



## Proceedings of the Lecture

On

### India and India-Bangladesh Relations

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Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a lecture by the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh. The event took place at the BIISS auditorium on 7 April 2014. **His Excellency Pankaj Saran**, the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh was the guest speaker of the event. He spoke on India and India-Bangladesh relations. **Ambassador (retd) Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS presided over the session. **Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed**, ndu, psc, Director General of BIISS delivered the Opening Address.

**Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed**, ndu, psc, Director General, BIISS, welcomed all distinguished guests to the Country Lecture Series. He said BIISS had been organising these lectures for some time for the purposes of enhancing understanding about specific countries with whom Bangladesh has inescapable bilateral relations, exploring the potentials and avenues for promoting and strengthening further relations with them. He added that BIISS has conducted country lectures on Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Russian Federation so far.

He expressed his heartfelt gratitude and thanks to **H E Mr. Pankaj Saran** for agreeing to the proposal and being present to deliver his keynote lecture at BIISS despite his very busy schedule. He also recognised and thanked Brigadier PC Thimmaya, the Defence Attaché of Indian High Commission in Bangladesh in this regard.

Major General Ahmed said India is now on the verge of emerging as a major world power. In fact, India is often attributed as a political and economic powerhouse of the world. For two decades, India's economic performance has been very impressive. In the last ten years, its average economic growth has been 7.66 per cent. The Gross Domestic Products tripled from US\$ 617 billion in 2003 to US\$ 1.84 trillion in 2012. Per Capita GDP also increased, from US\$ 564 in 2003 to US\$ 1533 in 2011. In terms of Purchasing Power Parity, India now stands as the 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy of the world. All these enhance its stature worldwide and in South Asia; how India engages with its immediate neighbours, determined its resolve and ability to become a major world power.

Noting the uniqueness of Bangladesh-India relations, Major General Ahmed said that apart from geographical imperative of being surrounded by India, the long and historical ties, cultural affinities, shared values and vision only necessitate that the two countries

have a cooperative partnership for achieving mutual national progress and prosperity. He acknowledged the extraordinary assistance India provided during our War of Liberation in 1971 conveying his gratitude to the people of India through the High Commissioner for their unstinted support. He said bilateral relations had widened and deepened since then to span numerous aspects. India is a major trading partner of Bangladesh, being the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest source of imports. But bilateral trade is heavily tilted in favour of India; Bangladesh incurred a deficit of US\$ 4.22 billion in 2013. This is a major concern despite India's efforts to reduce the gap by providing duty free access to Bangladeshi products. Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) also concern Bangladesh. As two neighbours share common borders, there are many unresolved issues e.g. border demarcations, exchange of enclaves, sharing of trans-boundary water resources, maritime delimitation, management of the porous border and related criminal activities etc.

Major General Ahmed said Bangladesh-India relations have come a long way in developing a mature relationship based on mutual necessities and complementarities. The landmark visit of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi in January 2010 ushered a new era in bilateral relations to forge closer ties of goodwill, amity, build bonds of cooperation and mutual benefits. Successive initiatives and achievements since then have driven the relationship to new heights. Cooperation increased in the areas of energy in terms of electricity import from India, which could be a stepping stone for regional electricity grid in South Asia. He also mentioned about India's supply of US\$ 1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh for infrastructural development. New areas of cooperation also are emerging like traditional medicine, fisheries, Sundarban's biodiversity, etc. More notable were the enhancement of security cooperation with conclusion of the long waited extradition treaty, security cooperation between the two border forces, and putting in place an MoU on joint border management etc. The deaths of Bangladeshis at the border remain a major irritant of bilateral relations although remarkable success has been achieved in recent years in reducing the numbers of such unpleasant incidents. The sharing of trans-boundary water resources also needs urgent attention. Foreign Secretary level consultations in March 2014 in New Delhi were testimony to the fact that both countries equally feel the need to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues while striving for advancing the cooperation and strengthen further inexorable bilateral relations. He concluded his speech by expressing his sincere gratitude to all distinguished guests for responding to his invitation to attend the seminar.

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS said Bangladesh and India are two closest neighbours in South Asia. History, culture and values of the two peoples have been evolving together, side by side for millennia. Two countries have a common heritage and a shared journey through history. He noted that Bangladesh gratefully recalls India's support to the war of liberation. Throughout history, India was one of the most prosperous and influential countries in the world until it fell under colonial domination. Since its independence in 1947, India started to consolidate and over the last three decades, showed tremendous development. The growing global interest in engaging with India is due mainly to her emergence as an economic powerhouse, a rising leader in science, technology and an influential player in global affairs. India compelled attention as the world's largest functioning democracy, which

nurtured a pluralistic society and succeeded considerably in transforming potential fault lines of religion, language and ethnicity into an effective federal republic. It demonstrates democracy and development are not either/or choices, but could co-exist and complement each other. He further stated that India's strong presence in the Indian Ocean Rim and its desire to be a permanent member of the UNSC described the country's regional and global visions for next decades.

### **Lecture by H E Pankaj Saran, High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh**

**H E Pankaj Saran** thanked BISS for organising the country lecture. He expressed satisfaction at the presence of distinguished speakers which to his opinion, that is not uncommon due to the institute's intellectual rigour and contribution to strategic studies. He remembered reading publications from BISS and meeting its scholar as a young diplomat in Dhaka in the late 1980s. He noted the growth of the institute's stature as well as that of the strategic community in Bangladesh throughout this time. He welcomed the intensification of the dialogue among different think tanks in Bangladesh with those in India. He then attached equal significance to the growing role of media, and lively TV talk shows in Bangladesh. These contributed immensely in making the people of the country more aware now about issues of national importance, he opined.

He delivered his lecture in three parts: a brief overview of today's India, a review of the status of its bilateral relations and lessons learnt, and the way forward. Referring to the ongoing national elections in India, he termed consolidation of democracy, enhancing pluralism, federalism as major achievements India made after becoming free of the colonial rule. But these were not easy. Immediately after independence, the country faced both internal and external challenges; for example, wars with Pakistan, China, continuous instability in Kashmir and insurgency in Northeast India were to name a few. The growth rate was not up to the mark. Therefore, Indian leaders abstained from joining any political and military grouping. India's present status in today's world has been possible because of its continuation of strong, effective democracy, basic values, and profound attention towards institutions. Indian people also made sure that the country would not become dictatorial or unitary, which made Indian politics more flexible, strengthened states and a well-defined national identity.

Talking of modern times, the High Commissioner brought in the growth and achievements of Indian economy. These, in his view, began with the reforms in 1991. He termed India as a large common market with vast economies of scale. The growing middle class, media, communications IT revolutions played vital role behind India's economic prosperity. Poverty levels of nearly 60% of the early 1950s, fell to about 22% in 2011-12. The number of poor was about 270 million at present. About 20 million people were pulled out of poverty every year since 2004-2005. Food grain production rose from 51 million tonnes in 1950 to 258 million tonnes in 2011-12. Also, life expectancy among women rose from 32 to 68 years in the same period.

Despite being the fourth largest global economy, India's per capita income of about US\$ 1527 (2011), is the lowest among the G-20. The gross savings rate was 30.5 per cent and gross investment rate is 35.5 per cent of GDP. Foreign exchange reserves reached US\$ 303 billion by April 2014. However, the High Commissioner described ten challenges for the country to meet:

1. Work out a model of development to suit India, i.e. not copying other's model;
2. Eradicating poverty, illiteracy, disease;
3. Ensuring rapid economic growth;
4. Ensuring food, water and energy security
5. Ensuring an inclusive and employment generating growth.
6. Correcting regional imbalances i.e., how growth was shared across India.
7. Empowering Indian women and other disadvantaged groups.
8. Focus on education, health and other important values.
9. Protection of the environment, i.e. sustainable development.
10. Building infrastructure.

India is trying to create an atmosphere for ensuring its growth and broadening development choices; therefore, working with immediate neighbours and building equal partnerships were of utmost importance to India. With the end of the cold war, the global centre of power has shifted to various places. As for economy, the Asia-Pacific region is getting more focus now. With a constructive role, India is trying to shape a peaceful, stable and prosperous world.

On India-Bangladesh relations, he praised the economic growth Bangladesh achieved saying the high growth rates of both Bangladesh and India have been high exactly at the same time. While India's economic relations with Bangladesh have been good, those with Pakistan are not so much. He also said Bangladesh is quite ahead of Pakistan by all economic indicators. Bangladesh-India economic relations might be called as mutually complementary and reinforcing.

The current generations of both Bangladesh and India learnt a lot about the events of 1947 and 1971 from textbooks and discussions. Their desire to policymakers needed to be addressed. High Commissioner expressed his strong belief that the generations should like to look to future, not the past; they would like broader, stronger India-Bangladesh relations. Though building bridges is not an easy task, both countries are going ahead on that course, he said. India-Bangladesh relations that are marked by complexity, richness and overlapping jurisdictions now cover numerous spheres of cooperation and are richer than they were before. Number of stakeholders has grown for both nations and the cooperation transcend the government levels which were welcome improvements. He believed the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development signed between the

Premiers of Bangladesh and India in September 2011 in Dhaka, would be immensely helpful to provide effective directions for future.

High Commissioner Pankaj Saran illustrated various initiatives, undertaken in last few years for addressing interests of both countries. These were:

1. Founding of a comprehensive border management system consisting of institutional mechanisms, a coordinated border management plan, an extradition treaty, opening of border haats, reviving DC/DM level talks, upgrading border infrastructures;
2. Better contacts between the security agencies of both nations.
3. Though the Agreement and the Protocol to the Land Boundary Agreement are still not ratified, both sides agreed and signed the terms of the settlement for enclaves, adverse possessions and undefined areas. All strip maps pertaining to the 1974 Agreement have been signed and exchanged which took forty year to complete. Access from Tin Bigha to Dahagram and Angarpota has been made sure for day and night with electrification completed. Moreover, new integrated check posts would be set up; one of such was introduced in Agartala in 2013. High Commissioner hoped to partially operationalise the Petrapol-Benapol check post later in 2014.
4. The High Commissioner lamented the agreement on water sharing of Teesta River not being done. He spoke about the exchange of information between Bangladesh and India on water flow at Gazaldoba in India and Dalia in Bangladesh between 1998 and 2010. On 10 February 2012, both countries agreed for a probable solution for sharing water of Feni River on Tripura side, identification of six more rivers for initiating discussions on water sharing, creation of a subgroup for conducting joint study and assessing the impact of the Tipaimukh Project in Bangladesh, cooperation on providing flood data, dredging and bank protection works etc.
5. For reducing trade imbalance, Indian market has been opened for all Bangladeshi products but 25 tariff lines on zero duty-zero tariff basis. In 2013, Bangladesh exported its highest volume to India so far and Indian investors now consider Bangladesh as a potential destination.
6. SOPs have been signed to facilitate road and rail communication among Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. India-Bangladesh cooperation in the railways sector is getting stronger; measures are underway to facilitate travel on the Maitree Express. Both countries are also discussing coastal shipping; direct contacts have been established between Bangladesh ports and those on Eastern Indian coast.
7. A US\$ 1 billion credit by India to Bangladesh is at advanced stage. Of this, 200 million has been turned into grant and 150 million already disbursed to Bangladesh.

8. India and Bangladesh are enhancing cooperation in the power sector. Bangladesh would get 500 MW of power through an inter-grid connectivity and India agreed to provide more from its Northeast region for long and short terms. An Indian company agreed to supply diesel for Bangladesh through pipeline. Bangladesh and India are also discussing with Bhutan and Nepal for exploring their hydropower prospects.

9. Initiatives are being undertaken to expand cooperation in IT, education, media, health, environment, small development projects etc. Besides, people-to-people linkages are enhancing. All these initiatives would benefit people of both nations for long time, he hoped.

H E Saran then moved on to the last part of his lecture, i.e. way forward. Bangladesh and India have longstanding links and therefore, they need to prosper together. Mistakes made in the past should be avoided in the future, he opined. A strong and prosperous Bangladesh would not only benefit Bangladesh itself, but also India and other countries too. He then said Bangladesh and India share many similar security concerns. Mutual antagonism would always lead to harm for all. As a result, neither India nor Bangladesh should allow instability to arise that could endanger both of them. Albeit cooperation on security issues is a high priority, that would no way be understood as either side surrendering their individual sovereignty. He stressed the necessity for both countries to accept the UNCLOS agreement aimed at delimiting India-Bangladesh maritime boundary, inviting Nepal and Bhutan for discussions on power, water and connectivity. Addressing the scarcity of resources, water for example, remains a grave concern. This invaluable resource must be made proper use of and therefore, a consensus among all stakeholders was of utmost necessity.

India-Bangladesh relations must be broadened in terms of sectors, involving wider cross-sections of society. Bridging the knowledge gap needed more attention. Aspirations and core interests of each other should be understood and addressed properly. Exchange of experience could help a great lot for that purpose and that must be reciprocal. Both India and Bangladesh should allow each other to benefit from respective strengths. For example, when Bangladesh could get access to a growing Indian economy, Bangladeshi companies should be allowed to import materials from India or instruments if that would benefit Bangladesh. Bangladesh's plentiful workforce, vibrant culture and geographical location would be helpful for ensuring its economic growth and prosperity.

The High Commissioner emphasised the development of people-to-people contact; initiatives are being taken to facilitate business and travel between Bangladesh and India. He talked about the need for promoting coastal shipping, long term usage plan of inland waterways, turning illegal trade into legal, food security, environment protection and water management etc. Further advancement in sub-regional and regional cooperation is needed. Bangladesh and India should work together on global issues as well. India attaches a very high priority to its relations with Bangladesh on this key partnership, rests the prosperity of both nations. He concluded his lecture by thanking the audience.

In his concluding remarks, **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS said the discussions of the High Commissioner and the questions and comments from the floor, prove Bangladesh-India relations reached new levels in terms of extent and integrity of cooperation. It is heartening to note Bangladesh and India agree to resolve the issues of maritime boundary and exclusive economic zone through arbitration by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. He hoped the court's verdict expected in June this year, would help remove an important irritant between the two countries and will usher in a new era of cooperation.

However, he acknowledged that some serious issues continue to elude resolution. It is obvious that while the governments of the two countries are making efforts to find solutions to specific issues and problems, it has become extremely important to undertake serious measures, campaign for confidence building and greater mutual understanding. He commented that it calls for removal of barriers; facilitate greater people-to-people contact, exchange among individuals and organisations at central and local levels covering people ranging from government officials to businessmen, academia, cultural activists, students, scientists, doctors, other professionals as well as tourists. Easing of visa procedure and issuance of on arrival visas by India, recently, would go a long way in this regard. Nevertheless, more could be and must be done to ensure that fraternal peoples on both sides of the border would be able to march ahead towards sustained development and shared better life together. He stated that as India continues to grow and develop, it is likely to be more and more confident about its own abilities, security and was expected to take more enlightened and benevolent views of its relations with neighbours. He added that Bangladesh must do its best to encourage this trend and reap the benefits of partnering with a growing and more confident India.

In conclusion, he thanked everyone for contributing to the success of the Country Lecture on India. He especially thanked the High Commissioner Pankaj Saran and his colleagues from the Indian delegation. He expressed gratitude to all senior civil military officials including former officials for taking time out and attending the lecture, particularly members of the academia, businessmen, representatives of think-tanks and media.

## **Questions and Answers Session**

### **Questions**

**Ambassador (retd) Humayun Kamal** : Thanked the Indian High Commissioner for his comprehensive lecture. One positive move forward was India agreeing to issue multiple visas for five years. It also agreed to open more visa offices in Bangladesh, presently numbering six. He congratulated the Indian government's decision to make visa procedures easier and issue on arrival visas to 180 countries including Bangladesh. He suggested Bangladesh reciprocate the same by making visa procedures easier as well like providing on arrival visas. That will promote more interactions, people-to-people contacts and create South Asian community. On trade, he said though India has granted duty free and zero-tariff access for Bangladeshi products to its market, non-tariff, para-tariff barriers, surcharges, countervailing duties etc still remained in place. These are hindering

Bangladeshi products into Indian market. Referring to the Bangladeshi Premier's visit to India in January 2010, he said discussions were held with the Indian Premier to remove these barriers (as mentioned in paragraph 33 of the joint communiqué) to ensure more access for Bangladesh into Indian market. Thus he wanted to know what measures the Indian government has taken to address these. On Tipaimukh dam, he said that there are opposing voices in India also just like in Bangladesh. He wanted to know the current situations of that project. The Maitree Express train service was inaugurated between Bangladesh and India. But the occupancy rate is only 50 per cent or less; albeit it takes 10-11 hours to travel by train Bangladesh to India, immigration and custom procedures prolong that journey. He suggested that India could do something to shorten that time and make the service more popular.

**Ambassador (retd) Shamim Ahmed :** He asked how the Indian High Commissioner would evaluate the present excellent state of Bangladesh-India relations compared to those existing between 2001-06 when relations were less interactive; what reasons could be attributed to the nature of relations in that period? He also wanted to know if the High Commissioner himself or the High Commission has any assessment of the popular perception of India in Bangladesh for impacting Bangladesh-India relations.

**Zaglul A. Chowdhury :** Thanked the High Commissioner for he rightly brought in two particularly important issues, i.e. the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and the Teesta River water sharing. During the last five years, Bangladesh-India relations have grown leaps and bounds. Thus, Bangladesh should have expected total resolution of these two issues instead of keeping on discussions about them. He expected that regardless of the upcoming government in India, these two issues would be solved in near future.

**Ambassador (retd) Humayun Kabir :** He said that our long common history creates convergences and divergences, creating understanding and misunderstanding in turn. We are deeply connected by geography. His queries included if we understand each other, how Bangladesh-India relations and geographical proximity could be used for mutual benefits, what the High Commissioner would suggest to develop better mutual understand etc. Referring to the recent developments, he asked that whether India is really connecting with the people of Bangladesh or a particular segment in the country. He opined bilateral relations are between the people, not the governments alone as they would come and go but the countries and people will remain in place. Thus, what would the Indian High Commissioner suggest for reaching out to the people and enhance bilateral relations? He expressed his difference of opinion about the bilateral policy pursued by India to promote sub-regional cooperation yet noted that regarding the South Asian region, some progress has been made in that regard covering Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan. On the west, for example, the water issue connects us and new options are also being explored for raising cooperation. On the east, there are Myanmar and China. There is the BCIM; talks are going on about Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. He wanted to know about the Indian official position on these conflicting issues; given the ongoing elections in India, he further asked whether there would be any shift in India's relations with other countries if the government would change.

**Major General (retd) Ferdous Mian :** It is now said that the Indian Ocean has become a critical place in world affairs. Western powers and the US are now shifting their focus or

centre of gravity towards Asia, the Indian Ocean and the strategic Asia-Pacific corridors. Race is going on for establishing strategic dominance by big powers from both near and far. The US had established economic and military dominance in this region. It also is challenged by China at regional and global levels; on the other hand, there could be conflicts of interests between China and India at regional level. Bangladesh, due to its important geographical and strategic position, might be caught up in conflicts for establishing supremacy among big powers in the Indian Ocean. This country connects South and Southeast Asia. Therefore, its geostrategic importance cannot be ignored. Various stakeholders in the Indian Ocean would need it as a security partner if not as a strategic one. And India being the nearest neighbour, would surely be attentive to this issue. Referring to a student's query during his own lecture in the National Defence College of Bangladesh, he asked what option Bangladesh should have in case of a Sino-Indian conflict. He wanted to know that as India attaches substantial importance to its relations with Bangladesh, how it would encompass Bangladesh regarding the security architecture in the Indian Ocean and what are the things to be initiated at various levels, i.e. government or people's levels.

**Secretary (retd) Sohel Chowdhury :** Could border haats be treated as viable alternatives to international trade? If Bangladesh could have international trade with the rest of India, why not with Northeast India? That could somewhat reduce Bangladesh's huge trade deficit with India. On the question on Akhaura, he said referring to High Commissioner Pankaj Saran that infrastructural development has been neglected by both Bangladesh and India. The Banglabandha land port in Bangladesh was commissioned in May 2004, yet even after almost ten years, no normal trade is moving beyond Banglabandha; India also did nothing about Phulbari. Bangladesh does have some small trade with Nepal. However, the Phulbari has not become developed and international trade also remains virtually the same. Banglabandha could potentially become the second largest land port in Bangladesh after Benapol. He asked the High Commissioner if he would be able to do something about Banglabandha.

**Mr. Mohammad Fazlul Haque :** Chairman and CEO, National Youth & Social Welfare Council of Bangladesh, said Bangladesh and India should set up such a relation which should be example to the world and neighbouring nations. He commended the High Commissioner's speech as encouraging, emphasised on people-to-people contact and thanked the High Commissioner for inviting Bangladeshis to visit India. He requested the High Commissioner to support Bangladesh to enhance people-to-people contact. He also highlighted High Commissioner's statement that Bangladesh and India need to know each other. He asked to donate books. He mentioned that his organisation was running health services, another area Bangladesh and India could cooperate. Finally, he said that although the Indian cricket team had lost the previous day, SAARC did not as Sri Lanka is a SAARC member. He stressed the need for a stronger SAARC and emphasised on India's role in strengthening the organisation. He also talked about the role of youth who are the future leaders in strengthening people-to-people contact.

**Ambassador (retd) Ashfaque Rahman :** There is a strong perception in Bangladesh that India views Bangladesh with same security concerns as it views Pakistan. Have the security apparatus and the policymakers of India changed this approach after 1971?

Because, on many issues, they still approach Bangladesh as if it still were a part of the erstwhile Pakistan and this approach could be seen in talks at the foreign office when such talks are held there on major issues in Bangladesh-India relations.

**Muhammad Nurul Huda, Inspector General (retd), Bangladesh Police :** In view of the currently emerging scenarios in India, would Indian secularism be threatened on account of electoral compulsions? If not, then why?

**Mr. Md. Shoaib Choudhury, Director, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industries (DCCI) :** Business between India and Bangladesh was heavily in favour of India. Unfortunately, Bangladesh's export basket to India is very limited. Whatever Bangladesh is exporting to India, there is a complaint from business community that Indian importers questioned the quality of our products. As far as quality is concerned, the Bangladeshi official testing authority BSTI which started few years back and was in the process of improving their standards. The Indian government is also cooperating very recently to upgrade the standard. He commented that Bangladesh must communicate with its Indian counterparts for improvements. He added that in the field of agriculture, the two countries could cooperate more. Bangladesh achieved self-sufficiency but the country's population growth has doubled. The country is the eighth largest potato growing country and the harvest is upcoming. Yet its storage capacity is not up to the standard. He hoped that India would open up its door for potato export from Bangladesh.

**Secretary (retd) Mr. M. Mokammel Haque :** Thanked the chair of the session and the High Commissioner for the presentation. He said the quality of the presentation around the table and the presence of the media indicate the interest and good relations between India and Bangladesh. He recalled that in 2007, he was attending a counter terrorism seminar. And there were broad attacks on India from several intellectuals in Bangladesh. He stated in that seminar that neither Bangladesh nor India could wish away each other as neighbours. Therefore, it would be better if we can come to terms with each other. Simply attacking would not help. The countries should find out respectable, honest and forward looking relationship which he believed High Commissioner Saran has very aptly explained. He mentioned about the problems between big and small countries around the world. The fact remains that both the big and the small have their own strengths and weaknesses—whether it is the US and Cuba or Venezuela and US, or Russia and Ukraine. But he believes that the best thing happening to India and Bangladesh is that it is happening for the better. He added that a very sad and tragic incident in 1975 changed the whole dimension. But it was not discussed as certain things are taboo in discussing in public. That has existed in Bangladesh for an extremely long time. He underlined two things. One that High Commissioner already discussed and which had been elaborated by Professor Amartya Sen and another scholar whose name he could not remember. They presented the difference about the social indicators and development in the subcontinent excellently. He added that India, in his view, is not a country, not even a subcontinent but more than a continent. It has brought within its purview languages and nationalities. Although we call them Indians, there are many sub-nationalities within themselves. They have different colours, languages, cultures and food habits. But the union of India is another wonder in the world, and the democracy that

functions. Some say that the central government in India is becoming weak, but it is the strength of the states that is making India more formidable. And India will continue to stay like this. He stated Bangladesh would remain a bridge.

### **Response by the Indian High Commissioner**

**To Ambassador (retd) Humayun Kamal :** High Commissioner thanked him for his appreciation of India's visa procedures initiatives. The trade imbalance essentially needs a resolution. He termed the introduction of the quota free and duty free regime in 2011 as a notable development in this regard. Referring to trade negotiations of preceding years, he said negotiators from both sides had developed their own methods for making small concessions from each other to secure quotas for particular products like Jamdani sarees, men's trousers, shirts etc. It became a practice but was not very useful and going nowhere. In India, it was a basic political decision that when time would come, Indian market would be opened to all Bangladeshi products except the 25 products mentioned earlier with the expectation that the opportunity would be grabbed by Bangladeshi businessmen who could refine their business model keeping the market of 1.2 billion people in mind. The process has begun and some Bangladeshi companies are already entering Indian market; India is facilitating that process as well. Bangladesh's exports to India for the last ten years have grown ten times; exports were about US\$ 50 million ten years ago which reached about US\$ 563 million in 2013. The issues of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers are very much on the agenda as reflected in the discussions held between India and Bangladesh in Dhaka in March 2014. Initiatives are being taken to address the tariff issues and they can be divided into two parts: those arising from phytosanitary standards and testing, the others from inadequate border infrastructures and connectivity. Both in their own ways constituted non-tariff and para-tariff barriers for entry of Bangladeshi products into India. On the first case, the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) in India are trying to come up with a modus vivendi which would enable Bangladeshi products to be certified. And if there are agricultural or processed products to be exported, there would be certain requirements for testing. Secondly, some green channels are also being considered to be established involving land customs stations which would test first, and then clear items for exports. Thirdly, the possibility of opening up all of the 30 plus land customs stations is also under consideration, meaning particular stations would be used for particular transactions. These will also help reduce transaction cost and hazards. For trade infrastructures, both sides have lacking. A process of developing new, integrated check posts is on track. Here, High Commissioner referred to the Agartala check post which was opened in November 2013; to his mind, it is a promising development. He lamented that trade infrastructures on India-Bangladesh borders remained largely unchanged since 1947 or 1971 which neither India nor Bangladesh paid sufficient attention to, but they should. Both sides are therefore, equally responsible for this. With regard to state-based charges (Indian states) or levies on imports from Bangladesh, India is trying to assure national treatment for Bangladeshi products entering its market. And currently it is not able to provide any better treatment. Both India and Bangladesh need to make sure that they get equal treatment in each other's markets regarding that national treatment was a well-documented concept in international trade. India is committed to and would do its

best to encourage more imports from Bangladesh. He expressed satisfaction that in last few years, more Indian companies are viewing Bangladesh as a potential destination for their investments. More companies and projects are in the pipeline and if some Indian companies can set up their production facilities in Bangladesh then they would also be able to export to India, China, and Myanmar etc from here. If the investment aspect could be brought into the trade aspect, there is a likelihood of a better and frequent institution than only relying on trade. On Tipaymukh issue, he informed it is discussed between the governments of India and Bangladesh. A joint subgroup under the Joint River Commission (JRC) had been created which met twice. India also assured Bangladeshi government that it would not do anything that would adversely impact Bangladesh and also offered a stake in the Tipaymukh project should it feel disadvantaged. High Commissioner then informed that the Tipaymukh dam was not under construction. For the Maitree Express, he said an expert group formed of members from both countries' railways in 2012, found the number of passengers has risen considerably in last two years. The customs and immigration complexities exist in both India and Bangladesh. Moreover, the quality of railway Bangladeshi railway lines would have to be upgraded because the inter-country trains using these could move only at a certain pace. Presently, the railways of both countries agreed to issue return tickets for travellers which was one way ticket earlier.

**To Ambassador (retd) Shamim Ahmed :** The relations between two countries depend on mutual interests. Interests will not change with the change of governments. India will try its best to maintain good relations with any government in Bangladesh which it had been doing since 1971. Therefore, these relations could not be confined to any particular timeline or any government in Bangladesh or in India. That would be unfair. If there is something that can help the people of Bangladesh, India would do that; with regard to the popular perception of India in Bangladesh, he said they are doing their job. However, if their expectations would not be met, the Indian side would go back to the drawing board and try finding out what went wrong on its part. He added that when on 17 May 2014, if a change in Indian government would occur, the issues in India-Bangladesh relations would remain in their place and cooperation would go on as long as there is receptivity towards those initiatives. India would treat its relations with Bangladesh in a manner fully acceptable to Bangladeshi people.

**To Zaglul A. Chowdhury :** There are negative feelings in Bangladesh about the Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta water sharing issue. High Commissioner regretted the Land Boundary Agreement not being ratified and the Teesta Agreement fiasco. But there are positive dimensions too. Now a formula to exchange enclaves, deal with adverse possessions and demarcate the unmarked areas has been agreed upon between both sides. He credited officials on both sides for this development. Yet, the logical conclusion to it would be ratification and implementation. But it is not possible to guess the prospects of ratification until the ongoing Indian elections conclude. India is committed to endorsing the ratification and building the necessary political consensus for that purpose. In fact, the ratification bill was put to the upper house of Indian Parliament so that the bill would not expire with the expiry of the lower house and remain legally valid.

**To Ambassador (retd) Humayun Kabir :** Both countries are trying to promote their mutual relations. The circles in this relationship are actually expanding. A way to enhance relations would be to go beyond the government and political levels. India is trying to reach all sections of the Bangladeshi society, all political parties and other stakeholders in India-Bangladesh relations. Interests really would not change over time. As long as the basic principles in India-Bangladesh relations remain similar, interests constant, policy would remain pretty much the same. On Indian position about China and Myanmar, High Commissioner said that India and China, after holding talks at Premiers' level in early 2014 agreed to include Nepal and Bhutan into the BCIM Economic Corridor Initiative. Meetings were also held in Kunming, China; another meeting is scheduled in Bangladesh, most probably in June 2014 which High Commissioner Saran himself hopes to attend. India remains strongly committed to hold talks with all parties involved in this enterprise, of course, at an official level. Recently India, Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed to a track-2 dialogue and if they can come to further agreement, the dialogue could become a track-1 dialogue. On water management, the dialogue is still at track-2 level. There are other countries holding stakes in the basins and flows of the rivers Brahmaputra and Narmada; they should also be brought into the dialogue.

**To Major General (retd) Ferdous Mian :** It would be up to Bangladesh whom they would chose as strategic partner. India only wants to promote peace, stability, trade relations as well as safe environment for littoral states. A regional architecture for peace, stability and development would serve these purposes well. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can be followed as a model for that.

**To Secretary (retd) Sohel Chowdhury :** Border haats can not be considered as alternatives to broader international trade. India asked Bangladesh to open border haats in Assam and Meghalaya. Nonetheless, Bangladesh should focus on more trade with Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad for more profits. India's Northeast has good social indicators but not good economic prospects; e.g., Bangladesh's export to Tripura stands at 98 per cent compared to Tripura's export of just 2 per cent to Bangladesh. Banglabandha is a disappointment and attempts are going on to resolve it.

**To Mr. Mohammad Fazlul Haque :** The High Commissioner agreed with about the importance of people-to-people contact. India has done quite a lot in the area across different sections of society in Bangladesh. He also referred to the (1:53:30) delegation programme which had been quite successful and generated a good response. With the question regarding books, High Commissioner said India would be happy to provide whatever it could. About SAARC, he commented that at some point India needed to choose what is more important for the country—form or substance. If it were substance, India is trying to go ahead with those countries that sre willing to cooperate. This is why there is BIMSTEC or the new emerging coalition as discussed earlier consisting of Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and India etc. Whenever India would find a group of countries who sre willing to move ahead and generate more rapid cooperation, he believed India should allow it to continue, even it pushed for SAARC. He said that SAARC has made progress, although not as much as expected. He also noted that if India

could move ahead with smaller group of countries, it should not allow SAARC to come in the way of that process.

**To Mr. Md. Shoaib Choudhury :** On trade imbalance, High Commissioner said that the narrow trade basket is an issue. The two countries should work together to find out their comparative advantages. About readymade garments and textiles, he said he is aware that some forays have been made into Indian market; some manufacturers had good experience and some had bad. If a policy framework can be put in place, it should be given some more time before the message could be circulated down to the companies and enterprises level. Entry into the India market is going to be difficult, albeit the market was next to Bangladesh. Perseverance and confidence in own products would definitely carry the day. On Indian exports to Bangladesh, he observed that by looking at the composition of the imports, most of them are found as adding value to Bangladesh's economy. For example, if Bangladesh imports cotton, yarn or textile machinery, there is a value addition going on. There is no escaping from the fact that India and Bangladesh actually have to build virtual cycle of investment between themselves. If Bangladesh imports raw steel for making ships or rubber for making tires, on economic terms, it is a win-win situation. But diversification of the export basket from Bangladesh is a project which India would be glad to work with. He added that agricultural sector has huge potential. Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in food grain, although it is a very much understated success stories in the world. He stated that Indian leaders have absolutely no hesitation in noting that in many social indicators, Bangladesh is far ahead of many Indian states.

**To Ambassador (retd) Ashfaqur Rahman :** There was a time when both India and Bangladesh were mutually suspicious. Activities by foreign elements in Bangladesh made Indian security agencies ramp up their own measures. The management of India-Bangladesh borders is totally different from that of India-Pakistan borders.

**To Muhammad Nurul Huda, former IGP, Bangladesh :** We should have to wait. The very nature of the Indian state would prevent it from becoming a totalitarian/fundamentalist entity although India has some lacking for upholding secularism. Moreover, India's security itself would be endangered without secularism. After 1947, India has been witnessing coalition governments. However, India's governance would become more inclusive by addressing aspirations from different parts and groups in the country. Being a diverse country, the defining divides could be found in the forms of cultures, faiths or languages.