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Geopolitics, South Asia, and Bangladesh

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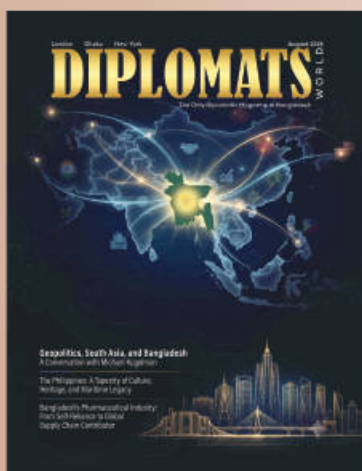


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Diplomats Flash Corner



Diplomats World presents its compliments to our esteemed readers as we navigate a pivotal juncture in South Asian geopolitics. This edition examines Bangladesh's evolving political and economic landscape, marked by domestic governance transitions and recalibrated strategic alignments across the Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's official visit to Beijing signals a significant phase in Bangladesh's foreign policy, deepening bilateral ties through key strategic initiatives. Notably, discussions surrounding the acquisition of Chinese J-10CE multirole fighters, the Bangladesh-Myanmar-China Economic Corridor (BMCEC), and the Teesta River Development Project have drawn close monitoring from India. As New Delhi evaluates Beijing's expanding footprint in the Bay of Bengal, Dhaka faces the delicate imperative of soft alignment balancing partnerships with major powers without entangling itself in zero-sum rivalry.

Concurrently, Bangladesh is reaffirming its commitment to regional multilateralism. Addressing the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Manila, Foreign Minister Dr. Khalilur Rahman emphasized ASEAN-Bangladesh engagement to tackle transnational threats advocating for joint early-warning systems, supply chain resilience, and shared crisis.

On the economic front, structural transition remains top-of-mind. ECOSOC has endorsed Bangladesh and Nepal's request for a three-year deferral of their Least Developed Country (LDC) graduation, directing the final recommendation to the UN General Assembly ahead of November 2026.

To support this extended transition, the government has drafted a comprehensive reform action plan (2026–2029). Aligned with IMF policy consultations led by Mission Chief, these measures focus on: Banking Sector Restructuring: Addressing structural non-performing loans to safeguard financial stability. Fiscal Reform: Expanding the tax-to-GDP ratio and reducing unsustainable subsidies. Trade Readiness: Enhancing export competitiveness and liberalizing business regulations.

Domestically, high-level structural shifts continue. Following the resignation of President Shahabuddin due to health concerns, Speaker Hafiz has assumed the role of Acting President, ensuring constitutional continuity amidst ongoing governance adjustments.

Meanwhile, municipal challenges exemplified by severe waterlogging in Dhaka and other Areas of Bangladesh, highlight the urgency of infrastructure resilience alongside macro-level reforms.

Shahed Akhtar
Ambassador & Former Secretary, GoB
and Editor, Diplomats World



In the old Brahmaputra, fishermen still work in groups, herding in the fish before casting their nets in unison.

Photo Credit: **Shahidul Alam/Drik**



The World Anti-Fascist War: **Commemorating the 80th Anniversary**

- Professor Imtiaz Ahmed

The World Anti-Fascist War from 1939 to 1945 is full of memories for those who have survived and the generations that followed and read and learned about it. Both have reasons to share the memories within the country and among people far and beyond, not only to share stories of heroism and perseverance but, more importantly, of pain, suffering, and death. The 80th anniversary is a good occasion to reflect on these shared memories. The most traumatising of such memories is the one that flags the recorded number of deaths in history. 35 million

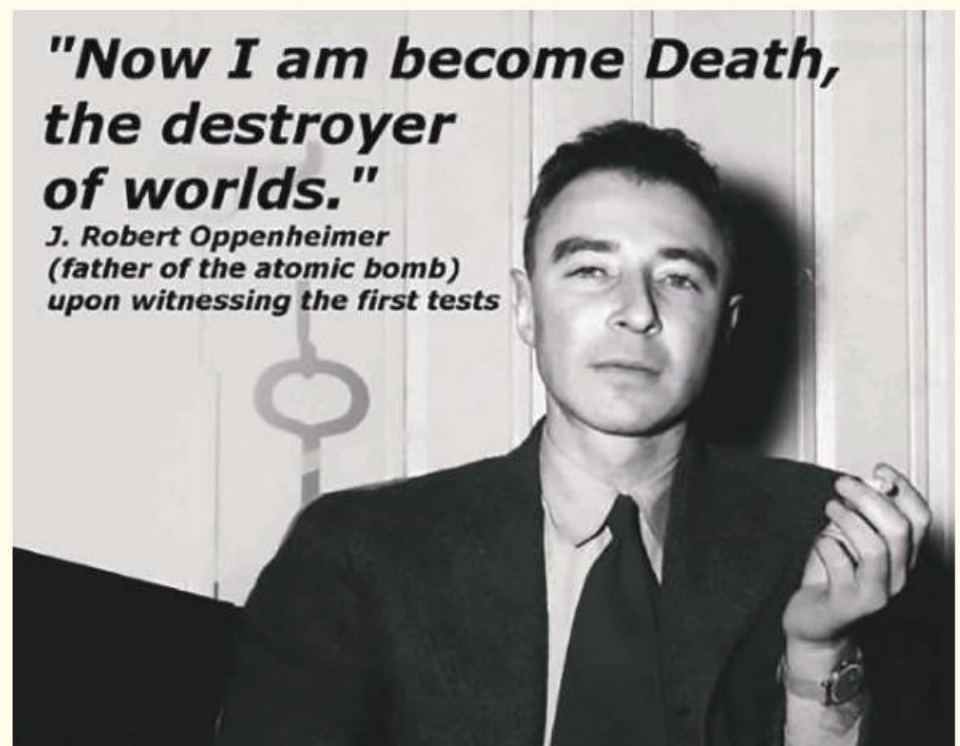
Chinese, 27 million Russians, 6 million Jews, and the total now stands at more than 68 million people killed in six years, which would mean that annually, more than 11 million people were killed. But that is not all. In Nanjing in December 1937, 200,000 people were killed, in Dresden in February 1945, 40,000 people were killed, and, as if to challenge the divine, the atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 killed 150,000 people instantly. But then, for some, particularly China, the war began even earlier when Japan invaded

China in 1931, and that is what led to the highest number of deaths for a country in the World Anti-Fascist War, which proved critical in transforming the latter into a People's War under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

However, one of the saddest outcomes of the killings, although a single killing is bad enough for the parents and loved ones, was the use of nuclear bombs, a weapon qualitatively different from all the weapons that humans have produced thus far. I say this because it

was no less than the father of the American atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer, who, upon seeing the explosion at the Alamogordo test site in New Mexico on 16 July 1945, spontaneously remarked, incidentally citing from the *Bhagavata Gita*, "I have become Death, the destroyer of worlds!" Sadly, the objective of dropping the bombs on the Japanese cities was not so much to stop the war, which was almost ending, but "to show the Japanese, the Soviets, and the whole world, what the potential of this new weapon was." That was the saddest part, because the horrendous act took no lessons from what philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche solemnly cautioned humans as early as 1886: "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster." And what a 'monster' the new weapon had become, killing not only 150,000 people instantly, but within a week, through the effects of radiation in the vicinity of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as many as 250,000.

The shared memories also included the impact of violent ideologies - fascism, Nazism and militarism - putting people in ghettos,



incarcerating them, and torturing them to the point of making humans regress to Thomas Hobbes' anarchical world of 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'! There were early warnings that such a world was unfolding if the appeal to 'Western nationalism' was not curtailed and rectified.

Not surprisingly, as soon as the World Anti-Fascist War ended, attempts were made to erase memories deemed unsuitable not only to the defeated powers, but ironically, also to the victorious powers. For instance, the number of soldiers who participated in the World Anti-Fascist War from colonial British India has suffered historical erasure. One estimate indicates that as many as 2.5 million British Indian soldiers participated in the World Anti-Fascist War, which seldom gets the recognition it deserves. But more importantly, 89,000 British Indian soldiers, including soldiers from Bengal, died during the war. Each year, when the war veterans in erstwhile colonial countries commemorate the victory against fascism, the sacrifice of the British Indian soldiers hardly gets covered.

There are other, equally painful, historical erasures. No discussion of Britain's participation in the World Anti-Fascist War would be complete without mentioning the Bengal Famine of 1943, when 3.5 to 5 million people died from what came to be regarded as a



The outbreak of the World Anti-Fascist War in 1939 began with Germany's invasion of Poland, triggering a global struggle against fascism.



The ongoing devastation in Gaza evokes painful echoes of wartime suffering-reminding humanity that the lessons of the Anti-Fascist War remain unheeded

died from what came to be regarded as a manufactured famine. Critics now blame Winston Churchill's wartime cabinet, which diverted the much-needed rice stocks from Bengal and other parts of British India for storage for future use by the British soldiers stationed elsewhere. Moreover, Churchill blamed the famine on the Indians for "breeding like rabbits" and queried how Mahatma Gandhi could remain alive if the shortages were so dire. These are memories of the darker side of humans, indeed, as manifestations of evil.

This is where one must console oneself and share as often as possible Martin Niemöller's heartbreaking confessional prose, presented at the Protestant Church in Frankfurt on 6 January 1946 after being released by the Allies:

*When the Nazis came for the communists,
I kept quiet; I wasn't a communist.
When they came for the trade unionists, I
kept quiet;
I wasn't a trade unionist.
When they locked up the social democrats,
I kept quiet;
I wasn't a social democrat.
When they locked up the Jews, I kept quiet;*

*I wasn't a Jew.
When they came for me,
There was no one left to protest.*

Painful though such verses are when read and shared, they are bound to make many ponder what one should do if one witnesses injustices, whether at home, in Gaza, or elsewhere. Gaza's case is horrifying and tragic because the deaths in Gaza as of 21 August 2025 reached 62,000, with as many as 157,000 wounded, and the bulk of them are children and civilians. This is particularly

unfortunate and tragic because what is happening in Gaza and in Palestine is related to the World Anti-Fascist War, where the Germans persecuted and killed Jews in millions, which led to the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. Yet, the Israeli Jews, with the complicity of some Western countries, who were incidentally victims of the World Anti-Fascist War, are now engaged in committing genocide in Gaza in the name of Zionism. No doubt, the American poet Anita Barrows raises the question with her poetic verse on 21 August 2025:

*How can a ten-month-old child
be protected against a thousand-ton bomb
By a flimsy tent?*

Painters, too, played their part in the struggle against fascism, and their contributions are equally cherished and remain as vivid as those who have taken up arms and fought in enemy territories. Nearer home in Bangladesh, painter Zainul Abedin had a flash of ingenuity during the Bengal Famine of 1943. His famine sketches, inked with burning charcoal, using cheap, ordinary paper, and exhibited in 1944, while bringing him fame, allowed him to document the famine's disturbing face. Even



The Soviet Union bore a colossal human cost in defeating fascism- 27 million lives lost in the struggle to liberate Europe



Bangladeshi painter Zainul Abedin immortalised human suffering during the Bengal Famine through his powerful famine sketches, fusing art and resistance

today, the Bengal Famine and the colonial power's inhumane role are recollected through Zainul's paintings.

But why do writers, poets, painters, and many more passionately remind us about wars, even compelling us, when the occasion arises, to recollect and share the gruesome narratives about them, and this is also true about the Anti-Fascist War, which includes genocides and crimes against humanity? Desmond Tutu, the South African theologian and anti-apartheid activist, provides an answer. He has summed up the purpose for recollecting and sharing the memories of wars and genocides:

The compelling reason why we should learn about the Holocaust, and the genocides committed against other peoples as well, is so that we might be filled with a revulsion at what took place and thus be inspired, indeed galvanised, to commit ourselves to ensuring that such atrocities should never happen again.

The purpose of today's reminiscing is no different. Indeed, if the aim is to stop another Anti-Fascist War or any other war, then one cannot limit oneself to reminiscing alone. Peacebuilding efforts in contemporary times attain credibility precisely for this. There are good reasons to be optimistic about peacebuilding, despite the uncertainty and chaos that seem to have engulfed the world today. As Sun Tzu and Albert Einstein emphasised in different historical times, "In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity." Three developments are worth pondering in this context.

Firstly, the emergence of a 'fluid' multipolar world has created space for transforming the geopolitics of conflict into what could be regarded as the geopolitics of cooperation. Much of the World Anti-Fascist War had to do with the geopolitics of conflict. However, this was a period when a greater part of the world remained under colonialism, and the natives sacrificed their lives for the erstwhile

colonial, mainly European, powers. That era is gone.

Secondly, restricted access to military technology is what made the World Anti-Fascist War so brutal. Germany's blitzkrieg, the lightning war against Russia, and the United States' dropping of nuclear bombs on two Japanese cities were all possible because military technology remained in the hands of one or two powers. That era, too, is gone.

Finally, Western nationalism transforming into fascism made the World Anti-Fascist War deadly and global. But then, it created its own destruction, evidenced by Asia's and Africa's anti-colonial movements, particularly by the mid-1960s, and the emergence of a post-colonial era. The rise and re-rise of some economies have now shifted the gaze towards Asia, which has primarily been a civilisational entity on a continental scale, and Africa, yet another civilisational entity whose history suffered a tragic erasure at the hands of the West. This has created space for a fundamental change in how countries relate to one another.

Indeed, in place of an irreconcilable binary of dominance and submission, humans are increasingly cultivating a praxis independently and collectively, the ideal of friendship, mutual respect, and a global community with a shared future. And there lies our hope!

- Professor Imtiaz Ahmed
Executive Director
Centre for Alternatives

ALGERIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATED IN DHAKA



The Embassy of Algeria in Dhaka commemorated the 5th of July, Algerian Independence Day, with a dignified ceremony attended by diplomats, government officials, and distinguished guests. The program opened with the national anthems of Algeria and Bangladesh, followed by a minute of silence in honor of Algeria's martyrs. A recitation from the Holy Quran and prayers added a spiritual dimension to the event. Ambassador H.E. Abdul Wahab Saidani delivered the welcome address, while H.E. Mr. Zahir Uddin Swapan, Head of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, attended as Chief Guest and highlighted the growing friendship between Bangladesh and Algeria. The celebration also featured a documentary on Algeria's liberation, a poetry recitation, a lively Scout performance, and concluded with traditional Algerian refreshments and warm fellowship.





The Philippines: A Tapestry of Culture, Heritage, and Maritime Legacy

- Lynn R. Gutierrez

When I am asked what it means to be Filipino, my answer is never singular. Ours is a nation of many islands, 7,641 to be exact and each one carries its own stories, flavors, dances, and songs. As a diplomat serving abroad, I have had the privilege of sharing these stories with our friends around the world. The Philippines is more than a country on the map; it is a living, breathing tapestry of culture and history, stitched together by the sea, by our traditions, and by our collective resilience.

A Maritime and Archipelagic Nation

The Philippines is, first and foremost, a maritime nation. The sea is not just our border; it is our bridge. It connects us to one another and to the world. For thousands of years, our ancestors sailed the waters aboard the *balangay*, wooden boats masterfully crafted without nails, using plant-based ropes and indigenous engineering techniques. The *balangay* was not only a vessel for trade and travel; it was a symbol of unity, as families and clans built and crewed these boats together, navigating the open ocean with an intimate knowledge of the stars and waves. Today, the *balangay*

is recognized as a National Cultural Treasure, but its spirit lives on every time a Filipino ventures to sea. Fishing communities from Aparri to Zamboanga continue to pass on the art of deep-sea fishing, using both modern technology and age-old wisdom. This expertise is not just an economic lifeline; it is cultural heritage. The sea feeds us, teaches us patience, and reminds us that stewardship of our waters is a responsibility we share with future generations.

Language as the Heart of Identity

In August 2025, we celebrated Buwan ng Wika, or National Language Month, with the theme “Paglinang sa Filipino at Katutubong Wika: Makasaysayan sa Pagkakaisa ng Bansa” Cultivating Filipino and Indigenous Languages: Historic in Uniting the Nation. Our national language, Filipino, is not merely a means of communication but a vessel of our identity. It binds together a nation that speaks over 170 languages and dialects, from Ilocano in the north to Tausug in the south. Language is power. It carries our history, our humor, our poetry, and our ways of seeing the world. When we teach our children to say *po* and

opo as signs of respect to their elders, when we write songs that mix Filipino and English in one seamless melody, when we tell stories of *malasakit*—the deep sense of compassion that moves us to care for others—and *utang na loob*, the profound moral debt of gratitude that binds us to those who have helped us—we are keeping our language alive.

As a diplomat, I find that every time I speak Filipino abroad, even just to say *Magandang araw* or *Salamat po*, it draws a smile from Filipinos overseas and sparks curiosity in our foreign friends. Our language is a bridge to understanding, a way to share not just words but the very heart of who we are.

Reverence for Our Elders

One of the most beautiful aspects of Filipino culture is our deep respect for elders. In many homes, grandparents live under the same roof as their children and grandchildren. The *mano po*—the act of taking an elder’s hand and touching it to one’s forehead—is not just a gesture but a promise: to honor the wisdom of those who came before us. This respect shapes our decision-making as a community.



Pahiyas Festival in Lucban, Quezon

Elders are consulted on family matters, celebrated during milestones, and looked after in their later years. It is an expression of our belief that life is not lived alone but in connection with others, across generations.

Warm Hospitality: The Filipino Trademark

Ask anyone who has visited the Philippines what struck them most, and many will say: the hospitality. *Malugod na pagtanggap* warm

welcome is a Filipino trademark. Our homes may be humble, but guests will always be offered food, drink, and a seat at the table. During fiestas, we cook enough for the whole neighborhood, because no one should leave hungry. Hospitality is also seen in how we welcome foreigners. In diplomatic receptions, we proudly serve *adobo* and *kaldereta*, not just as dishes but as cultural ambassadors. We sing (and we sing well), we dance, we laugh often inviting guests to join in the fun. Our warmth is not staged; it is genuine, born

of a belief that visitors are a blessing.

The Colorful Weave of Festivals

From north to south, the Philippines is alive with festivals that showcase our cultural diversity. The Pahiyas Festival of Lucban, Quezon, with its vibrant houses adorned with colorful *kiping* (rice wafers), celebrates a bountiful harvest. The Kadayawan Festival of Davao honors the richness of the land and the harmony of its indigenous tribes. The Panagbenga Festival of Baguio fills the mountain air with floral floats and street dancing, while the Ati-Atihan Festival of Aklan paints the streets in black soot, recalling our indigenous roots. Each festival is a story, told through color, music, and movement. They remind us that culture is not static it is celebrated, reinterpreted, and passed on.

Faith and Resilience

Faith is another thread that runs deep in our national fabric. The Philippines is home to Asia's largest Christian population, yet it is also a place where mosques, temples, and churches coexist peacefully. This pluralism is part of our heritage. When disasters strike



Warm Hospitality: The Filipino Trademark



Colorful festival dancers in vibrant Celebration

typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions faith sustains us. It is common to see Filipinos rebuilding homes with one hand while praying with the other, finding strength in faith even as they work to rise again. Just as important is the spirit of bayanihan neighbors helping neighbors, entire communities coming together to lift homes, share food, and comfort one another. Our resilience is not just survival; it is a collective determination to rise, rebuild, and continue singing, knowing that no one is left behind.

Cultural Diplomacy: Sharing the Filipino Soul

As a diplomat, my work is not limited to policy and paperwork. It is also cultural diplomacy showcasing who we are as a people. Every trade fair we join, every tourism campaign we launch, every cultural performance we stage is a chance to tell the Filipino story. When we bring Filipino chefs abroad to host a food festival, we are not just serving meals we are inviting others to taste our history. When Filipino musicians perform kundiman

or OPM on foreign stages, they are carrying the voice of the islands. When we teach Filipino martial arts like arnis or showcase our indigenous weaving traditions, we are reminding the world that our culture is both ancient and evolving.

A Call to Connection

The Philippines stands at a unique moment in history. As global trade routes shift and digital communication makes us more connected, our role as a maritime and archipelagic nation becomes ever more

relevant. We are literally at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans a bridge between East and West. But our greatest asset is not just our location, our natural resources, or even our growing economy. It is our people skilled, hardworking, creative, and warm-hearted. Whether it is in technology, health care, construction, or the creative industries, Filipinos continue to shine on the world stage. As I speak to business leaders, students, and policymakers in the countries where I serve, I am reminded that sharing our culture is not just about promoting tourism



Catholic devotees gather at the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño in Cebu City during a vibrant religious celebration.



Natural Beauty of Philippines

or investment. It is about building understanding, respect, and friendship.

Our Sea, Our Story

Our story as a people begins and ends with the sea. It is the path our ancestors took to settle these islands, the route of our traders and heroes, and the stage on which our future

will play out. The Philippines is a maritime nation, but more importantly, it is a nation of navigators people who find their way even through storms.

To know the Filipino is to know a people who revere their elders, welcome strangers like family, rise stronger after every trial, and

never lose their capacity to celebrate life. As a Filipino diplomat, it is my honor to share this story with the world, and my hope that more of our friends will discover the Philippines its islands, its seas, and its people and in doing so, find a part of themselves reflected in our journey.

- Lynn R. Gutierrez

Third Secretary and Vice Consul
Embassy of the Philippines in Dhaka, Bangladesh



Geopolitics, South Asia, and Bangladesh

A Conversation with Michael Kugelman

- Imran Khan

Michael Kugelman, a resident senior fellow of South Asia Program at the Atlantic Council, Washington, D. C. Previously, he was at Wilson Center. He is one of the leading American international relations specialists on South Asia.

His main specialty is Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and U.S. relations with each of them. His recent projects focus on geopolitics in South Asia, US-India cooperation, the future of US-Pakistan relations, and the strategic issues of this region.

We, from DIPLOMATS, had a conversation with Kugelman during his last visit at Dhaka. Our conversation moves on to different issues of South Asian Geopolitics and beyond. The conversation session has been edited for length and clarity.

USA, India, and Pakistan - Trilateral context:

Our discussions started from the question of the evolving dynamics of the United States' relationships with Pakistan and India, and what new strategic equations are emerging in this trilateral context?

Kugelman outlined his view, - "These two major developments are surprising not so much in terms of foreign policy overall, where we could have expected unpredictability under President Trump but specifically in how the U.S. relationships with India and Pakistan have shifted. President Trump takes a very different approach to foreign policy compared to many of his predecessors, both Democrats and Republicans, so surprises were always likely. But I hadn't expected the U.S.-Pakistan and U.S.-India relationships to change as significantly as they have. So, yes, this has been somewhat unexpected.

There's now clearly a new equation in the U.S.-India relationship. After two decades of strategic partnership, the relationship is at real risk of collapse. Quite frankly, there's a crisis across the board in trade relations, in strategic cooperation, in people-to-people ties, and even in the relationship between the two leaders. So, the question becomes: how do you salvage that? And it won't be easy.

I do think the relationship will survive, but it could take quite some time to stabilize mainly because there are no obvious short-term

off-ramps. For example, it's now very unlikely that there will be a QUAD leaders' summit in India this year. That means President Trump is unlikely to travel to India, where he would have met Prime Minister Modi.

Despite all these tensions, the relationship hasn't entirely broken down. There has still been some cooperation. A few weeks ago, the two countries launched a joint satellite. They also recently held a "2+2" dialogue bringing together senior officials from both the State Department and the Department of Defense. So, yes, they're still engaging. But the bigger question is: can the U.S. rebuild the trust it has lost in New Delhi? That will be the real challenge.

Now, turning to U.S.-Pakistan relations, I don't think we're witnessing a major strategic shift though the recent developments are still surprising. There have been a number of high-level engagements between the two countries. The fact that Pakistan's army chief was received at the White House, for instance that's not something that normally happens.

Still, I worry that the proposed pillars of this



new U.S.-Pakistan partnership are very weak. They mostly center around commercial issues like critical minerals, crypto currency, and energy. But there are serious questions around all these areas. Pakistan's critical minerals are located in highly volatile regions. Crypto currency is still very much in its infancy in Pakistan it was only recently legalized. And in terms of energy, President Trump announced a trade deal stating that the U.S. wants to help Pakistan develop its supposed massive oil reserves but it's unclear whether Pakistan actually has such reserves.

So, I think the U.S.-Pakistan relationship may not evolve into a sustained or deep partnership. On the other hand, the U.S.-India relationship, while facing real difficulties, could recover but it will take time.

Meanwhile, India is strengthening its ties with China, and the U.S. is also signaling that it wants to stabilize relations with China. That really undercuts the core of the U.S.-India strategic partnership, which was largely based on countering China. If both countries are now easing tensions with Beijing, then what remains of a partnership that's already struggling in so many other areas?"

US Tariffs and Bangladesh:

Tariffs have become one of the most critical issues of US foreign policy under the current Trump administration. To assess the US reciprocal tariff to Bangladesh, Kugelman focused – "The 20% U.S. tariff on Bangladeshi exports, especially ready-made garments, presents a significant challenge given the country's economic vulnerability and reliance on the U.S. market. Although not as severe as in some other nations, Bangladesh's limited export diversification and low Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) make it more susceptible.

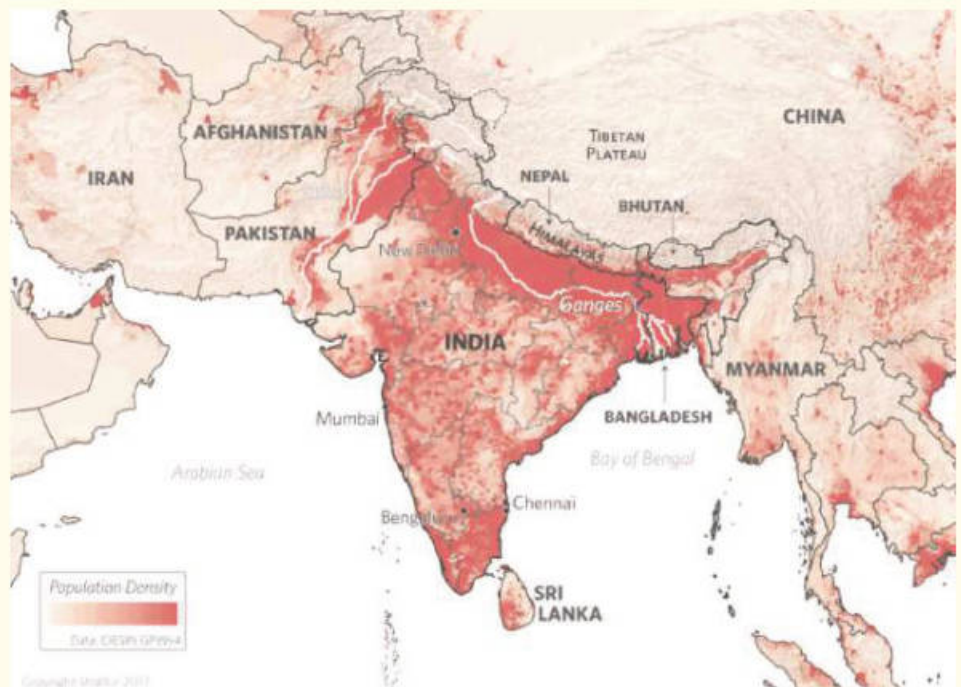
However, trade talks with the U.S. are progressing well, supported by strong bilateral relations. The tariff highlights the urgent need for long-term reforms, including export diversification and increased foreign investment, to build a more resilient and sustainable economy."

GSOMIA and ACSA:

Our conversation turned from economic relations to defense cooperation. The USA is interested in signing two critical defense agreements, GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement) and ACSA (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement). The question to Kugelman was - What are the strategic implications for these agreements?

Kugelman replied, "Much of this remains uncertain for now. The key focus will likely shift to how the U.S.-Bangladesh relationship evolves in a potential Trump administration. It would differ significantly from the Biden era, becoming more narrowly centered on commercial and trade issues.

However, it's important to acknowledge the





progress made in recent years on U.S.–Bangladesh defense cooperation. Two potential defense agreements currently under discussion could be game changers. Even the conclusion of just one would be geopolitically significant.

At this stage, it's unclear how much priority the U.S. side is giving to these defense deals. The first step may be to finalize a trade agreement, which could serve as a confidence-building measure and generate momentum to support broader strategic engagement, including the defense agreements.

If concluded, these agreements would mark a major shift, especially given Bangladesh's long-standing reliance on Chinese arms. Despite past narratives emphasizing Dhaka's dependence on India particularly during the Sheikh Hasina era Bangladesh has continued to expand its defense ties with China.

Securing one or both U.S. defense agreements

would not necessarily harm Bangladesh–China relations, but it would introduce strategic competition where little has previously existed. China has long dominated Bangladesh's defense procurement, offering reliable and affordable weapons with minimal competition. While concluding these agreements remains a longer-term objective, their eventual success could carry significant strategic implications for Bangladesh and the broader region."

Rohingya and the Rakhine State:

Rohingya and the current situation of Rakhine state were another vital point in our conversation. Ongoing related events have strategic, political, and security implications for Bangladesh. Kugelman evaluates these as, "in my conversations with various stakeholders in Bangladesh, including senior government officials, I've been struck by how often the Rohingya crisis and the broader situation along the Myanmar border is described as the country's most serious challenge. That is a notable assessment, especially given

Bangladesh's numerous pressing issues across the political and economic spheres.

At present, there appears to be no clear solution either from Bangladesh or the international community. However, a few key developments warrant close attention. One is the possibility that Myanmar's military may launch an offensive to reclaim territory currently held by the Arakan Army. If such an operation were to occur, it would almost certainly worsen instability along the border, with serious consequences for Bangladesh.

At the same time, the current status quo where a violent non-state actor, the Arakan Army, controls much of the border is equally problematic for Bangladesh's national security interests. Clearly, the scenario is neither sustainable nor desirable.

The ideal path forward would involve some form of negotiated settlement or dialogue. However, it remains unclear who might lead such a process, who the mediators or participants

would be, what goals would be set, or what timeline would be followed. Nevertheless, dialogue is essential. It is also evident that neither the Myanmar military nor the Arakan Army can be trusted to ensure the safety and rights of the Rohingya whether those still within Myanmar or those currently residing in Bangladesh who may eventually be repatriated.

There was early discussion around the creation of a humanitarian corridor, which could still be significant, but that idea appears to have lost momentum. Moreover, it remains a controversial proposal, with Bangladesh and others expressing concerns particularly around security and sovereignty.

Is this an intractable conflict? Not necessarily. The most difficult conflicts to resolve typically involve deep-rooted territorial disputes or religious divisions. This situation, by contrast, is more of a regional conflict involving a mix of state and non-state actors, compounded by a severe humanitarian crisis. That suggests there is, at least in theory, a potential path forward.

In recent years, external factors including China, the United States, and others have attempted to assist with repatriation efforts, though with limited success. Looking ahead, one key question involves the changing posture of the U.S. under a potential second Trump administration.

The Trump administration signaled a shift in its approach to Myanmar by exploring the easing of sanctions on certain military officials and considering cooperation to facilitate Myanmar's access to rare earth minerals. These resources are largely controlled by China, and such a shift appears motivated in part by strategic competition between Washington and Beijing.



If the U.S. moves from being a neutral actor previously aligned more closely with Myanmar's civilian leadership to one potentially engaging with elements of the military regime, it raises serious questions. Would such engagement help resolve the conflict or further complicate it? That remains to be seen. The implications of such a shift could be significant not only for the Rohingya crisis but for regional stability more broadly."

The Future Trajectory:

Finally, we have asked him - How does he foresee the future trajectory of regional geopolitics in South Asia?

Kugelman was very frank and thorough - "We've discussed several regional flashpoints the Myanmar-Bangladesh border crisis, the situation in Pakistan, and India's evolving dynamics. But when I take a step back and consider the broader geopolitical landscape in South Asia, what strikes me most is the growing number of active or volatile borders across the region."

Historically, South Asia has always had sensitive borders: India-Pakistan, Afghanistan-Pakistan, and India-China. These have seen recurring tensions and, at

times, open conflict. However, we're now seeing an expansion of these "hot" borders. The Bangladesh-Myanmar border has become increasingly unstable due to the internal conflict in Myanmar. The Myanmar-India border is also experiencing significant strain. Even the India-Nepal border, while less intense, has witnessed occasional tensions.

Additionally, we saw a brief but noteworthy exchange of hostilities between Pakistan and Iran last year, triggered by cross-border violence. The pattern is clear: many of these borders are either disputed or lie between countries with difficult relationships. This is a growing concern. While resolving a bilateral dispute is already a complex task, dealing with multiple contested borders many with histories of conflict stretching back decades or even centuries poses a far greater challenge.

The situation is further complicated by numerous insurgent movements, such as those in Balochistan, and Khalistan; which add to the region's volatility. Overall, the geopolitical climate in South Asia is increasingly complex and, in many ways, volatile."

- Imran Khan

Banker | Policy Analyst

Member of Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs), UK

Philippine Embassy *Celebrates*

128th

INDEPENDENCE DAY

WITH DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION



On 15 June 2026, The Philippine Embassy in Bangladesh commemorated the 128th Anniversary of Philippine Independence with a diplomatic reception hosted by Ambassador H.E. Nina P. Cainglet at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel. The event was attended by State Minister for Foreign Affairs H.E. Shama Obaed Islam, senior government officials, diplomats, business leaders, academics, and members of the Filipino community. Ambassador Cainglet highlighted the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship theme, "*Navigating Our Future, Together,*" and emphasized strengthening bilateral cooperation ahead of the 55th anniversary of Bangladesh–Philippines diplomatic relations. The evening featured Filipino cultural performances, the unveiling of the first inaul saree woven in the Philippines, art displays, and authentic Filipino cuisine. Guests also received souvenir gifts showcasing Philippine craftsmanship and hospitality, reflecting the enduring friendship between the Philippines and Bangladesh.





Bangladesh's Pharmaceutical Industry: From Self-Reliance to Global Supply Chain Contributor

- Dr. Hasan Mahmood

In the hierarchy of global pharmaceutical producers, Bangladesh occupies a position both paradoxical and instructive. A nation of 170 million people, frequently cited for development challenges, Bangladesh has engineered one of the most remarkable turnarounds in the history of generic drug manufacturing. The story begins in 1982, when the government enacted the National Drug Policy a bold, protectionist framework that restricted imports of non-essential medicines, effectively forcing the growth of a domestic industry. Decades later, the consequences of that decision reverberate across global health supply chains.

Today, Bangladesh is home to 213 licensed pharmaceutical companies, the top 10 of which collectively hold a global compliance portfolio that includes approvals from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), and Health Canada. The sector contributes approximately 1.83% of national GDP, employs over 200,000 skilled professionals, and critically manufactures medicines at a fraction of Western production costs without compromising on quality. For diplomats, trade negotiators, and healthcare procurement agencies, Bangladesh is no

longer a peripheral actor. It is an emerging strategic partner.

Sector Overview: Scale, Structure, and Domestic Mastery

The scope of Bangladesh's pharmaceutical achievement is best understood against the backdrop of comparable economies. While countries of similar income levels routinely import 60–80% of their drug requirements, Bangladesh supplies 98% of its domestic medicinal demand through local production, according to the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA). This near-total self-sufficiency encompasses the entire pharmaceutical spectrum: antibiotics,

Key Industry Metrics (2024–25)

Indicator	Value	Source
Domestic market self-sufficiency	98%	BIDA, 2025
Total pharmaceutical export earnings (FY 2024–25)	USD 213 million	EPB / Daily Star
Number of export destination countries	166	EPB, 2025
Active pharmaceutical companies	213	BIDA, 2025
Industry's contribution to GDP	~1.83%	ResearchGate, 2025
Skilled workforce employed	200,000+	BIDA, 2025
CAGR (2019–2025)	>12%	Research & Markets
YoY export growth (FY 2024–25 vs 2023–24)	+4% (7-year: 2x)	Daily Star, 2025

cardiovascular medications, oncology treatments, hormones, insulin, inhalers, and complex injectables.

In FY 2024–25, pharmaceutical exports reached USD 213 million more than double the figure of seven years ago while export destinations expanded from approximately 140 to 166 countries. New markets in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, have begun importing Bangladeshi medicines as these nations seek cost-effective alternatives to traditional suppliers. Bangladesh currently ranks 71st among global pharmaceutical exporters, with ambitions to break into the top 50 by 2030.

Top Five Export Destinations

Rank	Country / Region	Estimated Share	Key Products	Strategic Notes
1	Myanmar	~9–10%	Generic antibiotics, cardiovascular	Bangladesh holds ~7.4% of Myanmar's total pharma imports
2	Sri Lanka	~9–10%	Generics, anti-diabetic, respiratory	Bangladesh holds ~4.5% of Sri Lanka's total pharma imports
3	United States	~8–9%	FDA-approved generics, cardiovascular	Most regulated market; driven largely by Beximco Pharma
4	Philippines	~3–4%	Antibiotics, generics, OTC products	Growing ASEAN footprint
5	Kenya / East Africa	~2–3%	Anti-infectives, essential medicines	Entry point for Sub-Saharan African expansion

Sources: Pulitzer Center (2025); Financial Express; Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau (EPB, 2023); Import Globals (2024)

Beximco Pharmaceuticals: Bangladesh's Global Pioneer

Founded in 1976 and beginning manufacturing operations in 1980, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd (BPL) is the most internationally prominent pharmaceutical company in Bangladesh. With manufacturing facilities approved by the US FDA, EMA (AGES, Austria), TGA Australia, Health Canada, GCC regulators, and Taiwan's TFDA, Beximco operates at the level of compliance demanded by the world's most stringent regulatory authorities.

Beximco Pharma became the first Bangladeshi company to receive US FDA approval. This milestone opened the American market to Bangladesh for the first time and demonstrated that a Bangladeshi company could meet the most demanding regulatory standards in the world.

Since that approval, Beximco has received multiple Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) approvals from the US FDA, including for Carvedilol (hypertension), Sotalol Hydrochloride (cardiovascular arrhythmia), and Baclofen (muscle relaxant for multiple sclerosis and spinal cord conditions). The Baclofen approval is particularly noteworthy in the context of rare and specialty disease treatment: multiple sclerosis affects approximately 2.8 million people worldwide and remains both underdiagnosed and underserved in low- and middle-income countries.

Role in Global Rare and Critical Disease Drug Supply

Beximco's contributions to the global supply chain extend beyond conventional generics into critical and rare disease therapeutics. In May 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic Beximco introduced the world's



A quality control scientist conducting advanced analytical testing to ensure the safety, efficacy, and quality of pharmaceutical products.

first generic version of remdesivir, branded as Bemsivir, making the antiviral accessible at a fraction of the originator drug's price. Subsequently, the company became Bangladesh's first to obtain production and marketing authorization for molnupiravir (branded Emorivir), the first oral COVID-19-specific antiviral. Both products were distributed to over 50 countries. In a major global health breakthrough, Beximco Pharma recently launched "Triko", a generic version of a triple-combination therapy used to treat cystic fibrosis, a rare and life-threatening genetic disease. This represents a cost reduction of approximately 96–98%, making treatment accessible to thousands of previously untreated patients.

These achievements were made possible by a critical structural advantage: Bangladesh's status as a Least Developed Country (LDC) exempts it from TRIPS patent obligations until 2033. This legal flexibility allows Bangladeshi companies to manufacture and export generic versions of patented drugs including those for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and oncology that would otherwise cost thousands of dollars per treatment course.

For developing and emerging economies, this represents an extraordinary value proposition.

The TRIPS Waiver Advantage: A Diplomatic and Commercial Opportunity

Bangladesh's pharmaceutical competitive advantage is structurally underpinned by its LDC status under the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The

TRIPS waiver for pharmaceutical products, currently extended until 2033, exempts Bangladesh from enforcing pharmaceutical patents enabling local companies to manufacture and export generic versions of drugs still under patent protection in developed markets.

This is not merely a domestic industrial policy benefit. It is a global health diplomacy asset. For nations in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East where populations are growing and non-communicable disease burdens are rising a bilateral pharmaceutical trade agreement with Bangladesh can dramatically reduce national drug import costs. Countries spending 40–60% of healthcare budgets on imported medicines can access therapeutic equivalence at 10–30% of Western originator prices through Bangladesh.

The diplomatic implications are significant. Several African Union nations have already begun exploratory discussions with Bangladeshi trade representatives about formal medicine supply agreements. Sri Lanka, during its 2022 economic crisis, relied heavily on Bangladeshi pharmaceutical imports as foreign exchange reserves collapsed and Western suppliers became unaffordable. This precedent illustrates



State-of-the-art production ensuring excellence from manufacturing to packaging.



A symbol of modern infrastructure, innovation, and industrial excellence

the resilience value of a Bangladesh pharmaceutical partnership.

Opportunities for Partner Nations: A Strategic Framework

For governments and trade missions evaluating pharmaceutical import diversification or health sector partnerships, Bangladesh offers

Challenges and the Path Forward

Bangladesh's pharmaceutical ascendancy is not without structural challenges. The

country imports over 85% of its Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) needs at an annual cost of USD 1.3 billion a significant

Drug registration timelines present a third barrier. Unlike garment exports, pharmaceutical market entry in regulated countries requires two to five years of dossier preparation, regulatory review, and facility inspection. This long cycle demands patient, well-capitalised strategies a constraint that favours larger, well-funded companies but limits market agility for the sector as a whole.

Bangladesh as a Pharmaceutical Diplomatic Partner

Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector has evolved into a dynamic and globally relevant industry. With strong domestic foundations, expanding exports, and emerging global credibility, it stands as a model for developing economies.

several distinct strategic opportunities:

The government of Bangladesh further supports pharmaceutical export through a 6% export subsidy on pharmaceutical products and a 5% subsidy on API exports. Customs duty exemptions on API raw materials further reduce production costs for international buyers.

dependency that creates supply chain vulnerability. The government's flagship API Industrial Park, designed to onshore ingredient production and attract FDI, remains under development. Until this park reaches full operational capacity, Bangladesh's cost competitiveness remains partially contingent on uninterrupted API supplies from India and China.

The contribution of leaders like Beximco Pharma demonstrates how strategic vision, innovation, and compliance can elevate a national industry onto the global stage.

For international stakeholders, Bangladesh is no longer just a sourcing destination it is a strategic partner in building a more equitable global healthcare system.

- Dr. Hasan Mahmood
Lead, Learning & Development
Beximco Pharmaceuticals PLC

JAMDANI: THE PRIDE OF BANGLADESHI WEAVING HERITAGE

Jamdani is a traditional handwoven fabric that proudly represents the rich textile heritage of Bangladesh. Its roots go back to the Mughal era, when it was highly valued for its refined quality, artistic beauty, and luxurious feel. Made from the finest cotton, Jamdani is soft, lightweight, and breathable, making it ideal for the warm and humid climate of the region. What makes Jamdani truly special is the supplementary weft technique used in its creation. In this method, artisans manually insert extra threads into the fabric during the weaving process to form intricate and decorative motifs. This labor-intensive process requires a high level of craftsmanship and patience, resulting in each Jamdani piece being one of a kind.

The motifs commonly seen in Jamdani include floral patterns, geometric designs, and traditional symbols that carry deep cultural meanings. These designs reflect a blend of Mughal influence and Bengali artistic expression. Unlike printed or embroidered textiles, the motifs in Jamdani are woven directly into the fabric, giving it a textured and elegant appearance. The weaving of Jamdani has been preserved for generations in the Rupganj and Sonargaon areas of Narayanganj.

In 2013, UNESCO recognized Jamdani as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Today, Jamdani saris are worn during weddings, festivals, and special occasions. Despite modern challenges, skilled artisans continue to uphold this tradition, ensuring that Jamdani remains a vibrant symbol of Bangladesh's cultural legacy.





Agriculture Beyond Food: Bangladesh's New Frontier of Diplomacy

- Dr. M. Shahidul Islam

When diplomacy is discussed, agriculture is rarely the first subject that comes to mind. Foreign policy is traditionally associated with security, trade, defense, and political alliances. Yet in the twenty-first century, the global landscape has changed profoundly. Climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, pandemics, water scarcity, and geopolitical disruptions have elevated agriculture from a domestic development concern to a strategic pillar of international relations.

Today, the ability of nations to produce food sustainably, share agricultural innovations, strengthen climate resilience, and cooperate

on natural resource management increasingly influences regional stability and global prosperity. Agriculture has become far more than a means of producing crops; it is an instrument of peace, resilience and international partnership. This emerging dimension of statecraft is often described as agricultural diplomacy.

Agricultural diplomacy has become an established component of foreign policy in several countries, although each has adopted a different model reflecting its comparative strengths.

The Netherlands, despite its small landmass

has become one of the world's largest agricultural exporters through innovation, greenhouse technology, seed systems and high-value horticulture. Dutch embassies include agricultural counsellors who actively promote agricultural trade, technology partnerships, food system innovation and scientific cooperation around the world. Agriculture has become one of the country's most influential diplomatic assets.

Brazil has demonstrated how tropical agricultural research can support international development. Through the work of Embrapa, Brazilian scientists have shared expertise in tropical agriculture, soybean production,



Bangladeshi farmers at work, reinforcing food security and Sustainable agricultural growth

livestock systems and soil improvement with numerous countries in Africa and Latin America. Scientific cooperation has strengthened Brazil's diplomatic relations while opening new economic opportunities.

Japan has long integrated agriculture into its development cooperation programs. Through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), agricultural modernization, irrigation, rural development, food security and capacity building have become important instruments of Japan's international engagement, particularly in Asia and Africa.

China has significantly expanded agricultural diplomacy under its South-South Cooperation programs and the Belt and Road Initiative. Hundreds of Chinese agricultural experts have worked in Africa and Asia, while Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers established in many countries have promoted improved crop production, irrigation technologies, hybrid rice and

mechanization.

India increasingly uses its agricultural research institutions, digital agriculture, seed technologies and capacity-building programs to strengthen cooperation across South Asia, Africa and developing countries. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programs have trained thousands of agricultural professionals, complementing India's broader development diplomacy.

Türkiye has successfully integrated agricultural development into its international cooperation strategy through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Projects on irrigation, horticulture, livestock, vocational training and rural development have strengthened Türkiye's partnerships across Central Asia, Africa and the Balkans.

These diverse experiences demonstrate that agricultural diplomacy is no longer confined to major powers. Countries with strong

agricultural knowledge, innovative technologies and credible development experience increasingly use agriculture as an instrument of international cooperation, economic engagement and soft power.

Agricultural diplomacy encompasses the use of agricultural science, technology, trade, development cooperation and food systems to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships. It supports humanitarian assistance, promotes sustainable development, facilitates technology exchange and builds trust among nations facing common challenges. As climate change intensifies and global food systems become more interconnected, agricultural diplomacy is assuming a central role in international cooperation.

For Bangladesh, this changing global context presents an important opportunity. Over the past five decades, the country has undergone one of the world's most remarkable agricultural transformations. Once synonymous with



Agricultural cooperation fosters food security, sustainable development, and shared prosperity

chronic food shortages and devastating natural disasters, Bangladesh has emerged as a country widely recognized for its achievements in agricultural production, disaster resilience and rural development. This experience has created a valuable reservoir of knowledge that can contribute not only to national prosperity but also to regional and global development.

Bangladesh's agricultural progress has been neither accidental nor effortless. It is the outcome of visionary public policies, sustained investments in agricultural research and extension, strong collaboration among national institutions, and above all, the resilience and innovation of millions of farming families. Scientific advances in crop improvement, irrigation, integrated pest management, balanced nutrient management, mechanization and climate adaptation have substantially increased agricultural productivity while improving rural livelihoods.

Institutions such as the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation

(BADC), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Soil Resources Development Institute (SRDI), agricultural universities and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) have collectively built a dynamic agricultural innovation system. Their contributions have enabled Bangladesh not only to enhance food production but also to diversify agriculture into horticulture, fisheries, livestock and high-value crops.

These achievements are increasingly recognized beyond Bangladesh's borders. Many developing countries facing similar agro-ecological challenges are interested in learning from Bangladesh's experience in crop intensification, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, seed systems, extension services and farmer-centered innovation. Such interest provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to contribute more actively to international development through the sharing of scientific knowledge and practical experience.

Agricultural diplomacy is not simply about exporting technologies or agricultural products. It is about sharing solutions to common global challenges. It is about building partnerships

that improve food security, strengthen resilience to climate change and promote sustainable use of natural resources. In this respect, agriculture serves as a bridge connecting science, development and diplomacy.

The importance of food security in international relations has become increasingly evident in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global food supply chains, while regional conflicts and extreme weather events demonstrated how disruptions in one part of the world can rapidly affect food availability and prices elsewhere. Food insecurity contributes to poverty, social instability, migration and conflict, making agricultural cooperation an essential component of global peace and security.

Climate change further reinforces the diplomatic significance of agriculture. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, salinity intrusion, droughts, floods and emerging pests threaten food production across continents. No nation can address these challenges in isolation. Scientific collaboration, technology transfer and coordinated adaptation strategies have become indispensable.



Empowering women farmers to strengthen food security and sustainable development

Bangladesh has accumulated valuable experience in adapting agriculture to a highly dynamic and risk-prone environment. Farmers cultivate crops under conditions of floods, cyclones, drought, salinity and river erosion while continually adjusting production practices in response to climatic variability. Research institutions have developed improved crop varieties, integrated farming systems and resource-conserving technologies that demonstrate how agricultural productivity can be sustained under difficult environmental conditions.

This practical experience has significance well beyond Bangladesh. Many countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific face comparable challenges and can benefit from knowledge exchange and collaborative research. By sharing innovations developed through decades of scientific endeavor, Bangladesh can strengthen partnerships with other developing nations while contributing to global efforts to achieve food security and climate resilience.

Agricultural diplomacy also reflects a broader concept in international relations—soft power. Unlike military or economic coercion, soft power derives from a nation's ability to inspire, influence and build trust through knowledge, culture, innovation and constructive engagement. Bangladesh has already earned international respect through its leadership in disaster preparedness, microfinance, peacekeeping and social development. Agriculture can



become another important pillar of that soft power.

Sharing improved crop technologies, supporting capacity development, training young scientists, collaborating on climate-smart agriculture and contributing to regional food security initiatives are forms of diplomacy that create goodwill and long-term partnerships. Such cooperation strengthens Bangladesh's international standing while advancing shared development goals.

The coming decades will require a new generation of diplomatic thinking in which food systems, environmental sustainability and scientific collaboration occupy a central

place in foreign policy. Bangladesh is well positioned to become an active contributor to this emerging global agenda. Its experience demonstrates that agricultural transformation is possible even under severe resource constraints, provided that science, sound policies and the determination of farmers work together.

The question, therefore, is no longer whether Bangladesh has a story to share. It is whether the country is prepared to transform that experience into a strategic instrument of international cooperation and sustainable development. Agricultural diplomacy offers precisely such an opportunity.

- Dr. M. Shahidul Islam
Former Director General,
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)

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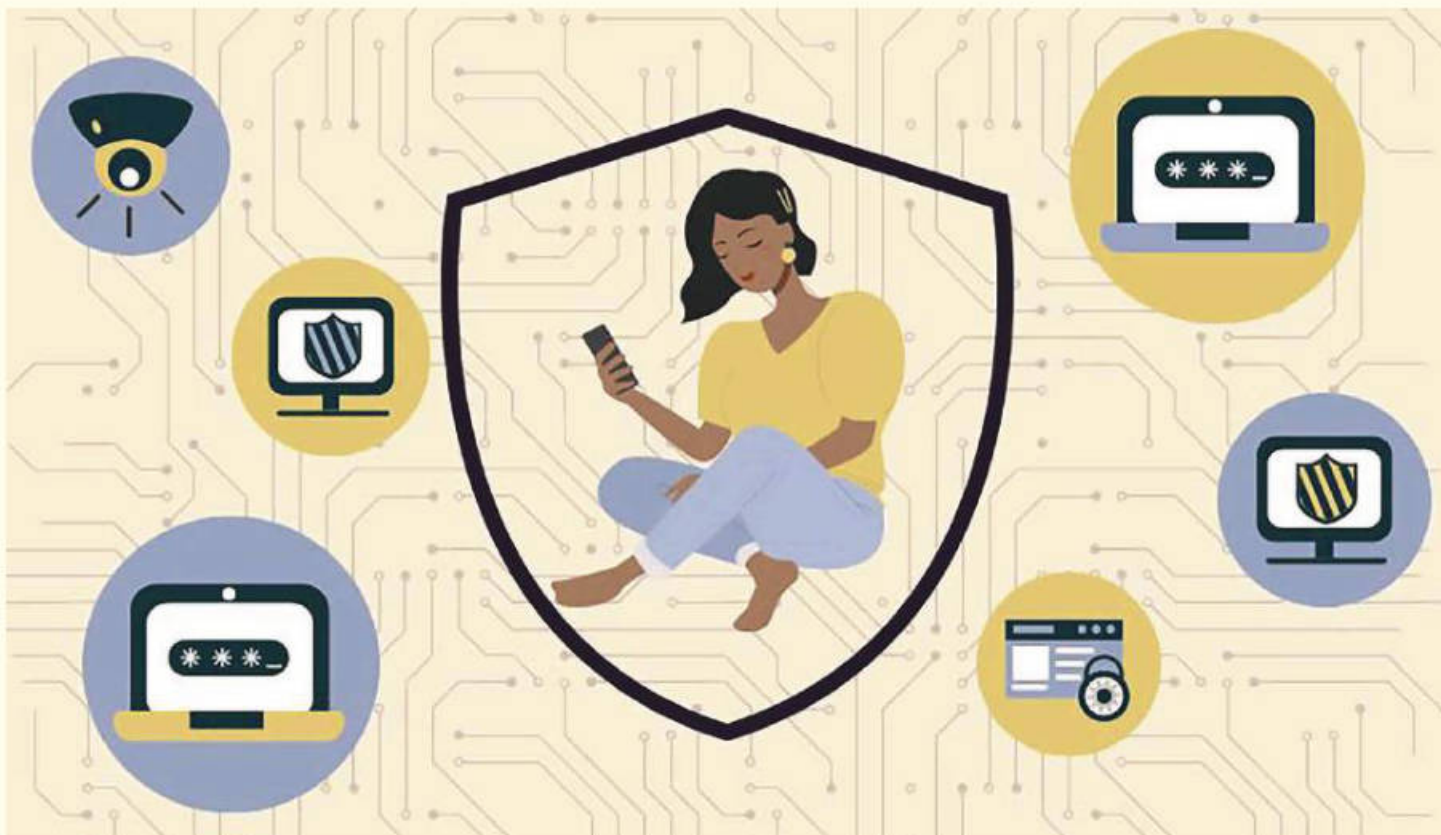
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Creating Safer and More Equal Digital Spaces

- Zafar Sobhan

We are living in a time when communication happens everywhere, instantly, and in ways that shape public opinion and even public safety. And that places a particular responsibility on us those who work in the world of information.

We all know that the digital revolution has completely transformed the way people communicate. In many ways, this has been a profound democratization of speech.

Today, anyone with a smartphone can say anything, to anyone, at any time. Voices that were previously unheard now have platforms. Marginalized groups can organize, express themselves, and hold power to account.

And that is a remarkable development. But at the same time, we cannot ignore the darker side of this transformation.

The very openness that empowers so many also creates vulnerabilities. Online platforms have become fertile ground for harassment, disinformation, and coordinated attacks. The speed at which content spreads, and the lack of accountability in many online spaces, has created an environment where harm can be done quickly, anonymously, and at scale.

And while these problems exist everywhere, they take on unique characteristics in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Context

Here in Bangladesh, we have seen how women and minorities are disproportionately targeted. We have seen hate campaigns. We have seen personal photos weaponized. We have seen character assassination, misogynistic trolling, and communal speech that plays on deep,

sensitive social divides.

Worst of all, we have seen cases where rumours on social media have led directly to real-world violence entire communities attacked, individuals targeted, neighborhoods set on fire, all because of an alleged Facebook post or a doctored screenshot.

When a single misleading post can mobilize hundreds of people within minutes, the stakes could not be higher. We are not just dealing with “online harm.” We are dealing with threats to safety, to social cohesion, to the very fabric of our society.

The problem is very real, and it is urgent.

Below are some concrete examples of real-world harm done:



Ramu (2012)

A Buddhist community in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, was attacked and temples were burned after a doctored Facebook image was circulated alleging that a Buddhist youth had desecrated the Qur'an. The post was fake but the violence was real, and devastating.

Brahmanbaria (2016)

A Hindu man was falsely accused on Facebook of insulting Islam. A manipulated screenshot spread rapidly, leading to coordinated attacks on Hindu homes and temples. Dozens of families were displaced all because of a digital lie.

Bhola Incident (2019)

A young Hindu man's hacked Facebook Messenger account was used to send alleged derogatory messages about the Prophet (PBUH). Before anyone checked the facts, a mob formed. Clashes resulted in four deaths and many injuries again, driven by misinformation.

In addition, women in media, academia, and activism routinely face targeted campaigns

on Facebook and TikTok with doctored photos, abusive comments, and coordinated trolling. These attacks silence voices and reinforce inequality.

These examples show how misinformation, rumours, and hateful online speech move fast and hit hard, often with irreversible real-world consequences.

Taking Things Seriously

We have to acknowledge that digital spaces do not automatically nurture equality or fairness. To the contrary, they often amplify

existing inequalities. Those who are already vulnerable offline become even more vulnerable online. Women who speak publicly are attacked more viciously. Minorities are singled out. And disadvantaged groups find themselves drowned out by louder often more abusive voices.

This is not something we can ignore. This is something we must confront head-on. And this brings me to the central question: What can we in the mainstream media do?

What Mainstream Media Can Do

First, we need to put our own house in order. Before we talk about our role in shaping the national conversation, we must look inward. If we are serious about promoting equality and safety in digital spaces, then our own newsrooms must model those values. We must ensure that our workplaces are inclusive. That women are safe, empowered, and represented. That minorities are not marginalized within our own structures. That young journalists, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, feel supported and protected. We cannot credibly advocate for safer digital spaces if we do not maintain a safe and respectful environment in our own professional spaces.





Second, we must invest in education and training. The digital world is complex. It moves fast. And it is constantly evolving. Our journalists and editors need to be equipped for this reality.

This means comprehensive training in:

Digital verification
Fact-checking methodologies
Gender sensitivity and ethics
Minority rights and concerns
Online safety practices
Recognizing the dynamics of harassment and coordinated misinformation campaigns

Training is not a luxury anymore. It is a necessity. Because we cannot combat misinformation, we cannot protect vulnerable voices, and we cannot maintain credibility in a digital world if we ourselves are not properly prepared.

Third, we need to be extra cautious about what we publish. In a digital ecosystem driven by speed and virality, we must resist the pressure to be first at the cost of being accurate.

Yes, speed matters. But accuracy matters far more. We must revive the old ethos: get it right before you put it out.

Check. Double-check. Verify. And if you're not sure hold the story. The "publish now, fix later" mentality is irresponsible and dangerous.

Once misinformation is released, it spreads faster than any correction ever can. Once something is out there online, it takes on a life of its own. And as we have seen, the





consequences can be deadly.

It is true that social media rewards speed over accuracy. There is enormous pressure to be first. But we have to withstand that pressure.

Embrace Our Role as Lodestar

This is perhaps the most important point of all. In a world overwhelmed by opinions, rumours, and viral misinformation, the role of the mainstream media is more important, not less. Even if fewer people are reading newspapers or going directly to our websites, those who do come to us need something specific:

They need certainty. They need verification. They need the truth. They need to know that if it comes out on mainstream media, then it is authentic, fact-checked, verified news.

We must be:

The fact-checker

The authenticator

The corrector of falsehoods

The calm voice amid digital chaos

And the exemplar of how responsible information sharing should look

Our responsibility has grown, not shrunk. People need somewhere to go somewhere

reliable, somewhere trustworthy to check whether something circulating online is true or not.

That is our job. That is our duty. And in a time when misinformation can spark violence, it may even be seen as a public service responsibility. We must rise to it.

This is not someone else's problem. This is our responsibility. And the role we play today may well shape the future of public discourse in Bangladesh.

- Zafar Sobhan
Editor, weekly Counterpoint



Drawn Back to His Roots: How Jobayer Left a Corporate Career to Build “Sukher Khamar” and Transform a Village

- Rahitul Islam

Leaving behind the fast-paced, mechanical life of Dhaka, a prestigious corporate career, and a secure future to return to the countryside and become a cattle farmer would seem irrational to many. Most people would not hesitate to call such a person “crazy.” That was exactly the reaction faced by Jobayer Islam, a native of Purba Lakshmikola village in Raiganj upazila of Sirajganj. Yet after spending two decades in Dhaka and building a successful 14-year career in public relations and writing, he chose to return to his roots

with a different dream: to contribute to a sustainable and modern agricultural transformation. Today, that dream has taken shape as Sukher Khamar (Happy Farm), an innovative agricultural enterprise located in Baghail village of Kahalu, Bogura.

Where It All Began: A Dream Fueled by Courage

After completing his SSC and HSC education in Sirajganj, Jobayer moved to Dhaka in 2004

for higher studies. He earned both his BBA and MBA in Marketing from Government Titumir College and subsequently entered the public relations profession. After spending 14 years in the field, he began contemplating a different future during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. He decided to return to rural Bangladesh and become a farmer.

The decision to leave behind nearly two decades of urban life was not easy. He first convinced his wife, Afsana Mina, to support

his vision. For his project, he selected Baghail village in Kahalu, Bogura an area renowned for its agricultural productivity, yielding two rice harvests, one potato crop, and various vegetables each year.

With an initial investment of BDT 1.62 million and the purchase of three cattle for BDT 180,000, he launched the commercial journey of “Happy Farming,” or Sukher Khamar. In 2023, he relocated permanently with his family to manage the farm full-time.

Bringing Educated Youth Back to Rural Bangladesh

Jobayer envisioned more than a traditional farm. He wanted to create a modern, professionally managed agricultural enterprise. Drawing on his extensive professional network, he began recruiting skilled and educated young professionals from Dhaka.

One such individual is Shahin Murtaza, who previously worked as a web developer in the capital and now serves as Head of the Digital department at the farm.

“Everyone leaves the village for Dhaka,” Shahin says. “I did the opposite and left Dhaka



Modern livestock farming is at the heart of Sukher Khamar's sustainable agro-ecosystem

to work on a farm. Many people laughed at the idea initially, but today I believe it was one of the best decisions of my life.”

Similarly, Yakub Ali joined the organization as an executive shortly after graduating from Bangla College. Today, the farm, farmhouse project, and guesthouse collectively employ 11 full-time staff members.

From Livestock Farming to Agro-Tourism

Recognizing the growing global agro-tourism industry, Jobayer and his co-founder, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer Tasdikh Habib, decided not to limit the project to cattle fattening alone. Instead, they transformed it into a living learning center where urban residents can experience rural life and gain a deeper appreciation for farmers’ contributions.

Environmentally friendly earthen cottages have been built to accommodate visitors. Over the past eighteen months, 144 guests have visited the farm, while approximately 1,800 visitors arrived during the last nine months alone. Among them, 619 stayed overnight in the guesthouse facilities.

Alongside cultivating chemical-free vegetables, rice, and bananas, the farm has introduced a cattle-sharing investment model, through which investors receive 50 percent of the profits after a six-month investment period.



Solar-powered infrastructure forms a key component of Sukher Khamar's vision for a zero-waste, climate-friendly agricultural ecosystem



Solar-powered infrastructure forms a key component of Sukher Khamar's vision for a zero-waste, climate-friendly agricultural ecosystem

Currently, Jobayer earns an average monthly income of around BDT 400,000 from the enterprise.

The Vision Ahead: A Zero-Waste Sustainable Agro-Ecosystem

Sukher Khamar has now expanded into Sukher Khamar Agro Village. The enterprise currently houses 96 cattle, 17 sheep, and 23 goats. Modern agricultural technologies are being integrated, including hydroponic corn fodder production and fish farming using bottom-clean tank technology. The entire operation runs on solar power.

To guide the project, a team of 33 professionals has been assembled, including three retired agricultural scientists from Bangladesh Agricultural University and a retired military officer.

Spread across 30 bighas of land along the banks of Bankadighi in Baghail village, the Agro Village is being developed according to a comprehensive master plan:

A 15-Bigha Resort

A rural retreat where urban families can

enjoy village life and natural surroundings.

A 15-Bigha Integrated Farm

A large-scale livestock and aquaculture facility with plans to accommodate:

400 cattle

500 sheep

500 goats

Fish farming operations

A Zero-Waste Production Model

The project aims to convert farm waste into valuable resources, including:

Biogas

Vermicompost

Liquid organic fertilizer

Green Energy and Carbon Credits

Plans are underway to install a one-megawatt solar power system on farm structures, with future ambitions to generate income through carbon credit mechanisms.

A Social Movement and “Sukher Hashi”

Sukher Khamar Agro Village is not merely a commercial venture; it is also a community-based social initiative. The project has been divided into 4,000 shares, of which nearly 1,000 have already been sold. Founding shareholders have reportedly received ownership documentation and related rights associated with the project.

The initiative also includes the establishment of a mosque, a Hifzia orphan madrasa, and the Sukher Khamar Foundation. Through the foundation, a special cattle-rearing program called “Sukher Hashi” (Happy Smile) has been launched to help rural women achieve



Empowering rural women through sustainable farming, shared prosperity, and meaningful livelihoods.



The integration of advanced agricultural machinery highlights the growing adoption of climate-smart and technology-driven farming methods

economic independence.

In addition, the farm has contributed to local infrastructure development, including road improvements and other community projects, creating new economic opportunities throughout the area.

The farm's digital presence has also become

a source of inspiration. Every month, approximately 3.5 million people watch Sukher Khamar's videos on Facebook, encouraging countless young Bangladeshis to consider agriculture as a viable and rewarding career path.

Today, anyone entering Baghail village can easily be directed to Sukher Khamar. Jobayer

Islam's bold decision demonstrates that when knowledge, innovation, and technology are effectively combined, agriculture can be both financially rewarding and socially impactful. More than just a farm, Sukher Khamar has emerged as a model for sustainable agriculture and rural development in Bangladesh.

- Rahitul Islam
Writer and journalist



Who's Who Bangladesh Awards 2026: Honouring Leaders of Impact and Visionaries of Progress

- Hamim Islam

Who's Who, an international award-giving platform, is an essential directory of noteworthy and influential individuals from all walks of life in the UK and across the world. It has been published annually since 1849. As a leading source of biographical information, Who's Who features more than 33,000 globally distinguished individuals from the fields of business, agriculture, art and culture, academia, social welfare, and sports. This platform has honoured distinguished Bangladeshi personalities for their outstanding contributions to society. The honours were handed over at a grand function organized by the Bangladesh chapter in Dhaka.

The exclusive ceremony was attended by around 350 guests, including diplomats, respected Government of Bangladesh dignitaries, and prominent business leaders. Yasser Khan Choudhury, the Hon'ble State Minister of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, graced the occasion as the chief guest and handed over the prestigious awards. Who's Who Bangladesh Chief Executive Nazinur Rahim and Editor Lutfun Nahar Taposhi were present alongside other eminent figures, including renowned journalist and agricultural development advocate Shykh Seraj.

In his remarks, Hon'ble State Minister Yasser

Khan Choudhury stated that there is no alternative to the contributions of creative and talented people in building a prosperous and progressive society. He emphasized that the awardees have proven their excellence in their respective fields, thereby increasing the nation's pride. In this era of information and technology, he noted, it is essential to convey the work and life philosophies of such eminent personalities to the new generation. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to patronizing talent so that Bangladesh can shine even brighter on the world stage, adding that international-standard recognitions like Who's Who will undoubtedly boost the awardees' morale and inspire others to build



Prof. Dr. G.K.M. Mustafizur Rahman receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 for his outstanding contributions to agriculture



Farida Akhter Poppy (Bobita) receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 in recognition of her outstanding contributions to arts and culture



Rahitul Islam receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 for his outstanding contributions to arts and literature



Mansur Ahmed Chowdhury receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 in recognition of his outstanding contributions to education

a better society.

This year marks the fifth edition of the Who's Who Bangladesh Award Ceremony. The Who's Who Bangladesh Award is a biennial event, proudly hosted every two years. Since its inception in the country in 2016, this two-year cycle has allowed for a comprehensive and objective selection process to identify the nation's most outstanding individuals. By gathering every alternate year, the ceremony consistently shines a spotlight on those who have made significant, ongoing contributions to society, ensuring their achievements are recognized and celebrated on both a local and global stage. Ultimately, the core objective of the Who's Who Bangladesh award is not only to recognize those who have driven positive change and introduce them on the world stage, but also to boost their morale and inspire future generations to contribute toward building a more prosperous and progressive society.

Over the years, the Who's Who Bangladesh Awards have honoured some of the most eminent citizens of the country. Past recipients have included Sanjida Khatun, Hassan Azizul Hoq, Prof. Anisuzzaman, Toab Khan, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Aly Zaker, Selina Hossain, Dr. Rafiqul Islam, Golam Sarwar, Valerie Ann Taylor, Shahabuddin Ahmed, Mustafa Monwar, Shamsuzzaman Khan, Bibi Russell, Ln Kohinoor Kamal, Runa Laila, Syed Monjurul Islam, Ihsanul Karim, Sabrina Sultana, Kazi Rafiqul Alam, and Rafiqun Nabi.

Who's Who Bangladesh not only presents awards but also recognizes the most prominent individuals of the nation. This recognition stands as a valuable example and a source of inspiration for future generations of Bangladesh.

The 2026 Who's Who Bangladesh awards proudly celebrated a remarkable cohort of visionaries, recognizing Prof. Dr. G.K.M. Mustafizur Rahman, Honourable Vice Chancellor at Gazipur Agriculture University, for his contributions to agriculture, and the legendary film actress Farida Akhter Poppy (Bobita) in arts and culture. Literary pursuits were honoured through Rahitul Islam, a dedicated fiction writer and journalist. Mansur Ahmed Chowdhury, Chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and founder trustee of Impact Foundation Bangladesh, was lauded for his dedication to education. The entrepreneurial spirit of the nation was highlighted by awarding eminent businessman Ershad Ullah, Member of Parliament and former Director of BGMEA, and Taslima Chowdhury Kona Alam, Managing Director of Women's World. In the professional category, the award went to Md Shakawath Hossain, CEO of Unique Hotel & Resorts PLC (Seraton Dhaka and Westin Dhaka). Excellence in media is acknowledged through Shafiq Ahmed, COO and Head of News at Ekattor TV. Sayeed Ur Rabb is recognized for his brilliant contribution in the sports category. Furthermore, the profound impact of community service was honored by awarding Shanthi Sri, founder of the Sri Chinmoy Centre in Bangladesh, for social work. Last but not the least, The Lifetime Achievement award is bestowed upon Shahidul Alam, the renowned media institution builder, photojournalist, and founder of Drik.

The inspiring evening concluded with a dinner held in honour of the awardees and the esteemed guests. The 2026 Who's Who Bangladesh Award Ceremony not only celebrated the individual brilliance of its honourees but also reaffirmed the nation's collective potential. By bringing together visionaries from diverse sectors ranging from agriculture and corporate leadership to arts, journalism, and social welfare the event



Ershad Ullah receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 for his outstanding contributions to entrepreneurship and business leadership



Shakawath Hossain receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 in the Professional category, recognizing his outstanding leadership and excellence in Bangladesh's hospitality industry



Shanthi Sri receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 in the Social Work category, recognizing her outstanding dedication to humanitarian service and community development



Taslima Chowdhury Kona Alam receives the Who's Who Bangladesh Award 2026 for her outstanding contributions to women entrepreneurship



Renowned photojournalist and media visionary Shahidul Alam receives the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Who's Who Bangladesh Awards 2026.

event highlighted the multifaceted progress of Bangladesh. As these distinguished personalities continue to pave the way in their respective fields, their recognition serves as a powerful catalyst for the people's welfare and country's development. Ultimately, the Who's Who Bangladesh initiative remains steadfast in its mission to document history-makers, elevate local talents to the global stage, and inspire a future driven by excellence, dedication, and innovation.

2016 - 2026 Award Winners by Category

Category	2016	2018	2020	2022	2026
Agriculture	Shyek Shiraj	Prof. Dr. MA Rahim	Md. Bodu Mia	Ln Kohinoor Kamal	Prof. Dr. G.K.M. Mustafizur Rahman
Arts and Culture	Sanjida Khatun	Aly Zaker	Mustafa Monwar	Runa Laila	Farida Akhter Poppy (Bobita)
Arts & Literature	Hassan Azizul Hoq	Selina Hossain	Shamsuzzaman Khan	Dr. Augustine Cruze	Rahitul Islam
Corporate	Rahim Afroz	NRB Bazar	Dr. Mohammad Abdul Halim Patwary	Abu Sadeq	Masud Ur Rahman
Education	Prof. Anisuzzaman	Dr. Rafiqul Islam	Prof. Dr. Shahla Khatun	Syed Monjurul Islam	Prof. Mansur Ahmed Chowdhury
Entrepreneur	Anis Ud Dowla	Abdur Rouf JP	Dr. Mohammed Faruque	Sulaiman S Ajanee	Ershad Ullah
Journalism	Toab Khan	Golam Sarwar	Md. Shafiqur Rahman	Ihsanul Karim	Shafiq Ahmed
Professional	Barrister Monwar Hossain	Dr. Shajahan Mahmood	Dr. Gulshan Ara Kazi	Prof. Dr. Md. Sharfuddin Ahmed	Md Shakawath Hossain
Social Work	Sir Fazle Hasan Abed	Valerie Ann Taylor	Khandaker Mohiuddin	Kazi Rafiqul Alam	Shanthi Sri
Sports	Akram Khan	Kazi Md. Salahuddin	Zobera Rahman Linu	Sabrina Sultana	Sayeed-Ur-Rabb
Women Entrepreneur	Preeti Chokrabarty	Monowara Hakim Ali	Bibi Russell	Nasima Aktar Nisha	Taslima Chowdhury Kona Alam
Lifetime Achievement	Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury	Shahabuddin Ahmed	Mahmudur Rahman Benu	Rafiqun Nabi	Shahidul Alam

- Hamim Islam
M. A Development, University of Sussex

RICKSHAWS: DHAKA'S MOBILE ART

The rickshaw, a small, three-wheeled vehicle, is a symbol of Dhaka and Bangladesh. Handcrafted by artisans, these vehicles are painted with vibrant designs featuring flowers, animals, historical events, and national heroes. Adorned with tassels and plastic flowers, rickshaws become moving art exhibitions, integral to urban life. The craft, taught orally and through practice, involves both men and women painters. Celebrated in festivals and media, rickshaws represent a dynamic form of urban folk art and a shared cultural identity. In 2023, UNESCO recognized the cultural significance of this tradition by inscribing Dhaka's rickshaws and rickshaw paintings on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.





Pope Leo Calls for Christian-Muslim Unity to ‘Revive Humanity’ Through Compassion and Solidarity

- Archbishop Kevin S. Randall

At a landmark interfaith gathering in the Vatican, Pope Leo urges Christians and Muslims to deepen cooperation in promoting compassion, empathy, and human dignity, emphasizing that shared spiritual values are essential to addressing today’s humanitarian, social, and moral challenges.

In an era marked by armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, forced displacement, technological transformation, and increasing social polarization, Pope Leo has issued a powerful appeal for Christians and Muslims to work together in restoring humanity through compassion, empathy, and solidarity. His message, delivered during an interfaith colloquium at the Vatican, highlighted the indispensable role that religious communities can play in promoting peace, mutual

understanding, and respect among peoples of different faiths.

The Pope’s address came during a meeting with participants from Jordan’s Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies and the Holy See’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. The gathering reflected the growing commitment of both religious and academic institutions to strengthening dialogue between faith traditions and exploring shared responses to the pressing moral and humanitarian issues facing the modern world.

The members of Jordan’s Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies were visiting Rome to participate in a colloquium titled “Human Compassion and Empathy in Modern Times.” Established under the patronage of His Royal

Highness Prince Hasan bin Talal of Jordan, the institute has long served as a respected platform for fostering dialogue among religious communities, scholars, and policymakers committed to peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.

Addressing the participants, Pope Leo emphasized that compassion and empathy are not merely ethical ideals but foundational principles deeply rooted in both Christianity and Islam. He described these virtues as essential attitudes that inspire believers to serve others, uphold justice, and strengthen social harmony.

According to Pope Leo, the shared moral teachings of Christianity and Islam provide a strong foundation for addressing many of



Representatives of Jordan's Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies participate in the Vatican colloquium on 'Human Compassion and Empathy in Modern Times'

today's global challenges. Despite theological differences, both traditions emphasize mercy, kindness, care for the vulnerable, and responsibility toward fellow human beings. These shared values, he noted, offer an important basis for collaboration in promoting peace and human dignity across cultures and societies.

Reflecting on Islamic teachings, Pope Leo referred to the concept of *ra'fa*, or compassion, as a divine gift placed by God within the hearts of believers. He noted that one of the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah is *Al-Ra'uf*, meaning "The Ever-Compassionate." This sacred attribute reminds Muslims that compassion originates with God Himself and should naturally be reflected in the lives of those who seek to follow His guidance.

By acknowledging this important element of Islamic spirituality, Pope Leo reinforced the Vatican's longstanding commitment to recognizing the richness of other religious traditions and encouraging respectful dialogue grounded in mutual appreciation rather than division.

Turning to Christian theology, Pope Leo explained that God's compassion is most clearly revealed through the life and person

of Jesus Christ. Rather than remaining distant from human suffering, God entered human history by taking on human flesh. Through Jesus, divine compassion became visible, tangible, and deeply personal.

The Pope observed that Christ did not simply witness suffering from afar but experienced it directly. In doing so, He became what Pope Leo described as the living embodiment of compassion, demonstrating that authentic love requires closeness, sacrifice, and active concern for others.

This theological reflection highlighted a significant point of convergence between Christianity and Islam: both traditions understand compassion as originating from God and both call believers to translate divine mercy into concrete acts of service toward humanity.

Pope Leo stressed that compassion and empathy are not optional virtues reserved for exceptional individuals. Instead, they represent essential obligations for every believer. Faith, he argued, must always be expressed through practical concern for those experiencing hardship, poverty, injustice, and exclusion. From the Christian perspective, the Pope explained, love for the poor occupies a central place in the Gospel. Followers of Christ are called not only to assist those in need but also to share in their suffering and accompany them with dignity and hope.

In this context, Pope Leo expressed particular appreciation for the humanitarian role played by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Despite its limited natural resources, Jordan has earned widespread international recognition for hosting millions of refugees fleeing



Religious scholars and faith leaders gather at the Vatican to strengthen Christian-Muslim dialogue and promote peaceful coexistence

conflicts in neighboring countries, particularly Syria and Iraq.

The Pope praised Jordan's generosity and hospitality, describing the country's commitment to welcoming displaced populations as a practical example of compassion translated into national policy. Such humanitarian efforts, he suggested, demonstrate how moral principles rooted in faith can positively influence public leadership and international responsibility.

Jordan has consistently positioned itself as a leading advocate of interfaith dialogue, religious moderation, and peaceful coexistence. Initiatives led by the Jordanian Royal Family including the Amman Message, A Common Word, and continued support for interreligious scholarship have strengthened the country's reputation as an important bridge between cultures, religions, and civilizations.

The Vatican has maintained a close and constructive partnership with Jordan on many of these initiatives, recognizing the country's contribution to promoting religious harmony in a region frequently affected by political instability and conflict.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of Pope Leo's address focused on the impact of modern technology on human compassion. While acknowledging that digital communication has connected people across continents in unprecedented ways, he warned that constant exposure to images of suffering may gradually weaken emotional responsiveness.

The Pope observed that today's global audiences encounter wars, natural disasters, famine, refugee crises, and human tragedy almost continuously through smartphones, television, and social media platforms. Instead of increasing empathy, however, this relentless stream of distressing images can produce



Pope Leo greets thousands of faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, reaffirming the Vatican's enduring message of peace, compassion, and global solidarity

emotional fatigue and indifference.

This phenomenon, sometimes described by psychologists as "compassion fatigue," risks creating societies that witness suffering without feeling personally responsible for responding to it.

Recalling an early reflection of Pope Francis, Pope Leo warned against becoming accustomed to the suffering of others. When individuals repeatedly conclude that another person's

pain "does not affect me, it does not interest me, it is none of my business," the moral fabric of society begins to weaken.

The Pope therefore encouraged believers to resist this culture of indifference by cultivating authentic relationships, personal engagement, and active solidarity with vulnerable communities.

His remarks carry significance far beyond religious institutions. They speak directly to



An aerial view of St. Peter's Basilica and St. Peter's Square in Vatican City one of the world's most significant centers of faith, diplomacy, and interreligious dialogue



A moment of interfaith solidarity as Pope Francis and a Muslim religious leader meet at the Vatican to strengthen dialogue and cooperation for peace

governments, humanitarian organizations, educators, diplomats, civil society leaders, and international organizations seeking practical approaches to conflict prevention, social cohesion, and sustainable peacebuilding.

Interfaith cooperation has increasingly become an important dimension of international diplomacy. As global challenges become more complex, religious communities

possess significant moral influence, extensive grassroots networks, and the capacity to mobilize millions of people in support of humanitarian causes.

Whether responding to refugee crises, combating poverty, promoting education, addressing climate change, or advancing peace initiatives, collaboration among faith communities can complement governmental and multilateral efforts.



The ongoing devastation in Gaza evokes painful echoes of wartime suffering-reminding humanity that the lessons of the Anti-Fascist War remain unheeded

For diplomats and policymakers, Pope Leo's message underscores the growing relevance of faith-based diplomacy. Constructive engagement among religious leaders can help reduce tensions, counter violent extremism, strengthen social resilience, and foster mutual respect across cultural boundaries.

The Vatican itself has consistently promoted interreligious dialogue as an important instrument for advancing international peace. Through the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, it continues to engage religious communities worldwide in discussions focused on coexistence, human rights, environmental stewardship, humanitarian cooperation, and shared ethical responsibilities.

The colloquium with Jordan's Royal Institute illustrates how partnerships between religious institutions and academic organizations can create meaningful platforms for dialogue grounded not only in theological discussion but also in practical cooperation for the common good.

Pope Leo concluded his address with a compelling call to action. Christians and Muslims, he said, should draw upon the spiritual richness of their respective traditions to undertake a shared mission: to revive humanity wherever compassion has grown cold, to give voice to those who suffer, and to transform indifference into solidarity.

His appeal reflects a broader vision in which religion serves not as a source of division but as a force for reconciliation, healing, and collective responsibility. At a time when global societies face deep political, economic, and humanitarian uncertainties, this vision offers a timely reminder that lasting peace requires more than diplomacy alone. It demands empathy, moral courage, and a renewed commitment to the dignity of every human being.



The ongoing devastation in Gaza evokes painful echoes of wartime suffering-reminding humanity that the lessons of the Anti-Fascist War remain unheeded

Ultimately, Pope Leo's message resonates well beyond the walls of the Vatican. It is a universal invitation to governments, faith leaders, civil society, and citizens alike to rediscover compassion as a guiding principle of public life. By working together across religious and cultural boundaries, Christians

and Muslims have the opportunity not only to strengthen mutual understanding but also to contribute meaningfully to a more just, peaceful, and humane world.

For the international diplomatic community, the address serves as a timely affirmation

that dialogue remains one of humanity's most effective tools for building trust. In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, compassion and solidarity are not simply moral aspirations they are essential foundations for global stability, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development.

- Archbishop Kevin S. Randall

Ambassador

The Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See to Bangladesh

Saudi Arabia Eyes US\$1 Billion Investment in Bangladesh's Infrastructure



Saudi Arabia has expressed interest in investing up to US\$1 billion in Bangladesh's transport, communications, and port sectors to support the country's growing infrastructure needs. The commitment was conveyed by Dr. Rumaih Mohammad Al-Rumaih, Vice Minister of the Saudi Ministry of Communications, during a meeting with the

Hon'ble Prime Minister at the National Parliament Building in Dhaka. The Saudi delegation included senior representatives from the Saudi Investment and Development Authority, the Ministry of Communications, Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT), and the Ambassador-designate to Bangladesh.

Welcoming the delegation, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to strengthening economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia and highlighted ongoing policy reforms to create a more investment-friendly environment. Dr. Al-Rumaih praised Bangladesh's investment climate and expressed interest in undertaking short-, medium-, and long-term projects. The meeting also noted that RSGT, which has operated the Patenga Container Terminal since June 2024, has invested US\$170 million in modern facilities and is keen to participate in additional government-approved infrastructure projects.

Bangladesh Speaker Meets Iranian Counterpart, Reaffirms Solidarity and Bilateral Friendship



Hon'ble Speaker of the Bangladesh National Parliament Mr. Hafiz Uddin Ahmed met with H.E. Mr. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, during his visit to Tehran to attend the State Funeral of the late Supreme Leader of Iran, His Eminence Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Speaker Ghalibaf

welcomed the Bangladesh delegation and thanked them for joining the funeral ceremony.

During the meeting, Speaker Hafiz Uddin conveyed the heartfelt condolences of the Government and the people of Bangladesh and expressed solidarity with Iran during its period of national mourning. He highlighted the longstanding friendship, shared cultural heritage, and strong people-to-people ties between the two countries. The Bangladesh Speaker also appreciated Speaker Ghalibaf's role in advancing the recent peace understanding between Iran and the United States and reaffirmed Bangladesh's support for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve regional and international issues peacefully. He invited Speaker Ghalibaf to visit Bangladesh at a mutually convenient time. The Bangladesh delegation was received in Tehran by Deputy Speaker H.E. Mr. Hamid Reza Haji Babaei upon arrival.

Bangladesh, Tajikistan Agree to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation and Regional Connectivity



Hon'ble Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. Khalilur Rahman and Deputy Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Mr. Idibek Kalandar reaffirmed their commitment to expanding bilateral relations during the inaugural Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between the two countries.

The two sides reviewed cooperation in trade, investment, tourism, cultural exchanges, industrial collaboration, visa facilitation, and economic partnership. Dr. Rahman stressed the need to enhance private sector engagement, business exchanges, and activate the Joint Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation. They also discussed direct air connectivity, resident diplomatic missions, and greater mobility of goods, services, and people.

The Foreign Minister welcomed Tajikistan's proposal to establish a Bangladesh-Tajikistan Parliamentary Friendship Group and thanked the country for supporting Bangladesh's candidature for the Presidency of the 81st United Nations General Assembly. Both sides pledged closer coordination at the United Nations, the OIC, and other international forums, while Tajikistan expressed support for Bangladesh's aspiration to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Denmark and Bangladesh Reaffirm Commitment to Sustainable Economic Partnership



Honourable Minister of Finance Mr. Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury held a productive meeting with Ambassador of Denmark to Bangladesh Mr. Christian Brix Møller, reaffirming the strong and longstanding partnership between the two countries and their shared vision for sustainable economic development. During the meeting, Ambassador Møller highlighted Denmark's broad engagement in Bangladesh,

particularly in port and logistics, dairy, water treatment, renewable energy, and women's entrepreneurship. He noted that these areas of cooperation are contributing to Bangladesh's economic transformation and sustainable growth.

The discussions focused on expanding bilateral cooperation through innovation, investment, and knowledge sharing to address common development priorities. Both sides emphasised the importance of promoting green growth, resilience, and inclusive economic opportunities.

The Finance Minister appreciated Denmark's continued support for Bangladesh's development journey and welcomed deeper collaboration in strategic sectors. Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining regular dialogue and strengthening cooperation for mutual benefit and sustainable prosperity.

Bangladesh Calls for Stronger Regional Cooperation at 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum



Hon'ble Foreign Minister Dr. Khalilur Rahman addressed the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), calling on ASEAN and ARF member states to strengthen collective efforts for the safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation of forcibly displaced Rohingyas to Myanmar. He stressed that resolving the Rohingya crisis is vital for

regional peace, security, and stability.

Dr. Rahman also underscored the need for stronger regional cooperation on disaster resilience, counter-terrorism, technology governance, and maritime security, reaffirming Bangladesh's leadership in disaster management and counter-terrorism within the ARF.

He proposed an ARF Technology Governance Framework to encourage the ethical use of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, while reiterating Bangladesh's support for resolving maritime disputes peacefully through dialogue and international law.

Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr. Humaiun Kobir also attended, reaffirming Bangladesh's commitment to regional cooperation and multilateral engagement.

Bangladesh and European Partners Discuss Expanding Trade, Investment and Strategic Cooperation



A meeting between the Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr. Humayun Kabir and five European ambassadors and senior diplomats appointed to Dhaka was held in the capital, focusing on strengthening Bangladesh's partnership with European countries. The meeting was attended by Mr. Ashik Chowdhury, Executive

Chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA). Discussions covered the longstanding friendly relations between Bangladesh and European partners, expanding economic cooperation, and various issues of mutual interest.

The participants emphasised the need to further deepen and diversify cooperation in key areas, including trade and investment, defence, civil aviation, and other potential sectors. The Foreign Affairs Adviser expressed hope that existing relations with European countries would continue to grow based on mutual trust, shared interests, and constructive engagement.

The European diplomats also expressed their interest in enhancing multilateral cooperation with Bangladesh and exploring new avenues for partnership to promote shared development goals and mutual prosperity.

Bangladesh and France Explore Stronger Cooperation on Women, Children and Gender Equality



French Ambassador to Bangladesh Mr. Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet paid a courtesy call on Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Children Affairs Prof. Dr. AZM Zahid Hossain at the Bangladesh Secretariat, where they discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation in social development and humanitarian initiatives.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on expanding collaboration in women's empowerment, child development, gender equality, and humanitarian assistance. They emphasised the importance of joint efforts to promote inclusive policies, enhance social protection, and improve the well-being of women and children through knowledge sharing and partnerships.

Ambassador Séré-Charlet highlighted France's feminist foreign policy and reaffirmed his country's commitment to promoting gender equality and advancing the rights of women and girls globally, including in Bangladesh. Minister Prof. Dr. AZM Zahid Hossain appreciated France's continued engagement and expressed Bangladesh's readiness to further strengthen cooperation. Both sides reaffirmed their shared commitment to deepening the Bangladesh–France partnership for inclusive development, social welfare, gender equality, and humanitarian cooperation.

Bangladesh Reaffirms Commitment to Labour Reforms During Meeting with ILO Director-General



Hon'ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ms. Shama Obaed Islam, MP reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to creating a better work environment during a meeting with ILO Director-General Mr. Gilbert F. Hounbo, who was on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh. During the meeting, the State Minister highlighted the

Government's efforts to advance decent work, social justice, and labour rights through comprehensive labour-sector reforms. She reiterated Bangladesh's commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, and workers' rights, while seeking the ILO's continued cooperation in strengthening labour governance, protecting migrant workers, and ensuring safe and skilled labour migration.

The State Minister expressed hope that Bangladesh's progress in labour reforms would receive due recognition at the upcoming ILO Governing Body Session and support the early resolution of the case under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution.

Mr. Hounbo appreciated the Government's commitment to improving working conditions and reaffirmed the ILO's support. Both sides pledged to further strengthen the Bangladesh–ILO partnership for decent work and social justice.

Bangladesh Police Official to Participate in Regional Workshop on Countering Violent Extremism



The High Commissioner received a courtesy visit from Mr. Main Uddin Chowdhury, Additional Deputy Police Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), who will participate in the regional workshop titled “Exploring Networks in Gaming to Address Pathways to Extremism (ENGAGE 2026)” in Kuala Lumpur.

The workshop, organised by the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), will bring together regional practitioners and stakeholders to discuss emerging challenges and opportunities in online gaming ecosystems, youth engagement, and the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE).

During the meeting, the High Commissioner congratulated Mr. Main Uddin on his selection for the important programme and wished him success. He expressed confidence that the knowledge, experience, and networks gained from the workshop would contribute to strengthening regional cooperation and capacity-building efforts in addressing evolving security challenges.

The visit underscored the importance of international collaboration and knowledge exchange in promoting a safer digital environment.

Bangladesh Moves to Revitalise Jute Sector Through Economic Diplomacy and Export Expansion



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Textiles and Jute jointly organized a coordination meeting titled “Strategic Economic Diplomacy and Export Expansion for Bangladesh’s Jute Sector”, where Hon’ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ms. Shama Obaed Islam, MP, and Hon’ble State Minister for Textiles and Jute Mr. Md.

Shariful Alam announced the formation of a Joint Working Group and plans to organise an International Jute Expo.

The meeting was attended by senior government officials, industry representatives, researchers, and development partners. The State Minister for Foreign Affairs highlighted the importance of economic diplomacy and Bangladesh Missions abroad in restoring the global reputation of the country’s “golden fiber.” The State Minister for Textiles and Jute stressed the need for stronger coordination to enhance production, value addition, and market diversification.

The Joint Working Group will prepare a roadmap for jute promotion, address trade barriers, encourage technology adoption, and support industry modernization to establish Bangladesh as a leading supplier of sustainable jute products.

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জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন
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**জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে
নিম্নবর্ণিত কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করছে:**

- ১০৩ টি প্রতিবন্ধী সেবা ও সাহায্য কেন্দ্রের মাধ্যমে বিনামূল্যে থেরাপিউটিক সেবা প্রদান;
- ৭৫টি প্রতিবন্ধী বিদ্যালয় পরিচালনা;
- অটিজম রিসোর্স সেন্টার ও এনডিডি কর্ণার পরিচালনা;
- ১২টি স্পেশাল স্কুল ফর চিলড্রেন উইথ অটিজম পরিচালনা;
- ৪৫টি ড্রামাথ্য ওয়ান স্টপ থেরাপি ভ্যান সার্ভিস কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা;
- অটিস্টিক শিশুর পিতা-মাতা/অভিভাবক ও কেয়ার গিভারদের প্রশিক্ষণ;
- বেসরকারি সংস্থা/ব্যক্তি পর্যায়ে আর্থিক অনুদান প্রদান কার্যক্রম;
- কর্মজীবী প্রতিবন্ধী পুরুষ ও মহিলা হোস্টেল পরিচালনা;
- দক্ষতাবৃদ্ধি বিষয়ক প্রশিক্ষণ কার্যক্রম;
- পিতৃ-মাতৃহীন প্রতিবন্ধী শিশু নিবাস পরিচালনা;
- বাংলা ইশারা ভাষা দিবস উদযাপন;
- বিশ্ব সাদাছড়ি নিরাপত্তা দিবস উদযাপন;
- জাতীয় ও আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিবন্ধী দিবস উদযাপন ও মেলার আয়োজন;
- জাতীয় সংসদের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম পার্শ্বে প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষার্থী ও ক্রীড়াবিদদের জন্য
খেলার মাঠ পরিচালনা;
- বিশেষ চাহিদা সম্পন্ন ব্যক্তিদের জন্য ক্রীড়া কমপ্লেক্স নির্মাণ;



প্রতিবন্ধী সেবা ও সাহায্য কেন্দ্রের মাধ্যমে প্রতিবন্ধী শিশু ও প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিকে বিনামূল্যে থেরাপি সেবা প্রদান



মোবাইল থেরাপি ভ্যানের মাধ্যমে প্রতিবন্ধী শিশুকে বিনামূল্যে থেরাপি সেবা প্রদান।



মাননীয় মন্ত্রী, সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয় কর্তৃক প্রতিবন্ধী সেবা ও সাহায্য কেন্দ্র ও প্রতিবন্ধী শিশু নিবাসের কার্যক্রম পরিদর্শন



শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের মাঝে হুইল চেয়ার বিতরণ করা হয়



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