



**Seminar on
Economic Diversification and
Global Market: Bangladesh's
Opportunities and Way Forward**

Wednesday, 14 February 2024

**Organised by
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)**



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SEMINAR ON

Economic Diversification and Global Market: Bangladesh's Opportunities and Way Forward

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a seminar titled '**Economic Diversification and Global Market: Bangladesh's Opportunities and Way Forward**' on Wednesday, 14 February 2024 at the BIISS Auditorium. **H E Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP**, Honourable Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, graced the seminar as the Chief Guest. **Mr Md Abul Kalam Azad, MP**, Former Principal Coordinator (Sustainable Development Goals Affairs), Prime Minister's Office; **Ambassador Masud Bin Momen**, Secretary (Senior Secretary), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and **Dr Shah Md Helal Uddin**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh were special guests of the Seminar. **Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker**, Chairman of BIISS, moderated the seminar as the session chair. The seminar started with the welcome address of the Director General of BIISS, **Major General Md Abu Bakar Siddique Khan, ndc, afwc, psc, G+**. The keynote paper titled 'Economic Diversification and Dynamics in the Global Market' was presented by **Dr Mahfuz Kabir**, Research Director of BIISS. **Professor Dr Mohammad Jahangir Alam**, Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Bangladesh Agricultural University; **Dr Md Deen Islam**, Associate Professor, Department of Economics; **Professor Dr Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddique**, Department of Economics; and Professor **Dr Rozana Rashid**, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka have contributed to the topics on 'Agricultural Diversification and Export Potential', 'Diversification of Manufacturing and Global Linkage', 'Diversification of Services: Regional and Global Opportunities', and 'Quality Enhancement and Diversification of Overseas Job Market', respectively as the panellists. After that, remarks were made by the Special Guests and followed by an open discussion session. Thereafter, the Chief Guest delivered his valuable speech. Finally, the session chair, Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker, delivered the concluding remarks. Senior officials from different ministries, ambassadors, high commissioners, former diplomats, senior military officials, media, researchers, academia, and students from various universities, representatives from different think tanks, international organisations, participated in the seminar and enriched it by presenting their valuable opinions, comments, suggestions, and observations during the open discussion session.



WELCOME ADDRESS



Major General Md Abu Bakar Siddique Khan, ndc, afwc, psc, G+
Director General, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

Major General Md Abu Bakar Siddique Khan was commissioned in the Corps of Artillery in 1991. He graduated from Bangladesh Military Academy, earning Osmani Gold Medal and Qudrat-e-Khuda Gold Medal for academic performance. He also graduated from Defence Services Command and Staff College and National Defence College, Bangladesh, and has attended various courses both domestically and internationally. General Siddique has extensive experience in the Air Defence Artillery Regiments, commanding two Regiments and one Border Guard Battalion. He has held various positions, including Brigade Major, Instructor Gunnery, Platoon, and Term Commander at the Bangladesh Military Academy. He has also served as Instructor Class A and Senior Instructor Army at Defence Services Command and Staff College, and as Instructor in the Armed Forces War Course Wing of National Defence College. General Siddique served as a Military Observer and Sector Staff Officer Operations in UNTAET and ONUCI and participated in the Multinational Joint Exercise in Kuwait. He has held positions as Director General at Sena Kalyan Sangstha and has completed courses in Fire Control System Operations, International Symposium, Brigade Command, Long Gunnery Staff Course in India, and Master of Defence Studies, MSc, and MPhil from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).

At the outset of his speech, the Director General of BISS paid his deepest homage to the memory of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his family members, along with three million martyrs who laid their lives for the liberation of Bangladesh. In the month of February, he also paid solemn tribute to the memory of all the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement, who sacrificed their lives to establish the rights of our mother tongue.

The Director General noted that everyone has gathered to look into the crucial discourse surrounding Bangladesh's economic landscape, exploring avenues for diversification and strategies for leveraging global market opportunities. Bangladesh has made remarkable growth in economic development over the past two decades. From being 'the bottomless basket,' the country has transformed into a rapidly emerging economy with a growing industrial base and a robust services sector. However, as to navigate the complexities of the global economy, Bangladesh must adapt, innovate, and diversify its economic activities to ensure sustained growth and prosperity. He believed that the seminar underscores the importance of economic diversification in the context of Bangladesh's development trajectory. Economic diversification entails the expansion of the range of economic activities and sectors within a country's economy, thereby reducing dependence on a single sector or product.

For Bangladesh, a nation historically reliant on a few specific industries, diversification presents both challenges and opportunities.

It is essential to acknowledge the significant development Bangladesh has made in diversifying its economy. The country has witnessed notable growth in sectors such as information technology, pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, and agriculture. However, there remains immense potential for further diversification across various sectors, including tourism, renewable energy, ICT services, manufacturing, etc. It is high time to explore how Bangladesh can effectively harness its competitive advantages and tap into global market opportunities. In an increasingly interconnected world, access to international markets is paramount for sustaining economic growth and fostering development. Bangladesh possesses a young and dynamic workforce, a strategic geographical location, and the potential to be a trading hub. All of which can be leveraged to enhance its global market presence.

The Director General opined that Bangladesh must shed light on the challenges and barriers that Bangladesh faces in its pursuit of economic diversification and global market integration. These challenges may include infrastructural constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, regulatory frameworks, and geopolitical dynamics. By identifying these challenges and devising pragmatic solutions, the country can chart a course towards a more diversified and resilient economy. Now is the time to focus on the role of innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology in driving economic diversification. Innovation and technology have the potential to revolutionise traditional sectors, spur the emergence of new industries, and enhance productivity and efficiency across the economy. Encouraging a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship will be crucial in unlocking Bangladesh's full economic potential and propelling it towards sustainable development.

In his concluding part, he hoped that the seminar would serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing on the critical issues of economic diversification and global market integration. By bringing together policymakers, industry experts, academics, and stakeholders, the aim is to chart a collective path forward for the economic development of Bangladesh. The Director General encouraged all participants to actively engage in the discussions, exchange insights and ideas, and work towards concrete solutions that will propel Bangladesh towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION



Dr Mahfuz Kabir

Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

Dr Mahfuz Kabir is Research Director at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka. He holds PhD in Economics from School of Economics and Finance, Curtin University, Australia. As a professional economist, he has 23 years of experience of research and training in Bangladesh and abroad. His areas of research interest include trade and investment modelling, transport and connectivity, system of environmental-economic accounting (SEEA), ecosystem accounting, regional integration in BIMSTEC and SAARC, macroeconomic issues, disaster and risk management, climate change, energy, budget, social protection, time series and panel data econometrics, stochastic frontier analysis, partial and computable general equilibrium modelling. He has published extensively from home and abroad that include World Bank, UNDP, Elsevier, Springer and Routledge.

Dr Mahfuz Kabir began by highlighting the resilience of the Bangladesh economy despite numerous challenges encountered over the past decade and a half. These challenges span from political uncertainties to external sector pressures and issues within the financial sector. Particularly, in the current government's tenure, the economy has demonstrated noteworthy performance in terms of economic growth, poverty reduction, and managing external sector dynamics. These three pillars of the economy have shown significant progress, positioning Bangladesh as a developmental role model. This achievement has garnered recognition from both development partners and scholars worldwide. Dr Kabir added that such recognition underscores the remarkable strides made by the economy.

He emphasised that the economy has notably benefited from two significant pillars within the external sector. One of these pillars is the robust export sector, particularly highlighted by the success of the garment industry. Additionally, the economy has been bolstered by remittance inflows, further supported by development partners through the implementation of various large-scale projects. This support is crucial in Bangladesh's endeavour to achieve its ambitious development goals. Specifically, the nation aims to transition into a developed country by 2041 and advance from a lower-middle-income to an upper-middle-income status by 2031. Moreover, Bangladesh aims to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, despite encountering

numerous challenges along the way. Progress has been observed in critical areas such as poverty reduction and other dimensions of human development. Dr Kabir further highlighted the importance of diversification, drawing parallels to initiatives dating back to the 1950s.

The foundation of diversification is crucial, as underscored by international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. In the 1990s, both developed countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) adopted diversification strategies, restructuring their production and expanding the range of export products. This historical context provides insight into Bangladesh's approach to export assessment and policy formulation. The government of Bangladesh has been actively pursuing diversification strategies through various projects and policy initiatives over the years. Recent policy documents, including the Eighth Five-Year Plan and the Perspective Plan to achieve the goals set for 2041, emphasise the importance of export diversification. Similarly, the Export Policy of 2021-2024 and the National Tariff Policy of 2023 underscore this imperative. These policy documents not only identify challenges and current strategies but also provide recommendations for government agencies and the private sector.

Academic literature and impact papers, notably those published by the IMF and World Bank, consistently advocate for export diversification. Recognising the vulnerability associated with over-reliance on specific sectors for exports, these institutions stress the need for diversification to mitigate risks. The global economic landscape has witnessed significant upheavals, notably the financial meltdown of 2007-2008, highlighting the importance of diversification in safeguarding against such shocks.

Dr Kabir elaborated on the global economic landscape, citing various disruptions that have occurred over time. These disruptions range from the financial crises originating from the US, which reverberated across economies worldwide, to fluctuations in global business cycles. Furthermore, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts such as those in the Middle East and Tamil Sindhi, all contribute to the volatility experienced in the global economy. Such disturbances are not uncommon throughout modern history, and their recurrence underscores the need for resilience and adaptability within economies. He emphasised the implications of over-reliance on a few sectors, particularly in terms of export earnings. Literature suggests that countries diversifying their export sectors are better positioned to weather economic uncertainties compared to those that do not diversify. Additionally, buyers in international markets tend to favour diversified economies, viewing them as more stable partners. Conversely, countries overly reliant on specific sectors face greater vulnerability and may encounter challenges in negotiating favourable terms in international trade. Dr Kabir underscored the importance of diversification not only as a strategic response but also as a business imperative in navigating the complexities of global trade dynamics.

In light of this global economic backdrop, Dr Kabir provided a contextual overview of the Bangladesh economy. Notably, he highlighted the ongoing turmoil in the global economy, characterised by sluggish growth rates. Major economies such as the USA, EU, UK, and China have yet to fully recover their pre-COVID performance levels. Additionally, emerging economies like India and China, considered economic powerhouses, are also experiencing subdued growth. Despite initial projections by institutions like the World Bank and IMF indicating a potential depression in 2023, revised forecasts now suggest that 2023 will witness the lowest growth rates post-COVID. These projections signal a prolonged period of economic recovery globally, with sustained challenges anticipated until at least 2028. Turning to Bangladesh's economic performance, Dr Kabir noted that apart from a

slight dip in 2019-2020, the country has maintained relatively satisfactory growth rates. Despite facing successive impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh's economy recorded a growth rate of 6.03 per cent in the last fiscal year. This resilience is noteworthy, considering the financial stresses experienced within the country.



Dr Kabir expressed optimism regarding Bangladesh's growth trajectory, anticipating a growth rate exceeding six per cent. However, he acknowledged significant pressures on foreign exchange reserves, particularly impacting trade flows, especially concerning imports of raw materials, goods, and capital machinery. Despite assurances from the Honourable Prime Minister regarding the normalisation of sectors such as food, medicine, energy, and essential raw materials for exports, other sectors face uncertainties contingent upon ministerial preferences, including those of the Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh Bank, and the NBR. Moreover, there are imposed tariffs on non-essential items, further complicating trade dynamics. Addressing price levels, Dr Kabir highlighted the persistent challenge of high inflation, contributing to production cost escalation and subsequently diminishing international competitiveness. Despite these challenges, he commended the resilience and diligence of Bangladesh's entrepreneurs, whose efforts have helped navigate the complexities of the current economic landscape.

Dr Kabir noted the commendable resilience of Bangladesh's entrepreneurs, who continue to sustain production and export activities despite numerous challenges. He highlighted a significant but silent transformation in technology installation, particularly in the textile industry. During the COVID-19 pandemic and amidst ongoing international slowdowns, there has been a shift from cotton-based production to the installation of capital machinery capable of producing both cotton and non-cotton goods, such as man-made fibres. However, he also highlighted challenges stemming from a contraction in monetary policy within the country, which places additional pressure on business entities. Despite these challenges, the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector has continued to play a dominant role in Bangladesh's export landscape, with its contribution surpassing 70 per cent

of total goods exports since the mid-1990s. Dr Kabir emphasised the exponential growth trajectory of the RMG sector, particularly during the 1990s, signifying its pivotal role in Bangladesh's export growth. While the RMG sector remains vital, there are also emerging opportunities in non-RMG products, such as fruits. Bangladesh has seen remarkable progress in fruit production, notably becoming a significant producer of mangoes on a global scale. Additionally, the country has achieved notable successes in vegetable production, ranking third globally, as well as in inland fisheries, where it ranks among the top three or four globally. Dr Kabir also highlighted Bangladesh's advancements in producing dry food, ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food, and plastic recycling, underscoring the country's diverse economic potential beyond traditional sectors.



Dr Kabir then brought up in his presentation the significant strides that Bangladesh has made in recycling plastic, particularly in producing high-value RMG products such as denim. Moreover, partnerships in footwear manufacturing, both in leather and non-leather categories, have shown promising potential, especially in the travel goods sector. The ceramic industry is also gaining prominence, boasting high-quality products with due consideration for environmental implications and global climate change mitigation efforts. Furthermore, Dr Kabir discussed the burgeoning furniture sector and the increasing importance of light engineering goods, electrical, and electronic goods. Bangladesh's special economic zones are now open for investment, welcoming both local and international private sector participation. Analysing the factors behind Bangladesh's impressive export performance, Dr Kabir highlighted positive correlations between the export value index, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, and export earnings, both in the short and long run.

External factors such as the Multifibre Agreement and the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) facilities in the EU and other regions have played crucial roles. Internally, factors like improved infrastructure, bonded warehouse facilities, and financial incentives for the Research and Development (R&D) sectors have

contributed to export growth. Importantly, these incentives comply with the World Trade Organization's (WTO) regulations, ensuring adherence to international trade norms. Bangladesh aims to sustain this growth trajectory, particularly leading up to the LDC graduation in November 2026. In addition to RMG products, non-RMG items like home textiles and leather goods are emerging as significant export contributors, despite compliance challenges in accessing developed country markets. Other notable non-RMG exports include cotton and cotton goods, intermediate goods, and headgear, all demonstrating considerable export potential and contributing to Bangladesh's diversification efforts beyond traditional RMG exports.

Dr Kabir discussed the predominantly privatised nature of various sectors in Bangladesh, particularly emphasising the need to attract private sector investment in diversified industries such as home textiles, light engineering, and paper goods. Notably, Bangladesh has transitioned from being a net importer to an exporter of paper products, including A4-sized papers, previously imported from countries like Malaysia. This shift towards import substitution reflects Bangladesh's growing capabilities in producing high-quality paper items, including tissues, which are now being exported. Furniture manufacturing has also emerged as a promising sector, with Bangladesh showcasing expertise in this area. Despite progress in export diversification, Dr Kabir highlighted Bangladesh's heavy reliance on the RMG sector, which accounts for approximately 85 per cent of total goods exports, based on recent fiscal year performances. However, within the RMG sector, there has been a notable diversification trend, with a gradual shift from cotton-based to non-cotton products, such as man-made fibres. While export volumes may have faced some challenges, he emphasised that the value and total earnings from exports are on the rise, owing to this transformation. Currently, around 70 per cent of Bangladesh's exports are cotton-based, with the remaining 30 per cent being non-cotton products. However, there is a strategic aim to reverse this ratio, with a vision to have 70 per cent of exports derived from non-cotton products in the future. To achieve this, Dr Kabir stressed the importance of conveying Bangladesh's capacity to produce non-cotton goods to potential buyers, leveraging existing high-cost machinery investments made by entrepreneurs.

Dr Kabir then delved into Bangladesh's export destinations, highlighting emerging markets such as India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. He noted that while traditional markets like the EU and the UK remain significant, there is a growing focus on new geographies, particularly in the Middle East, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia emerging as important destinations. Bangladesh is now customising products for these markets, moving beyond traditional offerings like T-shirts to cater to specific preferences. However, he noted challenges in the Chinese market, where despite favourable trade agreements offering tariff-free access, Bangladesh's exports have not seen consistent growth. While discussions are underway to increase market access, exports to China remained only US\$677 million in FY2022-23. Conversely, North America's share of Bangladesh's exports has decreased slightly, with Europe, especially the European Union, gaining prominence. Top export destinations for Bangladesh include the USA, Germany, and the UK, with India emerging as the seventh-largest market based on 2023 export data. The EU and North America continue to be promising markets, while the UAE has ascended to the list of top export destinations in recent years. Dr Kabir's analysis underscores Bangladesh's efforts to diversify its export markets and adapt to evolving global trade dynamics.

Examining RMG exports, Dr Kabir highlighted key products driving the performance of Bangladesh's RMG sector. Trousers stand out as the most dominant item, followed by T-shirts and knitted shirts, with sweaters, shirts, and other garments comprising significant portions as well. Despite this, diversification is evident within these product categories, with a focus on improving quality and expanding product varieties. In terms

of export destinations for RMG products, the EU leads the pack, accounting for 50 per cent of Bangladesh's RMG exports. The USA and UK follow closely behind, with other notable destinations including Canada, Japan, Australia, and India. Dr Kabir noted the increasing significance of India as a destination for Bangladesh's RMG products, with Indian consumers showing a growing preference for Bangladeshi RMG items, evident in the presence of a large number of Bangladesh RMG products in Indian supermarkets. This trend underscores the evolving landscape of Bangladesh's RMG exports, with a continued emphasis on product diversification and quality improvement to cater to diverse international markets. Additionally, the growing acceptance of Bangladesh's RMG products in emerging markets like India further solidifies the country's position as a leading exporter in the global RMG industry.



The services sector in Bangladesh is witnessing notable developments, particularly in manufacturing-related services and transformative areas like sea and air transport. Educational tourism and construction-related services are emerging as significant components of services exports, alongside financial services and the rapidly growing IT-enabled sector. The rise of IT-enabled services underscores Bangladesh's transition towards a knowledge-based economy, aligned with the Vision 2041 document's goal of becoming a "Smart Bangladesh." Government services currently top the list of services exported, followed by computer-related services. While the USA remains the primary destination for services exports, its contribution has decreased from 70 per cent to 19 per cent over recent years. China follows with a reduced contribution of 11 per cent. Other emerging destinations include the UK, Japan, UAE, and Germany, highlighting Bangladesh's growing presence in global service markets.

Despite challenges in the financial landscape and global economic slowdowns, Bangladesh's trade missions in key markets like Tokyo, Canberra, and Singapore have shown resilience. However, inconsistency in trade partner engagement remains a challenge, necessitating a concerted effort to enhance trade relations and capitalise on opportunities for both goods and services exports. With nineteen missions equipped with commercial wings,

Bangladesh is well-positioned to bolster its exports further, signalling the potential for continued growth and diversification in the global trade arena.

Dr Kabir then elaborated on the services sector of Bangladesh's economy, noting the emergence of manufacturing-related services alongside transportation and tourism-related services as significant components of services exports. Additionally, construction-related services, financial services, and the rapidly growing IT-enabled services sector play crucial roles in Bangladesh's services export landscape. Dr Kabir underscored the importance of transitioning towards a knowledge-based economy, aligning with the vision outlined in the "Vision 2041" document, which aims to establish a "Smart Bangladesh".

Highlighting the pivotal role of IT-enabled services in this transition, Dr Kabir emphasised the need for investment in computer and ICT-related services. Interestingly, government services currently top the list of services exported, albeit not solely limited to computer-related services. Analysing destination compositions, he pointed out significant shifts in contributions, particularly from the USA and China. While the USA remains a major destination, its contribution has decreased from 70 per cent to 19 per cent over recent years, while China's contribution has reduced from 13 per cent to 11 per cent. Conversely, destinations like the UK, Japan, UAE, and Germany are gaining prominence in Bangladesh's services export landscape. Dr Kabir discussed the challenges faced in services export, particularly concerning consistency in partner countries. Despite the USA, Germany, and the UK being significant destinations, inconsistencies in partnerships pose challenges. Dr Kabir highlighted the importance of commercial missions in fostering trade relationships, noting the performance of these missions in terms of the value of services exported. However, he also emphasised the need for improvement, stressing the importance of enhancing both goods and services exports. Dr Kabir thus emphasised the multifaceted nature of Bangladesh's services sector, encompassing a wide array of industries from manufacturing-related services to IT-enabled services. While significant strides have been made, there remains a need for continued investment and strategic partnerships to further bolster Bangladesh's position in the global services market.

He then proceeded with specific recommendations in the latter part of his presentation, focusing on mission-wise boosts in exports facilitated by commercial missions across various destinations. Notable destinations include Rome, Italy; Netherlands; Poland; Denmark; Sweden; Austria; and Turkey, where significant export activities are observed despite the absence of inter-country wings in some cases.

Examining services exports, Dr Kabir highlighted the performance of missions with commercial wings in cities such as London, Tokyo, Brussels, Geneva, Ottawa, Madrid, and Canberra. These missions have played pivotal roles in facilitating successful service exports. Conversely, missions without commercial wings, like Hong Kong, demonstrate noteworthy achievements despite lacking dedicated commercial representation. Dr Kabir suggested the possibility of re-evaluating commercial priorities or establishing commercial wings in areas currently lacking representation to further leverage export potential. In the closing remarks of his presentation, Dr Kabir underscored the identification of high-priority sectors and special development sectors outlined in Bangladesh's export policy. He praised the comprehensive nature of the export policy, which not only prioritises specific goods and services but also channels incentives and provides policy support accordingly. Furthermore, Dr Kabir highlighted the significance of documents such as the Five-Year Plan and the National Tariff Policy, particularly in addressing anti-export bias within the domestic market. Addressing the prevalent issue of inflation on the global landscape, Dr Kabir reiterated its impact despite ongoing efforts to manage it. This persistent

challenge underscores the need for proactive measures to navigate economic uncertainties effectively. His presentation proceeded with a call for continued vigilance and strategic policymaking to ensure sustained growth and resilience in Bangladesh's export sector amidst dynamic global economic conditions.

The overall earnings of Bangladesh from imports have not been significantly hindered, which is a positive outcome. However, the potential for greater export volume remains untapped due to the alarming rise in global inflation. This unprecedented increase poses a significant challenge, impacting export volumes adversely. Additionally, the shift in monetary policy, with an increase in interest rates across various regions, including Bangladesh, marks a departure from historical trends. Initially, the government refrained from adjusting policy rates, but mounting pressure to address inflation compelled it to implement higher interest rates and introduce innovative financial instruments such as smart interest rates and impact bonds. These measures aim to curb inflationary pressures effectively. Analysing the global inflation landscape, as depicted in the IMF's 2023 report, reveals high inflation rates ranging from three to 10 per cent in key export destinations of Bangladesh, particularly in Latin American markets. This widespread inflationary trend further complicates export dynamics, necessitating adaptive strategies to navigate these challenging conditions.

Although initially identified as emerging destinations, Latin America is also grappling with high inflation rates, with Argentina experiencing an alarming rate of 161 per cent. Similarly, Australia faces a 10 per cent inflation rate. Interestingly, while food prices remain relatively stable in supermarkets, certain other items witness price hikes, contributing to inflationary pressures. While developed nations are on the path to recovery, developing and emerging markets, which constitute our primary export destinations, continue to face challenges.



In light of these circumstances, Dr Kabir emphasised the importance of strategic decomposition. Regions such as South America, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia should be prioritised in government policies as crucial export destinations. Economic diplomacy, guided by the Honourable Prime Minister's vision, should play a central role in directing relevant measures to expand export destinations effectively. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to encourage innovation and diversification within product lines, particularly within the RMG sector. Entrepreneurs driving diversification efforts should be duly recognised and rewarded. While the government has instituted measures such as the Certified Investment Promotion (CIP) status to incentivise diversification, there remains a gap in adequately diverting resources towards forward-looking strategies. This underscores the importance of redirecting attention and resources to support exporters actively engaged in diversification efforts, ensuring sustained progress towards future objectives.

Dr Kabir suggested that the Ministry of Commerce and other relevant government agencies should proactively identify entrepreneurs who are driving export diversification efforts. Even if their export volumes are not significant, they should be acknowledged and rewarded for their contributions to expanding the export landscape. Additionally, Dr Kabir emphasised the importance of extending policy support and benefits to all sectors, not just the RMG sector, which currently receives the majority of benefits. Sectors such as light engineering and other diversifying industries often face challenges in accessing loans from banks and other constraints that hinder their potential for growth. Furthermore, Dr Kabir recommended establishing commercial wings and missions in strategic locations such as Hong Kong to facilitate inquiries and promote export activities. There is a clear opportunity to establish commerce bureaus in areas where they do not currently exist, enhancing support for exporters.

Lastly, Dr Kabir underscored the importance of encouraging women entrepreneurs, who possess the skills to identify potential markets and contribute significantly to export activities. Currently, male entrepreneurs dominate the list of Commercially Important Persons (CIPs), highlighting the need for greater representation and support for women in the export sector.



Dr Kabir considers that there is a significant opportunity to include women who are contributing to the export sector. Additionally, he highlights the importance of environmental sustainability in production, noting the high number of certified RMG factories in Bangladesh. However, he expresses concern that these certifications have not translated into tangible trade gains. Dr Kabir emphasised the need for conveying the country's commitment to environmental sustainability to global buyers through trade missions and business promotion councils. He also stressed the importance of regular meetings and clear priorities within these organisations to ensure effective collaboration with government ministries. Dr Kabir acknowledged the crucial support provided by development partners throughout Bangladesh's development journey, from poverty reduction to infrastructure development and market access. He urged continued support, particularly after Bangladesh's graduation from the LDC status, emphasising the significance of market access agreements with APA and potentially ASEAN to expand export opportunities.

Finally, Dr Kabir highlighted the untapped potential of various sectors such as transport, tourism, ICT, and light engineering items, along with electrical and electronic goods. He emphasised the need to attract both domestic and international investors to the numerous special economic zones (SEZs) identified in Bangladesh. He then concluded with his firm belief that this concerted effort will not only reshape production landscapes but also foster diversification and boost the country's export earnings.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS



Professor Dr Mohammad Jahangir Alam

*Faculty of Agricultural Economics and
Rural Sociology Bangladesh Agricultural
University*

Dr Mohammad Jahangir Alam is a Professor in the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University. He is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Adelaide, Australia. He was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, Australia. He was a Fulbright Scholar at the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University, USA. Dr Alam was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness at Louisiana State University, USA, and a Commonwealth Postdoctoral Fellow at SOAS, University of London, UK. He was a Visiting Professor (EU Erasmus Mundus) at the Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland, and a Visiting PhD Scholar at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, University of Arkansas, USA. He obtained his PhD and Second Master's from Ghent University, Belgium. He has published more than 150 articles in peer-reviewed journals and several book chapters and written several research reports. He also has research experience in Bangladesh, Belgium, the UK, Australia, and the USA. He has been experienced in collaborating with IFPRI, FAO, IRRI, ILRI, ICRISAT, DANIDA, University of Plymouth, Louisiana State University, University of South Australia, SOAS University of London, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Australian National University, University of Adelaide, Curtin University, Peking University Lincoln University New Zealand, University of Oxford, University of Arkansas, Asian Productivity Organization to name a few, either as a consultant or as a team leader/member in different research projects.

As a panel discussant, Dr Alam began his remarks by mentioning the issue of natural resource management. He mentioned that Bangladesh is such a country that mainly depends on two sectors for its economy, that is the RMG sector and the remittances sent by the migrant workers. Hence, the lesson learned from COVID-19 as the Prime Minister also mentioned that the country must have more sectors or diversified sectors for income and to earn more from the international market. And there is huge potential for agriculture to that end. He stated that in all important policy documents like the perspective plan or the 8th Five Year Plan the issue of foreign income diversification received significant importance. Hence, he mentioned that he would focus on the issue of agricultural diversification and export potential in his remarks. According to him, during the last couple of decades, the country's agriculture sector has been performing very well irrespective of any sector within agriculture. For example, if we look at crops, if we look at livestock, if we look at aquaculture, and other related agricultural sectors, we see that there has been tremendous growth in the last couple of decades and particularly in the last decade.

Then he mentioned some numbers and noted that Bangladesh is currently 2nd in Jute production, 3rd in rice production, 6th in pulses production, 7th in spices, 8th in tea and also good in producing guava and mango. Bangladesh is 9th and in Hilsa production Bangladesh is the first. So, approximately there are twelve products in which Bangladesh is ranked among the top 10 countries. If someone looks at the growth of agricultural production, someone can observe that in terms of total grain production, in 2006 it was 2.614 tons while in 2019 just before COVID it went up to 4.34 tons. In all other sectors like Fish, milk, meat, egg, rice, vegetables and spices the growth rate was tremendously very high. And in many of the cases, Bangladesh is now in the position of surplus production comparing the previous decades. From these data, he referred that during the past decades not only production has increased tremendously but also agricultural diversification occurred. He said that as rice is our staple food, approximately 73 per cent of the country's land is used for rice production and the remaining 27 per cent of cultivable land is used for producing other crops. Bangladesh is now producing 30 different crops such as spices, fruits, vegetables, etc. If someone looks into the changes in the past, then s/he can observe that there is a huge change in fruit production. Hence, in terms of the country's agricultural diversification, though the pace is not so huge, still it can be seen that the change is happening in many of the agricultural crops, fruits and vegetables.

Dr Alam then referred to the number from the panel survey of the 'Bangladesh Integrated Survey of International Food Policy Research' and mentioned that from 2011-2015 and 2018, the agricultural diversity score was 3 to 4 which means that every farm household producing 3 to 4 different crops although 73 per cent of the land is used for the rice production only. And if someone looks into the index to examine agricultural diversification, s/he can find that there have been huge changes in the diversities. It is a known fact that there is huge variability among the regions in the country, for example, drastic change occurred in the North-Western part of the country in terms of agricultural diversification. But in other parts, for example in the coastal area or the eastern part less diversification occurred in those areas.

Hence, if someone looks into the export potentials of agricultural production, one can see that in the last more than one decade, the share of frozen fish has been the highest. For example, it is more than 50 per cent of total agricultural production exported to the international market. But still, the country has huge potential, particularly for processed foods and processed commodities. Although Bangladesh is in a surplus in many agricultural products, but still they are mainly season-based and lack available arrangements for processing, many of the products are wasted as it cannot be stored or processed. Hence, there is a huge potential in the processing sector. It was found that there is a huge demand for processed food in many countries, particularly in the Middle Eastern and Far Eastern countries. So, the country can process and export those processed foods to those particular regions. He then gave an example in this regard and mentioned that recently he and his team completed a project named, 'the one country, one priority project' and for Bangladesh that is Jackfruit. It is a known fact that Bangladesh produces a huge amount of Jackfruit. However, more than 40 per cent of the total production is wasted during the season because of a lack of further processing facilities. So, this is one of the products that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) targeted to promote in the international market. And the second identified product is mango. Although there is huge progress, particularly in the mango processing, for the Jackfruit processing arrangements are required as it is the country's national fruit. He mentioned that he visited some of the East Asian countries and has seen they are producing many products by using Jackfruit, for example, Chips and Juice, etc. So, we can tap these facilities and we can promote agricultural products like Jackfruit, or mangoes to the international market.

He then mentioned another study by the World Bank and gave some numbers. For example, there is huge untapped potential from agriculture. And then Bangladesh can tap the export potential for shrimps, fruits and vegetables and if these are processed and then target to export to the international market. But there are some challenges as well like the lack of infrastructure in hygiene in processing in the country and insufficient guarantee of quality control. There is lack of facilities like a 'fit for human consumption certificate' and if the country wants to export processed food or the agricultural commodities or the fruits to the international market, there is a need to focus a lot on that. Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Bangladesh government has been working to establish one quality control laboratory in the Purbachal area and also facilities like developing good agricultural practices. But in addition, the Ministry of Agriculture has been working and is almost at the final stage of developing the agricultural products marketing policy focusing a lot on how to tap the export potential by exporting agricultural and then processed agricultural commodities to the international market. The country has some difficulties and bad reputations while attempting to export agricultural commodities to the international market and particularly, the micro forum compounds have been identified in some consignments and then the exports were banned in some European countries. It is also important to diversify the agricultural products or commodities as more the 50 per cent of the total export comes from shrimp or aquaculture. Hence, Bangladesh should diversify its agricultural products or commodities to the international market. He concluded his remarks by commenting that as the country is graduating from the LDCs and as the country is going to achieve some of the milestones in the coming years, it has to diversify the economy and also in that regard it needs to diversify the agricultural products and commodities to the international market to fulfill what the country is aspiring mentioned in perspective plan, 8th five-year plan and other policy documents.



Dr Md Deen Islam

*Associate Professor, Department of
Economics, University of Dhaka*

Dr Md Deen Islam is an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka. His research interests include development economics, applied international trade, Macroeconomics, and urban economics. He completed BSS and MSS in economics from the University of Dhaka and obtained PhD in economics from Boston University. He was a pre-doctoral fellow at the Global Policy Development (GDP) Center at Boston University. He was a member of a multidisciplinary team and contributed to two studies investigating the implications of Bangladesh's LDC graduation on access to essential medicines in Bangladesh. These two studies have recently been published in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, he has expertise in impact evaluation and causal analysis research to examine the effectiveness of development interventions. In particular, he uses structural and micro-econometric techniques to draw inferences from the household survey and administrative data. He has experience working with impoverished people's education, health, and livelihoods and has published on poverty, inequality, child labour, and other development issues. He has worked as a consultant for the Center on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), Dhaka, RTI International, North Carolina, USA, and the Bureau of Economic Research (BER) of the University of Dhaka.

The speaker thanked the chair and claimed that the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been playing a crucial role in diversifying and facilitating exports. They have conducted several studies on export diversification, and the keynote presenter provided a comprehensive overview of export barriers and constraints. The research team found that most focus is on production side factors like technology, infrastructure, and energy, neglecting the importance of marketing and market research. They studied four major export sectors: leather, footwear, agro-processed, and light engineering. The findings revealed a significant gap in information for Bangladeshi producers and manufacturers, particularly in developed countries. They lack a dedicated market research team, which can lead to a lack of competitive advantage for their products. Additionally, some producers are unaware of the regulatory requirements for exporting in those markets, despite knowing there is demand. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' efforts in diversifying and facilitating exports are appreciated.

Bangladesh, a member of the least developed country (LDC), currently enjoys significant trade advantages in developed countries due to its regulatory and documentation requirements. However, exporters, particularly from medium and small industries, are unaware of the advantages they can receive in Europe or the USA and the frontier varieties they can produce using frontier technology. This leads to a significant gap in innovation. The Ministry of Commerce has initiated the development of a Bangladesh trade portal to provide information about foreign markets and regulatory requirements. However, the dynamic export market and frequent changes in rules and regulations make it difficult for the Ministry of Commerce to track these changes globally. The

Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play a crucial role in collecting information on Bangladesh's potential products in developed countries, regulatory requirements, and production methods. In developing countries like China or India, new varieties of the same product may be discovered and produced more efficiently and with better quality. Disseminating this information to small and medium industries, which are mostly family businesses, would help them understand their product's demand and market opportunities. By collaborating with the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, knowledge can be generated that is a public good at a low marginal cost. This knowledge could lead to many interested producers in Bangladesh exporting their products to these markets.

The speaker claimed that Bangladesh is generally not recognised for its high-quality non-RMG products, which has led to consultation meetings and complaints about the lack of market price. The buyer in the Middle East is not willing to pay the same price as a Chinese supplier to Bangladeshi suppliers due to Bangladesh's lack of recognition. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play a crucial role in promoting the country's image by disseminating information about high-quality products to potential buyers in developed countries and regularly showcasing them at trade fairs and other events. The global market has a smiling curve, with production having only a small fraction of value, with most producers at the bottom of this curve. To move to the upper portion of value-added activities, Bangladesh needs to integrate more into the global value chain. For example, to export in developed countries, Bangladeshi exporters typically sell their products through chain stores. However, some products require extended after-sales services, such as consumer electronics products. Walton, a high-quality fridge, and AC manufacturer in Bangladesh, struggles to enter the European and US markets due to insufficient investment to establish service centers in Europe and the US. Collaboration between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Commerce can help connect Bangladeshi exporters with chain stores and brands in Europe and the US, enabling them to sell their products to Chinese stores and brands. This collaboration is essential for Bangladeshi exporters to learn from and improve their after-sales services.

The speaker believed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play a crucial role in integrating Bangladeshi exporters with the global value chain, particularly around packaging. Many exporters in Bangladesh lack knowledge about how to package their products, which can hinder their ability to sell to developed countries. This is a significant barrier that can be addressed by collecting and disseminating information in the export market. Another issue he highlighted is the high cost of testing and certification for agro-processed food items, which can be costly for exporting to Europe or the US. To address this, he urges the Ministry of Farmers can mobilise the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI) to perform these tests more efficiently and cheaply. Bangladesh also lacks requirements for agro-processed items and consumer electronics, such as pickles or agro-processed food items containing mustard oil. The EU has banned exporting these items due to the high urea content in the ingredients. However, Bangladesh does not have any domestic requirements for these items, making it difficult for producers to maintain high standards and export them. It is essential to ensure safety and other requirements in the domestic market, especially for food items, to attract more producers who can export to other markets. As Bangladesh graduates out of LDC in November 2026, the apparel and RMG sector is heavily reliant on tariffs in many developed countries. Diversifying away from the RMG is necessary to sustain economic growth and employment for the growing population. In conclusion, the speaker urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce can collaborate to address these challenges and help Bangladesh diversify its export market.



Dr Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddiquee

*Professor Department of Economics,
University of Dhaka*

Dr Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddiquee is a Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka. He obtained his PhD from the University of Manchester, UK. His research interest includes impact evaluation using RCT with a special focus on poverty, well-being and inequality at the micro, meso, national and global level. He is also involved in working with different Ministries of Bangladesh's Government. Over the past 18 years of his research and teaching experiences, he has been extensively involved in developing statistical indicators, statistical tools, indices, designing the intervention, measuring the impact of the different interventions for the local and international organisations working in Bangladesh.

Dr Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddiquee opened his speech by expressing gratitude to the BIISS for inviting him to speak on service sector diversification and its importance. After greeting the honourable chair of the session, special guests, distinguished panelists, and the audience, he stated that he would be starting with the relative importance of the service sector.

He then invited the audience to look at the history of Bangladesh from 1972 to 2022 and said that if taking the average of the past 51 years, it can be found that the GDP growth is 4.6, agriculture 2.7, industry 7.5, and 4.6. He emphasised that from these statistics, the relative contributions of the sectoral contributions to the GDP, which would be around 50 per cent, around the range of 48 to 58, could be identified. Therefore, half the GDP comes from the service sector. He proclaimed that even a 1 per cent growth could give Bangladesh half of the play. Following the first panellist, Dr Mohammad Jahangir Alam's statement on the damaged agricultural products such as potatoes and others, the involved persons are not aware of the process of getting services for the stories. Therefore, there's a lack of capacity for the stories.

Dr Siddiquee then spoke from the perspective of the relative contributions of the service sector, especially the export contributions, which are negligible in a say. He insisted that Bangladesh is an economic model of South Asian countries from many perspectives. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), it is leading in the case of human development. Despite this, the state and its stakeholders need help to answer the questions about the relative contributions concerned with the service sector.

Dr Siddiquee then insisted that Bangladesh was far off from India. Pulling up the example of the previous fiscal year of 2022-2023, he stated that Bangladesh exported US\$7.5 billion worth of services. Meanwhile, in the fiscal year 2021-2022, the export amount was around US\$8 billion. Upon comparing the past two years, it is clear that the rate has declined. Dr Siddiquee then pointed towards China's export rate, which is US\$392 billion, followed by India US\$241 billion. Comparing the three countries, Bangladesh has the intuition that it has a grad scope to increase the economy of scale and benefit from it. He then referred to Dr Mahfuz Kabir's slide on product diversification. Dr Siddiquee then insisted that robust research focused on the service sector is absent in Bangladesh, which included the service sector's definition, relative contribution, and comparable or comparative scenarios of Bangladesh, India, and other neighbouring countries. Without further and rigorous research, it cannot be expected to find more fine-tuned or further innovations regarding Bangladesh's service sector.

Dr Siddiquee then pointed out the synergies. Bangladesh began with 900 industries in 1972; currently, it has 5000. Therefore, the export earnings highly rely on the RMG sector, around 84-85 percent. He then referred to Dr Deen Islam's speech, where he rightly mentioned the reputation of the country's branding. In his remarks, Dr Siddiquee highlighted the RMG as Bangladesh's brand. Therefore, it was able to create the demands. He added the importance of technologies in the role of global demand and building brands. To achieve this, Bangladesh's government is based on Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041, meaning that the market trends will change. It will focus on IT-enabled people and their digital skills. Bangladesh is establishing universities and emphasising the creation of such kinds of people. He then argued about the importance of rigorous research, as he had to skim through to learn about the situations of the service sectors, comparisons to the neighbouring countries, gap identifications, global demands and Bangladesh's current position. He upheld his opinion that Bangladesh is seriously lagging behind other competing countries and has a gap in scope to work with and enhance the service sector to an upper level. He then referred to Dr Kabir's presentation, where he addressed some challenges because the stakeholders are selling the products at lower prices, competing with the competitors. Therefore, after graduation in 2026, Bangladesh will have an advance in three years.

Dr Siddiquee then analysed that the Bangladesh government is trying to withdraw the incentives, which will pressure the RMG sector. In that case, Dr Siddiquee argued that prices would be increased, creating a more competitive environment for Bangladeshi products. However, he also expressed concern about whether it will be competitive to the required amount or whether Bangladesh will lose market share. He also stated that even if we have reached a certain level of exports thanks to the RMG sectors, other service sectors are also included. He then moved on to the governance structure within the customs procedures. He claimed there are two stages, the first being the notion of services. At this point, he emphasised that things would be more effective if the country reached the first stage. Besides, the stakeholders need to do more research focusing specifically on the service sectors, which would provide a solid outline of the definitions of the service sector and the potential that service sectors could develop and export to other countries. This means having an idea about the potential for findings from the service sectors. The second stage, according to Dr Siddiquee, is the service sector providing agencies; it is at this stage that the functioning process of the governance structure and its improvement process can be identified. The 1 per cent increase in the service sector can be a game changer if another sector, by double growth, can give the same benefits. He argued that this would help understand the developed countries and their compositions regarding sectoral contribution. He then brings up the example of the United States of America, where two-thirds of their GDP comes from the service sector.

Dr Siddiquee then concluded that as Bangladesh aspires to be a developed country by 2041, it is vital to emphasise terms of giving more focus on the service sectors by allocating more resources, providing incentives for the researchers to identify and mapping out the overall scenarios of the service sectors in Bangladesh. That way, taking the potential advantage of the service sectors in the time ahead would be possible.



Dr Rozana Rashid

Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Dr Syeda Rozana Rashid teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka. She completed her undergraduate in International Relations from the University of Dhaka. She obtained a Master's in Forced Migration from the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC), University of Oxford, UK and a PhD in Migration Studies from the University of Sussex, UK. She was awarded a Chevening scholarship from the UK government and a D.Phil bursary from the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex. Over the past twenty years, she has researched labour migration, human trafficking, irregular migration, remittance and refugees and published more than 30 books, book chapters and journal articles from home and abroad. Forced and voluntary migration, poverty, gender, climate change, social protection and livelihoods are among her areas of research interest.

Professor Dr Rozana Rashid, Department, of International Relations, University of Dhaka, at the beginning of her remarks, expressed gratitude to the organisers for inviting her to the session. She stated that the discussion would be incomplete without touching upon the overseas labour migration. She mentioned that her deliberation would be complementary to the keynote speaker. She stated that the nation's skills, employment, and economic growth have all received a lot of attention lately. The improvement of quality through skill training for work abroad has also been discussed. Remittances account for 5.2 per cent of the GDP, making it significant. Bangladesh offers enormous potential and a sizable population. The growth of human capital offers the possibility to turn this into a dividend. It may open up possibilities and prospects for the nation. Bangladeshis currently reside and work in 163 different countries. The majority of people live in 12 countries. 91 per cent of the people are headed to 12 different nations. This is shocking because it shows that the focus is on nations that require labour for low-skilled jobs.

She highlighted that the Gulf region is mostly dependent on the 4-5 lac skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled migrant labourers from Bangladesh who arrive each year. Less than 15 per cent of the flow is made up of women. Initially an individual endeavour in the 1970s and 1980s, the flow has evolved over decades to become a major contributor to the national economy. The Gulf corridor accounts for more than 65 per cent of the total migration from Bangladesh. In Particular, 55 per cent of women are emigrating to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. The majority of male labourers from Bangladesh work in semi-skilled occupations including construction, cleaning, security guard, driving, hotel service, and so forth. The domestic sector employs female labourers. Originally developed as a risk-reduction technique for individual families, this industry is now part of the nation's economy. Bangladesh made US\$ 23 billion in 2023, which went towards the GDP of the nation.



While talking about the reasoning behind the quality improvement, she stated that only 25 per cent of workers have specialised skills. This raises concerns about the caliber and level of the capabilities. This has multiple implications for the nation's economy. First, the national policies of the destination countries rarely let semi-skilled and unskilled workers bring their families abroad. It suggested that immigrants frequently visit their families back home. Second, most of the time, exploitation results from these unskilled and semiskilled employment. They hardly ever find employment when they return to Bangladesh. These are the effects of Bangladesh's low-skilled migration. This is where the reasoning behind improving quality resides.

She mentioned that the fourth industrial revolution is underway, and because of its integration into the global value chain, it offers us fresh promise for employment and skill development. The World Economic Forum forecasted that the fields of data analysis, cyber security, environment management technology, and climate change will see significant job growth in the next few years. The question is whether or not our next generation is prepared to take advantage of the chance. Unskilled and less skilled people have more chances to be recruited overseas than their more skilled counterparts, but they also have fewer options for success. Despite the fact that Bangladesh sent almost 1.3 million workers overseas last year, 73 per cent of them lacked formal education. As a result, just a small per centage of Bangladeshis have benefited, mostly performing 3D (dirty, dangerous, and demanding) work overseas. Numerous anecdotes about the vulnerabilities of unskilled workers at different stages of their migration are prevalent in the media. She provided various recommendations. The workforce must first be skillfully prepared for respectable, well-paying occupations. Immigrants will have a better chance of filling positions in wealthy countries if they improve their abilities. It is time to consider sending people outside of the Middle East. The country may diversify by sending people to the US, Australia, and Japan, all of which have a labour shortage and need foreign workers in the service and other industries. Professionals with high levels of expertise and training, such as engineers, surgeons, and IT specialists, have excellent prospects. Nonetheless, it is necessary to retrain the less educated and ready them for the global, diverse market. The national skill policy development, which has cleared the path for reform and improved skills throughout the



nation. Many men and women have received training and are categorised into groups such as fresh skilling, upskilling, reskilling, entrepreneurship development, apprenticeship and recognition of prior skill. These are commendable projects in terms of their scope. The concern is, however, how well they can match the global supply and demand for skill. Are we aware of the types of employment that are out there in the world? What kind of individuals are present to fill those job openings? She doubted that any research had been done on this. The second is the calibre and level of expertise. This is an additional area that requires attention. She provided one illustration of this. Female migrants from Bangladesh who travel overseas to work as domestic helpers are required to complete mandatory training. Their instruction does not, however, have much application in real life. They must retrain themselves in the language. As a result, it is doubtful whether this training is standard, useful, or practically applicable. Despite this, new technical training facilities have been built. It is crucial that supply and demand are matched. Diversification is required not only with regard to skills but also with regard to employment, destinations, and source regions within the nation. In addition, women must be involved in any programme for quality improvement. More competent personnel must be sent. In addition, gender parity must be preserved. People who are marginalised must have access to this kind of training. One possibility is to deploy agricultural labourers to Africa. Moreover, migration diplomacy needs to be given the utmost importance.

OPEN DISCUSSION



Mr Salauddin Kashem Khan

*Chairman, A K Khan and Company Limited and Coats (Bangladesh) Limited
Former President of Bangladesh Employers' Federation*

Mr Salauddin emphasised the importance of skills development in Bangladesh, highlighting the country's low per capita remittances in South Asia. He suggested that receiving countries should set up training institutes in Bangladesh, such as UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, to skill up their workforce to meet the required standards. This would also be done for Japan and South Korea. He appreciated Mr Abul Kalam Azad, a member of Parliament, for his active involvement in skills development. He urges the National Skills Development Authority to be more active and effective. Regional colleges like Ju-Ed and Ru-Ed should be encouraged to enter the IT-enabled services sector to create more IT-enabled workers who can be used domestically and internationally. As a former president of the Bangladesh-Japan Chamber of Commerce, Mr Salauddin proposed leveraging Bangladesh's strategic partnership with Japan under the Big P initiative to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). He argued that Bangladesh is in a good position to attract investments from Japan due to the uncertain situation in Myanmar. Furthermore, he believed that Bangladesh needs to fast-track negotiations to join the RCEP, which is the single

largest trading block and Bangladesh must be a member as it transitions from LDC status to middle-income status. At the regional level, Mr Salauddin refocused on Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, which has a consumer market of 200 million and is expected to become one of the world's seven largest economies by 2050.

The focus has been on Malaysia, but it is crucial to refocus on Indonesia by upgrading our mission in Jakarta. The Indonesia-Pakistan economic cooperation structure, IPEC, has been a significant part of this relationship. The SRIAKU initiative, supported by Indonesian President Dr B J Habibie and IDB President Muhammad Ali Madani, is a way to reactivate this relationship. The current government supports this initiative, which was resolved at the ninth OIC summit in Doha in 2000. The senior secretary of the foreign ministry should review the proposal. The low-price policy for economic diversification and the global market is crucial for Bangladesh's development goal of becoming a developed country by 2041.



Ambassador Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury thanked the organisers for hosting the seminar and focused on Dr Mahfuz Kabir's keynote paper. The paper is exhaustive but has two weaknesses. Firstly, it does not adequately address the comparative aspect of GDP growth, which includes Western countries, India, China, and Bangladesh. It also overlooks Vietnam, which is the most comparable country to Bangladesh in terms of economic growth from the 70s to today. Secondly, the paper neglects the importance of free trade agreements (FTAs), of which Vietnam has 16, 11 of which are bilateral and 6 are multilateral in nature. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to economic growth.

Ambassador Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury

Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

During his time as Ambassador to Vietnam, he discussed the potential for treaty agreements with the US and Bhutan, which could potentially lead to financial losses. However, he emphasised the importance of foreign direct investment (FDI) for diversification, as it can attract investment, create job opportunities, and potentially lead to export diversification. He also emphasised the need for diversification in various products, including manufacturing, agriculture, and job markets. Despite this,

the speaker believed that the need for diversification has been a long-standing issue, with only Dr Rozana highlighting the reasons behind this.

He said that Mr Salauddin Kashem has raised an important issue about export diversification in the East, particularly in Indonesia, which is understated in our studies. Indonesia's property market is an area that should be focused on for high-tech developed exports. The speaker thanked the keynote speaker for his brilliant paper. Bangladesh, an LDC, has transitioned from an LDC to a developing country due to international support measures on the multilateral trading system. These measures focus on government support benefits for exporters, focusing on textiles. However, there is limited time for the transition, with the EU market reaching its maximum by 2029. The speaker suggested extending these facilities to other emerging sectors, including government support, to rationalise the overall package for export promotion. This should be equally extended and inclusive of emerging sectors for the transition period.

He discussed the potential extension of the multilateral trading system transition period for 2026 and 2029, focusing on the benefits it could bring to emerging sectors. He emphasised the importance of adaptation to technology for overall productivity and the awareness of private sectors in transforming themselves to diversify. He suggested that the government should not be spoon-feeding private sectors, but rather embracing them and working together to face this challenge. Distribution is linked to foreign direct investment and technology transfer, with intellectual property being a crucial issue for overall investment and technology transfer. Besides, global standardisation is also essential for diversification, as emerging products must follow global standards. He also emphasised the need for policy reform, ensuring it is investment-friendly, diversification-friendly, and transparent. The integrity, predictability, transparency, and implementation of these reforms are essential for achieving success. He concluded by highlighting the need for a joint effort to face the challenges and ensure the success of the transition period.



Ambassador Abdul Hannan

Ambassador Abdul Hannan began his statement by thanking the Chair and the keynote speaker for his brilliant paper. He stated that Bangladesh has graduated from a low-developed country to a developing one because of the international support measures under a multilateral trading system. In Bangladesh's context, it is the support measures of the government. This support benefits the exporters in terms of their exports, and it is focused on only governments and textiles. He believed that Bangladesh has little time for the transition; it is up to 2029 at the maximum for the European Union Market. He asked whether extending the same facilities, rationalising them and not focusing on the government to other sectors are indicators of the emergence of other sub-sectors. He then followed up on whether these support measures could be extended to rationalise the overall package that the government has had for export promotions. He voiced his opinion that these promotions should be equally extended and include some emerging sectors for the transition

period. So now the point is whether this transition period, agreed upon in the multi-lateral trading system for 2026 and the European Union 2029, could be extended. He emphasised the continuous diplomacy through international foreign affairs and commerce as well as the World Trade Commission in Geneva. Therefore, this is the time to refocus on how much Bangladesh can benefit in terms of the extended transition period that will ultimately define, in terms of consequence, giving more benefits to the emerging sectors.

He added that adaptation to the technology is vital for overall productivity; otherwise, there is no way out. A technical transformation has emerged but should be seen in all sectors. He then emphasised the awareness of the private sector as they are the ultimate beneficiary and whether the delivery is ready to transform themselves to diversify. He asked whether the government's spoon-feeding tendencies towards the private sector is the way towards diversification, and the answer is an astounding no. Therefore, it is time for the private sector to embrace the challenges with a joint effort and go forward. He said that diversification is linked with foreign direct investment and technology transfer. He then mentioned the issues surrounding intellectual property, investment packages and technology transfer, which are crucial. Another critical point, he said, is global standardisation, whether every emerging product follows international standards. Otherwise, diversification will be impossible. His final recommendation is to create a policy reform that is investment and diversification-friendly. He also emphasised that it has to be genuinely transparent and has integrity.



**Dr Iftekhar Ahmed
Chowdhury**

*Former Advisor (in charge) Ministry
of Foreign Affairs, Government of the
People's Republic of Bangladesh*

After thanking the chair, Dr Iftekhar Chowdhury stated that Bangladesh's graduation from the LDCs is both a boon and a bane. It can be considered a boon because it improves Bangladesh's global image and gives it better credit ratings. This phenomenon, in theory, should allow it to borrow more cheaply on the worldwide market. However, it is a bane because Bangladesh would lose preferences such as under the EU's everything but arms. It needs to be noted that Bangladesh has not been able to optimise these advantages quite yet. Bangladesh needs to be transformed into a competitive advantage to overcome these challenges or comparative advantages. One of those ways is to raise wages that will be carefully calibrated with increased productivity because low wages tend to perpetuate poverty. He stated that diversification is critical because, with regard to preferences, they do not face reasonable tariffs. The Honourable Prime Minister and the Government of Bangladesh laser-focused on the Internet sector, which can help the state leapfrog into economic modernity. Additionally, he emphasised that the pharmaceutical industry should seriously reflect on navigating WTO regulations on trading intellectual

properties or trips. He then spoke about individual and mutually beneficial agreements with regional trading arrangements, such as ASEAN and RCEP, which need to be explored to unblock potentials.

He emphasised the word 'selectively' as its implications would merit more serious research for maximal outcomes. He pointed out some challenges regarding Professor Rozanna's comment on upskilling labour, as some FDAs are encountering problems. The problem between India and Singapore is in regards to their FDA. Also, the developed countries oppose the movement of natural persons, a WTO regulation norm. His experience as a PR in Geneva for many years is a lesson that relying on preferential treatment can prolong pain. He adds that as soon as Bangladesh confronts the real world of competition, the better. Graduation can be a breakout moment to reflect on reforms to raise productivity or boost growth.

He concluded by saying that efforts must be directed towards moving up the value chain by attracting quality and stressing quality. He recommended that MoFA can aid the captains of industry in the private sector through nimble diplomacy and effective market identification. This should provide the intellectual matrix for box thinking.



**Lieutenant General (Ret'd) M
Harun-Ar-Rashid**

*Former Chief of Army Staff Bangladesh
Army*

Lt General M Harun-Ar-Rashid opened his note by stating the role of Bangladesh's Armed Forces' deployment in peacekeeping missions worldwide. The members stay in the countries long and establish goodwill amongst the people. He gave the example of India, where the Indian contractors supply their country's Peacekeeper's needs. In the case of Bangladesh, no contractor has tried to develop their supply route in this regard. There have been many visits, but there have never been any developments. Therefore, he wondered whether the Foreign Ministry could intervene in developing business relationships with the countries where Bangladeshi troops are deployed. He added that Bangladesh's business relationships always look forward to Japan and Western markets, but those countries have strict regulations of quality controls and ingredients. So, Bangladesh can check the vast market in the low developing and developing countries, but they are not ready to explore these countries. Bangladesh can expand its export items to a higher standard by venturing into those countries. He then pointed out the high cost of market globalisation and export orientation. Additionally,

business enterprises require much paperwork throughout the year; it is also a costly phenomenon. The National Board of Revenue is another factor to consider, as the tax policy vexes most people. New entrepreneurs face many obstacles as financial institutions are not ready to support new ventures. He pushed the government for incentives for young entrepreneurs. He concluded his remarks by emphasising the need to develop the country's manpower.



**Mohammad Shahjahan
Siddiqui**

*Chief Executive Officer at Bangla
Chemical and Non-Government Advisor
Bangladesh Competition Commission*

MrS Siddiqui started his speech by greeting the audience. He then immediately pointed out how the discussion happening so far in the seminar revolved around economic diversification in the global market. Referring to the paper presented by Dr Kabir, MS Siddique said the emphasis was on the export market. Hence, the focus of the discussion was narrowed down to the export market only. He, then, shed light on the local industries, which according to him should be put on priority. He started reminiscing about the time when 20 years ago, Bangladesh started importing biscuits from Malaysia. Even though at the start, people criticised the initiative, that ultimately led to the case of biscuit imports from Malaysia around 20 years ago. It eventually led to the spurred innovation among manufacturers, resulting in the production of local biscuits. And as a result, the country started to export biscuits to other countries. Again, he used an example and this time it was of hydrogen peroxide production in Bangladesh. He highlighted that despite import allowances at zero tax, some entrepreneurs in Bangladesh established hydrogen peroxide industries to meet the demands of the textile industry. Hence, it was not tax benefits but the creation of

the local market that fueled the industry. Mr Siddiqui to further his point, presented case studies of how trade facilitation can bolster both local industries and exports. He asked to consider the Indian model of establishing free trade zones through which India developed zones for re-exporting products. According to him, because of the strategic location of Bangladesh, the country has the opportunity to replicate this model. He mentioned how Bangladesh already has a Chinese, ASEAN, and Indian market. On top of that, Dubai and Singapore have also gone through development because of the creation of free trade zones. Hence, MS Siddiqui talked us through the benefits of transformation into a free economic zone. A free economic zone will facilitate imports of raw materials, benefiting both local and export-oriented industries. To achieve this, Bangladesh only needs to necessitate a minor policy adjustment to permit other importers to import raw materials for sale in both local and export markets as Bangladesh already has the infrastructural backup. In his concluding remarks, he pledged to focus on trade facilitation. Because it requires minimal investment and technological requirements but can pave the way for economic and export diversification.



Professor Dr Mizan R Khan

*Deputy Director, International Centre
for Climate Change and Development
(ICCCAD), Independent University,
Bangladesh*

Professor Dr Mizan R Khan, began his speech by introducing himself to the audience. Professor Khan, then, addressed the comment of Professor Rozana Rashid's discourse regarding labour export, emphasising the Prime Minister's proactive stance on climate-induced displacement to propose a suggestion of his own. Highlighting his extensive experience as a climate negotiator for the Bangladeshi delegation for the past 22 years, Khan proposed a shift in perspective from focusing solely on labour export to the Middle East market to exploring opportunities in industrialised countries. To give more credibility to his proposal, he referred to a policy piece published in Science Magazine advocating for selective relocation abroad. He discussed the policy of that paper where relocation from developing to developed dates can happen because they have negative population growth and we have surplus labour. Hence, he then suggested a plan to establish training institutions for young women and men from vulnerable areas of Bangladesh and train them to learn the language of the respected state where we can relocate them selectively without complete migration. Finally, Professor Khan referred to

this process as selective relocation abroad and mentioned that as many states have already implemented this policy, in Bangladesh, policy research is ongoing in this regard. And within a few months, a detailed policy will be presented.



Lieutenant Colonel Shahadat Hossain (Ret'd.)

Consultant on China Bangladesh Affairs and Chinese Language Teacher

Lieutenant Colonel Shahadat (Ret'd.) began his speech by expressing his profound gratitude to the BISS for extending the esteemed invitation to speak on the imperative subject matter of service sector diversification. In his speech, he described the relative importance of the service sector.

Lt Col Hossain embarked on an insightful exploration of the relative significance of the service sector within the economic framework of Bangladesh. He underscored the importance of understanding the sector's role not only in driving economic growth but also in identifying and addressing critical gaps inherent within the nation's economic landscape to draw parallels between Bangladesh's trajectory and that of its neighboring countries. He then offered insights into the sector's comparative importance and potential for advancement. He proceeded his speech by giving a historical perspective on the GDP growth of Bangladesh.

Delving into historical data spanning over five decades, from the nation's inception in 1972 to the present, Lt Col Hossain examined the nuanced growth patterns across various sectors of the economy. He elucidated the sectoral contributions to the GDP, highlighting the service sector's remarkable position as a primary driver of economic output. And that is why the significance of even marginal advancements within this sector, delineates its capacity to yield substantial dividends in terms of overall economic prosperity.

Furthermore, Lt Col Hossain compared Bangladesh's export performance in the service sector against that of regional counterparts, particularly India, offering a compelling narrative of the nation's standing on the global economic stage. Through a detailed analysis of recent export data, he highlighted the formidable challenges and untapped potential inherent within Bangladesh's service sector, compelling stakeholders to seize upon the vast opportunities for growth and expansion.

In a critical appraisal of existing research paradigms, he laments the dearth of comprehensive studies focused specifically on the service sector within Bangladesh. He underscored the urgent need for rigorous research initiatives to inform evidence-based policy formulations and drive innovation within the sector. With unwavering conviction, he contends that without a robust foundation of empirical knowledge, the nation risks squandering its potential for economic advancement and global competitiveness. He tried to make a clear object of research; it is important to research the development sectors to increase growth. Without research, it can't be expected to get more fine-tuned or further innovations. So that creates the problems of Bangladesh's service sector. He mentioned how the export of Bangladesh started with the nine RMGs in 1972, and it's now in 5,000 industries. Building upon this foundation, he emphasised the imperative of branding and recognition within the service sector, drawing parallels with the success of the RMG industry. In his speech, he advocated for strategic initiatives

aimed at positioning Bangladesh as a premier destination for service-oriented endeavors, underscoring the pivotal role of policy alignment and skill development in realizing this vision. He, then, talked about the service sector and what are the potential service sectors that Bangladesh could develop and export to other countries, which means having ideas about the potential scope of earnings from the service sectors. Another thing he talked about is the service sector providing agencies, which means how the governance structure is functioning and how to improve that governance structure and that one per cent increase in the service sector by an amount that can receive means the amount that we receive if we increase another sector by double growth that gives the same benefits. So, increasing the same per centage growth in the service sector would help.

In conclusion, he shed light on his call for concerted action and strategic foresight in harnessing the latent potential of the service sector. He again emphasised the imperative of collaborative research endeavors, governance reforms, and incentivisation schemes to catalyse growth and enhance competitiveness in this critical sector. With an unwavering commitment to Bangladesh's vision for prosperity and development, he urged the stakeholders to seize upon the boundless opportunities that lie ahead and pave the way for a vibrant and dynamic service sector poised for success in the global arena. At last, he described the importance of increasing incentives for the researcher to help them identify and map out the overall scenarios of the service sectors in Bangladesh.



H E Mr Iwama Kiminori
Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh

H E Mr Iwama Kiminori commenced his speech by saying how he did not anticipate talking before the audience, but as the discussion turned to be about export diversification, he wanted to contribute a few words. Mr Kiminori emphasised the importance of collaboration within the country rather than focusing on exports to Japan or other countries so that the potential of the local markets here in Bangladesh can be tapped.

Then, acknowledging the obstacles faced by both domestic and foreign manufacturers as the previous speakers mentioned, he suggested inviting more investors and foreign people with the collaboration of Bangladeshi business people and foreign investors. He believed that this collaboration can not only facilitate the enhancement of exports but can create opportunities for the domestic market as well. He, then, concluded by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to speak.



H E Mr Yao Wen
Ambassador of China to Bangladesh

Acknowledging the presence of esteemed guests and expressing gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the seminar, Chinese Ambassador, H E Mr Yao Wen began his speech. He found the initiative of Brisbane to diversify its economy and enhance competencies by 2026 for the graduation of LDCs very perceptible. Hence, he felt obliged as a Chinese Ambassador to contribute to this endeavor by collaborating with other development partners. He, then, shed light on the fact that in the previous year, mangoes from Bangladesh exported to China were not high in number. However, he delightfully gave good news for Bangladesh that the number will increase this year. Because if the ongoing relationship between the two states strengthened and the market of China opened to Bangladesh, there would be millions of tons of mangoes exported to China.

He then mentioned how the contributions of China go beyond the mangoes. They are trying to import jute products from Bangladesh. However, he opined that Bangladesh suffers from marketing issues. And that is why many states are unaware of how good our jute products are. So, acknowledging the challenges, he mentioned how they are collaborating with FBCCI to organise a jute expo in China. He added that this expo will help Bangladesh get more investments and market the diverse products of Bangladesh. He echoed the same words

as the Japanese ambassador that Bangladesh does need more foreign investments. However, he stated that other than focusing on only RMG, Bangladesh should introduce more products that can be exported. If Bangladesh does so, it can export more to other states. He said that China, in that case, will also invest in relevant agencies. In conclusion, he expressed his commitment to working towards a smart Bangladesh and contributing to its economic development.



**H E Mrs Makawadee
Sumitmor**

Ambassador of Thailand to Bangladesh

In the beginning, Royal Thai Ambassador, H E Mrs Makawadee Sumitmor shared insights from her own experiences. Her first point was that the problem regarding the role of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce in Bangladesh is the same for Thailand as well. Even in Thailand, diplomats cannot stick to traditional roles as dedicated commercial wings are missing. So, they need to contact different ministries to collect information and report back to the head office.

In her second point, H E mentioned the potential of Bangladesh to produce high-end products; especially in the RMG sector. She, then, highlighted the problem area of how not being able to produce the RMG under our brand is disrupting branding the country. Hence, her observation is to create products under the label of a Bangladeshi brand, so that the world knows how we are capable of producing high-end products.

Finally, in her last point, she mentioned how FTA and PTA can help diversify the market and Thailand is keen on forging an FTA with Bangladesh to further strengthen economic cooperation between the countries. In conclusion, she thanked the audience and ended her speech.



H E Indra Mani Pandey
*Secretary General, Bay of Bengal
Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical
and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)*

H E Indra Mani Pandey, the secretary general of BIMSTEC started his speech by thanking the chair for giving him the floor. He, then, mentioned how Bangladesh is also trying to achieve free trade agreements among the countries in the Bay of Bengal region. And if the agreement of free trade is negotiated, this will help the export sector of Bangladesh.



**H E Haji Haris bin Haji
Othman**
*High Commissioner of Brunei to
Bangladesh*

H E Haji Haris bin Haji Othman, High Commissioner of Brunei to Bangladesh pointed out Bangladesh's economic diversification is the reason why Brunei is focusing on how to diversify their economy as well, along with signing a few MOUs with Bangladesh in the sectors like- agriculture, fishery, livestock. He also believed that Bangladesh has a lot to offer and to help Brunei.

The excellency also assured about migration that Bangladeshis can migrate to Brunei and invest there in these sectors. He praised the speakers for having learned about these situations, issues, and narratives of Bangladesh in the context of Bangladesh's diversification, its opportunities and challenges, some recommendations, and the options and alternatives for the economic diversification as well. He concluded his speech by raising a question, what specific strategies has the Government of Bangladesh employed to diversify the economy beyond the dominant RMG sector?



H E Nguyen Manh Cuong
*Ambassador of the Social Republic of
Vietnam to Bangladesh*

H E Nguyen Manh Cuong, Ambassador of the Social Republic of Vietnam to Bangladesh, praised the organisers for arranging a seminar on a very timely topic. He said that it is very beneficial for all of the Bangladeshis as well as people of other countries because Vietnam faced the same problem before as a developing country. He shared his chats with the Ambassador about Bangladesh having more investment for the betterment of the environment, for manufacturing, more different kinds of items to small foreign investment which are very important. He further emphasised creating a belief in foreign investment to protect small foreign investments in Bangladesh. He explained two reasons for this. Firstly, the impact here will affect Bangladesh and secondly, we have improved the administration, and it's not only investment that has been improved. As per the present scenario, he said that in the future lies closer cooperation between Vietnam and Bangladesh. He also believed that through many of these seminars, both the countries can each chain their shared interests, which comes from their shared history as developing countries.



Pawan Badhe
*Counsellor, High Commission of India
in Bangladesh*

Mr Pawan Badhe agreed that the previous presentation has correctly underlined the urge in Bangladesh for development and to support Bangladesh in its further growth and development. Then he highlighted two important points from the presentation.

The first one was made on skill development, by which he meant as many of us are aware that India in their recently concluded G20 presidency, had a priority on skill development and global skill mapping, which looks at a structured way in which mapping can be done on the global gaps on skills internationally and in their stands committed in that as well to help a scaling, especially digital scaling of citizens around the world, especially in Bangladesh.

On the note of his second point on the export diversification and free trade agreements, he stated that once the comprehensive economic partnership agreement which is in talks between India and Bangladesh is concluded, both the countries will be able to further enhance their bilateral trade robustly.

REMARKS OF THE SPECIAL GUESTS



Dr Shah Md Helal Uddin

Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Dr Shah Md Helal Uddin is currently working in the Ministry of Agriculture as Additional Secretary. Prior to his present position, he worked in Power Division under Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources as Deputy Secretary, Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary. Before that he served the Ministry of Agriculture as Assistant Chief and Senior Assistant Chief since his joining the Bangladesh Civil Service in 1998. Dr Helal has wide experience in the areas of development policy, planning, and development administration. He attended a good number of training sessions at home and abroad. He pursued academic excellence in diverse fields ranging from agriculture, food and nutrition, governance and public policy, macro-economic analysis, and development planning. Finally, Dr. Helal did PhD in Agricultural Economics in 2014.

Dr Shah Md Helal Uddin, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture at the beginning of his remarks, expressed his gratitude to the organisers for arranging such an important seminar. He stated that agricultural diversity is a crucial factor in fostering economic prosperity. This stage involves the transformation of traditional agriculture into a dynamic and commercial sector by moving the conventional mix of agricultural goods to high-quality products. An agricultural sector that is inclusive and diverse, can serve as a crucial catalyst for Bangladesh's enduring and sustainable economic growth. As Bangladesh has been focusing on diversifying its economy to reduce vulnerability to external shocks and create new growth opportunities, thus, diversification in agriculture requires the highest priority. In this regard, the Bangladesh government is very much aware of its role.

He pointed out that in recent years, the government has also been relentlessly exploring opportunities to expand into international markets in order to engage in global manufacturing and supply chain networks. Bangladesh began significantly exploring different agricultural opportunities throughout the Middle East and across Africa, using both bilateral and international channels. The country contends that sustainable agriculture not only guarantees the continued existence of the country, but also facilitates opportunities for wealth, trade, and the extension of our national influence worldwide. During the process of agricultural diversification, it is important

to acknowledge the significant contribution of agricultural innovation, spearheaded by small and marginal farmers, which has played a crucial role in increasing the production of agricultural commodities and services. He expressed his gratitude to the scientific community in the agricultural sector for their innovative and creative ideas that have greatly transformed our agriculture and significantly contributed to our food self-sufficiency.

He mentioned that economic diversification will be further encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). He concurred that Bangladesh has made sufficient progress towards increasing agricultural product production and diversification. The time for market diversification, he said, is now. The MoA is addressing it. Bangladesh exports agricultural products to other nations. But there are issues, like quality and safety. In this context, he stressed the importance of the private sectors. Even if the regulatory frameworks are getting stronger, it is disheartening to see certain entrepreneurs try to go beyond the rules. It thus places the nation at a disadvantage. Russia was the example he gave. Russia imposed an export prohibition on potatoes a few years ago. The process of winning back trust has not been easy. It takes a long time to rebuild confidence and trust once they are lost. He thus asked that the business sector fulfil its obligation.

Regarding using Nitrophorin agricultural products, he affirmed that the ministry will look into it. He referred to Professor Rozana Rashid, who highlighted the role of agricultural workers in foreign countries. He informed the audience that Bangladesh had an engagement in this regard with Gambia 20 years back. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) was involved with the process. The ministry will take into consideration whether they can replicate such kind of engagement in other countries. He believed that exporting agricultural labour would not be feasible for the nation. Bangladesh has a large number of agricultural experts that the nation should stress exporting.

He claimed that the support measures have increased the competitiveness of the products. There has, however, also been some misuse. Considering the present financial hardship. Aside from remittances and RMG, the agricultural sector has been crucial in mitigating the impact. Agriculture performed the role of the anchor, acting as a shock absorber. At some point, nevertheless, the agricultural product must leave the support system in order to become more competitive. A review of the timeline and modalities is required. He appreciated the point made by the Chinese ambassador regarding mango. He commented that China has been a great partner in regards to agricultural research. In conclusion, he believed the exchange of ideas in the seminar would help more to understand how the diversification in the agriculture sector will contribute to ensuring economic diversification.



Ambassador Masud Bin Momen

*Foreign Secretary (Senior Secretary),
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA),
Government of the People's Republic of
Bangladesh*

Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, a career diplomat, has served as Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary since December 2019, previously served as Bangladesh's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Japan, and Italy, has a history of diplomatic engagements, including his tenure as Bangladesh's Ambassador to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Food Programme, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Ambassador Masud held various positions at the Bangladesh Headquarters, including Director-General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2006 to 2008, and Deputy High Commissioner at the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi from 2004 to 2006. He also served as Director of Poverty Alleviation at the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu, Nepal, from 2001 to 2004. Ambassador Masud served as Director in Charge of the Foreign Ministry's United Nations Wing and Foreign Secretary's Office in Dhaka from 1998 to 2001. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1988. Ambassador Masud holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Tufts University, a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Dhaka, and a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Dhaka. He has achieved First Class First positions in both degrees and has received awards for his achievements. He also received a Rector's Medal from the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre for his outstanding trainee officer performance.

Ambassador Masud Bin Momen began his concluding speech by paying heartfelt tribute to the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with Begum Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib and the martyrs of 15th August, whose sacrifices paved the way for the birth of independent Bangladesh. Bangladesh, the eighth most populous nation globally and strategically located between South East and South Asia, holds immense promise for growth and prosperity. Its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific configuration is of special significance. Since its independence, Bangladesh has undergone a remarkable transformation from being one of the world's poorest nations to emerging as a thriving economy in Asia. Today, it is widely recognised for its robust garment sector, which has been a key driver of economic growth. With an average annual GDP growth rate exceeding 6 per cent over the past decade, Bangladesh has outperformed the South Asian average since 2010. Projections from the London-based Centre for Economics and Business Research indicate that Bangladesh is poised to become one of the world's 20 largest economies by 2038.

He then informed the distinguished audience that Bangladesh has earned international acclaim for its successful poverty alleviation efforts, recognised as a model by the United Nations. It stands as the largest LDC scheduled for graduation in 2026. The future of Bangladesh's economy lies in its focus on industrialisation, although agriculture remains a dominant sector. The service sector is also experiencing rapid growth, contributing to the country's economic diversification and resilience. Ambassador Momen emphasised Bangladesh's commitment to furthering its economic development agenda and leveraging its strengths to create a brighter future for its citizens. He underscored the importance of continued international cooperation and support in achieving

Bangladesh's economic goals, especially as it prepares for graduation from LDC status. With a strong foundation in place and a strategic focus on industry and services, Bangladesh is poised to realise its full economic potential in the coming years.

In his address, Ambassador Momen then highlighted the significance of Vision 2041, as outlined by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This visionary plan emphasised several key priorities, including food security, access to education and healthcare, gender equality, and good governance. It underscored the government's commitment to industrialisation and digitalisation, aiming to enhance exports, diversify the economy, and attract increased foreign investment.

The latest election manifesto of the ruling government also underscored these critical issues, aligning with the long-term vision set forth in Vision 2041. Recognising the importance of achieving high-income status by 2041, Bangladesh acknowledges the need to diversify its economy. Currently, the RMG sector constitutes eighty-five per cent of exports, posing a risk of vulnerability due to limited destination markets. To mitigate this risk and transition towards a new path characterised by diversity, inclusivity, and sustainability, Bangladesh is committed to implementing strategic initiatives aimed at expanding its export base, promoting economic diversification, and fostering a business environment conducive to sustainable growth and development.

Bangladesh strategically harnesses digital technologies, recognising its vast potential for growth. Ambassador Momen then mentioned that the panellists present on this occasion have identified numerous products and areas ripe for development. However, he emphasised that although local industries are safeguarded, to maintain foreign currency reserves, raising tariffs on certain goods has thus far been the favoured solution. While this boosts tax revenue, it also challenges the goal of enhancing resource mobilisation while ensuring competitiveness and fairness. He then urged the audience consider both sides of this coin in this regard.



To propel Bangladesh forward, Ambassador Momen emphasised to diversify the country's industrial and export portfolios, making the economy more resilient to global market dynamics. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has consistently emphasised the importance of product and market diversification. He emphasised diligently connecting with markets, offering a competitive array of products. He informed the audience that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with the missions abroad to explore new markets, but he clarified that efforts alone may not suffice to expand Bangladesh's economy. Support from the private sector, other government entities, and think tanks are still needed.

To achieve this, he urged to streamline bureaucratic processes, upgrade digital and physical infrastructure, simplify investment and business regulations, and provide incentives to foster a more diverse industrial base and promote innovation. Relying solely on traditional subsidies and export incentives may not align with Bangladesh's post-LDC scenario. Instead, he urged to adopt a forward-looking policy mix that encourages learning, innovation, and risk-taking, while creating opportunities for new businesses and sectors. The export-led growth model, driven by competitive labour costs and trade preferences, has its limits. Ambassador Momen has deemed it imperative that the people of Bangladesh transition to a more sustainable and diversified economic model, one that ensures long-term growth and prosperity for Bangladesh.

In 52 years of independence, Bangladesh has seen remarkable leadership and achievements that pave the way for transitioning to a new development paradigm focused on inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. The nation can now capitalise on several strengths, including a bold political vision supported by the strong and committed leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, strategic geographic location, and significant global economic potential driven by a burgeoning young workforce, and the wealth of knowledge from local enterprises. Additionally, there is a need to foster synergy in international partnerships and tailor trade and investment agreements to support sustainable local industrial development. As graduation from LDC status looms, Bangladesh finds itself at a critical juncture to implement reforms that will sustain its progress. This pivotal moment offers an opportunity for Bangladesh to lay the groundwork for a smooth and irreversible transition while also serving as a role model for other graduating LDCs.

Bangladesh's future prosperity relies on the transformation and upgrading of its industrial landscape, actively shaping both global and local production, consumption, and trade patterns. Ambassador Momen emphasised that the people of Bangladesh possess numerous advantages to leverage, including an expanding domestic market, a reputation as a reliable business partner, and a history of successful local brands and companies. A dynamic private sector committed to innovation, along with equal engagement from international partners, is crucial to realising these benefits. A clear roadmap must be drawn to guide everyone forward. It is imperative to identify a few priority sectors with comparative advantages and high potential to complement the RMG products. Collaboration among industry stakeholders, policymakers, and businesses is essential in formulating this roadmap. Sectors such as leather, jute, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, and IT-enabled services with high value addition deserve special consideration. Ambassador Momen then ended with relaying his firm belief that through well-coordinated efforts and shared responsibilities among the government, private sector, and international partners, success in shared endeavours can be achieved.



**Mr Muhammad Abul Kalam
Azad, MP**

*Former Principal Coordinator for SDGs,
Prime Minister's Office, Government of
the People's Republic of Bangladesh*

Mr Md Abul Kalam Azad is currently a Member of Bangladesh Parliament (Jamalpur-5). He was the country coordinator for Bangladesh's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leading the planning and implementation process from the Prime Minister's Office, demonstrating quick decision-making quality, and promoting pro-people administration in the Civil Service. Mr Azad previously coordinated administrative, development, and reform processes in the Prime Minister's Office. He has supported the implementation of 100 Economic Zones, Hi-tech Parks, and Public Private Partnership initiatives, supervised NGO coordination, and provided policy support for investment climate for the Board of Investment and Bangladesh Investment Development Authority. Mr. Azad, a long-time manager in the Economic Relations Division of the Government, has successfully managed foreign investment, foreign grants, and bilateral and multilateral investment dialogues, resulting in numerous high-value agreements. He has 34 years of civil service experience, including field level development administration, judicial service, and human resource development activities. He also worked in the private sector, including as chairman and director of various companies, financial institutes, sports, and aviation. He has been instrumental in the administrative reforms of the Bangladesh Civil Service, including the introduction of the Annual Performance Appraisal system. He was awarded as the first youth President of Rover Scouts and the Silver Tiger as an adult leader. As President of Bangladesh Scouts, he focused on character building for youths at Asia Pacific Region, and global levels.

Mr Muhammad Abul Kalam Azad, MP, said that he agreed with ideas and recommendations from speakers before him, to a large extent. He also agreed with the idea of prioritisation which would come first and might be looked into. He wanted specifically to draw attention to issues of Bangladesh's economic diversification, including growth, GDP, exports and imports, and life experiences, that became crucial in facing the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Regarding diversification, he asked why RMG constituted about 80-85 per cent of Bangladesh's exports. This must be looked into and the country could obviously learn from its friends—China, Vietnam, India, and others. But what could be learning points from RMG? He asked this because the sector was facing all kinds of challenges, namely, labour crisis, disputes, laws, dwindling capital investments, poor infrastructures, tax and tariff problems, fire incidents, Rana Plaza like events, everything. But still, the sector is flourishing. Why does Bangladesh have well-certified garments factories? What might be the reason behind that?

He said that in the 1980s, a Bangladeshi former civil service official, Mr Nurul Kadir Khan, began to work with the RMG sector. When he began this business, he also trained a huge number of workers from Korea, almost all of whom later became owners of RMG factories themselves. His robust steps contributed immensely to such scenarios. On the issue of policy, he referred back to Dr Siddiqui who spoke on policy change. That unique change came in the form of bonded warehouses at factory premises. It was quite unthinkable in those days. Customs authorities did not agree with these but the government did and they decided to have such warehouses at the premises of owners. It has been working very well ever since. But now time has come to what else would be needed for diversification. In this regard, Mr Azad said many important issues came from the presentations,

and discussions and those should be prioritised, e.g., jute and jute products, leather, vegetables, pharmaceuticals, muslin, Jamdani, and of course, skill development for service sectors. His idea, therefore, suggested sitting the private sector, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), economic zones authority, etc., together, with a view to identifying potential areas and work accordingly on what steps should be taken; learnings in these regards should be first in Bangladesh and then from outside.

Some major strengths of the country are, that it has about 100 economic zones, the BIDA, the National Skill Development Authority, plans for the next 100 years, etc. In addition, there were plans for implementing the SDGs, Smart Bangladesh by 2041, Developed Bangladesh by 2041, Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan, and the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100. Therefore, there must not be room for losing ways. He concluded the speech by urging all for sitting together with a view to finding out issues, where and what kind of policy changes would be required.

REMARKS BY THE CHIEF GUEST



Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP

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

Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP is the current Foreign Minister of Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. He served as a former Minister in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, and as a state minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from January 2009 to July 2024. They also held positions in the Ministry of Environment & Forest and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He completed his PhD in Environmental Science Environmental Chemistry, Limburg University, Belgium, 2001 and he has several master's degree in Human Ecology (Environmental Science) from Vrije University of Brussels, Belgium, International Politics from University of Libre-de-Brussels and Inorganic Chemistry from Chattogram University, Bangladesh. He also has an International Certificate in Human Ecology, International Association of Human Ecologist, Geneva, Switzerland, and a Certificate in French Language (02 years), Alliance Franchise, Chattogram, Bangladesh. He is a former Visiting Fellow and Academic Board Member of European Institute for Strategic Studies (CERIS) Brussels, Belgium and he is a part time teacher for many public and private institutions in Bangladesh. Dr Hasan Mahmud, an environmentalist, was awarded the "Certificate of Honorable Mention" by Green Cross International for his significant role in combating global climate change. As the President of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment, Forest, and Climate Change of Bangladesh National Parliament, he has been instrumental in addressing environmental and climate-threatening issues. He has been asked to give special guest lectures at prestigious universities such as Cornell University in New York, USA, Harvard University in Boston, USA, and Melbourne University in Melbourne, Australia.

The Chief Guest said, that over the last 15 years or so, Bangladesh made tremendous progress. However, the country also has the highest density of population in the world, with 1,260 people per square kilometre. On the other hand, India is a populous country too, but has about more than 450 people per square kilometre. In China, the figure is around 350. Bangladesh moreover, is a country of climatic events. Every year, nearly 20 per cent of its total land area goes under water due to floods and in every 10 years, the per centage rises to 70; this is a floodplain. There are droughts, cyclones and other climatic events. The country is affected by all negative factors of climate change; still, it has shown the ability of how to prosper, over the last 15 years. It used earlier to be a member of the LDCs group, but now has graduated into a developing country. This would be declared in 2026 if there would not be another COVID-like pandemic which has delayed the declaration. There was food deficit in the mid-1950s when the population was 55 million; he referred by this to the then East Pakistan. Since then, not a single inch of arable land increased, rather decreased 25 to 30 per cent, approximately, owing to the expansion

of cities, infrastructure buildups, industrialisation, sheltering increased number of populations, etc. Today, the population is 170-175 million.

Referring to the Foreign Secretary, he said the country ranked eighth in terms of population which earlier was seventh. Pakistan has now claimed that spot as its population is 241 million. However, during Bangladesh's independence in 1971, this was 55 million whereas Bangladesh's was 70 million. Thus, it could be seen Pakistan has surpassed Bangladesh regarding the growth rate in population. Dr Mahmud expressed concerns that Bangladesh could retain its number eighth position due to similar high growth rates in other countries of the world as well. Despite losing a lot of arable lands, Bangladesh became self-sufficient in foodgrain production. Back in 1972, its foodgrain production was 11 million metric tons which currently stood at about 40 million metric tons. This impressive achievement wondered not only the people of Bangladesh, but also the World Food Programme (WFP). Bangladesh is a case study now for other countries. The WFP shows Bangladesh as such to others that, how one of the most densely populated countries, affected by negative factors of climatic change and events, has become self-sufficient in foodgrain production. Back in 2009, when the current government assumed power, Dr Mahumd was appointed as the State Minister for Foreign Affairs. The GDP then was about US 80 billion which is now US\$578 billion, a sixfold growth. The budget was Tk.0.8trillion but now is Tk.7.67 trillion. About 40 per cent people lived below the poverty line, which dropped now to 18.6-18.7 per cent. Furthermore, in 2009, extreme poverty was 20 per cent which is just 5 per cent at present. These figures show how Bangladesh progressed over the last 15 years; the achievements were not because of some magic but the magical leadership of the honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In terms of monetary value, the export basket also increased but unfortunately, is not still diversified. Dr Mahmud said he was highly satisfied with the learned expressions and comments by different people at the seminar.



Diversification of exports is closely associated with the rapid and inclusive economic growth of countries. In the Eighth Five Year Plan of Bangladesh, issues concerning the diversification of exports were considered in a broad spectrum that included not only products and geographical diversification, but also intermediate goods, quality, and goods to service.

To achieve the goal of exports diversification, the government focused on three aspects: the trade policy regime ensuring export competitiveness, reducing the anti-export bias of the trade regime, and reducing the anti-diversification bias of exports. For diversification of the export basket, several sectors had been identified as high priority ones and for special development. Highest priority sectors included value-added RMG, garments accessories, software and ICT products, pharmaceuticals, plastic products, footwear, jute goods, agricultural and agro-processed products, shipbuilding, and skilled manpower. Here, Dr Mahmud spoke on the Netherlands. The country is one-third or less the size of Bangladesh but has yearly agricultural exports of US\$72 billion; of this, US\$50 billion is their domestic product and US\$22 billion is value-added, which they import from others and then add value into those. Conversely, Bangladesh's total export is not US\$72 billion yet. There remained a lot of scope to export agricultural goods as the country is quite fertile. He said he was happy to hear from the Chinese ambassador and other diplomats who were willing to import Bangladeshi agricultural products, e.g., mango. If someone would go to Europe and buy mangoes from super shops, for Dr Mahmud, it would not be mangoes but some sort of vegetable. Mango export has a lot of potential and so do other agricultural products. Last year, earnings from such exports were about US\$1 billion; this year, the target is twice that figure. However, in near future, Bangladesh could export over US\$ 0 billion of agricultural goods.

For diversifying the export basket, the Bangladesh government is providing various facilities; it has planned for providing facilities to priority and special development sectors which include project loans, reduced interest rates, income tax rebates, possible financial incentives and subsidies for utility services like electricity, water and gas in line with WTO rules, export credit at lower interest rates, softer duty drawback, bond facilities, duty-free imports of equipment for setting up compliant enterprises, etc. At the operational level, the Business Promotion Council has been established for different sectors. There are also plans for inter-sector projects to address issues such as the reviewing bond system, duty draw-back, subsidies, etc, to keep export prices. The country today is facing a lot of challenges after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the war in Gaza, as the demand for garments products has decreased and so is the buying capacity of buyers where these are exported to. The geopolitical scenario in the vicinity of Bangladesh is also evolving all the time, giving rise to both opportunities and challenges for the country, of which it remains adequately aware. Hence, the government is taking prudent steps in that regard, keeping the emerging geopolitical scenario in view. Measures to attract FDI and establish new special economic zones (SEZs) have been strengthened. Decision has been taken to set up about 100 SEZs throughout the country and Dr. Mahmud estimated nearly 20 had already been set up where many industries went into production.

When Bangladesh became independent in 1971, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the economy in 1972 was around 52 per cent while industrial sector was only 5 per cent. Nonetheless, in 2022, the agricultural sector's contribution came down to 11.22 per cent while industrial sector's rose to 34; Dr. Mahmud expected this would rise to 35 this year. With the industrial sector's contribution growing day by day, that indicates Bangladesh is gradually becoming an industrialised nation and will hopefully contribute close to 50 per cent into Bangladesh's GDP. These have been possible because of pragmatic, visionary plans undertaken by honourable Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina. The whole world is going through the 4th Industrial Revolution. The first one was the invention of the steam engine in 1752. After this, Bangladesh lagged behind advanced countries like those of Europe by 150 years. Because, the first steam engine-powered train ran in Bombay in 1852, that was a gap of 100 years. The second Revolution was the invention of electricity in 1821 by Michael Faraday and it was introduced first in Kolkata in 1901, again lagging behind by 80 years. Third Revolution was the invention of microprocessors and personal computers in the 1960s whereas these began to be used in Bangladesh at the beginning of the 1990s, showing a delay of 30 years. However, the country would not remain behind as far as the 4th Revolution was concerned. The current government floated the slogan “Digital Bangladesh” back in 2008 to transform the country into one such in reality. Many had laughed at the plan, even party workers and supporters asked what it was, as they hardly had any idea about it. At present, the slogan is a reality. The country has 170 million people with 190 million SIM card users. One could easily see the transformation. Someone from Bangladesh is working in the Middle East and when his father calls him from Manpura or Sandweep, Kutubdia or Bhola Island, for money to use in familial purposes, the worker can send that in minutes; this is digital Bangladesh. When Dr Mahmud himself took admission at university, he had then to stand in the line for half of a day and another half day plus a few hours to deposit the slip. Nowadays, people apply and receive the results online, another example of digital Bangladesh’s progress. It is truly a digital country today. Dr Mahmud in 2011 visited Char Kukri Mukri with Helen Clark (8th Administrator of the UN Development Programme). In those days, there was no national grid electricity in Char Kukri Mukri and solar panels were used for that purpose instead; even computers were run by solar panels. Dr Mahmud and Ms Clark spoke with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh through a video conference from there. When Ms Clark went back to New York, she said the resolution she got in Char Kukri Mukri, a remote island in Bangladesh, sometimes she missed that in New York. This is another notable example of digital Bangladesh. On the 4th Industrial Revolution, Dr Mahmud said, ICT and robotics were the parameters of that event. For that, skilled manpower would be necessary which must be emphasised. He concluded by saying very useful discussions took place in the seminar and valuable suggestions came up, asked BISS to summarise all these and disseminate widely. This would make the seminar truly successful.



CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR



Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker

*Chairman, Bangladesh Institute of
International and Strategic Studies (BISS)*

Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker, a 1986 batch member of Bangladesh Foreign Service (BCS-FA), joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1989. He holds a BA and MA in English Literature and Linguistics from Dhaka University, obtaining a MA 1st class 1st. They completed a second master's in international policy and Practice at George Washington University in the USA. He also received a diploma in International Relations and Diplomacy from the International Institute of Public Administration in Paris and participated in a short course in International Law at the Hague Academy of International Law. Ambassador Sarker has a long diplomatic career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, serving as Director General (Europe) and Director General (International Organisations). He has also served in Bangladesh Missions in Paris, Kathmandu, Cairo, Hong Kong SAR, Stockholm, Beirut, and Tehran. He has also served as Bangladesh's Consul General in Hong Kong SAR, Ambassador to Sweden, Lebanon, and Iran, and as a delegate to UNESCO. Sarker has also participated in SAARC meetings, climate change negotiations, and OIC Foreign Ministers meetings. He acted as the Chief Conference Coordinator and hosted the 45th OIC-CFM in Bangladesh in 2018, chairing most OIC meetings for nearly a year. He represented Bangladesh in international conferences and played a crucial role in preparing for Bangladesh's claim of the continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal, the framework agreement with Russia on the Ruppur Nuclear Power Plant Project, and the ICJ case on the Rohingya genocide.

Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker went ahead with his concluding speech by extending a warm welcome to the guests who presented their valuable knowledge and comments at the seminar. He, then, added the discussion was very probing and relevant for making meaningful and faster progress towards the realisation of the dream of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which is Golden Bengal, a Bangladesh prosperous and developed. He further added, Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is also relentlessly pursuing the visions that once the father of the nation saw. The chairman highlighted the fact that Bangladesh has already achieved the vision 2021 and to make the Vision 2041 true, the takeaways from this session are indeed of great importance.

He emphasised the urgency of economic diversification. The chairman voiced his concerns about how limiting the economy to one single sector or a few will not be enough to experience growth. He then suggested that the economy of Bangladesh should be export-driven more. To make the economy export-driven, the chairman said Bangladesh needs to increase expertise in as many sectors as possible. This will create diversification and help survive the shocks and disruptions happening in the world. So, this is of great urgency.

He, then, mentioned the example of the RMG sector to further his point. The RMG sector occupies 85 per cent of Bangladeshi exports which boils down to the fact that, for export Bangladesh is depending on one sector majorly. However, the chairman believed that Bangladesh has a root in tradition and culture. Hence, Bangladesh has a history of reviving from ancient times to modern times that gives natural strength and foundation to replicate and develop many other sectors. According to him, Bangladesh has brain strength, which is a great opportunity to enhance IT and many other related sectors. He, then, again said this use of brain strength will lead to the enhancement of the service sector; lifting the export sector. has been very fruitful and very productive.

In the last phases of his speech, the chairman again thanked the distinguished guests who were present in the seminar and gave their valuable recommendations to identify the areas to diversify and also on how to proceed for the future. He, then, referring to the comment of the Foreign Secretary, said, what Bangladesh needs is a road map to address the urgent need. And a precise report on the seminar can play a crucial role in creating the road map.

He further added that based on the seminar, BISS will also make a list of recommendations to help explore what can be done in terms of diversification, policy reform, and infrastructural development; rather than only waiting for the government to do the work alone. The investment and participation from the development partners are also pivotal for diversification. What was intriguing was that the countries presented in the seminar expressed their spontaneous support for investing, and developing trades with Bangladesh. So that means, the path towards economic diversification is going to be a very concrete step forward.



Then, not to repeat what the speakers and discussants had already talked about, the chairman started to conclude his speech. He thanked the Honorable Foreign Minister for gracing the event with his presence and giving directions about how to diversify the economy. He also appreciated Dr Hasan Mahmud's suggestion on building economic resilience and autonomy to cruise confidently in the global economic and political situation. As the transition is happening, we have to go beyond 2026.

Finally, the chairman expressed gratitude towards the panelists, special guests, and participants for their professional and scholarly contributions to the seminar on diversification. He particularly acknowledged the overwhelming enthusiasm and attendance, highlighting it as a testament to the importance of the topic. He extended his appreciation to the colleagues from BISS for their efforts in organising the event and the director general for his contribution. Concluding with an invitation to lunch, the chairman showed appreciation once more, emphasising the collective effort that made the seminar a success.



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