

**High Commission of India  
Dhaka**

Remarks by High commissioner at the inaugural session of  
Bangladesh-India Friendship Dialogue  
(1 November 2019)

- Your Excellency Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Hon'ble Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament
- Your Excellency Md. Shahriar Alam, State Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Md. Shahidul Haque, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh
- Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma, Hon'ble Minister of Finance, Transformation and Development, Health & Family Welfare, PWD, Government of Assam, India
- Shri Ram Madhav Varanasi, National General Secretary, BJP, India
- Shri M J Akbar, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, India
- Mr. M. Shahidul Islam, Secretary General, BIMSTEC
- Dr. Radha Tomal Goswami, Director Techno International College of Technology, Working President, Friends of Bangladesh (India Chapter)

It is a great pleasure for me to be present here at the 9<sup>th</sup> round of Bangladesh-India Friendship Dialogue organized by the Bangladesh Foundation for Regional Studies and India Foundation. I would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh and Friends of Bangladesh for supporting and coordinating this event. This Dialogue spanning over several years has no doubt helped generate greater understanding between India and Bangladesh. The various subjects that the Dialogue proposes to deal with are also very relevant. This 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dialogue comes at a very opportune moment in our bilateral relations.

2. India-Bangladesh relationship is based on history, language, secularism and several other commonalities. Our unique friendship is forged in Liberation War of Bangladesh. It is not an exaggeration to say that very few countries in the world share such fraternal ties as that of ours.

3. Our neighborhood policy follows our Prime Minister's vision of '*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas*', which implies that we prosper together. The Government of India accords top priority to relations with Bangladesh. For us, it is neighborhood first, and in the neighborhood, it is Bangladesh first.

4. In the last 5 years, we have been able to make a lot of progress in furthering our bilateral relationship. Today, our relation is multifaceted and cooperation covers a wide spectrum of areas including trade, commerce and investment, security & border management, connectivity, energy & power, information technology, space, nuclear science, development projects, culture and greater people-to-people exchanges. At the recently concluded visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India, both the leaders reaffirmed their mutual commitment to strengthen bilateral relations for the benefit of the entire region. We share a bond which is transcending strategic relationship.

5. At this Dialogue, the first cluster of subjects which will come up for discussion is '**Trade, Investment To Generate Employment**'. Today India-Bangladesh trade has crossed \$10 billion mark. India has extended duty-free, quota-free access to Bangladesh to its market of 1.3 billion people. Riding on the success of RMG sector, Bangladesh's exports have grown by 52% and crossed US\$ 1 billion last year. As Bangladesh graduates from LDC status to the status of a developing country by 2024, we are looking at entering into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Bangladesh. CEPA will help Bangladesh reduce its bilateral trade deficit with India and also increase collaboration in non-traditional exports.

6. I am happy to say that Indian investment proposals registered with Bangladesh Investment Development Authority exceeded US\$ 3 billion by 2018. In addition, more than US\$ 10 billion of Indian investment in power & energy, logistics, education, IT and medical sectors is in the pipeline. The upcoming Indian Economic Zones in Mongla and Mirsarai will further facilitate Indian investment in Bangladesh.

7. Let me give the example of Marico Limited which is in the FMCG sector. Marico employs 270 people directly and almost 2800 people indirectly. 99% of their total workforce is Bangladeshi. There are only four expatriates from India, i.e. only 1% of employees. Marico contributed more than Taka 1100 crore revenue to the Bangladesh national exchequer over the last 5 years. A similar success story is that of Pidilite Industries, the makers of well known FEVICOL brand. They have just opened their second factory in Bangladesh at Bhaluka, for which Pidilite earmarked over Taka 550 million investment. Pidilite will be first major manufacturer of pigment emulsions in Bangladesh and will provide solutions to local textile, footwear, paper & packaging applications. They are also a big employer and as many workers and Indian investment in Bangladesh leads to employment and capacity building.

8. Coming to the second cluster which is '**connectivity**', Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has on more than one occasion mentioned that she would like to see all pre-1965 train connections restored between India and Bangladesh. At present there are four rail connectivities between India and Bangladesh on which passenger and freight trains are running. Apart from that, Chilahati (Bangladesh) - Haldibari (India) rail link work is in progress. We are also working to open Shahbazpur (Bangladesh) - Mahisasan (India, Assam) and Akhaura-Agartala rail link. Reconnection of these old links and opening up of new links will further increase connectivity and trade between the two countries. During Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, it was announced that the frequency of Maitree Express will be increased from 5 times per week from present 4 times and that of Bandhan Express from 1 time to 2 times per week. Under Indian Lines of Credit, projects in sectors like ports, power, railways, roads and airports are being undertaken. Amongst the investments under Line of Credit, major share of our development partnership is with railway sector. Under Line of Credit, 9 railway projects have been completed including construction of Bhairab and Titas bridges. The other projects are under various stages of progress. I am sure, upon completion, these infrastructure related projects will enhance the quality of life of citizens.

9. In the area of maritime and inland water connectivity, we have signed Coastal Shipping Agreement in 2015, Protocol on Inland Waterways Trade and Transit (PIWTT) for improving inland waterways connectivity, an MoU on Passenger and cruise vessels on coastal and protocol routes. I am pleased to inform that in April-May 2019, inaugural runs for cruise services between Dhaka-Guwahati and Dhaka-Kolkata routes were also conducted successfully and 4 such cruises have been completed by now through the beautiful Sundarbans.

10. We have also signed the Standard Operating Protocol on the use of Chattogram and Mongla Ports during the recent visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. We are certain that it will enhance economic cooperation between North Eastern States of India and Bangladesh and further the development of the logistics and transport infrastructure in the region. It will be very beneficial for Bangladesh as only Bangladeshi transport vehicles will be allowed for these services. We share 8 Protocol Inland Waterway Routes. Considering the immense potential for cargo movement using inland water and coastal shipping routes, recently both sides decided to operationalise two additional routes i.e. Sonamura - Daudkandi and Dhulian – Rajshahi. The increase in air and road

connectivity between various capital cities of the North-Eastern States of India and Bangladesh will improve people-to-people contacts and tourism.

11. Recently the Act East Policy Department of State Government of Assam organized an India-Bangladesh Stakeholders Dialogue. This was an extremely important initiative at which discussions were held on how to optimize the geographical proximity of Bangladesh with North Eastern States, Chief Minister of Tripura and Finance Minister of Mizoram were also present clearly indicating the interest generated in North East for greater trade, investment between India and Bangladesh. Business community in Bangladesh feels that increasing connectivity can help Bangladesh double its exports to India within 3 years.

12. As regards the '**Technology, Power and Energy**', India and Bangladesh are cooperating in these three important sectors. Bangladesh has been receiving 1160 MW of electricity from India and a large number of power projects are coming up including some under the Line of Credit. We are actively working with the ICT Ministry on IT related issues. We have also undertaken a project in the IT field under the Line of Credit under which IT/Hi-Tech Parks will be set up in 12 districts of Bangladesh at a cost of US\$ 206 million.

13. Through our High Impact Community Development Projects as well as Government-to-Government arrangements, we are addressing issues relating to '**Ecological and Sustainable Development**'. We also have bilateral mechanisms in the form a Joint Working Group on Conservation of Sundarbans and a Joint Working Group on Trans-Boundary Conservation of Elephants.

14. The final cluster, which is on the agenda of the Regional Dialogue, on '**Containing Extreme Ideology for Regional Security**' is one of the most significant dimensions of this Dialogue. You must be aware that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appreciated the zero-tolerance policy of the Government of Bangladesh against terrorism and commended Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for

her resolute efforts to ensure peace, security and stability in the region. And I am sure that scholars and academics present here will be able to make significant contribution on this important subject which is of vital security interest to both India and Bangladesh as well as for the entire region as a whole.

15. We have made huge strides forward in our respective efforts at achieving development and growth. We will also work together to commemorate the two important anniversary years: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Birth Centenary in 2020; and 50 years of Bangladesh's War of Liberation, and the establishment of India-Bangladesh bilateral diplomatic ties in year 2021.

16. I sincerely hope that this dialogue will give valuable insights to take forward our mutually beneficial partnership to newer heights and opening of new vistas for co-operation between India and Bangladesh. I would like to thank the organisers once again for this excellent initiative and I wish all the best for the deliberations.

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