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INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS IN AN INDO-PACIFIC CONTEXT

**Deputy Commandant, Defence Services Command & Staff College,
Bangladesh, Air Cmde. Qazi Mazharul Karim, ndc, acsc, psc;**

Chief Instructor, Senior Directing Staff and Faculty;

Course Members of DSCSC;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Namaskar, Salam Aleikum and Shubho Sakal to you all.

I am delighted to visit the Defence Services Command & Staff College of Bangladesh. This is my first visit, and my first opportunity to speak here. I understand that the audience includes officers of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and Bangladesh Police, as well as 47 officers from 18 other countries, including two of my compatriots. Thank you therefore, DSCSC, for inviting me to address this cosmopolitan group of future leaders.

For fairly obvious reasons, evidenced by a cursory glance at any map of this region, Bangladesh is a country of primary strategic, political, economic, cultural and even social priority to India. I daresay there is possibly a similar priority attached to the relationship the other way around too. But ours is more than a relationship of merely local importance for two neighbours: constituting as we do two of the ten largest populations in the world, our ties are consequential for the sub-region, the region and the world.

The corollary of that: we increasingly need to contextualize our ties with reference to the regional and global geopolitical dynamic that impacts all of us.

It is with this in mind that I thought it might be useful to locate our partnership with Bangladesh in the context of the emerging Indo-Pacific concept, and to use this as an opening to outline this idea to Bangladeshi future thought leaders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ideas have salience because of the context in which they emerge. They develop weight and significance depending on the circumstances that then impact upon them. The idea of the Indo-Pacific is therefore both a response to the increased geopolitical turbulence in the global system, but it is also the outcome of the more complex, pluri-polar world in which we live.

To use a current phrase, the Indo-Pacific concept is a manifestation of the fact that our world needs new horizontal themes of plurilateral discourse.

The most widely-discussed such theme is of course in the maritime domain. Long relegated to discussions in International Relations seminars or Naval symposiums as a “Mahan vs Mackinder” debate, it is safe to say that a broader maritime lens has now become a lasting part of the international discourse. This is directly where the IndoPacific concept assumes salience.

A few words about the evolution of this concept in its larger sense. While the concept is not new, it has taken some time to achieve traction. Of late, many countries have issued their own definitive statements on their approach to this new construct. These include the US, Australia and Japan, but also ASEAN as a group, and even countries in Europe, such as Germany and France. This is a reflection of the fact that this broad area is today one of the centres of geopolitical gravity. As people who live in this area, it is logical that we think deeply about what these developments mean to us, and to work to try and shape such thinking.

As I will suggest, the entire point about a free and open concept is that it is also open to being defined with different levels of nuance by individual countries, depending on their priorities. Therefore it is entirely reasonable that there is no single agreed-upon Indo-Pacific concept. And I think it is appropriate that there should also not be any such rigid framework for a dynamic idea. But it is also reasonable that there are commonalities, because some concepts and values should be as universal as possible. These include the notions of international law, equality of nations, freedom to choose partners, and the rights of all to utilize fairly the common maritime domain, for trade, transport and transit.

What then is this region, in actual geographic terms? It spans the combined space of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, in its widest definitions, although understandably, many countries have their own, more circumscribed geographic definitions. In general terms, however, it does comprise at least 38 countries, spanning 44 percent of the world's surface area, housing 64 percent of the world's population. And it accounts for 62 percent of the global GDP with more than 50 percent of global trade traversing these waters. The region is highly heterogeneous with countries at different levels of development connected by a common thread of these interlinked oceans.

Why has this construct gained salience of late? In part, because the same processes and forces that have generated the rise of Asia are still at work. And the arc of growth and prosperity is moving relentlessly westward, through Pacific East Asia to Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Gulf and East and Southern Africa. With it, the centrality of the maritime domain has increased as well, enhancing its geoeconomic and geopolitical significance.

Indeed, the region's geopolitical weight is also fortified by the strategic importance of **choke points** such as the Straits of Hormuz, Malacca, Bab-el Mandeb and so on. These can either be vital guardians of global prosperity if well regulated, or global risks if the waters they constrict are exposed to piracy, disputes, dissent and/ or even poor navigation services.

As is obvious, this region is directly relevant to India's interests, for we are located pretty much at the centre of it. To our East beginning with Bangladesh, we have deep and intensive cooperative ties. A bit further, India-ASEAN trade stood at 2019 at US\$ 81 bn; trade with Japan, ROK and China stood at US\$ 126 bn; trade with the US at US\$ 87 bn; Australia at US\$30 bn, and with Bangladesh at a notch over US\$ 10bn. So too, the region south and southwest of India contains civilizational partners and key economic partners, ranging from Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, to the countries of the Eastern and Southern Coasts of Africa, Maldives, Mauritius and Sri Lanka.

Almost all of our FTAs are with the nations east of India—ASEAN, Japan, ROK, Singapore. ASEAN alone accounts for some 20% of inbound foreign direct investment into India; on the western Indo-Pacific, Mauritius and UAE are the other two big investors. Almost all of our imported energy products (gas, oil etc) is sourced either from this region or through the Indo-Pacific. At the political level, we have a Summit-level dialogue with ASEAN for well over a decade, Summit-level ties with the African Union, and we are also founding members of IORA and BIMSTEC.

At the level of people-to-people ties, some 6 million persons of Indian origin are citizens of ASEAN countries; 6.7 mn are citizens of other IORA countries (not counting ASEAN, the Gulf or Australia); the Gulf area is estimated to have another 4 million, and nearly a million more in Oceania. And we work closely with most of these partners to enhance maritime security, including through the exchange of White Shipping information, through logistics exchange agreements, exercises, training exchanges, hydrographic surveys and so on.

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, it was with these thoughts in mind that through the announcement of SAGAR—Security And Growth for All in the Region—our Prime Minister outlined in 2015 a comprehensive vision for the Indo-Pacific. In doing so, he explicitly set out to seek partnership and cooperation with all littoral states, with the promise of our using capacities to address shared challenges, ranging from managing the marine environment, trade, and marine science to transborder challenges like piracy and smuggling. This has since been further elaborated by our Indo-Pacific vision, as set out by Prime Minister Modi in his speech at the Shangri La dialogue three years ago.

In essence, India's IndoPacific concept reflects:

- Recognition of the growing relevance of the concept, and its importance for India's own strategic interests, given our location;
- The fact that India's primary focus is on the Western Indo-Pacific, and the Central Indo-Pacific. That is to say, the IOR and its surrounding seas.
- Recognition of the fact that the IndoPacific is more relevant than the Asia-Pacific, a term that has long been focused on Asia's Pacific rim and is therefore increasingly no longer fit for the times in which we live. In short, the Asia Pacific concept did not include South Asia and West Asia, or the Indian Ocean coast of East and South Africa. No reason, therefore for us to endorse a concept that does not include us. Our Indo-Pacific concept is, in contrast, inclusive as it includes all East Asian partners, Southeast Asian nations, South Asia, West Asia, Africa, Oceania and even the Pacific coasts of the Americas and the Russian Pacific seaboard. Through it, we also see a continental dimension that includes Central Asian States as well, as they are civilizationally-tied to South and West Asia.

Friends,

India's vision of the Indo-Pacific is built upon fundamental principles that ought to be acceptable to all. The Indian approach to this concept is to seek to create in partnership a free, open and inclusive order, that assures all countries in the region, and others with interests in it, a stable and secure maritime and littoral

area, with mutually-beneficial cooperation constructed upon a foundation of respect for international rules and laws. Our approach is respectful of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, irrespective of size, or military capacity. Through this basic approach, we underscore a guarantee of the freedom of navigation for all in the international seas and the airspace above these seas. This is also the basis for us to focus on enhanced connectivity.

Our inclusive approach also implies a willingness to work with all countries in the IndoPacific. We stand for the use of existing regional mechanisms, like ASEAN and the platforms it has offered, to promote dialogue-based efforts to resolve differences, find new mechanisms to enhance economic cooperation and promote sharing of maritime space and airspace. We also emphasize working through BIMSTEC, IORA and other regional mechanisms with members that have a positive agenda, in trying to find mutually-acceptable means to enhance cooperation. Ours is an approach that is open to all, and directed against none.

In that sense, it echoes the foreign policy approach set out by *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Therefore our approach is built upon the principles of Respect (for all, and for international laws); Dialogue (to resolve differences); and Cooperation, to ensure Peace and Prosperity, or five “Ss” in the Hindi language.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in this larger effort to balance our foreign policy by enhancing the maritime aspect to the level of priority traditionally accorded to our continental relationships that our Indo-Pacific concept has assumed salience. Building upon the notions of “Looking East” and then “Acting East”, External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar said, and I quote, the “Indo-Pacific construct signifies the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans that can no longer be handled as distinct spheres. It is a reiteration that the world cannot be frozen for the benefit of a few; and the fact the security, stability, peace, and prosperity of this vast region is vital for the world. The Indo-Pacific concept is not tomorrow’s forecast but yesterday’s reality. It captures a mix of India’s broadening horizons, widening interests, and globalised activities.”

For us, therefore, the Indo-Pacific is an area of direct material consequence to our strategic and other interests.

In pursuit of these goals, at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok in 2019, India proposed an Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative (IPOI) to support the building of a rules-based regional architecture centered on seven pillars — maritime security;

maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; trade, connectivity and maritime transport. In implementation of these vital platforms for regional architecture, we have also offered and hosted dialogues and events to bring about convergences in the regional architecture of East and South east Asia, and those in the Western Indian, we hosted a second edition of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) in New Delhi in 2019. Participating countries from the Indo-Pacific — Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Seychelles, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America looked at themes that could help us develop larger regional cooperation across this shared oceanic and continental space. Unfortunately, due to COVID, we have not been able to schedule follow on events in 2020 and 2021.

Looking ahead, there is a critical need to increase dialogue and understanding of the free and open nature of the Indo Pacific, with a view to maximize the economic opportunity for all, and to maintain a free, open and secure maritime commons. We are working toward greater economic integration with Southeast Asia, strong partnerships with other major powers (such as the US, Japan, Australia, France, UK and China), investing in maritime logistics and infrastructure, reducing barriers to trade and investment, and strengthening regional economic partnerships through regional and bilateral trade agreements.

Achieving all of this will take a considerable effort, collectively. For our part, India is implementing or considering the following:-

- ASEAN at the centre of India's Indo-Pacific vision. India continues to consolidate deeper ties with the East and southeast Asian nations at a bilateral and multilateral level. ASEAN and India make up one-fourth of the global population and their combined GDP is estimated at over US\$ 3.8 trillion. India is also part of multilateral organisations such as BIMSTEC and the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation, both of which include ASEAN member countries. India aims to bolster its economic cooperation with ASEAN further, in infrastructure, Fintech, information technology and IT enabled services, e-commerce, education and skill development, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, and agriculture and food processing. Continuing Indo-Pacific economic integration also requires establishing greater physical infrastructure and connectivity between South and Southeast Asia, supported by stronger private sector participation, which requires substantial doses of investment.
- India's evolving ties with Australia, with the elevation of the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the release of India's

economic strategy for Australia and vice versa, offers opportunities to create a dependable partnership in the Indo-Pacific. In September 2020, we created a new vertical in our foreign ministry, with the Oceania territorial division and Australia at its centre and including ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific divisions. An Australia-India Free Trade agreement (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) is under consideration. Robust ties between the two countries will pave the way for a stronger Indo-Pacific economic architecture.

- In a post-Covid era, economic growth can be revived by sound economic (power, water and transport) and social infrastructure (education and health). Connectivity and inclusion in the region must be based on comprehensive policies (robust legal and regulatory framework, interagency coordination) that can attract investment in infrastructure, build financial systems and shape digital economies — a necessary step to realize the Indo-Pacific trade potential. Private investment in infrastructure must be mobilized. It is sobering to think that out of the US\$ 50 trillion global stock of capital managed by pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, insurance companies and other institutional investors, only 0.8 percent is allocated to infrastructure.

- The pandemic has reversed decades of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, with collateral damage to education, health and nutrition. It has exacerbated social and economic inequalities and has exposed global disparities. Countries in the Indo-Pacific must work together to create a resilient development paradigm to address this severe humanitarian crisis.

- India is also considering institutional reform to enhance inter-agency coordination in the effort to develop a blue economy, including security, maritime budgetary allocation, naval acquisitions, maritime trade, energy needs, transportation, connectivity, fisheries and marine exploration.

- Sectors like automobiles, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, advance manufacturing, critical minerals, healthcare, education, infrastructure, science and innovation, and technology transfer could offer opportunities for regional economic recovery. We aim to provide inclusive and creative leadership driven by reciprocity in the region, provided it focuses on capacity building across government institutions and business organizations, market integration and regional links with established norms for stronger economic cooperation. There must be greater convergence of goals, supported by coordinated actions.

- India also aims to develop a multi-layered approach towards cooperation in the region, seeking complementarities with others, building trade facilitation centres, with a focus on niche goods and services, and using technology to build responsive processes.
- Economic diplomacy and domestic reforms are intricately interlinked. How we chooses to engage with the world will primarily depend on our ability to build a new narrative around strengths and offerings, our capacity to build new engines of growth and productivity (like its pharmaceuticals, automotive and telecom sectors), our drive to prosper and grow and look out for the world, and our commitment and ability to engage at granular and macro levels. We as a nation also focus on developing a sophisticated knowledge base in the countries in the region.

Put differently, social and economic inequality in the Indo-Pacific region is a barrier to realizing the potential growth possible from economic integration across this mega-region. Therefore, following COVID, diplomacy must aim to create long-term solutions so that the 'new normal' is more equitable than the previous one. Our concept of the Indo-Pacific is tailored exactly in such a way. We believe that the metrics of engagement must be defined differently, not just based on flows of physical goods, services, finances and people, but on the basis of building capacity-led connections, complementarities, sustainable commitments and mutual dependence across countries and sub-regions. The region's 'new normal' economic diplomacy should seek balance between competition and cooperation, aspirations and the achievable, and regional and global. It needs to be navigated on the strong foundation of rules-based collaboration. I believe that India's concerted actions in the Indo-Pacific region will determine the evolution of the region towards sustainability and progression. This would require that all countries re-imagined, reformed, resolved to build more resilience based on trust and transparency. It is no longer **about world powers competing in the region, but how regional countries could lead.**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me now try and locate the India-Bangladesh relationship as a key element of this somewhat larger canvass that I just outlined.

It is an often-repeated reality that India and Bangladesh share a special relationship of shared history, language, culture, ties of family and kinship. Our people fought together in your Liberation War, as an integrated force, a rare example in recent history. Built on this modern foundation, the bonds we share are eternal and will always stand the test of time. India's longest land border

(4096 kilometres) is with Bangladesh. Thus the destinies of our two countries are literally inter-linked.

Over the last ten years, we have made unprecedented progress in furthering India-Bangladesh relations and have taken huge strides towards building a multi-faceted relationship which today covers cooperation in a wide range of areas including security and border management; trade, commerce and investment; connectivity; energy and power; space; developmental projects; culture; and people-to-people exchanges. Our Prime Ministers have correctly referred to the current phase of our relationship as a '*Sonali Adhyay*' or a 'Golden Era'. Let me outline this a little.

To start with, we have amicably resolved both our maritime and land boundaries. The India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) came into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification in June 2015. On 31 July 2015 the enclaves of India and Bangladesh in each other's countries were exchanged and strip maps were signed. In the exchange of enclaves, India transferred 111 enclaves with a total area of 17,160.63 acres to Bangladesh, while Bangladesh transferred 51 enclaves with an area of 7,110.02 acres to India. The settlement of the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh, as per UNCLOS award of 07 July 2014, has paved the way for the economic development of this part of the Bay of Bengal. This has opened up the possibility of cooperation in the blue economy and areas such as marine biotechnology, response to disasters, deep-sea fishing, etc. Our forces have since launched successful joint search and rescue operations in the Bay of Bengal region when our fishermen go missing; coordinated patrols; HADR exercises, etc.

A number of security related agreements (Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners, Combating International Terrorism, organized Crime and Illicit drug trafficking, MoUs on Prevention of Circulation of Fake Currency Notes and Prevention of Human Trafficking and Extradition Treaty) have been signed between both the countries and working groups have been constituted to curb illegal activities in the border areas. Our border guarding forces also enjoy excellent cooperation— be this in the form of sharing of information or apprehending criminals. They interact and coordinate with each other at various levels and resolve outstanding issues amicably. The initiative of the BSF and BGB to declare a stretch of border as a "crime-free zone" is a welcome confidence building measure that will go a long way in achieving our shared objective of a 'crime-free, incident-free border'.

Improvements in connectivity are an important prerequisite for trade, investments and people-to-people ties. This has been an important area of focus

for both our governments. India-Bangladesh is a good example of connectivity through multimodal transport system. Movement of goods by road is effected through two Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) and 34 functional Land Customs Stations (LCSs) along the border. Except for the first phase of lockdown imposed by the Pandemic in early 2020, the Indian border for trade and passengers has remained open.

In the case of Bangladesh, the rivers that make up this remarkable country are historically the primary driver of trade and transport. Thus, our Protocol on Inland Water Trade and Transit (PIWTT) has been operational since 1972. It facilitates movement of goods between our two countries on ten specific routes. In 2016, we started trans-shipment of goods to North-Eastern States of India through Ashuganj river port and then Akhaura-Agartala by road under the PIWTT; as infrastructure improves here, this route will also develop further. Our Coastal Shipping Agreement signed in June 2015 enabled direct sea movement of containerized/bulk/dry cargo between the two countries. In February 2017, container ship services started between Kolkata and Pangaon under this framework. During visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in Oct 2019, both countries concluded Standard Operating Procedures for the use of Chattogram and Mongla ports for movement of goods to and from India, particularly to and from the North East of India.

As to railways, out of the seven links that existed between India and Bangladesh upto 1965, five Broad Gauge inter-country rail links between India and Bangladesh are now operational. Work on one old link is ongoing. A 7th new rail-link between Agartala and Akhaura is being financed under grant assistance of India. Freight trains are running regularly on all the 5 operational rail-links between India and Bangladesh while passenger services are offered on three routes. During the COVID lockdown last year, Bangladesh and Indian railways created history by introducing parcel train services, container train service and freight service for automobiles. Freight carried, and revenue earned by both railways rose significantly last year. Through our LOCs and grant supplies, rolling stock including diesel locos, coaches and so on have been provided to Bangladesh Railways.

Regular bus services also connect India and Bangladesh, on 5 approved International Routes. These include (i) Dhaka-Kolkata, (ii) Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata, (iii) Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata, (iv) Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati and (v) Dhaka-Agartala. Prior to this pandemic, there were 90 flights operating weekly between India and Bangladesh and an understanding to increase this to 120 flights. Currently, we have an 'Air Bubble' connecting various Indian cities like New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai to Dhaka and Chattogram.

Improvement of border infrastructure is also an essential requirement for ensuring seamless movement of goods and people. According to a latest World Bank study, improvement in logistics in Bangladesh could increase its exports to India by 192%, increasing its GDP by 19%. Keeping this in mind, we are working on upgrading 7 Land Customs Stations, to Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at the India-Bangladesh border. This will be in addition to Petrapole (West Bengal) and Agartala (Tripura) where the ICPs are already operational; and Dawki (Meghalaya) where work on setting up a new ICP is underway. At present, we have 4 functional Border Haats, 3 Haats have been recently inaugurated and 9 new Border Haats are in pipeline.

Moving to trade, Bangladesh is today our largest trade partner in the region, and one of our top 15 trade partners. The first Trade Agreement between India and Bangladesh was signed in 1972 and has been renewed periodically. Our bilateral trade has registered a significant increase—in both directions-- in the last ten years, and has crossed US\$ 10 billion milestone in 2018-19. For its market of 1.3 billion people, India has extended duty-free, quota-free access to Bangladesh on 100% tariff lines except alcohol and tobacco. I am glad to note that riding on the success of RMG sector; Bangladesh's exports to India have stayed above the US\$ 1 billion mark for the last three years and are set to further increase. Despite Covid related disruptions, we were able to successfully maintain our supply chains: India is today Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia. As Bangladesh graduates out of LDC status, we are keen to enter into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Bangladesh. Such an arrangement will not only boost trade in goods and services, but also investment flows. Indeed, Indian investment proposals registered with Bangladesh Investment Development Authority exceeded US\$ 5 billion by 2020; over \$3.5 bn in FDI stock is already in Bangladesh from India. Upcoming Economic Zones developed by India in Mongla and Mirsarai will further facilitate Indian investment in Bangladesh.

One sector of specific importance in our partnership is the power sector. India is committed to supporting Bangladesh in its vision of 'Power to All' by 2021. Bangladesh currently imports about 1160 MW of power from India. The 1320 MW coal-fired Maitree thermal power plant, a 50:50 JV between National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) of India and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), is being constructed at Rampal. During Bangladesh PM's visit in April 2017, agreements for generation/ supply/ financing of more than 3600 MW electricity were signed between Indian public/private companies and Bangladesh side. The involvement of Indian private companies in power sector in Bangladesh has also increased in last few years. In September 2019, Reliance Group has signed agreements to set up a 718 MW gas-based combined cycle power plant in Meghnaghat over the next

three years. Adani Group is also setting up of 2x800 MW coal based power plant in Jharkhand from which power will be supplied to Bangladesh through a dedicated transmission line. And our newly promulgated Crossborder Power Export Guidelines will facilitate the creation of two way flows of electricity, and even a subregional electricity market involving Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India, and in future, even Myanmar.

Energy sector cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also seen considerable progress in the past few years. In September 2018, both the Prime Ministers participated, through video-conferencing, in the ground breaking ceremony for construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur for supply of Diesel to Bangladesh from Numaligarh Refinery Limited. ONGC Videsh Ltd has acquired two shallow water blocks in consortium with Oil India Limited and is working to explore prospects of oil and gas. Options in terms of clean and renewable energy are also being explored. We are sharing our experience in civil nuclear energy with Bangladesh especially as the first nuclear power plant is under construction at Rooppur; power evacuation infrastructure worth US\$ 1 bn is being built by Indian firms in Bangladesh to connect this NPP to the domestic grid of Bangladesh.

From modest beginnings in the years after Bangladesh's liberation, India's development cooperation with Bangladesh has grown in size and coverage. Our Lines of Credit are focused on various infrastructure development projects in sectors such as road, rail, port, airport, power, information and communication technology, health and technical education. Out of a total LOC portfolio of US\$ 27.11 billion extended to 63 countries by the Government of India, the largest development partnership is with Bangladesh with GoI LOCs of almost US\$ 8 billion having been extended to the Government of Bangladesh. Projects covered by the LoCs focus on infrastructure development in Bangladesh and improving connectivity within Bangladesh and also between the two countries. Indian credit lines are at the best rates available to Bangladesh from any other development partners. India remains committed to continue develop cooperation with Bangladesh and fully support Bangladesh's vision of becoming a middle income country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041. In addition to Lines of Credit, we are also undertaking several grant projects in Bangladesh in diverse sectors, including education, health, water, culture, urban development, disaster management, etc.

Human resource development is a key component of India's Development Cooperation and Foreign Policy. Our training programs have been a vehicle to share our experience and to learn from the journey of development of other countries. Over the last 55 years, the Government of India through Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program has trained more than

200,000 government officials and professionals from 160 partner countries. As India and Bangladesh share similar administrative and judicial mechanisms, we have been extending various training programs to officials of Bangladesh Civil Service-Admin cadre, police, narcotics control, customs, Anti-Corruption Commission, judiciary and teachers. The Government of India has offered courses for 1500 Bangladeshi Admin Cadre officials over a period of six years from 2013 at National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie and has been training another 1800 officials from this year. 1152 Bangladeshi police officials were trained over the past five years at various premier training institutes. Similarly, we are extending training for 1500 Bangladeshi judicial officials since 2017 at various State Judicial Academies in India. In addition to these, every year around 180 scholarships are offered for Bangladeshi students for pursuing under-graduate, post-graduate and M.Phil/PhD courses in educational institutes of India including the prestigious IITs and NIITs. So far, around 8000+ Bangladeshis availed these training and scholarship programs in India since the year 2013. 07 October 2019, a new dimension was added to ITEC by unveiling a new initiative titled ITEC 2.0. These new initiatives include **ITEC-Executive**, which is aimed at senior officials and professionals, policy makers and technocrats, at our apex public institutions like IITs and IIMs, e-ITEC programme in partnership with IIT- Madras for delivery through **live online training**. The e-ITEC programme was also adapted to provide online training to Bangladeshi medical professionals during the COVID crisis.

India and Bangladesh share a historical legacy of 1971. Every Indian takes pride in the knowledge that Indian soldiers and Muktiyoddhas fought together in Bangladesh's Liberation War. During the visit of the External affairs Minister H.E. Mrs Sushma Swaraj to Bangladesh in 2017, India had gifted items of memorabilia of the Liberation War to the Bangladesh Armed Forces. Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's extraordinary gesture of honouring the next of kin of Indian soldiers who laid down their lives during the Liberation War also deeply touched the people of India. In recognition of their contributions, we are providing an additional 10,000 scholarships for the wards of Muktiyoddhas (worth BDT 35 crores); free medical treatment for 100 Muktiyoddhas in Indian Armed Forces hospitals every year; and 5-year multiple-entry visas for them.

We have an ongoing and robust security co-operation which has gained momentum with several high level visits from the defence establishment of the two countries and training exchanges. These visits include the first ever visit of the Defence Minister of India to Bangladesh in 2016. We have strengthened cooperation in this area with signing of defense related agreements, including a framework agreement for defence cooperation; and agreement for extending a defence line of credit worth USD 500 Million to Bangladesh. A number of new initiatives such as the 'Annual Defence Dialogue' and Tri-services Staff talks,

bilateral exercise and coordinated patrols by the two Navies, joint exercises for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief etc. are further strengthening our ties.

Last but not the least is our focus on strengthening people-to-people contacts which we view as the cornerstone of our relationship. A liberalized visa policy and a number of measures to ease access to Indian visa for Bangladesh nationals have boosted the movement of Bangladesh nationals to India. Lastly let me say a few words about cultural contacts between India and Bangladesh which is intensive and deep. Whether it is our music, literature, theatre, film, other performing or visual arts, there is so much we share with each other. This relation is unique to India and Bangladesh and needs constant nurturing and care. The friendship between the people of our two countries is at the heart of our relations. We are fully committed to strengthening this further.

With this, I now come to an end of my lecture and once again thank the Staff College for giving me this opportunity to present my thoughts to this distinguished audience. The house is now open for questions.

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