

Opening remarks COL (ret) David M Shanahan
Workshop on National Security and Civil-Military Relations Bangladesh
16 Nov 2009

Honorable Advisor to the Honorable Prime Minister, H.E. Mr. H T Imam, MG Mian, Amb Sobhan, Amb Moriarty Distinguished guests, and most importantly Workshop participants

I am delighted to be with you on behalf of the Director of APCSS, LTG (ret) Ed Smith, who will join us at our closing on Thurs. The Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies has a proud legacy of nearly 15 years of interaction with Government and other professionals from Bangladesh. In that time, it has hosted nearly 200 Bangladeshi fellows in our resident executive education courses in Honolulu Hawaii. As well, it has sponsored numerous workshops and conferences in which Bangladeshi officials have participated. The underlying aim of all these efforts has been: expanding knowledge, enhancing skills and building person to person and institutional networks to advance security cooperation in the Asia Pacific Region.

Today I am both humbled and gratified that APCSS has played a modest part to help assemble such an impressive, accomplished, and diverse group of professionals. I am gratified as well at the personal support that has been given this effort by the Honorable Prime Minister. As is the case with any issue of such importance, it is crucial that a wide breadth of perspectives be incorporated. In that regard, the full participation by hand selected representatives of the Chairman of the major opposition party, as well as other non-governmental participants will be critical if the workshop results are to enjoy widespread acceptance and influence sustainable improvements.

The workshop as has been described takes on the important work of defining and seizing the opportunity to foster advancement in the realm of National Security and Civil Military Relations in Bangladesh.

As we consider that noble purpose in the context of recent Bangladesh history, I am reminded of the 19th Cent English author Charles Dickens, in the opening words of *A Tale of Two Cities* when he described the time of ferment accompanying the French revolution:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so ...like the present period

He might have been writing of Bangladeshi political history today - so full of challenge, but also with the basis for great promise and optimism.

In the U.S. an animated film premiered a few days ago that is a version of another popular Dickens novel. In it, an old man is given a tour of his life, seeing it from the perspective of the past, present, and the future. Near the end of the tale, when the man is presented with the bleak and terrible future that his past and present actions have forecast for him, he laments and cries pleadingly "is this an image of what **will be** or **what might be** if I don't change"

In a sense this workshop has as its aim to take the participants to that same point - where they can deliberately regard the challenges and imperatives that Bangladesh's history presents, and resolve to change, and, by so doing, help shape a future that is better than one that simply projects the past and present into the future. A future where the Security Sector is more perfectly joined in common cause with Bangladeshi political and civil society to further the State's capacity to secure the welfare of all it's people. This isn't easy and is a continuing struggle for all counties, including the US, where a vigorous debate rages even now on the future of American involvement in Afghanistan. Recognition and resolution to do something though is an important step.

The poet Rabindranath Tagore once wrote "If you shut the door to all errors, truth will be shut out" In that vein I would suggest that participants will be successful in achieving the common cause aimed for by the workshop to the extent that you approach your work with an open mind- not so open as to allow your brains to fall out, but, not so rigid as to be invulnerable to truth and opportunities for consensus in fostering needed action steps for tangible progress. We will ask participants to work hard over the coming days to find common ground that can be the basis for such action. Lesser professionals might be pessimistic at the challenge and shrink from it but I ask you to summon the tenacity and courage expressed as well by Tagore, who once asserted: "I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door - or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present."

From the outset I'd like to be clear about the role of the co-sponsors of this event. As workshop organizers, we do not claim to have answers to the challenges you face. From the stance of facilitators, it would be false and arrogant to suggest that we can provide what you alone must struggle to produce. As very supportive, but disinterested enablers, the organizers purpose in the workshop will be to facilitate that struggle for you participants who are actually in the public arena and accountable to the bodies you represent for the results you achieve together.

As Theodore Roosevelt, an American president, suggested at the beginning of the last century,

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strives to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

As we proceed this week in the important work before us I ask all participants to strive valiantly and to spend yourselves in the worthy cause of bettering National Security and Civil-Military relations within Bangladesh. In so doing you will live up to your highest calling of professionalism- knowing the triumph of high achievement as you further the security of your country, and the welfare of your people.

Together with our esteemed co-sponsors- the Bangladesh Institute of International Security Studies and the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies organizers pledge our fullest and best effort to enable your success.

And to paraphrase what John F Kennedy might have enjoined you

With a good conscience your only sure reward, with history the final judge of your deeds, go forth to the noble purpose you have before you, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be your own.