INAUGURAL SESSION

Welcome Address by
Colonel Abul Basher Imamuzzaman, psc
Acting Director General
BIISS

I am, indeed, privileged and honored to welcome you all to this five-day long International Workshop on “Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms”, jointly organized by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security (APCSS).

Distinguished Guests,

A general consensus exists on the necessity of sound institutions for consolidation of democracy. Aiming to highlight, among other things, this necessity, this workshop’s purpose is to generate “constructive” dialogue among political leaders, policy makers, academics, practitioners, representative from security forces, non-governmental organizations, social and civil society organizations and members of the business community to stimulate ideas and proposals for reenergizing the democratic process. Without meaningful reforms revitalization of the democratic process will not be possible.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addition to the Inaugural and the Concluding sessions, the Workshop has six plenary, three group plenary, and four facilitated subgroup sessions. During the course of these sessions, distinguished participants, from home and abroad, will academically and objectively, address, discuss and debate on numerous issues related to the Workshop’s various themes.
Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Before I conclude, let me express our deepest and warmest gratitude to H.E Professor Dr Iajuddin Ahmed, the Honourable President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for gracing the Workshop's Inaugural session as the Chief Guest. We are, indeed, indebted to him for his valuable time and his gracious presence in this august gathering. I deeply thank the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies (APCSS) for approaching us to organize this international Workshop with BIIS. Perhaps without APCSS's support the event would not have been possible. This is the first joint collaboration between BIIS and APCSS, and I believe that we will be able to organize jointly similar workshops/conferences in the coming days. I thank the designated moderators, speakers, discussants and the audience for their valuable time. Let us look forward to hearing constructive deliberations from the Workshop.

Once again I thank everybody.
Welcome Address by  
Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ed Smith  
Director  
Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS)  
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

I am honored to serve presently as the Director General of Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) based in Honolulu, Hawaii. Accompanying with my five colleagues I am here. All of us are invited here to participate in this workshop. We hope, we trust and we believe that it will be a helpful and a fruitful dialogue on the areas of high importance for Bangladesh today i.e., the ongoing evaluation of democracy and security reform in this country. If we face a question why are we invited from Hawaii to participate in this workshop, I will say that we address the security challenges and conduct courses for the senior and medium level security practitioners, military as well as civilian, governmental and non-governmental officials from forty nations of the Asia-Pacific region and other parts of the world. We consider this particular opportunity as a special occasion. We do have some unique expertise and are helping security professional in this region to understand next steps possible needed in security system analysis and reforms. We can help identify and outline the appropriate next steps and considerable requirement relating to strengthening government rules, responsibly, enabling real security sector progress. We bring more outside experience all of which can facilitate dialogue related to the workshop topic.

As has been mentioned, the workshop is scheduled for five days. Day one and day two, today and tomorrow, we have a vast group of highly qualified presentation and discussion - all involved in the security policy formation in
Bangladesh. We have five presentations, followed by discussion and comments. This two-day will help us to understand the security challenges of Bangladesh. And latter the separate groups will recommend on security issues. The general question will be, how the government, civil society can work more cooperatively and collaboratively to advance for real information for security sector reform in Bangladesh. Once again, the participant of APCSS also will be highly helpful from your comments.

Thank You.
Opening Speech by the Special Guest
Ms. Geeta Pasi
Charge d’Affaires
Embassy of the United States of America,
Dhaka

It is a pleasure to address you. This workshop on “Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms” presents a timely opportunity to reflect upon the evolution of Bangladesh’s political and security environment. It will provide a lively forum to discuss the democratic process.

I hope your discussions will not be limited to academic issues but will instead produce practical recommendations on the way forward for democratic transition, focusing on governance and security sector reforms. I expect your recommendations to reflect and synthesize the broad spectrum of opinions in Bangladesh so they can be put to good use by policy makers.

Bangladesh has entered an unprecedented period of reform since January 11. As Bangladeshis seek to determine a path for this country that is free of corruption, violence, and political feuding, the foundation you lay during this interim period is crucial. The foundation must support the finished structure – if it built with democratic principles and respect for human rights at its core, then freedom, productivity, and stability can flourish. But...if the foundation is laid with elements that are themselves undemocratic, the future of the democratic system itself will be jeopardized.

In a democracy, the role of the security sector is vital to ensure that sovereignty and public safety are preserved and that law and order are respected. Without such guardians, the democratic system can be threatened from within by
dangerous factional struggles and blatant disregard for the greater good. But the ultimate responsibility for governing must rest squarely on the shoulders of civilian government—an elected body representing diverse groups within society that governs justly and conscientiously. Sadly, history is replete with examples of military leaders who have unwisely left the barracks, much to the detriment of their country and their own institution.

No one disputes the military’s key supporting role in this process. This role has been successfully assumed by some of history’s most esteemed military leaders. At the same time, those who have modified the part have often been judged as, in the worlds of America’s first President, George Washington, “inauspicious to liberty.” One of America’s greatest generals, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was mindful of this when he cautioned his colleagues in the civilian government to constantly be on guard against “unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought,” of the military sector. “The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will exist,” he said.

While such “misplaced power” can erode the success of a government, security forces can do much good if properly focused. For its part, Bangladesh’s military has proven its skills at home and around the world, including in United Nations peacekeeping operations. For example, the military is currently engaged in life-saving relief efforts in response to the floods.

The State of Emergency has provided Bangladeshis an opportunity to rewrite their political future. They have lent their support to the civilian caretaker government and the military in efforts to combat corruption and rebuild political institutions that will sustain and support democracy. This opportunity brings sobering responsibilities for both the
civilian and military leadership to fulfill their roles to the best of their ability, respecting the distinctions between them.

The United States has extended our support to the interim government during this State of Emergency. We support its goal of conducting free, fair and fully participatory elections by the end of 2008 and the restoration of a democratic system. We recognize that this is a formidable task, and I urge you to exercise your power to assist wisely and with great care, whether you are tasked with a civilian or a military role.

Anti-corruption efforts are a key component of the interim government's mandate. Corruption has too long robbed Bangladeshis of the fruits of their labors. It must not go unpunished. In calling corrupt individuals to account, however, the government must hold itself accountable to the international standards of due process and human rights.

The rights of the accused, in corruption cases as well as other cases, must be respected for these prosecution efforts to lead to an era of greater freedom and justice. So-called "secret" detentions, abuse of detainees, and deaths in custody are unacceptable. They are detrimental to the credibility of the government's reform process. Such incidents should be investigated and prevented from reoccurring.

Anti-corruption efforts and the pursuit of justice with due process are only part of a successful reform process. Building independent institutions is also important. We support electoral reform, including the development of an improved voter list and the laying out of a roadmap that leads to free, fair and credible elections by the end of 2008. We are prepared to expand our assistance to Bangladesh in this regard.

We have consistently urged that the ban on politics be lifted as soon as possible. Building a new political system requires dialogue. Politicians must be part of the reform dialogue.
This does not mean that the knowledge and expertise of those in the military sector cannot be brought to bear on the reform dialogue. This conference provides an excellent opportunity to develop reforms for the security sector that will accompany political reforms and enhance the success of both.

This workshop is an example of the productive and mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and Bangladesh. We are eager to assist when and where we can in facilitating democratic governance, prosperity, and stability. We are pleased to co-sponsor this conference.

You will address the duties and challenges that lay before the caretaker government and military during this unique period in Bangladesh's history. Before closing, I would like to acknowledge the strong collaboration between BIiSS and APCSS. I am sure this workshop will contribute to more contacts and exchanges between scholars and security experts of our two countries. I wish you a very productive workshop.

Thank you.
I am, indeed, very happy to be present in this five-day long international workshop jointly organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) in Dhaka, the magnificent city of Bangladesh. I see the topic of the workshop “Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms” is timely and relevant in the present context of Bangladesh. On the occasion of the workshop, I extend my felicitations and best wishes to those who are attending the workshop. I wish a comfortable stay of foreign guests in Dhaka.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development in the developing countries is very difficult. Reasons are manifold. Owing to an array of reasons like colonial legacy and inherent weakness, most of the developing nations have hardly been prepared to deal with these tasks. Not only the social forces, like, classes, social groups, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities but also the social, political, economic and cultural institutions in the region were underdeveloped, unevenly developed or fragile. To these have been added subjective factors like the failure on the part of the national leadership in the developing world to provide even a semblance of good governance. Misgovernance viz. lack of transparency, accountability, and participation often overwhelms the process of development. As a consequence, developmental efforts in a large number of developing countries often exacerbated conflicts among
different classes, social groups, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. As a result, these countries from the very beginning of their independence were facing numerous internal cleavages involving a cross section of classes. Such problems of primarily political nature, often assumed security dimension. A good number of countries have suffered from sustained political conflicts, staggering instability, political violence and even civil wars. Thus, the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development in the Third World has never been smooth, often highly difficult and hazardous.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is no exception in the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development. This country has been undergoing arduous political processes since its Independence. While probing into the chequered history of Bangladesh, we see the road to democracy and development is not smooth rather it is a bit rugged. There are many ups and downs in the way of institutionalizing democracy. The people of this country are friendly and they love democracy. Therefore, our endeavors should be to this direction in order to achieve the hopes and aspirations of the common masses. Democracy is not merely a system of governance rather it is a social system and a life-style. In this context I would like to recall a great quotation, “The measure of a democracy is the measure of freedom of its humblest citizens”. Democracy and governance are thus intimately entwined. For strengthening the base of democracy, there is no alternative to attain good governance. In this connection, I would like to say if we can ensure proper functioning of democratic system and unhindered practice of democratic culture, the attainment of good governance and development would be easier. It needs capable, honest, transparent and accountable administration as well as responsible, accountable and patriotic political
leaders who will lead our country to the right direction. Without strengthening the democratic institutions, the function of democracy and its gradual maturity will remain unaccomplished.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The country’s march towards freedom and prosperity, transition to democracy, attaining responsible governance and achieving security reforms is challenging but mass-demanding. Today, in this country, we deal with a society riddled with intolerance, poverty and steeped in wide scale illiteracy. The violence and polarization grip the political arena. Sharp differences persist among the political elite over fundamental national issues. Parochial rivalry and cleavages among different political and social forces, professional groups and social strata continue to pose severe chaos to the polity to the extent of impinging upon the national security.

Over the years, political and economic institutions of the society could not attain the desired expectations of the people. In the face of violent political conflict and mistrust, a large segment of the politically conscious people have kept themselves aloof from the political arena. Thus, civil society has been fragmented and, consequentially, weakened. In these circumstances, we have to find out the way of proper functioning of democratic norms and values, establishing of rule of law and good governance for the well-being of the country as well as the nation.

It is in this backdrop the joint initiative by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka and Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu, USA to organize the present Workshop on the theme democracy, governance and security reforms is a timely response to a set of most crucial issues of our national life.
I hope the learned audience, including the representatives from the APCSS, gathered here would grapple squarely with all the issues related to the theme of the Workshops. And finally, some policy recommendations will be made for the policy makers to concentrate their practical efforts aimed at facilitating the ongoing democratic transition, devising ways and means of ensuring responsible governance and conducting necessary security reforms.

With these few words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I congratulate you all once again and declare the Workshop Open.

Bangladesh Zindabad.
Remarks and Vote of Thanks by the Chair
Ambassador Mufleh R. Osmany
Chairman, Board of Governors, BIJSS

This is the moment of opportunity for the people of Bangladesh. Opportunity to change; Opportunity to transform and opportunity to achieve a better quality of democracy.

The ideals of the nation concerning freedom, democracy and governance are defined by deeply held faith, beliefs, and values. A meaningful discussion and debate about democracy, rule of law and security reforms would logically draw upon the roots of social ideals and basic interests of the people of Bangladesh.

The urgent need for qualitative change in the system, practice and culture of democracy in Bangladesh is acknowledged by all. The question is how to bring it about. The end is undisputed and unquestioned. The debate today is about the ways and means to achieve this cherished goal.

The wind of reform and transformation currently sweeping the polity of Bangladesh holds out the promise of a better future. Much will depend on the wisdom and patience that will go in to the process of managing the change. This transformational opportunity is too precious to be lost in the wilderness of barren promises. All the stakeholders of Bangladesh polity are challenged by this opportunity.

Historic opportunities are often frittered away in the lure of power, glory and opportunism. It has happened with us in the past. It is for the collective wisdom and transformational leadership to take the nation from the darkness of uncertainties towards the light of democracy and rule of law.

Change and continuity are important factors in the process of positive and creative transformation. Political and
legal space cannot be totally changed overnight. The negative aspects need to be changed while the good ones need to be continued. We need change as much as we need continuity. The process of change has begun. The road map is being charted out. The journey of hope begins with a realistic dream, renewed vigor and fresh determination. We are indeed happy that the process has started and some bold and visible steps have already been taken.

Promotion of democracy is one of the major foreign policy objectives of the most powerful democracy of the world - the USA. It is logical that we are holding this seminar in cooperation with our American friends from APCSS. This seminar aims at cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of experiences.

We hope to make proposals to the Government for policy framework, at the end of this five-day-long exercise. We are indeed looking forward to a process of creative engagement over the next five days. Participation and contribution of all our distinguished guests will lead us towards the success of this timely effort. We are much grateful to the Honourable President for kindly being with us and for inaugurating this seminar. Your inspiring words Mr. President will be the guiding light for our seminar. We thank our partners in this program - the APCSS. Thanks to our distinguished guests, and participants.

Long Live Bangladesh
Long Live Bangladesh - US Friendship.