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created as soon as possible with the foreign ministry. The foreign office without these two divisions is a boat without a rudder.

The research division will conduct an in-depth research and analysis of regional and global events and its possible impact on Bangladesh. It will provide the government short-term and long-term strategic environment within which Bangladesh may likely to operate.

The objective is that Bangladesh must be prepared to respond to possible anticipated events and is not surprised by the turn of events. Some strategies and initiatives can be developed in a measured and systematic way for proactive planning and response.

All foreign issues have a legal dimension from perspective of international law. Again there is no fully-equipped legal division within the foreign office and the law ministry does not appear to have expertise on international law. It seems Bangladesh foreign policy moves within a vacuum of international law.

For the research and legal divisions, qualified individuals may be recruited and sent overseas for higher specialized education and training. On return they would be able to provide advice on issues that are vital for Bangladesh foreign policy. They should have a career path that attracts them. They are not transferable from the Ministry, although they may be sent to diplomatic missions for a short period for practical experience.

Transfers and postings of officers of Foreign Office are currently conducted haphazardly. There is a view that there is a tendency to put a "square peg into a round hole". For example, there are many instances where talented officers are not being placed in an appropriate area of their expertise.

I do not know whether annual report of activities of Ministry of Foreign Affairs is published timely or not. The report is important as it catalogues events in which the Foreign Office is involved. It is a valuable resource for researchers and academics.

To sum up

The above paragraphs are indicative of some of the realities and challenges to Bangladesh foreign policy in the 21st century.

One primary question is whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should become a ministry that directs all matters of foreign relations- trade, economic, and environment, or should it be confined only to diplomatic relations and leave all other relevant foreign related activities to others as currently exists.

As a nation, we begin to ask, debate and answer these questions. I would like to see that the foreign ministry plays a central role in all matters of foreign relations at a time of unprecedented transformation of internal and external environment.

A foreign policy is successful if it is proactive and result oriented. It must not respond only to situations as they develop but plan ahead of strategy so that it can respond adequately to anticipated or unanticipated events.

The presentation was followed by lively discussions by the distinguished participants across the floor. Following are the key points, questions, comments and observations that go on during discussions:

Ambassador Masud Aziz

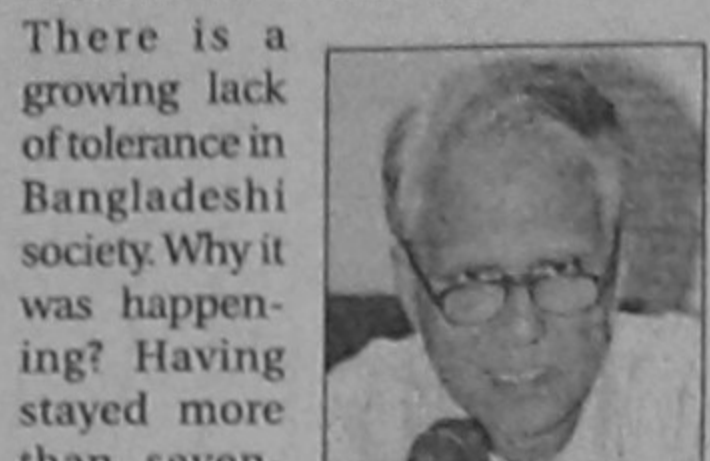


To my mind, this makes of going in favour of realpolitik. Realpolitik is zero-sum game and how much of

morality or ethics we need to sacrifice at the ground realities. We in Bangladesh already have come out with an oxymoron I being a Muslim I do not understand why we ought to qualify the word moderate. It is absolutely self-contradictory.

Robustly articulate a position against breach of international norms by the high and mighty. Denying dictum of Machiavelli, because of the ICT connectivity with the global communities we can always connect with the global societies, articulate a position and try to influence if any policy to our national interest. Global problem needs global solutions and Bangladesh need to consider where it fits in. Global warming is the best example. For the wrong deeds or misdeeds over the centuries of others we are paying the price. We will go under water; we are having salinity and desertification in northern districts. It has direct impact on food security. Do we sacrifice because somebody will angry; we will not articulate our position. This is a very formidable challenge.

Ambassador Zamir



There is a growing lack of tolerance in Bangladeshi society. Why it was happening? Having stayed more than seven years in Middle East, I witnessed a transformation of Bengali ethos in terms of receiving cultural traditions of the Middle East within our society and the social fabric. Even in the eighties, a religious person never did wear a hijab but now even younger people wear hijab. It is partially because over the years nearly three to four million people now live as expatriate in the Middle East. They are the money earners for families in the rural areas. They are coming back and sending their children to Madrasa and also teaching their families how children should behave. It affects social fabric of rural Bangladesh. This leads to the issue of Wahabism and lack of tolerance within the society. Second, we have had a very ineffective Parliamentary Standing Committee structure. Now what we really should have? There should be very effective, open transparent discussion of foreign policy issues or matters which might have strategic implications for foreign policies in the Parliamentary Standing Committees like the cases of UK, Germany, USA or even Brussels or even Rome where academics, think tanks, personalities, and media personnel are invited to give their views and it is transparent and in some cases it is followed by the television channels. That will help the people in the country to know what is being discussed and thought of in particular issue so that it can later be discussed in the floor of the House and to know whether reflecting what has been discussed. The third point is lack of professional interest within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In many cases, Foreign Ministry representatives do not have interest or capability to take part in the discussion on very important issues in international relations like climate change, poverty eradication, food security, trade imbalance which directly impact on Bangladesh. Foreign policy we can talk for hundred years about the future direction of foreign policy. To whom you are addressing the matter. For the last 16/17 months, we have had a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we have had important decisions in the Foreign Ministry, I do not see there has been any relevance between their mind and what we are thinking. Today we have Newspapers, Electronic Media focusing on foreign policy. But have we had any interaction in the last seven months with the media and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

game. Either you hit out or get out. What is really necessary is to see how we can overcome the challenges and take advantage of the limited opportunity provided by globalisation. WTO is very important for Bangladesh. How much our intellectuals, academics, experts really know about the WTO and implications of subsequent rounds and talks including Doha Round, Hong Kong Round and Cancun, etc? What is of utmost necessity is to develop government expertise. What the provision of market access will serve to Bangladesh? Our exports are concentrating on 4/5 items. Even, if we were given market access in a list containing 500 commodities, it will not serve our interest. Therefore, let us not be one dimensional, be multi-dimensional. Side by side, we need to develop our capacity. Should we only sell commodities or exportable items? Why not to sell ideas? Apart from that, why we don't talk about services sector?

Ambassador Anwar Hashim

Globalisation is an issue of importance for all of us. In the context of globalisation, competition is the name of the game. To what extent is the opinion of our foreign office reflected in the foreign policy? It is alleged that our foreign policy is guided by intelligence agency. If it is, for future dynamics of foreign policy, it should end. Second, how efficiently we are dealing with the overseas Bangladeshis? The numbers are now in millions and remittances are about six billion dollar. The overseas division should be created under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Third, Bangladesh is branded as militant or terrorist country and it affects the image of the country. There should be a separate section in the Foreign Ministry to deal with the terrorism issues efficiently.



Ambassador QMA Rahim

Foreign policy should reflect the aspiration of the people and it should be debated in the Parliament.

According to the decision of Parliament, Foreign Ministry and government machinery should be held responsible in implementing their policies. But it hardly happens in Bangladesh. Therefore, we don't know what our foreign policy is. So far, Bangladesh's foreign policy is to react to actions by others and development elsewhere beyond our country. That is also sometimes by the man on the spot, not getting directives from the Foreign Ministry or the Government. Foreign policy is not something fixed. It is a



Ambassador Mahmud Hasan

Bangladesh doesn't have foreign policy. This is primarily because of not having the capabilities of achieving that policy. Over the past several years, we have never had a head of the government who has the capabilities of foreign policy formulation or its implementation. The Foreign Ministry is not incapable but it lacks directions. Because we don't have policy. First of all, let us have a foreign policy and then we can talk about the future direction of it.

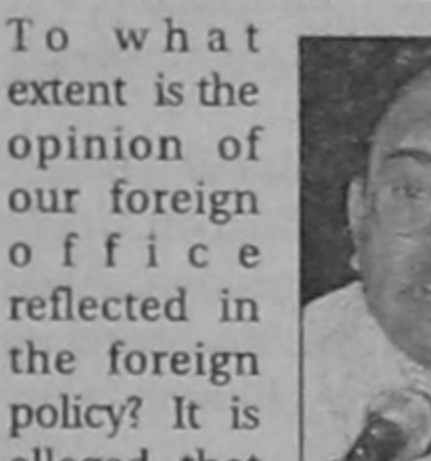
dynamic policy devoted to many aspects. There is no list of dos and don'ts given by the Parliament or by the Ministry. We have to have clear and defined objectives, strategy, and implementation plan. We have more or less consensus on our foreign policy objectives that is security and poverty alleviation, in other words, to defend and development. But, these have to be implemented through strategies that to fit in particular time frame. Previously, our economy was dependent substantially on foreign aid. So, our policy was geared to getting maximum aid from either multilateral agencies like World Bank, IMF or bilateral countries like USA and others. Now, hardly any aid is coming and our economy has also developed. So, aid is not that important factor now. Our important factors now are investment, trade and foreign remittance. Therefore, our foreign policy should immediately shift from aid getting to trade and investment, and employment for our people. Another factor is the globalisation of terrorism which has implication for our national security. Terrorists don't confine themselves within the national border. It certainly has become the subject of our foreign policy. Whatever the policies, they have to be implemented. Is our foreign office adequately prepared what ever foreign policy we have? WTO has become so important for Bangladesh in dealing trade. Who handle WTO matters in Bangladesh? Foreign Office has marginal importance. Our aid policy is implemented by ERD, trade policy by Commerce Ministry, foreign employment by Labour Ministry. Therefore, what is left for Foreign Ministry? Foreign policy has to be dynamic with a strategy on the basis of the needs of the day. For all, we need to have dynamic political leadership.

Ambassador Kazi Anwarul Masud



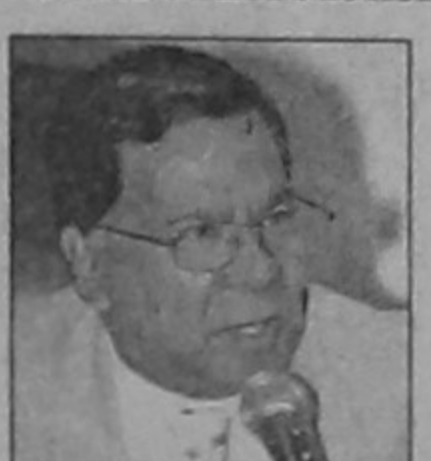
In this age of globalisation and limiting sovereignty, whether Bangladesh can really follow an independent foreign policy? The unipolar world has really come to an end and it is multipolarity which has seen in international affairs. Present day world has not been able to adapt itself to the change situation. Now, so far as the doctrine of pre-emption concerned, any one going to American. We do lack expertise. The challenges that are being faced or will be faced in future are many.

Ambassador Shafiqullah



To what extent is the opinion of our foreign office reflected in the foreign policy? It is alleged that our foreign policy is guided by intelligence agency. If it is, for future dynamics of foreign policy, it should end. Second, how efficiently we are dealing with the overseas Bangladeshis? The numbers are now in millions and remittances are about six billion dollar. The overseas division should be created under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Third, Bangladesh is branded as militant or terrorist country and it affects the image of the country. There should be a separate section in the Foreign Ministry to deal with the terrorism issues efficiently.

Ambassador Mohsin Ali Khan



Introducing language programme is good but the real condition is very dismal. An officer trained in Japanese language is being posted in Paris. The maritime boundary... legal affairs branch should be strengthened but it's a dumping place. The economic diplomacy should be given priority to achieve economic benefit for the country.

Ambassador Mahmud Hasan

Bangladesh doesn't have foreign policy. This is primarily because of not having the capabilities of achieving that policy. Over the past several years, we have never had a head of the government who has the capabilities of foreign policy formulation or its implementation. The Foreign Ministry is not incapable but it lacks directions. Because we don't have policy. First of all, let us have a foreign policy and then we can talk about the future direction of it.



The twin objectives of foreign policy are security and development; security is not to be viewed purely in military terms; non military threat to our security are of equal importance. This interalia include threat to creation of liberal, tolerant, democratic multi religious, multi ethnic society by the extremists and militants; poverty and underdevelopment.

Ambassador Shahed Akhtar



Foreign policy is an umbrella term which covers entire gamut of relations such as security, trade, manpower, etc. The Foreign Ministry can have valuable role for National Security Council.

Ambassador Aminul Islam



We are not really free to follow foreign policy independent of external influences. We need to strengthen economic wealth to operate independent foreign policy. Political stability is important for foreign investment.

Ambassador Masum Ahmed Chowdhury



Is Bangladesh capable of adopting an independent foreign policy? Whether we should address the problems-be it regional, global problems. Are external pressures too much on us?

Working Session II: Implementation of Foreign Policy: Obstacles

In this session the keynote presentation was made by Ambassador Rashed Ahmed. The session was chaired by Ambassador Shamim Ahmed.

Ambassador Rashed Ahmed



It is my privilege and honour to exchange views with a cross section of intelligentsia on obstacles to our foreign policy implementation. I believe that diplomacy is the first line of our defense; we can achieve a lot more to overcome the formidable challenges through a foreign policy reflecting the hopes and wishes of our people; removal obstacles would help to realize this objectives. While we endeavor to remove obstacles to its implementations we would also need to identify some of the obstacles to formulation of the foreign policy. The illuminating paper presented by Amb. H. Rashid would help this exercise.

2) Having spent almost 35 years of life in Bangladesh diplomacy and 5 years as UNSG's special representative in Kosovo I do not know where to begin the story.

3) One major obstacles perhaps common to all foreign ministries is implicit in the objective of foreign policy/diplomacy itself involving promotion of friendly relations with other countries including resolution of differences and problems through negotiations and dialogue. This is generally conducted by professional diplomats through quiet diplomacy; a mix of formal and informal interactions and importantly building relationship of trust through building personal equation with a cross section of influential actors involved who contribute directly or indirectly to the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. In this crucial area of building personal equation, trust and goodwill the extent to which this objective have been achieved are of such intangible nature that it is hard to quantify or prove it to the public at large. In contrast the promotion of exports or conclusion of economic, investment, technical and joint venture agreements are of relatively much more tangible and of concrete nature; people can see the visible results and applaud the achievements. Hence there is generally inadequate appreciation in the role of diplomats; more attention is focused on the perks/amenities they enjoy abroad which to many a poor country can ill afford. This is not viewed as an investment.

For this sort of perception the foreign office and ourselves are also to blame. We would need to work hard through a totally new approach to remove this obstacles to foreign policy implementation by greater interaction with media and public at large. This would help to gain crucial public support behind foreign policy implementation.

The twin objectives of foreign policy are security and development; security is not to be viewed purely in military terms; non military threat to our security are of equal importance. This interalia include threat to creation of liberal, tolerant, democratic multi religious, multi ethnic society by the extremists and militants; poverty and underdevelopment.

5) Excessive preoccupation with political aspect of diplomacy.

6) Economic diplomacy-bilateral and multilateral crucial to success of another element of foreign policy namely development-obstacles-foreign office marginal role in foreign economic bilateral and multilateral relations, foreign trade and investment. Merger of ERD with foreign ministry and foreign trade as Amb. H. Rashid has proposed. BOI to be staffed by both civil and foreign service officers.

7) Image building-projection of positive image of Bangladesh abroad-external publicity a propaganda arm of the party in power rather than of the country; need to be reorganized with eminent journalists and intellectuals. In addition ministry of separate desk of ministry of culture;

8) Demarcation of maritime boundary and strengthening of maritime cell in the foreign ministry to work with greater transparency.

9) To have strong legal cell with able persons well versed a international law

Domestic structure and foreign policy-lack of domestic consensus-Dr. Henry Kissinger. Our context lack of domestic consensus and confrontational nature of our politics particularly involving two major parties reduced our foreign policy to totally opposite and divergent approach to the most important pre occupation of our foreign policy which is our bilateral relation with India. Bearing a brief period after independence the major part of our bilateral relations has been characterized by 'mutual mistrust'. This should sound familiar to someone to those of our colleagues worked in erstwhile Pakistan foreign service. What has then changed after independence? Is our foreign policy an old wine in a new bottle. For this Bangladesh alone cannot be blamed. In fact it is failed that Indian diplomacy should have demonstrated greatest sense of maturity, wisdom and understanding in handling its bilateral relations with Bangladesh given the formidable challenges facing Bangladesh after independence to achieve socio, economic and political stability. In particular Indian leadership should have shown greater understanding an appreciation of the tragic internal developments following the change of Government post 1975 and repeated failure the political process of Bangladesh. For India to base its foreign policy on the expectation of eternal gratitude for help rendered in the past even if it is legitimate the natural and to wish that the domestic structure and type of Government in another country should conform to its wishes unfortunately do not constitute sound basis of interstate relations and is not grounded on the realities of international politics.

Fortunately Indian foreign policy seem to have acquired a great deal of pragmatism at present in keeping with her growing international stature and economic cloud as is evident from her dealings, among others with the military junta of Myanmar and with General Musharraf of Pakistan. This offers a window of opening which Bangladesh diplomacy should take advantage of. Instead, therefore waiting for India, Bangladesh foreign ministry should start the process involving a serious exercise of our policy towards India and try to remove the bureaucratic and other obstacles impeding development of full potentials of bilateral relations between the two countries. This would call for creation of policy planning and research cell in the foreign ministry. I am told there is shortage of funds. The cell started when I was D.G. (Admin & Policy Planning). It has now become non functional for I am told lack of funds. The money spent by foreign ministry for canvassing for individual candidates for jobs in multilateral organization should now be fruitfully utilize for this purpose.

This is not suggested out of perceived weakness of Bangladesh visa a vis a large neighbor. One practical lesson in conflict resolution I learnt as UN Regional Administrator/ Representative in Kosovo is that there is no military solution our solution through use of force/violence to any conflict or differences. The overwhelming NATO force could not solve the problem militarily involving Kosovo/Serbian 'militants/extremists'. When I opted for patient and painstaking negotiations with the so called militants (some black listed) there was significant progress in inter-ethnic reconciliation paving the way towards independence of Kosovo. The opposition to the independence of Kosovo is not from local Kosovo Serbs and Albanians who are willing to live and worked together as there is acute unemployment, 70 percent of population are young and aspire to join EC. The opposition to Kosovo's independence is coming from the radicals in Belgrade who are creating the trouble in Kosovo with the help of paid mafias. It is the young Kosovans that form the backbone of new democratic, multi-religious and multicultural Kosovo based on tolerance and pluralism. In this context I regret the delay in according recognition to Kosovo by Bangladesh. Apart from the fact that Kosovo is born out of genocide

and heroic fight by freedom fighters it offers significant economic opportunity and market for our goods not only for Kosovo but also Albania, Serbia and Montenegro. This is also a symptom of the obstacle to the implementation of our foreign policy.

The success achieved in a negotiated resolution was possible as I received full support from a disciplined NATO force. Successful diplomacy has to be backed by force or perception of force. This is an important lesson. We need a small modern army back by plus the capacity to mobilize the whole civilian population who should be trained and put into reserves as Lee Kuan Yui did for Singapore. This was followed by setting up 'national cadet corps' in all secondary schools so that parents would identify the army and police with their sons and daughters. We wanted the people to regard our soldiers as their protectors'.

A combination of innovative and purposeful diplomacy back by force would remove the psychological, perceived or real fear which is acting as a major obstacle to finding a mutually acceptable negotiated resolution of the entire gamut of issues with India.

Another obstacle is the perception that significantly improve relations with India may affect our bilateral relation with China and Pakistan. This is not how international diplomacy works. India and China have significantly improve their bilateral relation which has not affected Pakistan's long standing friendly relation with China. In fact Pakistan has taken more initiative than Bangladesh to significantly move forward in key areas of bilateral relationship including various initiatives to help a new approach to resolve the Kashmir problem. At the end of the day the dictum that there are no eternal friends or enemies but eternal interest constitute the pragmatic orientation of the foreign policy.

Moreover it is an important to grasp the implications of recent and dramatic developments international issues one would need to note handing of the Tibetan crisis by US, EC and India particular. All these Governments firmly existed the temptation to exploit entry Chinese card take advantage of China's discomfiture and event counselled state by Dalai Lama and try to come the situation. The reason being that these countries have crucial strategic, political, economic interest had stake with China. US has sought China's help in trying to reach in negotiated settlement of its nuclear dispute with North Korea. Bangladesh diplomacy would need to reorient its foreign policy by accordingly.

Other major obstacles to implementing the twin objective of foreign policy stems from a restricted conception of viewing security purely in military terms. There are fundamentally non military threats to our security emanating from extremism and militancy, food crisis, energy and dwindling foreign investment. Bangladesh economic diplomacy would need to much more active and focused in getting a new international trade deal through WTO for LDCs, to eliminate protectionism and for greater access of our goods to world markets; negotiate new technology, seeds, fertilizer to boost food production; take more proactive role in getting support from donors and multilateral institutions to cope with climate change and its disaster effects on our ecology and environment.

In the ultimate analysis the twin objectives of foreign policy i.e. security and development would rest on removing the major hurdle to the creation of stable, liberal and tolerant through poverty elimination and development. The report Bangladesh 2020 has stated that for a substantial reduction of attainment of universal adult literacy and access to poverty by 2020 would need a 'GDP growth rate of 7-8 percent, which should include basic healthcare, effective protection of the environment and successfully managed urbanization and an economy on a highly competitive footing with significantly diversified exports in global markets'. Its states that acceleratory growth by itself not sufficient for poverty reduction and lays highest emphasis on human resource development. The need for creating at least additional 50 million jobs including essential social economy infrastructure would require investment worth over 300 billion spread over a quarter century. The report believe this is possible by host of majors including domestic mobilization, and importantly from remittances of migrant workers and foreign private investment as ODA decline. This would call for removing the obstacle to economic diplomacy through merger of economic ERD, foreign trade with foreign ministry and significantly improved inter ministerial coordination and cooperation. Foreign ministry would have to open its door to qualified and competent people from all professions.

Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin

Despite all the nitty-gritty of foreign policy, for a country like Bangladesh,

future foreign policy could be shaped based on the determinants like the domestic situations as well as regional environment. Domestic political stability is indispensable to sustain economic growth. Both are essential core foreign policy elements for a viable foreign policy. Art of diplomacy is built around establishing a modus operandi with other countries.

Masud Aziz

It is impossible to formulate a foreign policy without having national consensus on major domestic issues.

Shafiqullah

We have to be very careful about the image of the country. Because, previously it was poverty and corruption, now it is Islamic militancy that is impeding country's image.

Zamir

Political parties should include important issues pertaining to foreign policy and their views particular issues in their manifesto. It should include matters of security, national strategic interests, relationship with the neighbour countries, particularly with India, and matters of foreign trade and investment. The Foreign Ministry should play an interactive role in discussing the issues of foreign policy with other stakeholders on regular basis.

Anwar Hashim

The major constraint of foreign policy is resource constraints. What really is needed is the optimisation or maximisation of benefits out of the limited resources. We should make prioritization of matters to implement.

Working Session III: Bangladesh Foreign Policy: The Way Forward

The keynote presentation was made by Ambassador Farooq Sobhan and session was chaired by Mr. Shah Hussain Imam of the Daily Star.

Ambassador Farooq Sobhan



The first point is what time frame we are speaking about? It is useful to adopt a long-term view perhaps over the next 20/25 years because some changes will be necessary for us to make and these will not happen overnight. But, clearly, there is a need to look at both the foreign policy priorities and equally how to address these priorities and the issue of implementation and delivery.

We have to acknowledge three or four ground realities. First and foremost is the weakness of the Foreign Ministry and its relations with other Ministries and Department. It had evolved over the years with some unfortunate practices in the way of conducting diplomacy. Therefore, first we need to see how we can re-establish the traditional roles and responsibilities of the Foreign Ministry. Foreign policy can be formulated by the government and, in some cases input should be taken from the Parliament. But this is of course the responsibility of Prime Minister and the Cabinet with inputs from Foreign Ministry. So, the first point is really re-establishing the overarching responsibility of the Foreign Ministry centring coordination with the line Ministries. Second, there is an absence of truly professional diplomatic service in Bangladesh. It is the quality training at all levels that can ensure professionalism in diplomacy. It is needed for diplomats to have expertise on different languages, area, and on subject of specialisation at the foreign office. For example, the Chinese diplomats went through the period of specialisation in one particular country. The recognition of merit and ability is important to build professionalism. In Bangladesh, unfortunately we are still wedded to the seniority system alone. There is no clear recognition of merit. There is a need for specialisation, career planning, and fast tracking people in foreign office. If we want to see quality people with the quality performer, true professionalism, we ought to take account all these factors.

Whether we like it or not and some people clearly don't like it, we have to be serious to address our relations with India. We can't afford luxuries either ignoring India or entering into confrontational relationship. India needs us as much we need India. Without active cooperation of Bangladesh, Indian Northeast will remain backward, underdeveloped and landlocked. Although efforts are being made to link Indian northeast to Myanmar and beyond but the advantages that Bangladesh can offer can't be replicated. So, how do we put the relations on a footing? What are the issues that we need to address? There are problems and certainly water is one of them. The border is always been major issue of India-Bangladesh relations. From Indian point of view, there are issues cross border, security issues, movement of people, and so on and so forth. What we know is that if we are able to integrate our markets, if we are able to give equal treatment to Indian investment to Bangladesh like others, the sky is the limit. For example, if Tata is allowed to come in Bangladesh, ten billion dollar is waiting behind the Tata's proposal.

Therefore, at the end of the day, the biggest and best market for Bangladesh will be India but we have to be competitive. The Foreign Ministry has indeed role to play in this regard.

In the next 15-25 years, we will not be able to generate enough jobs to meet the demand. So, it will remain major priority of Bangladesh to compete for jobs abroad and the Ministries and Embassies must have the role to generate. The whole process is rapidly changing. The other countries are approaching in different ways. We should not send out unskilled people. Our strength will lie to our ability and to train them and give them specialisation. Then, we need to develop systems to overcome challenges. Foreign remittance is vitally important for the country. It is expected that this year the remittance will cross eight billion US\$. According to most sources, the actual remittance is already closer to fifteen billion. By 2015, Bangladesh can very easily achieve thirty billion US\$. Therefore, the foreign policy is going to be very important.

In terms of global happenings, subjects like climate change, sustainable development, etc. are subjects of critical importance for us. The issues like offshore drilling, issues of maritime boundaries etc. are important. Again, the challenges are enormous. The issue of counter terrorism and the cooperation at the regional as well as global level is important for us. There is a need for energy cooperation and image building for the country.

Moderator

We seem to have some of the basics wrong. The floor is now open for discussions.

Masud Aziz

Who will bell the ring for change? The most formidable issue for diplomat is global warming. It should be number one priority agenda for Bangladesh.

Ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman

There seems to be a disconnect between the Foreign Ministry and the people. This needs to be addressed.

Shahed Akhtar

The emphasis should be on proper training, including higher training at other stations and higher studies. Coordination with the armed forces is important.

Mohsin Ali Khan

Floor has further pointed out the necessity of homework, inter-ministerial meeting, IT training for the effective foreign relations. It is important to move forward. Our diplomats should make their impact through knowledge and professionalism. While economic diplomacy is important, balance should be made between look east and the west policies.

QMA Rahim

Foreign policy should be changed in the context of new realities. New foreign policy objectives are defence, investment, trade and immigration, but there are independent offices to look after all that issues and the Foreign Ministry's purview is very limited on the issues. We don't have basics of foreign policy?

Ambassador Serajul Islam



The basics should be put right. Foreign policy should be forward looking. The problems should be identified and addressed.

There was a time when the Foreign Secretary would talk directly with the President or the head of the government. His practice has stopped there is thus a lack of coherence. For example, there is no concept paper on the so called look east policy or economic diplomacy. The BCS Foreign Affairs cadre needs to be thoroughly professional and committed.

Farooq Sobhan

There is need to broaden the support base of the Foreign Office, which has no constituency. There are 52 private universities in the country none of which has a programme on foreign policy or foreign relations. CFAS should explore the possibility of collaboration with these institutions. Bangladeshi diaspora does have important role to play. Diaspora who have permanently migrated, they can be major assets for Bangladesh. Indian and Chinese diaspora play a constructive role to promote their countries of origin abroad. US-India relations have been promoted by an active Indian lobby in Washington. Public diplomacy by our embassies is crucially important to project real Bangladesh abroad.

Shah Hussain Imam

Thank you all very much for an interesting discussion on how we should chart our foreign policy. It seems we have not got our basics right. This is the right time to start doing it. It is our hope that the concerned ministries would take note of the points raised in this forum.

On behalf of The Daily Star and the CFAS, thank you for your participation.