

Re-emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021: Implications for South Asia

The webinar titled “**Current Afghan Situation and Bangladesh**” was organized by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University (NSU) on 9 August, 2021 to understand the current situation from academic and geopolitical lenses as the emerging unrest and power shifting in Afghanistan will have consequences in the entire South Asian region. The distinguished Panelists were Dr. M. Mustafa Mastoor, Special Representative and Senior Advisor, High Council for National Reconciliation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Professor Atiqul Islam, Vice-Chancellor of North South University. The Keynote Speaker of the webinar was Brig. Gen. M. Sakhawat Hussain, Ph.D., (retd), Senior Fellow of SIPG at NSU. And the discussants were Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, Mr. Faruque Ahmed, Former Executive Director of BRAC International, and the Former Foreign Secretary of the Bangladesh Government Ambassador Shahidul Haque, now a Professorial Fellow of SIPG at NSU.



Dr. M. Mustafa Mastoor, Special Representative and Senior Advisor, High Council for National Reconciliation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, spoke at the webinar as the Guest of Honour live from Kabul. He stated, “We are holding several meetings with Taliban to understand which one of the existing Islamic models they want to implement but they are adamant to implement their own model to run Afghanistan and that’s a major issue of the present conflict”. He also added that the recent diplomatic efforts of Bangladesh on Afghanistan issues are not as strong as they were before and hopes it will improve in the future.

Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, honoured the event as the Chief Guest. He said, "We welcome the ongoing peace talks in Afghanistan and ask the UN to step up its efforts. We don't want to see our fellow South Asian and SAARC member state Afghanistan suffering anymore". He also stated that Bangladesh welcomes Afghan people's own right to build a democratic, pluralistic, and inclusive society through recent peace talks. Bangladesh insists on becoming a development partner and assists Afghanistan in all bilateral cooperation for mutual benefits. And as soon as the situation becomes conducive, Bangladesh will reopen the embassy in Kabul.

Keynote Speaker of the webinar Brig. Gen. M. Sakhawat Hussain, Ph.D., (retd), Senior Fellow of SIPG at NSU discussed the geopolitics and consequences of the current Afghan Crisis in the South Asian region and Bangladesh. He stated that a continuation of the Afghan internal conflicts will have a spill over effect as seen in the past which may jeopardize the external and internal security of this region. He also opined that Bangladesh, having historical ties with Afghanistan should consider improving ties with Central Asia including Afghanistan. Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka pointed towards placing importance on both hard and soft power objectives. She stated that we need to analyze the long-term impacts of the fact that the Taliban is trying to win the hearts of the mass public by lowering the oil price and the amount of *Mahr* (money paid by the groom at the time of Islamic marriage). Mr. Faruque Ahmed, Former Executive Director of BRAC International who worked in the humanitarian and development sector in Afghanistan stated that security is a big challenge there along with weak governance and the high cost of doing business. He also opined that security should be ensured first for peacebuilding and development in Afghanistan.

Former Foreign Secretary of the Bangladesh Government Ambassador Shahidul Haque, now a Professorial Fellow of SIPG at NSU, said although Pakistan, India, Iran all are in the race for influence in Afghanistan, China has the most important role to play to fill the void left by the withdrawal of NATO and US forces. "In order to bring peace and security in Afghanistan, the governance of Afghanistan should be done by the people of this country without any interference of outsiders." Ambassador Shahidul added.

Professor Atiqul Islam, Vice-Chancellor of North South University Chaired the Session. In his concluding remarks he said that although the re-emergence of the Taliban may represent initial strategic gain for Pakistan, Pakistan is also at high risk of much chaos and the influx of refugees from Afghanistan if another civil war starts there. He also said that India has good reasons to be concerned as China will be keeping a sharp eye on Afghanistan as well. China has already met with the Taliban leaders as they don't want their interference in Xinxiang and BRI projects.

The event ended with the playing of an Afghan folk song as a tribute to the fellow Afghans wishing peace and prosperity in their lives. Diplomats, academics from various universities including NSU and Dhaka University, journalists, and students from the USA, Norway, New Zealand, Bangkok, Italy, UK, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh were present among the participants.