

**Speech of Bangladesh Ambassador Mohammad Ziauddin on “Bangladesh’s policy priorities and its relationship with the United States and the regional powers”,
Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame, Indiana
Room C104, Hesburg Center, 1:30 p.m., November 7, 2016**

**Merilyn Keough Dean and Professor of History R. Scott Appleby,
Distinguished Faculty Members and Guests,
Scholars and Students,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good afternoon to you all.

It is an honor and pleasure to speak before you all. I thank you for your kind presence. I also thank Professor R. Scott Appleby for inviting me to be here this afternoon. Today’s topic on which I am to speak is “Bangladesh’s policy priorities and its relationship with the United States and the regional powers”.

Bangladesh is a country of around 56,000 square miles and 160 million people. Its size is that of the State of Iowa which has a population of merely 3.1 million. It is strategically located with India and its population of 1.25 billion on the west; Southeast Asia with over half a billion on the east; and China with 1.4 billion in the north. It is located in the center of a vast market of three billion people. It has thus the prospect of being the economic hub of the region.

Bangladesh emerged from British colonial rule as Eastern Wing of Pakistan on 14 August 1947. A year after in 1948 its journey to independence began when the students of the Dhaka University led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, later the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh, rebelled against the Pakistan government and stood against imposition of Urdu language of the Western Wing of Pakistan as the only state language in the country when Bangla language was spoken by the majority of the people of the whole of Pakistan. It reflected the West Wing’s mindset to treat its East Wing as its colony. The resultant rift began the process of the parting of ways. The days followed were open, ruthless exploitation by West Pakistan of the East Wing.

The culmination was on 26 March 1971 when the poised West Pakistan Army unleashed a brutal genocide on the Bengali people. A nine-month bloody war of liberation ensued with 3 million people killed and 200,000 women violated by the Pakistani army and their collaborators. Victory came on 16 December 1971 to a new nation completely devastated by the ravages of a brutal war.

True, Bangladesh was born with many difficult challenges. Statehood had to be consolidated, economy reconstructed, infrastructures built, social inequities reduced, membership of international organizations attained. To do that, the people’s spirit had to be revived from the tragedy of genocide. The Father of the Nation’s charismatic leadership gave them that spirit and new life. But on 15 August 1975, he and 18 members of his family were assassinated by some military miscreants ending his efforts.

At the time of the assassination, only the two daughters of the Father of the Nation survived as they were abroad. Both took oath to redeem the wrong done to their family and to the new nation. They began their struggle in exile against the military and quasi-military dictators who ruled Bangladesh for the next twenty one years. The eldest daughter, Sheikh Hasina began strengthening her father's political party, the Awami League. A time came when the party led the people to rise up and pave the way for the two sisters to return home. Their struggle continued with 19 attempts on Sheikh Hasina's life. She finally got elected as Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1996 to 2001, and then again from 2009 till now.

Bangladesh's overall development under Sheikh Hasina's leadership began in right earnest from January 2009 when her government took office and initiated her "Vision 2021", and "Digital Bangladesh". She began by restoring secularism in the constitution; ensuring independence of the judiciary; strengthening the election, anti-corruption and human rights commissions; digitalizing public services; and implementing zero tolerance against terrorism and religious extremism.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's policy priorities are based on geopolitical realities and socio-economic challenges. There are, therefore, a number of top priorities. I will go over a few of them – the topmost ones. The first is the adverse impacts of climate change on Bangladesh, a deltaic country with 57 trans-boundary rivers originating in the Himalayas, a 710 kilometer of coastline with 12 districts directly exposed to the sea. Science informs that 1° C rise in global temperature would lead to a meter rise in sea level submerging a fifth of Bangladesh and displacing over 30 million people.

Recent years have seen the increase and intensity of the vagaries of nature due to climate change adversely impacting agriculture, water resources, forest, fisheries, livestock, infrastructure, settlement, health and social services, and overall development. For some time, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina went around the world telling about Bangladesh's predicament and the urgent need of an international agreement on climate change measures, and assistance to the most vulnerable countries.

At one point, she felt her pleas fell on deaf ears. So she decided that Bangladesh will have to look after itself. She adopted a Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy with a 134-point adaptation and mitigation action plan. She also setup a Climate Change Trust Fund with US\$ 300 million from own resources and a Climate Change Green Fund with resources from our development partners. Her efforts on climate change earned her the UN's Champion of the Earth Award in 2015, and recently, the Foreign Policy magazine's "Global Thinker" on Climate Change.

Another top priority of Sheikh Hasina's government is food security. She believes right to food was the first among all fundamental and human rights. So she mobilized all efforts to achieving food security and reducing malnutrition in her first term. In recognition for her success in attaining food security, in 1998, the FAO awarded Bangladesh its prestigious CERES Medal.

Today, Bangladesh is the 4th largest rice producing country in the world and a food exporting country. A recent UN Report highlights Bangladesh will end hunger by 2030.

A notable way to decrease hunger is through increasing employment of women. Their employment is on the increase in Bangladesh, particularly in garments and aquaculture industries. The government is also working with World Food Program to provide meals to school children. The "Food for Education" Program developed in the 1990s with fund from the US have been providing cash or food vouchers to poor families who have pledged to send their children to school to be educated citizens.

Education of the population is among the topmost priorities of Sheikh Hasina's government. It is also enshrined in the Bangladesh Constitution. Sheikh Hasina considers education as imperative for a knowledge based society, which can sustain economic growth and rid itself of all ills, particularly poverty. With that perspective, Sheikh Hasina formulated the National Education Policy 2010 that calls for streamlining the curricula of the primary and secondary level institutions.

Significant are the changes brought in the Curricula of Madrasas to bring them within the fold of modern education. To ensure better livelihood to Madrasa students and to reduce the risk of their adopting extremist ideologies, vocational and professional courses have been made available at the secondary level madrasa.

Another significant measure is promotion of ICT for achieving "Digital Bangladesh". Free internet services have been arranged for schools; over 200 text books made available on-line; and multimedia classrooms and ICT labs set up in some secondary and higher secondary schools. Innovative is the mobile computer labs teaching children the use of computers all over the country. It may be mentioned here that 320 million free text books have been given this year to 40 million students in the primary schools. This practice of giving free text books was started by Sheikh Hasina from 2010, a year after she assumed the office of the Prime Minister which was in January 2009.

The government's policy driven measures have led to almost 100 % enrolments at the primary level. Special emphasis is on girls' education which has been made free up to higher secondary level. Special stipends are also given to girls to increase their enrollment in higher secondary and graduation levels. Such measures in primary and secondary levels have helped achieve a prime target of MDG-3. Currently the male-female ratio at secondary level is 47 to 53. Noteworthy is "Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust Fund Act 2011" that ensures education for poor, meritorious students.

Women empowerment is another top priority of the government. Sheikh Hasina, a staunch advocate of an inclusive, secular, socio-economically developed Bangladesh, believes this is achievable only with equal participation of women in all walks of life. She, therefore enacted the Women Development Policy 2014 to place women in the forefront of national development. She also enacted the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 to protect women and children rights. She also adopted policies to help women leadership to grow from the grassroots to the top levels in the government, and in the private sector.

The World Economic Forum- Global Gender Gap Report 2014, ranked Bangladesh 10 out of 142 countries for political empowerment of women. Bangladesh leads South Asia on Women Empowerment. Bangladesh is possibly the only country today in the world where women simultaneously hold the high positions of the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Deputy Leader of the Parliament. Women have also reached high positions in the judiciary, administration, civil service, armed forces and law enforcement agencies.

In all services, women have 15 % posts reserved for them. In primary schools, 60 % posts of teachers are reserved for women. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina first started recruitment of women in military service. Today, women participate in UN Peace Keeping Missions. Two women police contingents are presently participating in UN missions- one in the Ivory Coast and the other in Haiti.

Among the topmost priorities of Sheikh Hasina's government is countering terrorism. She is herself, one of the worst victims of terrorism. Among world leaders, there is no one else who had lost 18 close members of the family, including father, mother, and three brothers with one only 10 years old, in a mass massacre. There is no one who was exiled twice from her own country and yet fought her way back to return home to fight for people's rights. There is no one who has survived as many as 19 attempts on her life. The assassination attempt on her life on 21 August 2005 was the most astounding. Sheikh Hasina was addressing a public rally held to protest the rise of terrorism and extremism in the country when 13 grenades were lobbed killing 24 people, mostly women and injuring over 500 with splinters.

It is, therefore clear why Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is firmly committed to a "Zero Tolerance" Policy against terrorism and extremism. She is committed not to allow Bangladesh to be used by any terrorist group or entity against any other state. In her present term, a robust legal, regulatory and institutional regime has been developed to combat terrorism and violent extremism. The Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, further amended in 2012 and 2013 provided the legal bedrock for comprehensive counter-terrorism measures.

Other regulatory tools adopted by her are the Anti-Terrorism Rules 2013 specifying responsibilities of the respective law enforcement agencies; Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2012 and Mutual Legal Assistance Act 2012; Money Laundering Prevention Rules 2013; and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Rules 2013. Bangladesh has active counter-terrorism cooperation with the United States. In October 2013, Bangladesh and the USA launched a Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Initiative. The US has been helping build Bangladesh's counter-terrorism capacity by providing training and equipment support.

To defeat terrorism and extremism ideologically, Bangladesh is entrenching democracy, secularism and women empowerment. To uphold peace and the rule of law and to end the culture of impunity, Sheikh Hasina's government remains pledge-bound to bring justice to the perpetrators of the war crimes of 1971 Liberation War. The International Crimes Tribunals-

Bangladesh (ICT-BD), established in 2010, have completed trials of some of these war criminals, maintaining high standards of international judicial process and practice.

Recent history indicates that the international community showed wisdom and conscience in bringing the criminals of the Nazi Holocaust, Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, to justice. The US Secretary of State John Kerry very rightly and categorically said that the brutal killings of ISIL are genocide, and called for the trials of the perpetrators. Bangladesh agrees with Secretary Kerry's views. In fact, Bangladesh does not believe in the existence of the self-proclaimed ISIL.

Bangladesh's foreign policy is based on the Father of the Nation's dictum: "Friendship with all and malice towards none." Sheikh Hasina, during her two terms has followed it to the letter. Bangladesh thus enjoys unparalleled confidence and trust of its neighbors; good bilateral relations with the key players in international politics; and vibrant diplomatic presence and proactive role in the United Nations.

Recent international successes and Bangladesh's affirmative position in the world are reflected in the election of the Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; a Bangladeshi Parliamentarian as President of Inter-Parliamentary Union; Membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council (2015-2017); and as Executive Member of International Telecommunication Union for the second time.

Distinguished All,

Bangladesh and the USA have, over four decades, built a strong bilateral relationship based on common values and mutual respect. During the genocidal war on the unarmed people of Bangladesh by the Pakistani army, many US politicians and statesmen, and most importantly, the American people stood by our side. Leading them all, was the famous Senator Edward Kennedy of the State of Massachusetts. The US Consul General in Dhaka, Archer K. Blood also played a valuable role with his reports on the genocide drawing the attention of the US leadership.

When the Father of the Nation was in jail in Pakistan, 54 US Congressmen wrote a letter to the then Secretary of State, Bill Rogers to help in stopping his hanging by the military rulers. American legends - Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Ravi Shankar and Billy Preston held a Concert for Bangladesh in New York in 1971 to draw the world's attention to the systematic massacre of the Bengali people. Lately, Sheikh Hasina has been honoring all those foreign friends who stood by us in 1971, a good many of who are Americans.

Since 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President Barack Obama, have institutionalized our two countries' bilateral relations. Senior officials of our countries hold annual partnership dialogue, and regular dialogue on security and military affairs. Trade and Investment Dialogue is held annually under the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA). Bangladesh also participates in President Obama's four initiatives, especially on health, food security and climate change.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken personal interest to work with President Obama in Equal Futures Partnership Initiative pledging a world with equal opportunities for women in all spheres of human endeavors. Collaboration is also very strong in counter-terrorism. Both countries condemn mindless violence and extremism in the name of ideology or political expression. Both believe violence has no space in democracy.

Both also consider each other as important partners in democratic governance, integration with global economy, disaster management, climate change adaptation, food security, human rights, religious freedom and global peacekeeping. We are working on Duty Free Quota Free access of our goods to the US market as enjoyed by some other LDCs. We seek equal treatment of all LDCs from the US as has been given by the European Union to all LDCs.

In the sphere of US-Bangladesh trade relations, interestingly, Bangladesh is the 4th largest apparel exporter to the US. This industry employs 4 million workers, of which 90% are girls from poor families. Their earnings have empowered them. Their contributions now provide better nutritional food, allow siblings to go to schools, and give them a respected voice at home. Their empowerment is helping reduce poverty, control population growth and increase literacy. Significantly, this trend is supporting our fight against extremism and terrorism by transforming our society into a progressive one. For these efforts to succeed, it is vital for the US to give Bangladesh apparel duty and quota free access to its market. It would expand Bangladesh apparel industry, employ and empower more girls and help establish a modern society. USA would then be as fair as the 52 other countries, like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, China, Japan, India and the European Union that gives Bangladesh duty and quota free access to their markets.

Bangladesh is an important buyer of US products and services. Our national airlines, the Biman, is procuring ten aircrafts from Boeing, six of which have been delivered. US oil and gas exploration giant, Chevron and many American companies like the Ellicott Dredgers, GEC are engaged in Bangladesh. USA is now the largest investor in Bangladesh. Last year's (2015) FDI from the USA to Bangladesh was US \$ 560 million, accounting for one-fourth of the total global FDI into Bangladesh.

USA has also become Bangladesh's largest single export destination. The bilateral trade between the two countries reached US \$ 7 billion last year. USA is also Bangladesh's second largest development partner. In the USA, we have over half a million Bangladeshi Americans, mostly, professionals, scientists, engineers, doctors, and students who all are making good contribution in enhancing ties between our two countries.

Recently on 29 August, Secretary Kerry visited Bangladesh and held bilateral talks with the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. During the meeting, Secretary Kerry recognized the impressive progress achieved by Bangladesh in food security, health, education and many of the socio-economic sectors over the past few years and commended the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in advancing the development of Bangladesh. Secretary Kerry greatly appreciated Bangladesh's partnership with the US in the area of security and development. He lauded the recent move of the Law Enforcement Agencies to curb the terrorist activities and

offered his government's support and assistance to the tremendous efforts of government of Bangladesh in this regard.

In the South Asian region, Bangladesh believes cooperation is imperative for optimum utilization of resources and thus development, peace and stability of the region. Our efforts are therefore focused on strengthening all regional organizations like the BIMSTEC, BCIM-EC. Lately, BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) has been progressing in developing infrastructures, trade, joint hydro-power project, and people to people contacts.

India, which shares land and maritime boundary with Bangladesh on four sides, stood by our people's struggle for independence in 1971. Therefore, Bangladesh, under Sheikh Hasina, considers India as our true friend. In those dark days, India gave shelter to over ten million Bangladeshi refugees. India also allowed our government in exile to operate from its territory till victory and independence of Bangladesh was achieved.

Therefore, Sheikh Hasina, during her terms as Prime Minister of Bangladesh, made all efforts to consolidate our two countries' relations. The Indian leadership was equally responsive. Regular visits of the Heads of State and Government have been taking place for years. Bangladesh and India have also been working closely in counter - terrorism in the region. Meetings are held regularly between our border security guards to eliminate cross border terrorism and other criminal activities.

Bangladesh and India are interconnected by road, rail, water and air. Both are involved in sub-regional and greater regional connectivity initiatives. Energy connectivity has recently been added as a new dimension in the two countries' relations. Recently, the maritime and land boundaries demarcation between the countries have been solved peacefully setting a unique precedent. The relationship is at its best.

With China, Bangladesh has developed good relationship through the years. It has grown in many fronts. On trade, China is our largest trading partner. The two way trade volume was US \$ 9 billion in 2014. In the last five years Bangladesh's import from China grew by 20 % and exports by 40%. China is also a major investor in Bangladesh. Two economic zones have been earmarked for China and Chinese investors. China has been for decades a dependable partner in developing our countrywide infrastructure. Bangladesh receives military aid and training and technology from China.

Chinese President Xi Jinping recently paid a milestone visit to Bangladesh on 14 October which was the first visit by a Chinese President to Bangladesh since 1986. A total of 27 deals worth \$ 24 billion were signed during this visit, which included 15 agreements and MoUs and 12 loan and mutual agreements. Among these is a cooperation agreement on increasing investment and production capacity building, under which 28 development projects will be infused with \$ 21.5 billion in foreign aid. There is an economic and technical cooperation agreement for \$80.3 million grant, \$700 million loan agreement for Karnaphuli tunnel construction, \$280million credit

agreement for Dashekandi Sewerage Treatment Plant project and four more loan deals with regards to six ships. Memoranda of Understanding have been signed, under China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, for cooperation, maritime cooperation, joint feasibility study on a free-trade area, new ICT framework, counter-terrorism collaboration, capacity building and sharing of information, tackling climate change risks, regional and international cooperation, and cooperation on power and energy sectors.

Bangladesh has been able to maintain equal robust relationship with China, India, the USA, Japan, Russia and the European Union. This was possible because all of these big powers respect Bangladesh's stance of "Friendship with all and malice towards none" and believes Bangladesh to be a friend that needs them all to progress and prosper.

As an LDC steeped with multifarious problems, Bangladesh has been fortunate to have many good friends. Their help has been enabling Bangladesh to fight poverty and improve the overall well-being of its people. Bangladesh's GDP has grown from US \$ 6 billion in 1971 to US \$ 220 billion in 2016; literacy rate raised from 25 % to 75 %; life expectancy from 47 years to 72 years; Human Development Index from 0.303 to 0.570; major MDGs achieved, particularly on gender parity, infant and maternal mortality ahead of 2015 deadline; poverty level reduced to 24%; annual GDP growth rates maintained over 6.2 % for the last 10 years despite unprecedented global economic recession, and crossing 7 % in the last fiscal year for the first time; export earnings increased to US\$ 34.2 billion; remittances to US\$ 15 billion; and Foreign Exchange Reserve to US\$ 32 billion (equivalent to 8 months' import expenditure), to name a few socio-economic indicators. Bangladesh is now the 33rd largest economy in the world in terms of PPP or Purchase Power Parity. It is also the second largest supplier of apparel in the world.

These achievements have caught the imagination of the world and been duly recognized by Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan with Bangladesh listed in their respective lists of "Next Eleven" and "Emerging Five". All these have inspired the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to mention a number of times in his speeches that, "Bangladesh is a role model of development." Inspired by all these achievements, Bangladesh now confidently looks forward to graduating to a middle income country by 2021 and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with the cooperation of all.

I thank you all for your patient hearing.