



**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies**  
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## **Summary of the Proceedings**

### **Country Lecture Series on 'Malaysia'**

**Sunday, 25 August 2013**

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) launched a new programme titled "Country Lecture Series" on 25 August 2013 at BISS auditorium, Dhaka. **H. E. Dr. Dipu Moni, MP**, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, was present as the Chief Guest and inaugurated the "Country Lecture Series". The first lecture in this series was delivered by **H. E. Ms. Norlin Binti Othman**, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Bangladesh. **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) chaired the Country Lecture Series. **Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc** Director General of BISS delivered the address of welcome.

#### **Inaugural Session**

**Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc** Director General, BISS at the commencement of his address of welcome expressed his gratitude to H. E. Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, for giving her consent to inaugurate the Country Lecture Series as the Chief Guest. He also thanked H. E. Madam Norlin Binti Othman, High Commissioner, High Commission of Malaysia to Bangladesh for being the Guest Speaker on the occasion. He explained the reason behind introducing the Country Lecture Series, which was to enhance knowledge and understanding about specific countries, study the relationship between Bangladesh and that country and explore further scope and potentials of bilateral relationship. Then he elaborated the background of Bangladesh-Malaysia bilateral relations, where he mentioned the cultural and religious affinity between the two nations. Malaysia's early recognition of Bangladesh after the independence was also pointed out by General Shafiuddin Ahmed. He opined that since both the countries are members of OIC, NAM, the Commonwealth, D-8 and ARF as well as strong proponents of multilateralism, Bangladesh and Malaysia share common understanding on major regional and international issues. He pointed out that the major areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and Malaysia have been economic and technical assistance, trade and investment, employment of Bangladeshi work force in Malaysia, defence-cooperation, educational exchange, tourism, culture and sport, technology-transfer and human resource development. He hoped that the Country Lecture Series will be a success and will have a positive impact like other regular activities of BISS.

At the end of his address, he again welcomed all distinguished guests to the Country Lecture Series.

**H.E Dr. Dipu Moni, MP**, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, inaugurated the "Country Lecture Series". She said that Malaysia is an important country for Bangladesh. The two nations enjoy friendly relations based on the foundation of historic ties and culture. The state of relations is reflected in the growing bilateral cooperation covering a wide range of sectors that include economic and technical assistance, trade and investment, employment of Bangladeshi workforce in Malaysia, exchange programmes of various kinds, increasing tourism, culture and sports. The two countries see eye to eye on many regional and international issues and have been working closely in the international fora to advance peace, stability, and development. Bangladesh is the third largest trading partner of Malaysia among the South Asian nations, following India and Pakistan. Malaysia is also the largest ASEAN investor in Bangladesh. Malaysian companies have invested in areas such as telecommunications, textiles and financial sector. However, the trade balance is overwhelmingly in Malaysia's favour. She hoped that in the coming years the trade gap will be balanced and Bangladesh would be able export more items to Malaysian market. Malaysia is one of the largest destinations for Bangladesh labour force. She informed the audience that Malaysia had officially withdrawn its ban on recruiting Bangladeshi workers. The country also regularised approximately three lakh undocumented Bangladeshi workers. As a result of government-to-government agreement, workers hoping to work in the Malaysian labour market would be able to go there in cheaper cost. She hoped that this country lecture will greatly help further identify how to improve bilateral relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh.

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS chaired both the inaugural and the lecture session of the Country Lecture on Malaysia. At the outset of his speech, he mentioned the role of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in setting up the guiding principle of Bangladesh's foreign policy. He, then, went on to explain the reason behind initiating the Country Lecture Series as to provide a regular forum for learning more about Bangladesh's friends in different countries and to examine and explore ways of further strengthening and expanding friendship with them. He hoped that this endeavour would benefit government officials, businessman, academics, civil society and media representatives. The chair of the session also hoped that BISS would hold this lecture regularly and would invite resident Ambassadors/ High Commissioners as well as eminent persons, academics, businessmen, civil society representatives to speak on special topics of interest related to their countries. He stated that selecting Malaysia as the topic for first lecture was random selection as well as the matter of convenience from the part of the High Commissioner of Malaysia. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad mentioned the warm relationship between Bangladesh and Malaysia based on mutual friendship and trust which was strengthened by mutual cooperation in the fields of trade, investment, education, manpower and tourism. He extended his thanks and gratitude to H. E. Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, for her inspiring words and to formally inaugurate the "Country Lecture Series". He also offered his thanks to H. E. Madam Norlin Binti Othman,

High Commissioner of Malaysia for agreeing to be the first Guest Speaker of the Country Lecture Series. Then, he thanked all distinguished guests including government officials, businessmen, members of the diplomatic corps, academia, civil society and the media.

### **Session on Country Lecture on ‘Malaysia’**

At the commencement of her speech, **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** thanked BIISS for inviting her as the Guest Speaker on the eve of the Country Lecture Series. She described Malaysian society as multi-religious and multi-racial. Malaysia considers herself as a developing young nation aspired to claim her place at the centre of the world society. She elaborated her point of Malaysian society being heterogeneous one by saying that, Malaysia has the most Chinese medium schools outside China as well as the largest Chinese and Indian diaspora. Madam Norlin opined that, any state’s foreign policy is the extension of its domestic policy and Malaysia is no different from that. Thus it has stylised its foreign policy to save the national security, national interest and economy. Foreign policy of the country has been shaped through an evolution during different national leadership. Under the leadership of the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman up to 1970, Malaysia pursued a strongly pro-western and anti-communist foreign policy while under Prime Ministers Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn, Malaysia shifted its policy towards non-alignment and neutrality. This policy shift was continued and strengthened by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, since he concentrated on a regionalist approach and South-South cooperation. Mahathir sought to establish ‘Look East’ policy as an alternative to the West, where Japan and South Korea were viewed as models. She also mentioned, during his premiership Malaysia signed up to an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and ASEAN+3, a regional forum with China, Japan and South Korea. Malaysia took a firm stance against the profiling based on religion by the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attack. She also mentioned the steps taken by Malaysia to fight terrorism and its favour for multifaceted approach to deal with this global problem.

Madam Norlin identified Malaysia as a ‘trading nation’ which requires a peaceful international environment and that shaped the policies of Malaysian government to put greater effort on economic diplomacy. The rapid development of Malaysia was largely attributed to the fact that, it had tried to look up to Japan as a model and tried to develop human capital through joint technological cooperation programmes. She also emphasised on the ‘facilitator’ role of the government for the business community in Malaysia where government officials would help the businesses to thrive. She mentioned that sovereignty; mutual non-aggression and non-interference in the domestic matters; peaceful resolution of any conflict and peaceful coexistence as the guiding principles of Malaysian foreign policy. Madam Norlin stated that Malaysia has been a strong critic of intervention in domestic affairs of other countries although Malaysia supported NATO’s involvement in Kosovo under certain situation. On the issue of recent crisis in Egypt and Syria, she explained Malaysia’s position being in the favour of humanitarian assistance rather than humanitarian intervention. High Commissioner Norlin explained the ‘One China Policy’ as well as having a good trade relationship with Taiwan as pragmatism of Malaysian foreign policy. Another great example

of this pragmatism would be the warm relationship between Malaysia and her neighbours despite having unresolved border problems. On globalisation issue, she gave emphasis on being pragmatic to take the best out of the system and at the same time to give the best to the system. She mentioned the regional and global economic crisis as the main challenge of the economic globalisation. During the 1997 economic crisis, Malaysia was hurt the least due to the fact that unlike its fellow Southeast Asian neighbours it did not take any financial loan from the IMF and World Bank. She identified the economic globalisation as a tricky one for any governments. At the end of her speech she mentioned the Malaysian aspiration to become a developed nation by the year of 2020 as well as explained some of the efforts by the Malaysian government.

### **Open Discussion**

**Dr. M. Enamul Huq**, Former IG, Police Bangladesh, asked that Malaysia pursued One-China Policy but why there was no One-Korea Policy. He further inquired about the current status of the extradition treaty between Malaysia and Bangladesh. In her response, **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** mentioned that Malaysian One-China Policy is a result of pragmatism in its foreign policy. However, there is a representative office in Taiwan which is known as “Friendship Centre”. Malaysia has diplomatic missions in both Koreas. She added that when it comes to taking such decisions, ASEAN countries do not take individual decisions. Rather, the decision is taken as a regional grouping. With regard to the extradition treaty, she said that Malaysia has extradition treaty with a few countries. However, she needs to check the current status regarding an extradition treaty between Malaysia and Bangladesh.

**Mohammad Shah Alam**, retired secretary of the Bangladesh government, asked about the Malaysia’s policy on the Strait of Malacca. International powers intervened in the Strait and subsequently declared it international waters. He questioned why Malaysia does not claim the Strait. He also commented that Islamic finance has flourished in Malaysia. He asked why Malaysian companies do not set up their businesses in Bangladesh and offer their products here. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** responded that Strait of Malacca is very small in size. At present, discussion is going on as to where the Malaysian boundary ends. However, the objective of Malaysia is to keep the passage safe for commercial shipping and boundary talks are still going on. Regarding Islamic finance, she commented that Malaysia has bought a bank in Bangladesh but its owners did not do much about it. However, the interest of Malaysian businessmen willing to come to Bangladesh has not been appraised.

**Brig. Gen. M. Sakhawat Hussain**, Former Election Commissioner, commented that Malaysia has become an economic power-house in a short time. He asked how much Malaysia has been able to achieve regarding its Vision 2020. Malaysia has taken up a policy named “second home”. He asked what the objective of such policy was. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** noted that by 2020 Malaysia wants to become an industrialised country and to graduate into a high-income country. Some of these visions have been achieved and she hoped that her country should be able to reach the rest of the goals in the next eight years. Under the “second-home” programme Malaysia welcomes foreigners to take up residency,

but not citizenship, in the country. People above the age of 50 can come and purchase houses and people below the age of 50 are allowed to open up business there. But neither group can work in Malaysia. There is also a certain fee to be paid to avail these facilities.

**Suhel Chowdhury**, former commerce secretary, questioned about the Government Linked Companies (GLCs) in Malaysia. He asked whether these companies are similar to Public-Private Partnership (PPP). He raised questions that Malaysia grows palm oil in countries like Vietnam and Cambodia, adding that Bangladesh might be interested in such endeavours. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** answered that some telecom, power and other companies owned by the government was later privatised and their share sold to the market. However, the government retains substantial share of these companies. There are known as GLCs. Regarding palm oil plantation, she said land has become expensive in Malaysia. However, since there are tax exemption facilities within the countries of ASEAN, Malaysia grows palm oil in other countries and brings back. This also rehabilitated former soldiers in those countries.

**Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan**, The Independent, asked what the ultimate future of the Bangladeshi workforce working in Malaysia is. He also asked, since Malaysia has a Vision 2020, what advice it can give Bangladesh to achieve its Vision 2021. He finally inquired about Malaysia's Rohingya policy. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** commented that last year an agreement was signed between Bangladesh and Malaysia. According to the agreement, documents and necessary training will be provided to the workers. The cost involved has also been greatly reduced. The Malaysian employers must pay at least 900 ringgits (approximately US\$ 300) and cover medical costs of the workers. After the end of their work period, all of these workers will be sent back home. She notified that Malaysia is interested to take workers for palm oil industry and the country does not limit sectors where Bangladeshi workers can work. She praised the diplomatic mission of Bangladesh in Malaysia as very cooperative, adding that Malaysia has recently legalised 300,000 Bangladeshi workers. With regard to achieving Vision 2021 of Bangladesh, she commented that Bangladesh has different dynamics compared to Malaysia. Therefore, Bangladesh will have to find its own balance. Regarding Rohingya refugee question, she said that Malaysia does not recognise refugees. When Vietnamese refugee came to Malaysia, they were kept in a separate island. Refugee children are allowed to go to school. However, Malaysia's official policy is no refugee can stay in Malaysia.

**Dr. Mustafizur Rahman**, Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy, commented that Malaysia took up the Look-East Policy like Singapore. Japan developed based on its innovative technology. But in case of Bangladesh, it is not sure what Look-East Policy means. In her response, **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** said that Look-East Policy implies that finding out new and closer areas other than the West. Malaysia has sent a lot of people to Japan for training. It also received grants by Japan to develop its manpower. Malaysia started by exporting electronic components rather than manufacturing machinery. A lot of constructions in Malaysia were also done by the Koreans. It still pursues its Look-East Policy. Citing the recent trade statistics between Bangladesh and Malaysia, she noted that

trade balance is still in Malaysia's favour. To address the problem, Bangladesh needs to diversify its products in addition to textiles and frozen foods. She also mentioned about Bangladesh trade fair in Malaysia, adding that there are some Bangladeshi restaurants in Malaysia.

**Dr. Mahfuz Kabir**, Senior Research Fellow, BISS commented about taking lessons from Malaysia. Per capita income of the country reached US\$ 16,000 and it has become an industrialised country. Bangladesh exports some products that do not include industrial items. He asked how to bridge this trade gap between the two countries. He further questioned about the progress of FTA between Bangladesh and Malaysia. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** answered that more efforts need to be done to bridge the trade gap between Malaysia and Bangladesh. Praising the water disaster management, she commented that the recovery rate of Bangladesh is very good.

One participant said that Bangladesh is so much economically involved with Malaysia. He noted that one way to reduce trade gap is provide duty-free access. Regarding FDI, he asked about the FDI policy of Malaysia towards Bangladesh and why investors are not coming to Bangladesh. He also questioned about how Malaysia dealt with the economic crisis of 1997. **H. E. Norlin Binti Othman** responded by saying that despite the fact that Bangladesh has a lot of potentials, it is difficult to get Malaysian investors to come to Bangladesh. She cited the example of Robi Axiata in Bangladesh which made a loss compared to other countries like Cambodia and Vietnam. She mentioned that Malaysia managed to recover faster from the financial crisis compared to its neighbours because during that time it did not take loans from the IMF.

In summing up the Country Lecture, **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad** commented that the ties between these two friendly countries will grow in strength to strength in the days ahead. While there are a lot of lessons for Bangladesh to learn from the Malaysian development experience, both countries stand to gain by closer cooperation in different fields as elaborated by the High Commissioner. He finally expressed his gratitude to all distinguished guests including government officials, businessmen, members of the diplomatic corps, academia, civil society and the media.