

Roundtable Titled ‘Bangladesh-India Relations: Expectations, Challenges, and Future Prospects’ (বাংলাদেশ-ভারত সম্পর্ক: প্রত্যাশা, প্রতিবন্ধকতা এবং ভবিষ্যৎ) Held at NSU

Dhaka, 30 November 2024: The South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), in collaboration with the Department of Political Science & Sociology (PSS) at North South University (NSU), hosted a thought-provoking roundtable discussion today on the topic “বাংলাদেশ-ভারত সম্পর্ক: প্রত্যাশা, প্রতিবন্ধকতা এবং ভবিষ্যৎ” (Bangladesh-India Relations: Expectations, Challenges, and Future Prospects). The event, held at NSU’s Syndicate Hall, brought together a distinguished panel of experts and stakeholders to explore the evolving dynamics of Bangladesh-India relations, with a focus on identifying opportunities, addressing challenges, and charting a constructive path forward.

The roundtable was privileged to have Md. Touhid Hossain, Hon'ble Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Interim Government of Bangladesh, as the Chief Guest, who graced the occasion with his esteemed presence. In his address, Mr. Hossain underscored the critical need for fostering mutual trust and engaging in open, constructive dialogue as a means to overcome the existing challenges and unlock the full potential of Bangladesh-India bilateral cooperation. He candidly acknowledged that the nature of the relationship before and after the 5th of August has shifted, acknowledging it as the current reality. However, he remained optimistic, asserting, "Our relationship is not defined by just a few days or months. I firmly believe that it will improve in the near future."



Mr. Hossain went on to highlight the importance of building a strong national consensus, stressing that many times in the past, opportunities for greater cooperation have been missed due to a lack of unity within Bangladesh. "We could have achieved more if we had worked together with a unified national approach," he remarked. He emphasized that the true measure of Bangladesh's success in enhancing bilateral ties with India would be rooted in national consensus and unity, which, he believes, will serve as the litmus test for the country's future progress in this regard.



The discussion featured a distinguished panel, including **Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuaad**, Joint Member Secretary of AB Party; **Mr. Saquib Ali**, Former Diplomat with the Government of Bangladesh; **Lt Gen (Retd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, PhD**, Former Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division; **Professor Dr. Mohammad Abdur Rob**, Vice-Chancellor of Manarat International University; and **Dr. S. M. Asaduzzaman Ripon**, Vice Chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). These experts brought a range of perspectives to the discussion, addressing both the challenges and opportunities in strengthening bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.

The panel was moderated by **Dr. M. Jashim Uddin**, Associate Professor at NSU's Department of Political Science & Sociology, who skillfully facilitated a rich exchange of ideas. Dr. Uddin noted that many Bangladeshis feel that the country has not received the expected support from India following the Liberation War of 1971. He also highlighted the current tensions and challenges in the Bangladesh-India relationship, reflecting on how these historical and contemporary issues have shaped public perceptions and diplomatic efforts. He stated that a much-anticipated national unity is needed, giving the highest priority to our national interests.



In his opening remarks, **Professor Sk. Tawfique M. Haque**, Director of SIPG, set the tone for the discussion by providing a comprehensive analysis of the historical, political, and economic factors that have shaped Bangladesh-India relations. He stressed the importance of building a national consensus in Bangladesh to develop a more constructive, forward-looking relationship with India. “To deal with current crisis and tension with India, we must begin by fostering a National Level Dialogue and move towards a national consensus,” he stated, calling for a unified approach to address shared concerns and build long-term cooperation.

Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuaad emphasized the role of lobbying and political maneuvering in shaping Bangladesh-India relations. He argued that external pressures and vested interests have often complicated diplomatic efforts and undermined the spirit of cooperation. He raised a provocative question: “The entire India-Bangladesh border is fenced—does this truly reflect the behavior of a friendly neighboring state?” His remark sparked a deeper conversation about the implications of security measures on bilateral ties.

Mr. Saquib Ali highlighted the lingering effects of colonial trauma as a significant barrier to smoother relations between the two nations. He observed that, historically, Bangladesh’s leadership has often prioritized political party interests over national interests, with the people’s welfare coming second. "Until this changes," he cautioned, "the potential for a truly cooperative relationship will remain constrained."

Lt Gen (Retd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman brought attention to the growing influence of China in the region, noting that this has placed the Bangladesh-India relationship in a particularly delicate position. **Professor Dr. Mohammad Abdur Rob** echoed similar concerns, stating that India’s regional aspirations and aggressive measures complicate efforts to build a cooperative relationship with Bangladesh. He also expressed frustration over the derogatory remarks made about

Bangladesh by some Indian media and political party, saying, "When the people of Bangladesh are called 'termites,' how can we expect a friendly relationship to flourish?" He called for a relationship based on **equal give and take**, where both nations work collaboratively on mutual interests.

Dr. S. M. Asaduzzaman Ripon, Vice Chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), expressed deep concern over the continued use of extremist narratives in Indian media, noting that these narratives, often propagated by previous regimes, continue to shape perceptions in both countries. He also commended the students of **North South University**, particularly for their role in July Revolution. "I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the students of NSU," he said. "When Dhaka University was closed, it was the private university students who took the initiative and led the movement to success. This act of bravery and unity earned the respect of the entire nation and exemplified the power of youth-driven change." He also emphasized the need for national consensus.



In his closing remarks, **Professor Abdul Hannan Chowdhury**, Vice-Chancellor of North South University (NSU), expressed a hopeful outlook on the future of Bangladesh-India relations. He thanked the panelists for their insightful and enriching contributions, which deepened the understanding of the complex issues at hand. Professor Chowdhury reaffirmed NSU's commitment to hosting meaningful dialogues that contribute to shaping the political and economic landscape of the region. He emphasized that such discussions are vital for fostering understanding and addressing the challenges both nations face.

Acknowledging the deep historical, cultural, and economic ties between Bangladesh and India since 1971, Professor Chowdhury noted that while these connections are significant, it is also essential to address the issue of external interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs. He stated that such intrusion is "unacceptable" and called for greater autonomy in decision-making. Furthermore, he

underscored the need for educational reform, starting at the primary level, as a crucial step toward building a generation equipped to lead the nation forward. "By reforming our education system, we can ensure that future generations are better prepared to serve the nation's needs and contribute to its growth," he concluded.



The roundtable concluded with a **vote of thanks** by **Dr. M. Jashim Uddin**, who expressed his gratitude to all participants for their valuable contributions. This event marked an important step toward understanding and expressing gratitude for the valuable contributions of the participants and stated that a relationship of dignity must be established between Bangladesh and India.