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## PROCEEDINGS

Seminar on

### BANGLADESH-SOUTH AFRICA BILATERAL RELATIONS: EXPLORING THE POTENTIALS FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION



**18 November 2021**



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# Webinar on

## **BANGLADESH-SOUTH AFRICA BILATERAL RELATIONS: EXPLORING THE POTENTIALS FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION**

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organized a Semi-webinar on “Bangladesh-South Africa Bilateral Relations: Exploring the Potentials for Future Engagement and Cooperation” on 18 November 2021. **H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP**, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest of the Semi-webinar and **H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor**, Honourable Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa, attended as the Guest of Honour. **Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**, Director General, BISS chaired the session.

An insightful and comprehensive speech on Bangladesh-South Africa relations and its implication on regional and global politics was delivered by H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor. This was followed by a lively open discussion. Senior officials from the Bangladesh government, former ambassadors, representatives from different foreign missions, businessmen, members of academia, researchers, faculties from various universities and media representatives took part in the Semi-webinar and expressed their views on various aspects of Bangladesh-South Africa relations.





# Welcome Remarks by the Chair



**Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**  
Director General, BISS

On behalf of BISS, **Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**, Director General, welcomed everyone to the Semi-webinar on “Bangladesh-South Africa Bilateral Relations: Exploring the Potentials for Future Engagement and Cooperation”. At the outset, he expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the honourable chief guest, the guest of honour, and the participants for gracing this session with their kind presence. Afterward, he paid his homage to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the country is celebrating his birth centenary. He also extended his deep respect to the martyrs who made their supreme sacrifice for their motherland during the War of Liberation in 1971.

General Bari briefly discussed a comparative analysis of Bangladesh and South Africa and their journey of struggle. According to him, both countries have a kinship in the sense that they share a history of emancipation through struggle. Both the countries maintained warm diplomatic relations that were formally established on 10 September 1994 during the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the President of the Republic of South Africa. The spirit of this relationship lies in the philosophies of two timeless voices of history: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Nelson Mandela, fondly known as Madiba to his people. Their inherent leadership is derived from their love for their people. While the episodic leadership of Bangabandhu was chiseled by the brutal, oppressive, and discriminatory colonial rule of the British Empire, and later, the decades of internal schism in the neo-colonial setup of Pakistan; the colonial oppression on the people of South Africa, extreme poverty and the racial discrimination they faced molded the exemplary leadership of Nelson Mandela. Their legacies are encapsulated in a life committed to reconciliation and nation-building. Bangabandhu stated, “to do anything great, one has to be ready to sacrifice and show one’s devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice are not capable of doing anything worthy.” Bangabandhu and Madiba both dedicated their lives to forge a close partnership between the two continents to fight colonialism in any form and emancipate the people of the global south from poverty and underdevelopment, in their common struggle for a fairer and just world.





General Bari stated that the principle of mutual interest, solidarity, and respect for the national sovereignty, which was derived from the “Bandung Spirit” of South-South cooperation, has been the cornerstone of the relations between Bangladesh and South Africa. He added, Bangladesh became a “Development Miracle” through enhancing its capability to combat socio-economic challenges. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is well on its way towards achieving Vision 2041 as it strives to transform into a “Sonar Bangla”, despite prevalent multidimensional challenges. Needless to mention that 1.1 million Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh amid military persecution in the Rakhine state are a key concern for Bangladesh at present. He said that Bangladesh values the partnership and cooperation with South Africa in its journey towards the development vision, in contributing to regional and global peace, and in tackling common challenges that emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

While discussing the level of engagement in the multilateral forums, General Bari opined that Bangladesh is working to promote South-South cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He mentioned that South Africa is a partner country of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) economic bloc and Bangladesh is also a member of the New Development Bank (NDB), a venture under BRICS. Bangladesh and South Africa are long-standing members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Commonwealth. Moreover, both are also members of the G77 plus China and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORA-RC). The Indian Ocean region, being at the crossroads of the global geopolitical race and economic powerplay, is becoming an increasingly contested space. Hence, IORA countries need to strengthen cooperation for peace and tranquillity in this region. Thus, Bangladesh and South Africa have several multilateral arrangements to work together and strengthen bilateral cooperation.



As far as trade and commerce are concerned, General Bari stated that the relationship between the two countries is gaining importance also in terms of trade and opportunities. The expanding bilateral economic relation still has a huge potential to foster growth and create employment opportunities. In his view, Bangladesh has massive investment opportunities in different sectors including ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, leather products, tourism, ICT, etc. Both countries have a scope of closer cooperation in the field of education, cultural exchange, skills and technology transfer, and maritime economy. South Africa has developed a diversified manufacturing base that has shown its resilience and potential to compete in the global economy. In this sector, both countries can share their experiences. Moreover, agriculture, including fisheries and livestock, can be a potential area of cooperation. Also, institutional cooperation in the agricultural sector would benefit both of the countries.

General Bari suggested that under the changing global and regional dynamics, Bangladesh and South Africa need to work together to find new avenues for deepening mutual cooperation. Both countries need to explore every opportunity to ensure all potential enhancement of bilateral relations for the sake of peace and mutual prosperity. Finally, General Bari expressed heartfelt gratitude to the honourable Chief Guest, H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, and the guest of honour, H E Dr Grace Naledi Pandor, the distinguished guests and learned audience for their kind participation.

# Speech by the Guest of Honour



**H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, MP**  
Honourable Minister of International  
Relations and Cooperation of the  
Republic of South Africa

**H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, MP**, Honourable Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, opened her speech with a question about how to transmit progressive ideals into the world. By progressive, Dr Pandor means ideals that seek to promote what is humane and good for all people. She mentioned that the powerful people in the world are more interested in securing more power and less interested in using their power for the good of others. She argued that the world is solely in need of practical following of the exemplary lives of leaders like President Mandela and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and suggested that media could play a crucial role in promoting such great leaders' values.

Dr Pandor believes that commemorations are special occasions during which people are afforded the opportunity to honour the achievements and sacrifices of the past and draw inspiration for what is needed to achieve in the present. She expressed her gratitude to be afforded the opportunity to join the people of Bangladesh in commemorating both the Golden Jubilee of the independence of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the centenary anniversary of the birth of the Father of your Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Highlighting Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's contribution to the independence of Bangladesh, Dr Pandor mentioned that the story of contemporary Bangladesh starts with the story of Bangabandhu, who loved his country and dedicated and sacrificed his life for a country named "Bangladesh". Bangabandhu was the key driving force for the emancipation of the people of East Bengal and spent significant periods of his life in prison because of the struggle he led against oppression and injustice. In this year, in which Bangladesh marks the celebration of three milestones, South Africa, records the solidarity and support of the people of Bangladesh in their own liberation struggle. The values that the people of this country forged in waging a battle for their hard-won independence and democracy were also expressed in the principled support provided in the context of the United Nations through the Non-Aligned Movement, the international campaign against apartheid. These values were pursued and promoted by the leadership and people of Bangladesh. South Africa attaches great importance to its relationship with Bangladesh. Both countries have strong bonds of solidarity, friendship, and cooperation underpinned by bilateral relations.



Two countries share a commitment to the values of South-South cooperation and multilateralism; where Dr Pandor believes people should not be chauvinistic in their nationalism and aspire to be a dominant world power alone. Multilateralism believes in respect for the United Nations and its global role and support for its institutions to be the premier global institutions of global values. Both countries also share commitments to the value of achieving the socio-economic development of people. So, Dr Pandor thinks South Africa is very fortunate but well placed to join Bangladesh as the country commemorates its golden jubilee of independence and the wonderful anniversary of the father of the nation. Therefore, on behalf of the government and people of South Africa, Dr Pandor conveyed her best wishes to the Bangladeshi government and its leadership, along with its people.

Dr Pandor said that South Africa and Bangladesh have forged a close bilateral partnership in pursuit of shared values and objectives. South-South cooperation is a potential area for closer cooperation between these two countries. And in this regard, both of the countries celebrate the two founding fathers, Madiba and Bangabandhu's dedication, which has the intent of forging a close partnership between the two sub-continent, to ensure that both countries fight colonialism in any form, emancipate the people of the global South from poverty and underdevelopment, in the common struggle for a more equitable world. The notion of South-South cooperation is not about just being friends. It's a collaboration, which has a very clear objective of improving the condition of our people of those who are most vulnerable and most poor. South-South cooperation is about forming an alliance of countries of the South that are developing, which have the potential to make a difference in the world. It is vital as countries of the South that they use their resources. Achieving such an intention will not be easy because those who hold power don't want the South to have influence. And so, the alliances that South exhibit today are crucial. But there are powerful forces out there who don't want the South to unite, who don't want the South to succeed. There are powerful countries that want countries to remain forever poor, forever dependent, and it is this fight that South is paying close attention to. And it is through such cooperation, as exists between South Africa and Bangladesh, that both countries will begin to make advances in this common obligation.

Dr Pandor then talked about the "Bandung spirit". She noted that that the 1955 Bandung Conference that gave rise to the "Bandung spirit" of South-South cooperation underscored the principles of mutual interest, solidarity and respect for national sovereignty. These Bandung principles continue to play an important role in shaping and guiding the relations. Both Bangladesh and South Africa know that together, they can make a difference; together, they can make the Bandung principles live.

Dr Pandor also shed light on the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). She informed the audience that Bangladesh and South Africa belong to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which is an organization that is eminently suited to the pursuit of such cooperation and initiatives. She congratulated Bangladesh on assuming the Chair of IORA and assured that South Africa would support Bangladesh's chairmanship of IORA. The organization is looking forward to celebrating the IORA's silver anniversary of 25 years of existence in 2022.

South Africa will consult with Bangladesh on how the celebration can be utilized to emphasize the growing practical agenda of cooperation that is being pursued through IORA whilst emphasizing the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region in the global arena. Dr Pandor believes that the Indian Ocean rim is very important for South Africa and all those who exist along the Indian Ocean coastline. It is important because it was an association that President Nelson Mandela held in very high regard. President Mandela spoke of his vision concerning the Indian Ocean rim when he said, “the natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic cooperation and other peaceful endeavours. Recent changes in the international system demand that the countries of the Indian Ocean shall become a single platform.” This was the vision President Mandela articulated when he spoke of the image of IORA. The Indian Ocean Rim is a region that is at the crossroads of global economic powerhouses, with greater trade and economic activity being developed. Within this shifting global economic and geopolitical landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all have heard big countries speaking of the Indo-Pacific as a new area of global power interest. This contributes to the perception that the Indian Ocean rim region is becoming an increasingly contested space. Within this myriad of security and socio-economic challenges facing the Indian Ocean rim region, it will be critically important to ensure that the association IORA is extremely strong and coherent. Dr Pandor warned of those who would seek to ensure that IORA does not become strong. Dr Pandor feels a bit nervous when she sees so many countries wish to be partners in IORA, and she is always suspicious of their interests. Dr Pandor believes the member countries of IORA must guard the core values that led to its establishment and not allow the new interested partners to divert the organization from the core purpose for which it was created. In IORA, she said, the countries work closely together because they seek to make closer cooperation established in the multilateral domain and cooperate on the major common challenges humanity faces.

Focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Pandor mentioned that the world is facing a health crisis unlike any other in human history. As the world seeks solutions to the numerous challenges resulting from the fallout related to Covid-19, she stressed that people have to be guided by the vision of the iconic leaders, President Nelson Mandela Madiba and Bangabandhu Shaikh Mujibur Rahman. They would have emphasized the importance of all nations arising and collectively working together to ensure an expeditious conclusion to the pandemic. Although President Nelson Mandela and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are not alive, she noted that both of them would have wanted vaccines to be a public good. They would have been horrified that there are parts of the world where 60 per cent of the population are vaccinated, and there is the developing world where less than 10 per cent are vaccinated. That fact would have made them very vocal in protesting this inequity. Dr Pandor highlighted that people must be equally vocal about this inequity. Referring to President Mandela and Bangabandhu, Dr Pandor noted that these leaders would have been horrified that although 3 per cent of Africans are vaccinated, there are some countries that are holding 500 million vaccines, enough to vaccinate 60 per cent of the population of Africa; and yet, these countries are not talking about sharing vaccines. Develop countries are talking about a booster shot. And so, South Africa and Bangladesh must fight for vaccine equity. It is extremely important that people are not quiet.



Dr Pandor stressed the importance of ensuring equitable, predictable and affordable access to treatments in real-time. And that all the tools people require of the world are provided in order to be able to respond to this pandemic and to all future pandemics. Dr Pandor is confident that the founding fathers would have been horrified that it is the developing countries that are at the back of the queue for vaccines, whilst the richest countries are selfishly advancing their own people's interests, and at the same time, denying developing countries' right to vaccine production.

Dr Pandor further added that South Africa has some capacity for producing vaccines. She shared an incidence with the audience that three months ago, a South African pharmaceutical company that produces vaccines already signed contracts with countries with the international community that 80 per cent of what is produced in South Africa will go to them, and only 20 per cent will remain in South Africa. She said that this was not an acceptable contract and they forced the company to change the contract. Dr Pandor stressed that people must be paying close attention to the kind of commercial undertakings that some of the companies have and ensure that by virtue of their private interest and profit-making, they do not detract from the values that developing countries wish to promote. It's very important that we pay attention to these matters.

Dr Pandor believes that, as a developing nation, people must intensify the call to end vaccine nationalism and vaccine selfishness. She stressed for an urgent waiver to be granted by the World Trade Organisation TRIPS Agreement on intellectual property rights to ensure that developing countries can rapidly upscale their production capacity to be able to increase the supply of Covid-19 vaccines. It is important that countries allow the sharing of technologies so that the pandemic can be stopped. She expressed her support to the Secretary-General of the United Nations that none of us is safe until all of us are safe. And this is what people must strive for. She extended her appreciation to the people and government of Bangladesh for the sterling work that the country has undertaken on the multilateral front. For example, Bangladesh has been very supportive of the proposal of South Africa, and other countries have made for a temporary waiver of the regulatory aspects of the TRIPS regime in the WTO.

Dr Pandor highlighted that South Africa has noted the domestic efforts and plans announced by Bangladesh as part of its efforts at climate mitigation in the face of the devastating impacts of climate change. Both President Ramaphosa and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasized the importance of developed nations providing support to vulnerable developing nations through technology transfer and through mitigating the cost of climate adaptation at the recently held 26<sup>th</sup> Climate Summit. There were announcements about efforts to assist South Africa to transition away from coal dependence. It is critical that countries continue to cooperate and partner in efforts to ensure that the world can meet the challenge to adapt to an inclusive green economy that serves the developmental needs of people. Highlighting South Africa's climate change complexity, Dr Pandor said that they face a tremendous challenge in climate front since they have over 50 years of very extensive coal available in their country.

It's a large mineral resource in South Africa. So the question is, as South Africa make this change to green energy, what will happen to the thousands of people that are employed in the coal industry? What do South Africa do with the large coal stock that it has in their coal mines? These are key scientific and technological questions that need to be answered. South Africa can't leave mining villages without employment. It cannot leave mining communities without a livelihood. South Africa must make the transition to green energy, but at the same time, it must do it in a just fashion. This is the policy response that has been agreed upon in South Africa.



Turning to South Africa's foreign policy objectives, Dr Pandor informed the audience that their foreign policy is an extension of its national policy and is based on its national interests and objectives. South Africa believes that the country's development is inextricably tied to that of African regeneration; to this end, the African agenda is central to its foreign policy aims and objectives. Therefore, they have defined and continue to pursue an African agenda, which is predicated on entrenching democracy, equality, respect for human rights, peace and security, and of course, ensuring the acceleration of economic growth for bettering the lives of all African people. In South Africa's foreign policy, they prioritize the development of their immediate neighbours in the southern African region. South Africa is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and it is committed to pursuing regional integration and regional industrialization. The country believes that it must develop regional value chains and support industrialization because this will assist in addressing South Africa's own domestic socio-economic challenges; and, of course, those of SADC as well.



Beyond the region, South Africa remains committed to advancing the African agenda, including ensuring Africa's development and its increasing positive place in world affairs. The country has been extremely supportive of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which has come into effect from May 2019. This free trade area will promote intra-African trade and offer an opportunity to create larger economies of scale and markets, and improve the continent's prospects to attract investment. The Free Trade Area establishes a market of over 1 billion people, with a combined GDP of approximately US\$ 3.3 trillion. The Free Trade Area comprises 55 African countries and will become the largest free trade area globally. So, it's the next big market opportunity. Dr Pandor invites Bangladesh to use South Africa as a springboard into the continent to leverage the available opportunities.

Dr Pandor also talked about South African involvement in conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and mediation. The country also plays a role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the African continent. Its role has been informed by its drive, showing an African renaissance for all of Africa, with the goal of building a continent that is at peace with itself. This goal aligns with the country's understanding that it is not possible to have peace without development, nor it is impossible to have development without peace. South Africa also believes that the development of the African continent is vital to the development of all countries of the south and for the African agenda 2063. South Africa is acutely aware of this responsibility and relies on the partnerships forged with the countries of the Global South. Guided by its philosophy of "friendship to all and malice to none", South Africa recognises its partner in Bangladesh in achieving this noble ambition.

South African foreign policy is premised on the maintenance of international peace and security through advocating for the peaceful settlements of conflicts and inclusive dialogue. The country shares Bangladesh's concern regarding the violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in occupied Palestine territory. And the country notes the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Myanmar. South Africa commends the efforts of Bangladesh's government to assist the vulnerable people of Myanmar and call for a peaceful and sustainable resolution to this matter. Dr Pandor mentioned that South Africa and Bangladesh are long-standing and very important members of the Non-Aligned Movement, members of the Commonwealth, members of the G77 plus China, and now IORA. Both countries share a commitment to development and developmental issues on the international agenda and work very closely on these. They are also sharing a commitment to addressing their own development challenges. And Dr Pandor believes that through her visit here there are immense examples of the potential that exists for collaboration on social development issues, particularly the empowerment of women in business. She hopes that both countries can learn from the experiences of one another.



Dr Pandor praised Bangladesh's miraculous development in different sectors. She said fifty years into independence, Bangladesh has an amazing story to tell. It is among the five fastest-growing economies in the world. Bangladesh's economy has averaged above 6 per cent annual growth for nearly a decade and has lifted many of the country's poorest out of destitution. The number of people living in extreme poverty in Bangladesh has shrunk from around 19 per cent of the population a decade ago to about 9 per cent. Per capita income has risen almost threefold since 2009. The country is experiencing an emerging and growing middle class, which is evident in the expanding tax base and sustained gains in private consumption and spending. This country is listed as one of the next 11 developing countries tiers with the potential for foreign investment-led growth, a very attractive destination.

Dr Pandor noted that South Africa value its relations with Bangladesh. She recognized that South Africa has a great deal to learn from Bangladesh in achieving its own objectives. Bangladesh's enormous strides in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by both in Bangladesh and the wider region as well are an example that people should draw on. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is well on its way to achieving vision 2021, and 2041 as the country strives to transform into a "Sonar Bangla", having already attained the status of a lower-middle-income country and crossed the threshold for graduating out of least developed country (LDC) status. Due to the socio-economic achievements of the present government, Bangladesh is now called worldwide a development miracle. It has been recognized for the attainment of several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is on track to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Bangladesh is one of the largest textile exporters in the world. The country has also developed a large amount of self-sufficiency in pharmaceuticals, steel and food processing. The telecommunications industry has seen rapid growth over several years, and the country has huge multinational corporations present and doing well. In Bangladesh, even amid the pandemic and



the lockdowns, the economy has proven to be resilient to the shocks brought about by Covid-19 despite the global economic downturn. Referring to a report released by the IMF in October 2020 Dr Pandor said that Bangladesh was among the few economies with growth in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, which just illustrates its economic resilience. She also praised the work of the government in promoting women's development and women's entrepreneurship. The work done by the Joyeeta Foundation, which she had the privilege of visiting, illustrates the developmental power of encouraging entrepreneurship, and economic participation through innovative financing and support models. Dr Pandor believes South Africa has much to learn from this example.

Bangladesh and South Africa have been maintaining diplomatic relations for many years. In his visit to Bangladesh in March 1997, President Mandela signed a Declaration of Intent along with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to promote diplomatic links between the two countries. The declaration was formalized into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the establishment of regular bilateral consultations in 2019. Both countries now have regular exchanges between their senior officials. And this has allowed both the countries to expand relations, which ranged from shared values of freedom and democracy, justice, human dignity, the empowerment of women as well as the promotion of international peace and security. Dr Pandor talked about Bangladesh's Foreign Minister's visit to South Africa earlier this year. Their deliberation confirmed that there is a significant scope for collaboration between the two countries. She said that she sincerely looks forward to the next session of the bilateral mechanism to explore the tangible deliverables of Bangladesh and South Africa's agenda of cooperation.

Dr Pandor further added that South Africa considers Bangladesh a country with enormous potential for the expansion of trade and economic relations. South Africa has closely followed the impressive growth and social progress of Bangladesh, particularly in areas of electricity generation, physical infrastructure development, information technology and communication health, education, and women's economic empowerment. Bangladesh and South Africa have complementariness and comparative advantages that can be exploited for mutual benefit, particularly in trade and technical investment exchanges in information and communications technology and skills development fields. Like most emerging economies, South African is not immune to the challenges in the global environment posed by narrow nationalism and the rise of protectionism. The coronavirus pandemic also had a devastating impact on the economy of the country. The government has responded with an economic and social stimulus and recovery packages aimed at reigniting growth and promoting greater job creation. South Africa has also been decisive in ensuring policy certainty. South Africa's future economic prospects are favourable, and it is indeed an attractive investment destination.

Dr Pandor concluded her speech by re-emphasising her country's commitment to further deepening the bonds of friendships that exist between South Africa and Bangladesh. The global South is mindful of the importance of keeping the values of the Bandung Spirit alive as it moves forward to secure economic freedom and development for the people of the countries, regions and sub-continent. The South Africa-Bangladesh partnership is securely anchored in common values and a shared social and economic emancipation vision for all.

# Open Discussion



**Salahud Din Ahmad**, Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, stated that he was awestruck by the english letter “M”. The “M” which strikingly stands for Madiba, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Mujib, Mandisa and Momen. He said that Dr Pandor reminded him of the Africa which he knew from his childhood, the Africa that was politically presented by Mohondas Karamchand Gandhi and poetically presented by Rabindranath Tagore. He believed that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which is now

being chaired by Bangladesh, will prove the justification of its existence. Besides, he hoped that the strategic partnership between Bangladesh and South Africa would bring tangible deliveries. Lastly, he wished that the South-South cooperation would succeed.

**Major General A M S A Amin (Retd)**, former Ambassador and the chairman of the Center for Security and Development Studies, began his remark by expressing his gratitude to BIISS for organizing this timely programme and appreciated Dr Pandor for delivering an excellent presentation.



General Amin valued Dr Pandor’s charming presentation on the history of South Africa, Bangabandhu and Madiba as well as the future engagement with Bangladesh. Some of the moral values that Dr Pandor mentioned in her deliberation were also appreciated by General Amin. Connecting with those moral values, he recalled his engagement with an organization called “Noitik Samaj” for practicing moral values.

Based on Dr Pandor’s rich context and insights on the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), General Amin wanted to know from Her Excellency about the IORA and conflicts that exist in global geopolitics. He raised two questions regarding that issue. First, he wanted to know how far Dr Pandor thinks that IORA, though very much vital, can be manageable being a conglomerate of so many states with different interests. Because of these conflicts of interests, General Amin believed that IORA could not be meaningful though it was conceived long ago. At this point, he wanted to know from Dr Pandor that how she would propose

recommendations to address these challenges. Secondly, General Amin flagged the issue of Bandung Spirit. He recalled that he grew up through the Bandung spirit. Regarding Bandung spirit, he asked his second question to know about how to actualize the values in real life in South-South cooperation.



**Shahidul Islam Chowdhury**, Special Correspondent, New Age, said that despite Madiba's interest to engage with Bangladesh more, there is hardly any visit by high level South African leaders to Bangladesh. So he asked when South Africa would open an embassy in Dhaka to encourage bilateral relations.

**M Shamsher Ali**, former President of the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences, congratulated Dr Pandor for her wonderful speech. He also commended her for mentioning two of the greatest leaders of all time, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Nelson Mandela. He said that she has rightly pointed out that the leaders would have taken a strong stance on the unjust world economic order if they were alive. Then he identified three areas where Bangladesh-South Africa bilateral cooperation could be achieved.



First area is the management of national parks. South Africa has "Kruger National Park" which is one of the largest game reserves of South Africa. The park has wonderful management and this is an area where South Africa could assist Bangladesh. as the country has been trying to set up national parks. Second area is food, more specifically halal meat. He opined that there is an opportunity for Bangladesh to import halal meat from South Africa as most of the butchers in South Africa are Muslim. Third area is sports. He shared that he is a great admirer of the cricketers of South Africa. He believed that there is an opportunity for cooperation in this regard.



# Response by the Guest of Honour



## **H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, MP**

Honourable Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa

**H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, MP**, agreed with Mr Salaud Din Ahmed and said that she is confident that IORA will do very well under the leadership of H E Dr Momen. She said that she has seen his leadership already and she was sure that H E Dr Momen will make sure that the organization works in terms of the action plan and achieves its objectives. She is looking forward to working together in that regard. In terms of the South-South cooperation, she said that Bangladesh has never deviated from the core values that are espoused in and emerged from the Bandung conference. And due to that fact, there has been a steadfast support from Bangladesh against colonialism and racism, which are the essence of the Bandung conference. Bangladesh has been absolutely outstanding in that regard. She said that she thinks the role that Bangladesh is playing in the peace mission is a concrete example of its commitment to these very important global values. She said that a country would only support the peace missions and send its young men and women into danger in other parts of the world only if it is committed to peace for everybody. For her, this is espousing the positive values that she believes to be important to the world.

Replying to Major General A S M A Amin, she said that in South Africa, they have been very concerned about the residue of apartheid in the consciousness of the nation. Apartheid was an extremely violent political system and it created a lot of violence in the country. So the

country started an initiative called the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM), where they are trying to revive the positive moral values. Here they do not mean morality in the boring sense of Queen Victoria, but morality of consciousness of one's possibility to take an active interest in promoting the good of others, in using one's ability to the interest of others. She expressed her intrigue in the moral society organization that General Amin had referred to, because that is something that they really wanted to try and enroot in South Africa. It has been proving to be difficult, but they are continuing to persist. The initiative is led through the office of the Deputy Prime Minister of South Africa and they try to work particularly with civil society organizations, specially the religious sector. She stated that the issues of morality and values are very important and that she can connect the ambassador with colleagues who are working in the same area as him in South Africa.

She continued that General Amin was right in terms of what he said about the importance of oceans. While in political areas IORA may not be the strongest force, it has the agglomeration of 24 nations that can make a huge difference. She also thinks that countries such as France, the United States and the United Kingdom would not be interested in what IORA is doing, and would not want Minister Momen to become their collaborating partners, if they did not regard this association as having potential of being very influential. So, IORA does not neglect the complex geopolitics that is unfolding, particularly with respect to the Indo-Pacific. In fact, IORA has developed a paper where they are looking at how IORA interfaces with this emerging development. So, IORA is not neglectful of the emerging global issues.

In response to General Amin's query on how to actualize the values of Bandung spirit, Dr Pandor suggested that the constant practice of the promotion of democracy, engaging young people and ensuring the living of these values in the whole statutory framework of a country will help actualize the Bandung spirit. When people experience new statutes, new laws, they soon acclimatize to these statutes. And their every singular act will make these positive principles a living reality. People learn these values in their consciousness through education. So if the political parties do not practice gender equality, then people will not enjoy those political parties. If political leaders are racists then they should not be allowed to register. Therefore, if positive values are once introduced in the whole statutory framework through people's daily acts, then over time, one can see the commonality and emerging consciousness. This situation ensures positive change in the society. However, Dr Pandor admitted that achieving these goals through setting positive values in the society is very much difficult.

Regarding the matter of opening new embassies, she confirmed that her team has noted the interest and will return with the response. However, she was remorseful and said that due to the context of a very difficult economic situation, South Africa had to close ten embassies. Thus, the South African government has no intention to open any new embassy. Instead of opening new embassies, the foreign office is more interested in expanding its consular services. In Bangladesh, instead of opening a new embassy, the foreign office is looking to open consular service so that people do not have to look at New Delhi to get their visas. Dr Pandor ensured that she will discuss this issue with her colleague, the Minister for Home Affairs to address this issue.





In regards to M Shamsher Ali's remarks on the three important areas of cooperation such as the management of national parks, halal food and sports, Dr Pandor instructed her officials to note down the suggestions of how South Africa can help Bangladesh government in managing the national parks. Regarding halal food, Dr Pandor opined that as a Muslim she also realized that there are still gaps remaining in developing the quality of halal food. She agreed with M Shamsher Ali that South Africa has the finest quality of halal food. She was also thrilled to inform that Malaysia recognized South Africa's halal food quality. Now South Africa is exporting halal beef to Malaysia. Thus, Dr Pandor expressed her hope for future collaboration between the South African halal food industry and Bangladesh. On sports, Dr Pandor agreed that the South African cricket team is one of the strongest teams. Just before the start of the T20 world cup, South Africa won a series against Sri Lanka. For that reason, the whole nation was very much hopeful for the T20 World Cup. However, they lost the T20 world cup and many of the cricketers got injured. Therefore, the nation is unhappy. Dr Pandor informed that South Africa won the Rugby World Cup which is very gratifying. And on football, she said that they are trying to do better and the South African Women Football team is doing better than the Men's football team.



# Address by the Chief Guest



## **H E A K Abdul Momen, MP**

Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

At the outset, **H E A K Abdul Momen, MP**, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, welcomed H E Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa. The Foreign Minister added that Dr Pandor visited Dhaka during a seminal occasion in Bangladesh when the nation is celebrating the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as well as the golden jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh. He recalled that 25 years ago, when Bangladesh was celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, the great leader of South Africa, Nelson Mandela graced the anniversary in 1997. After 25 years, Foreign Minister of South Africa, is gracing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is a very interesting connectivity. He appreciated Dr Naledi for delivering a detailed, informative and very insightful speech on Bangladesh-South Africa bilateral relations and foreign policy of South Africa. He said that the speech outlines the existing bilateral relations between Bangladesh and South Africa and provides the essence of direction for future course of actions.

Dr Momen stated that Bangladesh and South Africa are two friendly countries. The relations between the two countries are characterized by close bonds based on shared values and cooperation. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in September 1994, immediately after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. The Bangladesh resident mission was opened in Pretoria in February 1995.

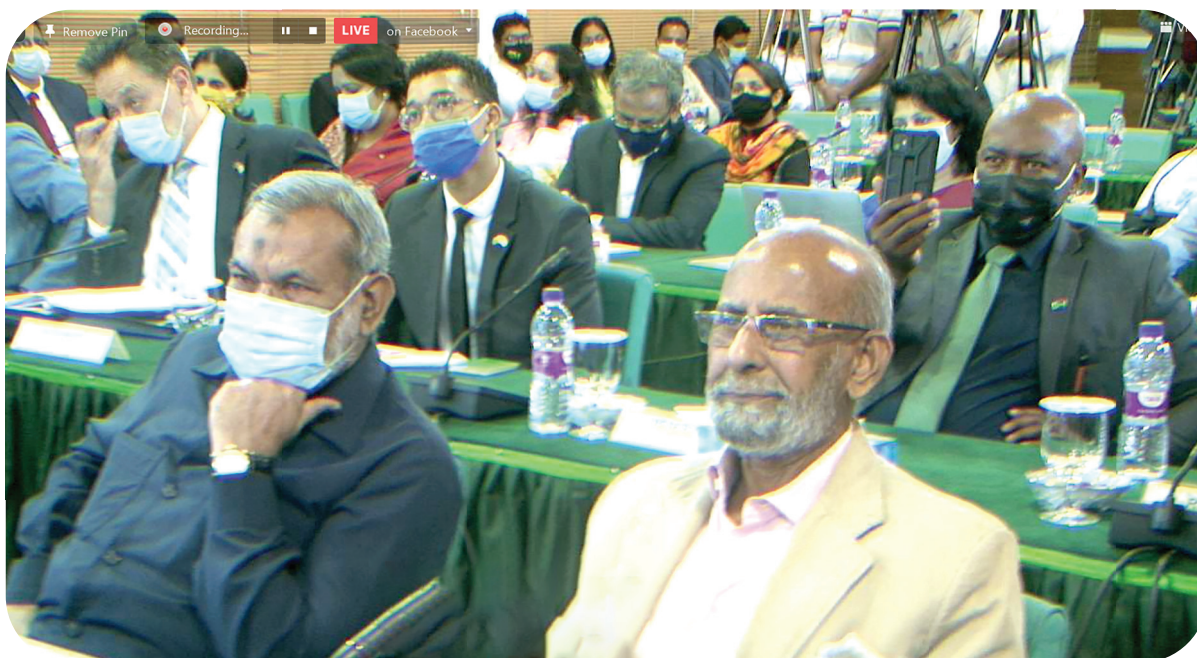
Regarding the issue of the opening of a South African embassy, the Foreign Minister stated that there is a strong demand for an embassy in Bangladesh. This issue was raised during his recent trip to South Africa. In her visit to Bangladesh, Dr Pandor assured that they would find a way out for the consular services in Bangladesh. Hence, he hoped that some arrangements could be made to facilitate the visa and other consular requirements of the Bangladesh nationals intending to go to South Africa.

The honourable Minister added that though Bangladesh and South Africa formal bilateral diplomatic relations were established in 1994, the relations between the people of the two countries date back far in the past. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, expressed his unequivocal support at the UN for the end of the apartheid system in South Africa and even in his maiden speech to the UN in 1974. He repeated the demand many times in many international forums. Like the Father of the Nation, many people of Bangladesh were on the streets, again and again, demanding the end of apartheid in South Africa and Bangladesh is happy that the apartheid is now over.

Regarding the visit of President Nelson Mandela to Bangladesh, Dr Momen said that the visit of President Nelson Mandela in March 1997 was a watershed event in the bilateral relations of the two countries. President Mandela visited Bangladesh to join the silver jubilee of independence. During his visit, the late President Mandela stated, “I have deep respect for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Standing in this great country today, I also want to be a friend of Bangladesh. Standing here as a friend of Bangladesh, I want to say that we will fight hunger, we will fight poverty and any other problem facing us.” During the historic visit of great South African leader, he recalled Bangabandhu’s invaluable contributions and stance against apartheid. Also, he assured about the opening of the South African mission in Bangladesh. Besides, a Declaration of Intent was signed between President Mandela and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, expressing the intention of both Bangladesh and South Africa to explore all possible avenues to extend and deepen political and economic cooperation. Hence, enhancing the bonds through solidarity, friendship and cooperation are the cornerstones of Bangladesh-South African bilateral relations.

Reflecting on development, Dr Momen stated that Bangladesh and South Africa have a similar trajectory of development. Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies of the world, and South Africa is one of the largest economies of the African continent. With its rapid economic progress and business hub in the Southern African region, South Africa has been making tremendous advancements in socio-economic sectors. It has all the potential to become one of the world’s most advanced economies in the near future. The socio-economic growth of both countries has offered a renewed opportunities to further faster and foster bilateral relations.





Regarding the economic development of Bangladesh, the Foreign Minister said that the government of Bangladesh, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has proclaimed vision 2041 for transforming the country into a self-reliant, prosperous, equity based and developed country in 2041. The country is well on its way to achieving SDG 2030. Bangladesh aspires to be a prosperous country as envisioned by the Father of the Nation. The government has introduced policies for inclusive economic growth. More and more women and youth are being engaged in income generation sectors. The country looks to achieve sustainable development through women empowerment, providing education, skills and health for all, infrastructure building and implementation of digital Bangladesh. As a result, Bangladesh today is recognized as a role model for economic development owing to the government's sustained effort. Over the last decade, Bangladesh has registered commendable economic growth. Bangladesh has been cited as a development miracle as it achieved over 6.8 per cent of the GDP growth in the last 12 years and reduced poverty by more than half. Despite the Covid pandemic, the workforce has remained quite good, and there has been a sustained inflow of remittance by the Bangladeshi expatriates. The foreign reserve has also reached a higher mark during recent years, and the country's macroeconomic situation remained quite stable.

Dr Momen then elaborated on the social and human development of Bangladesh. It has made a lot of progress in the last decades. The country has made commendable achievements in gender equality, education, women empowerment, public health, coping with climate change and social safety net arenas. He emphasized that in order to achieve the proclaimed visions and goals of Bangladesh, it is imperative to enhance its bonds with friendly countries. South Africa is one of Bangladesh's closest friendly countries. The cordial relations between two countries transcend the common bond of just friendly relations. Therefore, Bangladesh attaches particular importance to further developing and promoting overall relations, including trade and economic cooperation and person to person contact.



While discussing economic relations between Bangladesh and South Africa, Dr Momen stated that they have enormous potential to develop their trade relations and investment. During the fiscal year 2020-21, Bangladesh imported goods from South Africa worth only US\$ 132 million and exported goods worth US\$ 110 million. The amount of bilateral trade has remained lower. However, the amount of trade can be multiplied by diversifying and broadening mutual exports and imports. Both sides are making sustained efforts to develop mutual trade and investments. South Africa may consider importing various goods from Bangladesh, taking into account the various incentives provided by the Bangladesh government. South African investors may invest in the economic zones, special economic zones and high-tech parks of Bangladesh. Apart from that, Bangladesh and South African entrepreneurs may establish joint ventures in different sectors. In this respect, he proposed to establish a “Joint Venture Unit” for readymade garments, jute, pharmaceuticals, leather food, agro-processing, plastic and chemical products. Joint venture industries would provide employment opportunities for both countries’ workforce. South Africa has a diversified manufacturing base. Hence entrepreneurs can share their experience with Bangladesh, which will be mutually beneficial.

The Foreign Minister then discussed his last visit to South Africa in August. During the visit, he noted huge interest among the South African political leadership and business people to promote the overall relations further. It was a fruitful visit as both sides had the opportunity to identify the potentials of cooperation and the course of future engagement. During his meeting with H E Angela Thoko Didiza, Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, both leaders identified significant areas of cooperation in agriculture. They discussed cooperation in agriculture, including small contact farming, market access, trade, skill development and digitalization. Both countries also reflected how development is disporting women empowerment in Bangladesh. Besides, they underlined the need for establishing cooperation in environmental areas and climate change.

Moreover, they underlined the importance of people to people contact beyond government for strengthening cooperation. Both sides also agreed to engage the Agriculture Councils of the two countries to promote overall agriculture relations. The Bangladesh side also proposed establishing a centre in South Africa on agriculture cooperation between two countries, which may be named “Bangabandhu-Madiba Centre on Agriculture Cooperation”. Bangladesh also proposed establishing a “South-South Forum of Development Finance” where Foreign Ministers can explore and discuss the critical issues of the southern countries and share experience and best practices. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh also met with Ebrahim Patel, Minister for Trade, Industry and Competition of South Africa. In that meeting, they identified the IT and agro-processing industry collaboration between Bangladesh and South Africa, which will provide a win-win situation for both countries. Both sides have also underlined the importance of joint ventures between the two countries in different sectors, including readymade garment and pharmaceutical sectors.

During his visit to South Africa, besides meeting with Foreign Minister Dr Pandor, Dr Momen also met with a couple of business chambers of South Africa. For instance, in his

interaction with the representatives of the Black Business Council of Bryanston, both sides highlighted the importance of networks between the business groups of two countries to develop trade and economic relations. The Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) in Johannesburg focused on how Bangladesh and South Africa could diversify and expand trade and business activities. Both South Africa and Bangladesh agreed to conclude agreements in essential areas, e.g., basic education, investment promotion, trade cooperation, air and shipping connectivity, avoidance of double taxation, agriculture and environment cooperation, academic scholarship and fellowship, training, and government cooperation between business chambers. Both countries also underlined the importance of cooperation in the blue economy and climate change areas. Besides, they highlighted the importance of continuing cooperation under the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The Bangladesh government deeply appreciates the support that the government of South Africa is extending to the Bangladesh nationals who are living in South Africa.

Dr Momen expressed that Bangladesh and South African relations have continued to grow due to mutual intent and sustained efforts. Apart from engaging bilaterally, both countries are collaborating at regional and international levels. So Bangladesh will be ready to take advantage of South African offers. Bangladesh can use South Africa as a springboard to develop its trade and investment goals, entering the largest free trade area of the world that would consist of 55 countries upon signing a free trade agreement.

Dr Momen stated that, guided by the philosophy “Friendship to all and malice towards none”) of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh initiated the resolution of the culture of peace and non-violence at the United Nations General Assembly. South Africa joined, besides others, at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resolution in 2019. For sustainable peace across the nation, it is essential to reduce violence and wars. According to the concept of culture of peace, it is necessary to inculcate a mindset of tolerance and a mindset of respect to others irrespective of religion, culture, ethnicity, and colour.



He stressed that such a mindset of respect towards others can ensure sustainable peace across nations. Both countries are working towards this mission. All countries of the world have to end the venom of hatred against each other. In this regard, he mentioned that recently, 1.1 million Rohingya had been evicted from their own land because of the spread of venom of hatred against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, and South Africa is giving Bangladesh support for their repatriation.

The Foreign Minister also mentioned that the 1955 Bandung Conference enshrined the Bandung spirit of South-South cooperation and underscored the principle of mutual interest, solidarity and respect for national sovereignty. These principles continued to play an important role in maintaining cooperation in many areas of bilateral interest. Both Bangladesh and South Africa are working together to promote South-South cooperation with a view to borderless sharing of knowledge, ideas, and experiences and successfully addressing challenges. From the fourth industrial revolution, Bangladesh has proposed the “South-South Centre for Knowledge and Innovation” as it helped promote broader partnership among the developing countries of the South.

Regarding membership in different organizations, Dr Momen stated that Bangladesh is also strengthening its ties with BRICS, of which South Africa is one of the members. Bangladesh and South Africa are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Commonwealth, where countries cooperate on various issues of mutual and regional interest. Both countries are members of IORA where they actively work to develop cooperation to harness benefits for shared prosperity. IORA offers many common areas of cooperation, including coping with the IORA states’ common challenges. Bangladesh looks forward to South Africa’s continued support for harnessing and establishing of priority projects of IORA with a view to attaining the socio-economic development of IORA states. Bangladesh and South Africa share similar beliefs and positions in a wide range of issues at the international forums and extend support. For instance, Bangladesh extended unconditional support to the South African candidature at the UN Security Council membership for the term 2011-12 also, and it supported them again in 2019-20. Besides, Bangladesh also extended support to South Africa to the other candidatures to the UN in the recent past.

While discussing bilateral visits, the Honourable Foreign Minister added that many regular visits mark bilateral relations between the countries. There have been various visits, e.g., high political and official in the recent past. Moreover, a good number of exchanges of visits of the private sector delegations between two countries in the past had taken place. Foreign Ministers are also holding regular consultations. For instance, the 5<sup>th</sup> round of senior officials meeting between foreign ministries of two countries took place in Dhaka in September 2019 to review the existing gamut of relations and focus on bilateral areas of potential engagement. However, both countries underscored the significance of more exchange of visits of business delegations and chambers’ officials, business to business and people to people contact to develop relations and sectoral cooperation.



The Foreign Minister concluded the speech by speaking about both countries' common dreams and aspirations. He mentioned that both countries are fortunate to have great visionary leaders, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Nelson Mandela, who have provided a sense of direction for the countries and envisioned the power of emancipation of their common people. Both the leaders dedicated their lifelong efforts and made untold sacrifices. Bangladesh is also an earnest supporter of promoting bilateral relations with other countries in a globalized world. Necessity is felt to flourish the mutual ties further and realize the potentials of cooperation. Both South Africa and Bangladesh may explore opportunities for mutual efforts to attain the common aspiration of the people of both countries. Only by following the priceless guidelines that they have left, both countries can hope to pay the deepest respect to them.



# Closing Remarks by the Chair



**Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**  
Director General, BIIS

In his concluding remarks, **Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te** thanked the Guest of Honour, H E Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, Honourable Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa, the Chief Guest of the Semi-webinar, H E Dr A K Abdul Momen, MP, Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, again for meticulously shading lights on the relations between the two great countries and raising the potential areas of cooperation and partnership. He remarked that the audience have benefited a lot from listening to the designated scholars, guests, and other participants who raised questions and expressed their opinions.

## Edited By

**Colonel Sheikh Masud Ahmed, SPP, psc**, Research Director, BIISS

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