

Event Report

Celebrating 50 Years of Independence || BILIA LECTURE SERIES

Lecture 1

Bangladesh at 50 (1971-2021): Its Contribution to Global Politics

Date & Time

07th March, 2021, Sunday, 6.30pm

Venue

BILIA Auditorium, Dhanmondi, Dhaka



BANGLADESH INSTITUTE OF LAW AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (BILIA)



Introduction

On celebrating the glory of *Mujib Borsho* and the 50 years of Independence of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) initiated a series of Lectures. The inaugural Lecture titled “**Bangladesh at 50 (1971-2021): Its Contribution to Global Politics**” was held on 07 March, 2021 at BILIA Auditorium. Md. Touhid Hossain, Former Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh was the keynote speaker. Among the panel discussants Ambassador M Humayun Kabir, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka were present. Keeping the convenience and safety measures in mind, the Lecture was held both on virtual platform and with limited physical presence of guests at the BILIA Auditorium. The session is chaired by Barrister M. Amir-Ul Islam, Chairman, BILIA and conducted by Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Director, BILIA.

Keynote Address



Md. Touhid Hossain presented the keynote paper on ‘Bangladesh’s contribution to Global Politics’ focusing on its role, activities, achievements, contribution, and failures in global politics. According to Mr. Hossain, the real world international politics is largely determined by power which can be military, economic and social. Bangladesh with sustainable economic growth and a per capita GDP (PPP) at US\$ 3,900 is looking forward to graduation from LDCs list. Its success in advancing the MDGs has been impressive. In line with the above information, it is pertinent to say that Bangladesh is the only Muslim majority country which has attained gender-parity in primary school enrollment. Bangladesh, with its deep rooted cultural heritage and ethnically diverse population, is a country with freedom-

loving, secular, democratic, and hardworking people. The country is located at the crossroad between South Asia and South East Asia (two fastest growing region of the world) which locates the country in a geographically important position. Bangladesh enacted two important legislations in maintaining justice and rights: the *International Crime (Tribunal) Act, 1973* enabling a domestic court to try international crimes recognized in the *Rome Statute* of 1988 establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Children Act, 1974, recognizing special rights for children including Juvenile Courts for juvenile delinquents. Towards the end of 70's, Bangladesh engaged in issues beyond its borders. In 1979, Bangladesh became a member of the Al Quds Committee to support the Palestinians and their rights to have a separate state under a two state solution. Bangladesh being member of the Islamic Peace Committee involved in an international peace making effort. The first Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAAARC) was held in Dhaka, in 1985. During the same time Mr. Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was elected as the President of the 41st UN General Assembly in 1986. Moreover, during 1990, Bangladesh became a member of the 35 nation's coalition against Iraq and sent troops to non-combatant role. Bangladesh contributed to global peacekeeping and peace building through its participation in the UN Peacekeeping operations (UNPKO). Since 1988 the Country has participated in 54 missions in 40 countries across continents. Troops from Bangladesh participated in post conflict transmission in a number of countries; e.g., removing landmines in Cambodia and South Sudan. In order to hold free, fair and credible national election, in 1990 Bangladesh introduced the concept of Caretaker Government. However, such concept was stuck down by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh declaring inconsistent with the constitution.

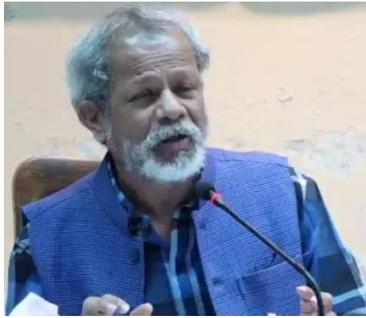
Among various other achievements, Mr. Hossain Continues, the concept of Microcredit have been remarkable in reducing poverty. Such credit system has been a better substitute to what locals face; an atrocious rates of interest during seasonal scarcity from local money lenders. Using the Microcredit model, an estimated 300 million people are said to have benefited all over the world. Such Model has earned Nobel Prize for Prof. Yunus and Grameen Bank and has significantly altered global politics of poverty. In 1975, Bangladesh became member of LDCs and made important contributions to achieve better terms of trade for the group. This allowed all LDCs to enter EU market without duty or quota for all goods excluding arms. Meanwhile, the economy of Bangladesh became over-dependent on single export commodity and concentration on expatriate workers in the Middle East. Technological advancement and crisis in the Middle East region can threaten our export and foreign exchange flow, respectively resulting minimum access to global politics.

Panel Discussion



Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir, joined the session through online platform and made valuable observations on the keynote paper. According to him, the integral linkage between domestic and external elements and utilization of hard and soft power concept are the two important framework in global politics. The soft power leads to norm and value and the birth of Bangladesh is based on that norm or value proposition. Since the declaration of independence, Bangladesh has promoted peace as a public good; therefore, promotes peace at a bilateral and regional level by encouraging and maintaining peace among neighbors. Connectivity being the future of this region was essentially created by Bangladesh. Bangladesh used connectivity as a tool of utilizing the soft power. On promoting connectivity, our Hon'ble Prime Minister allowed India to use our ports and other connectivity facilities. Moreover, Nepal and Bhutan were also allowed to use our ports and facilities.

The establishment of SAARC is another value proposition initiated by Bangladesh and has created a regional environment for resolving the regional issues through dialogue and discussion. Bangladesh, through various troops, over the years has contributed in maintaining peace and harmony where necessary. This is one of the areas where Bangladesh can promote the norm creation or norm promotion in the global environment. Bangladesh has transformed its domestic achievement into the global environment as a kind of agenda. According to the UN Security Council Resolution 1375, Bangladesh has drawn up a national action plan on the role of women in promoting peace and security. Now many countries are willing to re-discover the role of women in promoting peace, progress and economic development. From its own experience Bangladesh has contributed in the global environment and its internal experience has created an example which can influence the external environment to peace and development. Being a promoter of peace and friendship, Bangladesh for the first time is facing challenge from geopolitical strategic perspective in terms of Rohingya crisis. Both China and India are neighbors to Bangladesh and Myanmar and playing an active role in the Rohingya crisis. The role of concerned countries have made the Asia Pacific region the future of International politics and is bringing global attention towards the South Asian regional countries for handling international politics and diplomacy efficiently. Bangladesh needs to rethink its foreign policy and reorganize domestically to navigate competitive environment of outside world.



Professor Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed while commenting on the paper trailed back to ancient civilization of Bengal. The concept of power dynasty in greater Bengal is quite old, started from the time of raja-maharajas and these rajas were the elected representatives of the people. Bangladesh fought for liberation war and made a history in the world. Bangladesh is the first country in the Sub-continent that is People's Republic. The foreign policy principle of "Friendship towards all and malice towards none" was embedded in the election manifesto of the Awami League in pre-1971 period and in that clause it is written that we will not be part of SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). At present, Bangladesh with 6 to 7% growth has made the country geopolitically important. We can turn our large population to human resource and continue to remain in the position of global importance with proper utilisation of human resource. Bangladesh maintains a foreign policy of maintaining friendship with all. Our cultural aspect also plays an important role in maintaining friendship with all and enmity towards none. That is one of the reason why Bangladesh is a member of all UN Committees. The concept of diaspora is important in evaluating economic development, diasporic countries like US, Canada attract re-investment and many re-investment opportunities of Bangladesh is diverted towards those diasporic countries. Prof. Imtiaz concluded commenting that Bangladesh has a tremendous success story in controlling the Corona pandemic. It should have been included in the paper.



Barrister Tania Amir joined the Lecture through Zoom. While commenting on the paper she mentioned about the first government of Bangladesh, its initiative in representing and introducing Bangladesh to the world. Our foreign policy of maintaining peace, friendship, and solidarity with international community is imbedded in our Constitution. Article 25 of the Constitution promotes international peace, security and solidarity. With the help of international law and various dispute resolution mechanisms we can resolve our water boundary dispute with Myanmar and India. Though Bangladesh has fulfilled all obligations in the moment of an international crisis, the Rohingya crisis has made the country fall into a difficult position as we did not ratified the *1951 Refugee Convention*.

Ratifying to this convention has various advantages. If Bangladesh would have ratified the Convention then other ratified resourceful countries could have been asked to give shelter to Rohingyas. The Rohingya crisis has turned into a political crisis and a humanitarian approach may not be sufficient to handle this crisis.



Open Discussion



Mr. Arifuzzaman, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Law, addressed the right of self-determination, proclamation of Independence, drafting of our Constitution, subsequent diplomatic achievements. Over the years Bangladesh has achieved economic growth, stability and cultural diversity. After independence although the Country has gone through Marshall Law but judgment of 5th and 7th amendment cases abolished the Marshall Law provision from the Constitution and made it a punishable offence to proclaim Marshall Law in the Country. While commemorating 07 March, 1971, the announcement of independence was through a Constituent Assembly forming the first government of Bangladesh and the Constitution.

Mr. Tauhid Hossain, the keynote speaker was given the floor to address the observations that were raised by the audience. The current Rohingya crisis needs to be resolved but ratifying the Refugee Convention may not resolve the issue. Legal resource could have been an option to resolve the Crisis but it can only be availed when perpetrators are defeated. While addressing the 50th glory of

Independence, Mr Hossain stated that Bangladesh as an independent governable country maintained friendship with all and enemy to none. Although, after partition and formation of Bangladesh was with less opportunities but with time the Country has made remarkable economic and social achievements. Women being an active part of the society has contributed in the economy and empowering women will bring much more to the Country.

Concluding Remarks



Barrister Amir- Ul Islam, chair of the session, in his concluding remarks said that the Proclamation of Independence is the charter of independence of Bangladesh where equality, human dignity and social justice has been perceived as her guiding principles. Bangladesh yet has not been able to cultivate these three destination points. The economic development that we have achieved is not sufficient without establishing equality, human dignity, and social justice.

Appreciation



Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Director, Bangladesh Institute of law and International Affairs (BILIA) thanked and conveyed gratitude towards all the participants present both physically and virtually at the Lecture. He warmly announced that the second lecture of the series celebrating the 50 years of Independence would be on the Proclamation of Independence which will take place on 10 April 2021 and cordially invited the audience for the next lecture.

The number of attendants at the Lecture both through zoom and physical presents were remarkable; around 80 people joined through the zoom platform and 45 people joined the Lecture physically. This report is prepared by Tasmiah Ali, Research Assistant (Law).