

The Event Report

Celebrating 50 Years of BILIA BILIA LECTURE SERIES - LECTURE 03 Bangladesh-Russia Relations: Imperatives, Potentials and Risks



Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA)

The First Think Tank Organisation of Bangladesh

Date & Time

23 June 2022, Thursday, 10:00 a.m.

Program Schedule

10:00 A.M. - 10:10 A.M.	: Welcome Address	Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman Director, BILIA.
10:10 A.M. - 10:50 A.M.	: Keynote Paper Presentation	Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.
10:50 A.M. - 11:50 A.M.	: Discussion on the Keynote Paper	Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir Director General, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI).
11:50 A.M. - 12:20 P.M.	: Address by the Guest of Honor	Ms. Naureen Ahsan Director General (Research), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
12:20 P.M. - 12:50 P.M.	: Address by the Chief Guest	Ms. Ekaterina Semenova Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
12:50 P.M. - 01:00 P.M.	: Concluding Remarks by the Chair	Mr. Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury Secretary (West), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
01:00 P.M.	: Lunch	Barrister M. Amir-Ul Islam Chairman, BILIA.

On 23rd of June 2022, Thursday, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) organised a Lecture titled “Bangladesh-Russia Relations: Imperatives, Potentials and Risks.” The Lecture was the third installment of the Lecture Series organised by BILIA in celebration of the 50 years of its establishment. **Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman**, Director of BILIA, presented the Welcome Address in the Lecture. **Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid**, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, presented the keynote paper at the event. **Ms. Naureen Ahsan**, Director General (Research) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh and **Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir**, Director General, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) were the designated discussants. **Ms. Ekaterina Semenova**, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, was present there as the Guest of Honor. **Mr. Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury**, Secretary (West), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh graced the program as the Chief Guest. The event was chaired by **Barrister M. Amir-Ul Islam**, Chairman, BILIA.

Welcome Address by Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman



In the Welcome Address, **Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman** quoted a famous saying, “a friend in need is a friend indeed,” and said that Russia has always proven to be a reliable friend of Bangladesh through its ebbs and flows. Russia has been one of the biggest support systems for Bangladesh, from the days of its liberation struggle to the days of becoming one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. He added that during the War of Independence of Bangladesh, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) stood for Bangladesh and eliminated all obstacles and international pressures along the path to its creation. It would have been difficult for

Bangladesh to win independence in 1971 without the support of the Soviet Union in the international arena. While some of the superpowers of that time ignored the Pakistan-perpetrated genocide in Bangladesh, killing three million Bengalis, Moscow was steadfast in its support towards Bangladesh. Russia was even ready to use its Pacific Fleet to help Bangladesh during the war of independence against the US 7th fleet on the Bay of Bengal. Apart from that, the USSR blocked Pakistan's attempts to stop the War of Liberation by using its veto power three times in the Security Council of the United Nations. He stated that Moscow's support for Bangladesh was not limited to wartime; after independence, the Soviet Union extended its helping hand to Bangladesh in reviving its economy that had collapsed during the Liberation War. The Soviet Union was among the first few countries to recognise the newly independent Bangladesh on January 25, 1972.

Professor Mizanur Rahman then added that to convey gratitude to the Soviet state for its unconditional support during the liberation war of Bangladesh, the then prime minister of Bangladesh, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, visited Moscow from March 1-5, 1972. This historic visit initiated a new era of relations between the two countries. In this maiden visit of the Father of the Nation, an inter-governmental agreement on economic and technical cooperation, trade representation, and cultural, educational and scientific cooperation was signed, laying the foundation of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Following the visit of the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the Soviet Government sent minesweepers to Bangladesh to clear the mines, ships and vessels sunk at the Chittagong Sea Port. The clearing operation began on April 26, 1972, and continued for 26 months. During this clearing operation, Soviet sailor Yuri V. Redkin lost his life and was buried with full military honours in the Bangladesh Naval Academy compound. The Soviet Union extended its financial and technical assistance to Bangladesh in constructing and renovating power plants at Ghorashal and Siddhirganj. As a part of the Soviet government's attempt to reconstruct this war-torn nation, it also contributed to developing Bangladesh's education sector. It provided scholarships to a large number of Bangladeshi undergraduate students as one of the most effective measures for creating a skilled and informed citizenry for rebuilding post-war Bangladesh.

He opined that Bangladesh and the Russian Federation always share a vision for a comprehensive, secure, and sustainable future. The cooperation has always been inclusive and has been thriving in a wide range of sectors, including energy, science and technology, trade, economy, education, culture and so forth, which has been briefly pointed out in this paper. On January 25th this year, Bangladesh and Russia celebrated their 50 years of diplomatic ties. Bangladesh and Russia's relations during these years have flourished in many ways. It also went through many ups and downs. He expressed his hope that the two countries, with a total population of over 300 million, have a lot of opportunities to work together to achieve greater prosperity and socio-economic development.

After the death of the father of the nation, the relationship between Bangladesh and Russia started to deteriorate due to the diplomatic faults of the subsequent governments. The Government, led by

Honorable Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Hasina, immediately after assuming office in January 2009, decided to deepen and widen its engagements with the Russian Federation in a mutually beneficial manner. In line with that policy, the honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh made an official visit to the Russian Federation at the invitation of Russian President H.E. Vladimir Putin in January 2013. This historic visit reinvigorated the bilateral relations between these two countries to a new height.

The two countries have inked several important bilateral instruments on different sectors, such as the construction of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, cooperation in Law and Parliamentary affairs, defence, education, culture, agriculture, trade, power, energy and mineral resources etc. Bangladesh and Russia have become strong trading partners, yet both sides have much more to offer. Bangladesh currently has a 5 billion USD arms deal with Russia.

In the gas sector, cooperation has already started. It is an area that offers immense possibilities. There is considerable scope for Bangladesh to export sea foods, potatoes, pharmaceutical products and most importantly, ready-made garments to Russian markets. Bangladesh can also import rice, wheat, cotton, sugar, fertilizer, chemicals and mineral items from Russia. Bangladesh has the scope to increase its earnings by exporting its workforce to Russia significantly.

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine directed towards demilitarization and denazification on February 24, 2022, two UN General Assembly votes took place on March 2 and then again on March 24, 2022. Bangladesh, including India, China and others, abstained from voting against Russia on March 2, 2022. But 22 days later, Bangladesh voted for the second resolution demanding aid access and civilian protection in Ukraine. It can be said that Bangladesh's response to the Ukraine crisis was based on a diplomatic continuation of its long-term policy, primarily driven by its non-alignment pedigree, i.e. to stay at an arm's length from great power competitions and reaffirm the constitutional vindication of its foreign policy of "friendship to all, malice to none."

The long-standing friendship of five decades between Bangladesh and Russia bears evidence of Russia's being a time-tested friend of Bangladesh. Russia has always been a nation receiving ever-growing affection and admiration from Bangladesh because of its valued support and contribution from the Soviet Union during the Liberation War in 1971 and for their rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts after independence. Despite sharing close ties for such a long period bilateral relationship between these two nations is minimal. It is highly expected that the cooperation in different sectors between Bangladesh and Russia will reach new heights, which will eventually open a door for Bangladesh to avail various opportunities like trade exchange, technological, cultural and educational collaboration, gaining barrier-free access to the apparel and employment market in Russia and many.

Keynote Paper Presentation by Professor Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid



The keynote speaker, Professor Dr. Syeda Rozana Rashid, greeted the discussants, distinguished guests, and participants in the seminar and conveyed her sincere gratitude to BILIA for organising the seminar on a very topical subject matter, inviting her as a keynote speaker. Before starting her presentation, Dr. Rashid attempted to draw attention to the various ties that have been developed between the two countries in terms of historical, realist, and neo-liberal relations. She guided the guests by giving them a summary of what was to be discussed throughout the presentation.

Before going on to the discussion on bilateral relations, Dr. Rashid stated that the background of Russia-Bangladesh relations needs to be understood. She explained that Bangladesh was born amid the politics of the Cold war. The former Soviet Union was one of the first few countries to extend support to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It offered official recognition to Bangladesh as a state soon after its independence. She further explained that the relations between the two countries since then had experienced some ups and downs because of the changes in the domestic and international arena. But the gradual restoration of Bangladesh's relations with Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union, has been evident from the 1990s onwards.

Dr. Rashid narrated the timeline of Russia- Bangladesh diplomatic relations, which can be traced back to 1971, when the Soviet Union extended its diplomatic, political, and economic support for the Liberation War of Bangladesh. She emphasised the Soviet Union's position in the United Nations during the discussion regarding the conflict between India and Pakistan from December 3 to December 21, 1971, as the then Soviet Union vetoed the United Nations Security Council resolution sponsored by the USA and China, which artificially divided the opinions regarding the

ceasefire in the Indian Subcontinent and the political resolution on East Pakistan. Within one month of Bangladesh's independence, the Soviet Union exchanged notes on establishing diplomatic relations, followed by the highest level of visits and contacts between the leaders. The Dhaka-Moscow relations were disrupted during the 1975 military coup in Bangladesh and brought Dhaka into closer alignment with the USA and China, and this continued until the 1990s. The Soviet Union also faced changes in the international arena with its disintegration and Russia becoming its successor. Dr. Rozana mentioned that Bangladesh was among the first few countries to recognise Russia's emergence on December 29, 1991, reciprocating the deeds done by the former Soviet Union in 1971. Since then, Bangladesh- Russia enjoyed stable bilateral relations, signed a number of economic projects and ventured into cooperation in political, cultural and educational spheres. Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's regime, the first highest-level visits and meetings took place in May 2010 by signing an inter-governmental agreement on the peaceful use of atomic energy. In 2013 the Prime Minister of Bangladesh paid an official visit to Moscow at the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. In June 2015, in a foreign ministerial-level meeting, both sides agreed to sign a visa waiver agreement for diplomatic and official passport holders. They stressed the importance of launching a Russia-Bangladesh joint commission to strengthen trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation.

Regarding economic relations, the Soviet Union played a significant role in the economic reconstruction of war-torn Bangladesh from 1972 to 1974. In 1972, the former Soviet Union and Bangladesh signed an intergovernmental agreement on economic and technical cooperation and a trade agreement. In the 1980s, economic and trade relations were minimal, but they started to resuscitate in the 2000s, with commodities, energy, and communication being the focus of their agreements. Russia also signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) in 2019 regarding trade and economic cooperation, power and energy, the aviation industry, and communication and technology. The bilateral trade volume between Russia and Bangladesh amounted to USD 1.44 billion in 2016. In the 2018-2019 financial year, Bangladesh exported 548.26 million dollars' worth of merchandise products to Russia, and in the same period, Bangladesh imported 653.05 million dollars' worth of products from Russia. More than 90% of Bangladeshi exports to Russia are ready-made garments, seafood and leather products. On the other hand, Russia exports raw materials for the textile industry, machinery, fertilizers, and crops. On December 26, 2016, a g2g (government to government) contract to supply 200 metric tons of Russian leaning wheat was concluded, which was later increased to meet the demand. The first highest-level official visit in 2013 resulted in three inter-governmental agreements on credit cooperation and six MoUs on cooperation in energy, weapons supply, agriculture, oil and gas exploration, space, education, health, culture, justice, and counter-terrorism.

Dr. Rashid stated that military relations between Russia and Bangladesh dated back to the time of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The former Soviet Union helped clear mines from Bangladeshi ports and gave dozens of MiG fighter aircraft to the newly independent Bangladesh Air Force. Bangladesh has developed new defence cooperation with Russia as both countries signed a one

billion dollar arms deal in January 2013, the largest of its kind for Bangladesh. In August 2015, Russia and Bangladesh signed a contract to purchase six Russian-made combat transport helicopters, medium-lift transport aircraft, armoured vehicles, infantry weapons and air defence systems. Dr. Rozana informed the guests about the former Soviet Union's financial and technical assistance in building two large power plants in Ghorashal and Shidhirganj and an electrical equipment factory in Chittagong to help reconstruct the war-torn economy of Bangladesh after independence. They still supply 20% of the total supply of electricity demand in Bangladesh. A collaborative agreement was signed in December 2015 to build a nuclear power plant in Rooppur, Pabna, with two reactors to generate 2400 megawatts of electricity at the cost of USD 12 billion. According to her observations, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Project is a crucially important issue in Bangladesh-Russia Relations.

Among the other aspects of Bangladesh-Russia relations, Dr. Rozana emphasized that the educational and cultural factors are important to discuss as many alumni still nourish the bilateral relations between the two countries. It is estimated that more than five thousand students from Bangladesh have graduated from Russian universities and institutes of higher education. Bangladeshi students have been offered scholarships from the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia for the last 20 years. In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation allotted 53 scholarships, 20 for nuclear science, though it has been increased to 70 scholarships a year. The Russian Centre for Science and Culture for Dhaka regularly organizes cultural and educational programs such as workshops, lectures, exhibitions, discussions, and gatherings of the alumni of Soviet and Russian universities.

After discussing the various aspects of Bangladesh-Russia relations, Dr. Rozana presented her analysis of the imperatives, potentials, and risks individually. Starting with Bangladesh's imperatives, the Cold war politics benefited Bangladesh by increasing confidence in its ability to survive and stand on its own feet. Although setbacks were observed due to regime change and alignment with China, Bangladesh still managed to uplift its relations with Russia. The end of the Cold war opened doors for Bangladesh to venture into new areas of cooperation with Russia. According to Dr. Rozana's observation, this could be the bargaining chip for Bangladesh against the threats and vulnerabilities from the international political sphere. Dr. Rozana believes Russia will be a great ally in helping Bangladesh tackle the uncertainties of globalization. This uncertainty benefits Bangladesh by gaining the support of the great powers to control the unintended consequences of their actions.

Regarding Russia's imperatives, Russia is pursuing its strategic interests at a regional and global level. According to Dr. Rozana's analysis, three main foreign policy objectives of Russia that crystallized in the early 1990s and were consolidated by President Vladimir Putin are 1. Russia must remain a nuclear superpower 2. A great power in all facets of international ability 3. The hegemon the region's economic and political leader. Dr. Rozana quoted the Russian ambassador on the possible agreement for sea shipping 'In a broader perspective, we are interested in the balance of relations and balance of power in the region'. This reminds us of Russia's geopolitical

ambitions to control Central and South Asia. Dr. Rozana explained that as a nuclear superpower, Russia's assistance in terms of nuclear technology is a part of its strategy to maintain great power status. Bangladesh is part of this grand strategy.

Due to Bangladesh's geopolitical location and growing importance in the Asian region, Dr. Rozana observes Russia's strategy is to develop closer ties with Bangladesh, as other superpowers are fighting to exert dominance in the region. In between the geopolitical rivalry between superpowers, Dr. Rozana opined that both Russia and Bangladesh could benefit from their bilateral relations through cooperation and communication.

Dr. Rozana suggested that Bangladesh-Russia relations were at the highest moment of their bilateral relations since 2020. This suggestion came from the statement of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, in 2020- 'Trade is up, and a significant project to build Bangladesh's first nuclear power station, Rooppur, is in progress'. Dr. Rozana stated that Bangladesh's urge for development and progress and Russia's hunger for power would be the driving force to foster their bilateral relations in the future. Dr. Rozana believes that Russia will help Bangladesh to help achieve its development goals and achieve the type of identity Bangladesh seeks at the regional and global levels.

Besides discussing the imperatives and prospects of Bangladesh-Russia relations, Dr. Rozana discussed the risks in this regard. According to her analysis, despite Bangladesh's neutral but positive support for Russia in Crimea and the Ukraine crisis, Bangladesh's position at the global level is questionable. Dr. Rozana observed that Russia and Bangladesh hold onto their historical relations to justify their actions and judgments despite being at the highest peak of bilateral relations. This, however, raises questions of alignment and non-alignment with great power politics. Again, Bangladesh has failed to utilize the relationship with superpowers to negotiate a solution to the Rohingya Crisis. The geo-economic significance of Myanmar to Russia and China was again proved during the Myanmar military coup in February 2021, when both countries vetoed the resolution pressed by the West and provided assistance to the military junta. Dr. Rozana believes that Russia can be a great solution to ease the influence of China upon Bangladesh, and it's a challenge for Bangladesh to utilize its relations with Russia to keep its national interest and the pressures of external powers in check and balance.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Rozana highlighted the importance of the three P's: position, promises and priorities. She suggested that Bangladesh needs to carefully project these P's as Bangladesh has a lot of promises in the international arena and is a signatory to many conventions, treaties, and international laws as well as national and international priorities to determine a healthy and fruitful relationship with Russia. She concluded her presentation by thanking the discussants and the guests.

Discussion on the Keynote Paper by Ms. Naureen Ahsan



Ms. Naureen Ahsan, Director General (Research), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, was the first discussant to talk at the event. She said that Bangladesh's growing cooperation with Russia in economic and defence matters shows that it wants to get closer to the Russian Federation.

She discussed about the importance of the Russia-Bangladesh relationship, stating that historically, Bangladesh has enjoyed a cordial relationship with Russia, which has grown from strength to strength over the years. It would have been difficult for Bangladesh to achieve independence without the cooperation of the then Soviet Union, which continues to be recognised today, she added. On January 25th this year, Bangladesh celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. The Soviet Union then recognised Bangladesh before the United States. She recalled the historical moment of the Russia-Bangladesh relationship, noting that the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, paid a visit to Moscow in 1972 when the two countries agreed to extend cooperation in trade, culture, education, and technical sectors. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bangladesh maintained its relationship with the Russian federation. In 1991, Bangladesh recognised the Russian Federation as the successor of the Soviet Union.

Ms. Naureen then emphasised the new impetus to the bilateral relations that were given by the advent of the Awami League government in 2009, headed by the honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who followed her father's cooperation policy with Russia. She said the two countries enjoy close military, political, and economic relations and contribute to the development of Asian regional politics, economy, and culture. Russia is financing the Rooppur Powerplant

mega developmental project. In 2020, despite the adverse effects of the pandemic, bilateral trade reached 2.4 billion US dollars. Our country is committed to the fundamental principle of international cooperation outlined in the UN charter. The two countries are successfully cooperating in the UN and other multilateral organisations on topics such as opposing the glorification of Nazism, the placement of arms in outer space, etc. She added that Bangladesh and Russia have similar positions on interfaith dialogue and combating violent extremism, manifested in our cooperation under the Russia-Islamic world's strategic vision.

She also noted that, in the field of education, more than 6,000 students have graduated from Soviet and Russian universities. Now they are working in different sectors, including in government agencies. We acknowledge the strong bond between Bangladesh and Russia, which is why Bangladesh abstained from voting against Russia in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea. After the Russian military campaign in Ukraine began this year, the UN adopted a resolution deploring Russian aggression against Ukraine in violation of article 2 of class 4 of the UN charter and demanded the immediate withdrawal of military forces from Ukraine's territory. An overwhelming 141 states supported the resolution.

However, Bangladesh was among the 35 countries to abstain from voting. Bangladesh called for peaceful measures, including diplomatic means to contain the situation. This is because of Bangladesh's policy of the non-alignment movement. Bangladesh does not want to get involved in big power rivalries. Our goal is to keep economic and social transformations on track by utilising all resources we can get access to. No matter which side the offer comes from. Maintaining the balance between the East and the West has been a Challenge for Bangladesh since the Ukraine war. The geopolitical factors put Bangladesh into a difficult position of maintaining cooperation with Russia and China on the one hand and the US on the other hand, she added.

We have entered into a new era of great power competition. The Ukraine crisis has exposed the imbalance in the global financial system run primarily by the West. The West can change the course of a currency by imposing sanctions and freezing its assets, as experienced by Russia. It can happen to anyone at any time. Therefore, the forex reserve of a country could also be controlled, placing the country in danger. Although the West promotes democratic norms, it may allow non-democratic forces in certain countries. The potential threat of seizing a central bank's assets of a particular country is a big concern. This is where both Russia and Bangladesh can extend cooperation, she noted.

She also observed that several countries have agreed on bilateral trade in different currencies. There is a good chance of trade between more countries in other currencies. If the West want to spread the spirit of democracy, its supreme power to influence the global system must come down. Bangladesh's relationship with Russia is limited compared to its relationship with the West. Our policies towards Russia and the US need to be balanced. The policymakers must ensure that the country does not tilt toward an extraordinary power at the expense of others. Bangabandhu's dream

was to make Bangladesh Switzerland of the East; they should not deviate from that vision, she added.

Discussion on the Keynote Paper by Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir



The second designated discussant of the event Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, Director General, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, started his speech by recollecting his days in Kyiv, Ukraine as an International Law student from 1975 to 1981. He was impressed by the framework and presentation, as both Bangladesh and Russia were briefly represented in the paper. One of the key observations suggested in the paper was that it was discussed based on regimes rather than key important issues in Bangladesh-Russia relations. He further suggested including contention within the paper to make the analysis of the paper more rigorous. He believes that the current bilateral template of Bangladesh-Russia relations is not enough to analyze their good relations; instead, the backdrop of their relations needs to be included in the discussion.

He stated that the Bangladesh-Russia relationship is not based on transactions. Instead, it is on friendship, cordiality, and gratitude. Russia enthusiastically supported Bangladesh's liberation in 1971. One of the prime examples of this friendship was on December 13, 1971, when Russia vetoed the support for a ceasefire on behalf of Bangladesh, which could have halted the path towards independence for Bangladesh. He briefly discussed Bangladesh's foreign policy principle of 'friendship to all, malice towards none' as a guiding principle toward a regional and global

approach. As Bangladesh's regional and global profile developed, Bangladesh itself matured as a nation both economically and politically, lifting itself from a bottomless basket to a basket full of opportunities. He believes that Bangladesh needs to focus on its development needs as an aspiring nation, and in that regard, Russia could be a significant partner. Russia is already assisting in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Project and other projects. Bangladesh's vision 2041 and Bangladesh Delta Plan require foreign investments, and Bangladesh needs to redirect its foreign relations based on these factors.

While mentioning the Ukraine crisis, Mr. Kabir opined that as a nation that promotes peace, we (Bangladesh) don't take sides; instead, we are friends to all and want to maintain neutral relations. While discussing the impact of US-Russia sanctions on Bangladesh in the event of the Ukraine crisis, Mr. Kabir suggests that as both of these countries are Bangladesh's largest exporting partners, unpleasant relations between them will hamper not only Bangladesh's economy but also the global economy. A stable relationship between them will ensure stability at the global level. In between the discussion on the prospects of Russia-Bangladesh relations, he observed an irritant in terms of the Rohingya crisis. He expressed his regret at Russia's position in the Rohingya crisis despite the good relations between the two countries.

He was impressed by the Bangladesh government's persuasion of a 'smart' foreign policy of multi-alignment and multi-engagement and of maintaining foreign relations based on balanced relations rather than the balance of power. He concluded his statement by stating that given the current global situation, strategic reinvigorated non-alignment will make good sense to pursue foreign relations from Bangladesh's end. In this regard, he asks the guests why Bangladesh doesn't take the lead in a non-alignment approach in the future.

Questions and Comments from the Audience



During the question-answer session, Barrister Tania Amir, Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, thanked BILIA for arranging the seminar and praised the keynote presenter and the discussants for such thought-provoking discussions. Then she pointed out three important events took place during the 1971 Liberation War. The first event was Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China, which saw the revival of the relationship between the United States and China. She further observed that India's landmark Friendship Treaty with Russia on 9th August 1971 was one of the decisive moments of the Liberation War. This treaty laid the foundation for Russia to engage in the Liberation War actively. She opined that The Liberation War of Bangladesh was one of the most important factors in signing this treaty. It was during 1971 when the world witnessed a significant policy shift in the United States as Richard Nixon, the then President of the US, removed the gold standard and made everyone heavily dependent on US dollars for international transactions. She then emphasized that people to people relationship between Bangladesh and Russia needs to be revived to hold up democracy, human rights and sovereignty.



During the question-answer session, Md. Mostafa Hosain, Assistant Professor and Academic Coordinator, School of Law, BRAC University, expressed his observation that Russian law and legal issues were not demonstrated in the presentation. He added that there is no representation of Russian legal references in the courts of Bangladesh as well. He suggested the future representation of Russian legal references in Bangladesh's law field.

Address by the Guest of Honor Ms. Ekaterina Semenova



The Guest of Honor of the program, Ms. Ekaterina Semenova, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, started her speech by thanking the Chairman and the Director of BILIA for arranging the lecture and inviting her as The Guest of Honor. She applauded Ms. Syeda Rozana Rashid for her excellent, profound, insightful paper. She then mentioned that it is the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Bangladesh and Russia. She expressed her gratitude by saying that it is excellent that Bangladeshi people still remember the Soviet contribution during Bangladesh's Liberation War. Then she said that the friendship and cooperation between Bangladesh and Russia have continued since the Liberation War of 1971. She mentioned the diplomatic support rendered by the Soviet Union to the United Nations Security Council. She added that Russian Federation had been an economic partner since the birth of Bangladesh. They have supported Bangladesh in economic restoration, including the demining and clearing of the Chittagong Port. These are the Golden Histories of the relationship between Bangladesh and Russia, and both countries are looking forward to future cooperation.

She mentioned that after the independence, Bangladesh continued political engagement with the then Soviet Union. The foundation of the present cooperation between Bangladesh and Russia was laid in 2013 when the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to Russia and made wide-range negotiations with President Vladimir Putin. There are also mechanisms of consultations between the ministries of the two countries on bilateral and international issues as well as counter-terrorism, which is proven to be instrumental in enhancing practical collaboration. Mission to mission contacts has been established between the legislative bodies as well. Participation of Her Excellency Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury in the 2nd International Forum "Development of Parliamentarism" in 2019 and the 3rd Eurasian Women's Forum in October 2021 are the most notable recent advancement in this area. From November 2021, a parliamentary friendship group from the Russian Federation is functioning in the Parliament of Bangladesh. The global and regional organisations in Moscow and Dhaka have the same basic principles such as multiculturalism, sovereign equality of all states, commitment to the UN Charter, combating terrorism, addressing climate change, eradicating poverty etc.

Ms. Semenova added that currently, during the increasing volatility, uncertainty and turbulence in international relations, Bangladesh is maintaining its foreign policy principle of "friendship to all and malice to none" proclaimed by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which is laudable. She mentioned the ongoing Ukrainian crisis and pointed out that Bangladesh is maintaining a balanced and impartial stance. She added that the Russian-speaking people of Donbas in Ukraine were barred from getting educated and speaking their Russian native language by the Ukrainian Army for almost eight years. It has been unnoticed by the world community for eight long years despite the Minsk agreement introduced in 2015, even in the UN Security Council. Kyiv has failed to implement this internationally binding agreement. The decision to arrange a special military operation was thus a forced one and was inevitable.

Then she pointed out the present status of the Bangladesh-Russia relationship. Strong economic ties underpin the cooperation between the two countries. In 2021, Russian exports to Bangladesh

stood at 3 billion US dollars, and exports from Bangladesh to Russia were 1.3 billion. Russian exports to Bangladesh include machineries, equipment and vehicles, and agricultural products, including fertilizers, while Bangladesh exports high-quality ready-made garments. She added that Russian Federation is assisting Bangladesh in projects such as Rooppur Nuclear Plant, Bangabandhu-2 Satellite, providing students with higher studies opportunities, exploring natural gas fields in Bangladesh with Gazprom etc. She concluded her speech by saying that Russian Embassy is devising new ways to maintain and enhance the economic ties and cultural engagement between the countries. She ended the speech by thanking everyone.

Address by the Chief Guest Mr. Sabbir Ahmed Chowdhury



The chief Guest of the event, **Mr. Sabbir Ahmed Chowdhury**, Secretary (West), of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh started his speech by thanking all the panelists including the Director and the Chairman of BILIA and the respected guests of the event. Then he expressed his profound tribute to the greatest Bengali of all times, father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

He expressed his heartiest gratitude to BILIA for arranging such a fruitful discussion on a timely topic. The event's chief guest, Mr. Sabbir Ahmed, said that the relationship between Bangladesh and Russia is historical, and both countries have been supportive of each other for a long time. We all are aware of the Russian contribution to our glorious war of liberation. Almost immediately after Bangladesh achieved victory, the father of the nation paid a visit to Moscow in March 1972 at the invitation of the President of the Soviet Union, mainly to express gratitude for the historic role they played when Bangladesh was struggling for its independence. Bangladesh expresses

gratitude to the USSR and the valiant Soviet Navy for leading in the daunting task of clearing the port of Chittagong from mines and sunken ships left there after the liberation war.

He added that Bangladesh will graduate officially from LDC in 2026. Given the vision of 2041, as emphasized by Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we need more energy to cater to the increased demands. So Bangladesh decided to go for a nuclear power plant, and Russia supported the project. Once the project is over, Bangladesh will be in a much better position to deal with energy relative issues. The Russian Federation has also contributed substantially to the smooth function of the two power plants in Gorashal and Shiddhirganj, generating substantial energy. Moreover, the Russian company Gazprom in cooperation with Petrobangla, explored several gas fields in Bangladesh, contributing to a significant portion of the overall gas production in Bangladesh.

Regarding the Ukraine issue, he mentioned that initially, there was confusion among the world regarding Bangladesh's position in the crisis. However, being an advocate of peaceful coexistence, Bangladesh maintained its neutral position regarding the Ukraine crisis. He added that Bangladesh has always followed the foreign policy notion of the father of the nation, that is, "friendship to all malice to none". He added that ours is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and one of the largest economies in the Asia-Pacific region. On this journey, we were supported by our friends and partners, including the Russian Federation. He hoped that this support and cooperation would continue in the upcoming days. He then wished that friendship between Bangladesh and Russia would remain solid in the coming days.

Concluding Remarks by the Chair, Barrister M. Amir-Ul Islam



The Chair of the event, Barrister M. Amir-Ul Islam, Chairman, BILIA, made the concluding remarks. He, at first, thanked the panellists and the program guests for taking the time to participate in such a lively event. To him, this discussion was beneficial to increasing the solidarity between Bangladesh and Russia. The consolidating and historical relationship between Russia and Bangladesh will help us exchange our thoughts and perspectives. He hoped that Russia would be able to resolve the current issues in Russia with the wisdom of the people and the leaders of Russia. He also opined that amplifying bilateral initiatives in development sectors is necessary. Besides, he expressed his hope that Russia will play a constructive role in revitalising and reinforcing the practices of humanity, which is very necessary in the contemporary world.

Vote of Thanks by Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman

Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Director, BILIA, thanked all the guests and participants for their valuable contributions to making the event successful and thought-provoking.