

Symposium on New Powers in International System: China and Turkey

**Date: March 28, 2019
Venue: BILIA Auditorium**

Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) had organized a symposium on, **“New Powers in International System: China and Turkey”** on Thursday, March 28, 2019 at BILIA Auditorium.

The symposium was presided over by, Mr. Muhammad Kamaluddin, Former Ambassador. Whereas, Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka and Deputy Director (International Affairs), BILIA and Ms. Umme Salma Tarin, Assistant Professor, Department of International, Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) were the designated discussants for the symposium.

The symposium starts at 03:00 p.m. with the welcoming address by Mr. Reza Kibria, Member of the Executive Council, BILIA. In his welcoming address Mr. Kibria introduced the respective Chairs and discussants as well as the presenters of the papers. After the welcoming address, the honorary Chair Mr. Kamaluddin appreciated the approach of BILIA to bring up such a significant topic for discussion. He also added that the topic in discussion was very relevant in terms of the present global scenario.

After that, two papers were presented pertaining to the theme of symposium.

Ms. Rumi Akter, Research Assistant (IA), BILIA presented the first paper of the symposium titled, **“The Rise of China and Implications for International Politics”**. In her presentation she basically focused on the concept of the rising powers by comparing its past and present scenario and the features that lead China to become one of the strongest rising powers of the world after the cold war era. Ms. Rumi stressed that, with the end of the cold war, the international system was freed from the USA and the USSR based global order and observed a major transition in the international politics due to the new rising powers’ (mainly the BRICS Countries) rapid economic development, and expanding political and cultural influence. She also pointed out the fundamental features of a rising power and a seriatim analysis and comparison of those features to China. While bringing the economic perspective Ms. Rumi stated that, being the fastest growing economy it can be expected that China will surpass the United States as the world’s biggest economy by the year 2030. She also mapped out a number of factors that resulted in a rapid boost in China’s economy and further raised a question stating, **“Can economic power be translated into political power on the international stage?”** Ms. Rumi also shed lights on certain most argued recent topic of international affairs that are basically related to the strategic initiatives of China, for example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Belt and Road Initiative of China, the Transit and the Transportation Agreement (TTA) between China and Nepal, etc. She further claimed that, where on one hand China plays passive role in international politics by keeping a balance between its Confucianism and realism beliefs, on the other hand it tries to disseminate itself as a major power on the international stage with its development initiative in other countries. That indirectly shows that China uses soft power policy rather than the conventional hard

power policy. Ms. Rumi concluded her presentation by quoting the famous saying of Professor Martin Jacques that, “the rise of China will transform the world in a communal, collective and familial manner rather than a coercive and aggressive one.”

Mr. Labib Murshed, Research Assistant (IA), BILIA presented the second and final paper of the symposium titled, “Turkey: A New Regional Power in the Middle East”. In his presentation Mr. Murshed discussed five major factors that are contributing to Turkey’s emergence as a regional power in the Middle East and the future role of Turkey in the Middle East based on the present geopolitical development. Mr. Murshed stated that, Turkish foreign policy that rotated around its secular-nationalistic principles along with US strategy in the Middle East was changed into an Islamist foreign policy, with a mix of Neo-Ottoman and nationalistic ideas since President Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey in 2002. Improving bilateral relationships with the Muslim countries and communities through trade, “Islamic Humanitarian Diplomacy”, “Mosque Diplomacy”, providing range of Islamic services and fight against the violent streams of Islam, particularly the Wahabism, Islamophobia and anti-Islamic mentality are some of the evidences that show the change in Turkey’s foreign policy. He further added that, implementation of Turkey’s new and confrontational foreign policy against Bashar al Assad in the Syrian Civil war, against the US-backed Kurdish YPG militants, active support for Qatar in the present Gulf Crisis against Saudi Arabia and UAE, for Muslim Brotherhood against the Egyptian regime, for the Palestinian cause against the Israeli regime and its policies, and for Sunnis of against Iraqi Shia militias can be viewed as Turkey’s attempt to spread regional political influence. Mr. Murshed also pointed out some of the key characteristics of a rising power that Turkey possesses for example, its conduct of an independent foreign policy, strong military, strong indigenous defense industry, strong economic potentials and last but not the least, its growing influence in the future Middle East geopolitics. In conclusion, Mr. Murshed observed that, given Turkey’s current military development along with a strong indigenous defense industry, it is likely to emerge as one of the strongest Middle Eastern power and major global power in the near future.

After the end of the mind-boggling presentation session some thoughtful and remarkable comments were made by the honourable guests and discussants of the symposium.

Professor Dr. Amena Mohsin who appeared as an honourable guest in the symposium made few suggestions on both the papers presented. She appreciated the excellent effort made by the presenters and congratulated them as well. She also added that the papers would have been more praiseworthy if they included a bit more deep analysis touching the democratic and human rights situation of the Countries in discussion. Mr. Reza Kibria as another guest appearance put his thoughts on both papers as well. Mr. Kibria started his mind-storming comments by saying he is deeply impressed by the presentation made by Ms. Rumi and Mr. Murshed as their papers covered different important matters and perspective as well as by their thoughtful writing style. However he observed that the papers could have more practical and should have touched other important and unique matters precisely, like the refugee problems and five years economic projection by IMF from Turkish perspective, comparison of China’s economy with its democracy, the South China Sea issue and China’s relationship with South East Asian Countries as well as with India, another rising power of the Asia.

Followed, Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, as the designated discussant of the conference shared few opinions on the papers presented by stating that the analytical framework and overall paper works were done nicely. Her suggestion for the first paper was that it should have included deeper discussions and critical analysis as to China's strategic implication of its foreign policy towards USA and South East Asian and African Countries. She further added that China's policy towards Bangladesh and response towards the Rohingya crisis could also have been brought. And as to the second paper she suggested that it should have addressed the issues regarding Russia and Palestine as well as other burning environmental issues. She also believed that questions like- what kind of secularism used to exist in Turkey, whether it was adopted from the European system or not?, and whether this secularism was the reason behind the rise of Erdogan and his party in Turkey could have been raised in the second paper. But overall she was quite satisfied and happy with both the papers and the presentations considering the limitation as to the time frame of presentation. Ms. Umme Salma Tarin, started her discussion by congratulating both presenters for their brilliant research work and outcome. According to her the first paper successfully proved that China is no doubt a rising power by spreading its cultural, economic and political influence over the neighbouring Countries. She on the contrary observed that though the paper includes the rise of China but lacks in projecting China's political implications. She also suggested that China's conflict with USA, India (due to India Nepal blockade), Sri Lanka and Malaysia (due to South China Sea and territorial dispute) should have been addressed. China's role in Syrian crisis and establishing economic control over the Latin American and African markets were also worth addressing. Her remarks on the second paper were that, the paper was exceptional as it covered Turkey's military strength projection but it lacks in putting sufficient light on the internal problems, economic and democratic situation of Turkey, as economic strength and democracy are the prerequisites of stable domestic and political situation of a country. The presentations and the comments by the discussant and guests were followed by a lively open discussion where questions were posed to the paper presenters from members of the audience, which included IA professionals, diplomats, researchers, academics, economists, development workers and students.

In his concluding remarks the chair of the symposium Mr. Kamaluddin, thanked all the participants and guest for joining the worthwhile discussion. He concluded by quoting a famous saying, "In international relations, there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies, only permanent interests." The symposium was formally brought to an end by Dr. Shahdeen Malik, Honorary Director, BILIA.

The event was covered by Sumaiya Sarwat, Research Assistant, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA)