

Bangladeshis Need to Project Themselves Positively to the Public in the USA

Interview with Bangladesh Ambassador to USA, Humayun Kabir

by M Anwarul Haq

The Daily Star (DS): How would you assess the present state of US-Bangladesh relations? What are the particular areas of cooperation that are being stressed between the two countries?

Bangladesh and the United States have traditionally enjoyed excellent bilateral relations. Apart from the fact that people of USA gave tremendous support to our liberation struggle in 1971, United States has been one of our most important partners in development. The assistance received over the years from the people and government of the United States significantly contributed to our socio-economic development. Apart from economic cooperation, our two countries have worked very closely in matters of international peace and stability. Our position against the illegal occupation of Kuwait and our participation in the multinational forces during the Persian Gulf conflict, enhanced our esteem among the Americans and the US government.

As you know, support for democracy is an essential element in the US foreign policy. After a decade of autocratic rule, restoration of democracy in Bangladesh in 1991 ushered in a new dimension in our relations with the United States of America. US invitation to former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia soon after her assumption of office to a meeting with the US President is an indication of the US government's recognition of the free and fair election held in Bangladesh. During her visit, the then Prime Minister had an opportunity to meet with the President and the Vice President, and US businessmen where she discussed ways to further strengthen the existing friendly relations between our two countries.

Present administration of President Bill Clinton is keen to see that our relations become stronger with wider cooperation in all fields. Our participation in UN Peace Keeping Operations and our active participation in Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti have taken the state of our bilateral relations to new heights. During my presentation of credentials President Bill Clinton "saluted" Bangladesh for its contributions to UN peace-keeping efforts. He also paid tributes to the "giant strides" made by Bangladesh toward democracy and economic reforms and expressed his admiration for the courage and fortitude of Bangladeshis "people for democratic reforms" and people for human rights. President Clinton gave his assurance that the US would continue to encourage American companies to invest in Bangladesh and "re-emphasised" his government's commitment to assist Bangladesh's economic development process.

I strongly believe that contacts at the political leadership level is an essential element in the development of bilateral relations. Such contacts help in better appreciation and understanding of each others' views and therefore took the initiative of arranging meetings for our visiting leaders including the Foreign Minister, Finance Minister and the Commerce Minister with the leaders of the US Administration and the Congress. Our former Foreign Minister was invited by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Sub-committee for Asia and Pacific of the US House of

Representatives in 1993. This was the first time that a foreign minister of Bangladesh was invited by this powerful Congressional Committee. The occasion was an unprecedented opportunity for the Foreign Minister to present Bangladesh's view points to the US Congressional leaders. His statement was appreciated by the members of the committee and widened their understanding of our country. The Foreign Minister also met with Mr. Anthony Lake, the National Security Adviser and one of the closest advisers to President Clinton on foreign policy matters. During this meeting, Mr. Lake reiterated his government's happiness at the very close relationship between our two countries and assured the American government's full support to further strengthen the relationship. The former Finance Minister during several of his visits to Washington in connection with the World Bank and the IMF meetings also had opportunities to meet the political leadership of the USA which have certainly contributed to the growth in our bilateral relations. Last year I arranged a meeting with the current Chairman of the Appropriations and International Committees of the US House of Representatives for him. These were the first political level contacts with the new Republican leadership of the US Congress when the Finance Minister was able to

portray the bold economic reforms of the government and the steps taken towards strengthening of democracy in Bangladesh.

The Congress in this country has a very important role in foreign policy matters. We, at the Embassy, have thus devoted ourselves to maintain a close relationship both with the leaders and their staff. We made it a point to establish contacts with as many Congressional leaders as possible and to project our interest to them. As a result of our sustained efforts, the House Foreign Affairs Committee arranged an exclusive hearing on what was called "The Other South Asia", meaning countries in South Asia other than India and Pakistan. This was the first time in many years that Bangladesh received some focused attention in the US Congress and in which the issues, hopes and aspirations of the people of our country were highlighted. We have tried to maintain the momentum and I have been assured by the present leadership of the Congress of their continued support. Our then Foreign Minister has formally invited Congressman Richardson to visit Bangladesh. I have also been told by the current Chairman of the House International Relations Sub-committee for Asia of his keen interest to visit Bangladesh in the near future. Such visits will no doubt be a significant step forward in our existing relationship.

Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, DC is vigorously disseminating in the business community information on the wide-ranging macro-economic and sectoral reforms undertaken by the government of Bangladesh and the consequent investment opportunities that now prevail. The volume of business inquiries received and cleared by the embassy is steadily growing

Our continuous efforts in expanding areas of cooperation yielded positive results when

goodwill for our people and our country. People in this country are very supportive of our endeavours for bettering the socio-economic condition and institutionalising of democracy in our country.

DS: What is the volume and nature of US investment in Bangladesh and what policies do you think would encourage more US investors to come to Bangladesh?

The current rough estimate of \$ 25 million investment in Bangladesh from USA does not correctly capture US investment interest in the country. There are 11 US-owned manufacturing companies operating in Bangladesh. Furthermore, one US-owned life insurance company, two US commercial banks operate in Bangladesh. Added to this are investment in office and transport equipment of about 10 American service sector firms. During the first Bangladesh Petroleum Investment Roundtable (BPIR) held on September 14, 1993, in Houston, Texas, USA, five companies signed memorandum of understanding with Bangladesh for exploration of oil and gas. BPIR is expected to be held sometime this year. Meanwhile, Occidental Oil and Gas Corporation has concluded a production sharing contract with Bangladesh, and a PSC has been signed recently and exploration work has already begun. Various US companies have also proposed to invest in Bangladesh's power sector. If negotiations between these potential US investors and the Bangladesh authorities are

successful once we have worked out in details our gas pricing policy, we shall see total US investment in the country jump-up by several hundred million dollars.

The government has put in place a sound policy framework to attract foreign investment in Bangladesh. The industrial policy has been significantly changed. The government announced the National Petroleum Policy in July 1993 intended to stimulate investment in exploration, production, refining, marketing, and pipeline infrastructure. These policies and recent macro-economic reforms as well as the government's commitment to democratic principles and rule of law have been well appreciated by prospective investors. The sound policies are however not always being implemented on the ground. As a result, potential investment interest often do not get translated into actual investment. Investors complain that although the government has adopted sound measures like "one stop" service, in practice potential investors are shuttled around different places and the processes involved are cumbersome. In the present world when all countries are competing with each other for foreign investment, this implementation bottleneck can prove very costly.

Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, DC is vigorously disseminating in the business community information on the wide-ranging macro-economic and sectoral reforms undertaken by the government of Bangladesh and the consequent investment opportunities that now prevail. The volume of business inquiries received and cleared by the embassy is steadily growing. Over the last two years, the embassy has succeeded in encouraging representatives of a number of US companies to visit Bangladesh, for whom appointment with relevant officials and chambers were made. The Embassy organised a programme for a Bangladesh business delegation led by President of FIBCCI in October, 1995. They visited New York, Washington, Houston and Los Angeles and met with cross-section of business community and generated a great deal of interest among US investors to invest in Bangladesh. During the annual Bank-fund meeting of '95, the World Bank sponsored a half-day seminar on investment opportunities in Bangladesh which was addressed by the former Finance Minister and President of FIBCCI, Chairman, BOI and the meeting was attended by a large number of potential investors. As this trend continues and intensifies, with appropriate support and backing from Ministries and agencies in Bangladesh, there are reasons to be hopeful that the interest of US businesses will grow and flow of investment will rise significantly. So far sensitising US investor is concerned a good deal of progress has been achieved during the last two years and we should be now entering the phase of concretising investment projects in the next few years, particularly in power, telecommunications, oil and gas development, electronics, tourism and perhaps even private sector financed physical infrastructure projects.

DS: Has the image perception of Bangladesh changed in the recent years after the restoration of democracy and following a number of economic reforms undertaken to open up the economy?

The restoration of democracy and radical reforms towards development of a free and healthy private sector in Bangladesh have dramatically changed the image of Bangladesh in the US. In a recent Congressional hearing, both the Chairmen of the House Foreign Affairs Committee for Asia and Pacific and the Assistant Secretary of State of the South Asian Bureau have lauded Bangladesh's transformation from an international basket case to a country that has attained self-sufficiency in food. President Clinton praising the economic reforms of Bangladesh has said, "I believe further economic reforms will foster a vibrant and robust private sector resulting in the economic growth necessary to meet the hopes of the Bangladeshi people for a better life for their children and grandchildren."

As I mentioned earlier, relations between two sovereign nations become stronger with face to face contact between the leadership of the two countries. Although many of our leaders visited the United States over the years, there have not been many high level visits from the USA to Bangladesh. We have therefore urged with the leadership of this country to come to Bangladesh and to see for themselves our endeavours in uplifting the quality of the lives of our people. Our former Foreign Minister during his meeting with Mr. Anthony Lake last year raised the matter of high level visits from the USA and said that Bangladesh would be very happy to receive the American President and the First Lady. Mr. Lake said that due to preoccupations, it might not be convenient for the President to visit but a visit by the First Lady could be considered. We were really happy that Mrs. Clinton did indeed decide to visit our country.

Mrs. Clinton's visit was, in many ways, a landmark in US-Bangladesh relations. The US

First Lady holds an official position of particular honour and importance. Although a private visit, Mrs. Clinton's trip was the second highest level visit by a US dignitary to Bangladesh since that of Mr. Henry Kissinger. She highly praised the successes of the Grameen Bank that she had witnessed during her visit to our country. She said that her husband as Governor of Arkansas sought advice from Prof. Yunus for creating Arkansas' own group-based borrowing programme called "The Good Faith Fund." She also said that the Treasury Department was establishing an annual Presidential Award for microenterprise excellence. According to reports from various sources, she particularly enjoyed her stay in Bangladesh, her interaction with rural women, and has come back to the United States with a very positive view of our country and our people. She has spoken very well of Bangladesh in her public appearances in the country. While addressing WB officials on November 8, 1995 Mrs. Clinton, in reply to a question on incentive for girls' education, specifically mentioned the highly successful Bangladesh experience of Food for Education Programme as well as special stipend programme for girls. The American media including the prestigious New York Times and the Washington Post as the television networks gave wide coverage. The media coverage of her visit has projected Bangladesh all over the United States and have helped Americans to change their perception of our

land and people. I am sure President Clinton has also learnt more about our country from the experiences of his wife and daughter.

DS: What is the current view about child labour, now that Bangladesh has eliminated almost all child labour, particularly in the field of all its garment exports to the US which carry certificates that the items have not been the product of child labour?

The number of child workers in the garments sector in Bangladesh is estimated at roughly five per cent of the workforce in that sector. As a result of various measures taken by government and the BGMEA, the incidence of child labour has significantly reduced and is now virtually non-existent.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the elimination of child labour from the garment industry was signed on July 4, 1995 by BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO. By signing the MoU, Bangladesh has undertaken a noble task to eliminate child labour in the garment sector in a humane and socially responsible manner.

The Textile Importers Association in USA, and the apparel importers are satisfied with our decision to eliminate all child labour from the garment factories. They have, however, emphatically told us that they did not support any 'Boycott Call' of Bangladeshis.

DS: Would you tell something about the Bangladeshis in the US and how they are doing in different fields?

In the last decade or so, the number of Bangladeshis living in the United States has increased manifold. Among them many have come as immigrants. There is also a successful professional group of Bangladeshis across the US. There are a number of companies owned by expatriate Bangladeshis who are doing good business locally in consultancy, construction, computer technology etc.

DS: Has there been any perceptible change in the US policy and role towards our region, particularly Bangladesh? The US administration has created a separate department for South Asia in the State Department. What has been its main focus?

The Chairman of Asian and Pacific Affairs Sub-Committee of the US House of Representatives last year described US interest toward South Asia as "the step child" in American Foreign Policy. It is not for me to comment on the views of a US Member of Congress but I can only state that we would like to see more focused attention of the US to our region. With the end of Cold War and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, there was some downscaling of American interest in South Asia.

Fortunately, in recent months we are experiencing a renewed interest of the US in our region. The prime ministers of India and Pakistan have come to Washington on official visits and as a result political and economic interaction with these two countries have been re-invigorated. I am very hopeful that similar US interest in the smaller nations of the region including Bangladesh will be forthcoming. The special Congressional hearing on the "Other South Asia" should vindicate my optimism. Americans today are attracted by India as it forms the tenth largest market for them. I tell them that South Asia together could form the seventh largest market and hence it would be unwise to ignore the smaller nations. The creation of a

Bureau of South Asian Affairs in the US State Department certainly speaks of greater importance laid by the American government toward South Asia. I believe the primary focus of the Bureau is India-Pakistan relations. Non-proliferation, the Kashmir Issue, the situation in Afghanistan and human rights, promotion of democracy and development of trade and commerce. But to diffuse their mono-syllabic approach, my strategy here in talking to officials as well as policy makers has been to emphasise that in long-term strategic interest of perpetuating in historic perspective US presence in South Asia, they should widen and diversify their focus in terms of greater involvement with their huge capital and technological inventory into private sector-led economic development of the whole region. With an enabling atmosphere in terms of policy reforms, this should now be possible to have much greater interaction in trade and business development than narrow focus on some historical regional political disputes only. I have found very positive and enthusiastic response to the new way of US looking at the region from a human and sub-continental approach where all countries will benefit.

DS: What would you suggest for increasing contact and cooperation between the two countries?

I think I have answered this question at length in reference to other questions. I may however add that in order to increase contact and cooperation between two countries we need to continue to project ourselves positively to the public in this country. We must be able to resolve our domestic problems in a positive and constructive manner in order to prevent scaring away prospective investors and the existing US business in Bangladesh. We must also make vigorous efforts to project the new image of Bangladesh in local media, particularly specialised journals on investment, tourism etc. Frankly, the better we do at home on all fronts the more we get a better image abroad.

Under unavoidable circumstances, INTERNET could not be published today.

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Wednesday 3rd July
(All programmes are in local time. We recommend programmes printed in bold. There may be changes in the programmes)

BTB

3:00 Opening Announcement: Al Quran Programme Summary 3:10 Recitation from the Gotta 3:15 Re-telecast of Selected Programme 4:00 News in Bangla 4:15 Sports Programme 4:45 Tagore Songs 5:00 News in Bangla 5:25 Agni 6:00pm News in Bangla 6:25 Lok-Loklaya 7:00 The News 7:05 Open Openway 7:25 Nitter Tale 8:00 News in Bangla 8:30 Chhaya Chando 9:00 Mini Series: Shin Totokawa Story (II) 9:30 News in English 10:30 Shasthathatha: Health Programme Based on Child & Mother 10:35 Ujibon: 11:30 News in Bangla 11:35 Thursday's programme 11:40 Close down

BBC

6:00am BBC Newsroom inc. World Business Report/Asia Today/24 Hours 9:00 BBC World Headlines 9:05 Under the Blue Flag 10:00 BBC Newsday 1:00 BBC World Headlines 1:05 Horizon 2:00 BBC World News 2:30 Time Out: Film '96 4:00 BBC Newsdesk 6:00pm BBC World News 6:15 Panorama 7:00 BBC World News 7:15 World Business Report 7:30 BBC News: Asia & Pacific 8:30 Time Out: Auction 9:00 BBC World Headlines 9:05 Under the Blue Flag 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 Time Out: Top Gear 11:00 The World Today 1:00 BBC World Headlines 1:05 The Tourist 2:00

CHANNEL V

7:00am Rewind VJ Supriya 8:00 Jump Start VJ Trey 9:00 Frame By Frame 12:00noon The Vibe VJ Luke 1:00 By Demand VJ Trey 2:00 Rewind VJ Supriya 3:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 4:30 By Demand VJ Trey 5:30 Rewind VJ Supriya 6:30 The Vibe VJ Luke 7:30 First Day First Show 9:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 9:30 Sapsun Mangta Har 10:00 Speak Easy 10:30 First Day First Show 11:00 Top of the Pops 11:30 The Ride VJ Trey 12:00am BPL Dye 1:00 Haysah 2:00 By Demand VJ Trey 3:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 5:00 Frame By Frame

STAR PLUS

6:30am Voltron 7:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 7:30 GI Joe 8:00 Sabre Rider and The Star Sherri 8:30 The Adventures Of Black Beauty 9:00 Aerobics 9:30 Style 9:30 Nanny and the Professor 10:00 Mr. Belvedere 10:30 Graham Kerr's Kitchen 11:00 Extreme Close Up Lily Tomlin 11:30 Gabrielle 12:30 Santa Barbara 1:30 The Bold & the Beautiful 2:00 The Oprah Winfrey Show 3:00 Remington Steele 4:00 Graham Kerr's Kitchen 4:30 Extreme Close Up Lily Tomlin 5:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 5:30 The Adventures Of Black Beauty 6:00pm Lost in Space 7:00 Home and Away 7:30 Charles in Charge 8:00 MASH 8:30 The Golden Girls 9:00 Empty Nest 9:30 NYPD Blue 10:30 The Bold & the Beautiful 11:00 Santa Barbara



Campus on Zee TV, Tonight at 12:30

6:30 All Out 7:00 Khana Khazana 7:30 Gaane Anyane 8:00 Ek Minute 8:30 Mr. Minto 9:00 Vimal Naye Tarane 9:30 Baaghi Apni Baat 10:00 Parapara 10:30 The News & Business Roundup 11:00 The Dream Messages 11:30 Aap Ki Adalat 12:00 Salab 12:30 Campus 1:00 Hasyar 1:30 Film Deewane 2:00 Suno Suno Tring Tring 2:30 Zee Arabia: Infotainment (TMM)

STAR Sports

7:30am Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships Highlights 8:30 Asia Sports Show 9:00 High 5 11:30 Football Match 10:30 Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships 1996 from London GB Ladies' Singles Quarter Finals 4:00 World Cup of Squash 5:00 International Motorsports News 7:00 Live: Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships 1996: Men's Singles Quarter-Finals Live from 12:00 World Motorcyle Championships Netherlands Grand Prix Highlights Assen Circuit 2:30 High 5 11:30 Football Match 3:30 World Wrestling Federation Action Zone 5:00 The European Tour Peugeot Open de France Guy 4

STAR MOVIES

7:30am Comedy: Johnny Be Good (Arabic Subtitles) 9:30 Classic: From The Terrace PG (Arabic Subtitles) 12:00 Family All New

PTV

9:00am Tidaraut Aur Tarjuman Hand/Nat 8:20 Cartoon 8:30 Khataran 8:45 Mansoorobaj Baran Khud Kafait 9:00 Sur Savana & Sehra Ka Safar & Sada-E Kasim 9:40 Shana Ba Shana 9:50 Aaj Ki Kitaab-Aik Nazm 10:05 Boy Kay Ladon 10:30 English Film: Chop And Dale 10:55 Milli Naghma 11:00 Khairan 11:10 Ab Baba (Drama Serial) 11:35 Naghmazar (Drama Serial) 12:00noon Urdu Khil 12:55 Duran-e-Hakeem 1:02 Bismillah 1:15 Gichan (Drama Serial) 2:00 Inteha (Drama Serial) 2:50 The Earth Revealed 3:20 Arushi Pulley 3:40 Natural World 4:35 How Things Work 5:00 Yeh Munk In Hae 5:25 Hamara Sehat 5:55 Krab Quir 6:25 Auro Sohar 7:00 Tararum 7:05 Felix The Cat 7:30 Such Gup 7:45 English News 8:00 Marven Gold Raceway 8:25 Jawan Rang 8:55 PTV Gold 9:00 Break for Headline News 9:20 Aap Ki Answer Magood 10:00 Khairan & Commercial News 11:00 Tes Aashman 12:00 NYPD Blue 12:45 Khas Khairan Close down

ZEE TV

6:00 News 6:30 Jaagron 7:00 A To Z of Computer The Management Course 8:30 Through The Gear 9:00 Helpline 9:30 Gaane Anyane 10:00 Lalime Khudaurat 10:30 Dunya 11:00 Its My Show 11:30 Hum Paanch 12:00 Karanvans 12:30 Sur Taal 1:00 A To Z of Computer 2:30 Tara 3:00 Film Chakkar 3:30 Celeste 4:00 Bhujang 4:30 Positive Health Show 5:00 A To Z of Computer 5:30 Hum Zameen 6:00 Cartoon

SONY ET

8:30 Rangela Re 9:00 The Three Stooges 9:30 Dennis The Menace 10:00 Dream Of Jeannie 10:30 Aimee 11:00 Faasle 12:30 Cine Matinee-Hindi Feature Film 2:00pm

Kusar

3:00 Zame: Asman 3:30 Mere Message Meri Geet 4:00 Surf Wheel Of Fortune 4:30 Ghaav 5:00 Sunday Ki Sunday 5:30 The Three Stooges 6:00 Dennis The Menace 6:30 I Dream Of Jeannie 7:00 Mere Message Meri Geet 7:30 Premier 8:00 Surf Wheel Of Fortune 8:30 Faasle 9:00 Ghaav 9:30 O'Mara 10:00 Janna Kaha Mera Jigar Gaya Ji 10:30 Cine

Prime-Hindi Feature Film

1:30 Mere Message Meri Geet 2:00 Rangela Re 2:30 Closed

DD 7

8:05am Jannudin 8:10 Rabindra Sangeet 8:20 Bomedon 8:30 Sandhan Chakri Khabar 8:50 Adhunik Jeeban Setu (Serial) 9:30 Pratihansa (Serial) 10:00 Bengali

Bhaktigopi

12:30pm Chalti Hawa 1:00 Janam (Serial) 1:30 Bengali Movie Club Film Show 5:05 Nepali Programme 5:30 News 5:35 Chuching Fank 'Kathak Katha' 6:00 Palki Katha 6:30 Jay Jayanti 6:55 Khelari Prithvi 7:30 Bangla Sambad 8:00 Samayer Samany 8:30 Sahitya Samkriti 9:00 Jeeban Setu (Serial) 9:30 Pratihansa (Serial) 10:00 Bengali

Movie Club Film Show

1:00 Closed

EL TV

06:00 Dance Dance 07:00 Best of the Best 08:00 Tarane Aur Fasane 09:00 Music Time 10:00 Tararum 10:30 Dance Mania 11:00 V-3 plus 11:30 Karam 12:00 Special 3:00 Film Cha A'T 3:30 Kal Bhi Aaj Bhi 4:00 Ziro Se

Hr The Anupom Kher Show

4:30 Liberty Public Demand 5:30 Special 7:30 Aagar 8:00 Hit Hai Fit Hi 8:30 The Move Usha Uthap Show 9:00 Tere Bhi Chup Mere Bhi Chup 9:30 Amar Prem 10:00 Advance Booking 10:30 News Line 11:00 Special Am 12:00 Dance Dance 01:00 Music Time 02:00 Tarane Aur Fasane 03:00 Best of the Best

TOM and JERRY



James Bond

THANKS, MARY - BUT NOW THAT YOU'VE WARNED ME, CLEAR OUT!

BUT YOU DON'T SCARE...



GULP!



JUST HELPING TO BUILD THE KIDS CONFIDENCE!



WHAT'S THE RUSH, LIMEY? SHE'S NOT LEAVING JUST YET!

