

On the Occasion of Celebrating 75 Years of Fulbright Program U.S.-Bangladesh Together Towards Tomorrow

Keynote Speech

by

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

28 October 2021

1. About U.S. Fulbright Program

- **The Fulbright Program is the flagship international academic exchange program that is sponsored by the U.S. government.** The program grants awards to nearly 8,000 students, scholars, teachers and professionals every year from the U.S. and other 160 countries. The program is well-known for merit-based selection and academic prestige and is awarded to people from all backgrounds without any discriminatory practices.
- **The program was created in 1946, post World War II, through the legislation of Senator J. William Fulbright.** J. William Fulbright entered politics in 1942 and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He was a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and in 1943 the House adopted the Fulbright Resolution. His visionary leadership on international relations led to the rising engagements and relations.
- **Senate Fulbright contributed in creation of the United Nations, its peace keeping initiatives.** Had been the longest serving chair (1959-1974) of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Senate.
- **Fulbright alumni have been successful in government, arts, business, education and several other fields.** Among the alumni, there are 60 Nobel Prize winners, 75 MacArthur Foundation Fellows, 89 Pulitzer Prize winners and 40 current or former state or government heads.
- **The program has enhanced international understanding, collaboration and partnerships.** Since the inception, more than 400,000 Fulbright alumni have studied, taught and conducted research in each other's countries. The program has also boosted the

technical and intercultural skills and knowledge of alumni who then further benefited their colleagues and future generations through positive changes in their professional and interactive approaches.

2. More about Senator Fulbright

- **Senator J. William Fulbright was a prominent and influential American statesman of the 20th century.** Fulbright was elected to the United States House of Representatives as a Democrat. He pursued a political career of over 30 years in the United States Congress and was the longest serving chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His substantial influence on America's foreign policy and international relations was widely acknowledged. Fulbright's efforts and contribution towards mutual understanding and partnership formed the prestigious Fulbright program. The adoption of the Fulbright Resolution facilitated international peacekeeping initiatives and encouraged the participation of the United States in what has been formed as the United Nations. Senator J. William Fulbright passed away on 09 February 1995 at the age of 89.
- **Quotable quotes of Senator Fulbright**
 - In the long course of history, having people who understand your thought is much greater security than another submarine.
 - The exchange program is the thing that reconciles me to all the difficulties of political life.
 - As a conservative power, the United States has a vital interest in upholding and expanding the reign of law in international relations.
 - To be a statesman, you must first get elected.
 - In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith.
 - The citizen who criticizes his country is paying it an implied tribute.

3. My association - a family affair

- Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya was a Senior Fulbright Fellow at the *Center for Global Development (CGD)*, the Washington D.C. from 2004 to 2005. Currently, a Non Resident Fellow at the CGD.
- Dr Bhattacharya's brother, **Dr Debadarshi (Dipen) Bhattacharya**, who has worked for NASA and professor of Physics and Astronomy at the Riverside City College, California, USA and also a science fiction

novel writer was a Fulbright Fellow from USA at BRAC University from 2006-2007.

4. U.S.-Bangladesh Economic Partnership

- a) Net ODA disbursement: **The net ODA annual disbursement from the U.S. to Bangladesh increased from \$124.73 million in 2011 to \$404.87 million in 2019.** This resulted in the rise of U.S. shares from 12.68% to 16.06% of total ODA disbursements to Bangladesh from DAC countries over this time period.
- b) ODA commitment to education:
- **Over 2010-2019, the average dollar value of the ODA commitment of U.S. to the education sector of Bangladesh was \$5.10 million (according to annual data provided by the OECD from 2010-2019).** This constituted 4.83% of total ODA commitment to education sector of Bangladesh from official donors leading it to be one of the top four DAC donors in terms of ODA commitments to education.
 - **ODA for education has also contributed to SDG 4 (Quality Education), specifically target 4.4.b, which is to increase the number of scholarships to developing countries for enrolment in higher education.**
 - **Bangladesh is also the fastest growing countries in sending international students to the U.S.** In the 2019-2020 academic year, over 8,800 Bangladeshi students studied in the U.S. with more than 75% studying in STEM fields (41% studied Engineering, over 19% studied Math/Computer Science and 14% in an on-the-job training in their respective fields of study).
- c) Trade:
- *Exports:* **Over the last decade, Bangladesh exports to the U.S. increased by nearly two folds;** from \$3.95 billion in 2010 (24.38% of total exports) to \$6.97 billion in 2021 (17.98% of total exports). Over the last two decades, the U.S. has consistently been the number 1 export destination for Bangladesh compared to 5 other top principal countries (Germany, UK, France, Netherlands and Canada).
 - *Imports:* **Bangladesh imports from the U.S. consistently increased over the past two decades.** Over 2010-2020, total imports to the U.S. rose by nearly 5 folds with the share in

Bangladesh imports increasing from 1.97% in 2010 to 3.82% in 2020. The major import items are oil seeds miscellaneous grains, cotton iron and steel, electrical machinery, equipment and parts, nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and parts.

- *Balance of Trade:* The Bangladesh enjoys trade surplus with the U.S. It was Tk. 15737 crore in 2020, rising from Tk. 7836.06 crore in 2000.
- d) Net FDI Inflow: **The net FDI inflow to Bangladesh from the U.S. was \$56.95 million in 2010 and \$296.35 million in 2020 causing the inflows to rise by five-fold over the period. Over the last decade, the U.S. has remained as one of the top five sources of FDI for Bangladesh** with shares in total FDI inflows of Bangladesh rising from 6.24% to 11.56%.
- e) Remittance: **The share of remittance inflow from the U.S. increased consistently over the last two decades resulting in the country being among the top three principal sources of remittance for Bangladesh.** The percentage of remittance received from the U.S. increased from 12.38% in 2000 to 13.21% in 2010 which remained stable till 2020.

5. U.S.-Bangladesh Trade, Investment and Strategic Forums

- Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue: The 7th US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue was held on June 10, 2019 where the two governments highlighted cooperation on security, development, humanitarian issues and counterterrorism and agreed to closely cooperate to advance an inclusive and secure Indo-Pacific region.
- Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA): The U.S. and Bangladesh signed the TICFA to address barriers to higher bilateral trade and investment on November 25, 2013. The 5th TICFA meeting was held on March 05, 2020. Both delegates focused on Bangladesh market access for U.S. agricultural goods and financial services and the issue of abiding by international labour norms. There were discussions on the possibility of increasing trade and investment that required improvement of investment climate in Bangladesh. Plus, U.S. delegates also reassured of the consideration of Bangladesh in the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) facility for Bangladeshi

goods to the US market that was suspended after the Rana plaza incident in 2013.

- Security Dialogue: At the 7th Bangladesh-US Security Dialogue in 2019, the two countries agreed to enhance counterterrorism and civilian security issues. The US delegates also reassured to support Bangladesh in helping the Rohingyas return to Myanmar in a sustainable manner.

6. Looking into the future: Aligning with Bangladesh's development aspirations

a) Recovery from COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 8):

- i. **In Bangladesh, till October 2021, the U.S. has provided nearly \$121 million for the COVID-19 recovery efforts.** In 2020, more than \$17 million in new funding was provided to support recovery which also included a food assistance program for 100,000 urban poor of low-income areas, provisions to re-establish linkages between markets and local agricultural production, support for supply chains as well as development activities in post pandemic period. Doctors and nurses have also been trained on COVID-19 infection prevention and control (IPC) and case management for effective treatment and to reduce the spread of the virus.
- ii. In 2021, Bangladesh has received over 2 million pieces of PPE and further measures will be taken to increase domestic production of PPE and medical supplies with an aim to boost employment and economic development.

b) Vaccine (SDG 3): The U.S. is also supportive toward the Bangladesh government's aim of vaccinating 40% of population by the end of 2021. Till date, the U.S. donated 11.5 million doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and support for rollout of national vaccination campaign. Additionally, \$25 million has been announced for life-saving medical and oxygen supplies and cold chain equipment for vaccine management.

c) Rohingya (SDG 17): Since August 2017, the total humanitarian support for the Rohingya crisis was more than \$1.5 billion from the U.S. Assistance is directed towards education, food, security, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene. Funds are also used for management of the COVID-19 crisis as well as

supporting the local host communities in Bangladesh which have been negatively affected.

- d) **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger): The U.S. supports Bangladesh government to improve availability and access to domestically produced nutritious food.** The U.S. Government's Feed the Future activities help to improve agricultural productivity and diversity in southern areas of Bangladesh. In 2019, over 225,000 farmers were supported to use technology for improved agronomic practices that aids the growth of the agricultural sector. For diversification purposes, USAID works with the private sector to identify market opportunities for new and underdeveloped crops which raises household income and nutrition.
- e) **SDG 4 (Quality Education): The U.S. supports the improvement of the quality of education in Bangladesh.** To improve early grade reading, USAID works with the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education to invest in teacher training and teaching and learning materials. Since 2013, the education programs have trained more than 16,667 teachers in teaching early grade reading and allocated 2,061,881 books and reading materials to primary schools. Importantly, the programs have also expanded schooling to 27,301 out-of-school children.
- f) **SDG 5 (Gender Equality): The U.S. has also aided the Government of Bangladesh in ending child marriage and attain the objectives of the 10-year National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage (2018-2030).** In 2021, The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) in partnership with USAID launched the "Actions to Prevent Child Marriage in Bangladesh". Implemented by the John Hopkins University, the campaign aims to raise awareness about risks of early pregnancy, current laws, support mechanisms and high returns to girls' education.
- g) **Climate (SDG 7, SDG 13): During the visit of U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate to Bangladesh in April 2021, several initiatives of USAID to address climate change in Bangladesh were highlighted.** Depending on fund availability, USAID will initiate the "Bangladesh Advancing Development and Growth through Energy" (BADGE), a \$17 million worth project to increase access to clean energy, develop efficient energy markets and reduce carbon emissions.

- h) LDC Graduation (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 13, SDG 15, SDG 16, SDG 17): **Since 1971, USAID provided more than \$7 billion development assistance to Bangladesh.** In 2019, more than \$200 million dollars were directed through USAID for expanding food security, employment opportunity, health and education, environment protection and establishing democratic institutions. In 2020, a bilateral agreement amendment was signed with the government to support development activities worth more than \$156 million addressing development challenges and the pandemic impact.
- It is expected that the U.S. will reconsider the provision of GSP facility for Bangladeshi commodities to the U.S. market.
 - As a whole, the multifaceted dimensions of the U.S.-Bangladesh partnerships are expected to facilitate structural transformation and smooth LDC transition of Bangladesh.
- i) Fourth Industrial Revolution (SDG 8, SDG 9): **Recently, USA-Bangladesh Tech Investment Summit was organised in Silicon Valley by Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).** The event has facilitated discussions on potential investment opportunities in the start-up and technology sector of Bangladesh.

Thank you!