Bangladesh for hosting the Third IORA Blue Economy Ministerial Conference (BEC-III) under the theme—“Promoting sustainable Blue Economy-making the best use of opportunities from the Indian Ocean”. South Africa is well represented at the conference, with a delegation led by H.E. **Ms. Makhotso M. Soty**, Deputy Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries. South Africa is particularly pleased that Bangladesh will assume the vice-chairmanship of the association at the IORA Council of Ministers Meeting, scheduled to take place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 3-7 November 2019. It is also looking forward to supporting Bangladesh when Bangladesh will assume the IORA chair at the end of 2021 and preside over the association during its 25th Anniversary commemoration.

During president Mandela’s visit to Bangladesh in March 1997, he signed a Declaration of Intent together with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to promote diplomatic relations between two countries. This declaration was formalized in January 2019 to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Establishment of Regular Bilateral Consultations. He was pleased that the 5th round of the bilateral structured mechanism under which the two countries advance and manage bilateral relations, the South Africa-Bangladesh Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM)—took place on 03 September 2019. The SOM sought to emphasize the growing importance of strengthening the coordination of the two countries. It also sought to focus on time bound delivery and implementation of identified projects emanating from various departments of the respective governments. Both sides took note of the enormous potential to expand mutual economic relations, considering bilateral trade grew from US\$ 1.9 million in 1994 to US\$ 337 million in 2018. They have complementarities and comparative advantages which can be exploited for mutual benefit, particularly in trade, investment, technical exchanges in information and communications technology, and skills development fields.

It is remarkable that only 25 years ago, South Africa attained its rightful place in the community of nations as a free and democratic country. In 1994, they set themselves for the task of building a united, democratic, nonracist, nonsexist and prosperous society including building a better Africa, in a better world. Successive governments made strides that they realize this vision, through initiatives and programmes aimed at addressing socioeconomic challenges. South Africa is currently reviewing its National Development Plan (NDP)—Vision 2030, in order to tackle triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. President Cyril Ramaphosa identified 5 fundamental goals the government aims to achieve to transform the South African Society by 2030. Those are: 1) no person in South Africa will go hungry. 2) The economy will grow at a much faster rate than the population. 3) Two million more young people will be in employment. 4) Schools will have better educational outcomes and every 10 year old will be able to read for meaning. Finally, violent crime will be halved.

Like most emerging market economies, the country has not been immune to challenges in the global environment posed by narrow nationalism and rise of protectionism. It entered into a technical recession in the first half of 2018. The government responded with an economic stimulus and recovery package aimed at reigniting growth and promoting greater job creation. They have also been decisive in ensuring policy certainty. These and other interventions have set them firmly on the path of recovery. South Africa’s future economic prospects are favourable and it is indeed an attractive destination.



He concluded the lecture by re-emphasizing their commitment to further deepening the bonds of friendship that exist between South Africa and Bangladesh. They are mindful of the importance to keep the values of the Bandung Spirit alive as both countries move forward to secure economic freedom and development for their people, regions and subcontinents. The South Africa-Bangladesh partnership is securely anchored in common values and a shared vision of social and economic emancipation for all people.

Open Discussion



Professor Dr. **Muhammad Shamsher Ali**, theoretical physicist and founder-vice chancellor of the Bangladesh Open University and the Southeast University, said Bangladesh and South Africa were following the ideals of their respective great leaders Nelson Mandela and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for happy nation building. Dr. Ali had the opportunity to meet Mandela when the leader came to visit Bangladesh. In his first question he said it was very difficult to reduce/overcome the problems existing for centuries; whether ambassador Sooklal could inform about areas where gaps still remain, especially apartheid, reflected by unemployment, inequality, gaps between legality and reality. In his second question, he said although Bangladesh also had this problem but the scale was very low and the government is fighting it adequately; he wanted to know how successfully South Africa was battling sexual abuse of children. This was a major concern as he wanted South Africa to be on the path where all children would feel safe. For suggestions, he mentioned wildlife preservation; the Kruger National Park of South Africa, the largest national park in the world. Dr. Ali visited the park which was the size of Israel. He wanted to know how they were managing it so successfully. Bangladesh government also established a few national parks apart from wildlife preservation in the Sundarbans. This is an area both countries could learn from each other. Referring to proposition of Bangladesh-South Africa cooperation in cricket by Director General, BISS, Dr. Ali said Bangladesh did and was also doing very well in the sport. But the country's cricket team often lost matches as players missed catches. This one department, i.e., fielding, was still to improve, although other departments were doing pretty good. Therefore, he wanted to know if ambassador Sooklal could do a little bit more, not only in cricket, but in general, as the tradition of games in South Africa was very high, also were science and technology but those were not on the agenda.

Maj Gen (retd) **Imamuz-Zaman, BB, psc** asked the Ambassador whether they are thinking of opening South African embassy in Dhaka.

Ambassador (retd) **Kazi Anwarul Masud** touched upon three issues. Firstly, he noted that there is a global perception of looming recession due

to mainly the trade war and the rise of nationalism and populism etc. Secondly, there is a process of de-globalization and increasing inequality which is perhaps one of the inevitable results of capitalism. In this regard, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman have written lots of books. Thirdly, he focused on xenophobia. There is a wave of xenophobia in South Africa, particularly among the coloured population who constitutes about 8.2 per cent of the 56 plus million people according to the latest census. As a result, China has been haunted out of South Africa despite being lived there for years and having the largest trade



deficit of about US\$ 600 billion. Reflecting on these issues, he wanted to know in what way South Africa is going to manage these challenges.



Ambassador (retd) **Muhammad Kamaluddin**, referred to General (retd) Imamuzzaman's suggestion of opening a South African consulate in Bangladesh. He went to Cape Town last year, but was supposed to send his passport to the South African diplomatic mission at New Delhi for obtaining the required visa. When he was about to send his passport there with permission of the Bangladesh Home Ministry, as retired ambassadors could not maintain their diplomatic passports as soon as they would retire from their post, that created a dilemma. When the visa request reached New Delhi, they informed that his passport should go to Colombo, because they had begun issuing visa from Colombo and not New Delhi. Thus the passport reached Colombo.

There are some agencies but he did not know if they were honorary consul of South Africa; there were some middlemen who always would create various complications. There were an ordinary sort of mailing, super sort of speed, super duper of speed, and hence, he requested opening of a consulate as soon as possible to avoid such complications as Dr. Sooklal invited Bangladeshi investors to South Africa and there were also about 2,00,000 Bangladeshis in that country working very hard and doing business despite lots of hazards.

Lam-ya Mostaque, research officer, BISS thanked Dr. Sooklal for his brilliant speech which was very informative and full of hope. She asked him for sharing South Africa's experience of power trade under the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP). She opined that Bangladesh could learn from South African experience as it was also looking to cooperate with its neighbours in the energy sector.



M S Siddiqui, legal economist, said that before independence, the wealth of South Africa belonged to the white people. Therefore, he wanted to know how they were redistributing the wealth in post-apartheid South Africa.

Md. Alamgir Hossain, research officer, Bangladesh Heritage Foundation, stated that historically, Bangladesh and South Africa have good relations in some areas and suggested to develop these relations further. In this regard, he put emphasis on economic relations as there are many potential areas. He then asked the guest speaker to elaborate his view on having some concrete plans like FDI and creating employment opportunity to further strengthen economic relations.



Response by the Deputy Minister



H.E. Ms Makhotso Magdeline Soty

Deputy Minister

Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Republic of South Africa

Ms Makhotso Magdeline Soty said that issues related to politics need political guidance and political discourse. On sex abuse of children in South Africa, she stated that abuse bonds with killing there; the country faces big trouble and is struggling to overcome it. Youths from universities and primary schools are being sexually abused and also killed. She suggested that the president will have to come up with some sorts of approaches.

About the Kruger National Park, she said this park falls directly under the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries. Regarding the management of the park, she noted that earlier, they faced serious challenges. It is not being managed by one department; though her department is the leading body department, it is not the only one. She then talked about “multi-departmental” approach within all departments that are affected including those of police, tourism and environment, forestry and fisheries, and elaborated on reasons to have such an approach. There is a lot of cross-border crimes happening at the Kruger National Park as it is situated near the border with Zimbabwe. They are aware of the issues like rhino poaching and illegal migration of Zimbabweans through the park to South Africa. Such migration is not safe if they become victims because of the attacks from animals around there. Therefore, South Africa signed agreements with the bordering countries which helped them a lot. Under the agreements, those countries would have to take responsibility when such incidents take place with their community. South Africa is managing the park well, the police are also playing their part and her department is playing a bigger part. However, there is a need of cooperation among many role players and one department remains able to do that. Such cooperation has helped them a lot to take charge of that area.



The minister said xenophobia is a pure criminal activity which is happening in South Africa. Moreover, these attacks are taking place from both sides, e.g., South Africans and non-South Africans residing in the provinces. Attacks mainly take place when it comes to issues of selling drugs around there, using young people to participate in drug selling and for competition in business. For example, when a South African rented his house to a non-South African to do business, they as usual bargained with each other regarding price. When such bargaining took place, people addressed it as xenophobic without considering the fact they were the people who had been together for years and understood each other. If the Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi and people from many other countries of Africa did the same thing, it was not called xenophobic. By this, she inferred that such incidents could never be xenophobic attacks. There is no way for South Africans to live without people from sister countries as before 1997, these countries gave them shelter. They used to live there. Thus, South Africans cannot do this when it becomes risk free. Incidents took place from South African side as well as from non-South African side. Hence, she recommended that government must take initiatives so that they can live harmoniously with people of other countries.

Response by the Guest Speaker

Dr. Sooklal thanked the audience for their insightful questions. He also thanked the Deputy Minister for covering most of the questions; referring to the very first point made by Dr. Shamsheer Ali and to attach it with what the Deputy Minister said, that is, gap between legality and reality, he said it is widely acknowledged that South Africa has one of the best constitutions in the world today, the constitution in paper. In practice, a number of challenges existed in making the provisions in the constitution a reality. One of those was happening now, what the Deputy Minister referred to as the violence, also referred to by Dr. Ali. On 03 September 2019, President Ramaphosa issued a very strong statement where he said that South Africa belonged to all who resided in South Africa, irrespective of where one emanated from. President Mandela said they were a Rainbow Nation. But over the years, they had become a multifold Rainbow Nation, Dr. Sooklal said. He then referred to H.E. **Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury**, Bangladeshi High Commissioner in Pretoria, and said there were some 3,00,000 Bangladeshis who now called South Africa home. The case was similar for over about 6,00,000 Chinese; several hundred thousand Pakistanis, Indians, Thais, and several hundred thousand, going into millions, of Africans from all parts of Africa. Because, South Africa has a pull factor, not only due to the economic opportunities it could provide but also for the fundamental freedoms guaranteed to everyone. As a result, there would inevitably be some points of tension and the country, a young democracy, is still trying to come to terms with these challenges as they were addressing their domestic challenges, to get above that were new for them. The government is very much committed to ensuring that what are, by and large, criminal elements, be wiped out from South African environment as the country welcomes everyone and everyone would feel at home there. To substantiate this, he suggested talking to Bangladeshis in South Africa. There were few incidents that might occur, but by and large, they had a good quality of life in South Africa and would speak very fondly of that country; so would the other communities. Therefore, getting back to Dr. Ali's point on apartheid, he said the legacy of apartheid could not be eradicated in one lifetime; it was intergenerational. Because, so deep were these divisions and legislations that prevented the majority community from having the very basic rights, access to basic services—housing, sanitation, water, electricity, education, healthcare, all of these. The majority population, over 85 per cent of South Africa's population, did not have access to some of the most basic services. That would not be eradicated in just 25 years.

The country made tremendous progress in providing basic services to all of its citizens. Its quality of education belongs to amongst the best in the world today. 12 of South Africa's universities were ranked in the global 500. But, the challenge was to bring the majority community that was marginalized, denied access to quality education into the main fold; the government put a lot of emphasis there and also in ensuring that everyone had access to healthcare; the current universal health insurance of the government is part of that process to ensure access to healthcare, education and other basic services so that there could be a more equitable South African society. Many challenges the country experienced under apartheid, still persisted;

Commemorating the Silver Jubilee of Diplomatic Relations between South Africa and Bangladesh

Guest of Honour

Ambassador Dr. Sooklal

Deputy Director-General, Asia and Middle East, DIRCO, South Africa

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majority of the community were not still involved in the mainstream of economic activities. Thus, many of them said that they got political emancipation in 1994, but not economic emancipation. That is an ongoing work and the government is working towards that goal for ensuring every South African could have a stake in the country's economy and benefit from it. That was not for just a small privileged sector of society which continued to dominate the economy. These were major challenges that required great deal of efforts; policies were put into place and legislation was there enshrined in the constitution. But it still remains an ongoing work. Concerning the issue of wildlife preservation, Dr. Sooklal said about a meeting of senior officials on 03 September 2019; there had been agreement that South Africa would cooperate and was willing to share its own vast experience in this area, work with Bangladesh to see where to share best practices and benefit from each other including exchange of animals. There was also agreement to look into each other's zoos, tuning those and how there could be mutual benefit, so that societies of both countries could benefit from the bounty of nature in whatever they could best cooperate.

About the looming recession, he agreed with the prediction made by the World Bank, the IMF, and it was the trade wars directly between China and the US in this regard. It was not going to get better, he opined. There would be an election in the US next year and it would be the "Trump Card" for President Trump. Although the president regularly tweets that his administration is working and continuing negotiations towards a deal, Dr. Sooklal personally believed the president would not agree on such a deal; it is his election ploy for keeping China on its toes, appeasing his constituencies that brought him into power and will again vote in his favour. This has, of course, direct impact on South Africa. Its impact on the global economy was already visible. The figures for the EU could also be reversed. The engine of the EU, Germany, was predicted to grow by a mere 0.3 per cent or so. France and the UK were already in a recession; with challenges within the EU and around Brexit, or what is happening, there is no strong leadership in the EU anymore. France has its own

problems. Chancellor Merkel is on the decline. Nowadays, the powerful leadership no longer exists in Europe that once did there. Europe has its own challenges, politically, let alone economic ones. The most vibrant regions now, economically, are Africa and Asia. Over 17 African countries grew by 5 per cent or plus last year. Asia, despite the global economic slump, is still growing significantly, to achieve 3-7 per cent of growth. He termed it as a miracle. The coming together of Asia and Africa in a stronger configuration, could only benefit both communities, he opined. The watering down of multilateralism should be fought. There could not be a de-multilateralism process. And there could not be de-globalization. Globalization has been good, but its impacts have been on a small band. These impacts did not percolate down to the masses and therefore, there had been reactions against the benefits. The fact of today's interconnected, interdependent world could not be reversed; the fourth industrial revolution would force communities into closer association with each other whether they would like it or not. De-globalization would be catastrophic for all. Hence, it should be made sure that the benefits of globalization percolate to all sectors of the society.

On China, he said there were about 6,00,000 Chinese in South Africa, according to conservative estimates. South Africa has a major trade deficit (the largest) with that country. Nevertheless, it has a trade positive with Bangladesh at this moment which was good news for them, he commented. A relationship



would not just be based on trade; there were so many other benefits. China offers South Africa a tremendous number of scholarships and skill development programmes every year. It also offers technology transfers; all that was happening around the 5-G, South Africa was very much dependent on the Huawei company and that was why President Ramaphosa spoke very positively in terms of the technology wars. As far as Dr. Sooklal believes, technology is the root cause of the current US-China trade war. It is not just trade. It is about technology, as one that could come out fast with the most advanced technology, would dominate the economic space. And that is why the US is putting blocks as the gap between, not just China but many developing countries also and the advanced economies into technology space had narrowed which itself was a major problem, not for the US alone.



He then questioned: the fact that the world is still being dominated by the 1945 configuration of the UN, 1.2 billion people of 55 countries from an entire continent did not sit in the Security Council, how could that be a mirror of the world today? The entire African continent could not be denied a place at the high table. That was not the reality of today's world. As he was projecting, he was looking into some trade figures of 2030; most of the P-5 members would not even be in the top five global economies, let alone

in the top 10 by 2050, yet an inclusive global society was being talked about, representative of the global community today. This is very difficult and was known in South Africa where it was understood from rulers of the apartheid era who did not want to give power up. Because, when one would sit at the high table and have power in hands, that person would not be willing to give it up; that is the contestation being seen today what is happening between the US and China. That is part of the larger challenge, in terms of those who were occupying the high table. He did not suggest getting out of there but simply putting in more chairs around the table, so that all could collectively determine the new shape and new architecture of the new global regime that must come into being, be it the political architecture, the financial architecture; why must it be that the World Bank, the IMF heads should always be between Europe and the US? He called it an archaic system and questioned why all should go along with this. It is important for countries like South Africa or Bangladesh, the global south that are rising. This tide cannot be stopped, neither can history. The global south will rise and get their rightful place in all these institutions they have set up and must defend. The very people who put the pillars of the UN system into place, of the multilateral architecture of 1945, are now crumbling that. Why are they doing so? Because there are new players on the stage who have a claim and can stake a claim to sit around the high table. And the architecture must be protected as that is the only inclusive architecture for all, to collectively ensure there would be a global society that would be inclusive which would bring all together in a cooperative spirit. These were the difficulties according to him.

Dr. Sooklal also mentioned about a discussion of 03 September 2019, regarding the opening of a South African diplomatic mission in Bangladesh. It has been on the agenda and politically, the decision was there that they needed to open a mission in Dhaka. But like in any configuration, it would come with financial implications. And at present, South Africa was relooking its global presence; there was an exercise initiated by H.E. **Naledi Pandor**, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa, who took office in June 2019, to relook the country's global presence. The ambassador thought that after 25 years of democracy and having established such presence, it was time they review this. He assured the audience that the first place they would open a new office in Asia, it would be in Bangladesh. They took heed of the fact that there had been difficulties for Bangladeshi visitors in visa applications for going to Colombo. As of April 2019, South Africa had shifted that responsibility to its diplomatic mission in New Delhi. This was somewhat an improvement. It might not totally solve all problems in this regard but was an improvement that Bangladeshis would now have to deal with New Delhi for visas. He said they were aware of the middle persons and the difficulties they caused in terms of this. He had spoken with **Mr. Benjamin Joubert**, who was from the South African mission in New Delhi and to the new high commissioner designate H.E. **Mr. J. S. Ndebele** on how to best address this challenge. It should not be there. But most importantly, South Africa is in the very advanced process of looking at e-visas. Hopefully, within the next year or so, they would introduce the e-visa scheme. The president of South Africa pronounced on this; the minister of home affairs, minister of tourism and the cabinet will supervise this and they were very keen to fast-track the introduction of e-visa; this would hopefully alleviated much of the challenges Bangladeshis were now facing. But he earlier told to his colleagues and Mr. Joubert that should anyone from Bangladesh business sector face any difficulty in getting a visa, they should get in direct contact with them. In this regard, he mentioned that **Mr. Seth E. Zia** had been a great asset to South Africa. The country is on the verge of appointing an honorary consul in Dhaka. Hence, he requested to get in touch with them since they regarded that the Bangladeshi business community would like to come and get involved in South African



business sector as very important partners while South African authorities would make sure to facilitate the process and remove all difficulties. He could give the assurance about this.

About the power pool issue, he said there was an independent power producers' act in South Africa where they fed into the national grid that was controlled by the state utility, ESKOM. The independent power producers are, of course, green energy producers who sell their produce to the national grid. Here, he said Mr. Joubert from the New Delhi mission could provide more information concerning modalities the country was putting in this respect. On redistribution of wealth, he said it was not an easy process, given the skewed nature of South Africa's economic space at the dawn of its democracy. But the government put in place what was called the Black Economic Empowerment Scheme to ensure that the majority community, a part of all new business ventures, a part of the economic space are given opportunities; and this was not dominated by those traditionally dominant in the economic space. It worked where there was a sizable number of black businesspeople including major business houses that were now at the hands of the black community. But that was still a small percentage and would have to spread on a larger scale. Therefore, the government introduced several economic incentives that were promoting black businesses and making

sure they were in the mainstream of the national economy. That is an ongoing work but there are dedicated efforts to make sure that the majority community occupies the economic space significantly in the country. With regard to economic opportunities, he said as he indicated at a meeting a day before, that the joint study being undertaken between the South African Department of Trade and Industry with the Bangladeshi Ministry of Trade was almost complete. The idea was to look into the opportunities and complementarities in various sectors, for both Bangladeshi and South African private sectors. There were many sectors identified; the agricultural space was believed to be one sector which had tremendous room for cooperation for both markets. Manufacturing sector was another area where there could be extensive cooperation. In the defence sector, he believed both countries could benefit from each other significantly. Thus, it might happen that once the study would be adopted, a joint trade committee would be put in place. He also stressed the importance of bilateral visits from both countries' business communities who would visit each other's country to evaluate business opportunities. There is a need for mutual exchange of business delegations. This was something on the horizon and they would try to ensure this happens within the next 12 months.

Closing remarks by the Chair



Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque,
Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh

Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Bangladesh, thanked Ambassador Dr. Sooklal for his deep understanding of Bangladesh-South Africa relations and also global issues. He lauded the ambassador for rightly pointing out the fact that when Bangladesh was going through a struggle in 1971 to have freedom, it looked to South Africa for inspiration and that continued to remain so. The visit of President Mandela is a historic event for Bangladeshis. Mr. Haque was at that time, a director at the Bangladeshi Foreign Office and also happened to be in the team that organized the visit. Thus, he had the opportunity to listen to him including in the tea room. Bangladesh and South Africa are working not more so at bilateral level but more so at multilateral level. That was where both countries are cooperating, be that at the Commonwealth, Non-aligned Movement (NAM) or the IORA. But as Bangladesh is growing as a country, both economically and otherwise, about five years back, it was realized that the country's links with Africa were rather very thin. Since then, Bangladesh had strengthened its relations by not just visiting on a regular basis and trying to see how people got connected, but in terms of setting up missions also. This year, two missions had been set up and the country was looking forward to having some more missions in Africa. It was understood that not only trade or business but also being together in the global arena, like in global institutions. He again praised Dr. Sooklal for saying that the world was passing through a very difficult time.

Often, people say they are facing a major fundamental transformation in the global architecture without having a major war. In the past, a major war had always been followed by restructuring of the global order. In the history of past thousand years, it could be seen that a major war was followed by such restructuring. Although presently there has not been witnessed a major war at the global level, transformations are taking place not only in terms of geopolitics but also in terms of economy. In the process, fairly or unfairly, multilateralism has come under fire, whether it is in the context of the UN, the WTO or globalization, so much



so, people were now asking if they are into the era of post-truth and post-human rights. Are they no longer rallying points that helped put in the architecture together being seen today? Secretary Haque thought that in this debate, developing countries like Bangladesh and South Africa were together and want to put in, as Dr. Sooklal rightly pointed out, as Nelson Mandela had often been recognized globally for that, is a fair and justice-based society where people could get their fair share of wealth. On redistribution of wealth, he said it reminded that some recent studies suggested as Bangladesh was growing at 8.13 per cent (last year) and was hoping to cross over to a double digit soon. Some studies also suggest that Bangladesh, over the last 10 years, has been the top fastest growing economy; it grew at a rate of 188 per cent according to some statistics, even putting China and some other growing economies behind. But this was also marginalizing many people who were not getting benefits of the growth. That was a reality. The debate often seen in any government is how to keep the economy growing and how that growth would remain friendly to people. He then put growth into a broader context where it would generate employment and distribute wealth; distribution of wealth in an economy has always been a debatable issue, will remain so and Secretary Haque did not think it could easily be resolved. But the question was how far it could be brought to a certain level where people would not be hurt. He concluded by saying that Bangladesh is deepening and widening its relations with African countries. It is not only South Africa but the whole of Africa where a big opportunity is in sight and mutually beneficial relationships that could be grown. Some of Bangladesh's traditional partners are slowing down in terms of their economic and political activities. Therefore, in Asia and Africa, there is a need to be together for creating a better world for countries in these two regions if not for the whole world. Seretary Haque thanked H.E. Makhotso for her courage to come out and say things that had to be said and added that Africa was not the perfect place but he did not think there was any perfect place in the world either; there remain challenges societies should recognize first before addressing those. He thanked her again for showing as to how civil servants should be protected.

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